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The Company of Four at the Lyric, Hammersmith: A paradigm for the emergent National Theatre concept

Murphy, Hugh Mack, Jr., Ph.D.
The Ohio State University, 1988
THE COMPANY OF FOUR AT THE LYRIC, HAMMERSMITH:
A PARADIGM FOR THE EMERGENT NATIONAL THEATRE CONCEPT

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

By
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The Ohio State University
1988

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Dedication

To my parents,
Hugh M. Murphy and Montez S. Murphy
whose love and belief in me
have been a great source of comfort

and

to
Dr. George Bogusch
(1931-1981)
under whose inspired and human pedagogy
the myriad uses and joys of
theatre history
were first revealed to me
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication.................................................................................................................i

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................ii

Vita........................................................................................................................iv

Table of Contents.....................................................................................................v

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. The Company of Four at the Lyric, Hammersmith: A Paradigm for the Emergent National Theatre Concept</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Historical Perspective ......................................................................... 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sources of this Study .......................................................................... 9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion .................................................................................................. 11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. The Founders of the Company of Four and a Brief History of the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hugh Morgan Griffith Beaumont .................................................................. 14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Tyrone Guthrie ............................................................................. 17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norman Higgins .......................................................................................... 20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rudolph Bing .............................................................................................. 21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Formation of the Company .................................................................. 23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Name for the Company ........................................................................... 23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Home for the Company ........................................................................... 24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith .............................................................. 25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Administrative Structure of the Company ........................................... 30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion .................................................................................................. 32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
III. Changes in English Tax Law and Their Effect on the Company of Four......33

Discussion........................................................................................................33
Conclusion.......................................................................................................49

IV. The Company as a Producer of New Works by British Authors..............51

Introduction...................................................................................................51
The War Plays
  The Shouting Dies...................................................................................57
  An English Summer.................................................................................59
  The Same Sky.........................................................................................61
  The River Line.........................................................................................63
Summary........................................................................................................67
The Revues
  Tuppence Coloured................................................................................69
  Oranges and Lemons..............................................................................71
  The Lyric Revue....................................................................................74
  At The Lyric............................................................................................75
Conclusion....................................................................................................77

V. The Company of Four as a Presenter of Works by Cocteau, Sartre
and Anouilh.................................................................................................80

Introduction..................................................................................................80
Jean Cocteau and The Eagles Has Two Heads...........................................81
Jean-Paul Sartre..........................................................................................86
  Men Without Shadows and The Respectable Prostitute......................86
  Crime Passionnel....................................................................................90
Jean Anouilh.................................................................................................93
  Point of Departure................................................................................94
  The Anouilh Renaissance Continues....................................................96
  Time Remembered................................................................................97
  The Lark.................................................................................................100
Conclusion..................................................................................................103
VI. Revivals Produced by the Company of Four

Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 108

The Gielgud Season

   Richard II .................................................................................................................................. 113
   The Way of The World .............................................................................................................. 117
   Venice Preserv'ed ...................................................................................................................... 122
   Summary .................................................................................................................................... 127

Revivals from the European Repertory ..................................................................................... 128

   The Seagull .............................................................................................................................. 129
   A Doll's House ......................................................................................................................... 134
   The Cherry Orchard .................................................................................................................. 138
   Hedda Gabler ........................................................................................................................... 143

Revivals of Shaw .......................................................................................................................... 148

   Pygmalion .................................................................................................................................. 149
   Captain BrassBound's Conversion ............................................................................................ 151
   Misalliance ................................................................................................................................. 154

Other Plays from the British Repertory

   Caste ......................................................................................................................................... 157
   The Relapse ............................................................................................................................... 161
   Dandy Dick ................................................................................................................................. 165
   The Vortex .................................................................................................................................. 167
   Trelawney of the 'Wells' ........................................................................................................... 171

Conclusion ...................................................................................................................................... 173

VII. The Company of Four in Cooperation with Other Companies .................................... 175

Introduction .................................................................................................................................... 175

The Apollo Society ....................................................................................................................... 177

The English Opera Group .......................................................................................................... 188

The Young Vic .............................................................................................................................. 184

Other Companies ......................................................................................................................... 187

Conclusion ...................................................................................................................................... 188

IX. Conclusion: Measuring the Paradigm ................................................................................. 190

Introduction .................................................................................................................................... 190

The Archer-Barker Scheme .......................................................................................................... 205

Conclusion ...................................................................................................................................... 206
Appendices

A. Productions of the Company of Four, 1945-1956.................................209

B. Presentations by Other Companies at the Lyric, Hammersmith, .......... 1945-1956 ..........................................................................................211

Bibliography ......................................................................................................214
Chapter I:
The Company of Four at the Lyric, Hammersmith:
A Paradigm for the Emergent National Theatre Concept

An Historical Perspective

With the possible exception of the Elizabethan period no time in the history of the English theatre has been more scrutinized or written about than the period from 1956 to the present. This interest in the English theatre, post 1956, is understandable for a number of reasons.

The first of these is the growing respectability of the theatre as a cultural barometer of the society by which it is produced. More and more, observers of culture have come to regard the theatre as a valid expression of the cultural framework within which it is created. Inexplicably, the theatre did not begin to gain the respectability that other narrative art forms--the novel, for example--had enjoyed for some time until well into the post-World War II era.

A second reason for the growing interest in the theatre is accessibility offered by the electronic media. With the advent of television, motion pictures and, most recently, cable television and video, the theatrical experience, or an electronically enhanced version of it, has become accessible to a far greater number of people than possible in the period before the blossoming of these media.

A final factor in the theatre's growing legitimacy as a artform that must be considered is the establishment of programs of government subsidy (such as the Arts Council of Great Britain and The National Endowment for the Arts) which were
formed with part of their respective charges being the dissemination of the theatre arts to areas outside urban centers such as London and New York. As a result of programs put in place and administered by these two organizations, the theatre is accessible to a greater number of people than it was, for instance, in the period between the two world wars.

Perhaps the single greatest accomplishment of the British theatrical establishment during the period from 1945 to the present, however, was the establishment of the National Theatre in 1948 and the opening, in 1976, of The National Theatre of Great Britain's South Bank theatre complex. Even with construction delays, the political infighting that the necessary budgetary appropriations occasioned, the opening of the National Theatre facility garnered a tremendous amount of attention both in Great Britain and around the world. The National Theatre complex has been pointed to as a singularly successful example of ongoing government subsidy to the arts and of the partnership between the arts, government and the private sector. The National Theatre, as an institution, has been hailed as an example of what is achievable when many of the most creative and talented people within an artform are co-joined. It has been lauded as establishing a repertoire made up of great works from dramatic literature, important new plays by established British and American playwrights and of the cutting edge of experimental theatre, as seen in the works of new playwrights.

And yet, there seemed a trend, in considering the establishment of this theatrical milestone, to regard its origins as parthenogenic. It was as though the National Theatre had sprung, full grown, from the brows of two or three particularly far-sighted and resourceful producer/directors.
In point of fact, the concept of a "national theatre" had sprung up as early as 1904, when:

... William Archer, eminent dramatic critic and translator of Ibsen's plays, had invited a young friend of his, Harley Granville-Barker, by name, to collaborate in investigating the problems involved in the foundation of a National Theatre. The result of their labours was issued privately in 1904, under the title of 'A National Theatre: Scheme and Estimates' with a contributed endorsement signed by some very important persons indeed: ... Henry Irving, Squire Bancroft, J. M. Barrie, John Hare, Henry Arthur Jones, A. W. Pinero.

The national theatre scheme suffered various fortunes, both good and bad, including the purchase, in 1938, of a parcel of land in South Kensington, London. On this land it was proposed that a theatre building that would house the would-be national theatre was to be built. One of the first positive steps toward making the national theatre a reality, however, came in 1949, when "the National Theatre Bill went before Parliament and was passed, without a division, by both houses and a committee was set up to advise on a building."

Despite the imprimatur of an Act of Parliament, The National Theatre would not begin production for another thirteen years. In 1962, Sir Laurence (later Lord) Olivier was appointed The National Theatre's first Director, and the organization took up what were planned as "temporary" quarters in The Old Vic. The company commenced production in October of 1962 with a production of Hamlet.

The National's temporary home was to house it for fourteen years. In 1963, Denys Lasdun was appointed architect for the National Theatre Complex and in

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1966 a plan for the complex and construction estimates received government sanction. In 1969 actual construction began on the South Bank facility.

During the fourteen year span from 1962 to 1976, The National, at the Old Vic, continued to produce a repertory of plays that included classics from both the English and European repertories and new works by British and American authors. But throughout this period there was a sentiment that what the National Theatre was producing was but a pale shadow of what it would be capable of once it moved to its new South Bank home.

The National Theatre, once opened on the South Bank, quickly outstripped even the most optimistic of expectations that had come to be associated with it. And yet, perhaps as a result of the National Theatre's size and the scope of its endeavor, a type of revisionist theatre history has begun to spring up that seemingly ignores a great deal of theatrical endeavor and experimentation that went on before The National Theatre commenced production in 1962 and long before the fruition of Archer and Granville-Barker's dream on the South Bank.

In the important years between 1949 and 1969, when the idea of a "national theatre" was taking shape in the minds of the people who would help mold and guide this institution, there were abundant paradigms for what a national theatre could be. There were, of course, the models provided by other national theatres. Virtually all the European countries had established a national theatre dedicated to the production of classics of each nation's dramatic literature. There was even, in France, the paradigm of a "dual national theatre." The Comédie Française, for example, had been in existence since 1680

founded in 1920, was dedicated to the production of a more populist and didactic repertory.

There were paradigms, even in Great Britain, for what was to become The National Theatre. Certainly the dissemination of theatre outside the urban center of London provided by The Committee for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (C.E.M.A.) and the Entertainments National Service Administration (E.N.S.A.) during and immediately after World War II was driven by the same impetus that lead to the inauguration of the fledgling National Theatre's "Theatre-Go-Round" program, which toured National Theatre productions to provincial theatres.

The repertory movement also provided a partial paradigm for the nascent national theatre concept. By the 1920s, the repertory movement, begun in 1891, had gained considerable support in Great Britain. One of the accomplishments of the repertory movement was the encouragement of new dramatists away from the commercial and financial pressures of London. Among the successes of the repertory movement was The Birmingham Rep, under the direction of Barry Jackson (1879-1961). Jackson, besides producing imaginative productions of Maeterlinck,

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4 The Théâtre National Populaire, was founded in 1920 by Gemier, at the Palais de Chaillot in the Trocadero. Gemier was "successful in obtaining government grants to defray the occasional cost of inviting a variety of companies to play to workers-audiences .... He also organized provincial tours, pioneering the use of motorized transport for stage equipment. His work came to an end when in 1934, the Trocadero was reconstructed to house the International Exhibition of 1937. .... The second T. N. P. was directed by Vilar from 1951 to 1963 and by Georges Wilson from 1963 til 1972 ...." Phyllis Hartnoll, ed. The Oxford Companion to the Theatre (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) 824.

5 "Barry Vincent Jackson (1879-1961), English director and wealthy amateur of the theatre, knighted in 1925. He was trained as an architect, but in 1907 founded an amateur company, The Pilgrim Players, which became professional when in 1913, he built and opened for it the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, in his birthplace. .... Jackson maintained it [The Birmingham Repertory] with his own money for the next 22 years as a creative force in the English theatre, often in the face of local hostility and indifference." Hartnoll, Companion 431.
Yeats and Rostand, also gave "steady encouragement" to the dramatist John Drinkwater. This parallels what came to be one prong of the mission of the National Theatre, the encouragement of new playwrights.

These three examples of paradigms that fed into the National Theatre scheme in its formative years, and the presence of other paradigms disproves the misconception that the production practices of the current National Theatre were a noble experiment enacted by visionaries. The current production practices of the National Theatre can be viewed as the end of a series of theatrical experiments that had gone on before it.

One of the most unusual, and noteworthy, experiments in this vein was an eleven-year venture called "The Company of Four." The Company of Four was a cooperative venture among four producers: Hugh "Binkie" Beaumont, Tyrone Guthrie, Rudolph Bing and Norman Higgins. The Company produced plays from 1945 to 1956, and in that period mounted sixty nine productions at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith. A great many of these productions subsequently transferred to West End theatres for commercial runs of varying lengths. In the course of its eleven-year existence, the Company introduced numerous new playwrights, fostered considerable acting and directing talent, and provided a new lease on life for a derelict and moribund suburban theatre.

A fourth contribution of the Company of Four that must be considered is its service, as a paradigm—both positive and negative—for the National Theatre of Great Britain. This hypothesis is supportable on several grounds.

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The first of these is that several members of the Board of Governors of the National Theatre during its formative years, such as Hugh Beaumont and Sir John Gielgud, had been closely associated with the Company of Four.

The second corroboration for this assertion is that many of the production policies (e.g. platform readings of poetry and musical performances) that were inaugurated by the National Theatre in its early years, and considered innovative, had, in fact, been tried by the Company of Four during its tenure at the Lyric. Even the artistic mission and the philosophy that dictated the choice of repertoire at the National can be said to mirror that of the Company of Four.

A third and final facet of this argument deals with the relationship between Her Majesty's Government, The Arts Council of Great Britain and the theatre. Support for the professional theatre in Great Britain comes in two forms: direct subsidy (e.g., funding and the provision of services) and indirect subsidy (e.g. exemption from taxation). The argument could be made that the abuse of indirect subsidy by the Company of Four led to a stronger policing of "not-profit-distributing," (roughly equivalent to the American non-profit theatre) theatre companies and help solidify the case for support that made a multi-million pound venture like the National Theatre possible.

Besides providing a partial paradigm for the National Theatre, the Company of Four merits study for a number of other reasons. The Company of Four and its production history, for example, also provide a unique theatrical bridge.

First, since The Company of Four existed from the end of World War II until 1956—a date often cited as the beginning of the contemporary theatre--its production history provide a connective link between the theatre of the war years and the contemporary theatre.
The British theatre during the period from 1945 to 1956 was very much a theatre in transition. Its playwrights seemed profoundly influenced by the low level realism and naturalism of American playwrights. John Whiting and N. C. Hunter owe far more to Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams, dramatically, than either owe to Terence Rattigan and/or Noel Coward. And both Williams and Miller received first productions of their works in England by the Company of Four.

The British theatre was also greatly affected by the dramatic literature that came out of Europe following the end of World War II. The dark dramatic vision seen in the works of Anouilh, Sartre and Cocteau continue to influence playwrights like Edward Bond and Peter Terson. The Company of Four was instrumental in helping introduce the work of these European playwrights to the British theatre going public.

And yet, if the Company of Four was so innovative and farsighted, why is it virtually unknown outside the relatively small London theatrical community? Part of this is the result of the personality of Hugh "Binkie" Beaumont, who guided the venture. Beaumont was an intensely private person. And in the way that theatrical ventures often take on the personality of their founder/directors (e.g, Jerzy Grotowski and the Polish Laboratory Theatre) some of that privateness seems to have transferred itself to the Company of Four. A second and probably more important reason for the Company's obscurity is that it ended, as shall be shown, under a cloud.

This study, then, will have two aims. The first is to provide some historical and theatrical context for the Company of Four, a company largely unknown outside the English theatre. The second is to show that The Company of Four must be regarded as one paradigm for the emergent national theatre of Great Britain.
The Sources of this Study

No single, central work exists on the Company of Four. As a result, it is necessary to draw on numerous sources to establish a frame of reference for the Company.

Personal Interviews

Two people in particular, both of whom were closely associated with the Company of Four, have been particularly invaluable. Ms. Kitty Black worked for seven of the eleven years that the Company was in existence as "second in command" to Murray MacDonald, the Artistic Director and to his successor, John Perry. She has been a constant source of information and insight into the Company and its personnel.

Mr. John Perry, who managed the Company after MacDonald's resignation, has also been helpful in this aspect. As a lifetime friend and associate of Hugh Beaumont, he has been particularly helpful in explaining the Beaumont production philosophy and the Beaumont persona.

The British Theatre Museum

The British Theatre Museum (formerly The Gabrielle Enthoven Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum) possesses a comprehensive collection of programs for the eleven-year production period of the Company, and an extensive file of newspaper clippings about the productions. These files have been helpful in putting together a comprehensive production history of the Company. Additionally, these files contain many production photographs of Lyric productions that were reproduced in the press. These photographs have been extremely helpful in gaining an overview of productions values as they progressed over this period.
The H. M. Tennent Office Files

The staff of the H. M. Tennent office have been extremely helpful in allowing access to the organization's files on the Company of Four. Chiefly, these files consist of reviews of all Company productions. These have been helpful in outlining the response of the critical and journalistic communities to the Company's productions.

Unfortunately, when the Tennent office changed accounting firms several years ago, all of the account and tax records for this period were destroyed. Therefore, many of the financial figures used in this study are either approximations based on standard contracts from this period or are the specific recollections of people interviewed. In the latter case, they are footnoted as such.

Contemporary Biography

A substantial number of the people involved with this venture have since become sufficiently well known in the theatrical community to have written autobiographies or to have had such works written about them. Where such works exist, I have incorporated information and quotations germane to this study. Where possible, I have attempted to corroborate materials from biographies by means of newspaper accounts and other sources. One of the great disadvantages of this study is that Beaumont—who will quickly emerge as the prime mover of the venture—was such a private person that almost nothing of a biographical nature has been written about him.

Newspaper Criticism and Reportage

In the early years of the Company of Four, newspaper and periodical criticism of the productions was largely restricted to the daily and Sunday London
newspapers. While the view of the Company offered by such a limited sample is restrictive, it is intriguing to note that many of the daily critics who reviewed Company of Four productions (J. C. Trewin, James Agate and Ivor Brown, for example) later became major writers and commentators on the theatre. As the reputation of the Company grew, the number and range of publications that reviewed its productions grew as well. Where it is possible to do so, I have attempted to provide as broad a cross section of the critical response to productions as possible.

The National Theatre has been a fertile ground for writers of theses and dissertations. These works range from Ralph Robert Allison's study of the dual national theatre to Ronald Everett Sherriffs' study of government support for the theatre. These studies prove helpful in understanding the current National Theatre, and how its current production policies and practices have come into being, but rarely provide evidence of the paradigms on which that institution is based.

The study of the Company of Four, as has been pointed out, provides an interesting and insightful historical bridge to the British theatre for the period between the end of World War II and 1956, the date which many consider the beginning of the contemporary theatre. On the whole, this time period has not had

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the historical examination that the period after 1956 has garnered. Two ancillary benefit of this study will be a fuller understanding of that time period, and how the production practices of one company in the short span of eleven-years brought about changes that would have far reaching effects across the theatrical community.
There were a number of factors that led to the founding of The Company of Four. As the chapter on English Tax legislation and its effects on the theatre will indicate, non-profit companies that were constituted for education and charitable purposes enjoyed the benefit of exemption from the payment of Entertainment Tax. This certainly was a central impetus that lead to the Company's founding. A second impetus that lead to the founding of the Company was the desire to provide touring productions for venues such as the Arts Theatre, Cambridge. A third and final impetus that figured in the founding of the Company may have been in establishing a "try-out" theatre for productions that Beaumont was considering bringing into the West End.

The Company was founded, therefore, to meet the several needs of four founders. The brief biographic sketches of the founders and members of the first Board of Directors—Hugh Beaumont, Tyrone Guthrie, Norman Higgins and Rudolf Bing—that follow will both provide insight into the four personalities that were involved in the early years of the Company and outline the reasons the various producers and organizations that they represented gave their imprimatur to the venture.
Hugh Morgan Griffiths Beaumont (1908-1973)

Born in 1908, Hugh Morgan Griffiths Beaumont began his career as an assistant theatre manager, at Cardiff, for the theatrical syndicate of Howard and Wyndham's. Howard and Wyndham's held the lease on several large theatres throughout Britain which were used for touring productions of "star" vehicles. After leaving the firm, he worked as business manager for both Aubrey Smith's touring company and Phillip Ridgeway's provincial theatre at Barnes. He subsequently joined Moss Empires, another theatrical syndicate.¹

By 1936 Beaumont had risen within Moss Empires to the position of Director, but was becoming dissatisfied with the quality of productions that the firm was booking. He was persuaded by H. M. Tennent, to join a production firm that Tennent was starting.

The firm opened its first production, The Anteroom, on 14 August 1936, at the Queen's Theatre.² It was a failure, as was every production during their first year. The losses of the first year came to over £36,000.³ Nevertheless, the firm managed to flounder on.

In 1940, Tennent, who had been chairman of the board, died and the management of the firm passed into Beaumont's hand. Despite the initial difficult years, by 1940 the firm was beginning to make its mark in the West End. The productions mounted in 1940 included Rebecca, The Devil's Disciple and All Clear. In 1941, the first complete year of Beaumont's management, the company produced


² The Anteroom was by Kate O'Brien in collaboration with Geoffrey Gower and W. A. Carot.

³ Kitty Black, personal interview, 18 July 1981.
No Time For Comedy, The Nutmeg Tree, Blithe Spirit, Ducks and Drakes, Dear Brutus, Old Acquaintance and The Morning Star. This was the first glimmer of what was to become the Beaumont production philosophy: a blend of revivals of established plays from the English repertory (Dear Brutus), new plays (Blithe Spirit), and importations of the current hits from the New York season (No Time for Comedy). Added to this was Beaumont’s determination that:

Everything that the firm did had to be of the highest possible quality. There has never been a standard set in the West End as high as Tennent’s. And everybody knew it. And everybody wanted to work for Tennent’s because they were well treated, they had beautiful clothes, they had the best designers, they had marvelous sets, and they had, eventually, the best theatres. And they were made to feel loved, which, I think, is what actors need more than anything else.4

In the ten years after the firm was founded, the Tennent name appeared as chief producer of no fewer than eighty seven productions. By 1956, that number had risen to two hundred and thirteen and included such noteworthy productions as those in Gielgud’s Haymarket season, most of the London premieres of the plays of Noel Coward, and revivals ranging from The Duchess of Malfi (1944) to Three Sisters (1951). Obviously, in a brief span of time, Beaumont had succeeded in making Tennent’s one of the most powerful and illustrious producing firms in London.

In 1951 Beaumont was named to the governing body of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, and, in 1962, to the board of the National Theatre of Great Britain. That he sat on the board of both of these institutions in their critical, formative years is indicative of either the esteem in which he was held or the power that he wielded. He also served on the Drama Panel of the Arts Council of Great Britain.

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4 Kitty Black, personal interview, 19 July 1981.
Though the number of projects he was involved with diminished in his later years, he continued to be active in the running of H. M. Tennent, Ltd., and had four or five productions at various stages of development, including the revival of Somerset Maugham's *The Constant Wife* with Ingrid Bergman, at the time of his death from a heart attack in 1973.

The respect and devotion engendered by Beaumont were legendary. On the occasion of his death, Laurence (later Lord) Olivier, wrote to the Times:

He was a trusted friend and confidant of more people than anyone I know, and should you be visiting his office, possibly to cast a play, and name seven or eight prominent people, he would be sure to have a personal letter from all of them on his desk received within the last few days. He believed in Shakespeare's dictum 'Those friends thou has, and their adoption tried, grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel,' I am happy he made me feel such a one.  

The number of people that he made to feel "grappled to his soul" were legion. From Sir John Gielgud to Ian Carmichael and Peggy Wood, it is almost impossible to pick up a volume of theatrical biography from this period that doesn't include some mention of Beaumont.

And yet, were it not for this fragmented picture, there would be no picture of Beaumont at all. John Perry, his associate from many years, claims that "all his life he hid behind the rubric of H. M. Tennent." The more one reads of Beaumont's exploits and the more one talks to those who knew him, however, the more one is lead to the conclusion that he realized his ability to arouse interest as a charismatic figure would be diminished if too much of his personal life were known.

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6 John Perry, personal interview, 24 August 1981.
Beaumont was undoubtedly the prime mover behind the Company of Four. He was the only one of the four to remain with the venture for its entire eleven-year tenure, and it was on his shoulders that the responsibility fell when the venture encountered difficulty with the royal Commission on Customs and Excise.

William Tyrone Guthrie (1900-1971)

Following directly behind Beaumont in importance in the formation of the Company of Four was Tyrone Guthrie. Born in 1900 in Tunbridge Wells, England, Guthrie's mother, Norah Guthrie (nee Power), was the granddaughter of Tyrone Power, the Irish comedian. The son of a doctor, Guthrie attended Wellington College, Berkshire, and later St. John's College, Oxford, where he earned his B.A. in ancient history and philosophy in 1923.\(^7\)

At Oxford, Guthrie acted in student productions, among them the annual Oxford University Dramatic Society (O. U. D. S.) Shakespearean production, in which he played Glendower in *Henry IV, Pt. 1* under the direction of J. B. Fagan. Shortly afterwards he was offered a contract by Fagan to appear at the Oxford Playhouse.

In addition to many bottle washing duties, I played various small parts, to the disconcertment of my colleagues, who found my towering stature reinforced by a strong instinct for theatrical effect, as yet entirely undisciplined. I think I had it in me to be a striking, even powerful, interpreter of a very limited range of parts; but absolutely not to be a 'useful actor,' whose service would be in steady demand. Mr. Fagan made no pretense that I was anything but a crashing liability in almost all the parts that I played, but still indicated that he thought I had talent; that sometime, somehow, something might be made of me.\(^8\)


In September, 1924, Guthrie left the Playhouse to join the British Broadcasting Corporation in Belfast, where he remained until 1926, when he was appointed director of the Scottish National Theatre. In 1928 Guthrie was hired as director for the Festival Theatre, Cambridge, where he remained for two years. Guthrie's two seasons at the Festival Theatre were remarkable for the wide range of productions he mounted, including Pirandello's *Naked* and *Six Characters*, Toller's *The Machine Wreckers*, and Gilbert Murray's adaptation of *Iphigenia in Tauris*.

In 1931 Guthrie staged his first play in the West End, James Bridie's *The Anatomist*. Between 1931 and 1933, he directed nine shows, among them his own play, *Follow Me*, and the premier production of Priestley's psychological thriller *Dangerous Corner*. His *Love's Labour's Lost* so impressed Lillian Baylis that he was engaged to direct in the 1933-34 season of her repertory company that alternated between the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells theatres.

He directed six shows in his first two years with the company, and, in 1939, was invited to become administrator, as well as to continue staging plays. With the onset of war, and the partial destruction of the Old Vic, the company ceased operation in London and began touring under the auspices of C.E.M.A. Guthrie remained head of the company through their reopening in London in 1944.

Here, accounts of Guthrie's life begin to differ. One source maintains that "about a year later (1945) Guthrie resigned his post with the Vic Wells organization and became a director of the 'Company of Four' at the suburban Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith." Guthrie, in his autobiography, never mentions The Company of Four. He does, however, manage to register his impression of both Beaumont and the firm of H. M. Tennent.

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9 *Current Biography*, 1950 comp. 314.
Clever Mr. Beaumont, always sensitive to public taste, and alert to seize any managerial advantage, was pursuing in London, the policy which had once been peculiar to the Old Vic, and offering an interesting series of classical productions, better mounted and more starrily cast than ours. He had an advantage . . . . Suddenly we found that we, the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells, were no longer the beloved only twin children of the Arts Council's theatrical family. A new and more glamorous baby had arrived.10

The vituperative quality of Guthrie's assessment of Beaumont aside, the fact remains that it was in his capacity as administrator and director of the Vic Wells organization that he was invited to join the venture. The reasons for his disenchantment and subsequent resignation from the group will be covered later in this study. By the 1947-48 season, he had disassociated himself from the venture.

Between 1948 and 1953 he directed widely, including such projects as Taming of the Shrew in Helsingfor and Oedipus Rex in Tel Aviv. In 1953 he became involved with one of the most significant project of his life. In that year he undertook the artistic direction and management of the newly formed Stratford, Ontario, Shakespeare Festival, which opened with his production of Richard III starring Alec Guinness. He remained head of the Festival until 1957.

In the Birthday Honours List of 1961 he was created a Knight Commander of the British Empire. In 1963 his production of Hamlet opened the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, Minnesota. With that production, Guthrie achieved the singular distinction of having been instrumental in helping to found major theatres in three countries. He returned to the Old Vic to direct John Gielgud in a 1967 production of Tartuffe, and died in 1971.

Though Guthrie's association with the Company of Four was short-lived, his impact must be considered in any study of the Company.

10 Guthrie, A Life 224-225.
Norman Higgins (1898-1974)

Higgins was born at Burnely, Lancashire, in 1898. Little is know of his early life except for a tour of duty with the Royal Field Artillery during World War I. In 1933 he founded the Cosmopolitan Cinema in Cambridge, a venture designed to take advantage of the rapidly expanding study of film as an art form. He headed the organization until 1936, when he was invited by Lord Keynes to become general manager of the Cambridge Arts Theatre, which was a gift to the city from Keynes and his wife, the ballet dancer Lydia Lopolkova.

Higgins' association with drama and theatre in Cambridge and in Great Britain, in general, was long and illustrious. He produced and directed over two hundred plays, operas, ballets, pantomimes and revues. From 1949 to 1953 he served as chief administrator of the Cambridge Summer Festivals of Music and Drama, and from 1946 to 1953 was a member of the Drama Panel of the Arts Council.

It was in his capacity as managing director of the Arts Theatre that Higgins was invited to become part of the Company of Four. The Arts functioned then as a combination repertory and rental house. Between productions mounted specifically for the theatre, the theatre was leased to touring production. As a result, Higgins was constantly in search of productions that would uphold the standard he had set. Since the Arts was practically the same size as the Lyric, it represented an ideal place to try out productions during the four week pre-Lyric, Hammersmith, tour. Later, when shows began touring after their Hammersmith appearances, the arrangement was maintained in order to provide productions for Higgins' seasons.
The efficacy of this arrangement helps explain why Higgins was the only one of the four who remained associated with the Company after its second year.\footnote{Freda Gaye, ed. \textit{Who's Who in the Theatre}, 14th ed (London: Pitman Publishing, 1967) 738.}

Higgins was also involved with a number of organizations related to the theatre. Among these were the Council of Management of the Theatrical Managers Association and the Apollo Society (an organization that, as will be seen, was heavily involved with the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith early in the tenure of the Company of Four), Ballet Joos and the Guildhall School of Drama. He had been created an M. B. E. directly after World War II in recognition of his service with the Home Guard and died in 1974.

\textbf{Rudolph Bing (1902- )}

Rudolph Bing's association with the Company of Four was probably least influential since he sat on the board as the deputy of John Christie, and only remained with the venture for its first year.

Born in Vienna in 1902, Bing was one of four children of an Austrian industrialist. He considered a career as a concert pianist, but the economic collapse of Austria at the end of World War I forced him to abandon these aspirations.

From 1921 to 1927 he was employed by Hugo Heller, an antiquarian bookseller who also ran a theatrical booking agency. He left the firm in 1927 and was presently engaged by Carl Ebert for the Darmstadt State Theatre as \textit{leiter das betriebbureau}, a general Factotum whose duties included casting and artistic supervision of State Theatre productions. Bing followed Ebert to the Charlottenburg Municipal Opera in the same capacity as general artistic overseer. In 1933, when Hitler became Chancellor, both Bing and Ebert fled Germany to return to Austria.
Things were becoming difficult for Bing in Austria when "there arrived in the mailbox, unheralded, an astonishing letter from Fritz Busch with a most remarkable commission."\(^{12}\) The British building magnate and arts patron John Christie was mounting an opera festival at Glyndebourne and had hired Busch as director. Busch had hired Carl Ebert as artistic director and Ebert had urged the hiring of Bing as general manager for the two week festival.

Glyndebourne was to remain Bing's artistic home for the next sixteen years, and his association with both Glyndebourne and John Christie led to his being invited to become one of the Board of Directors of the Company of Four.

In 1945, shortly after the end of the war, there was another theatrical venture, the 'Company of Four' --Glyndebourne, H. M. Tennent, Ltd., Cambridge Arts Theatre, and Guthrie--which took over the Lyric Theatre in Hammersmith for a season of straight plays to introduce works of serious modern playwrights and to give employment to actors being demobilized from the Armed Forces. \(...\) With unfamiliar plays and mostly young actors, in a small theatre some distance out from the West End, this was inevitably a losing proposition, and didn't interest Christie much: he rarely came. As the losses mounted, he became increasingly unhappy about the Company of Four and in early 1947 the venture collapsed.\(^{13}\)

His assessment to the contrary, the Company did not collapse in 1947, but this statement does date the dissolution of the Christie/Bing involvement in the venture. Ironically, the Lyric, while leased to the Company of Four, was to provide the London venue for several productions by The English Opera Group that had originated at Glyndebourne.

In 1947 Glyndebourne resumed its annual festival. Bing had hopes of enlarging the Festival from its small scope to that of a comprehensive musical


\(^{13}\) Bing, *5000 Nights* 106.
festival that would rival Salzburg. He was also central to the founding of the
Edinburgh Festival.

In 1950 Bing succeeded Edward Johnson as managing director of the
Metropolitan Opera, and remained head for twenty two years. He guided the
company through its move to Lincoln Center and retired at the end of the 1971-72
season. He was created a Knight Commander of the British Empire in the 1971
Birthday Honours List.

The Formation of the Company

The articles that incorporated The Company of Four were written by the
attorney that also handled all legal matters for H. M. Tennent. It was incorporated
as a non-profit-distributing company specifically constituted to undertake a number
of activities, including the production of live theatre. The four directors named as the
Board of Directors were, not surprisingly, Beaumont, Guthrie, Higgins and Bing.
Though the governance of the organization should have been shared by the four
Directors, both Higgins and Bing were occupied with the management of other
companies, both of them removed from London. Guthrie was directing in far-flung
theatres. Beaumont was the only one of the four who would be close enough to the
venture to take a day-to-day part in deciding its course.

A Name for the Company

Once the group of founding members was in place, one of their first
considerations was what the new venture should be called. Finally, "The Company
of Four" was decided upon for a variety of reasons.

First, there were four producing organizations or producers involved in the
project. Second, the name was a conscious parody of Compagnie de Quinze.
(Company of Five), the theatrical collaboration founded in 1930 by Michael St. Denis and Jacques Copeau. This work of this collective was known and admired by several of the original four Directors. Finally, the Company proposed to mount their productions in such a way that a show would rehearse for four weeks, tour for four weeks, and play four weeks at the Lyric, Hammersmith. Obviously, four was the magic number associated with the Company, and Rudolph Bing finally suggested the name that they settled on.

A Home for the Company

Once the foundations for the Company had been laid, the choice of a proper theatre to house their productions was one of their first priorities. As has already been indicated, Beaumont had apparently begun negotiations over the Lyric, Hammersmith before the Company was formally put together. The Lyric represented an ideal choice for this type of project for a number of reasons.

Its location was both an advantage and a disadvantage. Located in one of the suburbs adjacent to London, the Lyric was close enough that actors could commute to it without undue hardship. On the other hand, it was situated far enough away from the West End that it represented a major effort for audiences to get there. There would be little chance of "walk up" business with a theatre located twenty five minutes from the other West End theatres.

Second, the theatre was an ideal size. It seated approximately seven hundred and fifty, which meant that any success would run the chance of making a fair profit, while a failure in such a small theatre would not bankrupt the Company.

\[14\] Black was told that the Lyric had been leased long before any formal announcement concerning the Company was made.

Additionally, the theatre was approximately the same size as several houses to which the Company proposed to tour productions.

And finally, the theatre was available at a very low price. While the exact price stated in the contract is not known, sources agree that the Lyric was let by Beaumont for roughly £200 a year in 1945.¹⁶

The Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith

Before proceeding with the examination of the Company of Four, a brief history of the Lyric might prove informative, since its history shows that it had been used for this type of venture before.

The Building of the Lyric

The land on which it originally stood and the first building, the Lyric Opera House, were owned by Charles Cordingley, who also owned the West London Advertiser, the Hammersmith newspaper.¹⁷

Cordingley commissioned the design of the hall from Isaac Mason and it opened on 17 November 1888.¹⁸ Cordingley had trouble obtaining a license because of fire laws. Finally, in an attempt to meet fire codes and obtain a license, Cordingley undertook remodeling the theatre but the effort so depleted his finances that he was forced to sell the theatre shortly after it reopened.

¹⁶ The amount of the rent was supplied by Kitty Black and confirmed in conversations with John Perry.


¹⁸ Fozzard and Berenice Goodwin, Catalog of The Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, Exhibition (London: 1979) unpaginated.
The East Management

In November 1891, the theatre was bought by Acton Phillips. Phillips was the licensee of another Hammersmith hall, the Hammersmith Palace of Varieties.

Phillips leased the theatre to John Marlborough East\(^{19}\) (1860-1924), who, with his brother, Charles Alexander East, (1863-1924) produced seasons of melodrama. The East management represents the first period of success for the Lyric. Their first several seasons were so successful that Phillips undertook yet another renovation of the theatre, for which he commissioned the pre-eminent theatrical architect of the day, Frank Matcham. Matcham designed no fewer than one hundred and fifty theatres between 1877 and 1912, including the London Hippodrome and the London Coliseum, currently the home of the English Nation Opera.

Of the survivors, the Lyric, Hammersmith should be considered first. It is the earliest complete Matcham design now to be seen in London, and may well be one with which the architect was particularly pleased . . . Of all the London theatre reconstructed by Matcham, the Lyric suffered most severely from the inadequacies of its site and the imperfections of an earlier building (by Isaac Mason, 1888). Matcham could make most straitjackets look comfortable but he made little attempt to deal with the thoroughly intractable old entrance block in Bradmore Grove. For more than seventy five years his auditorium endured an ugly, cramped approach. The cure, when it came, was drastic.\(^{20}\)

It is Matcham that we must thank for the glorious little theatre that is the Lyric today, for it was to his original 1895 design that the theatre was returned when it was reassembled in 1977-79, following the 1972 demolition of the building in which it originally stood.


In 1899 Phillips died and the lease passed to his son. Phillips, Jr., encountered some difficulty and in 1904 the theatre was closed. It went through several managements until 1920, when another of the near miraculous happenings that make up the history of the Lyric occurred and it was leased to Nigel Playfair.

The Playfair Years

Nigel Ross Playfair (1874-1934) became enamoured with the theatre while reading law at Oxford, and gained his first theatrical experience with the O. U. D. S. He first appeared professionally in 1902 as Mr. Melrose in A Pair of Knickerbockers. His unusual voice and appearance made him a natural farceur.

Near the end of World War I, Playfair became interested in producing and directing. One of his first efforts as a director was a revival of The Marriage of Figaro for Sir Thomas Beecham. This production so impressed the novelist Arnold Bennett that Bennett formed a syndicate to back Playfair in his first independent venture as producer and director at the Lyric, which had recently become available.

Playfair's fortunes in the early years at the Lyric followed the same up and down course that had characterized the years just before his tenure. The response to his productions varied from adulation to jeers and booing. It was to replace a show that had received the latter, a production of As You Like It, that Playfair hit upon the idea of reviving The Beggar's Opera. This production, is the vehicle perhaps most associated with the Playfair era at the Lyric.

Although nineteenth-century audiences had seen performances of Gay and Pepusch's ballad opera, in the twentieth century it had been long neglected. It was

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21 Nigel Playfair, Hammersmith Hoy (London: Faber and Faber, 1930) 145.
22 Playfair, 183.
first brought to Playfair’s attention by Frederick Austin, one of the singers in Beecham’s opera company, who later adapted the music for the production. Bennett was asked to adapt the text and Claud Lovat Fraser to design the sets and costumes.

From the beginning, the production was plagued with problems. As You Like It had to be withdrawn and The Beggar’s Opera was forced to open two weeks ahead of schedule, with considerably less rehearsal than planned. Additionally, the loss of the two weeks revenue from As You Like It meant that Lovat Fraser’s original designs for The Beggar’s Opera had to be scrapped in favor of a single, unit set. Necessity being the kind of parent that it is, however, these disadvantages must have worked to the advantage of the production, for The Beggar’s Opera was the most memorable production of Playfair’s years at the Lyric.

Opening on 5 June 1920, The Beggar’s Opera ran for over three years. It so rapidly became a cult item that a "Beggar’s Opera Club" was formed, membership being restricted to those who had seen the production thirty or more times. One overzealous piano tuner, it was reported on the occasion of the tenth anniversary revival, had seen the production three hundred and fifty one times, the equivalent of sitting through eight performances a week for forty-four weeks!\(^{23}\)

The original run continued through December 1923 and the production was revived in 1925, 1926, 1928, 1929 and 1930.

His health failing, Playfair gave up the management of the Lyric in 1932 and two years later died, but not before giving his age a theatrical experience unequaled in the years between the two world wars.

\(^{23}\) Fozzard and Goodwin, Catalog of the Lyric Exhibition.
The Years Between the Wars

In the decade following Playfair's death, the Lyric was closed for long periods. The Lyric had fallen on such hard times that, at the beginning of World War II, it was abandoned.

The Sommerville Years

The Lyric was in a completely derelict state when it was "rediscovered" by J. Baxter Sommerville. Sommerville was one of a rapidly vanishing breed, the monied English eccentric. He was trained as a solicitor, but had an obsessive love of lost causes, most often in the form of vacant theatre buildings. At the time of his death in 1963, he was managing director of the Theatre Royal, Brighton (one of the theatres to which Company of Four productions toured); was lessee of the Lyric, Hammersmith; was freeholder of the Theatre Royal, Margate, and the Queen's Theatre, Poplar; and was producer of several summer repertory companies in the provinces. Malcolm Morley, in his book on the theatres of Margate, estimates that Sommerville's theatrical ventures, at the time of death, provided employment for over three hundred and fifty people.24

Sommerville was doubly attractive as a lessor to the directors of the Company of Four. Besides being willing to lease the Lyric for a nominal rent, his Brighton theatre would make an ideal touring theatre for Company of Four productions. So, after the briefest of negotiations, the Lyric was let to The Company of Four for a nominal rent.

The Administrative Structure of the Company

Obviously Beaumont, Guthrie, Higgins and Bing could not be expected to handle the day-to-day management of the newly formed company. Higgins and Bing were tied to organizations outside London and Beaumont and Guthrie were far too occupied with keeping other theatrical projects up and operational to undertake the duties associated with the Company of Four at the Lyric, Hammersmith. An administrator would be needed to handle the project.

For the first year of the Company's operation, this task fell to Murray MacDonald. Born in Glasgow in 1899, MacDonald had made his stage debut with the Scottish National Players in 1919. After playing seasons with various repertory groups and touring South Africa with Olga Lindo, he made his London debut as an actor in Mrs. Fischer's War in 1931. His directorial debut came in 1935 when he directed, in conjunction with Tyrone Guthrie, The Viceroy Sarah. Between 1935 and 1940, when he joined the Army, MacDonald directed over twenty productions. Several of these, such as Bonnet Over The Windmill and Robert's Wife were for H. M. Tennent, Ltd. Following demobilization, MacDonald directed The Hasty Heart before being invited to join The Company of Four as manager. He served in that capacity for the Company's first year, during which time he directed The Shouting Dies, The Thracian Horses and The Eagle Has Two Heads. MacDonald left the Company at the end of the first season, according to Kitty Black, because he found directing three shows a year coupled with the administrative duties that were expected of him too taxing. MacDonald continued to direct until 1970.

When MacDonald left the Company he was replaced by John Perry. Perry was born in 1906 and made his debut in 1928 as Jack Chesney in Charley's Aunt at

the Prince's Theatre, Manchester. After touring Canada and the West Indies with the Florence Glossop-Harris company, Perry retired from the stage for seven years. He returned to the stage in 1938 and appeared in *Spring Meeting* (a script which he co-authored with the Irish novelist M. J. Farrell) and the revival of *George and Margaret* before 1940, when he joined the R. A. F. As a playwright, his works include the aforementioned *Spring Meeting*, *Treasure Hunt* (also with M. J. Farrell, 1949) and *Castle Anna* (with Elizabeth Bowen, 1948, produced by The Company of Four). Perry was, for many years, Binkie Beaumont's companion.²⁶ He joined the Company of Four in 1947 and remained its administrative director until the Company ceased production in 1956.

Both MacDonald and Perry had, as second-in-command, Kitty Black. Born in Johannesburg, South Africa in 1914 Black trained as a concert pianist. She joined the firm of H. M. Tennent as a clerk-typist in 1937. She left Tennent's to help administer the Company of Four in 1945. Black is also an author, having adapted, among other works *Men Without Shadows* and *The Respectable Prostitute* (1947) and *Crime Passionel* (1948), all from Jean-Paul Sartre and all produced by The Company of Four. Black left the Company of Four in 1952 to become the dramatic agent at Spenser Curtis Brown Publishing. Her book, *Upper Circle*,²⁷ is perhaps the only book that comes close to being a comprehensive work on the Company of Four. Its anecdotal approach, however, makes it more enjoyable than scholarly reading. Black, however, provided a thread of continuity between the MacDonald and Perry managements. And, in retrospect, it is possible to make the assumption that it was,


in fact, Black who may have been responsible for much of the day-to-day operation of the Company of Four.

This, then, was the administrative team that headed the Company of Four for its eleven-year existence. What becomes truly remarkable, in retrospect, is that the Company was able to mount such consistently ambitious seasons with so little staff. There were, of course, other people who aided in the running of the Company. They were employees of the parent company, H. M. Tennent, however; the real work of running the company fell to MacDonald, Perry and Black.

**Conclusion—The Stage Is Set**

By this point, almost everything necessary to set the new artistic venture in motion had been put in place. There were four producing partners to oversee the venture; they had a name; they had a theatre in which to begin production; and they had an administrative team to run the venture.

The four managing partners also had a mutually agreeable production philosophy to guide the new theatre; to produce serious works by new authors and to provide employment for the best new talent of the English theatre, specifically those actors who were being demobilized from the service. While this philosophy would be subject to change early within the eleven-years of the Company's existence, it would undergird the Company during its formative stage. Finally, with all the requisite pieces in place, the Company of Four commenced production in March, 1945.
CHAPTER III:
Changes in English Tax Law and Their Effect on
The Company of Four

Before proceeding with an examination of the production history of the Company of Four, it is necessary to discuss the tax statutes and legislation that made the operation of the Company a profitable proposition, and the parliamentary discussion of tax-exemption and subsequent changes in legislation that occurred during the period from 1945 to 1956. While the effects that parliamentary enquiries and the introduction of the Theatrical Companies Bill in 1954 had on the Company of Four are difficult to assess, there can be no doubt that changes in the Government's position on exemption from Entertainment Tax weighed heavily on the fate of the Company of Four. Before proceeding to the specifics of the parliamentary debates, it might be useful to examine a brief overview of the history of government support to the theatre in Great Britain in the 20th century.

Government support for the performing arts has historically taken two forms: 1) direct subsidy of the various art forms, their practitioners and the institutions that regularly foster and present the arts and 2) either remission of or exemption from the payment of taxes. An example of the first of these types of support is the payment of theatre companies that toured under the auspices of the Committee for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts and subsidies given to specific theatres and
producing companies such as the Old Vic. These direct subsidies were given by the Arts Council of Great Britain, established by Royal Charter in 1946. Because the amount of funding the Arts Council could disburse was limited, and because the Council wished to support projects that it could not fund directly, the Arts Council also undertook a program whereby it would underwrite interest-free loans to arts institutions that then used these funds as venture capital, and repaid the loan over a period of time. These funds, once repaid, were then re-granted or relaided. Any organization receiving such an interest-free loan had the obligation, or right, to carry, as part of its advertising, the phrase "in association with the Arts Council of Great Britain." Organizations that carried this imprimatur were also frequently the recipients of the most prevalent form of indirect subsidy, exemption from the payment of Entertainment Tax. Exemption from the payment of Entertainment Tax was one of the central factors that both made The Company of Four a workable proposition, and, later, when these laws were changed, the abolition of this helped sound its death knell.

Since 1916, there had existed in Great Britain an Entertainment Tax which assessed a duty on live theatre, sporting events, cinema and other forms of amusements such as concerts. Additionally, as with any tariff, there were exceptions to the rate and exemptions from the tax that eventually made it possible for Beaumont to turn the Company of Four into an entity that would prove extremely profitable for H.M. Tennent, Ltd., and Tennent Productions, Ltd. The similarity between these two organizations would figure heavily in the Parliamentary questions that were raised later.

The Finance Act of 1916, the first Finance Act to place a tax on entertainments, started the controversy.
With Parliamentary approval, the Treasury, through the Commission of Customs and Excise, levied a tax on admission tickets as one means of paying for the war in 1916. As part of the original act, the Treasury allowed exemption for the tax if the entertainment was both of a "wholly educational" character and not presented for profit. The problems of how to tax entertainment that was educational and profitable and how to distinguish "educational" from "amusing," first posed by Mr. David Mason in Parliament in 1916... were a continual source of trouble.¹

The entire history of the Entertainment Duty, which had been foreseen as a 'temporary duty,' is chronicled in A. P. Herbert's *No Fine on Fun*, which outlines some of the problem areas to which Sherriffs refers. Writing in 1957, after the original Finance Act had been amended in 1917, 1918, 1919, 1921, 1922, 1923, 1924, 1931, 1935, 1940, 1942, 1943, 1946, 1947, 1948, 1949, 1950, 1952, 1953, 1954, and the enactment of new Entertainment Duty Regulations in 1955, Herbert charts some of the difficulties inherent in calculation of the duty, not to mention exemption from the same.²

The exemptions and compromises in the Act were not enough. They have been growing like an ugly rash all over it, and now there are 12 (or 13) classes of exemption clearly but laughably set out in Notice 100 by the Commissioners of Customs and Excise. There have been, to date, 12 changes of 'rate' on the living theatre alone, and there are now three different rates or 'scales' of duty: (1) living theatre, etc., (2) sport, and (3) cinema. There are some fascinating little problems where categories of entertainment or exemption overlap. What tax is payable, for example, where 'a flower show includes a vocal concert'—or 'an organist accompanies a silent film'? the flower show, if provided by a society not established for profit, would normally be exempt (under Section 11, Finance Act, 1923). But the 'vocal concert' would probably be put into the wicked amusements class, and it would be taxed under Scale 1. The organist and the silent film are more difficult. But I think that, if the organist played for 'not less than one quarter of the total time', the tax would be payable 'at a composite rate', that is, two-thirds of the duty chargeable on a film (Scale 3) plus one-third of the duty chargeable on the organist under Scale 1. Isn't it fun?³

¹ Sherriffs 121.
³ Herbert 20-21.
For over two hundred pages, Herbert charts the rise and fall of parliamentary sentiment as it affected a tariff on every form of entertainment from cricket matches and amateur theatricals, to Exemption 6, Section I (5) (d), Finance (New Duties) Act, 1916, which allowed exemption for any entertainment that included a "revival of National Pastimes."^4

The legislation that provided for exemption, while admirable in spirit, obviously left several gray areas open to interpretation. Several of these gray areas were made even grayer when amendments to the original act were voted on to clear up the question of exemption:

at events combining several "entertainments of a mixed nature (play ground equipment was permissible at a flower show but a vocal concert was not, a band concert at a zoo might lead to a disqualification, horses could perform tricks but could not race) . . . ."

The second area of interpretation came with the granting of exemption if the entertainment was presented by a "society, institution, or committee not conducted or established for profit." Neither the original Finance Act, nor any of the amendments to it disallowed exemption to companies that had been specifically put together for the simple purposes of taking advantage of the exemption. It may have been the assumption of Parliamentarians that, with the very firm position being taken by the Commission on Customs and Excise, for an organization so constituted (that is, specifically non-profit to present entertainments that would be exempt from the payment of Entertainment Tax) would have been foolhardy.

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^4 Herbert, 104. "Here I can think of nothing but Morris dancing and archery. But, if things go the same way in the theatre much longer, we may one day see a gallant manager claiming to put on a show under Exemption 6."

^5 Sherriffs 122.
For the first eighteen years of its existence, the Finance Act of 1916 can be said to have been of primary benefit to organizations that were, like the Royal Zoological Society, at least partly educational. This was due to the very firm position taken by His Majesty's Commission on Customs and Excise, that "no movement, however worthy, if it were involved in artistic representation, would be regarded as partly educational."  

Obviously, this ruling excluded all theatrical managements from applying for exemption. Finally, through the persistence of the theatrical community, particularly Sir Reginald Rowe, one of the Governors of the Old Vic, this ruling was relaxed in 1934; the Old Vic Trust was the first theatrical organization to be granted exemption.

It was assumed that the relaxation of the guidelines regarding exemption would open the flood gates and that numbers of managements would apply for exemption. It would have made sound business sense to do so, since, in some case, the rate of tax was as high as thirty three per cent of the gross.

The government, however, interpreted the ruling—which was done case by case—stringently and by 1939 only five theatrical companies—The Old Vic Trust, Regent's Park Open Air Theatre, Cambridge Arts Theatre, The Festival Theatre at Stratford upon Avon, and Donald Wolfit's company, the Advance Players—had been granted exemption.

According to Sherriffs: "At this time, the concept of 'educational' came to apply to most drama and a great number of companies had constituted themselves as non-profit according to the rather incomplete letter of the 1916 law."  

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7 Sherriffs 124.
company so constituted was Tennent Plays, Ltd. which commenced operation, as a non-profit entity, with a production of Macbeth (Piccadilly Theatre, July 1942)

In October 1943, a special committee was established to advise Customs and Excise on the eligibility (i.e. educational nature) of productions making application for exemption. This committee was chaired by Sir Ernest Pooley. Some of the early recommendations made by this committee seem, in retrospect, arbitrary and capricious.

[The committee] quickly demonstrated a self-defeating reluctance to enter into any controversy by advising an exemption for Charley's Aunt on the grounds it was a classic and refusing to recommend all plays by Priestley, Maugham, and Barrie because they were "controversial moderns."

In the period between 1939 and the revision of the Finance Act in 1946, tremendous changes had taken place in the commercial theatre. As a result of the war, the shortage of venture capital was beginning to be felt. Into this situation stepped savvy entrepreneurs such as Beaumont, who had found a way to take this apparent adversity and turn it round to the benefit of his company.

Outside money would be procured for an individual play and a special private limited company formed to run it; the established theatre management would receive, besides all the normal running expenses, a fixed weekly fee for management. The normal accepted weekly fee was £20. In 1949 it had risen to £40.

It was this weekly management fee, coupled with the exemption from Entertainment Tax, that provided Beaumont with the incentive to form a non-profit-distributing (roughly the equivalent of a non-profit) company. And, accordingly, Tennent Plays, Ltd., (later to become Tennent Productions, Ltd.) was set up with a

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8 Pooley was one of the governors of The Old Vic Trust, and would later serve as chairperson of The Arts Council of Great Britain.

9 Sherriffs 125.

10 Landstone 71.
non-profit constitution and with a board of directors virtually identical with that of the commercial firm of H.M. Tennent, Ltd.¹¹

With this arrangement of management entities, Beaumont had a nearly perfect setup. He retained H. M. Tennent, Ltd., as his chief production company and ran most of his large scale West End productions through it. Then there was Tennent Plays, Ltd., which was dissolved in 1947 and was replaced by Tennent Productions, Ltd. Tennent Plays/Productions, Ltd. operated with non-profit charters and were exempt from the payment of Entertainment Tax. Tennent Productions, Ltd., though it did do some producing itself, was chiefly a management company. It was responsible for the day-to-day management of shows that transferred into the West End. The responsibilities of the management company including advertising, collection of box-office receipts, accounting, payroll, payment of employment tax for actors and National Health stamps, and so on.

The Company of Four was a third entity. It, too, was set up with a non-profit distributing charter and was exempt from the payment of Entertainment Tax. Additionally, it functioned as a try-out theatre, of sorts, for H. M. Tennent, Ltd. and Tennent Productions, Ltd. Productions mounted by the Company of Four, would then be optioned or "managed" by Tennent Plays, Ltd., for which the company was paid a £40 a week management fee.

Consider the possibilities the exemption from Entertainment Tax, coupled with the management fee, presented. For example, when exemption from Entertainment Tax came under fire in the House of Commons in 1954, Mr. Woodrow Wyatt, the Labor Party M.P. from Birmingham provided the information that

¹¹ Landstone 71.
A Day By The Sea, then being presented by Tennent Plays, Ltd., at the Haymarket Theatre was "earning £3,000 a week, on which, if it were not exempted from entertainments tax, it would be paying the Exchequer £500 a week."  

When one considers that once Company of Four productions began to transfer, Tennent Plays, Ltd. regularly had four or five productions playing in the West End, on which they received the exemption from the payment of Entertainment Tax and £40 per week management fee, Tennent Plays, Ltd. was probably making between £2,000 and £2,600 a week by the careful manipulation of this exemption.

From the time exemption from the payment of Entertainment Tax was granted to Tennent Plays, Ltd., in 1942 there was considerable controversy. The first storm came when Tennent Plays, acting as management for John Gielgud, announced a West End season in 1943 that included Gielgud in Love for Love. A great hue and cry arose regarding the granting of exemption to a "bawdy play." While modern audiences would be hard pressed to find much bawdiness in Congreve's comedy, the public reaction at the time was considerable.

The second bone of contention was in regards to the salaries being paid by Tennent Plays to the actors, authors and designers that worked for them. During World War II, theatre managers and producers faced the troublesome prospect that they might lose days or whole weeks of box-office receipts as a result of the Blitz.

In an attempt to find a scheme that would allow production to continue and not drive smaller managements out of business if the worst happened, it became standard practice for managements to pay actors and authors a percentage of the gross, in much the same fashion that shareholders in Elizabethan companies received a designated percentages of the companies takings. Under the scheme in  

the late '30s and '40s, actors and authors were guaranteed a small salary, close to the minimum wage, and a percentage of the gross commensurate with their status with the company.

The trouble arose over the definition of "gross." Commercial managements, which were liable for the payment of entertainment tax, were forced, by necessity, to calculate gross on the box-office receipts less entertainment tax. Tax-exempt companies, such as Tennent Plays, Ltd., could, however, calculate their gross without deducting the tax. The result, was that, on comparably successful productions, actors and authors in the employ of Beaumont's tax-exempt companies received approximately thirty per cent more than they would from other managements, including his own for profit, H. M. Tennent, Ltd.

Beaumont, however, despite warnings from C.E.M.A., decided that all entitled to such payment should receive their percentages on the gross takings, without any previous deduction of the equivalent of Entertainment Tax. This, of course, raised the cry of unfair competition; obviously artists working for Tennent Plays, Ltd., and landlords letting their theatres could draw sums far above the market rate. 13

This inequity could result in a considerable difference in the remuneration received by an actor. Consider the case of the previously mentioned A Day by the Sea. At the time of its discussion in the House of Commons, A Day by the Sea was taking in approximately £3,000 at the box-office. N. C. Hunter's A Day by the Sea starred Sybil Thorndike, John Gielgud, Ralph Richardson and Lewis Casson. As leading lights of the day, they might reasonably expect to split ten per cent of the gross among themselves. This would come to £75 per actor. When one considers that, at the end of the war, the pound sterling was valued at $5.20, this would mean an additional $389.00 per week per actor in salary. Had the requisite Entertainment

13 Landstone 77.
Tax, in the amount of £500 been paid on this gross, the share received by each actor would have dropped to the equivalent of $312.40. The $75.00 difference in these two figures makes it easy to see why the Tennent management was one of the most popular in the West End.

Almost from the time of the passage of the Finance Act of 1946, controversy raged around Beaumont and the various arms of the Tennent management octopus. By December 1949, a Parliamentary Inquiry had been launched, in response to a memorandum from the Theatre Managers Association regarding Arts Council subsidy of commercial ventures. In reality, of course, members of the committee were attempting to determine the exact nature of the relationship between the profit-making H. M. Tennent, Ltd., Tennent Productions, Ltd., and the other venture with which Beaumont was heavily involved, The Company of Four. In his testimony before the Parliamentary Commission (an exchange that ran to one hundred and seventy two questions and answers) Beaumont "declared that the sum of £20,000 annually was required to be available to meet the running costs of the Lyric, Hammersmith, and explained how the initial capital, after the disastrous income tax decision had gone against Tennent Plays, Ltd., had been recovered by the generosity of the directors in agreeing to hand over the rights in September Tide to Tennent Productions, Ltd."

By 1954, the controversy concerning the working of Beaumont and the various parts of the Tennent organization had stirred again as the following excerpt from The Times indicates.

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14 Black 153. Beaumont refers to the earlier judgment by Customs and Excise that had removed the tax-exemption of Tennent Plays, Ltd. and in which Custom and Excise levied a fine of approximately £50,000 and had forced Tennent Plays Ltd. to go out of business and Tennent Productions, Ltd. to come into being.
MR. WYATT (Birmingham, Aston, Lab.) asked leave to introduce the Theatrical Companies Bill, to control non-profit-making theatrical companies. He said that the need for the Bill arose from the way in which some people were operating Section 8 of the 1946 Finance Act (sic), under which any play put on by a non-profit making company whose objects and aims were partly educational might be exempted from paying entertainment tax. The principal non-profit making company enjoying this concession in London was Tennent Productions, Ltd. There was another company with a similar name H. M. Tennent, Ltd. and the two companies shared the same director, Mr. Hugh Beaumont, who was the principal shareholder of the profit-making company. By a skillful use of the law concerning entertainment tax concessions, Mr. Beaumont had built up his profit-making company on substantial lines and had created a great theatrical empire. The non-profit-making company's current production, A Day By The Sea, had a cast which included three knights and a dame. The prices of the seats had been put up, and by the production of this and similar plays great reserves had been built up for the non-profit making company, which they then used to pay the actors far more substantial salaries than other theatrical companies could afford, putting on their plays at the best London theatres.

There would soon be five plays paying H. M. Tennent Ltd. £200 a week, and not one could be called in any way educational. Ten thousand pounds a year was earned in management fees by the profit-making company by this means. Other managers and producers were being squeezed out by the operation of this growing monopoly. He had nothing against Mr. Beaumont personally, but he was cleverly using the concession to build himself up as the greatest theatrical impresario in London. The Bill proposed that any director or principal in a non-profit-making company should not also be employed by or have a financial interest in a profit-making company, and that a non-profit-making company should not pay a management fee for any of its plays to a profit-making company.

MR. SYDNEY SILVERMAN (Nelson and Colne, Lab.) opposed the Bill. He said that there might be instances where it would have a completely crippling and paralyzing effect on every attempt to encourage real theatre by a non-profit-making company.

Two interesting points leap to mind. First, Wyatt’s contention regarding the rate at which salaries and rentals were being paid is distinctly at variance with the testimony that Beaumont gave before the Parliamentary Commission in 1949. Second, Silverman fails to give an example of how the passage of the bill might be deleterious to an "attempt to encourage real theatre by a non-profit-making company.

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15 The Times, 11 March 1954: 9

16 Landstone 77. "All further contracts, in accordance with theatrical custom, were to paid only on the sum remaining after deduction of the equivalent of the Entertainment Tax. To this Tennents have rigidly adhered."
company." Obviously, the company would save itself the £40 (roughly $200) management fee. If that consideration is put aside, the substance of the Bill can be seen to be an indictment of the managerial practices of Tennent Productions, Ltd., and the ethics of Beaumont.

On June 26, the Bill was re-introduced in the House for its second reading. Wyatt, in presenting the Bill again, indicated that he had had

. . . many representations from people in the theatrical industry who were strongly in favour of it. The exceptions had been employees or associates of one or other of the Tennent companies, who were the main beneficiaries of the entertainment tax concession to which it applied. It was significant that almost invariably those who had made representations in favor of the Bill had asked that their names should not be used, for fear that they would be banned by the Tennent organization either from acting or obtaining a theatre, or carrying on their business in the profession. They included extremely well-known people and members of the Society of West End Theatre Managers.17

Mr. Nigel Fisher (Conservative Party, Hitchin), in presenting opposition to the Bill, made the observation that the Bill might have a detrimental effect on the theatre, in relationship to "its traditional competitor, the cinema, and television."

Mr. Boyd-Carpenter, who, by this time, had become Financial Secretary of the Treasury, said that "if there was evidence of serious abuse of the existing financial provision the Government would not hesitate to take action to remedy it, but they were not convinced that this was taking place at present. It was not a Bill for which the Government could provide special facilities."18

This statement from Boyd-Carpenter was a strong signal that the Theatrical Companies Bill would not receive support from the party then in power. Essentially,

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17 The Times, 26 June 1954: 9.
18 The Times, 26 June 1954: 9.
this guaranteed that the Bill would die in committee. Whitaker's Almanack\textsuperscript{19}, which contains a digest of Parliamentary Proceedings, has no listing for the Theatrical Companies Bill for any of the years between 1954 and 1958.

The introduction of the Theatrical Companies Bill, however, had focused the attention of both Parliament and the theatrical community on the issue on Entertainment Tax. In January 1955, a joint committee of the two houses, chaired by Mr. Dingle Foot, Q.C. (Queen's Counsel) was set up to consider the effect of the entertainment duty as it affect theatrical and 'analogous arts' in Great Britain\textsuperscript{20}. This committee also had representation from the major unions such as British Actors' Equity Association, and the National Association of Theatrical and Kine employees.

Between the time the committee was formed and the memorandum that outlined its findings was presented to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, an interesting article appeared in The Times, under the headline "Stage Casualties of Entertainment Tax: Nine Months Run and No Profit."

Some facts about the recent surprising withdrawal of two plays which seemed to be have settled down for really long runs in the West End were contained in a statement made yesterday by Mr. Peter Saunders. Both The Manor of Northstead and Witness for the Prosecution were casualties of entertainment tax. The Manor of Northstead, which ran for nine months at the Duchess Theatre and took in about £47,500, after paying entertainment tax of £8,451 10s 3 1/2d., actually involved Mr. Saunders in a loss of some £1,000.\textsuperscript{21}

Saunders humorously likened the plight of the theatre, both profit-making and non-, to "the reign of Henry VIII, when Lord Chancellor Morton declared that


\textsuperscript{20} Herbert 113-115.

\textsuperscript{21} The Times, 15 February 1955: 10.
those who appeared wealthy could well afford to pay high taxes and those those who appeared poor could even better afford it because clearly they had been saving money.\textsuperscript{22}

The previous quote is included because it provides a parallel to the case cited of \textit{A Day By The Sea}, and because the timing of this statement by Saunders is too opportune to be overlooked. The commercial theatre was obviously marshaling its forces. Saunders' statement appeared in \textit{The Times} just two days before the announcement that the Committee which had been formed would pay a call on the Chancellor of the Exchequer to urge the exemption of all forms of live theatre from the payment of entertainment tax.

The memorandum presented by the committee included some interesting statistics as regards provincial and suburban theatres. According to the findings of this committee, in tax year 1953, of the forty five provincial theatres from which statistics were gathered, only sixteen had made a profit on their productions, while twenty nine reported a loss. And of those that had reported a profit, only in three instances was the profit as much as fifty percent of the total tax paid. At seventeen of the theatres that made a loss, it was less than the amount of the duty.

Despite the attempted Parliamentary slap on the hands that the Theatrical Companies Bill represented, Beaumont and the Company of Four continued production through the end of 1956. It was the end of The Company's lease on the Lyric, coupled with a "decline" in fortunes that put an end to the venture. As Black reports:

There were to be only a couple more productions at the Lyric under the aegis of The Company of Four, and the lease was up at the end of March, 1956. At that time there had been 69 productions, of which 23 had transferred, but as the lease would have required a long term renewal, it was felt that the

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{The Times}, 15 February 1955: 10.
financial commitment was too high. £20,000 annually was needed to cover the almost certain losses, and as the firm's reserves stood at only £20,151 they preferred to call it a day and retire on their laurels.

Between its inception in 1945 and the cessation of production in 1956, The Company of Four transferred twenty three productions to the West End, where they were managed by Tennent Productions, Ltd. Each of these productions netted Tennent the aforementioned management fee at the rate of approximately £40 per week.

Some of the productions, such as *Dark of the Moon*, did not fare well and closed after very brief runs. Some of the productions, such as *Tuppence Coloured* and *Oranges and Lemons*, enjoyed incredible commercial success in the West End, and lengthy runs for which they paid no Entertainment Tax. An indication of the difference this made in the amount of money recouped is given by Black in reference to the previously mentioned *September Tide*:

Had the play been presented by HMT(ennent) Ltd., the firm would have acquired a net gain of £18,829.9s.1d. By foregoing this very attractive return on their investment, the net gain to the non-profit-making company was £39,578.16s.0d.24

In other words, the difference in profit for this single production was slightly in excess of the £20,000 a year that Beaumont maintained was required to operate the Company of Four at the Lyric, Hammersmith.

Between 1954, when the Theatrical Companies Bill was introduced in Parliament, and 1956, the Company mounted only six productions. Three of these--

23 Black 225.

24 Black 149.
The Cherry Orchard, Hedda Gabler and Misalliance—were revivals of classics. Sandy Wilson's The Buccaneer, Patricia Moyes's translation of Jean Anouilh's Leocadia (under the title Time Remembered), and Christopher Fry's translation of Anouilh's The Lark were productions of new scripts. Three of these—Hedda Gabler, Time Remembered and The Buccaneer—transferred to West End theatres after their Lyric, Hammersmith, runs.

In 1957 a Conservative Government was elected and gained control of the House of Commons. In presenting his Address on the Budget, Mr. Thornycroft, Chancellor of the Exchequer made the following proposal.

First, I propose that the living theatre should be freed from duty altogether (loud cheers). The cost of this, including certain other entertainments at present charged under the first scale, will be £2,250,000.25

Thornycroft's budget proposal included repeal of all entertainment tax levied against sporting events and a drastically reduced scale for those taxes against the cinema and television.

After seven major attempts to abolish [Entertainment] tax on theatre since 1933, a motion backed by 235 Members of Parliament and referring to "the importance to the prestige, culture and well-being of the nation of preserving the living theatre" was accepted by the Treasury in 1957. The Chancellor of the Exchequer of the day, Mr. Thornycroft, announced the abolition of the tax on theatre and all sport and a lowering of the tax on cinema—the loss in revenue was estimated at £12,250,000 per year given after a tax on television licenses had been established—in April of 1957.26

With this abolition, the particular emoluments attached to non-profit-making theatrical production that had made Tennent Plays, Tennent Productions and The

25 Times. 10 April 1957: 5.
26 Sherriffs 131-132.
Company of Four extremely lucrative ventures disappeared. The activities of these three organizations had certainly helped to focus the attention of both the theatrical profession and of Parliament on the question of Entertainment Tax and exemption from payment of the same.

Conclusion

Between 1945 and 1956, The Company of Four produced sixty-nine productions at the Lyric, Hammersmith, of which twenty three transferred to the West End for commercial runs. It would be misleading to make the impression that Beaumont, H. M. Tennent, Ltd., Tennent Productions, Ltd. and The Company of Four were the only firms engaged in this sort of activity. The producer and manager of the New Theatre, Bronson Albery, for example, had Albery Productions, Ltd., a profit-making, tax-paying production company and Una Productions, Ltd., which was non-profit and did not pay entertainment tax. Beaumont and H. M. Tennent, Ltd., however, were the only producers transferring productions on such a scale and with such frequency.

The precedent of transferring a production from the management of a subsidized or tax-exempt theatre, such as the National Theatre or the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, to a separately constituted profit-making and corporate income tax paying corporation in the end proved exceedingly beneficial to the theatre. The benefit could be clearly seen with the National Theatre's wildly successful productions of *Guys and Dolls* (1977) and *Amadeus* (1979). Both of these productions went on to enjoy lengthy runs in the West End, under commercial management, following their runs in the repertory of the National Theatre. The same holds true of the Broadway success *Les Miserables* (1986), which was first produced in Great Britain not by one of the major commercial producers, but by the
Royal Shakespeare Company. The enormous success of these productions and the revenues that they produced helped underwrite some of the less commercially viable offerings in the repertories of these two companies. In much the same way Tuppence Coloured, which transferred to the Globe for a lengthy run, most certainly helped pay the bills for Captain Brassbound's Conversion.

The analogy is, of course, not exactly parallel. With the four week tour that proceeded many of the Company of Four productions, there must already have been strong indications as to the box-office potential of the productions before they ever opened at the Lyric, Hammersmith. And, of course, both of the state subsidized theatres mentioned here are much more likely to extend the run of a success by keeping it in the repertory. This practice both increases the ticket revenues of the National and the RSC and saves these theatres the cost of rental on a West End facility.

Nevertheless, productions mounted by the state subsidized theatre transfer, and they do so in part because of the acumen of Beaumont and the example of the financial gains to be made shown by the Company of Four. For this reason, the Company of Four may be regarded as a paradigm, even if a faulty or negative one.
Chapter IV:

The Company of Four as a Producer of New Plays
by British Authors

Perhaps one the the most noteworthy accomplishments of the Company of Four during the tenure at the Lyric was the number of new plays by British authors that it produced. Consider that during its eleven year tenure it did first productions of thirty new scripts by British playwrights—or an average of between two and three new scripts a year.\(^1\) This equals the number of new scripts by British playwrights produced in most years by the National Theatre of Great Britain, an organization that operates with a considerable government subsidy, and with three performance spaces.\(^2\)

Before proceeding with an examination of the sources of new scripts for the venture, it might be helpful to define what is meant by "new plays."

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\(^1\) In the years between 1945, when the Company began production, and 1950, they produced twenty new scripts by English authors. In the years between 1950 and 1956, when the Company ceased production, they produced only ten new scripts by English authors and two of these were revues.

\(^2\) How one determines the average number of new scripts produced by The National Theatre is problematic. During the first season in The Old Vic, for instance, the National produced two new scripts: Pete Shaffer's *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* and Charles Wood's *Dingo*. During its first season in its new South Bank facility, the National Theatre actually presented four new plays: *Watch it Come Down* (John Osborne), *Weapons of Happiness* (Howard Brenton), *Counting the Ways* (Edward Albee) and *State of Revolution* (Robert Bolt). On the average, however, the National Theatre presents two or three new scripts a season.
A number of works included in this chapter and considered as having been first produced by the Company at the Lyric, had had prior productions. These productions were generally a single performance given by a non-commercial production company, such as The Services Sunday Society, or short runs at one of the smaller theatres, such as the New Boltons Theatre or the Mercury, both of which functioned in much the same way that the "fringe theatres" or off-Broadway function today. However, for the purposes of this study, plays that the Company presented for their first commercial run in London will be considered as having been premiered by the Company. Where a question exists as to whether or not the script had been previously produced in London, I have relied on the index of plays presented in London included in each of the numerous editions of Who's Who in the Theatre and Glenn Loney's Twentieth-Century Theatre.

Even though the production of new plays was one of the stated purposes of the venture, examination of the production history of the Company reveals that there were a larger number of new plays produced in the first six or seven years of the

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3 The Services Sunday Society was one of the seven independent "Sunday producing Societies" listed in the 1952 edition of Stage Yearbook (London: Carson and Comerford, 1953) 37. These societies, the most famous of which is, perhaps, the Repertory Players, functioned in much the same way that Equity Showcase and workshop productions do, in giving playwrights an opportunity to see and hear their work performed. It also allowed managements to preview work that they might later produce for a commercial run. The Mercury Theatre and the Arts Theatre were two theatres that functioned much like off-Broadway to fringe theatres.

4 Who's Who in the Theatre was first published in 1912, under the editorial guidance of John Parker, by Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, Publishers, of London. It is an invaluable source of information on actors, casts, seasons and so forth. Glenn Loney's 20th Century Theatre (New York: Facts on File, 1983) is a more anecdotal approach to much of the same material, with the addition of material on the New York seasons. My own research has proved that Loney's work is less than reliable, and where a disagreement in fact occurs, future scholars would be advised to accept the word of Parker and his contributors.
venture than in the final five or six. Whether this was the result of changes in the management over its eleven year existence, or whether, following the general hiatus in theatrical production during the war, there was a larger than usual pool of scripts awaiting production is impossible to say. Nevertheless, any consideration of the history of the Company, and of theatrical history in this period, must take into account the fact that the Company of Four was among the most vigorous and active producers of new scripts in the years immediately following the war.

As has been stated earlier, both Beaumont and the Tennent staff in general were very much committed to keeping up on the work of other managements and artists now working for the Tennent management. Members of the staff were regularly sent off to see performances in both the fringe theatres and in the regional theatres that were just beginning to make their impact felt. This practice not only provided them with several scripts that they subsequently produced, but it also provided an idea of what sorts of plays were proving successful for other theatres.\(^5\)

Obviously, the majority of new scripts produced by the Company were brought to their attention either by playwrights who wanted their work produced, or by directors who had been given the scripts by the authors and wanted to direct them for the Company.

There were two factors that made playwrights offer the Tennent organization, and later, The Company of Four, first refusal on scripts. The arrangement with the

\(^5\) As Kitty Black reveals, it was this habit of sending members of the firm to see other productions that actually saved the firm of H. M. Tennent. During the first eight months of trading, Tennent and Beaumont managed to lose their entire investment. At about this time Elsie Beyer, the firm secretary went off to see a production on a Sunday evening by the Repertory players and was so impressed with it that she immediately got the firm to buy the rights. The play was Gerald Savory's *George and Margaret*, which ran for over a year at Wyndham's Theatre and saved the fortunes of the firm.
Company included a four week tour prior to the London opening, which functioned— for British playwrights—in much the same way a pre-Broadway tour or tryout worked for new American plays. It represented a chance to refine and polish the script, and to let actors gain the experience of playing the show before an audience. Conrad Aiken, who helped adapt his short story "Mr. Arcularis" into Fear No More writes about this tryout period in his foreword to the published edition of the play:

I traveled with the Company to Bristol and Cardiff and Brighton, working closely with Peter Ashmore: "sitting in" at all rehearsals, "writing in" the new material, chopping and changing the old, mostly in hotel bedrooms at midnight; trying out, on stage, the most minute and apparently negligible variations in phrasing or rhythm, allowing the actors themselves to "ad-lib" a fragment of "business" or dialogue; and then together selecting whatever seemed best to work. A fascinating and unforgettable experience, one of the most rewarding, in what I could learn from it, that I have ever known.

The second factor that cannot be lightly dismissed is that, as one of the two or three most powerful production companies in London, the Tennent organization was in a position to give these new scripts first-class productions.

They (writers) always had the very best: the best theatres, the best designers and, of course, the best actors. So, of course, consequently, they were all mad to come and work for us.

Sometimes, plays came to the attention of the Company in unusual or roundabout ways. The Same Sky, for instance, was the first effort at writing by Yvonne Mitchell. As The Times of 31 December 1951 announced:

The play, which won the first prize in the competition organized by the Arts Council as part of the Festival of Britain, is to be produced at the Lyric, Hammersmith at the end of next month.8

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7 Kitty Black, personal interview, 21 July 1983.

8 The Times, 31 December 1951: 6.
This production, and the relationship it implies between the Company of Four and the Arts Council of Great Britain is particularly interesting, in terms of later developments.

It very quickly became known in the theatrical community that, with a change of bill every four weeks, the Company was always on the lookout for interesting new scripts. So, as the result of competitions, from the fringe and theatre clubs, by interested directors and playwrights, new scripts came to the attention of the Company of Four and were a not inconsiderable part of the repertory that it produced by the Company in the first half of its tenure at the Lyric, Hammersmith.

While the plays produced by the Company represent an eclectic group of scripts, there were several types of plays that remained a consistent part of the repertory. Poetic drama continued to be a staple of the repertory. Along with giving first productions to three of Christopher Fry's poetic one acts, Boy with a Cart (1950), Thor, with Angels and A Phoenix Too Frequent (both 1951) and Peter Yates's The Assassin (1956), the Company also gave the first production in England of Ronald Duncan's adaptation of Cocteau's The Eagle Has Two Heads (1946), and Fry's adaptation of Anouilh's The Lark (1955). The Company continued to provide poetic drama a home long after it had been abandoned by the rest of the theatrical establishment.9

The second genre that continued to make up a noticeable part of the Company's repertory might most accurately be described as "drawing room

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9 "poetic drama: a term applied to plays written in verse or in a heightened 'poetic' style, which in the 19th and 20th centuries, constituted an attempt to restore the medium of poetry to the stage." Hartnell, ed. Oxford Companion 4th ed. Boy . . . (1950), Thor . . . (1951), Phoenix . . . (1951), Assassin . . . (1946), Eagle . . . (1946) and The Lark (1955) were the production dates for the plays mentioned above. Poetic drama was an emergent form in the years between 1930 and 1950.
comedy/drama." Among scripts produced by the Company that fall into this category are Wynyard Browne's The Holly and the Ivy (1950)\textsuperscript{10} and Castle Anna (1948)\textsuperscript{11}, by Elizabeth Bowen and John Perry.

This study will examine two other genres at greater length. The first of these includes plays written about or against a background of World War II. The second genre is revue, an hybrid variety of musical theatre that derived from the operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan and from vaudeville. While the choice of these two and the exclusion of the two other genres here mentioned is arbitrary, an examination of works produced by the Company in the two broad categories of revues and plays about the war genres will provide a scaled down version of the production history of the Company. Additionally, it was with plays about the war that the Company had the least commercial success and with the revues that it achieved the greatest success.

\textsuperscript{10} The Holly and The Ivy was premiered by the Company on 28 March 1950. Wynyard Browne had also written Dark Summer, which the company had produced in 1947. The son of an Anglican clergyman, Browne was also a novelist.

\textsuperscript{11} John Perry and Elizabeth Bowen's Castle Anna was produced by the Company 24 February 1948. By this time Perry had become Managing Director of the Company of Four.
The War Plays

It is perhaps a truism of literary and theatrical history that the English theatre was more concerned with and dealt with World War II in a quintessentially different fashion than did the American dramatic literature and theatre of the same period. This is explicable because England entered the war much earlier than did the United States, and as a result of the Blitz, the war was being fought, figuratively, in English back yards. This difference could not help but be reflected in the dramatic literature that arose as a result of that conflict. Plays that used World War II as dramatic material were seen in the offerings of the Company as well, and, of the thirty new plays by British authors that they presented, four directly dealt with the World War II or subjects closely related to it.

The Shouting Dies (1945)--An Inauspicious Beginning

The Shouting Dies was "nobody's choice for a play to open (the Company's first season) with"¹² but the Company's opening at the Lyric had been delayed several times while waiting for Emlyn Williams to finish rewriting his play, Spring, 1600. Finally, it was decided to go ahead and open the venture with a new play by Ronda Keane.¹³


¹³ A search of the National Union Catalog, both pre-1956 and post-1956, reveals no other work under Keane's name. Nor does it reveal the publication of this work. Keane may, of course, have written, as did many authors in this period, under a pseudonym in different forms. One possibility exists that this was a collaboration between M. J. Farrell (1904- ) and John Perry. Farrell and Perry had already collaborated on another play, Spring Meeting (1938). According to the Pseudonyms and Nicknames Dictionary, Farrell's real name was Mary Nesta Skrine Keane and as a novelist she wrote under the pseudonym Molly Keane. The Shouting Dies may have been another Keane-Perry collaboration under yet another pseudonym.
In retrospect, the play seems an unorthodox choice for a first production and unlikely to attract audiences still pulling their lives together following the destruction of World War II. Conversely, the play had a topicality that might make a later production both less feasible and less attractive. And the play did have several things to recommend it: it was a new play and it had a small cast on a single set. Directed by Murray MacDonald, *The Shouting Dies* starred Joan Young and Margaret Johnston, and opened on 5 October 1945.

There seemed little to distinguish either the play or the performances as the beginning of what purported to be a distinguished venture, and such was noted by the critics reviewing the play.

This is an unhappily small play for a big experiment; the opening of the Company of Four's high reign at the Lyric, Hammersmith. Lest we forget, Miss Ronda Keane warns us that this is not a time to forgive. Her German finds—like a very different personage—that, in one sense, his future can be only his past entered through another gate. A play of good intentions but of less substantial achievement.  

The play was as readily dismissed by the reviewer from *The Times*:

> No doubt an exciting topical play might spring from the plight of an American girl, who enamoured of a man she supposes to be a Dane of German extraction, discovers that he is a Nazi prepared to plead the necessity of Belsen . . . . but this is not the play, so naive its assumptions, so oversimplified its characterizations, and the Company of Four would seem to have their new enterprise moving off on the wrong foot.  


14 J. C. Trewin, *The Observer*, 7 October 1945: 2

Since there were other plays running in the West End that dealt with the war, it would be unfair to assume that The Shouting Dies was dismissed by the critics because of its subject matter. Seemingly, it was the handling of the subject matter—"less substantial achievement" and "naive . . . assumptions"—that the critics found fault with in regard to the work.

Little can be said to redeem The Shouting Dies, either as a dramatic work or as a portentous beginning for the Company of Four. Still, the Company must be given credit for, after delays, "sinning bravely" in finally commencing production, and for having produced a new script by an English writer.

An English Summer (1948)

An English Summer, by Ronald Adam, had previously been produced for a single performance at Wyndham's Theatre in December of 1947, by the Services Sunday Society.16

Adam was born into a theatrical family that went back several generations. After a brief stint as a chartered accountant, he began acting in 1926 and took up management in 1932. As an actor-manager, Adam mounted over one hundred and fifty productions between 1932 and 1939 in repertory theatres and in short seasons in London. In 1939 he joined the R.A.F., where he served as Wing-Commander from 1939 to 1945. It was his experience in the R.A.F. that provided the dramatic material for An English Summer, his first completely original work.17

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16 Who's Who in the Theatre, 11th ed., p. 80

17 Adam had helped adapt Professor Bernhardi and The Melody that Got Lost. He later wrote A Wind on the Heath and a book of reminiscences entitled Overtures and Beginners.
In this play, Adam was attempting to make use of dramatic techniques that had been introduced in the United States in such plays as *Waiting for Lefty*. *An English Summer* is an almost objective recording of the daily life of an R.A.F. squadron stationed in the south of England during the height of the Battle of Britain.

Directed by Ronald Crier, the production was a showcase for young character actors returning after the war. Andre Morell and Peter Hammond played the two central characters, Sqd/Ldr. Henry Armstrong and Flt/Off. George Mayhew, unknowingly father and son. Unfortunately, they did so to less than enthusiastic reviews.

Any technically veracious stage representation of the Battle of Britain must stir our emotions, and Mr. Ronald Adams' is one which a great many people will be thrilled to see. It is not a good play in the sense that *Journey's End* and, in a lesser degree, *Flare Path* were good plays. The little story it chooses to tell is pinned, as it were, on the face of battle, the grim reality of which exposes its artificiality.  

The artificiality of the central dramatic (or melodramatic) conflict was the point upon which J. C. Trewin, in *The Observer*, took Adam to task.

All of this is tingling document-stuff bound to stiff the spirit. The pity of it is that Mr. Adam has tried to tack to the theme a piece of fiction that is as facile and contrived as the reporting of the battle is veracious.  

The "facile and contrived" fiction to which Trewin refers deals with Squadron Leader Armstrong, who discovers that one of the men in his command— one that he must order into the air with scant hope of seeing return— is a son from whom he has been estranged for many years. *An English Summer*, neither a critical nor a popular success, closed at the end of its four week run.

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The Same Sky (1952)

An English Summer appears to have quelled the Company's ardor for plays dealing with the war, for it was four years before they undertook the production of another, the above mentioned The Same Sky, by Yvonne Mitchell. Mitchell had begun her career in 1939 in Great Expectations. Her first London appearance had come in 1944 as Teresa in The Cradle Song. She had played roles as varied as Eliza in Pygmalion (1951, Embassy Theatre) and Electra in The Flies (1951, New). Later in the 1952 season, she would appear as Avonia Bunn in Trelawney of the Wells for the Company of Four.

As part of the Festival of Britain, The Arts Council sponsored a playwriting competition. There were five winners, with each of the winning scripts being given production by companies that were "in association with The Arts Council of Great Britain." Mitchell's production was among the most prestigious, since it was by a company closely allied with the leading London theatrical producer and was the only one of the prize-winning plays produced in London. The other winning plays, for example, were given productions at smaller regional theatres like the Guildford Repertory Company.\(^{20}\)

The Same Sky is set in the Jewish East End of London, and is a none too thinly veiled reworking of the Romeo and Juliet story. In this version, however, a young Jewish girl, Esther Brodksy, defies her orthodox upbringing to wed a gentile airman as he is about to leave for the Front. This situation enrages the intensely

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\(^{20}\) The 1953 Stage Yearbook carries notification of the prize winners and the companies that will produce them. Apparently Mitchell's script was originally titled Here Chose I, and was slated for production at the Nottingham Playhouse. (The 1953 Stage Yearbook, London: Carson and Comerford, 1953.)
religious pater familias, who takes his daughter back into the household, but refuses to speak to her. Their long battle is ended only when news is received that Esther's husband has been killed in battle.

The play makes an interesting juxtaposition to the Adam play that the Company had produced four years earlier. In the Adam play the broad sweep of the canvas is World War II, with the relationship between father/commander and estranged son/flier being but one brushstroke on that canvas. In the Mitchell play, the reverse is true. The dramatic throughline of the play is the Brodsky household, particularly the relationship between Esther and Poppa Brodsky, and the war seems almost incidental to the conflict between them. The Mitchell play is also interesting, in its portrayal of Poppa Brodsky's extreme orthodoxy as the factor dividing the family.

The Company gave the play a production commensurate with being a winner of the Festival of Britain playwriting competition. It was directed by Daphne Rye and the Brodsky parents were played by Frederick Valk and Thora Hird, two character actors of considerable reputation. Frances Hyland played the other central role of Esther.

The play opened in Hammersmith to reviews that can be characterized as mixed:

About this play there is less to be said than one had expected. Yvonne Mitchell is among the best of the younger English actresses, and I had illogically hoped that her play would yield the same excitement as her acting. The story . . . is moving, but unoriginal, though it does justice to its theme and would be a creditable first achievement for any dramatist.²¹

For most of the reviewers, the real achievement of the piece was the accuracy with which Mitchell had observed and put down life in the Brodsky household.

... Mitchell presents the family life in great detail. It is well observed detail.

Its chief quality lies in the way in which the author has caught the staccato bustle of the Brodsky household.23

I hope that Yvonne Mitchell will continue in writing as well as in acting, for her dialogue is natural.24

Unfortunately, Ivor Brown, who included the above in his was not to have his wish granted.

Miss Mitchell has announced that she intends to write no more plays. For those who have not yet made such a renunciation, the main object lesson of The Same Sky is the importance of having a subplot. At this dramatic level, a single situation, however poignant cannot be prolonged for two and half hours.25

Mitchell stood by her word. The Same Sky was the only dramatic work she ever produced. The Same Sky, however, transferred to the Duke of York Theatre, following its run at the Lyric. It closed forty four performances after its transfer.

The River Line (1952)

With Charles Morgan's The River Line the Company experienced the greatest success that it was to enjoy with a war play. The play opened on 2 September

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22 The Times, unsigned review 1 February 1952: 2.


1952, after an initial production by the Company as part of the 1952 Edinburgh Festival.

At the time of this production Morgan was one of the literary lions of England. Born in 1894, he entered the Royal Navy in 1907, at the age of thirteen, one of the last generation of adolescent "cabin boys" to enter His Majesty's Service in this fashion. He was taken prisoner very early in World War I, and held prisoner in Holland for the duration of the war. While in prison, he wrote his first novel, The Gunroom, which was published in 1919. It quickly became a cause celebre, as much because it was openly critical of the Royal Navy as because it was by a promising young author.

In that same year, Morgan entered Brasenose College, Oxford, where he was active in the O.U.D.S. Upon graduation he joined the editorial staff of The Times. In 1926 he was promoted to the position of principal dramatic critic, a post he held until 1939. Just prior to leaving The Times, he had written his first play, The Flashing Stream, which had been produced with some success. He earned a considerable reputation as a lecturer and essayist, and in 1949 was elected a membre de l'institute de France. It was in this same year that The River Line first appeared as a novel. Morgan had originally conceived of the work as a play but had some trouble in determining its dramatic shape and eventually settled on the novel as the appropriate form. The thought that the material of The River Line was inherently dramatic continued with him, and three years later he adapted the novel for the stage himself.26

26 This biographical sketch is a synopsis of the extended biography that appears at the beginning of Selected Letters of Charles Morgan, Eiluned Lewis ed. (London: Macmillan, 1967) 2-41.
It is interesting that the Company should choose to produce *The River Line*, for it bears many similarities (tone, technique and subject matter) to the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, whose work the Company of Four also helped to introduce in England.

The play deals with a reunion of a group of resistance fighters who have been an outpost on 'the river line,' the underground railroad that helped to return downed fliers to England. This particular group has had the unpleasant experience of having to kill one of their own number, the brother of one of the people at the reunion, when considerable evidence mounted that he might be a double agent. The play deals with the emotional hazards of war on a much more philosophical plane than did some of the other war plays produced by the Company of Four. It poses much the same existential questions as does Sartre's *Men Without Shadows*, which will be discussed in a subsequent chapter.

One can only assume that the merit of this play must have been apparent, for it received a production much more illustrious than any of the war plays that had preceded it. The play was directed by Michael McCowan, and the pivotal roles of Phillip Sturgess and Marie Chassiagne were played by Paul Scofield and Pamela Brown. Two of the smaller roles were played by Virginia McKenna and Robert Hardy, who later went on to distinguish themselves in *Born Free* and *All Creatures, Great and Small*, respectively. Settings for *The River Line* were by Alan Tagg, with costumes by the design team known as Motley,\(^\text{27}\) who would later be associated with the Gielgud season for the Company of Four.

\(^{27}\) The design team was made up of Elizabeth Montgomery, Sophie Harris, and Margaret Harris. They were later involved with the Gielgud season at the Lyric and were the designers of the original production of *South Pacific*. Their textbook on costume design, *Designing and Making Stage Costumes*, (London: Studio Vista, Ltd., 1964) is considered one of the standards texts in the field.
Whether it was because *The River Line* had originally been published as a novel, or because Morgan's early reputation had been earned as a novelist was to blame, the majority of critical responses dealt with the piece's literary rather than theatrical merits. W. A. Darlington lead the critical community in his evaluation of the piece:

A second visit crystalizes and confirms the opinion I formed of it at Edinburgh a fortnight ago. It is by no means a faultless piece of work, and for two thirds of its length its virtues are literary rather than theatrical. But it is far and away the most interesting new play that has been seen on our stage for many months past.28

J. C. Trewin, in a long magazine article on the many offerings of the Edinburgh Festival, gave a similar but less vehement assessment.

Mr. Morgan uses this moral predicament (the guilt or innocence of the agent 'Heron') to discuss the problem of responsibility, and to acclaim the gift of 'interior grace;' he writes with all his civilized imagination, if with intermittent dramatic force.29

Despite this "damning with faint praise," *The River Line* must be considered both a popular and a critical success. After its four weeks at the Lyric, the production transferred to the Strand Theatre for a run of one hundred and fifty performances. By this time, however, transfer to the West End was becoming commonplace for Company of Four productions. A final interesting footnote to *The River Line* occurred in 1955, when *The River Line* was televised, one of the first dramatic works to be accorded this distinction.


The War Plays—Summary

The Company's war plays were as diverse in viewpoints as the four people who wrote them. The first two can be summed up as "nobody's choice to open with" and one of the first English experiments in documentary drama. They were by writers with little or no reputation and fell into obscurity very quickly after the Company of Four production. The last two, The Same Sky and The River Line, are not so readily dismissed. Both achieved some measure of critical success and transferred to West End theatres following the Lyric production. The Same Sky may have succeeded as a result of its curiosity value. It was a "prize winner," a first play by a well-known actress, and had an odd reversal in portraying the orthodox Jewish father as an autocrat and villain.

Of the four that have been considered here, The River Line has the most dramatic potential. Its characters are nicely drawn. It poses questions of real philosophical heft and its writing is very stylish. Add to this that it was by a writer of some reputation and it is easy to see why it succeeded.

One interesting sidelight is provided by looking at the placement of these productions within the long roster of Company of Four productions. As the opening production, The Shouting Dies had remarkable visibility but the habit of transferring productions had not yet begun. An English Summer was produced in the middle of a season that had five other shows transfer to West End theatres. The Same Sky shared much the same fate. It was the third show to transfer in a season that had three other transfers. It was almost as though the producers were reminding the public that one part of the Company's mission was the production of plays that did not have tremendous commercial potential in a season when they were transferring virtually everything else they produced.
The war plays make an interesting microcosmic study of the entire tenure of the Company of Four and raise questions about the commercial nature of the offerings of this not-profit-distributing company that are even more glaring when one considers another set of plays, the revues.

The Revues

With one particular genre, The Company of Four had a remarkable record of success. Every revue produced by the Company transferred to a West End theatre and enjoyed a lengthy run following its stay at the Lyric, Hammersmith.

By the end of World War I, "revue" had come to signify a distinctly English form that meant a collection of songs, sketches, and comic turns—a form that differed from music hall and burlesque, and from the American vaudeville, in its use of topical material. There were producers that the English theatregoing public associated with this form (Herbert Farjeon, C.B Cochran, Andre Charlot), but Beaumont was not one of them.

... putting on a revue is a very different matter from the technique required for a straight play and the firm had no expertise in the new field.... Although the formula of the intimate revue was eventually proved to be exactly what the public wanted, Binkie admitted ruefully that this was something entirely outside his experience; the firm never touched the medium again until after the war when Laurier Lister showed them how to do things at the Lyric, Hammersmith.

For that reason, it is safe to assume that the revues produced by The Company of Four were the result of interest on the part of the individual directors who put them together, rather than the idea of Beaumont.

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30 Black, 39.
The Company's first revue came very early in its production history, with *Tuppence Coloured*, which opened on 4 September 1947. The title was derived from pulp magazines of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which were available in two formats—"penny plain" (without colored pictures) or "tuppence coloured." The title was meant to imply, of course, that this was a most elaborate edition of a revue, with no expense spared.

One of the great charms of revue, and one of its strengths, was that it allowed a group of writers to contribute one or two numbers each rather than making it necessary for one writer to produce an entire evening of topical material. This gave the evening considerable diversity and also allowed the producer/director to mix materials from seasoned revue writers with that of new and untried writers.

*Tuppence Coloured* was arranged by Laurier Lister, who had already been involved with the Company through his work for the Apollo Society. With this type of revue, much of the success depends on the correct blend of sketches and song, both serious and satiric. In attempting to arrive at this blend, Lister prevailed upon some of the most pre-eminent theatre composers and writers to provide material. Besides including material already popularized by Edith Piaf ("La Vie En Rose"/Piaf/Louiguy) and Ethel Waters ("Suppertime" by Irving Berlin), Lister was also able to persuade Benjamin Britten (who had provided incidental music for other Company of Four productions) to realize several settings of songs by John Gay and

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*Penny Plain*, was, in fact, the title of the next revue mounted by Laurier Lister, which made use of the talents, once again, of Max Adrian, Elisabeth Welsh and Joyce Grenfell.
Thomas Arne. And since Joyce Grenfell would be performing, Lister called upon the services of Richard Addinsell, her frequent collaborator.

The material contributed was eclectic in the extreme. It ranged from "Early Snow"—a Noh play by Komparu Zemblo Motoyasu, translated by Arthur Waley and directed by Peter Brook—to "Matinee," a wickedly funny sketch by Arthur Macrae that lampooned the English habit of the audience taking tea in the theatre, by having the company on stage do the same.

The casting of the revue was as stellar as the choice of material. The company numbered ten, including Max Adrian, Denis Martin, Elisabeth Welch, and Joyce Grenfell, all of whom enjoyed considerable reputations as comedians and, in the case of Welch, as a song stylist. Settings and costumes were minimal, but at least one set of scenery stopped the show. For the "La Vie En Rose" number, Hurbert Gurschner recreated Edouard Manet's "A La Bar De La Follie Bergere."

Another wonderful scenic effect was for Max Adrian's appearance as a railway signalman in "Between The Lines." Lister was able to have the setting designed by Emett, a popular cartoonist then drawing for the magazine "Punch."

Joyce Grenfell recounts the initial stages of the work.

I was involved with *Tuppence Coloured* from the beginning, and I should think it was classic example of revue-making. Outside advice came from all sides: 'Beware of artiness.' 'Don't let in too much Beauty.' 'Insist on strong direction.' Yes, I said, of course; and hoped for the best in fluctuating moods of gloom and optimism . . . . Our spirits went up and down like yo-yos after the usual enthusiastic read-through when the material seemed so original and imaginative . . . . then one of those inexplicable theatrical wonders happened—overnight the show jelled, tautened, took shape and flew. When the press and public came to the first performance . . . they found a fresh, imaginative and entertaining little revue and they welcomed it.32

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The reviews received by the production were almost universally ecstatic:

Mr. Coward, in his blither spirits, would, I think, appreciate "Tuppence Coloured," the intimate revue at the Lyric, Hammersmith [an earlier portion of the article had dealt with Coward's 'Point Valaine']. Here a college of wit-crackers is in residence under the eye of Laurier Lister, who has seen to it that matters never dilly-dally on the way ("Brief, short, quick, snap," said the Host of the Garter on another occasion, and it is a good motto for revue). . . . This, with hardly a lapse, is a revue of style and wit. . . . Among a platoon of authors, composers, producers, and designers, honourable mention to Richard Addinsell, Peter Brook, Geoffrey Wright and Molly McArthur, not to mention John Gay, who must ever fit snugly into a riverside night at the Lyric. . . .

The best things in Tuppence Coloured. . . . come in the second half. The first half is a little too consistently satirical, and therefore . . . ends by being just a trifle depressing, in spite of a great deal that is witty.

Tuppence Coloured played to standing room only for its run at the Lyric and then transferred to the Globe Theatre. The success of the Company with this topical satiric revue ensured that this genre would continue to have a home in Hammersmith.

Oranges and Lemons (1948)

Oranges and Lemons,
Say the bells of St. Clements.
You owe me five farthings,
Say the bells of St. Martins.
When will you pay me?
Say the bells of Old Bailey.
When I grow rich,
Say the bells of Shoreditch.
When will that be?
Say the bells of Stepney.
I don't know,
Says the big bell of Bow


Here comes a candle to light you to bed,
Here comes a chopper to chop off your head.\textsuperscript{35}

This children's rhyming song, which chronicles the bells of the boroughs of London, provided the title for the next revue by the Company of Four. But the phrase "oranges and lemons" had long before entered polite parlance to indicate that an item or event was a combination of things pleasant (oranges) and unpleasant (lemons). Which is exactly what this topical revue set out to provide as well.

The evening might as well have been called "Son of Tuppence Coloured," for much of it, as one critic remarked, was very much like the successful parts of the previous revue. Once again, Laurier Lister arranged the evening. And once again, Max Adrian and Elisabeth Welch were two of the featured performers. Apparently, however, the success of Tuppence Coloured had convinced the Company that they need not produce the revues on such a shoe string, for as one reviewer noted, it was "decidedly stronger in spectacle."\textsuperscript{36}

With the success of Tuppence Coloured, writers were clamouring to have their material included in a revue at the Lyric and Lister was able to choose from among the best and the brightest writers. Sandy Wilson, who would later score a tremendous success with The Boyfriend (1953), contributed several numbers ("For Art's Sake" and "The Sunday Sisters") and the writer/painter Clemence Dane

\textsuperscript{35} "Oranges and lemons" is a children's nursery rhyme, the earliest known printed version of which is Tom Thumb's Pretty Song Book, ca. 1744. According to Bergen Evans, "the assigning of words to the rhythm of certain bells is widespread. These are all bells of London churches. The sound of Bow Bell marked the limit of cockneydom. It is also believed to be the bell that told Dick Whittington to 'turn again, Lord Mayor of London.'" Dictionary of Quotations, collected and arranged and with comments by Bergen Evans (New York: Delacorte Press, 1968) 55.

\textsuperscript{36} Unsigned review, "Oranges and Lemons," The Times 29 November 1948: 2
contributed another ("The Spanish Lady"). Music for the evening came from sources that varied from Wilson and Swann to Nicholas Phipps and Christopher Hassall. One interesting historical note is that *Oranges and Lemons* included a good deal of material by Michael Flanders and Donald Swann, but not writing together. They collaborated on only two of the twenty four musical numbers. These two later went on to become an internationally famous music and comedy team that produced such revues as *At the Drop of a Hat*, and *At the Drop of Another Hat*. Designers for the evening included many of the old Company of Four standbys (e.g., W. Stanley Moore and Hubert Gurschner), but was supplemented by at least one set designed by Cecil Beaton and several by the cartoonist Roland Pym.

Apparently the market for this kind of topical satire had not been flooded by the previous year's production, for the reviews were only slightly less complimentary than the year before.

This is, spiritually, at any rate, the second edition of *Tuppence Coloured*; one good revue is very apt to beget another. It is not perhaps so witty as its predecessor, but it is no less sprightly, no less tuneful, no less pretty and cheering; it finds its mildly satirical targets here there and everywhere, and it is decidedly stronger in spectacle.\(^{37}\)

At the Lyric, Hammersmith 'Oranges and Lemons,' a revue by a score of hands and assembled by Laurier Lister, appears as the follow-up to 'Tuppence Coloured.' It is true to its predecessor in being swift, informal and not afraid of experiment. New talent shines .... 'Oranges and Lemons' will provide happy river-side nights for the time being. A move to the West End should follow. But the dancing must improve before that.\(^{38}\)

Regardless of whether the dancing improved or not, it followed its dramatic forebear, *Tuppence Coloured* into the Globe Theatre, where it ran for one hundred and six teen performances.

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\(^{37}\) Unsigned review, "Oranges and Lemons," *The Times* 29 November 1948: 2

The Lyric Revue (1951)

In 1951, with the exception of Graham Payn and George Benson, not one member of the cast (of The Lyric Revue) meant a thing at the box office. Such "names" as the show could boast were to be found exclusively among the writers and composers – Noel Coward, Michael Flanders, Donald Swann, Kay Thompson, Richard Addinsell, Norman Hackworth... and several others. When we all met on the first day of rehearsals it was dinned into us very firmly that the show was being mounted on a shoe-string and that we were to have no aspirations about eventually transferring to the West End. We were to tour for four weeks and then open at the Lyric, Hammersmith, for four weeks only.39

The majority of the sketch material for The Lyric Revue evening was written by Arthur Macrae, whose material ranged from a version of Peter Pan as it might have been written by Tennessee Williams, to a "send-up" of Nancy Mitford as Lady Robinson of Crusoe. One of the only "unsuccessful" turns of the evening - i.e., a sketch that was taken to task by the critics for being perhaps too acerbic—was Noel Coward's "Don't Make Fun of the Festival," which, of course, made great fun of the Festival of Britain, which was going on that year.

The Lyric Revue opened to notices that Beaumont could not have written more glowingly himself. Ivor Brown led off the critical community in his unalloyed praise.

The Lyric Revue has not been built up on two stars and a chorus, but on twelve players with real contributions to make and well able to make them. William Chappell has directed them cleverly and the whole thing has pace, polish, and professional adroitness... Rarely were so many cooks at work on a broth of capers; so far from spoiling it, they turn it to first-class refreshment... There is an item called "Complaints." I have none. Nor

had the audience, which, so far from being plaintive, cheered so powerfully as to be audible in deepest Chiswick.\footnote{Ivor Brown, "Colonels and Capers," \textit{The Observer}, 27 May 1951: 6.}

The reviewer for \textit{The Times} was equally full of praise.

The determined faultfinder might perhaps complain that as a revue this is almost too amusing. But then, what is Mr. William Chappell to do, with a gifted company champing at the bit, as it were, and a principal author who sees the funny side of some most unexpected things.\footnote{Unsigned review, \textit{The Times}, 25 May 1951: 2.}

The revues at the Lyric were beginning to garner considerable notice. \textit{The Lyric Revue} was reviewed by seven of the daily papers and features about it appeared in six periodicals.

The Company of Four management were forced to rescind their word regarding the limited run of \textit{The Lyric Revue}. In fact, it played to capacity for eighteen weeks at the Lyric, Hammersmith--including a visit on 21 August 1951 from Her Royal Highness, Princess Margaret--and then transferred to the Globe Theatre, where it ran an additional nine months. But having \textit{The Lyric Revue} at the Globe Theatre, two doors from the West End's Lyric Theatre, was confusing to patrons. Finally, it was decided to remove \textit{The Lyric Revue}, keep the company together and stage a new revue, to be called \textit{The Globe Revue}, which ran for an additional six months. Thus, the company that had been brought together for "four weeks, and four weeks only," at the Lyric, remained together for twenty two months.

\textbf{At The Lyric (1953)}

The last of the four revues put on by the Company of Four opened at the Lyric on 23 December 1953. It was again directed by William Chappell. Alan Melville, who had already established a reputation as a revue writer with a series of revues
entitled *Sweet and Low, Sweeter and Lower*, and *Sweetest and Lowest* provided almost all of the lyrics and sketches for the evening. The majority of the evening's music was by Kenneth Leslie-Smith, who had also composed music for several of the Company's earlier revues. There was a single number by Flanders and Swann and a few contributed by Paul Dehn.

*At The Lyric* had a more stellar cast than had any of its predecessors. Hermione Baddeley, who would later go on to achieve her greatest fame in the television series "Maude," and Dora Bryan, best known for her roles in the "Carry On" films were the leading ladies. Ian Carmichael was once again featured, and to round out the starring quintet were Eric Berry and Rachel Roberts. This was an most unusual departure into comedy for Miss Roberts, who had made her name playing serious roles. Making her debut in this production was Shirley Eaton, a statuesque blonde who later went on to play the role of Jill Masterson, and be painted gold in the film "Goldfinger."

Considering how many of this breed he had reviewed, it is little wonder that Ivor Brown in *The Observer* was hard pressed to find superlatives for this particular effort.

The new revue *At The Lyric*, whose title gives the address, is up to the usual standard of hilarity. Mostly by Alan Melville and Paul Dehn, with music mostly by Kenneth Leslie-Smith, it is mostly as good as usual . . . . But see and hear for yourself—and I hope the company will make it easier to hear distinctly. Probably it was only first night nerves that scuffled the wit.42

Following the run at the Lyric, this revue underwent an odd metamorphosis. As Ian Carmichael explains it:

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Somewhere around March, it was decided that several of the items would be replaced and that we would, when ready, move into the West End with a second edition. This we did, opening in the St. Martin's Theatre during the week following our closure in Hammersmith under the new title 'Going To Town.' Again we were well received but this time we only managed to run for a further couple of months.\textsuperscript{43}

Conclusion

In much the same way that the production history of the plays The Company produced that concerned World War II was a type of history writ small, the revues provide a less heterogenous but no less revealing type of history.

First, it points up the commercial nature of the entire enterprise. Obviously, the Company of Four was formed by the Tennent organization on the prospect of making money through theatrical productions. It could even be argued that these commercial ventures made possible some of the less commercial work, such as revivals and the production of new scripts. In much the same way, The National Theatre's tremendously successful production of \textit{Guys and Dolls} (1977), and the subsequent West End transfer of that production, provided considerable revenues for a company with a complement of productions with little or no commercial potential.

Second, the examinations of these two genres points up the company of Four's standing practice of transferring box office hits to the West End as quickly as possible. The first three of these revues follow that pattern faithfully. The last of them, \textit{At The Lyric}, coming as it does after parliamentary questions had been raised about the legality of these non-profit-distributing theatre companies, did not. The Company could no longer convert these productions into profit centers for the parent company. If the Company had not ceased production very soon after the last of these

\textsuperscript{43} Carmichael 266.
four, the theatregoing public would probably have been given the opportunity to see "son of" At The Lyric in very short order.

It is possible, therefore, to evaluate the Company of Four as a presenter of new plays on two distinct criteria: (1) by relating that practice relates to its stated purpose of being a showcase for the best young actors, directors and playwrights, and (2) by comparing The Company to other producing companies, most particularly the National Theatre.

Of the first of these criteria, it is probably most truthful to say that the Company was as good as its word—for a time. Its stated commitment to presenting new plays was very much one of the guiding principles in the early years (during the MacDonald years, and the period when Kitty Black continued to exercise some measure of dramaturgical control over the venture) but fell off in the latter years of the venture (the John Perry management and the period when the Company was putting all of its energies into the production of lavish seasons such as the Gielgud season). It would also be accurate to say that during the early days of the venture, the management was much more committed to providing these new works by English authors a further viewing by transferring them to West End theatres under the Tennent/Beaumont management. It is interesting to observe that, by 1952, only six new works by English playwrights had been transferred to the West End. Of the fifty-six works the company had produced, nineteen had transferred. After 1952, the Company of Four produced only one new work by an English author: Sandy Wilson's The Buccaneer, 1955, which transferred to the Apollo Theatre. The Company had quite obviously lost the taste for presenting new plays. This can be put down to two possible causes. The first is change in management. The second is that the Company was coming under closer and closer scrutiny from the Government
concerning the practice of "selling" productions mounted by a production company exempt from entertainment tax to a parent company that was not.

In comparison to a company such as the National—our second criterion for comparison—the Company of Four must be lauded for their commitment to new works. The percentage of new plays in the whole repertoire was much higher overall than in the first seasons of the new National. And while those choices may not have been the most daring, they do represent an admirable mix of new work by playwrights who were already established and those who were just beginning to make their mark on the dramatic scene. This comparison becomes even more remarkable when the comparative production capabilities of the two enterprises are taken into account.

Using these two very subjective criteria, then, it is possible to find the Company of Four both lacking and yet one of the most visible forums for new works by English playwrights in the years immediately following World War II.
CHAPTER V:

The Company of Four as a Presenter of Works by Cocteau, Sartre and Anouilh.

As the preceding chapter demonstrated, one of the services that the Company of Four rendered to the British theatre, as an institution, was in providing first productions for new works by British authors. Parallel to that, and of equal importance, was the service of providing premiere productions in Britain of works by American authors (such as Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams and Lillian Hellman) and European authors, particularly the French. Indeed, during its eleven-year tenure, the Company of Four was the single most consistent British presenter of new works by Jean Anouilh, Jean-Paul Sartre and, to a lesser degree of, Jean Cocteau.

In the years between the two World Wars, a curiously bi-partisan relationship existed between the British theatre and its nearest theatrical neighbor, the French theatre. Though there were short seasons presented by French companies in London during this time, (e.g., the 1934 presentation of Copeau's Compagnie de Quinze in André Obey's Don Juan) and the occasional "adaptation from a French play by . . ." in the commercial theatre, there was little evidence of any artistic cross-pollination between these two 'national theatres,' in the broadest definition of the term "national."

There are several factors that help to explain this. First, and foremost, this was not a particularly fertile or golden period for French drama. With the exception
of Jean Giraudoux (1882-1944) and Georges Feydeau (1862-1921), whose works are popular sources of material for adaptation, the works of some the most prolific French dramatists of this period—Marcel Pagnol, Andre Obey and Henri-Rene Lenormand, for instance—are infrequently revived.

The second factor that should be weighed in the consideration of the relationship between these two theatres is the intense nationalism that lingered on in England, following the conclusion of World War I. This nearly 'jingoistic' conviction that that which was English was infinitely superior did not halt English playwrights from lifting—lock, stock and denouement—the plots of French commercial successes for adaptation.

Nevertheless, The Company of Four, was among the first to present works both in adaptation and in translation by the French authors who were to become major playwrights of the twentieth century. These were among the first productions—and certainly the first that began to approach 'commercial' presentation—in Britain of Cocteau, Sartre and Anouilh.

Jean Cocteau and The Eagle Has Two Heads (1947)

The first of these productions came in the Company's second year of operation with Ronald Duncan's adaptation of L'aigle à deux têtes by Jean Cocteau (1889-1963).

With the exception of Nothing-Doing Bar (with music by Darius Milhaud) presented at the London Coliseum in 1920, Cocteau had had nothing that resembled a commercial London production before 1946. Les Parents terribles (translated by Caroline Francke) was presented in 1940 at the Gate Theatre, one of the city's
smaller theatre clubs. Later that same year, *The Infernal Machine* was presented at the Arts Theatre.

Translated from Cocteau's original *Le mort écoute à la porte*\(^1\) by the poet Ronald Duncan, *The Eagle Has Two Heads* was strongly in the vein of neo-poetic drama characterized by the work of T. S. Eliot and Christopher Fry. The play had originally been written as a vehicle for the romantic French actor Jean Marais.

He had even specified its dimensions. Marais asked for a drame in which he would remain 'silent' in the first act, 'cry with joy' in the second, and 'fall down the stairs backwards' in the third.\(^*\)

Saddled with this *reductio ad absurdum*, Cocteau took, as the point of departure for his play, the life of Elisabeth of Austria (1837-1898), so desolated by the death of the Archduke Rudolf at Mayerling (1889) that she spent the remainder of her life in solitude and madness. Elisabeth was stabbed by Luigi Lucchinci, an Italian anarchist, as she prepared to board a steamer in Geneva in 1898. Cocteau, gripped by the latent theatricality of the basic plot, abandoned the historic truth of Elisabeth's life to erect a dramatic structure that moves the play into the realm of the surrealist.

\(^*\)\(^{1}\) According to Ronald Duncan, *How to Make Enemies* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1968) 142 and 158, the play, unproduced in France at this point, had originally been titled "*Le mort écoute à la porte*." When Beaumont protested that a literal translation of "*Death Listens at The Door*" would not do, Cocteau put forward the alternative of "*Azrael*," after the Angel of Death. Beaumont was afraid that audiences would mistake this for Israel and cabled Duncan for another title. Duncan decided on *The Eagle has Two Heads*. When the play came to be produced in France, Cocteau accordingly changed the title to *L'aigle à deux têtes*, and told friends that Duncan had mistranslated his original title.

Ronald Duncan, whose poetic drama, *This Way To The Tomb*, had just been produced, agreed to do the translation/adaptation.

While *This Way To The Tomb* was running, I was asked by Hugh Beaumont to translate Cocteau's latest play, *Le mort écoute à la porte*. I told him I thought the subplot was too involved, and the only thing I would be interested in doing would be to adapt the play drastically.³

While attempting to render the poetic language of the original French, Duncan reduced the importance of the subplot and of the lesser characters, such as Edith de Berg, lady-in-waiting to Elisabeth.

The production by the Company, which opened on 4 September 1946, was directed by Murray MacDonald. Set designs were by the painter Hubert Gurschner, and costumes by Anthony Holland. To compose the incidental music, which included a 'triumphal anthem' against which the bloody *denouement* takes place, the Company commissioned the young composer Benjamin Britten.

The play ends with the Queen and the poet lying dead on the stage, and as they fall a National Anthem is heard. I had naturally run into Ben and asked him to compose this: he had agreed and as usual, like a good tailor, done his job on time and to the precise measurements and specifications. But the management had done nothing about getting his anthem recorded: they had made moves to hire a small string orchestra without noticing Ben had of course scored it for a brass band. In the end the band of the Household Brigade was approached: there seemed to be doubt whether we would have the recording for the opening of the play. The theatre had suggested that as an alternative, the house musicians . . . should, if Ben's anthem didn't arrive, render the Welsh National Anthem, or *Deutschland Uber Alles* from offstage.⁴

The cast of *The Eagles Has Two Heads* was top notch. Eileen Herlie played the haunted Queen Elisabeth, opposite James Donald as the anarchist

³ Duncan, *Enemies* 90 and 142. The name change is reported on 142.

⁴ Duncan, *Enemies* 151.
Stanislas-Azrael. Lady Edith de Berg (the role reduced by Duncan) was played by Jill Esmond, the Duke of Wittenstein by James McKechnie, and Noel Willman and Uriel Porter completed the cast in smaller roles.

Perhaps it was a result of the "stellar" nature of the cast. Perhaps, after a year of production, the press was beginning to sit up and take notice of The Company of Four. Whatever the reason, there was considerable press 'puffery' for the production before it opened.

Both Hobson and Trewin gave the play lengthy, but less than glowing reviews

The candles gutter, the storm howls down the castle chimneys, and a legendary queen in love with death plays cards with her murdered husband. Add an assassination, a treacherous Chief-of-Police, and a mandrake-like shriek and you have Mr. Cocteau's idea of an agreeable evening. But not mine, thank you very much. For the rest . . . there are Romance, Republicans, Rhetoric and Ruritania, and a performance of remarkable stamina by Miss Eileen Herlie, who talks and talks and talks, but is most eloquent in that one enormous scream.

Trewin was only slightly more favorably disposed to either the play, or the production.

The drama, now at the Lyric Hammersmith, sags perilously between its opening flare and its grand operatic close---staircase and national anthem, stabbed queen and lover poisoned---but a remarkable performance by Miss Eileen Herlie is enough to enliven the production . . . Players, director, two Gurschner settings are in a theatrical effect that derives, one would hazard from the Parisian stage of the roaring eighteen-thirties. It may be magniloquent, but it does not bore.©

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Though the critical reception of the piece may have been lukewarm, it was enthusiastically received by audiences. So much so that it was revived/transferred in February, 1947 to the Haymarket Theatre, where it ran for one hundred and seventy performances.

One month later, it opened in New York with Tallulah Bankhead and Helmut Dantine as Elisabeth and Stanislas, but closed after only twenty-nine performances.

The play had been touring America very successfully with Tallulah Bankhead as the Queen and Marlon Brando as the poet. Brando was thrown out of the production before it opened in New York—by Tallulah, of course, who had got her own way so much that she had changed the final curtain of the play.

There was even, briefly talk of a movie of the play with Bette Davis, which was never made. The play was revived in 1979 at the Chichester Festival, with Jill Bennett in the role of the Queen.

*The Eagle has Two Heads* was precedent setting for two reasons. First, it was the first Company of Four production to transfer to the West End under the management umbrella of Tennent Productions, Ltd. Second, it was the first Company of Four production to attract the kind and amount of media attention that would later become commonplace. This is not surprising, because it was at about this time, according to Charles Landstone, that Tyrone Guthrie and the Glyndebourne interest withdrew, leaving the Tennent interest and the absentee Norman Higgins of the Cambridge Arts Theatre in command. Faced with a growing portion of the 'governance' of the Company, and the prospect of a Tennent

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Productions managed transfer, it is hardly surprising that the Beaumont publicity machine went into high gear for *The Eagle Has Two Heads*.

**Jean-Paul Sartre**

With its 1947 production of *Men Without Shadows* (*Morts sans sépulture*) and *The Respectable Prostitute* (*La Putaine respecteuse*, frequently translated *The Respectful Prostitute*) the Company of Four once again provided an early production of an important French playwright, Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980). The Company of Four was edged out of the distinction of being the first British company to produce the work of Sartre by a production of *Vicious Circle*. 8

Sartre first came to the attention of the public with his novel *Nausea* (*La Nausée*, 1938). His first philosophical treatise, *Being and Nothingness* (*L'Être et le Néant*), was published in 1943, the same year in which his first play, *The Flies* (*Les mouches*) was produced by Charles Dullin. It is remarkable that his scripts received productions outside France so rapidly after that.

Part of the celerity with which this happened is attributable to Kitty Black. Fluent in French, Black was a frequent visitor to France before World War II and a devotee of French Theatre. It was her translation of both plays (and of all subsequent productions of Sartre by the Company) that was produced.

**Men Without Shadows and The Respectable Prostitute** (1947)

8 (*Huis Clos*, translated variously *No Exit* and *Vicious Circle*, the script for this production had been translated by Marjorie Gabain and Joan Swinstead) which was directed by Peter Brook, with Alec Guinness and Beatrix Lehmann at the Arts, London and opened on 16 July 1946.
Perhaps one of the most fascinating aspects of the two one-act scripts is that they present distinctly different approaches to the use of 'history' as dramatic material. Men Without Shadows, which dealt with life in the French Resistance, is an example of history closely observed that is employed as dramatic material. The Respectable Prostitute, on the other hand, represents Sartre's use of history garnered at third or fourth hand—in this case, from newspaper accounts.

In brief, Men describes the interrogation of a group of prisoners who have committed an act of sabotage. They have, before the action of the play, unsuccessfully attempted to take a village and needlessly killed three hundred people. The real action of the play, however, lies in the way the saboteurs manipulate each others' emotions to keep one of their number from breaking and giving away the secret of the group. The dramatic device that Sartre uses very effectively is the continual shift back and forth between the cell where the prisoners are being held and the room where the interrogations are taking place. Not only does the audience see the psychological interplay between prisoners, but that between prisoners and captors as well.

The Respectable Prostitute, on the other hand, represents a dramatic view, on the part of Sartre, that makes no pretense at eschewing bias. Its view of history is revisionist, in that it re-examines the events of history with the perspective of events that were occurring in France even as Sartre wrote.

In brief, Prostitute is based on the alleged rape of two white prostitutes by nine black men in Alabama in 1931. The Scottsboro case, as it came to be known in legal circles, was used by Vladimir Pozner as the basis for a newspaper piece called "Le Voil".9

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9 The Writings of Jean-Paul Sartre, compiled by Michael Contat and Michael Rybalka, translated by Richard M. McCleary (Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern
Posner's account of the case appeared in 1938. The inter-racial problems of the United States, however, were frequently in the news in France during this period.

Black's role as translator for the two one-acts came almost by default.

Once more the problem of translations was debated, until one day John Perry suggested that I should make a literal version, and after that he and I could collaborate on the final text. "After all," he said, "we're both authors," and so I set to work.

Sartre's dialogue is so vivid and his characterisation so strong that making a translation was like putting one of those dry Japanese flowers in water and watching it spring to life. When the scripts were finished, John Perry declared they needed no revision and could be produced as they stood. Perhaps this was the greatest moment of my life for I realised that I had managed to convey in English exactly what the original author had meant without any adaptation or rejigging of the situation in order to make it acceptable in translation.

With the direction of these plays, Peter Brook returned to the Company of Four. He had previously directed The Brothers Karamazov (1946) for the Company during its first season. By the time he came to the Sartre double bill, he had directed Cocteau's The Infernal Machine at The Chanticleer (1945) and Huis Clos at the Arts in the year before this production. Edward Trostle Jones writes in Following Directions: A Study of Peter Brook:

University Press, 1974). Sartre wrote the play in a few days to complete the bill scheduled for the Theatre Antoine. Racism was in the news in 1946 in connection with Senator Bilbo's racist politics and with a series of lynchings in the United States South, and it would not be long before it was exploited in literature. Sartre got his inspiration from a famous case reported in a partisan fashion by Vladimir Pozner in Les Etats desunis [The Dis-United States] (Denoeil, 1938); the chapter called "Le Voil" <The Rape>, pp. 97-109.

10 Black 127-128.
As he often would do later in his career, once Brook embarked on staging a particular dramatist, he continued with other works beyond his initial engagement with that playwright.\(^\text{11}\)

This certainly proved true for Brook's association with the works of Sartre and, later on with Jean Anouilh.

One of the adjustments that Brook made in the script was to eliminate the scene break between scenes three and four, to move more quickly to the denouement of the play. Settings for the two pieces were by Rolf Gerard, who had designed Brook's *Huis Clos*.

In *Peter Brook*, J. C. Trewin makes the following assessment of the two pieces.

> Each was labelled 'Peter Brook's production'; at twenty-two he more than ever a name. Neither piece mattered a lot, even if people fainted every night (once there were six) over-wrought by the torturing of men and women of the Resistance, prisoners of the Vichy military.\(^\text{12}\)

Ivor Brown's review echoed Trewin's assessment.

> The continuing sight of physical beastliness is nauseating except, presumably, to sadists and impedes any of the emotions likely to be stirred by imaginative art. Later on Sartre's piece does pull itself out of the pit of its squalor, and the Resistance members become people instead of raw material for lash and and screw and mere pieces of enduring or collapsing flesh. But it is too late; the blood-bath presented with excessive slowness in Peter Brook's otherwise vivid direction has dulled one's eagerness to listen.\(^\text{13}\)


\(^{13}\) Ivor Brown, "Spooks and Fiends", *The Observer*, 20 July 1947: 2.
What praise there was, if praise it can be called, was reserved for the second half of the evening's bill.

The story is frank, sardonic, well-told . . . . It is the kind of thing that Somerset Maugham would have done better, but it is good enough to make up for the wearisome horrors of the first piece.\(^{14}\)

These two productions are noteworthy in being the first productions in English of these scripts by an emergent French author and in their being some of the early work of a director who would later emerge as one of the pre-eminent directors of the contemporary theatre.

**Crime Passionnel** (1948)

With Kitty Black's translation of *Les Main Sales* (frequently translated as *Dirty Hands*), produced in 1948, the Company made its next foray into the presentation of work by Sartre. The script was first performed on 2 April of that year at the Theatre Antoine, directed by Pierre Valde, with some "friendly supervision by Jean Cocteau".\(^{15}\)

Brooks's commitment to direct *La Boheme* and *Le Nozze di Figaro* for the Royal Opera House, however, kept him from undertaking this project and the direction fell to Peter Glenville.

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The central plot of Crime Passionnel deals with the assassination of a political leader, Hoederer. The twist is that he is being assassinated by his own party. To accomplish this the Party has planted a young dissident, Hugo, in Hoederer's villa as his secretary. Hugo, who will, when the moment is right, carry out the assassination. Typical of Sartre's philosophical stance, this situation brings the young man's humanism and his political ideology into sharp conflict. Hugo finally assassinates Hoederer, but for the purely personal reason that he believes that his wife has had a sexual liaison with Hoederer.

Crime Passionnel was directed by Peter Glenville, with settings by Rolf Gerard, and the production had three remarkable actors at its core. The role of Hoederer was played by Roger Livesey, and Jessica, Hugo's wife, by Joyce Redman. Both had appeared in several productions for the Company of Four previously. The role of Hugo was played by Michael Gough, who was beginning to make a career in the theatre and would later go on to become a regular member of the company at the National Theatre.

In the year that intervened between the production of the Sartre double bill and Crime Passionnel, the critical community had apparently come to a greater appreciation of Sartre and it showed in the response to this play.

The new Sartre is the most exciting play that has come my way in nine months.... Sartre is now recognised as an enormously effective craftsman in the theatre, but many people are, reasonably enough, put off by the persistent picking over of the haircombs of squalor which has seemed to be inseparable from his outlook. Crime Passionnel, however, is quite free from this streak.16

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Ivor Brown was more kindly disposed toward this effort than he had been toward *Men/Respectable*.

Sartre's *Crime Passionnel* . . . is something we get at rare intervals, a play which assumes some sense of political realities in the British playgoers . . . . But the thing is adult in its appeal: it is also exciting, when prolixity does not hamper its course and it is rendered with a fine blend of force and sensitivity.17

The performances of Livesey, Redman and Gough were roundly praised, although the honors were split between Livesey and Gough. Worsley calls Livesey's performance "an exceptional piece of work," and of Gough, Brown says "This production would be well worth while if only to establish this most promising actor."

Audiences responded very favorably to this production. When the four week run at the Lyric was over, the production transferred to the Garrick Theatre, surely the first work by Sartre to play in the West End. Unfortunately, Livesey had a film commitment that kept him from continuing with the show at its transfer, and was replaced by Basil Dean. Whether as a result of the change in cast, or simply because West End audiences were not so kindly disposed toward the work, the show closed within a few weeks of its transfer, after only sixty one performances.

In the ten years immediately following the production of *Crime Passionnel* in 1948, there were only three productions of Sartre in Britain. Two of these productions were of *The Respectable Prostitute*. Surprisingly, one of them was by a commercial management at the St. Martin's Theatre. The other was by Joan Littlewood, at the Theatre Workshop, Stratford, East.

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The Company of Four can hardly be said to have "popularized" the plays of Jean-Paul Sartre. These first productions were, however, extremely important in demonstrating the theatrical potential of plays that pointed the way toward the theatrical genre characterized by John Osborne's 1956 Look Back in Anger.

Jean Anouilh

Jean Anouilh was unquestionably the most prolific French writer of this period. Between his first play L'Hermine, in 1929 and his death in 1987, he produced twenty-six original works and an additional half-dozen translations and adaptations. On Anouilh's work as a dramatist, Philip Thody writes:

Of the twenty-six plays which Anouilh has had performed since 1932, only two have been failures in box-office terms. Admittedly, none of Anouilh's plays has ever run for as long as [Andre Roussin's] La Petite Hutte, Patate, or The Mousetrap, and it was only relatively late in his career that he achieved success on Broadway with L'Alouette (The Lark) and Becket. 18

Even though Anouilh had been writing since 1929, and had indeed produced seven plays that had been highly successful in Paris--Le Voyageur sans bagage had run for an impressive one hundred and ninety performances--he was largely unknown in Great Britain before the war.

But like the lifting of the barriers between England and France with the defeat of Napoleon, the floodgates opened between the cultural lives of London and Paris and the names of Jean Anouilh, Jean-Paul Sartre, Andre Roussin and Louis Ducreux brought a whole new lease of exciting plays to the London stage. 19


19 Black 105.
By 1949, Anouilh had had only one production in Britain. The Old Vic had presented *Antigone*, starring Vivien Leigh and directed by Laurence Olivier, who also played the Chorus. Then, in 1950, Anouilh's repute and popularity in Britain improved markedly. In January, H. M. Tennent presented Peter Brooks's production of *Ring Round the Moon*, in a translation by Christopher Fry. With Margaret Rutherford, Claire Bloom, and Paul Scofield the production ran for over six hundred and seventy performances.

**Point of Departure** (1950)

In December, the Company of Four opened its first Anouilh production, *Point of Departure* (1941, *Eurydice*).

With Binkie's dislike of Greek classics there was no question of using the original title, and we [Black and Brook] racked our brains for weeks until one night in a telephone conversation with Peter I said "that might make a good point of departure..." and the title was found.\(^{20}\)

Peter Brook was to serve as director for this production. Once again, however, other commitments--actually the first production of the Nancy Mitford's adaptation of André Roussin's *The Little Hut*--kept Brook from repeating the success he had had with *Ring Round the Moon* and the directorial chores were undertaken by Peter Ashmore. The production starred Mai Zetterling and Dirk Bogarde, who was just beginning to make a name for himself as a film actor.

The critics were sharply divided on the merits of this script, though universally complimentary on the performances. Though Brown took exception to

\(^{20}\) Black 172.
the "escapism and defeatism" of the piece, he apparently had more objections to the circumstances of its presentation than to the presentation itself.


His references to "Tax-Free Goods" and "Arts Council Trade Mark" can only be interpreted as jibes at the Company of Four, resulting from the controversy over its relationship with Tennent Productions, its exemption from Entertainment Tax and the Company's association with the Arts Council of Great Britain. The Times was more kindly disposed toward the piece.

The importance of M. Anouilh is that he alone among modern playwrights is able to wear the tragic mask with ease . . . . The tragedy is not only impressive for the clearness with which it displays its thought under an amusingly designed pattern of ironic cross-lights; it is impressive also as a tragedy conceived from end to end in strictly theatrical terms. It provides the audience with exciting theatrical entertainment and the actors with some half a dozen fine acting parts. The company under the direction of Mr. Peter Ashmore fill these parts with distinction and support them admirably.22

Point of Departure was tremendously well received by audiences. One of the reasons for this may have been what Beverly Baxter of The Evening Standard termed "the most explicit sexual scene on stage to that time."23

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After the Point of Departure try-out week at Brighton, several old ladies wrote to complain about the love scene played between Dirk Bogarde and Mai Zetterling in the hotel bedroom. I was summoned to the Palace and ushered into the Presence [of the Lord Chamberlain].

When we got round to discussing the letter he admitted that the scene had been passed because the stage directions required the young couple to be lying on top of the bed fully dressed. In performance Mai had discarded her black tunic and was wearing a white *broderie anglaise* slip which was perfectly modest, not to say virginal.

"Oh, very well," said his military lordship. "But tell Mr. Bogarde to keep his hands off the upper part of Miss Zetterling's body."

Whether or not Bogarde obeyed this directive is unknown. Even if he did, the play still possessed a fascination for audiences that allowed it to transfer to the Duke of York's Theatre, where it ran for one hundred and forty nine performances, giving M. Anouilh two West End successes in the span of a year.

**The Anouilh Renaissance Continues**

Though it was to be several years before the Company undertook another Anouilh script, productions by other managements, commercial and non-profit, kept interest in the French playwright alive. The 'discovery' of Anouilh proceeded apace through 1951 when productions of *Ardele* (1948, *Ardèle ou la marguerite*) and *Colombe* (1950) opened in the West End. *Ardele*, starring Isabel Jeans, and directed by Anthony Pellisier, opened at the Vaudeville Theatre on 30 August 1951, and closed after sixty seven performances. *Colombe*, directed by Peter Brook and starring Michael Gough, Joyce Redman and Yvonne Arnaud, opened at the New Theatre on 13 December 1951, and ran for nearly four months. In 1952, a production of *Thieves' Carnival* (1932, *Le Bal des voleurs*), originally mounted the year before

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24 Black 142.
by the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, transferred to the Arts Theatre for a limited run.

**Time Remembered (1954)**

Then, in 1954, the Company of Four once again brought Anouilh to the attention of the theatre-going public, with their production of *Time Remembered*, written in 1939 and originally titled *Léocadia*. Kitty Black having by this point severed her professional association with The Company of Four, the translation for this production was by Patricia Moyes.

I had been in my new job [as director of the Drama Department at Spencer Curtis Brown, literary agents] for just over a year before I did my first deal with Binkie over another Anouilh play. I had just acquired a new author, Penelope Packenham-Walsh—pen name Patricia Moyes—who had already written one play, *A Fiddle at the Wedding*, which Peter Ustinov had directed. Raymond Raikes wanted a new translation of Anouilh's *Léocadia* for a radio production, and it seemed the ideal solution for Penny to take on the job.

One of Margaret Rutherford's friends heard the first broadcast, told Margaret to listen to the repeat a few days later and Margaret promptly rang Binkie to say she would like to do the play. An astonished Penny was summoned to the office on Sunday afternoon, confronted with Billy Chappell and Peter Rice, director and designer, and told the play was to open at the Lyric, Hammersmith in three weeks' time.²⁵

William Chappell, the director, had earlier made his directorial debut with The Company of Four's *The Lyric Revue*. Sets were by Peter Rice, and Leslie Bridgewater, "house composer" for all Tennent productions provided incidental music.²⁶ Rutherford and Paul Scofield, who also starred in this production were, no

²⁵ Black 224-225.

²⁶ Black 19-20. "Leslie Bridgewater, operating from the Haymarket, arranged or composed all such music and engaged the necessary musicians for any theatre that was housing a Tennent production. Binkie described Leslie's music as 'plinkety-plonk,' and in the office he was privately known as Leslie Ditchwater."
doubt, hopeful of repeating the great success they had had with *Ring Round the Moon*.

Perhaps one of the most noteworthy factors associated with *Time Remembered* is that it marked the professional debut of Mary Ure, then just five months out of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. Ure would later go on to garner considerable notice in the role of Allison in premiere of John Osborne's *Look Back In Anger*.

The reaction of the critical community to Anouilh's work continued to be mixed.

M. Anouilh decorates with fascinating theatrical expertness a fantastic idea which is not perhaps of the first water.²⁷

Kenneth Tynan, just embarking on his career as a drama critic, found more to like in the play.

This brilliant play lacks the body of a great Anouilh vintage, but only because it is a piece rose, the thrill of which lies in its bouquet, a chateau-bottled fragrance . . . . The tale unfurls in the heart as lightly and crisply as a Japanese water flower, with that blend of sophistication and innocence which M. Anouilh learned from Giraudoux and Giraudoux from the Parisian air he breathed.²⁸

Both Scofield and Rutherford were praised by the critics, but it was Ure who walked away with the lion's (or lioness') share of the notices. Again, from Tynan's review:


The familiar Anouilh heroine (known to cynics as Little Orphan Anouilh) is played by Miss Mary Ure with a cool certainty alarming in a professional debut.\textsuperscript{29}

And from the Times:

Miss Ure represents reality and has the more important part. She is decorative, she is cool, she is remarkably self-possessed and clearly she has a promising talent for light comedy.\textsuperscript{30}

Following its run at the Lyric, \textit{Time Remembered} transferred to the New Theatre where it ran for one hundred and seventy nine performances, again demonstrating the commercial viability of Anouilh's scripts.

It is an odd circumstance that Beaumont allowed the Company of Four to premiere so many of Anouilh's works. Empiric evidence and history had proved the Anouilh's commercial viability. \textit{Ring Round the Moon} had run for over six hundred performances. \textit{Point of Departure} had accumulated almost one hundred and fifty and \textit{Time Remembered} stayed the course for one hundred and eighty. Why not take these vehicles directly into the West End?. The obvious advantage for Beaumont in having the Company of Four produce them lay in selling off the Hammersmith production to Tennent Productions, Ltd. and thereby gaining the exemption from Entertainment Tax. But why not allow Tennent Productions, Ltd., to produce them directly? Perhaps it was the presence of Black, bi-lingual in French, who had proved herself capable to taking on translation duties, that made Beaumont produce these works at the Lyric, Hammersmith. Or perhaps it was that since these scripts were

\textsuperscript{29} Tynan, \textit{The Observer}, 5 December 1954: 11.

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{The Times}, 3 December 1954: 11.
unknown quantities, Beaumont was allowing the buffer of a production in what was becoming a "try-out theatre" for Tennent Productions before taking the risk of a West End transfer.

The Lark (1955)

Anouilh's lyric and haunting retelling of the life of Joan of Arc, *The Lark* (*L'Alouette*), was the next, and the last, Anouilh script produced by the Company. Written in 1952 and first produced in France in 1953, *L'Alouette* had proved a tour de force for the French actress Suzanne Flon and ran six hundred and eight performances, achieving the longest run of any Anouilh script to that time. In fact, it was still running in Paris when the Company of Four production opened on 11 May 1955.

This production, with a translation by Christopher Fry, provided Peter Brook the occasion to direct another Anouilh vehicle and to cast Dorothy Tutin in the leading role.

Two years earlier, when he saw Suzanne Flon in Paris, he had decided that Dorothy Tutin, among British actresses would have the special simplicity for Anouilh's Jeanne d'Arc. . . . Brook nursed his casting until an hour came to use it. Then in May 1955 he did the play for Tennents at what had so far been a lucky theatre for him, the Lyric, Hammersmith (once, his only chance of a personal London stage, he had been offered, and refused, its directorship). 31

The other central roles, The Dauphin and The Promoter, were played by Donald Pleasence and Leo McKern, respectively, both of whom were making their Company

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31 Trewin, *Brook* 78-79.
of Four debuts. The decor for the production was by Jean-Denis Malcles, who had designed the Paris production. In fact, the almost slavish replication of the Paris production was later to provoke comment from several members of the critical community.

Added to this was that the script invited comparisons with Shaw's *St. Joan*, which had most recently been produced at the Arts Theatre in September of 1954, with the Irish actress Siobhan McKenna in the lead. Comparisons, invidious though they may be, were so much in the minds of the reviewers that both of the major reviews of the piece open with sentiments to the effect that "Shaw, its not."

Almost from the announcement of the production, the intense nationalism associated with Shaw's *St. Joan* weighed against this production of *The Lark*. It was certainly the central tack taken by the critics. Kenneth Tynan led the attack.

Now it would be false to say that M. Anouilh's play was not in the same street as Mr. Shaw's; it is so much in the same street that one cannot help noticing how many doors farther down it is .... This is Shaw's Joan more tritely exploited, not a harbinger of protestant nationalism, but a conventional symbol of the individual defying society. The business of drama is to tell us something new about human beings trapped in a desperate crisis. M. Anouilh tells us nothing we did not know already.\(^{32}\)

Tynan went on to sum up the script as "Shaw's pack of cards reshuffled, with all the aces removed." Harold Hobson, in The Sunday Times was only slightly more favorably disposed toward the piece.

In Joan of Arc, M. Anouilh has a subject which has been treated almost to the point of exhaustion in France. We in this country can hardly help looking on it as the special property of Bernard Shaw. *The Lark* draws from the same historical sources as *St. Joan*, and superficially the two plays are much alike. Yet the differences are more important than the similarities.

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M. Anouilh continually impresses by his cleverness, but tension comes and goes in a way that is sometimes unaccountable and on the whole unsatisfactory. In spite of the "flashbacks" which put us retrospectively in possession of the facts of Joan's history, her character undergoes little or not development. She is, at the beginning, a vaguely sympathetic urchin, clinging with stubborn pride to a few simple ideas of which she is certain. Up to the time when her courage and her "voices" fail her she hardly changes and on her recovery she is the same vaguely sympathetic urchin.

Though Tutin may have been Brook's vision of the Saint of Orleans, she was not so viewed by the critics, who termed her "little more than a game and raucous cheerleader," (Tynan) and thought her "powerless to do little more than touch our sympathies" (Hobson).

It was not an auspicious production for Brook. Tynan held that his direction was "a shade more declamatory than the occasion demands," and Hobson does not even mention him. Jones, in his critical study of Brook's career, terms this production "a triumph" and adds:

As customary in his productions of the fifties, Brook received praise for his skillful handing of crowds on stage in The Lark. 34

While Jones' contention that it was customary for Brook to receive good reviews in this period of his career is supportable, the reviews for The Lark do not undergird that generalization. The reaction of the critics to The Lark were not complimentary about Brook's handling of the crowd scenes.

Whether as a result of the lukewarm reception for the piece, critically, or perhaps because the Company of Four realized that the audience for the piece might


34 Jones, Directions 41.
be limited. The Lark did not transfer, but was held over for an impressive run of one hundred and nine performances.

**Conclusion**

In its eleven-year tenure at the Lyric, Hammersmith, The Company of Four presented first productions in English of seven scripts by authors who must be considered major French writers of the first half of the century.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Eagle Has Two Heads</td>
<td>Cocteau/Duncan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Men Without Shadows</td>
<td>Sartre/Black</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Respectable Prostitute</td>
<td>Sartre/Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime Passionnel</td>
<td>Sartre/Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point of Departure</td>
<td>Anouilh/Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Remembered</td>
<td>Anouilh/Moyes</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Lark</td>
<td>Anouilh/Fry</td>
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So, roughly ten percent of the repertoire produced by the Company was composed of new French works.

How does this compare with the rest of the British theatre and the rest of the commercial theatre? During this same period of time, 1945-1956, the commercial management of H. M. Tennent, Ltd., mounted approximately one hundred and twenty-five productions, of which six were new French scripts. Those scripts with their authors and adapters were

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Play</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ring Round the Moon</td>
<td>Anouilh/Fry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Little Hut</td>
<td>Roussin/Mitford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure of Fun</td>
<td>Roussin/Macrae</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colombe</td>
<td>Anouilh/Cannan</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Private Life of Helen of Troy</td>
<td>Roussin/Macrae</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hippo Dancing</td>
<td>Roussin/Morley</td>
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</table>

And of these six, two were productions of *pieces rose* by Jean Anouilh and four were adaptations of boulevard comedies by Andre Roussin. Clearly the powers that controlled both H. M. Tennent and The Company of Four understood the fine
distinction between that which was clearly commercial, and that which could be
turned commercial with the right production and attendant publicity.

In his book on Broadway, *The Season*, William Goldman defines a
phenomenon which he terms "The Snob Hit." According to Goldman's taxonomy:

Why did they have to go to Rosencrantz [And Guilden- stern are Dead]? For the same reason they have to for to any Snob Hit: it is socially
necessary, and it is medicinally sound. The Snob Hit is rooted in two false
beliefs: 1) theatre is "good" for you and 2) British is better. The first
accounts for so many Snob Hits being "lofty" in either subject matter or
treatment, or both. Poets, clerics, historical figures from various ages; these
are the grist of the Snob Hit. The second is the reason why the power of the
show has to come from England. 35

Substitute "French" for "British" in the above paragraph and it is possible to
explain the commercial success, on transfer, of scripts like *The Eagle Has Two
Heads* and *Men Without Shadows*. This less than flattering assessment is born out
by an examination of the fates of these three playwrights in the time following this
period.

Insofar as I have been able to determine, there was but one production of an
script by Cocteau in the decade between 1956, when the Company ceased production
and 1966, a decade later. His *Les Parents terribles*, under the title *Intimate
Relations*, was produced at the Arts Theatre in January 1951. During the same
period, there were two productions of new works by Sartre. In 1957, the English
Stage Society presented *Nekrassov* (1955, *Nékrassov*) as part of the Edinburgh
Festival. And in April 1961, The Royal Court Theatre presented the British
premiere of *Altona* (1959, *Les Séquestrées d'Altona*). 35

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But what of Anouilh, who had, for the Tennent organization, proved such a golden egg laying goose? He, alone, managed to sustain some of the popularity that the Company of Four had helped to generate. In 1959, the Arts Theatre presented a double bill of Madame de . . . (an adaptation by Anouilh of a work by Louise Vilmorin) and Traveler without Baggage (1936, Le Voyageur sans bagage), directed by Peter Hall.

1961 was a banner year for Anouilh with the Royal Shakespeare Company premiering Becket (1958, Becket ou l'honneur de Dieu) and a West End production of The Rehearsal (1950, La Répétition ou l'amour puni). Translated by Kitty Black and Pamela Hansford Johnson, and produced by H. M. Tennent, Ltd., The Rehearsal ran for three hundred and forty four performances.

In 1964, Poor Bitos (1956, Pauvre Bitos ou le dîner de têtes) opened in the West End and ran for three hundred and thirty four performances. The following year both The Cavern (1960, La Grotte) and The Fighting Cock (1958, L'Hurluberlu ou le réactionnaire amoureux) had successful West End productions.

Obviously, of course, Anouilh continued to produce scripts for production far longer than either Cocteau or Sartre. With that in mind, the role of The Company of Four and its parent organization, H. M. Tennent/Tennent Productions, Ltd., should be underestimated in popularizing Anouilh in the period after World War II.

If the central premise of this study, that the Company of Four was a paradigm for the National Theatre is accepted, how does the Company of Four fare in comparison to that organization regarding the production of new works by European authors? Writing of the National in 1973, Ronald Hayman holds:

Apart from Frisch and Beckett, the contemporary playwrights to be represented at the National have been Peter Shaffer, Noel Coward, Arthur Miller, John Arden, John Osborne (as an adaptor of Lope De Vega), Tom Stoppard, John Lennon, John Spurling, Maureen Duffy, Natalia Ginzburg, Charles Wood, Fernando Arrabal, Carl Zuckmayer (in an adaptation by John
Mortimer), Peter Nichols, James Saunders (a children's play) and Adrian Mitchell.36

While the numbers are impressive for new English playwrights, the representation of European dramatists is pitifully small. Were such a list to be made for The Company of Four it would include Ronda Keane, Thornton Wilder, Emlyn Williams, Jan De Hartog, William Saroyan, John Coates, Sean O'Casey, Maurice Valency, S. Iwaszkiewicz, Jean Cocteau, Peter Yates, Kenneth Hyde, Ferenc Molnar, and Jean-Paul Sartre. And this list is only for the first two seasons of the Company of Four’s operation. The argument could be made that Hayman was writing about the first ten years of the National’s history, when they were both hampered by the restrictions imposed by the Old Vic and were in the process of exploring the possibilities that the vast repertoire of world drama presented. What if we consider the National Theatre’s current current repertory, now that it is in the South Bank Facility and fully operational? Unfortunately, the outlook becomes even more dismal.

In the repertory of the National Theatre, and either performing or rehearsing in the period from January to June 1988 are:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Play</th>
<th>Director</th>
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<tr>
<td>Small Family Business</td>
<td>Alan Ayckbourn</td>
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<tr>
<td>'Tis Pity She's a Whore</td>
<td>John Webster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waiting for Godot</td>
<td>Samuel Beckett</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertaining Strangers</td>
<td>David Edgar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Shakespeare Plays</td>
<td>(Peter Hall, director)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cymbeline</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Tempest</td>
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<td>The Winter's Tale</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pied Piper (children's play)</td>
<td>Adrian Mitchell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cat on a Hot Tin Roof</td>
<td>Tennessee Williams</td>
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<tr>
<td>A Place with the Pigs</td>
<td>Athol Fugard</td>
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</table>

Admittedly, the production of new plays—by both British and European authors—was one of the stated philosophies of the Company and is not necessarily part of the mission of the National Theatre. The fact remains that the representation of non-British playwrights in the current repertory of the National is minute. And, in a historical comparison, the Company of Four must be considered a much more innovative and active producer of both new works by British authors, as Chapter Four indicated and, as has been shown above, of new works by European authors than the current National Theatre of Great Britain.
CHAPTER VI:
Revivals Produced by the Company of Four

As the preceding two chapters have demonstrated, the Company of Four, during its eleven year tenure at the Lyric, Hammersmith, did an admirable job of providing first productions of both new scripts by British authors and of first productions in English of plays by foreign authors, particularly the French.

But what of those plays that had, over the years, come to be regarded as classics and/or standards of both British and foreign dramatic literature? As this chapter will show, the Company relied heavily on plays from this broadly defined segment of dramatic literature for a large portion of the repertory that it produced. For the purposes of this study let us consider the revivals produced by the Company of Four in four groupings:

1) the three productions of the 1952-1953 Gielgud season, since they were produced as a single season with a resident company

2) the productions of the classics from the European repertory, since they tend to cluster in the later years of the Company's history and are characterized by increasingly elaborate production values
3) the three revivals of plays by George Bernard Shaw
4) revivals of other classics from the British repertory

Before proceeding with an examination of these productions, however, it might prove useful to examine some general trends in the production of revivals in England at this period.

To some extent, World War II and the period immediately after following can be viewed as a "golden age" for the production of scripts generally regarded as classics. This is partially due to the formation of organizations such as C. E. M. A. (Committee for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts) and E. N. S. A. (Entertainments National Service Administration) and the support that they gave to companies, such as the Old Vic, that continued to produce theatrical entertainment during and immediately after World War II, a period when theatrical production, in general, was curtailed. Though the repertory presented by these C. E. M. A.-sponsored companies was not entirely classical--the first season presented by the Old Vic at Burnley, for instance, included a production of DuMaurier's Trilby--the preponderance of plays produced under these auspices were classical and, in the words of George Rowell, helped slake an "insatiable appetite for some inspiriting alternative to the stress and danger to their occupations".¹

Between 1939 and 1945, for example, there were fifty-one productions of plays by Shakespeare in London theatres. Conversely, during 1940, fewer than thirty new scripts were given first productions in West End theatres in London.

¹ Rowell and Jackson, The Repertory Movement 79.
During the same period, however, there were eleven Shakespeare productions, including Shakespearean seasons presented by Sir Donald Wolfit, John Gielgud and Robert Atkins. Add to that number three revivals of Shaw, and one each of Wycherley, Congreve, and Gay and it becomes clear that plays from the classical tradition were at least as important a part of British theatrical scene as were commercial productions of new scripts. This lends credence to Tyrone Guthrie’s assessment of this period.

It was remembered that in the 1914 war public taste revolted against anything serious or difficult. Artistically ambitious efforts died horrible and unlamented deaths . . . Instead of the frivolity of the 1914 war, public taste was serious. Libraries all over the country reported a rise in the demand for serious and classical books. Sadlers Wells Opera met with enthusiasm in cities not hitherto know for musical cultivation. Welsh miners acclaimed Sybil Thorndike, and King John played to capacity in places like Lancaster, Ulverston and Burnley.²

There was, therefore, a strong tradition in place of managements producing revivals of classics when the Company of Four commenced operation in 1945.

In general, the sixteen plays that the Company of Four produced that fall under the broad rubric of classic theatre group themselves into three categories. The first of these consists of those plays—chiefly those by Shakespeare and his contemporaries—against which each generation of actors feels the need to test its mettle. Plays such as Hamlet and Richard III provide a yardstick against which each generation measures its actors and against which actors measure themselves. Thus, for the generation that attended the theatre between the two world wars, debate may have raged as to whether Sir Laurence (later, Lord) Olivier or Sir John Gielgud was the definitive Hamlet for the age. But, in a manner that bears out

² Guthrie 22-221.
Jan Kott’s analogy of the great staircase mechanism of history and even as they stood at the top, these two theatrical giants must have realized that later productions of Hamlet would give "pride of place" to another generation of actors and that Gielgud and Olivier would be supplanted at the top by actors such as David Warner, Dame Judith Anderson or Diana Venora.

The second group of revivals consists of those plays regarded as classics from foreign dramatic literature (i.e. A Doll’s House, The Seagull) revived because new adaptations or translations had been written. Again, these productions provide a yardstick, but, in this instance, for an age or culture to re-evaluate dramatic works in the light of new information and new schools of thought. An example of this occurred in 1952, with the coronation of Elizabeth II. The public fascination with the institution of the monarchy and the tremendous outpouring of nationalistic feeling that accompanied it gave rise to numbers of theatrical productions that ranged from The Young Elizabeth, which examined the life of Elizabeth I as her namesake ascended the throne, to the Company’s own production of Richard II, which examines the rights and responsibilities of the monarch.

The third category of revivals are those plays that have withstood the test of time, and have become "standards," simply because they represent immensely enjoyable theatrical fare. Examples of plays that fall under this heading are some of the plays of George Bernard Shaw, and the farces of Arthur Wing Pinero.

Quite obviously, these groupings are not exclusive and the argument could be made that Captain Brassbound’s Conversion, for example, provides both an opportunity for an actress in the role of Lady Cicely to "test her mettle" against a

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role associated with Ellen Terry and that the play helps inform an age about the role of women in society. And, undeniably, Brassbound is tremendously enjoyable theatrical entertainment. It is clearly a case of the "one being in the many, and the many in the one".

Of course, these were not the concerns that prompted The Company of Four to produce sixteen revivals between 1945 and 1956. The commercial potential of each of the scripts produced was the Company's consideration, at base. These groupings, however, will at least begin to provide a context to consider the revivals mounted by the Company of Four.

The Gielgud Season (1952-53): A Season of Ghosts

The season of three plays he mounted and acted in in late 1952 and early 1953 was Gielgud's first association with The Company of Four, although his association with H. M. Tennent, Ltd. and Tennent Plays/Productions, Ltd. went back to May, 1938 when Gielgud had directed Spring Meeting by John Perry and M. J. Farrell for Tennent Plays, Ltd.

John Gielgud’s career had been having some curious ups and downs, and at various times when he had been out of work, I had pleaded with Binkie to let him do a play at Hammersmith. But Binkie had been adamant. To appear at the Lyric would have implied that John was slipping and it was better to wait until we were more successful. Now that we were firmly established as the theatre where exciting and top quality productions were always to be seen, the situation was different.4

4 Black 195.
A season of three plays were announced for production in late 1952 and 1953. The three plays were Richard II, Venice Preserv'd and The Way of the World. Each, in its own way, had a special association for Gielgud.

Richard II (1952)

Gielgud had first played the role of Richard II in 1929 at the Old Vic, and had scored a great personal and critical success in it.

People rose to their feet, clapping, and cheering, stamping and shouting. Ivor Brown called the performance 'exquisite' and Harcourt Williams was later to write 'His playing of the Abdication scene will live in my mind as one of the great things I have witnessed in the theatre'.

Gielgud repeated the role in 1931, again at the Old Vic, and in 1936 directed the play for the Oxford University Dramatic Society, with David King Wood in the lead and Vivien Leigh as the Queen. In 1937, he both directed and starred in the play in his season at the Queen's Theatre. Between this production and that in 1952, the play had only been performed in London once, in the 1947 season at the Old Vic, with Alec Guinness in the title role. Richard II was both a play and a role closely associated with Gielgud.

Gielgud began preparation for the Lyric season during the final weeks of the filming of Joseph Mankiewicz's film version of Julius Caesar, and had originally thought to play Richard himself.

Fearing he might be too old for the part, he suggested Paul Scofield. As he realized later, it might have been wiser to engage another director than to ask Scofield to work under him in a part he had made so much his own. At first he tried to give Scofield complete freedom, but two days before the Brighton

5 Hayman, Gielgud 57.
opening John made a lot of suggestions based on what he had done himself in the part. The result was not altogether happy.\(^6\)

Scofield was supported by a roster of well-known players such as Paul Daneman (Thomas Mowbray), Herbert Lomas (John of Gaunt) and Eric Porter (Henry Bolingbroke). Settings and costumes were by the Australian designer Loudon Sainthill. Though Sainthill had been designing in Australia since 1940, this was only his second production since coming to England.\(^7\) Sainthill drew his inspiration for this production from medieval manuscripts, and his costume designs employed the clear aniline colors of medieval illumination and stained glass against a roseate gold cyclorama. It was clear, however, that it was Gielgud's direction of Scofield in the role he had made so much his own that was the central interest of the critics.

Mr. Paul Scofield's characterization, fascinating and memorably moving when he is obeying his own instinctive impulse, loses its virtue, temporarily, but unmistakably, only when he attempts to shape it to the celebrated notion of the artist King . . . . Yet there is a sort of tyranny in presenting any actor with a set theme for his performance and then saying to him, if only in an attitude of expectancy, "Now act this." Mr. Gielgud, of course, is too sensitive and too sensible to have done any such thing, as the grace and freedom of Mr. Scofield's performance in the first and last parts of the play clearly show.

\(^6\) Hayman, Gielgud 183


\(^8\) Unsigned review, The Times, 30 December 1952: 3.
Scofield's performance Ivor Brown, of The Observer, "damned with faint praise."

Here is a careful and a well-considered performance, in which, the exquisite speeches of the talkative king are delivered with a scrupulous regards for the finesses of phrase. Yet I felt all the time that the king was a figure abstract and remote. Scofield touches the mind more closely than the feelings. I could not become excited by the fall of this monarch, who is a chilly, almost prim-looking figure from the start, when capricious debauchery is the temper set down in the text.

Perhaps the most balanced view, and certainly the one most complimentary to Scofield, was given by J. C. Trewin, writing for The Sketch.

The production at Hammersmith is Gielgud's: at its centre is Scofield and I found him almost intolerably moving... In saying this I contradict some of my colleagues. Scofield for me discovers more pathos in the part than any Richard since the young Gielgud, and he does not do it by extravagant gulps from a bucket of self-pity... his reading is just, consistent, able to move mind and heart.

Brown spent considerable space, in his review, expressing his dissatisfaction at Sainthill's unit set, which, he thought "prettily served the Plantagenet parade," but went on to add:

*The play, if it is to be scenic at all, demands quite a lot of landscape and architecture, and the economic solution of the building problem has been clever. It is true that we seem to watch a game played with toys, but this suits the theatre which is what the house agents insist on calling "bijou." This picture-stage shows that it has some advantages over the bare boards as well as some limitations. It is in the monologues that one misses the close quarters which an open platform bestow upon the forward-striding player.*

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This assessment was seconded by Trewin, who ended his piece on the production with:

Loudon Sainthill's decor is too finicking. He has a small stage; but we should not be reminded of Toytown.\footnote{12}

Despite the fact that the production broke all box office records and took in £ 1,936 in one week,\footnote{13} it was impossible for the production to transfer, because the company had been hired for the season and were rehearsing The Way of the World during the day while performing Richard II in the evening.

In the final analysis, the experience was not a happy or satisfying one for Gielgud.

Paul Scofield gave a fine performance, though I do not think I helped him very much. I was too aware that I had played the part myself and that I was not giving him a sufficiently free hand to develop it along his own lines.\footnote{14}

Black adds:

In the end the production was disappointing—John Gielgud admitted that he had tried to make everybody copy what he had done himself and he chivvied poor Paul Daneman into stitches by trying to make him age twenty years when he was still very inexperienced.

In the following year, 1953, Gielgud was invited to mount a four week season at Bulawayo, Rhodesia (later known as Zimbabwe) as part of the first Rhodes

\footnote{12} Trewin, The Sketch 4 January 1953: 16.

\footnote{13} Hayman, Gielgud 183.

\footnote{14} John Gielgud, in collaboration with John Miller and John Powell, Gielgud: an Actor and his time (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc, 1980) 175.

\footnote{15} Black 198.
Festival, honoring Cecil Rhodes, British statesman and financier. One of the plays he mounted for that season was Richard II, with himself once again in the title role.

What disappointed him most was the actual experience of playing Richard II. Ever since 1937 he had been longing to act the part again, especially when he was directing Scofield in it. But in Bulawayo he found that all he could do was an imitation of the performance he had given at the age of thirty-three. Sixteen years experience of life and an improved technique seemed to be of no help. Like Hamlet and Romeo, Richard II had been a splendid milestone in his career, but one he could not return to.\(^\text{16}\)

Gielgud has never attempted the role since that 1953 performance in Africa.

The Way of the World (1953)

Congreve's The Way of the World had been largely neglected by producers in the first half of the twentieth century. There had been, in fact, only three London productions of the play since 1900.

In 1924, Playfair announced The Way of the World by Congreve for the Lyric, Hammersmith . . . But it was, above all the acting of Edith Evans as Millamant and Robert Loraine as Mirabell which brought the public to see the revival of a classic which no one had imagined could possibly succeed with a modern audience.\(^\text{17}\) Playfair's production had a successful run of one hundred and fifty performances and helped launch the career of Edith Evans, who was hailed as "the most accomplished of living and practising English actresses."\(^\text{18}\) The Way of the World was performed again in 1942 at the Mercury Theatre. And then, in 1948, John Burrell had directed it for the Old Vic, again with Edith Evans. In this production "she relinquished her

\(^{16}\) Hayman, Gielgud 187.

\(^{17}\) John Gielgud, Stage Directions. (London: Heinemann, 1963) 62

dazzling Millamant to the young Faith Brook, to give theatregoers that great ruin of a woman, that 'antidote to desire,' Lady Wishfort."^{19}

Gielgud had never played The Way of the World, but had vivid memories of Evans as Millamant, though he had been but twenty when he saw the production. As he had done in Richard II, Gielgud surrounded himself with what Kenneth Tynan called a "conglamouration of stars."^{20} The casting of the major roles was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Actor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fainall</td>
<td>Eric Porter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirabell</td>
<td>John Gielgud</td>
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<tr>
<td>Witwould</td>
<td>Paul Scofield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petulant</td>
<td>Richard Wordsworth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sir Willful Witwould</td>
<td>Brewster Mason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waitwell</td>
<td>Peter Sallis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs. Fainall</td>
<td>Pauline Jameson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs. Marwood</td>
<td>Eileen Herlie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Millamant</td>
<td>Pamela Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lady Wishfort</td>
<td>Margaret Rutherford</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In general, the critics found much that was admirable in this production, particularly Gielgud's direction.

It is most enjoyable, thoroughly stylish, highly polished, conducted with great verve, speed and taste, glitteringly alive.^{21}

John Gielgud's new production has all his usual qualities--wit, style, pace delivery and daring.^{22}

^{19} Forbes 212

^{20} Hayman, Gielgud 184

But in much the same way that Gielgud's own appearance as Richard II had been so much in the minds of the critics, the "ghost" of Edith Evans—as both Millamant and as Lady Wishfort—weighed heavy in critical appraisals of this production.

The truth is that Dame Edith Evans has spoiled us for any revival in which she does not appear.23

The fact that many of us who were too young to see Dame Edith Evans's Millamant have at least seen her incomparable Wishfort, added to the discomfort.24

In retrospect, even if there had not been a "definitive" reading of the role of Millamant a scant thirty years before, it is doubtful that Pamela Brown would have been warmly received by the critical community. In her study Restoration Revivals on the British Stage (1944-1979) Retta M. Taney observes:

The difficulty of Brown's Millamant was apparently based on the not insubstantial fact that the actress was not in sympathy with the character.25

This assessment is certainly supported by the reviews which contain phrases such as "the impression is that she is unaccountably not in love with the idea of


Millamant,\textsuperscript{26} and "A strange, original creation, moving, intelligent, never for a moment Congreve's heroine."\textsuperscript{27}

The adverse criticism occasioned by Brown's lack of sympathy with the character was equalled, or exceeded, by Rutherford's lack of ability to play in the proper style.

Miss Rutherford is equally unsuited. In her case, the intention seems to be not so much to twist the words out of shape as to smother them in the kind of "funny business" for which she is famous. Her best lines are lost in a welter of mannerism and cavorting that is like a parody of her own best performances.\textsuperscript{28}

'Welter' seems to have summed up Rutherford's performance as T. C. Worsley employs it as well:

Miss Margaret Rutherford cannot get that formidable jaw of hers round half of Congreve's phrases. Comic business is not enough here. She is drowned in a welter of unprojected sentences. She goes down with all guns firing, it is true, but she goes down.\textsuperscript{29}

A central concern for the Kenneth Tynan was the 'unbalanced' and, as a result, unsatisfactory nature of the love scenes between Millamant and Mirabell, which could have been caused by Brown's lack of sympathy with her character.


\textsuperscript{27} J. N. B. R., \textit{The New Statesman}: 232.

\textsuperscript{28} J. N. B. R., \textit{The New Statesman}: 232.

\textsuperscript{29} T. C. Worsley, \textit{The New Statesman} "Millamant and Brutus," 7 March 1953: 260.
Mr. Gielgud, an impeccable Mirabell in plum velvet, has Pamela Brown begging for mercy almost before the battle is joined.\(^{30}\)

The amount of publicity received by Company of Four productions over the years had increased markedly, this production, however, was certainly one of the few, if not the only Company of Four production reviewed in The New York Times. In a piece on the London theatre season and Gielgud in particular, Brooks Atkinson wrote:

As an exercise in stylization, the acting is immaculate, satirically mannered and accomplished, but in perfecting the style Mr. Gielgud is omitting the life. Both Mr. Gielgud and Miss Brown are sacrificing the fun to the technique. Mr. Gielgud's Mirabell is too scholarly and Miss Brown's Millamant lacks force.

In Stage Directions, Gielgud gives the following definition of "style."

What exactly is style in acting and stage production? Does it mean the correct wearing of costume, appropriate deportment and the 'nice conduct of a clouded cane'? Does it also imply a correct interpretation of the text, without undue exaggeration or eccentricity, an elegant sense of period and beautiful unself-conscious speaking by a balanced and versatile company of players, used to working together; flexible instruments under the hand of an inspired director?\(^{32}\)

This certainly comes close to describing Gielgud's approach to The Way of the World. He had provided an elegant and exquisitely correct setting around a


\(^{32}\) Gielgud, Directions 104.
diamond—the central relationship of Mirabell and Millamant—that, by his own admission, he had no idea how to polish.

I could not find much to do with Mirabell and was haunted by the memory of Edith Evans' performance as Millamant, which was perhaps why I failed to help Pamela Brown, whom I loved and who had made such a great success with me in *The Lady's Not for Burning*. The success of the production was chiefly due to Margaret Rutherford's splendid Lady Wishfort. The charming decor was designed by James Bailey and I managed to arrange the text a little better than usual to simplify the rather boring complications.33

*The Way of the World* played to appreciative crowds, and according to Hayman, duplicated the financial success of *Richard II*.34 But because *Venice Preserv'd* was in preparation the production could not transfer. The run, however, was extended, playing for three months, rather than the four weeks announced for each of the productions.

*Venice Preserv'd* (1953)

Thomas ('Gentle') Otway had written during the Restoration the last major English tragedy until *The Cenci*, an actor's play rather than a poet's. Nobody had seen his name on a London programme since the bawdy romp of *The Soldier's Fortune*... had turned up in the West End during the nineteen thirties. Once they had called him "next to Shakespeare", not for the quality of his language which runs forcibly without flooding into an Elizabethan cataract, but as a tribute to the pathos of *The Orphan* and, more reasonably to the dagger-thrust of invention in *Venice Preserv'd*.35

33 Gielgud, et al., *Gielgud: an Actor and his time* 175.

34 Hayman, *Gielgud* 184.

35 Trewin, *Peter Brook* 66.
I had read *Venice Preserv'd* some years before and felt there was something strikingly effective in the play and Peter Brook agreed. Nobody had done it since the eighteenth century, when all the great actors and actresses had played it, but it seemed tailor-made for me and Scofield, one of the few plays, like *Othello*, which has two magnificent leading parts for men.\(^{36}\)

Gielgud's assessment that "nobody had done it since the eighteenth century" was not quite accurate. Though the play had been largely neglected:

A 1920 revival by the Phoenix Society at the Lyric Theatre [Hammersmith], with Baliol Holloway as Pierre, Cathleen Nesbitt as Belvidera and Edith Evans as Aquilina reaffirmed the difficulty of playing the tragedy naturally.\(^{37}\)

One of the greatest innovations for the Brook-Gielgud production was in the restoration of certain scenes generally expunged from the text.

For much of its theatrical history, following the sexual openness of the Restoration period, some bawdy scenes, originally written according to legend at the suggestion of Charles II himself, were purged from the play in performance. Not surprisingly, Peter Brook restored them.\(^{38}\)

The scenes alluded to here are between the courtesan Aquilina and her protector, Antonio, and are often referred to as the "Nicky-Nacky" scenes, as a

\(^{36}\) Gielgud, *et al.*, *An Actor* 175.

\(^{37}\) Taney 130.

\(^{38}\) Jones, *Directions* 44.
result of Antonio's nickname for Aquilina. They involve the regimen of flagellation and domination of Aquilina over Antonio, played out as an erotic masochistic game.

Besides the restoration of these bowdlerized scenes, one other noteworthy aspect of the production was Leslie Hurry's designs.

One can recreate scene upon scene from the production as if they hung upon the walls of the Accademia: the chiaroscuro of the cellar, heavily-arched, where the conspirators assembled; the Venetian Senate in its pomp against the darkly glowing depths, the far distances of Leslie Hurry's design, noble in perspective.

Gielgud, himself, says of Hurry's work that it was "beautiful, very simple." Brook's direction of this production won kudos from the critics at every turn.

Peter Brook's production shows no fault of exhibitionism: the play is taken seriously; the story moves lucidly and briskly in its trackway of corruption and carnage. The grouping and lighting are finely contrived.

Peter Brook has staged the piece excitingly without the smallest fumbling for effect.

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39 Trewin, Brook 68.

40 Gielgud, et al., An Actor 175.

41 Ivor Brown, Observer, 24 May 1953: 11.

Peter Brook, with his gift for finding the heart of a piece, has put it on stage with imaginative clarity against Leslie Hurry's atmosphere setting.

Scofield, in the role of Pierre, won the kind of plaudits he had not attained in the role of Richard II.

London is beginning at last to realise, with little gasps of astonishment, that Paul Scofield is a versatile actor. This First Player among our younger actors . . . .

If he has what is theatrically the most rewarding of the men's parts he makes the most of it, giving a clear, unforgettable portrait of the man of action who has set himself a noble aim and is untroubled by doubts.

Perhaps because the Antonio/Aquilina scenes had been so frequently omitted from productions, or perhaps just because they were, in this production, acted with such vigor, Brown and Wordsworth, in these two roles, were mentioned in virtually every review.

The coarse humours of the doddering lecher Antonio and his greedy contemptuous strumpet Aquilina are given full values by Richard Wordsworth and Pamela Brown.

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44 Trewin, Sketch 584.


... Brown is a wondrously flamboyant courtesan, and ... Wordsworth plays to her well as the lecherous senator--possibly a satiric portrait of Shaftesbury--with his "hurry-durry" and dotard's baby talk.47

Gielgud's performance was acclaimed for fine verse speaking and for the way he made the process of Jaffier's ratiocination so visible.

One cause for audience adulation of Gielgud at this time was completely external to the production. In the Coronation Honours List, published on 2 June 1953, it was announced that Gielgud was to receive a knighthood, a gesture that many in the theatrical community felt long overdue. Jaffier's first line in the play is "My Lord, I am not that abject wretch you think me."

On the eve of the Coronation, there was such a prolonged burst of laughter, cheering and applause after the line that John had to pause for several minutes.

Paul Scofield made his first entrance shortly after John... 'When, a long time later, I came on, John's face was streaming with tears and the whole theatre was charged with high emotional excitement. It seemed as if the whole world was glad for him and he was overwhelmed by this quite unexpected and clamorous revelation of public affection. And it was his own humility and vulnerability that was most moving. It was also quite funny, because it wasn't easy after that to get on with the play!'48

Regardless of the groundswell of affection that he enjoyed during this period, according to Gielgud's account, Venice Preserv'd was the only production in his season at the Lyric, Hammersmith that lost money.49


48 Hayman, quoting Paul Scofield, Gielgud 186.

49 Gielgud, et al., An Actor 176.
Summary

The Gielgud season at the Lyric, Hammersmith could aptly be called a "season of ghosts." The first production, Richard II, suffered from the ghost of Gielgud's own performance of the title role, how this affected his direction of Scofield, and the close association between himself and the role in the mind of both the public and the critics. The Way of the World suffered from the ghost of Dame Edith Evans's performances in two of the central roles and similar association.

In the case of Venice Preserv'd, Gielgud and company managed to exorcise the conception that the play had become a museum piece and was all but unproducible.

According to Taney, the production of Venice Preserv'd was significant for Gielgud in three ways:

1. His success as Jaffier disproved a remark about the limitations imposed on his performance by the cerebral quality of his interpretations:
   
   Mr. Gielgud cannot make convincing love and he lacks dash. Flatness, indeed a Chekhovian flabbiness of spirit and body, characterises all his productions, the best no less than the worst. His supreme need is for an increase of flesh and blood as well as mind and spirit.

2. Second, during the run of the play he gained his Knighthood. Finally, he successfully produced a drama long regarded as a museum piece.

50 "Mr. Gielgud's Career", The Observer, 4 June 1939: Cited in Taney 328.

51 Taney, Restoration Revivals 131.
In a retrospective article after the Gielgud season at the Lyric, Ivor Brown summed up Gielgud's power to draw an audience for playwrights

... such as Webster and Otway, by who our rather conservative playgoers are not drawn except with the magnetic audition of a much-admired actor... he does not draw merely because he is himself, but because he insists on judicious casting round about him, give a major care to the lesser parts, and bestows upon the author's whole intention as much skill and devotion as he does upon his own part. His power to draw the public has a special advantage in that he can guarantee support for the classics of 'the fringe.'

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Revivals from the European Repertory

Revivals, or productions of new translations and/or adaptations of major works from 'the classics' of the European repertory played a small but nonetheless important part in the presentation of the Company of Four. Of the sixty-nine productions that the Company mounted, four can be considered to come under this categorization.

How does one differentiate, in this, however, between such works as those by Jean Anouilh, such as The Lark, considered in an earlier chapter, which would, through time, rise to the standard of classic and productions such as The Seagull, A Doll's House, The Cherry Orchard and Hedda Gabler? For the purpose of this study, at least, the major differentiation that is made is that the authors considered under this categorization were not living and could, as a result, take no part in the production of their works by the company. Though this differentiation may seem, on the surface, to make little difference as regards the final disposition of the production,

the intervention of Bernard Shaw, for example, certainly figured in the final fate of 
Captain Brassbound's Conversion. And Noel Coward's other involvements with 
H. M. Tennent, for another example, may have lead to the revival of The Vortex, a 
script that had gone unrevived for 25 years.

The Seagull (1949)

"The stage has gone to the dogs, Irina Nikolayevna. There were mighty oaks 
in the old days, but now we see nothing but stumps."

Shamrayev
Act I
The Seagull

Chekhov's The Seagull was the first play from this category undertaken by the 
Company. The Seagull had failed miserably in its initial production at the 
Alexandrinsky Theatre, St. Petersburg, in 1896. The British admiration for and 
fascination with Chekhov, however, extended back to the century's beginning. 

As far as can be ascertained, the first of Chekhov's plays to be acted in 
English was The Seagull. Shaw persuaded the Stage Society to produce 
The Cherry Orchard in 1911, and Uncle Vanya in 1914. These early 
productions failed, but helped to make Chekhov's work known to actors and 
critics alike. Three Sisters was produced in London for the first time in 1920, 
but the first production to be commercially successful was The Cherry 
Orchard, brought to London in 1925 from the Oxford Playhouse. Even more 
successful was a series of productions by Komisarjevsky at the Barnes

^ Gielgud's adaptation of this line is very free. David Magarshack translates the 
line "Paul Chadin! There are no such actors now. The stage is no longer what it 
was, madam. In the old days we had mighty oaks. All we have now are tree 
stumps." Anton Chekhov, David Magarshack, transl., Chekhov's Plays. (New 

Theatre under Philip Ridgeway . . . which finally naturalized Chekhov in England.  

How far that "naturalization" had extended is debatable. Between the Komisarjevsky productions at the Barnes Theatre, in the 1920s and the Company of Four production, 1949, there was only one documented production in London, a 1936 production at the New Theatre.

This was the first full scale West End production of a Chekhov play. Edith Evans was Arkadina, Peggy Ashcroft Nina, Stephen Haggard Konstantin. Alec Guinness had only a few lines as a workman in the first act. Komisarjevsky provided a new translation of his own.

The Company of Four production was directed by Irene Hentschel. Hentschel was one of a stable of directors regularly employed by the Tennent organization, for whom she had directed a production of The Doctor's Dilemma (1940), with Vivien Leigh. For The Company of Four she had produced Galway Handicap (1947) and Bred in the Bone, (1948). The translation used for this production was by George Calderon. Settings for the production were by Paul Sheriff, and costumes were by William Chappell:

An ex-ballet dancer who had trained with Marie Rambert (he had created the Gemini dance in Horoscope with Margot Fonteyn and Michael Soames for the Sadlers Wells Ballet), Billy seemed able to turn his hand to anything,

55 Hartnoll, Concise Companion 94.

56 Hayman, Gielgud 97-98.

57 George Calderon, 1868-1915, author and playwright who also wrote about Tahiti under the name "Tihoti." Among the other plays that Calderon wrote was The Little Stone House. In 1914, Calderon published a translation of Reminiscences of Tolstoy, by his son Count Ilya Tolstoy. In 1915, Calderon was reported missing in Gallipoli.
designing the dresses for *Point of Departure*, writing a biography of Margot Fonteyn and filling the monkey skin in a brief appearance at the end of *The Little Hut.\(^{58}\)

Chappell, of course, was later closely associated with the revues presented by the Company of Four.

The cast for this production was "starred with good names."\(^{59}\) In the central role of Arkadina, the fading actress come home to rest on her laurels, was Isabel Jeans.

Isabel was a fascinating choice for Arkadina. An exquisitely beautiful woman, she had an elegance that was almost Parisian to supplement her English upper-class aura, and the very fact that she was not normally considered to be a classical actress gave her performance an added reality.\(^{60}\)

Opposite Jeans was Ian Hunter, as Trigorin, the novelist who is at first attached to Arkadina, but later steals the heart of Nina, as played by Mai Zetterling. Zetterling had made her debut in her native Sweden in 1941, where she had played a variety of roles including Anya in *The Cherry Orchard* and Elektra in *Les Mouches*. Her "English language" debut came in 1948 as Hedvig in *The Wild Duck*, at The St. Martin's Theatre. Nina was her second role in English.\(^{61}\) Paul Scofield played Constantin.

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\(^{58}\) Black, *Circle* 186.


\(^{60}\) Black, *Circle* 151.

Something has gone a little wrong. The play is acted well in a convention to which it is ill-suited, so that the poetic overtone are but faintly heard, and for the peculiarly satisfying Tchekhoian rhythm we are given the bumpily realistic movement appropriate to Edwardian drawing room drama.

The production occasioned a critical response that can be called, at best, mixed. The Times reviewer clearly thought the production wrong-headed:

... the production somehow fails to imply the special quality of these people. ... It shows no recognition of the fact that they live very largely within themselves ... their interaction seems entirely unpoetic and unnecessarily crude.

The reviewer strikes a humorous note, however, in his assessment of Scofield's Constantin.

Mr. Paul Scofield is disappointing as Constantine. He is from first to last altogether too matter-of-fact, and so self possessed and collected is he at last that he is in no fit state to blow out his brains.

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63 The Times, 5 October 1949: 6.

64 The Times, 5 October 1949: 6.
Trewin, reviewing the production for The Observer, thought more of Scofield.

... Scofield's Constantin is most moving in the last numbed decision. Throughout, the youth thinks, feels, communicates: Scofield is not a mock-sensitive actor with vibrato in the voice and St. Vitus in the limbs.

Zetterling, as Nina, drew unfavorable comments which focused chiefly on her difficulty with English:

the foreignness of her accent spoils her magnificent speech at the end.66

... Zetterling will realise Nina's overwhelming fourth act when her English is more practiced.67

... though she is right as the child-like Nina of the early scenes, her command of English is not yet supple enough for the great speech in the fourth act. The end of the play is blurred.68

Jeans' interpretation of Arkadina was apparently too "hard" to be engaging for any of the critics.


... Jeans flaunts the selfishness of Arkadina like a cloak, but she simplifies the character: this woman could never be, in her son's phrase "the perfection of a sick nurse." 

[Jeans] plays Madame Arkadina with the deliberately theatrical hardness and amusingness which have a superficial justification in the fact that Irina is an actress. The element of persuasive pity which may well be the source her power over men is absent.

All critical reservations aside, Black terms it "one of our most prestigious productions" and The Seagull was sufficiently popular with audiences that it transferred to the St. James's Theatre after its four weeks at the Lyric, opening on the 16th of November, and running for sixty-two performances.

**A Doll's House (1953)**

Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, first produced in England in 1889, had been neglected for much of the first half of the 20th century. There had been two productions of the play at the Arts Theatre (1930 and 1945), and a commercial production at the Winter Garden Theatre in 1946 starring Angela Baddeley.

The adaptation used for this production was by Peter Ashmore, who also directed. Ashmore had been the Artistic Director of the Oxford Playhouse during the war and was, like Hentschel, one of a group of directors regularly used by

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71 Black 151.
H. M. Tennent and Tennent Productions, Ltd. For the Company of Four he had
directed Caste (1946), Pygmalion (1947) and Trelawney of the 'Wells' (1952).
Ashmore seems an odd choice for directing the psychologically complex A Doll's
House in light of the string of comedies from the standard British repertory that he
had previously directed. Settings and costumes were by Reece Pemberton, whose
efforts in helping Ashmore realize his artistic vision were to cause comments.

Once again the dramatic abilities of Mai Zetterling were called upon. In the
role of Torvald, Ashmore cast Mogens Weith, another Scandinavian actor who spoke
"perfectly modulated English."72 Opposite their Scandinavian authenticity, Ashmore
banked the talents of George Rose (Krogstad), Rosalie Crutchley (Mrs. Linde) and
Michael Goodliffe (Judge Rank).

On two particular issues, the critics seemed unanimously disposed,
unfortunately in the negative. The first of these was Zetterling's attack in the play's
first act. At the behest of Ashmore, Zetterling made overmuch of the animal imagery
that is contained in Torvald's references to her and presented a performance that
was an unconventional reading of the role of Nora.

Clearly the Nora of the early scenes must chirp and flutter, and babble of
macaroons. Still it can be managed tactfully; Miss Zetterling twitters on one
note. Although her command of English has developed, and she is more at
ease with Nora than Nina, Ibsen's skylark than Chekhov's seagull, we are
aware in the first act of her vocal monotony. An exaggerated tripping-hither,
tripping-thither does not help.73


She so vastly overplays Helmer's "little squirrel," the romping child mother, that her incessant vivacity tires the mind.\textsuperscript{14}

Miss Zetterling toiled so hard at her squirrel-scampering and songbird-trilling that we began to think glumly of labour ahead.\textsuperscript{15}

The critics were almost unanimous in their assessment that Zetterling improved tremendously across the course of the evening, and that her Nora of the play's final scenes was a delight to watch.

Mogens Weith, of the "perfectly modulated English," received uniformly laudatory notices.

\ldots Weith, on the other hand, gives us a complete portrait of Helmer, making all the points with light, easy persuasive touches.

The Danish actor, \ldots Weith, had a clear and convincing conception of the self-righteous husband Helmer. \textsuperscript{76} In his lechery and his irritated impatience alike, Mr. Weith was excellent.\textsuperscript{76}

Weith \ldots whose face is uncommonly expressive, is Torvald to a hair; I have never known the part more truthfully handled.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{74} Unsigned review, \textit{The Times}, 9 September 1953: 2.

\textsuperscript{75} J. C. Trewin, "Women's Hour," \textit{The Observer}, 13 September 1953: 11.

\textsuperscript{76} Unsigned review, \textit{The Times}, 9 September 1953: 2.


\textsuperscript{78} J. C. Trewin, \textit{The Sketch}, 23 September 1953: 420.
Ashmore's direction of the piece was adjudged generally sound. The critics were unanimous, however, in their disregard for his usage of a strange anomalous bedroom, included in the set, for the staging of the final scene.

For some reason, Peter Ashmore— a producer of known perception— has elected to take us into the Helmers bedroom for the third act. Now this is a stage apartment that I feel should be as rigorously off-stage as Duncan's bed-chamber. We are alarmed to find it included in Reece Pemberton's composite set which contrives to get us into sitting-room, bedroom and hall. And we are more surprized when, during the crucial scene of the last act we have to go to the bedroom angled across the corner of the stage.79

It is a pity, maybe, that— working on a rather too cunning multiple set by Reece Pemberton— [Ashmore] has chosen to place the last scene inside the Helmers bedroom. All has been well until then... But if ever a scene needed to be played at stage centre, it is the final reckoning between Nora and Torvald. Why pen them over there in a doll's bedroom?80

... Pemberton added a bedroom on the left of the stage to balance the passage on the right leading to Helmer's study. Playing a small scene or two here... did not much matter. But to put the great last scene there perched and cramped offcentre is to dissipate the interest and the extra business involved... introduces just the wrong kind of realism at the very moment when truth itself hangs in the balance.81

With A Doll's House, The Company of Four had much the same kind of success— appreciative audiences, mixed reviews, considerable puffery in the media— that they had with The Seagull.

79 Trewin, Sketch: 420.

80 Trewin, The Observer, 13 September 1953: 11.

One major difference, however, is that *A Doll's House* did not transfer after its run at the Lyric, Hammersmith. Or, at least, not to a West End theatre. Following the Hammersmith run Weith and Zetterling took this production to The Nørveboros Theatre, Copenhagen, where they performed it, with a Danish supporting cast. This production, and the Gielgud *Richard II* (subsequently remounted in Bulawayo, Rhodesia) were among the first Company of Four productions that had "international tours," but they would not be the last. Though not specifically mounted under the auspices or aegis of the Company of Four, both these productions were close copies of that which had been presented at Hammersmith. Gielgud's cast, for instance, was virtually identical, and he used the Lyric sets.

**The Cherry Orchard,** (1954)

The Company of Four's next adventure in the presentation of the classics of the European repertory brought John Gielgud back to the Lyric, Hammersmith to direct his own adaptation of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard.*

Komisarjevsky had produced *The Cherry Orchard* in his 1924-25 season at Barnes (with Charles Laughton as Epihodov), but the first commercially successful production of *The Cherry Orchard* was J. B. Fagan's 1925 production for the Oxford Playhouse. Following its run in Oxford, the production, which starred Gielgud as Trofimov, subsequently transferred to The Lyric, Hammersmith:

The reviews were very favourable and Nigel Playfair offered to transfer the production to the Lyric Hammersmith as soon as the Oxford season was over. This was a very brave decision, for comparatively little time had gone
by since the Stage Society had put on a production of the play in London only to find that the critics were bewildered and most of the audience walked out.\textsuperscript{82}

In this instance, the audience did not walk out and the production was so favorably received that it transferred to the Royalty Theatre following its Lyric run.

The Liverpool Rep had transferred a production of the play to the St. James in 1948 for a limited run, and, in that same year, it had also been produced at the Arts Theatre.

For the Company of Four production, Gielgud undertook his own adaptation of the script.

After these rewarding experiences with foreign directors, I was naturally eager to experiment in trying my own hand at directing a Chekhov play, but it was not until 1954 that I was asked to stage The Cherry Orchard. In the other Chekhov productions it had always been necessary to re-phrase many of the speeches in the Garnett translations, though Komisarjevsky had himself made his own translation of The Seagull for his 1936 production. In 1954 I worked with a Russian friend, and managed to make a new version of The Cherry Orchard, which seemed to me to be more colloquial than any of the older published translations and easier for the actors to speak.\textsuperscript{83}

In the central roles of Madame Ranevsky and Lopahin, Gielgud cast Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies and Trevor Howard. Gielgud had frequently worked with Ffrangcon-Davies, their professional association going back as far as 1924 when she had played Juliet to Gielgud's Romeo for Barry Jackson. Additionally she had played Olga in Gielgud's 1938 production of The Three Sisters, directed by Michel St. Denis. Howard, who had made his professional debut in 1934, had played

\textsuperscript{82} Hayman, Gielgud 30.

such roles as Petruchio in *The Taming of the Shrew* (New, 1953) and Mat Burke in *Anna Christie* (Arts, 1947). Additionally, his appearances in films such as *Brief Encounter* (1945) and *The Third Man* (1949) had made him a name familiar to the movie-going public as well as to theatregoers. Settings and costumes for the production were by Richard Lake.

The critical response was largely favorable for the production, and praised it with assessments that included:

*The Cherry Orchard* has returned in remarkably full bloom . . . . Gielgud appeared . . . to have judged the second, third and fourth acts with sensitive truth, a miracle of pause and effect. Much of the casting is ideal.  

So it goes on, with the accomplished company unfailingly obedient to the short and long rhythms established by the producer . . . . The end is Sir John Gielgud's extraordinarily complete stage realization of the peculiar elasticity of Slav melancholy . . . . The great charm of the performance is that it compels us to the illusion that such melancholy is as natural to us as to those in whose blood it runs.

For the rest, Gielgud's direction has a brilliant mixture of laughter and melancholy . . . . In short, the pattern is complete, the production cherry-ripe.

The production was not without its detractor, however.

This production never, from the start, quite distills the full atmosphere. It was too solid, too heavy in parts and too cluttered and this worked against this flicker and chequer of mood which should shimmer through the play like the sheen on shot-silk . . . . but I don't wish to end by implying too harsh a picture of the production. It is only by comparison with what it could have

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85 *The Times*, 22 May 1954: 8.

been that it disappoints. It is very well worth seeing as it is, and may quite likely by now have settled into better focus.\footnote{T.C. Worsley, \textit{The New Statesman}, 29 May 1954: 697.}

Reactions to Ffrangcon-Davies as Ranevsky were equally split. They ranged from W. A. Darlington's opinion that "Ffrangcon-Davies must have a special honor for a performance in which comedy and pathos are most subtly blended,"\footnote{W. A. Darlington, \textit{Daily Telegraph and Morning Post}, 22 May 1954: 9.} to an interlocutory review of her performance by T. C. Worsley:

\begin{quote}
Is Miss Ffrangcon-Davies a little too unselfish, playing down the part too far below its value? Exquisite and touching in her passages of grief, is she in her gaiety sufficiently unforced and sparkling? Is she not a little too sincere? Does she sufficiently suggest the shallowness of a character on whose surface the play of shadow and shine is easy-come and easy-go?\footnote{T. C. Worsley, \textit{The New Statesman}, 29 May 1954: 697.}
\end{quote}

Worsley was also the only reviewer at all critical of Howard's Lopahin, about which the other reviewers were unanimous:

\begin{quote}
Howard's Lopahin is exactly right.\footnote{Ivor Brown, \textit{Observer}, 23 May 1954: 11.}
\end{quote}

Ffrangcon-Davie's Ranevsky and Howard's Lopahin . . . have a claim to belong to the authentic Tchekhov theatre.\footnote{The Times, 22 May 1954: 8.}
Worsley, on the other hand, thought Howard needed "a little less assurance early on, or rather a heightened conscious-ness of his disadvantages, a touch more of social unease."  92

Conclusion

The production ran for its scheduled four weeks at the Lyric. Whether as a result of the reservations voiced by the reviewers, or because other commitments kept the company from doing so, the production did not transfer as so many of its predecessors had done.

English actors certainly seem to have a special gift for playing Chekhov. Perhaps we are more nearly in sympathy with the Russian temperament than we imagine.  93

This production apparently quenched Gielgud’s hunger to direct Chekhov. In 1961 He played Gaev in The Cherry Orchard opposite the Ranevsky of Peggy Ashcroft. He did not return to directing Chekhov for eleven years, when he directed and starred in Ivanov in London and New York.  94


93 Gielgud, Stage Directions 92.

94 Hayman, Gielgud 248-249.
Hedda Gabler, (1954)

Just a year later, The Company of Four was to score perhaps its greatest triumph in this arena with Hedda Gabler, starring Peggy Ashcroft. First performed in 1890, Hedda was produced on the London stage just a year later.

In the twentieth century Hedda had been produced in London in 1922 (The Hampstead Everyman), 1942 (The Mercury) and 1951 (The Arts). There had also been a revival by a commercial management of the 1942 Mercury Theatre production in 1943 at the larger and more central Westminster Theatre.

Peter Ashmore directed the Company of Four production, and employed a translation by Max Faber. Settings and costumes were by the design team Motley, and incidental music for the production was by Leslie Bridgwater.

The real drawing card of this production, however, was Peggy Ashcroft. Ashcroft, of course, was by this time a star of the first magnitude, having established her reputation in roles that ranged from Desdemona (which she played opposite Paul Robeson, Savoy Theatre, 1930) to Fanny in Sea Fever (adapted by Auriol Lee and John Van Druten from Marcel Pagnol, the New Theatre, 1931). She had been

95 Max Faber, 1904-, has published numerous translations of Ibsen, including An Enemy of the People, Hedda Gabler, and The Wild Duck.

96 The design team of Motley was made up of Elizabeth Montgomery, Sophie Harris and Margaret Harris. They were the frequent designer of choice for John Gielgud, designing his Richard of Bordeaux, among other productions and designed both the London and Broadway productions of South Pacific. Their book, Designing and Making Stage Costumes (London: Studio Vista, Ltd., 1964), is considered one the standard texts in the field.
awarded the C. B. E. (Commander of the British Empire) in 1951. This was, however, her first foray into Ibsen.

The stance that all of the critics took was an appreciative one for the unorthodox approach that Ashmore took to the production, and Ashcroft's abilities to help him realize this approach. Ashmore refuted the usual readings of the script, the "nineteenth century way with pessimistic art was to treat it with a decent solemnity . . . Ibsen was notoriously without a sense of humor." Instead, while maintaining the psychological subtext inherent in the script, Ashmore led Ashcroft and company into a reading of the script that managed to eke from it some moments of wry humor.

It is as an essentially comic character that Miss Ashcroft plays her. The fineness of the playing consists in the unfailing certainty with which it sets Hedda's odious actions in an ironic light and at the same time forces them to yield their full theatrical flavor. Never once does the performance fall into burlesque. Yet there is not a moment when we cannot salt our enjoyment with the reflection that the heroine's pretensions to aesthetic taste, to aristocracy of spirit or the nobleness of despair are preposterous.

This Hedda is not a figure of tragic intensity but of sharp and merciless comedy . . . . The great thing about Miss Ashcroft's playing is that it establishes this comedic understanding between the player and the audience without abating in any way the theatrical excitement inherent in the part.

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100 Unsigned review, *The Times*, 9 September 1954: 11.
While maintaining that "Ashmore's production is the finest tribute to Ibsen since Mr. Michael Benthall's *Wild Duck* in 1948," Kenneth Tynan, reviewing the production for *The Observer*, makes punning statements about Hedda's sexuality.

Hedda's destructiveness springs not from passion but from sexual frigidity. Not otherwise would she marry Tesman; not otherwise repel the advances of Brack; not other otherwise stiffen at every mention of motherhood; or burn Eilert Lovborg's manuscript, his "child" by Mrs. Elvsted . . . the whole display is a monument to *nymphomanie de tete*, which might roughly be translated as the nymphomania of Hedda.\(^{101}\)

And finally, even though it is contained in a paean of praise for Ashcroft, Keown's assessment echoes that of the critics.

The last production in which she appeared has added to, in its way, to stage history. Just as Komisarjevsky had shown with *The Seagull* that Chekhov could be reprieved from the funereal gloom in which he was commonly submerged, so Peter Ashmore's handling of *Hedda Gabler* proved beyond question that Ibsen's play was not pure tragedy, but tragedy shot through with mordant comedy . . . so much irony was discovered that the audience laughed as surely it has never laughed at Ibsen in London.\(^{102}\)

Remarkably, the entire production received notices that were equally laudatory. Besides Tynan's tribute, the critics held that:

Ashmore's production is excellent in every respect and the acting is good at all points.\(^{103}\)

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\(^{102}\) Keown, *Ashcroft* 84-85.

\(^{103}\) *The Sketch*, 22 September 1954: 556.
Ashmore's production is entirely fit to contain this fine performance. It is at all points unobtrusively helpful and every word spoken is heard.

Hedda was as popular with audiences as it was the critics. It ran from September to December, at the Lyric and then transferred to the Westminster Theatre, where it played for one hundred and fifty five performances. Oddly, according to Black's Upper Circle, its transfer was under the auspices of the profit-distributing H. M. Tennent, Ltd, rather than Tennent Productions, which had managed all the other Company of Four transfers. One possible explanation for this change in what had been, to that time, a standard practice, was that this was the period when the Parliamentary vetting of the Theatrical Companies Bill was focusing the attention of the theatrical community on Beaumont and the Tennent organization.

After its run at the Westminster, Hedda toured to Holland, Denmark and Oslo, Norway. Ashcroft and company experienced great trepidation at how such an unorthodox Hedda would be received in Ibsen's homeland. But their worries were for naught. As the dramatic critic for Aftenposten, the leading Oslo newspaper wrote:

It is curious to have to register the fact that an English actress has shown the Norwegian public how Hedda should be played . . . . There is the most intimate connection between the Hedda Gabler of Peggy Ashcroft and the intentions of Ibsen himself.

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104 The Times, 9 September 1954: 11.

105 As cited by Keown, Ashcroft 86.
A final gesture of the success of the production came when "the King of Norway set his seal on the general acclamation by giving her the King's Medal, in gold . . . ."106

Other Revivals

Besides the seven plays mentioned above, The Company of four also presented "revivals" of eight other scripts that come under the broad rubric of major works from the standard British repertory. The plays that come under that rubric and the year that they were produced by the Company are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caste</td>
<td>1947</td>
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<td>Pygmalion</td>
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<td>The Relapse</td>
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<td>Dandy Dick</td>
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<tr>
<td>Captain Brassbound's Conversion</td>
<td>1948</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Vortex</td>
<td>1952</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trelawney of the 'Wells'</td>
<td>1952</td>
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<tr>
<td>Misalliance</td>
<td>1956</td>
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One interesting aspect that the inclusion of the dates makes evident is that these revivals tend to cluster—that there were periods when the Company seemed very much committed to the production of revivals, and that there were periods when these plays, or types of plays, were not produced by the Company.

Equally interesting is the fact that the Company seemed to concentrate on revivals of plays from the standard British repertory during their early years (Caste, Pygmalion, Dandy Dick) and on revivals or new productions of plays from the

106 Keown 86.
European repertory (A Doll's House, The Cherry Orchard, Hedda Gabler) later in its production history.

Revivals of Shaw

The fortunes of George Bernard Shaw as dramatist are frankly only tangential to and outside the boundaries of this study. But in considering the three revivals of scripts by Shaw that the Company of Four presented, it might prove helpful to examine the period just before the Company commenced production. This production history "writ small" may help indicate whether the Company of Four were demonstrating tremendous vision in producing neglected or infrequently seen Shaw, or whether they were following the pack and were attempting to "cash in" on a great resurgence of interest in the playwright's works.

In The Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre, Hartnoll claims:

It would be impossible to list all the revivals and translations of Shaw's major plays. Setting aside Pygmalion, which, like Major Barbara and Caesar and Cleopatra, has been filmed, the most popular appear to be Saint Joan, followed by Candida, Arms and the Man, The Doctor's Dilemma and You Never Can Tell.

Hartnoll's conjecture holds at least partially true. If the period from 1939 to 1956 (roughly the beginning of World War II to the cessation of production by the Company of Four) is considered, both Pygmalion and Saint Joan, for instance, each had four productions, while You Never Can Tell was unproduced on the London stage during this period. The other scripts mentioned had one or two productions.

each. The sporadic nature of the production of Shaw's works can be explained in part by the fact that he retained, until his death in 1950, the right of refusal to allow production if he found the artists or the management of a production company seeking to present his works "unsuitable." This retention figures prominently in the consideration of Captain Brassbound's Conversion, for instance, that follows.

**Pygmalion (1947)**

The Company of Four's first Shaw revival was, at best, inauspicious. Inarguably, *Pygmalion* was one of the most frequently produced of Shaw's works during this period. Since the first performance in 1914 (with Mrs. Patrick Campbell and Sir Herbert Beerbohm-Tree as Eliza Doolittle and Henry Higgins) *Pygmalion* had proved itself a both attractive and durable vehicle. There had been revivals in London in 1927, 1934, 1939 and 1944.

One thing that may have made the script so attractive for producers is that the roles of Eliza and Henry are so balanced in terms of both the size of the role and in the ability of the role to sway the sympathies of the audience. These two closely matched roles had often attracted actors. Interpreters of the role of Eliza had included Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies, Diana Wynyard, Margaret Rawlings and Ellen Pollock. Henry Higgins had been played by actors that ranged from Robert Morley to Esme Percy and Michael Golden.

The Company of Four production was directed by Peter Ashmore. Eliza was played by Brenda Bruce. Bruce had appeared the year before in the Company of Four production of *Caste*. Bruce had acted with the Birmingham Repertory from 1936-1939, and had also been featured in the revue *Sweet and Low* (1943). Henry
Higgins was played by Alec Clunes. Clunes had been, since its founding in 1942, the artistic director of The Arts Theatre, one of the smaller London theatres that had provided a home for poetic and experimental drama. Settings for the production were by Kathleen Ankers.

The critics took almost no notice of this production. Harold Hobson, in possibly the shortest review possible, wrote:

A fine play finely revived. Mr. Alec Clunes attacks Higgins with the zest of a man eating a hearty breakfast after a ten-mile walk; and Miss Brenda Bruce's Eliza is bacon and eggs, too, rather than caviar.

Hobson's praise for Clunes was echoed by the reviewer for The Times, who termed Clunes's performance "brilliant," and also shared Hobson's reservations about Bruce's performance as Eliza.

At any rate [the wager scene] is the actress's main chance to establish a heart for Eliza under the tantrums and the tomfoolery. Here Miss Bruce is refused it, for her face in this scene is underlit and cannot be seen clearly. Without this chance her performance seems not quite up to Eliza yet. She makes fun of Eliza in the first two scenes, and though her gravity at the tea-party is delightful, the part does not recover from that first mistake.

With reviews such as these, there could have been little consideration given to the prospect of transferring the show, the practice of doing so having started earlier that year with Caste and The Play's The Thing. Pygmalion closed after its four week run at the Lyric.

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Captain Brassbound's Conversion (1948)

Captain Brassbound's Conversion had been infrequently revived in London since its premiere production in 1906 under the Vedrenne-Barker regime at the Royal Court Theatre with Ellen Terry as Lady Cicely Wayneflete. It had, in fact, only been produced twice in the forty plus years, in 1912 at the Little and in 1929 at the Hampstead Everyman.

In point of fact, Brassbound was not, in its origins, even a Company of Four production.

During the time she had spent in America, Flora made firm friends with Hector MacGregor, who told her of the little Theatre Royal at Windsor where he frequently worked. After returning from war service he had been given a job there at a time when his future seemed uncertain. He suggested to Flora that if there were any play she particularly wanted to do she should write to John Counsell, the theatre's manager. First of all, Flora sent him a play which Counsell refused. He considered that the play was not good enough for her. He added, however, that were they to agree on a play he would be delighted to have her come to Windsor. Hector remembered someone in America suggesting that Flora should one day do Lady Cicely Wayneflete... Her response had been that no one in England would offer her a comedy after playing Lady Macbeth. Macgregor told John Counsell of this suggestion and shortly afterwards he offered Flora the opportunity of playing the role Shaw had created for Ellen Terry.\(^\text{110}\)

The production proved both a critical success and a great audience favorite during its two week run in Windsor. So great had been its appeal, the management would have transferred the production to the West End except for Shaw's refusal.

According to Barrow, Shaw had made a promise that the Maurice Evans production of *Man and Superman*, then on a national tour, would be the next of his plays to go into the West End. Beset by tax problems, Shaw did not feel that he could afford to pay the taxes from two productions of his works which were running concurrently in the West End.

And so, in a reversal of the usual trend of transferring productions out of The Lyric, Hammersmith, this production from Windsor transferred in. MacGregor, who had played Brassbound in Windsor, was replaced by Richard Leech.

Robson garnered exemplary notices in this production.

Robson plays [Cicely Wayneflete] with so much buoyancy, accomplishment, and verve that we join the entire cast in confessing ourselves conquered and relinquish all our pedantic objections.111

Parted from the stark and doom-struck daughters of woe whom she usually has to enact, [Robson] saunters, piping songs of innocence, to a new and happy triumph in the fairy-tale Morocco of Shaw's invention. To the light and frothy comedy Miss Robson brings a conquering simplicity and humanity. The acting side of the play is all hers, a floral dance without a false step.112

Leech did not fare as well, unfortunately, in the reviews.

The casting, otherwise, struck me as somewhat inadequate. Richard Leech's Brassbound has to carry the burden of an absurd and complicated plot: he, as well as the play, is saved by the dialogue and by Miss Robson.113

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Captain Brassbound himself is unreal beside the Judge, a character drawn with impeccable realism and always well placed, but Mr. Richard Leech, treating him like an operatic sort of invention looks and sounds well enough.\textsuperscript{114}

Robson’s success in the role led her to enlist the critics in her attempt to get Shaw’s agreement to her taking the production into the West End.

At the final curtain on the first night Flora was asked to make a speech. “This is Flora’s holiday,” she began. In character she politely asked the critics to persuade Shaw to let her take the company into the West End with the play.

The critics seemed happy to oblige in this request.

Let us treat it as a new Shaw and bring it to a central stage: it should hold its own among the comedies of the day.\textsuperscript{115}

I hope “Captain Brassbound” will reach the West End. This is a Shaw seldom played . . . . Certainly, it deserves a central house better than, say, the meandering “Lute Song.”

Robson’s plea, reinforced as it was by the critics, unfortunately fell on deaf ears. Following the run at the Lyric, Brassbound’s Conversion toured for four weeks, but did not transfer to the West End.

\textsuperscript{114} The Times, 14 October 1948: 2.

\textsuperscript{115} Times, 14 October 1948: 2.

Misalliance (1956)

Misalliance was not only the last revival of a script by Shaw produced by the Company of Four, but it was also the first major revival of Shaw during the centenary anniversary of his birth, and last production of the Company of Four. The Company's final Shaw revival was a stellar production.

Misalliance, like Captain Brassbound's Conversion, had graced the stage infrequently. Between the 1910 premiere and the 1956 Company of Four production, the play had been produced exclusively by the smaller suburban theatres and theatre clubs around London. It was revived in 1922 and 1924 at the Hampstead theatre by the Everyman troupe and in 1930 and 1935 at the Royal Court and "Q" Theatres, respectively.

This production was directed by Lionel Harris and designed by (Jay) Hutchinson Scott. Harris had little directing experience when he came to direct Misalliance, having previously directed only a production of Richard Brinsley Sheridan's The Duenna at the Westminster, London. After training at the Edward VII School of Art, University of Durham, Scott had been the resident designer at both the Oxford Playhouse and the Bristol Old Vic. His first West End production had been the revue Penny Plain (1951).

The cast included Peter Barkworth, Ursula Jeans, Roger Livesey, Miriam Karlin and Donald Pleasence. Pleasence had appeared most recently for the Company as the Dauphin in The Lark. Karlin, who had made her stage debut as Lorene, in the Company of Four production of The Time of Your Life, would go on to become president of British Actors Equity. Livesey acted for the Company in a
number of productions, including *Crime Passionnel*. Jeans (in real life, Mrs. Roger Livesey) had appeared in The Company of Four's 1950 production of *Man of the World*. Barkworth had made his London debut in 1952 and was at the beginning of a distinguished acting career.

As befitted a revival in the centenary of Shaw's birth, one of the major points of discussion for the critics lay in the consideration of this play in relation to Shaw's complete *œuvre*. Their judgement on this point was sharply split.

All that Shaw did in "Misalliance" he did better elsewhere; except perhaps the burglar.\(^{117}\)

Youthful playgoers incline to pooh-pooh the great Shaw. He was one of their parents' gods and they dislike the reek of stale incense. It will, I should guess, be some time before they get around to re-discovering him for themselves. Meanwhile, Misalliance, . . . may help them a little on the way round. It is one of the less familiar plays; . . . More positively, it has the advantage of showing the Shaw of 1910 in tearing high spirits.\(^{118}\)

It is natural to write off as a back number the great man of yesterday, and Misalliance (with this human frailty in mind) would seem to be a pretty good choice of play for the first revival of Shaw's centenary year. . . . Yet the curious thing is that the success of this revival will turn not on the brilliance of the discussion but rather on the theatrical effectiveness of the comic situation brought about by the foolish little man who comes to avenge his dead mother's honour.\(^{119}\)


While unanimously commenting on the comic effect that this production achieved, none of the critics make mention of Harris' direction of the piece. The lion's share of the praise in the reviews went to Donald Pleasence, in the role of the Burglar.

... Pleasence, varying from the maudlin to the maudlin bellicose, make this burglar the best thing of the evening.\(^{120}\)

Mr. Pleasence's performance is one of the flawlessly comic performances that must take permanent lodgement in the memory.\(^{121}\)

... none of the old and sound theatrical points of the comic burglar episode is missed by Mr. Pleasence. His skill is such indeed that each is brought to its utmost sharpness. His control of the comedy is as strict as his control of the pathos ... From the moment Mr. Pleasence appears the success of the evening is assured.

The rest of the company were, unfortunately, not so warmly received.

... Livesey and ... Webb do not bring the necessary bite and guile to the talk .... Livesey is too lightly fantastic for Tarleton, Mr. Webb is altogether too spry for the gentle and worn out Summerhays.\(^{122}\)

Miss Ursula Jeans and Mr. Roger Livesey apply Stanislavsky principles to Mr. and Mrs. Tarleton, but seem to arrive, perhaps undesignedly, at Brechtian results.\(^{124}\)

\(^{120}\) Hobson, *Sunday Times*, 12 February 1956: 2.

\(^{121}\) Cookman, *Tatler*, 22 February 1956: 300.

\(^{122}\) *The Times*, 9 February 1956: 10.


Though the Company had gotten the Shaw centenary off to a portentous start, it was rather more the end of an era for The Company of Four than the beginning. With the lease on the Lyric, Hammersmith ending, Misalliance played its four weeks there, but did not transfer and was the last production mounted by the Company of Four.

**Revivals of Other Plays from the British Repertory**

**Caste** (1947)

T. W. Robertson's *Caste* has the distinction of being the first play from the repertory of English classics presented in revival by the Company of Four. First presented in 1867, *Caste* was a landmark in the development of "realistic" drama, and is the most frequently revived of Robertson's plays. This production of *Caste* also enjoys, through a technicality, the honor of being the first Company of Four production to transfer from the Lyric, Hammersmith, to the West End. If a suitable theatre had been available for its transfer, the Cocteau/Duncan *The Eagle Has Two Heads* would have been the first production, but:

... the next comedy, a revival of Tom Robertson's *Caste* became our first West End transfer (to the Duke of York's) beating *The Eagle* by a narrow margin.

Like many dramas of social importance, *Caste* seems very much tied to the age in which it was produced and the sensibility of that time. Then, as times and

\[125\] Black 123.
mores change, the social sensibility closely allied to the particular play changes and
the play is infrequently produced. Such was the case with Caste. There were only
two London productions of the script in the first half of the 20th century. In 1903, the
play was produced as a starring vehicle for Marie Tempest and in 1929 it was
produced in repertory at the Old Vic.

The Company of Four production of Caste was directed by Peter Ashmore
with settings by Phillip Fellows and costumes by Gladys Coff. The leading role of
Polly Eccles was played by Brenda Bruce. Captain Hawtree was originally to be
played by Paul Scofield:

... Scofield had completed his first triumphant season at Stratford and was
going to have a few weeks off before rejoining the company. I persuaded him
to take on the part of Captain Hawtree, the hero's friend, and he duly
appeared at the first reading. Unfortunately he then realized that it was going
to be quite mad to spend what was meant to be a holiday playing in yet
another production and asked us to release him from the contract. Fortunately
Peter Ashmore's cousin, Frith Banbury, was available to take over, and
chalked up a very amusing performance.126

Banbury, a R.A.D.A. (Royal Academy of Dramatic Art) graduate had been acting
professionally since 1933. Banbury would later become a frequent producer for the
Company of Four, directing for them Dark Summer (1947), The Holly and the Ivy
(1950), The Old Ladies (1950) and The Pink Room (1952).

Both Ivor Brown, reviewing for The Observer, and James Agate, in The
Sunday Times, used the occasion of this revival of Caste to impart a lesson in
theatre history and the place of the dramatic critic in it.

126 Black 124.
Three things to be asked about any revival. What was the play's relation to its time? Is it now a museum piece? Is it still alive?... Query; From whom can that knowledge be obtained? Answer: The contemporary dramatic critics.

D.C.s do not reprint their criticism out of pure vanity. At the back of their heads is the notion that they are recording stage history and making it available in book form.127

Agate then proceeds to establish a lineage of dramatic criticism that includes Joseph Knight and Clement Scott, Archer, Shaw and Max Beerbohm. This odd history lesson continues back to a consideration of the Bancrofts' On and Off Stage and The Journal of the Bancrofts. Agate confesses himself stumped by the fact that the Bancrofts wrote nothing about the reaction to the first production of Caste (which they produced) but only an anecdote involving a practical joke on the actor playing George D'Alroy. Agate works his way back to a consideration of the production at hand, which he commends in a fashion almost desultory:

I can see that today's audience cares for none of these things, so let's proceed by Question and Answer. Is the old play worth whatever the Lyric charges plus bus fare? Yes. Is it well produced with a sufficing compromise between the leisureliness of yesterday and the impatience of today? Yes. Is it well acted? Yes.128

Ivor Brown's review was equally grounded in a consideration of the place that Caste holds in the great scheme of theatre history.

I cannot believe that Bancroft would have sanctioned anything of this kind in what was to him, and to his audience, a naturalistic comedy. We may regard that classification as very odd today: to us the piece may seems as artificial a piece of confectionery as the most baroque of wedding cakes. But the


history of "Caste" is plain enough, and our business surely is to play it as it was intended or leave it alone.

Having issued that caveat, Brown goes on to add: "... Ashmore's production ... is decently respectful of Robertson's intentions up to a point." The acting of the production was praised by both critics, save in the odd case of Elliot Mason, in the role of Marquise de St. Maur.

... Mason was about as close to the Marquizzly as Bearsden to Belgravesquare, but this actress however much miscast, is never less than a delight.130

The Marquise of Miss Elliot Mason?131 I would go to the stake rather than utter a word about this masterpiece of miscasting.

Whatever reservations the critics may have had about Mason, and about the revival of this important play, it proved popular with audiences. Following the four week run at the Lyric, Caste transferred to the Duke of York's Theatre where it ran for eleven weeks.


131 Mason trained for the stage with the Scottish National Players and made her professional debut in 1922 in Glasgow as Mrs. Haggerty in The Old Lady Shows Her Metals. She made her London debut in 1923, and was a mainstay of The Scottish Players until 1932. She had appeared in New York as Lady Kerton in The Lake (1933). During World War II she toured with Emlyn Williams. Mason died 20 June 1949.

The Relapse (1947)

The Company of Four's 1948 production of John Vanbrugh's Restoration comedy, The Relapse was one of the most lavishly produced and glamorously cast of any of the revivals undertaken by the Company.

Though Taney, in her work Restoration Revivals, puts this production in 1948, in point of fact it opened 16 December 1947. This may be due to the fact that all the reviews of the production that she cites were written considerably after the opening. She also makes the observation "In 1948 England saw three Restoration productions (two them commercial West End offerings) of varying excellence." By mis-dating the Company of Four production, however, she fails to give the Company credit for having been in the vanguard in bringing Restoration comedy back to the stage.

The Relapse was directed by Anthony Quayle. Quayle, a classical actor with an established reputation, had begun acting in 1931 and played a variety of roles that included Iago and Jack Absolute in The Rivals. Following his demobilization from the Armed Forces after World War II, Quayle was just beginning to establish his reputation as a director, having made his directorial debut just the year before with a production of Crime and Punishment at the Wimbledon Theatre (later transferring to the New) that had starred John Gielgud and Edith Evans.

Settings and costumes for this production were by Jeanetta Cochrane. Cochrane was, for many years, on the faculty at the Central School of Art and Design, where the theatre is named for her. Crediting Cochrane with the design of this production, however, may be misleading. For The Relapse, Cochrane actually

133 Taney 146.
refurbished costumes that she had originally designed for Gielgud's production of *Love for Love.*

The cast of *The Relapse* included Cyril Ritchard (Lord Foppington), Paul Scofield (Young Fashion), Audrey Fildes (Amanda), Madge Elliott (Berinthia), and Jessie Evans (Miss Hoyden). Ritchard was well known as a comedian and a revue performer, having appeared in *Nine Sharp,* *and Up and Going,*—both by Herbert Farjeon—as well as a series of revues in the 30s: *So This is Love,* *Love Lies* and *The Love Race.* Madge Elliott was Ritchard's frequent co-star in these revues, besides being his wife. Immediately prior to this production, Ritchard had been appearing in New York in Gielgud's production of *Love for Love,* in which he played Tattle. *Love for Love* and this appearance in *The Relapse* marked a true departure for Ritchard (and for Elliott) from the comedies and revues for which they were known.

Jessie Evans, formerly a hospital nurse, had made her stage debut in Blackpool in 1943, as Clog in Emlyn William's *Pen Don.* Her first London appearance had been as Tina in *A Bell for Adano* (1945). After studying at the Old Vic Dramatic School from 1940 to 1942, Fildes had appeared with the Old Vic Company at the Playhouse, Liverpool until 1945. Prior to *The Relapse,* Fildes had appeared as Sonia in Gielgud's production of *Crime and Punishment* (1946) and as Elise Birling in *Point Valaine* (1947).

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134 Black 134.
"Van wants grace, who never wanted wit," begins J. C. Trewin's review of *The Relapse.* Almost unanimously, the critics found much to enjoy in the production, while remarking on what a creaky old war horse Vanbrugh's script was.

On the stage, the play cracks into two pieces: one of boisterous slap-bang farce in which Lord Foppington seeks country airs and rural heiress, and one of artifice in which Vanbrugh has the usual—and wearying—Restoration single-mindedness.

The reviewer for *The Times* shared Trewin's assessment of the script.

Not so well built as Blenheim, still it lasts. The sensualists are so candid, the plot so casual--Vanbrugh himself wearies of it at last and leave it in mid-

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135 The quotation, or allusion, is from *Imitations of Horace.* "The First Epistle of the Second Book of Horace, To Augustus" by Alexander Pope, originally published in 1737. The full citation is as follows:

Ev'n copious Dryden wanted, or forgot
The last and greatest Art, the Art to blot.
Some doubt if equal pains, or equal fire
The humbler muse of Comedy require.
But in known Images of life, I guess,
The labour greater, as th'indulgence less.
Observe How seldom ev'n the best succeed:
Tell me if Congreve's Fools are Fools indeed?
What pert, low dialogue has Farquhar writ!
How Van wants grace, who never wanted wit!
The stage how loosely doth Astrea tead;
Who fairly puts all characters to bed!
And idel Cibber, how he breaks the laws
To make poor Pinky eat with vast applause!
But fill their purses, our Poet's work is done,
Alike to them by Pathos or by Pun.

(lines 280-295)

This epistle of among Pope's most daring political satire, with George II ("Augustus") as the butt of most of it. Astrea refers to Mrs. Aphra Behn.

air--and the whole thing so disarmingly intended to please with or without
regard for the rules.  

The critics, on the other hand, had no such reservations when it came to
Ritchard’s performance.

As for Foppington, . . . Ritchard gives him a familiar and attractive absurdity,
to which he lends a touch of real distinction in the creature’s hobble when his
knees are tied.  

. . . Ritchard is a monstrous fine Foppington, whom he endows with a
drawling, peevish coo, as of a genteel and half-throttled ring-dove: this at
least is happy nonsense.

Tynan’s review credited Ritchard (and Quayle) with illuminating a point about
Restoration comedy that was apparently frequently overlooked in production:

He [Ritchard] was chiefly excellent because he was vulgar; he showed us
what we had long suspected, that Restoration comedy outside Congreve is
not witty and artificial, but broad and boisterous.

Quayle’s direction of the production was well received:

\[\text{\textsuperscript{137}}\text{The Times, 18 December 1947: 6. Blenheim Castle, the ancestral home of}
\text{the Churchill family, was designed by Vanbrugh around 1705. Woodstock Park and}
\text{the initial funds to build the house were given to the duke of Marlborough in}
\text{appreciation for his leading the British and Austrian forces in their victory over the}
\text{French and Bavarian forces at the battle of Blenheim, on the Danube, in the War of}
\text{the Spanish Succession, 1704.}

\[\text{\textsuperscript{138}}\text{The Times, 18 December 1947: 6.}

\[\text{\textsuperscript{139}}\text{J. C. Trewin, The Observer, 21 December 1947: 2.}

\[\text{\textsuperscript{140}}\text{Kenneth Tynan, He That Plays the King (New York: Longman, Green and}
\text{Company 1950) 79.}
The plot . . . mingles farce dangerously with high comedy, thus setting the producer some awkward problems, all cleverly solved here by Anthony Quayle.

Anthony Quayle has produced with some comic invention. \(^{142}\)

. . . Quayle's production gets all the fun out of the intrigues and the plot . . . and contributes something of its own, especially in the extreme farcical treatment of events in a country house.

The Relapse was extremely popular with audiences, and following its run at the Lyric, it transferred to the Phoenix Theatre. According to Taney:

Ritchard's success encouraged him to direct the play and recreate Foppington in New York in 1950. It was an uneven production, but the incredible Foppington with his "Restoration Rhumba" walk still pleased. \(^{143}\)

Whom it "pleased" may be the question that needs to be asked here. The 1950 American revival of The Relapse, which opened at the Morosco Theatre on 22 November 1950, closed after a disappointing thirty performances.

Dandy Dick (1948)

Possibly the success the Company had had with Caste led them to mount a revival of another script from that same era, which they did with the revival of Arthur Wing Pinero's Dandy Dick.

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\(^{141}\) R.P.M.G., Daily Telegraph: 5.

\(^{142}\) J. C. Trewin, The Observer, 21 December 1947:

\(^{143}\) Taney 148.
Tennent's had mounted a production in 1945 with Sidney Howard. "Unfortunately, the star had died unexpectedly and the production had been abandoned."\textsuperscript{144}

Pinero, though a prolific writer of serious plays, is best remembered for the Court Theatre farces, which include \textit{The Magistrate} (1885), \textit{The Schoolmistress} (1886), and \textit{Dandy Dick} (1887), \textit{Trelawney of the 'Wells'} (1898) and \textit{The Second Mrs. Tanqueray} (1893). These last two are the most frequently revived of Pinero's works, sharing seventeen productions in London between the two of them in the first half of the twentieth century.

The Company of Four production was directed by Athene Seyler and "decorated" by Cecil Beaton. Athene Seyler had had a long and varied career, which included appearing, in 1925, in a production of \textit{Midsummer Night's Dream}, at Drury Lane, mounted by Basil Dean and Arthur Butt. Among other accomplishments, Seyler had co-authored \textit{The Craft of Comedy}, with Stephen Haggard,\textsuperscript{145} which has become a standard text on the topic. This was Seyler's first foray into direction.

Beaton, besides being one of the most eminent photographers of the day, was a much sought after designer. The designs with which he is, perhaps, most closely associated would come in 1956, with the opening of \textit{My Fair Lady}.

\textsuperscript{144} Black 134.

\textsuperscript{145} Athene Seyler and Stephen Haggard, \textit{The Craft of Comedy: Correspondence between Athene Seyler and Stephen Haggard}. (London: Frederick Muller, Ltd., 1943).
Inexplicably, there was almost no critical evaluation of this production. The only newspaper to review it was The Times, and the reviewer for that publication was unimpressed with the caliber of the revival.

So much shines plainly enough through the present revival, though many such revivals would shorten the life of any masterpiece.... All that can be said for the performance as a whole is that it does not wholly obscure the masterfully adroit use which Pinero makes of old-fashioned conventions, and that the fun of the old play is constantly breaking through the imperfections.

There were a few kind words for Blakelock:

Mr. Blakelock is delicious. The rest of the company play on a far lower level. Miss Joan Young catches the robustness, but not the humour or charm of Georgiana, the Dean's sister, more widely known as the "daisy of the turf." The two pretty daughters and their military adorers are without a single comic idea to sustain them.

The lack of reviews could be explained by the undistinguished nature of this revival. Not unexpectedly, Dandy Dick ran its four weeks at the Lyric, Hammersmith, but did not transfer.

The Vortex (1952)

Wednesday, 30 January [1952]

Rehearsal of The Vortex; extremely good, well directed and played. Dirk Bogarde a little floppy but a fine actor.\textsuperscript{148}

\textsuperscript{146} Unsigned review, The Times, 24 March 1948: 6.

\textsuperscript{147} Unsigned review, The Times, 24 March 1948: 6.

\textsuperscript{148} Graham Payn and Sheridan Morley, eds., The Noel Coward Diaries (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1982) 188.
With allowances made for the prejudice inherent in his having both written the play, and originated the role in which Bogarde was appearing, Coward's opinion of the production, the performances, and the way the script had held up with age was shared by the critics. When first produced in 1924, The Vortex had brought Noel Coward, as a playwright to the attention of the theatre going public. Coward's story of wickedness and depravity among the idle rich had run for two hundred and twenty four performances in the West End. The parts of Nicky and Florence Lancaster had provided Coward (and later, John Gielgud) and Lillian Braithwaite with a star vehicle. However, as one of the critics of this production observed, "few things go out of fashion so quickly as yesterday's idea of wickedness" and even though the script had become a mainstay of regional and repertory theatres just after its production, there had been no West End revival of the play since its premiere.

This revival was one in a series of Coward endeavors related to the Company of Four. Just the year before Coward had provided material for The Lyric Revue, and was beginning preliminary work on a musical based on Oscar Wilde's Lady Windermere's Fan, which he was considering producing at the Lyric, Hammersmith.  

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150 Payn and Morley 216. 16 July 1953: "I have decided to turn Lady Windermere's Fan into a musical for the Lyric, Hammersmith. Binkie is delighted with the idea and so am I, because it really is up my musical alley." When After the Ball, as it came to be known, was produced in June 1954, it played the Globe Theatre (where the Tennent offices were), not the Lyric, Hammersmith.
The mother-son duo in the 1952 production was played by Isabel Jeans and Dirk Bogarde. Bogarde had, of course, worked for the Company the year before in *Point of Departure* and Jeans had starred in *The Seagull* for them. The production was directed by Michael MacOwan, who was, later that year, to direct one of the most prestigious of the Company's productions, Charles Morgan's *The River Line*. Costumes were by the seemingly ubiquitous William Chappell, and decor for the production was provided by Gladys Calthrop, who had designed the original production in 1924.

Perhaps Coward should have considered a career in dramatic criticism, for his diary entry was an all too prophetic reflection of how the critical community regarded this revival.

How brilliantly this early Noel Coward play revives, and what an enjoyable evening it makes. After more than twenty years it remains extremely amusing in its first part and curiously moving in its last. Time indeed may have actually helped, for the Twenties have quickly become period and we see how successfully the young author in the middle of them caught his victims and fixed them in his solution of style.\[^{151}\]

This was the play which, some 30 years ago, announced to an amused and startled London the arrival of an audacious new playwright. Its revival now is a game with the Zeitgeist . . . . As it happens, the gamble pays. Indeed, the revival might be reckoned a triumphant success, were it not for the performance of the part which the author himself created on the stage.\[^{152}\]

While both MacOwan's direction and the performance of Isabel Jeans were held in high regard by the critics, Bogarde's performance was found sadly lacking.


\[^{152}\] *The Times*, 5 March 1952: 6.
Here Mr. Coward the actor became much missed. Dirk Bogarde's rendering of the young man was never more than adequate, when nothing less than a tour de force was demanded.\textsuperscript{153}

. . . Bogarde, in the Noel Coward part, is another matter. His performance is consistent, and even strong, but it doesn't really fit in with the play. He fails both to catch the brittle artificiality and to evoke the atmosphere and so doesn't succeed in convincing us that he is standing on the very edge. His final appeal to his mother comes over as if from strength instead of from weakness. It works in a kind of way, but not quite the way that it was intended.\textsuperscript{154}

24 March 1952

Cable from England saying that \textit{The Vortex} is being transferred to the Criterion and that Michael Gough is replacing Dirk Bogarde—he might be very good.\textsuperscript{155}

Dirk Bogarde came back to us after that in a revival of \textit{The Vortex}—Michael Gough took over when the play transferred to the Criterion—Dirk not liking long runs and growing more and more apprehensive about working in the theatre.\textsuperscript{156}

With reviews like the above, Bogarde's apprehension about working in the theatre is completely understandable. Regardless of what cast one chooses to put on the above, on 9 April 1952 The Company of Four production of \textit{The Vortex} opened at the Criterion Theatre, where it closed after a disappointing forty-four performances.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[155] Payn and Morley 190.
\item[156] Black 191.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Trelawney of the 'Wells' (1952)

Very closely on the heels of The Vortex, the Company mounted another revival, this time of Pinero's Trelawney of the 'Wells.' As was stated above, Trelawney had proved one of the most durable and popular of Pinero's plays and was as frequently revived as any of his farces.

This production, under the direction of veteran Peter Ashmore, had a cast peopled with what one reviewer called a "thespian milky way." This "milky way" was populated with stars and meteors that frequently flashed through the Tennents orbit. Shaun Glenville (Mr. Ablett) was a well known actor who had appeared, among other roles, as the mute Drunk in the Company production of Time of Your Life (1947). Yvonne Mitchell (Avonia Bunn) had written The Same Sky, which had won the Arts Council of Great Britain competition and been presented by the Company of Four earlier in 1952. If ever a cast list disputed Beaumont's claim that there were no actors under contract to H. M. Tennents, and that Tennents did not operate like a repertory theatre, it was the cast of Trelawney of The 'Wells.'

In the central role of Rose Trelawney, however, was a virtual newcomer. Barbara Jefford had studied at The Bristol Old Vic School and The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. Following her London debut as Bertha in Frenzy, Jefford had joined the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-on-Avon, where she had played numerous roles, including Isabella in Measure for Measure opposite John Gielgud (1950). This was her first appearance in London after leaving that company.

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157 Unsigned review, Queen, 4 June 1952: 4.
The stellar constitution of the cast could not redeem, for some of the critics, what some considered the obtrusive nature of the comedy in Ashmore's direction of the piece.

*Trelawney* cannot be called good Pinero, but it has a special charm, the charm of the absurd, all lavender sentiment and lilac romance. Delicacy and speed will convey its quality: bustle and lumber will inevitably lose it. Mr. Peter Ashmore offered us the second pair, and in excessive doses.

Last night at the Lyric, Hammersmith, I saw *Trelawney of the Wells* with half of its comic effect missed because Peter Ashmore had not trusted his author. The first act in particular had been directed with feverish determination to be funny at any cost, which made it less funny than I have ever known it . . . . I do not know if it will be possible . . . . for Mr. Ashmore to tone down the extravagances of his production to get rid of the constant straining after comic effect. If he can do this the play, on its merits would stand transference to the West End. Not otherwise.159

Jefford's notices as Rose ran the gamut from Darling-ton's assessment that "Jefford's Rose Trelawney is acted with sincerity, produced with discretion and charming" to the critic for Queen, who thought "Jefford . . . finds herself at a disadvantage, and would, in any case, appear to be miscast as the lovely tender-hearted Rose."

*Trelawney of the Wells,* coming, as it did, at the end of the 1951-52 season, and with mixed notices, did not transfer at the end of its four-week run. It did, however, manage to launch the career of Jefford, who went on to become a respected member of companies such as The National Theatre and The Royal Shakespeare Company.


Conclusion

During the eleven years that the Company of Four was in existence and actively producing, revivals played a major part in the repertory that they presented. Of the sixty-nine shows they were responsible for mounting, fifteen were scripts that come under the rubric of revivals. Statistically, that makes twenty percent of the productions that the Company presented revivals. This rate is certainly higher than the rate of any commercial management producing in Great Britain during this period. The Company of Four was among the first managements to recognize the importance and potential of including important revivals of classics in the repertory of a non-commercial theatre.

Ancillary to the number of revivals that the Company produced is the fact that four of these productions (Caste, The Relapse, The Vortex, Hedda Gabler) repeated the trend that was becoming commonplace for Company of Four productions and transferred to the West End after the Lyric, Hammersmith, run. Admittedly the transfers varied in their ability to draw an audience. The Relapse played over two hundred performances in the West End. The Vortex closed after less than fifty. The fact remains, however, that this string of revivals and their West End transfers are an indication of the willingness of the Company of Four to take risks. And this risktaking is mirrored in the presentation of new scripts.

As the concept of a national theatre began to gather credence in the years following World War II, supporters of this concept realized that a substantive portion of the repertory presented by such a theatre must reflect the dramatic heritage of Great Britain and of the classics of the European repertory. In practice, as the "dual national theatre" concept emerged, an unspoken division of this vast repertory has developed. The Royal Shakespeare Company has seemingly laid claim to Shakespeare, his Elizabethan and Jacobean contemporaries and the playwrights
of the Restoration. The National Theatre, on the other hand, has more consistently presented the classics of world dramatic literature than the RSC. This division of world drama is not ironclad. The Royal Shakespeare Company, for example, presented Michel St. Denis's production of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* as the final offering of its first Aldwych season (1960-61) and the National Theatre presented Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* as one of its inaugural offerings in its new South Bank home. Both companies, however, owe a debt to the Company of Four for demonstrating the commercial potential of this often neglected portion of the dramatic repertory.

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160 *Tamburlaine*, with Albert Finney in the title role, opened the Olivier Theatre at the National in October 1976. The Lyttleton Theatre had opened in March of 1976 with a production of Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days*, starring Dame Peggy Ashcroft. The Cottesloe Theatre opened in March 1977 with *Illuminatus*, a new script by British playwright Ken Campbell.
CHAPTER VII:
THE COMPANY OF FOUR IN COOPERATION WITH OTHER COMPANIES

In much the same way that Company of Four productions frequently transferred to the West End, The Lyric, Hammersmith, under the management of the Company of Four, also served as a terminus for productions that transferred from other theatres (frequently outside London, and occasionally outside England) for limited runs in the suburbs of London. And, while the usage of the Lyric as a rental house was a relatively straightforward business proposition, the aspect that makes the Company of Four's involvement interesting is the diversity of productions that came to Hammersmith as a result of this practice. The productions range from drama and ballet, to opera and readings of prose and poetry.¹

The Lyric's usage as a rental house made sound business sense for both lessee and lessor. It allowed the Company, as lessor, to amortize the rent paid on the theatre. Additionally, it kept the Lyric occupied and gave Lyric audiences

¹ Bronson Albery and Una Productions' *Red Roses for Me*, 1946. Una Productions was the non-profit producing company run by Bronson Albery that was the equivalent of Tennent Productions, Ltd. Una Productions was named for Una (Mrs. Donald) Albery. The Metropolitan Ballet presented a two week season in July 1949. The programs presented included: *Swan Lake*, the *Giselle* pas de deux and the premiere of André Howard's *Ballamento*. The season proved so successful that it was extended to 30 July. The English Opera Group presented a short season in May 1951, that consisted of Benjamin Britten's realization of *The Beggar's Opera*, *Albert Herring*, *Dido and Aeneas*, and *The Rape of Lucretia*. The Apollo Society presented "Love Poems," an evening of poetry read by Peggy Ashcroft, Dylan Thomas and Valentine Dyall on 3 November 1946.
productions to attend when the Company was not producing. This latter reason should not be underestimated, since a theatre that is too frequently dark will begin to lose its audience.

The Lyric, Hammersmith as a venue made good business to lessors for two reasons. First, a small, suburban theatre could be rented for considerably less than theatres in the metropolitan center. By utilizing the Lyric, Hammersmith, a company could conceivably afford a short London season without running the financial risk that would necessarily accompany the rental of a West End theatre. Second, as a small suburban theatre, the Lyric was an ideal venue for offerings like ballet and marionettes that would have a limited ability to draw an audience.

Whatever the reasons, the fact remains that the Company of Four’s practice of subletting the Lyric made a diverse range of theatre and associated art forms accessible to Hammersmith audiences and brought audiences in contact with what would later become some of the most important theatre, music and dance companies of the time. The Lyric, for example, provided a venue for The Young Vic, The English Opera Group and Ballet Rambert early in the production history of each of these companies. A list of the presentations at the Lyric of other production companies appears as an appendix at the conclusion of this study. Finally, these usages also foreshadowed the National Theatre’s practice, later, of not restricting itself solely to the presentation of theatre. It might prove helpful to examine the Company of Four and its relationship to the literary arts (i.e., The Apollo Society), to the musical arts (i.e., The English Opera Group) and to theatre for young audiences (i.e., The Young Vic). Through such an examination, what will emerge is an expanded view of the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith and the Company of Four.
The Apollo Society

Very quickly after The Company of Four commenced production there, the Lyric, Hammersmith became the regular venue for The Apollo Society. In his preface to The Apollo Anthology, the poet Cecil Day Lewis writes about the founding of the Society.

Dame Edith Evans and Miss Peggy Ashcroft were already giving popular readings of poetry in canteens and service centres in London. They were joined by the poets C. Day Lewis and Stephen Spender, and by the pianists Natasha Litvin and Angus Morrison. George Rylends, Dean of King's College, Cambridge, lent them his years of experience in spreading the love of poetry . . . . So The Apollo Society came to be founded. Its programs consisted of groups of poems preluded, concluded or interspersed with musical pieces, the intention being that the poems and the music should comment on each other . . . . Since those early days many famous artists have participated. Over two hundred recitals have been given all over the country to every sort of audience.

According to Peggy Ashcroft's article "On the Speaking of Verse," that appears as part of the preface to the Anthology, The Apollo Society was founded "to revive the neglected art of reading poetry aloud." Ashcroft's addition to the preface helps to recreate what an evening given by the Society must have been like.

One of our first principles has been to give the recitals an intimate and informal atmosphere; to create as far as possible in whatever theatre, hall or schoolroom we perform the atmosphere of reading at home and to avoid any suggestion of 'giving a performance.' For this reason we (generally two and occasionally three readers) sit round a table fairly close to the piano. Only seldom, if for instance the platform is very low and the reader cannot be seen, do we stand. The fact that the reader is, or appears to be, reading from the book in his hand (even if he knows every word) eliminates the menace of 'reciting.'

2 Selwyn and Lister, The Apollo Anthology (London: John Murray, Albemarle St. W., 1953) v.

3 Selwyn and Lister vii.

4 Selwyn and Lister vii.
One important aspect of the Apollo society presentations was the combination of music and poetry. Angus Morrison defines the relationship between the music and the poetry of the Apollo offerings.

At its inception the Apollo Society, formed to revive the somewhat neglected art of reading poetry, felt that this long and honourable association of the two arts, used with tact and discrimination, could and would do a lot towards breaking down the public's prejudice against poetry reading as being a forbidding, precious and (dare I say it?) often acutely embarrassing form of entertainment. Committed then to combining and exploiting the sympathetic overtones and parallels between music and poetry, what was the best way to set about it? Emphatically not by simultaneous performance. . . . The poems therefore must follow the music (or in certain cases the music the poem) and some sort of connection be established.  

A typical Apollo society offering on the theme of the city of London, outlined in the Anthology might be arranged as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>London</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In Honour of the City of London</td>
<td>John Dunbar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upon Westminster Bridge</td>
<td>William Wordsworth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(music) &quot;Chelsea Reach&quot;</td>
<td>John Ireland, comp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from London Pieces</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A Ballad of Street Cries</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Caledonian Market</td>
<td>William Plomer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(music) &quot;Ragamuffin&quot;</td>
<td>John Ireland, comp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from London Pieces</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The choice of the Lyric, Hammersmith by The Apollo Society was almost certainly the work of Kitty Black, who served as the Secretary of the Society for many years. The first of the Society's presentations at the Lyric was an evening of poetry presented 1 April 1946 by Sybil Thorndike and Lewis Casson. In

\[5\] Selwyn and Lister ix.
presentations by the Society that followed this initial offering, theatrical professionals that ranged from the very well known, such as Margaret Rutherford, to relative newcomers, such as Mary Ure, lent their talents to the Apollo Society. In total, there were thirteen presentations by the Apollo Society at the Lyric, Hammersmith. During the years between 1945 and 1947, it was the regular venue for Society presentations.

Although the Society continued its programs of poetry and music, after 1947 these programs moved to other theatres. There are several possible explanations for this move. First, the Lyric, Hammersmith, was not the most centrally located. It was at least a thirty minute bus ride to reach Hammersmith from the center of London. Some of the 1948 offerings of the Society took place, for instance, at the Arts Theatre, which was much more centrally located and had a tradition of being associated with verse drama.

The second reason for the move after 1947 may have been the success of the Company of Four productions. By the end of 1947 the Company of Four had transferred two productions (Caste and The Play’s The Thing) to the West End and had opened Tuppence Coloured, the first of the revues, and a tremendous money maker for the Company. The success of these productions may have eliminated the need to offset the rent on the Lyric in every conceivable way. And, of course, the rental to The Apollo Society would have necessitated the additional expenses associated with front-of-house staff. And, for that reason, the Company may have decided to forego the few additional pounds that were to be made from renting out the Lyric for one night engagements.

For whatever reasons, after 1947 the Apollo Society’s use of the Lyric became extremely sporadic and they were often to be found in more centrally located theatres.
Summary

Very quickly after the National Theatre moved to its new South Bank facility in 1976, a regular feature of the National's offerings were the "platform performances." These were short programs that featured short programs of poetry and prose, minimally staged presentations of works outside the normal purview of dramatic literature. Normally presented immediately before evening productions, platform performances increased traffic through the foyers, book shops and restaurants that are a part of the National Theatre complex. In that aspect, platform performances represent a sound marketing practice on the part of the National Theatre. From an aesthetic standpoint, however, platform performances began to move the National Theatre away from the public perception of a "purpose built" theatrical complex to something that more closely resembled a multi-arts center.

This holistic view of the arts as inter-related forms is undergirded by the usage of the National's foyers as temporary gallery space and short musical performances that are presented as a part of the National's roster of programs.


7 "The Unkindness of Strangers: Tennessee Williams and the Critics" A platform performance given by actors of the National Theatre Company simultaneously appearing in the National's production of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, 11 March 1988.

8 "The Melodramatic Imagination: From the Victorian Stage to the Hollywood Screen." This exhibition of victorian setting and costume designs and designs for early Hollywood films was organized to complement a film series at the National Film Theatre entitled "Hollywood Melodrama." January 15 through March 25.

In much the same way, the Company of Four—whether by design or by serendipitous happenstance—provided a similar holistic view to Hammersmith audiences in the early years of Company of Four and, in the process, gave considerable service to the literary arts, as well. And while it would be mistaken to ascribe too much to the aesthetic motive, the end result cannot be denied.

**The English Opera Group**

A number of factors coalesced to make the involvement of the English Opera Group and the Company of Four a productive (and ongoing) one. First, the Lyric, Hammersmith's size made it nearly perfect for the presentation of chamber opera.10

Second, Benjamin Britten, who was one of the founders of the English Opera Group had been involved with the Company of Four at least as far back as the production of *The Eagle Has Two Heads*. And, finally, with the presentation of *Let's Make An Opera*. The Company provided Britten with one of his first and most popular successes.

**Let's Make An Opera** (1949, 1950, 1951)

During the 1949 Aldeburgh Season, Benjamin Britten's *Let's Make An Opera* had scored an instantaneous success. The manager at that time was Elizabeth Sweeting... who answered a telephone enquiry with the news that the company would very much like to come to London; the venture moved into the Lyric on 15 November for an eight-week season and repeated its success the two following Christmases. Even the bus conductors serving the Hammersmith area were whistling the audience songs and the rafters rang

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10 "Chamber Opera: a term used to designate twentieth century operas of small and intimate proportions using a chamber orchestra. Examples include Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1916) and Paul Hindemith's *Cardillac* (1926). The term has also been applied to 18th century works such as Pergolesi's *La Serva Padrona*. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Stanley Sadie, ed. (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1980) Vol. 4.: 118.
every night with the crashing choruses enthusiastically rehearsed under the baton of Normal del Mar.\textsuperscript{11}

The 1949 Aldeburgh production was the premiere of this Britten work. In 1949 Britten, Eric Crozier (librettist for the piece), and Peter Pears had founded the Aldeburgh Festival at least partly as a home for The English Opera Group, which had come into being in 1947. The English Opera Group was specifically constituted for "the creation and performance of new operas and to encourage poets and playwrights to tackle the writing of librettos in collaboration with composers."\textsuperscript{12} To inaugurate the new company and to give it an appropriate vehicle to tour, Britten had composed \textit{Albert Herring}, which the group had premiered at Glyndebourne in 1947. The activities of the Aldeburgh Festival quickly expanded beyond the presentation of chamber opera, but the EOG continued to be based there until 1961 when they were "adopted" by the Royal Opera at Covent Garden.

\textit{Let's Make An Opera} was ideal Christmas fare and a slightly sophisticated competitor for the Christmas pantos that filled other houses. One of the aspects that made \textit{Let's Make}... such a favorite with audiences is that it includes a large element of audience participation. During the first half of the opera the audience is divided into standard choral SATB configuration (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass--although the choice of which of these lines any audience member should chose to sing is entirely at his or her discretion), are taught choruses that represent the various birds the little sweep meets on his journeys up and down the chimneys of London, and are given a "short course" in how to sing opera (i.e., following the

\textsuperscript{11}Black 151-152.

conductor, reading cutoffs and so forth). In the final act, the audience joins in as the chorus to complete the action onstage.

A critic would have to be very hard hearted, indeed, to find fault with a work that so captured the popular imagination. As the anonymous reviewer of the 1950 production noted:

Like Peter Pan and the other fairy tale children who never grow old, Sam, the little sweep boy, is becoming one of London's regular Christmas visitors. Each new production of *Let's Make an Opera!* brings small modifications of the original; modifications which are invariably improvements, as the opening performance by the English Opera Group at the Lyric theatre made very clear.

Understandably, *Let Make an Opera!* is one of the few productions where the audience gets reviewed, as well as the production on stage.

Apart from the children's tendency to race the conductor in solos, the ensemble was happily free from all anxious moments, and although in the communal songs the audience was suffering from first night shyness, there was no doubt that Mr. Trevor Harvey's singing lesson was one of the most enjoyable of the many surprises which this refreshing entertainment has to offer.

**Summary**

The English Opera Group presented *Let's Make An Opera* at the Lyric, Hammersmith in 1949, 1950 and 1951. In much the same way that Leonard Bernstein, through his "Young Peoples Concerts," introduced an entire generation to the joys of symphonic music, *Let's Make An Opera* can claim to have done much the same for another generation and chamber opera.

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14 *The Times*, 6 December 1950: 2.
In addition, the English Opera Group presented several short London seasons that included *The Beggar's Opera* (1950) and *Albert Herring*, *The Rape of Lucretia*, *Dido and Aeneas*, and a revival of the ever popular *Let's Make an Opera* (1951). And, as would happen frequently over the eleven-year tenure at the Lyric, the Company of Four provided a home for a newly formed company to present its first London season.

**The Young Vic (1946)**

In a similar fashion, The Company of Four was involved with The Young Vic during the Young Vic's early years. The first production of The Young Vic, *The King Stag*, was produced at the Lyric, Hammersmith in 1946.

The Young Vic had been founded in 1945, under the leadership of George Devine, as the training wing of the Old Vic Theatre. Besides the training of actors, one of the purposes of the Young Vic was to present adult actors in plays suitable for young people.

In 1946, three separate organizations had been started, which were nevertheless closely linked. . . . There was an acting school, run by Glen Byam Shaw, an experimental theatre project (under Michel St. Denis) and a young people's theatre (under George Devine). They had grown from an idea of St. Denis, for a comprehensive Old Vic Theatre Centre, whose main purpose was to become a 'laboratory of invention.'

*The King Stag*, based on Carlo Gozzi's commedia dell'arte scenario *Il Re Corvo*, was their first production and was directed by Devine. The script was the result of a polyglot transmogrification. The original by Gozzi had been translated into French by Pierre Barbier, and it was from this French adaptation that adapter

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Carl Wildman produced the version used by the Young Vic. The design team of Motley based the designs for the production on the work of the French primitivist Rousseau. In its original conception, The King Stag was to tour to schools.

Devine . . . was also trying to organize a company to tour schools with ambitious commedia dell'arte productions, meeting substantial resistance from education authorities in doing so.16

The production of The King Stag opened on Boxing Day (26 December) 1946. The critics found much that was praise-worthy in the production:

The Young Vic Company, which aims at creating a children's theatre, at the Lyric, Hammersmith, last night produced their first play; and a very jolly one it proved to be, which the elderly will enjoy as much as the young.17

J. C. Trewin reviewed the production in terms that were almost as florid as the sets.

The King Stag is quite another matter, no uproarious coloured supplement, but a delicate period print, a school-of-Goldoni fantasia from a leather-bound book on the upper shelf . . . . You might say that while The Wizard of Oz [another Christmas panto] is every child's glass of ginger beer, The King Stag is the exceptional child's cup of hot chocolate in the most delicate of Sevres porcelain.18

Summary

The difficulties with the education authorities, coupled with increasing financial problems of the Old Vic Centre made the proposed tour unworkable. The King Stag played a four week Christmas season at the Lyric, Hammersmith and then closed. The Young Vic's financial difficulties continued to mount, however, and in

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16 Elsom and Tomalin, National Theatre 99.


August 1951 it ceased operation. The production of *The King Stag* was one of a very few productions the Young Vic managed to mount. As it had done with The English Opera Group, the Company of Four had been involved, if only peripherally with an important young company during its formative stage.

In interesting footnote to this chapter of history of The Company of Four comes from the fact that Black became one of the most prolific producers of theatre for young audiences in London after her association with the Company. Nicholas Stuart Gray originally offered his script for *Beauty and the Beast* to the Company of Four for production as a christmas panto at the Lyric. However, the transfer of the English Opera Group's *Let's Make An Opera* had just been arranged. Black, however, sensing the merit of the script agreed to produce it independently. It was the beginning of a long and happy association between playwright and producer. Between 1949 and 1953, Black produced *Beauty and the Beast, The Princess and the Swineherd, The Marvellous Story of Puss in Boots, and The Emperor's Nightingale*. The venues for these productions ranged from the Mercury and the Rudolf Steiner Hall to the Fortune Theatre And the Theatre Royal, Stratford East.

At a performance at the Rudolf Steiner Hall in the East End, a ten year old arriving late looked at the stage and remarked, "Oh, look. Technicolor." At the Theatre Royal, Stratford, East, where we staged *Puss*, a small figure peered over the top of the box office, laid down his one shilling and sixpence and said: "Same again, please."

"Have you seen it already?" asked the amazed booking lady.
"Free times," replied the cockney patron, and departed blissfully to his fourth experience in the gallery.19

Perhaps it was the exposure to the Young Vic that revealed the potentialities of theatre for young audiences to Black.

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19 Black 161.
Other Companies

As the list that appears as an appendix to this work clearly indicates, the Lyric, Hammersmith enjoyed a continuing and healthy usage by other companies during the eleven years that it was run by the Company of Four. Among those companies were several ballet companies (Ballet Rambert and The Metropolitan Ballet), several foreign theatre companies (The Belgian National Theatre and Theatre de Mime Francais) and even occasionally functioned as a recital hall (Eve Maxwell-Lyte and Libby Holman).

From 1963 to 1975 Kitty Black was the producer of the World Theatre seasons at the Aldwych Theatre. The World Theatre seasons functioned, for the theatre, in much the same way that the Spoleto Festival of Two Worlds functions, in drawing together the best of international theatre talent. In this capacity, one of her chief duties was to edit and provide simultaneous translations of scripts being performed by the companies involved in the seasons. It would be presumptuous to make the assumption that Black was responsible for the many uses to which the Lyric was put her time there. However, after she severed her association with the Company, the use of the Lyric by other companies dropped off markedly. Black left the Company after the opening of Gielgud's Richard II in December 1952. In the period from the beginning of 1953 to the demise of the venture in 1956, The Belgian National theatre appeared there for two weeks in July 1953; Paul Scofield, Mary Ure and Margaret Rutherford, (who were appearing in Time Remembered) did an evening for the Apollo Society in March 1955; and two marionette companies appeared there in December 1953 and April 1955, respectively. If Black was not completely responsible for the many usages of the Lyric during the period from 1945 to 1952, she certainly helped make such a diversity of ancillary offerings possible.
Though undoubtedly motivated by fiscal matters, the end result was that the Lyric's many usages increasingly made it a venue where the arts in their diversity could be enjoyed rather than a hall solely for the presentation of theatre.

Conclusion

The scheme that had been looked into over a greater period of time was one whereby the Old Vic would return to its late 1920s role as a home for drama, opera and ballet. This had been known as the 'Tri-Partite' scheme.... The Tri-Partite scheme was that the Old Vic and its Annexe should be shared during a working year by Prospect Theatre Company, the touring section of the Royal Ballet and the English Music Theatre Company. The Arts Council went as far as setting up a relevant Lyric Theatre Enquiry to look into the needs and resources of the lyric theatre in London. It was found that the Tri-Partite plan did, in fact, have much to recommend it. But the Arts Council found that, in 1976, they had insufficient subsidy to back such a potentially expensive sharing arrangement of the Old Vic—however worthy.

Though the abandonment of the Tri-Partite scheme sounded the death knell for a comprehensive multi-arts center housed at the Old Vic, The National Theatre through its platform series, exhibitions and in collaborations with other organizations (such as the National Film Theatre) has provided audiences with exposure to other arts forms. The success of these has led other producing organizations to duplicate the platform performances or to embark on their own related ventures. Both Riverside Studios and the current management of the Lyric, Hammersmith, for example, have ongoing programs that include musical performances, book talks, and readings of prose and poetry. Where did the paradigms for these programs come from? In part, of course, they can be said to have been an offshoot of the work of C. E. M. A. and E. N. S. A. during the World War II. But the potential for linking such a program or series of programs to an ongoing theatrical venture, and of

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entering into collaboration with other arts organizations to the benefit of both parties involved was visibly demonstrated by the Company of Four at the Lyric, Hammersmith. And, in so doing, the Company provided early support for several companies that would emerge as important producing organizations in their own right in the years that followed.
Chapter VIII:

CONCLUSION: MEASURING THE PARADIGM

There has hitherto been one enormous obstacle to the establishment of a National Theatre in England. However willing a man or body of men might be to give a new impulse to the art of the theatre, and place England abreast of France and Germany in respect of theatrical organization, he or they could have no definite idea how to set about it. A public park, a picture gallery or free library is easily created, and once created, virtually 'runs itself.' There are a hundred recognized models for its organization and management. But an Endowed Theatre is, in England, a wholly unfamiliar piece of mechanism, and the management of it an unknown art... It is essential to break away, completely and unequivocally, from the ideals and traditions of the profit making stage; and it is essential that the new system should have resources to give it time to establish itself and take hold upon the public... For example, in our list of a season's repertory, the reader will very likely see several plays which he, personally, does not greatly long to see, at a National Theatre, or elsewhere... the repertory holds more than one play for which we ourselves cherish no particular enthusiasm. No theatre can live entirely on plays which appeal equally to everyone.

William Archer and H. Granville Barker
Scheme and Estimates for
A National Theatre:
1907

Be it therefore enacted by the King's most Excellent Majesty with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

I. Upon the submission to the Treasury of a scheme satisfactory to them for the erection by the Trustees of such a theatre as aforesaid on the site reserved to them for the purpose in accordance with the said arrangements, and for the equipment and management thereof, the Treasury may undertake to make, and may make out of moneys provided by Parliament, upon such terms and subject to such conditions as they may think fit, such contributions to the funds of the trustees as they think fit (not exceeding one million

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pounds) in respect of the cost of erecting and equipping the theatre in accordance with the scheme.

National Theatre Act, 1948

Olivier's appointment to the directorship of the National Theatre was announced two months after the opening of the first Chichester season, so the second was inevitably something of a public preview before the Grand National First Night, and the third and fourth seasons consisted of visits from the newly formed National Theatre company, which in turn consisted largely of actors, directors, stage management and administrative staff who had worked for Olivier at Chichester. So for four successive seasons, audiences were treated to the finest experiences that Olivier could contrive for them.

Ronald Hayman
1975

Meanwhile the company has been performing in cramped conditions at the Old Vic and in theatres leased for a summer season in the West End. When the National Theatre occupy their new home on the South Bank in 1974 (?) Lord Olivier will become Life President and will be succeeded by Peter Hall.

Postscript: In September 1972 it was announced that because of the building workers' strike the January opening in 1974 has been abandoned and that the earliest date for the first production must be February or even March.

Arnold P. Hinchcliffe
1974

It is also unfortunate that the offices are not in the same building as the theatre. In the first few years of the company's life, Olivier, Dexter and Gaskill appeared to spend most their time with the actors, but later it seemed more and more as though the important decisions were taken in the offices and presented to the actors some time later as faits accomplis. All these things will be different, of course, after the much postponed opening of the New National theatre building, but by 1975, the company will have been working at the Old Vic for twelve years—the formative years of its life.

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And then, suddenly, it was open. On 16 March 1976 "Ralph's rocket"—a pyrotechnical rocket set off by Sir Ralph Richardson—arched out over the Thames. The National Theatre, after countless construction delays, several changes in management and artistic direction, and untold political maneuvering, was open.

Unfortunately, this "consummation devoutly to be wished" was not without its drawbacks. The roof leaked and audiences couldn't get from the Lyttleton or the Olivier to the Cottlesloe without going out into the elements. Actors became lost in the vast underground warren of tunnels and were so far divorced—by sheer distance—from stage management that a special system had to be installed, where actors arriving in the wings pressed a button showing that they were in place. Stage management, in turn, pressed another button when that cue came and a green light lit up. But it was open.

What were the paradigms upon which the National Theatre based its operations during this early, formative period? Should the Chichester Festival be considered one of these paradigms? What about the other "national theatres," such

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4Hayman, The Set-up 99-100

as existed in France? Can they be considered as functioning as a paradigm for the National Theatre of Great Britain?

Certainly, the Chichester Festival was regarded by many in the theatrical profession as being a precursor to the National. However, this consideration lay chiefly in the fact that Sir Laurence Olivier, who guided the Chichester Festival through its first four years of production, was Director of the National through its first fourteen years of production. However, Olivier relinquished the direction of the National just before the move to the South Bank Complex. The Chichester Festival is, therefore, more appropriately paradigmatic of the National Theatre during its "temporary" tenure at the Old Vic.

What about the budding National Theatre's closest theatrical neighbor, the French National Theatre? As has been indicated, the bifurcation of the French National theatre between the Comédie Française and the Théâtre National Populaire (T. N. P.) was certainly replicated in the dual theatrical missions of the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre. The Royal Shakespeare Company is undeniably "the house of Shakespeare" in much the same way that the Comédie Française is "the house of Moliere." But, is there a similar correspondence between the National and the T. N. P.? While the division of dramatic literature between the National Theatre and the RSC certainly mirrors the similar division between the T. N. P. and the Comédie Française, the T. N. P.'s inclusion of elements such as lectures, vaudeville, and the provision of both ballroom dancing and meals to ticket holders lead to a more populist view of the theatrical experience than that borne out by a consideration of the National's current repertory and production practices. While the National's roster of platform performances and music events would appear to mirror some of this populism, the National restricts these ancillary offerings to related or analogous art forms.
No exactly analogous paradigm to the National Theatre existed when the National commenced production in 1962. Instead, it is probably more accurate to consider that parts of many theatrical entities functioned as paradigms for the National Theatre. The production practices of the National are an amalgam of examples provided by other theatre companies.

Among these, the Company of Four must be considered. How does one measure the level of paradigmatic correspondence between the Company of Four and the current National Theatre? It would certainly be misleading to lay the two entities side by side and chart their similarities and differences. In doing so, one is bound to encounter parts of the current National Theatre's philosophy and production practices the paradigms for which were provided by other theatrical ventures. The Company of Four's paradigmatic correspondence to the National in these areas, as a result, would be very low. A fairer comparison might come from comparing the Company of Four's tenure at the Lyric, Hammersmith, and the National Theatre to some third set of criteria. The problem with this comes in determining what set of criteria to use. Like the Indian folktale of the seven blind men and the elephant, there are as many perceptions of what a British "national theatre" could and should be as there are people who encounter it--as employees, as audience members, as pedestrians passing through the South Bank complex--in the course of a year.

One set of criteria against which to judge the current National Theatre (and the Company of Four, as a paradigm for that institution) are those criteria that show what the "national theatre" set out to be. How did the institution's founders conceive its mission? One statement of that mission is to be found in the 1907 Archer-Barker scheme for a national theatre. Of course, to make such a comparison is to measure both the Challenger and the Concorde against the blueprints for the
Wright Brothers machine that inaugurated the era of flight at Kitty Hawk. The framers of the 1907 Scheme and Estimates for a National Theatre could no more have conceived of the current National Theatre than the Wright Brothers could have conceived of putting a man on the moon. And yet, such a comparison does begin to provide us with a framework to consider two disparate entities: the current National Theatre and the Company of Four. In empiric terms, the 1907 Archer-Barker scheme is the original design for an experiment and the current National Theatre is the fruition of the design in full operation. In this consideration, the Company of Four becomes a preliminary stage in which the design of the experiment is refined.

Before preceding with considering the correspondence, or congruence, of these two producing organizations to the Archer-Barker scheme, it may be helpful to re-examine how paradigms function. Essentially, paradigms are only examples or models. In general, the term "paradigm" is regarded as connoting a positive example. "They did it that way, and it worked, so we shall do it that way as well." But paradigms can function in a negative manner as well. "They did it that way, and it didn't work, so we will do it this way." Empirically, knowledge is frequently arrived at in experiments that would be considered "failures." Correspondingly, it is possible that a theatrical paradigm could provide insight by not working—i.e., not being successful.

In their treatise on the national theatre, Archer and Granville Barker laid down six purposes, or missions, for the theatre that they proposed. The six prongs of the mission statement, as it were, of the imagined and longed for national theatre organization were:

1. To keep the plays of Shakespeare in its repertory.
2. To revive whatever is vital in the English classical drama.
3. To prevent recent plays of great merit falling into oblivion.
4. To produce new plays and to further the development of modern drama.
5. To produce translations of representative works of foreign
   dramatists, ancient and modern.
6. To stimulate the art of acting through the varied opportunities
   that it would offer to the members of the company.\textsuperscript{6}

To that comprehensive and almost equally unachievable list, I would add a
seventh prong to the mission statement:

7. To explore and inaugurate innovative financial and managerial practices
   regarding the operation of the theatre.

In some ways, of course, the inclusion of this last begs the questions.
However, it is a question that, in retrospect, sorely needs to be begged. Archer and
Barker, after all, operated out of a very nineteenth-century view of the theatre and
could have had no conception of how corporate the theatre would become in the
twentieth century and how factors like changes in tax law would effect it. If
Beaumont and the Company of Four could make a going concern of the Lyric Theatre,
Hammersmith, why couldn't other firms do the same? And, could a National Theatre,
one once it appeared upon the landscape, and was operating with government sanction,
begin to ease those legal and governmental strictures?

\textsuperscript{6}Whitworth, The Making 83. Whitworth quotes from "The Proposed
Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre: an Illustrated Handbook, 1909." This is
the document that resulted from the consolidation of the Archer-Barker forces and a
similar group lobbying for a memorial to Shakespeare.
Let us, however, examine the paradigmatic correspondence between the National Theatre, as the culmination of the Archer-Barker scheme of 1907, and the Company of Four, as one of the paradigms that fed into the National theatre in its formative years, on the basis of the Archer-Barker list and reserve the seventh point for a "coup de theatre."

"To keep the plays of Shakespeare in its repertory"

During the eleven years that the Company of Four was active in production, only one Shakespeare play was produced; John Gielgud's 1952 production of Richard II.

For the most part, the National Theatre has left the production of Shakespeare's works to The Royal Shakespeare Company. Against that generalization must be laid the fact that the National inaugurated its tenure at the Old Vic with a production of Hamlet, and that very quickly after the South Bank facility was opened in 1976, a production of Hamlet joined the repertory. And, of course, a production of Christopher Marlowe's Tamburlaine, the Great—a dramatic piece as analogous to Shakespeare as possible—was one the first fully realized productions of the National once settled on the South Bank.

In the current 1988 repertory of the National, there are no less than three Shakespeare plays: Cymbeline, The Tempest, and A Winter's Tale. These three, however, are being presented as a trilogy—of sorts—and, as all three are being directed by Peter Hall, enjoying his "swan song" at the National, a single directorial vision is uniting them.

On this criterion, therefore, The Company of Four suffers in comparison to the National Theatre. But, since neither organization, in the final analysis, had really taken this as part of its mission, this low paradigmatic congruence is excusable.
"To revive whatever is vital in the English classical drama"

The ambiguity of this statement would surely have qualified Archer and Barker as framers of the Finance Act of 1916. Since the term "whatever is vital" is open to interpretation, perhaps our considerations should be limited by the term "English classical drama." And, in a catholic spirit, let the considerations include the broadest possible definition of 'classical.'

The current National Theatre has done an admirable job of maintaining a repertory that fulfills this mission statement. The current repertory includes John Webster's 'Tis Pity She's A Whore—and not much else that fits this description. Of course, such a blanket indictment dismisses the desire to keep the broadest possible definition of classical. If anything, the National has stretched the limits of this definition to the breaking point. Since 1962 the repertory of the National has regularly included productions such as When We Are Married (J. B. Priestley, December 1979) and Plunder (Ben Travers, Old Vic, January 1976 and Lyttleton, May 1978). The National has functioned, in retrospect, as a sort of living textbook of theatre history, revealing to its audiences the plays and the theatrical styles of many ages.

The Company of Four, however, fares well in this comparison. In the eleven year production history of the group, it produced productions of scripts by T. W. Robertson (Caste, 1947) George Bernard Shaw (Pygmalion, 1947, Captain Brassbound's Conversion, 1948, and Misalliance, 1956), Sir John Vanbrugh (The Relapse, 1947), John Galsworthy (The Silver Box, 1951), Arthur Wing Pinero (Trelawny of the 'Wells,' 1952), William Congreve (The Way of the World, 1953), and Thomas Otway (Venice Preserv'd, 1953). Demonstrably, the Company of Four had a commitment to the production of this segment of dramatic literature and
enjoyed an enviable success of their productions of the same. Both *Caste* and *The Relapse*, for instance, transferred to West End theatres for commercial runs after playing at the Lyric, Hammersmith.

On this criterion the Company of Four must be considered a positive paradigm for the National Theatre of Great Britain. The Company was certainly as committed and as active a producer of "whatever is vital in the English classical drama" as the National Theatre.

"To prevent recent plays of great merit from falling into oblivion"

Once again, the ambiguity of Archer and Barker's statement serves both institutions in good stead. How does one define "great merit," or, for that matter, "oblivion"?

In the current repertory of the National, *Fanshen*, by David Hare, certainly fits that description. This adaptation of William Hinton's book about the Communist revolution in China was first produced by the Joint Stock Company in 1975. It played from 22 April to 10 May on the terrace of the Institute for Contemporary Arts (ICA). Though the reviews for the piece very complimentary, implying, perhaps, "great merit," it has been infrequently revived since this initial production, until the National Theatre production.

The Company of Four fares as well as the National under the consideration of this criterion. Among the scripts that the Company rescued from obscurity were Noel Coward's *The Vortex* (1952, and unproduced in the West End for 20 years when the Company revived it), Rodney Ackland's *The Old Ladies* (1950, first produced in 1935 and not revived in the West End since that time) and Emlyn Williams' *Spring, 1600* (1945, the script had been unsuccessful when it was premiered in 1934. Williams
rewrote it extensively before the Company of Four production). If the validity of this criterion is accepted, the Company of Four must be judged as responsible as the current National Theatre. But, again, the interpretation of what is meant by this criterion and the observance of each of the institutions to it is so relative that it becomes, in the final analysis, so subjective as to be meaningless. For a production entity closely tied to a commercial firm— in the manner that the Company of Four was closely bound to H. M. Tennent—"great merit" could be construed as meaning commercial potential unrealized by a lackluster or inapt first production. For a theatre grounded in a literary and dramaturgical tradition— as the National Theatre certainly is—such merit might exist in dramatic resonances provided a work by something as removed from dramatic literature as a change in government. On this criterion, the Company of Four must be judged on a par with the current National Theatre.

"To produce new plays and to further the development of modern drama"

With the first part of this mission statement, at least, the assessment becomes a little less subjective. One of the stated missions of the Company of Four was the production of new plays by British authors. The Company produced thirty new works by British authors during the period from 1945 to 1956. Among the authors that they helped introduce to the theatre-going public were Wynyard Brown (Dark Summer, 1947 and The Holly and The Ivy, 1950), Ralph Petersen (The Square Ring, 1952), and Yvonne Mitchell (The Same Sky, 1952). Playwrights who had already had work presented, but who had works premiered by the Company included Gordon Daviot (The Little Dry Thorn, 1947) and Emlyn Williams (Charles Dickens, 1951 and the revision of Spring, 1600, 1945). The Company averaged between two
and three new scripts each season, a number which roughly equals the current rate of production of new scripts by the National Theatre, and exceeds that number in several of the years just after it commenced operation. Additionally, nine of the twenty scripts that The Company of Four premiered transferred to the West End for runs after the Lyric, Hammersmith premieres.

Certainly, in a spirit of generosity, it is possible to enumerate seasons when the National was more actively involved in the production of new works than they currently appear to be. The first twenty months after they took possession of the South Bank complex, for instance, represent such a time. In that period they premiered the following new scripts:

- Watch it Come Down
- No Man's Land
- Weapons of Happiness
- Bedroom Farce
- Strawberry Fields
- State of Revolution
- Four to One
- Old Movies
- Bow Down
- Sir is Winning
- Lavender Blue
- Half Life
- The Hunchback of Notre Dame

John Osborne
Harold Pinter
Howard Brenton
Alan Ayckbourn
Stephen Poliakoff
Robert Bolt
Gawn Grainger
Bill Bryden
Tony Harrison
Shane Connaughton
John Mackendrick
Julian Mitchell
Ken Hill/Victor Hugo

However, the original statement by Archer and Barker refers to "new plays" and "modern drama," and would seem inclusive of works other than those by British authors. If the production of new works by European authors is taken into consideration, the Company of Four was much more active than the National Theatre has been.

In its eleven-year tenure, the Company gave nine works by European authors first productions in England. The majority of these were by Jean-Paul Sartre (Men without Shadows, The Respectable Prostitute and Crime Passionnel) and Jean
Anouilh (Point of Departure, Time Remembered and The Lark). Three of these six transferred to the West End following runs at the Lyric, Hammersmith.

This record of productions makes the Company at least as active in this field as the current National Theatre. With the exception of a revival of French/Irish playwright Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot and a new production of Athol Fugard's A Place with the Pigs, the National Theatre seems to have restricted itself to presentations of scripts largely by British authors, with a few productions of classics (e.g. Tennessee Williams' Cat On A Hot Tin Roof) for good measure.

And, arguably, this is as it should be. Neither organization has or had taken, as part of their production philosophy, the presentation of scripts from the entire spectrum of world drama. And yet, if we measure the two against the vision of the national theatre put forth by the Archer-Barker scheme—as an expression of the "ideal national theatre"—the Company of Four fulfills the paradigm in a more complete fashion than does the current National Theatre.

"To produce translations of representative works of foreign dramatists, ancient and modern."

Between 1945 and 1956, the Company of Four produced fourteen plays that may legitimately come under this heading. The scripts were:

The Trojan Women
The Brothers Karamazov
The Eagle has Two Heads
The Play's The Thing
Men Without Shadows/
The Respectable Prostitute
Crime Passionnel
Point of Departure
Monserrat
A Doll's House
The Seagull

Euripides/Kinchin-Smith
Dostoyevsky/Guinness
Cocteau/Duncan
Molnar/Wodehouse
Sartre/Black
Sartre/Black
Anouilh/Black
Robles/Hellman
Ibsen/Ashmore
Chekhov/Calderon
The National Theatre has Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in its 1988 repertory. Of course, this blanket dismissal is unfair. During its first season at the Old Vic, the National produced five plays that fit this category:

- *Dance of Death* by Strindberg/Locock
- *Mother Courage* by Brecht/Bentley
- *Three Sisters* by Chekhov/Budberg
- *Fuente Ovejuna* by de Vega/Sillitoe
- *La Fianza Satisfecha* (A Bond Honoured) by de Vega/Osborne

The National Theatre, has, in fact, produced a great many scripts that fit this category. They range from Tom Stoppard's *On the Razzle* (1981, adapted from Johan Nestroy's *Einer jux will er sich machen*) to a revival of *The Trojan War Will Not Take Place* (1983, adapted from Jean Giraudoux's *La Guerre de Troy n'aura pas lieu*) by Christopher Fry in 1955). An objective consideration must lead to the conclusion that, on this criterion, the Company of Four was a positive paradigm for what would emerge as the National Theatre.

"To stimulate the art of acting through the varied opportunities that it would offer to the members of the company"

This criterion proves problematic, since it is difficult to determine what Archer and Barker meant by it and how they foresaw the national theatre fulfilling it. The statement can be interpreted as meaning that the national would stimulate actors through giving them the opportunity to perform in productions that employed many theatrical styles and from diverse periods of theatrical history, or whether they
foresaw some training wing akin to the Young Vic or the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School.

Certainly the current National Theatre provides actors with roles that stretch their capabilities. Witness Felicity Kendall as the pubescent boy Christopher in the aforementioned On The Razzle. And the National Theatre studio program provides ongoing exposure and experience for all members of the NT company to topics as varied as "The Actor and the Text," to verse speaking and mime. Additionally, the Platform Performance series can be seen as fulfilling this developmental function. It allows actors in the National company to depart from the roster of roles assigned to them to do things such as poetry readings and to participate in "works-in-progress."

There were no such opportunities provided by The Company of Four. On this criterion, the Company has no paradigmatic congruence to either the Archer-Barker scheme, or to the current National Theatre.

"To explore and inaugurate innovative financial and managerial practices regarding the operation of the theatre"

The National Theatre has been extremely innovative in the diversification of its undertakings. This innovation has ranged from the inclusion of bookstalls and restaurants in the NT complex to the inauguration of tours and Platform Performances. These endeavors represent the attempt on the part of NT to develop profit centers completely separate from the main profit center, the production of plays. The subsequent transfer of NT productions, such as Amadeus and Guys and Dolls, to the West End, represents the same kind of profit center development, only on a much grander scale.
The Company of Four showed equal innovation both in its usage of the Lyric, Hammersmith (i.e., the rental of the theatre to organizations like The Apollo Society and to other producers like The Young Vic) and in inaugurating the entire practice of transferring productions into the West End. The Company of Four, admittedly, was operating inside the letter but outside the spirit of the law that governed exemption from the payment of Entertainment Tax. And, therein lies the aforementioned "coup de theatre."

Were it not for the activities of the Company of Four, and the Parliamentary attention that they focused on the issue of what had been announced in 1916 as a "temporary tax," the abolition of that tax might not have taken place. Were that tax still in place, the transfer of productions from the National Theatre repertory to commercial West End might not be possible and, as a result, deprived of the possibility of the conversion of productions into profit centers, the repertory of the current National Theatre might be vastly different than that currently performed. If the possibility of moving it to the West End did not exist, it is doubtful that the National Theatre could justify the production of Alan Ayckbourn's Small Family Business. And the presence of these profit centers makes possible some of the more experimental undertakings by the National Theatre, such as David Edgar's Entertaining Strangers, a communally generated play first done in Dorchester with Ann Jellicoe's theatre company. Because it was instrumental in causing the tax reforms of 1957, therefore, were it not for the Company of Four the current National Theatre might be a vastly different entity.

Summary

In four of the seven criteria that we have considered, there is some degree of paradigmatic correspondence between the productions of The Company of Four at
the Lyric, Hammersmith between 1945 and 1956 and the National Theatre of Great Britain. In almost every case, of course, the degree of correspondence is subject to the interpretation of those criteria as set down by William Archer and Henry Granville-Barker at the beginning of the century. In the cases of the plays of Shakespeare and of "stimulating the art of acting" there is little or no correspondence between the two entities.

On the final criterion of innovative financial and managerial practices, finally, the Company of Four was, as a paradigm, groundbreaking. But the Parliamentary debates, and the tax reform that resulted, were a reaction to the fact that the Company of Four, in collusion with Tennent Productions, Ltd., was almost operating outside the law. For that reason, the paradigm may be considered negative in nature. On the majority of the Archer-Barker criteria, however, there is some degree of paradigmatic correspondence, and, as a result, The Company of Four must be considered one of the paradigms for the emergent national theatre concept.

**Conclusion**

Earlier in this chapter, the National Theatre was compared to the elephant in the Rudyard Kipling retelling of the Indian folktale. Each of the seven blind men who encounter it has a hold on a different part of the animal, and, as a result, perceives it as being analogous to something different. These analogies range from "very like a wall" from the blind man who stands with his hands against the elephant's side, to "very like a tree" from the one with his arms wrapped around the creature's leg. In a very real sense, the Company of Four at the Lyric, Hammersmith, provokes as many different perceptions and was as many different things to as many different people.
To Binkie Beaumont, it was, quite simply, one of the means whereby he was able to make H. M. Tennent, Ltd. and Tennent Productions, Ltd. the most successful and influential production companies in London between 1945 and 1956. Though, admittedly, the Company of Four was the weakest and most expendable member of the triumvirate, the third leg of the stool was necessary to give the whole scheme balance. It would have made no sense for a non-profit company to sell its productions to a production firm that would, in turn, have to pay both Entertainment and Income Tax. So, the Company of Four made the Beaumont regime at H. M. Tennent perhaps the most powerful theatrical dynasty in twentieth-century theatrical history.

For Kitty Black, the Company of Four must have seemed like her own theatrical venture. It was Black, after all, who provided the continuity from the MacDonald to the Perry management periods, and Black, as well, who was probably responsible for the both the number and success of the new scripts by French authors that the Company produced. Never "just a job," for Black the seven years with the Company of Four and, by association, with H. M. Tennent were a way of life. Reading *Upper Circle*, one can sense the pain that came with her disassociation from the venture.

For directors and playwrights, the Company of Four was like having a repertory company right in suburban London. With a change of bill planned for every four weeks, there was a greatly increased chance of interesting the firm in projects that would have met with little or no enthusiasm from the commercial managements of the West End.

For the critical community, the Company of Four must have been the locus for some of the most interesting new work going on in London during this period. From the new French scripts to first productions of new scripts from America, and from the
Gielgud season to the revues, the Company of Four was responsible for much that was exciting and innovative. It was not always, necessarily, good theatre, but it was always interesting.

For actors, The Company of Four was, in a way, a goose that, from time to time, laid a golden egg. There was the guarantee of twelve weeks work—and work with a firm associated with H. M. Tennents, the most prestigious theatrical producer around—and every once in a while there was the golden egg of a West End transfer. Considering the numbers of actors that must have worked for the Company of Four, it is amusing that virtually none of them remembering doing so.

And, finally, for audiences, the Company of Four was the production firm responsible for some of the most interesting and entertaining theatrical offerings in London—and on tour—during this period; From the bittersweet irony of Jean Anouilh's *Time Remembered* to the re-discovered pomp and pageantry of John Gielgud's production of *Venice Preserv'd*, and from the 'roll in the aisles' humor of *Tuppence Coloured* to the 'lay them in the aisles' horror of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Men without Shadows*.

Perhaps it is only in retrospect, having heard the various blindmen tell their tales, that one can begin to assemble something that resembles a picture of the Company of Four. A complete picture can never be assembled. Too many records have been lost. Too many recollections have become faulty or colored by time. And of equal fascination with beginning to assemble a picture of the venture is the realization that, unwittingly, the Company of four may have served as a paradigm for the National Theatre of Great Britain.
APPENDIX A

PRODUCTIONS OF THE COMPANY OF FOUR, 1945-1956

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Opening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Shouting Dies</td>
<td>Ronda Keane</td>
<td>5.10.45</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Trojan Women and the Happy Journey</td>
<td>Euripides/</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trenton to Camden</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spring 1600</td>
<td>Thornton Wilder</td>
<td>9.11.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death of a Rat</td>
<td>Jan de Hartog</td>
<td>15.1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Time of Your Life</td>
<td>William Saroyan</td>
<td>14.2.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomorrow's Child</td>
<td>John Coates</td>
<td>12.3.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Thracian Horses</td>
<td>Maurice Valency</td>
<td>7.5.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Brothers Karamoz</td>
<td>Dostoyevsky/Guinness</td>
<td>6.7.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer at Nohant</td>
<td>S. Iwaskiewicz</td>
<td>9.7.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear No More</td>
<td>Walter Macken</td>
<td>5.8.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Eagles Has Two Heads</td>
<td>Cocteau/Duncan</td>
<td>4.9.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Assassin</td>
<td>Peter Yates</td>
<td>14.10.46</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caste</td>
<td>T.W. Robertson</td>
<td>4.1.47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Galway Handicap</td>
<td>Walter Macken</td>
<td>4.2.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Rossiters</td>
<td>Kenneth Hyde</td>
<td>4.3.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Play's The Thing</td>
<td>Molnar/Wodehouse</td>
<td>14.4.47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oak Leaves and Lavender</td>
<td>Sean O'Casey</td>
<td>12.5.47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pygmalion</td>
<td>Bernard Shaw</td>
<td>17.6.47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Men Without Shadows and The Respectable</td>
<td>Sartre/Black</td>
<td>22.7.47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuppence Coloured</td>
<td>Revue/Various</td>
<td>4.9.47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dark Summer</td>
<td>Wynyard Browne</td>
<td>29.9.47</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Little Dry Thorn</td>
<td>Gordon Daviot</td>
<td>11.11.47</td>
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<td>The Relapse</td>
<td>Vanbrugh</td>
<td>16.12.47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bred in the Bome</td>
<td>Michael Egan</td>
<td>21.1.48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Castle Anna</td>
<td>Bowen/Perry</td>
<td>24.2.48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dandy Dick</td>
<td>A. W. Pinero</td>
<td>23.3.48</td>
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<tr>
<td>All My Sons</td>
<td>Arthur Miller</td>
<td>11.5.48</td>
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1 Black 242-243.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Director</th>
<th>Opening Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crime Passionnel</td>
<td>Sartre/Black</td>
<td>16.6.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An English Summer</td>
<td>Ronald Adam</td>
<td>1.9.48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Captain Brassbound's Conversion</td>
<td>Bernard Shaw</td>
<td>13.10.48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oranges and Lemons</td>
<td>Revue/various</td>
<td>26.11.48</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Damask Cheek</td>
<td>Van Druten/Morris</td>
<td>2.2.49</td>
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<td>Dark of the Moon</td>
<td>Richardson/Berney</td>
<td>8.3.49</td>
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<tr>
<td>Royal Highness</td>
<td>Margaret Webster</td>
<td>13.4.49</td>
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<td>Love in Albania</td>
<td>Eric Linklater</td>
<td>7.6.49</td>
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<td>The King of Friday's Men</td>
<td>Michael Molly</td>
<td>30.8.49</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Seagull</td>
<td>Chekhov/Calderon</td>
<td>4.10.49</td>
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<td>The Boy with a Cart and Shall We Join The Ladies?</td>
<td>Christopher Fry</td>
<td>19.1.50</td>
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<td>Man of the World</td>
<td>C. E. Webber</td>
<td>22.2.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Holly and The Ivy</td>
<td>Wynyard Browne</td>
<td>28.3.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>If This Be Error</td>
<td>Rachel Grieve</td>
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<tr>
<td>View Over the Park</td>
<td>C. P. Snow</td>
<td>30.8.50</td>
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<td>The Old Ladies</td>
<td>Rodney Ackland</td>
<td>2.10.50</td>
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<td>Point of Departure</td>
<td>Anouilh/Black</td>
<td>1.11.50</td>
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<td>The Silver Box</td>
<td>John Galsworthy</td>
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<td>The Lyric Revue</td>
<td>Revue/various</td>
<td>26.5.51</td>
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<tr>
<td>A Phoenix Too Frequent and Thor with Angels</td>
<td>Christopher Fry</td>
<td>10.1.51</td>
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<td>Charles Dickens</td>
<td>Dickens/Williams</td>
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<td>Summer and Smoke</td>
<td>Tennessee Williams</td>
<td>19.11.51</td>
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<td>The Same Sky</td>
<td>Yvonne Mitchell</td>
<td>31.1.52</td>
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<td>The Vortex</td>
<td>Noel Coward</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monserrat</td>
<td>Robles/Hellman</td>
<td>8.4.52</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trelawney of the 'Wells'</td>
<td>A. W. Pinero</td>
<td>12.5.52</td>
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<tr>
<td>The River Line</td>
<td>Charles Morgan</td>
<td>2.9.52</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Square Ring</td>
<td>Ralph Petersen</td>
<td>21.10.52</td>
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<tr>
<td>(The Gielgud Season)</td>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
<td>24.12.52</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richard II</td>
<td>Congreve</td>
<td>18.2.53</td>
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<td>The Way of the World</td>
<td>Otway</td>
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<tr>
<td>Venice Preserv'd</td>
<td>Revue/various</td>
<td>23.12.53</td>
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<td>A Doll's House</td>
<td>Chekhov/Gielgud</td>
<td>21.5.54</td>
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<td>At The Lyric</td>
<td>Ibsen/Faber</td>
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<td>The Cherry Orchard</td>
<td>Anouilh/Moyes</td>
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<td>Hedda Gabler</td>
<td>Anouilh/Fry</td>
<td>10.4.55</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time Remembered</td>
<td>Sandy Wilson</td>
<td>8.9.55</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Lark</td>
<td>Bernard Shaw</td>
<td>8.2.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

Presentations by other Companies
at The Lyric, Hammersmith,
(1945-1956)

The Apollo Society, an evening of poetry read by Dame Sybil Thorndike and Lewis Casson, 1 April 1946.

Donald Albery and Una Productions, Red Roses for Me. 9 April 1946. Red Roses had opened at the Embassy Theatre, one of London's smaller theatres, on 26 February. It played little more than a month at the Lyric, Hammersmith and transferred to the New Theatre on 28 May 1946. The Lyric engagement may have been an interim booking until the New was available.

The Apollo Society, an evening of poetry, 27 May 1946. (Readers not specified in The Times advertisement)

The Apollo Society, "Conversation Piece," an evening of poetry, 24 June 1946. (Readers not specified in The Times advertisement)

The Apollo Society, "Facade," with Constance Lambert and Leighton Lucas and "Song of the Cold," with Dorothy Green; 22 September 1946. The Apollo Society, an evening of poetry with Margaret Rawlings and Max Adrian; 6 and 7 October 1946

Ballet Rambert, one performance, 13 October 1946.

Eve Maxwell-Lyte, an actress-singer in a solo concert; 21 October 1946.


The King Stag, a Christmas panto presented by the Young Vic and produced by George Devine; 26 December 1946.


The Apollo Society, an evening of poetry read by Cathleen Nesbitt, John Laurie and Margaretta Scott with music by Christopher Hassell; 5 January 1947. The evening's program was arranged by Sir Edward Marsh.
The Apollo Society, an evening of poetry read by Eileen Herlie, Stephen Murray and Cecil Day Lewis; 26 January 1947. The evening's program was arranged by Cecil Day Lewis.


Professor Skupa's Puppet Theatre; A marionette show presented twice a day: 26 April 1947.

The Apollo Society, an evening of music and poetry ready by Rachel Kempson, Robert Harris and Angus Morrison; 30 May 1947.

The Company of Four Sunday Club, "Woyzeck" and "The Green Cockatoo:" 25 July 1947. (This is the only mention of the Company of Four Sunday Club. This formation of a Sunday producing society may have been a ruse to avoid censorship by the Lord Chamberlain of the two scripts being presented.)

Georgette Hagedoorn, advertisement in The Times reads "solo performance by this celebrated Dutch diseuse and singer;" 10 October 1948.

The English Opera Group: Let's Make An Opera: by Benjamin Britten and Eric Crozier. 15 November 1948 (three week engagement).

The Hogarth Puppets: 10 January 1949 (two week engagement).

John Wright Marionettes; 16 May 1949 (one week engagement).

Salzburg Marionettes; 23 May 1949 (two week engagement).

Metropolitan Ballet in a two week season that includes "Le Lac des Cynges," pas de deux from "Giselle" and premiere of Andre Howard's "Ballamento;" 11 July 1949; season extended to 30 July 1949.

Ballet Rambert; two week season, from 31 April 1950.

Bristol Old Vic in Moliere's Tartuffe: translated by Miles Malleson and directed by Alan Davis with Frances Rowe, Jesse Evans and John Moffat; 27 June 1950.

English Opera Group, The Beggar's Opera (Gay and Pepusch, realized by Benjamin Britten); 17 July 1950.

The English Opera Group: Let's Make An Opera; by Benjamin Britten and Eric Crozier. 9 December 1950 (three week engagement).
Northern Ireland Festival Company, under the direction of Tyrone Guthrie: The Company presented three plays; *The Passing Day, Danger, Men Working*, and *The Sham Prince*. 1 April 1951.

English Opera Group, in a season of four operas, *Dido and Aeneas, Albert Herring, Let's Make an Opera* and *The Rape of Lucretia*; 30 April 1951.


Libby Holman, singer, in an evening of "Ballads, Blues and Sin Songs;" 22-26 July 1952.

Theatre de Mime Francais; 29 July 1952


Ballet Rambert, "with Sally Gilmour;" 1 December 1952.

Belgian National Theatre, in a season of two plays *Ondine* (Giraudoux) *Arms and the Man*; 20 July 1953.

The Lanchester Marionettes; 1 December 1953.

The Apollo Society, an evening of music and poetry read by Mary Ure, Paul Scofield and Margaret Rutherford; 27 March 1955.

Professor Skupa’s Puppet Theatre; 24 April 1955.
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214


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