CLIFFORD ODETS
AND AMERICAN POLITICAL THEATRE

Christopher J. Herr

Contributions in Drama and Theatre Studies, Number 103
Lives of the Theatre
Josh Beer, Christopher Innes, and Simon Williams, Series Advisers

PRAEGER

Westport, Connecticut
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To my parents, William and Joanne

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Series Foreword

Lives of the Theatre is designed to provide scholarly introductions to important periods and movements in the history of world theatre from the earliest instances of recorded performance through to the twentieth century, viewing the theatre consistently through the lives of representative theatrical practitioners. Although many of the volumes will be centred upon playwrights, other important theatre people, such as actors and directors, will also be prominent in the series. The subjects have been chosen not simply for their individual importance, but because their lives in the theatre can well serve to provide a major perspective on the theatrical trends of their eras. They are therefore either representative of their time, figures whom their contemporaries recognized as vital presences in the theatre, or they are people whose work was to have a fundamental influence on the development of theatre, not only in their lifetimes but after their deaths as well. While the discussion of verbal and written scripts will inevitably be a central concern in any volume that is about an artist who wrote for the theatre, these scripts will always be considered in their function as a basis for performance.

The rubric "Lives of the Theatre" is therefore intended to suggest both biographies of people who created theatre as an institution and as a medium of performance and of the life of the theatre itself. This dual focus will be illustrated through the titles of the individual volumes, such as *Christopher Marlowe and the Renaissance of Tragedy*, *George Bernard Shaw and the Socialist Theatre*, and *Richard Wagner and Festival Theatre*, to name just a few. At the same time, although the focus of each volume will be different, depending on the particular subject, appropriate emphasis will be given to the cultural and political context within which the theatre of any given time is set. Theatre itself can be seen to have a palpable effect upon the social world around it, as it both reflects the life of its time and helps to form that life by feeding it images, epitomes, and alternative versions of itself. Hence, we hope that this

series will also contribute to an understanding of the broader social life of the period of which the theatre that is the subject of each volume was a part.

Lives of the Theatre grew out of an idea that Josh Beer put to Christopher Innes and Peter Arnott. Sadly, Peter Arnott did not live to see the inauguration of the series. Simon Williams kindly agreed to replace him as one of the series editors and has played a full part in its preparation. In commemoration, the editors wish to acknowledge Peter's own rich contribution to the life of the theatre.

Josh Beer
Christopher Innes
Simon Williams

Preface

Luther Adler, a friend of Odets' and fellow Group Theatre member, asked the playwright, "Again fruit?" when he heard Odets had made one of his characters a fruit vendor. This book was born from a similar attempt to make sense of the images of abundance in Odets' plays and nurtured by a growing sense that Odets' work still had much to tell us, not only about himself but about the times through which he lived.

My debt to previous scholars cannot be repaid in words. Most particularly, Margaret Brenman-Gibson's fascinating biography offered insights into his character that were invaluable to my work. Many colleagues and teachers have read drafts of this at various stages. Fred and Lise-Lone Marker, Ronald Bryden, David Blostein, and Barrie Hayne all helped shape the early drafts into a recognizable form. Colleagues from the University of Toronto—Nadine Sivak, Marlene Moser, Rebecca Harries, Mark Ceolin, Sharon Reid and others—offered camaraderie and insight. Christopher Innes, Simon Williams, and Josh Beer gave patient encouragement and suggestions during the revision process.

California State University, Los Angeles (CSULA) awarded me a creative leave in 2001 to finish important revisions; Bowling Green State University and Ron Shields secured an opportunity for me to present a paper at the Southeastern Theatre Conference's Theatre Symposium 2000; students in my graduate and undergraduate courses at both universities have challenged me see the period differently, as did the talented actors in CSULA's production of *Waiting for Lefty*.

The City Museum of New York gave me access to its theatre files, and the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Billy Rose Collection gave invaluable access to the Odets papers housed there. The Clifford Odets estate graciously granted permission to quote from his plays and archival materials.

My dear friends and teachers Matthew Wikander and Christine Child gave hospitality and good counsel, and deepened my understanding of theatre. For her patience, hard work, and unflagging support, the deepest debt is to my wife, Melissa.

Abbreviations

BFP	John Gassner and Dudley Nichols, *Best Film Plays of 1945*. New York: Garland, 1977.
B-G	Margaret Brenman-Gibson, *Clifford Odets, American Playwright: The Years From 1906-1940*. New York: Atheneum, 1981.
CBN	Clifford Odets, *Clash by Night*. New York: Random House, 1942.
HPT	Clifford Odets, "How a Playwright Triumphs." Based on an Interview with Arthur Wagner. *Harper's Magazine*. September, 1966, 64-74.
LCA	Clifford Odets, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.
NM	Clifford Odets, *Night Music*. New York: Random House, 1940.
NYT	*New York Times*.
RLD	Wendy Smith, *Real Life Drama: The Group Theatre and America, 1931-1940*. New York: Grove Press, 1990.
SP	Clifford Odets, *Six Plays*. . New York: Methuen, 1982
TBK	Clifford Odets, *The Big Knife*. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1949.
TCG	Clifford Odets, *The Country Girl*. New York: Viking Press, 1951.
TFP	Clifford Odets, *The Flowering Peach*. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1954.
TFY	Harold Clurman, *The Fervent Years*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1983.
TIR	Clifford Odets, *The Time Is Ripe: The 1940 Journal of Clifford Odets*. New York : Grove, 1988.

Introduction

Throughout his career, Clifford Odets (1906-1963) attempted to live with strange, persistent contradictions, caught between the acclaim he received in the 1930s as America's popular revolutionary playwright, and the subsequent criticism he received as a film writer, a studio "hack," in the 1940s and 1950s. In many ways, his is the same story he told in his work, the tale of the quick, sweet, fatal ride of the American Dream—the ride of Joe Bonaparte, the protagonist in Odets' *Golden Boy*. While limiting, the widely accepted notion of Odets as *the* playwright of the 1930s holds truth, for it is impossible to understand his work outside the context of the Group Theatre, the depression, the rise and fall of American leftism, or the development of an encompassing consumer culture. Indeed, his work parallels and participates in a radical questioning of the entire American ethos.

Odets certainly seemed to be the "Golden Boy" of the American theatre for at least a few years, beginning with his spectacular debut in 1935, when the first four of his plays were produced on Broadway: *Waiting for Lefty*, *Awake and Sing!*, *Till the Day I Die*, and *Paradise Lost*. Odets gained an instant reputation from these early plays. He was hailed by reviewers as a genuine talent, an heir to the legacy of Eugene O'Neill. Even after the box-office failure of *Paradise Lost*, Heywood Broun defended it—and its author—in the strongest terms possible in American drama: "I was present when the earliest work of Eugene O'Neill was first performed and I was no dope. I said that here was a new and glorious talent in the theater and that O'Neill would go far. Perhaps I am a little late in hurling myself, body and soul, on the Odets bandwagon. But I want to make no reservation in stating the opinion that this young man is a far greater figure than O'Neill ever was or will be" (B-G, 386). By 1938, Odets had appeared on the cover of *Time* as a leading spokesman for the new left with the title "Down with the General Fraud!" No wonder, then, that his frequent returns to Hollywood screenwriting forced many to call into question his ideals or his talent. Indeed,

Odets became for many the living embodiment of a struggle rooted deep within American culture: between idealism and materialism, between fervent hope and base practicality.

It need not be argued that the arc of Odets' career is of greater interest than his plays. However, his origins as a political playwright and his near-obsession with the idea of the marketplace—which deals in people as well as commodities—make his biography a necessary part of any study of his plays. Such an explanation seems so natural to his story and discussions of his work that critics have often commented on the virtual impossibility of separating Odets' life from his work, despite the risk of falling into a narrow biographical reading of the plays. Gerald Weales notes that Odets the "celebrity" cannot be separated from Odets the "playwright." Gabriel Miller agrees, suggesting that "because he himself was not immune to the success syndrome, the critical reception of his early work colored the critics', the audiences', and Odets' own attitude towards his subsequent efforts."[1]

Much of Odets' initial success was attributable to what the designer Mordecai Gorelik called "his amazing intuitive grasp of the American scene," his ability to dramatize large-scale cultural shifts: the loss of American idealism, the rise of consumer capitalism, the utopian hopes of American leftism and the development of popular culture as an expression of the common voice.[2] Perhaps more importantly, his plays and screenplays reveal the culture for which Odets' works were produced and the conditions under which they were written. Odets' close friend and biographer Margaret Brenman-Gibson notes: "Odets had scribbled, 'I will reveal America to itself by revealing myself to myself.'" (B-G, xiv).[3] An absolutely necessary step, then, in an examination of Odets' career, if we accept that the life and the work are part of the same conjunction of personal, historical, and artistic events, is an analysis of the economic conditions that prevailed in both the theatre and the film studios at the time he was working. An examination of the external pressures on a playwright working for a financially challenged theatre in the 1930's, as an independent playwright in the 1940s and 1950s, and as a screenwriter for the Hollywood studios from 1936 to the early 1960s provides insight into the plays and screenplays themselves.

In both the plays and the life, economics matter. It is absolutely central to an understanding of Odets' work that Sid and Florrie don't have a place to sit in *Waiting for Lefty*, that Ralph can't buy a pair of black and white shoes in *Awake and Sing!*, that Phil Cooper has to sell blood in *Rocket to the Moon*, that Charlie Castle is a film star who enjoys the Hollywood lifestyle while hating the films he works in. From *Waiting for Lefty* onwards, Odets' characters are caught up in the economic system, bullied by it; they try to beat it, sometimes work within it, but are conscious always of the ubiquitous power of the marketplace. Odets therefore tried to reconcile the utopian dreams of American life—abundance, opportunity, freedom—with the constraints placed upon those dreams by the mechanisms of the marketplace. He adopted ambivalent images that reflected both the promises and failures of American democracy. By dramatizing these struggles in the lives of ordinary people, Odets created a political theatre from the objects of everyday life.

NOTES

1. Gerald Weales, *Clifford Odets, Playwright* (New York: Pegasus, 1971); Gabriel Miller, *Clifford Odets* (New York: Continuum, 1989) 117. The life and the career have been melded completely not only by Odets' use of the personal but even more so by the critical reception of his work. It is no accident that all six book-length works on Odets use his name as the title, sometimes followed by a descriptive phrase. In addition to the above, the books include R. Baird Shuman's *Clifford Odets* (1962), Edward Murray's *Clifford Odets: The Thirties and After* (1968), Michael J. Mendelsohn's *Clifford Odets: Humane Dramatist* (1969), and Harold Cantor's *Clifford Odets: Playwright-Poet* (1978). The descriptive phrases after Odets' name in each title represent not only a new take on the work but a new take on the life, a repositioning of the biographical as well as the artistic.

2. Mordecai Gorelik, *New Theatres for Old* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1962) 242.

3. Brenman-Gibson's biography of Odets, *Clifford Odets, American Playwright*, covers the life and career of Odets from 1906 until the commercial failure of the last play produced by the Group, *Night Music*, in 1940. Brenman-Gibson's work is a psychoanalytical reading of the works within the larger context of the life. Not strictly the kind of correlation between work and life that Miller and Weales see, but rather the exploration of the private rather than the public Odets, her analysis is nevertheless extremely useful and detailed and indispensable for any student of Odets or the Group.

Chapter 1

Odets and America, 1906-1929

THE IMMIGRANT'S SON

Clifford Odets was born on July 18, 1906, in Philadelphia, the son of Eastern European Jewish immigrants. His mother, Pearl Geisinger, left her poor Romanian family to come to the United States with her sister Esther in 1896. Part of the third large wave of Jewish immigrants fleeing oppression in Europe, Pearl never quite adapted to her new country. On the other hand, Lou Odets, a sheet feeder in a Philadelphia printing business, was a Russian immigrant who had adopted his new country gleefully. He refused to acknowledge his birth name, Gorodetsky, or his European past, threatening family members who might reveal the secret. He also deliberately played down his Jewish heritage, refusing to speak Yiddish at home, taking only American papers, and becoming active in the Masons. Lou's actions were not unusual for immigrants of his generation, who faced enormous pressure to assimilate into American life. This process of assimilation was accelerated by the economic mobilization for World War I, which moved immigrant workers more rapidly into the workplace, and institutionalized in the postwar Americanization Act, requiring immigrants to take classes in language and American patriotism. In addition to outside pressures to either fit in or go home, even within the Eastern European Jewish circles the economic incentives to assimilate were irresistible; advancement seemed possible only if one played by the rules of the new country.[1]

The Odets family eschewed regular religious observance, though even Lou recognized the social benefit to maintaining the appearance of piety outside the home. Clifford never celebrated his *bar mitzvah*; though he briefly attended *cheder* to prepare for the ceremony in early 1919, he dropped out. Nevertheless, despite his immediate family's diffidence in matters of religion, Clifford was exposed to Jewish history and culture through other relatives and friends. For a time after Clifford's birth, Lou and Pearl lived with Esther and her husband, Israel Rossman, a would-be cantor who was forced to work as a fruit peddler to make ends meet, in a

small flat in a Jewish neighborhood. Odets developed a great fondness for his aunt and uncle's home. In contrast to his own parents, his aunt and uncle spoke Yiddish and always had food ready for guests. Israel would spend pleasant hours entertaining guests with traditional songs in Hebrew and Yiddish. After his family moved away, Odets spent his Philadelphia visits in their home and would speak of them fondly throughout his life.

The Jewish working-class environment he found at the Rossmans' inspired much of Odets' work. When his second full-length play—an unproduced melodrama about a musical genius—was summarily rejected by Group Theatre director Harold Clurman in 1932, Odets began to reconsider his roots as source of inspiration: "I've begun to think abut the Greenbaum family play. I have much feeling for that sort of thing and could really do something with it. . . . the Greenbaum thing is much nearer to the truth of my own feeling and reality" (B-G, 236). The "Greenbaum play" would eventually become *Awake and Sing!*, Odets' first full-length success and in many respects his best play. Like his father, Odets rarely talked or wrote in his letters or journals about his heritage, and when he did, it was often to separate himself from it; his letters make occasional derogatory references to "low-class Jews." Yet when he wrote plays like *Awake and Sing!*, his sympathetic understanding of the problems of the Jewish-American immigrant earned him praise as the "lyric poet of American Jewry."

There is ample evidence throughout Odets' plays of Jewish influence. In addition to characters in *Awake and Sing!*, characters in his other plays are carefully drawn types of people he observed around him growing up, often second-generation immigrants (Joe Bonaparte in *Golden Boy*, Steve Takis in *Night Music*) trying to carve a place in the world. Odets' unique dialogue, too, is charged with Yiddish rhythms, phrasing, and vocabulary and salted with observations overheard in the Rossmans' kitchen and elsewhere. Harold Cantor notes that for Odets, the Yiddish rhythms (Bessie Berger's "I raise a family they should have respect" or Jacob's "give me for a cent a cigarette" in *Awake and Sing!*) not only captured the authenticity of Jewish-American speech but, even more, distilled the experiences of immigrant life into living language. The Bergers are a family in transition, from immigrants to assimilated: "Odets brought into play his sensitivity to the psychological implications of words and phrases for both the older generation and the younger."[2] Though his later plays moved away from specific concern with Jewish immigrants to the problems of American democracy, he nevertheless anchored those plays with Jewish characters as well: Siggie in *Golden Boy*, Rosenberger in *Night Music*, Prince in *Rocket to the Moon*. By 1946 Odets was so identified with Jewish-American characters that he was labeled the man who had made "by a considerable margin the most important achievement in the literature of the American Jews."[3] Odets' own ambivalence about his religion is the struggle of the immigrant in America who hopes to "melt" into the melting pot without losing a sense of personal individuality.

Life was difficult for the Odets family, as it was for most immigrants coming to America at the turn of the century. The conflicts they faced—between dreams of affluence and the harsh realities of immigrant life, between the desire for respectability and the shame inflicted upon foreigners in the strange land, between the

freedom of opportunity in America and the responsibilities of family, religion, and society—reflect a new generation of American writers raised by these immigrants. Such writers, Odets included, were deeply marked by their experience; they express the need not only to fit in but to remake the New World so that all might fully participate. Alfred Kazin, a contemporary of Odets, talks about reliving through his family's stories the painful history of European Jews who had come to America to escape persecution. For Kazin, talk of *der heym* ("Home") was both painful and enchanting; it called up images of persecution and danger but at the same time confirmed the cultural unity of the Jewish people: "The most terrible word was *aleyn*, alone. . . . *Aleyn! Aleyn!* My father had been alone here in America as a boy. *His* father, whose name I bore, had died here at twenty-five of pneumonia caught on a garment workers' picket line, and his body flung in with thousands of other Jews who had perished those first years on the East Side."[4]

Kazin remarks that his Jewish identity and his leftist political beliefs had the same source—a vision of home: "Socialism would be one long Friday evening around the samovar and the cut-glass bowl laden with nuts and fruits."[5] While Odets' identification with Judaism as represented by his aunt and uncle's kitchen was never fully articulated, his own vision of America's promise was often expressed in images strikingly similar to Kazin's. Odets consistently returned to images of material plenty—fruit, for example, appears as a central metaphor throughout his work—as a symbol of the American promised land. These immigrants had seen a land where they could enjoy living conditions their ancestors never dreamed of, where high-quality consumer goods were widely available. Indeed, one of the ways in which new immigrants measured their assimilation was by the accumulation of material possessions; they gained a sense of fully belonging more as consumers—who could buy the same products as native-born Americans—than workers.[6] The work of writers like Kazin and Odets was born from the struggles of the immigrant experience filtered through the seemingly endless bounty offered by America. They chastened the promise of the new world with reminders that it was for many still unrealized.

During Odets' early childhood, his family moved around frequently in search of success. They left Philadelphia in 1908, but when Lou failed to find work in New York, the family moved back. But by 1912, Lou had found a job in New York, and the family remained in the Bronx for the rest of Odets' childhood. As Lou became successful, his marriage with Pearl was beset by increasing problems. Pearl was shy, sensitive, quiet, and chronically ill, probably with the tuberculosis that would eventually cause her death at age forty-seven. Lou was brash, overconfident, sociable, and concerned with keeping up appearances. The tension between his parents helped to forge a strong bond between Odets and his mother. A sensitive child, more at home with books than with physical activity, often alone, he sought constant affection from her. Her withdrawal from him worsened when Odets' sister, Genevieve (born in 1910; a second sister, Florence, was born in 1916), was disabled by infantile paralysis. Odets' biographer, Margaret Brenman-Gibson, argues that Pearl's withdrawal influenced Odets' relationships with women throughout his life. His anxiety about being abandoned by his mother developed into a form of

misogyny that manifested itself in compulsive seductions and abandonments of scores of women over the course of his life.

Brenman-Gibson exhaustively details the manifestations of Odets' misogyny. A charming and handsome man, he was a compulsive womanizer and carried on elaborate correspondence with potential or actual lovers that was playful and tender, yet also aggressive and accusatory. Odets would berate correspondents who did not respond quickly enough and constantly sought the attention of women, especially those whom he perceived as soft and motherly. Yet at the same time he evinced a hostility toward them that proceeded from a fear that they, like his mother, would withdraw their affections; at times, Odets withdrew completely from female companionship, working feverishly in isolation. He married three times: the first, a secret marriage made in 1928, when Odets was twenty-one, ended apparently in a murder-suicide in July 1929, when his wife killed their infant daughter, then shot herself. Odets never publicly spoke about this marriage, and even the exhaustive biographical information compiled by Brenman-Gibson can turn up only a few fleeting references to it. The other two marriages, to actresses Luise Rainer and Bette Grayson, were tempestuous, ending in divorce. Odets also had countless affairs with actresses and other famous women of his day, including Fay Wray, Ruth Gordon, Frances Farmer, and others. The complex relationship with women may help to better understand Odets' persistent commodification of the female body in his plays. His female characters are often seen as sexual objects, but at the same time are often as witty, powerful, and emotionally complex as his male characters.

Odets' relationship with his father was equally difficult. He admired his father's ambition, hard work, and determination to become a success yet at the same time was unable to reconcile himself with the personal costs of such ambition. At times throughout his childhood, Odets felt completely isolated by his lack of connection to either parent. On several occasions, he referred to himself as an "orphan," and some of his early attempts at writing, such as a melodramatic story titled "The Boy Who Ran Away," underscored both his need for human connection and his need for recognition. Indeed, anxiety about "making it big" would recur throughout his mature work. In Odets' plays, characters such as Ralph Berger and Moe Axelrod in *Awake and Sing!*, Joe Bonaparte in *Golden Boy*, Kewpie and Ben Gordon in *Paradise Lost*, Edna and Florrie in *Waiting for Lefty*, Charlie Castle in *The Big Knife* are both fascinated and frightened by the power of the marketplace, driven to create a sense of home in a world that seems hostile or indifferent. Never feeling fully at home himself, this conflict between sympathy and success would serve as a cornerstone for both his work and his life.

ODETS' AMERICA IN THE 1920s

Odets spent his childhood and adolescence in New York, attending Public School 52 in the Bronx and hanging out with the "Beck Street Boys," a loose aggregation of schoolmates and neighborhood friends. Meanwhile, the world was changing rapidly; the tense European political situation exploded into world war in 1914, and though Woodrow Wilson honored for a while the isolationist feelings of most Americans, a sense of inexorable change both at home and abroad was in the air. The Socialist candidate for president, Eugene V. Debs, had garnered almost a million votes in 1912, suggesting that an increasing number of the immigrants and workers facing poverty and squalid conditions in the burgeoning cities sought significant changes in the social order. Arriving in America at the rate of about 1 million per year, many of the new immigrants, including Italians and Eastern European Jews, had joined ranks, officially or unofficially, with the Socialists and the labor unions, fighting for social justice.

The years leading up to and including World War I had been a period of moderate social reform in the United States. Though reform was often slow and tinged with moral righteousness in the first part of the century—child labor or minimum wage laws faced fiercer opposition than temperance legislation—significant changes had already been made by 1917. Progressive municipal governments, settlement houses such as Jane Addams' Hull House in Chicago, the muckraking journalism of Upton Sinclair and others, and the establishment of labor unions after violent strikes in textile mills in Paterson, New Jersey, and Lawrence, Massachusetts, in the 1910s marked a new spirit of reform combating the ravages of uncontrolled greed and monopoly capitalism. Allied against big business and the "trusts," these reformers also attempted to fight the alienation brought about by modern technology, rapid population growth, and the increasingly impersonal city.[7]

Despite advances, such struggles indicated a growing gap between rich and poor, between the political left and the political right, between nativists and foreigners. Elected to his second term in 1916 partly on the claim that "he kept us out of the war," Wilson's liberalism had lured many voters away from the Socialist Party following the 1912 election. But when the United States entered the war, many felt he had betrayed his ideals to protect American economic interests. After the initial fear of involvement, war fever soon ran high; a jingoistic patriotism swept the country. Congress hurried the Espionage Act into law in 1917, adding to it a Sedition Act in 1918, which made it a crime to openly criticize the American form of government or the Constitution. These laws gave the government broad powers to punish outspoken opposition to the war, powers used not only to fight legitimate threats to national security, but also to punish dissenters, or to coerce into silent cooperation those who questioned America's motives. Rose Pastor Stokes, a noted feminist and Socialist, was given a ten-year prison sentence for declaring, "I am for the people and the government is for the profiteers."[8] Debs himself was imprisoned for his opposition to the war in 1917, and leftist organizations such as the International Workers of the World (the "Wobblies") were persecuted.

Odets was still too young to have a clearly defined politics in place, but he was sensitive to the talk that swirled around his immigrant Jewish and Irish neighborhood during the war. Already, he was drawn to the idea of fighting the establishment. As he later said, at this time he began to understand that "in a capitalist society, criminals, artists and revolutionists are brothers under the skin. For related reasons they are all men of opposition" (B-G, 44). Odets' political beliefs, coupled with his own personal sense of being on the outside, would take the fertile soil of the depression and the Group Theatre to develop fully, but it is fair to say that World War I was a powerful influence on his development. Discussions of war recur throughout his work: in his plays *Waiting for Lefty*, *Awake and Sing!*, *Rocket*

to the Moon, *Night Music*, and *Clash by Night* and his screenplay for *None but the Lonely Heart*. In the 1930s, on the eve of another war, Odets and his leftist contemporaries would remember the last, cautioning his audience about the dangers of blind obedience to authority.

The beginning of Odets' personal transformation paralleled powerful changes taking place in American politics and social life. As the postwar adjustment began, America had become overnight the leading world economic and military power, a creditor nation, and a strong, if reluctant, force on the world stage. Yet there was in the aftermath of the war a violent reaction against involvement in world politics, a calculated effort to return America to its prewar cocoon. First, there was the scuttling of Wilson's proposal for American participation in the League of Nations by the Senate. Henry Cabot Lodge, who led the opposition to the treaty, voiced fears common to many that European entanglements would prevent America from acting in its own best interests. Second, the Russian Revolution of 1917 had precipitated a fear of similar rebellion in the United States, which culminated in the "Red Scare" of 1919-1920. New immigration laws had made membership in the Communist Party a criminal offense, and Wilson's attorney general, A. Mitchell Palmer, executed raids in which 10,000 suspected "reds" were arrested and many of them deported.

The fear of foreign radicals combined the separate fears of leftist politics and immigration. Members of leftist groups and unions were lumped together as "bolsheviks" or "reds." One of the outgrowths of the Palmer paranoia was one of the most famous cases of the 1920s: the arrest and trial of two Italian anarchists, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, for a payroll robbery and murder in Massachusetts. After a trial of dubious legitimacy, they were convicted in 1921 and eventually executed in 1927.[9] The Sacco-Vanzetti trial became a rallying point for leftists during the 1920s, a symbol of the political battle lines of postwar America. Maxwell Anderson, one of the leading American playwrights of the 1920s and 1930s, would find the events surrounding the case so important that he would make it the subject of two full-length plays, *Gods of the Lightning* (1927) and *Winterset* (1935), and composer Marc Blitzstein—who would find fame in the 1930s with his Federal Theatre Project musical *The Cradle Will Rock*—worked his entire life to find a way to express the events surrounding the trial in musical form. Odets himself was impressed enough with the trial to specify that a picture of the two men be visible to the audience in his play *Awake and Sing!* (SP, 40). Sacco and Vanzetti became a sort of shorthand, as the theatrical left began to merge art and politics more overtly—and more successfully. In the same way, trials and labor conflicts in the 1930s would galvanize the literary left; artists and writers used their work to openly support a particular political goal.

The anxiety driving the Sacco-Vanzetti trial and the Palmer raids would manifest itself in the passage of increasingly isolationist laws. The Immigration Act of 1917 had prevented illiterate immigrants from entering the country, and for the first time in 1921-1922 immigration quotas were set—at 35 percent of the projected immigration for that year. Thousands of immigrants, most from Southern and Eastern Europe, were stranded at Ellis Island or returned to their homelands. Congress also passed a series of strong tariffs on foreign goods, protecting the homegrown

products of American industry against invasion. On the domestic front, the Ku Klux Klan was revived in the South and Midwest in 1915, tapping into a deeply rooted American xenophobia and racism. Membership in the Klan skyrocketed, from 2,000 members in 1920 to almost 4 million by 1924 (though membership would decline precipitously, falling to 200,000 by 1929, partly as a result of highly publicized scandals). Floggings and lynchings occurred all across the South, and violent disturbances flared in the North as well.[10]

The Klan's rise, like the Palmer raids and the new immigration legislation, evinced a growing fear of "radical" European influence and a nostalgia for a pioneer Americanism that eschewed "foreign" influences. Indeed, the plight of African-Americans in the South had been growing steadily worse since the end of Reconstruction. The imposition of restrictive Jim Crow legislation prevented most from voting, and violence was common against those who tried to assert their rights. As a reaction, African-Americans began to move North in enormous numbers—over half a million in the years 1916-1920—looking to industrialized cities in the Midwest and Northeast for employment and new opportunities. These men and women settled in places like Chicago's South Side and New York's Harlem, creating new areas composed entirely of black Americans. These communities soon developed a rich, vibrant culture and economy, manifested most significantly in the flowering of the Harlem Renaissance. Nevertheless, race relations throughout the country were tense: Wilson had segregated federal offices during his administration, race riots occurred in Chicago, Texas, Arkansas, and elsewhere in 1919, and an antilynching law was defeated by a filibuster led by southern senators in 1922.

Changes were also taking place in the American workplace. With virtually full employment because of the war effort, labor unions had prospered during the war. The American Federation of Labor more than doubled its membership between 1916 and 1921. In addition, workers went on strike with greater frequency than ever before: more than 3,000 strikes involving 4 million workers were called in 1919 alone. Many of the strikes failed, however, and by 1921, unions began to lose many of the gains they had made during the war. One sign of coming economic trouble was that membership in unions declined steadily throughout the 1920s, an unusual trend in times of prosperity.[11] Coupled with the decline in industrial production in the years immediately after the war—business profits fell from $8 billion in 1919 to $1 billion in 1920—antiworker sentiment accelerated inflation and unemployment so that $5.00 in 1914 wages was worth only $2.40 in 1919.[12] Even more importantly, unions, weakened by the shutting down of governmental war supports, became increasingly desperate. Strikes grew more violent and were more violently suppressed. Also, throughout the 1920s, judges issued restraining orders against labor, and Congress and the Supreme Court marshaled legislation effectively curtailing union activity. In 1919, Massachusetts governor Calvin Coolidge earned a national reputation by firing the striking Boston police force, backing his decision with the power of the state guard. Coolidge's action was supported even by Wilson, who admired the "man who had defied Bolshevism and won."[13]

Despite labor unrest throughout the decade, the 1920s were marked by an unprecedented economic boom, largely fueled by an aggressive consumer capitalism. Productivity rose sharply throughout the decade; in fact, production increased an

astonishing 63 percent in the years 1920-1929, while there was an actual 7 percent decrease in the number of person-hours worked. Wages rose as well, though not as quickly, largely because continued capital re-investment of the huge profits that large companies made in the 1920s increased productivity still more and created a growing abyss between rich and poor: "Between 1920 and 1929, per capita disposable income for all Americans rose by 9 percent, but the top 1 percent of income recipients enjoyed a whopping *75 percent* increase in disposable income."[14]

Thus, despite the low inflation and the overall increased earning power of American workers that drove the economic boom between 1922 and 1929, there were signs of trouble. For example, many workers in unskilled factory jobs barely earned enough to survive. Even more importantly, the boom was in part built upon a farm recession that kept commodity prices low throughout the 1920s. Farmers who had been encouraged to mortgage their farms and cultivate more land during the war found themselves with huge, virtually worthless surpluses of grain at its conclusion. Wheat, corn and wool prices dropped 60-75 percent when wartime purchasing plans were abandoned in 1920; farmers struggled to unload their crops. Though prices rebounded somewhat in the mid-1920s, the crisis on smaller farms continued into the depression, when the plight of farmers became truly desperate. Because the basic problem of the small farmer stemmed from overproduction during the war, it was exacerbated by increased productivity as better seed, pesticides, fertilizer, and the gasoline-powered tractor became widely available. Though legislative attempts were made to alleviate the crisis, farm unrest grew throughout the decade.

The cracks that had appeared in the facade of wealth weren't visible enough to deter most Americans. The country was generally wealthy; the wartime prosperity of the country in general was shared by the Odets family. Indeed, Lou Odets had made enough money during the war boom to buy his own printing business and had moved the family to a bigger place on Longwood Avenue, one of the nicest apartment buildings in the Bronx. They would move a number of times over the course of a few years, each time to a bigger place; Lou advertised his elevated economic status by improving the family's material conditions. Thus, in a relatively short time, the Odets family had risen from a working-class immigrant family to enjoy membership in the middle class, capable of participating in the material abundance that America offered. Odets' father bought a pianola, which served as much as a symbol of success as a musical instrument.[15]

Looking back later, Odets would question the purpose of such aggressive socioeconomic climbing, seeing in his own disjointed childhood experience a crystallization of the American myth of success. In notes filed in a folder titled "783 Beck Street" he examined his own family's relationship to the dream: "The American and dehumanizing myth of the steadily expanding economy. To move into this house was thought a terminal, a mission accomplished. But it became a mere wayside stop on the line and one moved to something higher and bigger. Where does America stop? When does it begin to make homes and sink nourishing roots? . . . Oh, the waste of it all" (B-G, 38). Odets formulated an idea to write a play tracing the history of a house, a play that would reflect what he called "social ideals" in the people of the play, that would effectively transmute his personal experience into an examination of American life and culture.

As the war ended, the family was living in the building at 783 Beck Street, where Clifford had his own room for the first time. He read voraciously, performed in small school plays, and wrote outlines for stories and sketches. It was in school that he first encountered the work of Victor Hugo, whose *Les Miserables* he later called "the most profound art experience I have ever had . . . Hugo inspired me, made me aspire; I wanted to be a good and noble man, longed to do heroic deeds with my bare hands, thirsted to be kind to people, particularly the weak and humble and oppressed" (TIR, 334). Hugo's sympathies for the dispossessed helped to define Odets' feelings of dissatisfaction with the status quo and offered him a clearer object for his compassion. A Hugoesque sympathy for the weak and downtrodden became a defining characteristic of Odets' later work; the same romantic longing for connection and usefulness would be later enkindled by others, including the Communist Party and the Group Theatre. Odets' reaction against oppression and degradation was romantic at base rather than political. His politics developed not as conscious leftism, but as an instinctive reaction against the poverty and isolation he saw around him, as well as a personal reaction against the crassness of his own father's social climbing. As he was to later tell the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1952, "When I wrote, sir, it was out of central, personal things. I did not learn my hatred of poverty, sir, out of Communism."[16]

The 1920s were much as F. Scott Fitzgerald had chronicled, a giddy return to prosperity, wild and nervous. The Republican candidate for president in 1920, Warren G. Harding, was elected by a wide margin on the promise that he would give the country a political and economic stability that it longed for. Harding's administration, while far more probusiness than Wilson's, continued with a course of cautiously progressive legislation. But the return to "normalcy" was ultimately a political retrenchment to the conventional values of middle America—before he entered public office, Harding had been a conservative newspaper editor in the small town of Marion, Ohio. Though Harding's tenure in office was cut short by a heart attack, his administration left at least one lasting legacy. The appointment of four conservative Supreme Court justices, including former president William Howard Taft, shifted the balance of judicial power to the right and ushered in a period of inordinately probusiness, antilabor legislation that would feed the boom of the 1920s and, later, would hinder the early years of Roosevelt's New Deal.

There are indications, though, that the widespread poverty of the 1930s had begun during the 1920s. Rick Szostak argues, for example, that the 1920s can really be seen as a boom only in relation to the Depression of the 1930s: technology in the 1920s did not develop quickly enough to allow for sustained economic growth.[17] America had moved to the right as much as a result of the perception of unequaled prosperity as actual fact. As Odets' family had prospered, so did many members of the middle class. Radio, the automobile, and electric appliances all became commonplace items, available for purchase by almost anyone on the installment plan. Contentment reigned; the elimination of poverty seemed to many a realizable goal. There were flashes of reform from the left, especially Robert La Follette's campaign for president in 1924. Running as a third-party candidate for the Committee

for Progressive Political Action—a loose affiliation of leftist groups including pacifists, labor unions, feminists, and farmers and endorsed by the Farmer-Labor Party, the Socialist Party, and the American Federation of Labor—the Wisconsin senator earned 4.8 million votes. In fact, La Follette and his running mate, Burton K. Wheeler of Montana, defeated the Democratic party in eleven states, contributing to the Democratic movement toward the left during the early Franklin Roosevelt years.[18] Nevertheless, the Republican hands-off approach to the economy, coupled with America's standing as the leading economic power in the world, gave big business the freedom to increase production without restraint, betting—wrongly—that the supply would create its own market.

Even under the banner of "normalcy," different visions of America were in conflict: radicals and reformers against the old guard, minorities and immigrants against traditional visions of Americanism, internationalists against isolationists. Added to this mix was an upheaval in the arts no less powerful. Since the 19th century, American writers had attempted to create a unique culture that would stand independently of European models. Yet despite limited success during the literary renaissance of the mid-19th century, the United States had never been able to match its political democracy with a similar progressivism in the arts, nor had it ever escaped the literary shadow of England. In the early years of the 20th century, however, inspired by revolutionary ideas imported from European thinkers and writers—Marx and Lenin, Freud, Nietzsche, Zola, Dostoevsky, and others—and horrified by the pointless destruction of the war, American writers began to experiment, looking to fuse new artistic forms with political leftism. Many American writers—the "Lost Generation" of Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, H. D., Ezra Pound, and others—would go abroad in search of new forms, escaping the increasing commercialization, narrowness, and pettiness of American life. Others felt that the real struggle for the American arts, especially theatre, was in the United States; artists such as novelist Sinclair Lewis and composer Aaron Copland, among many others, challenged the growing "Babbitry" of American life with satire, experimentation, and fierce energy.

Some of the first outgrowths of this movement before the war were new literary journals such as *the seven arts*, founded by Van Wyck Brooks and Waldo Frank, and *The Masses*, founded by Max Eastman. These new journals sought to bring about a connection between the developing American arts and a more consciously radical politics, though "while they advocated socialism . . . their leftism was generally more lyrical than practical. A Socialist America represented to them the fulfillment of their aesthetic theory."[19] While these writers were forging new paths in search of a genuine American literature and drama, Odets, young and politically naive, was building an aesthetic that would dovetail with the new movement. He was introduced to modern European drama at age fourteen through silent film versions of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and Wilde's *Salome*. Odets became so excited by the productions that he ran to the library to read the plays. Struck by the power of performed drama, Odets even briefly entertained an idea that his father might allow him to attend drama school. Failing to see how drama could lead to business success, his father refused; Odets reluctantly entered Morris High School in September 1921 at the age of fifteen.

During high school, Odets began to resist more openly the idea of success promulgated by his father. Lou had already determined that Clifford would work as a copywriter in the advertising agency he was planning to start and so pushed his son to take practical courses toward that end. Trapped, Odets became an increasingly unhappy student, escaping to his room at home to bury himself in his own reading and writing. He failed a number of subjects and barely managed to pass others. One of the few highlights of Odets' abbreviated high school career was earning the declamation medal for his recitation of the narrative poems of Robert Service. He was proud of his voice and nurtured it as a talent that could give him a career in the theatre, first as an performer in vaudeville amateur nights, then as an actor in stock companies, as an actor in professional Broadway theatres, and eventually as a playwright.

Odets' only other involvement in the high school was his participation in the Junior Dramatic Club, into which he threw himself with great enthusiasm, skipping other classes to watch lessons. Though he started as an actor, he immediately began to think about directing and writing plays as well. He wanted to learn everything he could about theatre and would often watch rehearsals silently for hours, recording snatches of the conversations taking place around him. Acquaintances were often astonished to hear something they had said reappear years later in one of Odets' plays. But despite these small successes, by November 1923, Odets left high school. He couldn't reconcile his dreams with the tedium of school, partly because he knew that going to college was never a real possibility. Under his father's domination, he felt condemned to the life of a middle-class Jewish businessman, a life thoroughly at odds with the loftier pretensions revealed by his self-consciously literary letters and journals. He started to read the literary and dramatic columns in the newspapers, act in local amateur productions, and when he could, attend the theatre either in the Bronx or downtown.

THE NEW AMERICAN THEATRE: PROVINCETOWN AND THE THEATRE GUILD

The American theatre had started to blossom in the first part of the 20th century. Though American drama had made great strides in "pictorial" realism through advances in theatre technology and the work of playwright-directors such as David Belasco and Augustin Daly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the drama in the first part of the new century relied heavily on melodramatic plots and sensational staging. However, in the years just before the war, a number of "little" theatres had sprung up, taking as their model neither commercial Broadway houses nor the local stock companies, but progressive theatres such as André Antoine's Theatre Libre in Paris, the Abbey Theatre of Dublin, and the Moscow Art Theatre. These European theatres staged plays in a way that broke away from facile acting and pictorial realism to show deeper meaning in a new drama. Equally important was the "new stagecraft" influenced by the theories and practice of European designers such as Edward Gordon Craig and Adolph Appia and the new drama pioneered by playwrights such as Strindberg, Shaw, Ibsen, Chekhov, and Maeterlinck.

Fighting to make theatre a vehicle for social engagement, they reacted against the tradition-bound practices of the 19th century theatre, bringing social content–plays about politics, disease, poverty, social institutions–and more consciously artistic methods of acting and directing to the fore.

In the United States, the first little theatres were established in 1912: in Chicago, the Chicago Little Theatre; in Boston, the Toy Theatre; in Fargo, North Dakota, the Little Country Theatre; and in San Francisco, the Player's Club. *Theatre Arts Magazine*, founded in 1916 by Sheldon Cheney, became one of the main connections between American practitioners and the ongoing experiments of European theatre. From these pioneers, the movement boomed in the 1910s: over sixty such theatres were founded in large cities and small towns. Amateur theatres with limited budgets, the little theatres nevertheless embraced experimentation in playwriting, direction, and performance that opened the door to larger and more lasting experiments in the 1920s and 1930s. Mark Fearnow has argued that these theatres were an aesthetic counterpart to the progressivist movement in politics that had cleaned up city governments and attempted "trust busting."[20] Indeed, the little theatres had at base a similar main goal: to establish an alternative to commercial theatre that would embrace the newest developments in European drama. Some also encouraged the development of a stronger tradition of American drama.

From the little theatre movement, two important groups emerged that would permanently change the direction of American theatre: the Provincetown Players and the Washington Square Players (later the Theatre Guild). These two groups helped to develop a repertory of American drama and a tradition of theatrical production that could rival Europe's. Even more, they marked the beginning of a professional theatre in America not in thrall to the star system or to the commercial pressures of Broadway, mingling art with commerce for the first time. In essence, the little theatre movement allowed a truly political drama to develop in the United States, for it fused the aesthetic experimentation of European drama with American political leftism characterized by Socialism, progressivism, and an opposition to 1920s Republican normalcy.

Initially, most of the little theatres depended upon European models for staging and playwriting. American playwrights were overlooked, probably because America had not yet produced a critical mass of quality plays. But the Provincetown Players—founded in the summer of 1915 by a group of Greenwich Village writers and radicals vacationing in Provincetown—had different goals. The group was organized by George Cram ("Jig") Cook, a tireless experimenter who had theatrical connections in Chicago's Little Theatre. The Provincetown group also included Susan Glaspell, Eugene O'Neill, John Reed, Robert Edmund Jones, Harry Kemp, and others. Provincetown took inspiration from European political and aesthetic spirits of revolt, but they wanted even more to establish an original and powerful American drama. By the second summer, the theatre had established itself as a collective dedicated to producing new work, and in 1916, moved their winter productions to a small theatre on Macdougal Street in New York, where they built a small, but important, audience.

As Provincetown developed from an insular group to a theatre specifically dedicated to aid playwrights who might not otherwise see their plays produced,

they began to articulate their mission more clearly. A 1917 circular outlining the upcoming season also defined their goals for a "Playwright's Theatre" in language fired by zealotry:

> We mean to go on giving artists of the theatre—playwrights, actors, coaches, designers of set and costume–a chance to work out their ideas in freedom . . . We are still not afraid to fail in things worth trying. This season too shall be an adventure. We will let this theatre die before we let it become another voice of mediocrity. If any writers in this country—already of our group or still to be attracted to it—are capable of bringing down fire from heaven to the stage, we are here to receive and help.[21]

By all standards (except perhaps financial) they were successful. Provincetown was the first company dedicated to plays written by American authors; by 1925, they had produced ninety-three new plays by forty-seven different playwrights, including the first productions of O'Neill's one-act sea plays, as well as Glaspell's *Trifles* and *Inheritors*. In 1920, they had their first great success with an experimental production of *The Emperor Jones*, by O'Neill—who gave the theatre even greater legitimacy by winning the Pulitzer Prize the same year for *Beyond the Horizon*. *The Emperor Jones*, a critical and commercial hit, was the first Broadway crossover of a play produced by a little theatre and helped to fix O'Neill's reputation and Provincetown's position at the forefront of the new American theatre.

If Provincetown established itself as a home for American writers and offered O'Neill the chance to produce his epoch-making drama (he continued to stage experimental work with them even after he had become successful on Broadway), another New York group was founded in 1914-1915 that would develop American theatre in another direction. The Washington Square Players were also inspired by European developments in theatre, but unlike Provincetown, they depended almost entirely upon European dramatists for their repertory. Like Provincetown, the Washington Square Players had begun as an amateur group, but unlike Provincetown, which was restlessly experimental and never comfortable with the idea of success, the Washington Square Players developed into a successful, organized professional company. After a halting start as an amateur theatre, the initial group was forced to disband partly because of complications caused by American participation in the war. But the group was reconstituted on a more permanent basis in 1919, taking on a new name, the Theatre Guild, and organizing themselves under a board of directors who would oversee all theatre operations.

As their adoption of the term "guild" suggests, the Theatre Guild was founded as a craft association by a group of professional theatre people, among them director Phillip Moeller, executive director Theresa Helburn, and designer Lee Simonson. They wanted to establish a permanent company that would over a period of years build a tradition of progressive theatre in the United States. Furthermore, by becoming professional, the Guild hoped to free itself from the taint of amateurism that plagued the Little Theatre movement. But perhaps the most important goal of the Guild directors was to establish a theatre as free as possible from the hit-or-miss pressures of the Broadway marketplace. The theatre was structured on a subscription basis in part because they believed that only a self-supporting theatre would be forced to maintain contact with its public.

The Guild began on shaky financial ground, but eventually the professional productions of good, noncommercial plays helped to establish them as one of the most important theatres of the period. By 1925, they were successful enough to build their own theatre on West 52nd Street, raising over $600,000 for the project through the sale of public bonds. However, the responsibilities of a permanent building added to their reliance upon a subscription audience. The Guild was increasingly driven to reflect the tastes of a large audience whose subscriptions allowed the Guild to continue, a shift not always in keeping with their original goals. Indeed, the decision to move early successful Guild productions to Broadway brought forth acrimonious debate among the board of directors. The questions raised were ones that Provincetown, by remaining resolutely experimental and amateur, had not really faced: how could a company produce artistically viable theatre if it were forced to operate on the Broadway principle of reaching as large an audience as possible? How it could afford to survive if it didn't? How could a politically progressive theatre reach a large enough audience to survive?

While other professional theatres enjoyed scattered success—for example, the independent producer Arthur Hopkins produced a successful *Hamlet* with John Barrymore in 1922, and the New Playwrights Company in the late 1920s offered experimental plays outside the confines of the Broadway box—they didn't have the staying power of the Guild. The Guild was successful because they managed to tread a middle ground between creativity and the marketplace, to meld progressive (never radical) politics with professional theatre. In many ways the flagship American theatre of the 1920s, the Guild's particular problems raised questions about the relationship between art and commerce that would resonate in American theatre for years, particularly in Odets' plays with the Group Theatre. The pressure to produce a hit that would keep the theatre afloat remained in conflict with the desire to produce socially progressive theatre. To reach the people, theatres had to produce drama of a certain quality and scale; to move them, they had to be able to understand and express their beliefs and desires.[22]

Provincetown and the Guild, therefore, were created as art theatres in an era that saw America consolidating its economic strength abroad, defending its political hegemony at home, and attempting to establish a literary tradition equal to Europe's. But even though the plays produced by the new theatres were aesthetically progressive, and though many of the individual members of the theatres (especially Provincetown) were outspoken Socialists or Communists, neither the Guild nor Provincetown were particularly political in terms of the plays they produced—though some, such as Glaspell's *Inheritors*, were overtly concerned with issues of social justice. Even those of O'Neill's plays that dealt with class differences tended to focus on metaphysical rather than political conflicts, what he called "the hidden conflicts of the mind." For the most part, both theatres tried to bring American theatre forward through a development of form more than specific political content. The Guild's means of expression were quite different from Provincetown's, though both were influenced by a bohemian-aesthetic view of theatre. For example, the mandate of the Washington Square Players, implicitly adopted by the Guild, asserted, "We have only one policy in regard to the plays we produce—they must have artistic merit. Preference will be given to American plays. . . . Though not organized for

purposes of profit, we are not endowed. Money alone has never produced an artistic theatre. . . . Believing in democracy in the theatre, we have fixed the charge of admission at 50 cents."[23]

The Guild's democratic impulses were an outgrowth of a desire for self-expression more than a desire for political expression; they wanted to be able to work as freely as possible from the economic constraints of Broadway. The founders were dissatisfied with the American commercial theatre; they saw an opportunity to create new work and elevate tastes rather than reform the political structure of America. In fact, the Guild—whose espoused preference for American plays did not materialize until they had built a solid financial base with European plays—believed that there was something inherently progressive about doing the newest and best drama, regardless of social message or country of origin; in essence, they were, as one contemporary commentator said, "more conspicuously bohemian than revolutionary."[24] Of course, in addition to important productions of nonpolitical plays, the Guild did produce politically-oriented plays from both sides of the Atlantic, including Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* in 1923, and premieres of a number of Shaw's plays.[25] Nevertheless, their primary focus was the creation of high-quality drama that would elevate as much as express the tastes of its audience, that would expose them to a great tradition of European drama that might, in time, call forth an American equivalent. In essence, the Guild's policies were structured much like the dominant conception of political democracy current in the 1920s, with its deep-rooted distrust of radical leftism and its striving for a truly American culture based upon, but not beholden to, European models.

FINDING A ROLE: ODETS IN THE NEW THEATRE

European influence on American theatrical practice increased during the 1910s and 1920s when prominent companies visited the United States. Among the visiting troupes were the Abbey Theatre, in 1911 and 1915, Jacques Copeau's company, in 1917 and 1919, the Moscow Art Theatre, in 1923-1925, and German director Max Reinhardt. Reinhardt brought his celebrated production of *The Miracle* to New York in 1924, where it was hailed as one of the season's highlights. In his limited theatrical experience, Odets had never encountered anything like the new theatre in live performance. He was so moved by Reinhardt's production that he saw it dozens of times, taking a job as an cloakroom attendant in exchange for free tickets. Months afterward he still wrote journal entries about the production.

After leaving high school, Odets had been seriously contemplating a career in the theatre, though pressure from his father had driven him into a series of menial jobs in various businesses: an apprentice copywriter in his father's firm, a bookkeeper and general office help, even an abortive stint as a door-to-door Fuller Brush salesman. However, his aspirations for a theatrical career were sharpened by the Reinhardt production. In late 1924, for example, he contemplated auditioning for the Neighborhood Playhouse, one of the more influential little theatres in New York. Nevertheless, the extent of Odets stage experience at this time was his work as a "ringer" elocutionist for the Moss vaudeville circuit. He recited poetry for a