A WORLD ELSEWHERE:

THE STAGE CAREER OF ANEW MACMASTER

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

Carl Paul Falb, Jr., A.B.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1974

Reading Committee:                                            Approved by
John C. Morrow
Roy H. Bowen
John A. Walker

John C. Morrow
Adviser
Department of Theatre
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to recognize the support and assistance of the following persons and institutions for their generous contributions toward documenting the story of Anew McMaster:

In Ireland—Micheal Mac Liammoir and Hilton Edwards, Brendan O'Brien of Athlone, Gabriel Fallon, Felicia and Sean Murphy, Treasa Davison and Noel Shiels of Radio Telefis Eireann, and the staffs of the National Library of Ireland, Trinity College Library, and the Pearse Street Library of the City of Dublin.

In Britain—J. C. Trewin, Muriel St. Clare Byrne, Eileen Morley, Kathleen M. D. Barker of the Society For Theatre Research, the British Broadcasting Corporation, and the staffs of the Enthoven Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Newspaper Library of the British Museum, and the Shakespeare Centre at Stratford-upon-Avon.

In the United States—Lynnette Williams.

Special thanks and appreciation are extended to Anew McMaster's children, Mary Rose (Aranson) and Christopher, for their help, support, information, and hospitality. It is hoped the following report will be accepted in partial payment for their patience and understanding.
VITA

August 27, 1936 .......... Born - Dayton, Ohio

1958. ............... A.B., Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts

1967-1969 ............. Administrative Assistant to the Chairman
Department of Theatre
The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

1969-1972 ............. Academic Adviser, University College
The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

1973-1974 ............. Evening Program Coordinator, University College
The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

PUBLICATIONS

"Current Developments in British Regional Theatre." (with John Morrow)
Today's Speech, April 1968.

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Theatre

Theatre History. Professors John H. McDowell and John C. Morrow

Dramatic Literature. Professors John C. Morrow and Harold Walley

Acting and Directing. Professor Roy H. Bowen
RESEARCH SOURCES

When this study was begun, there was the hope that Anew McMaster's fifty years in the theatre had produced a large quantity of memorabilia: programs and playbills, promptbooks, newspaper cuttings, letters, perhaps even some reminiscences. This hope was not fulfilled. The residue of a lifetime was remarkably scant, and what there was lay unsorted in a cardboard suitcase for more than two-and-a-half years after the death of Marjorie McMaster, who survived her husband by more than seven years. Their son, Christopher, had cleaned out some desk drawers in his mother's home after her death, placed the material in the suitcase, and brought it to his home in England. The more interesting and useful parts of this residuum of McMaster's life are discussed in the following sections, but still it was distressingly little: photographs, letters and fragments of letters, some newspaper cuttings, some personal items unrelated to the McMasters' life in the theatre. Examination of this material revealed, however, that highly useful information still remained for the researcher, and it also was clear that almost everything dealing with the more negative aspects of the McMasters' personal and professional lives had been excised. It appeared that, following the death of her husband, Marjorie McMaster had sorted through the material, kept some, and discarded some. It was a prudent act by someone who had always been protective of her husband, but, to her credit, Marjorie kept much of the important evidence, even
though it tends always toward a positive viewpoint. Perhaps she thought that one day someone would come looking to tell Mac's story.

"A Lifetime in the Theatre"

Neither Mac nor Marjorie wrote an autobiography, but in August, 1957, they prepared a series of radio broadcasts for Radio Telefis Eireann (RTÉ) concerned with McMaster's career and entitled "Memoirs of an Actor." In 1968, six years after McMaster's death, these radio scripts were published as a twelve-part series in the Irish Times, with the title, "A Lifetime in the Theatre." The author obtained photocopies of these articles from the Irish Times, and they provided the chronological foundation for this study. Marjorie was the better writer, and extant drafts of the radio scripts indicate Marjorie wrote most of it. But it is certainly Mac's story, as well as his opinions and feelings. After thirty years of marriage, Marjorie could almost tell Mac's story better than he could.

Most of the information contained in the Lifetime series was checked against other sources for factual accuracy, and it was with some satisfaction (and relief) that the author discovered that, when Mac said he had been somewhere and done something, it was true. There was some small elaboration around the facts, but the factual core was remarkably accurate. Lifetime was not the whole story, of course, but it provided a fairly secure basis for further research.

Throughout the text of this study, the Irish Times reprints are referred to as "Lifetime." The series was published entirely in 1968, and following are the dates of publication for each segment:
1 - September 24: "A Lifetime in the Theatre"
2 - September 25: "Living in London"
3 - September 26: "Shakespeare in Australia"
4 - September 27: "To Ireland With a Company of My Own"
5 - September 28: "Enter Mrs. Patrick Campbell"
6 - September 30: "Back to London"
7 - October 1: "Contagious to the Nile"
8 - October 2: "War-Time Doldrums"
9 - October 3: "Back to Australia"
10 - October 4: "Pageant at Slane"
11 - October 5: "America Calls"
12 - October 7: "Life With the American Dream"

Manuscript Sources

Some manuscript material was found at Christopher McMaster's, much of it drafts of the radio broadcasts and identical to the final printed version. However, there is a small amount of material written by both Anew and Marjorie McMaster which was apparently edited out or used as first draft and discarded. This material is fragmentary, but gives some additional information that was incorporated in this study. These fragments are cited in the text as follows:

A. McMaster Small Notebook MS. Four small pocket-sized notebooks filled with notes and jottings in McMaster's handwriting, which appear to be his first random thoughts about the radio scripts.

A. McMaster 1957 MS. This manuscript fragment appears to be a first draft for the broadcasts. It is in McMaster's hand and deals with his youth and early years in London. Little of this material was used in the broadcasts, and so it becomes a main source of information about McMaster's early years.

Radio Notebook MS. Most of the radio broadcast manuscript was written by the McMasters in red-covered school copybooks. Much of the text in these copybooks appears in substantially unaltered form in the Irish Times, but one copybook seems to contain an earlier version of the material and does provide information not found in published sources.

M. McMaster Single Page MS. A single page of lined notebook paper containing material written by Marjorie McMaster about their return from America.
Several other manuscript fragments were useful in this study, including:

A. McMaster Notebook MS. In Anew McMaster's hand, this appears to be a very early draft of a proposed book by McMaster about his life. It is very fragmentary and rambling and deals with his early years in London.

M. McMaster Black Notebook MS. This includes occasional jottings by Marjorie McMaster from July, 1931, to May, 1937, usually written as she was travelling by train, either on tour or for personal reasons. Entries are very occasional, but do give some access to her thoughts and details of some of the daily business of touring.

M. McMaster Copybook Pages MS. Five loose pages torn from a copybook, containing material written by Marjorie McMaster during the period 1925-1933.

Daily Appointment Diaries for 1914, 1920, 1925, 1955, and 1962. Marjorie McMaster kept a daily appointment diary throughout her life, and five of them are extant. These remaining diaries could not have been better chosen. They represent either very significant years or very typical years, so that by studying them it is possible to date important events or to reconstruct a typical McMaster touring season.

**BBC Program**

On April 17, 1963, about eight months after McMaster's death, the British Broadcasting Corporation aired a seventy-five minute radio broadcast entitled "Mac." It was a collection of reminiscences about McMaster by a large group of people, including Noel Coward, Hilton Edwards, Kenneth Haigh, Rachel Kempson, Micheal Mac Liammóir, Patrick Magee, Harold Pinter, Dorothy Primrose, Sybil Thorndike, and Emlyn Williams. A tape recording of this program was found in the McMaster memorabilia, and a transcript was provided to the author by BBC. The broadcast provided a considerable amount of anecdotal material about McMaster. Footnote references are given as **BBC Program**.
Typescript Sources

After McMaster's death in 1962, written reminiscences were sought from his friends and colleagues for incorporation into a proposed memorial book. The book was never published, but the typescripts were found in the McMaster papers. Material from the following typescripts is used in this study:

**W. Bridges-Adams MS.** Four pages, dated September, 1964, written by the former director of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon.

**Christopher Casson MS.** Three pages, undated, written by a noted Dublin actor, the son of Sybil Thorndike and Lewis Casson. Casson was a long-time friend of the McMasters and acted with McMaster in several Dublin productions.

**Maurice Good MS.** Fifteen pages, dated December, 1962, by an actor in the McMaster company in the early 1950's. The best description of McMaster, the man and actor.

**Micheal Mac Liammoir MS.** Eleven pages, dated 1964, by the noted Irish actor and author, co-founder of the Dublin Gate Theatre, and McMaster's brother-in-law.

**Christine Countess Longford MS.** Seven pages, undated. For many years Lord Longford maintained and directed a theatrical company in Ireland, and the Longfords were friends of the McMasters.

**Marjorie McMaster MS.** Twenty-seven pages, undated.

Other reminiscences in this collection are by Herbert Moulton and Sybil Thorndike. There is also a typescript by Harold Pinter, who was in the McMaster company in 1951-1953, which Pinter later had printed in a nineteen-page limited edition entitled Mac. Publication information is given in the sources listed at the end of this work.
Interviews

Personal interviews with members of McMaster's family, friends, former actors in the company, and others were essential to filling in the complete story. Often, gaps would occur in the McMaster history, and they could be filled in only by the people who were there. The list of people who could have been interviewed is very long indeed; many people were involved with Mac during his lifetime. The challenge was to determine who would have important information, who could make unique contributions. Then the challenge was to find them. The author is grateful to those who consented to interviews, and to those who helped find the interviewees. Some people were found whom the author thought were surely gone forever, and there was then delight as the many stories about Mac were recalled again. Following is a list of interviews used in the preparation of this study:

Mary Rose McMaster Aranson. McMaster's daughter and a former actress in the company. (Mill Valley, Calif., May 15-16, 1972.)

Christopher Casson. Dublin actor, who played Tireisias to McMaster's Oedipus in 1942, and later appeared with McMaster in other Dublin productions. (Dublin, Jan. 24, 1973.)


Treasa Davison. Actress with the company in the mid-1950's. (Dublin, Jan. 25, 1973.)


Pauline Flanagan. Actress with the company in the early 1950's. (Glen Rock, N. J., July 13, 1972.)

Gabriel Fallon. Irish critic and author, member of the Board of Directors of the Abbey Theatre. (Dublin, Feb. 6, 1973.)
Kitty Fitzgerald. Actress with the company in the late 1940's. (London, Oct. 12, 1972.)

Maurice Good. Actor with the company in the early 1950's. Telephone interview. (London, Jan. 6, 1973.)

Ronald Govey. Actor and business manager with the company in the mid-1950's. (London, Jan. 6, 1973.)


Christine Countess Longford. McMaster family friend. Lord Longford translated the version of Oedipus that McMaster performed, and produced the Dublin debut of that play in 1942. (Dublin, Feb. 28, 1973.)

Siobhan McKenna. Irish actress. Telephone interview. (Dublin, Jan. 5, 1973.)


Brendan O'Brien. Director of the All-Ireland Amateur Drama Festival, and student of Irish theatre history. (Athlone, Co. Westmeath, Feb. 12, 1973.)

Den O'Connell. Actor with the company in the early 1940's. (Dublin, March 7, 1973.)

Godfrey Quigley. Actor with the company in the late 1940's. (Dublin, Dec. 15, 1972.)


Sally Travers. Marjorie McMaster's niece and an actress who appeared with McMaster in Dublin in the late 1940's. (London, Oct. 12, 1972.)


Derek Young. Actor with the last McMaster company in 1959. (Dublin, March 5, 1973.)
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .................................................. ii
VITA ................................................................. iii
RESEARCH SOURCES ............................................... iv
INTRODUCTION ...................................................... 1

PART I

Chapter

I. McMaster The Actor ............................................. 5
II. The McMaster Company ......................................... 18

PART II

III. Early Years ..................................................... 33
IV. London (1911-1914) ............................................. 39

   Opera
   Fred Terry and Julia Nielson
   First Touring Experience
   Irish Friends
   A Return to Liverpool
   Conclusion

V. On Tour in Ireland (1915-1919) ............................. 58
VI. Australia ........................................................ 66

   Paddy, the Next Best Thing
   Williamson’s
   Oscar Asche

VII. London Again .................................................. 80

   Marjorie
   Iris
   Beginning the McMaster Company
   Conclusion

xii
PART III

Chapter

VIII. THE FIRST FIVE YEARS. .............................. 101

In the Tradition
The First Tour
The Company Develops
A Season in Dublin
Film Interlude
The Abbey Again
Mrs. Patrick Campbell
Conclusion

IX. THE THIRTIES. ........................................ 142

Hard Times
Stratford
A Season in London
Ireland/Egypt/England
Conclusion

X. THE FORTIES .......................................... 182

Wartime Tours
Oedipus
Postwar
Conclusion

XI. THE FINAL DECADE. ............................... 197

To Australia Again
Mostly Touring
Long Day's Journey Into Night
Last Years

SOURCES CONSULTED ................................. 242
INTRODUCTION

Anew McMaster was an actor who toured Ireland with his company for nearly thirty-five years. Mac, as he was known to everybody, was firmly in the British actor-manager tradition, and he maintained that tradition until he was nearly its last representative. The last McMaster company toured in 1959, and Mac himself was active in the theatre until his death in 1962.

The history of Anew McMaster and his company is an interesting one, not least because McMaster himself was an interesting figure. But the story of the company also gives contemporary insight into the actor-manager tradition, the life of a provincial touring company, and the ways of survival within a declining theatrical tradition. The routine and life style of the McMaster company is a contemporary reproduction of an old tradition, and Mac's personal stage history is a kind of summing up of the making of an actor-manager.

McMaster's life encompassed vast changes in the theatre. His beginning on the stage was with Fred Terry and Julia Nielsen in the tushery of The Scarlet Pimpernel, and toward the end of his life he played James Tyrone in the U. S. national tour of Long Day's Journey Into Night. In 1928, his company had to contend with the effects of talking pictures, and twenty-five years later with the effects of television. By the end of his career, the paternalism of the actor-manager system had given way to the actors' union. Underlying all the changes, however, is
a remarkably consistent pattern of existence within the company. Actors in the first company in 1925 would have felt comfortable in the routine of 1955. The same towns were visited, the process of obtaining accommodations, setting up the stage, and giving the performance was the same. The company still played every night of the week and some afternoons. The tradition of the touring provincial theatre had enormous stability in the face of change, and for McMaster that stability was essential.

Mac preferred the past. As he once said, "The past is always so full of glamour that seems to elude present day life." He was in many ways a person born after his proper time, someone who was really a late Victorian figure forced by circumstance to live through the enormous changes of the post-1914 period. The company not only allowed Mac to act in the manner he preferred, it allowed him to live the life he preferred, insulated to a substantial degree from the changing world outside.

In many ways Mac lived a hard life. Former actors in the company, looking back on their experience, remark on the difficulties, the hard work and continuous effort, and attribute their survival to the resilience of youth. But McMaster loved the life—the touring, the countryside, the people, and above all being on the stage almost every night. Finally, Mac was lucky. He was able to create his own world and to live there happily almost to his death. Few men have had that opportunity.

This study is divided into three main parts. Part II deals with

---

McMaster's formative years up to 1925, and Part III includes the years with his touring company. These two parts are predominately chronological in structure, and to set the scene Part I was written to provide a brief, composite description of McMaster, the man and actor, and of the daily life of the company. It was hoped to provide a framework in this way, both to highlight important elements in McMaster's development and to give some sense of the continuing life of the company.

The composite picture presented in Part I is the product of a host of sources, including interviews with many friends and former members of the company, including McMaster's son and daughter, Christopher and Mary Rose; published works and unpublished manuscript reminiscences, and records, tape recordings and broadcast transcripts of McMaster and those who knew him. It is always more difficult to describe a person than to relate facts, and the problem is compounded when the person is an actor. But it is hoped that the following portrait of Anew McMaster and his company will give the reader a reasonable approximation of that man and the world in which he lived.
CHAPTER I

McMASTER THE ACTOR

Acting is an ephemeral art that vanishes in the moment of creation, and it is always unfair to try to reconstruct an actor's art in words. The words are never enough to give a total sense of the man on stage, what he does from moment to moment and the effect he has on an audience. The problem is doubly difficult when the author has never seen the actor perform and must rely on the descriptions of others to paint the picture. McMaster was such a striking figure, however, that he is always vividly recalled by those who knew him, and ultimately a consistent—and entertaining—picture of the man emerges.

In many ways, McMaster on stage was much like the nineteenth-century Irish touring actor Gustavus Vaughan Brooke. G. V. Brooke was born in Dublin in 1818, made his London debut in Othello, and eventually had great success in Australia. W. J. Lawrence, who wrote Brooke's biography, describes him as

The tallest of tragedians, . . . his figure was extremely graceful in contour. With the limbs and features of an Apollo, and the head and shoulders of a Hercules, Brooke, as he strode the boards majestically, . . . making the theatre resound with the music of his voice, must have presented a figure of manly beauty, the like of which has seldom been seen on the English stage.  

---

1W. J. Lawrence, The Life of Gustavus Vaughan Brooke, Tragedian (Belfast: Baird, 1892), pp. 28-29.
Contemporary taste does not permit the descriptive hyperbole of the late nineteenth-century writers, but there is no doubt that Mac's physical presence on and off stage was great. He was six feet, one inch tall, with blond hair and eyes that his brother-in-law Micheal Mac Liammoir describes as the color of "harebells," and which one actress said changed color with the role: bright blue for Oedipus, dark gray for Shylock, and black for Othello.\(^2\) McMaster's vocal equipment was equally impressive, with a wide-ranging musical voice supported by a large chest and lung capacity maintained by vocal exercises and his passion for walking and swimming. Even in his sixties Mac was physically imposing when he stripped to the waist for Othello. Maurice Good, an actor in the company in 1952-1953, remembers seeking a job from Mac:

I found my way round to a mews at the back of Fitzwilliam Square [in Dublin]. Mac himself trundled down the back steps and let me in. . . . We were inside the flat now, and the diaphragm swelled prodigiously under the light singlet as he turned to speak to me. The voice was too loud for such a domestic opening. 'You can have coffee, sherry, tea—or perhaps you drink?' I nodded, I hoped intelligibly. Was I expected to roar my reply like that? 'The Jameson, Marjorie—now, where have we put it?' The consonants ricocheted around the room and expensive Venetian glasses tinkled their response to his metallic trumpet. . . . There was a crash from somewhere in the bathroom and Mac's triumphant voice: 'Got it! At last. . . .' which, a moment later, was complete sforsando inches from the back of my head. 'SAY WHEN!!' it blasted. 'When!' I screamed in reply, and sank into a couch, my first word to him finally achieved and a huge red goblet holding half a pint of whiskey held firmly in both hands.\(^3\)

All who heard McMaster act remark on the "music of his voice," the range and variety of his speech. Sybil Thorndike attributed it to


\(^3\)Maurice Good MS.
his Irishness:

He was an outward actor, and the Irish have got that knack of entertaining speech. They've got more notes than the ordinary English person. The ordinary English person likes to keep within an octave. Well, Mac had, I should think, getting onto three octaves that he used.  

This vocal range and variety was, however, largely the product of McMaster's early training in the school of Fred Terry and Julia Nielson and of his love of the opera. He was to a large extent a frustrated singer, and he carried this interest in music into his acting. His niece, Sally Travers, characterized him as "like an orchestra, everything was the tunes and rhythms of Shakespeare. And when the music line and the intellectual line met, it was electrifying." Barry Foster, an actor with the company in the early 1950's, describes Mac's as a

... tremendous voice with the note of a great tenor in it.  
... He would hit a note that would seem to go straight up to the back of the balcony and hit the wall and come back, and you'd hear it on the way back as well. It was the most thrilling sound in the theatre, I think, particularly in the last half of Oedipus when ... this incredible thrilling trumpet sound would start, ... but it was coming out of this enomous Wagnerian figure, ... this incredibly handsome giant.

Playwright Harold Pinter, also a member of the company in 1951-1953, recalls:

His voice was unique: in my experience of an unequalled range. A bass of extraordinary echo, resonance and gut, and remarkable sweep up into tenor, when the note would hit the back of the gallery and come straight back, a brilliant, stunning sound. I remember his delivery of this line: 'Methinks (bass) it should be now a huge (bass) eclipse (tenor) of sun and moon

---

4 BBC Program.  
5 Personal interview with Sally Travers, Oct. 12, 1972.  
6 BBC Program.
(baritone) and that th'afrighted globe (bass) Should yawn
(very deep, the abyss) at alteration.' We all watched him
from the wings. 7

McMaster had little use for intellectual analysis of Shake-
spearean plays or characters. His truth came from his own emotions and
his response to the situations in the play. The result was that his
performances were often uneven from night to night, within a given
performance, and sometimes within a single speech. In exchange for this
unevenness, Mac had this ability described by Irish critic Gabriel
Fallon:

Quite suddenly, Mac would seize upon a line and endow it
with such a piercing importance that it appeared to carry
the total emotional content of the play.

I shall never forget when towards the end of that
first Romeo [in Dublin] he came to the lines:

'Shall I believe

That unsubstantial Death is amorous . . .'

His voice took on an unwonted intensity, increasing as it
moved from word to word:

'O! here

Will I set up my everlasting rest,
And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars
From this world-wearied flesh.'

The effect of his delivery of these lines . . . was as if a
rusty knife had been plunged into the middle of one's breast
and twisted in the wound.

Again in Macbeth, . . . Mac's despairing cry, 'Wake
Duncan with they knocking. I would thou could'st,' was some-
thing which once heard could never be forgotten. It threw
a light upon the play which dozens of more orderly perform-
ances had never succeeded in throwing. It was the same in
all Mac's Shakespearean parts—in his Othello, his Lear,
his Hamlet. 8

This ability to capture an audience with a single word or phrase
permitted Mac to break contact with the audience at will, to pause and

7Harold Pinter, Mac ([London:] Pendragon Press, 1968),
pp. 11-12.

8Evening Press (Dublin), Sept. 16, 1964.
adjust his costume, give instruction to an actor, even to adjust a light
or a piece of scenery, and then to snap back into the character and the
action, bringing the audience with him. On one occasion while hearing
confession in his role as Cardinal Giovanni de Medici, Mac heard some
boys playing around his car, which was parked in front of the theatre.
He jumped down across the footlights, dashed through the house with
confessional robe flying, shouted to the offending boys, and returned
to the stage to continue the confession while the audience remained
silent and attentive.

Seeing McMaster adjusting the ivy on a trellis in Romeo and
Juliet, Fallon accused Mac of having too much "cool head" over "warm
heart" in his acting, a reference to actor Joseph Jefferson's
prescription for an effective balance of technique and instinct in
acting. Mac's response, in a letter to Fallon dated June 1, 1941,
shows that McMaster was clearly aware of his situation:

No! No! No! I never think about technique at all, and I
almost despise it. English actors love to be told their
technique is good because they like to think their work
is the result of study and of their own brains. Such are
just good craftsmen, not artistes.

I act as Mrs. Siddons calls 'in nature' or as I like
to think as God tells me. Or perhaps to put it less
pretentiously, as I feel at the time.

Unfortunately, 'Nature' or God fails me often, say
three times out of ten; sometimes for reasons unknown,
sometimes because I have not kept the instrument (my body)
in order. So God must not be blamed when I act badly. . . .

The great fault I see in my work is that my emotions
carry me too much and that the 'cool head' is not always
there; it lacks 'a temperance which may give it smoothness.'
This often leads to incoherence as well as other grave
faults.9

—Letter in the possession of Gabriel Fallon.
McMaster's unevenness as an actor was his greatest fault. Although this was partly the result of doing the same plays again and again over the years, it was a characteristic noted by critics in the early days of the company. It was the product of reliance upon the gods for inspiration, his interest in action and emotion, boredom with mere narrative or exposition, and his long years on tour in the county towns. Maurice Good also thinks it was because Mac took more chances:

He was always a risker. He could afford to throw away half a part if it would somehow help to release what was more useful to him—his spontaneity. Years before I joined Theatre Workshop I had observed in him an actor with the fullest traditional equipment including the finest voice I've ever known, who was capable of abandoning nightly a life's achievement in a role and go out like a leopard after something new. We young ones, he would say, were not the first to discover the value to an actor of improvisation. After two thousand performances of Othello one must (as he did) improvise or perish.10

Many people believe that unevenness is the price paid for occasional greatness on the stage, that an utterly consistent actor never digs deeper into his own soul to present that occasional and single performance that is truly "great" because of its superiority to the very good performance that can be repeated day after day. Christopher Casson, son of Lewis Casson and Dame Sybil Thorndike and long-time friend of the McMasters, classifies the two types of actors as "vertical" and "horizontal":

The magic of Mac was in the moment, the great moment that suddenly, surprisingly and yet inevitably pierced to the centre. He did not crawl along the ground from particular to particular, but hovered like a bird of prey until the instant of attack... Anew McMaster was a 'vertical' actor. The

10Maurice Good MS.
regular down-to-brass-tacks habitual actor is 'horizontal'.
We need both kinds, and both can be both—but not all the
time... .

Maurice Good contrasts McMaster in this respect to Sir Laurence
Olivier:

Olivier . . . lays his charges, sets his fuses, and appalls us
with resultant explosions, the magnitude of which he had judged
to a hair's breadth. McMaster, consumed by his daemon, erupts
preternaturally and we sit enthralled in the cosmic glare.  

Pinter describes the difference:

He was capable, of course, of many indifferent and off-
hand performances. On these occasions an edgy depression and
fatigue hung over him. He would gabble his way through the
part, his movement fuzzed, his voice acting outside him, the
man himself detached from its acrobatics. At such times his
eyes would fix upon the other actors, appraising them coldly,
emanating a grim dissatisfaction with himself and his company.
Afterwards, over a drink, he would confide: I was bad tonight,
wasn't I, really awful, but the damn cast was even worse.
What a lot.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

It was consistent with him that after many months of
casting through Shylock he suddenly lashed fullfired into
the role at an obscure matinee in a onehorse village; a
frightening performance. Afterwards he said to me: What
did I do? Did you notice? I did something different. What
did you think of it? What was it I did? He never did it
again. Not quite like that. Who saw it?  

McMaster's preferences and his experience working in touring
melodrama companies in his youth led him to put emphasis on action in
all his productions. As a result, he would tend to race through
Othello's speech to the Senate, even with its moving and beautiful
description of those qualities in him that attracted Desdemona, because

11Christopher Casson MS.
12Maurice Good MS.
13Pinter, Mac, pp. 12-13.
it does not move the plot very far. Maurice Good:

Everything in Othello moved forward quickly—that contrived handkerchief scene was over so rapidly we were hardly aware of its absurdity, only its value to the plot. Mac had a reverence for the 'plot.' There was time even (provinces only) for a snatched curtain, in true opera style, with Iago after the 'Jealousy' scene.

But then Good recalls the climax of the scene where Iago baits Othello:

'. . . abandon all remorse;
On horror's head horrors accumulate.'
It was one of his supreme technical achievements—the rising crescendo of pure sound, at which not Iago alone, but the world seemed to quake . . . . I did see a few of the performances with all the stops cut, when he stupefied Iago, dazzled the cast, and stunned the audience into a spell-bound silence before the final roars of applause.14

Was Anew McMaster a "great" actor? It is a question admitting much discussion and little definite conclusion. However, those who saw him on the stage claim his greatness for him, and compare him favorably, on his best nights, to Olivier and Gielgud. There seems little doubt that here was an exceptional talent that spent almost all of its mature years touring the towns of Ireland.

British critic W. A. Darlington, in a book entitled The Actor and His Audience, studied the histories and the personal and professional characteristics of those British actors he considered "great": Richard Burbage, Thomas Betterton, David Garrick, Sarah Siddons, Edmund Kean and Henry Irving. Darlington's conclusions give some help in determining McMaster's stature, of course without implying that Mac should be included in such an august list. Darlington noted:

The Great Actor . . . will have one remarkable feature—his eyes. . . . The only other physical attribute that these

14Maurice Good MS.
great players have in common is strength . . . , plain
ordinary muscular power and control. 15

On both counts, McMaster scores well with his striking blue eyes and a
physical constitution that maintained his strength and vigor until he
died at the age of seventy.

The first mental quality that the actor needs is the power of
make-believe, or . . . a creative imagination . . . . It is
the power to get itself accepted that the actor's make-
believe differs from the child's . . . . The next question is
what other qualities of mind or character are necessary to
carry a man or woman higher than the rank and file of the
profession . . . . The first is concentration, or, as Gordon
Craig called it in Irving's case, single-mindedness. The
second is that individual magnetism . . . today usually
called personality. 16

Again McMaster ranks high. He was utterly single-minded about the
theatre; indeed, he had little life outside the theatre and preferred
to be touring and performing above all else. His friends were of the
theatre, most of his reading related to the theatre, and when he was
"resting" and not on tour he was the most restless of men. As for
magnetism or personality, Mac had that in abundance, too. His presence
on stage attracted attention no matter what he or the other actors were
doing or saying, and off-stage one was usually aware if he was in the
area. Quite without intending it, Mac was usually the focus of
attention—people knew he was there.

Darlington then goes beyond these three characteristics of the
actor to define a "power" that all the great actors had:

15 W. A. Darlington, The Actor and His Audience (London:

16 Ibid., pp. 145, 147.
It is the power, possessed by the great player and by the
great player alone, to establish between himself and a respon-
sive audience a complete emotional accord. ... On the quality
of the audience's response depends the quality of the player's
achievement, from which it follows ... that an actor can
be great only when he is playing to an audience that can
let him be so. A corollary from this ... is that an
audience more sensitive than common, on occasion, can thrust
greatness on an actor by inspiring him to find heights and
depths in himself which are notmally beyond his reach. ... This,
then, is the Great Actor's secret, that he can feel
an emotion so intensely, express it so vividly, and share
it with his audience so completely, that he turns a crowd
of strangers, for the moment, into a sentient being.\textsuperscript{17}

One of the least adequately explored areas of the theatre is
the effect of the audience upon an actor or a production. Even less
clear is the phenomenon by which certain actors create a strong empathic
response in the audience while other actors are merely observed in
performance. Darlington's statement relates to McMaster's history in
two different ways. First, it is clear that he was strongly influenced
by his audience. For example, McMaster states that his best performance
of Othello was before an interracial audience in Malta in 1937, where
the emotional audience response could be felt by the actors. Second,
Darlington's statement raises the question of whether the audiences of
the Irish countryside, who were the continuing support of the McMaster
company over the years, constituted a type of audience especially
supportive of and responsive to a talent such as McMaster's.

McMaster clearly preferred Irish audiences, and even preferred
country audiences to those of Dublin. Subsequent evidence will indicate
that McMaster's decision to tour Ireland was motivated largely by

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., p. 151.
circumstance and less by an idealization of the qualities of the Irish audience. However, Hilton Edwards, an Englishman who has worked in Irish theatre for forty-five years, maintains that:

Irish audiences see best with their ears. They have an amazing sense of words but not a great appreciation of what they are looking at. . . . This highly developed appreciation of words would suggest that audiences in Ireland are readier than those of other countries to respond to productions in which words are of greater significance than spectacle; to the theatre of the past, and, as I believe of the future.18

If that is so, McMaster probably found his best audience when he came to Ireland, because Shakespeare and Sophocles, the center of the McMaster repertoire, are superbly aural theatre.

Mac often was criticized because he took his talent to Ireland and stayed there. It has been argued that he could have established himself in England during the Second World War when actors were in great demand to entertain the troops and to maintain morale at home. Or that after the war he should have seen that actors of his type were again in some favor in London. The study will try to indicate, however, that a move from Ireland was not a practical one for Mac, because, as his daughter pointed out, he didn't have the strength or determination to persevere in the world of the London West End, and, as Mac Liammóir said, Mac didn't do anything that didn't "amuse" him. Most important, however, was the fact that Mac had found a constant and supportive audience in the towns and hamlets of Ireland. Darlington summed it up:

Acting does not exist at all until it finds an audience of some kind; great acting cannot exist at all until it finds an audience of the right kind. Kean could not give a great performance until he was helped to it by an audience ready to judge by what it felt, and not by what it thought it ought to feel. Some potentially great actors never find such an audience, and never touch greatness in consequence; some find such an audience now and again, and become great players on a particular occasion or even for the run of a play. 19

McMaster found his audience in Ireland, specifically in the county towns. Whether McMaster was a great actor or not, he had elements of greatness in him, and some would say it was a shame that he spent his career in Ireland rather than sharing himself with more of the world. But Mac's audience was in Ireland, and he could not leave it for long. He played at Stratford in 1933 and never went back; he played much of England in the 1930's but seized the beginning of the Second World War as a pretext for his more or less permanent return to Ireland. After Ireland, the audiences of Australia and Egypt were close to what he needed. Actress Dorothy Primrose describes one characteristic of that audience:

I can remember an interminable train journey when [Mac] talked to me about what he said was his favourite way of acting. Touring around in Ireland and playing in the smallest possible towns and villages, in halls and tiny places, where the audience had no idea of how the play was going to finish. I can remember him talking about twenty minutes about performances of Romeo and Juliet, when the audiences would shout out encouraging words and give him advice, and with that sunny sort of smile he said he was often tempted to take their advice and wondered how the play would finish up. In the tomb scene in Romeo and Juliet, right at the very end someone cried out in great distress, "Oh, give her a good shake!"20

20BBC Program.
That kind of direct response can occasionally prompt greatness, and for Mac it was life-giving and sustaining.

In the middle 1950's and after, McMaster was viewed by younger actors as rather old-fashioned in style, rather too large all around, not subtle enough in his Shakespearean interpretation. But there are few actors surviving who are what Edmund Kean's biographer H. N. Hillebrand calls "tragic soloists," and their disappearance is a loss to the theatre. McMaster was such, and those who knew him understand how infrequently actors of his particular skill appear in the world.

Hillebrand, writing in 1933, sums up his response to the question of how Kean might be viewed by actors and audiences of the 1930's:

But the fact is that with the passing of the great tragic soloists a good deal of the magic has gone out of Shakespeare. And I believe that if a modern audience could see Booth or Salvini or Kean it would learn, with a sense of revelation, what high passion means to high poetic tragedy. There is not a Shakespearean actor living who would not give his eyes to be able to do what those men did. And if they could, the interpretation of Shakespeare, the conception of this or that role, the delivery of this or that point, and more broadly the technique of great acting, might again become the subject of argument in clubs and drawing rooms and in the press.  

CHAPTER II

THE McMaster COMPANY

It has lately been the custom of the theatrical paragraph-maker to deny the truth of the assertion attributed to Bouicault that Shakespeare spells bankruptcy, but Dion
spoke the truth. Put Shakespeare on with little but fine acting and beautiful speech, and see how many will pay to look and listen.1

--Frank Fay, 1902

For nearly thirty-five years, the McMaster's challenged Frank
Fay's gloomy assessment of the Bard's box office appeal by touring
Ireland performing the major plays of the repertoire—Othello, The
Merchant of Venice, Macbeth, Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet and King Lear.
Of course, plays like Mr. Wu, The Shop at Sly Corner and Love From a
Stranger also were offered for the Saturday night audience, but
Shakespeare was at the center, and it was Shakespeare for which the
company was known. The life and routine of the company over the years
was remarkably consistent. Modes of travel varied according to the
demands of the times and, over time, the proportion of Irish-born actors
increased, but these were the only notable adjustments in a routine
that was established in the first year of the company—1925.

An average McMaster company was composed of young actors from

1Robert J. Hogan, ed., Toward a National Theatre: The
Dramatic Criticism of Frank J. Fay (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1970),
p. 87. Fay was the first leading actor of the Abbey Theatre and,
with his brother, William, one of the founders of that theatre.
England and Ireland (and occasionally other countries), a few more mature actors who had worked regularly with the McMasters, and an old trouper who was representative of the long line of touring actors, men who never had looked to the London West End as their goal. In the early years of the company J. C. Warren typified the touring actor; in the last years it was Eugene Wellesley, who had spent many years with Sir John Martin Harvey. McMaster would advertise in the theatrical trade newspapers in London for young actors willing to tour Ireland. Often he would go into London to audition, although Barry Foster was hired by mail while he was still a student at the Central School. Often an actor would be hired because he was a certain type. According to Barry Keegan, "The first thing he said was, 'Darney, Marjorie, wonderful for Darney, Charles Darney. Put the false piece on and we're off, give him the job.' And I didn't know what he meant at the time, because I wasn't very familiar with period plays..."\(^2\) Keegan soon learned he was playing opposite Mac in *The Only Way*, Martin Harvey's adaptation of *A Tale of Two Cities*. For Henry Woolf there was another consideration: "I got the job by telling a great number of lies in answer to an advertisement in *The Stage*, saying I played every part in Shakespeare, and I got the job, but I think it had something to do with the salary I was prepared to accept."\(^3\)

Actors never joined the McMaster company for the money. The pay scale was never very high. Prior to the war three to four pounds a week

\(^2\)BBC Program.

\(^3\)Ibid.
was the maximum, and during the war profits were shared and therefore variable. In the late Forties actors began at four pounds a week, and by the early 1950's it was six pounds for newcomers and eight pounds for those with some seniority. On the last tour in 1959, eight pounds a week was standard. Out of this wage the actor had to pay for "digs," accommodations that cost about thirty shillings a week for full board in the 1930's, rising to about two pounds, ten shillings by the late Fifties. Although no one got rich, in fairness it should be pointed out that this salary scale was in line with what was being paid in Dublin throughout the period.

Once the company was complete, there was usually a week of rehearsals in London or Dublin if many new people had been hired. If the newcomers were few, however, it was not unusual for the new actors to be in London one day and in Anascragh, Co. Galway, the next preparing to appear in Othello that night. They suddenly realized (a) that they really were going to tour some of the smaller Irish towns, (b) that they would be playing Shakespeare there, and (c) that McMaster expected every actor to know his Shakespeare. He was often surprised and disappointed to discover that his new actors did not have their Iago or Lorenzo prepared.

Actors had to learn fast. For example, the Autumn, 1952, tour opened in Youghal, Co. Cork, with a repertoire including The Merchant of Venice, Ten Little Niggers, Othello, The Importance of Being Earnest, Taming of the Shrew, Oedipus, and Hamlet. During the eighteen-week season, McMaster added An Inspector Calls, An Ideal Husband, Macbeth,
As You Like It, Duet For Two Hands, and Lady Windermere's Fan to the bill of plays. This wide-ranging repertoire was not reserved only for the larger towns. During the week of September 25, 1955, the people of Corrofin, a town of 250 in Co. Clare, were offered the following bill—a different play for each night and matinee: Othello, Macbeth, Niggers, Merchant, Dial M For Murder, The Bells, She Stoops to Conquer, Dracula, and Dangerous Corner. Few towns in the world could fail to appreciate such a varied offering. As actor Henry Woolf said, "I don't think that the Old Vic or Stratford or the ... National Theatre may go short in looking for someone to emulate, because when they achieve a weekly repertory like that, built around one man, then indeed they need look no further, I would think."  

In addition to being fast studies, McMaster company actors had to be versatile, sturdy, and healthy. The unvarying routine of the company was: open on Sunday night, play seven nights and as many as five matinees, close on Sunday night, strike the set (and often the stage), travel on Monday morning, perform on Monday night, and so on. In normal times the company travelled from town to town by car and truck with the McMasters and the actresses in the "Royal Car" and the actors in the front and back of the truck. Distances travelled were not great, and usually a morning was enough to reach the next town. The company's arrival often had the effect of a circus parade. Mac was well-known, 

---

4From the daily diaries of Eugene Wellesley. The author is grateful to his widow, Mrs. Muriel Wellesley of Romsey, Hampshire, England, for making the diaries available.

5BBC Program.
his arrival was anticipated, and occasionally he would stride down the main street greeting and waving to the townspeople. Young boys would follow along, hoping to help in the transfer of the lights, scenery, and costume hampers into the theatre in exchange for free passes.

Sometimes it was a theatre in which the company played, but often it was a municipal or church hall or a cinema. The McMasters were fully prepared to construct a full stage out of wood, pipe, and velvet drapes, or to add whatever pieces were necessary to transform the existing stage or platform into an appropriate theatre. Lighting was McMaster's particular passion, and he travelled with an impressive array of Rob John spotlights, portable dimmers and standard lighting units. These were hung and wired, often just with a hope that the available building wiring would be able to take the load. Occasional performances were given by candlelight when the circuits were not up to the mark and the hall was plunged into darkness. And it was said that the townspeople knew when Mac was in town because the lights in their homes dimmed slightly when the McMaster curtain went up. When the company played the Theatre Royal in Waterford, the Cork Opera House, the City Theatre in Limerick, and other standard theatres, the set-up would be much less improvised.

The next order of business after moving into the theatre was to find digs, the actors' accommodations for the week. Every established touring actor kept records of the digs he had used in the towns visited. Quality, comfort, and service varied according to the architecture and the proprietor, and actors like Eugene Wellesley would make appropriate
notations of the experience, sometimes an enthusiastic affirmation of satisfaction and often a rather plaintive and qualified note such as, "Pretty grim, but warm." For actors new to the routine the search was rather more risky and usually more time-consuming. Actors would walk from house to house, talking and bargaining with the owners, seeking to live that week as comfortably and cheaply as possible. It could be a long and frustrating procedure, especially if actors from other travelling companies had recently left town without paying their bills, an occasional event. Sometimes, to add insult to the search, it would rain, and the actors would come to the end of an afternoon tired and soaked with a performance scheduled for the evening. Eventually, accommodation was found. The McMasters usually stayed in a hotel. While the theatre was prepared, Mac took his afternoon nap with a stocking tied around his eyes to keep out the light.

Monday night and every night of the following week the company performed. Whether it was in Cork or Kilfinnane the audience came. In the smaller country towns the local gentry arrived by car and took preferred seats on chairs near the front of the house. People from the town and surrounding countryside sat further back, often on benches, and it was common to have a group of men standing in the back, as in church. Curtain time could vary since harvesting activities or church services could delay the arrival of the audience. Pinter remembered one evening when the curtain was delayed:

It was St. Patrick's Night. The curtain was supposed to rise at nine o'clock. But the house wasn't full until eleven thirty,
so the play didn't begin until then. It was well past two in the morning before the curtain came down. Everyone of the two thousand people in the audience [it was a cinema in Limerick] was drunk. Apart from that, they weren't accustomed to Shakespeare. For the first half of the play, we could not hear ourselves speak, could not hear our cues. The cast was alarmed. We expected the audience on stage at any moment. We kept our hands on our swords. . . . I came offstage with Mac at the interval and gasped. Don't worry, Mac said, don't worry. After the interval he began to move. When he walked onto the stage for the 'Naked in bed, Iago, and not mean harm' scene (his great body hunched, his voice low with grit), they silenced. He tore into the fit. He made the play his and the place his. By the time he had reached 'It is the very error of the moon; She comes more near the earth than she was wont, And makes men mad.', (the word 'mad' suddenly cauterized, ugly, shocking) the audience was quite still. And sober. I congratulated Mac. Not bad, he said, was it? Not bad."

When the curtain parted to begin the play, there must have been a true sense of magic present. A hall normally used for social or religious events had been prepared as a theatre, the house lights were switched off, and the stage lights came up to reveal the scene. Of necessity, the Mc Masters put emphasis on costume and lighting rather than scenic effects, and the initial effect must have been one of dazzling light and color illuminating a rather ordinary hall.

McMaster was always completely made-up, no matter the size of the theatre, and as elegantly costumed as the role would permit. His Othello was a light-brown Moor rather than black and came complete with black wig, earrings, and Moorish costume open to the waist. Macbeth had flowing red hair, Hamlet was blond and dressed in black, and when Mac played The Cardinal he wore a red robe with a long, full train that often filled the entire stage. The actors arranged themselves as best they could. Sometimes the costumes did not coordinate well, but they

"Pinter, Mac, pp. 9-10."
were always attractive and occasionally opulent. In the mid-1950's one of Desdemona's costumes served as a wedding dress for Mac's daughter-in-law.

Of course the actors had to double in roles, even in the larger companies. When the mood was on him, McMaster would play the Duke of Morocco or Balthazar as well as Shylock, but then he considered Merchant a "night off" and so was willing to double another role if it was necessary. The McMasters also employed "Walter Plinge" as a regular member of the company. Plinge was a pseudonym used in the program when an actor was doubling a minor role. He had a long career, beginning with the F. R. Benson company at the Lyceum in London in 1900 and continuing with regular employment down to the last McMaster tour in 1959. Originally, Plinge was owner of a public house near the Lyceum.  

Actors also had responsibilities in providing music and sound effects. Recorded music, usually opera, was used to heighten dramatic effect within scenes throughout the history of the company as well as providing overture and entr'acte selections. It was usual for an actor to come offstage and play a music or sound cue before his re-entrance. In the early 1950's, Mac's King Lear used to rage through a storm generated offstage by cast members with thunder sheets, drums, whistles, and other instruments, all under the direction of Patrick Magee (then McGee), long-time McMaster actor who subsequently gained recognition in films and as de Sade in the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Marat/Sade.*

After the final curtain, the company usually made some

---

scenic changes in preparation for the next day's bill of plays. If the
play was a modern one that required a box set rather than drapes and
rostrums, they would erect the appropriate side of an ingenious double-
faced set that permitted the choice of a very smart modern setting or a
rather more rustic beamed and panelled room. Afterward the actors
usually adjourned to the nearest pub where, with luck, the townspeople
would stand them to a few rounds of Guinness.

Days were spent rehearsing and playing matinees. Matinees were
very important to the company since they often made the difference in
the financial success of the tour. Performances for school children
frequently were scheduled, and McMaster always presented the plays—
usually Shakespeare—that were a part of the required school curriculum
that year. Sometimes the school children would come to the theatre,
but usually the company would travel to the school, bringing costumes,
drapes, and lighting with them.

The schools were operated by the Catholic Church, of course,
and school visits were only one part of the McMasters' necessary
connection with the Church. To a substantial extent, the success and
continuation of the company depended on the maintenance of good
relations with the Church. This was true on the practical level in that
many of the halls and theatres were owned by the Church and that the
school matinees were an important source of income. But it was more
profoundly true in that a frown from the Church hierarchy or the local
priest could result in loss of patronage from the church-going popula-
tion.
The company made regular appearances at convents and monasteries throughout Ireland. These were pleasant visits because, in addition to adding to the company's financial health, the religious orders were good audiences and provided excellent food. Often men would have to play women's roles in monastic performances since women were not permitted, but in the late 1940's actress Kitty Fitzgerald was the first woman admitted to Mount Melleray Abbey so that she might play Ophelia.9

Mac had been born a Protestant and had no special interest in religion. But over the years his relationship with the Catholic Church in Ireland remained good. Whether he ever converted to Catholicism is a matter of some dispute, but he was a regular and rather ostentatious participant at Mass on Sunday, carrying a rather large missal and parading down the center aisle in some style. McMaster was not just playing another role, however. The theatrical quality of the Church and the Mass attracted him, and he enjoyed his church-going very much. Later, when some lamented that he could not be knighted for his service to theatre, he told them that the only honor he would really liked to have had was to have been made a Knight of the Holy Roman Empire.10

With the school and convent-monastery matinees, the McMaster company would usually play at least two matinees a week, and Mac was not above scheduling five if the demand was there. Occasional grumbling from the actors was heard if a week was too busy; usually their contracts did not specify additional payment above two matinees.

Sunday night was always a performance night since in Ireland that is traditionally a time for entertainment. Saturday night activities are curtailed somewhat owing to the pending Mass next day, so Sunday night was the time for dances, cinema, and theatre. Church events provided a certain structure for the McMaster company's year. Tours normally began after August Bank Holiday and continued to early December, when the company rested for Christmas. The day after Christmas, St. Stephen's Day, traditionally was the opening date for the holiday pantomimes and occasionally for the recommencement of the McMaster tours. Lent was always good for theatre business since dancing was not permitted, but Holy Week was time off for Mac. Usually the tour began again on Easter night and continued through June. Generally speaking, the Church calendar benefitted the company, and Mac knew how to make the best of his opportunities.

After the Sunday night performance, the company would dismantle the set (and the stage, if necessary), and pack the props, costumes, and lights in their travelling hampers in preparation for the Monday morning departure. This Sunday strike marked the end of a long week that often included ten or twelve performances of eight or ten different plays in two or three theatres. Every day the stage was restructured for the next play, and often lights and scenic elements were removed from the main theatre and carried to a school or convent for a performance. It was hard, continuous work for everyone, including Mac and his wife, Marjorie.

Marjorie McMaster was in fact the administrative and operational backbone of the company. She was not over five feet tall and was rather
frail looking, but she had deceptive strengths of all kinds—physical, administrative, managerial. She also acted occasionally. During set-up and strike she could be seen carrying scenery or costume hampers, directing the arrangement of the theatre, preparing for production or loading the truck. She supervised the box office and the finances, paid the company, ordered and paid for the advertising with cash on the spot. She was also McMaster's essential support, from making sure his make-up case and costumes were ready when he arrived at the theatre to prompting him from behind the scenery when he went dry on stage. Mac's word was law and they never disagreed publicly, but because most of the decisions were passed on to the company by Marjorie, she and the actors were often at odds. Finally, many of them came to regard her with "respect" rather than affection. She probably did not care; her attention was on Mac.

Next day the tour continued on to the next town. The autumn 1952, tour is typical. Unless noted, each town was played for a full week, and the dates given are for the first day of the engagement:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Town/Location</th>
<th>Performances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 3</td>
<td>Yougahal (Town Hall)</td>
<td>7 perf: Merchant, Niggers, Othello, Earnest, Shrew, Oedipus, Hamlet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 10</td>
<td>Kinsale (Municipal Hall)</td>
<td>7 perf.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 17</td>
<td>Skibbereen (Town Hall)</td>
<td>8 perf: add An Inspector Calls. One day only.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 24</td>
<td>Rossmore (The Hall)</td>
<td>7 perf.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 25</td>
<td>Kermare (Carnegie Library)</td>
<td>8 perf.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 1</td>
<td>Bandon (St. Patrick's Boys Club Hall)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 8</td>
<td>Dromcollier (Parochial Hall)</td>
<td>7 perf.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 15</td>
<td>Tipperary (Gaiety Theatre)</td>
<td>8 perf: add As You Like It.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sept. 22 Hospital (Mitchell's Hall) 10 perf: Saturday matinee at Mercy Convent, Doon; add An Ideal Husband, Lady Windermere's Fan.

Sept. 29 Galway (Town Hall Theatre) 10 perf.
Oct. 6 Caher (Parochial Hall) 9 perf: Friday matinee at Rockwell College [school].
Oct. 13 Dungarvan (Friary Hall) 7 perf: No performance Monday, first night off since tour began.

Oct. 20 Cork (Opera House) 9 perf: no Sunday perf.

Nov. 3 Fermoy (Palace Hall) 9 perf.
Nov. 10 Kilkenny (Kilkenny Theatre) 9 perf: add Duet For Two Hands; Sun. mat., scenes from Shakespeare at Mercy Convent, Callan.

Nov. 17 Mullingar (County Hall) 9 perf.
Nov. 24 Navan (Cyms Hall) 10 days, 15 perf. Tour closed Dec. 3.

In all, 155 performances had been given in eighteen towns from a repertory of twelve plays. During the four-month tour, the actors had had two days off.**

Touring with the McMaster company was hard in the moment, but the actors who lived the life usually look back on it with gratitude and affection. There were several levels to the experience. One was the opportunity to see Ireland. The weather often was bad, and in winter it was difficult to escape the damp and chill in an actor's temporary accommodations. But there were many times when the countryside—often seen from the back of a truck—was striking and memorable. Barry Foster:

Our first date was Youghal, ... my first sight of an Irish village with this incredible light down there. You look across and see a hill with corn on it, ... a ruined barn near the brow of a hill, perhaps half a mile away, and you see it all in perfect detail. ... And that was my first moment of realization of what Italian Renaissance painting

**Data from the Eugene Wellesley diaries.
was about, . . . and I realized, you know, that all that isn't phony, that that's how it does look.

Touring was excellent training for actors, a form of education that does not exist any more. Foster sums it up:

[Mac] taught you all those things which everyone's busy telling you while you're a student that you'll learn in [repertory], and which, of course, you don't—in weekly rep, that is. Because weekly rep consists in throwing a show on which might be a little way near it by the first house on Saturday. After the second house on Saturday you've said goodbye to that play forever. With Mac you learnt from coming back to the play in different conditions each time. And the other thing was simply learning by having to exist on the same stage with Mac. . . . He was very anxious that his Tago would be strong and attractive and in every way matching his brilliance. There was never any question in his mind of anyone taking a play from him. This he considered, quite rightly, to be too ridiculous to even think about.

Pinter adds another dimension to the experience:

There was the day, the sleeping, the theatre—the whole thing was one was learning . . . something about how to live, and for me this period with [Mac], in fact, represented the Golden Age.

And Patrick Magee:

Well, that sort of thing, yes, but principally, largely, the fun. We had grand times.12

12All closing quotes from the BBC Program.
PART II
CHAPTER III

EARLY YEARS

Like several noted "Irish" actors, James Quin and Barry Sullivan among them, Anew McMaster was born in England. On Christmas Eve, 1891, he became the second son of Andrew and Alice McMaster, then residing at 2 Palm Hill in Claughton, a section of Birkenhead, the city across the Mersey River from Liverpool.¹ Mac's given name was Andrew, and it is not known where "Anew" came from or when he began to be known by that name. It sounds like a substitution that a child might use if it could not pronounce "Andrew," and it may be that Mac was given his shortened name by his year-older brother George.

McMaster's father was Irish, but of Scotch-Irish Presbyterian descent. He was the product of that roundabout emigration pattern by which families moved from lowland Scotland to northern Ireland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (in response to economic opportunism and the plantation of Catholic Ireland) and then sailed back to Scotland or the English west midlands during the Irish famine of 1845-1848. Liverpool became a center of this second migration, increasing its permanent Irish population by about 300,000 during the

¹Birth certificate, General Register Office, Somerset House, London.

33
famine years.²

During the Victorian period Liverpool was "the second port of the Empire," its harbor filled with ships, including ocean-going passenger liners setting out for America, Australia, and the other parts of the world. Birkenhead had built its first docks in 1847, and by the end of the century was a major shipbuilding center. Andrew McMaster had been born in 1855, and, by the time of Mac's birth, had become a master stevedore on the Liverpool docks, a title indicating a responsible supervisory position and a relatively comfortable economic level for the McMaster family.

Andrew McMaster had married Alice Maude Thompson of Liverpool in that city in mid-1887. He was 32 years old, she was 21. In 1890 their first child, George, was born and named after his paternal grandfather. Anew (Andrew) was born a year and a half later. Three-and-a-half years after Mac's birth, his mother died of "acute phthisis."³ It was tuberculosis. This was the first of a series of family tragedies Mac would experience, and it would not be the last time tuberculosis was involved. Mac had no memories of his mother, but photographs show an attractive woman with the large eyes and well-formed mouth that he inherited. Her death must have been a shock to Mac, perhaps especially so since, by all accounts, his father was a rather distant parent.

Then on August 5, 1896, thirteen months after the death of his


wife, Andrew McMaster remarried in a rather unusual match for the dour Presbyterian. His second wife was Zoe Papayanni, nineteen-year-old daughter of Basilio Papayanni, merchant and partner in the Liverpool-based Ellerman and Papayanni shipping line. McMaster was then forty-one. A year later Mac's only sister, Eileen, was born in Birkenhead.

One can only speculate on the effect of all this on Mac, then not quite five years old. The death of his mother, the arrival of a stepmother not yet twenty, the birth of a sister, the presence of Greek relatives and even Greek Orthodox priests in the household must have caused both excitement and confusion in the young McMaster. Without taking psychological analysis too far on such limited evidence, one can see early foundations for Mac's preference for the past, his insistence on the irrationality of life, and his choice of the theatre as a place where a preferred life could be created.

As McMaster grew his problems were compounded by isolation from and a lack of communication with his father. Andrew McMaster appears as the picture of the conservative Scotch-Irish businessman whose life was in his work. While attempting to list his father's good qualities, Mac gives this somber picture:

He had great integrity . . . in business affairs and was generous to me on occasion. . . . He was the type who judges his fellow men as to the size of breakfast they could put away, and he was most solicitous that we should wear in winter this flannel 'chest protector' to cover our lungs.4

Not a bad man, certainly, but one who might find it difficult to have understanding for a boy who did not share his interests.

4A. McMaster 1957 MS.
Apparently the only relative remembered with real affection by McMaster was his mother's spinster sister, Dora Thompson. She was known as his "brown-bread" aunt because she vigorously advocated the consumption of a particular brand of brown bread (made by Doctor Allinson, ex-M.D.) as the cure for the afflictions of man. 5 Perhaps Aunt Dora, who attended her younger sister at her death, was not a part of the staid Ulster wing of the family, and could sympathize with the sensitive and isolated boy who may have shared many of his mother's traits. Dora was the only one of Mac's family to remain friendly to him throughout his life. She died in the early 1950's at the age of 93, and left him her house and a little money.

The McMaster children would spend their summers with their father's sister, Mary, at her home in Warrenpoint, Co. Down, in Ireland. They would go across the Irish Sea to Newry and then to Warrenpoint, a resort town on the inland end of Carlingford Lough, the lovely lake that flows into the Irish Sea halfway between Belfast and Dublin. It was at Aunt Mary's that Mac's first interest in theatre was manifest.

At the bottom of the garden was a loft [in a carriage house], and in this I used to act one-act plays to whatever audience I could persuade to endure them. I blush to think of how many little boys and girls were dragged in to act against their will. If ever I didn't do in the daytime what my companions required of me, I was assailed with the black-mailing remark, 'If you don't do what you are told, I won't act tonight.' That settled it, I did as I was told. 6

Little is known about McMaster's boyhood theatre-going experiences, but he grew up at a time when touring theatre was at its height in Britain, when famous actors and great plays regularly came to

5Lifetime, no. 1. 6Ibid.
theatres like the Shakespeare and the Royal Court in Liverpool, the Theatre Royal in Dublin, and the Opera House in Belfast. Mac recalled going on school trips to see the F. R. Benson company, and he remembered his father's refusal to let him go with his brother to see Henry Irving's farewell performance of The Bells: "I implored my father to take me, too; he gave me a penny as compensation; I threw it at him."

The performance was at the Royal Court in Liverpool on December 3, 1904, when Mac was nearly thirteen. When he was sixteen he saw Sir John Martin Harvey in The Only Way, his famous adaptation of A Tale of Two Cities:

The highly dramatic and well-acted prologue alone left me in a fainting condition, and Harvey's performance as Sydney Carton was perfect. I thought I had seen the greatest actor in the world—I was ill with excitement for days after this matinee.  

About this time McMaster's family situation was approaching a crisis. He was not a success at school, largely because he already possessed a character trait for which he would be noted in later life: "I always found it terribly difficult . . . to concentrate on anything that did not interest me. . . ."  

His few academic achievements related to the theatre, and in general he hated school. His father doggedly tried to interest Mac in banking, a field in which his brother was showing satisfactory development. But that did not work, either, and Mac's alienation from his father was nearly complete.

He remembered, "By the time I was fifteen or sixteen I was the

7 Lifetime, no. 1.  
8 A. McMaster 1957 MS.  
9 Lifetime, no. 1.
despair of my father. He often used to say I wasn't worth my salt. He openly showed great preference for my brother.\textsuperscript{10} Mac and his father were never reconciled, and, sadder still, Mac never got over the need to prove himself to his father. He wrote:

Later in life . . . I wanted very much to impress my father but never succeeded in doing so. Many years later I was enjoying a Shakespearean season, playing to overflowing houses. I pressed him to come to Hamlet. I still have his letter written a week later (I am sorry to say the only letter of his I have) in which he says, 'As soon as you realize Shakespeare is agony for grown-up people to listen to the better—even Henry Irving lost his shirt on it.'\textsuperscript{11}

Andrew McMaster died in 1940 at the age of 85, apparently never having seen his son on the stage.

At the age of eighteen, Anew McMaster had grown to slightly more than six feet in height, and had a handsome boyish face and striking blond hair with a curious part that curled toward the center of his forehead. Increasingly his interest was with the theatre, and when the break with the family occurred in 1910, it was to the world of the theatre that he fled. For the young Englishman the destination naturally would be London, and it was there that McMaster went to begin his long career.

\textsuperscript{10}\textit{Lifetime}, no. 1. \textsuperscript{11}A. McMaster 1957 MS.
CHAPTER IV

LONDON (1911-1914)

McMaster's experiences in the London theatre of the period 1911-1914 were to have strong influence in shaping and confirming his theatrical preferences and prejudices. He did not come down to London completely unformed theatrically, but he had predispositions which became manifest immediately upon his arrival. The experiences and choices of these first years set Mac firmly on the course he was to follow for the rest of his life.

Opera

Mac's earliest memory of London is of the opera: "My first opera in London was Strauss's Salome, Beecham conducting at Covent Garden, I think. I enjoyed it without understanding the music then."¹ His memory was good, as it usually was with opera. It was the autumn of 1910, and young Thomas Beecham's second season of conducting at Covent Garden. If McMaster followed the season closely, he would have had an education. Beecham's company performed thirty operas in twenty-eight weeks to harsh critics and small houses.²

¹A. McMaster Notebook MS.

Opera was McMaster's life-long passion, in some ways a more consuming interest than the theatre itself. Over the years he seldom missed an opportunity to attend an operatic performance, whether it was in London, Paris, and Monte Carlo or in Dublin and Cork. As a boy he had seen performances by the Carl Rosa, Moody-Manners, and Cavalliere Castellani companies, all noted provincial touring opera troupes. Mac arrived in London just as one of the most exciting and innovative periods in opera and ballet was beginning. At Covent Garden he could hear Emmy Destinn, Nellie Melba, and John MacCormack. In 1913 Caruso made his return after an absence of six years. Other great singers of the period were Martinelli, Tetrazzini, Edvina, and Scotti. As one critic said, "Production was non-existent, scenery shabby, and the repertory under-rehearsed. . . . But great singing was certainly to be heard in those days."3

In 1913 a revolution came to the London opera stage when Beecham brought the Russian opera with the great bass, Fedor Chaliapin, to Drury Lane. With Boris Godunov in 1913 and Prince Igor in 1914, the Russians revolutionized British opera practice in decor and dance. Their integration of music, dance, and decor brought new life to the opera and raised interest in the art. And Mac was there for most of it.

McMaster gravitated to the romantic and melodramatic in all theatrical matters, and opera was both a natural object of that interest and a reinforcement of it. Simplicity of plot, direct expression of emotion and straightforward action are all characteristics of opera

which are later found in McMaster company productions and in Mac's own acting style. He also integrated opera into his productions directly. From the beginning, operatic music was incorporated in overtures and entr'actes and as mood music underlining the action of the play. The "Liebestod" was always a part of the last scene between Othello and Desdemona, and trumpet calls, triumphant entries, and other thematic music was regularly transferred from the opera into all the McMaster repertory.

In another significant way Mac applied his interest in opera and music to his dramatic art. He had a good singing voice, although it was not one to permit an operatic career. As an actor, however, he had a style in which the "music" of a role was often as important as the content of the lines. Those who heard him act were often aware that his variations in cadence, tone, and pitch had a highly musical quality, an effect sometimes at odds with the content and meaning of the lines. Hilton Edwards, co-founder of the Dublin Gate Theatre, was to observe years later that playing Shakespeare demands great musical ability, and that McMaster's sense of cadence and his rhythm and tone were the strong points of his technique. Mac acquired this technique primarily from Fred Terry, the noted actor and the next major influence in the early years of McMaster's career.

Fred Terry and Julia Neilson

London theatre just after the New Year, 1911, offered the playgoer typical Edwardian fare. Christmas revivals of Maeterlinck's The Blue Bird and Barrie's Peter Pan (with Pauline Chase) were playing. At
the Shaftesbury The Arcadians with Cloely Courtneidge was in its 604th performance, Daly's was showing the operetta A Waltz Dream, and Cyril Maude was at the Playhouse in A Single Man. H. B. Irving was appearing at the Queens with Stella Patrick Campbell in The Princess Clementina, and Laurence Irving and his wife, Mabel Hackney, were in The Unwritten Law at the Kingsway. Also present were the actor-managers: Charles Hawtrey, Gerald duMaurier, George Alexander, F. R. Benson. Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree was playing in the long-running Henry VIII at His Majesty's, and Oscar Asche and Lily Brayton had produced the exotic Count Hannibal at the Garrick.

Another husband and wife team returned to the London theatre the night of January 2. Fred Terry and Julia Nielson had come back from a successful tour of America, and were presenting the sixth revival of The Scarlet Pimpernel. This play was one of the two enduring foundations of the Terry-Nielson company (with Sweet Nell of Old Drury), but any Terry-Nielson opening night was an event. The Stage reported:

There was quite a little family party, a regular gathering of the class, at the New [Theatre] . . . when Miss Julia Nielson and Mr. Fred Terry reappeared at their old West End home. . . . Miss Marion Terry and other relations were in the stalls; and the house was filled elsewhere with hosts of 'old friends,' whom Mr. Terry, in his gracefully phrased and evidently heartfelt little speech, . . . bracketed with the 'sweet new friends' whom he, and his wife, and their company have recently been making across the Atlantic.4

The Scarlet Pimpernel has a cast of forty-two plus walkers-on labelled only as "etc.," and among the "etc." on the night of January 2, 1911,

4Jan. 5, 1911, p. 17.
Sometime after his arrival in London, Mac had presented himself to Terry's stage manager, John Turnbull, and walked out of his office with a contract in his pocket "at the princely salary of one pound a week, with 2/6 extra for a second matinee in a walk-on part." Although it appears that Mac had no previous theatre experience, it was not unusual that he could find a job with an established company like the Terrys'. The actor-managers usually maintained large companies of supers for their more spectacular productions, and salaries were low, as McMaster discovered. Even at one pound a week it was a significant turn in Mac's life. Forty-five years later he would write, "I learnt more from Fred Terry than from any other producer, not only for his great gifts in this direction, but because I was so very receptive at that period of my life."7

Fred Terry usually gets small mention in the history of the theatre because for the last thirty years of his life he and his wife were associated with the kind of old-fashioned romantic acting and production that ended in London with the coming of the First World War. But Terry had served a long apprenticeship in the twenty years prior to the time of the Terry-Nielson company, including a four-year stay with Tree at the Haymarket, 1890-1894. During those twenty years, Terry played more than seventy-five roles of all kinds. He had a firm grounding in the nineteenth-century stage.

---

5 Program in the Entloven Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
6 Lifetime, no. 1. 7 A. McMaster 1957 MS.
By all accounts he was an excellent actor. Audrey Williamson wrote of seeing Terry in *Pimpernel* in Brighton in 1928, when Terry was sixty-five:

No one who had ever heard the bell-like Terry voice, . . . or seen that impeccable display of humour, subtlety of nuance and period style, could ever forget it or tolerate for one instance the slovenliness of diction, technique and carriage that characterized so much of later West End acting. . . . Only from one voice on the stage . . . have I heard a volume and beauty of sound to equal that which reverberated, like a great cathedral bell, through the theatre when Fred Terry spoke.  

Much of the nature McMaster was a strong echo of Fred Terry. Mac's voice had the Terry clarity and power, and he emulated Terry's stature and carriage on stage. Even Mac's interest in the "music" of a role was derived from his first employer. He recalled:

Fred in direction . . . emphatic as to the musical importance of dialogue. A little later on I was to play . . . Hollins in *Sweet Nell* of Old Drury with old Arthur Williams as the boozy actor and Julia as Sweet Nell. A servant announced, 'A visitor, Madame.' Julia said, 'A visitor?' I said, 'A visitor?' Williams said, 'A visitor?' And we rehearsed at least an hour to set each a different musical 'visitor.'

The fact that Julia Neilson had trained as an opera singer also was a contributing influence.

Terry's influence also extended to the organization and structure of the McMaster company. To his company Fred Terry was "The Chief," and, though on tour he might come down from his first class railway car to play poker with the company, to Mac, Terry and Neilson were always "The Royal Couple." The actor-manager system was highly
paternalistic. To a large extent, the actor-manager's public image was that of a proper Victorian-Edwardian parent, with correct dress and proper manner as an example to the coming generations. Maq carried this attitude into his own company, even though by that time the age of the actor-managers was past. Over time, the actors in his companies became less and less the willing inheritors of a tradition and more and more democratically-minded individuals who used the McMaster company to gain experience without being wedded to the system or its perpetuation. Often Maq would be surprised, angered, or saddened by the lack of "loyalty" among his actors when they left the company or questioned his decisions. Maq was in the tradition, but he fathered few sons.

Though McMaster was hired as a super, he soon moved up one small notch:

During the run of The Scarlet Pimpernel, an actor who was playing the tiny but effective part of The Aristocrat in the prologue left the cast, and one night after the show Fred Terry and his daughter Phyllis Nielson-Terry sat solemnly in the stalls to see if I could do it. I passed this ordeal, and played him for the rest of the run. 10

So Mac had his first speaking part on the London stage. One more experience was to come:

Last nights with the Terrys were nearly as exciting from an audience point of view as a premiere, and Terryites came in great force. My exit line [as the Aristocrat] was, 'To the devil with the Republic,' and I received--on that last performance--a round of applause on my exit. I never sit in the New Theatre . . . without remembering my first round of applause on the professional stage. 11

The play, again a box office success, had been extended for a week, and

10 A. McMaster 1957 MS. 11 Ibid.
McMaster's first exit round is recorded on Saturday, January 28, 1911.

The following Thursday, February 2, the Terry-Nielson company opened a new play, *The Popinjay*. "A. McMaster" is listed in the program as a super.\(^{12}\) The production received bad notices, but ran 147 performances through June 17. *Pimpernel* then re-opened on June 26 and played forty more performances through July 29, when the company disbanded for the summer. Terry-Nielson would tour the "number ones," the major British cities, in the autumn, and Mac hoped that he would be able to obtain more important roles. He spoke with Fred Terry, who told him, "Go into the provinces and play, my boy, preferably in melodrama. It will give you weight and teach you how to master rough audiences. [Terry was referring to the *Popinjay* audiences.] Just keep one eye on yourself and don't fall into their most glaring exaggeration."\(^{13}\)

**First Touring Experience**

McMaster made the rounds of touring company agents and managers, and eventually was engaged by Oswald Cray "at 35/- per week to play as cast, to be assistant stage manager and assistant business manager."\(^{14}\) Cray was well established in the world of touring melodrama, a recent success having been *The Mormon and His Wives*. When Mac joined the company in August, 1911, the play was an adaptation of a popular book by Guy Thorne entitled *When It Was Dark*. The plot concerned the supposed discovery on Christ's tomb of the words, "I, Joseph of Arimathea, stole

\(^{12}\)Program in the Enthoven Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

\(^{13}\)A. McMaster 1957 MS. \(^{14}\)Ibid.
the body of Jesus and hid it elsewhere." This discovery allowed the villain to cause chaos in the modern world by proving that the resurrection and ascension were a fraud. Mac recalled:

I played three parts twice nightly, including 'second heavy' in the first act. The first heavy (or villain) was a character called Constantine Swabe, and I was an aider and abetter of his villainies. In the second act I was a black Eastern potentate, and in giving instruction for the torturing of the hero I had a line: 'Bring out the bastinado.' This line I brought out with great gusto, which, for a reason I could never explain, brought the house down. I rather enjoyed making this little sensation, but the hero (who was also the manager) objected, and I had to throw away the line—my very first lesson in understatement on the stage. . . . In the next act, off came the black and I was a light comedy man.  

The Cray tour seldom stopped at the major cities, but rather visited Farnsworth, Longsight, Bishop Auckland, Halifax, Bury, and Huddersfield during Mac's tenure. In the last week in August the company visited the Queen's Theatre, Leeds, where Cray first staged an adaptation of Dickens's *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, which had been produced by Tree a few years before. Mac was delighted to find he had been cast as Drood, and was only slightly less so when it turned out his was not the leading role. McMaster remembered, "I had, I think, a scene when I was doped, which I acted with appalling staginess, giving the best imitation of H. B. Irving in the Dream Scene from *The Bells*."  

After about nine weeks with Cray, McMaster left to rejoin Terry-Nielson for their autumn tour. His experience with Oswald Cray had been

---

15A. McMaster 1957 MS. "Bastinado" is punishment by beating on the soles of the feet.

16From touring company reports in *The Era*.

17A. McMaster 1957 MS.
limited and rather inconclusive and was not to be repeated. But he had
gotten his first taste of touring the provinces, and, as assistant
business manager, may have learned something about the mechanics of
touring with a company. This was not to be his last contact with the
world of melodrama, although it would be four years before he returned
to it.

Irish Friends

The Terry-Nielson company returned to London in December and
presented as their Christmas offering the first revival in London since
1902 of their first major success, *Sweet Nell of Old Drury*. McMaster
apparently was down to play the role of "Rollins" in this production,
but at the last moment lost out to a "friend of the producer,"18 and
so again joined the ranks of the supers. This left him with time on his
hands, even during performance, so Mac and another member of the company
hired into the cast of *Everybody's Doing It*, a revue featuring Russian
dancer Lydia Kyasht at the Empire Theatre. Every night in the spring of
1912, Mac and his friend could be seen coming out of the New Theatre in
full makeup, dashing across Charing Cross Road, into Leicester Square,
and down Lisle Street into the stage door of the Empire, where they
joined the chorus of male dancers. Mac had no training, of course, but
he was tall, handsome, and young, and managed to move with sufficient
grace not to be distracting.19

18A. McMaster Small Notebook MS. 19*Lifetime*, no. 1.
theatre owner, Sir Charles Wyndham, so that he might revive Mrs. Dane’s Defense on May 16. The New had been the Terry’s London home since January, 1905, but after this season they would never again appear at that theatre or indeed perform Sweet Nell or Pimpernel anywhere in the West End. From this time on, nearly all their work would be done in the provinces. Through the end of 1913, Mac toured with them.

When he was not touring, Mac was a member of a circle of young actors that included Robert Andrews, at seventeen a six-year veteran of the stage; Ivor Novello, then nineteen and up from Oxford to try a career as a song writer; twelve-year-old Noel Coward, and two of Coward’s friends, Alfred Willmore and his sister Marjorie. Willmore also was twelve, and was in the middle of a successful career with Tree at His Majesty’s, where he had appeared as Macduff’s son in Macbeth, as Michael Darling in a Christmastime Peter Pan, and, in the summer of 1912, as Oliver in Oliver Twist. Marjorie was Mac’s age, and had taken responsibility for the care and upbringing of her only brother, Alfred. She served as tutor and escort for the young actor, and on tour in Peter Pan she occasionally would act or get into harness to "fly" as stand-in for Peter. She was a tiny girl, very slight and under five feet tall, which made it easier on the stagehands.

Ten years later Mac and Marjorie would be married, and Alfred Willmore would become the noted Irish actor Micheal Mac Liammóir, founder (with Hilton Edwards) of the Dublin Gate Theatre. Mac Liammóir provides an eyewitness account of the twenty-year-old Anew McMaster in the summer of 1912:
My first sight of him was in a London restaurant called Apperrodt's. . . . Apperrodt's was a frigid but happy place, . . . and as its name suggests it was Teutonic in spirit and in fact. White, glistening and spotless, it stood near the Criterion Theatre in Piccadilly Circus, and the air as soon as you passed the threshold was fragrant with the scent of Leberwurst and gherkins, and cool, creamy potato-salad.

Because I was a child and McMaster, arriving suddenly in pale grey with a lilac-coloured shirt, was in his twenties he seemed to me not merely grown-up but perhaps the most hilariously beautiful living creature I had ever set eyes upon except, perhaps, Ellen Terry or Nijinsky. Tall, slim, golden-haired and with astonishing eyes that were the colour, not of violets as many people said, but of harebells. The term 'Greek god' was frequently applied to him. It was applied to his whirlwind entrance . . . that day. 'And of course it could be true,' he said, 'because you see I'm half Irish and half Greek . . . I mean me stepmother was Greek, you see—oh, yes, dear, Papayanni was her name before she married me father—and if that doesn't make me half Greek what does?' The characteristic note was struck immediately; he was not inventing a romantic background for himself, he believed it was so. . . . 'But me poor nose, dear!' he went on to the table at large. 'Just plain north of Ireland. Or I suppose you might call it Roman. Yes, R-r-roman . . . like Sarah in Britannicus.'

The friendship of the "Irish in England" blossomed, and the Willmores found themselves swept into McMaster's world. Mac Liammoir recalled a night in 1912 when

at the corner McMaster and Dennis Nielson-Terry are waiting, and Marjorie and I are breathless and a little late and Mac . . . , his hands full of roses burning red and gold in the Cockney dust, bounds forward and cries, 'God, darlings, at last! Dennis and I were dropping in our tracks! If we miss one note of the overture I'll kill you both—you're always late. Still, it's all part of the charm I suppose—now remember, dears, it's been me life's ambition for you to hear your first Butterfly with Dennis and me,' and as we race through the thrilling corridors [of Covent Garden]

---

20 Micheal Mac Liammoir MS.
he bursts into song, 'And the walls and the ceilings—God, how I love it!'\textsuperscript{21}

Marjorie recalled in a memoir:

We three from Ireland . . . spent every possible moment together. I always laugh when I think of our walking down the Haymarket, arms linked, with me in the middle and the other two talking over my head as if I wasn't there. So busy talking that they were oblivious to how people stopped and stared at them. . . . No one notices the tiny girl wedged between them—so very plain except for two great broad plaits of red-gold hair, and with an enormous mouth nearly too big for her minute frame. But she noticed them. She noticed everything. Micheal used to say, 'Mama . . . is un-noticed, but noticing.'\textsuperscript{22}

In December, 1912, McMaster returned to London during the tour break, and obtained a part in a revival of the Christmas pantomime, The Golden Land of Fairy Tales. He was to play Prince Richard, the role performed the previous year by his friend, Bobbie Andrews. It opened Saturday, December 21, at the Aldwych Theatre, and continued for a month of matinees. It was probably not a very exciting engagement for Mac, but there was some interest for him in that many of the supers were members of the chorus of Der Rosenkavalier, which Beecham was rehearsing for its first English production around the corner at Covent Garden.\textsuperscript{23}

A year later, in December, 1913, McMaster left the Terry company permanently after its autumn tour. No reason is given, but it seems likely that after three years with the company, including two years on the road, Mac thought it was time to try something different. He was twenty-three years old, and it was clear he could not make a career with

\begin{footnotes}
\item[22] Marjorie McMaster MS. \item[23] A. McMaster 1957 MS.
\end{footnotes}
with Terry-Nielsen. Marjorie's daily appointment diary for 1914 shows Mac's constant presence in London and in her company until mid-February. Then the Willmores went off on a seven-week tour of Peter Pan, leaving the unemployed McMaster in London. Mac Liammoir remembered:

When things were bad and not even a juvenile lead on a humble number two tour was in sight... [Mac] would send long and excessively worded telegrams... saying something like: 'Everything indescribable agony darlings come to lunch to-day if you wish to see me alive probably not a bite to eat but come anyway West End part fallen through just as I expected landlady a cow but am trying to bear up utter despair Mac.'... But then he railed against so many things, and one was never certain that he was not in fact savouring every moment life had to offer with insatiable relish. His unceasing declaration that life was Hell and that he, in spite of appearances, was suffering the agonies of the damned, was delivered with such rococo elaboration that one half expected to see him float into the air on the wings of his own enjoyment.24 McMaster remembered those times in London as being very exciting.

According to him, "A sort of golden light seems to enfold one's memories, ... the people we met, the operas we heard, the plays that we saw—it was as if... we were all trying to cram into life all the beauty and colour and friendship of our world."25

A Return to Liverpool

In late May, 1914, McMaster joined a company that was to present a five-week season of plays at the Liverpool Repertory Theatre. For the previous three years, producers A. B. Croll and Lawrence Hanray (an actor in the regular repertory company) had been using the theatre's

24 Mac Liammoir MS.
25 Lifetime, no. 2.
off-season for their own productions. This year the season opened May 25, and over the following five weeks Hanray-Croll presented a repertory that included *Admiral Guinea*, *You Never Can Tell* (the only Shaw McMaster was to do until 1959), *The Case of Rebellious Susan*, *Captain Drew on Leave*, and *The Awakening*. In a closing-night speech on June 27, Hanray, "thanked the public for the hearty and cordial support they had given, which support had gone a long way to temper their disappointment, the weather having been against them."  

This season marked McMaster's first encounter with a repertory of plays substantially in the tradition of the realistic stage rather than the romantic spectacle of the Terrys and the touring melodramas. Whether more extensive experience in this kind of theatre would have diverted Mac's interest from the Romantic stage is doubtful, but in any event this brief season only served as a springboard for Mac back onto the romantic-spectacular stage. As he was winding up his season with Hanray-Croll, a producer named Alfred Denville was preparing the touring version of *Joseph and His Brethren*, an elaborate spectacle that Tree had staged at His Majesty's from September 2, 1913, through January 14, 1914. (Alfred Willmore had been Benjamin.) As was common practice, Tree had leased the rights to Denville for a "northern" tour, and Denville was to have the use of the original scenery, costumes, and properties.

Denville was a protege of the noted producer of pantomime and

27 *The Era*, July 1, 1914, p. 8.
pageants, Augustus Harris. He had had a substantial success in 1913 touring an elaborate production of The Miracle with a cast of "380 artistes, along with 24 horses, mules and goats," and now he prepared to present Joseph on a similar scale. It was to open August 10 for a projected month's run at the Liverpool Olympia, a large theatre that usually presented music hall and variety artists.29

It seems likely that McMaster, in Liverpool for the Hanray-Groll season, heard of the Denville production and auditioned. He was chosen to play Joseph. Suddenly Mac had his first big break. After three-and-a-half years of walk-ons and melodrama, he was at last in a major role in the tour of a West End success. Though not yet in the West End, the credit could give McMaster a step up on the way to London success—if he was lucky. In addition to McMaster, the leading actors were Richard Symons and later William Galvert as Jacob, Rosabelle Dodd as Zuleika, and J. E. Savery as Pharaoh. A "chorus of 100" was supplemented by local singers and musicians in each city visited.

Newspapers announced that Joseph would be presented twice nightly with matinees on Wednesday and Saturday "until further notice," and assured readers that "The Olympia production . . . is to be on an even more elaborate scale [than the original production], and will provide one of the . . . most brilliant spectacles ever seen here."30

28 The Era, April 19, 1913, p. 13.


30 Liverpool Courier, Aug. 7, 1914.
The August 19 issue of *The Era* reported "a most satisfactory amount of public support" for *Joseph*, and said Mac "looks the youthful Joseph to the life, and has earned high approval on all hands."\(^{31}\) But Denville's open-ended run proved delusive, and the show closed after three weeks on August 29.

It seems likely that there was insufficient audience in the Liverpool area to support fourteen weekly performances for an extended period. But unfortunately for Denville, one additional factor undoubtedly caused reexamination of the production's prospects. A week before the play opened, war was declared. Although the effect of the war was less immediate in the provincial theatre than in London,\(^{32}\) the war caused a drop in business and a large amount of uncertainty. The termination of the Liverpool run of *Joseph* apparently left Denville in a bind. It appears that the company "rested" for two weeks, then went to Bradford for a week before coming back to the Liverpool area to play at the Royal Court in McMaster's home town of Birkenhead. The company then played Manchester at the end of September, again rested the first week in October, then journeyed through a regular northern tour—Southport, Nottingham, Blackpool, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Birmingham, and Derby—before closing December 5. Mac's first big success in the theatre was over.

\(^{31}\)p. 8.

Conclusion

McMaster returned to London at the end of 1914. He was twenty-three years old, and had four years of experience in the theatre on his record. During that four years he had been more out of London than in. He had spent nearly two full years on the road with Terry-Nielson, and had been involved with Hanray-Croll and Joseph for the last eight months of 1914. Although Mac had not planned it, his earliest experiences were heavily in the touring tradition.

His central experience was with Terry-Nielson. In acting style and production technique, in the role and function of the actor-manager, in the structure of the touring life, the influence of Fred Terry on Mac's subsequent career is great. Certain habits, attitudes, and procedures that McMaster acquired from his experience with Terry-Nielson carried through to the last days of Mac's own company.

This basic structure was reinforced and elaborated by his other experiences during the pre-war period. With the exception of his five weeks with Hanray-Croll, all of McMaster's performing credits were earned on the "romantic" stage: the tushery of Sweet Nell and The Scarlet Pimpernel, the melodrama of When It Was Dark, the spectacle of Joseph and His Brethren. He was obviously predisposed toward this style of theatre, and his experiences reinforced this predisposition. Mac enjoyed the costumes and the lighting, the opportunity for the grand acting gesture, the performance in a world utterly different from the one in which he lived.

It was little noticed at the time, but even before McMaster had
come to London the romantic or "actor's theatre" was declining in popularity, and the realistic stage or "playwright's theatre" was on the rise. Darlington provides an excellent summary of this complicated development in theatre history, and points out that this change was well underway by the last decade of the nineteenth century. Shaw's Arms and the Man, Candida, You Never Can Tell, Caesar and Cleopatra, and Man and Superman were all written and performed before the death of Henry Irving in 1905. Darlington analyzes the season of 1908-1909 to show that even then the runs of productions by the romantic actor-managers were significantly shorter than the runs of plays of the realistic stage.\textsuperscript{33}

Mac probably did not realize, and perhaps did not even care, that he had received an excellent education in a withering branch of the theatre. Consideration of this problem would be postponed anyway by the consequences of the war. When McMaster got back to London, the war was having a larger effect on his life than the rise of realism on the stage, and he was forced to deal with some immediate realities.

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}
CHAPTER V

ON TOUR IN IRELAND (1915-1919)

McMaster returned to London at the end of 1914 to find the theatre sharing the general uncertainty of the times. People often had difficulty just getting to the theatre. Gasoline was rationed, taxis became scarce, and one could get caught in the Underground if a raid occurred while in transit. Theatres began giving six matinees and two evening performances a week to avoid problems associated with the blackout. Costs of rental and production rose rapidly, and the government imposed an Entertainments Tax that added to the price of tickets.\(^1\) The effect of war is often unpredictable, however, and in this instance the theatre was to prosper.

The public, when it went to the theatre, went there to forget its grim duty outside. . . . It wanted laughter, colour, romance and sentiment. . . . The theatre then found out that, so far from having to struggle for its existence, it was going to have a boom.\(^2\)

The popular theatre of the First World War was the musicals, musical comedy and revue. Between 1914 and 1919 the most successful London productions included *Maid of the Mountains*, *The Bing Boys*, *Peg o' My Heart* (which ran for three years), *Romance* (1,049 performances), *Daddy*


Long Legs, A Kiss For Cinderella and, most famous of all, Chu Chin Chow (2,235 performances).

Actors were in great demand in wartime London, but Mac was not to participate in the theatre boom. Enormous patriotic fervor was abroad in the country, and those men (including actors) who were not moved by patriotism to join the armed forces were moved by public pressure or conscription. Marjorie Willmore wrote in her diary on August 4, 1914, about a man she was very close to: "He talks no more about going to Brazil, but rather of going to the war. I hope he does—we want every man available." McMaster, however, was not going to war. It was not a political or moral decision. Mac had no life outside the theatre and no real sense of nationalism or patriotism. He could not see himself fighting in a war for any reason; it made no sense in the world he was creating. His life was in the theatre, and he would have to go where he could maintain that life. As social pressures mounted in 1915, Mac looked at the alternatives and decided that he would go to Ireland for the duration.

Home Rule for Ireland had been passed by Parliament in 1914, but implementation had been suspended for the duration of the war. Although Ireland was, therefore, still a part of the United Kingdom, it had a measure of independence. One effect of this situation was that the extension of conscription to Ireland was thought to be politically unwise. For McMaster, then, Ireland provided the haven.

The war was not a bad time to be in Ireland. Industry and agriculture prospered as Ireland found a ready market in Britain and elsewhere for everything it could produce. Prices rose to a peak in 1920,
making the last seven years of union with Britain the most prosperous in modern Irish history. The country was politically calm, economically healthy, there was no conscription (although thousands of Irishmen volunteered for the British army), and, important for McMaster, the theatre was active.

In Dublin the Theatre Royal and the Gaiety were visited regularly by the major British touring companies since Dublin was still a major stop on the provincial tour. The Queen's Theatre on Great Brunswick Street was the house of melodrama, with an occasional visit by the stars of music hall and variety. Twice nightly in 1915, the Queen's was presenting the "powerful military drama," Dick, the Trumpeter, followed by The Female Detective, The Bride of the Battlefield, and the Queen of the Redskins ("Indian costumes, etc. . . . imported direct from the North American Settlements").

Many companies spent most of the time touring. From 1910 to 1914 the city of Athlone in central Ireland had regular visits from the companies of Harold Lloyd, Lena-Lewis, Alf Saunders, Bertram Weston, Ira Allen, George Mallins, William L. Dobell, and O'Brien-Ireland. The romantic, patriotic, and sensational world of the Irish melodrama touring company became the next contributor to the development of Anew

---


4Playbills (GA71:90752), Pearce Street Library, Dublin.

5The author is greatly indebted to Mr. Brendan O'Brien of Athlone, Co. Westmeath, for much of the information about Irish touring companies.
McMaster. Sometime during 1915 he joined the O'Brien-Ireland company and stayed with them, on and off, for the next three to four years.

The O'Brien-Ireland troupe had been formed around 1906. Jimmy O'Brien was the older partner and had been working in Ireland at least since 1884. He usually was the comic lead. Harry Ireland was a young actor, usually cast as the hero, who ultimately became well-known as a producer of Irish drama.6 Appearances by O'Brien-Ireland in Kilkenny, 1907-1913, show a standard repertoire of Dion Boucicault and Victor O'D. Power melodramas together with other plays like Lady Audley's Secret.

There is very little direct information about McMaster's tenure with O'Brien-Ireland. It was a period of his life he seldom talked about, and he hardly ever included it in his professional resumes. One fact is known, however: Mac did not use his real name during his time in Ireland. For the time being he was Martin Doran. He probably chose to use a pseudonym for several reasons. He was in fact avoiding service in His Majesty's Forces, and may have thought it discreet to use another name. The McMaster name has a definite northern Ireland connection, and it may have been politic as well to associate himself with the southern part of the island. McMaster probably saw his work with O'Brien-Ireland as a comedown for a former London West End juvenile, even one who hadn't been very successful. So he was Martin Doran. The name has a certain music—in Ireland the surname is pronounced with the accent on the first syllable. Mac Liammoir says the name was chosen because McMaster had an old suitcase with the initials "M. D." inscribed on it. "Martin" was an

6 Manuscript by Seamus deBourca in the Pearse Street Library, Dublin.
appealing name to Mac, and "Doran" was Irish but not ostentatiously so. 7

In May, 1915, the O'Brien-Ireland company appeared in Kilkenny with the following repertory: Outcasts of Dublin, My Jack, The Law and the Lady, An Irishman's Home, The Call to Arms, Lady Audley's Secret, and two Victor O'D. Power plays, The Curse of Rathvara and The Peril of Sheila. A "concert and farce" were included in the evening's entertainment. Admission was reasonable: 1/-, 6d and 3d, with "soldiers in uniform half-price to all parts except 3d seats." 8 The list of plays seems to show the effect of having Irishmen in British uniforms at the time; there are few patriotic Irish plays on the bill and certainly not the nationalistic Wolfe Tone or Robert Emmett of a few years before. It may be assumed that after the Republican Rising of the following Easter, the more militant plays came back on.

What may have seemed like exile to McMaster was in fact a return home, not only in a geographic and ancestral sense, but in theatrical terms as well. He was plunged into the theatre that was an ancestor of the theatre he already had chosen in London and on tour. The connection between The Peril of Sheila and The Scarlet Pimpernel is a direct one, as is the acting of T. P. Cooke and Fred Terry. Mac already had shown his preference for the traditional style of acting, and in the melodrama he found traditional acting enshrined. "Until the twentieth century tradition had been the most powerful force in the theatre for hundreds

7 Personal interview with Micheal Mac Liammoir, Nov. 24, 1972.
8 From a manuscript by Brendan O'Brien using contemporary newspaper accounts as sources.
of years, and it lasted longer in melodrama than anywhere else." There were highly marked gestures, especially the outstretched arm and the pointed finger, and appropriate facial expressions. Speech was the "most distinctive aspect of melodramatic acting," with peculiar pronunciations and syllabifications as well as special rhythms, including pauses. It was marked by an excess of energy in movement, action, and stage business, and the business itself often had its own tradition, such as the end-of-scene tableaux.

As one looks at the later McMaster companies, it is possible to see other inheritances of melodrama. Musical accompaniment was always used, not just for overture and entr'acte, but within the action of the play as in melodrama "to create or enhance emotional agitation." The company itself usually had the general structure of stock types—hero, heroine, villain, comic man/woman, good old man/woman. Another hallmark of melodrama was present, "The emphasis on sensational and rapid action . . . which produces . . . complete subordination of character development to the story line, and rigid moral distinctions." Mac was often in trouble with the critics on this score, especially when he produced Shakespeare. The repertoire of the McMaster companies also was largely melodrama, although relatively few of the old melodramas were presented. On his first tour Trilby was produced, and the following year The Bells was the only non-Shakespearean play on the bill. As the

---


10 Ibid., pp. 193-197. 11 Ibid., p. 36.

12 Ibid., p. 38.
seasons passed, the list of plays with melodramatic origins in the McMaster repertoire grew longer, and Mac was almost always in the most melodramatic role. It also should be noted that the repertoire also included some of the most melodramatic of Shakespeare's plays, including *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Richard III*, and *Othello*.

Although McMaster's passion came to be Shakespeare, during his formative years the primary influence was melodrama in various forms. Mac had never been a Bensonian, and apparently never desired to become one and to tour the provinces playing Shakespeare. He had not worked with Tree or Forbes-Robertson or any of the others who carried on the nineteenth-century Shakespearean acting tradition. Mac's education was in melodrama, and his final awakening to the possibilities of playing Shakespeare was not to occur until 1923.

Melodrama had a basic appeal for McMaster that went beyond aspects of acting and production. Michael Booth sums up the genre and gives an insight into McMaster's preferred personal world:

> Melodrama appeals directly to the most elemental feelings of the audience and to their instinctive desires for a better and more exciting world. It has a refreshing lack of pretension about it; there is no messing about with intellectuality. It always goes straight to its emotional and physical point and never deviates from there.\(^{13}\)

Those who knew McMaster will recognize the emphasis on emotion over intellectuality, the lack of pretense or of deviation from his central attitudes and beliefs. Most of all they will recognize Mac's desire for a better and more exciting world, not politically or socially, but in human and personal terms. Since Mac saw this better world in the past, the

\[^{13}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 38.}\]
planning for the future seemed to be a much less important activity.
Eventually McMaster was able to create his own world out of a large
amount of the past, a necessary amount of the present, and only a little
of the future. In a real sense, because he was able to do so, he was
very lucky.

McMaster spent four years touring Ireland, acting in the stand-
dard melodramas of the time, and learning the craft of melodramatic
acting at its source. This wartime hiatus was to have greater signifi-
cance for Mac's career than he probably thought at the time. For an
extended period he had the opportunity to examine, practice, and develop
his art on a daily basis. He was working within a repertory of ten to
fifteen plays to which he kept coming back time after time. He lived
and worked with an established and stable company of actors, most of
whom had spent their lives in the melodramatic theatre. Mac was able to
do what he needed to do—go to school in his chosen field, take time and
opportunity to learn.

Equally important, McMaster learned about touring in Ireland.
Although there is no evidence he ever planned at this time to return to
Ireland with his own company one day, he must have had a complete edu-
cation in the business of touring from O'Brien-Ireland, including hiring
theatres, finding accommodations, locating actors, promotion and publi-
city, and the financial aspects. Also, for the first time Mac saw
Ireland, the cities, towns, and crossroads where a theatrical company
might play. It is an education not in any book, and, although McMaster
didn't know it, it was another essential part of a preparation that
would lead him back to Ireland in a few years.
CHAPTER VI

AUSTRALIA

In 1919 peace had come to England and war was coming to Ireland. The Easter Rising of 1916 had only involved the city of Dublin, and the countryside had been quiet throughout the period of the world war. But after the war political tension between the British government and the Irish Republicans became greater, and "The Troubles" began, a two-and-a-half year country-wide guerilla war with the Irish Republican Army on one side and the Royal Irish Constabulary on the other, supplemented by the "Black and Tans," ex-army irregulars sent to Ireland to aid in suppression. A truce was not signed until July 9, 1921.

If McMaster was still touring at the time, it is likely that the end of the world war and the beginning of fighting probably was more than enough to get him to return to London. He probably went there in mid-1919, and he found some major changes in the West End since he had gone away.

Paddy, the Next Best Thing

McMaster, now twenty-seven, returned to a new theatre. Those who had provided much of his theatrical education were gone or declining--Tree, the Terrys, even the touring companies. The war had swept away the Romantic stage, and in its place was the realistic theatre of playwrights like Galsworthy, Barrie, Maugham, and Shaw, and

66
actors like Gerald duMaurier, Charles Hawtrey, and Seymour Hicks. They made realistic acting, often called the "cup-and-saucer school," dominant in London.

As actors must, they gave their public the kind of acting that it would accept. . . . Nothing was required of them but Archer's 'ever more delicate and faithful Imitation,' and soon it was regarded as heresy in any actor even to wish to act in any other style. Those who felt they needed more breadth, and took the occasional opportunities to appear in classic revivals, found themselves suspect. If they continued in their heterodox behaviour, they were labelled 'Shakespearean' and, regarded as a race apart, were no longer in the running for parts in modern plays.¹

Increasingly, the theatre became a place in which the 'great' actor was unprovided for; increasingly, the audiences learned to understand and seek for plays in which the star was no longer a solo performer but the leader of an orchestra. As playgoers ceased to experience strong emotion in the theatre, they lost the capacity to respond to it.²

McMaster, wholly raised in the old and now disappearing tradition, went with the new trend and had success. He was signed for a part in a play that was to become one of the popular hits of the 1920 season, Paddy, the Next Best Thing. This play had been first produced at the Shubert Theatre in New York on August 25, 1919, with great success. Heading the London company was an Irish-American actress, Peggy O'Neil. Playing opposite her was Ion Swinley, and old Bensonian especially remembered for the power and beauty of his voice, now seldom used in Shakespeare. Mac was to play the second male lead, the "lazy, young wastrel" Jack O'Hara, who, in response to romantic rejection by Paddy, dashes off to America, returning in eighteen months with a beard,

¹Darlington, The Actor and His Audience, p. 164.
²Ibid., p. 135.
fur coat, and fortune, only to discover that he loved her sister Eileen (Betty Faire) all along. 3

A provincial tour preceded the London opening, beginning at the New Queen's Theatre, Manchester, on February 24, 1920. On April 5, Paddy opened at the Savoy Theatre in London and was an instantaneous success. The critics were not kind. The Daily Telegraph said it was "not a great play in any sense," 4 and James Agate called it "pure treacle." 5 But it did not make any difference. Paddy was in harmony with audience demands of the time, and there was an enormous amount of publicity besides, including the song "Sweet Peggy O'Neill." Eventually Paddy ran 867 performances and closed April 22, 1922. It made fortunes on tour and was twice revived in London in 1923 and 1929. 6

McMaster had been lucky. Returning to London after a four-year absence at age twenty-seven, trained in a now-unpopular style of acting, Mac might well have had a difficult time indeed. Instead he had a good part in a popular West End hit, was acting eight times a week, and was being paid every Saturday. He even had the chance to do a little moonlighting. On Sunday evening, February 27, 1921, and again the following Tuesday afternoon, March 1, McMaster appeared as Colin Langford in the Incorporated Stage Society's production of C. K. Munro's play, At Mrs.


4April 6, 1920, p. 7.


6One of the touring company Jack O'Hara's was F. J. McCormick, later the long-time leading actor at the Abbey Theatre. Lifetime, no. 2.
Beam's at the Kingsway. Mac's notices were good, the Morning Post reporting that he "played pleasantly, and even pathetically, as young Langford, the one really decent person in the piece."\(^7\)

Life fell into a routine. Mac established himself in his first London flat on Fitzroy Street. The setting was rather theatrical. Mac wrote:

The owner of the house was a great, blowsy woman who had an obscene wall-eyed monkey always clutched to her chest, which she called 'Jazz-boy.' My abode was on the very top floor—actually it was almost an attic, and was eventually reached by an iron stairway. . . . One memorable evening I invited my friends to view the [flat]. Marjorie came early and was very kind, . . . Ivor Novello came next and was so intrigued with Jazz-boy and his owner that I could hardly get him out of the dark hall. . . . As we clanked on upwards and reached the point where all pretence of stairs ended and we began to mount the iron ladder, Ivor stood still and in a voice fraught with admiration, murmured: 'But Mac, dear, it's marvellous. A little bit of linoleum and it would be a mansion!'\(^8\)

In 1921 Marjorie Willmore was sharing a flat with Stella Patrick Campbell on Hogarth Road, and Mrs. Patrick Campbell was occasionally on the scene, "growing fat now and dripping with beads and scarves and things, and filling the whole small bedroom with her overblown vitality."\(^9\) Marjorie's brother had left the theatre and gone to live in Ireland, and Mac, as the remaining member of the Irish trio, often came to tea or to dinner or to take Marjorie to the theatre or opera.

By most standards of theatrical life, McMaster's career was going well. He was playing a romantic lead in a long-running success.

\(^7\)March 2, 1921.
\(^8\)Life, no. 2
\(^9\)Marjorie McMaster MS.
His experience with the Stage Society seems to indicate he was becoming known. His circle of friends included some of the most successful stage and film personalities of the early 1920's and later, most notably Novello and Noel Coward. Mac might reasonably have anticipated a gradually rising stage and film career as a handsome, romantic actor, or at least a long career on the London stage, as many of his friends eventually had. For Mac, it was probably a very tempting prospect, but it was not something he would surrender to easily. He decided to leave London.

His friends saw his decision as an irrational act, but, seen in terms of Mac's history, it was more rational than being in *Paddy, the Next Best Thing*. McMaster had been in the play for more than a year in a part that provided little interest or challenge. He was bored. In fact, he had reached the "screaming point." Moreover, he was living the kind of life that, over the years, was always unbearable for him. He was in a settled routine, comfortable, but not very interesting. More important, it was not his kind of theatre, the theatre of the great actor and the grand gesture. It is understandable, then, that when Mac seized the opportunity for change, it was not to go into another West End play, but rather to go to a place where his preferred stage still lived.

McMaster learned that the dominant Australian theatrical management firm, J. C. Williamson, Ltd., had asked *Paddy's* producer, Robert Courtneidge, to release Mac so they could offer him a contract to join

---

10 *Lifetime*, no. 2.
their company as an actor. For McMaster, it would be a tour of the "number ones" of Australia, a country in which the theatre tended to be more traditional and rather less responsive to the London trends. Williamson's owned a chain of fine theatres, including His Majesty's in Sydney and the Princess in Melbourne. Mac saw his chance to escape the London routine, embark on a grand adventure, play once again on the Romantic stage, and probably make some money—though money was never the major factor in any decision.

In July, 1921, McMaster left the company of Paddy after fourteen months, sublet his flat, and wrote a letter to Marjorie, who was in Ireland:

Darling Marjorie, by the time you get this I'll be on my way to Australia. I don't know why I am going but there was no one here to tell me not to. I'll write some day. Love to Micheal and yourself. Mac.\textsuperscript{11}

\textbf{Williamson's}

His decision to go the Australia apparently had been quick and last-minute. The ship already had sailed and McMaster had to go by train to Toulon to meet it. The voyage took six weeks, and for Mac it was not a happy time. He was a poor sailor who did not like the endless expanses of water and could not abide shuffleboard and other shipboard recreation. He was often ill and spent much of the time in bed. One glittering break in the monotony was the stop at Colombo, Ceylon, which he found to be a colorful and intoxicating city.\textsuperscript{12} After stops at

\textsuperscript{11}\textit{Lifetime}, no. 2.

\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Radio Notebook MS.}
Freemantle and Melbourne, Mac's ship eventually reached Sydney.

For Mac Sydney must have been a very pleasant place with a harbor, coastline, and beaches that allowed him to indulge his lifelong love of swimming. In addition to his flat in Macquane Street, he acquired a beach hut on the coast at Bondi, and after the play he and other members of the company would go out to swim, ride surfboards, and forget the heat of the day.

Even so, he was unhappy and homesick at the start. He had discovered on shipboard that the first play in which he would appear would be *Paddy, the Next Best Thing*. It opened at the Criterion Theatre on September 24, 1921, and even though he got good notices, Mac was back in the grind of that play. He had no relief. After *Paddy* closed on November 11, Williamson's opened another Irish-American play, *Peg o' My Heart*, which ran an additional two weeks. Mac tried to be released from his contract so he could return home, but Williamson's convinced him to stay with the promise of better roles and more money. Mac stayed and at the end of the first six months was offered another half-year contract at double the salary. He accepted and the process was repeated, though not always with the same generous rise in pay, until he had been in Australia for about two years. During that time he played a variety of roles in all kinds of plays, "except pantomime and grand opera," including more than a year as Baldassare in the light opera *The Maid of the Mountains*.¹³

His first venture in theatre management occurred during this

¹³A. McMaster 1957 MS.
period. McMaster produced and played Oswald in the first Australian production of Ibsen's *Ghosts* in five matinee performances at the Palace Theatre, Sydney, September 27 through October 11, 1923. There is nothing to indicate why Mac took an interest in *Ghosts*, since nothing in his background and experience would lead him to do what the Sydney newspapers called an "art show." Perhaps it was the melodramatic plot combined with the Ibsen name that made him see possibilities, especially in conservative Australia. At any event, the play seems to have been a success, and for the first time Mac got billing in newspaper advertisements. A few years later he would again play Oswald under very different circumstances. Meanwhile, another major influence was about to enter McMaster's life.

**Oscar Asche**

In late August, 1922, Oscar Asche landed at Sydney to begin his third tour of Australia. Asche was an Australian who had worked his way to England and joined F. R. Benson's company in 1893, moved on to Tree in 1901, and in 1904 joined in management with another old Bensonian, Otho Stuart. Their second production was *The Taming of the Shrew* with Asche as Petruchio and his wife, Lily Brayton, as Katharina. "It was a breathless, knockabout, rampageous show, played on broadly farcial lines, and the audience rocked with laughter."14 It made Asche's reputation, and he performed it nearly 1,500 times throughout the world during his career. Asche also presented a notable *Othello* on tour in

1907. A large and powerful man with an excellent voice, his Othello was a formidable, elemental figure.\textsuperscript{15}

Beginning in 1911, Asche's interest had taken a different turn when he produced Kismet, an Oriental spectacular in which he played Hajj, the Beggar. Mounted on a shoestring budget of only 3,500 pounds, it returned a handsome profit.\textsuperscript{16} Asche then wrote and produced Chu Chin Chow, which ran for five years and 2,235 performances and made Asche a fortune. Never one to turn his back on a good thing, Asche produced Cairo in late 1921, and it was this play that he was now bringing to Australia. He toured with Cairo and then Chu Chin Chow for about a year.

In 1923, McMaster had occasion to meet Asche socially, and on Asche's second return to Sydney he asked Mac to join his company for a season he was preparing at the Theatre Royal. McMaster was interested in working with Asche, not only because of his reputation and style of production, but also because he had heard that Asche would produce Othello if he could find an Iago. Playing opposite Asche's Moor would be a great experience for a young actor, and Mac was "delirious with excitement" when he found out he would be the Iago.\textsuperscript{17}

The first production of the season, however, was to be one that would also play an important part in McMaster's later life, Arthur Wing Pinero's Iris. Asche had played the villain, Maldonado, in the original

\textsuperscript{15}Pearson, The Last Actor-Managers, p. 66.
\textsuperscript{16}Oscar Asche, His Life, By Himself (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1929), p. 137.
\textsuperscript{17}Lifetime, no. 3.
London production in 1901. Mac was to play the romantic lead, Laurence Trenwith, and an English actress, Diana Wilson, was in the title role.

_Iris_ opened October 20, 1923, and it appears from the reviews that Asche had given it the full melodramatic treatment.

Mr. Asche, swarthy and foreign, with long, curved-up mustachios and heavy eyebrows, exhibited the subterranean, volcanic passion. . . . Mr. Asche roused the audience to bursts of applause by his overwhelming suggestion of Maldonado's fury, as the millionaire nearly strangled his treacherous partner [Iris]. Checking himself in time with the cry, 'You're the kind of woman who would send a hot-blooded man to the gallows,' he turns her out of the house, and after smashing the furniture falls senseless to the ground.

Mac was described as "the modern Perseus, . . . young, slender, valorously swift of movement, and the very flower of youth." The meeting of Iris and Trenwith was described: "The strenuous embraces and rapturous kisses at this point were quite sensational, and the audience audibly gasped at the lover's eagle swoop."18

Volcanic passions and eagle swoops mark the style of theatre then out of fashion in London but very much the preferred mode for Asche and McMaster. It seems likely that Asche's skill in this style reinforced Mac's preference for direct and emotional interpretation of roles and for strong physical elements on stage. But this experience with Iris was to cause McMaster some trouble when he returned to London.

Rehearsals for Othello began during the run of Iris. It was a trying time for McMaster, who had never played Shakespeare and who always had trouble learning lines. He grew nervous, had trouble sleeping, and at the dress rehearsal had difficulty remembering his

lines. Afterward, Asche advised Mac to relax, to take a drive in the country, and not to look at the script again. He did so and on opening night was "practically word perfect."\(^{19}\)

McMaster's approach to the character of Iago also was characteristic of his attitude toward much of Shakespeare and dramatic criticism:

Professors worry themselves in print as to why Iago hated Othello so much that he brought about his complete downfall, when there appears, on the surface, to be so little reason for such violent feelings. . . . The more I delved into the part, the more sure I was that I had found a perfectly simple reason for Iago's attitude. He loved evil for its own sake. No need for reasons, he loved making mischief and creating misery for the fun of it. . . . Every word of the part fitted into this conception and I found it almost playing itself, so true and right in nature did it seem.\(^{20}\)

This very straightforward statement of Iago's motivation is wholly in accord with McMaster's theatrical experiences. His approach is essentially a melodramatic one. In Booth's summary of the essence of melodrama: "It has a refreshing lack of pretension about it; there is no messing about with intellectuality. It always goes straight to its emotional and physical point and never deviates from there."\(^{21}\) Mac's conception of Shakespearean tragedy was essentially melodramatic, but he also had the gift to transcend this conception with moments of higher truth that came from deep in his emotional core, moments that were electrifying on stage and showed the greatness of the actor.

McMaster was a rather uneven Iago. Asche said that Mac

\(^{19}\) *Lifetime*, no. 3. \(^{20}\) *Tbid.*

\(^{21}\) Booth, *English Melodrama*, p. 38.
"promises to become one of the best Iagos I have seen," some faint praise that recognized the distance he yet had to travel. The critic for the *Sydney Morning Herald* gave a fairly clear picture:

... a temperament of easily assumed gaiety and demonstrative good will, qualities belied by the malignant intensity of his soliloquies, and a repellent flippancy at the triumph of his evil traps. The conception has its drawbacks, and is likely to be hotly debated. However, it was at times strikingly carried out, with a not infrequent redundancy of gesture, fiendlike clutching of the fingers and Mephistophelian contortions of feature, which the actor will probably reduce with experience... But Mr. McMaster was brilliant in the temptation act... [and] deservedly shared in the tumultuous applause at the end. The actor is all the more likely to tone-down his reading because... in his lightness of manner he undermines the probability of Othello's simple credulity.\textsuperscript{22}

When the curtain fell on that first performance, the audience responded with call after call. Mac called it "one of the most exciting experiences of my life."\textsuperscript{23} At thirty-one, he had at last discovered Shakespeare, the playwright who was to be central to his theatrical world for the rest of his life. And his first experience had been in *Othello*, the role with which he became most identified. In his first encounter with the role he had the opportunity to watch Asche's Moor close-up, to study a conception of the part that had been notable in the Edwardian period. Although there were great differences between McMaster and Oscar Asche, the influence of Asche on McMaster's interpretation of Othello was great. It had directness, size, and came from the emotional center of the actor. As Mac played Iago every night for a month in Sydney, he must have learned much from Asche.

\textsuperscript{22}Nov. 26, 1923, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{23}Lifetime, no. 3.
Indeed, the experience with Asche was to have enduring effect on McMaster's thought about the theatre. Mac went to Australia for reasons not very clear to himself, he had no real preferences, no particular goals. He probably still considered the London West End as the ultimate end point, if he looked to the future at all. The time with Asche had opened up some new possibilities. Asche was one of the old actor-managers, he ran his company and played the leading roles. He was successful in London and the provinces. And he played Shakespeare in a straightforward manner that appealed to McMaster and seemed to please the audiences. Asche was in the line of Fred Terry, but he added one dimension to Mac's experience—Asche played Shakespeare.

Much later Mac wrote, remembering his opening night as Iago: "A great window opened for me and the air blowing in had simplified my whole life. I knew I was born to act in Shakespeare." This is a highly retrospective statement, and nothing McMaster did on his return to London shows that he had had that kind of major illumination in Australia. It would seem fair to say, however, that the experience with Asche was the final stage in the theatrical education of Anew McMaster. Whether or not he knew it at the time, all of Mac's later life on the stage was to follow with a certain rigorous logic from his experiences from 1911 to early 1924. Nothing he did after that was preparation. It was his life.

Asche followed Othello with a Christmastime production of The Spanish Main, an adventure melodrama he had written. It was old stuff

24_lifetime, no. 2.}
for McMaster. He played the villain Pedro Malorix, also known as "The Vulture," a role he described as a cross between Long John Silver and Mathias in The Bells. After the New Year, 1924, Asche revived The Taming of the Shrew, and Asche's Petruchio again provided the model for Mac, modified ten years later by W. Bridges-Adams at Stratford.

While he was with Asche, McMaster was preparing to return to England. On February 20, 1924, he wrote to Marjorie, reporting that he was playing Iago and saying:

I have no excuse for not writing except that I've been trying and trying to break away and get home but couldn't and didn't write because I hadn't definite news as to date of departure. . . . I am sailing via America on April 2nd and will stay about a fortnight in America. . . .

Then he wrote:

My dear Marjorie, I love you more and more with every passing minute I am away from you, and with some people it's not like that is it. So I can't be, in the long run, as rotten and changeable as I think I am."25

Mac was about to add another support to the structure of his life.

25Letter in the possession of Christopher McMaster.
CHAPTER VII

LONDON AGAIN

Marjorie

McMaster did not sail via America on April 2. For unknown reasons he left later in April and returned the way he had come, west-bound through the Indian Ocean with stops in Colombo and Port Said. His thirty-two months in Australia had been profitable financially as well as artistically, and at each stop he literally bought gold and jewels, Oriental robes and fabrics. The latter eventually would be worn by his Othello.

He arranged his return. From the middle of the Red Sea he cabled Micheal Mac Liammoir, then living in Switzerland, to join him in Italy for a homecoming tour of that country. Money was cabled to Marjorie with a request that she find him a new and better London flat.

In early June Mac's ship docked at Naples and Mac Liammoir was there to meet him.

I found him unchanged, not merely by what had been . . . a very real success, but by the opulence that accompanied this: a vast array of jewels and of gold cigarette cases and of what seemed to me a fathomless supply of money—a flutter of bank-notes above a gilded wallet—these were the only alterations one could trace.¹

Later McMaster was to claim he was earning 125 pounds a week at the end

¹Micheal Mac Liammoir MS.
of his Australian visit.\footnote{Chiswick Empire Theatre program, Nov. 1933, in the Enthoven Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.} The two friends commenced a grand tour of Italy: Naples, Capri, Rome, Florence. In Rome they spent an evening seeing \textit{The Cardinal}, a play about fifteenth-century Rome written by L. N. Parker, author of \textit{Joseph and His Brethren}. McMaster was attracted to the colorful and dramatic role of the Cardinal, and the play later became a regular part of the McMaster company repertoire. In Florence McMaster and Mac Liamoair parted, the latter returning to Switzerland and Mac going on to Paris. A few days there, and in late June, 1924, he was once again in London. Marjorie remembered:

It was a scorching Sunday in June, and the afternoon quiet had settled on Portman Square. I had taken a new flat for Mac [at 79 George Street], and a friend and I were having a peaceful afternoon . . . putting up curtains, as he was not expected for a week. Suddenly the . . . stillness was broken by a great clatter in the street. We rushed to the window and there drawn up outside the door were five taxis all heaped with travelling trunks, suitcases and crates. Out sprang Mac in a cream suit and wearing a Panama hat . . . . He stormed through the flat saying, 'Is this flat all mine, I mean really all mine, and you haven't changed a bit, duckie, not a bit.'

We talked and unpacked and he showed us all his purchases, exquisite things bought at every port. . . . Some days later when the unpacking had reached the great travelling wardrobes that held his suits, I found a wad of over 300 pounds shoved into the breast pocket of a jacket.\footnote{Marjorie McMaster MS.}

Once Mac was settled, the stage was set for another major event. It began with a black carpet that had been in the Fitzroy Street flat. Marjorie had taken it to the cleaners, and had registered it in her name. When Mac went to collect it, he had no receipt and the
cleaners could find no carpet for "McMaster." The next day Marjorie stopped at the flat:

I arrived to find him shaving, and the first thing he said was: 'I called to the Maples yesterday about my black carpet, but I'd no docket and they knew nothing about it.' I started to explain that I had the docket but he cut me short. Still shaving and with his face twisted into the most unnatural shapes, he hissed through the corner of his mouth: 'You know, Mana, to avoid all this sort of confusion, why not let's get married? Then we'd only have one name between us.' I was a little stunned as I'd always regarded Mac as a rather younger brother. I said I didn't quite see why I should get married over his old black carpet. Then he suddenly turned his enormous strange blue eyes on me and, feeling for spots on his face that the razor had missed, said: 'You see, anyway, I told my Chinese dresser in Australia that we were getting married when I came back to Europe.' He seemed to think that that settled it.4

Andrew McMaster and Marjorie Helen Willmore were married at the St. Marylebone District Registry Office on Monday, July 28, 1924. Mac admitted to his thirty-two years, but Marjorie reduced her's by two years for the official record. Maid of honor was Marjorie's old friend, Susan Perrin, and Bobbie Andrews was Mac's best man. Other witnesses listed on the marriage certificate were Mac's older brother George and D. J. Thompson, probably his "brown-bread" Aunt Dora.5

McMaster seldom planned much of his life, but he often had an unerring instinct for what needed to be done. Marjorie wrote that Mac "often acted on the most unaccountable impulses. The exasperating thing about it was that he was invariably right; just as birds fly unerringly across oceans, so he flew straight to a target which no one else could

4 Marjorie McMaster MS.
see at the time." When he married Marjorie he put the final, well-fit stone in the structure of his future career as a touring actor-manager. All those who worked with the McMaster companies over the years will say that Mac could not have done it without his wife. It was more than just moral support. Marjorie became the essential organizational center of the company. Without her, the next thirty-five years of McMaster’s professional life would have been utterly different.

It is equally true that Mac had chosen the true and appropriate role for Marjorie. From the time she had been in her middle-teens, much of her life had centered around her only brother, "teaching Micheal French and drawing and guiding his taste in reading, . . ." taking him to and from the theatre, being useful. Since 1917, when Micheal left the theatre and returned to Ireland, Marjorie had been without a focus. She worked during the war, then travelled with the Perrins to Egypt and other places, and lived a life filled with teas and theatre and weekends in the country. In 1924 she was thirty-two years old, a "spinster" (as all British marriage certificates say), and still she had no apparent direction.

To a certain extent, McMaster had begun to fill Micheal’s place years before. Now, consciously or unconsciously, Mac decided on the correct course. His nature was random and disorganized, except on stage. Marjorie needed to take care of someone. They had been like brother and sister, but perhaps Mac saw that they needed and complemented one another and that the filial arrangement would not do.

\( ^6 \text{Marjorie McMaster MS.} \quad ^7 \text{Ibid.} \)
Marriage was the answer.

In many ways, the early years of the marriage were difficult for Marjorie, but recalling those days forty years later, she wrote of them with obvious affection. McMaster was never good at details, but on large matters he was often instinctively right, and, after an unlikely start and numerous ups-and-downs, the marriage turned out well as they came to know and love each other. The final love they had was the kind that can only come from living and working together for nearly forty years.

**Iris**

Oscar Asche was soon back in Mac's life. Asche had left Australia in mid-June and was in London by the middle of August. He was approached by producers George Grossmith and J. A. E. Malone to direct and star in an adaptation of the French comedy success, *Le Roi*. Asche read the play, now called *The Royal Visitor*, thought it was "tosh," and predicted it would last a month at most. But he agreed to do it.\(^8\) It was given lavish mounting and had an excellent cast. In addition to Asche as the diplomat Boudier, the company included Yvonne Arnaud, Grossmith, Malcolm Keen, Diana Wilson (Desdemona in the Asche-McMaster *Othello*), and Anew McMaster in the small but "grateful" role of Boudier's secretary, Rivelot. In all, the cast totalled sixty including nineteen main characters, twelve secondary roles, and twenty-five supers. Sets were by Joseph and Philip Harker. It was an all-out

\(^8\)Asche, *His Life, By Himself*, p. 200.
effort. The Royal Visitor opened Saturday, September 27, 1924, at His Majesty's Theatre. It ran nine performances and closed the following Saturday, October 4, the shortest run in His Majesty's history.

Mac was again resting. For him it was probably a time of indecision. Realistically speaking, his prospects should not have been too bright. He was a West End actor who had spent most of the past ten years outside the West End—indeed, outside the country and the English theatre establishment. The wartime hiatus could have been a serious blow to his career, but he had come back to Paddy and had been somewhat re-established. Then he had gone to Australia for three years, and had returned to London at the age of thirty-two to a style of theatre in which he still had no substantial credits, in which his name was not well known. McMaster seldom had a plan, but time was running out on a West End career unless he achieved some kind of focus about what he wanted to do.

Meanwhile he considered a few ideas, one of which apparently included management. The McMahons spent New Year's Day, 1925, at Asche's, and then on January 9 Marjorie noted in her diary that Mac had "gone to see the stage at 'The Fortune'" theatre. A week later "Heady" (probably opera singer and McMaster friend Christian Hedmondt) was "coming up to discuss the Fortune scheme." And on the 24th, she noted, "I had to go to a meeting at the lawyers today for Mac about the play a day complications. . . . We've almost decided not to take the

---

9 Program in the Enthoven Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

10 Daily Appointment Diary, 1925.
Fortune after all.\textsuperscript{11} At this point the scheme disappeared from the McMaster's lives as something of greater importance happened. Mac was getting lucky again, but it was fortune well disguised for a time.

Marjorie's diary entry for January 14, 1925, says: "Mac goes to see Jack Barrymore at 5 about playing in Hamlet." That note is crossed out and under it is written: "Mac sees [Gerald] duMaurier about playing for him."\textsuperscript{12} Barrymore's Hamlet was to be the talk of the season after it opened on February 19, and, with the McMaster's old friend Constance Collier in the role of Gertrude, McMaster presumably had an entrance to see Barrymore. But the duMaurier meeting probably took precedence in Mac's mind because duMaurier was about to produce a revival of Iris with Gladys Cooper in the title role. Mac had played Laurence Trelwth in Asche's Australian production, and that part in the Cooper production would be a better personal showcase than anything he might hope to get in Hamlet.

It seems likely that duMaurier's door had been opened for Mac by his friends Ivor Novello and Robert Andrews. Both had been friends of Gladys Cooper since the early 1920's when she and Andrews had appeared together in a 1921 production of Maeterlinck's The Betrothal. In 1923, she went to America and was met at the boat by Novello, who by that time was an established film star. Their meeting started talk of romance, but it was just friendship—and publicity. Later that year they made the film Bonnie Prince Charlie together, and a friendship was

\textsuperscript{11}\textit{Daily Appointment Diary, 1925.}

\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Tbid.}
established that lasted throughout their careers.\textsuperscript{13}

The interview with duMaurier apparently was successful. The next day duMaurier telephoned to arrange a meeting with playwright Arthur Wing Pinero, and on the following day, January 16, duMaurier and Pinero heard Mac read the part of Trenwith. Then he waited. Three days after the audition Marjorie wrote, "No news of du.M. but we hardly expect it yet," and the waiting went on. On January 28 the word came: "Mac definitely engaged for 'Iris'\textsuperscript{14}

They celebrated by taking a quick trip to France. On February 4 they were off to Paris, Marseilles, and Menton on the south coast. Their week in Menton included at least three trips to Monte Carlo to attend Mac's passion, the opera. On Tuesday, February 17, they were back in London, and rehearsals began the following Friday, February 20.

W. A. Darlington has written, "The most admired actor on the London stage at that moment [1924] was still duMaurier, the most forceful and ambitious of the younger leading ladies was Gladys Cooper."\textsuperscript{15} DuMaurier had established himself before the war, but Cooper was a product of the post-war theatre. With single-minded purpose, she began in 1922 to overcome her chorus-girl beginnings and to establish herself as a serious and respected actress. In that year she revived Pinero's The Second Mrs. Tanqueray, and won high critical praise in a run of 222 performances. The following year she chose Sudermann's Magda, and that

\textsuperscript{13} Sewell Stokes, Gladys Cooper (London: Peter Davies, 1953), pp. 85-87.

\textsuperscript{14} Daily Appointment Diary, 1925.

\textsuperscript{15} Darlington, Six Thousand and One Nights, p. 110.
was a success, running 228 performances. In 1924 she joined with the duMaurier-Curzon management to revive Sardou's *Diplomacy*, and that too had been a hit, with Owen Nares, Lady Tree, and Dawson Milward in the company. For variety, Cooper also played in Christmastime productions of *Peter Pan* in 1923 and 1924, and in the latter year the original Captain Hook, Gerald duMaurier, was her producer.

Gladys Cooper was firmly establishing herself as a major force on the West End stage, and the union with duMaurier was a kind of culmination. There were practical as well as symbolic advantages to the partnership.

Gladys was happiest working with Sir Gerald duMaurier as her producer because he allowed her to do things in her own way. More important still, he allowed her to do them in her own time. Being—as she herself admits—the world's worst rehearsal, she never knew her lines until the dress rehearsal. She could be a difficult actress to work with, as Mac was soon to discover.

Meanwhile, the McMasters' social life often included Novello and Andrews as well as Constance Collier, Glen Byam Shaw (her godson), and, occasionally, Stella Patrick Campbell. Novello came to tea after the first *Iris* rehearsal, and the McMasters were to have gone down to Novello's home at Maidenhead the following Sunday, but Mac had a cold and spent the day in bed.

Soon there was trouble in the *Iris* rehearsals. A series of

---

entries in Marjorie's diary gives hints and clues: Sunday, March 1 (just over a week after the first rehearsal)—"Most discomforting talk to duMaurier on the telephone." March 2—"Mac went to see duMaurier—it's all most gloomy." March 3—"7 o'clock and Mac not back from rehearsal. I wonder what's happened." After this the diary entries cease, but there were still difficulties. The only account of them is McMaster's, and, while he may not be wholly objective about them, certain elements of the problem can be deduced. Cooper was often difficult in rehearsal and seldom knew her lines. She had been care-fully guiding her career upward with these revivals, and so she was more than first among equals in the company—the production was to center around her. McMaster indicates that she continually questioned his interpretation of his part,19 and it may well be that his experience with the free-wheeling and old-fashioned Asche was not the best prepar-a tion for the duMaurier-Cooper production in a more realistic style. Mac found it difficult to play love scenes with her when she insisted on wearing her hat and gloves and carrying her script.20 It must have been a difficult time for Mac. But Iris was too big a theatrical plum to throw away easily if he still wanted to West End career, and actors in a play are not always the best of friends in any case. It was a trying situation but not unique. Troubles continued. Three days before opening night it was decided to postpone the opening for four days. Finally, on Saturday, March 21, 1925, Iris opened at the Adelphi Theatre.

19Radio Notebook MS. 20Lifetime, no. 4.
The critics agreed that, after twenty-five years, the play was "stilted," "dated," and "aged." The \textit{Sunday Express} painted the picture: "Through a barrage of coughing I could hear the long, long speeches, see the stately stage meals. During one of these Gladys Cooper remarked, 'Isn't life jolly?' and the effect on the audience was a trifle unfortunate. They grew sarcastic."\textsuperscript{21} The cast seemed unable to overcome the dated quality of the play, and McMaster's problem was particularly acute since his character was in many ways the most dated of all. "Mr. Anew McMaster tries hard as Trenwith, but the modern spirit is against him."\textsuperscript{22} "Its young hero is a ridiculous prig, and his continuous 'I'm sorry' when he leaves her roused laughter..."\textsuperscript{23} "The young lover of Mr. McMaster was... a little tame, and his voice monotonous--an unfortunate detail in an already 'unsympathetic' part."\textsuperscript{24} "Mr. McMaster's Trenwith was a lover that neither he nor we could credit."\textsuperscript{25}

Another element of the production made Mac's problem more difficult—the characterization of the villain, Maldonado, by Henry Ainley. The plot of \textit{Iris} operates around the heroine's alternate selection of the upstanding hero, Trenwith, and the villain, Maldonado, who, though less appealing as a person, has a great deal more money. To make the defects of Iris's character more obvious and to make Trenwith's suit more believable, Maldonado's only real attraction should be his wealth. The rotund, melodramatic Asche was probably an excellent choice

\textsuperscript{21}March 22, 1925. \textsuperscript{22}\textit{Daily Telegraph}, March 23, 1925. \textsuperscript{23}\textit{Daily Mail}, March 23, 1925. \textsuperscript{24}\textit{The Times}, March 23, 1925. \textsuperscript{25}\textit{Daily Sketch}, April 8, 1925.
for the part in 1901, but Ainley was a handsome actor with a beautiful voice, a Bensonian who in 1912 had played Leontes in The Winter's Tale in Granville-Barker's distinguished first season at the Savoy. Ainley apparently played Maldonado well but incorrectly. "[Ainley] was so handsome, so attractive, and his glorious voice rang out so passionately that one wanted to tell Iris not to be so peevish and stupid, and to marry him right away."⁵⁶ Or as the Daily News said, "... his Maldonado was so much more distinguished than the Laurence Trelwith that one could hardly sympathize with Iris."⁵⁷

McMaster was in a bind. Not only did he have troubles working with Cooper, he was having a difficult time staying ahead of Henry Ainley and thereby becoming an acceptable third side of the triangle. Mac's experience worked against him in this production. He was certainly in the major leagues of theatre here, but his only previous West End experience had been as second male lead in Paddy. The stage experience he had in quantity was of the provincial school, with its stock types and direct emotions. In that setting McMaster would have been the hero of the play by right, but at the Adelphi in March, 1925, Ainley was not a "black villain" and Cooper not a "fallen woman." They were that plus something else, a something else compounded of the fundamental elements of the role, plus more modern psychological refinements and ambiguities, plus considerations of their own positions as "Ainley the Actor" and "Cooper the Actress." Given the elements of Mac's

---

⁵⁶Daily Sketch, April 8, 1925.
⁵⁷March 23, 1925.
stage education, it would have been an achievement indeed if he could have duelled Ainley and Cooper to a draw on that stage. Whether Ainley and Cooper were right to play the parts as they did, Mac was unable to provide an equivalent third, and the production went on to leave him out in the cold.

The Tuesday after opening there was an 11:30 rehearsal to make cuts in the play, apparently in response to the critics. More serious, however, was the fact that the box office was doing little business. At the start of the second week, Marjorie noted an ominous turn of events: "Rumors of Iris coming off or Ivor Novello playing Mac's part." On Tuesday of the third week she confirmed the worst: "Hear that Ivor is to play Mac's part in Iris--how mean and unfriendly!" For all his difficulties with the part and conflicts with Gladys Cooper, Mac finally had been brought down by economics. The play needed a lift at the box office, and it was thought that Novello might provide it. He was an established film star, and in the previous year he had had a London stage success with The Rat, which he and Constance Collier had written. After twenty-five performances, McMaster was replaced by Novello on April 13, and, as hoped, the box office soared. One account says that in Novello's first week receipts went from 900 pounds to 2,400 pounds. Eventually, Iris ran past the tentative closing date of May 2 and continued 152 performances to August 1.

28Daily Appointment Diary, March 24, 1925.
29Ibid., March 30, 1925. 30Ibid., April 7, 1925.
a longer run than that of the original production.

Novello had in fact been observing performances of Iris for some time before the decision to bring him into the cast. It must have been a difficult decision for him to make, since he was replacing one of his best friends, a friend for whom the part was important. Discreetly enough, Novello had removed himself from the McMasters' social circle when the situation arose, but still it was difficult for everyone. McMaster's initial reaction was close to despair. His cheery exterior hid an interior that could be pessimistic and despairing in the best of times, but now he had been struck a blow that involved much of his life as he saw it. It was an immense personal failure. He thought it would be ruinous for his career. People would know. His closest friends had been directly involved. The fact that Marjorie was now pregnant did not help. His self-esteem was low and slow to recover. Two years later, on a visit to London, he insisted on wearing dark glasses when he went out in public. 32

Legal negotiations followed his release, and it was decided to keep McMaster on full salary as an "understudy," but it was understood he would have no further connection with the production.

**Beginning the McMaster Company**

The Sunday after Mac's last performance, Marjorie went to the theatre to collect his clothes. Monday she "spent most of the day sorting out clothes and packing for our going away—where? Mac too

---

32 Personal interview with Micheal Mac Liamoir, Nov. 24, 1972.
miserable about coming out of the play for us to stay here." Saturday
Mac Liammoir arrived from Switzerland on his way to Ireland. There is
an indication of normalcy returning. On Monday, April 20, a week after
Novello went into the cast, McMaster and Mac Liammoir went to a party
Novello was giving, and two days later the three of them lunched to-
gether and then visited Mrs. Patrick Campbell.\textsuperscript{33} The friendship with
Novello and Andrews survived this test, and there is some evidence that
they were helpful in getting Mac to think about his next move.

On April 30, Mac Liammoir went to Ireland. Shortly afterward
Mac made a decision which is indirectly reflected in Marjorie's daily
dairy: May 8—"Mac goes to Ireland. D. comes to do sewing." May 11—
"Very busy and tired. Letters from Mac." May 13—"D. coming to con-
tinue sewing. Very busy day." May 18 and 20—"D. comes to sew."
May 22—"Mac arrives from Dublin, 6 o'clock morning." May 25—"Call
Druces about inventory and letting flat. Rehearsal 11 o'clock. Write
Bank."

In early May, 1925, McMaster had decided to form his first com-
pany and to tour Ireland with Shakespeare and other plays. It could not
have been earlier than May 1, since Mac Liammoir left London on April
30, and he did not know of Mac's plans until he was told while he and
Mac were sitting on the cliffs at Howth, a peninsula north of Dublin
City. Mac Liammoir remembered it as a balmy, windless day:

[Mac] still retained his air of slightly bewildered enchantment
with everything in the world, but the English theatre had
become anathema.

\textsuperscript{33}Daily Appointment Diary.
'I've turned on it forever,' he said. 'A rat-race. Cold, competent, fishy-eyed rats. And now I'm going to take out my own tour of Shakespeare: we begin with Hamlet and Romeo and The Merchant . . . other ones later . . . Macbeth and Richard III and perhaps, later still, some of the Greek Tragedies. Fit-ups, dear,' he hissed suddenly, 'with a black velvet background and great splashes of pure colour . . . marvelous dresses—and you must design some of them—and possibly some small insets, and I'm going to spend every bloody sou I've earned on a light plant. One can do so much with light. Imagine it: jewels glowing on a black velvet background . . . Shakespeare's words . . . What do you think about that?'

'Superb, but where? I mean where do you mean to do it?'

'Here in Ireland, of course. All the smaller towns . . . Think of them, Micheal, little towns like Dungarvan. Their taste has never been spoiled you see. They hardly see a film even. They've seen nothing for years by No Mother to Guide Her or Waifs and Strays of Erin's Isle.'

'Then will they ever . . . ?'

'Come to Shakespeare? Yes, they will. And that's why. Because they're pure you see. I've made enough to start off with, and all I ask of Ireland is a living, dear.' 34

While Marjorie began with costumes in London, Mac spent two weeks in Ireland organizing his first tour, planning publicity, making arrangements for halls and theatres, visiting people and places he had gotten to know with O'Brien-Ireland seven or eight years ago. He arrived back in London on a Friday and the following Monday was the first rehearsal call. Apparently someone had been assembling the company, perhaps Bobbie Andrews or another of Mac's friends. Little is known of the actors in this first company. Some, like George Owen, were from the Old Vic and joined McMaster during the off-season. Others were probably regular touring actors, alumni of the Benson and Charles Doran companies. One actor who did not join the company was Laurence Olivier, then in his early twenties, who considered an offer from Mac but decided

34 Micheal Mac Liammóir MS.
to join Lewis Casson at the Birmingham Repertory Company. It was a
decision to join the new school rather than the old.\textsuperscript{35}

Marjorie's diary filled with rehearsal times, visits to the
dressmaker, and the details of sub-letting their flat. Mac ordered
large quantities of fabrics from Liberty's, a Regent Street store with
lovely fabrics and high prices. Marjorie sent them back. He indulged
his passion for lighting and spent hours at Strand Electric talking
about spots and collapsible switchboards and footlights specially
designed for touring. Gradually the McMaster's flat began to fill
with the traditional hampers of a touring company.\textsuperscript{36}

In slightly more than four weeks the McMaster's built a thea-
trical company. It was a hectic time. Beginning on May 30 Marjorie's
diary becomes a series of eight blank pages. Then on Sunday, June 7,
1925: "Leave London for Wicklow."

\textbf{Conclusion}

Thirty years later, McMaster wrote that he had been planning
his touring company from the time he got on the boat to come back from
Australia,\textsuperscript{37} but there is little evidence to support that statement.
Indeed, the events of the year after his return to London indicate he
was attempting to resume his West End career. He apparently had a large
amount of money when he came back from Australia, but it went into a
London flat and other personal expenses, not a theatrical company. He

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{35}Letter from Lord Olivier to the author, Oct. 16, 1972.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{36}Marjorie McMaster MS.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{37}\textit{Lifeline}, no. 4.}
did not get into Iris until six months after his return, and he could have assumed a fairly long run with that cast and producer.

For a year, Mac had been floating without direction. He was re-establishing his old London life because it was what he had always done. It was the comfortable thing to do. But it is possible to see now that he was completely prepared for the life he ultimately chose in Ireland. His training as a touring actor of the old school was varied and complete: Fred Terry, Joseph and His Brethren, O'Brien-Ireland, Australia, Asche, Shakespeare. He had married Marjorie, and it later became clear that she was essential to his success. In a corner of his mind the experience of touring Shakespeare with Asche lingered as a valued memory, a taste of something "possible." Then Iris.

Iris was the catalyst. First, despair, then a desire to flee—somewhere. Then rejection of the attitudes and standards of the theatre that rejected him. McMaster was freeing himself from the London dependence.

The decision to go to Ireland was inspired but not obvious. McMaster's personal and emotional connections with Ireland in 1925 were not as strong as he would lead people to believe in later years. He had been born and educated in England. With a notable exception, his theatrical training had been in the English theatre, and success in London had been the goal. Mac Liammoir remembers that before the war they would talk about Ireland:

... he of the north and we of the south. Dublin held no lure for him ... his memories always circling about Castlewellan and Warrenpoint and the little places in County Armagh. ... Besides, he was no reformer ... and seemed in those early days as involved in the enchantment and struggle of the English stage
as any of its younger players, so that I began to suspect him of thinking of Ireland as a holiday house, and grew slowly to hate the theatre because the theatre, even to him, meant London and nowhere else in the world.\footnote{Micheal Mac Liammóir MS.}

If it was to be touring, why not England? In the 1920's, several noted companies were touring England with Shakespeare: Benson, Henry Baynton, Charles Doran, Ben Greet. It was a declining business, but that was not clearly seen yet, and in Mac's talks with friends the possibility of touring England probably was discussed.

McMaster chose Ireland for at least five reasons: (1) Ireland was less competitive. As far as one can tell there were no other pre-dominately Shakespearean companies touring there regularly, especially to the smaller towns. (2) Mac had the experience with the O'Brien-Ireland company and therefore knew the people, the towns, and the halls. He also had an established name. (3) McMaster needed to reject England and English theatre for the time being. This led to (4) his belief that the Irish audience was "unspoiled," rather like Shakespeare's own audience, more used to listening to good speeches and less jaded by other forms of entertainment. In other words, not English. (5) Mac did in fact have pleasant memories of his youth in Ireland and perhaps of the time with O'Brien-Ireland, too. Ireland was a "holiday house" for Mac, and he would go there.

Ireland would give Anew McMaster good times and bad, and there would be many long and difficult periods. Circumstance would cause reassessment of Mac's commitment to Ireland from time to time, but the initial decision was to prove a godsend for him. Even as he started on
his first tour, the world of the touring theatre was declining. The Thirties would see its disappearance from England, with the exception of Donald Wolfit's enormous effort. But, with hard work aided by circumstance and the affection and support of the Irish country people, "Anew McMaster and Full Company" would tour Ireland for thirty-four years.
PART III
CHAPTER VIII

THE FIRST FIVE YEARS

In the Tradition

A new McMaster thought of his company as an unique venture bringing theatre, especially Shakespeare, to the county towns of Ireland. Actually, the McMaster company was joining a very long line of theatrical companies extending back through two-and-a-half centuries of Irish history, and, while Mac's contribution was to be a valuable one and unique in its own time, it was really the continuation of a long theatrical tradition. A brief outline of this tradition follows, with emphasis on the theatre of the county towns.

"The history of the stage in Ireland commences in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, when a ballroom of Dublin Castle was converted into a theatre, in which the nobility were principal performers."¹ Gorbovoc was the play, and we can assume it was presented in much the same manner as London court theatricals of the period. In any case, the quotation probably is wrong since it would have been very unusual if there had been no theatre in Ireland at all prior to the late sixteenth century. However, it would have been a highly informal, itinerant and, by the standards of those who enjoy Gorbovoc, illiterate theatre—a touring theatre in fact. As with much "popular" theatre, it was unrecorded and

¹"Irish Theatricals," Dublin University Magazine, January, 1850, p. 121.
can be glimpsed only in the form of later itinerant companies.

The eighteenth century marks the recorded beginnings of Irish touring theatre. It was a glittering century for Ireland in many ways as the British diplomatic and cultural community centering around Dublin Castle helped to produce a stimulating intellectual and social climate, vividly reflected in the lovely Georgian architecture that can still be seen today and in the work of one of Ireland's most successful exports—its authors and actors. James Quin, Charles Macklin, Spranger Barry, Henry Mossop, Kitty Clive, Oliver Goldsmith, and Thomas and Richard Brinsley Sheridan all are Irish products of this blooming eighteenth-century theatrical growth. Natives also point to David Garrick's Irish mother (and French father). The Dublin theatres were those in Smock Alley and Aungier Street, and they occasionally travelled to the country towns for special events. The Smock Alley company went to Cork in 1713 to open a new playhouse, to Carlow and Drogheda in 1728, 1738, and 1740, and in 1736 and 1741 they toured to the north, including Belfast and Derry. "The racing and court sessions (assizes) at first offered the most lucrative periods for itinerant entertainers, but the taste for dramatic amusement grew so swiftly that before 1750 a few bands of strollers were crisscrossing Ireland at all seasons."\(^2\)

Early touring companies played where they could, especially in the smaller towns. The bill of plays, however, was by no means utterly low class. Clark cites playbills for the visit of the fifteen-member

James Love company at Tralee, Co. Kerry, in the spring of 1756. In nine weeks, usually performing three times a week, they gave thirty performances of nineteen tragedies, fourteen comedies, and twenty-two farces as afterpieces. Included were eight Shakespearean plays: Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, Richard III, Romeo and Juliet, Henry IV, The Merchant of Venice, and The Merry Wives of Windsor. Excepting Henry IV and Merry Wives, these works were the standbys of the McMaster company. W. J. Lawrence reports a strolling company in Ballymena and Coleraine in 1765, a visit to Antrim in October, 1779, of the Myrton Hamilton company from Belfast, and a season by the Fisher and Knipe company in Lurgan in September, 1765, with a program including Othello, Romeo and Juliet, Tamerlane [sic] and farces. As Clark states:

It was during the eighteenth century that the theatrical inclinations of the townspeople of Ireland were aroused and shaped into a permanent, nation-wide tradition. . . . A sociable, beneficent attitude in the majority of the upper classes, and a remarkable sense of humor in the lower orders made the eighteenth-century Irish towns an alluring 'Ultima Thule' for English as well as native performers. The seventeenth-century concept of players as vagabonds or inferior persons disappeared from the minds of both the profession and the public more quickly in Ireland than in Britain. . . . Thus the gratifying status that actors and actresses generally enjoyed before 1800 . . . proved a decisive factor in giving it fame abroad as 'the Hot-Bed for Actors.'

Mac would find the humor of "the lower orders" always more appealing than the "beneficent attitude" of the upper classes.

---

3 Clark, The Irish Stage, pp. 5-6.

4 W. J. Lawrence, "Old-Time Theatricals in "The Smalls," Ireland's Saturday Night (Belfast), Jan. 6, 1906.

5 Clark, The Irish Stage, p. 1.
Lawrence brings the story of the Irish touring theatre into the nineteenth century by describing a visit to Carrickfergus in 1805 of the Michael Atkins company of Belfast, which then included Edmund Kean. As sometimes happened, Atkins closed the tour abruptly and disappeared, leaving the actors without accommodation. They were permitted to stay in the court house, entertained the prisoners, and divided proceeds totalling seven pounds for the evening. Kean was often in Ireland in the early part of the century. In 1809 he had joined the company of a Limerick man, Andrew Cherry, who owned a circuit that included southern Wales and the Waterford area. Waterford was the birthplace of Kean's wife and second son, Charles.

The most noted nineteenth-century Irish touring actor was Barry Sullivan, who also got his start in "the smalls." After beginning at the Collins Pavilion in Cork City, the eighteen-year-old Sullivan organized a troupe of actors and began a town tour in Fermoy, Co. Cork, in 1839. He obtained an unused corn store and got help from a local "dramatic club" to turn it into a theatre. A three-man band was recruited, and the first violin also was required to play "second old men, sing Irish songs, and attend to the oil lamps or candles which did duty for footlights." The company toured for a year to Clonmel (where they did Macbeth without a Macduff!), Cahir, Waterford, Kilkenny,

---

6 Lawrence, "Old-Time Theatricals in 'The Smalls.'"
Limerick, and Tralee. In his maturity, however, Sullivan typified another trend by playing primarily in Cork, Belfast, and Dublin.\textsuperscript{9}

These three cities (and occasionally Limerick) became the theatrical centers, and visits by the players to the smaller towns became much less frequent as the century passed. Lawrence cites two reasons for the change. The first was the Act of Union of 1800, which had joined Ireland with Britain and thereby moved the seat of government to Westminster.

Once Dublin ceased to be the capital of a nation, Irish society in general . . . began to decay root and branch . . . . Under the altered condition of affairs few country towns could maintain their theatre, and places like Newry and Drogheda, long favoured with annual visits from the players, knew them no more.\textsuperscript{10}

The other reason was also to have effect in Britain:

During the last half century, . . . centralization, aided and abetted by its ally, the locomotive, has done much to kill the bustle and joviality that formerly obtained in our smaller towns. One of the most noteworthy changes . . . is the almost total disappearance of the country playhouse.\textsuperscript{11}

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, many melodrama companies appear to have been touring, but for the "classic" repertoire the tradition seems to have fallen to two English companies: Edward Compton and F. R. Benson. Speaking of Compton, Lawrence says:

\ldots it was not because he brought us up to his level, but rather that after Calvert and Saker he was the first purely

\textsuperscript{9}Sillard, Barry Sullivan, pp. 60-66.

\textsuperscript{10}W. J. Lawrence, "The Old Galway Theatre," Saturday Herald (Dublin), Feb. 9, 1907.

provincial manager that rose to ours. When he burst upon us in the early 'eighties, with his classic repertory, his well-rehearsed company, and his careful mounting, he came as an opportune corrector of the abuses occasioned by the swarm of crudely-trained actors who had invaded the land with the disruption of the old stock system.\textsuperscript{12}

As for Benson:

Next to Stratford their Irish tours were the happiest parts of a Benson year. From Londonderry to Limerick everybody was kind and life agreeably haphazard. . . . People made it plain that they wanted to do nothing but watch the Bensonians at night, and play [rugby or cricket] against them during the afternoon. . . . At Cork the performances would interrupt a run of parties. . . . In the rural 'smallis' they dared any fit-up stage in schoolrooms or barn. Venturing to hint to a local manager that actors and actresses ought not to share a single dressing room, FFES received the puzzled reply: 'And why not, sorr? Aren't they friendly?' . . . About now [1895], . . . Benson . . . and Osmond Tearle were rivals for the throne of the Irish tragedian Barry Sullivan.\textsuperscript{13}

This was the tradition the McMaster company now joined.

Officially two-and-a-half centuries old but probably older, the Irish touring tradition came from an English source, but the leading playwrights and performers tended to be increasingly Irish. And the Irish audience made a special contribution. As a part of Britain, however, Ireland could not help but be in the British tradition, and its authors and artists looked to London as the center and the goal. Now McMaster was bringing an essentially English repertory and company of actors into Ireland. As time passed, the repertory would change little, but a larger proportion of the actors would be Irish. The effect of Ireland on the Mc Masters would be great, and eventually they would be seen as

\textsuperscript{12}The Umpire (Belfast), June 5, 1898.

\textsuperscript{13}Trewin, Benson and the Bensonians, pp. 80-81.
the Irish leaders of an essentially Irish touring company.

The First Tour

On Sunday, June 7, 1925, Anew and Marjorie McMaster gathered their company at Euston Station in London for the journey to Ireland. Compartments were reserved for the actors, and a baggage car filled with company hampers and scenery was attached to the train. The trip was by train to Holyhead in northern Wales, by boat to Kingstown (now Dun Laoghaire), then again by train to Wicklow, twenty miles south along the east coast of Ireland.

Politically, Ireland was quiet after a long period of turmoil. The "troubles" with England had ended with the Treaty of December, 1921, which called for the creation of the Irish Free State rather on the Canadian model and the partition of the six northern counties from the south. Elections were held in June, 1922, which the pro-Treaty forces won, but a civil war followed which the Free State government suppressed rather ruthlessly. The resistance was broken in late May, 1923, and for the first time in four years there was peace and a measure of stability in Ireland.\footnote{Maire and Conor Cruise O'Brien, A Concise History of Ireland (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972), pp. 150-152.}

Little is known about the first McMaster tour, but two facts make it unusual in the light of subsequent history. First, the company had a very leisurely rehearsal period, including two weeks in London and another week in Wicklow. In the future, new actors would be hired, given a week of rehearsal at most (and often none at all), and magically transported from London to a small Irish town "out in the back of
beyond" to begin their career with the company. But this time the experience and the company was all new, Mac was learning a repertoire of new plays, and that took time. The week in Wicklow had a lazy, idyllic quality as the actors rehearsed during the day and then walked along with coast, went boating, and talked into the evening. Finally, June 15 arrived, and the first performance by a McMaster company in Ireland began. And that leads to the second unusual fact about this tour: McMaster was again "Martin Doran," and he was not appearing as an actor.

His non-appearance is easily explained. He was still under contract to duMaurier for the run of Iris. This meant a weekly paycheck for Mac, which helped to finance the company, but it also meant he could not perform on any stage while Iris was on in London. And Iris was proving to be a persistent success; it eventually ran through August 1. So McMaster could not appear with his own company until the tour was half over. Even then he did not appear as "A new McMaster."

It is not known why he chose to use "Martin Doran," the name he had used during his earlier O'Brien-Ireland seasons in Ireland. Perhaps he still saw the Irish venture as a come-down from London, and did not want to use his London name on a risky Irish experiment. It seems more likely that he was trying to insure the success of this first tour by attaching his company to a past success. In fact, he did connect his new company to the reputation of another, well-known Irishman. An advertisement in the Wexford Free Press announced:

Harry Ireland, Identified for 14 years with Entertainments of outstanding merits, presents a Specially Selected Company in
the Superlative Works of the Immortal Shakespeare, with Comedies and Plays of Especial Interest

Only after this is there the name "Martin Doran Productions," and after that, just to be sure, is listed "(Irish Dramatic Guild)." McMaster had all the possibilities covered. He attached his company to the O'Brien-Ireland reputation, used the pseudonym he had established during his wartime tours, and then tacked on "Irish Dramatic Guild" to show his harmony with the national mood of the time. It seems likely that Harry Ireland had assisted Mac in planning the tour and making arrangements, although there is no direct evidence of that. The O'Brien-Ireland company was no longer touring.

For all the emphasis on Shakespeare, the repertory was a mixed one. The bill of plays for the four days at Wexford was Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, At Dead of Night ("adapted from the Parisien success"), and Trilby ("Du Maurier's Masterpiece [by request]"). In the O'Brien-Ireland tradition, the program was "Followed by Concert and Amusing Sketch." Prices for the Theatre Royal were reasonable: 2/4 for the boxes, 1/3 in the pit, and 9d for the gallery.16

The bill of plays may reflect Mac's non-appearance on stage since Othello is missing, as is The Merchant of Venice. At Clonmel in mid-September, when he would have been acting, the end of a week's stand included performances of Trilby, At Dead of Night, Hamlet and Othello, with the Trial Scene from The Merchant of Venice performed as an after-

15 June 20, 1925, p. 10.
16 Ibid.
piece to both *Hamlet* and *Othello*. These plays, plus *Romeo and Juliet*, probably comprise the repertoire for the first tour.

It was a "southern tour," beginning in the east and swinging along the coast to the south and west:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 15-17</td>
<td>Wicklow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-21</td>
<td>Arklow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-24</td>
<td>Enniscorthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-28</td>
<td>Wexford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 29-July 5</td>
<td>Carrick-on-Suir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 6-12</td>
<td>Dungarvan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-19</td>
<td>Fermoy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-26</td>
<td>Mallow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 27-Aug 2</td>
<td>Youghal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 17-23</td>
<td>Cobh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24-30</td>
<td>Skibbereen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 31-Sept 6</td>
<td>Bandon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 7-13</td>
<td>Macroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-20</td>
<td>Clonmel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-28</td>
<td>Waterford</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This itinerary is taken from Marjorie McMaster's daily appointment diary for the year, and there is a two-week gap, August 3-16, in which the towns are not known. It is possible the company did not perform at all during that period. She also gives a few comments along the way: the first performance was met with a good house, business was "rotten" in Wexford, a "very good house" for *Hamlet* at Dungarvan, the Picturedrome in Clonmel was a "vile hall," and in Waterford she noted, "nice theatre, big house." The "nice theatre" was the Theatre Royal, a playhouse that had seen most of the great actors, including Edmund and Charles Kean, John Philip Kemble, and Sarah Siddons. Perhaps it was a good omen that Waterford, a fairly theatre-wise town, should turn out in such numbers.

---

that Mac scheduled an extra Monday night performance at the end of the tour, and that the house for that night should be the biggest they had had.

The first McMaster tour of Ireland closed Monday, September 28, 1925, in Waterford. Several characteristics of the tour may be noted which were to become standard practice. Early stops were for three or four days, but at Carrick-on-Suir the company began week-long stays, which continued throughout the balance of the tour. In the future, most towns would be visited for a week, with only the smallest villages having an occasional three-day stand. The company visited fifteen towns in thirteen weeks, by later standards a fairly typical tour. Then, as later, there were no days off since economic and social factors dictated Sunday night performances. Monday was the travel day, with a Monday night performance as well. One gets the impression that business was not overwhelming but probably satisfactory enough for a first tour by an unknown company. And many lessons were learned.

From Waterford the McMasters went up to Kingstown to catch the overnight mail boat to Holyhead, and on October 1 they arrived in London. Marjorie noted in her diary, "Very tired." It had been a long tour, but more than that Marjorie was now eight months pregnant. Two weeks after their return to George Street, she entered a nursing home, and at 9:20 p.m. on Tuesday, November 3, 1925, John Christopher McMaster was born.

It had been an eventful year for Mac and Marjorie, beginning with a trip to the south of France, the ups and downs of Iris, the new company and the Irish tour, and now their first child. With a company
and a family, McMaster had taken a definite turn toward a kind of sta-

bility in his life he had not known before. It was, of course, only a
relative stability, but whether he realized it or not the pattern for
the balance of his life had been established in the last six months of
the year. His next tour would feature "Anew McMaster," and for more
than thirty years there seldom would be a time when Mac's life was not
centered around his company. 1925 was the turning-point. The years to
come would see him drawn away from London as his center into the Irish
country towns where he would be welcomed and remembered.

The Company Develops

While Marjorie recuperated, Mac studied the lessons of the first
tour and began planning the second. He asked only for a living from the
Irish towns, and apparently the first tour had been enough of a finan-
cial success to encourage an increase in the scale of the operation.\(^\text{18}\)
Over the next two years he enlarged the repertoire, hired additional
actors, and added to a growing stock of costumes, properties, and
lighting.

McMaster could not rely forever on Old Vic and Stratford actors
who would work for him during their off-season. He needed to form a
permanent company, or one at least as permanent as the shifting needs
and allegiances of actors will allow. Then, as always, actors had
various reasons for joining. A few were from the old tradition of the
touring actor, men who spent their entire stage lives in the provinces,
and who had no interest in the West End. During the Twenties, this was

\(^{18}\)\text{Irish Press (Dublin), Nov. 28, 1927.}
John C. Warren, a Canadian who began playing in American companies, toured England and Scotland, and, at the turn of the century, came to Ireland where he joined the O'Brien-Ireland company. He was an old man by the time he joined McMaster, and played Polonius, Friar Lawrence, the Porter in Macbeth, Old Gobbo, and the Duke in Othello, among others.¹⁹ Usually there was a group of middle-aged actors who may have longed for the West End but who, unfit by temperament or ability, would never make it. In the early days a few well-to-do young actors would pay Mac for the privilege of playing Shakespeare with his company. They would give him a lump sum at the start of the season, and he would give it back to them in weekly wages.²⁰ The largest group of actors, however, were the young ones, testing, educating, and preparing themselves with an eye to the West End. McMaster's companies were almost always rather young. It was a good school.

In decor and lighting Mac was an innovator. Responding to the demands of touring Shakespeare on a fit-up stage and in uncertain halls, he put production emphasis on beautiful costume and dramatic lighting against a background of black velvet drapes. He was following the neo-Elizabethan staging ideas of William Poel, not because he had read Poel or seen his productions or because of ideological agreement, but through necessity. McMaster must be given credit, however, because in this period other companies continued to do Shakespeare in the small towns against pastoral scenic backdrops taken from the theatre's stock. With

Mac it was mostly costume and lighting, and his interest in lighting was an enduring passion. He was always trying and experimenting and adding new instruments. Over the years, he dimmed the lights in many small Irish towns.

With time, experience, and confidence, the company added much more of the Shakespearean canon to its repertoire. The first bill of plays was a limited selection of Shakespeare, with two melodramas in case public preference did not favor Shakespeare after all. On the day after Christmas, 1926, however, the company opened in Athlone, Co. Westmeath with a bill including Hamlet, The Merchant of Venice, Romeo and Juliet, Julius Caesar, Macbeth, and Henry Irving’s standard, The Bells. By the following October (1927), A Midsummer Night’s Dream and The Taming of the Shrew had been added. The company was now truly Shakespearean.

During 1926 and 1927, Mac himself was learning a great deal. It must be remembered that he had very little Shakespearean training or experience prior to organizing his company. His only prior experience appears to have been the Iago to Asche’s Othello, although he may have played a part in Asche’s Shrew. One may wonder at the quality of his early work when, at the end of only a year or so, he was playing Hamlet, Shylock, Romeo, Mark Antony, Othello, and Macbeth—as well as Svengali and Mathias. But the testimony of the Dublin critics at the end of 1927, which will be cited later, shows that McMaster had learned quickly and developed into a recognizable Shakespearean actor.

---

21 Information derived from newspaper reports and provided by Brendan O’Brien, Athlone.
An interview with McMaster, printed in the Irish Press (Dublin), November 28, 1927, gave a partial picture of McMaster and his company half-way through their third year of touring. Mac claimed to have been born in Armagh City in the northern Six Counties. As an actor making a career in Ireland, it was politic to have an Irish birthplace, and Armagh did have family connections. His father's cousins then lived in Tyron, a town south and west of Armagh City near the border with the Free State. In 1927 this border appeared to be a temporary product of the Treaty of 1921, but it came to have more permanent reality in later years, and by 1936 Mac had prudently moved his birthplace across the border to Co. Monaghan, the Free State county immediately to the south of Co. Armagh.

McMaster reported that he was touring Ireland seven months a year, beginning in the autumn and continuing to Lent, when the company went to England for an additional three months. This plan was variable; an actress who joined the company in the autumn of 1927 and stayed through 1928 reported that all the touring was in Ireland, but there were fairly regular visits to England until the Second World War. He listed Hamlet as the most popular play, and reported that the company toured mostly in the Free State since their three visits to border towns had been "not too encouraging." During its history, the company seldom

---

22 Marjorie McMaster MS.


went to the Six Counties because business was not good and because, ironically, the Scotch-Presbyterian-Ulsterman McMaster and his company of English-Irish-Jewish Shakespearean actors were seen as an Irish Catholic institution.25

McMaster concluded the interview on a typical note. He mentioned he was trying to arrange a Brussels and Paris season for his company, and wanted to try his Irish audiences "with Pelleas and Melisande, with Barrie's plays; even the French classics. My aim is to run more on the lines of the German and French Art theatres. . . ."

A Season in Dublin

The actors in the 1927-1928 company were remarkably distinguished for a young touring group, and they indicate to a certain extent the kind of success McMaster was having in Ireland. Among the men were Mac's brother-in-law, Micheal Mac Liammoir, who was returning to the theatre after a ten-year absence, and Hilton Edwards, a young Old Vic actor whom Mac had hired as a last-minute replacement. They became immediate friends and partners and a year later founded the Dublin Gate Theatre, which for forty-five years has presented a remarkable range of plays to Dublin audiences. J. C. Warren was still with the company, and other actors included Kenneth Wicksteed, a regular performer at Stratford; David Basil Gill, son of the noted London actor and producer Basil Gill, and Bovay Parry, who was to remain with Mac for many years. The women included Esme Biddle, a tall, red-haired Irish girl who had begun

25Personal interview with Ronald Govey, Jan. 6, 1973.
her career with F. R. Benson in the early Twenties and who had been at Stratford; Coralie Carmichael, later leading actress at the Dublin Gate Theatre for many years, and Ann Clark, who began by playing the Third Witch and quickly rose to be a memorable Desdemona.

In the spring of 1927 this company had made a short English tour of towns like Canterbury, Winchester, and Tunbridge Wells prior to a summer in Ireland that included Enniscorthy, Cappoquin, Dungarvan, Cobh, Youghal, Cork, Midleton, Kanturk, and Ennis. A similar tour began in October in Longford, and during this season McMaster noted that the Abbey Theatre company was to be in Cork City the first two weeks in December. The McMasters quickly hired the Abbey Theatre for that fortnight and prepared to present the first "Dublin Shakespearean Festival."

The Abbey had gone through troubled times. After the original high purpose and achievement of the early part of the century, the theatre had gone into gradual decline with the death of J. M. Synge, the departure of its leading actors, and the difficulties occasioned by the struggle with England and the civil war. The period 1916-1924 had been one of increasing poverty which eventually resulted in the approval in 1924 of an annual subsidy of 850 pounds from the Free State government. More significant for the health of the Abbey was Sean O'Casey, whose plays The Shadow of a Gunman (1923) and Juno and the Paycock (1924) saved the theatre from bankruptcy. By 1927 the Abbey company was again improving in quality and included F. J. McCormick, May Craig, Arthur Shields, Maureen Delany, Barry Fitzgerald, Shelagh Richards, Eileen Crowe, Ria Mooney, and P. J. Carolan. Economics still required, however, that the theatre be rented to other amateur and professional
groups, and it was in this way that Anew Mcmaster's Shakespearean Company came to play in the home of Irish realistic drama.

The theatre itself must have felt familiar to Mac's company; it was reminiscent of the rather irregular halls and cinemas they played in the country towns. The Abbey was the former concert room of the Mechanics Institute. After remodelling, it had a stage with a twenty-one foot proscenium opening and a depth from curtain line to back wall of sixteen feet, four inches. The overall width of the stage from wall to wall was forty feet, that is, about ten feet of wingspace on each side. Like many country halls, an actor crossing out of sight of the audience from one side of the stage to the other often had to go outside into the alley.26

On opening night, December 5, the play was Hamlet and the house was full. Joseph Holloway, a Dublin architect and inveterate playgoer, arrived during "To be, or not to be..." and reported Mac as a

...slim shapely figure clad in black with fine curly hair seated on a high backed chair. He was speaking in somewhat measured or slow pace, in sweet toned musical voice and thoughtful way that seemed very human, as it at once arrested my interest. During the first part of the play, Hamlet dominated... but, as it went on, the cutting judiciously brought out the plot in a most understandable way.

... The Play Scene was particularly well arranged and excellently played, and Hamlet's 'Alas, poor Yorick' speech gave me great pleasure to listen to, it was so delicately shaded off in vocal imagery and voice music! In the [closet] scene..., a... tragic grandeur was reached by both him and his queen mother, Esme Biddle, and the audience became enthusiastic after the scene and called the two players before the curtains... She and McMaster won the house from the start.... The whole performance was agreeable, and the

text carefully and consumately interpreted with perhaps a little too much stress laid upon words here and there. The setting and lighting were excellently carried out, and one must be a caviller indeed not to be pleased with the presentation of those earnest, very capable players. 27

Two points are of special interest: The business of taking a curtain call after a particularly dramatic scene was regular practice in the company at this time, a continuation of a long theatrical tradition, and one Mac was inclined to use in the county towns quite late in the history of the company. Textual cutting also was a regular McMaster practice, and he explained:

Hamlet, for instance, with us only takes 2 3/4 hours. I am afraid we will be blamed for it, but we must run as a commercial concern, and I find that the public do not want to sit any longer than that in a theatre. I have tried not to cut the famous scenes, so as to get the story perfectly clear. But we have included in Hamlet the King's closet scene, which is rarely played, but it is necessary to the continuity of the story. 28

Where there is probably some truth to Mac's opinion about the staying power of Irish audiences, it would also be his own preference to emphasize the plot and diminish somewhat the philosophic content of the plays. This tended to push Shakespeare a little closer to melodrama and to make for a more exciting evening of theatre.

Mac's Hamlet, however, was played in a rather low key,

27 For nearly sixty years, from the mid-1880's to 1944, Joseph Holloway attended the Dublin theatre and wrote down what he saw and thought in a series of copybooks. The result was more than 2,000 pages and 25 million words about Irish theatre, which was willed to the National Library of Ireland. There it became 221 manuscript volumes and a vast resource for the student of Irish theatre history. All Holloway citations will list the National Library of Ireland (NLI) manuscript volume citation and page numbers. Thus: Holloway, NLI MS 1914, pp. 919-921.

28 Irish Press (Dublin), Nov. 28, 1927.
apparently with little trace of broad, melodramatic playing. One critic said Hamlet spoke in a "normal, human voice," a voice that was "low and sweet and sad." Another said, "McMaster's study was at once impressive and human." He also noted another characteristic that always marked Mac: "... unlike some actor-managers he does not consider that the best consists in turning the tragedy into a one-man show." 

Con Curran in the Irish Statesman summed it up:

> It is not that Mr. McMaster's is a great Hamlet. He is neither as noble as Forbes Robertson nor as moving as Martin Harvey, but he is both noble and moving. He is a well equipped and serious actor who without conceit fills the stage with a graceful presence and fills his lines with music and meaning. His voice is singularly pleasing and of wide compass, and his reading of the part is reasonable and coherent.

Coralie Carmichael played Ophelia, Hilton Edwards was Claudius, Esme Biddle was the Queen, Mac Liammóir played Laertes (and also designed some costumes and the setting), Wicksteed was Horatio, and J. C. Warren was Polonius, "the best Polonius Dublin has seen for three generations," according to the Irish Times.

Two nights later, McMaster gave Dublin his Othello, again to a full house. The result was a little more uneven, but it is clear that the unevenness reflected McMaster's own preferences in the play. These led him to rush through the early expository scenes in order to get to the more emotional and confrontational scenes later in the play.

Holloway's criticism would be echoed for the next thirty years:

---

29 Irish Times (Dublin), Dec. 6, 1927.
30 Irish Independent (Dublin), Dec. 6, 1927.
The last act of Othello was so finely played that it redeemed a rather uneven and unconvincing performance. In this act Anew McMaster played with wonderful power and restraint, and little Ann Clark made an ideal Desdemona. I was wonderfully impressed by the playing in this act, and the audience got as still as death as they followed each episode with intense interest and became quite enthusiastic at the end. . . . McMaster started his Othello rather unconvincingly in his speech to the Senate. It was not until the great scenes between him and Iago [Hilton Edwards] that he grew into the part and showed the fine player he is. . . . McMaster brought the savage part of Othello's nature well to the fore. . . . He did not spare himself in his passionate outbursts when jealousy gets hold of him, but after the fiercest outbursts could get back command of himself and his voice in a surprising way. . . . He wore a black wig and looked as unlike his Hamlet as a man could look and behave. . . . Both Iago and Othello were twice called before the curtain after their great scene. This act ended in Othello's falling down in a fit and writhing on the floor. A fitting ending to the whirlwind of passion that had gone before.32

The Merchant of Venice and Macbeth were next, and Holloway saw them at the school matinees. He noted another McMaster problem, writing after the Saturday Macbeth matinee:

I never felt he was really within the skin of his part, though many times he was very effective and . . . illuminating in his gestures. Evidently to a youthful audience he cannot immerse himself completely with his parts—witness Shylock on Thursday and now Macbeth.33

At the Merchant matinee Mac apparently was in his most melodramatic form. Over the years his Shylock often would be an emotional and touching creation, but this time Holloway thought it all a little too much: "I thought McMaster's Shylock too fantastic and overplayed. . . . His make-up was good, but his additions to bridge of nose [were] not convincing and tricks of voice overdone. Exaggeration was its keynote."34

32Holloway, NLI MS 1914, pp. 928-930.
33Ibid., p. 947. 34Ibid., p. 931.
Holloway went back to the Abbey that evening to see three acts of The Merchant again, and he liked it better because Mac was less flamboyant in the role. He did detect, however, one of Mac's influences: "Shylock was a Svengalized Jew with a good deal of human spider about him."\(^{35}\) Holloway had not yet seen McMaster's Svengali.

Once again, the decor drew high marks. The Irish Independent remarked, "The Venetian atmosphere was admirably suggested with an economy of means that other Shakespearean producers might well study,"\(^{36}\) and Holloway observed, "The play was beautifully dressed and lighted and set—a most artistic eye is over all."\(^{37}\) Mac Liammoir was probably most responsible; he was almost as prolific and creative as a costume and set designer as he was an actor during the next forty years..

Overall, Macbeth was more successful than Merchant, but McMaster "tried to force his Macbeth into the same mould as his Hamlet, but in many places it proved a misfit," Holloway reported. "He took his soliloquies as a rule too slowly—overemphasizing many words here and there in the text unduly, and prolonging others in a sort of... drawl that was not very convincing."\(^{38}\) Macbeth was never one of Mac's best roles, though one might have thought it would have been one of his best. Years later Harold Pinter wrote, "... for some reason or other [Mac] rarely bothered to play Macbeth. ... Yet there was plenty of Macbeth in him. I believe his dislike of the play was so intense he couldn't bring

\(^{35}\)Holloway, NLI MS 1914, p. 935.  \(^{36}\)Dec. 9, 1927.

\(^{37}\)Holloway, NLI MS 1914, p. 935.  \(^{38}\)Ibid., pp. 946-950.
himself to play it."39

There are few critical records of the second week's productions of A Midsummer's Night's Dream, Romeo and Juliet, and The Taming of the Shrew. Holloway said McMaster's "Oberon made one think he was going in for a beauty contest, he looked so imposing and handsome," and he called Mac's Petruchio "dashing."40 The Irish Times, reporting standing-room only at the theatre, said, "Mr. McMaster's Romeo gained for him even more appreciation than did his Othello of last week. In the concluding scene he gave a performance that for the beauty of its sadness has not been bettered by any former Romeo."41 That may have been a little excessive. The Independent's man got the impression "that he was at least as much in love with lovely lines as he was with Juliet."42

The McMasters' season at the Abbey had been a triumph. The critics had raved, business had been good, and the audiences had included many of the social and theatrical leaders of the city. Little more than two years old, McMaster's company had come into Dublin for the first time and distinguished itself—and in the house of Yeats, Synge, and Lady Gregory. Mac never really needed the stamp of Dublin approval in order to feel that he was successful, but he must have had some feeling of triumph after this visit to Dublin. His company had shown that effective productions of Shakespeare could come in from the country towns and be a success in the capital.

39Pinter, Mac, pp. 12-13.
40Holloway, NLI MS 1914, pp. 981-982.
Holloway summed it up:

The young actor, Anew McMaster, has proved himself a chip off the old block of great tragedians, and has made more than good as Othello, Hamlet, and Romeo—indeed, his Othello is a really remarkable achievement. Critic W. J. Lawrence and I are of the opinion that he will bloom into the big tragic actor of his time. He has all the natural gifts that go to make a fine actor—height, good figure, handsome clear cut face, melodious voice of great range, and graceful gestures. He always pleases the eye as well as satisfies the mind. . . . If he doesn't rise to the very top, I for one shall be sorely disappointed. . . .

Film Interlude

McMaster made several motion pictures during his lifetime, but, with one exception, he does not give the names or other details. In the summer of 1928, he went to Tunisia to make a film about the adventures of an army patrol unit lost in the desert. The production met with many difficulties, including dysentery among the actors, a lack of water, and other production delays, and Mac was late returning to Ireland to begin the autumn tour. By contractual agreement, the film company paid him for the loss of company income. It is an ironic comment on the nature of Mac's career that he made this film. It was titled The Lost Patrol, and was a silent film released at the end of 1929 just when talking pictures were the new wave. The movie sank without a trace. A re-make of the film five years later with Wallace Ford and Reginald Denny was a great hit and one of director John Ford's earliest successes. Mac's career seemed destined to be just behind the times.

---

43 Holloway, NLI MS 1914, pp. 381-382.
44 Lifetime, no. 5.
The Abbey Again

The McMaster company returned to the Abbey for another two-week season the following December (1928). Again billed as the "Dublin Shakespearean Festival," this season differed from the first in two respects: The bill of plays included three that were not Shakespearean, and Sir Frank Benson agreed to join the company for the fortnight's run.

Benson had turned seventy on the previous November 4, and his long career had been in gradual decline since the end of the First World War. He was no longer the regular producer of the Stratford festivals, no longer had his own company. By the end of 1928, "he had no means, nothing but his name, his troop of friends, and his unblurred charm." His work consisted largely of the kind of thing that brought him to Dublin, personal appearances with local repertory companies. The February following his Dublin visit, Benson would begin three years of "farewell" tours, which would take him very near the end of his career. The most likely connection bringing Mac and Benson together in this season was McMaster's leading actress, Esme Biddle. She was an old Bensonian, and, more significantly, was married to Benson's manager, H. V. Nielsen.

Benson agreed to do five performances as Sir Peter Teazle in School for Scandal and two performances as Shylock. In all, Benson would appear for a week of the McMaster season, from Thursday of the first week to Wednesday of the second. Mac was to play Charles Surface

---

45 Trewin, Benson and the Bensonians, p. 252.
and Antonio, but at the last moment did not appear in Merchant. The balance of the bill included Hamlet, Othello, Romeo and Juliet, and Macbeth, a new production of Richard III, and two additions to a slowly growing list of melodramas, David Garrick and Mr. Wu.

The company included twenty-five actors, including several new faces. Edwards, Mac Liammoir and Coralie Carmichael had left to begin Dublin Gate Theatre Productions. Other leading actors remained with Mac, including Esme Biddle and Ann Clark, Bovay Parry, J. C. Warren, and David Gill, but there were many new names: Hilary Burleigh, Ann Muncaster, Phyllis Manners, P. Hunt-Lewis, William Van Craen. One cloud appeared on the horizon: Mac told critic J. J. Hayes that he might have to cut back on Shakespeare because he couldn’t find a suitable company to play it and still make ends meet. 46

Again Hamlet opened the season on December 3. McMaster’s notices were very good, with a tendency to see it as a better performance than the previous year. The Irish Independent’s critic noted a plus and a minus:

He cut, of course, . . . but, on the whole, with discretion, and his simple yet decorative settings enabled him to speed up the action, if not to the Elizabethan pace, at least in a fashion that is entirely beyond the power of managers who cling to the rigid traditions of the picture-stage. It is curious he should hamper himself with the old convention of a musical accompaniment to certain scenes. Not only is the orchestra irrelevant; its strains, however delicately modulated, clash incongruously with the rhythm of Shakespearean verse. 47

Holloway also notices the music:

46 Holloway, NLI MS 1922, pp. 1174-1175.

47 Dec. 4, 1928, p. 4.
The introduction of music was a mistake, and seldom, if ever, lent additional effect to the scenes in which it was introduced. [Dr. J. F.] Larchet and his orchestra were all at sea to know when to introduce the bits of music set out for this or that scene. . . . He had a half-sheet of paper with instructions on it but even so it was difficult to get the hang of the thing right.  

The contrast between the rather modern and efficient staging techniques and the use of music in the melodramatic manner to heighten mood within a scene is typical of McMaster. He was no theoretician. The realities of touring the small towns required simplified staging. But Mac's background was melodrama and his passion was opera, and from this time to the end of his career his productions would have musical emphasis to the action. Almost always the music would be orchestral renderings of operatic themes.

During this period a technological innovation allowed Mac to introduce music into his county-town performances without the impossible expense of a touring orchestra. He acquired a phonautograph. "Phonautograph" is the Twenties term for electric disk phonograph, and according to the Oxford English Dictionary the word first came into use in 1926. Ann Clark recalled that McMaster was among the first to use this device in dramatic performance, probably first doing so in 1928.  

Since no notice had been taken of the use of music in Mac's 1927 Dublin season, it seems likely that McMaster first incorporated music in his productions via the phonautograph sometime in 1928. In the 1928 Dublin season it appears that he used the phonautograph as well as the regular Abbey

---

48 Holloway, NLI MS 1922, p. 1102.

49 Personal interview with Ann Clark, Jan 12, 1973.
orchestra under Dr. Larchet. Holloway gives a passing mention to the "mechanical music," and the following year (1929) he was more specific: "Infernal music from a wheezy organ marred many scenes—in fact, marred every scene in which it was employed. . . . One would want to be deaf to appreciate 'canned' music of this sort." Whatever its effect on the Dublin audience, the pantomope stayed and may indeed have been a sensation in the county towns.

Thursday, December 5, was the first performance of School For Scandal. Holloway wrote:

A great house of old playgoers mostly filled the Abbey to welcome back Sir Frank Benson again. . . . [It had been twenty-five years since he last played Dublin.] Benson got a great reception on making his first entrance as 'Sir Peter Teazle'—a part which he played with great spirit and much energy. Ann Clark was a delightful lady Teazle. Their quarrel scenes were given with delicious humour. I left after the picture scene in which Anew McMaster made his entrance as Charles Surface, and presented a fine dashing portrait of the extravagant, good-hearted fellow. . . . The comedy was beautifully dressed and played in the old spirit. The Scandal Scenes took splendidly; they were so clearly spoken. . . . It was a night of rare enthusiasm, and the old actor must have been thrilled by his reception after so many years.

The production was a success, the Abbey was sold out for the three remaining performances, and it was decided to add another matinee the following Wednesday in place of Macbeth.

Mr. Wu had been in the repertoire for most of the touring season, and had been played for a week in Cork when problems with a

50Holloway, NLI MS 1922, p. 1174.
51Holloway, NLI MS 1930, p. 1022.
52Holloway, NLI MS 1922, p. 1118.
local Shakespearean society prevented Mac from presenting any Shakespeare there. The play was a Matheson Lang stand-by that had first been produced in London on November 27, 1913. The Irish Independent summarized the plot: "... the Chinaman, polished, with Western education, but with the philosophy of an eye for an eye, ... ruthless and relentless in his determination to avenge the honour of his family; and the offer of the mother, Wu's prisoner, asked to save her son by her own dishonour." The pillars of the Abbey must have trembled. The play was a great success. Holloway:

There was a great house for Mr. Wu. ... The opening act didn't interest me very much, but from the moment Mr. Wu entered Mr. Gregory's office the play caught fire and held the entire audience to the end of the play. In fact, the tension during the last act was almost painfully intense, and Anew McMaster's Mr. Wu dominated the scene.

Holloway noted that Mac played it in a subtle and quiet manner, as Lang had done. He and Esme Biddle, as Mrs. Gregory, were called again and again at the final curtain.

On Monday, December 10, McMaster went to a Rotary Club luncheon with Rotarian Frank Benson. He must have gone in deference to Benson since it was rare that Mac made such public appearances and he disliked promotional activities. Holloway quoted Harold Howell of the Abbey management as saying, "He found it hard to get proper support from McMaster this season, although you would be astonished to know what

---

53 Holloway, NLI MS 1922, p. 1162.
55 Holloway, NLI MS 1922, p. 1139.
56 Irish Independent (Dublin), Dec. 10, 1928, p. 6.
large sums were offered." 57 At the luncheon, McMaster spoke publicly of something close to his heart, "ultra-naturalistic" acting.

He said that although it was possible to act in a very natural manner, and there were distinguished men in their profession like Sir Gerald du Maurier who proved that, there were unfortunately younger men who thought that all that was necessary is to walk on and off and mumble their words. An actress, who, perhaps, was more famous for her beauty than for her acting, said to him that all you had to do on the stage was to be as you would be in your drawing room. If that were true [Mr. McMaster] would ask a lawyer to take a lawyer's part and a clergyman to take a clergyman's part instead of asking actors to do so. 58

The actress was not named.

The following night Sir Frank appeared in The Merchant of Venice as Shylock. The company was augmented by Micheal Mac Liammoir and Coralie Carmichael, who re-created their previous roles as Lorenzo and Jessica. Etme Biddle was Portia, Ann Clark played Nerissa, and Walter Humphreys was in for Mac as Antonio. The Evening Mail spoke of a "rapt house," 59 and Holloway called it "a truly memorable performance." 60

But the Irish Times critic saw something a little different:

The story was clear, the staging adequate, and the reception exceedingly cordial. But 'undisciplined' would seem to be the word which most accurately summarizes the acting. The team spirit was conspicuously absent, and this must be accounted for by the differences in the styles of acting between Sir Frank Benson and the . . . company supporting him. . . . In these days of 'naturalistic' acting such a performance as Sir Frank Benson gives is apt to be out of tune with his supporting caste. So it was last night. 61

McMaster gave his only performance of Richard III on Friday.

57Holloway, NLI MS 1922, p. 1112.
58Irish Independent (Dublin), Dec. 11, 1928. 59Dec. 12, 1928.
60Holloway, NLI MS 1922, p. 1148. 61Dec. 12, 1928.
December 14, again to a large house. It was only his fourth appearance in the part, and he frequently had to be prompted. Finally, several scenes toward the end of the play were omitted because it was running long. It was not a success. Richard was seen as "no mere canting rogue, neither is he the suave, cold-blooded villain of the type Machiavelli is supposed to have created. He is very human, with moments of splendour in his sins."63

Saturday afternoon and Sunday evening, T. W. Robertson's David Garrick rattled the walls at the Abbey.

Mr. McMaster departed from his more intimate and reserved style for the occasion, and translated his audience back to the good old-fashioned style. The piece was played as broad comedy, and the actors let themselves loose in the most unrestrained manner.64

Holloway reports that in the last act many of the actors were in the audience to watch Mac at his melodramatic best.65 Garrick is not a long play, and before the Saturday matinee Esme Biddle played the Messenger and Death scenes from Antony and Cleopatra as a curtain-raiser. Sunday night it was the short version of Romeo and Juliet, a regular part of the company repertory.

After the last performance of the season Sunday, McMaster made a curtain speech thanking the audience. He mentioned that he "has in mind" a plan to bring plays to Dublin each year with international

62 Holloway, NLI MS 1922, pp. 1174-1175.
63 Irish Independent (Dublin), Dec. 16, 1928.
64 Irish Times (Dublin), Dec. 17, 1928.
65 Holloway, NLI MS 1922, p. 1173.
stars, and he indicated that Oscar Asche was willing to come in The Merry Wives of Windsor. 66 Earlier Holloway had reported that both Asche and Mrs. Patrick Campbell were willing to come to the Abbey with Mac. 67 Asche was never to come, but in December, 1929, Mrs. Pat would indeed come to Dublin to appear with the McMaster company. Before that exciting time, however, Mac was back on the road. On St. Stephen's Day (December 26), the McMaster Shakespeare Company, recently of the Abbey Theatre, opened in Wicklow. 68

Mrs. Patrick Campbell

The McMasters toured Ireland through much of 1929. In early March they visited Athlone with the repertoire of the previous Abbey season, and the following October returned with a new production, Oliver Twist. Like Svengali, Fagin was a creation of Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, but according to Mac Liammoir, while McMaster's Svengali was modelled on Tree, his Fagin was a totally different, "an outrageously funny performance." 69 Mac Liammoir had played Oliver in Tree's 1913 production.

Plans were being worked out for the third visit to the Abbey. This time it would be for only one week since the theatre was not available for a longer period. It must have irritated McMaster to think his company was being replaced by the "Civil Service Dramatic Society." A newspaper advertisement on Saturday, November 30, 1929, announced that

67Holloway, NLI MS 1922, p. 1119.
68Ibid., p. 1178. 69BBC Program.
Mrs. Patrick Campbell would be joining the company to play in *Ghosts* and *Macbeth*.

Although McMaster had said the previous year that Mrs. Pat was willing to come to Dublin, final arrangements were not completed until he received a letter from her dated November 24, not much more than two weeks before the season was to begin:

Dear Mr. McMaster,

I would very much like to come and play Mrs. Alving and Lady Macbeth for you.

A hundred pounds a week and first class travelling expenses is ample.

I could come on the 2nd and rehearse for a week, but whether I could be ready with the two parts in seven days I don't know. . . .

I will come up Sunday the 2nd if I do not hear from you to the contrary, and you must do what you can to help me not make of fool of myself. I have Mrs. Alving's black dress, but nothing for Lady Macbeth. Please do not arrange too many soirées. I cannot work and play.

With warm regards,

Yours sincerely,

Mrs. Campbell was sixty-four, and had just completed her last London play, a 229-performance run of *The Matriarch* at the Royalty Theatre. She had had a long, spectacular, and temperamental career, including the original Pinero heroines Paula Tanqueray and Mrs. Ebb Smith and the first Eliza Doolittle (at the age of forty-nine) opposite Tree in 1914. She was one of Mac's major goddesses.

Since the Abbey company was still in town, McMaster rented the Theatre Royal for rehearsals, arranged a suite of rooms at the Shelbourne Hotel, and went off to Dun Laoghaire to meet Mrs. Pat at the

---

70Letter in the possession of Christopher McMaster.
pier. Mac remembered:

The great day arrived, and in a whirl of furs and magazines which she kept dropping, she emerged from... the ship. 'You'll have no difficulty in recognizing my luggage,' gurgled in that wonderful throaty voice... 'It's all painted bright green, it had to be as I was coming to Ireland.'

Ten o'clock next morning found me piloting her to the theatre... After embracing Marjorie... we started off down the dim corridor leading to the stage. Suddenly she stopped and, closing her eyes, took several deep breaths and murmured, 'Don't speak to me, don't move, I'm so overwhelmed. I can feel the ghosts of Yeats and Synge and dear George Moore surging around me.' 'What on earth are you talking about?' I asked. 'Mac, dear, this Old Abbey Theatre, of course,' she breathed, they are all here, it's all too wonderful.' 'Don't be silly, dear,' I said rather tartly. 'You happen to be in the Theatre Royal, a nice old smelly music hall, and now come along and let us get some work done...'

She took a dislike to the Theatre Royal after the original gaffe... and we had many succeeding rehearsals in her large sitting room at the Shelbourne.71

Rehearsals did not go easily. Mrs. Pat found that she had six days in which to prepare Lady Macbeth and ten days for Mrs. Alving. That was old stuff for Mac and the other members of the company, all veterans of the daily repertory tradition, but Mrs. Campbell found it all rushed and became increasingly difficult. Mac Liammoir, in All For Hecuba, paints a vivid picture of the change in Mac:

'Oh, it's been the ambition of my life to play with her,' [Mac said on the Sunday of her arrival,] 'and I don't know what people mean saying she's difficult, Micheal. You know her, Micheal... now you know how sweet she can be—oh, all that stuff about her being a nuisance is jealousy, sheer jealousy...'

But as the days went by Mac began to agree with the jealous ones who had complained of her caprices. 'She's pure heaven,' he repeated on the first Monday and Tuesday, 'and not a word of that stuff about her being difficult is true.'

On Wednesday he came to tea looking a little worn. 'Of course, she's such a great actress, you see,' he began. 'You have to forgive a great actress if she... well,
you just have to overlook these little moments, that's all.'

On Thursday he said, 'I suppose she is as great as ... yes, yes, she is. She is! But, oh dear, there are things in her character that—no, I won't say it.'

Friday arrived.

'I wonder,' he murmured, flinging himself onto a sofa, 'I wonder if a person who was a great artist could ever stoop—oh, the things she said to-day! The moods, the sulks, the venom—oh well, let's forget it! Forget it. That's all one can do!' But by the middle of the following week no doubts were left.

'To-day, dear, I saw. I saw with my own eyes what people mean about her,' he cried, striding up and down the room and breathing through his nose. 'Don't mention her to me, don't breathe her bloody name. She's a fiend, dear, in what may have been once a human shape! God, I didn't think it possible that any human being could be such a —— Oh, well, never again, that's all I can say —— May God, never again! Well, there you are, you see. It's no use. And I shall always adore the wicked bitch. You see, in spite of everything she's such an incredible artist.'

The occasion of Mac's distress in the middle of the second week was that Mrs. Campbell had written to the Abbey's manager on Tuesday saying that the opening of Ghosts must be postponed from Thursday to Friday in order to allow for additional rehearsal. Harold Howell, after more than an hour's talk with her Tuesday night about "Commercialism vs. Art," persuaded her to keep her word with the public and appear as scheduled. The conflict was not quite over, however. After the curtain calls opening night, Mrs. Pat thanked the audience "for their generous applause, which she said was scarcely deserved as the great tragedy was too hastily gotten up, and none of them had their text properly." The press quoted her as saying, "We have not done justice to

72 Pp. 95-96.

73 Holloway, NLI MS 1930, pp. 1023-1024.

74 Ibid., p. 1028.
this great tragedy," and she pointed to the "unevenness and scrappiness which marked this performance."\textsuperscript{75}

The performance was marred by a certain amount of uncertainty about lines, and Mrs. Campbell seemed especially nervous. Holloway thought she was afraid of being hissed by members of the Vigilance Committee, although Mac had prudently stated in an interview two days before opening, "We do not emphasize either the literary value or the sensational possibilities of the play. . . . We are interested in, and play only for, the superb dramatic content."\textsuperscript{76} Whether this curious statement had any effect on the Vigilance Committee is not known, but there was no hissing. Mac Liammoir recalled:

Her performance was an astounding affair, and had about as much to do with Ibsen's play as the Aubrey Beardsley illustrations have to do with Wilde's Salome. . . . No mother of a stricken man, no homely provincial Norwegian, could have looked or spoken as she did, and yet, as she moved about the stage sighing, laughing, and weeping, her smallest gesture a graven image of significance and beauty, that monstrous magnetism of hers held one fast, and Hilton muttered thickly in my ear, 'She's forgotten more than any of us will ever know.'\textsuperscript{77}

The cast received generally good notices, especially Charles Marford, an Old Vic actor who played Engstrand, and Esme Biddle as Regina. David Gill as Pastor Manders was less successful. On Friday night, before another full house, the cast was perfect in the text and "even Mrs. Pat Campbell played with ease."\textsuperscript{78} She had proven her case; one more day was

\textsuperscript{75}Irish Times (Dublin), Dec. 13, 1929, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{76}Irish Times (Dublin), Dec. 9, 1929, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{77}Mac Liammoir, All For Hecuba, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{78}Holloway, NLI MS 1930, p. 1047.
all that was needed.

It should not be forgotten that while the struggle over *Ghosts* was going on, McMaster was acting every day in the other plays scheduled for the season. On Wednesday, the day before the *Ghosts* opening, he had unfortunately scheduled one of his incredible double bills—*Hamlet* at the matinee and *Othello* in the evening. The Irish Times said, "That the company came away from such a test with honour, and even distinction, says much for the ability and direction of its members." 79 Marford played Claudius, Molly Tapper was now the Ophelia/Desdemona, and, with the illness of J. C. Warren, Polonius was played by Martin Glynn—with a West Cork accent. Walter Humphreys was Iago. Tuesday, Mac revived Mr. Wi. Holloway learned his lesson from the previous year, skipped the first act and was again spellbound by the second and third. 80

Sunday and Monday had been *Macbeth* with Mrs. Campbell, and the Abbey had been thronged to welcome her. Holloway, perhaps with a touch of chauvinism, thought she looked much like Sara Allgood:

She had fallen into flesh, and much of the beauty of her voice tones has vanished into a sort of hoarse whisper, but she was most effective in the Sleepwalking Scene, and in parts of the great murder scene and in the Banqueting Hall. She found some difficulty in entering or leaving the stage as there were quite a number of steps to be got up and down. . . . The tragedy started somewhat tamely, but the company got into stride as the piece progressed. . . . I left after the Sleepwalking Scene, for which Mrs. Pat was recalled three times. 81

Mac Liammóir paints another picture:

. . . one night when I was at the side of the stage during the performance she sailed up to me with a banana in her hand.

79 Dec. 12, 1929, p. 6.

'I've bought that out of my own money for your poor, thin little sister,' she proclaimed in the curious whisper of hers. . . . 'You will give it to her, won't you, nice kind boy? I'm sure Mac starves her.'

At this moment there was a stage wait and someone hurried up and said, 'Mrs. Campbell, it's your cue.'

'Oh yes, I know,' she murmured. 'But I don't think that's any reason for my going on, do you? You know, young man,' she went on, turning to me, 'your brother-in-law has such outlandish ideas about Macbeth. He seems to think it's a tragedy. Hm! He doesn't realize the Dear Old Bard had his tongue well in his cheek when he wrote it. All that poppycock about taking her milk for gall—so pointless! Hm. Hm! I'm sure he wrote Lady Macbeth specially for Forbes-Robertson. . . . Good luck for your new theatre and don't forget the banana, will you, good boy,' and she floated away to give Macbeth some excellent advice on the technique of murder.82

After the Saturday Macbeth matinee, she took her final curtain call with the McMaster's two children, three-year-old Mary Rose83 on one arm and four-year-old Christopher by the hand. Mary Rose fought valiantly against being held, and Mrs. Pat smiled beatifically as she dodged the blows. It brought the house down.84

The season had done magnificent business. The theatre had been booked out by Friday before opening, again perhaps somewhat galling for the Abbey management since the last Abbey production, George Shiels' Mountain Dew, had done little business.85 As a result of the demand, McMaster rented the Theatre Royal for an additional Sunday performance of Ghosts and that, too, was sold out. After the final curtain, Mac made a speech of thanksgiving and promised Antony and Cleopatra with

82 Liammoir, All For Hecuba, p. 96.
83 Mary Rose McMaster had been born Nov. 10, 1926, in Dublin.
84 Lifetime, no. 5.
85 Holloway, NLI MS 1930, pp. 1007, 1011.
Mrs. Pat for next year. It was, perhaps, one of his most subtle jokes.

Conclusion

By the end of the 1920's the McMaster Shakespearean Company was a firmly established and highly successful operation. In four-and-a-half years McMaster had become well known in the countryside and had capped his tours with three successful seasons at the Abbey in Dublin. The Abbey seasons had given Mac status and visibility. Although he was never to feel as at home in Dublin as he did in the towns, it was useful for him to be seen by the Dublin audience at this time. That audience had come in great numbers for each season, and it had always included the leading theatrical and social figures of the time. The reception given by Dublin must have excited Mac, and the visit of his company generated excitement in the city.

In this stimulating time, Mac was tempted to find a permanent base for his company; he began looking for a theatre in Dublin. Holloway notes the abortive McMaster plan: "McMaster was about to purchase the Tivoli for repertory when he heard that de Valera had done so for a printing office for his new daily. On hearing this McMaster got the disappointment of his life. He had set his heart on it." It was not the first time Mac had thought about having his own theatre, nor would it be the last, but none of the plans came to fruition. In this case it

86Holloway, NLI MS 1930, p. 1046.

87Ibid., pp. 1023-1024. The newspaper was the Irish Press, which began publishing in September, 1931.
may be that de Valera, who became Prime Minister in 1932, saved Mac from a costly learning experience. It is one thing to operate a successful touring company and quite another to have a capital investment in a theatre building, especially one like the Tivoli, a 1,500-seat hall that had housed music hall and variety for years.

McMaster's dream was always that if he got a theatre that was big enough he could offer Shakespeare and other great plays and playwrights to the public at low admission prices. It is a recurrent dream among theatrical producers, and is only very occasionally successful. As successful as the Abbey season had been, it is possible Mac would have made a mistake had he sought to make Dublin the permanent home for his company. There was audience enough for an annual two-week season, but, as time proved, there was not enough for extended visits in the repertory McMaster preferred. More important, Mac's future was in the towns, not only because his audience was there, but also because he was temperamentally suited to the touring life. Change was a central requirement of his life. Permanence and routine were anathema to him, and as the years went on, touring became a personal necessity as well as a professional one. The tour was liberating for Mac. It freed him from the world.

As the curtain fell on the last Dublin appearance of Mrs. Patrick Campbell, a high-point for the McMaster company had been reached. Success had been achieved, and difficult times were about to begin. For a variety of reasons, the decade of the Thirties was to be a trying one for Mac, with occasional triumphs and a great deal of trouble. During the next ten years the McMaster company would visit
Dublin only twice for a total of four weeks. Survival would be difficult and would require Mac to work at acting jobs he could not have enjoyed. The promise of the Twenties was to disappear as The Real World, never of much interest to Anew McMaster, began to press in on his life and the life of his company.
CHAPTER IX

THE THIRTIES

Hard Times

The 1930's brought difficulties to McMaster and the company. It was a period of uncertainty where survival often appears as the central need. Large forces were at work against Mac during this time as The Real World often intruded into his life. The American economic crash of 1929 had set off reverberations throughout the world, and money was scarce everywhere. To compound the economic difficulty in Ireland, an economic war between Britain and the Free State began in mid-1932 owing to a dispute between the new Prime Minister, Eamon de Valera, and the British government over financial arrangements contained in the Treaty of 1921. By 1938, the cost to Ireland of the tariff barriers and other resulting economic sanctions was forty-eight million pounds in lost trade. Lack of work in England also slowed Irish emigration with a consequent rise in unemployment from 29,000 in 1931 to 95,500 in 1933, eventually rising to a peak of 138,000.¹ Never a rich country, Ireland's economic distress was serious in the Thirties, and this must have been reflected in the financial health of the McMaster company.

McMaster had to cope with another problem: the talking picture.

The talk-films, as the Irish called them, had as large an impact in Ireland as in the rest of the world. Data is scarce, but at the end of 1930 there were twenty-nine cinemas in Dublin showing talkies, with seats for 25,000 people. A newspaper reported the re-opening of two cinemas as "an indication of the new prosperity which talk-films have brought to exhibitors." Al Jolson's first talkie, The Singing Fool, drew 50,000 customers during the first two weeks of its Dublin run. And in Dublin many theatres were showing films with their stage presentations.² Because of the equipment required, the talkies were somewhat later coming to the towns, but eventually they arrived and gave the McMaster's serious competition. After the initial fascination with talking pictures diminished, the townspeople found a place for both the McMaster company and the cinema, but in the early Thirties the advantage was clearly to the movies.

Meanwhile, the company was on tour in England and Ireland. The did not return to the Abbey Theatre stage in December, 1930, even though the theatre was available. It seems probable that the decline in theatre business in the face of cinema competition made the pre-Christmas visit to Dublin less appealing. The chain of annual visits was broken, and the company stayed in the countryside.

In March, 1931, McMaster hired the Abbey for a two-week season prior to Holy Week, and the story of this season shows that the company was having troubles. The bill of plays indicates that the company was moving away from a predominately Shakespearean orientation to a wider

variety of styles and authors, perhaps in an effort to counter the
effect of the movies. The season opened Sunday, March 15, with a week
of melodrama: Matheson Lang's Carnival and L. N. Parker's The Cardinal.
The only Shakespeare was a school matinee performance of Hamlet. The
second week saw Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, and Othello; Mr. Wu was
revived, and new productions of The Importance of Being Earnest and She
Stoops to Conquer were presented. The company included about fifteen
actors, and, with the exception of Bovay Parry, Walter Humphreys (now
the business manager), and Martin Glynn (also the baggage man and tech-
nical aide), none had been with Mac in his last Dublin appearance
fifteen months before. The new Desdemona/Ophelia was twenty-two-year-
old Kenlis Tайлour, and other leading actors were George Owen (a vet-
eran of the first tour), Frazer Scott, Blanche MacPherson, Kathleen
Williams, and Kathleen St. John.

Business was not good. The critic for the (London) Daily
Express summed it up: "Dublin theatres have not done well during the
season since September last [1930]. Even the Abbey experienced a
falling off. Mr. McMaster, . . . who concluded a fortnight's visit, did
not receive the support which his popularity and merit should ensure."
Holloway reported that on opening night the pit and stalls were nearly
full but the balcony was empty. On Tuesday—St. Patrick's Night—he
noted that the Gate Theatre was full and there were long queues in front
of the cinemas, but the Abbey was "full only to the first row of
stalls." The first night of The Cardinal drew a "fairly large" house,

3Newspaper clipping in Holloway, NLI MS 1940, p. 555.
Earnest did little business, Mr. Wu (on Thursday of the second week) had the largest audience to date, and only for the final night's production of Romeo and Juliet was there a full house. Clearly, times had changed. Whatever the causes, McMaster's impact on the Dublin theatre was reduced and the excitement of the previous seasons was not renewed. Mac's interest in Dublin diminished, never to be fully revived. The company opened in New Ross, Co. Wexford, on Easter night, and neither Mac nor his company played Dublin again for five years.

For the next year the McCarmacs toured Ireland. In July, 1931, the company was in the southwest, Kerry and Cork, and Marjorie recorded some of the better aspects of the touring life:

We left Killarney this morning [July 7] in a haze of delicate sunlight and drove here [Kennmare, Co. Kerry] along what I conceive to be one of the loveliest roads in the world—an endless delight of thick cobalt mountains, enchanting glimpses of island-studded lakes; sudden little gay waterfalls and everywhere a marvellous luxury of vivid prodigal vegetation—trees and rock-flowers and shrubs of every kind smothering the mountainside. . . .

The hall we are to eat in is sitting in a field of its own, bounded on one side by a low grey wall, and on another by an old-fashioned cottage garden. Two women were picking raspberries in it as I looked out of the window this morn on arriving, and at once they waved and offered me a cabbage leaf full of the lovely fruit. . . .

The whole place captivates me. . . . Perhaps it is the feeling of utter simplicity, of a complete oblivion to all sophistication, of an unsulliedness for all modern civilized hurry and mechanization that so envelops one with peace here. . . . I wonder is Ireland the last country in Europe to resist civilization. One has that feeling—that modern life doesn't touch it—but maybe there are other places like it. I don't know them. . . .

I do hope Mac is behaving well at the picnic—he has been so grumpy all day—and looks like Christopher when he is overtired—all huge gray eyes. . . .

4Holloway, NLI MS 1940, pp. 483-562.

5M. McMaster Black Notebook MS.
Life on tour was not always beautiful, and the lows could come close on the heels of the better moments. Writing two weeks after the idyll at Kenmare, Marjorie is in a different mood:

How I loathed last week—of all the vile places in this world Castleisland [Co. Kerry] beats all. This is bad enough. [She is in Newmarket, Co. Cork.] I sit instead on my bed in a very grubby room, whose wallpaper is in loops as if it were silk, whose door handles come off in one's hand.

But last week was a nightmare. I'm certain there is an evil influence pervading certain places. Castleisland is one. The people are ghoulish—they beat their dogs and starve their donkeys. I suffered such nervous torture there that I can't even write about the place.

This is dirty, depressing and ugly but it's not evil.

It will be lovely, though, to move on to a more open atmosphere.6

The tour went on into the autumn to places like Ennistimon and Boyle and into January, 1932, where records of a visit to Athlone show the same repertoire as the previous March in Dublin, except for the addition of The Bells.

During the summer of 1932 the McMasters disbanded the company and spent most of the time in Williamstown, Co. Galway. The children were then six and five years old, and were again reunited with their parents after, as usual, spending the touring months in nurseries or with relatives. Marjorie's diary records "a lovely sunny summer," and "the great square gray house up to its knees in rich... meadows—its brave, enormous, dilapidated rooms filled with sunshine and the babies in bathing dresses from dawn till night dancing about like fairies." This happy tone was to change, however. In London on August 16, she recorded this somber scene:

6M. McMaster Black Notebook MS.
Mac is gone. I've just come back to our dark little room after seeing him off. The water is still warm—his empty cup and tossed clothes all show how recently two people were here. Now I'm alone. I don't often see London so early—in the cold early morning light, with a leaden sky above, and hurrying workgirls, and untidy roads all seeming to be under repair. It presents a cruel, pathetic aspect.

Near Regent's Park on the pavement were the remains of a pavement artist's work blurred by the night's rain. I got onto the wrong bus, was charged 1d for being so careless, and so walked the rest of the way back. It's not 9 yet.7

In a striking change of pattern, Mac had decided to go to London to look for work. For the first time since the Iris debacle seven years before he was making the rounds of the West End. No reasons are given for the change, but it is likely they were financial. Some months later, when he was acting at Stratford, Marjorie noted in her diary that they were "paying off bills quite fast." Perhaps McMaster still had a lingering desire for a West End success. If so, this experience cannot have encouraged him since the job he settled for was in weekly repertory in Leicester, hardly a stepping-stone for a forty-year-old actor. It must have been a blow for him. His wife also noted his continuing problem: "I do hope Mac doesn't hate Leicester—he's bound to hate the job for he never could learn quickly, so how will he get off a new play a week."8

But Mac was still Mac, and in setting out by train, even to an unwanted job, he was:

... 'a gentleman travelling:'—cases on the rack, books and magazines on the table in front of him, and his glasses (which he never by any chance uses or needs) seriously balanced on his nose.

And so there we are—Mac speeding off to Leicester to turn into a rep. actor; Chris and Mary Rose far away in the spacious peace of lovely Williamstown....

And here am I alone again in a tiny stuffy room in

7M. McMaster Black Notebook MS. 8Ibid.
London, with so little light that I need the electric light on all day; silent as the grave. I might be an elderly spinster—I even look like one. I'm sure I was meant to live alone in one room—I come back to it so often.

In Leicester McMaster joined the Morton Powell Players, a long-established but second-rate company, then performing at The Playhouse on East Street. McMaster opened Monday, August 22, as the lead in Arthur Bouchier's play, The Scarlet Band, and the reviewer reported, "Mr. McMaster, although prompted often on his first night, showed himself a capable actor." Apparently Mac had some influence on the selection of plays, or had made some arrangement prior to taking the job, because three McMaster company plays were included in the next five weeks. Carnival opened the next week, and listed among the "newcomers" to the company was old McMasterite David Basil Gill. The Third Degree opened September 5, again with Mac in the lead, and the following week David Garrick was on. The critic called it "an artificial romantic comedy, the continued appeal of which is perhaps a little mystifying." But he rated McMaster as "excellent," and spoke better than he knew when he said, "His little Macbeth piece at the end really impressed the audience." Moths ("a romantic play") followed, and then Trilby, with Mac as Svengali and Mildred Howard as Trilby, was staged. Even then the critic noted that "DuMaurier's play seemed to date a little," but it would be in the McMaster company repertoire for another twenty-five years.

---

9M. McMaster Black Notebook MS.

10Leicester Mercury, Aug. 23, 1932, p. 10.

Then Mac went home. The following week the Morton Powell Players carried on with *Independent Means*, Mr. Powell himself in the lead. But McMaster had headed back to London. The only thing that might have kept him in Leicester, facing the coming weeks of *Mrs. Hunter-worth's Experiment*, *Joan Danvers, Jane*, and *Love At Second Sight* would have been money in the pocket. For him that was never enough, so Leicester was left behind forever. Never again was he to hire himself out as a single actor to a company of that standard.

The McMasters apparently rested in London through October and November. Little work was available and prospects were not good. Then fate—and friends—intervened, and Mac was signed to play Ford in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* at the Winter Garden in London. He was to be paid ten pounds a week for the run of the play.¹² His access to the part was through Oscar Asche, who was to direct and play Falstaff, and Sir Frank Benson, at seventy-three making his farewell to the London stage as Dr. Caius, a role he had played for forty-five years. Others in the company had a McMaster connection, notably Phyllis Nielson-Terry (Mistress Page) and Ion Swinley (Fenton), who remembered Mac from *Paddy, the Next Best Thing*.

The production opened on Boxing Day (December 26) and, in spite of the cast, drew very little interest from press or public. Reviews usually were respectfully neutral, praising Asche and offering warm thoughts for Sir Frank. *The Times* did not like music during the dialogue, said the cutting was not well done, and, while commenting on the

¹²Letter-contract dated Dec. 15, 1932, signed by producer Gervase Hughes, in the possession of Christopher McMaster.
"skillful acting," pointed out that "it is sometimes so elaborate as to check the movement of the play."\textsuperscript{13} The Observer remarked, "If all the drollery of the comedy (not to mention its moments of beauty) could scarcely be said to emerge, the general animation of the rendering had at least its 'seasonable' aspect."\textsuperscript{14} Mac's only notice (in the Observer) called him "properly frenzied." So McMaster was back in the West End, and very likely enjoying himself.

It is to be wondered, however, if he also saw the darker side of The Merry Wives experience. Its two leading actors had been noted actor-managers, but they were now the sad remnants of that tradition and way of life—which Mac, at forty, was trying to continue. Benson arrived at the Winter Garden after eighty-seven weeks of "farewell" appearances in Britain and Ireland extending over nearly three years. At seventy-three, with his knighthood, Benson could not afford to retire, and, under the insistent management of H. V. Nielson, stayed on the road and went where he was wanted. Prior to Merry Wives he had been in Cardiff, where, with a "ramshackle" cast, he did Shakespeare twice nightly.\textsuperscript{15} The following March, in a street accident in Bradford, Benson struck his head against a lamppost, and his career ended.

Asche, then nearly sixty-two, had a career filled with success and wealth. Now he was a declining and bitter man. In a newspaper interview, he was described as a "sad man with bitterness in his voice. . . . He sighs for the years before the war. He condemns modernism, and

\textsuperscript{13} Dec. 27, 1932. \textsuperscript{14} Dec. 27, 1932. \\
\textsuperscript{15} Trewin, Benson and the Bensonians, pp. 253-264.
laments its lack of culture." Asche blamed films and money, and showed only contempt for the talkies. Maintaining nothing on the stage was as good as it had been twenty-five years ago, he said, "The true theatre will never get back until the actor-manager is at the helm again." Events had passed Asche by. The man who earned more than 200,000 pounds in author's royalties on Chu Chin Chow, died three years later leaving an estate of twenty pounds. Two giants of Mac's theatre were ending their days without glory in front of his eyes. One may wonder if Mac rated his own prospects very highly at this time.

Stratford

One night the audience at the Winter Garden included W. Bridges-Adams, since 1919 the director of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford. He remembered that he had seen McMaster act once before:

It must have been between the spring and summer festivals of 1931 that my wife and I cut Stratford dead for a couple of weeks and went fishing at Waterville in County Kerry. We did not do much good, and after one totally blank day we came back to our hotel rather earlier than usual... On the wall there was a playbill... It told us that that night, in Cahirciveen, Mr. Anew McMaster and his company were to present The Cardinal... Cahirciveen was only ten miles distant, and the fish had let us down. We did the last thing any Englishman would have looked to do in the wilds of Kerry; we dined quickly, got into the car, and went to the play.

The little hall was full, but the prices were very low, and being in the business myself I could not help trying to figure out what Mr. McMaster's salary list and running expenses could be; not much, I decided, although he was travelling with a formidable repertoire... The mounting of the play impressed us. On a stage barely wide enough to hold the Cardinal and his train-bearers at one and the same time, there was an effect of spaciousness, of richness, of rightness as to period and taste that one did not always get in the West End of London. Even the

---

16 Yorkshire Evening News, March 1, 1933, p. 6.
lighting was imaginative, proceeding from a whole battery of lamps that were certainly not supplied by Cahirciveen. When at length Mr. McMaster appeared the mystery was explained. The years rolled away, taking with them all the accretions of a post-war stage. We were in the presence of a quite young man who was also a vintage actor-manager. . . .

My first sight of [McMaster] was enough to reveal that he had the essential touch of royalty in him, and it sent me home with the conviction that at least there was one very considerable fish to be caught in Ireland. . . . There remained one question; what sort of showing would he make in a cast of his own calibre? That was answered when I saw him playing Ford in London. . . . He was not the best Ford I had seen, but there was a distinction about him that seemed to isolate him from the rest. Force, drive, and an almost haughty resolve to be fine; the very qualities it occurred to me, for the 'too absolute' Calus Marcius. In 1933 Coriolanus went into the Stratford bill. . . .

The story of how McMaster came to the Stratford company in 1933 is somewhat less certain than Bridges-Adams recalls it. It is apparent that Mac did not jump at the chance to go to Stratford, if the offer was made sometime in January. Instead, he signed a contract to continue as Ford on a tour of Merry Wives, again at ten pounds a week. The tour began February 13. McMaster says that Bridges-Adams appeared in his dressing room in Leeds one night, offered him the role of Coriolanus in the Birthday production, and insisted on a quick answer. That has the ring of truth about it since Leeds was the third and final stop of the Merry Wives tour, which, faced with bad weather and small houses, folded on March 4. There is other evidence that McMaster was quite late coming into the Stratford company. A list of actors published in the Stratford

17 W. Bridges-Adams MS.

18 Letter-contract dated Feb. 2, 1933, and signed by producer Gervase Hughes, in the possession of Christopher McMaster.

19 Radio Notebook MS.
Herald on March 3 includes everyone but Mac. It seems likely that Bridges-Adams contacted McMaster at Leeds the week of February 27, that the Merry Wives tour then closed, and that Mac finally signed a Stratford contract on March 7, less than a week before rehearsals began.\footnote{Contract in the archives, Shakespeare Centre, Stratford-upon-Avon.}

McMaster was to be paid twenty pounds a week, second in amount only to leading actors Fabia Drake and George Hayes. The contract specified, "parts to include Leonato, Jacques, Bolingbroke, Coriolanus, Macduff."

Significantly, the contract also stated that the "managers will produce on the 17th of April, 1933, . . . and continue until Saturday, the 9th day of September. . . ." For the first time, the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre was producing a continuous season from April to September rather than two separate spring and summer seasons. It was to be a long summer for Mac.

The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in 1933 was not yet today's Royal Shakespeare Company, and had not yet earned the international reputation it now holds as a producer of Shakespeare and as an innovator in contemporary theatre. Then it was rather determinedly provincial, owing partly to its heritage of production by provincial touring companies and partly to the desires of the theatre's patron, Sir Archibald Flower. London returned the compliment: "The journey to Warwickshire was not part of every London critic's duty."\footnote{John Courtenay Trewin, Shakespeare on the English Stage, 1900-1964 (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1964), p. 165.}
festivals had been in the hands of actor-managers whose main work was in touring the provincial centers: Edward Compton, Osmond Tearle, Philip Ben Greet, and, most notably and most often, F. R. Benson. Bridges-Adams had come from the Liverpool Playhouse and therefore represented, not the touring tradition, but the next development in provincial theatre, the repertory company. Gradually, Stratford changed from a stop on the touring actor-managers' itinerary into a kind of provincial repertory theatre. Bridges-Adams brought a twentieth-century attitude to the festival as a non-acting producer, working closely with actors on interpretation and coordinating lighting and scenic design into an artistic whole. He was especially noted for not cutting the text: "Mr. Unabridges-Adams" Ben Greet called him.

He also had been moving toward opening the doors of the world to Stratford, toward making the festival less a provincial and more an international institution. Stratford companies toured America and Canada, and efforts were made to interest London in what was happening just a short jaunt off the London-Birmingham railway line. A disaster helped Bridges-Adams toward his goal. On March 12, 1926, the original Victorian theatre burned down. On April 23, 1932, the present theatre was dedicated. More than half the money raised for construction had come from outside the United Kingdom, and that seemed a very good reason indeed to take Stratford more into the world. However, it became clear that the Governors were not wholly in accord with Bridges-Adams ideas:

Having brought his 'British Bayreuth' into being, Bridges-Adams was now denied the means to bring it up to the standard expected of it. No doubt there was a certain amount of dead wood in the new Shakespearean company, but the price for better actors
was better salaries, and these the governors were unwilling to pay. So long as the theatre was full, they were content. 22

Finally, in April, 1934, Bridges-Adams resigned as director.

Thus McMaster came to Stratford at a troubled time for the festival. Bridges-Adams was probably beginning to see that his plans for the new theatre were going to be thwarted. The theatre building itself was causing problems owing to its poor acoustics and the distance between the actors and the audience. Mac would work under three different directors during the season, each an individual in personality and theatrical conception. The company was part-Old Bensonian, part-second-string London, part-young actor. The grueling traditional start to the season would require Mac to learn and perform four new roles, including Coriolanus, in eight days. And the season was to run twenty-one weeks without a break. It was not a promising situation, especially for McMaster, who had worked only with his own company for the past eight years.

The company was headed by Stratford veterans Fabia Drake and George Hayes, and there were two young newcomers in John Wyse from the Old Vic and Rachel Kempson, fresh from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. Miss Kempson (later Lady Redgrave) began her distinguished career by playing Ophelia opposite McMaster’s Hamlet and Virgilia (‘my gracious silence’) to his Coriolanus. Among the Bensonians were Stanley Lathbury, R. Eric Lee, Stanley Howlett, Gerald Kay Souper, Kenneth Wicksteed and Eric Maxon. Bensonian Randall Ayrton was stage director.

Rehearsals began March 13, which gave six weeks until the opening week, which included five first nights in six days: Much Ado About Nothing, Macbeth, As You Like It, The Merchant of Venice, and Richard II. This exhausting situation was occasioned by the felt need to get the plays on as quickly as possible in order to satisfy the Stratford tourist industry, and the situation was not to change until the post-Second World War regime of Sir Barry Jackson. In a sense Mac was lucky; he was to appear in only three of the first-week plays. But it was only a little bit of luck since he had to learn a new role in each play, he had to work with three different directors, and he was to open in Coriolanus on Monday of the second week.

Easter Monday, April 17, was opening night, and Much Ado was the play. Victor Cookman in The Times rated it "a sound, not too adventurous, production." Mac's only notice was in the Birmingham Mail: "Mr. Anew McMaster presented a hale and vigorous Leonato; he will be one of the figures of this festival." Bridges-Adams seems to have directed a very average production.

The next play was different for the theatre and for McMaster. Tuesday marked the first night of Theodore Komisarjevski's "aluminum Macbeth," the Russian director's very personal vision of the play, with George Hayes as a neurotic, fragmented, modern Macbeth rather at war on


24. This date also marked the death of McMaster's first acting influence, Fred Terry.

the Western Front. Trewin describes the decor, with "its scrolled aluminium screens, its curling stairs, its howitzers and rifles, its rattling machine guns and German-patterned helmets. . . ." 27 Certainly it was not McMaster's kind of Shakespeare, but he kept his own counsel. "We didn't know what Mac thought," Rachel Kempson said. "He played his part. He was a very tremendous Macduff, but it was a solo." 28 And so it seems, because he got very good notices for being a traditional Macduff in an untraditional setting. W. A. Darlington:

The result of knocking the two chief performances endwise . . . was that when Anew McMaster . . . gave us a piece of straight strong acting excellently spoken he had the chief personal success of the evening. 29

Wednesday and Thursday of the first week were days off for Mac, although he was rehearsing for the trials to come. The company produced As You Like It at the Wednesday matinee and Merchant on Thursday night.

Friday night saw Tyrone Guthrie's directing debut at Stratford with Richard II. George Hayes again created the title role, and Mac was Bolingbroke. Darlington, now calling McMaster "this year's chief new acquisition," approved his performance. Notices were average, one newspaper called it "dull," but, where mentioned, Mac was viewed favorably. Percy Allen, writing in the Christian Science Monitor (London) on May 8, draws what is probably a fairly accurate picture of McMaster at this time:

27Trewin, Shakespeare, p. 167.


29Daily Telegraph (London), April 19, 1933.
Bolingbroke was effectively played by an actor, little known, as yet, to London theatregoers—Mr. Anew McMaster, gifted with a fine stage presence, a compelling authority and a style somewhat reminiscent of the older traditional school. He recalled what one had read of John Philip Kemble; and he is now performing Kemble’s favourite part, Coriolanus. Mr. McMaster’s relative failure to get the full orchestral music out of Shakespearean verse was due mainly, I think, to insufficient familiarity with Bolingbroke’s lines.

In addition to line memorization, Mac also had some trouble with Guthrie’s style of direction. Mac said:

[Guthrie] wanted everyone to play it ‘white,’ as he termed it—meaning that one must not colour the words, which I found frightfully difficult especially in such a swashbuckling part as Bolingbroke. He was very kind and patient. . . .

The problem was not crucial to McMaster; for him Macbeth was a “night off.”

After the Saturday Macbeth matinee, McMaster was not due back on the Stratford stage until Monday night, but that performance would be his first as a lead—Coriolanus. Mac must have been under great stress. He did not know the play at all, had never read it, and admitted he was “not much impressed” with it when he did. The role is one of the longest in Shakespeare, and was learning it cold. He had prepared three other roles while working on Coriolanus. And there was a ghost in the wings—it had been a favourite and oft-produced role for Sir Frank Benson. Add to this was the fact that it was to be the “Birthday” production. Over the years, a celebration of some size had grown up in Stratford to celebrate Shakespeare’s birth on April 23. The day was filled with public activities and culminated with a production at the theatre in the evening before a distinguished audience. 1933 was no

---

30 Radio Notebook M3. 31 Lifetime, no. 6.
exception—except that the celebration was on April 24 since the birth-
date had fallen on Sunday. Processions, luncheons, speeches (by J.
Dover Wilson, Sir Philip Ben Greet, and Lillian Bayless), and English
folk dances and games filled the day. It rained hard, also a part of
the tradition. In the evening there was theatre.

For the production, Bridges-Adams "employed an inner proscenium
and sets built on rolling stages; there was a sunk forestage. Scene
upon scene was boldly contrived; the smashing in of the huge gates of
Coriolli; the return of the women to Rome, down the long stair; and
throughout, the surge and thunder of crowds."32 "[McMaster's] perfor-
mance is still remembered," wrote Bridges-Adams:

It had a classic simplicity; seldom has that noble but
incorruptible adolescent been presented with so little
psychological fuss. He did not make points, he was; he
charged through the part, and his great moments were the
natural emanation of his own spirit. I recall for choice
his sword-play in the gate of Coriolii, his bearing in the
triomp, his tenderness with his young wife, his defiance
of the 'common cry of curs,' the mystery that enveloped
him as he stood by the enemy's hearth—and of course his
death; he shouted with laughter as the knives went it,
died on his feet, and fell with a crash, like a column
in the Place Vendone.33

The laughter during the death scene was an addition that was pure
McMaster. The promptbook for the production was the same that had been
used in 1926. As the Volscians approach Coriolanus to kill him, the
stage directions read: "Throws down his sword, laughs, they stab him."34

---

32Trewin, Shakespeare, p. 166.
33W. Bridges-Adams MS.
34Promptbook at the Shakespeare Centre, Stratford-upon-Avon.
This straightforward direction Mac took to the dramatic limit. He started laughing as they approached and broke into great, roaring peals of demoniacal laughter, rising in volume and intensity throughout the stabbing until he crashed to the stage. Another memorable moment came during Coriolanus's denunciation of the rabble ("You common cry of curs . . . "). Bridges-Adams had Mac ascending a long flight of stairs, and at the top, silhouetted against the sky, McMaster's reading of the last line, "There is a world elsewhere . . . ", provided an enduring memory for one of Stratford's most distinguished historians.35

The critics were favorable, although they also pointed out his usual shortcomings. Darlington called the play "the best I have seen during the present festival," and said the Mac

... had most of the qualities demanded of the part, and certainly carried it off with great spirit and force, especially at the end... He has certain mannerisms of which he could well be rid, and in this part—the longest and most violent he has been called upon to play—these tricks are specially prominent. He mouths his words too much and is inclined to grimace at moments of emotional stress.36

The Morning Post said he was "the discovery of this year's festival," but noted that "effort was evident almost all the time," which was attributed to the strain of doing four roles in one week. "All too much of the rest," the Post continued, "was like a labour of oratory on the part of a valiant but tired Hercules." In a generally favorable review, the Manchester Guardian noted Mac's grimacing and said that he "overdid the expressions of pride in his face." And the Stratford Herald, while


36Daily Telegraph (London), April 25, 1933. Following two quotes also from editions published on April 25, 1933.
generally approving, also said:

At present he promises more than he gives, a fault that time and acquaintance with his surroundings will so quickly rectify that competence will soon become excellence. He must, however, guard against the danger of mouthing... He must realize, also, that the full rich tones of his voice will carry in quieter style with as great a force and greater effect than when ripped off his chest by a hurricane use of lungs. 37

Few critics remarked on any line memorization problems, but it appears there had been some, and that they continued. In the July issue of The Shakespeare Pictorial, the critic remarked, "Coriolanus is a longer part than Hamlet and an actor may be forgiven at the beginning if his lines are not wholly familiar. But by this time that ought to be remedied." 38

The picture of McMaster the Actor painted by the critics at this time is wholly consistent with reports from other periods in his career. In his early forties, Mac had become "himself," the figure audiences would remember for the next thirty years. His tall, broad-shouldered physique, blond hair ("golden brass color," according to Rachel Kempson) and powerful voice were employed in a style of acting called by some "traditional" and by others "old-fashioned." It was a style, nonetheless, wholly suitable for Coriolanus and the other great physical characters in Shakespeare. His Coriolanus was a striking creation in a style only a few actors can achieve. Owing to the size of the cast, McMaster never revived the play for his tours, and he never again played the role again. 39

---

37 April 28, 1933. 38 No. 65, p. 101.

39 In 1936, the Abbey Theatre offered McMaster the opportunity to play Coriolanus there, and for unknown reasons he turned the offer down. The Abbey never again invited McMaster to appear there.
Stratford now had six plays in production and there was to be an interval of a month before the seventh, The Taming of the Shrew, was to open. Life settled into more of a routine for the McMasters. The children had come to Stratford for the summer, and they were all living in a Tudor cottage called "Locksley" located high on a hill about five miles outside the town, "charming with a fresh green garden sloping steeply and now full of roses." Other actors had warned Mac about Stratford's summertime humidity, so Marjorie sought the high and distant cottage. For whatever reasons, Mac also was socially distanced from the theatre company. Miss Kempson does not remember seeing him at any time other than in the theatre and certainly not in the company social life.

Shrew opened on May 23 to favorable reviews. At least Petruchio had been a part of McMaster's repertoire for several years, so he did not have the memorization problems. As with Coriolanus, Bridges-Adams worked hard with Mac's characterization, and McMaster recognized the "enormous help" the director gave him. For the rest of his career, his Petruchio was essentially the Bridges-Adams creation.

John Wyse and Rachel Kempson were the Romeo and Juliet of Stratford's next production on June 20. It was her first professional acting triumph; Wyse did less well. Another "night off" for Mac, his Escalus was "most kindly in word and gesture."

The season was nearly half over, and there are small indications

---

40M. McMaster Black Notebook MS, June 18, 1933.
41Radio Notebook MS.
42Rachel Kempson interview.
43Birmingham Mail, June 21, 1933.
that the McMasters were not particularly happy. Marjorie recorded June 18 as "one of my bad days," and remarked, "Perhaps always having to keep Mac's spirits up helps me to down my own ... near depression." But she did note that Mac is "a great success here," and that it is "a good engagement so that we are paying off bills quite fast ...." It may be, too, that there was another factor affecting Mac's psychological state: he had been chosen to play Hamlet.

Hamlet had been under consideration since the start of the season. In mid-April, Bridges-Adams was reported to be trying to get Max Reinhardt to direct it, but perhaps that was a bit of early-season puffery. When it finally went into the bill, Mac decided he would not be chosen for the part because, "Up till then, all the parts I'd been cast for had been vigorous extrovert ones ... not very like the contemplative Prince of Denmark." But he was chosen, and perhaps he should not have been surprised. Of the other two leading actors, Hayes was three years older than Mac and was already playing Richard II, Macbeth, Shylock, and Benedick, and Wyse was in his mid-twenties and was playing Romeo. Other than those two, no one in the company had the name to do Hamlet, and a guest artist was unlikely. Bridges-Adams really did not have an ideal Hamlet, and it probably fell to McMaster by default. He may have been a reluctant winner, although he says he was "delighted."

The McMaster company had Hamlet in its repertoire from the first

---

44 M. McMaster Black Notebook MS.
45 Sunday Times (London), April 16, 1933.
46 Lifetime, no. 6.
but in a shortened version. Now, after Coriolanus and three other new parts, McMaster started putting another long, "Unabridges-Adams" role into his head. For him it meant "unbelievable study—not only were there whole scenes in which I'd never played before, but bits had to go back all over the place which left me distracted." With one interval, the play ran about three-and-a-half hours.

Other factors conspired to make life difficult. As predicted, Stratford's summer was hot and humid. The days at the theatre were long, usually beginning with a 10 a.m. rehearsal and ending with the final curtain of a performance more than twelve hours later. Then two days before the first night of *Hamlet* Mac received a relatively severe scalp wound from a sword while conducting the one-man siege of Corioli. It took eight stitches to close the wound. The next day was final dress rehearsal. For opening night, July 20, McMaster was not nervous and that worried him, too. From all indications, the evening was not a success, but the critical notices are striking in their variety.

Maurice Willson Disher, writing in the *Daily Mail*, dragged Mac over the coals and back again:

To-night's revival of *Hamlet* is a subtraction rather than an addition to the repertory... There is nothing to be said for Mr. Anew McMaster's shouting, screaming, storming *Hamlet*. His straining after effect in long pauses, emphasis on insignificant words and extravagant by-play—such as a dagger thrust at the empty throne—all point to his inability to feel the guidance of Shakespeare's verse. Instead of gently exploring his way through the maze of *Hamlet*'s mind, he tries to crash his way through, only to battle vainly against the outermost hedge.  

---

47Radio Notebook MS. 48July 21, 1933.
Darlington, on the other hand, called Mac's performance "disappointing," but said:

His rendering lacked nothing in intelligence, but a good deal in emotional power. He seemed, in fact, to have been so careful to give the meaning of the words that he lost touch with the feelings that inspired them. In his more passionate outbursts he let his voice get out of control and run shrill. Cookman in The Times called it a "sullen Hamlet," and said that Mac could play the revenge tragedy but could not show the inner mind of Hamlet. "At the end we have left with the impression that with a little luck something might have been done—say, the prompt dispatch of Claudius—which would have put everything right." The critic for the Morning Post, however, shows most clearly that the Hamlet Stratford saw was essentially the McMaster Shakespeare Company version:

He is a big, blond, immensely vigorous Hamlet—admirable so long as he holds himself in check. There is not much magnetism or profundity about him, but for good, workmanlike drama he is, in the quieter scenes, splendid. When the passion arrives, however, he tends to tear it to tatters.

McMaster was never capable of or interested in showing the interior, psychological states of the characters he played unless they were manifest in strong, passionate, physical terms. He could not show what Cookman looked for, "a mind capable of reflecting in his own disillusionment a spiritual world of contending forces." When McMaster was required to show the inner state, it appears he resorted to speaking slowly and paying rather loving attention to the words.

The moment a passage of reflective verse arrives his diction slows up and becomes completely unreal. . . . It is . . .

---

49 Daily Telegraph (London), July 21, 1933.
50 July 21, 1933.  51 July 21, 1933
possible to be too much obsessed with the idea of expression in individual words; for Mr. McMaster when 'churchyards yawn' he must almost yawn himself upon the word, and 'music' must be lengthened for four syllables on a descending chromatic; while the forced tearful note he uses at times in his first soliloquy and over 'the pangs of despised love' is distressing in entirely the wrong sense.  

Here, certainly, is a modern response to a traditional style.

One critic was unkind enough to strike at a very tender spot: "Mr. McMaster, good actor though he is, lacks what is the essential attribute of youth. . . . Mr. McMaster is tall and handsome and stalwart, but he is not youthful."  

(Emphasis added.) The John Gielgud Hamlet of 1930 had made a young Dane very fashionable.

However Mac felt about things, in public he never lost his sense of humor, especially about himself. Rachel Kempson remembered that, as Ophelia, "I went on for a certain scene in which he was almost immediately to follow. He used to say, 'Now then, dear, hurry up, get on, get it over, because you're all very fine in your tinpot way, but remember it's me they want to see.'" In fact, the audience did want to see him. A week after the season closed, The Stage reported that Hamlet had been financially the most successful production of the season.

For the first time in a long while, the McMasters had known the pleasures of working in one place for nearly six months. They had managed to pay some bills. Their children had been with them through the

---

52Shakespeare Pictorial, No. 67, Sept., 1933, p. 135.
53Birmingham Post, July 21, 1933.
54BBC Program.
55Sept. 14, 1933.
summer; seven-year-old Christopher had even appeared as Coriolanus’ young son in the second half of the season. McMaster had been a critical success in everything except Hamlet, and the audiences loved him. But the season had been long and difficult, he had learned seven roles, including two of the longest in Shakespeare, and it appears that he never wholly accepted or was accepted by the company. Most difficult of all, Mac had not been his own boss for more than a year, and he now must have realized that his own company was essential.

He was asked to return to Stratford for the following year, but Mac’s attitude toward that was shown one day while he was signing autographs at the stage door following Hamlet. A fan asked him, "Oh, Mr. McMaster, will you come back to us next year?" To which Mac replied, "Not unless I’m bloody starving, dear!"

A Season in London

During the Stratford season Sir Oswald Stoll had proposed to the festival’s Board of Governors that the entire company come in to London in the autumn to perform the repertoire there. Sir Oswald was known, not as a producer of Shakespeare, but rather of popular fare at the London Coliseum. He had been very successful over the years, and it seems he now had a very sincere interest in bringing Shakespeare to the West End, where a revival of the poet’s works was under way. The festival governors decided, however, that the company would not go down

---

to London. The reason for the refusal probably lay in the conservative operation of the governors and in their desire to keep the festival exclusively at Stratford.

Stoll was to have his Shakespeare anyway. Anew McMaster was engaged by Stoll to form a company and to play Shakespeare in London for a month. Mac was to have the chance to show London his Othello and Hamlet for the first time. He would at last be playing the Bard in the West End, or rather, within hailing distance. The theatre was not the Coliseum but rather the Chiswick Empire, a 2,500-seat hall up the Thames from the West End. It had been the scene of music hall and variety, then it was a cinema, and now, under Stoll’s relatively recent management, it was home for the McMaster Shakespearean Company. To enhance the atmosphere, Stoll installed Tudor wenches selling programs and had halberdiers decorating the staircase.60

London had seldom seen the kind of Shakespearean season that Anew McMaster offered it that winter. It was old stuff for Mac, and it harkened back to the two-week seasons at the Abbey. But this was a dazzling combination of Stoll, the city promoter, and McMaster, the provincial barnstormer, and its like has not been seen since. Between November 2 and December 2, the McMaster company gave thirty-five performances from a repertoire including The Taming of the Shrew, Othello, Macbeth, The Merchant of Venice, Richard III, and Hamlet, all old McMaster stand-bys. There were also four matinee performances of As You Like It, with Mac’s company plus Fadia Drake (from Stratford) and

60Shakespeare Pictorial, No. 70, Dec., 1933, p. 180.
Maurice Colbourne.

The company was a composite of actors from Stratford (Eric Maxon, Stanley Howlett, Gerald Kay Souper, Kenneth Wicksteed, C. Rivers Gadsby), a few from his own company (Walter Humphreys), and some London actors engaged for the occasion. Among the latter were Mary Casson, nineteen-year-old daughter of Sybil Thorndike and Lewis Casson; Diana Wilson, the Desdemona of the Asche-McMaster Othello, and (as Tranio, Montano, and Gratiano) twenty-year-old Anthony Quayle, subsequently a distinguished actor and director of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre.

The season opened with Shrew, Othello followed the next night, and on Saturday Mac gave London his Petruchio in the afternoon and his Othello at night. The second week saw Macbeth and Merchant added, Richard III did not appear until the fourth week, and Hamlet, now not Mac's favorite part, received only three performances in the fifth and final week. As usual, Othello had been done most often: eight times.

Once again Mac was freed from the restraints of Stratford production, and could mount the plays in the style he preferred. The Shrew was an ideal play with which to open since it allowed an all-out, entertaining, top-speed production. The Observer critic reported, "It can at least be said of this production that it does not traduce the robuster traditions of the Chiswick Empire." 61 Leslie Rees in The Era noticed the same quality: "There appeared to be an intermingling of the unselfconsciousness and recklessly lively spirit of old-time variety."

This feeling was heightened, no doubt, when Mac added a turn by a

61 Nov. 5, 1933.
popular dancing team, "Alec Dorian and Coral," to the wedding celebration! Rees continued, "What I did feel about the production, choppy as some of its edges were, was that here was proof once and for all that Shakespeare is definitely not a highbrow, remote and otherworldly." 

It was McMaster's view exactly.

Othello did not receive an overwhelmingly favorable critical reception. Darlington gave the most succinct summary:

A new McMaster's production, like his own playing of the Moor, had vigor but no subtlety, and hardly any poetry. Mr. McMaster has a very considerable understanding of Shakespeare, the practised man of the theatre, but for Shakespeare the artist in words he has no feeling. Some of the loveliest lines in all our language went for nothing in his mouth last night, but he threw an effective, if noisy, epileptic fit.

After the first few nights of the season the critics turned to other events and so little was reported of other productions in the Chiswick Empire season. The critic for Shakespeare Pictorial, however, did see the Merchant, and paints a grim picture:

Mr. McMaster as producer has butchered the play; Portia, Shylock and Antonio add to the slaughter by too frequently preferring their own words to Shakespeare's. . . . Mr. McMaster gives a sound performance as Shylock, and does not, thank heaven, over-stress the pathos. Mr. Eric Maxon, in a calamitous marcel-waved wig, plays Antonio and is surprisingly uninteresting. . . . Mr. Anthony Quayle is miscast as Gratiano. . . . The Lorenzo (Mr. Neville Flynn) [is] so genteel that he addresses Portia as 'Widdem.'

Of course, McMaster incorporated music throughout the performances, using an orchestra conducted by Anthony Bernard, who had also

---

62 Nov. 8, 1933.
63 Daily Telegraph (London), Nov. 4, 1933.
64 No. 70, Dec., 1933, p. 180.
been at Stratford. Consistent with many critics of McMaster productions from the Abbey Theatre days on, *Shakespeare Pictorial* urged, "[Mr. Bernard] should remember that for these plays music is an adjunct only, and should not push its claims so insistently."  

The McMaster company had not exactly taken London by storm, but there is some indication that the houses were of acceptable size, and that Stoll was satisfied. McMaster reported that Stoll offered him the lead in *The Golden Toy* at the Coliseum. But Mac was tired. It had been a long year of work in the theatre. Even for one who loved being on stage, it had been an exhausting experience capped by the non-stop effort of the last month. Mac had, after all, given thirty-one performances as Othello, Petruchio, Shylock, Macbeth, Richard III, and Hamlet in only twenty-seven days. One is tempted to ask whether any actor has done that before or since.

In his reminiscences, Mac echoes Bernard Shaw's advice to Ellen Terry, and tells how this period led him to a lesson about acting which was to serve him well over the remaining thirty years of his career:

> It is one of the curses of the era we live in that a tragedian should be called on to play more than four times a week. If he is forced to do so, either his work or his health will suffer. . . . I would go so far as to say that really great acting ended on the day that this non-stop habit was inaugurated. Salvini . . . refused to play more than four times a week, . . . and Duse, on her last tour, found it an impossibility to act more than every other night. Even today opera singers only appear in three or four operas a week.  

It is not certain that Mac, then forty-two, was more conscious of the

66 *Lifetime*, no. 6.
need to conserve his physical resources. But throughout the remainder of his career he rarely played a big tragedy more than two or three times a week.

In early December, McMaster headed for Ireland for the first time in sixteen months, travelling by car via Holyhead to Dublin, then down to New Ross to spend Christmas with friends. As usual, he left his wife behind in London to pacify Stoll and to deal with the details involved in winding up the Chiswick season. Always in the background, but essential to Mac's life, Marjorie also had found it to be a long year.

Whether Mac knew it or not, a milestone was passed as he drove out of London. When the curtain fell on Hamlet the night of December 2, 1933, it marked the final appearance on the London stage of Anew McMaster.

_Ireland/Egypt/England_

The McMasters spent the next three years on the road with their company in Ireland and England. Very occasionally, Marjorie would make diary entries concerned with the tour, the company, and the countryside:

_October 6, 1934 - Castlebar_ — In the pouring rain this morning, I met a man who is in the company outside the post office, smiling over a note he was reading. He showed it to me—it was from his landlady in Sligo, the town we've just left. It simply said—'The weather is terrible, for God's sake mind yourself.' I wonder have landladies in other countries the same quick interest in their lodgers, especially when they've only stayed three days?

_February, 1935 - Waterford_ — A gentle spring day of delicate softness... Two ancient black-shawled tramps sat on a [park] seat, so bent that they looked like little black bee hives. They smoked short white pipes in quiet and contentment. And then a Franciscan friar came striding across the grass—a well-built
virile man accompanied by a great springing wolfhound. As he passed the two old tramps rose to their feet and curtseied and cracked to him. Then they resumed their seats and their pipes and their silence, and placidly continued their dumb contemplation of the quiet day.

November 22, 1935 - Wexford -- Autumn again and soon my birthday. Chris was ten three weeks ago and little Mary Rose nine. Anxieties crowd in on us this tour, for with war rumours and bad weather the country seems restless and at night the wireless and the newspapers distract their thoughts. We are travelling without the car this tour—its taxes and licenses cost so much. It is odd to be using the train again, and in some ways I like it. There one sits, and outside life passes like a series of pictures... Irish trains are so leisurely, too—one limps and puffs in the most soothing manner... We'd a frightful journey here from Waterford because being Sunday there were no trains and Walter [Humphreys, the business manager], feeling terribly thrifty after a thin week, had ordered only one small car to carry all the women. The men, in utter misery, were crammed into the lorry, where they clung to bits of scenery and furniture and generally froze, the morning being particularly frosty.

November 27, 1935 - Enniscorthy -- My birthday—nothing very festive about it. . . . We rehearsed all morning. Much shifting of parts with five members of the company gone and a good deal of doubling to arrange. I've re-written School For Scandal for dear Sheridan (how he'd writhe!) omitting Backbite and Sir Harry Bumper and few other such folk.67

The tone of these entries gives some sense of the company on tour and the difficulties encountered during this not-very-prosperous time. Early tours had been made by train, but the McMasters soon switched to truck and car to permit greater flexibility and access to smaller towns. Their auto was sometimes grand and sometimes common, but it was always called "The Royal Car," the same name as that given the Terry-Nielson Rolls-Royce. During the Second World War, transportation would become a greater problem and often both men and women would be riding in the back of a truck.

67M. McMaster Black Notebook MS.
In January and February, 1936, the Gate Theatre in Dublin was playing Berkeley Square, and the program announced the forthcoming tour by the Gate company to Egypt. Also revealed was that "Anew McMaster ... will play a Shakespearean and classical season [in the Gate] at Easter."68 For the first time in five years, the McMaster company was to play Dublin.

The season opened Easter night and continued for two weeks. Main production the first week as School For Scandal—with Backbite, Harry Bumper, and the other minor characters restored. Six performances were given, including two matinees. The season opened with Othello, and other plays were Macbeth, Hamlet, Shrew, and, on Saturday night "by request," Mr. Wu. Ann Clark joined the company for the first time since 1928. Desdemona/Ophelia was now Faith Noble, and others included David Gill, Ray and Bovay Parry, Paula Sabina, and Nigel Fitzgerald.69

Critical reviews have the familiar ring:

To many of the audience ... [Othello] will have seemed too vigorous; for the Gate has accustomed Dublin to a style of Shakespearean acting which, if anything, stressed the poetry in these plays rather than the action. Mr. McMaster is at the opposite pole.70

In full blooded traditional style, he gives us a Macbeth who is far from traditional. Mr. McMaster's Macbeth is neurotic,

68 Program in the Pearse Street Library, Dublin.


70 Irish Times (Dublin), April 13, 1936, p. 8.
impulsive and bombastic.\textsuperscript{71}

The attendance [at School For Scandal] was not good. . .. The performance was a strange mixture of easy convincing acting . .. and loud forced speech and unconvincing hysterics.\textsuperscript{72}

The season ended with only modest success, and the company went back to the county towns. Although Mac would appear on the Dublin stage occasionally after this time, it appears that the company was not seen in Dublin again until after the Second World War.

During the Dublin season, one of Mac's old dreams was reborn. Holloway reported:

\textbf{[McMaster's] company has arranged to build a big theatre on an entirely new scale in Dublin within the next eighteen months. The theatre will be so constructed as to allow some thousands of an audience to see classical plays at prices ranging from 6d to 2/6. The site will be near O'Connell Street. 'I have in my experiences [quoting Mac] discovered that the people prefer classical plays provided they get them at a reasonable price. The capital is ready and when we have finished our present tour we will begin work.'}\textsuperscript{73}

As in 1929, the plan (if it was a real plan) came to nothing and thereby probably saved McMaster a great deal of money.

The Gate Theatre's Egyptian tour had been a great success, and they were asked to return for a second tour beginning in late January, 1937. Mac Liammóir and Edwards decided to invite McMaster to join the company to play Othello, Malvolio, Charles Surface, and John Worthing. Prior to departure, they played School For Scandal, The Importance of Being Earnest, and Death Takes a Holiday at the Gate in a three-week, post-Christmas season. Then they were off on a tour and holiday that

\textsuperscript{71}David Sears, The Independent (Dublin), April 13, 1936, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{72}Holloway, NLI MS 1970. \textsuperscript{73}ibid.
continued until early summer, 1937.

First stop was the Cairo Opera House, where Mac was a success, especially as Othello. During the performance he wore a jewelled chain that Sarah Bernhardt, another of Mac's goddesses, had worn, and Mac Llammoir recalled McMaster shouting to his dresser:

And you're not to let it out of your sight... When it's not round my neck you must keep it locked up in this box. Comprenez? It's one of the world's treasures—grand trésor, dear, you do understand, don't you? ELLE l'à portée—ELLE, vous comprenez, la divine Sarah?

Mac also indulged in rounds of what he called "squander-mania."

Mac Llammoir wrote:

Mac had gone wild over Cairo, and must have spent hundreds of pounds in the Al Fakir where he was the idol of the Arab dealers with his great height, his fair hair, his disarming smile and his indifference to bargainings. 'I've got to have that,' he would say, 'no, don't tell me the price, it would only depress me and it's Othello to-night so I mustn't allow myself to get worried about anything. Just put it on the bill with those silks and the blue glass things and I'll give you a check for the whole lot.'

Eventually, Marjorie joined him in Egypt and managed to curb his spending habits.

Two weeks after closing in Egypt the company visited Malta where McMaster played Othello in the opera house at Valetta. "One of my greatest faults is a susceptibility to an audience," he has written, and the emotional, interracial Maltese audience spurred him to give the performance of Othello he considered to be the best of his life. After Malta, McMaster, Mac Llammoir, Edwards, and Walter Humphreys visited Tunis, and then Humphreys was dispatched to India to see if a tour to

74Mac Llammoir, All For Hecuba, p. 236. 75Lifetime, no. 7.
that country by the McMasters was possible. Mac and the others returned to Ireland via Paris and London, arriving in Dublin at the end of May.

In 1934, after the Stratford season, the McMasters had acquired a London flat at 13 Fernshaw Road, a location Mac characterized as: "It's really Fulham, but we call it Chelsea, dear!" 76 Although the McMasters had been touring Ireland for nearly nine years, there is no evidence that they ever established a permanent home in Ireland until the Second World War made that necessary. The flat on George Street probably was the London base until the end of the 1920's, then flats, rooms, and summer homes were rented as needed until 1934. Beginning in mid-1937, after their return from the Near East, the McMasters were most often at home on Fernshaw Road since Mac's career had taken another of the unusual turns that so characterize it.

The tour of India projected for the autumn of 1937 did not materialize as the disintegrating political situation in Europe and North Africa limited civilian travel. Unexpectedly, the McMaster company did not return to the Irish towns, but turned up at the Theatre Royal in Bournemouth, England, for a season of weekly repertory that eventually extended over seven months. McMaster called this a "grilling" experience, and it probably was, especially since the company did not present a single Shakespearean play during its stay in Bournemouth. Mac believed the English really did not appreciate Shakespeare. 77 One can only speculate on the reasons for this extended season that Mac could not have enjoyed. It may have reflected general economic condi-

76 Mac Liammoir interview. 77 lifetime, no. 7.
tions in Ireland or the financial needs of the McMasters. Certainly it was cheaper to stay in one location and play rather than tour. At any event, as they had done in 1932-1933, the McMasters settled in for an extended English stay.

An advertisement in the Bournemouth Daily Echo on September 20, 1937, announced that "World Tours Ltd." were presenting Mr. Anew McMaster "and his London company" for a season, Grand Opening Night to be Monday, September 27. The first week, "by arrangement with Miss Julia Nielson," was to be The Scarlet Pimpernel. In a wholly appropriate closing of the circle, Mac stepped into Fred Terry's shoes and played Sir Percy Blakeney to "a sincerely warm welcome from a large and keenly interested audience." The bill of plays for the season gives a fascinating look at the repertoire of provincial stock companies in the 1930's, with some specifically McMaster flavoring: Our Betters, Judgment Day, The Best People, Trilby (the "version by J. C. Warren"), The Cat and the Canary, By Candle Light, The Speckled Band, She Stoops to Conquer, Mr. Wu, Victoria and Albert ("by Consuelo de Rayes"), Charley's Aunt, The Middle Watch, Romance, French Leave, The Bat, The Cardinal ("from the St. James Theatre"), Peg o' My Heart, A Murder Has Been Arranged, The Rotters, The Ghost Train, Hay Fever, The Three Musketeers, The Man in Possession, The Dover Road, Living Dangerously, The Queen Was in the Parlour, When Nights [sic] Were Bold, and Rookery Nook. McMaster did not appear in every play; on the average he was on stage


79 Information from the Bournemouth Daily Echo.
every second or third week.

The McMaster company had been in Bournemouth for nearly seven months, and showed no signs of leaving the stage of the Theatre Royal. Then suddenly, there was the kind of announced change that marked Mac's history. *Sweet Aloes* ("from Wyndham's Theatre") had been announced for the week of May 2, 1938, but when the day came the following notice appeared in the *Daily Echo*:

Owing to unforeseen circumstances the play *Sweet Aloes*, which it was proposed to present at the Theatre Royal this week, has had to be cancelled and the theatre will be closed until further notice.  

The theatre remained dark until June 20, so it is unlikely that Mac just lost his lease. Probably he was just tired of the Bournemouth season and decided to end it. The company left the city as quickly as it had come, and the McMasters never again played such a long season anywhere.

The company did not return to Ireland, however. In another curious turn, the McMasters turned up in Dundee, Scotland, for a ten-week visit through June, July, and August, 1938. It appears that McMaster's season in Dundee was connected with efforts by a group of citizens to continue live theatre in that city. The manager of the Alhambra Theatre said that if the season was not a success the theatre would become Dundee's thirty-first cinema. Mac may have forestalled that fate a little; when he returned to Dundee in February the following year, he again played the Alhambra, this time with the support of the

---

80 *May 2, 1938, p. 7.*

81 *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, June 21, 1938, p. 3.
"newly-formed Playgoers' Circle." 82

The company was now "The International Players," and included most of the people who had been at Bournemouth. Mac must have decided the Scots' Celtic heritage made them a better and more deserving audience: he opened with Hamlet and later offered Othello for the first time in over a year. (Moira Perrin was Desdemona/Ophelia.) The balance of the season, which ended August 27, was part-Bournemouth and part-McMaster, including David Garrick and School For Scandal. Evidence indicates that the McMasters went back to Ireland in the autumn to tour there for the first time in nearly two years. 83 The financial success of this tour is unknown, but at the end of February, 1939, the company was back in Dundee for their second season. Even with the support of the Playgoers' Circle, this season was not a success. It lasted only five weeks (February 27 to April 1), and included Love From a Stranger, The Cardinal, East of Suez, Eden End, and On Approval. Business was not good, and after the first two weeks Mac engaged another actor to do his parts and returned to London. The engagement ground to a halt, and the Alhambra was surrendered to the films. 84

Conclusion

During the decade of the 1930's, the McMasters spent a substantial amount of time outside Ireland. A London residence, the Egyptian

82 Dundee Courier and Advertiser, Feb. 28, 1939, p. 3.
83 Personal interview with Renee Bourne Webb, March 16, 1973. Information in the possession of Brendan O'Brien also shows the company played Athlone, Co. Westmeath, the week of Jan. 9, 1939.
84 Renee Bourne Webb interview.
tour, the Stratford, Bournemouth, and Dundee seasons, all meant that the
dream of touring Ireland with the classics had faded somewhat under the
press of events and economic necessity. During those years McMaster was
living or working outside Ireland nearly half the time, with a trend
toward increasing absence as the decade progressed. The pattern was to
tour in Ireland for a while, then to stop in one place for a time,
probably to accumulate money and pay off debts. Then back on tour. It
seems likely that touring was not a profitable activity, and so Mac had
to surrender at fairly regular intervals to a kind of theatre he dis-
liked, an extended stand in one place—and that place being England.

Soon, however, another event from the outside world would have
a significant effect on the McMasters and their company. Again,
circumstance would require an adjustment from Mac. Ironically, the
press of these external events would at last confirm Anew McMaster in
his destined role as an "Irish" actor-manager.
CHAPTER X

THE FORTIES

Wartime Tours

In the summer of 1939, the McMasters were living in London. On Sunday, July 23, McMaster went down to Ellen Terry's home at Smallhythe, Kent, to appear with Sybil Thorndike in scenes from Coriolanus. Miss Terry's daughter, Edith Craig, produced these scenes each year in a converted barn theatre on the estate as a memorial to her mother. Mac and Sybil Thorndike had been friends since her daughter appeared with his company in the 1933 Chiswick Empire season.

In late August Mac made the jump from Ellen Terry and Sybil Thorndike to St. Mary's Hall in Ballaghaderreen, Co. Roscommon, where the company's autumn tour opened with Love From a Stranger. Before this fourteen-week tour was over, the repertoire would include Romance, Trilby, Little Lord Fauntleroy (featuring fourteen-year old Christopher McMaster), Ladburnum Grove, Hamlet, Othello, and Merchant. This tour was unusual for two reasons: first, the company was playing split weeks, two towns a week rather than one, with a few exceptions such as Fermoy and Waterford at the end. The McMasters visited twenty-three towns in fourteen weeks, largely in the west and south. Second, on September 3, when the company was in Tuam, Co. Galway, war was declared. Mac did Love From a Stranger at the matinee and Hamlet in the evening.
performance.¹

For a time, the war had little effect on Mac. He went out on tour again in early 1940, and began negotiations to appear in a film with the Austrian actress, Elisabeth Bergner, whom he had met in Egypt in 1937.² Soon, however, the war forced the McMasters to re-examine their situation. They had been living and working in both England and Ireland for the past fifteen years, but under the stress of war those two countries were moving in different directions. England was gearing up for war; Ireland had proclaimed neutrality. London was a target for attack by Germany; Ireland, if it was lucky, would avoid destruction. British theatre was readying to help in the war effort, both at home and with the troops. Although McMaster gave travel restrictions as the reason why he decided to live and work in Ireland for the duration, it seems clear that the social and theatrical situation in Britain would have been alien to his thinking. He had no interest in the war, and to live in an environment substantially tuned to the events and needs of the war would have been unsatisfactory for Mac. After twenty-five years, Ireland would again be his wartime haven.

The effects of this decision on the McMasters were many, and the first was a change of residence. The Fernshaw Road flat in London was sold, and the furnishings shipped to Dublin where they were installed in an utterly different setting—a cottage on Howth, the promontory of

¹Information from the daily diaries kept by McMaster actor Eugene Wellesley, in the possession of his widow, Muriel Wellesley, of Romsey, Hampshire, England.

²lifetime, no. 8.
land that extends from the north side of Dublin City. The McMasters had accumulated many beautiful, unusual, and expensive household furnishings on their travels, and soon the simple, whitewashed Lough Leven cottage was filled with gilt chairs and Venetian mirrors, Waterford glass chandeliers, and Chinese cabinets, not the mention the stage props and furniture stored there in the off-season. The cottage overlooked Bailey's Lighthouse at the tip of Howth, and had a spectacular view of the hills surrounding Dublin and extending to Wicklow on the south. To the east was the Irish Sea. This pastoral setting was to be home for the McMasters until 1950.

Ireland during the Second World War was a very different place than in 1914-1918. During the first war, Irish farmers found a ready market in Britain for anything they could produce, and in general the war years were prosperous times for everyone. As an independent state and a neutral in 1939, Ireland's condition was less satisfactory. The country depended on friendly relations with the Allies to provide supplies, and for various reasons those supplies were usually not available in adequate quantities. No attempt had been made to stockpile essential raw materials or gasoline, coal, and fertilizer, so that rationing soon became necessary. Britain, having learned its lesson twenty-five years before, controlled domestic prices carefully, and Irish businessmen and farmers found they could make little money selling to the British. The absence of raw materials and a market resulted in a steep fall in production, a drop in exports from forty-seven million

---

3Marjorie McMaster MS.
pounds in 1929 to thirty-five million pounds in 1945, and rising unem-
ployment resulting in emigration to Britain. Early in the war, sugar,
tea, and fuel were rationed, by 1942 bread and clothing also were
limited, there was no gasoline for private cars, and coal was rare. In
1943, Ireland had twenty-five per cent of the normal requirement of tea,
twenty per cent of its gasoline needs, and no domestic coal at all.
Many of these shortages continued into 1947 and some until 1949. 4

For the McMaster's on tour the war meant never-ending circuits of
the towns: Tuam, Swinford, Westport, Castlebar, Kiltimagh, Cavan,
Kells, Doneraile, Tipperary, Mitchelstown, Fethard, Fermoy, and so on.
At a time when the fuel shortage meant horse carts and horse cabs in
Dublin, there was no "Royal Car" and the actors travelled in the truck
with the scenery, the women squeezed into the cab and the men in back
sitting on the costume hampers and the furniture. Fortunately, the
Monday-morning journeys to the next town were seldom long, thirty to
forty miles was the usual maximum, but still it could get cold riding
in the back. 5 Setting up the stage became more of an art; the scarcity
of wood often meant nails could not be used in the available lumber.
The local undertaker often was the supplier of wood. Occasionally,
performances were lighted by candles or oil lamps. But the McMaster
company was always welcome, perhaps especially so during the grim war
years, and often the local gentry would invite the company up for a

4 Meehan, "The Irish Economy During the War," pp. 29-37.

5 Much of the information about wartime touring is derived from a
personal interview with Dan O'Connell on March 7, 1973. O'Connell was
with McMaster in the early years of the Second World War.
drink after the play in appreciation, and also to have someone new to talk with.

Economic difficulties were such that for the first time the company was organized on a "commonwealth" basis, whereby shares were apportioned to the members of the troupe, and the week's income was distributed according to the shares held. Normally each actor would have one share, and Mac would take three or four for the costumes, scenery, and lighting. Marjorie also had a share as did Christopher and Mary Rose, who were both touring. As a group the McMasters did fairly well, but the average per-share income in this period was seldom as much as four or five pounds a week. One actor recalled how the company envied Coralie Carmichael, a leading Gate Theatre actress, who was guaranteed five pounds a week when she joined the company for a time.\(^6\) In fairness it should be noted that actor's salaries were never very high anywhere in Ireland. Orson Welles was paid three pounds a week and James Mason six or seven pounds for appearances at the Gate prior to the war.\(^7\) Also, it was then possible for touring actors to find digs that provided a bed and three meals for thirty shillings a week, or about one-third of a weekly share.

As might be expected, the company had a gradually increasing proportion of Irishmen as the war continued. While there were English actors in Ireland to avoid military service, as time passed it was necessary to hire more Irish actors, who brought Mac a variety of accents and little Shakespearean training. The quality varied, but, 

---

\(^6\)Dan O'Connell interview. \(^7\)Ibid.
especially in the postwar period, capable Irish actors were found who eventually obtained work in the British theatre. Probably the most notable Irish alumnus of the McMaster wartime companies was Patrick Magee (then McGee), who played the Marquis deSade in the Royal Shakespeare Company production of *Mарат/Sаде*, and who became a noted film actor, most recently in *A Clockwork Orange* and *Luther*.

In the early Forties, McMaster would occasionally leave his company touring the towns and come into Dublin to play a week or two at the Gate Theatre, either with Edwards-Mac Liammoir or under the management of Edward Lord Longford, whose company had shared the Gate name and theatre since 1937. Sometimes the productions were light entertainment: *Light of Heart* (March 23-28, 1942, produced by the Gate at the Gaiety Theatre), *Love From a Stranger* (December 1-5, 1942, produced by Longford at the Gate), and *Don Jupiter* (September 21-October 3, 1942, an independent production at the Olympia Theatre). Others played more to McMaster's strength: two Longford productions of *Othello* at the Gate, April 1-8, 1941, and December 8-12, 1942, and a Longford production of *Macbeth* on May 27-June 7, 1941. Lord Longford's most enduring contribution to the McMaster story is the role he played in getting Mac to play *Oedipus*.

*Oedipus*

Edward and Christine Longford had met the McMasters during the first Abbey season, and after that they regularly saw performances by the company whenever they came near the Longford's central Ireland home, most often in Mullingar and Athlone, Co. Westmeath. Lord Longford had a
great interest in theatre, was a director and financial supporter of the Gate Theatre, and eventually began his own company in the late-1930's, which played at the Gate and toured the larger Irish cities, sometimes presenting plays written by his wife. That kind of involvement in the theatre made them natural friends of the McMasters. 8

The Longfords saw a performance of Oedipus in Greece and came back to discuss the experience with the McMasters. Mac expressed an interest in the play but dissatisfaction with the Gilbert Murray translation, which was rhymed, and the W. B. Yeats version, which was in prose. Mac wanted blank verse for the dialogue and rhyme for the choruses. Later, over a luncheon at Jammet's in Dublin, McMaster again expressed his interest in Oedipus, and Longford went home to write a translation to Mac's specifications. It was completed and given to Mac, but circumstances delayed production until, as a Christmas gift in 1940, Mac told the Longfords that Oedipus would be produced the following month. On January 17, 1941, in a week that also included Smilin' Through, Little Lord Fauntleroy, and The Bells, the McMaster company presented Oedipus, The Tyrant, at the Theatre Royal, Wexford. Countess Longford recalled the first night:

Wexford loved Mac, and he loved Wexford. The old Theatre Royal was a real theatre, built in the early eighteen-hundreds and proud of its history. . . . It was lovely in the old days with a small circle of boxes reserved for the great families of the town. It was a good shape and in 1941 still had atmosphere. . . .

But on the day of the first night Ireland was covered with snow. Edward and I had a dangerous drive. Nothing but Oedipus would have brought us from Dublin to Wexford. . . .

We sat in the circle; I believe in the hereditary box

---

8Christine Longford MS.
of Pintan O'Connor, the best seat in the house; and we looked down at the antique pit overflowing with the boys and girls of Wexford, all as excited as we were.

Then the curtain went up on the palace of Thebes. . . .

I have never seen Mac look more marvelous. Why? Because he looked like himself for once, only taller than ever in his long robes; a tall, beardless, heroic Greek king, about the same age as himself. He spoke the first lines of the play; he enjoyed that and so did the audience. . . .

Mac knew it was not classical to be 'restrained.' The classics would not be classics if they were about people who did not show their feelings, or had no feelings. . . .

Mac's first climax was, as it should be, when he turned on Jocasta and swore he would learn the truth. Oedipus could not believe that his luck would fail him, and Mac understood that reckless trusting to luck. He was still our hero, we were all on his side; though he had his faults they were not bad enough to deserve the fearful blow that was coming.

Then it fell and Oedipus blinded came out of the door of the palace. We expected it, yet we could not believe it. We all felt the same shock. Only after a few seconds I realized how many of us were seeing the play for the first time; and I did not feel superior, I envied them, but the main thing was we were all seeing Mac's Oedipus for the first time.

There were screams in the audience, quite properly, at the sight of that face covered with blood. But he hushed them with his beautiful voice, and the last scene was best of all. He was right not to hurry, he knew he could hold us. Nobody was impatient, nobody thought the play was over, hysteria subsided; nobody had to be carried out, and they could not have been, they were jammed too tight to move. We all wanted to hear why he had done it, and what he was going to do next. When he said goodbye to his little daughters, horror turned to pathos, and the girls who had screamed were given a chance to cry. As the curtain fell we were all sure that this terrible thing had happened, and why it had happened. . . .

We cheered the protagonist, I don't know for how long, and made plans to see him again.9

Typically, McMaster did not rush into Dublin with his new production. It was eighteen months later, June 23-27, 1942, that his Oedipus was seen at the Gate under the Longford banner. Holloway objected to Mac's "overloud delivery and ranting," but admitted that,

9Christine Longford MS.
"The audience followed the tragedy with an intense interest and a stillness that could be almost felt. [Actress] Eileen [Crowe] declared it was impressive and beautifully presented and she was right—it was all that and more."¹⁰ The Irish Times said, "The performance ... recalled the spell with which we used to be held by great acting; one felt once more the tense hush, the utter stillness which only the finest playing can command."¹¹ And the critic for the Independent gave a positive review for a very curious reason:

The Christian rejection of Predestination weakens the end of the play for us.... He is by Christian standards guiltless of the sin and pollution for which he punishes himself.... I always sense this loss of sympathy by the audience ..., and ..., my test for the actor ..., is how he succeeds in the last ten minutes or so. By this standard Anrew McMaster ranks high. He was a splendid Oedipus in the early scenes, perhaps a little too dense when the evidence began to pile up, but on the whole, a fine manly type of Grecian ruler.¹²

By all accounts, McMaster's Oedipus could be a great and terrifying experience when he was in the mood. Gerard McLarnon, who was with the company in the 1940's, describes his experience as a young actor:

I was waiting to go on playing the messenger and Mac was wringing the last news out of the shepherd that he'd murdered Laius, his own father, and ... all this horror. Then he gets rid of the shepherd, and he's got about three lines ... before he goes off. Well, Mac said these lines and then he started to scream, and God, it was the most terrifying and tremendous thing I've ever heard in all my life. It wasn't just a man screaming. You felt this had come up really out of the blasted pit. It's really come up and up through his feet, his legs, his genitals, his throat, his head, up and up, and it wasn't one note only but a whole series of notes. It was absolutely terrifying, terrifying and amazing.¹³

¹⁰Holloway, NLI MS 2005, p. 1265.
¹¹June 24, 1942, p. 2. ¹²June 24, 1942, p. 3. ¹³BBC Program.
And later, Harold Pinter recalled McMaster's Oedipus in the early 1950's:

His concentration was always complete in Oedipus. He was at his best in the part. He acted with acute tenderness and tenacity. And he never used his vocal powers to better or truer effect. He acted along the spine of the role and never deviated from it. As in his two other great roles, Othello and Lear, he understood and expressed totally the final tender clarity which is under the storm, the blindness, the anguish. For me his acting at these times embodied the idea of Yeats' line: 'They know that Hamlet and Lear are gay, Gaiety transfiguring all that dread'. Mac entered into this tragic gaiety naturally and inevitably.\textsuperscript{14}

One may lament the fact that McMaster's Oedipus was never seen outside Ireland. Indeed, it was not even seen in Dublin after 1946 though it was in and out of the repertoire for another ten years. This Oedipus had been born in one of the Irish towns, and it was in the towns that he stayed. Mac may occasionally have been tempted to seek a larger audience, but he probably knew the gain was not worth the price, that his ego did not really require applause in London or New York, especially if the cost was his freedom. Those who saw McMaster act are sad that none of that art was ever recorded on film or television tape. There are recordings and a few radio transcriptions available, and they indicate that it is likely even film would not have caught Mac's talent.

The missing element would have been St. John's Hall in Tralee, the Confraternity Hall in Thurles, the Ideal Cinema in Westport, the Boathouse at Cappoquin, the local "theatres" of all kinds filled with the townspeople that made the essential contribution to the completion of Mac's art. They inherited Oedipus, their own special memory.

\textsuperscript{14} Pinter, \textit{Mac}, p. 15.
Postwar

From the end of 1942 through the remainder of the war, McMaster was on tour with his company, and he did not come into Dublin. There is no apparent reason for this; Dublin had a fairly full theatrical life throughout the war. Edwards-Mac Liammoir and Lord Longford offered a widely-varied repertoire at the Gate and Gaiety Theatres, including everything from Shakespeare through Shaw to Sherwood. Stanley Illsley and Leo McCabe produced plays at fairly regular intervals, mostly contemporary works such as Petrified Forest, Private Lives, and Journey's End. The Abbey offered a regular list of Irish plays, and actors Shelagh Richards and Cyril Cusack occasionally produced and appeared in plays. But McMaster was not there.

Finally, on the night of September 26, 1946, Mac reappeared on the Dublin stage with a vengeance as he opened a three-week run of Trilby. The production was by Edwards-Mac Liammoir in an adaptation by Mac Liammoir that gave McMaster maximum operating space. The Irish Times reported:

I watched . . . Anew McMaster, with a solid supporting team, frolic through as luscious a piece of rare melodrama as has been seen since the heyday of Todd Slaughter. Micheal Mac Liammoir, in his adaptation . . . has kept faithfully to the theatrical idiom of du Maurier's day, and one cannot help feeling that Mac Liammoir decided to have a thoroughly enjoyable wallow in the theatrical writing of the 1890's while he was about it . . . Anew McMaster took full advantage of the script to give us a superb example of Barnstorming in the grand manner. His Svengali had everything that Svengali should have—imperious, cosequous, cleaginous, sinister in turn—and he dominated the play to such an extent that the last act, in which he did not appear, might have been omitted. 15

---

The cast included Mac Liammoir's niece, Sally Travers, as Trilby, and Christopher McMaster as Little Billee.

After having been away from Dublin for nearly four years, McMaster now reversed the pattern and proceeded to appear in ten Dublin productions over the next year. With the exception of a thirteen-week tour in the spring of 1947, McMaster stayed in Dublin through the following September 13, 1947.

*Trilby* was followed by Mac's last Dublin appearance in *Oedipus*, this time directed by Hilton Edwards, with Reginald Jarman as Tireisias and Ginette Waddell as Jocasta. Shaw's *Don Juan in Hell* was given as an afterpiece. Both *Trilby* and *Oedipus* had been staged at the Gaiety, and now Mac stayed on to direct *She Stoops to Conquer* as the theatre's seventy-fifth anniversary production. It ran for a week, and, when the Gate company left on a European tour, Mac acquired the Gate and transferred *She Stoops to Conquer* there for an additional two weeks. This began a nine-week stay at the Gate for Mac. He next produced and appeared in *Parnell*, to small success, then directed but did not act in *Pink String and Sealing Wax*, which opened February 10, 1947, and ran for a month. While this play was on, the Christmas pantomime at the Gaiety closed owing to abnormally bad winter weather, and McMaster immediately prepared and opened *The Cardinal* in that theatre on February 20. After four years of no McMaster in Dublin, the city had two of his productions running simultaneously at the end of February. The final play in the Gate season was *School for Scandal*, which ran for a week and closed March 15.

The Gate season, in addition to establishing Mac with the Dublin
audience again, had an additional benefit for him: it allowed him to prepare his spring tour. The bill of plays included everything Mac had done for the past six months, except Oedipus, plus the standard Shakespearean list and Gaslight. This was essentially a "major cities" tour, including week-long stops at Limerick, Ennis, Galway, Nenagh, and Roscommon, four weeks at the Cork Opera House, and a three-week season at the Belfast Opera House, a rare stop on the McMaster itinerary.

McMaster closed the tour on July 5, a week earlier than planned, paid the company half salary in lieu of the last week,\(^\text{16}\) and came back to Dublin to begin rehearsals for a production of Winterset that was being prepared as a special attraction for the annual Royal Dublin Horse Show. Burgess Meredith was to play the lead opposite Paulette Goddard, who was making her first stage appearance. McMaster was cast as the judge, and Mac Liammoir also joined the company. Ria Mooney directed. The play opened August 4 and ran through a swelteringly hot month at the Gaiety. Reviews were good and usually kind to Miss Goddard, who was inaudible much of the time.

Mac immediately followed Winterset with another week of Pink String at the Gaiety, and on September 8 opened as Pagin in an adaptation of Oliver Twist by Ian Priestly-Mitchell. "Seldom has Dublin seen a show which so pulsates with energy and life as does this staging of a classic, and the rousing reception it got from an overflow house was richly deserved."\(^\text{17}\) Priestly-Mitchell also played the Artful Dodger,

\(^{16}\)Eugene Wellesley diaries.

\(^{17}\)Independent (Dublin), Sept. 9, 1947, p. 5.
and, as Nancy, Mac welcomed back Esme Biddle after a twenty-year absence.

Then, as suddenly as he had descended on Dublin, Mac was gone again. After *Oliver Twist* closed on September 13, 1947, it would be nearly seven years before he would act in Dublin again. As usual, no reasons were given, but it seems reasonable to assume that this nine months in Dublin had served the same purpose as his extended stays at Stratford and Bournemouth in the Thirties. They allowed Mac to accumulate some money and to pay off some bills. Since he did not really enjoy performing in Dublin, he came into the city only in response to financial opportunity or for a special production such as *Winterset*. It was rather like a pastoral outlaw making irregular forays into the enemy-held city to gather supplies necessary to enable his merry band to live the life they preferred. In the last ten years of the McMaster company, these urban incursions became more frequent, and, while the reasons were never exclusively financial, it begins to appear that even in the best economic times the Irish countryside was decreasingly able to provide the level of support the company required.

In the autumn of 1947 and spring of 1948, the McMasters were on tour. While they played a few weeks in Cork and Belfast, most of the time was spent in the smaller towns and cities: Arva, Killianbandra, Ardee, Ballinamore, Ahascragh, Abbeylueix, Drumshanbo, Kilfinane, and others. The autumn, 1948, tour began in mid-August in Skibbereen and ended in late October, about six weeks earlier than usual.\(^{18}\)

\(^{18}\)Eugene Wellesley diaries.
McMasters hurried back to Dublin to begin planning and preparation for a major adventure to open the decade of the Fifties: the company was going to Australia.

Conclusion

The Second World War finally established Anew McMaster and his theatrical company as an Irish institution. McMaster had been as much out of Ireland as in during the 1930's, but the coming of the war occasioned a commitment by Mac to Ireland, and for that decade he and his company were seen exclusively in the cities and towns of that country. This gave the McMasters a firmer place in Irish cultural history than they might have had if the war had not intervened. It is possible, however, that the war merely provided a convenient excuse for Mac to retire into Ireland. The touring tradition was dead in Britain by the end of the 1930's, and extended stays of weekly repertory in places like Bournemouth and Dundee were not Mac's ideal of theatre. So, citing "travel restrictions," the McMasters took their theatre wholly into the fascinating and difficult life of touring the Irish towns. This meant an endless round of small towns, village and church halls, and uncertain lodgings. The weather could turn cold and damp, and there was little relief in a time of food, fuel, and materials shortages. But the audience usually was there, and the actors knew that, whatever the difficulties, in the evening there would be theatre. For a time the war would vanish and a certain magic would descend on the Town Hall.
CHAPTER XI

THE FINAL DECADE

To Australia Again

Early in 1948, the McMaster's business manager, Walter Humphreys, began negotiations in London with representatives of Carroll-Fuller Theatres Co. of Melbourne for a possible visit to Australia by a McMaster company. It is not known who initiated the contact, but it seems likely that the McMasters began exploring the possibilities, since Mac had not been to Australia for twenty-five years. A tentative arrangement was made, and Humphreys went to Australia to sign the final agreement for an appearance by the McMasters at the Princess Theatre, Melbourne, in early 1949.¹

November, 1948, was a busy time for the McMasters as they prepared for the journey. They planned to produce at least three plays, Othello, Shrew, and Trilby, with the possibility of adding one or two later in the tour. Mac recruited a strong company of London actors for the major roles, including Eric Maxon (who had been with Mac at Stratford), Paul Stephenson, John Harrison, Daphne Slater, John Edmund, and Sheila Helpmann. In early December, the company went off by ship from Southampton. Mac had flown to Cairo and met the ship at Port Said in


197
mid-December. At Fremantle, the port city near Perth in West Australia, McMaster left the ship to fly to Melbourne in order to give him an extra week to make arrangements and to hire the supers.²

On February 4, 1949, the company opened a three-week run of Othello at the Princess before an audience in full evening dress.³ The newspaper billed them as "the Stratford-upon-Avon Players," and the reviewer called them "players from the theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon," which was somewhat closer to the truth. Several of the actors, in addition to McMaster and Maxon, had played at Stratford, but the Stratford connection was tenuous and would have raised the eyebrows of the Governors, had they known. Paul Stephenson was Iago, and Daphne Slater was Desdemona.

The Taming of the Shrew played for two weeks from February 25, and was followed by Dr. Angelus, a James Bridie play about an old doctor who murders his wife and mother-in-law, which had been in the repertoire in the last Irish tour. This also ran for two weeks and was followed by Trilby, which ran a fortnight and concluded the Melbourne season.

The company then set out on a major cities tour, which included Brisbane and Adelaide, and ended up at Perth. At this point the English contingent sailed back to Britain, and the remaining Irishmen settled in to enjoy Perth's beaches and to endure one of that area's longest and hottest summers. The Christmas dinner of turkey and hot plum pudding seemed a bit incongruous in 100-degree temperatures, but it was the

²Letter from Marjorie McMaster to Gabriel Fallon, Dec. 19, 1948, in the possession of Mr. Fallon.
McMasters' second Christmas away from home, and the tradition was important.\(^4\)

In February, 1950, the McMasters were preparing to return to Ireland when they received an offer from the Council of Adult Education (CAE) in Melbourne to do a theatre tour to the towns of Victoria under CAE auspices and financial support. The Council had been sending out theatrical, ballet, and musical tours for two years, and thought the McMasters' touring experience might interest them in an Australian jaunt. Mac quickly formed a sixteen-man company of Irish and Australian actors, they rehearsed in Melbourne, and in mid-May, 1950, this new McMaster company began an eight-week tour of Victorian towns.

While Mac had more than twenty years experience touring the Irish towns, his Australian travels had several unique elements. They rarely played a town for more than one or two days, and during the eight weeks they visited twenty-five different places with names like Wangaratta, Numurkah, Bendigo, Whill, Warrnambool, Poowong, and Yarrawonga.\(^5\) Transport was by Chevrolet automobile and "The Monster," a huge, red, converted refrigeration truck-trailer that carried some actors and all the props, costumes, scenery, and lighting equipment. Mac remembered:

> The journeys were marvellous—rather like a child's adventure story. Often we drove through miles and miles of uninhabited bush country, very still and hot, and somehow slightly

\(^4\) lifetime, no. 9.

menacing, where giant ghost gums rose up like skeletons all around us, and the only sign of life was an occasional kangaroo. ... For hours and hours we'd drive, and then, quite suddenly a tiny town would appear, set down hundreds of miles from the next one—complete with a swimming pool, a public library, a baby centre and a well-equipped theatre. Probably when those brave little settlements were originally founded, the public buildings were erected with the assumption that the towns would grow with the years into big important centres, for often we found enormous town halls with theatres attached to them, out of all proportion to the size of the population.  

A typical day was the visit to Traralgon. Before noon, The Monster rolled into this market town after the eighty-mile trip from Dandenong, and did a flourishing tour of the main streets to announce the arrival of the company.  

It then drew up next to a yellow clay quagmire behind the Shire Hall, and an impromptu road of branches, ashes, boards, and iron sheets was laid down so the scenery and equipment would be rolled into the hall. The stage and dressing rooms were prepared, and in the afternoon there was a school matinee of *She Stoops To Conquer*. At the curtain call, McMaster encouraged the children to tell their parents about the evening performance, "all about a big wicked man who murders ladies for their money." Advance bookings for *Love From A Stranger* had been few, but that night 200 people were in attendance. By ten past one the next morning, The Monster had been re-packed, and the company was ready to travel early the next day.  

Their visit was an event often celebrated at the local school-house, as Marjorie recalled:

We have just returned from a party after the play given by the

---

6 *Lifetime*, no. 9.
7 *Woman's Day and Home* (Melbourne), Oct. 2, 1950, p. 27.
schoolmaster to thank us for coming. . . . The party was in a big schoolroom, and we ate sponge cakes filled with fresh cream and little sandwiches. . . . All the women of the company were handed beautifully arranged bouquets of rosebuds and tiny chrysanthemums . . . and there were speeches of thanks and the usual compliments.6

The company ended its 3,500-mile tour on July 13 in Shepparton, and in true McMaster fashion began another one almost immediately. Two weeks later the Mcmasters were in Yallourn at the beginning of another month on the road visiting new towns and revisiting others. On the last day of August, their three-and-a-half month journey around southern Australia ended in the town of Bairnsdale. They had visited approximately forty towns in Victoria, New South Wales, and South Australia. They went back to Melbourne.

As spring came to that city, the Mcmasters stayed active in the theatre, playing another season at the Princess and appearing in a production of Light of Heart at the National Theatre. Mac's old friend, Elisabeth Bergner, came to Melbourne to appear in The Two Mrs. Carrolls, and during this season she gave a special matinee performance of readings from Shaw's St. Joan in which Mac read all the male parts. In 1928, she had played the role in Max Reinhardt's first German production.

After Christmas, their third away from Ireland, the Mcmasters sailed for London on board the M. V. Georgic, and they arrived home on March 5. Their two-year Australian journey was over.

6Written in Numurkah, Victoria, May 25-26, 1950. MS in the possession of Christopher McMaster.
Mostly Touring

Soon after the McMasters returned to Dublin they sold the
cottage at Howth, which was showing the effects of much use and then
disuse, and moved into a flat at the rear of 42 Fitzwilliam Square in
the city. Both Christopher and Mary Rose had remained behind in Aus-
tralia, and so the McMasters needed less space and more convenience.

Although the company had not toured Ireland for three years,
Mac's first plan was not to head for the country towns but rather to
undertake a tour of India in the autumn. Business manager Walter Humphreys went to New Delhi, Bombay, and other major Indian cities in June
and July to make arrangements and to negotiate contracts for what
appeared to have been an extended tour. In a letter to Mac, Humphreys
mentions he was only able to "finalize the first four months."9 The
project was abruptly aborted when Humphreys died unexpectedly in India,
and Mac would not—perhaps could not—pursue the tour without him.
Humphreys had been an essential part of the McMaster operation for more
than twenty years as business manager, travelling secretary, actor, and
good friend. Like Mac, he was among the last of a disappearing breed,
the touring theatrical manager, a group of men who dealt with the daily
demands of the actor-manager, theatre owner, and twenty actors.
Humphreys was irreplaceable to the McMasters, and, while one member of
the company usually was designated as business manager, the load in
later years fell even more on Marjorie.

---

9 Letter from Walter Humphreys to Anew McMaster from Bombay,
July 7, 1951, in the possession of Christopher McMaster.
In the autumn, Mac again did what he knew best. The company went on tour in Ireland, beginning what was to become an almost uninterrupted six-year round of travels to the county towns. It was a remarkable effort. The touring tradition was finished everywhere else. Donald Wolfit had made a valiant effort to tour Shakespeare in Britain up to 1950, but that, too, was now done. Gradually, television was joining movies as Mac's competition. The migration from the countryside to Dublin robbed Mac of some of his audience. But still the tours went on.

Two factors made McMaster's companies of this period among the best he had had. The first was that the postwar return to normalcy in Britain again made it possible for Mac to recruit young British actors. He would place an advertisement in *The Stage*, "Young actors wanted to carry spear in Ireland," and the actors would appear at the McMaster's Edith Road digs in West Kensington to interview. Among those recruited in this way in the early Fifties were Kenneth Haigh, in 1956 the first Jimmy Porter in the Royal Court's production of *Look Back In Anger*, and playwright Harold Pinter, who turned twenty-one while on tour with Mac in October, 1951.¹⁰ For both it was their first job.

The second factor contributing to the quality of McMaster companies was that Mac was now reaping the benefits of his own efforts in the countryside over the years. Irish boys and girls who grew up with McMaster school matinees in the 1940's now had become young actors who knew something about Shakespeare and who could suppress their accent.

Actors like Pauline Flanagan from Sligo and Maurice Good from Dublin were typical of the Irish actors growing up in the Forties and Fifties who would find popular acceptance in the British and American theatre of succeeding decades. Among the best known of this wave of Irish actors are Robert Shaw, Richard Harris, Peter O'Toole, and Milo O'Shea. But the British and American theatre is filled with working Irish actors, and for many of them the McMaster company provided the first theatre experience.

During this period the company was especially multi-national with Jack Arason from California (via the Royal Academy), Laurel Streeter, a New Zealander who joined the McMasters for their OEA tour in Australia, and Penelope Parry from Montreal. Mac also welcomed back Eugene Wellesley, Patrick Magee, and later Mary Rose and Christopher McMaster.

The tours were much the same. Automobiles and gasoline again were available so travel was easier, and Irish transportation had been nationalized so that, rather than haggling with a local truck owner for the trip to the next town, Marjorie had to pay the established (and usually higher) rate set by CIE, the government transport monopoly. But Monday was still the day of travel, and the company still gave seven evening performances and as many matinees as the area schools, convents, and monasteries could be persuaded to demand. Salaries were not overwhelming; about six pounds a week was average and the "all in" cost of food and lodging now ran about two pounds, ten shillings.\footnote{Eugene Wellesley diaries.}
There was Shakespeare, of course. Othello, Merchant, Hamlet, Shrew, Macbeth, and As You Like It (for matinees) usually were in the repertoire, as were the most recent mystery offerings: Love From A Stranger, Ten Little Niggers, An Inspector Calls. Old war horses reappeared regularly: The Sign of the Cross, The Cardinal (in which Mac wore a confessional stole given him by the Archbishop of Tuam), and The Bells. The quality of the young actors probably prompted McMaster to stage an unusual amount of Oscar Wilde. At one point the company was offering Lady Windermere’s Fan, An Ideal Husband, and The Importance of Being Earnest. On Saturday night, August 9, 1952, Mac brought Oedipus back into the repertory for the first time in at least six years. (Pinter played Creon.) It was an impressive opening week for the autumn season in the Town Hall, Youghal, Co. Cork: Merchant, Niggers, Othello, Earnest, Shrew, Oedipus, and Hamlet.12

From Youghal the tour ran for four months through Kinsale, Skibbereen, Rossmore, Kenmare, Bandon, Drumcollogher, Tipperary, Hospital, Galway, Cahir, Dungarvan, Cork, Waterford, Fermoy, Kilkenny, and Navan, a town of about 4,000, in which the company gave fifteen performances of eleven plays in ten days: Othello, As You Like It, Macbeth, Hamlet, Shrew, Merchant, Oedipus, Ideal Husband, Earnest, An Inspector Calls, Ten Little Niggers! In all, the company had given 149 performances in a little more than seventeen weeks. They had had two days off. It had been a typical tour.

One aspect of the tour was unusual, however. Following the last

12 Eugene Wellesley diaries.
performance in Kilkenny on November 16, McMaster made a curtain speech.

The Kilkenny Journal reported:

A new McMaster has been coming here for over twenty-five years and for the greater part of the time was greeted by packed houses. In recent years there has been a general decline in support and the attendance last week was so poor that Mr. McMaster felt compelled to announce at the end of Sunday evening's performance that he could not afford to come to Kilkenny again.

He did not do so in any sense of bitterness but appealed for government subsidy. He pointed out that governments throughout the world so valued performances of plays of the classic variety that they granted a subsidy for that purpose. He felt strongly on the subject and was one of the few non-subsidized companies which toured several countries.\textsuperscript{13}

For the first time Mac had publicly complained about a lack of business and had struck a town from his tour. There always had been good towns and bad, and Mac had not always been passive when business was not good or audiences unresponsive. Memorably, he once put on his \textit{Cardinal} robe and walked down the streets of Athlone, actor-acylytes by his side, cursing the town after a slow week.\textsuperscript{14} But now he began making his feelings known as he eliminated towns from the itinerary. The following May, Athlone was dropped when the company did poor business following a highly successful, two-week First All-Ireland Amateur Drama Festival in that city. Again in a curtain speech (written in advance), McMaster said\textsuperscript{15} that he had never been so badly treated and that he would never again play in a town that would crowd in to see amateurs but would not come to see Shakespeare. He closed by telling Athlone, "I will

\textsuperscript{13}Nov. 22, 1952.

\textsuperscript{14}Personal interview with Christopher McMaster, Oct. 26, 1972.

\textsuperscript{15}Personal interview with Brendan O'Brien, Feb. 12, 1973, and taken from newspaper accounts in the possession of Mr. O'Brien.
leave you to the amateurs."

The question of government subsidy also had not been publicly raised before, and the fact that it now became an issue probably shows most clearly that the economics of touring were less and less in the McMasters' favor. Mac's first public mention of the difficulty of financing his company had been in 1929, and over the years there had been good times and bad. But, as far as can be determined, Mac did not raise the issue of government support until 1951, even though the Abbey had been receiving government monies since 1924. Indeed, it seems likely that the McMasters would have refused government money since it would have meant some public involvement in company finances, at the least some income and expenditure disclosures. The McMasters always operated in cash out of their own pockets, and little of the company's financial history is known. It seems likely they would have resisted government efforts toward greater public accountability, but here was Mac complaining that he had no subsidy. During the next ten years, this would be a recurring theme, and when the company finally folded, the McMasters would be bitter that the Irish government never did contribute to the maintenance of their effort.

Mac had special reason to be upset in Athlone. The Longfords had come over from Castlepollard to see the company's new production of King Lear, and it must have embarrassed Mac to have his old friends see the half-empty house for one of Shakespeare's great plays. Lear was the first major addition to McMaster's repertoire since Oedipus ten years before. He did not add roles easily, especially those as demanding as
Lear. He had been studying the part for years and with special interest since the Australian tour.\textsuperscript{16} The lines came with difficulty to Mac, but Lear also requires a certain weight and experience. Just as McMaster had seen Oedipus as a man of his own age, now he decided he was old enough for Lear. The first performance had been given about two weeks prior to the stop at Athlone, Sunday, May 10, 1953, in the New Hall at Ennis, Co. Clare. Harold Pinter played Edgar:

He did Lear eventually. . . . Knew most of the lines. Was the old man, tetchy, appalled, feverish. Wanted the storm louder. All of us banged the thundersheets. No, they can still hear me. Hit it, hit it. He got above the noise. . . . At the centre of his performance was a terrible loss, desolation, silence. He didn't think about doing it, he just got there. He did it and got there.\textsuperscript{17}

Patrick Magee played Edmund and conducted the storm while pounding the drum. Eugene Wellesley was Gloucester, Elizabeth Gott played Goneril, Pauline Flanagan was Regan, and Mary Rose McMaster was Cordelia. Christopher McMaster played The Fool.

McMaster was now sixty-one, and his energy appeared undiminished. Through 1953 he regularly played the following roles on a weekly basis: Lear, Othello, Oedipus, Macbeth, Shylock, Hamlet, and Jacques. Indeed, he played them all in a two-week visit to Limerick in late May, 1953, plus several of his mystery-melodrama villains. As an actor who waited for the gods to descend and touch him with inspiration, Mac's performances were uneven, perhaps even had to be uneven if he was to survive constant touring in the greatest roles in English dramatic literature.

\textsuperscript{16} Lifetime, no. 9. \textsuperscript{17} Pinter, Mac, pp. 15-16.
If Mac was not having enough trouble with rising costs, declining attendance, and the amateur theatre movement, in 1954 he found that he would have to deal with an actors' union. In the early 1950's the Irish Actors Equity Association had been founded. Although British Equity was a long-established and powerful entity (and McMaster was a member), the Irish association was new and growing slowly and its success required that major employers such as the MoMasters be brought under Equity contracts. As Mac was assembling his first company after his return from Australia, Irish Equity was in touch with him concerning an agreement to cover his actors. McMaster wrote the kind of letter one might expect from someone who tried to keep all company business in his pocket:

I am writing to other touring managers, who, like myself, have no Dublin base, i.e., no theatre in which to perform permanently in the capital, to hear their views as to how Equity conditions are working out in the changed state of the country... Of course, if they find your contract is working out with them, it will, I am sure, present no difficulties to me.  

Of course, there were no touring managers like McMaster, and Equity had no contract with any other touring company, so Mac's research did not go far. Meanwhile the tour began. In December, Dermot K. Doolan, Irish Equity's general secretary, again wrote McMaster about the "matter of a touring contract," but Mac did not respond. For the next two years Equity tried informally to get Mac to sign a contract, but it was not until January, 1954, that the MoMasters signed their first Equity

---

18 Letter from Anew McMaster to Irish Actors' Equity Assn., Aug. 28, 1951. All information about the McMaster-Equity history is from the files of the Association.
agreement.

The idea of an actors' union violated McMaster's conception of the relationship between himself and the company. It was not just that the union could dictate the terms of a working arrangement or try to establish salaries. In the actor-manager tradition there was a highly paternalistic relationship between the actor-manager and the members of his company, and it was his company. There was one man in charge who assumed the responsibility of the father and expected loyalty in return. It was never a negotiated agreement; one joined the family. F. R. Benson was "Pa," Fred Terry was "The Chief." McMaster may not have had a strong philosophic attachment to this paternalism, it was just the way he had always operated. But this tradition did allow a continuity of style and purpose in a theatrical company in which the personnel was always changing, and indeed it permitted a company to exist as a corporate entity for longer periods than almost any other kind of structure. It had been a stable tradition for a long time, but now it was changing, and Mac would soon be facing that fact.

At Mitchelstown on Tuesday, February 9, McMaster put up a two-week notice of disbanding the company because an actress, Sheila Brennan, had given two-weeks notice. She talked with Mac who said the tour would continue if she stayed. She did so and the other actors were told in various informal ways that the tour would continue. However, on Saturday, February 27, at Wexford, Brennan again gave two-weeks notice, and Mac then announced that the tour would close the next day. The actors claimed two-weeks pay because proper notice had not been given, but McMaster claimed that the notice posted February 9 was still in
effect. Four company actors were members of Irish Equity and four belonged to British Equity, and they took their complaint to Irish Equity in a meeting on March 2. Three weeks later the Executive Committee informed McMaster by mail that he should have put up another notice or pay the two-weeks salary. They asked Mac to pay 161 pounds. On April 5 Mac responded that he was "under no liability to pay the salaries..." Finally, on September 30, a settlement was reached. The actors would get one week's pay.19

McMaster had some factors on his side. Doolan admits that under present Equity rules Brennan would not be allowed to give two-weeks notice.20 And the result differed little from a similar situation in July, 1947, when the company disbanded a week early and Mac gave the actors half-salary.21 Here, however, the actors had gone outside the company to seek satisfaction, and for Mac it was just one more sign of decline in the profession. He wrote to Eugene Wellesley, "I can hardly bring myself to see plays, so fed-up with attitude of performers, but then, one must work."22

McMaster came back to Dublin from that tour to prepare for his first appearance there since 1948. The role was appropriate in scale—he was to play St. Patrick in a massive three-day pageant scheduled for Easter weekend. The company included 1,500 men, women, and children

19Irish Actors' Equity Association, McMaster file.
21Eugene Wellesley diaries.
under the general direction of Army Captain J. A. Dowling, and music was
provided, on record, by a host of Irish church and operatic singing
groups. On Saturday afternoon the landing of St. Patrick at Drogheda
was enacted as Mac and his retinue were rowed up the Boyne River on a
(motor-powered) barge. As McMaster disembarked, the sun took its cue
and pierced the cloud-covered sky with a shaft of light to welcome the
returning saint.23 Mac always admired striking lighting effects, and he
took special notice of this one. He proceeded up the hillside, parleyed
with the local chieftain, was admitted to Ireland, and, as he made the
sign of the Cross the gathered throng blessed themselves in return.
That night the pageant moved to a natural fourteen-acre amphitheatre
facing Slane Castle, seven miles up the river. There, under a moonlit
sky, St. Patrick confronted the pagan King Laoghaire (played by McMaster
alumnus Godfrey Quigley), his queen (Pauline Flanagan), and their
dughters (Mary Rose McMaster and Gloria Breslin). The pagan druids
were defeated by Patrick and his monks, and the Christian faith had been
established in Ireland. Easter Sunday night the setting was the his-
toric Hill of Tara where the apostle was tried by the priests (Patrick
Magee and Trealach Hennessey) before the High King of Tara. For this
performance, Mac had convinced the producers to let him wear the more
traditional and colorful church vestments and tall mitre, arguing the
historically-accurate dress was not very interesting and that the people
would like to see the St. Patrick that hangs in so many Irish homes. He
wore full canonicals and looked every inch the Saint.

23 *Lifetime*, no. 10.
A year later, McMaster again appeared in a St. Patrick pageant, this time produced by himself, directed by Hilton Edwards, and written by Micheal Mac Liammoir. It was staged at Croke Park (normally a football field) on five days with a cast of a thousand "Christians, pagans, monks, peasants, dancers, tumblers, druids and so on." 24 Thirty thousand people attended the first performance on May 8.

In October, 1954, McMaster produced a two-week season of Shakespeare at Dublin's Gaiety Theatre. It is a measure of Mac's attitude toward Dublin audiences that this season marked his first appearance in that city in a Shakespearean role since 1942, and the first appearance by a McMaster company in Shakespeare since 1936. Incredible as it may seem, over thirty-five years of touring in England and Ireland, the McMaster company played Shakespeare in Dublin for a total of only thirteen weeks. Mac did not like coming into Ireland's capital for several reasons. It was really not his territory. Even in the 1920's his excursions into the Abbey had been seen as violations of the temple by certain parts of the closely-knit Dublin theatrical community. The city was the home of the Abbey and the Gate, and the more traditional style of acting and production was viewed with as little favor there as in London. The countryside gave Mac freedom, while Dublin offered criticism and an intense internal bickering not uncommon in small-city artistic communities. Even now, Louis Elliman, owner of the Gaiety, predicted bad business for the McMasters, and insisted on at least five plays rather than the week of King Lear and the week of The Taming of

24 Lifetime, no. 11.
the Shrew the McMasters had proposed.25

For the Gaiety season the company was composed of a core of regular members—Christopher and Mary Rose McMaster, Maurice Good, Jack Aranson, and Eugene Wellesley—plus some of the city's finest actors hired for the occasion: Christopher Casson (Mac's Tiresias in the 1942 Oedipus), Coralie Carmichael, Patrick Bedford, Milo O'Shea, Marjorie Hawtrey, Peggy Marshall, and T. P. McKenna. Sets were designed by Michael O'Herlihy.

McMaster opened on October 18 with three nights of King Lear, the only performances of that role he ever gave in Dublin. Notices were favorable, with special mentions for Christopher McMaster's Fool, Casson's Gloucester, and Wellesley's Kent. The matinee and evening performances on Thursday were Hamlet. Mac, now sixty-two, gave a curtain speech in which he described his Hamlet as "old mutton dressed up as lamb,"26 and he announced that, after almost thirty years, he would not play the role again. He never did. The first week ended with Friday and Saturday night performances of Othello.

The second week began with a new production of Shrew directed by Hilton Edwards. It was an "Irish Shrew," from Kay Casson's sets suggesting Irish hills and thatched cottages to Paul Farrell's Christopher Sly, who came on in modern dress and spoke the tongue of Fluther Good and Joxer Daly. All reviews mention Mac's vitality as Petruchio, and special notices went to Milo O'Shea, who played Grumio. Thursday's

25Letter from Marjoir McMaster to Gabriel Fallon, n.d., in the possession of Mr. Fallon.

play was The Merchant of Venice, and the reviews show that Mac was at
the top of his form, with Gabriel Fallon saying that McMaster "leaned
... toward Irving's great tragic figure epitomizing oppressed people
the world over." 27 Othello was again the Friday night offering.

Contrary to Elliman's prediction, the Gaiety season was a
success financially as well as artistically. Fragmentary box office
reports 28 show income for the second week totalled almost 1,250 pounds,
and that 1,451 patrons saw the Thursday night Merchant and 1,237 the
final night's Shrew. If receipts ran between 2,000 and 2,500 pounds for
the fortnight, it is likely that total attendance was 9-11,000, since
the scale was 7/6, 5/-, 3/-, and several hundred rush gallery seats at
one shilling each night.

Once again, the McMasters had come out of the countryside,
accumulated some essential money, and disappeared again. The money went
to the maintenance of their preferred country tours, but the situation
was not getting better, and Mac was no doubt looking for help. One
Dublin critic said, "This successful season ends on Saturday and now it
is for the Arts Council or some such body . . . to consider at once how
they can help McMaster to continue this work in the country as it ob-
viously supplied a vital need." 29 But the support was not forthcoming.

The autumn, 1955, tour began on July 31 in Tipperary, moved on
to Dromcolliher, Co. Limerick, and then to Skibbereen, Co. Cork, where

28 In the possession of Christopher McMaster.
29 Evening Mail (Dublin), Oct. 29, 1954.
following a performance of Oedipus on Friday, August 12, disaster struck. Early in the morning, the Town Hall where the company was playing burned to the ground, destroying a large part of the company's costumes, props, and other equipment. It was the second fire the McMasters had suffered, and like the first (at Sligo in 1942) they worked hard and quickly to get the company back on the road. The following Monday, they opened at the Stella Cinema at Bantry, Co. Cork, with Dial M For Murder. Only two performances had been missed. At a time when great effort was required to keep the company going, the Skibbereen fire was an especially difficult blow for the McMasters. They must have been reluctant to make the capital investment necessary to restore the lost costumes, lighting instruments, furniture, and scenery since they could no longer look forward to an indefinite future on tour. There is no indication that the McMasters considered disbanding the company in the face of this loss, and the tours went on through 1956 and 1957. But it seems possible that Mac and Marjorie looked at the difficulties strewn in their way and wondered how much longer they could go on.

Long Day's Journey Into Night

In early 1956 the McMasters moved from their Fitzwilliam Square flat into a house at 57 Strand Road, Sandymount, overlooking Dublin Bay. This was to be their final residence, and it was here that rehearsals for their spring tour began on February 11. While the previous tour had

been to the West, this one went North, opening at Dundalk, Co. Louth, directly north of Dublin, and then moving west across the northern counties of the Republic, through Co. Leitrim, and then into Co. Donegal, the county lying to the west of Northern Ireland. At the end of May they were playing in Moville at the northern tip of Ireland and across Lough Foyle from Co. Derry.

The following autumn the McMasters continued this northern orientation and crossed the border to play twelve weeks in the towns of Northern Ireland. There is little evidence that shows how often the McMasters visited Ulster, but it appears that a Northern Ireland tour was a rare event. After three weeks in the Republic at Trim, Ardee, and Clones, the company arrived in Newry, Co. Down, in mid-September to begin its northern swing. Towns included Omagh, Maghera, Ballymena, Coleraine, Ballycastle, Limavady, Dungiven, Castlederg, Enniskillen, Lurgan, and Kilkeel.

The McMasters were a great success. Marjorie wrote to Gabriel Fallon from Ballymena, Co. Antrim, on October 15:

To begin with, and quite against all prophecies, we seem to be a nine days wonder. . . . Newspaper men follow us about (did you see the ridiculous story in the Daily Express? They heard of us at the Belfast Telegraph office and spent their whole first day in Ireland with us); daily reports from Belfast pin the girls up for photographs, B.B.C. do talks about us, and best of all houses are excellent, in spite of tax and often no Sundays.

Then she reports an ironic turn of events:

On top of everything out of the blue comes the Secretary of Northern CEMA [Council for the Encouragement of Music and Art, later the Arts Council] offering a guarantee against loss for future tours, and it was followed up in a letter, saying, 'as they much appreciate your work in bringing Shakespeare plays to towns that otherwise would never see them and hope that you
will find it worth your while to make annual visits to Northern Ireland.’ Isn’t it a joke?31 It was a joke designed to break the heart. After touring for thirty years in the Republic without government support and no of it to come, the McMasters venture into the "Black North" and, after three weeks, that government volunteers support for their effort. The support was not great; it was a 200-pound guarantee against loss, which meant that if the McMasters made money CEMA gave them nothing. But they had some government backing for the first time. Reasons can be given why the Northern Ireland government would be more responsive to and supportive of the McMasters. There was a longer and more defined tradition of government support of the arts in Britain than in Ireland, financial resources were probably greater, and, after all, Shakespeare was British. But the irony remained. The only government support the McMasters ever received came from Belfast.

Marjorie also reported on another side of their Northern Ireland experience:

Some things up here are absolutely terrifying. There’s a kind of gestapo atmosphere, and we find ourselves whispering on certain subjects and avoiding others. . . . Last night they started beating the drums at 5 o’clock and were still at it at 12 o’clock when we left the theatre. The noise was absolutely indescribable but what was worse was the expression on the men’s faces—a concentrated venom which is indescribable. . . . I’m dreadfully on edge sometimes, but Mac is rather amused and when, in the hotel, a man with a face convulsed with hatred shouted at him, 'Anyone can see you are a Roman Catholic, it’s written all over you and don’t deny it!’ he just rocked with laughter.32

31Letter from Marjorie McMaster to Gabriel Fallon, in the possession of Mr. Fallon.

32Ibid.
The following February McMaster was again in trouble with Irish Equity, and, while the details of the dispute are not known, the correspondence indicates that the company's economic situation was not improving. On February 1, 1957, Dermot Doolan, general secretary of Equity, wrote to Mac saying that the Equity agreement was not being adhered to, especially in the areas of rehearsal salaries and payment for broken weeks.33 Several days later Doolan received a letter from Ronald Govey, an actor and Mac's business manager at that time. The letter was on stationery headed:

Commonwealth Productions Present

Anew McMaster and Full Company

General Manager: Ronald Govey

The listed address was the McMaster's home. Govey wrote:

Mr. McMaster has not been the manager of a company for some three years now. He is Honorary Artistic Director of a Commonwealth Company of which I am Honorary Manager. . . . As Mr. McMaster has ceased to be a manager, an agreement with him as such should of course be null and void.

This outrageous statement did not deter Doolan, who apparently wrote Govey to have him define the conditions under which actors were hired into the "commonwealth." Govey's response makes it clear that Mac's company was again operating on a commonwealth basis as it had during the Second World War, a profit-sharing arrangement by which actors are paid according to shares and the week's box office receipts. Govey's letter of February 15 indicates that five pounds, ten shillings was the weekly minimum salary for an actor. This was more than during the war, but

---

33 Irish Actors' Equity Assn., McMaster file.
under the eight pounds typical for leading actors in the company in the Fifties. Pay above that minimum depended on the box office. Govey said rehearsal payment "varies," and that at the present it was two pounds, ten shillings, a week. Recourse to the commonwealth system indicates that the company was having financial problems which required the reduction of fixed costs to a minimum. As is often the case, the cost of actors was the most controllable component; Mac could do little to reduce the costs of transportation, theatre rental, printing and advertising, costumes and scenery. Those were going up while Mac thought he had to hold the line on ticket prices. In the towns tickets seldom sold for more than five shillings (about sixty cents), and 3/6 (or forty cents) was more common through the 1950's.

On February 26, 1957, McMaster and several members of his company came into Dublin to open in a modern-dress version of Julius Caesar at the Gaiety. Hilton Edwards directed and played Caesar, Mac Linnmoir was Antony, and Coralie Carmichael appeared as Portia. All the actors wore a paramilitary uniform with magenta shirts, blue capes, dark breeches, and jackboots. McMaster played Brutus and, according to the Irish Times, gave "a deeply moving interpretation . . . ; catching every stage of the initial struggle between love and duty, and the subsequent excessive confidence." The play ran two weeks through March 9.

In the autumn the Mcmasters responded to a CEMA invitation and went back to Northern Ireland for another tour. It may be indicative of the economics of touring that the guarantee against loss had been

increased this time from 200 to 500 pounds. About halfway through the tour McMaster left the company. In a stunning change of events, he had gone off to America to play James Tyrone in the national tour of *Long Day's Journey Into Night*.

The story of how McMaster came to be chosen by Theodore Mann and Jose Quintero to play Tyrone has been constructed out of several stories which appear to conflict. These conflicts are resolvable, and what follows is the most "interesting" synthesis. Mann and Quintero apparently were at a loss to find an actor to play Tyrone on tour. *Long Day's Journey* had opened in New York on November 7, 1956, with Frederic March as Tyrone, Florence Eldridge as his wife Mary, and Jason Robards, Jr., playing Jamie. In July, 1957, this company appeared at the Paris Festival and then reopened in New York on August 19, in a run that continued through March 29, 1958. In this production, March made James Tyrone so much "his" part, that it must have been difficult for the producers to see anyone else in the role on the national tour. March was to travel with the production to Boston after the New York run, but would not tour the country. So Mann and Quintero chose an actor neither they nor the American audience had never seen.

It appears that Irish actress Siobhan McKenna convinced Theodore Mann to offer the role to McMaster.\(^35\) She had often seen him act as she was growing up in Galway, and later she made some recordings with him. In her opinion, Mac "was" James Tyrone, and she encouraged Mann to see if he was available. At 4 a.m. one morning, Dermot Doolan of Irish

\(^{35}\) Telephone interview with Siobhan McKenna, Jan. 5, 1973.
Equity received a telephone call from New York asking where Mac was. Doolan called around the North looking for Mac, and only succeeded in locating another Anew (or Andrew) McMaster, who was a lawyer in Belfast. This man agreed to track down Mac, and finally succeeded in locating him in Ballycastle on the northern Antrim coast. He left a message for Mac to call Mann's New York number. The call was made after a performance one night, and it appears that Mann and McMaster got into considerable confusion about how much money Mac was to be paid. According to McKenna (although the figures are not the actual ones), Mann offered Mac $1,000 a week and Mac said he couldn't settle for less than 400 pounds, neither of them realizing that the figures were identical. Then Mann said that he could offer $1,500, and Mac said he couldn't do it for less than "three," meaning 300 pounds. Mann thought he meant $3,000, and was about to break off negotiations when McKenna got on the phone, told Mac not to haggle about money, and to get on the plane for America.

Through the balance of the week in Ballycastle and the following week in Derry, McMaster and the company worked on recasting Mac's roles so the tour could continue. A copy of Long Day's Journey was obtained and Mac began the difficult process of memorizing a new, long role. On Thursday afternoon he did Shylock and in the evening appeared in Jane Eyre. Friday he was off to Dublin to pick up his luggage and go on to Shannon for the flight to New York. By noon the next day Mac was in New York, his first visit to the United States.

It might be supposed that the role of James Tyrone would have

---

36 Dermot Doolan interview. 37 Lifetime, no. 11.
been a natural for Mac, an old Irish actor playing an old Irish actor. In fact, it was difficult for McMaster. He had not read the play before he agreed to appear in it, and he found himself involved in a long part in a play he felt to be morbid. His first instinct was to make cuts in the text, but O'Neill's widow, Carlotta, was supervising the production and insisted on playing it as written. The rehearsal period was about three weeks long, and that was a rather short time for a three-and-a-half-hour play. Mac was spending his days at the Helen Hayes Theatre and his nights learning lines, and, even though his daughter (now married to Jack Aranson) was in New York City, Mac was missing the kind of major support only his wife could give. Marjorie had stayed behind to wind up the tour, and Mac was without her for the first time in a long while.

Although Mac was a professional and could discipline himself, he had spent a long period in his own company where he could be less disciplined, where he could gabble away a role if the mood was not on him that night. Here he was grappling with something he had not faced before, a lengthy major role in a serious contemporary drama being prepared for a major U.S. city tour. Intense and continuing discipline was required, and he found it difficult to relax when to needed to do so. His wife was not there, he ate less, lost weight, and began to take sleeping pills.\(^{38}\)

Chicago was to be the first "official" stop on the tour, and December 16 was tentatively set for the opening, after a "break-in" week

\[^{38}\text{Lifetime, no. 12.}\]
in a city like Toledo or Dayton. Troubles continued with the production, however, and the actor playing Edmund was replaced. First public performance did not occur until December 13—in Cleveland at the Hanna Theatre. Variety's critic noted that the opening night had been uneven, but that the second night was a great improvement owing to a reduced tendency to underplay. Fay Bainter as Mary Tyrone was given a positive notice, and, as for Mac, the reviewer noted, "He deftly plays the fading matinee idol with a kind of blustering alcoholic grandeur that gives way to resigned forlornness. These emotional changes of pace are done with telling tautness. . . . It's a magnetic clarifying portrayal." It appears McMaster was winning the battle.

The company played nine performances in Cleveland through December 21, and business was not good. Rather than moving on to Chicago, the next stop was for two weeks at the Shubert in Detroit. It is not known whether production problems caused the delay in the Chicago opening, or whether it was decided not to try to open there during Christmas week. Business was worse in Detroit as the company grossed only $7,500 of a possible $31,000 during the first week. In the first three weeks the production lost $14,483.

Mac celebrated his sixty-sixth birthday alone in Detroit on Christmas eve. There was a party, but for the first time in many years

40 Jan. 15, 1958, pp. 72-73.
41 Variety, Jan. 1, 1958, p. 53.
42 Variety, March 12, 1958, p. 73.
he had no family with him.

The Chicago opening finally took place the night of January 6 at the Erlanger Theatre. Claudia Cassidy wrote in the Tribune:

One of the great plays of a lifetime came to the Erlanger Monday night and there were empty seats in the house. I don't attempt to explain this, or to say why this play of all plays lacks the support of Theatre Guild-American Theatre Society subscription, which underwrites almost everything that comes to town, including the junk. I do say that if we let it die here we have only ourselves to blame that the town is turning into a theatrical desert. . . . A powerhouse of a play, it has fallen into good hands. In Chicago as in New York it is magnificently acted, and so superbly staged it seems just to happen.43

Despite the uniformly favorable reviews, the first six performances grossed only $14,800 of a possible $32,000, and the closing notice went up for January 25. This later was extended to February 1, but it was thought that the tour would not be continued after that date.44 Cassidy was not to be denied, however, as she continued to campaign for the show. Other critics joined in the effort, and the president of a local FM radio station, WMT, began unsolicited on-the-hour spot announcements promoting the play. Later, Actors' Equity permitted the actors to record short segments of the play for broadcast on the station.45 As a result, the second week's receipts were doubled to $28,691, and Theodore Mann decided the run would be at least five weeks and that the tour might be continued. Part of the problem was that the producers had invested $25,000 to $30,000 in a new production running

43Jan. 8, 1958, p. 23.
44Variety, Jan. 15, 1958, p. 73.
45Variety, Jan. 22, 1958, pp. 73, 78.
simultaneously with the New York company, rather than using the scenery, costumes, lighting, and properties of the original production after it closed. As a result, the necessary weekly income was pegged at a higher figure than it need have been, according to some critics.46 Business continued to be good through the third and fourth weeks, and by February 1 the company was $5,000 in the black for the tour.47 The producers posted a February 15 closing date for Chicago, and announced that the tour would continue on the road.

At the end of the fourth week, Fay Bainter was hospitalized suffering from fatigue and lumbar pneumonia. Variety reported:

Fatigue was brought on largely by the grind of eight performances per week in an unusually long play, the two Saturday shows involving a total of virtually eight solid hours on-stage. Journey has now resumed a seven-performance schedule, with the Monday night show dropped.48

Of course, Mac also was playing the same difficult schedule, eight performances a week including a show every night (early curtain on Sunday), and a Saturday matinee. He was used to the every-night routine, but here there were no "nights off," and the strain was beginning to tell. He wrote to Marjorie and asked her to join him in Chicago, and she arrived there at the end of January.

Once past the Chicago hurdle, the company moved successfully through a twenty-three week tour:

46Variety, Jan. 22, 1958, p. 78.
47Variety, March 12, 1958, p. 73.
48Feb. 5, 1958, p. 73.
Cleveland (Hanna) - December 13-21
Detroit (Shubert) - December 23-January 4
Chicago (Erlanger) - January 6-February 12
Pittsburgh (Nixon) - February 17-22
St. Louis (American) - February 24-March 1
Philadelphia (Locust) - March 3-15
Washington (National) - March 17-22
Baltimore (Fords) - March 24-29
Columbus (Hartman) - March 31-April 2
Denver (Auditorium) - April 4-5
San Francisco (Geary) - April 8-26
Los Angeles (Biltmore) - April 28-May 17

The McMasters and Miss Bainter (who rejoined the tour in Philadelphia) usually travelled between cities by air, while the rest of the company followed on the train. Mac invariably was involved in promotional activities, including radio and television appearances and talks to groups and at universities, so it was useful for him to get to the next town as soon as possible. Flying also helped him conserve his energy for the play; the train journey from Columbus to Denver took twenty-seven hours. 49

In general, business was good, with box office receipts running around $20,000 for an average week. 50 High point of the tour was the week in Washington, where the box office took in $37,800 of a possible $44,000, and the critics were adulatory. Richard Coe in the Washington Post paid the ultimate tribute:

How does this compare with the company . . . headed by Frederic March . . . ? Seldom can one say such a thing, but I mean it when I say that Miss Bainter and her Irish costar satisfied me far more than I was that memorable Gotham evening of over a year ago. The performance that night may have been one of those off evenings, but I often did feel I wanted more for those two rich

49 Letter from Marjorie McMaster to Gabriel Fallon, April 3, 1958, in the possession of Mr. Fallon.

50 Information gathered from various issues of Variety.
roles. Last night I felt I was getting what the printed version had led me to expect. This is McMaster's American debut and what an actor! He begins on not so high a pitch as March did... and his voice is an instrument to marvel about, a rich ranging of scale one seldom finds.51

Critical accounts of McMaster's James Tyrone give only fragmentary indications of what Mac did in the role. It seems clear, however, that McMaster's characterization was broader and more emotional than March's. One critic mentioned Mac's "florid, old-fashioned style,"52 but then admitted that he could not tell if it was Mac's style or Tyrone's style. R. H. Gardner in the Baltimore Sun gives the best picture of McMaster's Tyrone:

Probably on the assumption that a veteran matinee idol like James Tyrone would have a strong leaning toward self-dramatization, Aneur McMaster's performance is more theatrical than that turned in by Frederic March... The latter's struck me at the time as a masterpiece of realism, whereas last night I was always conscious that Mr. McMaster was acting. His is, however, precisely the sort of acting that Tyrone himself, in the actual situations, might have been guilty of. The result, therefore, is a performance which, in its own way, may be even more realistic than Mr. March's. In any event, Mr. McMaster does a uniformly fine job.53

The beauty of James Tyrone was that it allowed McMaster to give a "realistic" performance while playing in an "old-fashioned" style.

At that point the categories tend to disappear as the audience stops asking how much of the performance in Tyrone and how much McMaster.

The one becomes the other. McMaster later recorded the play for broadcast on Radio Telefís Éireann, and the listener can hear all the

51March 18, 1958.
52Herman Kogan, Chicago Sun-Times, Jan. 7, 1958, p. 34.
53March 25, 1958.
McMaster technique in the person of Tyrone. The accent has a slight Irish flavor, with phrases like "I can't forget it" and "Me father, me mother." His voice is resonant, he speaks quickly and very musically as he runs the scale and provides tonal emphasis in lines such as, "They were right [tenor] too [baritone]." In his long, fourth-act reminiscence with Edmund about his youth, McMaster's Tyrone is very emotional, much more so than the recent Laurence Oliver Tyrone, for instance. The story is told with a tear in the voice, and on lines like "at ten years old I dealt" and "nor food enough to eat" the emotional level is very high. He is on the verge of tears in talking about his mother, and has to stop to blow his nose. When he comes to the line, "It was in those days I learned to be a miser," the word "those" sounds a resonant note that sums up the terror of his youth.

There is little doubt that McMaster presented an interpretation with a higher emotional content than most contemporary actors would have thought appropriate, and that this emotional interpretation was the product of Mac's acting history and preferences rather than his calculated analysis of the character of Tyrone. That is not to say that McMaster's Tyrone was "wrong." Indeed, there is much to be said in favor of a more emotional interpretation than is usually given if one considers the type of theatre and drama in which Tyrone worked, the acting techniques of that period, the self-inflation of the wealthy touring star, the emotional deprivation of his youth, and the daily dramatic lie the Tyrones lived at home. Few actors have the size to

play Tyrone and fewer still the technique and ability to carry of a believable melodramatic interpretation of him. It is a tribute to McMaster that his Tyrone had no echo of Frederic March nor was it overwhelmed by comparison. McMaster had met a very difficult personal and professional challenge under conditions that were not always supportive. Much of America had seen a fine James Tyrone.

Mac and Marjorie arrived at Dublin airport in early June, 1958, after having stopped in New York to spend a few days with their daughter. Soon they were home again at 57 Strand Road, and within a few days Mac was again where he wanted to be, with the company on tour in Limerick. Under the direction of Nancy Manningham and Ronald Govey, the company had continued during the McMasters' absence, and to herald his return they stretched a banner across Limerick's main street proclaiming "Mac's Back." With a sigh of relief, he was soon back in the routine, the transition from Los Angeles to Limerick was made without difficulty. Once again it was Murder Mistaken, An Ideal Husband, and Othello. James Tyrone was gone, but not quite forgotten.

Last Years

Business had not improved during the McMasters' absence. Costs continued to rise and attendance was not good. The company went out on a short tour at the end of 1958, playing a month in Cork, this time not at the Opera House but at the Father Mathew Hall. The bill of plays included only three Shakespearean, As You Like It (for the school matinees), Othello, and Macbeth. The balance was romance and mystery: Rebecca, An Ideal Husband, Dear Delinquent, Murder Mistaken, Wuthering
Heights, and Jane Eyre. Mac played about four nights a week as the tour moved on to Dungarvan and Wexford.\textsuperscript{55}

At Christmas, the McMasters sat down and reviewed the situation and decided that the spring tour would be the last. As usual the income from Long Day's Journey was helping to support the company, but even that was not enough, especially in the face of the growing realization that, even in Ireland, the touring theatre was finished. Television had begun to be available, and, not only did that have an effect on their audiences, the McMasters discovered that actors didn't want to leave Dublin where television production was done.

At the conclusion of a short five-week spring tour, Mac ended his touring career by bringing the company into Dublin for another two-week season at the Gaiety, the first in five years. The plays were As You Like It, Macbeth, Merchant, Othello, and An Ideal Husband. Production expenses were kept to a minimum, even to pulling a stock backdrop from The Gondoliers for use in Othello.\textsuperscript{56} The run included eighteen performances from May 18 through May 30, 1959, and business was disappointing, except for the four school matinees of As You Like It. Mac had to put up with the students reciting the "Seven Ages" speech along with him, but it was worth it since the matinees paid the way.

On Tuesday night, May 26, McMaster gave his last performance of Othello in Ireland. He had played it more than 2,000 times over thirty-four years, and he still played it with vigor and strength at the age of

\textsuperscript{55} Personal interview with Derek Young, March 5, 1973.

\textsuperscript{56} Personal interview with Christopher Casson, Jan. 24, 1973.
sixty-seven. The Irish Times critic summed up Mac and the season:

Awry McMaster himself emerges as a force and as something of a legendary figure... He embodies the classical traditions of Shakespearean acting, and embodies it worthily. His voice remains an instrument of astonishing range, his presence can still command, subdue and inspire the audience in the grand manner. Best of all, McMaster has a glowing integrity in what he does, a faith in Shakespeare that brings its own reward in a strength and warmth with a great deal of subtlety. Much of the festival may be clumsy, underdone, verging on the monstrous; the rest is vibrant, exciting, and very much worthwhile. 57

Although the McMaster company had ceased to exist, Mac did not retire from the theatre. Indeed, he could not since the theatre provided his center and support, and involvement with it was his only means of staying alive. The three years between the disbanding of the company and Mac's death saw him involved in a wide range of activities related to the theatre. Not all of them were satisfying or challenging, but they kept him busy. Occasionally, events took Mac in surprising directions.

His involvement with Long Day's Journey Into Night did not end with his return from America. Late in 1958 the Norwich (England) Repertory Company was offered the scenery from the London production of Long Day's Journey after it closed. 58 A former McMaster actor, Gerald Batty, was acting in Norwich, and knew Mac had played Tyrone in the U.S. He persuaded the company management to invite Mac to come to Norwich to act and to direct the production, and Mac agreed. With two weeks rehearsal, a slightly cut version of the play was presented at the Norwich

---

57 May 22, 1959.

58 Anthony Quayle and Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies had played the leads in London.
Playhouse the week of February 2, 1959. It had been twenty years since Mac had last appeared in England, and he was warmly received by members of the company and by the audience.  

McMaster returned to Dublin to discover that the Abbey had obtained the rights to produce *Long Day's Journey* and was planning an April production. Mac let it be known that he was available to play Tyrone, and was greatly disappointed to learn that Ernest Blythe, longtime director of the Abbey, had vetoed Mac's appearance. The Abbey policy at that time barred appearances by guest artists, and Blythe used that excuse to keep McMaster out of the production. For a variety of reasons, relations between Mac and the Abbey management over the years had not been very cordial, but it is unfortunate that, because of the Abbey's decision, the McMaster James Tyrone was seen in America and in England, but not in Ireland. The play opened April 28 while Mac was completing a ten-day stand in Tipperary.

Meanwhile, Mac kept busy. He made records, acted in radio versions of *Long Day's Journey*, *Othello*, *Merchant of Venice*, *The Tempest* and *King Lear* (recording about one a year), assembled a one-man show of Shakespearean excerpts, and accepted acting roles as they came along. In September, 1959, he appeared as the Eastern Priest in a production of Shaw's *Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles* for the second Dublin Theatre Festival. He had not played any Shaw since the Hanray-Croll season in


60 Personal interview with Gabriel Fallon, Feb. 6, 1973.
Liverpool in 1914, and he admitted to director Godfrey Quigley that he would need help in understanding what Shaw was saying. But Mac could speak Shaw's long speeches, and the Irish Times said, "As priest and priestess [Nancy Manningham] . . . they hold the play together (almost) by splendid presence, beautiful voices, and admirable speaking." Milo O'Shea was the Simpleton.

At Christmastime, McMaster got involved with a fantastic production of Treasure Island staged at the National Boxing Stadium by "Barrymore Spectaculars." Apparently most of theatrical Dublin was involved in one way or another: Hilton Edwards designed the lighting, and the cast included Christopher Casson, Nancy Manningham, Maurice Good, Patrick Bedford, Barry Cassin, and a host of Dublin and McMaster actors. Mac played Long John Silver, and the Irish Times said he expressed three centuries of villainy by the way he said, "That will be Hunter and Joyce." A 30x50-foot, fully-rigged model of the Hispaniola was designed and constructed by students from the Bolton Street College of Technology for the production, but the ship and the play sank out of sight after one week. Mac never did get paid for his work.

Early in 1960, Mac obtained two days work at Ardmore Film Studios outside Dublin playing The Judge in a Hammer Film epic, The Sword of Sherwood Forest. He got the job through a London agent, Joan Reddin, whom Mac had retained with the thought that his success with Long Day's Journey might lead to some character roles in films.

---

television, or theatre. This motion picture was the only product of that effort. 64

In late February, 1960, McMaster was found performing in an unlikely setting. He was serving as adjudicator at the Amateur Drama Festival at Roscommon. Mac never had any love for the amateur theatre, he had eliminated Athlone from his tours when it became the major center of the amateur drama movement, and now he was sitting through a week or two of amateur productions of varying quality to which he was to give a proper response and choose a winner. Adjudicators were always well paid for the time spent, and it is likely that money was McMaster's main motivation. The fact that he was required to make money this way rather than with his company must have galled him because he stood up on the first night of the festival and delivered a prepared attack on government funding of the Abbey Theatre. The tone was bitter and the implied message was that the Abbey gets 14,000 pounds a year and does little for the country while the McMaster company gets nothing and has been forced to stop touring. The speech prompted a flurry of newspaper articles and letters to the editor in which people mostly talked past each other, but Mac's message was clear—he was unhappy without his company, and the government had never helped.

The year 1961 seems to have been one of relative inactivity for McMaster. He made only one appearance in Dublin in an unusual production of Ibsen's When We Dead Awaken at the Gate, February 9-25. The action was set in the Himalayas, and the reviewer noted that the women.

64 Personal interview with Joan Reddin, Oct. 18, 1972.
spoke their most pregnant lines while lying on their backs.

If 1961 had been slow, the following year provided compensation by being especially busy. It almost appears that Mac decided to get busy again: January 23—His first television appearance, "Ghosts in the Wings," Radio Telefis Eireann; End of February—Adjudicator for the Limerick Amateur Drama Festival; March 13-17—His one-man show at the City Theatre, Limerick; April 8—A midnight Irish Equity benefit at the Gaiety with Mac Lámhroid and Peter Ustinov (who was in Dublin in Photo Finish); June 1—Reads Shakespeare's Sonnets on television; One-man shows on February 20 at Armagh and April 27 and May 1 at Celbridge.

At Christmas, 1961, McMaster had received a telephone call from George Harland, an actor who had been with the company in 1958. Harland was about to finish a two-year term as Artistic Director of the Castle Theatre at Farnham, a town forty miles southwest of London in Surrey. As his final production, Harland had obtained permission from his Board of Directors to invite Mac to Farnham to play a week—as Othello. Mac readily agreed, and in late January he travelled to that town to begin a week of rehearsals. Appropriately, McMaster's last appearance in England would be in Othello.65

The week was unique because for the first time in thirty-five years McMaster would be playing eight consecutive performances of Othello. His only concession to that situation and his age (he was now seventy) was that the epileptic fit was cut for the two matinees. Mac prided himself on doing the fit, (Godfrey Tearle had always left it out,

he said,\textsuperscript{66} and it was a good melodramatic moment, but doing it eight
times a week was too much. Rehearsals went well, with Mac skipping
through his speeches until the end of the week. Harland reports Mac
said he was trying to "modernize" his interpretation, but he did not
succeed, and no one really desired that he do so.\textsuperscript{67}

Opening night was Monday, February 5, 1962, and that night and
the balance of the week were sold out. In addition to the regular
patrons, many of McMaster's old friends and former members of the com-
pany came down from London or from the towns of southern and western
England to see the show and talk with Mac. He regularly entertained
after the performance in Harland's flat above the theatre, and renewed
the memories and friendships growing out of fifty years in the theatre.

The critics were enthusiastic about Mac, Harland's Iago, and the
Desdemona of Jan Lingeman (also a McMaster alumna). The \textit{Surrey and
Hants News} mentioned the "careful pruning of the extraneous characters
and scenes," and said, "What a lesson to young actors is McMaster's use
of his voice—every sigh, every whisper audible. . . . It rises to
sonorous grandeur at times of a dramatic crisis and falls to a caressing
murmur as he woos his Desdemona."\textsuperscript{68} After the last performance, Mac
gave a curtain speech, and he apologized for its brevity since he had
given two performances that day and his years were "threescore and
ten."\textsuperscript{69} It was a rare public admission of his real age. Afterward,

\textsuperscript{66} Pinter, \textit{Mac}, p. 6. \textsuperscript{67} Harland letter.
\textsuperscript{68} Feb. 8, 1962, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{69} \textit{Surrey and Hants News} (Farnham), Feb. 15, 1962, p. 6.
he opened the bottle of Scotch the actors had given him, shared it all around, and talked until the small hours with the young company that made him feel young again.

Thirty years had passed since he had gotten this close to London with his Othello, indeed, it had been twenty-five years since he had played any Shakespeare in Britain. It must have been a good experience for Mac to play there again and to get some measure of professional recognition for his greatest role. Ironically, McMaster's style was coming back into fashion. A few years later Laurence Olivier stunned London with his emotional, volcanic, physical Moor, and had Mac been twenty years younger he might have found growing acceptance of the Othello he had always been.

The summer of 1962 was busy for Mac, and again the situation was a bit outrageous. On June 25 he opened as the "admirably ponderous" general in Desert Song, which was being produced at the Gaiety by "Festival Music (London)." While this play was running, rehearsals began for the next offering, The Maid of the Mountains, in which Mac had starred in Australia, 1922-1923. When rehearsals for this show ran into difficulties, McMaster effectively took over the directing duties. Desert Song closed July 14 after three weeks, and the following Monday Maid opened to very unfavorable reviews. However, Mac did well: "A new McMaster assumes an excellently hammy quality as the brigand chief, and

---

70Irish Times (Dublin), June 26, 1962, p. 15.
71Marjorie McMaster daily diary, July 2, 1962.
makes the other brigands so amateurish."  

It closed on August 4 after two weeks. Two weeks after that, on Sunday night, August 19, McMaster appeared in a benefit entitled "The Pick of the Tops" for the hardship fund of Irish Actors' Equity. He did the "Dream Scene" from The Bells, the Henry Irving classic. It was Mac's last performance; he died five days later, August 24.

Early in the week following the Equity concert, Mac complained of indigestion after lunch, but nevertheless went off to indulge his lifelong passion, swimming. Mac always had been healthy and strong, and even now, four months from his seventy-first birthday, there was no hint of physical decay. He and Mac Liammoir were about to start rehearsals for an Othello to be produced for the Dublin Drama Festival (Mac Liammoir to play Iago), and a short tour to Britain and perhaps the continent would follow. Marjorie saw the proposed tour itinerary and thought that it might be wise for Mac to have a physical examination before rehearsals began. On Friday morning Mac went off to the doctor. "He was gay and laughing when he went off with a long list of shopping to do before the hospital, and he returned with parcels and masses of flowers."  

After lunch the doctor called to report that Mac had a blood clot in his upper arm, and that he would have to spend at least three weeks in bed. The Othello was definitely out.

Mac had a terror of growing old, and somehow he had managed to avoid it. He had never played fathers or grandfathers on stage, never

72Irish Times (Dublin), July 17, 1962, p. 4.
73Marjorie McMaster MS.
had to become a character actor. He had played Hamlet until he was sixty-two, and he could still play Othello with a bare chest. Suddenly he had his first intimation of mortality, or at least of enforced retirement from the stage, the center of his existence. Mac Liammoir came to tea that afternoon and found Mac dutifully in bed, playing himself:

'Poorly is what you might call my condition, Micheal,' he said. 'Oh! And those terrible people at the hospital looked Askance, as you might say, at me X-rays. And I have to stay in bed like Sarah, in _Dana aux Camelias_, for three weeks! Three weeks! Mad with boredom.'

After supper Mac went back to bed to read the book his brother-in-law had brought, _Bernard Shaw_ by Blanche Patch, and around 10:30 he and Marjorie were discussing whether another cup of coffee would keep them awake when the telephone rang. Marjorie's sister, Peggy, was calling to inquire whether anything was wrong. She had a feeling something might have happened, but Marjorie assured her everything was all right. Marjorie hung up, returned to the bedroom, and found that in the three minutes she had been on the phone Mac had died.

A new McMaster had always been able to create his own world. His world was in the theatre and his own company, and that world had protected him from much of the routine, boredom, and reality of life. With his company on tour he lived in his own microcosm where all the elements of the outside world were present but could be controlled or suppressed if they became too assertive. Now Mac had denied old age and infirmity.

---

74 Micheal Mac Liammoir MS.

He had been alive and healthy to the end, had done a week of Othello, and forty performances at the Gaiety just three weeks ago. But at the first hint that that world might be taken from him, he was gone. It is too much to say that he decided to die, but whatever protected Mac in his life also spared him lingering old age and the constant fear of death. The touring was done, and it was time to go.

It had been a full life: Edwardian London, Stratford, Australia and Egypt, America, his company for thirty-five years, the touring life. He was really fifty years after his time in terms of the theatre he preferred, but he was more valuable to the theatre for that reason. He carried a particular style and theatrical tradition as far into the twentieth century as was possible, and thereby passed on the memories of that tradition to a generation for whom it might have been lost.

Perhaps the fact that McMaster lived and worked until the middle of this century will help those who love the theatre to capture and retain something of the theatre that has been lost and the actors for whom it was their life and their passion.
SOURCES CONSULTED

Books


Asche, Oscar. His Life, By Himself. London: Hurst and Blackett, 1929.


Newspapers and Magazines

Ireland

Clonmel Chronicle. Sept. 19, 1925.


Free Press (Wexford). June 20, 1925.


Irish Press (Dublin). Nov. 28, 1927.


Irish Independent (Dublin). Dec. 6, 9 and 16, 1927.


The Umpire (Belfast). June 5, 1898.

Great Britain

Birmingham Mail. April 18 and June 21, 1933.


Daily Sketch (London). April 8, 1925.


Dundee (Scotland) Courier and Advertiser. Feb. 28, 1939.


Manchester Guardian. April 25, 1933.


Observer (London). Nov. 5 and Dec. 27, 1933.


Sunday Express (London). March 22, 1925.


Yorkshire Evening News (Leeds). March 1, 1933.
United States


Australia


Special Materials

Manuscripts

de Bourca, Seamus. Two-page manuscript dealing with the O'Brien-Ireland Company. Pearce Street Library, Dublin.


Wellesley, Eugene. Daily appointment diaries kept by a member of the McMaster company, showing towns visited, plays performed, comments on actors' accommodations, and other details. In the possession of his widow, Muriel Wellesley, of Romsey, Hampshire, England.

Promptbook

Programs and Playbills


**King Lear.** Program from the Opera House (Cork). Sept. 1953. In the possession of Pauline Flanagan, Glen Rock, N. J.

**Pageant of St. Patrick.** Program of three-day pageant in Dublin, April 1954. In the possession of Pauline Flanagan.

Playbills from the Queen's Theatre, Great Brunswick Street, Dublin. 1914. Pearce Street Library, GA71:90752, Dublin.

Documents

From General Record Office, Somerset House, London:
- Anew McMaster, Birth Certificate
- Alice Maude McMaster, Death Certificate
- Anew McMaster and Marjorie Helen Willmore, Marriage Certificate


Letter-contract between Anew McMaster and Gervase Hughes, dated Feb. 2, 1933, for tour of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. In the possession of Christopher McMaster.

Recordings

