INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

ProQuest Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

UMI®
JESSICA TANDY: A TWENTIETH CENTURY ACTING CAREER

DISSERTATION

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

By

Tonia Krueger, M.A.

The Ohio State University
2002

Dissertation Committee:
Dr. Lesley K. Ferris, Adviser
Dr. Thomas Postlewait
Dr. Joy Reilly

Approved By:

Lesley K. Ferris
Adviser

Theatre Graduate Program

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
ABSTRACT

Jessica Tandy (1909-1994) is perhaps best known in the theatre world for her performance as Blanche in the 1947 premiere of Tennessee Williams’ *A Streetcar Named Desire*. For this role she won her first of three Tony Awards and a place forever in theatre history books. In the film world she is unique in that her career did not soar until she was in her 80s, when she became the oldest person in history to win an Academy Award for acting in the title role of *Driving Miss Daisy*.

Tandy made her first contributions to theatre on the London stage where she was among the best known and respected actresses of her generation, but World War II propelled her, like many other British performers, to America, where she remained the rest of her life, making substantial contributions not only to the Broadway premieres of key American playwrights but also to the development of regional theatre, such as the Guthrie Theatre. Star on all fronts, Tandy is one of the most significant actresses not only of her generation but of her century, and her career can be used as a touchstone for understanding the major movements in her field.

This study draws upon reviews and programs of numerous productions from the archive of the National Theatre for the Performing Arts in Great Britain located in Covent Garden, London, Tandy’s personal correspondence housed at the Library of Congress in Washington, D. C., and materials from Tandy’s private scrapbooks now located in the
Fairfield, Connecticut, home of Hume Cronyn. The dissertation examines three aspects of her career: 1) a basic chronology of events, 2) issues of ethnicity, age, and gender in relation to key moments, and 3) an account of theatrical figures and movements informing major phases in her career.
DEDICATION

To you my readers.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to Hume Cronyn for permission to examine the Tandy-Cronyn collection at the Library of Congress and for kindly welcoming me into his home for research on the Tandy scrapbooks.

Thanks to Candace Bothwell for copying much already published material from the scrapbooks, so that I could look at it at my leisure.

Thanks to Susan Cooper, for leading me to Jessica Tandy.

Thanks to Mayura Bisineer, for being ready with the words to the song in my heart whenever I forgot them.
VITA

November 20, 1970 ….. Born – Tucson, Arizona

1994 ...................... BA Theatre, Truman State University
(formerly Northeast Missouri State University)

1996 ...................... MA Communication/Theatre, Indiana State University

1997-Present ............ Graduate Teaching and Research Associate,
Presidential Fellowship, University Fellowship
The Ohio State University

PUBLICATIONS


FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Theatre
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Images</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Chapter One: Entering the Profession</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Chapter Two: Riding Success</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Chapter Three: Birth of an American</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Chapter Four: Broadway and Beyond</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Chapter Five: Film Star</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Epilogue</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Appendix 1: Ben Jonson's Eulogy to Shakespeare</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Appendix 2: Stage Roles</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Appendix 3: Film Roles</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Appendix 4: Radio Performances</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Appendix 5: Television Appearances</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

viii

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
## LIST OF IMAGES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jessica Tandy as Manuela with Joyce Bland as Fraulein von Bernberg in <em>Children in Uniform</em>, 1932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>John Gielgud as Hamlet and Jessica Tandy as Ophelia in <em>Hamlet</em>, 1934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jessica Tandy as Viola and/or Sebastian in <em>Twelfth Night</em>, 1937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>John Gielgud as Prospero and Jessica Tandy as Miranda in <em>The Tempest</em>, 1940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Thomas Hart Benton's <em>The Poker Night (from A Streetcar Named Desire)</em>, 1947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Jessica Tandy as Blanche in <em>A Streetcar Named Desire</em>, 1947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Jessica Tandy as Agnes and Hume Cronyn as Michael in <em>The Fourposter</em>, 1951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>George Grizzard as Hamlet, Ken Ruta as the Ghost, and Jessica Tandy as Gertrude in <em>Hamlet</em>, 1963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Playbill for <em>A Delicate Balance</em>. Jessica Tandy as Agnes, Rosemary Murphy as Claire, and Hume Cronyn as Tobias, 1966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Jessica Tandy as Eva in <em>Eve</em>, 1976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Jessica Tandy as Daisy Werthen and Morgan Freeman as Hoke Colburn in <em>Driving Miss Daisy</em>, 1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy at home, 1988</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
INTRODUCTION

When Jessica Tandy died from ovarian cancer in 1994 at the age of 85, nearly every newspaper in the English-speaking world published an obituary. In these obituaries Tandy was recognized for two major accomplishments: an Academy Award as Best Actress for the title role of *Driving Miss Daisy* in 1989 and a Tony Award as Best Actress for her performance as Blanche DuBois in the 1947 world premiere of Tennessee Williams’ Pulitzer Prize winning drama *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Several obituaries added that she had been married for more than 50 years to film and stage star Hume Cronyn, with whom she had acted, and a few mentioned her work in London theatre during the 1930s. None of the obituaries, however, did justice to the tremendous scope of Tandy’s career, which crossed seven decades, three countries, and several media. At her death much of her story remained in the shadows. It is therefore time for a major study of her lengthy, complex career, which reveals much about the history of British and American theatre in the twentieth century.

**Professional Career**

Few historians are aware that in addition to her American success Tandy made her first contributions to theatre on the London stage, eventually landing some key roles in Shakespearean productions at the Old Vic in the 1930s. Jessica Tandy played Viola and Sebastian in Tyrone Guthrie’s production of *Twelfth Night* and Princess Katherine to
Laurence Olivier's first Henry V. She was the second Ophelia to play opposite Sir John Gielgud's historic Hamlet, the first Miranda to his Prospero, and she was Cordelia opposite his 1940 King Lear.

Likewise few know of her participation in the development of regional theatre in the United States. Under the direction of Tyrone Guthrie, a pioneer in that movement and with whom she had acted in London three decades before, Tandy performed in the first and third seasons of the groundbreaking regional theatre in Minneapolis, the Guthrie, in 1963 and 1965. Tandy also contributed to the development of numerous new works by major playwrights. In addition to Blanche DuBois in Williams' historic work, Tandy played Jacqueline in Terence Rattigan's first popular piece, French Without Tears in 1936; she premiered as Agnes in Edward Albee's A Delicate Balance in 1966; as The Wife in his All Over in 1971; and she premiered as “Mouth” in Samuel Beckett's austere and powerful play, Not I,1 in 1972.

Blanche DuBois was not the only role for which Tandy received a Tony Award as Best Actress. She won for her role as Fonsia Dorsey in Pulitzer Prize-winning drama The Gin Game in 1978, and she acquired yet another Tony as Annie Nations in Foxfire in 1983, making her one of only five actresses in history to receive more than two of these awards.2 In addition to all of these achievements, she received numerous Obie, Emmy, lifetime achievement, and other awards for her outstanding work as a performer.

---

1 Billie Whitelaw, the well-known interpreter of Beckett, did not play this role until later.
2 The other four are Julie Harris with five, Zoe Caldwell (Tandy's friend) with four, and Irene Worth and Shirley Booth with three apiece.
Previous Scholarship

To date, only two significant studies have been published on Tandy’s career: a biobibliography (Barranger 1991) published three years prior to Tandy’s death and an hour-long television feature (Lifetime). Apart from those works and the numerous obituaries previously mentioned, two articles discuss her portrayal of Blanche in comparison with those of other performers (Barranger 1989; Spector), several interviews with Tandy briefly discuss aspects of her life and career, and numerous theatre and film reviews provide the responses of professional critics to her performances. Almost nothing has been written about her London theatre career, and none of these publications taps the extensive archival material available at the National Museum for the Performing Arts in Great Britain, commonly known as the Theatre Museum, and the Library of Congress in the United States.

Research Sources

Following a thorough review of published material, including play and film reviews, scripts, autobiographies, interviews, and films, I have spent numerous additional hours doing archival research. Having been granted unprecedented access by Hume Cronyn himself to the Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy collection housed at the Library of Congress, I have had the unique opportunity to mine the 98,000 documents and photos it contains. I have spent several weeks transcribing Tandy’s personal correspondence with her family and colleagues and examining the wealth of other pertinent materials this collection provides.
In addition to my research at the Library of Congress I have thoroughly examined the records at the Theatre Museum in London for more than 40 productions in which Tandy was involved during her early career. Finally, Hume Cronyn has welcomed me to his home in Connecticut, where in December 2000 I sat at his coffee table and examined the private scrapbooks Tandy herself compiled on her career.

Research Methods

My approach to Tandy’s career is biographical narrative. This is the first substantial narrative of Tandy’s career, beginning with her training at the Ben Greet Academy of Acting in the early 1920s and concluding with her 1994 film roles in Deepa Mehta’s Camilla and Robert Benton’s Nobody’s Fool. My biography examines not only Tandy’s famous roles but also the various and sometimes difficult choices she made in the course of her career and the forces influencing those decisions.

The narrative of my dissertation falls into three broad time periods reflecting key phases of Tandy’s work: first, her career in London as one of the significant stars of her generation; second, her transplantation to the United States and gradual establishment as a major stage actress there; and finally her rise to film stardom in her late 70s and early 80s. These sections break further into five chapters highlighting various issues which arose during each phase of her career, including key matters of gender, ethnicity, and age.

Each chapter addresses three major issues. The first is theatre history. This is a basic account of the events in Tandy’s career: which roles Tandy played, where and with whom, and how audiences and critics received these performances. The second is contextualization: How do these particular events reach into the broader movements of
theatre and film, from the popularization of Shakespeare to the trans-Atlantic
displacement of British performers during World War II? Tandy’s career reflects many
of the developments in mainstream 20th-century British and American theatre and film
performance and can in many ways serve as a touchstone for examining those issues.

The third issue is cultural analysis, examining issues of gender, ethnicity, and age
in relation to Tandy’s career. Throughout her career and life, Tandy placed herself at the
boundary between numerous dichotomies—as a member of the “poor gentility” in her
early career, as a “naturalized” citizen of the United States, as a single mother in her early
30s, as a professional woman with a family when this was uncommon, and as a film star
in her early 80s.

Each of my five chapters is structured to highlight the major issues affecting a
portion of Tandy’s career. The development of each chapter is loosely chronological for
easy comprehension, but its over all focus varies from that of the others. My first chapter
lays forth the seeds of the various venues in which Tandy was to perform during her life.
Some of these, such as performances in the arts clubs active throughout London in the
20s and 30s, were curtailed during the later development of her career, while others, such
as her pursuit of Broadway, led to flourishing developments. The second chapter follows
the choices Tandy made once she had reached her first plateau of success in 1932 and had
greater freedom to select the material she wished to perform. In this portion of her
career, while she continued to pursue more commercial endeavors for pragmatic reasons,
she was particularly invested in the performance of Shakespeare, and her performance as
Ophelia in John Gielgud’s *Hamlet* finds emphasis in this chapter. The third chapter takes
its starting point Tandy’s transplantation to the United States and builds to her triumphant performance in the premiere of Tennessee Williams’ *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Chapter Four attends to two key movements in Tandy’s life, her longtime collaboration with her husband Hume Cronyn and her active contribution to the resident repertory theatre in the United States and Canada. These movements come together in her 1982 performance as Annie Nations in *Foxfire*, for which she received her third Tony Award. This play written by and performed with her husband received its first performances not on Broadway but at regional theatres such as the Guthrie Theatre and the Stratford Shakespeare Festival. Chapter Four is organized around the locations in which Tandy performed, as she extended herself beyond Broadway.

Because Tandy is unusual in the film world in that she did not become a star until she was in her late 70s and early 80s, I retain the narrative of her film career for my final chapter, focusing there upon the journey which led her to become the oldest living actor to receive an Academy Award for Best Actress and the oldest performer to be nominated for an Academy Award, for her roles in *Driving Miss Daisy* and *Fried Green Tomatoes*. This chapter briefly returns to the 1930s and her first film role when she had yet to make her name in any medium. It then quickly progresses to the period in her life in which performing on film was primary. In this dissertation I discuss her television career only briefly, as her performances there for the most part merely supplemented or reflected her work on stage and film. Television was not a medium in which Tandy invested; for the
most part it merely supplemented her income. Apart from her participation in the series *The Marriage* (1954-1955), which I do address, Tandy’s early performances on television were primarily in stage plays adapted for that medium.

Of the genre of biography, my narrative falls into the category of “professional biography.” The life story I tell emphasizes Tandy’s career. Interests and events of great significance to Tandy may receive little or no attention. Tandy loved to cook and collected recipes from every source possible throughout her life. She was always eager to share her culinary discoveries with other women. Tandy enjoyed doing needlepoint during her spare time, and she spent many hours working on the decoration of her home and garden. In London Tandy enjoyed riding horses. On the island she shared with Hume Cronyn in the Bahamas, Tandy enjoyed snorkeling. She had a passion for the wild. In addition to these hobbies, she had a full and eventful relationship with her family—her mother, her two brothers, and her three children. Because these aspects of her life have little space in this narrative, it cannot aspire to be a full portrayal of the complete woman Tandy was. My own “performance” of Tandy is necessarily incomplete, for this is the biography of Jessica Tandy the actress, rather than of Jessie Tandy, or Jessie Hawkins, or Jessie Cronyn as she was known in her private life. As Alan J. Pakula said of Tandy during the memorial service for her at the Shubert Theatre on November 22, 1994, “One can explore the endlessly diverse women she inhabited on stage and in film without ever penetrating who Jessie was in life” (Pakula 1994: n. p.). Yet Tandy’s professional life was full, and it was a significant source of identity or sense of self for her.
As with any dichotomy, that between private and professional is ultimately an arbitrary and often slippery division. In order to do justice to Tandy's career as an actress, I do examine certain times in which the private directly impacted the professional. Very often personal issues such as her marriages to Jack Hawkins and later Hume Cronyn shaped the choices Tandy made about material, venues, or collaborators. Pregnancy and the welfare of her children led her to choices she may not have made otherwise, as when she left England with her daughter Susan during World War II. Where the private must be addressed to understand the professional, where Jessie and Jessica are the same, I do address those issues.

It is time Tandy's career receives the study it merits, and I am grateful to have Hume Cronyn's full support for my project. It is he who granted me access to the collection at the Library of Congress, he who has supplied me with the opportunity to examine Tandy's scrapbooks in his home, and he who inscribed my copy of his memoir with the words, "For Tonia who is becoming an expert on Jessica—good luck with your M.S. [manuscript]."
CHAPTER 1

ENTERING THE PROFESSION

Short runs at lesser-known theatres, tours across Britain, and brief stints in the United States mark Tandy’s early career, which was similar to those of many English actresses of the 1920s and 1930s. Key moments in this portion of her life include her training at the Ben Greet Academy of Acting; her numerous Arts Club performances; her early affiliation with the Birmingham Repertory Theatre; her debut as a performer in radio drama; her adoption of a stage name at the behest of Lee Shubert on her first American tour; her continued training in repertory at the Cambridge Festival Theatre; and her first international triumph in the first English adaptation of Christa Winsloe’s *Mädchen in Uniform*, the story of a schoolgirl whose attachment to one of her female teachers leads to scandal in a regimented Prussian boarding school.

My account cannot reflect the hours Tandy spent in these early years searching for work. It cannot reflect the hardships she faced in persuading people to consider her for roles, in supplying her own costumes from almost no money for the roles she did play, in making ends meet when there was no work bringing in an income. My narrative cannot demonstrate the time Tandy spent laboring at her vocation off the stage and in rehearsal, away from the audiences for whom she labored, metaphorically and literally.
knocking upon doors in the hope they would lead her to the path she wanted to tread. At the beginning of her career, as Tandy recalled in 1993 in an interview with Paula Zahn for *CBS This Morning*, she could not control the material available for her to perform. "Anything that came along, whether I thought I would be right for it, whether I hated the material, whatever it was, I would do it, and very often it led, strangely enough, to something which would be another open door for me" (Zahn 28 Jan 1993). From the beginning Tandy understood that to be an actor demanded more than standing upon a stage before an audience, and it is this additional work—on the street, over dinner, in the bathtub, that from the beginning expressed her character and laid the foundation for her success. In many ways this chapter tells a story about knocking upon doors, while the following chapter will illustrate where those doors led.
Professional Debut

When Jessica Tandy made her professional acting debut in November 1927, it was in a tiny experimental theatre in Cambridge Circus near the West End in London. A club equipped as a theatre where a range of low-budget plays were produced every three weeks for an audience of subscribing members, Playroom Six endeavored to fill a gap in the commercial theatre of London by focusing on the production of new plays by unknown writers and noteworthy foreign plays. More than 60 years later, Tandy recalled the theatre where she made her first professional performance. “It was a little theater in London, in the West End, but off-off-Shaftesbury Avenue. In fact, it was an upstairs room. It was called Playroom Six, and I think it held about fifty people in the audience” (Bryer and Davison 2001: 23). Like many of the plays at the tiny theatre, The Manderson Girls by Bertha N. Graham was a first showing of a new work. While we have forgotten play and playwright since this first showing, we have come to remember one of its lead actors as a key player in the history of English speaking theatre.

Tandy’s debut performance was as a confident, fashionable, fun-loving young flapper named Sara Manderson. Sara and her more serious and sincere cousin Clara (the other Girl of the play’s title) each falls in love with a man who is her polar opposite, Sara with an earnest ascetic, and Clara with a light-hearted bon vivant. For her acting Tandy was paid two pounds a week from which she was expected to supply her own costumes, in this production five changes of stylish Parisian clothing which Tandy constructed.
herself (*New York Herald Tribune* 11 Jan 1939). While Tandy was to play many roles that would echo Sara Manderson, she would soon move beyond the humble scope of *The Manderson Girls*.

Earlier that spring another young actress had made her London debut at Playroom Six.3 A year older than Tandy, Peggy Ashcroft paralleled her both in life and career, seeming to be always one step ahead or behind her during the 1920s and 1930s until Tandy crossed the Atlantic Ocean for keeps. Ashcroft, whose father died in World War I when she was only eleven,4 preceded Tandy in her debut at Playroom Six, in her season at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, and in her first marriage. She took up the roles of Ophelia and Miranda after Tandy had left them. The two actresses with so many similarities in life, work, and ambition never acted together. When they became acquainted, however, later in the thirties, the two became both friends and rivals, often vying for the same roles. Ashcroft’s actions and words became a favorite reminiscence of Tandy’s as she passed into her seventies, and in interviews she would often return to the time the two women were close associates.

**Initial Training**

Jessie Alice Tandy was born on June 7, 1909, in Upper Clapton, London, to Harry Tandy and Jessie Helen Horspool Tandy. Her father, a solicitor, died of cancer when Jessie was only twelve years old. Subsequently her brothers, particularly Tully (Edward) to whom she was to remain close all her life, became her champions and guides. Her

---

3 In May of 1927, Peggy Ashcroft made her London debut at Playroom Six in *One Day More* (*Kecwn 17*).
4 Tandy’s father died of cancer when she was twelve, so both girls spent became fatherless in their teens. While Ashcroft had one older brother, Tandy had two who provided the primary male influence on her teen life.
mother, for whom she was named, earned a living for the family as headmistress to a school for retarded children.\(^5\) Mrs. Tandy also took on clerical work and taught evening classes for adults; the need for money to support her family took the mother away from home much of the time. Her daughter Jessie took Shakespeare classes and acting classes to keep her evenings occupied. Tandy attended the Dame Alice Owens School for Girls, but she missed a year of school because of a bout with tuberculosis (Dodd 1955: 9).

 Eventually Jessie determined that she wanted to become a professional actress, and her mother acceded. “My mother, being ambitious for all of us, endorsed the stage as a dignified way for me out of our bleak life. It sounds terribly snobbish, but she raised us to be intellectually above our neighbors. She read to us, took us to plays, the pantomime, museums. I didn’t date, ever. By the time I was in acting courses, both of my brothers had gotten scholarships to Oxford” (White 1998: 53), she later said.

 While Tandy was a still a small child her brothers would put on informal theatricals in their home on Sundays. Her eldest brother Michael directed their original one-act plays, and Tully and Jessie performed. “I was a graceless lump,” she once recalled of those times. “My brothers would always say, ‘Oh Mummy, do we really have to have her in it?’” (Berger 1994: A1). Years later she reminisced about this experience to her daughter Tandy Cronyn. One Sunday at the age of nine Jessie was required to play “Princess Gwendoline of Perania (as pretty as they make ‘em) in a musical called A Maiden of Dreams. Tandy Cronyn in turn recalled her mother’s parody of herself as a miscast ugly duckling child: “She did a quick imitation of herself: stoop shouldered, woebegone expression on her face, with large, red hands dangling self-consciously in

\(^5\) Berger Road School, London.
front of her" (Tandy Cronyn 1994: n. p.). Despite her awkwardness as a child actor with her brothers, the experience led Jessie Tandy to a great love for the theatre, and once she had chosen it for her vocation, she never looked back.

At age thirteen or fourteen, Tandy matriculated for a four-year course of study at the Ben Greet Academy of Acting, where the emphasis in training was on Shakespeare. The family was far from wealthy, and it was a challenge to send Jessie to the school. At the school she was self-conscious about her financial circumstances. In her early seventies she recalled that time: "When I was in my teens and going home in a cab with friends after my acting classes, I’d tell the driver where I lived and he wouldn’t even know where that was, which is highly uncommon for a London cabby. I was so mortified" (White 1998: 52). Despite her self-consciousness and the financial challenge, Tandy was determined to continue her classes. In attending the school Jessie followed after some of the best-known actors in London, including Sybil Thorndike, Edith Wynne Matthison, and Mrs. Patrick Campbell, all alumni of the program, and Tandy hoped she too would find the professional success they had.

Sir Philip Ben Greet (1857-1936), the founder of the Academy, had helped to shape the course of Shakespearean performance in twentieth century England through two key associations: The Old Vic, where he was artistic director from 1914 to 1918, and the Open Air Theatre at Regent’s Park, where he served as Master of the Greensward from 1933 to 1935. Both theatres focused on offering Shakespearean productions at popular prices, and both eventually played an important part in Tandy’s career.

---

6 Different sources point to different ages.
7 In Yes, My Darling Daughter (1937), Tandy would later act with Sybil Thorndike.

14
Particularly during their golden age in the 1930s, the two theatres created a year-round venue for Shakespearean performance in London, where many of the most respected and best known theatre artists could hone their classical skills. In attending the Ben Greet Academy, consciously or not Tandy was allying herself with the values of such artists as Lilian Baylis⁸ and Robert Atkins,⁹ both close associates of Greet's, who placed reverence for the classics and public accessibility above commercial profit in theatre.

At the Old Vic, Ben Greet established in four short years, from 1914 until 1918, the viability of devotion to Shakespeare. After the theatre’s manager Lilian Baylis resolved to make the Old Vic’s mission Shakespearean performance, Greet was the second managing director she hired. This was “a momentous turning point in the Theatre’s history,” without which, George Rowell believes, Shakespeare at the Old Vic would have landed “on the scrapheap of good intentions” (Rowell 1993: 97). Thus, in the midst of World War I, Greet pulled success out of the barest of furnishings and preparation, enabling the Vic’s future abiding reputation for greatness.

The Royal Botanical Gardens in Regent’s Park had seen open-air productions of Shakespeare at the turn of the century through the efforts of Ben Greet’s Woodland Players. When in 1933 a permanent theatre was built there, Ben Greet assisted in its establishment as Master of the Greensward until 1935 (Mander & Mitchenson 1975: 267). With the establishment of a permanent summer theatre in London devoted to

---

⁸ Lilian Baylis (1874-1937) was manager of the Old Vic Theatre from 1912 until her death; her vision of its mission based on a dream she had one night led to that theatre’s primary affiliation with plays by Shakespeare (Rowell 1993: 95).
⁹ Robert Atkins was managing director at the Old Vic at the time Tandy attended the Academy and later joined Greet in founding the Open Air Theatre.
Shakespeare in addition to the offerings of the Old Vic, London had access to his plays year-round. Greet’s lifelong devotion to the Bard endowed London with a rich legacy.

When Tandy matriculated into the Ben Greet Academy of Acting, the school had been in existence for three decades and needed little direct supervision from Greet. Indeed in 1924, which was likely her first year there, Greet was completely absent from the school, having traveled to Paris to present English plays to the French (Isaac 1964: xix). By the time Tandy attended, Greet had only occasional contact with the school that bore his name, but his name was forever connected to hers through her alma mater. The two certainly became acquainted a decade later during their seasons together at the Open Air Theatre.

There is, however, some confusion among sources as to the precise years Tandy attended the Academy. Most chronologies place her first year there in 1924 when she would have been 15, but a program for a “Students’ Performance” sponsored by the Academy would place her there a year earlier (Tandy file, Theatre Museum). At the Academy Tandy was taught acting by working professional actors, and each provided a different approach to the art of acting. In an interview with David Black when Tandy was in her 70s, she described her training:

My training was to go to a theater school in London where the teachers were all working actors. All of them were, and they were all different. We worked very differently in those days. We started off by doing scenes as well as the ordinary vocal training and so forth. I understand that now you don’t ever do a scene until your second year. I would find that very difficult. One thing which was very important to me was I learned that there were many ways of going about it, because all the people who taught us had a different approach. We also did the classics. We got on with our Shakespeare. That’s very good training. If you can do that, you can do other things (Black 1993: 134).
Seeing that there were many possible approaches to character and scene work, each equally valid, Tandy was more prepared to work with a variety of actors. Her immediate exposure to scene work provided her with a basic understanding of the task required of an actor. In addition to the need to develop characterization according to her own independent method, she realized she must also learn to attend to the approach of her acting partners. Throughout her life Tandy valued acting as a shared endeavor requiring effective teamwork, never merely a solo performance. Late in life she remarked, “I think every actor has to find his way to the result, and as long as you all end up speaking to each other, that’s just fine” (Bryer and Davison 2001: 24). In addition to the importance of listening to partners and developing a personalized approach to characterization, Tandy’s work with Shakespearean texts at the Academy established in her an intense admiration for the classics and an eagerness to perform them.

Tandy’s first recorded public performance took place on Wednesday, March 28, 1923, at the Bijou Theatre in the Strand, a small theatre fitted atop the building where the school was housed (Isaac 1964: 234). At 2:30 p.m. students of the Ben Greet Academy for Acting gathered to perform scenes from The Merchant of Venice, poems in honor of the memory of William Shakespeare; a dance; and the first act of a play by Gertrude Jennings called The Young Person in Pink. That afternoon a thirteen-year-old Jessie Tandy performed Ben Jonson’s Eulogy that prefaces Shakespeare’s First Folio, published seven years after Shakespeare’s death.10

The applause! delight! the wonder of our Stage!  
My Shakespeare, rise; I will not lodge thee by

---

10 See Appendix 1 for the Eulogy’s text.
Chaucer, or Spenser, or bid Beaumont lie
A little further, to make thee a room:
Thou art a Monument, without a tomb,
And art alive still, while thy Book doth live,
And we have wits to read, and praise to give.

There is no record of audience numbers or reception for the performances—its only concrete reminder is the program in the Tandy file at London’s Theatre Museum—but the spirit of the words young Tandy spoke that first time on a stage lingered throughout the future decades of her career. Whether she was acting in the West End, on Broadway, or on film, Tandy never hesitated to exchange the likelihood of commercial or popular success for an opportunity to play a role in one of the Bard’s productions.11

Even before she attended the Academy, she had a tremendous appreciation for the works of Shakespeare, and her years at the Academy solidified her early enthusiasm. When she was a child, she would often attend theatre with her family, and her favorite productions to see were Shakespearean. She said, “Almost everyone would say, ‘Oh, God, it’s Shakespeare this afternoon.’ To me it was heaven” (Berger 1994: Al). For Tandy, Shakespeare was “Not of an age, but for all time!” His plays were always worth performing and, according to Ben Jonson, lifted the actor’s work to that of a living monument. The Old Vic and the Open Air Theatre were not the only places Sir Philip Ben Greet’s devotion to Shakespeare left a firm legacy.

11 Another program, dated Wednesday 16 July, 1924, records a second Tandy performance at the Academy. In this performance she played a scene from Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night with a girl named Freda Kelly (Lifetime 1999). This scene foreshadowed the numerous productions of that play in which Tandy would appear in the future.
A year later it is likely that Tandy had her first experience of participating in a production in the West End. A “J. Tandy” performed as an extra in the Repertory Players’ single performance of *Judas Iscariot* featuring Frank Vosper in the lead role of Simon Iscariot on November 23, 1924, at the Scala. This was the premiere production of a new play by E. Temple Thurston sponsored by a theatre club specializing in Sunday performances of classics and new plays. A schoolmate of Tandy’s from the Bijoux Theatre performance, Doris Baxter (billed as “D. Baxter”), and a future associate Rita Johns kept her company in that function (Wearing: 549). Neither this nor her earlier performance finds any mention in Tandy’s accounts of her career, but further than *The Manderson Girls* these performances foreshadowed the values upon which her future decisions were often founded: a reverence for new plays and the classics (especially Shakespeare) and a preference for artistic excellence over commercial success.

**Radio**

Three years after Jessie’s schoolgirl performances, during the year following *The Manderson Girls*, there is no record of Tandy’s stage performances. Her scrapbooks refer to a puppet version of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* under the direction of the

---

12 This was, however, not a professional production. It was a Sunday performance by a club, which went unpaid.
13 Frank Vosper was a well-known actor with whom Tandy was to appear again in the future on more equal terms at the Old Vic.
14 Rita Johns produced the Cambridge Festival Theatre season in which Tandy performed.
15 It is through connecting the two together that they may be attributed to Tandy. The Theatre Museum includes the “Student Performance” program in its personal file on Jessica Tandy, and its date is near enough to her recorded attendance at the school for it to have been correctly placed there. J. P. Wearing, in his compendium of performances of the London stage, speculates that J. Tandy of *Judas Iscariot* may be Jessica Tandy, as there are no other known actors with the surname Tandy and first initial “J.,” even though she was only 14 years old at the time. Because D[oris] Baxter appears on both programs and they are very near each other in time, I have been able to link the two together.
16 *The Manderson Girls* received only mediocre reviews, although Tandy’s performance in it was praised.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
American Ellen Van Volkenberg\textsuperscript{17} at the Arts Theatre, another experimental theatre to which she would return often, even after she had become a major star on the London stage; however those records make no mention of which role she may have played.\textsuperscript{18} At this time she also made her debut in radio, a medium she also was to return to often and with enthusiasm, in the role of Lala in \textit{Rampa}.

In 1922 when the BBC began its programmed broadcasting, four men were primarily responsible for its content: the General Manager J. C. W. Reith, and his assistants Arthur Burrows, Stanton Jeffries, and Cecil A. Lewis. The third of these assistants believed radio to be an apt venue for drama, and through his initiative drama became a regular part of the BBC’s programming. Consequently with the barest previous experience of theatre Cecil Lewis became Director of Drama at England’s first station (Lewis 1993: 59). According to Val Gielgud, who worked with Lewis at the station from 1928, “I have it on the considerable authority of Lord Reith himself that it is to Cecil Lewis that primary credit should be given for the first impulse towards the broadcasting of Drama” (Val Gielgud 1957: 18-19). In the course of his work, Lewis, who eventually won an Oscar for his skill at film adaptation,\textsuperscript{19} began to translate plays for the radio medium. Among these was Max Mohr’s \textit{Rampa}, the story of a man who comes to prefer the company of animals to that of humans. Jessie Tandy played the role of compassionate wife to a callous showman who exhibits the animal-lover at the circus.

\textsuperscript{17} Van Volkenberg was an American actress manager who, with her British husband Maurice Browne, shaped the Little Theatre movement in the United States through work at the Chicago Little Theatre, which they founded in 1912.

\textsuperscript{18} A contract in the Ellen Van Volkenberg collection at the University of Michigan library states that Tandy was to be paid five pounds for her labor but makes no mention of her roles.

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Pygmalion} (1938), film adaptation of George Bernard Shaw’s \textit{Pygmalion}. 

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Both Lewis and The Boston Christian Science Monitor admired Tandy's performance. The Monitor applauded Tandy's skills from across the seas, while Cecil Lewis observed them nearer at hand. The publication declared, "Perhaps the most touching performance was the Lala of Jessie Tandy . . . Jessie Tandy's portrayal was really startling, giving her hearers a revelation of the possibilities of radio acting" (10 Apr 1928). Lewis struck up a correspondence with Tandy and became for a time one of her mentors. He sent her words of encouragement when her heart was broken during the 1928 tour of Yellow Sands, and he wrote the role of Alice in the radio version of Through the Looking Glass with her skills in mind. Like most who came into contact with Tandy while she was still relatively unknown, Lewis expressed his certainty that she would be a success in her work. He admonished her to be diligent: "Make a career, my dear, that's the most important thing in life & you can do it." (Cecil Lewis to Jessica Tandy. Postcard 1 Aug 1928. Library of Congress, Container 326, Folder 4). She took him at his word.

**Repertory and Tour**

In 1928 Jessie Tandy returned from her puppeteering and broadcasting to the stage, moving to Birmingham to become a principal player with the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, a well-known regional theatre with connections in London. She arrived in Birmingham through the agency of her brother Michael, who "had gained a reputation as an actor in university theatricals and after graduation was offered a professional engagement with the Birmingham Repertory Theatre by Barry Jackson"
Michael turned down this offer in order to move into a career of diplomacy, but he guided Walter Peacock, Jackson’s casting director, to his younger sister Jessie.

Sir Barry Jackson (1879-1961), son of a wealthy Birmingham merchant, developed a passion for theatre at a young age and invested the rest of his life and his considerable fortune in it. A force in twentieth century English theatre on five fronts, three of which directly involved Jessie Tandy early in her career, Jackson made an indelible contribution to the composition and shape of both professional theatre in England and of the professional careers of many of its artists.

The five fronts to which Jackson contributed his time, energy, and fortunes began with a professional repertory theatre in his hometown. Built in 1913, the intimate theatre building housed 464 audience members who sat in a steeply raked house. There many of England’s finest actors found their first professional roles in noncommercial productions. Peggy Ashcroft, Ralph Richardson, Edith Evans, Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies, Margaret Leighton, Laurence Olivier, and Paul Scofield are only a few of the actors first discovered and trained at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre.

As the Repertory Theatre increased in virtuosity and popularity, Jackson began to initiate tours throughout the English provinces for his more successful productions, and

---

20 A version of this event, based upon a 1934 interview with Tandy, is also described by Dorothy Drake: “It was through her brothers really that Jessica Tandy’s love of the theatre came about; as children, they all used to act little plays, and when they went up to Oxford, the O.U.D.S. [Oxford University Dramatic Society] proved an outlet for their enthusiasm. As they grew older, however, they changed their minds, and when an opportunity arose for them to go upon the stage, they had both decided on other professions, but considerately they thought about their young sister, who was very keen, and urged her case. She got a hearing, and after a period of study, joined the Birmingham Repertory Company” (Drake 1934).

21 An actor and agent, Walter Peacock assisted many key English theatre artists, including Tandy, Emlyn Williams, and Laurence Olivier, in establishing their professional careers in the 1920s and 1930s.
these tours became the second front on which he, through his company, influenced the composition and sensibility of theatre in England. On the third front he also financed the leasing of various West End theatres, where Londoners could see productions of more successful Birmingham fare. Upon the success of his West End ventures, Jackson also began to try out new productions there, transferring them to Birmingham if they met with sufficient acclaim. Tandy acted for Jackson in Birmingham, on tour, and in the West End, but she never participated in the final two of his endeavors, the Malvern Festival, which he founded in 1928, and the Stratford Memorial Theatre, which he directed from 1945-1948, years after Tandy had left England to settle in the United States.

At the time Tandy joined the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in 1928 the company had been in operation for two decades and was at the height of its reputation and productivity. Jackson’s energies were currently focused on the creation of the Malvern Festival and on his developing London endeavors, and he may never have encountered the young actress. But despite the lack of personal connection, Jackson like Ben Greet left an indelible mark upon her, as he had created a venue where she could find her most rigorous professional training and her first professional success. Tandy always acknowledged the importance of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in enabling her to become the actress she did.

22 The Malvern Festival is an annual summer theatre festival established by Jackson at Malvern, Worcestershire. During Jackson’s management it often served as a stepping stone for productions moving from Birmingham to London. Although Jackson ceased his connection with the Festival in 1937, it continues. During the past 20 years its emphasis has shifted from drama to music.

23 The Stratford Memorial Theatre later became the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1960 under the direction of Sir Peter Hall. Jackson paved the way for the RSC when the theatre was only seasonal by inviting such artists as Peter Brook and Paul Scoffield to work there.
Tandy joined the season near its close. Her contemporaries Laurence Olivier and Peggy Ashcroft, both of whom had joined the company earlier in the season, had by that time returned to London, but Tandy would encounter them later during her seasons at the Old Vic. Tandy’s first production with the Repertory was a strange little piece set in a Welsh village. In Richard Hughes’ *A Comedy of Good and Evil* Tandy played an appealing young demon or fairy (the play draws upon both Christian and pagan folklore) who wreaks havoc in the home of a kindly reverend and his wife. Tandy later called the piece “one of the theater’s best plays” (Smith 1956: n. p.). The *Birmingham Post* said of her performance in this Christian fairy tale, “Miss Jessie Tandy, who plays the Child, has those very rare qualities which make the part, as they say, convincing. The Devil who came to Baudelaire in the shape of a beautiful woman is not so disquieting as this Devil who comes in the form of an innocent child. Miss Tandy, a young actress of considerable accomplishment, made it all so natural, so matter-of-fact, so credible. Her emotional moments were quite exciting too” (*Birmingham Post* April 30, 1928). Other notices in Birmingham papers pointed to her assurance, subtlety, and accomplishment, all of which suggested a great future for the young actress.

Notices for the revival of J. M. Barrie’s *Alice Sit-by-the-Fire*, the final production of Birmingham’s season in which Tandy played only a minor role, were likewise laudatory. Following the close of the season in Birmingham, Tandy embarked on her first tour, in a play which had its first success at one of Jackson’s West End ventures.
Eden and Adelaide Phillpotts'24 *Yellow Sands*, a domestic tale in which a spinster aunt ironically bequeaths her estate to her communist nephew, featured Tandy as the servant girl who wins the heart of the communist and persuades him to keep a bit of his inherited capital to build a home with her. Tandy kept no notices for her performances on tour;25 itinerancy and her first heartbreak26 discouraged her from retaining any souvenirs.

When Jessie returned to London from tour, she retreated to the country home of Cecil Lewis’ mother in December 1928, where she rehearsed his latest radio play, *Through the Looking Glass*. This aired on Friday December 21, 1928. “Jessie Tandy’s first words assured us that here was a real live Alice, straight from the pages of Carroll and Tenniel,” said *The Observer* the following Sunday (*The Observer* 23 Dec 1928). Cecil Lewis was delighted with her performance and immediately embarked upon writing a stage version of the play for her to star in, but unfortunately this was never produced.

After her work on *Through the Looking Glass*, Tandy remained in London under the sponsorship of Sir Barry Jackson through his association with the Court Theatre (Wearing 29: 1100). In 1922 Jackson had established a policy of bringing successful productions from Birmingham to London’s West End, and in 1925 he had begun premiering plays in London as well as transferring them from Birmingham. Actors such as Ralph Richardson, Edith Evans, and Laurence Olivier who had succeeded in Birmingham often found their first London success through Jackson’s London

---

24 A father-daughter team of playwrights who reached modest success through Barry Jackson’s patronage in the 1920s and 1930s. *A Farmer’s Wife*, perhaps their best-known comedy, ran at the Court Theatre in the West End for more than three years.


26 A lengthy commiserative letter to her from Cecil Lewis (October 13, 1928) is the only clue about this heartbreak. Evidently it was severe. It seems to have been a gentleman from the touring company, but Tandy evidently did not confide his name even to Mr. Lewis.
productions and more particularly the agency of his casting director Walter Peacock. Just a year before Tandy performed at the Court, in 1928 Jackson had brought Laurence Olivier and Ralph Richardson to that theatre in a modern-dress production of *Taming of the Shrew* (Bishop 1933: 90).

A satire criticizing the causes and prices of war, *The Rumour* by C. K. Munro was the first of numerous plays dealing with those themes to appear in Tandy’s career, reflecting the spirit of the decades between the two World Wars. The play takes place in a fictional country that has colonized another with the assistance of the English government. An English girl falls in love with one of the colonized subjects, and congregates with him and his friends in solidarity for their plight. While at one of their meetings, she is accidentally and tragically killed in a raid by the colonizing government. The story of her death, the rumor of the title, is utterly distorted. It is used to mislead the English into believing in the savagery of the colonized people. In the 1929 Court Theatre production of this play, Tandy’s role as Lena Jackson, the English girl whose accidental death rallies the English to war through mistaken propaganda, brought her no mention by reviewers, but it was a step toward greater recognition as a professional on the London stage.

---

27 Her participation in *The Rumour* also foreshadowed one of the major places she would develop her skills and recognition as a performer. The play had been given one of its few previous productions at the Cambridge Festival Theatre, a theatre where Tandy received her most rigorous training following her experience with the Birmingham Repertory Theatre.

28 The character appears in only two scenes.
In addition to the expanded opportunity for experiment that radio provided actors in the 1920s and 1930s, another venue provided them with further opportunity for challenge. Between World War I and World War II numerous club theatres sprang up throughout London. As clubs these theatres fell outside the censorship of the Lord Chamberlain’s office and offered an opportunity for Londoners to see performances of banned plays as well as experimental works. Club performances generally occurred as afternoon matinees or on Sunday evenings in order to avoid competition with commercial theatre. Many professional actors used club theatres to expand the variety of their work during a long run or to keep their skills honed when out of work. Margaret Webster, who acted with Jessica Tandy and John Gielgud at the Arts Theatre in *Musical Chairs*, a club theatre production directed by Theodore Komisarjevsky, which went on for a long run in the West End, recalled the club theatres as some of the finest training grounds for the outstanding actors who found their start in early twentieth century London:

But there is still nothing to compare with the variety and extent of pay-as-you-go training resources available to young actors in England in the Twenties and Thirties. The innumerable Sunday nights, the special matinees, the little do-it-yourself shows, Ben Greet, the Macdona Players, even the Old Vic in its 1930 format, all such workshops in which I and my generation forged the tools of our trade have ceased to exist (Webster 1969: 351-2).

Tandy actively partook of the training club theatres offered her throughout her years in

---

29 At that time married to Peggy Ashcroft, “Komis” as he was fondly known was a well-known Russian director, designer, and theorist. He had headed his sister Vera’s theatre following Meyerhold’s 1908 dismissal, and he had produced numerous experimental productions in the late 1910s at the Bolshoi Theatre. In 1919 he immigrated to London, where he remained through his death in 1954.
London. She began her work in theatre as an extra in a Repertory Players production, and she made her professional debut at Playroom Six. This second theatre, like many of its kind, went through several permutations.\textsuperscript{30}

Another club theatre of significance to Tandy was the Arts Theatre. She began there as a puppeteer and continued to perform there frequently even after her fame was established. Located on Great Newport Street between St. Martin’s Lane and Charing Cross Road, the Arts Theatre was founded in 1927 and rapidly achieved success through a 1928 production of John Van Druten’s banned play \textit{Young Woodley}.\textsuperscript{31} Of club theatres, the Arts was perhaps the most admired in the 1930s, and many of its productions soon transferred to the West End after their initial run there.

Following her performances in \textit{The Rumour} and \textit{Through the Looking Glass}, Tandy quickly accepted the minor role of a young Typist who falls in love in \textit{The Theatre of Life}. Translated and adapted by George Paston\textsuperscript{32} from a French adaptation of a Russian play, this is a whimsical parable of the need of ordinary people to indulge in illusion to romanticize their lives. The 1929 production brought Tandy the recognition of Frank Birch\textsuperscript{33} who directed it and with whom she was to work on numerous occasions in the future.

Frank Birch also directed\textsuperscript{34} the next play in which Tandy performed, \textit{Water} by Molly Marshall-Hole\textsuperscript{35} which ran for a mere fourteen performances at the Little Theatre.

\textsuperscript{30} Playroom Six continues to run today in a new location under the name of Players’ Theatre.
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Young Woodley} is a well-known play about a schoolboy expelled for an affair with his schoolmaster’s wife. It was written by John van Druten, who is best known for his play \textit{I Am a Camera} (1951).
\textsuperscript{32} George Paston is a pseudonym for Emily Morse Symonds, best known as a historian of English literary figures of the nineteenth century.
\textsuperscript{33} Frank Birch was later managing director of the seasons at the Cambridge Festival Theatre.
\textsuperscript{34} At that time the person who took on the functions of a contemporary director was called “the producer.”
in June 1929. After *Water*, in November Tandy returned to collaboration with Cecil Lewis for an Armistice Day revival of his adaptation of Paul Raynal's *The Unknown Warrior*. Tandy played Aude the Betrothed opposite Maurice Evans in the title role. H. O. Nicholson, a Bensonian actor who had performed with her in *Water*, played the father of the Evans’ soldier. A lyrical tale of the loss to war of love and life on the home front, *The Unknown Warrior* celebrates the courage, bravery, and general nobility of its title character, who sacrifices his life for his less than deserving loved ones at home.

Although this production had only two performances, it was a triumph for the young actress: after the special Armistice Day matinee performance at the eminent Haymarket Theatre the cast was introduced to the Queen of Spain who, with various ambassadors and members of the English aristocracy, had been in attendance (Unidentified article, Tandy Scrapbook A: 12). Tandy often recalled this brush with the royalty with wonder and awe, and it must have given her a taste of some of the possible benefits of fame.

---

35 Molly Marshall-Hole is unknown apart from authoring this play. Notices neither herald the debut of a new playwright nor hearken back to other plays Marshall-Hole had composed. I suspect that “Molly Marshall-Hole” is an ironic pseudonym, as the play’s theme deals with a community’s right to govern or marshal the construction of a reservoir (or watering hole).

36 Maurice Evans was later best known for his long-running productions of Shakespeare (*Richard II; Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet*) in the United States.

37 Bensonians were actors trained by Victorian Frank Benson, a declamatory classical actor. At one time or another they had been members of his touring company.

38 For years afterward her program biographies fondly hearkened back to this experience. In *Autumn Crocus* she named it “a big personal success” (Theatre Museum, *Autumn Crocus* program 1931). In an interview with Lola Duncan published in the *Modern* she mentions it as an early highlight to her career: “And I have had a few interesting experiences. Amongst them being sent for to the Queen of Spain’s box when I was playing at the Haymarket. I was presented to Her Majesty and was very thrilled when she complimented me upon my performance” (31 Dec 1932: 568-9).

39 Playwright George Bernard Shaw was also in the audience. In a postcard telling Lewis he would come to see the matinee, he wrote: “In my Unknown Warrior there arises a great need in a future war to discuss what happened in 14/18. Nobody can be found. So the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Dean of Westminster, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary decide to assemble in the Abbey at midnight to raise the Unknown Warrior from his tomb by Black Magic. They enter and find Christ seated on the Tomb. He agrees to grant their request. The Unknown Warrior rises from the Tomb and asks them what they want—in German. Yours faithfully, G. B. S.” (Lewis 1993: 77).
In January 1930, following Tandy’s big personal success in *The Unknown Warrior*, with the issuance of her first Actor’s Equity card, Jessie Alice Tandy found a new identity at the behest of American producer Lee Shubert. For the first time Jessica Tandy, a name she retained the rest of her life, received official recognition (Tandy Scrapbook A: 12). Perhaps in adopting this new identity Tandy felt as though she was truly coming into her own. Neither of her brothers had been called by their given names as they grew up; Edward was called “Tully” and George “Michael,” while Jessie who shared a name with their mother was always also just that, Jessie. At last in taking a name that was not her own, she had her own name as her brothers did.

**American Debut**

In 1924 playwright Gladys Bertha Stern published *Tents of Israel*, the first of a series of autobiographical novels. Set in London in the early 1920s, the novel focuses on the relationships among the women of a wealthy and proudly Jewish family by the name of Rakonitz. Anastasia Rakonitz, the matriarch of the family, governs the family’s decisions with an iron hand. When her granddaughter Toni comes of age, Anastasia passes guardianship of the family’s name and values to her, making Toni the new matriarch. The novel and its successors were so popular that Stern’s reputation as a novelist outstripped her reputation as a playwright. *Tents of Israel*, retitled *The Matriarch*, received numerous publications throughout the years following.

---

40 Although it may be a bit of a stretch to see the “ca” in “Jessica” as an abbreviation for “Alice,” it appears that in adopting Jessica as her given name, Tandy preserved an abbreviation of her middle name and an homage to Cecil Lewis’ fostering of her career. Alice is the name of the girl who went *Through the Looking Glass* in the plays Lewis had written for her.

41 She later adopted “Bronwyn” for her middle name. To her friends G. B. Stern was known as “Peter,” or “the other G. B. S.”
In 1929 Stern rewrote her novel for the stage, whereupon Frank Vernon directed it at the Royalty Theatre starring Mrs. Patrick Campbell in the title role. Lee Shubert picked up the American rights to the play a year later and invited Mr. Vernon to bring his production to Broadway. Of the London cast only two of the men, E. A. Walker and Abraham Sofaer, reprised their roles in the American production. A new all-English cast, which included Jessica Tandy, was assembled in London, and the company traveled to New York City together to perform in Shubert’s production.

When Tandy agreed to take the role of Toni, Shubert advised Tandy’s name change for her American debut, and the alteration seemed to work like a good luck charm. In the United States Tandy met with praise and publicity unprecedented in her career. *The Chicago Times* heralded her performance as Toni Rakonitz “one of the most excellent of the year” (5 Feb 1930). Notices consistently praised her performance on par with that of Constance Collier42 who played the title role in this production. Prior to its New York debut, *The Matriarch* previewed in several American cities, at the Princess Theatre in Chicago (American premiere) and at the Adelphi in Philadelphia. Tandy’s first experience of the United States included many of its major cities, and in each one she received plenteous praise for her skill and charm. She would return to the States whenever her London career fell into a lull during the next decade.

Tandy’s three-month stay in the United States began with tryouts at the Princess in Chicago. Tandy quickly became a favorite among critics there, some of whom

---

42 A British actress best known for her Shakespearean roles in the company of Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, Collier was extremely popular in her visits to the United States, where she mentored such actresses as Lynn Fontanne and Eva Le Gallienne.
continued to write of her as "Jessie." From Chicago the company proceeded to Philadelphia where Tandy continued to bask in the press's adulation. At last on March 18, 1930, *The Matriarch* opened at the Longacre theatre on Broadway, the only play to premiere that night. While some critics called Tandy's performance an imitation of Beatrix Thomson's, most praised her simplicity, sincerity and range. At the age of 20 through the force of a single production, Tandy had met success on Broadway.

In the summer of 1930 Tandy returned to London for a mere few months to act with the Oxford University Dramatic Society (O. U. D. S.) as Olivia in an outdoor production of *Twelfth Night*. Oxford University had established the practice of inviting the most eminent names on the London stage to perform with their student actors. In addition to the honor of performing with O. U. D. S. and the opportunity to play a Shakespearean role, Tandy felt further reason to take on the role. Having been presented to the Queen of Spain and become an American favorite, in many ways her performance as Olivia was a charitable repayment of perceived debts. Her love for Shakespeare had propelled her to attend the Ben Greet Academy for Acting, and her brother Michael's participation in O. U. D. S. had indirectly led to her appointment at the Birmingham

---

43 *Chicago Daily News* (22 Jan 1930); *New York Review* (25 Jan 1930). Press in Britain covering the play continued to call her “Jessie Tandy” until her return.

44 Beatrix Thomson played Tandy's role in the London production of the play.

45 In an interview published in the *Modern* Tandy describes an experience during one performance, which made sincerity easy: "I had a nasty experience in *The Matriarch*. I had to come downstairs in the play. One night I tripped and fell down the stairs, and lay at the foot full length, and was knocked out for a minute or so. Then I pulled myself together, got up, and found I had sprained my ankle. But I know the scene must continue. Constance Collier, who played lead, helped me to a chair, and I finished the act sitting. I had to cry at one bit; I didn't act sobbing this time. I was so overwrought that I burst into real floods of tears" (Duncan 1932: 569).
Repertory Theatre and all her subsequent career moves. Filled with a new confidence after her American success, Tandy must have felt disappointed at the negative or lukewarm press she received for this role.

Rather than thanking her for her contribution as she may well have expected, critics littered their notices with misspellings of her name, criticisms of her too-modern interpretation of Olivia, and complaints about her occasional inaudibility. These accusations of inaudibility and excessive originality would continue to mar her future attempts at Shakespearean production in England. In September the only trace of Tandy in London was a rebroadcast of Cecil Lewis’ adaptation of *Through the Looking Glass* with Tandy as the “perfect” Alice (*The Star* 16 Sept 1930). Tandy had already returned to the United States under the sponsorship of the Shuberts, where once again she received a warmer welcome.

In *The Last Enemy* by Frank Harvey (which had starred Laurence Olivier in the 1929 London production at the Fortune Theatre) an explorer who has perished in the Antarctic returns as an angel to preserve the purity of love between his spiritual daughter Cynthia Perry (Tandy’s role) and her soldier fiancé Jerry. For the American production Tandy was once again paired with Derrick De Marney, who had played her lover in *The Matriarch*. Although both Tandy and De Marney were applauded for their contributions to *The Last Enemy*, neither the critics nor theatergoers favored the play, which they deemed too dogmatic with its spiritual framework. The play soon closed. One review printed in *The New York Herald Tribune* called Tandy “one of Great Britain’s best gifts
the Messrs. Shubert,” and expressed “the hope that she will remain in America to act” (31 Oct 1930). It was to be another decade before Jessica Tandy would fulfill this hope.

West End Actress

When Tandy returned to Britain she immediately began rehearsals for a new G. B. Stern play, perhaps because of the immense success she had had in *The Matriarch*. Like *The Matriarch*, *The Man Who Pays the Piper* focused on the women of a British family in London in the 1920s. It begins with a prologue in which a father reproaches his sixteen year-old daughter for her late return home from socializing. He declares that as long as he supports the household its members are to abide by his wishes. Twelve years later the grown daughter who now supports the family as a costumier similarly reproaches her younger sister in mirrored circumstances. Diana Wynyard played Daryll, the costumier sister, and Tandy the irresponsible younger sister Fay. Critics praised Wynyard and Tandy’s performances, but they called the script a novelist’s play, tedious and undramatic, and the production closed after only six performances.

A few weeks after it had closed, St. John Ervine, himself a playwright, saw enough merit in the play to write a lengthy article about it for *The Observer*. In his article he dwelled on Tandy’s performance: “Miss Tandy, who has a cheeky face, took the stage with assurance . . . . This girl can act. There is the notable comedienne in her, if she can keep her head” (8 Mar 1931). Ervine was one of many critics who would point at Tandy’s appearance lending itself to comedic performance in contrast to the more sensitive, emotional playing of which Tandy was capable and which she preferred.

46 Later one of the roles of which Tandy was fondest was in a St. John Ervine comedy, *Anthony and Anna*.
Soon after *The Man who Pays the Piper* closed, Tandy began rehearsals for the premiere of a new playwright’s first play under the direction of Basil Dean. As Audrey or “The Young Lady Living in Freedom” in C. L. Anthony’s *Autumn Crocus*, Tandy capitalized upon the comedic skills John St. Ervine had observed to the delight of critics and audiences.

C. L. Anthony was a pseudonym for former actress Dodie Smith, who had studied at RADA\(^{47}\) and acted professionally in bit roles during World War I. *Autumn Crocus*, the story of a spinster schoolteacher who finds her first love at a vacation boarding home in Tyrol, was her first published work. Smith later found abiding recognition for her play *Dear Octopus*, her novel *I Capture the Castle*, and her children’s story *The Hundred and One Dalmatians*. When *Autumn Crocus* went into production she was managing acquisitions at a toy store.

Basil Dean had worked with Dodie Smith the actress during the war. When she submitted a copy of *Autumn Crocus* to him he immediately recognized a success and agreed to produce it when he returned to the stage from several months of film direction. After several weeks of rehearsal which the playwright attended, the play opened on 6 April 1931 to lukewarm applause, boos and hisses at its final curtain (Grove 1996: 76). But critics unanimously dismissed the poor audience reception as inappropriately unappreciative, praising the charm and poignancy of the play and its performers. The fine notices and word of mouth allowed the production to overcome the initial audience response and to run for 371 performances, transferring mid-run from the large Lyric Theatre to the more intimate Savoy. This was Tandy’s first experience of a long run.

\(^{47}\) The Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts.
In the cast of this production was a young actor named Jack Hawkins, 21 years old, who had recently met fame with a role alongside Maurice Evans and Laurence Olivier in *Journey’s End*, a popular war story, and who had acted for Basil Dean previously in his production of *Beau Geste*. He was to be the most significant acquaintance Jessica Tandy had hitherto made in theatre. In an unidentified article now in her personal file at the Theatre Museum in London, Tandy wrote of an earlier encounter with this young, ambitious actor:

I first saw Jack in 1924 and cordially detested him. Perched in a high seat in the gallery, I looked down on the most wonderful play I had seen—*St. Joan*. A boy was in it, acting as Dunois’ page. He watched the river while the Maid prayed that the wind might change, and called out about a king-fisher. How I hated him.

The part might as well have been played by a girl, me. I was fourteen (Tandy, “Men You Know”).

Tandy never had the chance to perform in Shaw’s *St. Joan*, but she did have the opportunity to meet the boy who had played Dunois’ page. Six years later, with numerous opportunities to act professionally herself surrounding her, Jessica Tandy could be more generous with Jack Hawkins. Her former envy of his position must have added to her attraction to the promising young actor. She also describes this second encounter in the article: “Seven years later, Jack and I met in ‘Autumn Crocus.’ I was still envious of his dash, attack and abandon on the stage, but I was also thrilled. We played opposite each other in this play, and a year later . . . we were married” (Ibid.).

---

48 Written when their daughter Susan was four, which places it in late 1938 or early 1939.
49 This is the year she played an extra in *Judas Iscariot* and performed Jonson’s *Ode* at the Bijoux.
50 Though she was likely playing Leda Veerkind in *Morning Glory*, a character often compared to Joan or Arc, at the time she wrote the article.
In his autobiography Anything for a Quiet Life, Hawkins writes of their adult meeting:

We were playing the young lovers in the play who were living together, or in sin, as Dodie Smith would have it. We were both twenty-one, and tremendously attracted to one another, and I suppose it was inevitable that the parts we were playing on the stage should spread over into real life. At any rate, we became lovers in fact, and rather vaguely talked about marriage, but looking back I don’t think we were really in love, although we loved one another’s company51 (Hawkins 1974: 47).

Really in love or not, the two continued to act together whenever given the opportunity both before and during their marriage. After the close of Autumn Crocus Tandy appeared in several theatre club performances, now expanding her connections beyond the Arts Club to Stage Society52 and Repertory Players53 productions.

Cambridge Festival Theatre

After the run of Autumn Crocus had ended, Tandy went to Cambridge in 1932 to perform with her former associates Rita John and Frank Birch. At the Cambridge Festival Theatre that summer she had the opportunity to perform in more than six major roles in primarily classical productions. These roles, from Cressida in Troilus and Cressida to Millicent Blazes in a new comic opera called The Pride of the Regiment, required her to play tragedy, comedy, vaudeville, and opera, in rapid succession. In many ways this experience completed the training she had begun at the Ben Greet Academy of Acting and with the Birmingham Repertory Theatre.

51 The two were divorced within the next decade, and that may account for Hawkins’ conclusion that they had never really been in love.
52 This club was founded in 1899 to perform contemporary plays refused a license. The Stage Society would lease various West End theatres for a Sunday evening performance. Tandy performed the role of Princess Agnes Salm-Salm in Juarez and Maximilian by Franz Werfel, translated by Ruth Langner.
53 Tandy performed the only female role in Below the Surface, a war play about submarine life directed by Jack Hawkins.
It is likely that it was during the rehearsal period prior to the opening of the season that she and Jack became engaged.\textsuperscript{54} He said their engagement occurred after he and his friends\textsuperscript{55} had attended a dress rehearsal for \textit{The Pride of the Regiment}\textsuperscript{56}:

Jessica, too [like Hawkins and his friends who had enjoyed themselves at the rehearsal], seemed in high spirits, but when I saw her the following weekend she was very down in the mouth. It turned out that the director\textsuperscript{57} of the frightful musical had taken a terrific shine to her, and was generally making her life intolerable.

Full of youthful gallantry, I said: 'We'll put a stop to this—we'll get engaged,' and off we went into Cambridge and bought two platinum rings to mark the occasion (Hawkins 1973: 48).

Upon returning to London in autumn 1932 Tandy acted in a new play with another theatre club. In \textit{Mutual Benefit} by Roy Jordan, a Sunday Playgoers' Association production, she played an innocent, frigid young woman who embarks upon an experimental relationship with a similarly natured young man in order to improve the depth of their artistry as actress and playwright. A variation upon her role in \textit{Autumn Crocus}, this role was scarcely a challenge for her, and she received the expected laudatory reviews.

\textsuperscript{54} An undated announcement from the London \textit{Star} belies his description of their engagement, for it states that the engaged man Jack Hawkins was playing in \textit{White Parents Sleep} when the announcement was made, a play that ran from January to April of that year (Tandy Scrapbook A, page 122). \textit{The Pride of the Regiment} did not open until June 13, requiring the dress rehearsal for the play to have occurred two months prior to its opening.

\textsuperscript{55} John Gielgud and Frank Vosper were two very well known actors whom Tandy had met through her recent participation in the Arts' production of \textit{Musical Chairs} under the direction of Komisarjevsky.

\textsuperscript{56} He misremembers this production as \textit{Daughter of the Regiment} (Hawkins 1973: 47).

\textsuperscript{57} V. C. Clinton-Baddeley, who also played her father in this production, directed. The earliest play of the Festival season opened April 14 and was directed by Frank Birch, who directed all plays except \textit{Pride}. Birch was married to a woman named Vera also acting in the company and therefore, as marital vows would not have been a factor for him, he would be unlikely to be dissuaded by an engagement ring. This places slightly greater suspicion upon V. C. Clinton-Baddeley, editor of an encyclopedia.

38
**West End Triumph: Children in Uniform**

During her stay in Cambridge Tandy found another sort of engagement. Leontine Sagan,58 the renowned director of *Mädchen in Uniform*, a very successful 1931 film59 about a Prussian girls’ boarding school, came from Germany to direct another film, *Men of Tomorrow* (1932) about a men’s college in England. Alexander Korda had intended this second film to be a vehicle for his protégée Merle Oberon. While the film was in production, Sagan was soon hired to direct the English stage version of her former film at the Duchess Theatre where Walter Peacock60 was managing.

Sagan and Tandy first met during the 1932 casting process for *Men of Tomorrow*. Tandy describes their original meeting as promising but unfruitful:

Some months ago, when I was playing at the Cambridge Festival Theatre, I got a letter asking me to come to town to see Leontine Sagan, the German producer, about a part in a film. It appears that the lady had seen my photo and had liked my face. She was quite frank. ‘No good,’ she said. ‘I want a fair-haired, typical English girl; you are not. But some day I hope to produce you.’ So back I went to Cambridge! (Duncan 31 Dec 1932: 568).

As was so often the case for Tandy in her early career, particularly in film, her unusual appearance prevented her from being cast in a role she desired. But her slightness and youthfulness were to do her better stead shortly thereafter, when Sagan was searching for the right girl to play Manuela on the stage. Sagan, herself dark-haired and dark-eyed as she perceived Tandy to be, remembered Tandy amidst her screening of hundreds of girls for the role of Manuela.

58 Leontine Sagan was born Leontine Schlesinger in Vienna in 1889. She died in 1974 in South Africa.
59 Originally banned in Germany and the U. S., *Mädchen in Uniform* was named best film of the year by several New York critics upon its eventual release.
60 Walter Peacock was Barry Jackson’s casting director and had assisted Tandy in obtaining her appointment with the Birmingham Repertory Theatre.
While Herthe Thiele, who had played the role of Manuela in the film version, was tall, blonde, and elegant in form, Sagan was willing to depart from those characteristics in considering Tandy. Rather than Tandy’s beauty Sagan was more concerned about her bosom, which the director felt needed to be small enough for a feasible thirteen-year-old (Barber 1978: n. p.). In addition to being thoroughly “looked over” by Sagan prior to and after the reading (this included having Sagan look down her blouse), Tandy’s interpretation of the role was audited by director Leontine Sagan, the producer Mr. Mitchelhill, and the presenter Frank Gregory. She stood upon the stage and “with a feeling of futility” (Tandy 1938: 50) read for them. They were satisfied, and she was cast.

Children in Uniform experienced several incarnations prior to the London stage production. First an unpublished autobiographical story about another girl by Baroness Hatvany Christa Winsloë, the story was rewritten for the German stage in 1930 under the title Gestern und Heute. In collaboration with Winsloë, who had also written the play, Leontine Sagan adapted it for film in 1931, after having directed a brief but successful production of the play in Berlin. Barbara Burnham translated the play into English for the London production. Winsloë later rewrote the play as a novel called Das Mädchen Manuela (The Child Manuela), published in 1933.

The story is simple: a young orphan girl starved for affection develops an attachment to the only kind schoolmistress in her harsh boarding school. Inebriated with

61 In the film Herthe Thiele was cast upon the insistence of Christa Winsloë, the play’s author (Sagan 113); perhaps Tandy was more the “type” Sagan herself had envisioned.
62 Frank Gregory was Barry Jackson’s managing director.
63 “Yesterday and Today.”
punch after a praised performance in her school play, she publicly announces her love for
the teacher. When the scandalized headmistress separates her from her classmates and
then declares that she is to have no contact with her beloved teacher, she attempts suicide.
In the autobiography and both play versions her attempt is successful. In the film she is
prevented just in time.

In London *Children in Uniform* moved audiences and inspired critics. This play,
written by women, directed by a woman, with an all-female cast, drew viewers to it as a
curiosity. They left feeling they had witnessed a great piece of theatre. Horace Richards
called it “one of the finest evenings ever I spent in a theatre anywhere in the world”
(*Theatre World* n. d.: 30). James Agate declared it “the reward . . . worth the vigil” of all
his nights of thankless theatergoing (*Times* 8 Oct 1932). Tandy later recalled the awe
with which audiences departed from the performances. “There was one performance
when the audience didn’t clap at all, they were so moved,” she said (*Berger 1994: A1*).

Tandy in particular found praise among critics. An unidentified newspaper
clipping saved in the Theatre Museum declares, “There is nothing like Miss Jessica
Tandy’s tender and penetrating study of the pre-destined child to be seen in London, nor
would it be possible for it to be improved upon.” Another article asserts, “Miss Jessica
Tandy plays the part of Manuela with a simplicity of yearning which keeps the girl’s
tragedy austere and lights the whole motion of the piece with a hard, clean radiance that
is very different from the ordinary glamour of limelight.”

---

64 Playwright Christa Winsloe and translator Barbara Burnham could be said to have co-authored the
English version of the play.
65 *Children in Uniform* file. Author’s initials V. S.-J.
66 n. d. Author’s initials J. B.
radiance was a quality that grew in brilliance through her years as a performer. As Manuela she had not yet found her vocal power, for which she also later came to be known, but she had found the other quality that made her unique. Throughout her career, from her twenties to her mid-eighties “radiance” was the term reviewers and others would return to most often to describe what they saw. It was this mysterious energy, this quality of being, that set her apart from other actors and gave Tandy her own special greatness.

*Children in Uniform* was publicized in England, Germany, Italy, Canada, and the United States. Fan mail from people irrevocably moved by her performance poured in; sketches of Tandy as Manuela abounded in numerous publications; her portrait was painted. At 23 Tandy suddenly found herself internationally known. As she put it, “My chance had arrived!” (Tandy 1938: 50).

Sometime during the 1932 run of *Children in Uniform*, Tandy participated in her first film, once again under the direction of Cecil Lewis. *The Indiscretions of Eve* was Lewis’ second film (following the first British film version of the opera *Carmen*). Based upon a short story Lewis had written sometime earlier, it centered on a wealthy young aristocrat who falls in love with a wax model in a shop and spends the film hunting down the mysterious original to the model. Tandy played only a bit role in the film, a maid as she was often to play in her earliest film roles. Lewis himself wrote, directed, and designed the film, and it was quickly ignored and forgotten by critics and audiences alike. Once again Lewis had provided Tandy a bridge to a new medium, but unlike radio the world of film took six more decades to welcome her.

67 “Miss Jessica Tandy as Manuela in ‘Children in Uniform’” by A. Egerton Cooper.
When Tandy told the Duchess Theatre about her marriage plans, they protested that her marriage would undermine the play. She later remembered that they said, "Think of the audience. How will they believe in you as a child if they hear you are an old married woman?" (Tandy, unidentified article. Theatre Museum personal file). Jack Hawkins writes, "That made us even more determined. I took out a special licence [sic] and... we were married at a Winchmore Hill church" (Hawkins 48). October 22, 1932, two weeks after Tandy’s wildly successful opening, featured a hurried wedding with few guests. Tandy wore a functional brown tweed dress suit and rushed away immediately after the ceremony to perform in a matinee of *Children in Uniform*. That afternoon she told the cast of her wedding, and they secretly made a collection to present her with an engraved silver serving dish for a present. The surprise of this gesture moved her to tears (Modern Weekly 3 Dec 1932). Married and famous, Tandy’s place in the world seemed to be established.

While *Children in Uniform* ran for only 265 performances as opposed to *Autumn Crocus*’ 371, Tandy’s role in the former was far more central and demanding. Through her appeal as Manuela, Tandy joined the ranks of the elite of her generation. It had been her “‘Big chance’ for which every hopeful young actress prays” (Tandy 1938: 50). Like many young actors who had received their initial training in club theatres and at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Tandy had through talent, persistence, ever-increasing connections, and rigorous hard work reached every actor’s dream of West End triumph. The doors she had knocked upon had led her to her dream.

---

68 Hawkins, who believed he lived in the Southgate parish, had misdirected most of their guests there (Hawkins 48; Palmer’s Evening Gazette 28 Oct 1932).
CHAPTER 2

RIDING SUCCESS

This chapter will trace the acclaim and disappointments Tandy encountered as she reached her first plateau of success as an actor. Her aim as an actor, particularly in this phase of her career, seems to have been to choose artistry over commercialism. She reached that goal in her association with such artists as Robert Atkins, John Gielgud and Tyrone Guthrie in London. Reviewers who lauded her acting skills but not her interpretation of Ophelia in Gielgud’s history-making Hamlet marred this achievement; her part in making this history has consequently been minimized. The decade following her role as Manuela in Leontine Sagan’s production of Children in Uniform reflects a continuation of the areas she had explored during the early years of her career. She acted with her husband Jack Hawkins in numerous productions; she performed with former acquaintances at club theatres; she returned to the United States occasionally to perform on Broadway; she premiered new works by unknown playwrights. The major transformation in her approach to acting was her increasing devotion to Shakespearean production at the newly-built Open Air Theatre in Regent’s Park, at the Old Vic, and
anywhere else she could find opportunity. This phase of her career culminated in a season as leading lady at the Old Vic and her abrupt transplantation to the United States upon the outbreak of World War II.
Prologue: “Clubbing It”

When Jessica Tandy, now the established actress, began her quest to perform the classics and particularly Shakespeare on the professional stage, only a few venues were open to her. In the early 1930s the English-speaking theatre viewed the classics as commercial anathema. Apart from repertory companies which could afford to include classical productions with their more lucrative popular offerings throughout their seasons, only the Old Vic and club theatres consistently staged the classics. Tandy had already tried many of the venues open to her. She had performed Shakespeare at the Arts Theatre Club in 1928, with the O. U. D. S. in 1930, and in repertory at the Cambridge Festival Theatre in 1932, and now it was time for her to set her sights upon the Old Vic. During World War I Ben Greet had established Shakespeare’s success at the eminent theatre, and it was fitting that his student should find her own success there.

With that aim in mind during the 1932-1933 run of *Children in Uniform*, Tandy continued to stretch and hone her acting skills in theatre club productions. Her newlywed husband Jack was a member of the Green Room, a social club for male actors, and two of these productions were charitable fund-raisers sponsored by this club. Both “Wedding March in the Tea Room”\(^6^9\) by M. A. Dormie and “The Dictator”\(^7^0\) by Lawrence Bloom were small skits that formed a portion of *The Green Room Rag*, according to Arnold Bennett “among the rare occasions upon which the theatrical profession publicly atones for sin” (*Dictator program*, Theatre Museum). Every few months members of the Green Room would put together a short program for the purpose of raising money to contribute.

---

\(^6^9\) 4 Dec 1932 at the Shaftesbury Theatre.
\(^7^0\) 10 Feb 1935 at Daly’s Theatre.
to the actors’ retirement fund and other charitable causes. Playwrights in the Club would write short skits, actors and their wives perform them, often at a theatre such as Daly’s or the Shaftesbury generously lent by its managers for the purpose.

Another of the club theatre projects upon which Tandy worked was to pave the way for a future season as leading lady at the Old Vic Theatre. In January 1933 the Arts Theatre Club put on an evening of one-act plays directed by a youthful Tyrone Guthrie, who was to have a substantial influence on Tandy’s future career both in London and the United States. In *Lady Audley’s Secret*, C. H. Hazlewood’s modern adaptation of the nineteenth century novel by Elizabeth Braddon, Tandy played step-daughter to the wicked title character. Flora Robson played Lady Audley. Both production and cast received laudatory reviews, and it ran for five performances, a lengthier run for a play put on at the Arts. Tandy had begun to prove to the London theatre artists and audiences that she was capable of carrying a lead role in a costume drama. Guthrie was to remember Tandy’s work as the ingénue of the production and to make use of her skills in similar roles during his 1937 season at the Old Vic.

Yet another significant club production and the first Tandy worked on after *Children in Uniform* had closed was in March 1933 under the stage direction of Eileen Thorndike, Sybil Thorndike’s sister. *Midsummer Fires*, an adaptation of Hermann Sudermann’s *Johannisfeuer* played at the Embassy Theatre under the auspices of the Charta Theatre Club and received indifferent reviews. It is noteworthy in that it introduced Tandy to the Thorndike clan, with whom she was to act again in the future, and in that much of the play’s draw depended upon her newfound popularity among
London theatre audiences. *Midsummer Fires* also reflected Tandy’s increasing devotion to period pieces and costume drama, especially where they assisted her in her courtship of the Bard. Although Tandy’s newfound fame was insufficient to save the play, it was sufficient for significant artists in London theatre like Sybil Thorndike and Tyrone Guthrie to take an interest in the furtherance of her career.

**Pursuing the Classics**

In the summer of 1933 a new theatre, rapidly to become a major force in the London theatre scene, officially opened for the first time. The newly-built Open Air Theatre offered London a series of Shakespearean plays in the Inner Circle, Regent’s Park. There had been Shakespearean productions at Regent’s Park (then known only as the Royal Botanical Gardens) from the turn of the century, when Ben Greet’s Woodland Players would stage numerous summer productions with audiences informally seated upon a grassy hillside. In 1932 theatre critic Sidney Carroll put together an experimental season known as the “black-and-white” *Twelfth Night* in an attempt to persuade backers that constructing a theatre for outdoor Shakespearean productions in Regent’s Park was a viable endeavor. While he lost money on his 1932 enterprise, he found sufficient success for entrepreneur Lewis Schaverian to join his investment. A rudimentary theatre was built and the 1933 season of *As You Like It, A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and *The Tempest* put into production under the direction of Robert Atkins, a former artistic director at the Old Vic.
During the black-and-white *Twelfth Night* tryout of 1932 Jessica Tandy was acting as Cressida in *Troilus and Cressida* in her first professional Shakespearean production at the Cambridge Festival Theatre. Critics had written admiringly of her passion and her outstanding mastery of the verse in this production. When the Open Air Theatre began for its first season, Tandy had just completed the triumphant run of *Children in Uniform* and had become premium casting material, as the billing for *Midsummer Fires* had proven. Armed with her outstanding reviews from *Troilus and Cressida* in Cambridge, success as Alicia Audley in a costume drama under the direction of Tyrone Guthrie, fame from her portrayal of Manuela, and with her husband Jack Hawkins already cast in the first production, Tandy obtained the role of Titania in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in the second production of the season. Her tiny stature was an advantage in her portrayal of the willful Queen of Fairies who, through the mischief of her consort Oberon, falls in love with an ass’s head.

Sir Philip Ben Greet served as Master of the Greensward. In this function he welcomed audiences to each performance, and, if it rained, invited them to decide whether to continue the production in the open air, beneath a tent ready for inclement weather, or to cease the performance entirely. For this season Greet was teamed up with another former Old Vic artistic director. Robert Atkins, who had served at the Old Vic following Ben Greet’s departure, directed the productions of that opening season. In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* Atkins also played Bottom, the bombastic tinker whose magically transformed ass’s head is stroked by the lovelorn Titania Queen of the Fairies.

---

71 Her role as Olivia in the OUDS *Twelfth Night* was unpaid, and she had been puppeteer more than performer in the Arts Theatre *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.
72 He played Orlando to Phyllis Neilson Terry’s Rosalind in *As You Like It*.

---

49 Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Phyllis Neilson-Terry, who had played Rosalind in the opening production of the season, played Tandy’s consort Oberon King of the Fairies. When Neilson-Terry left for a vacation Jack Hawkins stepped into her role, and he was later replaced by Jean Forbes-Robertson. Of the three actors who played Oberon, Phyllis Neilson-Terry found greatest popularity among critics. Although during the turn-of-the-century the practice had been relatively common, for 1933 casting a woman in a male role in a classical production was an unusual choice. At the Open Air critics and audiences took their feminine Oberon in stride.

Performances ran Tuesday through Sunday, both matinee and evening, and the three productions alternated in repertory. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, the most popular play of the season, opened in July and closed in September. Tandy’s performance found praise. Ivor Brown called her “A Titania as delicate in magic as a fairy’s wand” (*Observer* 9 Jul 1933). James Agate commented that “Miss Jessica Tandy’s Titania has an odd, inhuman roguishness that is very pleasant in a fairy queen” (*Times* 9 Jul 1933), and the *Morning Post* critic said her portrayal “had just the right ‘fayness’” (*Morning Post* 9 Jul 1933). These positive reviews were to serve as valuable ammunition in her transition from popular to classical actress.

73 *The Times* critic James Agate amusingly wrote: “Miss Forbes-Robertson is the third Oberon of the open-air season. Miss Neilson-Terry was the first, and when she went on holiday the part was admirably played by Mr. Jack Hawkins. Miss Neilson-Terry was a stately and impressive Oberon, who seemed to have been born a King of the Fairies. Miss Forbes-Robertson, on the other hand, might have risen from the ranks of the common or garden fairies to become the leader of them all. There were moments when she was inclined to forget her words, but this was the mortal side. There were others when one could not get her performance as Peter Pan out of one’s head, and if she had suddenly, with that pleading voice of hers, asked the audience if they believed in fairies, it is quite certain that even from beneath the umbrellas the reply would have been in the affirmative” (16 Aug 1933).

74 This was with the exception of W. A. Darlington, who wrote, “Oberon is a part which, in my view, should never be given to a woman” (*The Daily Telegraph* 9 Jul 1933).
Motley, a design firm soon to become identified with Shakespearean production in London through their association with John Gielgud, designed the costumes. Comprised of three charming women, Elizabeth Montgomery and the sisters Audrey Sophia Harris and Margaret “Percy” Harris, Motley was formed at the behest of John Gielgud, who had been struck with their ingenious drawings of him in character while they were still in art school together. They selected their name from a quote in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*: “Motley’s the only wear,” and they got their start in 1932 at O. U. D. S. designing costumes and settings for *Romeo and Juliet* under his direction.

In 1933 Gielgud also directed and starred in their first big success, *Richard of Bordeaux*, an elaborate costume drama about the English King Richard II at the New Theatre. In this production Motley pioneered the use of simple sets and costumes from such ordinary materials as painted fabric and felt treated with kitchen soap to resemble leather.

*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* was Tandy's first collaboration with the team of ladies, but she soon became friends with them, and they would often design gowns for her in productions for which no costumier had been engaged. Following the enormous success of *Richard of Bordeaux* at the New Theatre, the Motley costume shop quickly became a gathering place some of the greatest artists of the younger theatre generation, headed by John Gielgud. On a daily basis one could often find Tandy having her tea there with her husband Jack Hawkins, John Gielgud, Peggy Ashcroft, Glen Byam Shaw, Angela Baddeley, George Devine, and the three designers, all arguing about the best ways to reinvent London theatre (Wardle 1978: 39).
Later that year Tandy returned to radio to perform in the tragic war play *The White Chateau* by Reginald Berkeley, the first full length play performed on radio and written exclusively for that medium (Val Gielgud 66). Of her performance, radio critic Archie de Bear wrote "I shall not soon forget the infinite appealing sympathy of Miss Tandy's voice on the air, as she told her wounded Philip of her love for him. She has that indescribable vocal quality, that indefinable something which brings a lump to the throat, and makes one feel that life holds something better than the surface shows" (Daily Express 11 Oct 1933). This quality was communicated on stage in the simple radiance she was to exude throughout her life. In his column de Bear later voted Tandy's the best acting by a woman for radio in 1933 (Daily Express 1 Jan 1934). If there were a venue Tandy was to turn to for primarily commercial purposes throughout the next few decades, it would be radio.

Tandy's next performance was in an original stage play written by her old friend Cecil Lewis, who had first brought her to radio. In November 1933 *Iron Flowers* was produced for a single Sunday performance by the Repertory Players at the Shaftesbury Theatre. Her husband Jack Hawkins starred opposite Tandy. The play is noteworthy in that it was one of the earliest produced to depict a sympathetic character who chooses to have an abortion, and for that reason it was universally condemned by theatre critics. This was the last time Tandy was to collaborate with Lewis, though they corresponded infrequently during the next several years.

75 In Tandy's correspondence with Lewis is an epilogue he asked her to read in place of the playwright's usual brief speech at the end of a premiere. Written in verse, it criticizes audience members "who do not want to feel or understand" the "secret life" represented in the play (Lewis to Tandy, 5 Nov 1933. Library of Congress Box 326, Folder 4).
Ironically for the play's content it was near the time of their performance in *Iron Flowers* that Hawkins and Tandy conceived their daughter Susan, who was born in August the following year. For the next nine months Tandy had to take into consideration her pregnancy as she planned her career. Tandy's next two performances were in commercial West End productions, perhaps taken on with the need to support a coming baby in mind.\textsuperscript{76}

In December 1933 she joined the cast of Anthony Armstrong's wildly successful murder mystery *Ten Minute Alibi* (which totaled a run of 857 performances), as it neared its 400\textsuperscript{th} performance. The fourth actress to play the leading lady over the course of the run, Tandy was later followed in the role by two more actresses after she left the production to perform in Basil Dean's 1934 production of Rodney Ackland's new comedy *Birthday*. This next play ran for only 10 performances at the Cambridge Theatre in London before its closure. While critics felt that it was simply a bad play, Basil Dean believed it closed so early because of his audience's inability to appreciate his innovative thrust staging (Dean 1973: 197). Two experiences of West End fluff, *Ten Minute* a wild success and *Birthday* a dreadful failure, had given Tandy more than her fill of commercial theatre for a time.

Tandy's continued close association with the Motley-Gielgud circle encouraged her to hold the classics dearer than commercial West End, and after two unfulfilling West End experiences she determined to pursue another Shakespearean summer. Six months

\textsuperscript{76} In his autobiography Jack Hawkins described a vituperative exchange between the couple regarding the conflict between commercialism and art. After the opening of a commercial thriller he was performing in, he reports that Tandy said to him, "How can you forgo the classical theatre just to make money" (Hawkins 1974: 55). His response was that, "Someone had to make enough to support our house in Hampstead and our daughter" (Ibid.).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
pregnant, she opened as Viola in *Twelfth Night* on 13 April 1934 at the Manchester Hippodrome and stayed on for a run as Anne Page in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* with the famous Vanbrugh sisters playing Mistress Ford and Mistress Page.

Shakespeare was a new offering at the Manchester Hippodrome, and Tandy's was only the second season financed by Sir Oswald Stoll and Colonel Stanley Bell for the further refinement of the Manchester community. Critically the plays were a great success, but sparse public attendance led to financial failure, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* marked the end of these gentlemen’s well-meaning attempt to establish an Old Vic in the provinces. In her autobiography Irene Vanbrugh, who played Mistress Page, gives a description of the atmosphere of the production in the large music hall:

> The productions were being done by Stanley Bell, who for many years had served with Beerbohm Tree, and his setting of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was charmingly original. The center of the auditorium, which had served as a water tank in many of the variety bills, had the floor drawn over it and on top of this was spread a green carpet of artificial grass and, apart from one or two flats suggesting the entrance to the Pages’ house and on the other side the gallery of the “Garter Inn,” there was no scenery, and the play was staged on this village green. The audience sat all round and seemed to come right into the play with us; the whole atmosphere of this buoyant farce seemed to be part of the life of the village (Vanbrugh 142).

Despite the failure of Stoll and Bell’s enterprise, Tandy had succeeded in accomplishing her aim during her season in Manchester. She had gained experience and critical acclaim in two more Shakespearean productions, and she was well on her way to a season as leading lady at the Old Vic.

---

77 Viola continued to be one of Tandy’s favorite roles. This was the first of three productions in which Tandy played Viola during the next five years.
While Tandy performed in Manchester, an interview with John Gielgud about the state of young actors in England in the mid-1930s appeared in the London Era. Gielgud, who was commonly viewed as the greatest actor of his generation in the English-speaking world, had worked with Jessica Tandy in a club theatre production of his friend Ronald Mackenzie’s first play *Musical Chairs.* He also often met her at tea at the Motley shop. His comments reflected his high opinion of her ability. When asked to name the young actresses he most admired, he said, “Angela Baddeley and Jessica Tandy are in many ways the best bids for future stardom, in my opinion” (Era 31 Oct 1934). When it came to choosing an actress to play Ophelia to his Hamlet in an upcoming production at the New Theatre, he upheld his view.

Through her productions at O. U. D. S., the Cambridge Festival Theatre, the Open Air Theatre, and the Manchester Hippodrome, Tandy had demonstrated her devotion and skill in classical production. In August of 1934 her daughter Susan Phyllida was born. By October, with a two-month old baby and during a 12-performance run of a failed murder mystery at the Duke of York’s Theatre, Tandy went into rehearsal for one of the most celebrated Shakespearean productions of the twentieth century.

Commercial and Artistic Success: John Gielgud’s West End Hamlet

In October 1934, the theatre manager Bronson Albery invited John Gielgud to direct *Hamlet* at the New Theatre the next month. Albery had been Gielgud’s agent since

---

78 Gielgud later wrote, “Jessica Tandy and I had met in the Arts Theatre try-out of *Musical Chairs.* We did not make friends on that occasion, and I fancy that we parted in an atmosphere of mutual antipathy” (Gielgud 1938: n. p.). It was only when they worked on *Hamlet* together that the two truly became friends.

79 Bronson Albery, with his stepbrother Howard Wyndham, was heir to theatre manager Charles Wyndham. Together they held an interest in many of the theatres in the West End. The family’s monopoly of West End theatre was later known as the Wyndham-Albery Dynasty.

---

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
1932, when the Komisarjevsky production of *Musical Chairs* had been transferred, minus Tandy,\(^{80}\) from the Arts Theatre for a run at the New. After the tremendous success of *Musical Chairs*, Albery had also risked sponsorship of Gielgud’s production of the historic costume drama *Richard of Bordeaux*, Gielgud’s first success as a director and Motley’s first triumph as a design team. When this risk had proven enormously lucrative and with an empty slot for production at the New, Albery felt comfortable inviting Gielgud to fill the slot with Shakespeare’s masterpiece.

Gielgud had played the role of Hamlet once before in 1929 during a season as leading man at the Old Vic. This production had transferred to the West End and been praised by critics, but in the end it had lost money. He was reluctant to take on the production a second time and jeopardize the financial trust of his friend Albery, but Gielgud decided to make another assay, this time with his own choice of cast and designers. When it opened he commented that, “The curious thing is that only a few months ago I was set against the idea of doing ‘Hamlet’ again. . . However, I came to the conclusion that if I did not play Hamlet again now, I should soon be too old: I am just 30, which is the right age according to the text”\(^{81}\) (Conway 1934, n. p.). He and Albery cautiously booked the theatre for a run of six weeks, feeling that was more than ample time for even an extremely successful production of Shakespeare in the West End.

With only four weeks to rehearse, Gielgud gathered as many of his friends about him as he could to put up the play. The Motley team designed set and costumes. Frank

---

\(^{80}\) This was during Tandy’s run as Manuela in *Children in Uniform*.

\(^{81}\) Gielgud continued to return to the role many times throughout his career, even after he had become “too old.” Perhaps the astounding success of the play at the New led him to change his mind about this requirement.
Vosper played Claudius, Glen Byam Shaw Laertes, Jack Hawkins Horatio, George Howe Polonius, Laura Cowie Gertrude, and Jessica Tandy Ophelia. A young Alec Guinness who had been shadowing Gielgud for professional advice was given the role of Osric and Third Player, and George Devine, who was living with the Motleys at the time, played Bernardo and the First Player.

It is uncertain why Gielgud, whose preferred leading lady seemed to be Peggy Ashcroft, cast Tandy rather than Ashcroft in the role of Ophelia. Ashcroft was not engaged in the run of any other production at the time Hamlet was being cast, rehearsed, or performed. Perhaps Ashcroft wanted to attend to her new marriage to the director Komisarjevsky, whom she was soon to learn was being unfaithful to her; the couple visited Germany together during the run of the show (O' Connor 1997: 56). In 1935, after Ashcroft divorced Komisarjevsky, Gielgud cast her as Juliet in the famous production in which he swapped roles with Laurence Olivier, and Tandy returned to the West End to play in commercial successes.82 Perhaps, as Jack Hawkins was engaged to play Horatio, it seemed convenient to Gielgud to have both sides of the couple in the cast, although it is just as likely that Hawkins was cast to pair with Tandy rather than vice-versa.

Whatever the reason, Tandy considered it a triumph over Ashcroft, who had already played a season as leading lady at the Old Vic. Later Tandy was to say of Ashcroft, "We were of the same vintage. Peggy had the cream of it, the real plums. I got

82 Anthony and Anna, which ran for 788 performances, and French Without Tears, which ran for 1025 performances. Tandy left both casts early in the runs to take on other work.
some of them” (Gussow 1994: C1). Evidently this was Tandy’s perception throughout the 1930s. When Tandy would complain at a Motley tea, Ashcroft would say to her, “You’ve got to remember that I’m older than you” (De Jongh 1979).

Tandy attended rehearsals with a two-month-old newborn at home and in the midst of a short run of a murder mystery at the Duke of York’s Theatre. Line Engaged was one of the productions in which Motley separately created a dress for Tandy to wear (Line Engaged Program, Theatre Museum). In the cast of this play was Lewis Casson, husband of Dame Sybil Thorndike with whom Tandy was making increasing professional connection. Tandy had already performed under the direction of Thorndike’s sister, and she was soon to appear in several productions with the Dame herself. When Tandy accepted the role of Ophelia she could not have known for certain Line Engaged would be a failure at the box office and so quickly withdrawn. She must have been relieved, however, when it closed on November 3, twelve days before the opening of Hamlet.

With a flurry of activity, cast and crew went into rehearsal and production of Hamlet. John Gielgud was a maddening director, constantly changing his mind and expecting his collaborators to know his new mind before he did. Margaret Harris later remembered, “He sat in the dress circle with his feet on the rail, and shouted at the actors and changed everything every minute” (Croall 2001: 184). Alec Guinness wrote, “Gielgud’s directions to the actors were interrupted frequently, in full flight, by his calling out to the designers... ‘Motleys! Motleys! Would it be pretty to have it painted gold? Perhaps not. Oh, don’t fidget, Frith Banbury! Alec Guinness, you are gabbling...
Now turn upstage. No, not you. You! Turn the other way. Oh, why can’t you all act?

Get someone to teach you to act!” (Guinness 1984: 57). Sometimes it would require an entire morning to block a single page of text.

The Motleys designed a permanent set, and at Gielgud’s behest modeled the costumes after the paintings of Albrecht Dürer. The costumes were stiff and heavy, essentially made of painted canvas. Tandy was required to borrow a petticoat from her mother. Dorothy Drake interviewed Tandy as she donned her costume before performance: “‘Don’t wonder what this is,’ she laughingly explained, as I watched her putting on a somewhat weird garment, ‘it’s a flannel petticoat—one of my mother’s. My dress needs something underneath, so she gave me this. Look at the beautiful work round the hem; what a pity we don’t have such things nowadays’” (Drake 1934: n. p.). Even as one of the best admired young actresses in London, Tandy still had little extra spending money.

On opening night John gave the actors and designers little gifts. In her scrapbooks Tandy preserved a little card which probably accompanied a bouquet of flowers. Gielgud wrote to her, “Dear Jessie, Your exquisite Ophelia makes me feel so proud to have the pleasure of acting with you—I know you will have the success your brilliant performance deserves. Thank you with all my heart for your patience and sweetness in rehearsal, and the lovely result you have achieved. John” (Tandy Scrapbook B: 38). Tandy was to need all the encouragement she could find as notices began to pour out for the production.
The actors must have suspected they had a phenomenal success on their hands when at opening night the New Theatre made a record of early bookings. The first two nights sold out early, and the first two weeks paid for all the production costs. For the next five months *Hamlet* became one of the most profitable productions staged at the New Theatre and a record of popularity for Shakespeare in the West End. Bronson Albery retained *Hamlet* at the theatre long after its six weeks were up. His risk had paid off well.

While *Hamlet* received a great deal of attention from the press, critics were not unstinting in their praise. Set and costumes and some performances like that of Jack Hawkins were nearly always fawned upon, but Gielgud’s performance was not yet declared the definitive Hamlet it has subsequently become in theatrical memory. Nor did Tandy find the acclaim to which she had become accustomed. To her performance in particular critics took exception.

James Agate, critic for the London *Times*, titled his Sunday review of the production “Everest Half Scaled: Mr. Gielgud’s Noble Attempt,” reflecting his opinion of Gielgud’s performance in the title role. The last sentences of the review cruelly read, “Laertes and Ophelia are of the company of Shakespeare’s golden lads and lasses and should be played as such. The rest is silence, including Ophelia, for whom, in my opinion, that charming little actress Miss Jessica Tandy is quite pathetically miscast” *(Sunday Times* 18 Nov 1934). Earlier in the week Agate had written, “Of these [performances] only one is at fault, and, indeed, the fault is not in her acting. Miss Jessica Tandy’s appearance and temperament, the almost aggressive sprightliness of her,
run contrary to Ophelia" (*Times* 15 Nov 1934). This was the consensus of most of the critics. Words recurrent in their descriptions of her performance were pathetic, pathos, child and childlike, little, modern, unconventional, and miscast. Tandy’s interpretation of Ophelia did not match critics’ initial expectations of the role, though many later critics felt compelled to defend the insight and skill of her portrayal.83

John Gielgud himself had chosen her for her sprightly qualities and appealing sensitivity, and he stood by his choice despite the negative press by significant reviewers. He later commented that he had truly liked her interpretation of Ophelia:

> There was a great deal of controversy over Jessica Tandy’s Ophelia. Personally, I thought it a delicate and lovely performance. But I suppose Ophelia is one of the Shakespearean characters round which a great deal of tradition has gathered. Jessica Tandy’s conception of the part was original and personal. It was a daring piece of casting which, to my mind, was fully justified (Gielgud 1938: n. p.).

Many decades later he still recalled her performance with admiration. He wrote, “I think Ophelia is one of the most difficult parts in Shakespeare. Jessica Tandy, who played it with me at the New Theatre in London in 1934, was marvellously good” (Gielgud 1991: 43).

Tandy had encountered comments claiming she had been miscast in a role before. Critics often criticized her appearance as inappropriate for the role she was playing, but never before had critics claimed she was entirely wrong for a character. Indeed Tandy

---

83 J. I. Rugg-Gonn wrote an editorial to *Theatre World* defending at length Tandy’s portrayal of Ophelia. Among other things, he wrote that, “Jessica Tandy may not portray the gentle, amenable maiden with whom we are apt to associate Ophelia, but she portrays an Ophelia who is human and more interesting for being ‘different’... What is there, after all, to prove that Shakespeare did not intend his Ophelia to be something of a humorous minx?” (*Theatre World* Feb 1935 [Tandy Scrapbook B: 46]).
had come to rely on skill rather than beauty to lead her to success. Later in life she commented, “I’ve always been thought of as a rather plain girl. I used to have letters of introduction written for me which said ‘This is a very talented girl but don’t bother about how she looks; on stage she’s fine’” (Honan 1992: 7). When she played Manuela, several critics had commented on the contradiction between her cheeky, mischievous appearance and the soulful appeal of her rich performance.

Later Tandy claimed she had been spared the brutality of her reviews by the kindness of her husband. She wrote, “I believe it’s Jack’s ‘consideration’ that always gets me. When he played Horatio in John Gielgud’s ‘Hamlet,’ and I was Ophelia—severely slated by some of the critics—he kept all the notices from me, knowing I could not take it” (Tandy, “Men You Know”). But perhaps the ignorance of what was written plagued her experience of critical betrayal more than knowledge would have. Theatre artists rarely keep their opinions of reviews to themselves, and she must have been at least aware of the content of notices through hearsay. And to be spared reviews only when they are negative can impede an actor all the more, for the very act of forbidding those reviews brings the certainty they are poor. In the future, Tandy claimed she foreswore reviews altogether. She explained, “It may sound snotty, though it’s not meant to be, but no matter what is written I have to go on every night and believe what I’m doing. If they say Jessica Tandy can’t act her way out of a paper bag, I don’t want to know that because I’ve got to act my way out of a paper bag!” (Chambers 1986: 116-17).

Winifred Loraine wrote in supplement of Tandy’s essay about Jack Hawkins, “Jessica Tandy had a hard time starting out as an actress, because managers were always looking out for a pretty, fair girl. She was dark, regarded as an ugly duckling; her face, they argued, fitted into no type” (Tandy “Men You Know”).
Nevertheless audiences continued to flock to see *Hamlet*. After a record 155 performances, unprecedented in that decade for Shakespeare in the West End, the play closed, and more than 200 people were turned away at the last two London performances. Word of mouth and perhaps Gielgud’s tremendous personal popularity made *Hamlet* the event of the season, and retrospect has lifted it to a key event in English-speaking theatre of the century. Gielgud has come to be identified with *Hamlet* in the twentieth century, and this was the production that established that identity.

Mindful of their aim to transform theatre in England, Gielgud and his cast and crew set out on a tour of the provinces to bring their historic production to remote audiences. Tandy played Ophelia in Streatham Hill, Manchester, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Leeds. Her husband Jack Hawkins remained behind in London during the tour, and he was replaced as Horatio by Ellis Irving. Gielgud’s loyalty to Tandy and her Ophelia is reflected in his choice to retain Tandy for the tour. He said, “During the run of *Hamlet* she became one of my greatly valued friends. She is an actress of rare sensitiveness and perception, and I am looking forward to seeing her in another part as worthy of her powers as was Manuela in *Children in Uniform*” (Gielgud 1938: n. p.).

With John Gielgud’s 1934 *Hamlet*, Shakespeare had proven a viable commercial endeavor. As is so common in show business, one successful production led to numerous imitations seeking to recreate the original success. An impressive number of Shakespearean productions followed in the West End and on Broadway. In 1935 Gielgud returned to the New Theatre to alternate Romeo and Mercutio with Laurence Olivier in the longest run of *Romeo and Juliet* on record. In 1935 Guthrie McClintic also staged a
record-breaking *Romeo and Juliet* starring Katharine Cornell at the Martin Beck Theatre on Broadway. Maurice Evans, who played Romeo in this production, later made such a success on Broadway of Hamlet, Macbeth, and Richard II that he decided to remain in America and become a United States citizen.

After *Hamlet* toured the provinces, Gielgud and company invited Michel St. Denis, a famous French director whose Company of Quinze had recently dissolved, to direct an English version of André Obey’s *Noah* at the New Theatre. For this production St. Denis required the English actors to recreate the blocking and characterization of his renowned French version. Tandy played the wife of one of Noah’s sons, Tandy’s husband Jack Hawkins played another of the sons, many others from the cast of *Hamlet* performed, and Motley designed the costumes. This was the only time Tandy or Gielgud was to work with Monsieur St. Denis. A novelty, the production found neither critical nor commercial success, and Tandy returned to the West End to pursue her art.

**Commercial Success: French Without Tears**

Tandy’s next endeavor was a commercial success by John St. Ervine, a playwright who also wrote theatre criticism. In *Anthony and Anna*, a love story about the eventual marriage of two headstrong adults, Tandy played the American heiress Anna Penn. Critics praised the production, but theatre manager J. P. Mitchelhill decided to take it down after only a few weeks of relatively sparse houses. The cast protested and made an arrangement with Mitchelhill to exchange their salaries for a share in the profits of the production. It went on to run for 788 performances, although Tandy left the production in order to embark upon a Binkie Beaumont venture starring Diana Wynyard.
After a 1935 club premiere of *Farm of Three Echoes* with Sybil Thorndike and Dame May Whitty in the cast and a flop as Diana Wynyard’s sister in the 1936 Binkie Beaumont production of *The Ante-Room* by Edna O’Brien, Tandy went into rehearsal for the first major play by a young playwright named Terence Rattigan. Terry Rattigan had become part of the loose Gielgud circle through his participation in Gielgud’s first collaboration with Motley, when Gielgud directed *Romeo and Juliet* at the O. U. D. S. Rattigan had played only a minor part, but he was a colleague of George Devine and an aspiring gay playwright of the sort Gielgud often took under his wing. Rattigan’s father had arranged with Rattigan to sponsor his playwriting ambitions for one year. If, by the end of that time, Rattigan had failed to earn a living by his trade, he was to relinquish the theatre and become a diplomat. The year was nearing an end, and Rattigan had yet to make his mark as a playwright. Desperately he sent his latest play, a spoof on the easy way in which young travelers fall in love while studying French abroad, to actors and agents around the city. One of the people to whom he submitted his play was Kay Hammond, who in turn supplied the play to Harold French as a possibility.

When Bronson Albery, who managed the Criterion Theatre as well as the New, needed a stopgap to replace a failure, he agreed to have Harold French direct Rattigan’s new play, at that time called *Gone Away*. Albery’s only stipulation was that Jessica Tandy was to play the French ingénue. After *Hamlet* Albery had replaced J. P. Mitchelhill as Tandy’s agent and wanted to find her work after the failure of *The Ante-Room*. French and Rattigan agreed and began their hunt for young actors with comedic flash.  

---

85 This play later met success on Broadway.
Kay Hammond, the actress who had brought the play to the attention of French, was cast as the leading lady, a vamp who trails numerous young suitors along only to be thwarted by an ironic twist in her final conquest. One of the young actors the team found was an unknown Rex Harrison, who later went on to become a film star. Of the hurriedly assembled cast, only Jessica Tandy was an established name. After a ten-day rush of rehearsals and rewrites in which the play was renamed *French Without Tears*, the collaborators prepared for their opening. Final dress rehearsal was a complete disaster. The biggest challenge seemed to be remembering lines. Panic set in among the entire company, and one of the financial backers tried to back out. As the cast prepared to receive their last notes before opening, Harold French writes that Tandy spoke up, saying “‘Mr. French, you know we can’t open tomorrow night. This isn’t a play, it’s a charade and an under-rehearsed one at that.’

‘That may be your opinion but it doesn’t happen to be mine.’ I turned to the stage manager. ‘Keep the staff, re-set props and lighting and ring that curtain up in a quarter of an hour’” (French 1973: 159). The cast and crew ran the production a second time through that night, and this time they had their lines. They proceeded with the opening.

Tandy later recalled her encounter with French differently. In her account, “Tandy remembers that that cast made her the spokesman to go to the director and tell him they all felt so under-rehearsed it would look like amateur night. He took no notice, and after their first night ovation twitted her: ‘Amateur night, eh?’” (Barber 1978).

---

86 This was reflected when she was later cast with unknowns in Alfred Hitchcock’s *The Birds*. It also provides an ironic contrast to her exclusion from the film version of *Streetcar*, when Vivien Leigh became the name and the rest of the original cast the unknowns on film.
French Without Tears went on to become one of the longest running shows of the decade, filling houses for 1025 performances. Tandy left the cast early for the best of reasons, to perform a season as leading lady at the Old Vic. Her highest aspirations had come true, and it was among the happiest times of her life.

Season at the Old Vic

In 1935 Jessica Tandy joined the Old Vic for Tyrone Guthrie’s second season as artistic director there. During World War I the team of Lilian Baylis, who controlled the use of the building, and Sir Philip Ben Greet had worked to establish the Old Vic as a theatre where London audiences could always find high quality productions of Shakespeare at popular prices. In the decades following their collaboration the theatre had come to represent the epitome of artistic nobility. To perform at the Old Vic was an honor that could not be found elsewhere in England. At the Old Vic actors established their reputations as devoted and skilled artists.

Tyrone Guthrie had pursued the honor of directing the Old Vic for the first time during the 1933-34 season. A visionary even as a young man, he had felt that the theatre was becoming stagnant in tradition and needed both a commercial and artistic renovation. Consequently as artistic director he chose to cast some of London’s most popular rather than respected performers, reducing the number of productions in a season, and bringing in different designers for each production to make the production distinctive. Financially his alterations were a tremendous success. Politically they were a terrible

---

87 Among these was Charles Laughton, who was also a film star.

67
Letters of protest poured in from former audience members, and Lilian Baylis herself disapproved. Guthrie was replaced during the next two seasons, the failure of which induced Baylis to invite him to return for another attempt in 1936-37.

Mindful of the lessons he had learned previously, Guthrie compromised with Baylis by inviting established stars who had also proven themselves previously in Shakespearean roles to perform. Laurence Olivier and Edith Evans dominated the 1936-37 season. Guthrie invited Jessica Tandy, who had performed with him in *Lady Audley's Secret*, to perform as Viola and Sebastian in *Twelfth Night* and as Katharine in *Henry V*. In the former Olivier played Sir Toby and in the latter the title role. With enthusiasm Tandy left the run of *French Without Tears* to take up this opportunity. She later remarked that “Had I stayed in ‘French’ we might both have been rich by now” (Tandy, “Men You Know”), but she did not ever seem to regret the trade.

In his autobiography, Tyrone Guthrie called *Twelfth Night* “a baddish, immature production of mine, with Olivier outrageously amusing as Sir Toby and a very young Alec Guinness less outrageous and more amusing as Sir Andrew” (Guthrie 168). Several critics complained of Tandy's inaudibility in a few of Viola's speeches, but for the most part they were impressed with her doubling as Sebastian. A “J. G. B.” put it this way: “As for Miss Tandy’s performance, she has a lovely quality of pathos which makes the utmost of her two great speeches the ‘willow cabin’ and ‘patience on a monument’ passages. But elsewhere her voice is rather small for so large a theatre, and she diminishes it still further by so often turning her back on the audience” (“Back to the

---

88 Olivier was beginning his famous affair with Vivien Leigh, and Guthrie had considered casting her as Olivia, but Olivier asked him to cast Jill Esmond (Olivier’s wife) instead of Leigh, so Jill Esmond played Tandy’s Viola. Tandy had the discretion never to comment publicly on her perceptions of these events.
Audience” n. d., Clipping Theatre Museum). If her position in relation to the audience was responsible for their difficulty hearing her, the director was to be faulted more than the actress.

Of Henry V Tyrone Guthrie wrote,

It was now the spring of 1937 and the Coronation of King George VI was imminent. We thought that a ringingly patriotic Henry V would be appropriate and that Olivier would be well suited to the part. It was, and he was. Motley did a simple but extremely ingenious décor of flags; the supporting company, over a hundred strong, was excellent; the finale was, as a royal betrothal should be, fully choral and a dozen sopranos from the Opera used to hurtle down in cars from Sadler’s Wells just in time to appear, in their Tannhäuser frocks, and lend great body to a final high B flat (Guthrie 168).

Guthrie considered it his best production to date, and Tandy received her due acclaim as the young French princess who married Henry V. John Gielgud later said, “I remember vividly an enchanting and witty performance she gave as the French princess in Laurence Olivier’s first stage version of Henry V” (Gielgud 1994: n. p.). Ivor Brown wrote in The Observer, “Miss Jessica Tandy is extremely well suited as the French Princess” (Observer 11 Apr 1937). Herbert Farjeon wrote, “The light charm and delicacy of Miss Jessica Tandy’s Princess sparkles as irresistibly as a fountain in the sun” (The Bystander 28 Apr 1937). Yet another critic wrote, “Every moment of her performance was delicious” (Sunday Times 11 Apr 1937). For the first time since her season at the Open Air theatre she had found unstinting praise in the venue closest to her heart.

Return to America

When her season at the Old Vic had ended, Tandy went on to play another liberated young miss in Yes, My Darling Daughter. This time Sybil Thorndike was her
mother. The play lasted only 59 performances, but Dame Thorndike and Tandy enjoyed their collaboration enough to embark on a journey to the United States in J. B. Priestley's new play *Time and the Conways*, once again as a mother-daughter team. Thorndike later described their 1938 journey abroad:

> We were the most miserable company in the ship on Christmas Eve. We sang carols and cried buckets—I without Lewis [Casson, her husband], and half the others in some sort of matrimonial tangle. And the play wasn't a great success, though it was beautifully directed by Irene Hentschel, and Jessica Tandy was so good. It was too odd for New York, I think (Sprigge 1971: 224).

It was the beginning of Tandy's migration to another continent and a new life. War had broken out on the continent, and her marriage was floundering. During the next few years Tandy alternated continents from production to production, from season to season. The stability she had found at the beginning of the decade as a newlywed and one of London's young stars was dissolving. While Tandy was away with *Time and the Conways*, her friend John Gielgud wrote of her: "She should be one of the outstanding stars of the London stage, but at present her strict integrity prevents her from making those 'showy' effects which have often carried other lesser artists to sensational success" (Gielgud 1938: n. p.). The integrity John described in her was a source of perpetual disagreement in her partnership with Jack Hawkins.

Tandy returned to London in time to participate in a 1938 centenary tribute to Henry Irving featuring all the brightest stars of the London stage. Then she returned to the Duchess Theatre, home of her success as Manuela, to star as a modern Joan of Arc fighting a totalitarian regime in a fictional country. Norman MacOwan's *Glorious*...
Morning lasted for 324 performances and was proof both of the drawing power of Tandy's name and of the apprehension with which Britain viewed Germany and Italy's moves on the continent. In January 1939 Tandy played a rebellious young Irish villager in Paul Vincent Carroll's The White Steed on Broadway. The play won Carroll the Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Foreign Play, and furthered Tandy's acclaim in the States. That summer Tandy reprised her role as Viola at the Open Air theatre to the pleasure of critics and audiences. In September 1939 Britain declared war on Germany, and Tandy departed once again for America to tour Canada in three productions headed by Barry Jones. One of these productions was Geneva, George Bernard Shaw's prophetic satire on the inevitability of war.

Farewell to the Old Vic

The following summer Tandy returned to London to join her friends and husband in an attempt to save the Old Vic from failure during the war. The theatre had closed entirely during the war's outset, and during closure it had suffered extensive damage from bombing. It needed funds for repair. For the first production in 1940 Gielgud and company invited the famous Shakespearean director Harley Granville Barker to make one of his returns to theatre. John Gielgud played King Lear, Jack Hawkins Edmund the Bastard, Fay Compton Regan and Cathleen Nesbitt Goneril, and Jessica Tandy played Cordelia.

---

89 Tandy had acted with Compton in Autumn Crocus and Nesbitt in Children in Uniform. Nesbitt, who had played the punitive headmistress in Children, later wrote that she had detested the show, perhaps because of the hostility with which audiences viewed her due to her role.
In his autobiography Jack Hawkins describes the enterprise: "Later that summer a group of us, including my wife Jessica, got together and tried to keep the Old Vic going. In spite of the cast—which I suppose constituted about forty per cent of the best classical actors and actresses in the country—it was soon clear that the attempt was doomed. So was my marriage" (Hawkins 1973: 57). Tandy’s long absences in North America may have been in response to marital difficulties, but they had also taken their toll on the couple’s union.

In her autobiography Cathleen Nesbitt, who had first become acquainted with the couple during Tandy’s immense success as Manuela in *Children in Uniform*, writes of the conditions under which the company had to perform in the decimated building and war conditions:

No one was being paid more than £10 a week; all the proceeds, which must have been enormous, were devoted to the rebuilding of that part of the Old Vic that had been destroyed by bombs. There were practically no dressing rooms left. Fay and Jessica and I had to share one room, and I seem to remember that Jessica had just married and Fay was just divorcing (or was it the other way round?) and could have done with a little privacy! All of us could have done with better lighting. We had to line up for the one decent mirror, with a light that we could see by (Nesbitt 1977: 178).

The Old Vic had become a national symbol for the artists fighting for its survival. Critics were generous to the company as a whole, although once again Jessica Tandy was singled out for negative press. Herbert Farjeon wrote, “Miss Tandy is not up to Cordelia. She seems to have no reserves and to be making a commendable effort” (*The Bystander* 8 May 1940: 164). In the same article Farjeon praised the outstanding work of her

---

90 It was the other way 'round. It is understandable Nesbitt should be confused, for the only other time she acted with Tandy was during *Children in Uniform*, when Tandy was indeed a newlywed.
husband Jack Hawkins. Years later Tandy recalled the production. Barker had wished to create the illusion that after Cordelia's death King Lear finds incredible strength. He had the designers rig machinery by which Gielgud could lift Jessica Tandy high over his head when Lear enters carrying his dead daughter. Tandy said, "John did look like Superman and not one with a teeshirt. I wore white clothes with drapes and there was a swing under me to take some of my weight which was hidden by it and then I released a slip knot when we were arrived on stage" (De Jongh 1979: n. p.).

The next production was John Gielgud's first attempt at Prospero in The Tempest. Tandy played his daughter Miranda and Jack Hawkins Caliban. Granville Barker had declined an invitation to direct another production, and George Devine and Marius Goring stepped in to share in this function. Alec Guinness, who played Ferdinand to Tandy's Miranda, later recalled their experience working together. "I was in five productions with her, and in one of them, The Tempest, I'm afraid we've behaved disgracefully, giggling at what we considered absurdities, but to John Gielgud's indignation" (Guinness 1994: n. p.).

Once again critics dismissed Tandy's portrayal of her role as inaudible and forced. Shortly after opening she left the Old Vic and England to find a new life in the United States. Hawkins describes this shift:

Jessica was equally as ambitions, and so our relationship, like that of Shakespeare's young lasses, was star-crossed in the most literal sense: we were both too busy seeking to be stars ourselves to have time for marriage. Ambition came between us, and instead of being content to build a home life like so many other young couples of our age, we concentrated on building our careers. Obviously, we steadily grew apart until our marriage was in serious danger. Thus, when Jessica was offered a very good part in America, it seemed sensible for her to go. I was anxious that our little
daughter, Susan, should be somewhere safe, for prospects in Britain did not seem bright in 1940. So they sailed away together. But when we said goodbye in London, I never imagined that ten years would pass before I saw either of them again (Hawkins 1973: 57-58).

Peggy Ashcroft replaced Tandy in the role of Miranda. In a curtain speech shortly after Tandy's departure John Gielgud announced, “Ladies and gentlemen, I know you will rejoice with all of us in relief at the news just received—Jessica Tandy is safely in America!” (Croall 2001: 287). Although no one realized it at the time, England had lost the woman Alec Guinness later called, “A delightful, delicate, beautiful, and important ornament of the London theatre” (Guinness 1994: n. p.).
CHAPTER 3

BIRTH OF AN AMERICAN

After her role as the first Miranda to John Gielgud’s Prospero, Tandy left England for the United States. Driven away from the London theatre scene partly by the devastating effects of World War II and partly by estrangement from her first husband, Tandy next settled in New York and then the West Coast, hoping to establish a career there. Her outstanding credits from the London theatre scene provided little assistance in the United States during the war, so she went through a period of limited productivity, playing only a few supporting roles on film, occasionally with her future second husband Hume Cronyn.

In 1946 she played the title character of Tennessee Williams’ Portrait of a Madonna for the Los Angeles Actor’s Laboratory Theatre under the direction of Hume Cronyn. Her skilled performance in this play so impressed playwright Williams and Streetcar director Elia Kazan that they immediately cast her in the role of Blanche for the 1947 Broadway production of A Streetcar Named Desire.

Following the acclaim which surrounded her portrayal of Blanche, Tandy was faced with the harsh disappointment of being almost the sole collaborator from the original production team not asked to reprise her work; Vivien Leigh replaced Tandy in
the film version of the play. At the time Tandy gracefully kept her feelings to herself, but it was not until four decades later that her Academy Award for *Driving Miss Daisy* was to heal the wound she felt at her exclusion.
Birth of an American

When Jessica Tandy boarded the ship to America in 1940, her young daughter Susan in tow and £10 in her purse, she had no idea that this journey would be a permanent departure from the country to which she had been born a citizen. Her primary motivation in leaving England at that time was the safety of her daughter during the course of a war that lasted more years than any of the contenders expected. Tandy was bringing her daughter to live in the home of strangers, and she herself would remain nearby earning the money by which her daughter would be kept.

When the idea of sending Susan to America had occurred to Tandy and her husband, Tandy had few practical connections in the United States through whom to find a suitable home for her daughter. While Hawkins and especially Tandy had spent some time working abroad, the people with whom they associated during their stays were little suited for temporarily adopting a child of six. Tandy's primary associates had been other artists from Britain on tour with her. Americans she had met were theatre artists and managers, struggling like herself to earn a name and a living for themselves or too busy and wealthy to concern themselves with the welfare of a young child. Tandy had little to guide her in her search for an appropriate American family. So when one of Tandy's avid and garrulous fans91 wrote to her of friends he had living in the States who would be willing to shelter her little girl for a time, Tandy took up the best opportunity she had for a safe, stable, and friendly home for her daughter. The Horns were a family with two

91 Howard F. Lowry was a Sterling Fellow at Yale University. Because of his extensive correspondence about Tandy's roles, he eventually began to socialize with Hawkins and Tandy whenever he was in London. According to his letters, his greatest wish was to see Tandy perform in Shaw's St. Joan.
young boys, and Hawkins and Tandy felt Susan would find some measure of an ordinary childhood in their home. It seemed at the time to be the best choice the two actors could make for their daughter.

When Tandy arrived she took Susan to her new home, leased a room in New York City for herself, and began rehearsals for *Jupiter Laughs*, a new play by novelist A. J. Cronin. In this 1940 production Tandy played a fervently Christian psychiatrist who dies for love. She is killed in an explosion when her genius lover's work is sabotaged. Through Dr. Mary Malone's death and love, her paramour is transformed and spends the rest of his life continuing her work as a missionary in China. Readily and happily forgotten, this play had little impact on critics, audiences, or Tandy and was quickly withdrawn.

Perhaps the play did have some impact upon her. A young Canadian actor named Hume Cronyn had become familiar with her acting and managed to meet her backstage and tag along for dinner with another young man interested in wooing Tandy. This was later one of Hume Cronyn's favorite stories to relate. Apparently over the dinner Cronyn believed it would be entertaining for Tandy to see his impression of the British and their style of theatre, but she was not amused. He says she called him a fool to his

---

92 A. J. Cronin wrote to Tandy after the negative notices for the play (rather than the performances, which were praised) came out. He said that he would like to write another "good play" for her, "without halos or devastating explosions... There is an elfin quality about that lovely lock of hair which falls athwart your ethereal brow which belongs only to the heroines of J. M. Barrie. You tear Red across my horizon, at least, the most elusive of Mary Roses" (A. J. Cronin to Jessica Tandy 14 Sept 1940. Library of Congress Container 326, Folder 4). The closest he came to fulfilling that aim was when Tandy appeared in *The Green Years* (1946), a film adaptation of one of his novels.

93 She didn't even bother to save notices from it for her scrapbooks. As Hume Cronyn later said, Jupiter didn't laugh long enough (Lifetime 1999).

94 He told it in at least three printed and one filmed interviews. He also very charmingly related it to me over lunch in his home.
face, but in her version she simply glared at him. Tandy Cronyn later recalled, “She did say that her first impression of my father was not very good. She said he was insufferable” (Lifetime 1999). And one of Tandy’s major life changes was born. Despite his initial faux pas, Cronyn later managed to persuade Tandy to have dinner with him alone—and still later to marry him.

For the next six years Tandy performed in only two plays, 95 both imports from England. She earned a living by acting for the radio, but she had difficulty making ends meet. She later remembered, “Everybody who had said, ‘We long to have you here,’ disappeared into the woodwork. That was a tough time. It mattered terribly that I should make a living and I couldn’t” (The Los Angeles Times 12 Sept 1994: A1). The war that was to have ended so soon spread to the country where she had sought safety. The last threads holding together her marriage with Jack Hawkins fell away. During these years of upheaval Tandy made Hume Cronyn, her newfound love, her anchor and resolved to build a life with him. As time passed Tandy resolved to settle permanently in the United States. She wrote to Hume, “We are so close now—I am lost without you” (26 Mar 1942. Library of Congress Container 6). In 1943 she married her second husband; this time she would do it right.

In addition to her roles for radio, Tandy signed a five-year contract with MGM in the hope that she could break into the film world. On film Tandy found herself rejected on the basis of appearance far more than she ever been on the stage, and MGM gave her

---

95 Anne of England by Mary Cass Canfield and Ethel Borden, and Yesterday’s Magic by Emlyn Williams. About the preparatory process for Anne of England, Tandy wrote to Cronyn, “Rehearsal today was agony [no punctuation]. A lot of long winded nonsense and some very bad acting rearing its ugly head” (Jessica Tandy to Hume Cronyn 5 Sept 1941. Library of Congress Container 6).
only a few secondary roles to play. Hollywood cared little that Tandy was one of England's most renowned, admired, and respected actresses. Her letters to Hume Cronyn during that time mention her frustration over the inactivity in this portion of her life. While Tandy waited for her meager opportunities to work on film, she settled down to a more traditional married life than she had ever experienced. She attended to home, family, and friends. In September 1942 the Cronyns had a son whom they named Christopher and in 1945 a daughter named Tandy.

In April of 1942 Tandy had written to Cronyn, "How glad I will be when I only have you and Susan to think of, and I only lead one life instead of three" (Jessica Tandy to Hume Cronyn 8 Apr 1942. Library of Congress Container 6, Folder 11), and she tried to live up to her declaration. Jessica Tandy wanted to be content with a domestic life, and all her life she did enjoy many of its activities, but lifelong ambition, memory of past success, and a deep-seated love for theatre were impossible for her to relinquish. Her contract with MGM had little rewarded her, so when it expired she had not much inclination to renew it. Although her professional life had come to a virtual standstill, with the foresight of her husband it was soon to turn a major corner.

**A Streetcar Named Desire**

Hume Cronyn supported his wife's personal and professional decisions with generosity. He could see her unhappiness at the depletion of what had been such an enormous part of her identity for so many years, and he sympathized with her over Hollywood's seeming dismissal of her abilities. Always enterprising, Cronyn resolved to create opportunities for Jessica Tandy to perform if the film studios would not do so,
hoping that a showcase of her abilities might lead to some appreciation and more work. One of his areas of enterprise served as a venue for that project. With some of his colleagues in Hollywood who also had theatre backgrounds,\textsuperscript{96} he had participated in making the Actors Laboratory Theatre a space where film actors could continue to pursue their work on the stage in Los Angeles.

Some years previously Cronyn had come across some one-act plays by an unknown playwright; seeing their potential he had optioned them for performance for $50 a month for two sequential periods of six months each. While Cronyn was unable to find supporters who saw the same potential in the plays, he provided sustenance for the playwright Tennessee Williams during a very lean time, and Williams remembered the favor with gratitude. Although the plays never received the major production both men had hoped for, Williams allowed Cronyn to stage one of them at the Actors Laboratory in 1945 when the playwright had finally achieved recognition and financial stability with the success of \textit{The Glass Menagerie}.

In a letter to Edward Tandy, Jessica’s brother, Hume Cronyn explained his reasons for staging Williams’ \textit{Portrait of a Madonna} at the Actors Laboratory: “Short thought the run will be (about four weeks) I think that it will do Jessica good both psychologically and professionally. It’s time she reestablished her assurance both as a person and as an actress” (18 Jan 1947). Cronyn went on to describe the depression into which Tandy had fallen during the years in which her career was at a standstill and his eagerness for her to recover. Tandy later said of that time, “I’d had a good start and I was in the doldrums in Hollywood. It was not a happy position. I began to feel I had no

\textsuperscript{96} Some of these were John Huston, Anthony Quinn, and Vincent Price.
talent and it was a pipe dream. It was Hume who got me out of it” (Berger 1994: A1).
The short run of this play was indirectly to lead Tandy to a full recovery of her
confidence as an actress, emblematized in her acceptance of a Tony Award for Best
Actress in 1947.

*Portrait of a Madonna* was a preliminary sketch of the role that later became
Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. A portrayal of an aging belle who searches
unsuccessfully for love and ends the play in a mental institution, this playlet provided a
vehicle for Tandy to demonstrate the range and depth of her acting skills for film
producers who had hitherto failed to appreciate her. Critics and audiences in Los
Angeles were thoroughly impressed with her performance, although it did not move film
producers to make her any more offers. While Tandy was playing Miss Lucretia Collins
in *Portrait of a Madonna*, Tennessee Williams had just completed a draft of his latest
play, at that time called *The Poker Night*. Through the assistance of his literary agent
Audrey Wood,97 he had secured Irene Selznick98 to produce the play, and together they
obtained a contract with Elia Kazan to direct. Upon Woods’ advice, the play was retitled
*A Streetcar Named Desire*. Kim Hunter99 later recalled, “I asked Tennessee once, how
would you describe your sense of the theme of the play? And he said, ‘Well, I think it’s a

---

97 The daughter of a theatre manager, Audrey Wood opened an agency to represent playwrights in 1937.
Among her clients were Tennessee Williams (from 1939 on), Carson McCullers, and William Inge.
98 Daughter to Louis B. Mayer and first wife to David O. Selznick, Irene Selznick had recently separated
from her husband to launch a career of her own. *A Streetcar Named Desire* was her first project as a
producer.
99 Kim Hunter played Stella, Blanche’s sister, in the premiere production of *Streetcar*.
plea—a plea for the understanding of the delicate people.' The play is about Blanche" (Lifetime 1999). The actress who was to play Blanche Dubois would be crucial to the success of the production.

During the search for an actress to play the role of Blanche, the play’s producer, director, and writer were in strident disagreement. Pamela Brown, Margaret Sullavan, and Mary Martin were considered but eventually dismissed as possibilities. Bette Davis was asked about her availability, which was incompatible with a run of the play. At a loss, the three decided upon Hume Cronyn’s suggestion to visit the small theatre in Los Angeles to view Tandy in a special performance of Portrait of a Madonna. After seeing Tandy’s brilliant performance, all three were convinced she was the actress to play the role, and she was engaged. Each later wrote in their respective autobiographies about the experience of seeing Tandy in Portrait. Williams recalled, “It was instantly apparent to me that Jessica was Blanche” (Williams 1975: 132).

Tandy later described her opportunity with wonder and gratitude:

It was like suddenly a great big door opened to me, because I had felt that in Hollywood, although I was under contract to Fox, I was not being used as I could be. I wasn’t being given anything challenging to do. The stage, after all, was my first love, and this was a play which was a groundbreaker. There was no question but that this was a very wonderful play, and to be given the opportunity to play it was terrific. That I owe to Mr. Cronyn, who saw the possibilities (Bryer and Davison 2001: 27).

---

100 Tandy had no idea they had received her performance so well. She later said, “I thought everything went wrong, that it was the worst performance I had ever given. As a matter of fact, the next day I just went out walking. Nobody could find me, because they were calling, they wanted to talk to me. But I wasn’t home” (Bryer and Davison 2001: 28).

101 She had signed with Fox after her contract with MGM in the hope that they would find more use for her.
The actress had no qualms about signing a run-of-the play contract for the role of
Blanche, and she left her young family, including her teenage daughter Susan, in the care
of her husband in order to rehearse and perform the new play.

The casting team had as difficult a time finding the right actor to play Stanley as
they did with their search for the right Blanche. After much deliberation over known
stars, Kazan, Williams, and Selznick decided to go with a promising young actor by the
name of Marlon Brando.\footnote{102 When he visited several days late for his appointment Brando charmed Tennessee Williams by fixing
the electricity and plumbing in Williams' home before reading the play.} In the roles of Mitch and Stella they cast Karl Malden and
Kim Hunter. Lucinda Ballard designed the costumes and Jo Mielziner the set. Together
the team worked magic. The most challenging obstacle to the process was the marked
contrast in approach between Tandy and Brando. In performance this manifested itself as
technical brilliance on the part of Tandy opposed to overwhelming charisma on Brando’s
part.

Tandy later described her attitude toward her role:

My role as Blanche, which is my favorite, really was quite a challenge. In
my career I have come across only two others as challenging. In 1932 I
did a play in London called ‘Children in Uniform’ and I had a long,
emotional part in that one too. And later, of course, there was my very
challenging half of ‘The Fourposter’ (Smith 1956).

Blanche became Tandy’s favorite role because it placed her back in the realm where she
felt most confident. At last she had returned to a life of professional productivity and
recognition. After years of playing only stereotypical bit roles in films, she had returned
to the stage in a role that matched her experience and talent. Tandy was never to forget
the lesson her years away from acting had taught her. In future decades she was
constantly busy, continuing to make films even through her final illness.

In autumn of 1947 A Streetcar Named Desire opened for a trial run in Boston, and
it later moved to previews in Philadelphia. During the Boston run director Elia Kazan
turned to playwright Tennessee Williams and uttered the now famous prediction, “This
smells like a hit” (Wood 1981: 154). His prediction was utterly correct. When the play
opened on December 3, 1947, at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre in New York City, critics
hailed it as one of the greatest plays of the century. At opening night the audience gave
the play a thirty-minute standing ovation. Streetcar and its production team went on to
receive numerous awards, and it has become one of the most written about and produced
plays of the American theatre. The play received the Pulitzer, Donaldson, and New York
Drama Critics’ Circle Awards for Best American Play of the 1947-48 season.

For her role as Blanche Tandy won her first Antoinette Perry (Tony) Award for
Best Actress. Film director and producer Alan Pakula, who saw Tandy perform Blanche
during the previews in New Haven, said that as he watched her he became aware of “the
kaleidoscope of revelation in her work: Edgy, then lyrical, fragile, then fierce, rigid, then
yielding, desperate, then tranquil, absurd in quixotic fantasy, and finally noble in defeat
and the retreat from sanity” (Pakula 1994: n. p.). Tandy’s friend John Gielgud also saw
her perform, and he later said he had “marvelled at her power in the violent scenes she
had to play with Marlon Brando” (Gielgud 1994: n. p.).
Tandy gained her first universal praise from American reviewers since her role in *The White Steed* in 1939. *New York Times* critic Brooks Atkinson wrote:

Jessica Tandy gives a superb performance... This must be one of the most perfect marriages of acting and playwriting. For the acting and playwriting are perfectly blended in a limpid performance, and it is impossible to tell where Miss Tandy begins to give form and warmth to the mood Mr. Williams has created (*The New York Times* 4 Dec 1947).

Tandy had played her role with such brilliance that she became the measure against which all future actresses must be weighed in their portrayal of Blanche Dubois. Later in the review Atkinson commented further upon the challenges Tandy faced in the role:

Miss Tandy has a remarkably long part to play. She is hardly ever off the stage, and when she is on stage she is almost constantly talking—chattering, dreaming aloud, wondering, building enchantments out of words. Miss Tandy is a trim, agile actress with a lovely voice and quick intelligence. Her performance is almost incredibly true. For it does seem almost incredible that she could understand such an elusive part so thoroughly and that she can convey it with so many shades and impulses that are accurate, revealing and true (*The New York Times* 4 Dec 1947).

Other reviews were equally full of praise. Louis Kronenberger echoed reviewers from Tandy’s London past by starting out, “Jessica Tandy begins by seeming miscast—she doesn’t for one thing look the way you think Blanche should.” Like many of those reviewers he also continued, “but [she] ends up little short of triumphantly; hers is a performance that should not be underrated” (*PM* 5 Dec 1947: n. p.). Thomas Brailford, however, felt she was a good match for Blanche: “Jessica Tandy is perfectly cast in the rich principal role.” He continued, “She develops with seemingly effortless skill the enormously complex character of a gently bred girl whose mind is a fugitive from the sordidness of her life” (*Cue* 13 Dec 1947: 18).
Judging by the script, reviews, and Tony Award, the play appeared to belong entirely to her. But a number of factors undermined Tandy’s triumph. Kazan’s direction failed to lead audience sympathies to Blanche, and Marlon Brando’s “unschooled” charisma appealed much more to viewers than Tandy’s careful professional skill. Each night Tandy faced challenges imposed more by the circumstances of the production than by the difficulty of the role itself. The combined strain of playing such a challenging role and fighting audiences’ adoration of her character’s antagonist took its toll upon Tandy. It was perhaps this experience that brought her an important lesson in acting.

When in her seventies she looked back at her career: “I gradually learned that in my best work I remember to withhold things emotionally, so that the audience can feel them” (White 1998: 58). For Tandy it was particularly important to her that the audience feel sympathy for Blanche. Because of exhaustion from her struggle as and for Blanche, Tandy relinquished the role when eventually Streetcar went on tour despite her belief that an actor has an obligation to take an original production to remote audiences. Hume Cronyn later said, “There were moments during that run, when she was so consumed by Blanche and with herself and her own problems, whatever they were, that I know there was some sense of estrangement between us” (Lifetime 1999). Tandy needed time away from the play to recover.

---

103 Marlon Brando would often steal focus during crucial scenes of self-revelation for Blanche. At one point he stuck a cigarette up each nostril and wandered about like a walrus as Tandy was confessing Blanche’s guilt over her husband’s suicide. At other times Brando would try to find ways to make Karl Malden, who played Blanche’s suitor, late for his entrances, thus forcing Blanche to look foolish while she waited alone onstage.

104 Tandy said in an interview with Mike Wallace for CBS News: “I think we’ve always felt that if one has a successful play in New York there is an obligation if feasible to also take it on the road ourselves. . . . To give them the original, not a copy” (Wallace 18 Nov 1982).

87

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
After the lengthiest run Tandy had experienced in one of the most challenging roles written for the stage, Uta Hagen stepped into the role of Blanche and through it established herself as a major name in theatre. When Elia Kazan refused to direct the touring production with the excuse that he had become bored with the play, his friend Harold Clurman replaced him. Reviewers believed that Hagen was as brilliant in the role as Tandy, and without the presence of Brando or Kazan to skew the perspective of the audience, the play once again belonged to Blanche.

Although Elia Kazan’s directorial concept for the play intended audience sympathies to begin with Stanley and gradually transfer to Blanche, in later years as he looked back on the production Kazan believed that the shift in sympathies failed to happen in the premiere production. This failure is confirmed in the way in which Brando has come to be identified with Streetcar in the minds of any familiar with the work, whereas fewer immediately identify the play with Jessica Tandy. Likewise critics who viewed Uta Hagen’s performance of the role claimed that Hagen did not give a better performance than Tandy but that Hagen was more emotionally appealing.

Numerous influences led to a future general consensus that in the original production Tandy gave a brilliant performance, but audiences left the play cheering for Brando. Two major factors dominate: First, while Kazan’s intention may have been to make Blanche the protagonist, his own sympathies and directorial style interfered with his aim. Second, Marlon Brando’s portrayal of Stanley gave no room to the shift Kazan originally intended. Tennessee Williams, enamored of Brando from the moment they had met, gave Brando a carte blanche to do whatever he pleased in the role of Stanley. Even
when Brando began improvising his own lines later in the play’s run, Williams responded that the new lines were an improvement. Audiences were culturally predisposed to side with Stanley’s perspective, and Brando and Kazan’s own cultural biases ultimately reinforced that predisposition. In the end Tandy was blamed for the consequence of factors beyond her control, and this was emblematized in her loss of the film role to Vivien Leigh.

From the beginning of rehearsals Tandy was an outsider to American males Brando and Kazan. To break Tandy of her London theatre training Kazan designed a number of improvisations to place the actress herself emotionally in the space of Blanche’s psyche. One exercise included tying the actress with ropes and having other members of the cast taunt her until she cried (Bosworth 2001: 47). Kazan’s treatment of Tandy baldly contrasted his treatment of Brando, who was beginning to copy Kazan’s own swagger in the role (Bosworth 48). Brando was subjected to no improvisations, and he was even indulged in his extreme tardiness to early rehearsals (Selznick 304).

Likewise, Kazan’s very sensibility as a director emphasized the Stanley perspective of the play more than the Blanche. The mark of Kazan’s productions was spare, swift straightforward movement that built in intensity as the story of the play progressed. Production designer Jo Mielziner said of Kazan that he is “vigorous... never vague or temperamental” (Jones 1986: 196). As a result of Kazan’s aesthetic, Stanley’s perspective more than Blanche’s dominated the entire production. Kazan’s treatment of the two characters also led audience sympathies to Stanley. He instructed Tandy in rehearsals to begin each performance as “a heavy,” leading other characters and audience
to sympathize at first with Stanley. Then, gradually, he hoped, the audience sympathies would shift as they learned more about Blanche's history. He gave Brando no instruction about a transformation of character, feeling Stanley's rape of Blanche spoke for itself in turning audience sympathy against Stanley to Blanche. Evidently this failed to happen.

In an interview Tandy briefly mentioned one of the more challenging obstacles in her own portrayal of Blanche. Marlon Brando was difficult from the beginning.

A much younger, less experienced actor named Marlon Brando was in our 'Streetcar' cast. Even then he was a person of tremendous talent, though he varied with his moods. Marlon was a nice guy but he was terribly difficult at times. But then, who isn't? He made a tremendous contribution to the play... It's extremely difficult to do a part over and over and not get bored with it. This is hard work, you know. In eight years he has grown a great deal as a performer, and by doing such diverse things he has expanded as an actor (Smith 1956).

Tandy's remarks were tempered by time. Intimidated by his role, Brando consistently showed up hours late during the first week of rehearsals, and he did not have his lines memorized until the last rehearsals just before previews. During the run his attitude and behavior scarcely improved. Like Tandy he had signed a run-of-the-play contract, and in the midst of the accolades the play received he obtained several substantial offers from Hollywood. Because of his contract he was unable to accept any of these new opportunities until the play closed, so he began to harbor resentment against the production that had brought him fame. 105

The contrast between Tandy as Blanche and Brando as Stanley articulated a clash of gender and culture. In terms of gender, Tandy/Blanche expressed a feminine aesthetic and Brando/Stanley a masculine. Tandy's movements in the role were delicate, mothlike.

105 Brando's wish to see the play close early became a backstage joke. "Mr. Brando's not feeling well this evening," the crew would say. "The play has just won another prize" (Wood 1981: 93).
Her costumes draped softly around her. Brando’s movements in his role were abrupt and linear, and his costume was skintight and smooth. In terms of culture and experience, Tandy approached her role in the formal, studied manner she had learned in her years acting in Britain. As Karl Malden later said, “We used to kid about it, but we meant it—she was like the mother hen, she was the real pro in that company. She really kept it together. She did it with class. There was no screaming and shouting. She said, ‘It’s time to go to work, let’s go to work and get it over with,’ and we did” (St. Petersburg Times 12 Sept 1994).

It would be easy to misunderstand Tandy’s professionalism. She did not approach her roles from the outside-in, as one might think, however. Instead she approached her roles from the inside-out. Her characterizations were highly instinctive. Because she was British and a seasoned actress (she was 37 when she took on the role of Blanche, while Brando was only 23), Kazan and others stereotyped her as a technical actress rather than an intuitive one. Nothing could be less true. In England Tandy had been exceptional in her intuitive, emotional characterizations, and naturally she retained these qualities after she came to the United States. She aimed for a truthful portrayal of the character the playwright had written. She sought to “put on the bones and skin and flesh of the character you’re playing. And you can disappear; you don’t have to monitor yourself all the time. It happens.” (Lifetime 1999).

---

106 When fitted for his costume Brando insisted on removing his underpants to have the tightest fit possible (Bosworth 49).
107 “Mother Hen” was a nickname for Tandy coined by Marlon Brando during the run of the play (Manso 1994).
When Tandy sought to become the person she was playing, she never used her own emotions to generate the feelings of a character. Instead she sought to find the emotions the character felt in the moment and to truthfully play those. Her physical and vocal choices emerged from those feelings. Unlike Tandy, Brando began from the outside, seeking the character's physical traits before layering in his own emotions to find the truth of the moment. Brando worked out extensively in order to develop Stanley's musculature, he imitated Elia Kazan's gait, and he modeled Stanley's vocal patterns after the voice of a man he had encountered on the street. In finding the emotions of the character, however, Brando approached his role with the informality and instinct for which American actors have become known. He used his own emotions as fodder for Stanley's, relying heavily on emotional recall to work himself up to the feelings required. Sometimes those feelings were absent, and on those nights Stanley failed to have them too. As opposed to the consistency to which Tandy aspired, Brando's performances varied erratically. Tandy later recalled Brando's inconsistency: "If he was tired, he'd play tired. I personally don't think he enjoyed acting. It's a pity because he has gargantuan 'talent'" (Lewin 1994: n. p.). While critics and theatre professionals appreciated Tandy's approach and aesthetic, audiences increasingly identified with Brando's. Karl Malden, who played Mitch, said, "The audience just fell in love with Marlon. Marlon could do no wrong" (Lifetime 1999).

---

108 When she was asked in 1993 which of the roles she'd done was most like herself, she said, "Oh, there isn't one" (Bryer and Davison 2001: 25).

109 She elaborated in 1993 upon her development of a character's physicality: "Supposing I am playing somebody who is very old and who has lived a different kind of life from me... If I go about it by saying, 'Oh, well, she's old, so this is the way she will walk,' or 'this is the way her shoulders will bow' or 'this is the way she walks up the steps,' it doesn't work for me. I find that as I know more about a character, my body will do it. It will happen and I don't have to think about it" (Black 1993: 127).
In her battles with Marlon Brando to create the best performance possible, Tandy received no assistance from either playwright or director. Brando had become a favorite of theirs, and they refused to discipline him. Williams found Brando "Just about the best-looking man I had ever seen" (McCann 1993: 87), and Elia Kazan has said, "Of those I have worked with, the actor I like best is Marlon Brando" (Baer 2000: 240). Neither of them minded that Brando was unable to generate the same performance from night to night, and Marlon blithely forgot Kazan's earlier admonition that "[Y]ou must remember that there are other people in the cast also" (Manso 1994: 226).

The fleeting art of theatre, limited in expression to the moment of live performance, recognized and valued Blanche/Tandy, but the lasting visual arts of painting and film upheld Stanley/Brando. While it was Tandy who triumphed with her 1948 Tony Award, two later events solidified Brando's hold on Streetcar's memory. Thomas Hart Benton created a depiction of the play demonstrating Stanley's view of Blanche's character, and Tandy was excluded from the Academy Award-winning film version of the play in which Brando established himself as a force in Hollywood.

**Portrait**

In 1948 during the run of Streetcar Missouri painter Thomas Hart Benton was commissioned to paint a portrait depicting the characters of the play in action (See Image Five in Appendix Six). *The Poker Night (from A Streetcar Named Desire)*, in tempera oil on a panel, was intended to be a surprise gift for producer Irene Selznick. The painting depicts four men at a poker table, a woman sitting in the foreground, and another woman crouching behind her in a corner. To Tandy's dismay the figure in the foreground was
dressed in a sheer, form-fitting blue dress, provocatively arching her back and brushing her golden hair. In the actress’s mind the painting reinforced all the prejudice she must struggle to illuminate and undermine each night in her role as Blanche.

When *Look* magazine asked the cast to pose in a photographic replica of the painting, Tandy adamantly refused. Tennessee Williams became the liaison between magazine and actress, and in that capacity he appealed to the actress to change her mind. In a letter to Williams explaining her refusal to pose for the photograph, Tandy articulated ways in which she felt it failed to honor Blanche. She began the letter affirming her loyalty to the play and asserting ways she struggled to teach audiences to appreciate Blanche’s faceted humanity. She found it demoralizing enough that audiences found it so easy to take Stanley’s callous view of Blanche’s pretension. Tandy was not going to assist their easy complicity in Blanche’s victimization in publicity for the show. She wrote: “In this painting he [Thomas Hart Benton] has chosen to paint, it seems to me, the Stanley side of the picture. . . . I don’t want to do anything which will lead future audiences to think that they are going to see sex in the raw, as it were” (Tandy vs. Tennessee).

A publicity photo of Tandy in the role of Blanche demonstrates the contrast in Tandy’s view of her character and Thomas Hart Benton’s (See Image Six in Appendix Six). Her body is erect and almost regal, not arched. She holds up a glass full of whisky as though it were a jewel. Her dress drapes about and trails behind her like a shabby queen’s. Her eyes look dreamily into the distance, and her facial expression is forlorn but dignified. The background creates an interplay of light and shadow, of delicate curves.
given form. The photograph is the image of a woman struggling to maintain beauty and dignity in the face of terrible lack, and in it Tandy’s radiance of spirit as a performer is apparent.

Tandy succeeded in turning Williams’ request for her to pose into an apology, but she may also have succeeded in turning Hollywood casting agents against considering her for a film version of the play. Whether or not Tandy’s principles were a factor in casting the film, her boycotting of the painting was echoed in her own future exclusion. Hollywood is notorious for its use of sensationalism to appeal to mass audiences, and instead of Tandy they cast Vivien Leigh, queen of sensation, in the role of Blanche.

Film

Throughout the decades she spent in the United States, it remained Tandy’s great ambition to make it in the world of film. With a Tony Award in her pocket for the role of Blanche, it seemed at first to her that now was to be her great opportunity. Of the cast of the play she was the only one to receive an Award; certainly she would be a priority with agents in assuring the quality and success of the film. But, according to Elia Kazan, when the film when into production, “Charlie Feldman had said I could use my New York cast except for Jessie; Warners, who were putting up the money, insisted we get them a film star in the part of Blanche, so said Charlie” (Kazan 1988: 385). Kazan did not protest and passed the news along to Tandy, who “took it as well as anyone possibly could” (Ibid.).

It was not unusual for Hollywood to opt to cast film stars when transferring a Pulitzer Prize winning play to film. When State of the Union, the play that had won the
year before Streetcar, was converted to film, Ralph Bellamy and Ruth Hussey were replaced by Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn, despite the fact that Ruth Hussey had a great deal of experience acting on film. James Stewart replaced Frank Fay when Hollywood made of film of the 1945 winner Harvey, and he also replaced the star of 1936’s You Can’t Take It with You. What was exceptional in this case was the retention of cast, costume designer, and director, with the exception of Tandy. Occasionally Hollywood had kept a portion of the Broadway cast when filming a Pulitzer Prize winning play, but in those cases generally the female lead stayed, and a film star replaced the male lead. Our Town, the winner for 1937, was a case in point. Frank Craven who played the stage manager and Martha Scott who played Emily Webb stayed, while John Craven was replaced in the role of George Gibbs by William Holden. Likewise, in Harvey Josephine Hull remained in the cast and won an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress in her role, while James Stewart replaced the lead. But never before had so much of a production remained the same, with the exception of the award-winning female lead. Karl Malden put it this way: “The whole cast, I think for the first time in history, was hired to play except Jessica Tandy” (Lifetime 1999).

In London Vivien Leigh had been playing Blanche to packed audiences in Laurence Olivier’s highly sensationalized version of the play. Ten years before Leigh had starred in the largest box office hit to that day as southern belle Scarlett O’Hara in the 1939 film Gone with the Wind. When Warner Brothers decided they needed an established star to draw audiences to see the film of Streetcar, they may have already had Leigh in mind for the role. It is also possible they felt that Blanche was a role more likely
to appeal to a film star’s ego than rapist Stanley. And Blanche appealed to Leigh.

Without much ado, Leigh was offered and eagerly accepted the role, and she later won her first Academy Award for Best Actress for it. Brando was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actor.

Before the filming of *Streetcar*, Lucinda Ballard, who had been hired to design costumes for the film, wrote to Hume Cronyn: “It seems so sad to be doing Streetcar without [Jessica], especially as it’s going to be done as Jessica created it—even more poetically—not than Jessica could—but than Irene110 would let us—if you know what I mean—!” (Lucinda Ballard to Hume Cronyn 29 Jul 1950. Library of Congress Container 30, Folder 26). She wrote again during filming: “We all miss Jessica terribly . . . I must say Vivien is most humble and everyone loves her. Gadge often speaks of Jessica and what she did. Her ‘internal serenity’ is not just outward—no one as gifted and brilliant as Jessica . . . needs any outward there. Whatever any one does, from here on in, Blanche belongs first to Jessica” (19 Aug 1950. Library of Congress Container 30, Folder 26).

Jessica’s performance had not been forgotten by her collaborators, and it was used as inspiration for the play’s transposition to film. Kazan later said, “I’ve always felt that one of the most fascinating things about Jessica’s performance in *Streetcar* was that she made me realize what a lady the tramp character is. It was brilliant, totally intuitive acting. That is what great acting is all about, but Hollywood, then and now, has always had trouble getting that through its thick collective head” (White 1998: 57).

---

110 This was play producer Irene Selznick, whose previous connection with movies had perhaps wedded her aesthetic sensibilities to strict Realism. She too may have been a factor in undermining Jessica’s poetic portrayal of Blanche, especially considering that the Thomas Hart Benton painting was intended for Selznick’s home.
After it had become clear that *Streetcar* would continue its Broadway run for some time (it ran for nearly two years), Jessica Tandy’s children had joined her in New York City. Cronyn had stayed in California to work on a Hitchcock film\(^{111}\) (Cronyn 1991: 205). The couple had spent much time apart during the run of the play, as Cronyn also did stage and film work in London and Italy. After this lengthy absence, the Cronyns initiated a series of collaborations that would continue in the decades to come.

After the run of *Streetcar*, Jessica Tandy was determined to continue her work upon the stage, this time in the company of her husband who had helped to make Blanche possible for her. Although she struggled with feelings of rejection after her exclusion from the film, Tandy had won a Tony Award and a permanent place in American theatre history. She embarked upon the American era of her life.

---

\(^{111}\) The film was *Rope* (1948). Cronyn wrote the screenplay treatments.
CHAPTER 4

BROADWAY AND BEYOND

Following the close of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Tandy turned to a period of close collaborations with her husband, Hume Cronyn, which took them both from stage to film to television. These collaborations were so universally beloved that Cronyn and Tandy were often compared to the great acting team Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne. Like Lunt and Fontanne, Cronyn and Tandy were a transatlantic couple, he North American and she British. With time the association between the pairs became so frequent in the minds of the press\(^{112}\) that Cronyn coined the term the "Lesser Lunts" (Coe 1994: D1) to describe himself and his wife.

At this time Tandy also made solid contributions to the regional theatre movement, both independently and with her husband. After the American Shakespeare Festival Theatre formed in Stratford, Connecticut, she returned to her love for

---

\(^{112}\) For example, in 1987 Jerry Buck of the Associated Press called them "the greatest husband-and-wife acting team since the Lunts" (Buck 1987) as though it were simply a well-known fact. In his 1982 interview with the Cronyns, Mike Wallace asked Hume Cronyn about the frequent comparison (Wallace 1982). In his autobiography Cronyn says, "Because Jessica Tandy and I have not infrequently been compared to them, it might be assumed that we hoped to emulate them. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The comparison is a compliment, but the only thing Jessica and I have in common with the Lunts is that we are married and have been fortunate enough to have shared a long life in the theater" (Cronyn 1991: 135-136).
Shakespeare in *Macbeth* and *Troilus and Cressida* for its sixth season. When Tyrone Guthrie, who had directed her in both *Twelfth Night* and *Henry V* at The Old Vic, founded the Minnesota Theatre Company in Minneapolis in 1963, Tandy became a company member for its opening season. During this period in her career, Tandy also performed at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in Ontario, at the Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake, and at the Mark Taper Forum. Her commitment to these venues made a substantial contribution to the structure of American theatre outside New York City today. The two aspects of her career, collaborations with her husband and commitment to resident nonprofit professional theatre, came together in her performance as Annie Nations in *Foxfire*, for the play previewed at the Stratford Festival and at the Guthrie. After these initial runs the role later brought Tandy her third and final Tony Award for Best Actress on Broadway.
Tony Award to Two-Handers

After the close of Streetcar and her exclusion from the film version of that play, Tandy resolutely remained in New York City to pursue a career on Broadway. Blanche had transformed her understanding of herself as an actress, both in her triumph emblematized in a Tony Award and in her ability to overcome the disappointment of failing to achieve the film. Hume Cronyn remained Tandy’s firmest advocate and supporter in her transition from stardom in a major run to seeking new success. He immediately initiated a 1950 production of Samson Raphaelson’s newest play, which Cronyn directed and produced with the intent of providing his wife with another vehicle for her talents. Hilda Crane, the story of a woman torn by love who ends the play in a mental institution, was poorly received by critics, who accused Tandy of reprising Blanche in another setting. Despite poor reviews and a short run, the couple had discovered that they enjoyed working in close proximity, so they continued to collaborate in several minor off-Broadway productions before they returned to Broadway with the play that established them as one of the United States’ leading pairs. Hume later asserted, “We were an ideal mix. Because I was a pusher and shover and arranger and she wasn’t. She on the other hand had a much bigger talent than I did” (Lifetime 1999).

After the close of Hilda Crane, in 1952 Tandy permanently cast her lot with the Americans, choosing to become an official naturalized U. S. citizen. Prior to citizenship she had affected the course of American theatre history in the role of Blanche, and as a citizen she continued to shape American theatre through the impact of her work.
Teaming up

Searching for a new project after *Hilda Crane*, Cronyn discovered a play that seemed to have been written with the talents of the stage couple in mind. Featuring only two characters, *The Fourposter* by Jan de Hartog traced the growth of a couple’s marriage from their wedding night through several following decades. All the action takes place in the master bedroom of their home. De Hartog wrote the play in Holland when he was living underground during the Nazi occupation. His room contained nothing but a bed, and one day he asked himself what the four-poster had seen. He spent the next few months putting together the script he named after his bed. De Hartog’s play had opened four years earlier in London, where it had not been successful, but in 1951 Cronyn was interested in attempting a revival. Tandy was initially reluctant to take on the project, feeling it lacked depth, but at Cronyn’s insistence she joined her husband (Cronyn 1991: 223). He said, “She certainly wasn’t enthusiastic. I said, ‘Come on, it’s only a summer stock tour, and you’ll be brilliant at it, and we’ll have fun’” (Lifetime 1999). Tandy later said, “Hume had a harebrain idea of doing ‘The Fourposter’ in a summer theater. Originally, we played the comedy exactly as the author, Jan de Hartog, wrote it, even though it had failed in London.” This experience led to a revision of the script, for “We could tell exactly where the audience left us. The flaw was in the last act. The end was too morbid; the public refused to accept it. So, the author made a lot of changes in the last part” (Smith 1956: n. p.).

---

113 De Hartog was at that time son-in-law to another playwright, J. B. Priestley, who wrote *Time and the Conways* in which Tandy performed on Broadway in 1938. *The Four-Poster* was De Hartog’s first play, and he rewrote it for the Cronyns during their preview tour of Canada and the Midwest.
With the revisions complete, the Broadway opening developed into a run of more
than 600 performances and linked the couple’s talents irrevocably together. Lighthearted
and insubstantial, *The Fourposter* may ultimately have been the perfect medicine for
Tandy after several years of playing sensitive heroines at the edge of madness. The play
established Cronyn and Tandy as one of the twentieth century’s great stage couples and
initiated a highly popular partnership which later led to several Tony Awards for the pair.
Cronyn later exclaimed, “We knew after the very first opening that we had a tiger by the
tail” (Lifetime 1999).

The praise of critics bolstered the success of the couple’s first two-hander.
Brooks Atkinson wrote in *The New York Times*, “Miss Tandy skims lightly through the
follies and crises of Agnes’ married life. She is slight in her style of playing, but
gleaming in spirit; and she manages to suggest more interior restlessness and fury than
revival at the 3,000-seat City Center he once again wrote, “Hume Cronyn and Jessica
Tandy (Mr. and Mrs. Cronyn in civil life) are meticulous craftsmen. They seem to have
polished it as bright as it could possibly be. They have weighed every line, found all its
comic inflections; they have timed the dialogue and invented amusing business.”
Atkinson added that the play is “technically a stunt. As currently acted, it gives an
impression of being thoroughly normal and spontaneous” (*New York Times* 6 Jan 1955,
23:3). Of Tandy in particular he wrote, “She has a slender style and immense radiance of
spirit, and she is altogether delightful” (Ibid.). Once again a reviewer had observed
Tandy’s simple radiance, the quality which most characterized her acting. Cronyn’s
meticulousness and Tandy’s radiance united the couple in a thriving professional partnership of which Cronyn in particular was immensely proud. After the play closed, Tandy and Cronyn took the play on a lengthy tour. Tandy explained, “At the close of its Broadway run Hume had another hairbrain idea. For 42 weeks we trouped with ‘The Fourposter’ around the country, visiting colleges, civic groups and high schools and using simple backdrops for scenery. A lot of people enjoyed it a great deal but it nearly killed us!” (Smith 1956: n. p.). The two were later featured in a television performance of the play, although Rex Harrison and Lilli Palmer played the roles in the film version.

From the beginning of her acting career, Tandy had loved the accessibility of the medium of radio. Radio pioneer Cecil Lewis had served as father figure for her, and in many ways radio felt like her home. During her lonely early years in the United States she had played several roles in radio plays, including a long run in the early 1940s as Princess Nadia in a fantasy series. Before her marriage to Cronyn she wrote of her pleasure in radio: “Will you please wish hard that I get my radio job—I do really want it very much, I would like to do it apart from the monetary point of view,” (30 Jan 1941), she told him. When more than a decade later NBC radio offered her and Cronyn a 1953 radio series called *The Marriage*, perhaps with the success of *The Fourposter* in mind, she was only too glad to accept. The series was sufficiently successful that NBC decided to place it on television as that medium grew in popular force, and the Cronyns spent 1954 involved in their first television series. Cronyn writes, “I don’t believe the description *sitcom* had been invented in the early fifties, but that’s what *The Marriage*...
was, a situation comedy based on the domestic trials and tribulations of a quite ordinary
middle-class couple with two children. It was not a spin-off of The Fourposter, as has
frequently been reported" (Cronyn 1991: 253).

Television historians have understandably mistaken The Marriage as a spin-off
for the Crony's hit play, for the roles in the comedies are remarkably similar. A year of
grueling live television performance as television's Liz Marriott was a variation on the
demands of Tandy's previous work as Agnes, although her run as Agnes exceeded the
duration of both radio and television series combined.

With The Marriage bringing the Crony's to mass audiences through television
and radio, and with The Fourposter establishing them as a vibrant duo on the stage, the
couple soon came to be identified with the great stage couple Alfred Lunt and Lynn
Fontanne, who had become popular in the 1920s. Lunt, who was born in Milwaukee,
Wisconsin in 1892, established himself as a performer on Broadway in the 1910s.
Fontanne, who was born in 1887 in Woodford, Essex, England, settled in the United
States in 1916 after a successful career in the West End. Most frequently associated with
the Theatre Guild in New York City after their marriage in 1922, the two became
synonymous with outstanding partnership in comedic acting until their farewell
performance in 1958. The Crony's arrived together onstage just as the Lunts were
departing, and critics and audiences were eager to find successors for the stage couple
that had governed an era. As Tandy and Cronyn appeared together more and more
frequently, their names became irrevocably associated with Fontanne and Lunt.
Following the run and tour of *The Fourposter*, Tandy and Cronyn focused upon their work for television while hunting for another play. In 1958 they discovered a new promising work. *The Honeys* was written by children's story and adult thriller writer Roald Dahl and produced by the eminent Cheryl Crawford, who had spent much of the decade working with Tennessee Williams on several of his new plays. Hume Cronyn played twin brothers whose wives, played by Jessica Tandy and Dorothy Stickney, successfully attempt to kill their husbands off in order to enjoy a lovely holiday alone. *The Fourposter* had featured costume designs by Lucinda Ballard, who had worked with Tandy on *Streetcar*, and this next play brought her back into collaboration with her old designer friends of London, the Motleys. *The Honeys* received only a short run after its customary preview tour.

The Cronyns quickly moved on to *A Day by the Sea* at the Phoenix Theatre, a more substantial comedy by N. C. Hunter and directed by Englishman Cedric Hardwicke, with whom Tandy had acted ten years before in the film *A Woman's Vengeance* (1947). The London production of the play had featured Tandy's old friends John Gielgud, Sybil Thorndike, Lewis Casson, and Ralph Richardson in the cast. In the play Cronyn played a boring workaholic who courts the now-jaded love of his youth, played by Tandy. After the closing of *A Day by the Sea*, Tandy wrote to her brother Tully and his wife, "Hume and I continue to do just television as we are quite unable to find a play that excites us" (Jessica to Tully and Joan Tandy 6 Feb 1956. Library of Congress Container 6, Folder 9). Later that year Tandy told interviewer Bea Smith, "Last year we were in two Broadway plays, 'The Honeys and 'Day by the Sea.' Both collapsed, although the show
business was booming. I’m feeling a little sore about it—painful, I mean, not angry. I haven’t a play at the moment. I wish I had, though” (Smith 1956: n.p.).

It was another dark time for Tandy, a repeat of her experience twelve years prior, before the run of Streetcar. Hume Cronyn later said that there had been a time in the 1950s when “Jessie decided she was a lousy actress, a lousy wife and a lousy mother. I went back to our scrapbooks and pulled out reviews and said: ‘Will you listen to this?’ I also told her: ‘Look, I’m married to you, and I think I’m very blessed, and I won’t hear this garbage about your inadequacies’” (Chambers 1986: 121). It was perhaps after this time that Tandy realized, “You are richer for doing things. If you wait for the perfect part or for what sends you, you will have long waits, and you deteriorate. You can’t be an actor without acting” (Berger 1994: A1). Her next two projects were neither the “perfect part” nor something that could “send” her, but they did make her richer by giving her something to do.

Later that year Tandy appeared at the Coronet Theatre in The Man in the Dog Suit, a silly story featuring Hume Cronyn as a nice man who dons a dog costume on his days off. Tandy played his wife, undoubtedly with great reluctance. After the close of that play, early in 1957, Hume Cronyn echoed his wife’s previous perspective in a letter to Tully and his wife. “This has been rather a dreary season for us, in that we haven’t found a play, and consequently are relegated to the mechanics of television. Over any period of time it becomes an indigestible diet” (Hume Cronyn to Joan and Tully Tandy 3 Jan 1957. Library of Congress Container 6, Folder 9). As always, Hume Cronyn decided to take matters into his own hands, and he put together a production of short plays. In
1959 the couple appeared together under the sponsorship of the Theatre Guild in *Triple Play*, a collection of three one-acts by Tennessee Williams, Anton Chekhov, and Sean O’Casey.

Later in 1959 Tandy at last found a project that restored her enthusiasm for work. She had the opportunity to return to collaboration with the British artists she had left behind when she came to the United States. John Gielgud was directing a Broadway production of the play that established Peter Shaffer\(^{115}\) as a playwright. *Five Finger Exercise* had already won the Evening Standard Drama Award for its run in London’s West End. When it transferred to Broadway the original cast remained save Adrianne Allen, and to Tandy’s pleasure at the last minute Gielgud invited his old friend to join the production. At the Music Box Theatre Tandy played Louise Harrington, the snobbish mother of a sixteen-year-old girl played by Juliet Mills. Of her performance in this play, Brooks Atkinson wrote, “In the part of the mother she gives a brilliant performance. She describes a hateful woman who has social charm and grace; the petulance, duplicity and viciousness are almost invisible behind a mask of good manners” (*The New York Times* 13 Dec 1959, II: 3: 1). In the United States the play ran for ten months and won Gielgud a Tony Award for Best Direction. Tandy won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Actress. Soon after the close of *Five Finger Exercise* the Cronyns left Broadway to have a hand in shaping the course of American theatre through their contributions to a form that later became known as regional theatre.

---

115 English writer Peter Shaffer is best known for his plays *Equus* (1977) and *Amadeus* (1984).
American Shakespeare Festival

The fifties marked the early development of a movement that revolutionized American theatre practice. Throughout the early part of the twentieth century, Broadway held a monopoly on professional theatre production nationwide. Regional audiences outside of New York City had to rely upon tours of successful Broadway productions for their staple of professional theatre, with primarily community theatre productions to vary their artistic menu. After World War II, theatre artists became interested in the untapped potential available to them outside New York City, and the nation was amenable to such development. Among the many artists to shape the regional theatre movement in the United States, an Englishman and an Irishman were to play a key role. Lawrence Langner, who had founded the Theatre Guild in New York City earlier in the century, and Tyrone Guthrie, with whom Tandy had worked at the Old Vic in England, established two theatres that helped to herald a new age in American theatre. Jessica Tandy joined her fellow ex-patriots in contributing to this new foundation. She later said that one of the few positive changes to theatre from her early days to her later was, “that there are so many other alternatives to Broadway. There are a great many places which are not in the mainstream that do very good work with new writers and are contributing to the theater” (Bryer and Davison 2001: 34). This was the beginning of that change.

Lawrence Langner, whose original vocation was as a lawyer, arrived from London in the United States in 1911. During the course of the next several years, he began to experiment with playwriting and gradually moved away from law into theatre.

116 Other key artists included Margo Jones, Nena Vance, Zelda Fichandler, and Herbert Blau.
He was one of the founding members of the Washington Square Players in 1914, and in 1918 he formed the Theatre Guild with the intent of encouraging the development of original American plays as well as providing a venue for culturally significant European drama in New York City. By the 1940s Langner had settled in Connecticut where he founded another theatre company, the Westport County Playhouse, and he was interested in creating a solid location for Shakespearean production in the United States, on par with London’s Old Vic. His original hope had been to place the Shakespearean company in Westport alongside his Playhouse, but people with greater financial power were more interested in a Connecticut town that shared a name with the birthplace of the Bard. By 1955, with the assistance of the Ford Foundation and numerous other backers, Langner had managed to get a multi-million dollar state-of-the-art theatre built in Stratford, Connecticut. Katharine Cornell had broken the ground at the initial ceremony.

At the same time Langner was establishing what he hoped would be a venue for Shakespearean production in the United States, another theatre was developing in Canada. The Stratford Festival in Stratford, Ontario, Canada, which came from the same impetus as the American Shakespeare Festival, was established in 1952. While Tandy was delighted to return to Shakespearean performance at both theatres, her name was more closely linked to Langner’s theatre in Connecticut. The Connecticut theatre required the assistance of a major star of the American stage to assist its success more than its sister theatre did. While the theatre in Ontario thrived from its opening, Langner’s theatre failed to obtain the support of local residents or audiences and so faced
greater difficulties. With the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-Upon-Avon, England, the three theatres created three major Shakespearean venues in three different English-speaking countries.

The beginning of the American Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford, Connecticut, was filled with hope. Tandy joined the company for its 1961 season, the theatre’s sixth, in the roles of Lady Macbeth and Cassandra. Her friends the Motleys designed costumes for the productions, and Kim Hunter, who had played Stella in *Streetcar*, joined Tandy in the casts as one of the witches in *Macbeth* and as Helen in *Troilus and Cressida*. The season and Tandy’s performances were generally well received.

Howard Taubman, who attended the production for *The New York Times*, wrote of Tandy’s performance in her first production in Connecticut’s Stratford:

Her Lady Macbeth is a study in leashed ambition and rage. Her appearance has a pale fragility. The evil in her is conveyed by the tight, icy hardness of her speech. The Sleepwalking Scene becomes the surface manifestation of a fierce inner torment in which the sepulchral sighs communicate a burden of horror (*New York Times* 19 June 1961, 31: 1).

As in her portrayals of the most significant roles she had played in the past, Manuela, Ophelia, and Blanche, Tandy once more brilliantly depicted a woman’s tragic descent into madness. In an interview the actress described her approach to the role of Lady Macbeth:

It is my feeling that Lady Macbeth, despite what certain lines in the play might seem to indicate, does not have to be played as a dominating instigator of villainy. She was a womanly woman, in my opinion. I can’t see Macbeth interested in any other type.

After all, it isn’t Macbeth who first succumbs to the strain, is it? She is, first of all, I feel, a loyal wife ambitious for her husband rather than for herself. Admittedly, she helped carry matters to an extreme (Cooper 1986: 76).
As with Manuela, Ophelia, and Blanche, Tandy sought to humanize her role for her audiences. For Tandy Lady Macbeth was first of all a woman, human, vulnerable. Her actions and their consequences sprang from that humanity.

Despite Tandy’s desire to humanize Lady Macbeth, she once again encountered the challenge of performing opposite an actor whose approach to acting was grounded in the American Method as she had with Blanche. Pat Hingle had never played Shakespeare professionally before taking on the title role of the play, and this time Tandy’s leading man found less sympathy with audience or reviewers than she did. The *New York Herald Tribune* proclaimed, “You cannot marry an Actors Studio boy to an Old Vic girl and have them emerge as a . . . compatible . . . pair of Macbeths . . . These two would never occupy the same household” (*New York Herald Tribune* 19 Jun 1961). In this case most critics preferred the Old Vic girl.

Cassandra was another study in madness. Director Jack Landau set *Troilus and Cressida* during the American Civil War to mark the War’s first centennial. Howard Taubman called Tandy’s Cressida “passionate” (*New York Times* 24 July 1961, 15:1), but he questioned the period setting of the play. In the United States, for the first time since her seasons at the Open Air Theatre, Tandy had found praise and respect for her skill at Shakespearean performance. Her time at the American Shakespeare Theatre also marked some of her first performances away from the company of her husband in more than a decade. While Hume Cronyn did not participate in the American Shakespeare Theatre
season, the couple soon resumed their collaboration, first in a London revival Big Fish, Little Fish, directed by John Gielgud, and second in the premiere season of the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis.

Hume Cronyn had starred in Big Fish, Little Fish during its Broadway run. Written by mystery writer Hugh Wheeler, the 1961 ANTA production had won Gielgud his second Tony Award for Best Director. Working with Gielgud a second time after their collaborations in the 1930s, Tandy once more replaced one of the original cast members, this time Ruth White in the role of Edith Maitland, for the play’s transfer across the Atlantic Ocean. While Five Finger Exercise transferred from London to New York, with Big Fish, Little Fish Tandy and the cast traveled to London. After more than two decades, Tandy returned to the West End to play at the Duke of York’s Theatre where in 1934 she had acted in Line Engaged. In a letter to Tandy’s diplomat brother Michael and his wife Lillian, Hume Cronyn described London’s reception of the play:

Well we did it less than brilliantly. No, I’ll hedge that a bit. The production was less than brilliant—we, of course, were our usual sterling selves.

I always thought this was a play that had to get an almost unanimously enthusiastic press to succeed. As it turned out the New York press was far better. Jess got a generous welcome on her return, despite the fact that she had something less than a glowing role and they were good to me too. But the play was not liked, and I cannot pretend to wild surprise despite my disappointment (Hume Cronyn to Michael and Lillian Tandy 19 Sept 1962. Library of Congress Container 6, Folder 7).

118 Hugh Wheeler was originally from London. After college he settled in the United States, where he proceeded to write more than thirty mysteries under the pseudonyms Patrick Quentin and Q. Patrick.

119 In Big Fish, Little Fish Tandy played the matronly and possessive mistress of the “big fish” of the play’s title, who was played by Jason Robards, jr.
George Grizzard, who joined Tandy and Cronyn for their next project together at the premiere season of the Guthrie, played Ronnie Johnson, a bitter best-selling novelist, in the production.

**Guthrie Theatre**

Among the most significant influences upon the development of regional theatre in the United States, Tyrone Guthrie was a native of Ireland who came to the forefront in theatre during his seasons as artistic director at the Old Vic in London during the 1930s. Tyrone Guthrie and Jessica Tandy had worked together for the first time in an Arts Club production of *Lady Audley's Secret* in the early 1930s, and during his 1937 season at the Old Vic he had directed the actress as Viola and Sebastian in *Twelfth Night* and as Katharine in *Henry V*. Since the 1930s, Guthrie had been instrumental in creating the Stratford Festival in Ontario, Canada, which rapidly became a hub for Shakespearean performance in the Americas, and in the late 1950s he was invited to assist in establishing a theatre in Minneapolis, Minnesota, which was later to be given his name.

In 1957 Tyrone Guthrie, Guthrie's friend the director Peter Zeisler, and a wealthy Irish American businessman by the name of Oliver Rea, began to discuss the possibilities of creating a repertory theatre in the United States. Over whiskey in a pub in Ireland they decided that New York City was not the location for their theatre, so they began to look around for suitable cities in which an outstanding professional repertory theatre could thrive. After much deliberation and negotiation, eventually they came to a short list of three cities: Milwaukee, Detroit, and Minneapolis. Through the tenacity and

---

120 Who also helped to found the American Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford, Connecticut.
courage of Minneapolis residents who were eager to bring such an eminent repertory theatre to their city, the three men cast their lot with Minneapolis, and construction of a theatre was initiated adjacent to the Walker Art Museum near the Mississippi River. Designer Tanya Moiseiwitsch, who had been instrumental in shaping the building of the Stratford Festival Theatre in Ontario, was brought in as a consultant for the theatre’s design.

The establishment of the theatre company marked a new era in American theatre history. Theatres throughout the nation subsequently emulated the structure of the new company. In his examination of the development of regional theatre in the United States, Joseph Zeigler writes of the Guthrie:

The emergence of The Guthrie Theater was the second major turning point of the regional theatre revolution because it further legitimized the movement and gave it national weight. It gave hope to all regional theatres that they too could become known on a national level, that the Times might soon cover their opening nights, and that actors like Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy might soon set aside a season for them. The opening of the Guthrie was a turning point because it brought national attention to the [regional theatre] movement (Zeigler 1973: 75).

The Guthrie was intended to cultivate a relationship between the theatre and the surrounding community, between the stage and its viewers. Tyrone Guthrie’s old friend Jessica Tandy and her Canadian husband Hume Cronyn were invited to join the premiere company of the theatre, to give prestige to the cast and serve as role models to its younger members. Their example was needed. Peter Zeisler later wrote:

---

121 The first was the 1957 creation of the Ford Foundation, which through its commitment to funding theatre in locations away from New York City made the creation of numerous regional theatres a viable endeavor (Zeigler 1973: 63).
Because we were attempting to develop an acting company with the technique and craft to deal with the classic repertoire, we announced at the start of rehearsals that daily voice and movement classes would be part of the company's agenda. A number of senior members descended on me with wrathful indignation: They had been professional actors for many years, they explained emphatically, and did not need to go to class. As if on cue, at the very moment of their peroration, Jessica stopped by—in a leotard—to inquire just where the first class would take place. Miraculously, all objections to classes evaporated! (Zeisler 1994: 7).

The first season featured *Hamlet*, *The Miser*, *The Three Sisters*, and *Death of a Salesman*. Guthrie himself directed *Hamlet* and *The Three Sisters*, while Douglas Campbell directed the others. Tandy played Gertrude, Olga, and Linda Loman. Her husband played Polonius, Harpagon, Doctor Tchbutykin, and Willy Loman. Jessica Tandy met her lifelong friend Zoe Caldwell during the season. And she was immensely happy. She later reflected upon her time at the Guthrie with fondness:

I loved playing in a rep company. The happiest times of my life were those at the Old Vic and at Minneapolis and at Stratford, Ontario, where maybe I would play three times a week but it would be three different roles, three different plays, so it was very stimulating, wonderful (Bryer and Davison 2001: 37).

Critics traveled from all parts of the nation to witness the premiere of the new company. They disputed the merits of the modern-dress *Hamlet* and the pedestrian *Death of a Salesman*, but they agreed upon the universal merits of the commedia-style *The Miser* and the poetic ensemble of *The Three Sisters*. Howard Taubman of *The New York Times*

---

122 As early as 1942 Tandy had been hoping to perform in *The Three Sisters* under Guthrie's direction. Her wish had taken two decades to be fulfilled. She wrote in a letter to Hume Cronyn (10 Jul 1942): "I received a telegram from Guthrie... I thought it wise not to mention 3 Sisters. We'll see what happens" (Library of Congress, Container 6, Folder 11).
123 Zoe Caldwell is an Australian Actress who performed with the Union Theatre Company under the direction of Peter Hall in 1958-9. Caldwell has won four Tony Awards for her performances on Broadway. Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy introduced Zoe Caldwell to her husband Robert Whitehead, who is a cousin of Cronyn's.
Times called Tandy’s Gertrude “gentle and confused” (New York Times 9 May 1963, 41: 1) and her Linda Loman “fine in her way” (New York Times 20 July 1963, 11:2). Kevin Kelly of The Boston Globe wrote of Tandy’s Gertrude, “Jessica Tandy is excellent as the weak-willed queen. The show-down scene between Grizzard [who played Hamlet] and Miss Tandy is extraordinary” (Rossi 1970: 86).

Later that year Tandy and Cronyn returned to Broadway for a production of Friedrich Dürrenmatt’s allegorical meditation on the development of atomic warfare, The Physicists, at the Martin Beck Theatre in New York. Peter Brook directed this production, of which Tandy said, “The philosophical underpinning was good but obscured by Peter Brook’s embroidery” (De Jongh 1979: n. p.). When Tyrone Guthrie wrote to Hume asking, “Are you and Jessica still interested in next season? We are,” their answer was in the affirmative (Tyrone Guthrie to Hume Cronyn 13 Apr 1964. Library of Congress Container 70, Folder 11). Hume Cronyn later explained their readiness to leave the run of The Physicists for a season at the theatre they had helped to create:

“The Physicists” has been a strange and unsatisfactory production. I’m not much good in it—Jess is far more successful. We both found Peter B. rather trying—a sentiment which I’m sure is reciprocal. There’s no denying Peter’s brilliance but I don’t fancy the puppet master school of direction and Peter’s sense of humour can’t be said to be his strong point. Our Swiss-German playwrite [sic] has a very Swiss-German production—rather cold porridge” (Hume Cronyn to Tyrone Guthrie 24 Nov 1964. Library of Congress Container 70, Folder 16).

When in 1965 the Guthrie’s third season came around the Cronyns promptly arrived in Minneapolis for another repertory experience. During this season, Tandy
played Lady Wishfort in Congreve’s *The Way of the World*, Madame Ranevskaya in Chekhov’s *The Cherry Orchard*, and part of the Prologue in Brecht’s *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. In the former two plays, Tandy received weak reviews, but in the latter she set an admirable example of ensemble playing, caring not that her role was so negligible as to lack comment by the critics.

Peter Zeisler later recalled the awe with which other members of the company viewed Tandy’s performance of Madame Ranevskaya. Each night a group of staff members and performers would gather offstage to watch the scene where the character learns her home has been sold. He explained, “Jessica’s performance in that scene was, for many of us, the ultimate example of great acting. Her silent signification of a flood of conflicting emotions was a thrilling reaffirmation of the power of theatre” (Zeisler 1994: 7). Tandy’s ability to represent complexity had brought her recognition in her thirties in the role of Blanche, and that ability continued to characterize her performances as she entered her late fifties.

By giving their names and talents to the Guthrie Theater for two seasons, Jessica Tandy and Hume Cronyn made a solid contribution to the establishment of regional and repertory theatre in the United States. They demonstrated that Broadway and Hollywood stars with numerous awards to their merit found it well worth their while to spend time at institutions like the American Shakespeare Festival and the Guthrie.

Following the completion of their second season at the Guthrie, the couple performed in a new play by Edward Albee in 1967 under the direction of Alan
Schneider, himself a strong proponent of the regional theatre movement. *A Delicate Balance* depicts the emptiness between a couple who had known each other too long, lived together too long. The play is a meditation upon the emptiness of false intimacy.

The first choice for casting in the roles of Tobias and Agnes, the roles Cronyn and Tandy played, had been Lunt and Fontanne, who had retired to England. When the Lunts’ demands were too difficult for Albee’s tastes, the Lunts’ successors in theatre were the obvious next choice. Tandy later credited Albee for the ease with which the character came to her: “He wrote it very well. The mere way he puts his sentences together for that particular character gives such a clear picture of the sort of person that she is. He wrote it superbly” (Bryer and Davison 2001: 30).

While initially the play had only a lukewarm reception, the performers found praise. Walter Kerr wrote of Tandy in the role of wife Agnes:

Miss Tandy’s finest moment comes in a fierce assault on human withdrawal, on the evasive action each of us takes when he hears too much pain in the immediate neighborhood. Now the cool champagne-cocktail ice of her voice burns away and something nearer lava is served, neat *(New York Times* 23 Sept 1966, 44:1).

In Agnes Tandy’s customary radiance had turned to a hard brilliance. Director Alan Schneider wrote in his autobiography, “Jessie’s understanding of her character was almost instinctive; her voice, as well as every move she made, was like music” *(Schneider 1986: 375-6)*. Despite its negative press *A Delicate Balance* won the Pulitzer Prize for drama. Three years after failing to win the prize for *Who’s Afraid of Virginia 124 Tandy later collaborated again with both Albee and Schneider, although never again simultaneously. 119
Woolf, the play that has come to be synonymous with his name, Albee had received the honor he deserved. He accepted the award with his earlier play in mind (Gussow 1993: 269).

Playing Agnes acquainted Tandy with Albee, a playwright whose work she admired and would perform in again. As she grew older Tandy found it more and more possible and desirable to return to the company of those artists she most respected. In 1971 she premiered another of Albee’s plays, All Over, this time directed by John Gielgud, with whom Tandy was always eager to work whenever they were on the same continent. Decades had passed, but Gielgud’s directing style had not become any more focused since their days working on Hamlet. As she worked on the play, Tandy found no assistance from either Albee or Gielgud in her interpretation of the role of the wife, who was to become friends with her husband’s mistress. When she approached the two, “Edward said, ‘I’m sure we all understand that. You understand that, don’t you, John. John the fink of course said, ‘Well, not altogether, but . . . ’ I never got anything from either of them. I was lost in limbo” (Ellipses theirs. Croall 2001: 489). Nevertheless she was eager to work with them any time a good role was available.

Of the second of Albee’s plays in which Tandy performed, in a review for The Nation Harold Clurman wrote that Gielgud, “as director has given Albee his most thoroughly realized interpretation,” (Clurman 1994: 779), an ironic observation given the vagueness of Gielgud’s explanations to Tandy. Of Tandy, Clurman wrote, “As the wife, Jessica Tandy possesses the right air of intelligence and breeding, together with inner
firmness" (Clurman 1994: 781). John Simon wrote, “Jessica Tandy gives a bravura performance as the wife, all the more so since it must be done with delivery rather than dialogue” (Simon 1975: 325).

In 1968, after touring her first premiere of Albee’s work, *A Delicate Balance*, Jessica Tandy and Hume Cronyn furthered their contribution to the regional theatre movement in a production of *The Miser* at the Mark Taper Forum’s second season in existence. The Mark Taper Forum brought the regional theatre movement to Los Angeles, California, the long-time home of the couple. This production was essentially a recreation of that at the Guthrie, with the exception that Tandy took the role that had been played by Zoe Caldwell. Hume Cronyn reprised the title role, and Jessica Tandy played the matchmaker Frosine.

Tandy’s next project also demonstrated their support and appreciation for the growing regional theatre movement. Eventually to become one of the most successful regional theatres in Canada, the Shaw Festival at Niagara-on-the-Lake began its performances at the town courthouse in 1962 with a production of “Don Juan in Hell” from *Man and Superman*. In 1964 the now more-professional performances still occurred in the courthouse auditorium, and in this its third season Jessica Tandy played Hesione Hushabye under the direction of John Gielgud’s brother Val, a good friend of her former mentor Cecil Lewis. Tandy’s friend Zoe Caldwell had performed previously

---

125 The production was so much the same that Cronyn repeated a bit of business he had regarding a beauty mark. Both Zoe Caldwell and Jessica Tandy placed “a large beauty mark on her left breast” for the character. Caldwell writes, “Hume made the beauty spot a comic feature by pretending it was a large insect that needed removing” (Caldwell 2001: 163). Alan Woods, who saw the production at the Mark Taper Forum, recalls the same bit of business occurring between Cronyn and Tandy (Conversation with Alan Woods 13 Aug 2002).
at the festival and must have reported favorably upon her experience. Largely because of Tandy’s name, the production was covered by *The New York Times*, which praised the production.

**The Lincoln Center**

Jessica Tandy continued to support repertory theatre and regional theatre in the United States and Canada during the next decade of her career. The Lincoln Center in New York City was founded by Elia Kazan and Hume Cronyn’s cousin, producer Robert Whitehead, in the mid-1960s. Intended as a place where theatre as art rather than commercial enterprise could thrive, the complex features two theatres, one for traditional and the other for more experimental productions. The larger theatre seats approximately 1000, the smaller around 300. Most of Tandy’s performances took place in the larger Vivian Beaumont theatre, but one of her most significant occurred in the smaller Forum.

In 1970 Tandy returned to Tennessee Williams in a revival of *Camino Real* at the Vivian Beaumont Theatre. Tandy played Margaret Gautier. Harold Clurman, who had directed the tour version of *Streetcar* with Uta Hagen, reviewed her performance for *The Nation*. He wrote that he had come to detest the play after seeing three productions, and Jessica Tandy’s performance failed to overcome the script’s weaknesses. He stated, “Jessica Tandy makes a fine appearance but her shrill hysteria never convinces us that in addition to having a secret soul she was once the soiled vestal of many captivated lovers” (Clurman 1994: 740). Kazan had said that Tandy’s purity and goodness as a person radiated from her in her performance as Blanche and made her an excellent choice for the role. Clurman felt that it was that essence of purity in her nature that caused her
performance of Margaret Gautier, another incarnation of Blanche, to fail. Clive Barnes wrote of Tandy’s performance in *Camino Real*, “Jessica Tandy is quite marvelous as Camille. She walks in the ashes of a great beauty with all the dignity of an exiled queen” (*New York Times* 9 Jan 1970, 42: 1).

Two years later, in November 1972 Tandy and her husband participated in the Beckett Festival at the Forum. Hume Cronyn played the title role in *Krapp’s Last Tape*, the couple played another two-hander in *Happy Days*, and Tandy premiered a new work by the eminent playwright as the Mouth in *Not I*. Alan Schneider, whose name was closely linked to Beckett’s in the United States, directed their performances.

*Not I* was a stream-of-consciousness monologue told in third person about a woman’s own miserable life. A second character, the Auditor, dressed in black, stands before the woman and remains mute as her story pours forth. During the course of the play, as the mouth spews forth words, the Auditor shrugs four times. Tandy, who had survived Ophelia and Blanche, found the role immensely trying. Later she was to say:

The only role that I ever got out of control with—and I used to pray to God every night before I went on that He would let me break my leg or something so I wouldn’t have to do it—was in a play of Beckett’s, which was called *Not I*. All the audience saw was my mouth. Beckett doesn’t say exactly where the woman is or what the circumstances are. When Beckett talked about it, he said that the mouth was constantly spewing out and couldn’t stop. It was not in control of the brain. The woman is in absolute panic for twenty minutes. I couldn’t move my head because the spotlight had to hit my mouth. They strapped my head in and I had to hold on to something so that my body wouldn’t move. There were a couple of times when I think I had a small stroke in there. I was not in control of it, which was what he wanted. It was not like any other experience of acting (Black 1993: 130-131).
Tandy had realized the experience of playing Mouth would be trying from the moment she read the script. As she and Alan Schneider were rehearsing the play they consulted the playwright about the impact he wanted to make on the audience. Beckett’s response to their questions has now become a famous maxim for describing his plays. Tandy reported:

We went to see Beckett and he said it should last 23 minutes, which was a hell for leather speed. We tried it out and telegraphed him saying that it was unintelligible at that pace. He replied, “I’m not unduly concerned with the intelligibility. I want to work on the nerves of the audience.”

And then he said he wanted to do some revisions. When it came back all he had changed was the first word but he had taken out all the exclamation marks and some of the punctuation. His are plays you can come back to (De Jongh 1979).

Tandy failed to find the illumination about her character she had hoped for in her dialogue with the playwright, but she managed to make enough sense of the role to please her director, audiences, and critics.

Part of the challenge of playing the role of Mouth may have had to do with Alan Schneider’s directing style. While Tandy respected his work well enough to take on a second project with him, she had learned during rehearsals for A Delicate Balance that his notes could sometimes wound. Marian Seldes recalled an evening in Tandy’s dressing room as they worked on the earlier play. A note about Tandy’s performance arrived from Schneider. “I just looked at her,” said Seldes, “and I saw that her eyes were full of tears, and I knew mine were also. I remember saying to her, ‘You too?’ I thought it was something in the way those rehearsals were handled. It made the actors feel a kind of tension that had nothing to do with acting. There was some self-doubt” (Gussow
Hume Cronyn later commented upon the way in which actors felt somehow vulnerable when working with Schneider. Rather than Schneider giving his actors emotional support, the actors felt they had to support him. Cronyn said, “He was a dear man and in my opinion a very good director, but you had to protect Alan’s feelings very carefully . . . . You had to keep reassuring him” (Bryer and Davison 2001: 30).

After her miserable experience in the role of Mouth, Tandy herself found little desire to return to the plays of Samuel Beckett, despite the success with which her performances in that role and as Winnie in Happy Days were received. Tandy was awarded the 1973 Obie Award for Best Actress for her performance in Not I, in spite of (or perhaps because of) the phenomenon that the only portion of her body visible in the role was her mouth. In her later years, the second quality after her radiance for which she was admired as an actor, was her voice. This development was rather impressive, given the charge of inaudibility several critics in Tandy’s London days had made against her.

In 1955 Eric Bentley had written an ode to Tandy’s voice in his review of the City Center revival of The Fourposter. He said:

Jessica Tandy has a great voice.
What, in the theatre, is a great voice? An organ tone? Cordelia’s mellifluous pianissimo? Great actors have so often been criticized for their ugly voices that I am almost ready to state that a great theatrical voice is always an ugly one. Listen to Edith Evans. Or Miss Tandy. The high, bizarre tone reminds one of Mrs. Roosevelt—rather than the Voice Beautiful of radio announcers. And don’t they project rather oddly, rather excessively, throwing their voices rather calculatingly to some friend in the top gallery, amusedly watching it settle in his lap? A great voice is a voice that will do great things. We are told that Henry Irving’s voice
rasped and snarled—but with great power and variety. So with some of our actresses today... [his ellipses] Miss Tandy, for instance” (Bentley 2000: 321).

It was through the greatness of her voice that Tandy was able to make of Mouth a vibrant, breathing character.

**Stratford, Ontario**

Eight years before he guided the foundation of the theatre that was to bear his name, Tyrone Guthrie had navigated the creation of another theatre significant in the regional theatre movement. At the same time Lawrence Langford was overseeing the creation of a Shakespearean theatre in Stratford, Connecticut, Guthrie was involved in the creation of the Stratford Shakespearean festival in Ontario, Canada. With Tanya Moiseiwitsch assisting in the design of the space and civic leaders supporting the institution, the theatre opened in 1954 to immediate financial, critical, and popular success. In 1957 a 2,258 seat building replaced the temporary tent housing that had seated only 1500, to accommodate enormous audience attendance and to mark the permanence of the institution.

At the time the Stratford Festival came into existence Tandy was busy with her radio and television series *The Marriage*. Twenty-two years later and five years after Guthrie had passed away, she was prepared in 1976 to participate in another of her friend’s creations. For her first season at the Stratford Festival Tandy reprised two roles she had already played during her career: Lady Wishfort in *The Way of the World*, a role she had taken on during the second season of the Guthrie, and Titania in *A Midsummer*
In the novel and the play adapted from it, a 65-year-old woman leaves her husband and comfortable home in Montreal to be by herself. Alone, she builds a new life on the barest of incomes and finds happiness within. One of the discoveries Eva makes in her sojourn to herself is that of sexual pleasure with a Hungarian refugee who lives in the apartment upstairs. In the Globe and Mail John Fraser wrote of Tandy’s performance, “It is absolutely contrary to anything we have ever seen her in before, or expected to see her in, and it is done so compellingly that she practically whips us into
believing her against all our better judgments" (Pettigrew and Portman 1985 II: 98). For the first time in her career, at the age of 67, Tandy depicted real, explicit erotic desire upon the stage in a dramatic rather than comedic role.

After her first season at the Stratford Festival, Tandy appeared with Hume Cronyn in another two-hander on Broadway in 1977. Directed by Mike Nichols, The Gin Game by D. L. Coburn depicted Weller Martin, a lonely elderly man who lives in a nursing home. When Fonsia Dorsey, a new resident, arrives, the two initiate a friendship and commence a series of games of gin rummy. As the games progress, their desperate need to triumph over one another reveals the worst sides of their natures, and they end the play having lost their self-respect. The greatest challenge to the play, according to Hume Cronyn, was learning the lines, an unusual problem for those veteran actors. “We could not learn the words,” he writes.

The script required us to play fourteen games of gin rummy, all of them different and yet fiendishly similar. Panic took over—Dear God, is this game number seven or have I skipped to nine? I begged Mike to stay at home until we’d mastered this nightmare problem. He’d have none of that. The harder we tried, the worse it got. One day Mike said laconically, “You’ll never get it with clenched heads. Give yourselves a crib. Write it out—the sticky parts—on the tabletop. No one can see. Just let your eyes slip over the top of your cards to find out where you are.”

I thought this idea professionally outrageous. A crib, for God’s sake? However, we did as he suggested—and inside a couple of days the problem had disappeared. We no longer needed the crib. Mike had handed us a security blanket that resolved what was largely a psychological problem (Cronyn 1991: 400-401).

Tandy later spoke of her appreciation for director Nichols’ suggestion. “It was a great help because we didn’t have to wonder about what was coming next,” she said. “We
knew what was coming next and could play the play, although one night Hume cut out three games. He didn’t know it and denied it, but it’s true” (Bryer and Davison 2001: 29).

Cronyn’s description of the couple’s approach to the challenge of distinguishing among all their games of gin rummy reflected the Cronyns’ general approach to acting together. While they brought experience and talent to their roles, they also worked relentlessly to refine every moment of the play. Mike Nichols later elaborated on the couple’s perfectionism as they worked on *The Gin Game*:

[I remember] Jessie, giving up for her character all her most ladylike English characteristics, except for the h in Fhuck . . . . The two of you, drilling, rehearsing, repeating, improving, drilling, and working far more and longer and harder than I thought necessary or possible. Far more than anybody else. And that, of course, is the secret [to the Cronyns’ excellence in the play]. To be righter than anyone else to begin with, and then beat the shit out of it” (Nichols 1994: n. p.).

The play won the Pulitzer Prize for drama, and it ran for 517 performances. For her role as Fonsia, Tandy received her second Tony Award for Best Actress. Several critics felt that *The Gin Game* was undeserving of the Pulitzer Prize, claiming that the couple’s virtuoso performance in it made the drama seem better than it was. Harold Clurman wrote in the *Westchester Magazine*, “Yet for all its sober implications the play remains slight. What gives it body and special entertainment value are the charmingly deft performances of Jessica Tandy and Hume Cronyn under Mike Nichols’s knowing direction” (Clurman 1994: 892). He later reinforced his opinion in a second article for the magazine (Clurman 1994: 910).
In the summer of 1979, Tandy and Cronyn took the play on an international tour, first to the Lyric Theatre in London and later to Russia. After nearly forty years, Jessica Tandy appeared in the West End to packed houses as a star in her own right. Even in England, the two were compared to the Lunts. An article publicizing their performance read, “Husband-and-wife acting partnerships are rarer in America: only Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne come to mind” (unidentified clipping, Tandy file, Theatre Museum). Of her experience playing in Russia, Tandy said, “They had instant translation—ear phones—and that is a bit of a hazard because a line that’s about this long in English is about this long in Russian” (she moved her fingers from one inch to eighteen inches apart). “The instant translator had to go hell for leather to keep up with it and, of course, all the laughs came a little bit late” (Clark 1981).

Four years after her first season there, Tandy returned to the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in Ontario to reprise her role as Mary Tyrone in Long Day's Journey into Night and to premiere a new work written by her husband and children’s fiction writer Susan Cooper, whom the couple had met during a vacation Bahamas. Hume Cronyn later described the generation of Foxfire: “I was putting together a stage show for Jessica and me called ‘The Many Faces of Love.’ I said I needed four minutes for Jessica about love. Susan came up with a speech from the first Foxfire book in which a woman talks about her life as she cuts the eye out of a hog’s head” (Buck 1987: n. p.). Cronyn wasn’t able to use the piece for his collection, but he was inspired to commence working on an entire script based upon the material. Cronyn and Cooper began writing the play together in 1975, and in 1981 it was ready for production.
As Annie Nations in *Foxfire*, Tandy created one of her most memorable roles, for which she was later to win yet another Tony Award when she took the play to Broadway. Hume Cronyn played her husband Hector. About the play he said, "This is a play about the inevitability of change, and what change does to a family structure" (White 1998: 47).

The plot is simple: An elderly widow lives on her family farm in Appalachia. The ghost of her husband keeps her company. Her son wishes her to sell the property, and she resists. For her role Tandy listened to the speech patterns of the area in which the play was set. "I had to do an awful lot of learning of the accent, listening to tapes of those people speaking, but I had great sympathy for her. I could see a lot of my mother in her. My mother was an Englishwoman, of course, and while she grew up on a farm, when I knew her she lived in London. But there were verities about the two of them that I could draw from my memory. And I had great admiration for Aunt Arie Carpenter, from whom the character was drawn. She was a wonderful, feisty lady" (Buck 1987, n. p.).

Tandy took *Foxfire* from Stratford to the Guthrie in 1982, and the same year the production appeared on Broadway. In 1985 she performed the play in Los Angeles at the Ahamson Theatre, and in 1987 she appeared with her husband and John Denver in a television production of the play. Frank Rich wrote of her portrayal of Annie Nations, "Everything this actress does is so pure and right that only poets, not theatre critics, should be allowed to write about her" (Rich 1998: 186). Otis Guernsey called her performance "shining" (Guernsey 1987: 491).
A memorable moment in the play occurs when Annie Nations whirls around and at the end of her twirling flashes back to her seventeen-year-old self. People who saw the moment in the play were enchanted by Tandy’s transformation. Tandy said she was able to make the change from seventy to seventeen because:

Well, you see, first of all I believed it. That’s given. The scene didn’t work on screen. On the stage you heard the music in the background of the people dancing at the corn-husking. The lights changed, the music came in, and I felt as though I was seventeen years old. Then all the things that were said in that following scene were only things that would be said by seventeen- or eighteen-year-old people. So the writer had done it (Bryer and Davison 2001: 31).

Playwright Susan Cooper became fast friends with the Cronyns. She corresponded often with Hume, and her authorship of award-winning children’s novels made her a superb source of children’s books for Jessica, who loved to read them. Following Tandy’s death in 1994, Hume Cronyn and Susan Cooper were married in 1996.

During the years between Foxfire revivals, Tandy played Amanda Wingfield in The Glass Menagerie on Broadway in 1983 and Charlotte in Salonika by Louise Page in 1985. Of the latter, Hume Cronyn wrote to his sister Katherine and brother-in-law Tully: “Jess is lovely in the play which opened last night. The production, performances got very good reviews, the play did far less well, which leaves me melancholy because regardless of its flaws I find it poetic, funny and immensely touching. Unhappily, metaphor and fantasy are hard to sell in this country. Ah well. Both Jess and I feel that


132
the effort—a total labor of love—was well worthwhile” (9 Apr 1985. Library of Congress Container 6, Folder 9). Previously produced at the Royal Court Theatre in London, which had been founded by her old friend George Devine, the play contrasts age with youth, age winning out in the figure of Tandy’s character. This role echoed the image Tandy came to represent when she became a film icon. In her last films Tandy played roles in which she as an older woman is a source of vibrant vitality for the younger characters.

Her final role for the stage was in a two-hander with her husband. *The Petition* by Brian Clark ran for 75 performances at the John Golden Theatre on Broadway in 1986. Sir Peter Hall directed. Mel Gussow said of their acting that it was “a matter of hearts, minds and bodies in creative harmony” (Berger 1994: A1). Sir Peter Hall later said that the Cronyss “have an indefatigable appetite for work and put a lot of young actors to shame. It’s not enough for them to be good. They’ve got to go on and on” (Crew 1994: A4).

Tandy’s last two Tony Awards, for Fonsia Dorsey in *The Gin Game* and for Annie Nations in *Foxfire*, came in roles which she played opposite her husband Hume Cronyn. The couple had ripened into a comfortable collaboration. Jessica was one of the world’s great actresses, and enterprising Hume was perpetually finding new material to showcase her talents. His initiative guaranteed that she would always be able to find work, and her skill lifted his own to a level of greatness. Cronyn stated, “To try and stand outside the marriage, I’d say we have complementary capabilities. I do the hustling and business. I do more script reading. I handle contracts” (Chambers 1986: 117). A
few years later he said, "Jessie, I think, is the definitive actress... I think Jess is a better actor than I am, but there are things I can do that she can't. I'm more at home in television and film than she is, for example... I think we have marvelously and totally coincidentally been a wonderful team. I think I complement Jess, and I know Jess complements me" (Clarke 1990: 62).

As performers, the two used quite different techniques in coming to understand their characters. Together the couple became an emblem of what a great stage couple could accomplish, the "Lesser Lunts," as Hume Cronyn sometimes said. Elia Kazan described the contrast in the two in their approach to performing:

Both Jessie and Hume have that extraordinary ability as actors to express the dimension of a character through a natural discovery process that doesn't involve a lot of neurosis. Jessie explores the role from the inside out, while Hume likes to do a lot of research and to come to inhabit the character, getting at him from the outside inward. Either way is fine if it works, but what's most significant is how immaculate the characterizations are! With Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy there's no sloppy, self-indulgent spill-over into their personal life. It's the miracle of great acting: They don't get taken over by the characters; you get taken over by the characters!" (White 1998: 50).

Richard Monette, who had worked with the Cronyns on Foxfire in Stratford, Ontario, agreed with Kazan's analysis of the contrast between the two actors. Tandy worked from the inside out, basing her physical and vocal choices upon her feelings in the role, while Cronyn's physical and vocal choices came from an external inspiration. Monette recalled that in Foxfire, "Every night she [Tandy] would do everything new-minted, fresh. She spent a lot of time preparing and was a great instinctive actress. Hume was quite the opposite [in regards to instinct]" (Crew 1994: A4).
Tandy came to her freshness by beginning always with the script. Originally introduced to acting technique through scene work at the Ben Greet Academy of Acting, she understood that acting is an inherently collaborative art. In approaching her roles as a collaboration with playwrights, she saw herself as an interpreter more than a creator, and she worked very hard to reveal her characters as the writers had written them. The script was the major tool helping Tandy understand the character she was playing. Tandy described her instinctive, from-the-inside-out approach to perform in this way:

I think I try to delve into the script, because actually I believe it’s all there if only I can dig it out. One awful trap sometimes is that other characters will say things about your character—but it’s their opinion. Sometimes you get led astray and you think, ‘Oh, I’m like that, am I? I must play that.’ No. No. No. You have to know who you are. Then I think, if you can, don’t act it but be it. Then I think you’ve won” (Bryer and Davison 2001: 24).

Tandy tried to find the essence of her character by learning as much as she could about them from the script. Then, once she had learned who the person was and why they did and said what they did, she organically began to alter her being to fit that. She once said, “I find that as I know more about the character, my body will do it. It will happen and I don’t have to think about it” (Black 1993: 127).

Alec Guinness, who had frequently worked with Tandy in the 1930s, described the contrast he saw in characteristics of her later performances from those of the actress he had known. “When I saw her in, for example, The Gin Game, I was amazed at her strength and authority. What had seemed fragility had become as robust as iron, and her light voice had grown rich and varied” (Guinness 1994: n. p.). Particularly in her later years, Tandy was characterized on stage by her radiance and her vocal range. John
Gielgud described his perception of how Tandy remained consistent through time:

"Although somewhat fragile and delicate-looking in appearance, her vocal range, timing, and sense of humor gave her a surprising range, of which she took great advantage in the huge variety of parts she played throughout her long career" (Gielgud 1994: n. p.).

As Tandy moved into her seventies, she found stage acting, her primary love, too tiring to pursue, so she turned to film as a place she could find what she called "the breath of life to me" (The Los Angeles Times 12 Sept 1994: A1). Hume Cronyn said of her, "Jessie adores working. She's more fully alive when she's working" (Berger 1994: A1).

Just before she played her last two roles for the stage, Tandy wrote to her niece Brenda, "I do not know how much longer this [stage acting] can go on. I think we will have to taper off soon" (Jessica Tandy to Brenda Tandy Azario 29 Jan 1984. Library of Congress Container 6, Folder 6). In 1993, after seven years away from the stage, she said it was unlikely she would play again in the theatre, although more films were still likely: "Eight times a week, twice on Saturday, twice on Sunday: that takes a very great deal of energy. I'm not sure I have it . . . . At least, when you make a movie it's a certain number of weeks" (Bryer and Davison 2001: 36). From a rich and varied career on the stage, Tandy now turned to creating the same on film.
CHAPTER 5

FILM STAR

During Tandy’s early years on film she was confined to playing maids, uninteresting or unhappy wives, spinsters, and, after she had reached a more matronly age, difficult mothers. Although she resided in Hollywood for many years and was on contract with several major studios throughout the time she spent in the United States, it was not until she had won three Tony Awards on the stage that her long-pursued film career began to provide her with demanding and interesting roles, when she had reached her seventies. Hume Cronyn explained in part why it took so long for Jessica’s film career to take flight: “She wasn’t the sort of Hollywood girlie. She wasn’t the standard of prettiness” (Lifetime 1999). Tandy’s film career, still more than her work in theatre, was hindered by her physical appearance. In Hollywood she was also dismissed because of her British accent. Her physical appearance compounded with her cultural origins placed her in the background in the films she did work on during the first decades of her career.

It was not until the 1980s, when she was well into her 70s, that Tandy established herself as a vital force on film. Until that decade, while Tandy had acted in numerous
films, the world of film seemed only to bring her disappointment: her five-year contract with Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer in the 1940s brought her only a handful of minor and uninteresting roles, and she lost the film role of Blanche to Vivien Leigh in 1949. The final decade of her life brought international attention and acclaim to her artistry as a film actress. Her performances in Cocoon, Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Motel, Camilla, and other films reflect an increase in film roles for mature actors as the century neared its end. Her performance in the title role of Driving Miss Daisy brought her the Oscar she had so long deserved.
Early Films

When Jessica Tandy began her film career at the age of 23, she had just become a star on the stage for her poignant portrayal of Manuela. In *Children in Uniform* under the direction of one of the leading film directors of Europe, Leontine Sagan, it seemed likely at that time that her career on film was to catapult simultaneously with her stage career. Tandy had initially auditioned for a film role with Sagan, and it was practically accidental that the piece they worked on together was for the stage rather than for film. Although she never acted in Sagan’s films, when Tandy first stepped into the film studio for the shooting of *The Indiscretions of Eve*, she must have had high hopes for the outcome of this initial step.

In the early 1930s film acting, like radio acting, was still an extension of stage performance. Particularly as films moved from silence to talkies film directors sought actors with extensive theatre experience to play the roles. Jessica Tandy had already made a success of acting for radio, so it seemed little challenge to try her hand at film. Cecil Lewis, her primary mentor during her early years who had introduced her to radio acting, invited her to play a small role in a film he had written and was now directing. The role she played was only the small part of a maid to the main character, but it seemed likely given her fame in theatre that she would quickly move to more challenging roles. Unfortunately this was not the case. From playing a maid in her first film, Tandy continued to play maids on film in Britain and Hollywood for several more decades.

Upon Tandy’s arrival to the film scene, although many films were being created each year in England, that country was not known for its film industry. Films made in
Britain were usually produced rapidly and cheaply only in order to meet an annual quota. The British government, in order to encourage native arts and prevent a Hollywood colonization of entertainment in Britain, had passed the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act. This act required that of all films distributed or exhibited in Britain, a varying percentage\(^\text{127}\) must be from Britain. *The Indiscretions of Eve* was one such inexpensive film intended only to fill the required quota, not meant to be taken seriously as a work of art or commercialism. Tandy received no mention in the reviews of her first film. *Variety* called it “A weak picture on French musical comedy lines” (6 Sept 1932: 30).

Both of Tandy’s two earliest films emerged from connections she had made on the stage, and in the 1930s theatre remained her primary focus as an actor; she took on film roles to supplement her income more than to express herself as an artist. Jessica Tandy’s second film, another British production, was made in 1938 with Barry Jones and several other of the cast members with whom she later toured Canadian theatres in *Geneva, Tobias and the Angel, and Charles the King*. *Murder in the Family*, produced by 20th Century Fox and directed by Albert Parker,\(^\text{128}\) was a more serious commercial endeavor than Tandy’s first film had been six years before. In this murder mystery, Tandy played the unhappy daughter of the Barry Jones character. Of Tandy’s acting, *Film Weekly London* said, “Best is Jessica Tandy as a daughter of the murder-blighted household” (13 Aug 1938. Tandy C: 99). Her second movie role, like her first, foreshadowed those Tandy was to play for many years to come. As maids, uninteresting

\(^{127}\) In 1927 this percentage was 5% for exhibitors and 7.5% for distributors. After ten years the quota for both had been increased to 20%.

\(^{128}\) This was the last film Parker directed. He later went on to become a well-known casting agent in London.
daughters, or unhappy wives whose rivals are the film's main characters, Tandy had little to challenge her on film, and she continued to pursue the more rewarding venues of theatre and radio. Six more years were to pass before Tandy obtained another film role, this time opposite her second husband Hume Cronyn.

In the early 1940s Jessica Tandy had transplanted herself to settle with her new husband in Hollywood, in order to make a home and to be available for film work. During their courtship she had discovered a desire to become a serious film actor, and she moved to Hollywood filled with eager anticipation. Hollywood, however, failed to employ her talents. She kept busy caring for children Susan, Christopher, and Tandy. She succeeded in making her home comfortable and pleasant, but she failed to find the professional work she sought. Time after time she went to the studio for screen tests or to ask when her next project would begin, and time after time she was turned away. Her letters to Hume Cronyn detail the frustration she felt at being unable to persuade the studio to use her. In 1944 she wrote to him, "I'm going for a fitting tomorrow to Metro—but Lord knows when I will work" (16 Oct 1944. Library of Congress Container 7, Folder 1). Finally in the mid-40s she was given a slim opportunity. Much later she exclaimed about Hollywood, "Nobody out there really took me seriously. Hume really engineered my first significant parts in movies" (White 1998: 55).

*The Seventh Cross*, 1944, starred Spencer Tracy as a German liberal who escapes prison and spends the rest of the film fleeing the Gestapo. The film takes its title from seven crosses erected for the seven escaped prisoners, six of whom are recaptured and executed. The seventh cross waits for George Heisler, Tracy's character. Hume Cronyn
and Jessica Tandy played a kindly apolitical German couple who assist Heisler in escaping to Holland thus keeping the seventh cross empty. Director Fred Zinneman later described their performances in the film as “outstanding.” He added, “They were enormously moving in their portrait of a loving family threatened by an invisible power” (Shipman 1994: 27). Tandy appeared only in a few of the scenes, cooking for the men and being generally supportive of their more compelling activities, although The New York Times called her “emotionally devastating” (29 Sept 1944, 18:1) in the role. Unfortunately for Tandy’s future career, the role called for a simple, plain woman, and makeup artists created a most unflattering hairstyle for her—disheveled blonde braids pinned up on either side. Because her character was querulous and kind, Tandy spoke with a light voice, and her scenes provided no vehicle for the emotional power of which she was capable.

Hume Cronyn’s role in The Seventh Cross was much more central, and it is obvious that Tandy was cast opposite him as an afterthought, for who would be better suited to play his wife on film than his actual wife? He was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor for his work on the film. While Tandy enjoyed the project and commented in a letter to her husband on how well received their performances were,¹²⁹ the film failed to feature her according to her ambition. One of the better war films to be produced during World War II, The Seventh Cross brought Cronyn and Tandy a great deal of fan mail and the hope of finding more substantial work in the future.

¹²⁹ She wrote to her husband, “I can’t begin to tell you what an impression our performances in 7th + have made—and yours particularly about 10 times a day at least someone comes and introduces himself at the studio just to tell me how wonderful it was” (16 Nov 1944, Library of Congress Box 7, Folder 1).
Tandy’s next role was the most interesting she had yet played on film, but it still relegated her to the film’s margins. In The Valley of Decision, 1945, Tandy played the obnoxious rival of Greer Garson in the role of Mary Rafferty, a simple Irish girl who falls in love with the son of her employer. Tandy’s character Louise Kane triumphs in marrying Gregory Peck’s character, but she makes his life so miserable that he continues to be drawn to Mary Rafferty. In this role Tandy was once again given an unflattering blonde coiffure, and as Louise she spoke with a stridently high voice. Reviewers gave the film lukewarm notices, and if mentioned, Tandy was lumped together with several other performers. Tandy’s first but far from her only spurned wife character, the role brought Tandy little immediate reward.

She was, however, able to learn something about her craft from the experience. As Tandy worked on the film she observed the difference between the requirements of film acting and those of theatre with which she was more familiar and comfortable. As she watched a scene being filmed between Garson and Peck, she thought to herself it was too “small and quiet.” But later when she saw the filmed product of the scene, “Of course it was perfection. Both of them had the ability to be absolutely true with the greatest economy. And I said, ‘Ah, that’s the way screen acting is done” (Fishgall 2002: 101). Decades later Tandy herself was to become a master of economy on screen.

In 1946 Tandy returned to the professional company of her husband, this time playing his daughter in The Green Years, a film based on a novel by A. J. Cronin, in

---

130 This was the highest grossing film of Garson’s career. She was nominated for an Academy Award for her performance as Mary Rafferty.
whose earlier play\textsuperscript{131} Tandy had starred when she first moved to the United States. Seven months pregnant, Tandy was required to carry trays and wear loose shawls in order to mask her condition. A few months later she found a more interesting project, Joseph L. Mankiewicz’s first attempt at directing. \textit{Dragonwyck}, an adaptation of the novel by Anya Seton, was a Gothic tale of murder and romance in the vein of Hitchcock’s \textit{Rebecca}. In the film Vincent Price played his first of a long series of villains.

After Mankiewicz had worked with Tandy, he became her advocate. He had seen her performance in \textit{Portrait of a Madonna} at the Actors’ Laboratory Theatre during the summer of 1946, and he immediately wrote to producer Darryl F. Zanuck, head of the film studio where Tandy was under contract, “I have rarely seen acting to equal hers, and even more rarely seen a very tough, invited professional audience brought cheering to its feet as spontaneously. By the way, she does not play an Englishwoman” (Joseph L. Mankiewicz to Darryl F. Zanuck. Library of Congress Container 204, Folder 3). He continued, “Tandy has it all over Bette Davis as an actress, and is certainly more attractive. It would be a great pity if we were to miss out on a possible dramatic star by the unfortunately too prevalent custom of doing nothing with a vibrant personality and great talent” (Ibid.). Mankiewicz later explained that her English background was the main impediment to Tandy’s career in Hollywood. “The narrowness of most people in Hollywood in the mid to late 1940s was beyond imagining. If you had, for instance, an English accent you were like a piece of furniture that might or might not fit in a certain scene. That was it” (White 1998: 56).

\textsuperscript{131}The play was \textit{Jupiter Laughs} (1940).
Despite Mankiewicz's advocacy, Tandy continued to be relegated to minor roles in which a British accent was desirable. In her next film, *Forever Amber* (1947), she played a maid as she had in *Dragonwyck* and *The Indiscretions of Eve*. In 1958 on the television show *Person to Person*, Jessica recalled her experience in this movie: “One full year I spent making a picture called *Forever Amber*, and I couldn’t find myself doing anything except coming on and saying, ‘Ooh, Amber.’ And that’s a heck of a way to spend a whole year” (Lifetime 1999). It was not until she had been cast as Blanche in the Broadway version of *Streetcar* that Jessica Tandy obtained a key role in a major Hollywood film, although perhaps Mankiewicz’s memo alongside the support of Broadway had assisted her prospects.

In 1947 Tandy was given the title role in a thriller by novelist Aldous Huxley, author of *Brave New World*. Directed and produced by Zoltan Korda, *A Woman’s Vengeance*, based on Huxley’s story *The Giaconda Smile*, tells the tale of a man erroneously accused of murdering his first wife. In the course of the story Jessica’s character, a lonely spinster in love with the accused, is revealed to be the true culprit, and her last-minute confession spares his execution. Cast as Blanche, an aging beauty, in *Streetcar*, Tandy was given the role of another aging beauty on film. Both characters make a descent into madness. Tandy’s interpretation of Miss Janet Spence humanized the murderess, making her crime the product of greedy stupidity rather than maliciousness. Of her performance in this role, *Variety* said that, “Tandy scores decisively as the femme who wreaks vengeance on [Charles] Boyer when her love is spurned” (24 Dec 1947: 13).
After the close of *Streetcar*, Jessica had a long wait before she was offered another project. Tandy later said, "I was back in Hollywood for two weeks after *Streetcar* when the Fox casting director called. I get on the line and he asks, 'How tall are you?' I say, 'I'm 5 feet 4.' He said, 'Fine, that's all I wanted to know.' He never called back. It was good for both Hume and me, though. We learned in this short life where we truly belonged: in the theater" (White 1998: 57). Shortly after the phone call she learned that Vivien Leigh was to take her role in *Streetcar*, and the next film role Tandy was given must have seemed bitter to her in contrast.

*September Affair* (1950), named for Kurt Weill's haunting tune "September Song," failed to surpass the beauty of its theme song and Naples backdrop. The film depicts a married man who falls in love with an attractive pianist while on a business trip to Italy. Jessica Tandy played the unloved and uninteresting wife he leaves, while in her next film, *The Desert Fox* (1951), she portrayed a beloved wife whose husband leaves her when taken by the Gestapo to his death. As played by Tandy, both Catherine Lawrence and Frau Rommel possessed a dignified sadness, couched in their respective situations, that gives them a gentle appeal. In both these films Tandy's characters had grown sons, and her next few roles marked her transition to stereotypical mothers. In *The Light in the Forest* (1958) she played a genteel mother whose son Johnny is kidnapped by the Delaware Indians and later must return to struggle with adjustments to settler society. In addition to the complications surrounding her son, Myra Butler is a bedridden invalid. Under Tandy's portrayal, this character, like Catherine Lawrence and Frau Rommel, moved through her sorrow with a graceful, quiet resignation. In *The Adventures of a
Young Man (1962), based upon Ernest Hemingway's early stories, Tandy appeared briefly as the mother to the main character. In The Birds (1963), Tandy played the mother of a grown man.

**Film Classic**

Twenty years before The Birds, as Tandy and Cronyn were still courting, Hume Cronyn had been cast in Hitchcock's film Shadow of a Doubt. As he was working on it, Tandy wrote to him to describe one of the guests at a health spa where she was staying: “He has a goatee and doesn’t like Hitch’s pictures—thinks Carol Reed is much better—obviously knows nothing about movies or acting poor chap” (25 Aug 1942. Library of Congress Container 6, Folder 11). Tandy’s admiration for Hitchcock never wavered. When Hitchcock directed Hume Cronyn in his early picture, the director had recently transplanted from Great Britain to the United States, where he had already created Rebecca and Suspicion.

At the end of 1961 Hitchcock had just finished directing the most spectacular hit of his career, Psycho, and his name had become synonymous with onscreen suspense. During the 1950s, Tandy herself had acted in several of the better known episodes of Hitchcock’s television series Alfred Hitchcock Presents, and she was familiar with his directorial style. He was also familiar with her commitment and skill.

In December of 1961, Tandy was staying with her husband Hume as he worked on Cleopatra, starring Elizabeth Taylor. She had recently returned to repertory theatre and Shakespeare, playing Lady Macbeth and Cassandra at the American Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Connecticut, away from the company of her family. On December 132

132 See Appendix 4 for listings.
15, 1961, she received a telegram from her friend Alfred Hitchcock telling her that he and his wife had bought the Cronyns a little Christmas gift, only to find the couple was in Rome living on Hume’s “MORAL EARNINGS . . . SURELY YOU DON’T EXPECT US TO SEND THIS LITTLE TIKEN [sic] ALL THE WAY TO ROME THINK OF THE EXPENSE,” he said. At the end of the telegram he added, “INCIDENTLY [sic] I START A NEW PICTURE IN FEBRUARY DO YOU WANT TO BE IN IT? OR DO YOU WANT TO REMAIN IN ROME LIVING THE AFOREMENTIONED MORAL EARNINGS?” (Telegram Alfred Hitchcock to Jessica Tandy 15 Dec 1961. Library of Congress Container 201, Folder 10).

Tandy wrote back to him, “Is there something I could read? Either script or story? And if not, can you tell me . . . . I shall hold my breath in excitement and anticipation”133 (Letter from Jessica Tandy to Alfred Hitchcock [Dec 1961]. Library of Congress Container 201, Folder 10). Four days after his initial telegram Hitchcock sent her “a slightly over-written and unedited penultimate version” of the script (Alfred Hitchcock to Jessica Tandy 19 Dec 1961. Library of Congress Container 201, Folder 10). A few phone calls and telegrams followed, and in January 1962 Tandy began preparation for her role as Lydia Brenner in The Birds.

When Tandy was cast as Lydia Brenner, the widowed mother of the leading man, she was the only established performer in the cast. The others, from Tippi Hedren to Rod Taylor, were unknowns. Hitchcock was to become Tippi Hedren’s Pygmalion, casting her repeatedly in film after film. Tandy he was only to use once. Hitchcock described

\[133\] At the end of the letter she added, “P. S. Hume says he’s green with envy. Never mind, it won’t show behind the beard and toga.”
his approach with the actors for *The New York Times*: “I tell them why they are doing what they are doing. I show them how a particular shot fits into the movie. I just explained to Miss Hedren why she had to look back as she stopped to pick up a child. Because in the movie, the next shot will be a close-up of a raven flying at her head” (*New York Times* 1 Apr 1962). Tandy thrived under Hitchcock’s direction, and the other performers succeeded well enough that their subsequent careers flourished.

Now a classic of suspense, the film is familiar to most moviegoers. Hitchcock transposed the action of the original Daphne Du Maurier novel from rural France to urban California. In the film Melanie Daniels travels with her two lovebirds from San Francisco to Bodega Bay in search of a young man who sparked her interest. He is living with his mother Lydia. As romance develops between the two young persons, flocks of large birds begin to appear. The birds come in greater and greater numbers, plaguing the small town and killing residents. Enormous destruction and terror ensue, and the survivors manage to reach Melanie’s small car and drive away, wondering if the birds will overtake San Francisco as well. *The Birds* was an unprecedented phenomenon of special effects for Hitchcock.

The film portrays Lydia Blake as an unpleasantly possessive mother, and Tandy may not have been completely comfortable in the role. Tandy’s own difficult and needy mother had died earlier that year during her season at the American Shakespeare Festival, and Tandy, who always felt guilty that her brother Tully was his mother’s primary caretaker, had failed to reach England in time for the funeral.134 Of Lydia Blake, *Variety*

---

134 Tandy often invited her mother to live near her in the United States, but her mother always refused. She seemed to feel that Tandy rather belonged in England near her.
called her a woman "Whose dread of loneliness manifests itself in possessiveness" (27 Mar 1963: 6), a phrase that could have been applied to the older Jessie.

In keeping with Tandy's greater experience as an actor, her portrayal of Lydia Blake has the most depth of any in the film. Compared to Lydia, the other characters seem shallow and undignified. Despite her role as a possessive mother wary of any other attachments her son may find in the world, Tandy makes Lydia likeable. Her dignity sinks beyond the surface, and the emotions she manifests have depth. Hume Cronyn had written to Hitchcock at the director's invitation when Tandy first received the script. Hume said, "I don't like black and white characters and I don't see why Lydia shouldn't be possessive, but I sense a better way of doing it than as it stands. I think a decision has to be made about whether Lydia is fundamentally 'good' or bad.' It would seem to me both more original and more interesting if the choice was 'good'" (Hume Cronyn to Alfred Hitchcock 13 Jan 1962. Library of Congress Container 201, Folder 10). After pondering the matter, Alfred Hitchcock agreed, and the three artists decided to make Lydia "someone extremely vulnerable: apprehensive, lonely, and insecure" (Ibid.). Their aim was to have the audience identify with Lydia so that when she was afraid, they would be too.

Tippi Hedren, in contrast to Tandy, has a limited range of sexy appeal in the film, from pathetic wistfulness to shrill hysteria. Tandy's fragility as the mother is the believable result of true feelings, and her toughness in the role demonstrates real strength of character. Of his wife, Cronyn had said, "Jess is very very good at the terrifying business of hysteria," and her terror in the face of attacking birds was indeed chilling.
About Tandy’s performance Variety declared that “Of the others [than Tippi Hedren], Miss Tandy, a first-class actress, makes the most vivid impression” (Ibid.).

In 1973 Harold Pinter directed Tandy’s next film, Butley, in which she returned to the role of spinster, this time in a more appealing tone than she had been allowed before. Set at a university in London, the film depicts an alienated narcissist, played by Alan Bates, who teaches English and ruthlessly competes with his colleague Edna Shaft, played by the actress. A literate, artistic comedy, this was an adaptation of a play in which Alan Bates had also starred. The producer of the film was the American Film Theatre, an organization aiming at creating “major plays brought to the screen by major directors with extraordinary casts” (New York Times 28 Oct 1973: A). Walter Kerr described his favorite moment in the film:

There is a sudden, viciously impatient gesture made by Jessica Tandy in “Butley” . . . that nearly brought me to my feet with a whoop of encouragement. Miss Tandy, a teacher being tormented by the sadomasochist Alan Bates, was seated across the desk from her smirking, falsely deferential opponent. Between them, in the camera’s eye, stood a gooseneck lamp.

On a savage impulse, Miss Tandy shot out her hand and swept the lamp away, as though to clear the air between the two of them. But the gesture seemed, on the instant, more than a bit of drama imbedded in a particular play. It was as though Miss Tandy was not only trying to get the lamp out of there, she was trying to get the camera out of there....

Of course the actress may have intended nothing of the sort; she may simply have been doing what director Harold Pinter told her to do, and we know that Mr. Pinter is endlessly fascinated by the intrusiveness of physical objects (The New York Times 7 Apr 1974).

In his article Kerr implied that Jessica Tandy, Harold Pinter, and Butley were all more at
home in live theatre than on film, but *Variety* disagreed, stating, "Jessica Tandy makes a fine screen reappearance... Tandy, a middle-aged teacher who doesn't seem to understand her modern students, is excellent in projection of both a dedicated instructor and a skilled academic politician" (*Variety* 23 Jan 1974: 14).

Seven years passed before Tandy acted on film again. In 1979 she had performed a television version of her Tony Award-winning performance as Fonsia Dorsey in *The Gin Game* opposite Hume Cronyn. In 1981 she once again acted with her husband in John Schlesinger's *Honky Tonk Freeway*. An amusing comedy set primarily in Ticlaw, an enterprising village in Florida that has been forbidden an exit on the newly constructed freeway, the film traces the lives of several travelers who are eventually forced to leave the highway on the makeshift exit the residents have constructed. Tandy played an elderly alcoholic in denial about her condition who is married to a retired jingle composer. Hume Cronyn wrote: "We're most enthusiastic about the script," and the couple's enthusiasm translated to their performance (Hume Cronyn to Don Boyd 1 Oct 1979. Library of Congress Container 204, Folder 9). As he was completing the editing of the film, John Schlesinger wrote to Cronyn, "I am so glad that you approved of the film... I loved making the movie, believed in it totally, lost faith for a time and am now beginning to regain it" (John Schlesinger to Hume Cronyn 28 Jul 1981. Library of Congress, Container 204, Folder 9). Unfortunately, despite their enthusiasm and hope, the lighthearted and quirky film was a terrible commercial flop, failing to match the success of Schlesinger's former films *Midnight Cowboy* or *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*. 

152

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Still of the Night (1982) was another commercial flop. Jessica Tandy played the psychiatrist mother to Sam Rice, also a psychiatrist, played by Roy Scheider. Sam falls in love with a woman he suspects of murder, Brooke Reynolds, who was played by Meryl Streep. He discovers she is innocent, and the true killer is exposed. Robert Benton’s first attempt at directing suspense, the film’s action lacks that element. Meryl Streep later said of the film, “The dialogue seemed false. I got madder and madder because I knew the answer [to making her character real] lay within me, but I couldn’t wrestle it up.” Tandy commented about the general nervousness the collaborators felt in making the film. “She [Meryl Streep] had to smoke a lot in the picture, as I recall. A chain-smoking neurotic. I think that added to the general feeling of nervousness” (Maychick 1984: 125). Despite the failure of Still of the Night to transfer the nervousness of the creative process from set to film, Tandy was eager to work with Robert Benton again twelve years later.

The same year Tandy played Grace Rice, Tandy performed as Goldie Hawn’s mother Eleanor McCullen in Best Friends. While Grace had been cold and intellectual, Eleanor was simple and warmhearted. As she had in Still of the Night, in Best Friends Tandy appeared only briefly in the film. This was one of the few roles in which Tandy was not joined by her real life husband when she appeared as a couple; Barnard Hughes played her spouse Tim McCullen. Of Best Friends Cronyn wrote to Tandy’s brother, “Jess is just about to start a film for which she has no great admiration (Burt Reynolds
and Goldie Hawn) but it’s an amusing role and potentially commercial film. She also enjoys working” (letter to Tully Tandy 1 Feb 1982. Library of Congress Container 6, Folder 9).

By this time Tandy had won three Tony Awards for Best Actress in the theatre. She had never won an award on film, and she had never been given a film role in which she could demonstrate her abilities. Theatre, she felt, belonged to her much more than film and she belonged to theatre. In an interview when she was in her late seventies, she described the pros and cons of the two media and her preference and perspective on each one. She said:

I prefer the theater. In the theater, if you don’t get it right tonight, you can try again tomorrow, and every night until you finish. You can aim for an unreachable perfection. But it’s very important to do film and television too, because the percentage of people who go to the theater now is so tiny. Also, who tours anymore? You don’t do what we used to, which was to do a play on Broadway, and then take it on the road for a season. You don’t get exposure to a lot of people anymore, which is very important (Black 1993: 124-5).

Nevertheless, as Tandy aged it became more practical for her to perform on film rather than eight times a week in theatre. This work challenged her to learn new skills, for, as she felt, “It’s very frightening, I find, movie acting. It’s more grueling to be in a movie than to be in a play. You’re ill-prepared for every scene, you haven’t had time to work as a family with the company during weeks of rehearsal” (Honan 1992: 7). But she was more than ready to brave the grueling process.
Icon for Seniors

The last phase of Tandy's career brought her sizeable, challenging roles on film. As films began to be created featuring seniors in as major characters, Tandy was one of the most popular choices for casting among actresses of her generation. During this final phase, Hume Cronyn was to be seen with her on the screen more often than not. Tandy and Cronyn began this portion of her career with a cameo appearance at the beginning of *The World According to Garp* (1982), in the role of the delightfully conservative parents of revolutionary Jenny Field, played by Glenn Close. Although they play only one scene at the very beginning of the film, the few moments they appear provide a taste of the rapport that brought the couple so much acclaim on the stage. Their comedic timing is impeccable, and their characterizations lightly but carefully crafted.

Tandy next appeared by herself in *The Bostonians* (1984), as Miss Birdseye, the abolitionist turned suffragist, in an adaptation of the Henry James novel. The film was a Merchant Ivory production, and the first by that team to win them numerous Academy Award nominations. Vanessa Redgrave, who played Olive Chancellor, a nineteenth century feminist with an ambiguous attachment to her protégée Verena Tarrant, received an Oscar for her portrayal. *Variety* called Tandy a “standout” in her depiction of Miss Birdseye (23 May 1984), “an ancient lady who has been a member of just about every radical cause since she was jailed in prewar Georgia in connection with her abolitionist activities” (Canby 1984: 15: 1). The actors who performed in the film, such as Christopher Reeve and Vanessa Redgrave, had taken on the project out of a commitment

---

to its artistry rather than its commercial prospects. A memo from Sylvia Brooks to Hume Cronyn relays a phone message from producer Ismail Merchant: "He says Jessica was getting more than Christopher Reeve and Vanessa weekly because he wanted Jessica for that role and noone [sic] else" (Memo from Sylvia Brooks to Hume Cronyn 23 Nov 1983. Library of Congress Container 201, Folder 11). Tandy’s spry performance certainly rewarded Merchant’s faith in her.

In 1985 Tandy and Cronyn appeared together in a film that transformed Hollywood’s understanding of the box office appeal of seniors in leading roles. *Cocoon*, a science fiction story of elderly residents of a retirement community who discover a swimming pool that resembles a fountain of youth. After swimming in the pool, the film’s stars discover a renewed energy, vigor, and stamina. The pool is a repository for cocoons in which aliens from Antarea have been preserved for centuries, awaiting the return of a space ship to bring them home. At last a ship has come, and their friends, disguised as humans, have placed the pods in the swimming pool until they are able to return to their faraway planet. The elderly swimmers decide to depart with their new friends, to settle in Antarea, where the ailments of age are nonexistent. Tandy’s role as Alma Finley is flimsy, and she serves once again mainly as a support to her husband’s more central role.

Even though the film was, "really a movie more about the four guys," director Ron Howard later said, "Hume definitely felt that Jessica was an extraordinary talent and that anything that we could do in the script to . . . enhance her character, enhance her role,
would . . . only be an asset. He certainly didn't have to work hard to convince anybody of that” (Lifetime 1999). When the sequel to *Cocoon* came around three years later her character was to be featured much more extensively.

*Cocoon* was a tremendous box office success. With her participation in it Tandy’s film career was rejuvenated. In another science fiction film, *batteries not included* (1987), Tandy played a role that brought her first award for film acting. The Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror Films awarded her Best Actress of the year for her role as Faye, a kindly, delightful senile woman who is the first to spot mechanical creatures resembling Frisbees who have come to dwell in their East Village brownstone. The tiny spaceship-like creatures survive on electricity and, with their penchant for repairing broken items, assist the residents of the brownstone in saving their home from the developer who would tear it down. Hume Cronyn played Faye’s husband Frank. In the role of Faye, Tandy demonstrates her keen sense of comedic timing, and her simple radiance steals the film.

*The House on Carroll Street* (1986) was not the financial or artistic success Tandy’s other recent films had been. Tandy played Miss Venable, a wealthy spinster who hires Emily Crane, played by Kelly McGillis, to read to her. As Emily looks out the window of her new employer’s home she stumbles upon a conspiracy linking the FBI to former Nazi scientists. Originally produced in 1986, the film was not released until 1988. Between the original production of *The House on Carroll Street* and its later release, Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy reprised their roles from *Foxfire* for a 1987 television movie sponsored by Hallmark. John Denver joined the couple to play their musician son.
who urges his mother to sell the family property and move to a retirement community.
The Cronyns found John Denver personable, and the entire production team enjoyed working with the couple. After its completion, producer Dorothea G. Petrie wrote to them: “Thank you for your patience—& for setting the ‘tone’ for our entire company. You are both magic (personally & professionally) & I believe, because of you, our film will be too” (Dorothea Petrie to Jessica Tandy and Hume Cronyn 3 June 1987. Library of Congress Container 239, Folder 5).

In 1988 Tandy and Cronyn revisited their previous roles in Cocoon: The Return, in which the former retirement home residents return to Earth from Antarea in order to obtain a forgotten cocoon. During their visit home they must face the onset of aging and illness that their former environment creates. Tandy’s role is expanded in this sequel, and she has a poignant death scene with her husband after she is hit by a car when saving a child from it, and he gives his life force to her so that she might live.

At last in 1989, with the success of Cocoon and *batteries not included, the scene had been set for the production of the film that made Tandy’s earlier films seem like decades of preparation. In a process that somewhat reversed the bitterness of her loss of Blanche to Vivien Leigh, Tandy obtained her most significant film role in Driving Miss Daisy as a replacement for an actress who had made an enormous success in the stage version of the story. Dana Ivey had played the title role in the Pulitzer Prize-winning drama in 1988, and she had been given an Obie Award for Best Actress for her portrayal. Because Ivey lacked film experience, Hollywood producers hesitated to give her the film role, and a search commenced for an actress of the appropriate age who could take on the
role of the Southern Jewish widow. Morgan Freeman, who had been in the theatre production, was retained to play Hoke Colburn, Daisy Werthen’s chauffeur who opens her eyes to the heinousness of racism.

Tandy had long since learned not to count on anything with casting, but she desperately wanted the role. She had seen Frances Sternhagen play Daisy Werthen on stage and admired that actress’s performance. To her utter delight, Jessica Tandy was given the opportunity to play the most interesting and challenging role she had ever been given on film. In an interview she expressed her joy at being cast: “I never before had a part like Miss Daisy in a movie. I always played almost cardboard characters,” she explained (Clarke 1990: 64). During the filming process she often recalled her experience watching Sternhagen play the role on stage. “She was never out of my mind when I was playing it. I thought she was perfection,” Tandy said (Bryer and Davison 2001: 38).

When the film was released *Variety* predicted the future: “With guaranteed Oscar nominations for career-crowning performances by Morgan Freeman and Jessica Tandy,” the article began. It continued:

Tandy is a powerful stroke of casting, for she is not only the right age for Daisy but also has the flinty, stubborn, somewhat chilly personality that keeps the film from falling into easy sentimental traps.

Her Daisy is a captious and lonely old stick, living a bleakly isolated widow’s life in her empty old house, and her inability to keep from tyrannizing Freeman, housekeeper Esther Rolle, and other black helpers give the film a current of bitter truth, making her gradual friendship with Freeman a hard-won achievement (*Variety* 13 Dec 1989).

As she prepared for the role, in addition to her mindfulness of the choices Frances Sternhagen had made on the stage, Tandy once again thought back to her mother. Her
mother had been unaffectionate and critical, particularly during her later years, and
Tandy's resulting familiarity with those qualities became a critical tool in her ability to
represent them truthfully (Bryer and Davison 2001: 38). As Daisy Werthen, Tandy
leashed the radiance that had been manifest in Cocoon and Batteries Not Included so that
it became a shining, reflective brittleness. Not until the final scenes of the film, when
Daisy appears senile and in a nursing home, did Tandy remove the armor she had
constructed around the character. In those scenes her vulnerability painfully contrasts
with her previous gruffness.

Irene Worth, one of the most respected Shakespearean actresses of the twentieth
century, saw the film with wonder. The actress wrote Tandy a letter on New Year's Day,
1990:

You peerless Jessica,
   What a New Year you're going to give me in remembering how
   magical and wonderful you are—most recent [sic], of course, as Daisy—
   the flower of the field. And your Beauty! Thank you for showing us all
   what acting really is! (Irene Worth to Jessica Tandy 1 Jan 1990. Library
   of Congress Container 204, Folder 3).

Tandy's performance as Daisy Werthen inspired her colleagues in theatre and film as well
as the wider audience she was hoping to reach. Kim Hunter recalled, "I just remember
being absolutely delighted when the reviews came out . . . Jessica finally let the film
industry know that audiences are not against older people, that they can enjoy them and
their stories" (Lifetime 1999).
To Tandy’s further delight, the Academy of Motion Pictures and Sciences awarded her Best Actress of 1989 for her role as Daisy Werthen.136 “I am on Cloud Nine,” Tandy exclaimed at the Oscar Ceremony. Newly elected President of the Academy, Karl Malden, who was in the audience, thought, “It’s about time” (Ibid.). Four decades after Vivien Leigh had won an Academy Award for Best Actress in the role Tandy had created on stage, Tandy received her own award, becoming the oldest person ever to receive an Academy Award in performance. She had become a film star. Miss Daisy opened the casting door for Jessica Tandy. At eighty she had her choice of any film featuring a senior woman in a role. She basked in her glory, feeling a confidence she had never before found in all her decades of acting.137 Her daughter Tandy Cronyn “thought it buoyed her up and gave her a confidence in herself that I had never really seen before” (Ibid.).

During the following year Tandy had her choice of projects, and she chose Fried Green Tomatoes for its “emotion,” a quality she found too seldom in screenplays submitted to her. She described what inspired her to pursue the role of Ninny Threadgoode: “I love movies that make you come out of the theatre feeling glad to be a member of the human race, although I must say it’s quite rare. There are too many times you come out thinking what awful things human beings are capable of” (Honan 1992). In the film Tandy played a Southerner in a nursing home who is visited by housewife

136 Her co-star Morgan Freeman was also nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actor, and Dan Akroyd was nominated for Best Supporting Actor. The film won Oscars for Best Picture, Best Screenplay, and Best Makeup.

137 She later explained her surprise at being cast: “I’m not a big movie name, and I knew they needed someone who was bankable. Certainly, in films, I’ve played small supporting roles for the most part. What has been happening to the film is remarkable, but there is something about the story that has allowed the play to run for years” (St. Petersburg Times 12 Sept 1994: 12C). After the success of the film, she became bankable, as she said.
Evelyn Couch (played by Kathy Bates). As the women embark upon a friendship, Ninny Threadgoode recounts a story of fierce female loyalty she had witnessed in her youth and inspires Evelyn to act more courageously and independently in her own life. Much of the film takes place in flashback as Ninny tells her story. Kathy Bates later said of acting with Jessica, “She was in her eighties at the time we did the film but her excitement for it was the same as if she was sixteen and had just been given her first big part” (Lifetime 1999).

Tandy found the process of making the film a challenge, because the identity of her character altered several times during the production process. “When I said I would do it and read the script first of all, I was going to play Ninny,” she said (Byers and Davison 2001: 35). In the novel Ninny was an orphan who was befriended by Idgie, who is a tomboy who shows great courage. Ninny later marries Idgie’s brother. Then, “Early on, before we even started rehearsals, the director said, ‘I have a brilliant idea. What it’s going to be is that you are really going to be not Ninny, but Idgie grown old’” (Ibid.). So Tandy and the director went through the script and eliminated any references that identified Tandy as Ninny. Then later, as they went into production, the director changed his mind and returned to the original concept. But on the last day of shooting, “He said there was something ambiguous so that he thought for a moment I really was [Idgie]—which I didn’t buy for a moment. I was very confused, as you may have noticed” (Ibid.).

One of the box office successes of 1991, the film further established Tandy as an outstanding film artist despite her understandable confusion about her role. In London
The Daily Mail said, “That the film was ever made is a minor miracle; that it has gained its octogenarian star, Jessica Tandy, her second Oscar nomination is pure poetic justice. (Honan 1992). The article continues, “In ten weeks, unheralded and unhyped, Fried Green Tomatoes has outgrossed Warren Beatty’s hugely-hyped Bugsy, made almost five times its $10 ½ million production costs and even, in one glorious week, overtaken Spielberg’s Hook to reach Number One at the American box office” (Ibid.). One of the amazing surprises of 1993, the success of Fried Green Tomatoes revitalized “women’s films” in Hollywood, and a flurry of more emotional, less action-packed productions followed, including Tandy’s next two projects.

*The Story Lady*, aired in 1991, was a novel adapted for television by Susan Cooper. Rather than husband Hume, Tandy Cronyn, their daughter, acted with her mother Jessica. In the film, Jessica played a woman who moves in with her grown-up daughter and from her boredom makes a success reading children’s stories on television.

After Fried Green Tomatoes and *The Story Lady*, Tandy acted in the Shirley MacLaine/Marcello Mastroianni film *Used People*, released in 1993. In the film Jessica Tandy played Shirley MacLaine’s opinionated Jewish mother. Of the role, Tandy said, “I had to spend a lot of time with someone who would teach me the accent, which is very difficult, strangely enough. Mostly when I’ve been doing accents, it’s been Southern, which is easier for an English woman, but this one is so foreign to me” (Zahn 1993). A vocal coach was constantly present during the film to assist Tandy.
During her interview with Paula Zahn, Tandy referred to the illness that was eventually to take her life.\footnote{She was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in the late 1980s and had two operations for it before 1990.} “I don’t have the energy that I had and I’ve been ill and I’ve recovered and I’m going to make another film but I’m not going to make it until my energy’s back,” Tandy exclaimed (Ibid.). Not only did Tandy make another film, she made three.

To Dance With the White Dog was produced by Hallmark in 1993. Susan Cooper’s fourth major collaboration with the Cronyns, the three relished the opportunity to make the made-for-television movie together. Adapted from a novel by Terry Kay, it depicts an elderly pecan farmer whose wife (played by Tandy) passes away early in the film and returns to him as a white dog. He befriends the dog, whom at first only he can see, and after he has a stroke the dog “dances” with his walker in order to persuade him to use its assistance. Tandy and Cronyn were both nominated for Emmy Awards for their performances in this poignant story.

Tandy’s last two projects were completed shortly before she died, at 85, of ovarian cancer. In Camilla (1994) and Nobody’s Fool (1994), Tandy played two independent women who inspire the main characters in the films to greater nobility. Both films were dedicated to Tandy after her passing, for she had inspired her collaborators with her own courage in the face of illness. Robert Benton, who directed her in Still of the Night and Nobody’s Fool later said, “Jessica and Paul [Newman] are probably the greatest examples to all actors that a great actor is a very simple actor, that you do as little as is necessary, that there are no extra moving parts” (Lifetime 1999). On The Today Show Tandy elaborated upon her stillness as a film actor: “If you’re very angry for
instance, if that were the scene, maybe it's much more powerful to try to control that anger. But the audience will know you're angry no matter how quietly you speak” (Ibid.).

Of the two films, Tandy’s performance in *Camilla* better showcased her skill. Canadian novelist Paul Quarrington adapted the story for producer Christina Jennings from a story her songwriter sister had told her. While vacationing, Ali Jennings had met a remarkable elderly violinist, and together the two musicians had experienced some delightful adventures.

Canadian producer Christina Jennings was an acquaintance of Hume Cronyn’s nephew John Cronyn, and John spoke with his aunt and uncle about appearing in the film before Jennings submitted the script to Tandy. Jennings said, “I still remember the feeling I had when I got her letter—it was as if the floor had opened up underneath me. I had always known we had a good project, but when Jessica said, ‘Yes,’ then I knew we’d moved into a much bigger arena” (Maclean’s 1993: 46). Indian Canadian director Deepa Mehta139 eagerly accepted the project. In the role of Camilla Cara, Tandy demonstrated a graceful, unselfconscious charm. Her finest scenes are in her tender moments with Hume Cronyn, who played a suitor from her youth whose love she had shunned out of loyalty to her young son. In her later years, Tandy returns to her former love, and when her grown son asks her to sacrifice her suitor for him a second time, she refuses and this time leaves her son behind. The film is also a novelty in that in it Jessica

139 Mehta is perhaps best known for her 1996 film *Fire*, which created enormous protests when released in India. Set in that country, the film depicts a lesbian relationship that develops between two sister-in-laws to provide the love their unhappy marriages do not.
Tandy played her first nude scene when well into her eighties.\textsuperscript{140} When the film was released, Janet Maslin wrote in \textit{The New York Times}:

Jessica Tandy’s graceful presence in one of her final roles gives “Camilla” a valedictory grandeur. Though this is by far the lesser of two new films dedicated to Tandy . . . it’s the one that gives this great, unforgettable actress the more substantial showcase. “Camilla” spends an awful lot of time admiring Tandy in the title role, but that admiration is deserved. She moves enchantingly through an otherwise treacly film that wouldn’t work without her.

Tandy . . . approached this film with daring and surprising ease. While “Camilla” reveres its heroine, hers is hardly a standard great-lady role. Not every octogenarian actress would be game for skinny-dipping, fishing, violin playing and a wonderfully tender bedroom scene with her real-life husband. When Tandy and Hume Cronyn finish the film with a courtly scene on a beach at sunset, they provide a gallant, heartbreaking flourish.

As played by Tandy, Camilla is a free spirit whose wit and vitality are undimmed by age . . .

The trip revolves around Camilla, who flaunts her joie de vivre every chance she gets. This character’s flamboyance could easily have been unbearable, but Tandy fills her with tact and good humor (\textit{New York Times} 16 Dec 1994, C16: 1).

\textit{Camilla} was a fitting conclusion to a varied and sometimes daring career on stage, film, and television. Joanne Kaufman wrote, “Whatever poignance \textit{Camilla} possesses . . . comes from the insistent awareness that Tandy’s radiance has expressed itself for one of the last times” (\textit{People} 23 Jan 1995: 17). Not only did \textit{Camilla} feature the actress in an appealing, lengthy role, the film also provided viewers with a moving finale to Cronyn and Tandy’s partnership.

Neither \textit{Camilla} nor \textit{Nobody’s Fool} was released until after Tandy’s death. The second and last film featuring her in performance, \textit{Nobody’s Fool} was prophetic, requiring Tandy to say in one scene, “I have a feeling this is the year that God is going to

\textsuperscript{140} Jessica’s lifelong friend John Gielgud, who spent some onscreen time sans clothing in Peter Greenaway’s \textit{Prospero’s Books} (1991), was perhaps a role model for her in this respect.
lower the boom on me.” Robert Benton, knowing the state of Tandy’s health, had been worried about keeping this line from the novel in the script, but the actress faced the scene with grace and courage. Without heavy emphasis, but with simplicity and truth, she made the announcement to Paul Newman (Lifetime 1999). Of Tandy’s performance in Nobody’s Fool, Richard Alleva wrote, “The late Jessica Tandy . . . is radiant as the landlady” (Italics mine. Commonweal 24 Feb 1995: 55).

Tandy’s radiance of spirit was the quality that set her apart from other actors throughout her career. Whether they were viewing her on stage or in film (particularly in her later years for film), time and time again critics were struck by the paradox that she could communicate great richness and complexity through an appealing simplicity. By doing very little, by simply being in the “bones and skin and flesh” of the character, Tandy was able to illuminate her role and stir the empathy of her audiences (Tandy, Lifetime 1999). As early as 1932 a critic had written, “Miss Jessica Tandy plays the part of Manuela with a simplicity of yearning which keeps the girl’s tragedy austere and lights the whole motion of the piece with a hard, clean radiance that is very different from the ordinary glamour of limelight” (Unidentified Clipping Theatre Museum). In 1935 James Agate called her radiance a “native effervescence” (Times 9 Nov 1935). In 1937, “H. H.” translated the quality as an “engaging purity of style” (Observer 6 June 1937). Sidney Carroll, who founded the Open Air Theatre in London, described the quality in Tandy’s portrayal of Leda Veerkind in Glorious Morning in this way: “Never have I seen Jessica Tandy justify herself as an artist so clearly, so understandingly, or with greater unforced charm. There is a moving simplicity about her expression greater than any rampant
eloquence could produce" (Daily Telegraph 14 Jul 1938). These critics emphasize that Tandy's stage presence, her luminosity, was simple and natural. And they identified the quality as belonging to the actress more than to her characters. Rather than doing radiance, she was radiant.

In the United States critics continued to find the quality in Tandy's performances even decades later. Gilbert Gabriel wrote of her performance as Hilda Crane: "She is made wholly of warm light, this moving and lovely young actress" (Cue 11 Nov 1950: 22). Brooks Atkinson wrote of her portrayal of Agnes in The Fourposter: "She has a slender style and immense radiance of spirit, and she is altogether delightful" (New York Times 6 Jan 1955, 23:3). Tandy's lifelong friend Zoe Caldwell, who had performed with the actress during her seasons at the Guthrie, called the quality "a kind of luminous thing that she had," and Caldwell iterated that Tandy had possessed it from the 1930s until the time that she died (Lifetime 1999).

Judging by photos and other images of Tandy, her mouth and eyes seem to be the sources of her radiance. In most photos her mouth is relaxed and slightly open, as if she is listening to another person speak and is ready to respond at any second. Her gaze is always direct, whether she is looking directly away, at another performer, or at the camera. Her eyes are large and clear and perpetually seem to hold light. On film Tandy's radiance did not truly emerge until her performance in Alfred Hitchcock's The Birds, in which she finally seemed to become comfortable before the camera and able to attend to the task of acting. It was perhaps with The Birds that her eyes learned where to look in relationship to the camera, and she learned how to listen even in its presence. She
once said of effective film acting that "You are concentrated on whoever it is you are playing with. On the other hand, you have a lot of distractions with the camera moving, and people moving cables or other things. To shut them out is very difficult" (Black 1993: 124). Once Tandy had learned to shut those other things out, her radiance was able to shine.

After battling cancer for more than six years, Tandy’s last days were spent at home in the care of a nurse, in the company of friends and family. She passed away in the company of her husband Hume Cronyn, who had performed with her for the last time as her late-life lover in Camilla. Tandy found her identity through her work, and she had kept working as long as she could. Through her performances in Cocoon, Driving Miss Daisy, Fried Green Tomatoes, and Camilla, Jessica Tandy had paved the way for senior actresses on film. In tandem with her arrival at film stardom, Hollywood had altered its former hesitation to option screenplays featuring octogenarian women in major roles.
EPILOGUE

An examination of Jessica Tandy's professional life provides a window into English-speaking theatre of the twentieth century. With a career spanning six decades, three countries, and several media, the actress witnessed and participated in the permutations of her art, and she successfully negotiated each one. Her values as a performer both reflected and shaped those of her time and location in history. In the material she selected, in the collaborators she sought out, in the venues she pursued, Tandy consistently aimed at an unreachable perfection. Her chosen role model and associate was always John Gielgud, although the Atlantic Ocean prevented their frequent collaboration after the 1930s. Her chosen playwright was always Shakespeare. Her chosen medium was the stage. Tandy's priorities as a performer had crystallized for her during her teas at the Motley design studio in the 1930s, and although she left London to return only once as a performer, she never departed from that legacy.

The first portion of that legacy, which had its early seeds in her training at the Ben Greet Academy of Acting, was her preference for Shakespeare or, barring that, new playwrights whose work had literary as well as dramatic merit. In the 1950s Tandy was eager to contribute to the foundation of the American Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Connecticut, to play Gertrude in the premiere season at the Guthrie, and to work at the Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Ontario. All of these venues were dedicated to
performances of the Bard, other classical writers, or literarily promising contemporary playwrights. From her earlier years her dearest memories continued to be of her seasons at the Open Air Theatre and the Old Vic. Playwrights whose plays she returned to included Tennessee Williams, George Bernard Shaw, and Edward Albee. Williams, Albee, Jan de Hartog, and D. L. Coburn all won the Pulitzer Prize in drama for plays in which Tandy premiered. And she was always eager to perform in material written by her friend Susan Cooper.

The second portion of the legacy was more difficult to pursue, as her chosen collaborators remained in London where she had met them. But whenever she had the opportunity, Jessica Tandy would seek out the Motleys to design her productions, and she never turned down an opportunity to work with her old friend John Gielgud. Tandy repeatedly sought out the company of performers and other theatre artists whose aim transcended personal glory, who sought to uplift the shape of theatre in their time. Among these artists were Alan Schneider, Tyrone Guthrie, and, of course, her husband Hume Cronyn.

While Tandy spent numerous years in the West End and on Broadway, like the Old Vic which sought to bring Shakespeare to audiences at popular prices, Tandy felt she had an obligation to bring her work to wider populations. Whenever possible she took her Broadway successes on tour to regional audiences, and she was always eager to perform at regional and repertory theatres in the United States. In 1982 she explained, "I think we've always felt that if one has a successful play in New York there is an
obligation if feasible to also take it on the road ourselves . . . . To give them the original, not a copy” (Wallace 18 Nov 1982). She also pursued work on radio, television, and in film for that reason.

Tandy’s aim at perfection, sparked by the idealism of her associates in the 1930s, extended beyond the larger choices she made about material, collaborators, and venues. Her aim at perfection expressed itself most keenly in her approach to the roles she played. When rehearsing a part, whether she was in her youthful 20s or in her 80s, Tandy’s work on it never ceased. Of her work ethic, Hume Cronyn exclaimed:

> When Jessie gets her teeth into something, she is totally obsessed by it. We will go home at night after a rehearsal, and I will be so tired that I will say, “Oh please, God, show me to my bed and let me forget about it until tomorrow morning.” Then I will hear her still rehearsing in the bathtub.141 Literally rehearsing! Absolutely literally! (Clarke 1990: 62).

Tandy explained the source of her continuous rehearsal to Lawrence Quirk. “Any artist has just so much to give,” She told him. “The important thing is to give it all. Sometime [sic] it’s more than you think” (Quirk 1996: 320).

Tandy preferred working in theatre to working on film, for it provided her with more opportunities to find her ideal. Of this preference she stated, “I prefer the theater. In the theater, if you don’t get it right tonight, you can try again tomorrow, and every night until you finish” (Black 1993: 124). Hume Cronyn elaborated upon this desire in her. He said:

> We can be driving along the highway, having closed a play six months before, and Jessie will suddenly say, “I know how I should have done it!”

141 Tandy must have used the bathroom as a rehearsal and performance space more than once. At one time she said that she longed to play the role of Cleopatra but added with a laugh, “I’ll probably only get to play it in the bathroom” (Weatherby 1994: T12).
“What? What?” I will ask her. “What are you talking about? That last turn?”
“No. In that last scene I should have. . .” Oh, God, and I can’t even remember the name of the play!” (Clarke 1990: 62)

Likewise, Tandy preferred theatre because self-criticism was more difficult than on film. In theatre it’s easier to leave mistakes behind, for there’s always tomorrow to correct them. Theatre also lacks the burden of watching a past performance with no ability to alter it. Even after she had won an Academy Award for Best Actress Tandy found it difficult to view her acting on screen. She said, “Even watching my films terrifies me. I’ve seen only an early cut of Green Tomatoes and I’m afraid my whole attention was taken up criticising myself. I kept wincing at things I might have done better” (Honan 1992: n. p.).

Through her career, Tandy continued to try to get it right not only in each production, but as a performer. As she aged, she became less certain that there was a perfect approach to acting, or, if there was, that she knew anything about it. In an interview on the aging process, Tandy confided:

I was just thinking right now that when I began acting, I was quite sure that I knew how to do everything. The older I get, the less I am sure I know how to do anything. Actually, I know more—I know it’s there to be drawn upon. But I’m much less sure I know how to go about anything (Berman and Goldman 1992: 58).

The one technique Tandy was always sure of in her time upon the stage was the importance of listening to her partners. For Tandy this was the key to giving performance its illusion of reality. She said:

The most important thing is always to listen. If you don’t it gets very stale. You cannot give the illusion of the first time if you don’t listen to
what the other person says, which brings forth your response. If you are thinking about what you are going to have for lunch while the other person is talking, the audience will know it. . . . You have to pretend to yourself, while you are listening to what he says, that he is saying it for the first time, and that you don’t know what you are going to say next. You do know, of course, what you are going to say next, but you have to believe that it’s the first time. Each night is a separate challenge. It’s a whole new set of people out there. Also, neither one of us will play with exactly the same inflection every time. We will change it. The words will mean exactly the same thing, but the shift in inflection keeps it fresh and newer (Black 1993: 122).

Practicing her listening, Tandy continued to work at perfection of performance until she was well into her eighties. The desire to excel never ceased in her.

Tandy’s correspondence seldom reflects the significant way in which she found her identity through her work. In her letters to Hume Cronyn she speaks primarily of the matters—cooking, clothing, house decoration, children—which receive short shrift in this account of her life. In correspondence Tandy plays the role of Jessie rather than Jessica, the private woman rather than the public. The letters are a reminder that the Cronyns shared a private life first, a public life second, that behind the performer was the working mother, the caring wife, the concerned daughter. The letters reveal that it was the safe haven the couple provided for each other that permitted Tandy’s professional life to thrive as she grew older.

Tandy’s friend Zoe Caldwell wrote this description of Tandy’s career:

Jessica had been a very much admired actress in England as a young woman, then crossed the Atlantic to become a much sought after beauty in America, until Hume captured her and proceeded to make possible roles that she created and illuminated: the original Blanche Dubois in A Streetcar Named Desire, opposite Marlon Brando, being the pinnacle. She never left the theatre, grew as an actress until, in her eighties, she was untouchable (Caldwell 2001: 164).

174
Tandy did leave the theatre physically, when her body was no longer able to handle its rigorous demands, but she never relinquished her preference for performing on stage. While theatre always remained her primary love, she had also explored the mediums of radio, television, and film, and found great success in the last of these.

In her career, armed with the priorities she had discovered in the company of John Gielgud, Tandy went forward to shape her own path on two continents, contributing in turn to the shape of English-speaking performance through her devotion to perfection. Toward the end of her life, Tandy said, "Wisdom is learning from all your experience, which means maybe you don’t make the same mistakes over and over again" (Goldman 1994: 64). By her own definition, Tandy’s career expressed itself through a movement toward greater and greater wisdom.
APPENDIX I

BEN JONSON’S EULOGY

To the memory of my beloved,
The Author
Mr. William Shakespeare
And
what he hath left us.

To draw no envy (Shakespeare) on thy name,
Am I thus ample to thy Book, and Fame;
While I confess thy writings to be such,
As neither Man, nor Muse, can praise too much.
Tis true, and all men’s suffrage. But these ways
Were not the paths I meant unto thy praise;
For silliest Ignorance on these may light,
Which, when it sounds at best, but echoes right;
Or blind Affection, which doth ne’er advance
The truth, but gropes, and urgeth all by chance;
Or crafty Malice, might pretend this praise,
And thine to ruin, where it seem’d to raise.
These are, as some infamous Bawd, or Whore,
Should praise a Matron. What could hurt her more?
But thou art proof against them, and indeed
Above th’ ill fortune of them, or the need.
I, therefore will begin. Soul of the Age!
The applause! delight! the wonder of our Stage!
My Shakespeare, rise; I will not lodge thee by
Chaucer, or Spenser, or bid Beaumont lie
A little further, to make thee a room:
Thou art a Monument, without a tomb,
And art alive still, while thy Book doth live,
And we have wits to read, and praise to give.

176
Triumph, my Britain, thou hast one to show,
To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe.
He was not of an age, but for all time!
And all the Muses still were in their prime,
When like Apollo he came forth to warm
Our ears, or like a Mercury to charm!
Nature herself was proud of his designs,
And joy'd to wear the dressing of his lines!
Which were so richly spun, and woven so fit,
As, since, she will vouchsafe no other Wit.

Sweet swan of Avon! what a fight it were
To see thee in our waters yet appear,
And make those flights upon the banks of Thames,
That so did take Eliza, and our James!
But stay, I see thee in the Hemisphere
Advanc'd, and made a Constellation there!
Shine forth, thou Star of Poets, and with rage,
Or influence, chide, or cheer the drooping Stage;
Which, since thy flight fro' hence, hath mourn'd like night,
And despairs day, but for thy Volume's light
[Modernized from Shakespeare's First Folio].
APPENDIX 2

STAGE ROLES

23 Nov 1924
Directed by Campbell Gullan.
Frank Vosper and Rita Johns were in the cast.

22 Nov 1927
Directed by Bertha N. Graham.

8 Jan 1928
Directed by Ellen van Volkenberg.

29 Apr 1928
Directed by W. G. Fay

27 May 1928
Directed by W. G. Fay

Summer 1928
Director Unknown.

21 Feb 1929
Directed by Alan Wade.
5 Apr 1929
Directed by Frank Birch.

25 Jun 1929
Directed by Frank Birch.

10 Nov 1929
Directed by Cecil Lewis.

18 Mar 1930
Directed by Frank Vernon.
Constance Collier and Derrick de Marney were in the cast.

21 Jun 1930
Directed by Gyles Isham.
George Devine was in the cast.

30 Oct 1930
Directed by Harry Wagstagg Gribble.
Alan Wade and Derrick de Marney were in the cast.

10 Feb 1931
Directed by John Hastings.
Diana Wynyard was in the cast.

6 Apr 1931
Directed by Basil Dean.
Jack Hawkins was in the cast.

1 Nov 1931
Directed by Emlyn Williams.
Jack Hawkins was in the cast.

15 Nov 1931
Directed by Theodore Komisarjevsky.
John Gielgud and Frank Vosper were in the cast.

10 Jan 1932
Directed by John Fernald.
Jack Hawkins was in the cast.

7 Feb 1932
Directed by John Fernald.

14 Apr 1932
Directed by Frank Birch.

29 Apr 1932
Directed by Frank Birch.

2 May 1932
Directed by Frank Birch.

9 May 1932
Directed by Frank Birch.

16 May 1932
Directed by Frank Birch.

23 May 1932
Directed by Frank Birch.

7 Jun 1932
Directed by Frank Birch.

13 Jun 1932
Directed by V. C. Clinton-Baddeley.
10 Jul 1932

7 Oct 1932

4 Dec 1932

22 Jan 1933

21 May 1933

5 Jul 1933

5 Nov 1933

December 1933

Jan 1934
2 Feb 1934
Directed by Basil Dean.
Brian Aherne was in the cast.

12 Apr 1934
Directed by Stanley Bell.

9 May 1934
Directed by Stanley Bell.
Irene and Violet Vanbrugh were in the cast.

24 Oct 1934
Directed by Sinclair Hill.

14 Nov 1934
Directed by John Gielgud.
John Gielgud, Frank Vosper, Alec Guinness, Anthony Quayle, and Jack Hawkins were in the cast.

10 Feb 1935
Directed by J. Wallett Waller.
Jack Hawkins was in the cast.

2 Jul 1935
Directed by Michel Saint-Denis.
John Gielgud and Jack Hawkins were in the cast.

8 Nov 1935
Directed by Irene Hentschel.

1 Dec 1935
Directed by Murray Macdonald.
Sybil Thorndike was in the cast.
14 Aug 1936
Directed by Guthrie McClintic.
Diana Wynyard was in the cast.

6 Nov 1936
Directed by Harold French.
Rex Harrison was in the cast.

6 Dec 1936
Directed by Jack Hawkins.

23 Feb 1937
Directed by Tyrone Guthrie.
Laurence Olivier and Alec Guinness were in the cast.

7 Mar 1937
Directed by Tyrone Guthrie.
Flora Robson and Jack Hawkins were in the cast.

6 Apr 1937
Directed by Tyrone Guthrie.
Laurence Olivier and Alec Guinness were in the cast.

3 Jun 1937
Directed by Alfred de Liagre, jr.
Sybil Thorndike was in the cast.

3 Jan 1938
Directed by Irene Hentschel.
Sybil Thorndike was in the cast.

23 May 1938
Directed by B. Iden Payne and Athole Stewart.
Most of the luminaries of the British Theatre were in the cast. Rex Harrison and Jill Esmond, among others, also played Players of Today.

26 May 1938
Directed by Claud Gurney.

10 Jan 1939
Directed by Hugh Hunt.
New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Foreign Play.

11 Jul 1939
Directed by Robert Atkins.

23 Oct 1939
Queen Henrietta. Charles the King. His Majesty’s Theatre, Montreal, Canada.
Directed by Maurice Colbourne.
Barry Jones was in the cast. The play toured Canada in repertory with Geneva and Tobias and the Angel.

1939
Directed by Maurice Colbourne.
Barry Jones was in the cast. Toured in repertory with Charles the King and Tobias and the Angel.

1939
Sara. Tobias and the Angel. Canada (tour).
Directed by Maurice Colbourne.
Barry Jones was in the cast. Toured in repertory with Geneva and Charles the King.

30 Jan 1940
Directed by Maurice Colbourne.
Barry Jones was in the cast.

15 Apr 1940
Directed by Harley Granville-Barker and Lewis Casson.
John Gielgud and Jack Hawkins were in the cast.
29 May 1940
Directed by Marius Goring and George Devine.
John Gielgud and Jack Hawkins were in the cast.

9 Sept 1940
Directed by Reginald Denham.

7 Oct 1941
Directed by Gilbert Miller.
Flora Robson was in the cast.

14 Apr 1942
Directed by Reginald Denham.
Paul Muni was in the cast.

Summer 1946
Directed by Hume Cronyn.

3 Dec 1947
Blanche Dubois. *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Ethel Barrymore Theatre, Broadway.
Directed by Elia Kazan.
Marlon Brando, Kim Hunter, and Karl Malden were in the cast.

July 1949
Directed by Hume Cronyn.

14 Aug 1950
Hume Cronyn was in the cast.

1 Nov 1950
Hilda Crane. *Hilda Crane*. Coronet Theatre, Broadway.
Directed by Hume Cronyn.
Eileen Heckart was in the cast.
24 Oct 1951
Directed by Jose Ferrer.
Hume Cronyn was in the cast.

1 Dec 1953
Directed by Hume Cronyn and Norman Lloyd.
Hume Cronyn and Norman Lloyd were in the cast.

5 Jan 1955

28 Apr 1955
Directed by Frank Corsaro.
Hume Cronyn and Dorothy Stickney were in the cast.

26 Sept 1955
Directed by Cedric Hardwicke.
Hume Cronyn was in the cast.

30 Oct 1958
Directed by Ralph Nelson.
Hume Cronyn was in the cast.

15 Apr 1959
Directed by Hume Cronyn.
Hume Cronyn was in the cast.

2 Dec 1959
Louise Harrington. *Five Finger Exercise.* Music Box Theatre, Broadway.
Directed by John Gielgud, who won a Tony Award for Best Director for it.
This was a transfer of a British production from the West End to Broadway. Tandy replaced Adrianne Allen in the role for the United States run.

1960-1961
28 Jun 1961
Lady Macbeth. *Macbeth*. American Shakespeare Festival Theatre, Stratford, CT.
Directed by Jack Landau.
Kim Hunter was in the cast.

23 Jul 1961
Cassandra. *Troilus and Cressida*. American Shakespeare Festival Theatre, Stratford, CT.
Directed by Jack Landau.
Kim Hunter was in the cast.

18 Sept 1962
Directed by John Gielgud.
Hume Cronyn was in the cast. First production ANTA Theatre, New York, 15 Mar 1961.
For the London production Tandy replaced Ruth White in the role of Edith.

7 May 1963
Directed by Tyrone Guthrie.
Hume Cronyn and Zoe Caldwell were in the cast.

18 Jun 1963
Directed by Tyrone Guthrie.

16 Jul 1963
Directed by Douglas Campbell.
Hume Cronyn was in the cast.

14 Oct 1964
Directed by Peter Brook.
Hume Cronyn was in the cast.

1 Jun 1965
Directed by Douglas Campbell.
Zoe Caldwell was in the cast.

Summer 1965
Directed by Tyrone Guthrie.
Hume Cronyn was in the cast.

**Summer 1965**
Directed by Edward Payson Call.

**22 Sept 1966**
Directed by Alan Schneider.
Hume Cronyn was in the cast. The play won the Pulitzer Prize for Best Drama of 1966.

**Spring and Summer 1967**

**15 March 1968**
Directed by Douglas Campbell.
Hume Cronyn was in the cast.

**27 Jun 1968**
Directed by Val Gielgud.

**Oct 1969**

**8 Jan 1970**
Directed by Milton Katselas.
Al Pacino was in the cast.

**17 Nov 1970**
Directed by Lindsay Anderson.
John Gielgud and Ralph Richardson were in the cast. Transferred from London. Tandy replaced Dandy Nichols in the role of Marjorie for the American production.

**27 Mar 1971**
Directed by John Gielgud.
Colleen Dewhurst was in the cast.
Summer 1972-Winter 1973
Doris. Promenade All! National Touring Company.
Directed by Arthur Storch.
Hume Cronyn was in the cast.

20 Nov 1972
Directed by Alan Schneider.
Hume Cronyn was in the cast.

22 Nov 1972
Mouth. Not I. Lincoln Center, New York.
Directed by Alan Schneider. World Premiere.

1973

1973
Mouth. Not I. National Touring Company.

17 Feb 1974
Noel Coward in Two Keys: Anna-Mary Conklin, Come into the Garden, Maud; Hilda Latymer, A Song at Twilight. Ethel Barrymore Theatre, Broadway.
Hume Cronyn was in the cast.

1974-1975
Noel Coward in Two Keys. National Touring Company.

7 Jun 1976
Directed by Robin Phillips.
Maggie Smith was in the cast.

July 1976
Directed by Vivian Matalon.

Summer 1976
Directed by Robin Phillips.
Hume Cronyn was in the cast.
1977
Directed by Robin Phillips.

6 Oct 1977
Directed by Mike Nichols.
Hume Cronyn was in the cast.

1978

21 Jul 1979

7 Aug 1980
Directed by Robin Phillips and Peter Moss.
Hume Cronyn was in the cast.

4 Oct 1980
Directed by Robin Phillips.

26 Mar 1981
Directed by Alan Dosser.
Glenda Jackson was in the cast.

1982
Directed by Marshall W. Mason.
Hume Cronyn was in the cast.

11 Nov 1982
Directed by David Trainer.
Hume Cronyn was in the cast.

1 Dec 1983
Directed by John Dexter.
2 Apr 1985
Directed by John Madden.

June 1985
Directed by David Trainer.
Hume Cronyn was in the cast.

24 Apr 1986
Directed by Peter Hall.
Hume Cronyn was in the cast.
APPENDIX 3

FILM ROLES

20 Aug 1932
Maid. *The Indiscretions of Eve*. British International Pictures
Directed by Cecil Lewis.

12 Aug 1938
Directed by Al Parker.
Barry Jones was in the cast.

13 Jul 1944
Liesel Roeder. *The Seventh Cross*. MGM.
Directed by Fred Zinneman.
Spencer Tracy, Hume Cronyn, Agnes Moorehead were in the cast. Hume Cronyn was nominated for an Academy Award as Best Supporting Actor for his role.

6 Apr 1945
Louise Kane. *The Valley of Decision*. MGM.
Directed by Tay Garnett.
Greer Garson and Gregory Peck were in the cast.

6 Mar 1946
Kate Leckie. *The Green Years*. MGM.
Directed by Victor Saville.
Hume Cronyn was in the cast.

14 Feb 1946
Directed by Joseph Mankiewicz.
Vincent Price and Gene Tierney were in the cast.
15 Oct 1947
Nan Britton. *Forever Amber.* 20th Century Fox.
Directed by Otto Preminger.

15 Dec 1947
Janet Spence. *A Woman’s Vengeance.* Universal.
Directed by Zoltan Korda.
Charles Boyer and Cedric Hardwicke were in the cast.

25 Aug 1950
Catherine Lawrence. *September Affair.* Paramount.
Directed by William Dieterle.
Joan Fontaine and Joseph Cotten were in the cast.

28 Sept 1951
Directed by Henry Hathaway.
James Mason was in the cast.

25 Apr 1958
Directed by Herschel Daugherty.

Jul 1962
Directed by Martin Ritt.
Paul Newman, Susan Strasberg, and Eli Wallach were in the cast.

19 Mar 1963
Directed by Alfred Hitchcock.
Tipi Hedren, Rod Taylor, and Suzanne Pleshette were in the cast.

16 Jan 1973
Edna Shaft. *Butley.* American Film Theatre.
Directed by Harold Pinter.
Alan Bates was in the cast.

1981
Carol. *Honky Tonk Freeway.* Universal.
Directed by John Schlesinger.
Hume Cronyn was in the cast.
1982
Grace Rice. *Still of the Night.* MGM-UA.
Directed by Robert Benton.
Meryl Streep and Roy Scheider were in the cast.

1982
Directed by Norman Jewison.
Burt Reynolds and Goldie Hawn were in the cast.

1982
Directed by George Roy Hill.
Hume Cronyn, Glenn Close, and Robin Williams were in the cast.

10 May 1984
Miss Birdseye. *The Bostonians.* Almi Pictures Inc.
Directed by James Ivory.
Vanessa Redgrave and Christopher Reeve were in the cast.

11 Jun 1985
Alma Finley. *Cocoon.* 20th Century Fox.
Directed by Ron Howard.
Hume Cronyn was in the cast.

12 Dec 1987
Directed by Matthew Robbins.
Hume Cronyn was in the cast.

26 Feb 1988
Miss Venable. *The House on Carroll Street.* Orion.
Directed by Peter Yates.
Kelly McGillis was in the cast.

17 Nov 1988
Directed by Daniel Petrie.
Hume Cronyn was in the cast.

29 Nov 1989
Directed by Bruce Beresford.
Morgan Freeman and Dan Aykroyd were in the cast. Tandy won an Academy Award for Best Actress of 1989 for her role.

9 Dec 1991
Directed by Jon Avnet.
Kathy Bates was in the cast. Tandy was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress for her role.

1992
Narrator. *In the Company of Whales*. Discovery Communications, Inc.

16 Dec 1992
Directed by Beeban Kidron.
Kathy Bates, Shirley MacLaine, and Marcello Mastroianni were also in the cast.

16 Dec 1994
Directed by Deepa Mehta.

25 Dec 1994
Directed by Robert Benton.
Paul Newman was in the cast.
APPENDIX 4

RADIO PERFORMANCES


[Elizabeth], *Pride and Prejudice*, Series: Great Plays, 27 Apr 1941, Blue Network Radio.

Princess Nadia, Series: *Mandrake the Magician*, 1941.


“Vanity Fair,” Series: The MGM Theater of the Air, 29 Sept 1950, Syndicated WMGM.


APPENDIX 5

TELEVISION APPEARANCES

Judy Valdazar, “Fox in the Morning,” 30 Jul 1939, 10 Aug 1939, BBC-TV.

Miss Lucretia Collins, “Portrait of a Madonna,” *Actor’s Studio, Inc.*, 9/26/48, ABC-TV


“Icebound,” *Prudential Family Playhouse*, 1/30/51, CBS-TV

“Hangman’s House,” *Studio One*, 3/19/51, CBS-TV


Liz Marriott, *The Marriage*, 7/8/54-?, NBC-TV

“Christmas ‘Til Closing,” *Philco Playhouse*, 12/18/55, NBC-TV

Agnes, *The Fourposter*, 1955, NBC-TV

“John Quincy Adams,” *Omnibus*, 1/23/55, CBS-TV

“The End of Blackbeard the Pirate,” *TV Reader’s Digest*, 7/25/55, ABC-TV

“The Great Adventure,” *U. S. Steel Hour*, 1/18/56, CBS-TV

“The School Mistress,” *Star Stage*, 2/17/56, NBC-TV


“The Confidence Man,” *Alcoa Hour*, 5/27/56, NBC-TV

198

“A Murder Is Announced,” *Goodyear Playhouse*, 12/30/56, CBS-TV

“The Five Dollar Bill,” *Studio One*, 1/21/57, CBS-TV

“Clothes Make the Man,” *Schlitz Playhouse of Stars*, 4/5/57, CBS-TV

“Little Miss Bedford,” *Studio 57*, 6/9/57, NN-TV


“Murder Me Gently,” *Suspicion*, 10/7/57, NBC-TV

“War Against War,” *Telephone Time*, 3/4/58, ABC-TV


Blanche Stroeve, *The Moon and Sixpence*, 10/30/59, NBC-TV

“The Fallen Idol,” *Dupont Show of the Month*, 10/14/59, NBC-TV

“Producer’s Choice,” *Long Distance*, 3/31/60, NBC-TV

“Glass Flowers Never Drop Petals,” *Breaking Point*, 3/23/64, ABC-TV

“Punishments, Cruel and Unusual,” *Judd for the Defense*, 12/6/68, ABC-TV


“The Set-Up,” *FBI*, 2/13/72, ABC-TV

*Tennessee Williams’ South*, 12/73, CBC-TV

*Many Faces of Love*, 1977, CBS-TV

Fonsia Dorsey, *The Gin Game*, 1979, PBS

Annie Nations, *Foxfire*, 1987, CBS-TV

*Onstage: 25 Years at the Guthrie*, 1988, syndicated

Grace McQueen, *The Story Lady*, 1991, NBC-TV

199

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Cora, *To Dance With the White Dog*. Hallmark Hall of Fame, 1993
APPENDIX 6

IMAGES


2. John Gielgud as Hamlet and Jessica Tandy as Ophelia in Hamlet, 1934.

3. Jessica Tandy as Viola and/or Sebastian in Twelfth Night, 1937.

4. John Gielgud as Prospero and Jessica Tandy as Miranda in The Tempest, 1940.


7. Jessica Tandy as Agnes and Hume Cronyn as Michael in The Fourposter, 1951.

8. George Grizzard as Hamlet, Ken Ruta as the Ghost, and Jessica Tandy as Gertrude in Hamlet, 1963.


Jessica Tandy as Manuela with Joyce Bland as Fraulein von Bernberg in *Children in Uniform*, 1932 (*The Sketch* 19 Oct 1932: n. p.).
Gielgud as Hamlet and Jessica Tandy as Ophelia in *Hamlet*, New Theatre, 1934
(*The Sketch* 21 Nov 1934: 357).
Jessica Tandy as Viola and/or Sebastian in *Twelfth Night* at the Old Vic, 1937 (*The Sketch* 3 Mar 1937: 433).
John Gielgud as Prospero and Jessica Tandy as Miranda in *The Tempest* at the Old Vic, 1940 (Gielgud 1991: n. p.).
Thomas Hart Benton’s *The Poker Night (from A Streetcar Named Desire)*, 1947
(Dennis 1998: 134).
Jessica Tandy as Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, 1947 (Cronyn 1991: n.p.).
Jessica Tandy as Agnes and Hume Cronyn as Michael in *The Fourposter*, 1951
(Cronyn 1991: n. p.).
George Grizzard as Hamlet, Ken Ruta as the Ghost, and Jessica Tandy as Gertrude in *Hamlet*, Guthrie Theater, 1963 (Rossi 1970: n. p.).
Playbill for *A Delicate Balance*. Jessica Tandy as Agnes, Rosemary Murphy as Claire, and Hume Cronyn as Tobias, 1966 (Krueger, Tonia, Personal Archive).
Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy at home, 1988
(Postcard, Krueger, Tonia, Personal Archive).
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Published Sources


Bishop, George W. “John Gielgud’s King Lear: Old Vic’s Brilliant Reopening.” 16 Apr 1940. [Unidentified clipping Theatre Museum]


“Broadcast Play Children Should Hear.” *The Star* 16 Sept 1930. [Clipping Tandy Scrapbook A: 39]


Brown, Ivor. “‘Henry V’ by William Shakespeare.” *The Observer* 11 Apr 1937. [Clipping Theatre Museum]


Brown, Ivor. “‘Musical Chairs’ by Ronald MacKenzie.” *The Observer* 22 Nov 1931. [Clipping Theatre Museum]


“Chicago Deeply Impressed by Miss Collier’s ‘The Matriarch.’” *New York Review* 25 Jan 1930. [Clipping Tandy Scrapbook A: 21]


“A Comedy of Good and Evil: The Repertory Theatre.” *Birmingham Post* 20 Apr 1928. [Clipping Tandy Scrapbook A: 4]


222
Duncan, Lola. “Lola Duncan Interviews Jessica and Joyce.” Modern 31 Dec 1932: 561. [Clipping Tandy Scrapbook B: 17]


Eric. “At the Play: ‘King Lear’ (Old Vic).” Punch or the London Charivari. 15 May 1940: 542. [Clipping Theatre Museum]


Ervine, St. John G. “The Other G. B. S.” The Observer 8 Mar 1931. [Clipping Tandy Scrapbook A: 58]

Ervine, St. John. “Review of Children in Uniform.” The Observer 3 Jan 1933. [Clipping Theatre Museum]


Farjeon, Herbert. “The Theatre: ‘King Lear’ (Old Vic).” The Bystander 8 May 1940: 165. [Clipping Theatre Museum]


Gielgud, John. "I Made a Discovery." *Women's Journal*. Feb 1938. [Clipping Tandy Scrapbook C: 105]


Griffith, Hubert. “A Drama of the Dales.” *Evening Standard* 26 Jun 1929: 5. [Clipping Theatre Museum]


“Her Brothers Let Her Assist in Small Type: Jessica Tandy Learned at Five to Be Grateful for Least Opportunity.” New York Herald Tribune 11 Jan 1939. [Clipping. Tandy Scrapbook C: 57]

H. H. “Yes, My Darling Daughter.” Observer 6 Jun 1937. [Clipping Theatre Museum]


“John [Gielgud].” *The Era* 31 Oct 1934. [Clipping Tandy Scrapbook B: 34]

“John Gielgud as Noah.” *Daily Herald* 3 Jul 1935. [Clipping Theatre Museum]


“King Lear.” *The Times* 17 Apr 1940. [Clipping Theatre Museum]


“Lear at the Vic.” *The Tattler*. 15 May 1940, No. 2029. [Clipping Theatre Museum]


"'Musical Chairs': Clever but Unpleasant New Play." *The Morning Post* 16 Nov 1931. [Clipping Theatre Museum]


[Untitled Article. Review of BBC's *Through the Looking Glass.*] *The Observer* 23 Dec 1928. [Clipping Tandy Scrapbook A: 5]


"Old Vic: 'King Lear' by William Shakespeare." Observer 21 Apr 1940. [Clipping Theatre Museum]


Parsons, Alan. "'Musical Chairs': A Disappointing Play." The Daily Mail 16 Nov 1931. [Clipping Theatre Museum]

Parsons, Alan. "Woman's Real-Life Play: Drama of a Water Scheme: Dour Mr. McKinnel." The Daily Mail. 26 Jun 1929. [Clipping Theatre Museum]


Richards, Horace. "Shouts and Murmurs: This Strange Secretiveness." Review of *Children in Uniform*. n.d.: 30. [Clipping Tandy Scrapbook B: 16]

“A Rising Star.” *Chicago Times* 5 Feb 1930. [Clipping Tandy Scrapbook A: 30]


“Shakespeare’s ‘Dream.’” *The Morning Post* 9 Jul 1933. [Clipping Tandy Scrapbook B: 25]


Tandy, Jessica. "Men You Know, by Their Wives—No. 2: Jack Hawkins." With Winifred Loraine. [Unidentified newspaper clipping, Tandy file, Theatre Museum]

"Tandy's Fame Came Late in Life." *St. Petersburg Times* 12 Sept 1994: 12C.


237

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.


Wilson, A. E. “‘The Theatre of Life’: A Russian Play at the Arts Theatre Club.” *The Star* 6 Apr 1929. [Clipping Theatre Museum]


Woolcott, Alexander. “An American Critic Looks at the London Stage: Why This Gloomy Conspiracy of Silence about Good Plays.” *Telegraph*. Tues. 3 Jan 1933. [Clipping Theatre Museum]

Zahn, Paula. “Jessica Tandy Discusses Her Role in *Used People.*” *CBS This Morning* (28 Jan 1993).


**Filmography/Videography**


Cocoon. 20th Century Fox, 1985.


The Desert Fox. 20th Century Fox, 1951.

Dragonwyck. 20th Century Fox, 1946.


Forever Amber. 20th Century Fox, 1947.

The Green Years. MGM, 1946.


In the Company of Whales. Discovery Channel Video, 1992.


The Light in the Forest. Walt Disney, 1958.

Murder in the Family. 20th Century Fox, 1938.


The Seventh Cross. MGM, 1944.


The Valley of Decision. MGM, 1945.


Archival Sources


Washington, DC. “Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy Collection.” Library of Congress: Over 98,000 documents, including personal correspondence, photos, playscripts, and miscellaneous.