

WORLD DRAMA

FROM ÆSCHYLUS TO ANOUILH

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PREFACE

THIS book attempts to provide a general conspectus of the drama's development from its earliest days in ancient Greece down to latest times. Confessedly it is prejudiced, since without prejudice no essay of this kind can be other than a mere record of facts, and the endeavour here is to present something beyond a collection of statistical information.

Judgments on individual plays and on the work of various playwrights are, therefore, coloured by the light in which the entire progress of the theatre is viewed. Still further, it must be emphasized that these judgments are based on standards or values independent of particular times and places. In a volume devoted to a period of dramatic activity restricted both in time and in place certain plays may justifiably be selected for praise because they rise above the general tone of their companions: in a book dealing with the whole development of the drama such plays may, with equal justification, be omitted or dealt with cursorily. If we take Sophocles and Shakespeare, Aristophanes and Shaw, as our standards, many lesser authors, although perhaps important for their own time and country, must of necessity be ignored.

An attempt, of course, has been made to refer to many plays which, because of their historical significance, are worthy of notice even though they may no longer make appeal to us, but always my object has been to make a distinction between such historical significance and intrinsic value. Should any reader in another country feel that I have not done justice to authors whose local fame is greater than their general esteem, I refer to my treatment of certain periods of English dramatic history, wherein numerous plays of decided interest have been weighed against others of greater importance and found wanting.

Particular difficulty has arisen, naturally, in dealing with contemporary contributions to the stage. In this region there is no perspective supplied by time to aid us; yet modern efforts are those which most attract our attention. Because of these considerations I have devoted to the dramatic work of the twentieth century perhaps greater space than would have been accorded to it had this book been written, not in 1949, but in 2049—and certainly greater space than a strict balancing of worth with that of earlier times might warrant.

In this connexion another thing must be emphasized. A purely factual account of theatrical development would presumably treat of plays in all countries, East and West, according to their position in time; and it would, moreover, seek to deal with all manifestations of the art dramatic no matter where they were exhibited. Thus, for example, in a work of

such a kind an account of the Sanskrit theatre would appear alongside an account of the medieval stage in Europe, and presumably space would be devoted to the extraordinarily interesting religious 'mysteries' of India, Persia, and Tibet. In the present volume a definite orientation has been adopted. It begins with Æschylus and ends with Anouilh. This means that it is concerned chiefly with the Western drama and that other kinds of drama are dealt with largely in so far as they have aided in the evolution of Western forms. An account of the Oriental theatre is thus placed, not in medieval times, but in the modern period—when first these Oriental conventions came to be appreciated and were deemed worthy of imitation.

Naturally a book of this sort presents many and serious language problems. So far as possible, I have read (or seen, when opportunity offered itself) plays in their original tongues, but obviously only some half a dozen countries could so be dealt with. This meant application to translations, and fortunately there is a fairly extensive library, prepared by authors British and American, of theatrical works originally composed in other tongues. Even these large resources, however, sometimes proved inadequate, and consequently, as a third choice, I have turned to versions in French, Italian, or German. Thus, for instance, a rather important Hungarian drama has been read in Italian, a Czech drama in German, and a Bulgarian in French, since apparently none of these had been put into English dress. I fully realize that in the perusal of works at second, or even at third, hand much of the flavour of the original must inevitably be lost, particularly if the author was a poet; but I have sought, so far as possible, to make allowances for this inevitable loss.

After due deliberation, I have decided not to add a bibliography to the text of this volume. Partly this decision has been determined by the fact that divers such reading-lists have been published during recent years and are readily available; partly I have been influenced by the thought that any reading-list based merely on material in English must necessarily be inadequate because of the many dramatic literatures dealt with, and that a really appropriate bibliography would become inconveniently lengthy and would perforce include scores of titles in other tongues. If any reader wishes to devote particular attention to a selected period of dramatic development or to the contributions of an individual country, there should be no difficulty in his obtaining references to such books as will aid him in his course of study.

At the same time, it should be emphasized that in the following pages great care has been taken to make the factual information, and, in especial, the dating of plays, as accurate as might be. This has not proved by any means an easy task. Frequently even those critical works which might have been thought to provide authority were found to differ among themselves, while in certain instances the obtaining of absolutely definitive information proved impossible. All that may be said is that every endeavour has been exercised to make this volume as correct as possible in the

presentation of statistical information, although it is too much to hope that, with so wide a scope, errors have been entirely avoided.

For aid in locating elusive documentary evidence I have to thank many of my colleagues and friends, at the University of Birmingham, at other British universities, in the United States of America, and in continental Europe. The Cultural Attachés at the Embassies of the U.S.S.R. and Norway have also been most kind in helping me in this task. For all such assistance I am deeply grateful.

Some of the translated quotations from plays have been specially prepared for the present book, but many have been taken from already published versions. For permission to include both extracts from these versions and quotations from original works by British and American authors I have to thank the following:

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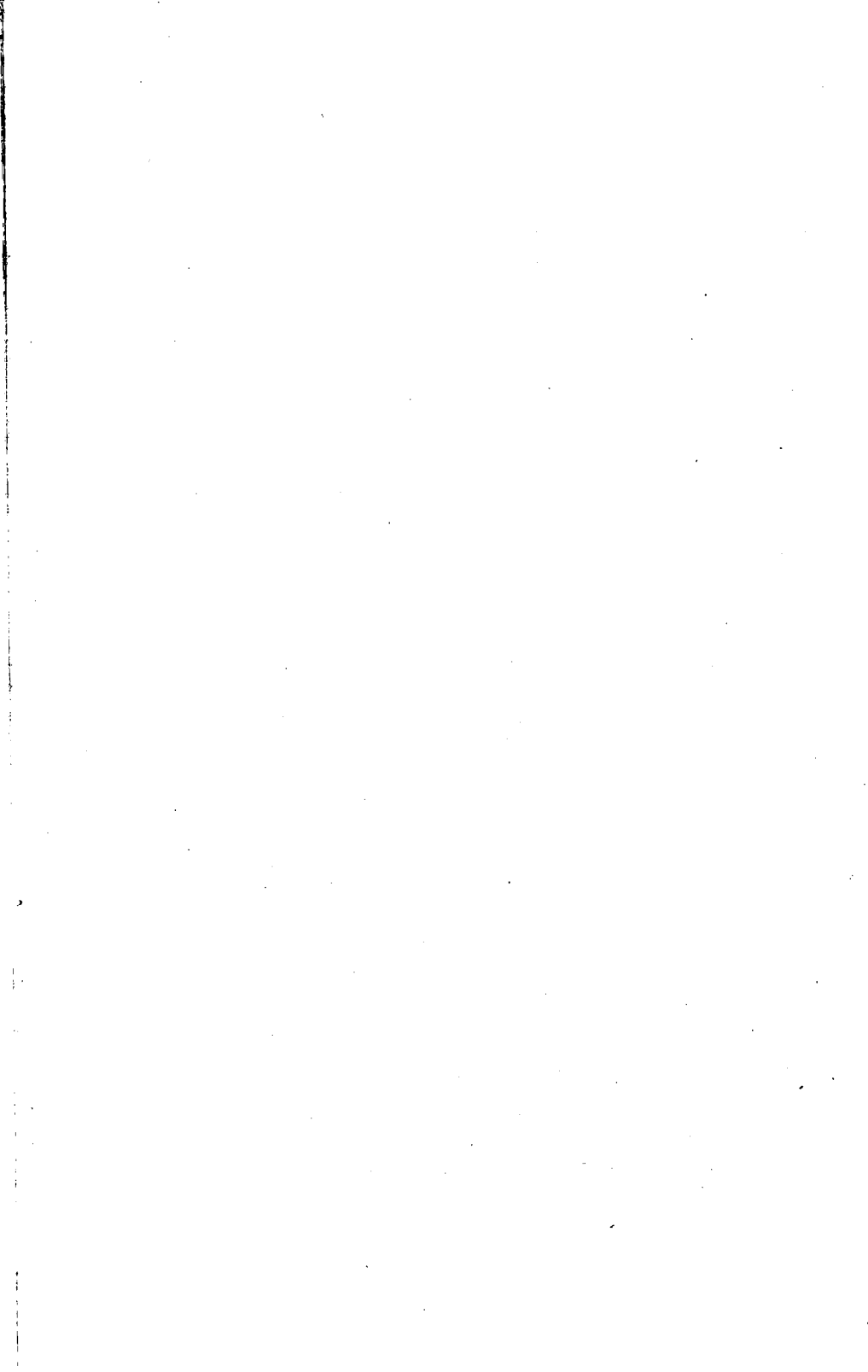
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A. N.



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