

The Theory of the Modern Stage

AN INTRODUCTION TO
MODERN THEATRE
AND DRAMA

EDITED BY
ERIC BENTLEY



PENGUIN BOOKS

The Theory of the Modern Stage

AN INTRODUCTION TO
MODERN THEATRE
AND DRAMA

EDITED BY
ERIC BENTLEY



PENGUIN BOOKS

Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth,
Middlesex, England
Penguin Books, 625 Madison Avenue,
New York, New York 10022, U.S.A.
Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood,
Victoria, Australia
Penguin Books Canada Limited, 2801 John Street,
Markham, Ontario, Canada L3R 1B4
Penguin Books (N.Z.) Ltd, 182-190 Wairau Road,
Auckland 10, New Zealand

First published 1968
Reprinted with revisions 1976
Reprinted 1978, 1979, 1980, 1982

Selection, Preface and commentary copyright © Eric Bentley, 1968
All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America by
Offset Paperback Mfrs., Inc., Dallas, Pennsylvania
Set in Baskerville

Except in the United States of America,
this book is sold subject to the condition
that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise,
be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated
without the publisher's prior consent in any form of
binding or cover other than that in which it is
published and without a similar condition
including this condition being imposed
on the subsequent purchaser

For

HALLIE FLANAGAN DAVIS

creator of the first people's theatre
in the new world

Contents

✓ Preface by Eric Bentley	9
✓ Acknowledgements	17

PART ONE TEN MAKERS OF MODERN THEATRE

✓ ADOLPHE APPIA The Ideas of Adolphe Appia <i>Lee Simonson</i>	27
ANTONIN ARTAUD The Theatre of Cruelty, First and Second Manifestos <i>Antonin</i> <i>Artaud, translated by Mary Caroline Richards</i> Obsessed by Theatre <i>Paul Goodman</i>	55 76
BERTOLT BRECHT The Street Scene <i>Bertolt Brecht, translated by John Willett</i> On Experimental Theatre <i>Bertolt Brecht, translated by John Willett</i> Helene Weigel: On a Great German Actress <i>and Weigel's</i> Descent into Fame <i>Bertolt Brecht, translated by John Berger and</i> <i>Anna Bostock</i>	85 97 105
E. GORDON CRAIG The Art of the Theatre, The First Dialogue <i>E. Gordon Craig</i> A New Art of the Stage <i>Arthur Symons</i>	113 138
LUIGI PIRANDELLO Spoken Action <i>Luigi Pirandello, translated by Fabrizio Melano</i> Eleanora Duse <i>Luigi Pirandello</i>	153 158
BERNARD SHAW A Dramatic Realist to His Critics <i>Bernard Shaw</i> <i>Appendix to The Quintessence of Ibsenism Bernard Shaw</i>	175 197
KONSTANTIN STANISLAVSKY Stanislavsky <i>David Magarshack</i> Emotional Memory <i>Eric Bentley</i>	219 275

CONTENTS

✓ RICHARD WAGNER	
The Ideas of Richard Wagner <i>Arthur Symons</i>	283
✓ W. B. YEATS	
A People's Theatre <i>W. B. Yeats</i>	327
A Theory of the Stage <i>Arthur Symons</i>	339
ÉMILE ZOLA	
From <i>Naturalism in the Theatre</i> , <i>Émile Zola</i> , translated by <i>Albert Bermel</i>	351
To Begin <i>Otto Brahm</i> , translated by <i>Lee Baxandall</i>	373

PART TWO

TOWARDS A HISTORICAL OVER-VIEW

GEORG BRANDES	
Inaugural Lecture, 1871 <i>Georg Brandes</i> , translated by <i>Evert Sprinchorn</i>	383
ARNOLD HAUSER	
The Origins of Domestic Drama <i>Arnold Hauser</i> , translated in collaboration with the author by <i>Stanley Godman</i>	403
GEORGE LUKÁCS	
The Sociology of Modern Drama <i>George Lukács</i> , translated by <i>Lee Baxandall</i>	425
ROMAIN ROLLAND	
From <i>The People's Theatre</i> , <i>Romain Rolland</i> , translated by <i>Barrett H. Clark</i>	455
The Theatre Can Belong to Our Century <i>Erwin Piscator</i>	471
ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE	
Some Observations on the Drama amongst Democratic Nations <i>Alexis de Tocqueville</i> , translated by <i>Henry Reeve</i> and revised by <i>Francis Bowen</i>	479
✓ A Note on Further Reading	485
Index of Authors and Works	487

Preface

THE reader of a book such as this, or even the bookshop browser who has not yet decided whether to buy it, deserves to be told what he may expect – what the editor intended to offer and what the editor knew he was not offering.

What is 'the theory of the modern stage'? Let me break the question into three. What (in the book) is theory? What, modern? And what, the stage?

It is always easier to lead off with a denial. 'Theory' is not criticism: this book (I could tell myself early in my own planning) must not be a collection either of theatre reviews or of articles on plays or playwrights. My concern must be with general principles. With the word 'modern' I had alternatives: the kind of drama we all call modern can be traced back, and often has been, to the middle of the eighteenth century, but generally we are thinking of Ibsen and after. For reasons of space I certainly had to think as we generally do, though I am glad to say that there is a good deal of referring back to the eighteenth century by the authors I have selected. The term 'the stage' takes in forms of art not treated here, such as music hall and perhaps the circus (though the latter really has no stage), and is sometimes used to exclude an art that is treated here – the drama. Some people, even when they have finished reading this book, will say it should have been called *The Theory of the Drama*. I myself would plead, however, that no book of pure dramatic theory would give such prominence to, say, Stanislavsky or Gordon Craig. Yet the word 'theatre' (*The Theory of the Theatre*) would probably mislead in just the opposite direction. I like to think that the term 'the Stage' still suggests the inseparable union of theatre and drama. And so this book is entitled: *The Theory of the Modern Stage*.

It also has a subtitle: 'An Introduction to Modern Theatre and Drama', the second half of which merely removes any vestigial ambiguities in the main title. The unremarkable word Introduction found its way in only after my thinking about the book had gone through several stages.

A person who is invited to edit a book on a given subject assumes, does he not, that the subject exists? Publishers must know what they are doing when they issue invitations! And after all one has

THE THEORY OF THE MODERN STAGE

heard of 'the theory of the modern stage' or something very like it. *Ergo*, there must be such a thing.

A person like myself who has even lived a good part of his life with 'the thing', and with all the phrases used to describe 'it', such as 'theory of the modern stage', is all the more apt to suppose, first, that the thing is very much *there* and, second, that he very certainly knows what it is. Yet, when the moment comes, one wonders.

There is a situation which we would like to be able to say exists, or which, at any rate, the rationalist within us would like to say exists. I would call it the foursquare situation. If life, if history, were foursquare, everything would be what it was, everything would be in its proper place, and classification would be as satisfactory as it sounds. For example, Émile Zola would be Naturalism, and Naturalism would be Émile Zola, and no discrepancy between theory and practice would be permitted. The novels would exemplify the essays, and the essays would summarize the novels.

Now Émile Zola is only a relatively difficult case. At least he did have the grace to subscribe to an *Ism*, and to define it with considerable lucidity and eloquence. What of artists who are scarcely theorists at all? What of artists who are bad theorists? What of artists who are bad writers?

It might be thought that bad writers would not come within the compass of a book like this in any case. Not so. The theatre arts are not all verbal: some of the theatre's artists must be permitted to be bad writers. They can be overlooked then! says the newcomer to this scene. Not so, neither! What they are fumbling to say may be very good; and it may be significant that it was said, or half-said, by them in particular; and even if it is not very good, it may be important in the future because it has been influential in the past. Is there a scandal in this last criterion? Shall I be told that, if we are talking of mere historical *weight*, I might as well have confined this study to the commercial theatre, and presented the views of C. B. Cochran, Hugh Beaumont, David Merrick and such? No, I think certain standards are built into the very notion of a book like this. That is why I did not bother to mention them when defining 'modern theatre'. It was, is, and will be pretty clear that my understanding of what modern theatre is diverges from that of the average ticket buyer in the West End or on Broadway. When I say that influence is important *per se*, I mean, for example, the influence of Richard Wagner's writing. They are not writings

PREFACE

I admire. They are simply writings I cannot deny the influence, the historic role, of. Therefore something had to be done about them in this book.

I put it thus circumspectly, for no excerpt from the works of Wagner appears in this book, except by way of quotation in an essay by Arthur Symons. The schoolboy in each of us would insist that, since Richard Wagner had theories, he must somewhere have given the definitive account of what they were, preferably in very clear summary form, moving briskly along from A to B to C. One can then set down his A's, B's and C's parallel to, say, Ibsen's, and compare the views of Wagner and Ibsen. But Ibsen did not care to theorize, and Wagner, who did, wrote prose which I, and not I alone, find rather unreadable, whether in German or English. Should I set my readers the task of ploughing through it anyway? I cannot believe they actually would. Symons sums up Wagner better than Wagner ever did, and is readable: that is why his work, and not the *Meister's*, is used here.

Something similar has to be said for Wagner's disciple, Adolphe Appia. There is the same bad prose and the same predilection for grandiose categories and high abstractions. Mr Lee Simonson brings Appia down to earth but so gently and lovingly that the Swiss designer's most ardent admirers can only be ingratiated by what Mr Simonson has written in the chapter included here.

Ibsen, as I say, did not theorize at all. The theory of Ibsenism was only something he occasionally read about, invariably with surprise and sometimes with fury. And the non-schoolboy in us is bound to admit there is something profoundly *satisfactory* about such a tightlipped author, about an artist who explains himself through his art alone. The absence from the present pages of Ibsen, Chekhov and Strindberg implies no disrespect. On the contrary, I respect the reticence of the two of them who were reticent - Ibsen and Chekhov. On the latter I would like to add that the passages usually quoted from him about his plays would hardly be in place here. They are of interest, like everything he wrote, but Chekhov is as secretive about his art and its essential principles as Shakespeare or Mozart. As for Strindberg, he assayed dramatic theory, as he assayed everything else, but only in the preface to *Miss Julie* does he show much theoretical grasp. There were two reasons for not printing that preface here. First, Naturalism is represented, and perhaps better, by Zola. Second, the famous preface is very widely available both in editions of *Miss Julie* and in anthologies of criticism and theory.

THE THEORY OF THE MODERN STAGE

In short, 'it would have been nice' to take the great dramatists and have each explain in turn how his art 'works'. In our day, all artists are asked to do that sort of thing all the time on radio and television. But the great ones of the past have not always done it, even in books, and when they have done it, they have not always done it well. Hence, the great figures are represented here by their own work only when their own work provides the best representation for them. It is to be hoped that my table of contents becomes more understandable in the light of this statement.

The book can only, of course, be an Introduction – I return to this word. The schoolboy in us wishes to tell the bookseller: Give me a book that contains all I need to know about modern dramatic theory. True, a person may not *need* to know very much in this field – he may even not need to know anything of it. But granted that he wishes to enter the field at all, and to be glad afterwards that he has, I would say that the best purpose the book can serve is *really* as an introduction – to a subject far larger than itself. What a Bernard Shaw thought about theatre and drama *cannot* be compressed, even by him, into a few pages. To have read the adroit Symons on Wagner is not to have comprehended Wagnerism but only to have made its acquaintance. It would be a disservice to education to pretend that this is not so. And of course education has often performed such disservices – many a Frenchman thinks he knows all philosophy after a brief flirtation with selections from selected philosophers at the *lycée*. Such is the little learning that is a dangerous thing. Education should not bring to students self-contained and seemingly self-sufficient excerpts – excerpts that seem not to be excerpts, and which aim at removing the need for further reading, rather than creating such a need. Introductions should introduce. Such thoughts, at any rate, governed my choices in making this book. I did not wish to pretend to be taking the reader everywhere, to be covering all the ground with him, but rather to provide him with glimpses of the ground from different vantage points, in different lights, through different binoculars. Even where my authors may be dictatorial and absolute, one dictator is here cancelled out by another, and thus the absolute becomes relative. If someone were to describe the book as 'merely a bundle of hints' I should not be dismayed, except by the word *merely*.

If it is important that I should not claim to do more than introduce, it is equally important that this be done with the thoroughness it properly requires. Some anthologies do not meet

PREFACE

this condition because the selections are too brief. One gets an author's conclusions without the argument by which the conclusions are reached, and this is not in the least educational. Just the opposite. By that method we train mere quiz kids, students who can cite Aristotle's 'unities' but have not the slightest idea what, in full, and in sequence, Aristotle said about them.

I have chosen such lengthy extracts for this book that – the space available being limited – I could not include very many extracts. This was the price that had to be paid. Granted that the book is purely introductory in aim, it is a price, surely, well worth paying. I have not appointed my ten makers of modern theatre THE ten makers of modern theatre, or my five historians THE five chroniclers of modern theatre.

To return to the question whether one really knows what the phrase 'theory of the modern stage' means. I have said that theory is a matter of general principles. Does the modern stage *have* principles? It would be easy, certainly, to imagine any art proceeding on principles in a way in which it really doesn't. School textbooks are full of such false imaginings. They teach that an Expressionist is one who, before painting a picture, looks through the fourteen points which are Expressionism and works all fourteen of them into his design. If my readers are not more sophisticated than this before they read this book, I hope they will be afterwards.

The proposition that theory is a matter of general principles might mean various things. Again I will start with a denial. I did not presuppose that the modern theatre was like a Church, agreed on a particular set of principles. But neither did I see a mere medley of personal differences of opinion. I started from a sense that there existed a main tradition, generally called Realism, and that there had been many revolts against it. I think it is fairly easy to place each figure represented here on one side or the other of the fence.

If I have avoided a chronological order which might have clarified this matter of tradition somewhat, it is because I saw in it a danger of a false progressivism. A well-known academic course in New York was called The March of Drama. That kind of rhetoric had body in Zola's time; now it rings hollow. I would not wish to present either our Realism or any of the proposed alternatives as that to which all Creation has moved. The names of my ten principal figures are given in alphabetical order.

Although the two main traditions of the modern stage will be repeatedly brought to the reader's attention, and although other large themes will recur here and there in the book, I have not

THE THEORY OF THE MODERN STAGE

picked the excerpts to prove a thesis, nor have I fought beyond a certain point with the fact that the word *theory* is a loose word. This is no place for the study of the theory of theory. Let me say in the simplest terms what my procedure was.

Realizing that I would be limited to a few figures, I made choices which are hardly personal, but correspond to a kind of consensus. That Richard Wagner is important in the history of theatre is not your opinion or mine, there is a consensus about it, one might almost say it is a fact. For Part One I chose ten names (a good round number) that seemed to have attained a similar status, making sure that I got the right chronological span – the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth – and sufficient variety. As to exactly what topics would come up, I let the principals, or their best expositors, speak for themselves, placing the emphasis where they themselves wished to place it. Part One imparts, I think, some sense of artists legislating reality into being. Shelley, in his notorious phrase about ‘unacknowledged legislators’ was not wholly wrong – he was certainly not talking about nothing. Many things become so because they are said to be so, like *credit* in our economic system. That is why, on occasion, the wildest fantasy can become the flintiest reality, and a crackpot’s theory may become solid history. Where would the history of religion be if this last proposition were not true?

But in part, even what the artists, the makers, say early on is only generalization upon what has already occurred. So there is a natural overlap between the first and second part of this book, for Part Two is almost wholly devoted to generalizations. Here the great precursor is Aristotle, who made such generalizations in his *Poetics*, and only by a notorious blunder was it for a long time assumed that what he intended was a manifesto, a prophecy, or a permanent book of rules.

If I believed the modern stage had had its Aristotle, Part Two of this book would be wholly given over to his *Poetics*. For lack of such a document, one picks out a few dozen pages of comment from many, many thousands. There is much brilliant commentary, but I had (I thought) to resist the temptation to exhibit brilliance, as also the temptation to ‘work in’ this or that distinguished name. In Part Two, the point was not to feature the work of any particular man as such, but only to find writing in which many of the threads of Part One were brought together. Say what we will in favour of concreteness and particularity, what we all want to do in the end is: generalize. We want to move on from the particular

PREFACE

to the universal, from fact to truth. Let me hasten to add that I by no means consider that this transition is actually effected in Part Two. Only that, in our efforts to effect it, some assistance is given. My choices were made with that, and only that, in mind.

Unlike the choices of Part One, they are personal choices, for there was now no consensus to go by. My reasoning was along these lines. The modern Aristotle would not be a metaphysician but a historian. The ‘over-view’ we are after is a historical over-view. Not to belabour the word *realistic*, I would say that what we require from a historian is a certain critical realism. In saying this I show, no doubt, the bias that has led to my including in Part Two excerpts by Lukács, Hauser, Brandes, Rolland and Tocqueville. Which is as it should be. If parts of this Preface have sounded like an apologia, I am happy if it ends up, instead, as merely an explanation.

ERIC BENTLEY

Acknowledgements

FOR permission to publish items in this anthology, acknowledgement is made to the following: for 'The Ideas of Adolphe Appia' from *The Stage is Set* by Lee Simonson to Theatre Arts Books, New York (copyright 1932 by Harcourt, Brace & Co., copyright renewed 1960 by Lee Simonson. Copyright © 1963 by Theatre Arts Books, New York); for 'The Theatre of Cruelty: Two Manifestos' from Antonin Artaud's *The Theatre and its Double*, translated by Mary Caroline Richards, to Grove Press Inc. and Calder & Boyars Ltd; for 'The Street Scene' and 'On Experimental Theatre' from *Brecht on Theatre* by Bertolt Brecht, translated by John Willett, copyright © 1957, 1963 and 1964 by Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, translation and notes © 1964 by John Willett to Hill and Wang Inc. and Methuen & Co. Ltd; for 'Helene Weigel: On a Great German Actress' and 'Weigel's Descent into Fame' by Bertolt Brecht, translated by John Berger and Anna Bostock, to the translators; for 'The Art of the Theatre: The First Dialogue' from *On the Art of the Theatre* by E. Gordon Craig to William Heinemann Ltd and Theatre Arts Books (All Rights Reserved, copyright 1956 by Theatre Arts Books); for 'A Theory of the Stage' from *Plays, Acting and Music* by Arthur Symons to Jonathan Cape Ltd; for 'The Ideas of Richard Wagner' and 'A New Art of the Stage' from *Studies in Seven Arts* by Arthur Symons, copyright 1925, by E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc., renewal 1953 by Miss Mona Hill, to the publishers; for 'Obsessed by Theatre', Paul Goodman's review of Antonin Artaud's 'The Theatre and its Double', from *The Nation*, to the author; for 'Spoken Action' by Luigi Pirandello, translated by Fabrizio Melano, to the sons of Luigi Pirandello and the translator; for the Appendix to 'The Quintessence of Ibsenism' and 'A Dramatic Realist to his Critics' by George Bernard Shaw to The Society of Authors; for David Magarshack's adaptation of his Introduction to *Stanislavsky on the Art of the Stage* (© 1961 by David Magarshack) to the author, Faber & Faber Ltd, and Hill & Wang Inc.; for 'A People's Theatre', from *Plays and Controversies*, by W. B. Yeats, to The Macmillan Company (copyright 1924 by The Macmillan Company, renewed 1952 by Bertha Georgie Yeats); for an extract from *Naturalism in the Theatre* by Émile Zola, translated by Albert Bermel, to the translator; for Brandes's in-

THE THEORY OF THE MODERN STAGE

augural lecture, translated by Professor Evert Sprinchorn, to the translator; for 'Origins of Domestic Drama', from *The Social History of Art* by Arnold Hauser, translated in collaboration with the author by Stanley Godman, to Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, and to Alfred A. Knopf Inc., publishers of *The Social History of Art*, Vintage Edition, by Arnold Hauser; for an extract from *Sociology of Modern Drama* by George Lukács and 'To Begin' by Otto Brahm, translated by Lee Baxandall, to the translator; for an extract from *The People's Theatre* by Romain Rolland, translated by Barrett H. Clark, to George Allen & Unwin Ltd.

I owe a special debt to friends and colleagues who undertook to make translations 'on spec', that is, before publication of this book was contracted for: Lee Baxandall, Albert Bermel, Fabrizio Melano and Evert Sprinchorn.

I have to acknowledge very much assistance in getting material copied and checking on various data from David Beams and Hugo Schmidt.

One contribution was an outright gift from the copyright owner, the ever-generous John Gassner.

Finally, this volume stands in quite a special relation to Toby Cole. Herself the editor of *Playwrights on Playwriting* and other standard works in the field, she has been both agent and friend to the editor of *The Theory of the Modern Stage*.

E.B.

Ideas are to drama what counterpoint is to music; nothing in themselves but the *sine qua non* for everything.

FRIEDRICH HEBBEL

Without theory, practice is only routine imposed by habit.

LOUIS PASTEUR

Our word *theory*, which we use in connexion with reasoning and which comes from the same Greek word as *theatre*, means really looking fixedly at, contemplation; it is very near in meaning to our *imagination*.

JANE HARRISON

PART ONE

Ten Makers of Modern Theatre

Adolphe Appia

ADOLPHE APPIA, 1862-1928, in figuring out how Wagner should be staged, made himself a pioneer of modern staging in general. Primarily a designer, he also wrote on the theory of theatre. His own writings are not drawn on here, for reasons explained in the editor's preface. What follows seemed to the editor to make a better case for Appia's scheme of things than Appia himself ever made, and it has the additional interest of being written by an eminent designer of the American theatre, Lee Simonson, 1888-1967. It consists of a chapter from his book, *The Stage is Set* (1932)*. It should be added that Appia's own writings, unavailable in English at the time his reputation was made, have more recently been finding their way into print. In book form, the first item was *The Work of Living Art and Man is the Measure of All Things*, edited by Barnard Hewitt and translated by H. D. Albright†: and it was soon followed by *Music and the Art of the Theatre*, edited by Barnard Hewitt, translated by Robert W. Corrigan and Mary Douglas Dirks‡. Less than book-length items had been published in English earlier. Perhaps the most notable of these is: 'Living Art or Still Life?', translated by S. A. Rhodes, in *The Theatre Annual 1943* (New York).

* Re-issued by Theatre Arts Books, New York, 1963.

† Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1960.

‡ Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1962.

The Ideas of Adolphe Appia

LEE SIMONSON

I. MUSIC AS LAWGIVER

To Appia, a passionate Wagnerite, as to Pater, music was the ideal art to whose condition all the other arts aspired. He found in Wagner's music-dramas of the Nibelung's hoard the key to the scenic artist's liberation. As a philosopher Appia longed for the consolation of the Absolute and found it in a new kind of operatic score, a novel cohesion of music and dialogue; once its secrets had been penetrated, its musical intervals, tonalities, and rhythms deeply felt, these could supply an unerring clue to their scenic interpretation, determining not only the form of the stage-setting itself but the movements of actors within it down to the smallest detail of stage business and the fluctuations of light that illuminated them. As an artist Appia found release in music because its emphasis was emotional rather than factual and so supplied a norm which an artist could approximate until his settings were equally expressive. Stage pictures were to be freed from the necessity of reproducing backgrounds of action; they were to be transfigured until every element in them embodied the emotions that it was to arouse as an integral part of its form, its colour, and its total design. *Ausdrucks kraft* – the force of expression, expressiveness – was one of Appia's favourite terms, and became the corner-stone on which most of the later doctrines of theatrical expressionism were reared. 'Music finds its ultimate justification in our hearts,' he wrote, using that traditional term to summarize the emotional core of our being, 'and this occurs so directly, that its expression is thereby impalpably hallowed. When stage pictures take on spatial forms dictated by the rhythms of music they are not arbitrary but on the contrary have the quality of being inevitable.'

THE THEORY OF THE MODERN STAGE

The theories that elucidated the basic aesthetic principles of modern stage design, analysed its fundamental technical problems, outlined their solution, and formed a charter of freedom under which scene-designers still practise, appeared in two volumes under two quasimusical titles: *La Mise en Scène du Drame Wagnérien* (*The Staging of Wagnerian Music-drama*) and *Die Musik und die Inszenierung* (*Music and Stage-Setting*). The first was published in Paris in 1895 as an inconspicuous brochure of fifty-one pages, the second as a full-sized volume, translated from a French script, in Munich in 1899. Neither was ever widely enough read to warrant reprinting, nor has either ever been translated,* a fact which immensely aided Gordon Craig in imposing himself as a prophet on the English and American theatre. Both the book and the booklet are now so difficult to procure that they have become collector's items. But their influence was immediately felt, for Appia was that rare combination, a creative artist of exceptional imagination and at the same time a rigorously logical theorist. Many of his ideas are blurred by an appallingly clumsy German translation, which, like most philosophical German, straddles ideas, so that catching their meaning becomes rather like trying to hold a greased pig running between one's legs. Fortunately *Music and Stage-Setting* contained eighteen illustrations of projected settings for Wagner's operas, which embodied Appia's aesthetic principles with such finality that they became a revelation of a totally new kind of stage-setting and stage lighting, then as strange as the outlines of a newly discovered continent at dawn and now so familiar. These drawings revealed a unity and a simplicity that could be made an inherent part of stage-settings in a way that no one had hitherto conceived, Wagner least of all. Practitioners of stage-craft were converted by a set of illustrations to a gospel which most of them never read.

There is in Appia much of the *Schwärmerei* typical of German music, and at times a mouth-filling grandiloquence, a bewildering mixture of philosophic concepts such as 'inner

* No longer true today. See the headnote preceding this excerpt. E.B.

THE IDEAS OF ADOLPHE APPIA

reality' and the transcendentalism of German metaphysics, expressed in romantic and mystic imagery (also typically Teutonic) used to beatify Art, Nature, and the Poet. Art is an inner something, eternal, ultimate, hidden behind appearance, another *Ding an sich*, which only a particular kind of poet, like Wagner the creator of music-drama, can clothe with meaning. The demands of Music become a kind of categorical imperative which, if obeyed, will lead to the universal laws of the universal work of art:

The loftiest expression of the Eternal in Man can only be reborn and forever renew itself in the lap of Music. In return Music demands that we have implicit faith in her. . . . This book was written in the service of Music and for such a mistress no experiment is irrelevant, no labour too great. . . . In order to express the inner reality underlying all phenomena the poet renounces any attempt to reproduce their fortuitous aspects; and once this act of renunciation has taken place the complete work of art arises. . . . Then Wagner appeared. At the same time that his music-dramas revealed a purely expressive form of art, they also confirmed, what we had hitherto dimly sensed, the omnipotent power of music. . . .

Music and music alone can coordinate all the elements of scenic presentation into a completely harmonious whole in a way which is utterly beyond the capacity of our unaided imagination. Without music the possibility of such harmony does not exist and therefore cannot be discovered. . . .

Music-drama will become the focus for all our highest artistic accomplishments and will concentrate them like rays of light converging through a lens.

Such prophecies and pronunciamentos resound through Appia's theories, at times with Wagnerian sonority. There are times also when his theories seem the scenario for another music-drama in which the artist-hero, guided by the goddess of Music, will wrest a treasure from its crabbed guardians, not a cursed treasure but a beneficent one whose magic touch is capable of transfiguring not only the artist but the theatre and all the world. Two thirds of *Music and Stage-Setting* are devoted to a lengthy speculation on the future of music-drama. Appia accepts Bayreuth as the ultimate expression of German culture, indulges in an elaborate

THE THEORY OF THE MODERN STAGE

analysis of French culture, shows how German music can arouse the religious nature of French musicians, how the French artist's sensitiveness to essential form can wean Germans from their instinctive dependence on realism. At Bayreuth, in an international poet's Elysium, the two nations are to conduct jointly a presumably endless cycle of music-dramas which will carry Wagner's original inspiration to the expressionistic heights implicit in his music.

At the same time Appia shows a thoroughly Gallic capacity for objective analysis, which he uses to explain the aesthetic problems of the scene-designer and the technical means available for solving them. Here with amazing directness and clarity he dissects the plastic elements of the stage picture. In doing so he anticipates in detail the present technical basis of stage lighting and outlines precisely the way it has since been used, not only as an indispensable means of unifying stage settings, by suggesting mood and atmosphere, but also as a method of emphasizing the dramatic values of a performance and heightening our emotional response to them. The first 120 pages of Appia's volume are nothing less than the textbook of modern stage-craft that gave it both a new method of approaching its problems and a new solution.

2. THE PLASTIC ELEMENTS

The aesthetic problem of scenic design, as Appia made plain, is a plastic one. The designer's task is to relate forms in space, some of which are static, some of which are mobile. The stage itself is an enclosed space. Organization must be actually three-dimensional. Therefore the canons of pictorial art are valueless. The painted illusion of the third dimension, valid in the painted picture where it can evoke both space and mass, is immediately negated when it is set on a stage where the third dimension is real.

The plastic elements involved in scenic design, as Appia analysed them, are four: perpendicular painted scenery, the horizontal floor, the moving actor, and the lighted space in

THE IDEAS OF ADOLPHE APPIA

which they are confined. The aesthetic problem, as he pointed out, is a single one: How are these four elements to be combined so as to produce an indubitable unity? For, like the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, he was aware that the plastic elements of a production remained irretrievably at odds if left to themselves. Looking at the stages about him he saw that the scene-painter of his day merely snipped his original picture into so many pieces which he stood about the stage, and then expected the actor to find his way among them as best he could. The painted back-drop was the only part of an ensemble of painted scenery that was not a ludicrous compromise. Naturally the scene-painter was interested, being a painter, in presenting as many stretches of unbroken canvas as possible. Their centre of interest was about midway between the top of the stage and the stage floor at a point where, according to the line of sight of most of the audience, they attained their maximum pictorial effect. But the actor works on the stage floor at a point where painted decorations are least effective as painting. So long as the emphasis of stage setting is on painted decoration, the inanimate picture is no more than a coloured illustration into which the text, animated by the actor, is brought. The two collide, they never meet nor establish any interaction of the slightest dramatic value, whereas, in Appia's phrase, they should be fused.

'Living feet tread these boards and their every step makes us aware of how meaningless and inadequate our settings are.' The better the scenery is as painting, the worse it is as a stage setting; the more completely it creates an illusion of the third dimension by the pictorial conventions of painting, the more completely an actually three-dimensional actor destroys that illusion by every movement he makes. 'For no movement on the actor's part can be brought into vital relation with objects painted on a piece of canvas.' Painted decorations are not only at odds with the actor but also with the light that illuminates them. 'Light and vertical painted surfaces nullify rather than reinforce each other. . . . There is an irreconcilable conflict between these two scenic