

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

EARLY WINNIPEG PLAYWRIGHTS

by

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ABSTRACT

Winnipeg in the Twenties and Thirties had an active theatre community in which thrived several known playwrights. The plays of two in particular, Harry A. Vaughan Green and Maurice Shannon Corbett, were published, as well as produced both in Canadian and American cities. The purpose of this thesis is to define the thematic and dramatic character of these two playwrights, and compare their work to other more widely recognized Canadian plays. The introductory chapter defines the theatrical climate in Canada, and attitudes toward early Canadian theatre in context of the times. Chapters II and III contain an analytical study of the plays of Green and Corbett, while in Chapter IV there is a brief summation of the study with some conclusions on the merit of the Winnipeg plays.

The theatrical climate in Canada during the Twenties and Thirties is discussed through the published remarks of certain critics of the times including Fred Jacob, Merrill Denison, Robert Ayre and Herman Voaden. Canadian reticence to their indigenous drama is compared to American indulgence toward their own playwrights and productions. The reinforcement of Canadian colonialism is shown by the way the British were able to exert their influences on Canadian culture and values. The trend to such dependency was detrimental to the establishment of a Canadian theatre. This thesis also traces the influence of the Canadian Authors' Association and their approach to promoting the

writing of Canadian plays.

Within the context of the Canadian theatrical scene, in which certain playwrights functioned, it became apparent that playwrights whose plays became widely recognized were from Toronto, the centre of the theatrical activity in Canada. Some of these plays, Brothers in Arms by Merrill Denison, Low Life by Mazo de la Roche, Man's World by Fred Jacob and Three Weddings of a Hunchback by H. Borsook are analyzed and discussed in terms of providing a basis for comparison of the plays by Winnipeggers, Green and Corbett, my contention being that their plays deserve wider recognition.

The representative Winnipeg plays, Green's Death of Pierrot, Forerunners, Good Times Are Coming and Corbett's The Rolling Stone, Lucky Dollars and Broken English are shown, in analysis, to have a richness and depth of meaning, as well as a relevance to society in context of the times. The Death of Pierrot is a fantasy which combines realism and surrealism with characters out of the Commedia del Arte scenarios. Society is condemned for its adherence to convention. A lonely and deprived farm couple are the characters in Forerunners, while Good Times Are Coming shows how the depression affects certain kinds of people, the wealthy, and the impoverished.

Corbett uses characters who represent the working classes. In The Rolling Stone Jimmy is a wanderer unsure of his goals. When he returns home he attempts against great odds to establish himself with a steady job. In Lucky Dollars, the protagonist is a young man who learns

a lesson about himself and the use of money. Tony, a central character in Broken English, is easily identified as a North End Winnipeg immigrant attempting to integrate in the new land. His daughter is in love with a man from the upper class, one who does not have the courage to go beyond his social limits. This conflict is resolved with humor and pathos as Corbett satirizes the class structure in Winnipeg during the Thirties.

The thesis questions the lack of recognition given the Winnipeg playwrights, since the study reveals that the plays of Green, and Corbett, compare favorably with the frequently anthologized eastern Canadian plays.

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PREFACE

Before resurrecting the Winnipeg plays which I propose to analyze, I would justify to some degree my motivation for research into their obscure creators. With my involvement with theatre in Winnipeg, in a modest way as director of "Plays for Living Actors Company", I have always been on the lookout for plays which would represent our local environment, and wondered if anything was ever written before Ann Henry's Lulu Street. A province which could produce writers like Ostenso, Grove and Laurence, whose fiction has given us some of the most revealing of human passions of the frontier civilization, should also have produced playwrights. I looked to the urban setting for these people in order to discern a different perspective of Manitoba society. Would there be paradigms similar to the prairie novels? The artistic thrust of the Manitoba novelists introduced certain patterns which have become associated with the prairies, such as isolation, the hostile land, the power in possession of the land, and of women and children as chattels. What would writers of urban themes focus on?

In my research into the history of theatre I learned that the Winnipeg Community Players, in the Twenties and Thirties, produced new Canadian plays on their Members' nights, and that Harry A.V. Green and Lillian Beynon Thomas were two Winnipeg playwrights whose works were used. In an index I found titles by Ida M. Davidson and quite by chance

I discovered that Maurice Shannon Corbett was a Winnipegger. It was fascinating to see in the Brock Bibliography of Plays, that Sister Mary Agnes of Saint Mary's Academy in Winnipeg had published forty-four plays.

If indeed there were legitimate plays which had been produced and published, why then were they almost completely ignored in any reviews or anthologies of historical Canadian literature? I decided to search for the Winnipeg plays, analyze their thematic and dramatic characteristics and attempt to determine what merit they had as drama. Were they as good as Denison's Brothers in Arms, or La Roche's Low Life, two plays which are periodically mentioned by the literati, or are they deservedly best forgotten? One of the difficulties, of course, in analyzing a play is that one cannot truly determine all its qualities from the printed page. As well as thematic and dramatic appeal, a play should have the practical effects for mounting. Apparently the Winnipeg plays, in context of the times were regarded as having these qualities. Green, Corbett and Thomas each had their plays produced professionally in Manitoba and other centres with good results, using mainly single sets for easy and inexpensive design.

My research of Winnipeg theatre helped a great deal in finding the Winnipeg plays. The old programs of the Community Players, some of which are in the Manitoba archives, have interesting and relevant information about Canadian drama which had been produced by the Players. Libraries were not particularly useful, but scanning the newspapers of the Twenties and Thirties turned up many reviews of Canadian plays,

including those written by Winnipeggers. At one time, then, Winnipeg plays were alive and their writers known. Sometimes I was introduced to people who knew of these writers or knew someone who did. A request in the local papers September 1977 brought me in touch with former theatre people who gave me useful leads. Harry Green's daughter, Dr. Nancy Sirett, phoned to tell me that her father, almost ninety years of age and living in Vancouver, was very active in the Winnipeg Community Players from its inception in 1921; he was one of the writers I was looking for. A student of mine mentioned that when she worked on the bookmobile in Victoria, an old gentleman who used to come in for books would chat with her about his theatre days in Winnipeg. That gentleman was Maurice Corbett, whom I had no way of knowing was a Winnipegger; the two plays of his mentioned in the Brock Bibliography listed only his American publisher. I corresponded with these two playwrights by letter and tape, and in November, 1977, I interviewed them in their homes. Fortunately they were in possession of most of their plays and were kind enough to lend them to me.

The Sisters of St. Mary's Academy were very gracious in allowing me to borrow the plays of Sister Mary Agnes. I interviewed a former student of hers, Sister Eileen of the Academy, and she reminisced about the personality of this prolific writer and her devotion to writing and directing plays.

The library at Red River Community College was most helpful in obtaining through inter-library loans the plays of Thomas and Davidson, as well as other materials from the rare book sections of other

Canadian libraries. The University of Manitoba's collection of the Canadian Forum was a good source of articles on theatre by Fred Jacob, Robert Ayre, and other critics of the times.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Winnipeg playwrights, two in particular, Harry A.V. Green and Maurice Shannon Corbett, whose works comprise the main discussion of this paper, were writing plays at a time when the cultural context in Canada was undergoing change, change manifested in the establishment of the Little Theatre movement across Canada. Along with writers like Merrill Denison, Mazo de la Roche and Fred Jacob, the Winnipeggers responded to this pervasive rumbling of cultural nationalism. Canada's participation in the First World War had brought a new feeling of self-recognition to Canadians, the creation of an indigenous theatre being a sign of that self-recognition.

Before World War One, Canadians welcomed the travelling American and British road shows, playing to both the smaller towns and large cities. The populace, willing enough to be entertained by outsiders, built accommodations; theatre houses mushroomed across the country, some financed by the American Road companies for their own benefit. Winnipeg, which was on the eastern circuit, had four main theatres at the turn of the century: the Winnipeg Theatre, the Winnipeg Opera House, the Dominion Theatre, and the Walker. After 1914, the frequent visits of the touring companies came to a halt, particularly in the smaller centres. The strong nationalism which marked this period influenced Canadian writers. Novelists and poets were encouraged, and

the Little Theatres promised to produce Canadian plays. Within this milieu, local playwrights responded with plays which reflected the new cultural climate of the country. Replacing the long poetic dramas of the nineteenth century, the postwar dramas brought a sense of a new beginning. Prominent among the new breed of playwrights were two Winnipeggers whose contribution to Canadian drama deserves recognition, Harry A.V. Green and Maurice Shannon Corbett.

Even with the new feeling of nationalism, the playwright of the Twenties and Thirties was still a timid expositor of his country's social ills. Such poets as Klein, Smith, Kennedy, and Scott chastised the country for its poverty and injustices. Prairie novelists, Grove, Stead, Salverson and Ostenso, wrote of the hardy stoical stock of prairie farmers, their courage and constant battle with the hostile land. These writers were well received; the reader could both enjoy the private experience he shared with the work or could react to it negatively, once again in private. A playwright's views and perceptions are reenacted before a large group, an audience who may or may not agree with the interpretation presented. Therefore, for the playwright, it is always more difficult to get acceptance. The new Canadian playwright usually stayed on safe ground knowing that his plays would face an audience still imbued with Victorian theatrical expectations and Edwardian values. Audience prudishness may have been a barrier to the fledgling writers, who, unlike American playwrights, hesitated to write about the more brazen and sordid aspects of life. Plays such as What Price Glory, Rain and Ladies of the Evening, are examples of popular American Drama which deal with violence, gore and immoral behavior.

American producers, according to a columnist of the time, Fred Jacob, seemed easily to overcome any audience resistance to such plays. But in Canada the most daring of Canadian playwrights would merely jostle and jibe with lighthearted drama, poke a stuffed shirt, or point an admonishing finger at outmoded puritanical behavior. Few went further. Perhaps it was this light touch, this delicate approach to preserve decorum, which made Canadian drama seem to lack substance.

Canadian thinkers of the times were aware that Canadian drama was too often nebulous, indefinite and ineffective. While not advocating the violence or sex which popularized the American drama, they nevertheless criticized the lack of vitality in their native drama. Some denounced the absence of a distinctly Canadian art of theatre or decried the deficiency in productions. Others suggested that Canadians should produce only the great classics. Few defended Canadian plays; some offered hope. Many of these opinions came from Eastern Canada, since Toronto, then as now, in comparison to other Canadian centres, was the hub of dramatic activity. One critic deeply interested in indigenous Canadian drama was Herman Voaden. He had been educated in drama and theatre at Yale, and had studied playwrighting under George P. Baker. On his return to Toronto, Voaden instituted the "Play Workshop", whose objective was to "develop a distinctly Canadian art of the theatre and to encourage the writing of Canadian drama".¹ Voaden taught a Modern Drama course at the Central High School of Commerce where he was an English instructor. Himself a playwright, he encouraged playwrighting, and set up a competition, publishing a volume of the winning plays in 1930, Six Canadian Plays. In his introduction, Voaden makes an

urgent plea for a nationalist drama:

There must be dedication, a faith and idealism to give unity and purpose to creation....These two things, dedication and absorption in a soil and people distinguished the Irish Literary Renaissance, a movement which holds great interest and promise to us as we look forward toward our own future as a creative nation.²

Voaden's active participation in theatre, and his encouragement to playwrights, had a positive influence on Canadian drama. His letter to Vincent Massey in February, 1929, drafting a national drama festival modelled on the British Drama League, was instrumental in organizing the Dominion Drama Festival.

Merrill Denison had more pessimistic views on Canadian drama. His 1929 essay, "Nationalism and Drama" compares the practice of Canadian Theatre and drama to the "art of dinghy sailing among the bedouins. There are no dinghys because there is no water."³ He suggests that there is no Canadian dramatic writing because there is no Canadian Theatre, and "it is impossible to believe that there ever will be one."⁴

True, there are exceptions. Just as there must be the occasional pond or river on which some bedouin has launched a raft and hoisted a sail,⁵ so there have been good Canadian plays. But the generality holds good.

Continuing in a negative vein, the essay holds that whatever interest in drama did exist could be attributed to the "intellectuals" of the country:

It is not at all surprising that there should be no Canadian drama. One's surprise comes from learning that anyone could have seriously believed there ever could be a Canadian drama. Let it be noted to the credit of the mass of Canadian citizenry that but a small fraction of its number has ever concerned itself about the matter. It has been a fancy of a very special and narrow group which, for want of a better name, may be called intellectuals.⁶

Although there is a tinge of sarcasm in Denison's remarks, his point is

well taken if one considers the founding members of the Winnipeg Community Players as an example. Lawyers Harry Green and C.A. Crawley, Dr. F.A. Young, and Professor J.H. Heinzelman, as 'intellectuals', fit Denison's narrow definition. Denison's point about the lack of a Canadian theatre could also be attributed to some general conditions which fostered dependency on British productions. According to this excerpt from the Bill of a British troupe of touring actors, theatre from abroad was much encouraged. Sir Barry Jackson, a British theatrical impresario, wrote in the preface of a souvenir program in 1931, with the title "Why We Come to Canada":

In the course of the past twenty years few incidents have given me more pleasure, or seemed a finer tribute to my work than the invitation extended by the National Council of Education to bring one of my Companies to Canada....Rather, my purpose -- as I understand it, the purpose also of Major Ney and the National Council of Education -- is to afford the people of Canada who are not able to visit the Mother Country an opportunity to enjoy theatrical fare equally with other subjects of His Majesty living within easy access to the West End of London. Just as we share our ancestry in common, the one with the other do we enjoy a similar culture, and as we have done this in the past surely shall we do so in the future. Nowhere in the Empire is this spirit of loyalty and co-operation more alive than in the Dominion.

British drama therefore, is our joint heritage and the six plays which comprise my programme from coast to coast of Canada are truly representative of British stage. Acted by British Players according to our own tradition, they are faithful examples -- in presentation and in rendering -- of what is to be seen in the West End of London....⁷

These ideas of a shared ancestry, heritage, and culture prevailed among many Canadians quite willing to consider British drama as their own, thus propagating a certain apathy about indigenous theatre and drama.

Even in an essay written as late as 1962, with references to early drama, William Solly expresses similar views to those of Denison, commenting further on why Canadian drama has continued to be in a state

of apathy:

Plays do not exist without productions and audiences to watch them, and though it is by now a well-worn excuse for the anaemic state of our theatre to say that our audiences have been lured elsewhere, it is nevertheless quite true that prolonged exposure to the skills of Broadway and American films has given rise to a widespread conviction on the part of Canadians that their drama will not only be inferior, but worse, amateur....Can we not with justification blame the very temper of the country, -- is there not a certain national lack of self-confidence, pride and romance which has refused to allow our drama to develop?...One comes with surprise upon something like Merrill Denison's Marsh Hay, which is quite a reputable play admirably sustaining tense drama for four acts -- but one is not too surprised never to have heard of its being produced.⁸

It is true that while many Canadian plays got published, few were produced. Fred Jacob, in 1925, criticized the well-meaning Canadian Author's Association for giving only a monetary reward to the winners of their playwrighting contests. The establishment of the C.A.A. and the Association's subsequent competitions for playwrights did provide an incentive to writers. But, Jacob said,

These contests are too much like the lotteries. They appear to have served their purpose when somebody gets the cash...The competition will do more to foster the writing of one-act plays than the lecturer, but it must go a step farther than in the past. The interest ought to focus on the stage where the successful play is given its opportunity to come to life, and not upon the winner of the cash reward.⁹

Jacob mentioned that the writers of the approximately twelve contests held after World War One simply disappeared into limbo and that with one or two exceptions, their plays were stillborn. The writers learned nothing because they did not see their plays produced. Mr. Jacob's suggestion that staging the plays should become part of the prize was later instituted.

Some critics were simply patronizing. Their suggestions as to what should or should not be produced could only have fostered inferior

feelings among new playwrights. In 1923, Mr. E. Dale wrote in the Canadian Forum:

There should always be presented on any bill of short plays...some work of more serious calibre and of wider import. Better far to make a glorious hash of Julius Caesar, or of A Doll's House than to make an unending line of successful Charlie's Aunts.¹⁰

Mr. Dale's remarks are similar to those of Jean Burton, who suggested in 1922:

ten of Wilde, of Barrie, of Pirandello to one of Beyond the Horizon, as well as experimentation with Russian, Scandinavian plays and the social problem plays of the French...the moving plays of the Irish school...¹¹

Both writers ended their articles with a hope for local playwrights, but it was a patronizing gesture. Writers like Dale and Burton are no better than the nineteenth-century writers and critics who believed that the only worthy plays were English or European and that writers should use them as models. Dale and Burton implied strongly that Canadian writers could not measure up to the standard of the dramatists of other countries. Conversely, Americans seemed to nurture indigenous plays and to accept their content even if laced with violence or sex. Jacob, in 1925, wrote of the way American critics defended their writers from foreign criticism:

More and more in recent years, the American drama has been running to violence in both speech and action. They smash and blaspheme and throttle and curse and roar murder, and word goes backstage from the box office, "Keep up the good work." -- following which new profanities go screaming out over the footlights.¹²

Jacob mentioned as examples What Price Glory, Rain and for a blatantly sexual show, Ladies of the Evening. He criticized Tarnish, by Gilbert Emery, for a scene in which the hero chokes, almost to death, a young woman who has annoyed him; the American critics praised the play. While

remarking that The Show Off failed in London, Jacob noted that this failure did not deter the American defences, and quoted one of the producers, Miss Rosalie Stewart, on her return to New York after the collapse of the play. Her remarks were to the effect that "American drama is so far ahead of that of London and Paris that it is futile to attempt to compare them. They haven't our tempo; their detail is not half vivid enough."¹³

Jacob did not condone Miss Stewart's remarks. The incident recounted simply indicates that unlike Canadian critics of the times, Americans offered their playwrights self-assurance. Canadian critics all too often fostered a lack of selfhood in their culture by failing to support or adequately to encourage the presentation of indigenous drama. It seems that these feelings influenced Canadian producers, who continued to rely on foreign plays. In contrast, the Americans preferred to produce their own, an attitude at least partially responsible for the development of a strong American drama history. As Jacob aptly phrased it, their motto was "See America First". Nevertheless, in spite of all the criticism, some fine Canadian plays were written and produced. Many of the plays were not only staged in local theatres, but in different Canadian and American cities. Winnipeg stages hosted the plays of Mazo de la Roche, Fred Jacob, and Merrill Denison, while the plays of Winnipeggers Harry A.V. Green and Maurice Corbett played in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Evanston, Illinois.

Green, a sensitive and poetic writer, brought a variegated background to his plays. He was a lawyer, an alpinist, metaphysicist and theatre enthusiast. Corbett, singularly in tune with his urban

environment, integrated his plays with the tempo of the times as he felt it. The two writers, living in Winnipeg during the Twenties and Thirties, were neither acquainted with each other nor aware of their common interest in theatre. Their economic and social backgrounds were vastly different. Green's interests were many. As a young man in Edinburgh he developed a keen sense of art and literature, an interest sharpened by artists and men of letters who came to visit his father. Green also tells how his legal practice in Winnipeg brought him into contact with the people of the prairies, from whom he learned of rural isolation. Green's plays were first staged by the Winnipeg Community Players at their Saturday night productions, a time set aside for experimental theatre. As the writer gained a reputation, his plays were produced in other Canadian and American cities.

Green's plays are as varied in subject and theme as they are in style. He writes of fantasy and dreams in his Death of Pierrot and Angela, and of the stark and harsh prairie life in The Forerunners. He draws on superstitious ritual of an elderly Ukrainian farm woman in A Miracle Play of Manitoba. In contrast, he sets the scene of another play, A Game at Mr. Wemyss, in the urban home of an upper-class gentleman. Good Times Are Coming, called a farce by the author, concerns two young medical students who decide to earn more and easier money by housebreaking than by pursuing their intended profession. Green also claims to have written the first ballets to be produced in Winnipeg. Au Salon de Coiffure (or Permanent Waves) was based on a story by Count Fouette de Bourre*, and L'Après Midi d'un Boulevard was based on an

*Count Fouette de Bourre was the founder of the Ballet Russe.

incident recounted in de Bourre's autobiography. Green's play for children, The Land of Far Away, was produced many times.

Green received his law degree from the University of Edinburgh, and came to Canada in 1912 when he was twenty-four. He joined the legal department of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company and worked there until his retirement at the age of seventy. He was one of the founding members of the Winnipeg Community Players, supporting them from the time of their inception in 1921 to the time of his retirement in 1958. Green was personally involved in every theatre activity other than acting and directing and moved in a social milieu of artists, writers and the affluent upper-class. Among his associates were artists whose names are well known, all of whom designed for the Winnipeg Community Players' theatre, L. Lemoine Fitzgerald, A.J. Musgrove and W.J. Phillips. In 1933 Green received a high honor from the British Columbia Drama Association Incorporated for his outstanding efforts on behalf of the Canadian drama*, a citation entitling him to the suffix C.D.A. (Canadian Drama Association).

By contrast, Maurice Shannon Corbett, born and educated in East Kildonan, Winnipeg, the son of a registrar at the Court of King's Bench, completed his formal education at high school. From the time he wrote his first play, before he was eighteen, and savored the success of its first production in the John Black Church in 1919, he was determined to pursue a theatrical career. The play had some touring

*Among the other recipients of this award were the Earl of Bessborough, Lady Tupper and Mrs. C.P. Walker.

sessions around the province and Corbett was encouraged by the positive reactions of his audiences. The following year he wrote Call the Cops, a comedy about the selling of a haunted house, a play with "lots of action, humor and slapstick,"¹⁴ as Mr. Corbett recalls. Another of his early plays, produced at St. Jude's Church, Bootlegger Run, deals with prohibition. The plot called for authentic bootleggers to masquerade as ministers of the church, under which disguise they were able to carry on their illicit business. Bootlegging, of course, was big business in those days, and the young Mr. Corbett chose a topical theme, handled it in a spirit of fun, and, as he reminisces, "gave Winnipeggers the kind of light entertainment they wanted."¹⁵ Corbett lived his young adulthood in the midst of the depression years, an environment which he fused with romantic ideas. In the social context of the times, in spite of the depression, the imagination of the populace was attuned to a certain romantic aura, which prevailed almost as an antidote to the hard times. Movies such as "Maggie", "Daddy Long Legs", popular songs like "My Blue Heaven", "April Showers", "I'm Looking for a Bluebird", and others, all added to that feeling of romanticism which Corbett wove into his plays.

In one of this dramas, The Rolling Stone, for example, a young man unable to find a job wanders from city to city. When he returns to his hometown, he finds that the girl he loves is about to marry someone else. In desperation, he searches for a job, finally creates one for himself on a dying newspaper, and succeeds. Corbett weaves the plot around a social setting familiar to the working class, then elevates the characters through romance. Another play, A Woman Called X,

concerns a girl whose uncle attempts to cheat her out of an inheritance. Corbett again derives his plot from the plight of the underdog, the conflict of poor versus rich, his setting from conditions of the urban lower class. Often his motif was a form of poetic justice. In Lucky Dollars, Corbett uses another social phenomenon in context of the times, the Irish Sweepstake -- the forbidden fruit of the two-dollar gamblers. The author surrounds the young protagonist with romance and a dash of mystery. There is suspense and conflict when the hero is accused of theft. Combined with themes of love, compassion and discipline, Lucky Dollars becomes a well-rounded play, one which catches the imagination of the audience as they identify with the young protagonist. While there is never anything profound in Corbett's plays, his dramas seem to pluck a vibrant chord in the human psyche. The author has a knack for directing his material to the core of the emotional spirit, playing on desires and dreams.

Corbett's own life was a series of disappointments. He worked mainly in theatre, but had to do other jobs like clerking to support himself. He did some acting and directing, but the pay was small. He became interested in journalism and wrote for the magazine The Islander for a short while, but was otherwise unsuccessful in establishing himself in a journalistic career. In 1927, financed by his aunts, he made a trip to Hollywood hoping to get into the movies; the closest he came to realizing that ambition, was to chauffeur William Burrell, a supporting actor in the Charlie Chase comedies, to and from the Hal Roach studio. Corbett speaks fondly of those days, but wistfully admits that "I might have shown more determination".¹⁶ As a result of his

Hollywood sojourn, on his return to Winnipeg, he got a leading part in Three Wise Fools with a stock company playing at the Dominion Theatre. Corbett says he got the job, which paid \$15.00 per week, because he "lied a little" about his Hollywood experience. For Maurice Corbett, times were tough, but miracles were just around the corner, and that dream, everyman's dream, is prevalent in his plays.

Both Corbett and Green were fortunate in that they had their plays produced. Some, like Green's Death of Pierrot, used intermittently for eighteen years, were in frequent demand. It is not known just how frequently it was produced; records show that it was first performed professionally by the Winnipeg Community Players in May 1923, at the Community Theatre, 959 Main Street in Winnipeg. Subsequently, it was produced by the Social Workers' Club of Montreal under the direction of Mr. Basil Donn, at the Victoria Hall in Westmount, on the 19th of November, 1926. Among other performances were those at the Regina Little Theatre, May 8, 1928, under the direction of M. Clements, and at the Gymnasium Theatre, Harmosa Beach, by the South Bay Junior Workshop Players in 1941. The play was published in 1923, and what copies are now available have become, of course, collectors' items. On December 15, 1923, Forerunners shared the bill of the Community Players with Fred Jacob's Autumn Blooming and Arthur H. Phelps's This Prairie. Forerunners was produced at other times in other cities under the titles of The Shadow of Peter and The Return of Peter. Green's The Land of Far Away was much in demand, to judge by the frequency of reviews and references to the play in newspaper clippings. Corbett's plays were published by two American firms, the Eldridge, and Payne

Publishing Companies. Unlike Green, whose affiliation with the Community Players gave him a ready outlet for his plays, Corbett had to market his work himself. A few he sold for sums from one to three hundred dollars. To most of them he retained the rights. The Rolling Stone was produced at the Dominion Theatre, but it lost money and Corbett recalls his mother's having to make a garden party to help collect funds to put toward the debt. At another time, Corbett organized a group of actors, and under the name of "The Variety Players" took them on a tour of Manitoba towns with productions of his plays. He recalls this venture as being very successful; they drew good audiences as well as meeting their financial goals.

The limits of this paper will not allow discussion of three other writers of the Twenties and Thirties who are of lesser significance than Green and Corbett, but nevertheless worthy of mention -- Ada M. Davidson, Sister Mary Agnes and Lillian Beynon Thomas. The historical plays of Davidson were published by the Manitoba Text Book Bureau. Sister Mary's forty-four known plays were published by St. Mary's Academy, and those of Thomas were produced by the Winnipeg Community Players and published by Samuel French. The plays of Davidson and Sister Mary are well unified, tightly constructed and historically accurate in their settings and style. Davidson's dramas, being historical, are never outdated and could be used successfully today. The same may be said for the historical and biblical plays of Sister Mary, though students of today would find some of the others too moralistically didactic. Of Thomas's three, Jim Barber's Spite Fence, according to reports, was the most successful, though it does not measure up to the

standard of Green's and Corbett's plays. Its redeeming feature is that it deals with the social problems of old people and their need for independence.

The Winnipeg Community Players were certainly aware of which plays were being presented at the major drama centre in Canada at that time, Toronto's Hart House Theatre. Since it was the policy of the Winnipeg group to produce Canadian drama, among the plays they staged were those by Merrill Denison, Mazo de la Roche and Fred Jacob. Two of these, Brothers in Arms by Denison and Low Life by la Roche, have through the years appeared consistently in anthologies of Canadian Dramatic Literature, as well as being discussed in critical essays. The examination of these two Toronto plays and of two others may be illuminating in determining the qualities of the output of the Winnipeg playwrights. The other two examples which may be appropriately useful for further comparison of thematic similarities are Fred Jacob's Man's World and H. Borsook's Three Weddings of a Hunchback. The latter will be particularly useful to sharpen the analysis of the diverse characteristics and themes in the plays.

Merrill Denison was given recognition for his plays about backwoodsmen, whom he knew and admired. His Brothers in Arms is about the extreme contrast and clash in lifestyles and attitudes between a Toronto businessman and backwoodsman. The play satirizes both the businessman, Major Browne, and his wife Dorthea as examples of shallow-minded people with an inflated idea of their own importance. In contrast, the author presents the backwoodsman Syd with his take-life-as-it-comes attitude. The clash and the acute differences of these

characters provide the basis for Denison's satirical comments on the military, on the naivete of women influenced by romantic movies and novels, and on the particular kind of person Major Browne represents. Denison also destroys the image of the backwoodsman as an honest, open and helpful person by the way Syd uses his familiarity with this environment as the power to subdue the businessman. This framework is exerted on a rather thin plot, but one handled with deft and humor. Browne and his wife Dorthea are waiting in a hunting cabin in the north for a man to drive them to the station. The Major, in a hurry to return to Toronto to consummate a big financial deal, tries to get some help from a backwoodsman named Syd White. Browne questions Syd about when the owner of the car that took him and his wife from the station will return to drive them back. Syd's replies are either precisely in answer to the questions, volunteering no further information, or vague enough to aggravate the Major's impatience. The sharp twist of irony that concludes the play comes on discovery that Syd is half owner of the car and could have driven the couple to the station right away.

The conversation between Browne and Syd, sparked with satirical jibes at Browne, and Dorthea's rhapsodizing of "the wild virgin country" make both the businessman and his wife look foolish. In contrast to Syd's tranquility, Browne's impatience and cantankerous behavior belittles him. Dorthea, who perceives the "dirty and squalid" hunting camp as a place of "rustic charm", becomes an object of ridicule. Although Denison creates an ironic situation which elevates the backwoodsman to a position of power and leaves the businessman fumbling, the playwright, pertinently incisive, also shatters the myth of the Davy

Crockett type backwoodsman.

The ironic aspects of the play are anticipated at the outset in the author's description of J. Altrus Browne:

A businessman with a penchant for efficiency. He served as a major in the Army Service Corps during the late war and spent a most rigorous time at Sandgate.* He looks forward to the next war.¹⁷

Browne's impatience as he waits for the man with the car is not only aggravated by Syd's attitude but with his romantically foolish wife's remarks:

(with an outflung arm gesture) but don't you love it here...I'm just dying to see one of those hunters. They must be such big fine simple men, living so close to nature all the time...one of those coureurs-de-bois...we've read of in books of Canada and we've seen them in the movies.(p.5)

The more Browne agitates, the less satisfaction he seems to be getting. The core of the theme is in Browne's inability to see that he himself is responsible for the delay in returning to Toronto. The writer uses the lantern as a symbol of Browne's blindness, a blindness which goes beyond the immediate situation, Browne's failure to see himself for what he is.

Syd: Kinda dark in here. (Looks around) A feller might have a bit of light. (Gets up and prowls around) They was a lantrun someplace around here with a chimley cracked.(p.5)

Browne refuses to see:

Browne: (impatiently and imperiously) Never mind the lantern. We'll only be here a few moments anyway.

Syd: Won't do no harm to have a bit of light.(p.20)

There is a double thrust of irony directed at both Browne and Syd. The lantern he lights is dirty and casts only a glimmer. Syd is not

*There was no active battle at Sandgate.

providing any light, he is not volunteering any information that would help Browne. Syd is dishonest, for he purposely tries to confuse Browne by withholding certain facts:

Browne: It's been dark half an hour. How long would it take him to get back.

Syd: I figger it'd take him about half an hour if he had a boat.

Browne: Half an hour eh. Should be here, then, soon. (Thinks)
Did he have a boat?

Syd: No...he didn't have no boat. (p.8)

Denison gives rich treatment to a sparse plot. He deals metaphorically with the characters and environment. Syd, whose slow demeanor defines the patience required in dealing with the backwoods of the country, metaphorically parallels nature by his cruel, unbending and unpredictable behavior. Like the natural elements of the environment, he is always victorious. Thematically Denison shows that hostility cannot be forced upon the environment.

Browne's personality symbolizes the military's waste of energy by rigid and foolish rules. The author makes humorous references to these tactics which would be appreciated particularly by ex-army personnel since the play was shown only three years after the war. The humor is broad, but this lack of subtlety is appropriate in context and allows for some criticism of the military without being offensive. When Syd admits that he was in the army and Dorthea makes the statement "with dawning wonderment", "Dear he too fought for his Country in the Great War. You're brothers in arms" (p.22), it sets the tone for the ridicule of army technique and authority, Browne becoming the symbol.

Syd: We done nothing but drill. One of them head lads would get us out and walk us. 'Tweren't no sense to that. Walkin' a feller around just for the sake of walkin'.

Dorthea: It does sound silly doesn't it dear...

Syd: Why them head lads'd make us clean our boots and then walk us around in the dust. Why didn't they keep us inside if they wanted our shoes shiny? (p.23)

When Charlie, the driver for whom Browne has been waiting, finally arrives on the scene, his first concern is to discuss with Syd the success of his hunt. He is indifferent to Browne's dilemma, and becomes more so by Browne's increasing impatience.

Browne: See here I've got to catch the midnight at Kalabar.

Charlie: Got to catch the midnight eh? You'd best be startin' soon. (p.24)

After Browne stomps out of the cabin in a rage Charlie enquires of Syd: "Why don't you take him? You ain't doin' nothin' (p.25). Syd replies: "He seemed set on having you" (p.25). Syd's statement seems to sum up Denison's point of view that one cannot afford to be inflexible.

The second example, Low Life by Mazo de la Roche, deals with an Irish immigrant family living in 'eastern Canada'. The wife, Lizzie, is a charwoman who works her fingers to the bone while her husband Benn stays at home and entertains his English ne'er do well friend Linton. The pun of the title refers, as well as to the kind of life they lead, to the unfair advantage the men take of the woman, as neither Benn nor Linton makes a sincere effort to find a job. The conflict centres on Lizzie's attempt to get rid of Linton. She does not, because she is led to believe that Linton's elegant diction and manners benefit her young daughter Gladys. The Irish immigrants' aspirations to reach

beyond their station stem from the Anglo-Irish relationship in the Old Country, where the British were socially superior. Benn, uneducated and slovenly, shows his respect by his generosity to the Englishman who takes every advantage of the situation.

With Linton's sponging, the play alludes to England's exploitation of the colonies. Had the author developed the idea to concur with the conflict between Lizzie and Linton, the play would have had more depth and meaning. As it is, the play lacks substance. Lizzie capitulates quickly to Linton, who firmly entrenches himself in the family's quarters. In spite of the play being a winner in Canadian playwrighting competitions, it is not one of the best of the early plays. It has none of the satire of Denison's Brothers in Arms or the suspense of Green's Forerunners, nor has it the quick repartee of Corbett's plays. Low Life's lack of wit and lustre fits Jacob's comment that some of the early one-act plays are "all structure without a spark of vitality." Canadian writers who have included Low Life in their reviews and anthologies as a meritorious example of Canadian drama may be questioned as to why the Winnipeg plays, many of which are superior, have not received similar recognition.

Fred Jacob, another eastern writer and editor of "Stage", a column in the Canadian Forum, used the new status of women, then much in the news, to comment on a changing society. His play, Man's World, the third example of the Toronto plays, deals with male-female conflict, focusing on a city editor who is determined to write an editorial about the danger of allowing women to enter politics. Jacob is skillful in his portrayal of the petty behavior which leads to misunderstandings

between the sexes. He satirizes the behavior of men who belittle the efforts of community-minded women, and is equally scornful of women who gossip and act irresponsibly.

The setting is a small town. The city editor, Mr. Kettleby, is one of a group of men who get together at his office every evening at 5 o'clock to play cards and exchange risqué stories. The men also have no qualms about making derisive remarks about the women in the town. In his editorial Mr. Kettleby intends to defame Mrs. Hendershott, a candidate for City Council. Mr. Kettleby is prevented by his wife who manages to make him believe that he never really wanted to write the editorial after all.

In Man's World, the men grumble about being dominated by their wives, having to go to church and Beethoven concerts. The dialogue is Babbitt-like and the town resembles Lewis's Zenith. Kettleby says:

Every place you go in America women and women's ideas run the show. Man's world that used to be so hearty, and vulgar and exciting is getting too prettified, and men are becoming just about as flabby as last year's parsnips. I tell you we are fast ceasing to be men.¹⁸

Jacob depicts the stereotypical thinking of both sexes. The editor's wife, described as a likable woman, says:

There is nothing so good for men as having a quiet place where they meet together with other men. The poor dears like to strut and blow and stick out their chests and pretend to one another that they are the devilish fellows that their wives know they aren't. (p.99)

Jacob focuses on the waning of the traditional idea of woman's place. It was a time in the social context of the country, when women whose interests were broadening expected their husbands to take more interest in the home. The tension in Man's World is created by the trepidation

in which the men approach this change; Kettleby's intended maligning of Mrs. Hendershott and her political aspirations becomes the manifestation of the men's fears, as this dialogue illustrates:

Kettleby: My theme is that nature intended the male to dominate.

Hooker: Do you think that the young men are so different from what they were when we were married?

Kettleby: You bet they are. Mary tells me that most of the young husbands...wash up the day's dishes. What is the world coming to? Men washing dishes! After next week's paper appears, I hope people will realize that there are a few real men left in this community at least, if you cannot find anymore of them in Canada...If my pen has any influence, Mrs. Sara Dotleigh Hendershott is not going to introduce petticoats into the Town Council. (pp. 91,92)

With Mrs. Kettleby's success in preventing her husband from writing the article, the play refutes the editor's statement "My theme is that nature intended the male to dominate". In theme, Jacob's play is reminiscent of Ibsen's The Doll's House, a play which shows the effect upon women of a male-dominated society. Man's World does not have the psychological depths of the Ibsen classic. Nora's character is complex and multi-faceted, while Jacob's female characters each portray a single characteristic stereotypical of a particular kind of woman. Yet these one-dimensional characters, particularly if they were played broadly, provide a good deal of humor in Man's World. As we shall see, this stressing of stereotypes as technique for creating humor is much used by Green and Corbett. For example Corbett's Lucky Dollars offers us an array of stereotypical women, each serving a defined purpose, each humorously expressing identifiable characteristics; the mother, the working girl, the sweet unaffected romantic young lady, and the self-centred old woman. Similarly, Green's characters in Good

Times Are Coming are equally effective as stereotypes, although he uses a more subtle touch in his other plays. This technique of stereotyping in Man's World and in the other plays, both enhance the comic effects and strengthen the themes.

But while Jacob uses basic feminine cliches for purposes of humor, a scene in his play deftly illustrates that these cliches are, for Jacob, barriers to honest communication between the sexes. For instance, Mrs. Lovey Perkins and Mrs. Hendershott are in Kettleby's office. Mrs. Perkins has told the other women that Kettleby's soon-to-be-printed article is an attack on her personally. Mrs. Hendershott is determined to prevent Kettleby from printing what she construes to be a defamation of her character. While the ladies are waiting for the editor to arrive, Mrs. Kettleby enters. In spite of the satiric treatment Jacob gives to the dialogue, Mrs. Hendershott's reply to Mrs. Perkins' remarks refers to the lack of communication between the sexes:

Mrs. Perkins: Don't forget that Bert told me it was a secret. It is not supposed to be known until the paper comes out next week. But Bert never keeps anything back in our little chats.

Mrs. Hendershott: There would be less trouble in the world if all husbands and wives were as candid. (p.96).

After the editor's wife persuades the other ladies to leave, she waits for her husband and discusses the issue with him. Mr. Kettleby is petulant and obstinate, but buckles under when his wife says:

Oh well, Acres, I know you will think it over and do what is best...I always have such perfect faith that you will not do the wrong thing. (p.109)

Man's World is in tune with the social environment of the Twenties. The author uses a light touch, giving equal consideration to both sides as he deals with the difficulty in breaking down old barriers which have polarized the sexes.

The final example in this group of plays is unique in its portrayal of a changing Canadian society. H. Borsook's Three Weddings of a Hunchback was first produced in Hart House Theatre in April, 1924. Within a framework of three weddings which a Jewish immigrant makes for his three daughters, Sorke, Miriam and Chaneh, this three-act play shows an early state of social upheaval in Canada. The events reflect themes of familial obligations and relationships, labor-capital conflict, the dissipation of traditional values, and the effects of marriage, particularly the changes it brings upon women. The play opens with a wedding feast. Amid the raucous behavior of the guests the main characters are established and individualized by particular character traits and contrasts. Sorke, the bride, is a loquacious shrew; her morose looking husband Hymie is, in contrast, withdrawn. One learns quickly that he is in love with Sorke's sister Chaneh in spite of her being homely and a hunchback. Tradition demands that the eldest daughter marry first, so Hymie cannot marry Chaneh. It is understood that since a dowry is involved and since he wants to get married, he must take Sorke. The parents of the sisters, Alter, a mellow kindly man, and his wife Ettl, a tight-lipped irascible woman, are also contrasted by their attitude toward Chaneh. The father's attitude is gentle. He is naive in his belief that all will be well as long as one can depend on traditional values. The mother's attitude is harsh; she

is not an idealist like her husband, nor does she hold any hope for Chaneh's future. Sorke's husband-to-be, Hymie, who adheres to tradition, is also contrasted with Chaneh's betrothed Izzie, who is symbolic of the new radical.

The themes are established quickly. Traditional values are juxtaposed to a fast-changing society. In the old tradition, parents, the symbol of authority, demanded that their children marry early and propagate. A dowry was a necessity for daughters, the sum of which depended on the girl's appearance and skills. Alter has had to pay dearly to get a husband for his daughter Chaneh.

Chaim: How much did he get from you?

Alter: Enough, enough, don't ask. May it only turn out for the best.¹⁹

In contrast, the new values question the need for ceremony and marriages; authority is challenged by labor strikes and violence.

The debilitating effects of arranged marriages are shown by Sorke's and Miriam's change to sloth and slovenliness, by Hymie's further introversion and by Ettl's bitterness. Chaneh, still innocent on her wedding day, thanks her father for arranging her marriage and receives a bitter reply from her mother.

Chaneh: It's like a dream. I've been dreaming of this ever since I was a baby and here it is true.

Ettl: A dream! Dream while you may. It would be better for you if it were only a dream. You'll find out all too soon what kind of a dream it is. I was against it from the start, (III, p.121)

There is much ambiguity in Ettl's speech. Her dreams are never fulfilled, they are replaced by disappointments. Marriage has turned Ettl

to an irate, overworked, foreboding woman, and she implies that Chanah will become the same. Her ominous glance connotes disaster for her daughter's marriage to Izzie. Izzie, the scoffer of tradition, approaches his wedding day with "lofty tolerance of condescending submission to their foolish, inane ceremony so out of date" (III, p.119). The dissipation of religious ritual is paralleled to the undermining of authority in labor-capital relations, Izzie being heavily involved in a strike action against his employer.

Chanah's plight as the underdog of the family is a metaphor for the universal plight of the underpaid and the exploited worker. Both must be redeemed, but for all attempts to save them, for all their courage and aggressiveness, the workers are unable to penetrate the formidable barriers of the capitalistic society. Like Chanah, they always lose. The workers who attempt to comply with the system suffer as much as those who defy it. Hymie is an example. Forced by his wife to adhere to practicality rather than to principle, he becomes a scab. Izzie derides him with a fiery speech which is not only scalding to Hymie, but denotes the internal problems of the labor organizations. The dissension among the laborers themselves is emphasized when Izzie includes the underdog Chanah in his derision.

Izzie: Get away from me, you ignorant hunchback! What do you know about this? Are you trying to lead me astray the way she led him? (III, p.123)

This split in the labor group, these difficulties which labor experienced in the early years of organization, are problems which the author attempts to deal with through Izzie. The insults he flings at Sorke are really an outburst condemning the members of his own class who do

not cooperate.

Izzie: You're the ones that betray your brothers and sisters, your husbands and children to the damn capitalistic class...You deserve to have your tongue and both your eyes pulled out. (III, p.123)

Sorke's violent reaction to these insults causes a free-for-all at Chaneh's wedding in progress at the time of the argument. A policeman comes on the scene and restores decorum. The dissidents must bend to the strong arm of authority as he takes the men to jail. The rest of the guests scatter. This scene parallels a probable consequence for strikes in a real-life situation of the times, as Borsook openly expresses his views of an uncaring society. Chaneh, as the innocent on the peripheral of two opposing sides, is left to suffer.

At the conclusion, some children from the street, apparently attracted by the fight, run through the house snatching bits of food. Chaneh, left to survey the chaos of her long-awaited wedding day, removes her veil, grabs the children and dances around in a frenzy, chanting and laughing hysterically. There is a sobering effect, even an ominous one, to the ending, as Ettl appears in the doorway. From her behavior in the play, she has become a symbol of those who believe that only the fit and the strong can survive. She has therefore shown little concern for Chaneh's feelings. Her approach to life is to accept with tight-lipped stoicism whatever is her lot. As she stands in the doorway she is the ominous foreshadowing of Chaneh's future and of the future of the working class. Ironically, Act I begins the play with a strong ethnic tradition and a stability, in spite of the raucous behavior of the family and guests. Act III concludes with the violent

intrusion on tradition by the new radicals and results in incarceration rather than a new freedom. Borsook's drama is thematically rich in its portrayal of the family's attempt to keep cultural order in the face of disturbing and disrupting social and economic conditions.

The eastern plays vary in setting, in structural fabric and dispensation of theme. They deal with the moral implications of different levels of society and ethnic groups and in the context of Canadian life during the Twenties and Thirties, offer insight into our multicultural country. The Winnipeg plays are similar in this respect; some have the added dimension of romantic motifs, love lost and regained, as in Corbett's The Rolling Stone, reversal of fortune, as in his Lucky Dollars and in Green's Good Times Are Coming, and virtue rewarded and evil punished, as in Corbett's A Woman Called X. Writers from both these areas of Canada wrote mainly from the familiarity of their respective environments, a condition which, no doubt, contributes to the strength of the plays. Merrill Denison's Brothers in Arms, set in the backwoods of Ontario, has little in common symbolically with Green's prairie plays. Yet there is a similarity, in that both write from their personal knowledge of the people and their way of life. Both use the rural characters to chastise the urbanites. These common elements are juxtaposed to the acute differences. For instance, Green's Death of Pierrot, imbued with poetic fancy, stands apart as unique among these plays, as does Three Weddings of a Hunchback, for its treatment of social ills in the context of the times. Other differences appear in plot, character and use of irony, and will come into focus in the analysis of the Winnipeg plays.

CHAPTER II

THE PLAYS OF HARRY A VAUGHAN GREEN

Drawn to the theatre by his close association with the Winnipeg Community Players, Mr. Green was actively engaged in the development of the company and its productions. Green began playwriting as a hobby. His first play, The Death of Pierrot, produced by the Community Players in 1923, won an honorable mention in the Canadian Author's Association playwriting competition, and was published in the Hart House volume of winning plays. Green's next two plays, Forerunners and A Miracle Play of Manitoba, both set in the prairie, reflect the author's keen perception of struggle in an alien and hostile environment. The writer's talent for the diverse and unusual is obvious in the variety of his plots. His three-act play Good Times Are Coming, one of his later works, is humorous, while being satirically critical of society. Green is also to be admired for the complex imagery of his shorter dramas, complexities unusual in one-act plays. The Death of Pierrot and the two prairie plays are examples of such symbolically rich dramas, and together with Good Times Are Coming, will be used in this paper as representative of Green's works.

The Death of Pierrot is a fine play combining the quality of surrealism, the intangibility of the unconscious mind, with the realism of an interfering and uncaring society. In Pirandellian style, the

play attempts to explore the unconscious state of two characters, Pierrot and Columbine, whom the author has taken out of the Commedia dell'Arte and placed in the twentieth century. The conventions of the 'real' world with its social pressures and economic demands intrude upon their idyllic existence through two characters, Solomon Grundy, a truant officer who sees Pierrot and Columbine as children, and Mrs. Grundy, who perceives the couple's way of life as evil. The play has some similarities to Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author. Like Pirandello's characters, Pierrot and Columbine are self-isolated. Pirandello's characters wish only to relive their experiences through their unconscious, seeking the truth, but they are thwarted by the actors who wish to take over. Pierrot and Columbine also wish to relive their former existence, but they are thwarted by Solomon and Mrs. Grundy who symbolize harsh reality.

Pierrot goes searching for a playwright or poet who will use him in his play or poem. He is unsuccessful, for the writers say he is "demodé". Thus abandoned, he goes home to the garret where Columbine greets him sympathetically. She decides that the only solution to their dilemma is to "ensnare a poet" and make him write poems about Pierrot. When the truant officer, Solomon Grundy, is sent to investigate the pair, he insists that Pierrot and Columbine make the proper adjustment to their lives according to conventional society. He cannot see any worthiness in their present existence, since they do not earn any money. Columbine, who has retained much of the original character's flirtatiousness, bewitches Grundy with her dancing. Under her spell, Grundy amazes himself by composing a poem. Caught up in the dreams and

allusions of the pair, he temporarily transcends his mediocracy. When Mrs. Grundy appears, led by Harlequin, from whom Columbine had run away, the woman insists that Columbine submit to society, the sign of submission being the wearing of a long skirt. Columbine does, and her action brings Pierrot to his death. The playwrights and poets who reject Pierrot are also intruders preventing him from functioning in his predestined role of a character in a play or a poem. The play opens with Pierrot's arriving home in a dejected state because he cannot find "work". His opening lines set the theme of the conflict between the past and the present. He discovers that the kind of theatre art in which he would feel comfortable and competent is outdated; in the Pirandellian vision, like the Six Characters, he feels equally rejected. Pierrot complains to Columbine:

Pierrot: Poor Pierrot is out of work again. All day he has tramped from door to door looking for work, but the poets say he is *demodé*. When he goes into their rooms they pull their hair over their eyes and pretend they cannot see him...The playwrights look at him with lifted eyebrows and ask, very brusquely "Your name and business, sir"...That's the realistic manner. When he says "La la gentlemen, I am Pierrot, give me a part in your play, they look him up and down and exclaim "Pierrot! he died long ago -- in the nineties." Then he demands "am I not alive, very much alive?" and he dances and pirouettes. But they only say, "Well, then, out of fashion. Dead or out of fashion it's the same thing. ²⁰

Pierrot realizes that there has been a change. He pirouettes in an attempt to demonstrate that art is unchanging; after all he has been in existence for several centuries. Columbine, wanting to console and help, makes a suggestion appropriate to her still unspoiled image:

Columbine: We must ensnare a poet and make him write a poem every day with Pierrot in every verse because there must be lots of poets in this town.

Pierrot: How shall we catch one?

Columbine: I'll dance a magic dance like this around him (dances around Pierrot). He'll follow me anywhere after that Pierrot.

Pierrot: Don't make it too magical, Columbine. (p.4)

Columbine, though much more delicately portrayed than the original Commedia dell'Arte character, is nevertheless aware of the power of her charm. Pierrot's remark expresses fear that she might leave and foreshadows the ugly event when she does. The chain of events which leads up to Columbine's desertion of Pierrot and his death is initiated by Solomon Grundy's appearance on the scene and asking of questions: "How old are you, little girl, (and to Pierrot) How old are you. Do you go to any school?" Grundy continues to ask questions. Columbine, innocently wise, deduces that the man must be a poet: "Only poets ask questions that no one answers" (p.4). The author, an informed reader and critic, suggests in that statement that there are no answers, for truth is relative. This recurring theme in the play is reminiscent of Pirandellian thought as is the idea of the timelessness and unchanging qualities of art. Both ideas are reinforced by this dialogue.

Pierrot: I can never believe you are as old as you say you are.

Man: How old is that?

Pierrot: As old as Eve.

Man: But they told me you were children.

Columbine: So we are if you think we are. (p.6)

Mr. Grundy, inspired by Columbine's dancing, is caught up in the magic of the situation: "I never felt like this before. My lips are mastered by strange speech. Listen..."(p.8). He speaks a poem. The final

stanza, the best of the four, suggests the primordial ritual of birth and alludes to Christ's creating an Eden on earth through love:

By the thorns that trail and twine
 From the tangle of your birth,
 Eden still is kept on Earth.
 Love is still a thing divine
 Lover of fair Columbine. (p.8)

With this poem Pierrot becomes the symbol of the eternal lover, and a Christ figure. The final stanza also alludes to Pierrot as Adam, for he will be ousted from his Eden by another character in the play, Mrs. Grundy, who appears later and represents the Satan figure.

After recitation of the poem, materialistic society is reflected by Grundy's quick return to the mundane. He questions the usefulness of the pair. How can they be useful, it having been established that they cannot make any money? In the dialogue between Grundy and Pierrot, Green jibes at the materialism of conventional society. Through Pierrot, he questions what is important in human needs; he condemns a philistine society which does not appreciate the artistry of others:

Solomon Grundy: If they can't make money what use are they?

Pierrot: (very softly) What use are the dreams in the heart of an exile, or the visions in the soul of a mystic. (Silence - Solomon Grundy continues to watch Columbine dancing; Pierrot to watch Solomon Grundy.)

Pierrot: (as before) To what purpose are the caperings of buffoons, and who shall justify laughter?

Solomon Grundy: (as if awakening) What's that you're asking?

Pierrot: The things they forget to ask in your schools. The things men never seek to answer in their business. (pp.10, 11).

Green also refers to the uncertainties of the world, that is, what occurs in life may not necessarily be as seen; the jesting of the

buffoon, meant to invoke laughter, may in fact invoke tears. Man is not what he thinks he is. Grundy had said "I never knew I was a poet until I saw you dancing" (p.8).

The first half of the play explores the initial innocence of Pierrot and Columbine and establishes their personal world, an idyllic trust in their art; even Grundy is elevated to an ethereal state. With the entrance of Harlequin and Mrs. Grundy, who is appropriately dressed in black, and symbolizes the social oppression, the tone of the play changes. Mr. Grundy complains that his wife always follows him; that is, man cannot escape from social demands nor is he permitted to live by the dictates of his intrinsic self. Mrs. Grundy sees only the evil in Columbine's and Pierrot's relationship. She does not see them as children, as does her husband: "Look at that woman's legs. Mr. Solomon, don't look. Pull down your skirts, hussy. You ought to be ashamed of yourself" (p.11). When Mrs. Grundy at first cannot persuade Columbine to comply, the older woman's attitude changes from demanding to cajoling:

Mrs. Grundy: (craftily) Anyway short skirts are out of fashion.

Columbine: (stopping her dance) What, out of fashion!
It's true then. Oh Pierrot!

Mrs. Grundy: (sweetly) Didn't you know my dear? (p.14)

Pierrot's attempt to console Columbine does not atone for her despair in being "out of fashion". She reminds Pierrot of what he had been told by the poets and playwrights, that out of fashion or dead is the same thing. When Pierrot says they meant him and not his clothes, Columbine's answer is ironic: "(still sobbing) Bu-- but clo-- clothes

are the woman" (p.14).

Columbine, like Solomon Grundy, does not know what she is, for she has been deceiving herself. In the context of the play Columbine's self-deception projects a basic human psychological problem. Green establishes fashion as the facade behind which man lives, as a barrier to selfhood. Fashion may be interpreted to mean much more than clothes; in a broader view it can refer to one's style of living, one's entire approach to life. The author succinctly establishes his point further by this dialogue:

Columbine: (drying her eyes) Oh Mrs. Grundy, could you make me fashionable.

Mrs. Grundy: That depends on you my dear.

Columbine: (eagerly) How, what must I do?

Mrs. Grundy: Promise to observe conventions in the future.(p.15)

Upon pinning a black skirt on Columbine, Mrs. Grundy answers to Pierrot's cries of "Hideous hideous.": "It can't be hideous. It's the fashion (p.15). Columbine finally deserts Pierrot in favor of joining Mrs. Grundy to become an acceptable member of society. Pierrot declines Grundy's offer of clothes which will give him the stamp of approval. The author, to the very conclusion, shows how man is misunderstood, how actions are misinterpreted. Solomon Grundy, in the only way he knows, according to the dictates of society, wishes to help Pierrot: "I'll run around and get you a respectable coat and hat, and we'll go right after them (Pierrot gives a laugh)" (p.18). Pierrot's laughter is his prelude to his death, misunderstood by Grundy, as one may misinterpret the antics of a buffoon: "That's fine Mr. Pierrot,

I'll just be a minute" (p.18). Pierrot chooses to die rather than face even a minute without Columbine:

Oh, I behold the tally of my days -- a vast and weary emptiness where every full-spun moment lacks for Columbine. A minute -- a minute will be too long! Columbine! (p.18)

With the death of Pierrot comes the death of innocence, and in this perhaps lies the tragic quality the author attributes to his play when he dubbed it a "trivial tragedy".

This is a well constructed one-act play. Green has a talent for cohesiveness. He leads into subsequent events with foreshadowing and logic. Pierrot had said he would die if Columbine ever left him. Columbine mentions her concern that Harlequin may find them. The motif of fashion with its ambiguities is established at the outset by what the poets and people say, and when Columbine mentions the patches on Pierrot's clothes. Even the relationship between the Grundys is set to precede the dialogue which then culminates in its full meaning. The Death of Pierrot is not only a well-rounded play, it has the spark and vitality which Jacob had said so many of the one-acters lacked. This play is delicately shaped with twists and turns in dialogue and sprightly action. Columbine, played by a talented ballet dancer, dances frequently both as reinforcement of her dialogue and as an expression of her mood. The dance which bewitched Grundy would have been, one imagines, one of the highlights of the play.

Green says that he was inspired to write the play by his great admiration for the performance of the famous ballerina Pavlova. The incident Green recalls is reminiscent of the love affair of the writer and the ballerina in Hans Christian Anderson's tale, "The Little

Ballerina". Green wanted to write a play to bring the artistry of the ballet to an audience. In a letter the author writes, "Twice I had seen Anna Pavlova dance. I was young and bewitched by her and ballet dancing in general. Hence, when I found that there was at that time in Winnipeg, a very fine ballet dancer, Olive Powell (her husband was an army officer stationed at Tuxedo Barracks), I wrote this little play as a channel for the display of her art."²¹

Green's richly creative mind and ability as a writer are also demonstrated in Forerunners. Drawing on his knowledge of the people of the prairie and his empathy for human despair, Green creates a play about a mad woman who murders her husband. As is his manner, Green embellishes the play with Christian symbolism as well as a certain mysticism which reflects his own interest in metaphysics.* On December 15, 1923 Forerunners shared the bill of the Winnipeg Community Players with Fred Jacob's Autumn Blooming and Arthur Phelp's This Prairie.

Forerunners is set in the interior of a lonely homestead on the prairie, midwinter 1893. There are three characters, John, the homesteader, his wife Mary, and a Trooper of the Royal North-West Mounted Police. The loneliness is established immediately as the play opens on a set where we see John nodding in a rocking chair and his wife sitting opposite to him. Beside her, on the table, is some darning and a lamp. Close by is an empty cradle. No sound is heard for twenty seconds except the ticking of a cheap clock. There is no movement but the unconscious motion of the woman's foot to the rocker of the cradle and the involuntary jerking of the man in his uncomfortable sleep. The setting

*Mr. Green was a member of the metaphysical society under the direction of Dr. Hamilton.

is typical of the barrenness of the homesteader's life. The stillness is not that of peacefulness, but of a devastating kind of boredom. This tone is carried through to the climax of the play and sharpened by the emotional hunger which emanates from the woman.

The opening dialogue reveals the anguish of the woman over the death of her four-year-old son Peter in spite of the attempts of her husband to console her. When it is revealed that the child died two years ago, the viewer becomes aware of Mary's mentally disturbed condition; her sorrow has become an obsession. The playwright builds on the first hints of conflict between the homesteader and his wife and deftly moves the play to the climax and revelation of a secret knowledge which she feels she possesses. She believes that her child is outside waiting to come back to her, but that he will only return if she is alone. This idea builds up in her mind and motivates her to murder her husband to make way for the child. As in most of Green's plays there is an ironic twist to the conclusion. In this play, after the deed is done the woman calls to Peter to come. There is a knock at the door and a trooper of the Royal North West Mounted Police stands there. Mary in her demented state thinks that the trooper is her son grown up.

The dead child, so alive in his mother's memory, becomes a living character which dominates the play. The clues which develop the plot, leaving to the motivation for the woman's murder of her husband, and her assumption that the mountie who later comes on the scene is her son, are carefully constructed within the framework of the dialogue.

For instance, when Mary has difficulty remembering how long

they have lived on the prairie, John replies with patronizing resignation. We know by the way he answers that she has asked the question many times before:

John: How old was little Peter when he died?

Mary: Four in December.

John: Four and two's six and that's three years ago - nine.

Mary: Nine years (pause) and the railway has never come, and the people have never come.

John: (laughing) and the bucks have never come.²²

With economy of language, Green reveals Mary's disappointments and loneliness magnified by the loss of her child. The following dialogue emphasizes the lack of human contact:

Mary: Day after day passes and we never see anyone, unless someone going to Poplar Branch or someone coming from Weed Lake, or now and then a Mountie. (A pause, then a different tone.) Do you remember, Peter always wanted to be a Mountie, poor wee chap, he never saw anyone else.

John: Don't think of that Mary, it will only upset you again.(p.2)

Mary's mental disturbance begins to take shape in a particularly voluble speech about sunsets. The poetic phrases, completely incongruous with the background of the woman and the nature of the setting, could, if improperly directed, evoke in the audience a reaction of laughter instead of compassion for the erratic woman; particularly since she speaks while John is munching raisin pie. When I asked the playwright about the use of language for Mary's speech which seemed out of context, he replied with a mischievous smile - "Well, she was looney."²³ Mary's speech seems to be the turning point in her rational behavior. She begins by expressing her fear of sunsets that "they make me feel so

lonely", to which John replies: "(laughing) How's that?" Mary's answer is attuned to her state of isolation:

Oh well, it's because I am city bred, I suppose, and in a city the buildings stand up against the sunset with their outlines softened and melting into it. They take its colours and perhaps a row of windows gives back a crimson glow. I don't know how to express it, but the buildings connect the sunset with oneself. They relate it to everything man-made. It becomes just lovely background as it were. (p.4)

Mary longs for the security she once knew of feeling something solid around her. The city buildings made her feel safe; the "crimson glow" of the sun which they reflected implies the benediction of a temple for Mary, in contrast to feelings of being "detached" by a "thing so vast," as she describes her view of her environment:

If you go beyond that clump of trees and stand facing West there's not a shack, not a tree in sight. As you watch, the greenness, or the whiteness, deepens at your feet, and the sky grows red and orange and aflame and space becomes visible, a thing so vast you can almost feel the little earth afloat in it -- detached apart from all the universe...and in your desolation you could weep. (p.4)

Green's work took him to many remote areas in the prairies, and, perhaps because his own environment was cosmopolitan, he empathized with the people he met who did not belong on the prairie, but were thrust into its barrenness by circumstances and consequently suffered the effects of alienation from their natural habitat. Green treats the sunset as an alienating factor, symbolizing the disappearance of the human being into the oblivion of the harsh Manitoba winter.

As Mary continues to gaze out the window at the setting sun, she becomes more eloquent, and her speech implies that she is, like Eve, "cast out of Eden" into the chaos of the world in which she now suffers. After having borne her child in travail, her sorrow and pain are

extended in the child's death. She sees the sunset as the "flaming sword" keeping her from "the tree of life" (p.4). The symbol of the Second Coming is associated with the return of Mary's son, an act which will open the doors of paradise to her. The references to the moon reinforce the idea of Mary's madness and provide the motivation for the murder: "I must have slept with the moonlight on my face last night and he came into my head on the moonbeams" (p.6). Mary searches in the moonlight for the ghost of Peter which she believes to be wandering about: "Oh Peter is your little ghost wandering out there alone?" (p.6).

As the play progresses Mary becomes more and more introverted. She cannot remember the familiar things of which John speaks, and appears to be oblivious of where she is. John asks her to play solitaire:

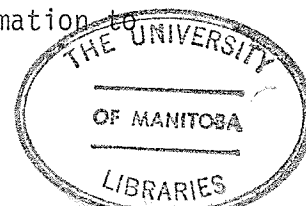
Mary: Solitaire! (laughs) I don't know how to play.

John: (looking puzzled) We've played nearly every night all winter. You played last night. (p.5).

Mary opens the door to see if she could see any lights, when there cannot be any lights to be seen. The howling of the prairie wolves and Mary's erratic behavior add to the feeling of terror which permeates this play. As Mary's mad state develops, the play builds proportionately in tension. Mary talks to herself; John, thinking that she is talking to him, strains to hear. This device of using soft and loud speeches provides added tension to the scene and builds to the climax. When John leaves the house "to see if the team is alright" Mary returns to the window and looks out. She is in the shadow of the moonlight when she calls to Peter: "Would you come to me Peter so that I could

see you, if I were alone?...if I had no one to distract my thoughts from you." She imagines that he answers "Yes there must be no one between us" (p.8). Mary builds up her antagonism toward her husband: "He told me to forget you. To sleep and forget you. Did you hear him tonight" (p.8). To Mary, John is a non-believer. When she was searching for Peter's ghost he had said: "Mary you know there is no one out there" (p.8). To further the Christ symbolism in this play, Mary in effect becomes a crusader for Christ, to rid herself of the non-believer. After Mary follows her husband outside and kills him, she returns, calmly wipes the blood from the knife, lays it on the table, and waits for the "second coming". It materializes with the appearance of a Mountie who asks to be billeted for the night. Mary receives him with outstretched arms. She had recalled earlier in the play how Peter had said he wanted to be a Mountie when he grew up. Her exclamation when facing the Mountie is ironically appropriate, and the scene is a startling bit of theatre with its mystical allusions. She says: "But.....but I don't understand, Peter. How did you grow up?" (p.9).

An American Theatre Group in Manhattan, Brooklyn, the Garrett Players, produced the play and called it "a gripping little play... with the simplicity and ruggedness for which the one-act plays of Eugene O'Neil have become famous."²⁴ Forerunners is indeed reminiscent of the setting of O'Neil's Beyond the Horizon. Both plays suggest, thematically, the search for what is beyond one's reach, and never to be attained. In Green's play there is no hope for Mary, who is lost in the void of the chaos of her existence. In O'Neil's play, Ruth, the biblical stranger to the tribe, demonstrates her affirmation to



life as she tries to win over Andy. In both plays there is the symbolic truth that only through death can there be rebirth. Green's play takes an ugly and awesome twist in the appearance of the Mountie as the Christ symbol. The idea of sacrifice is present, but it is an inversion of the biblical myth. Christ was sacrificed for the people; in the play John is sacrificed for "Christ". The play has other inversions of biblical symbolism. Mary can be considered the mother of the Christ figure Peter, but she has more association with death than with the generating of life.

The Death of Pierrot and Forerunners both reflect lonely individuals on the periphery of society and their inability to integrate. In Pierrot the protagonist dies rather than submit to society's conventions. In Forerunners the protagonist kills rather than submit to the conventionality of her husband's placid acceptance of life. Both plays, written in post-World War One, reflect the destruction and despair of those years, the characters are representative of the times. Returning soldiers and the general population expected a better world to emerge from the sacrifice of so many lives. The surviving soldier returning to his urban home was as forgotten and remote as Pierrot, the character from long ago, demodé. The homesteader, attempting to eke out an existence on his country's gift of a homestead, becomes a nonentity in a world preoccupied with the attainment of economic power.

Some prairie farmers had their own way of beating the economy. Bootlegging was a thriving occupation, the illicit liquor being shipped to Winnipeg by trains. Green, as the railway's legal representative,

was obliged to make investigative trips to the country towns and homesteads. In his travels he found inspirational material for his plays, both from personal experiences and stories told to him. Forerunners was one play conceived of a true incident, and A Miracle Play of Manitoba was another.

Mr. Green told me that he had heard of an incident in which an old woman saved the life of her granddaughter by performing a certain ritual. The townspeople considered the incident to be miraculous because the child's condition was thought to be beyond medical help. Green chose to write A Miracle Play of Manitoba around the theme of recurring struggle between the old and the new, specifically the trust in spiritual faith versus the trust in scientific knowledge. To attain the miracle the old ways combine iconography with Christian faith.

In A Miracle Play of Manitoba, a grandmother puts her faith in the incantations to the spirit as a recourse to healing by science. She admonishes the younger generation who rely on scientific methods which, she claims, fail them. The playwright works with a complex idea which incorporates the mystery of shamanism, the strength of one's beliefs, and the will to succeed. This is a rich play in spite of a slight contrivance which somewhat weakens the plot structure. The plot concerns an unmarried mother, Mary, and her child who is very ill. Mary tries desperately to get a doctor, but the only one in the district cannot be contacted. Suddenly her former lover, Mike, who everyone thought had gone away to study law, appears, and reveals that he has become a doctor instead. This coincidence is somewhat jarring. Mary

of course expects him to treat and save her child, but Mike, after examining the baby, claims there is nothing he can do. He has not come prepared. Of course Mike's appearance as a doctor is essential to the development of the theme, that to have faith is more important than to have scientific knowledge. The character who is central to this theme is Mary's mother, and grandmother of the sick child, Mrs. Zakhorah, who is preparing a ritual to cure the baby. Green does succeed in using the character of Mike to the greatest advantage in reinforcing his theme. The audience will become aware of Mike's ambiguity of thought by his dialogue with Mary, and later by his acknowledgment of the power of the grandmother's faith.

In the course of the play the grandmother also becomes the central figure in which Christian belief and dependency on folklorist custom are combined. In this one-act play Green also manages skillfully to weave a sub-plot around the former relationship of Mary and Mike. But he leaves some questions unanswered; what was Mary doing during Mike's six-year absence and who is the father of her baby? The author may have had good reason for this omission. Mike's lack of knowledge about Mary's behavior makes him irritable and petulant. His behavior seems boorish and incongruent with his profession, leaving one at a loss as to whether to sympathize with or condemn him. When Mary calls him in to see the baby he says:

I'm afraid of what I might do to her. It's you I want, not her. Do you think I want to be constantly reminded that someone else has first claim.²⁵

Mike continues to project his bitterness with other brutal remarks while the grandmother prepares the items which she believes will

instrument the cure for the child. There is reinforcement for her preparations in Mike's remarks when he says: "I didn't come prepared for this. You know that. It's the drugs that cure, not me" (p.8).

In spite of the weakness in the plot, the playwright has woven an interesting pattern of Christian symbolism and folklore. That the sick child is the child of an unmarried mother whose name is Mary, and that there is a certain element of sacrifice involving the child, connote a Christian symbol which is reinforced by the grandmother's calling the child "the poor lamb". The grandmother intimates that the child has been in contact "with a bad woman", causing a demon to enter the child. Mary's guilt feelings prompt her to cry out: "I thought I was cleansed by all my prayers and tears" (p.2). Mary's mother admonishes her with these remarks:

It's not you, you little fool. Didn't the good father warn you against the sin of pride. If the sins of the Blessed Saint Mary Magdelene were forgiven who are you that yours should be remembered? (p.2).

The old woman condemns her for her pride, one of the seven deadly sins. In her mother's eyes Mary is evil, but the mother overtly blames "the stranger from Arborg": "She came in a motor car driving it herself, the envious heart she had. It was she who put the evil eye on the precious lamb" (p.6). The woman driving the car is synonymous with Satan; Lucifer is jealous of God's favorite son. These allusions to Christian symbolism, however, lack cohesiveness. They are fragmented by the iconography in the ritual which the grandmother performs, embodying the European folklore of transference of evil and exorcism of the demon. Although exorcism is also associated with Christianity,

it is the grandmother's method of the ritual which distinguishes it as folklore. It will become obvious later in the play that in spite of Mike's scientific training, he too has been imbued with the folklore of his ancestors. One is first aware of these feelings when Mike and Mary reminisce about their last evening together in the forest before he went away to study. They mention the "wild plum tree in bloom"; folklore treats a blooming tree as a pregnant woman.²⁶ The white petals had fallen on Mary's dark hair, a symbol foreshadowing her pregnancy. Mike even now personifies the tree, carrying out the ancient belief of the tree as a deity:

Mike: Let's go and see it tomorrow. I bet it knows. I bet it'll be glad to see us together again.

Mary: Why should the plum tree remember us?

Mike: Why does the tree remember to blossom? (p.4).

Later on in the play, Mike vaguely gives some information about an incident in his childhood, throwing further doubt on his apparent strictly scientific attitude:

Mike: I'll admit as far as faith goes, if faith could have cured anybody, my old granny would have cured me.

Mary: Did she not? Did you not get better?

Mike: (sharply) What made you say that? (he looks at Mary curiously) It wasn't that. (p.9)

This recount weakens Mike's position and strengthens that of the grandmother. The incident also provides part of the logic for Mike's reversal in attitude when the child is cured.

Green also uses folklorist symbology in addition to Christian symbols to unify the play's theme of life and death. When Mike and

Mary recall their last evening together, they remember "a grouse-beak singing on a dead poplar" (p.4). The poplar tree was used in Slavic countries for a "need fire",²⁷ a fire to drive away the sickness of cattle. "Colors fading" and "waning moon", mentioned as dark images, also allude to the aura of sickness and death. Conversely the "wild plum tree" evokes a potent image of life. As the play progresses, it moves back to the Christian notion of rebirth, when the grandmother cures the child. Congruent with Green's style is his amazing ability to make his one act plays multi-dimensional. In showing Mike's ambiguity in his attitude toward faith and science, the character is provided with an inner conflict, giving another dimension to the more obvious conflict between the young people and the grandmother. Similarly, Green first symbolizes Mary as Magdalene. Then moving through a metamorphosis, she becomes the bride of the "wild plum tree", revered as a deity in folklore before reverting to the Christian image of the Virgin Mary in the concluding scene. While Mary and Mike are arguing, attention is brought to what the grandmother is doing by Mary's bumping into a bowl of water and overturning it. The focus is then on the old woman's readying of the child. The ritual consists of putting the child in a cradle, placing him before an icon, then wetting her cheeks, hands, knees, and feet with the water from the bowl. After the sign of the cross is made with a knife on the water, the door handle is similarly wetted. The grandmother also puts nine coals on the water and repeats the sign of the cross

with the knife.* The exorcism builds to the final event of the cure and to a reaffirmation of faith in something or someone far greater than scientific education.

As Mike begins to leave, he glances back at Mary kneeling beside the cradle (the Mother and Child image) and sees a change in the child's countenance. He affirms her cure, and the play ends with the apparent extension of the miracle which was wrought upon the child to Mary and Mike. The play concludes on a sentimental note as Mary turns to Mike and compassionately calls his name. Mike responds similarly.

A Miracle of Manitoba on one level is a play about redemption, even the folly of pride, and the need to humble oneself before God as demonstrated by the grandmother. On a secondary level it confirms the faith of the immigrant in the folklore of his ancestors and its residue in the collective unconscious which emerges through Mike. On a third level it deals with the metamorphosis of the human being through Mary, as she attains a state of equanimity. On a pragmatic level, A Miracle of Manitoba is a play which at a time of economic depression in Manitoba brought perhaps a measure of peace to the audience, suggesting that indeed there could be a miracle in Manitoba.

The fourth play under discussion is an entirely different play for Green, written in context of the Canadian scene in the Thirties. Not only is it a three-act play, it has a light breezy style void of any of the symbolism noted in the plays dealt with above. Good Times

*The formula used for the ritual is authentic; the instructions were given to Mr. Green by a Ukrainian woman who got it from her mother.

Are Coming, produced at the Dominion Theatre in January 1934, has farcical elements with an almost eighteenth-century kind of ribaldry, tempered only by the setting and mores of the twentieth century. Although the play is straightforward in its movement from event to event, developing the comedy, Mr. Green deftly makes his comment about society in general and its lack of sympathy for the have-nots. In context of the times, he also comments on the younger generation of women and their emerging concern for their fellow human beings, a growth to maturity so to speak. A third point which the author establishes, is that while deviancy is commonplace, man can only recognize it in someone else. The plot centres around the Turpie family -- Mr. and Mrs. Turpie and their two daughters of marriageable age, Janet and Mary. Mr. Turpie has secret meetings with a bookie who sneaks in the house after the ladies have retired. Turpie's business is doing poorly, so he engages the bookie, Albert Smith, in hopes of winning a lot of money by betting on the horses. Turpie keeps a diary of these activities and of his daily business dealings, many of which are unethical. Things get complicated when two starving medical students, Pete and Bill, who have decided to turn professional burglars instead of professional doctors, choose the Turpie residence to burglarize. They find Mr. Turpie's diary and Mr. Turpie finds them. On threat of exposing him to his family, the "burglars", seeing a way out of their impoverished state, insist that Mr. Turpie present them to his family as business friends and house guests. Subsequent to the various comical situations, the two "burglars" fall in love with the two daughters. Their fortunes take a reversal, and all ends well.

The play opens with the introduction to the family, establishing relationships and characteristics which are quite typical of the upper-class in the Thirties. A similar tone occurs in other Canadian plays dealing with this level of society.* There is action and comedy right from the beginning of Act I, particularly when the bookie Smith is introduced. Albert Smith's squeaky boots provide slapstick as well as an opportunity for puns when Turpie becomes worried that the squeaky boots will awaken his family.

Turpie: Be quiet man. Where did you get those boots?

Smith: Them boots set me back four bucks.

Turpie: Well, sit down and keep them from squeaking about it.²⁸

More comedy is provided by the interruptions of Janet, one of the daughters, and Mrs. Turpie, while Turpie is trying to complete his negotiations with Smith. Janet wants money for gambling, ironically, her dad scolds her for this immoral activity; Mrs. Turpie wants money for clothes (her habit of excessive spending will later bring one to sympathize with her husband). She also notices the muddy boots which she immediately has the maid pick up and burn, a frivolous and typical gesture of the woman who has no idea of what economy means.

Another funny scene involves the two burglars. When they first enter, they check their procedure by the rules in a book entitled "Practical Burglary":

Pete: What have I done with "Practical Burglary"? (He feels in his pocket and pulls out a book.) Here it is! You know Bill, I spent seven years learning surgery and seven minutes

* Jacob's Man's World and Corbett's High Temperature.

learning burglary! Now let's see. "Practical Burglary." Chapter 1. "Selection of Subject Premises." Chapter 2. "Effecting Entrance." We've done all that. Chapter 3. "Precautions after Entry." (He reads in the book.) Oh! yes. The next thing is to disconnect the lights. (I, p.18).

The diction the men use is incongruent with their new "profession" of burglary, adding further humor to the situation. When they find

Turpie's diary Pete says:

My dear William, this is where the advantage to a burglar of a course in psychology becomes manifest. The normal business man is sufficiently uneducated to be unable to throw off his placatory instinct, and this often expresses itself in secret writings. (I, p.118)

The entries in the diary revealing Mr. Turpie's crooked business deals provide the logic for his fear of being exposed. Mr. Turpie must comply; he cannot call the police, for fear of ruining his own reputation. He also would not wish to disgrace himself before his family, for no doubt he surmises that they consider him a paradigm of respectability.

The author keeps the play moving by continually introducing comical incidents. The appearance of two policemen frightens the "burglars" until they discover that they are not policemen at all but friends of the sisters. Their uniforms are costumes which they have donned to escort the girls to a fancy dress ball. Act II allows for the development of the love interest between the sisters and the "burglars" with just enough contrariness on the part of Janet to create some conflict. The scene is written to be played broadly with tempestuous speeches and melodramatic action, both laced with humor:

Pete: Miss Janet, I have an announcement to make, which, if I mistake not, will give you a great surprise.

Janet: Indeed!

Pete: I have come to the conclusion that you would make an admirable wife.

Janet: (incredulous that a proposal could be made in such a form)
What!

Pete: (Pete spreads his handkerchief on the floor and goes on his knees before her) I am therefore prepared...enter into a contract of marriage with you...

Janet: I'd just as soon think of marrying a snail... (III, p.25)

Janet continues to reject Pete; later it becomes obvious that her rejection is not serious, and the love affair develops, albeit through a negative approach. During this period Janet reveals herself to be a girl more interested in getting a job than in frivolous pastimes; but her mother has not allowed her to do so.

The events of Act III bring the confessions and the unwinding of the tangled lives of the characters. Mr. Turpie is ready to confess to his family when, coincidentally, the Chief of Police arrives to enquire whether anyone has seen two suspicious characters in the neighborhood. Turpie, completely unsympathetic to his "guests", seizes the opportunity to have Pete and Bill arrested, but the Chief cannot believe that two such fine gentlemen could be burglars. Encouraged by Pete and Bill, the Chief, who is portrayed as a fool, thinks that Turpie must be slightly deranged, so they carry him off to bed. Eventually the young men do confess to the daughters what they have done and who they are. By this time, Mary is much in love with Bill, and Janet and Pete have a mutual affection of sorts. Mrs. Turpie receives the news of the young people's alliance by fainting and fanning herself in the stereotypical manner of her character.

Essential to the approaching denouement is Mr. Albert Smith. Typical of Green's adeptness at unifying his plays and rounding out his character's function, Smith is dragged in by the Chief who thinks he has caught the burglar. When Turpie is faced with his bookie, there is a quick exchange of dialogue with Turpie's trying to explain his betting habits to his wife. In another example of ribaldry and broad comic action, the Turpie cook appears to claim Albert Smith as her husband. She butts the Chief in the stomach and retrieves her spouse. When the Chief attempts to handcuff the cook for impeding an officer in the execution of his duty, she retorts, calling him by name, thus alluding to their familiarity:

Cook: Ho, and when I'm in jail who'll hand you out a good stiff snort through the pantry window on a cold night, Elmer Simpson. (III, p.15).

The cook, carrying on in the vein of broad comedy, then pounces on the embarrassed Chief and snaps the handcuffs on him.

The author seems to take every opportunity to satirize a way of life which at the time of the depression was out of context with the economics of the country. For instance, Mrs. Turpie, like many women of the affluent class, is completely incapable of cooking for her family. It was an understood cliché that a good cook was a very important asset. When the Turpie cook threatens to leave, the Turpies entreat and bribe her to remain.

Mr. Turpie: No one cooks tripe like you -- so tender, so delicious. (III, p.16)

Mr. Turpie also bribes the Chief to forget the charges against the cook. He offers him five dollars and includes a promise to remove the

handcuffs. This must be executed by retrieving a key on a string around the Chief's neck. This action results in a tickling session which invokes a lot of laughter. Green uses the laughter as a device to change the focus of the scene, allowing the Chief to make his exit, which he does with the retort: "Alie Baby and her forty thieves can break into this house for all I care" (III, p.17).

The theme of the play can be seen in the title, which Green cleverly injects into the dialogue. When Mary suggests champagne to celebrate, Peter says: "Champagne, Oh boy! I believe good times are coming!" (III, p.19). The author also foreshadows coming incidents, a technique which is integral to Green's style. Previously, during a conversation with the two boyfriends costumed as cops, one of them, named Jack, says to Pete: "The girls are mostly going in something simple -- nurses or cooks" (III, p.21), to which Pete replies: "Cops and cooks always go together." This ties in with what the cook later says to the Chief about the drinks she gives him through the window. Another time, Bill, in defence of himself, mentions several times that he comes from a good family with lineage. This will tie in with the important concluding event when Bill finds himself heir to a peerage. Green chastises deviant behavior, particularly gambling, and particularly by a man like Mr. Turpie. When Turpie gets a phone call to say that the horse on which he put all his money was poisoned, he realizes he is financially ruined. This is a form of poetic justice, for he himself had said to his daughter, Janet, that gambling was immoral.

The concluding event leaves this play on a high and happy note. A Mr. French, a private investigator, appears, looking for William

Montague Brown, who is of course Bill, who by this time has indicated his betrothal to Mary. Mr. French announces:

The gentleman you know as Mr. Montague-Brown is the third cousin of a nobleman who died three months ago. The Earl left no near relatives and since his demise we have been using every endeavour to locate the new Earl, whose Grandfather, a son of the fourth Earl, came to this continent in the eighteenth century. Only today did I trace him here. (III, p.20)

Bill becomes the Earl of Wessex and most unbecomingly asks:

Is there any gravy? Kale. Dough. You know. (He pulls out the lining of his empty pockets.) (III, p.21).

Mr. French: Quite, quite, my lord, I did not just apprehend lordship's meaning....One million in England, a residence in Park Lane, three baron mansions, two shooting boxes in Scotland, one house boat on the Thames, a vast holding or war loan and sundry petty cash in the larger banks. (III, p.21).

Bill: Cheer up, good times are coming.

The theme is again reinforced:

Bill: Pete, you can have your choice, the house boat or a baronial mansion, and Turpie you can have the other. Meantime you'll all come over to England and we'll have a whale of a party. (III, p.21)

Mary demurely states, "You won't want me now, Bill", and he replies: "Mr. French, meet the Countess" (III, p.21).

This is a good play, with enough of a farcical approach to warrant the improbable happening. The play never deviates from its main thrust of the ruse. It keeps the action moving around the "burglars" with enough logic and motivation to make the action acceptable and believable.

Green deals a little differently with these characters than he does in his plays of the Twenties. There is some change and growth in

the four young people and some slight move to awareness in the parents. Of course, a three-act play allows for more flexibility. Janet is understanding of her father's predicament, Mary shows signs of a growing maturity, and Peter and Bill realize the folly of their ways. The thrust and tone of this play is also different from the harshness of Green's prairie plays with their elements of death and human sacrifice, and the rather bitter tone of his The Death of Pierrot, with its repugnance to organized social life.

With all the slapstick and fun going on in this fast moving comedy, Good Times Are Coming, Green also makes a few pertinent comments on a certain lifestyle, nothing profound, but he brings these truisms into focus. Man is not what he may appear to be. The upright head of the household, the respected citizen, may indeed be a man of shady character. Virtually everyone, Green believes, is deviant in some way; hunger and poverty can drive anyone to commit a desperate act, as did the young doctors.

Green wrote in retrospect in 1977: "This was written during the great depression. There didn't seem any way out of it then. (We hadn't thought of another war!) I thought it wasn't a bad play and might amuse people a bit, but maybe I was wrong." The last remark is indicative of the playwright's modesty, for the play was well received and called a "first class comedy" by the reviewers. Besides the entertainment value of this play, it also provides an insight to the social temper of the times, when the rich tried desperately to keep up a standard of living in the face of failing businesses. There was a great burden put on the providers. Women who had had everything all their

lives refused to face up to having less. The author puts a character like Janet in the play to show that not all women were frivolous, as she says to Pete, "My dear man, women are not all fools" (I, p.9).

CHAPTER III

THE PLAYS OF MAURICE SHANNON CORBETT

The writing career of Maurice S. Corbett continued from his first play, produced at John Black Church in East Kildonan in 1919, to a trial run in 1965 in Illinois, of a revision of his play Lucky Dollars. It seems that Corbett's career as a playwright could continue today if his plays received the proper exposure.* His work not only has a nostalgic quality, it also has a universally humanistic appeal with topical relevance. Although Corbett's most prolific time for writing plays was in the Twenties and Thirties, his plays remain topical in that they deal with common human elements, the restlessness of youth (in The Rolling Stone), the world of dreams, such as winning a fortune (in Lucky Dollars), the hopes and desires of one's offspring (in Broken English), conflict between youth and age (in High Temperature) and man's desire for heroic status (in A Woman Called X). The three plays chosen for discussion here are The Rolling Stone (1931),** Lucky Dollars (1934), and Broken English (1937), all three acts in length.

Corbett's style is consistent in his frequent use of family

*Mr. Corbett also wrote radio plays, short stories, articles, and a novel. At present he contributes articles to the Victoria Herald.

**The dates placed in parentheses after the titles are the earliest ones known by this writer by records of productions or publication of the plays. One assumes that they were written somewhat earlier.

settings and in certain characteristics typifying the figures of mother, father and daughter. Even in plays which do not have those particular roles, family influences are referred to in the exposition. The Rolling Stone presents one of Corbett's typical patterns of the middle-class family. The mother, Mrs. Rimmington, is ambitious for material, social and financial success, aspirations which she projects on the marriage possibilities for her daughter, Grace with Fred Allister, a successful young businessman, considered "the catch of the town." Corbett usually places the daughters of marriageable age in the role of the ingenue, and Grace fulfills that role. She is, as well, an innately thoughtful and sensible person, but one who buckles under maternal influence.

The father in this play is an easygoing man in his late forties. He suffers under the goading of his wife, who reminds him frequently that it was her doings, and her money, which put him into the merchant business. He looks forward to Grace's marrying Fred, hoping that their two businesses, his and the Allister firm, will then merge instead of being competitive. The tone of the play, mild dissension, is already set when the rolling stone, Tommy Brown, comes on the scene. Because the Rimmingtons feel that Tommy, Grace's high-school sweetheart, will interfere with Grace and Ted, they do not welcome his return. The tone of dissension is compounded. Grace still loves Tommy, but says that she is too sensible to marry a drifter. The rolling stone, Tommy, is another of Corbett's humble characters whom he likes to raise from a lowly position to one of importance. Corbett never portrays the poor as dismal; he gives them spirit and courage.

Tommy on his return shows no visible means of support, yet he

bears himself with self-confidence and an irrepressible spirit. At first, when he realizes that Grace is committed to Fred, he does become dejected, aware that by his drifting he has lost his sweetheart. Later, when he detects a glimmer of hope, he gears himself to prove to everyone that he can stick to something if he wants to. He decides to take the job on the Weekly Call, a paper on the verge of collapse. Tommy's situation is everybody's favorite fairytale. The knight errant returns from the quest. His years of wandering, of searching, of waging battle, have been unfulfilled. Whatever he was searching for, or thought he found, never turned out to give him the satisfaction for which he longed. Disappointed in himself, the knight returns home; the "princess" declares her love, and gives him her colors to fly. This show of love, and trust in his ability, gives him new courage but first he must prove himself to her by killing the dragon. The dragon, for Tommy, is what Mrs. Rimmington represents, the feeling that everybody in the town thinks he is a worthless drifter. The manifestation of the dragon is the challenge of a job which he promises to tackle in order to change his image. He says: "Tomorrow I'm going to take one of these jobs I was offered in town and stick for you and win."²⁹ Tommy is Corbett's spokesman; Tommy is Corbett. A glance back at Corbett's life, his sojourn in Hollywood, his drifting from one job to another, his desire to be a journalist and, no doubt, admonishment from his family and friends for not getting a regular job, are all there in The Rolling Stone.

The other lowly character who Corbett will raise up is Lois, a former school chum of Grace's, Fred's and Tommy's. Her father went

bankrupt and eventually died, leaving Lois to fend for herself. She works as a domestic for the Rimmingtons while trying to put herself through business school. Mrs. Rimmington and Fred treat her as a servant. Lois resents Fred's attitude and his show of conceit for his achievements, so she treats him rudely and is consequently scolded by Mrs. Rimmington. There are several references in the play to Fred and Lois having had certain feelings of attraction to one another which may still be in force. In reference to Fred, Lois says: "When we were classmates in school together - well, you wouldn't think he'd forget that." Grace assures her that he hasn't. "Oh Lois! Fred doesn't really overlook you --, he has asked about you lots of times" (I, p.19). At another time Grace says to her mother: "You know -- come to think of it -- the poor kid had a kind of crush on Fred when she was in school" (I, p.23). The dramatic irony is obvious in this play; everyone but the characters can surmise what is going to happen. Corbett's set-up is neat and the patterns are sharply defined. He employs two men, two girls, one of each of whom will provide the conflict to break up the alliance of the other two. On the periphery are the supporters of the protagonists and the antagonists. The dialogue reveals just enough to involve the audience in Fred's ironic situation. But Corbett does not give it all away. What evolves, to everyone's surprise, is that Fred will change from the self-assured go-getter type who bulldozes his way into personal achievement, to become a more refined and compassionate person. He emulates Tommy because he knows that Grace's affection for him is waning in favor of Tommy. This change will place Grace in a dilemma. As Fred becomes more tolerant, he becomes more desirable.

Lois gives the first hint of what is happening: "(Embarrassed) Well -- well your manner is so nice now -- it is sort of like Tommy Brown's" (I, p.68).

Fred is not one of the rich boys who had everything given to him, but he exemplifies Corbett's view of the mundane. Yet Fred is the type of character who can draw sympathy from the audience for his tenacious approach to life, and his awareness of how he managed to succeed. He talks to Tommy about his working days in Detroit when he went down there to get a job:

I went through some rotten times down there, took dirt, had to kowtow to the big boys, laughed at the Bosses' jokes -- but I knew what I wanted! I wanted the old Jack! And maybe I didn't feel good when I came home tootin' my big Cadillac down Main Street, eh. Better than hopping off a freight, Tommy. Dad hasn't got a bad business, either... why I'm sitting pretty. (I, p.35)

One of the exciting qualities in Corbett's play is that intermittently there are references typical of the era in which the play was written. These signposts, never obtrusive, occur naturally in the dialogue. For instance, though the word is not mentioned, there is reference to the depression in the preceding speech about "hopping off a freight." Congruent with Corbett's deliberate avoidance of the dismal, he simply evokes the hard times through Lois' position. The pay for her domestic chores was probably room and board and pocket money, a common practice in the Thirties for girls who were more or less left alone in the world.

There are other signposts establishing social mores in the context of the times, as for example, what girls were like in those days. Grace says to her mother when they talk about her impending engagement

to Fred:

(Slowly): Yes, I guess he can give me a pretty nice home all right...and that's what every girl longs for, a home! ...of her own... (I, p.13).

At another time she declines an offer of a cigarette, saying that nice, old fashioned girls don't smoke. When she is invited to spend a weekend in the country with Fred, a chaperone is also invited. Other references to the times are made about the national pastime, the game of bridge, and the problems with the new technology; radios either had no interesting programs or didn't work. This element of nostalgia is one of the qualities which gives this play a greater dimension than some of the Toronto plays. Although one may enjoy the satire in Denison's Brothers in Arms, Corbett's play has a greater range of human experiences. The interpretation Corbett gives to human nature, the mimesis, at that particular point in history when the work was created, extends itself to idealistic notions of today. One always enjoys the success of an underdog or the downfall of a snob. There is universal appeal in the love and encouragement which Grace gives Tommy.

The second act of the play is the low point for Grace. Although Tommy has worked for a while, and he and Grace have been seeing each other secretly, rumors circulate that Tommy has left the paper and disappeared. These rumors are substantiated by a poem of his printed in The Weekly Call which Grace surmises as his way of saying goodbye. The first and last stanzas express a confirmation of Grace's fears:

"Girl of mine, listen!
- I need you today:
For spells of Spring magic
Tempt me away.

O for the love of you,
 Binding me home -
 When the mad Wanderlust
 Sends me a-roam". (II, pp.61,62)

The well-made play has its high moods and its low moods, and the tone of the play is very low when Grace says: "I guess I was crazy to think that I could hold anyone like him" (II, p.63).

Fred, who has not given up his determination to marry Grace, is still on the scene. His tactics to emulate Tommy in order to win Grace's favor have become more than just pretense. He had been getting a most positive reaction from Lois for his change in attitudes, and indications are that he enjoys the change in himself from a self-satisfied stuffed shirt to a more wholesome and empathetic person. His admission of Tommy's fine qualities reflects a self-awareness and growth in Fred: "Yes, I guess a fellow can learn a lot from Tommy Brown" (II, p.68). Corbett uses the device of a double foil for the characters Tommy and Fred -- each is a foil for the other; the elements of contrast between them reverse themselves in the conclusion of the play, when Fred takes on some of Tommy's behavior and Tommy absorbs some of Fred's attitudes toward getting ahead financially in business. Fred's awareness of Tommy's virtues and the way he tries to change to be more like Tommy, shows the young business man to be an innately understanding person. Like so many others, Fred felt the necessity to wear a mask which he thought suited his position. His awareness is obvious in this speech about Tommy:

Oh, they're always going to stop -- those fellows! Just like the drunkard is always going to stop drinking -- or the fat man stop eating -- the rolling stone is going to stop rolling ...But I like Tommy! The way he was fighting it got under my

skin somehow...He made me feel I wasn't so much. Wasn't it -- just -- that -- I held the cards? (II, p.72)

Act II brings Tommy to a very low point. He arrives back in town at the Rimmington residence excited about his news that he has been on a secret trip selling advertisements for The Weekly Call, and that business is booming. Indeed, he has the dragon by the tail! He is informed by Mrs. Rimmington that Grace is spending the weekend with Fred and that their engagement is imminent. Tommy's disappointment is compounded by his desire to tell Grace that he has actually found what he wanted. The quest has ended with fulfillment.

Tommy: (hurriedly explaining) When I'm on the road; a million miles from nowhere, chasing the sights - well it's wonderful all right, but for me only! Unless I pass on these wonders -- and in this I've found myself! I've found out what has made me drift all over creation -- I'm ONE OF THE WRITERS now...Don't you see, I was an unconscious newspaper man and I have found my work! (III, pp.92,93)

Tommy receives one blow after another from the Rimmingtons, but the most crushing occurs when Mr. Rimmington informs him that he holds the mortgage to The Weekly Call. He bought it as a favor to old Mr. Baxter, the former owner, when the mortgage company was going to foreclose. This means that Tommy has, in essence, been working for Rimmington. To top that, he finds out that Mrs. Rimmington has intercepted and destroyed a letter that he had sent to Grace telling her he was returning home that day. The rage Tommy feels for this act gives him more will and determination to win. His first act of remission is to have a date with Lois.

The denouement of the play is sharp and swift but weighty with the wrappings of all the items of which this play consists. Tommy has

to ensure his safety with the paper, so he pays the interest plus two hundred dollars on the principal. He has to vindicate himself for the town so he will use the paper to expose graft and bring notice to the town, particularly to get a railroad:

Tommy: You watch the wrongs in this town we are going to right... (III, p.113)

Tommy must explain his position to Grace, but he graciously chooses to do so without condemning Mrs. Rimmington. What he does do is admonish the parents for interfering in their daughter's life: "What I mean is you are foolish to fight things like this. You only do harm" (III, p.115). Other disclosures to tie the unsolved quotients together concern Lois, now graduated, who has a job on the paper; and since Tommy has taken her under his wing, she has also become a popular partner for dates. Fred realizes that Grace does not love him. Grace has been kept unaware of Tommy's activities until Fred brings the news that The Weekly Call is going to expose a scandal involving his uncle, a scandal which will reflect on the entire Allister family. Fred realizes that one of the men who suffered a financial loss as a result of his uncle's dealings was Lois' father. He promises to see that she gets some of the money back. Fred admits that he has appealed to the man in charge to quash the story and give the family a chance to "square things first". Magnanimously, Fred admits that it is Tommy who not only has been compassionate and sympathetic about the case, but is a born newspaper man" who has succeeded, by force of a powerful editorial, in getting the railroad to branch off through the town.

Tommy and Fred, both having learned something, form an alliance:

Fred: You and I will buck in and build up this place --
our old home town. (III, p.141)

The Rimmingtons accept Tommy. Tommy wins Grace. Fred, it is understood, will unite with Lois, and the Rimmingtons get a successful son-in-law. Mr. Rimmington has the last laugh, as the paper which he bought out of the goodness of his heart promises now to make money, done without Mrs. Rimmington's help.

Perhaps the concluding dialogue in the play is superfluous in that the idea of the joys of wanderlust are again expounded, and rationalized:

Tommy: That's what you learn from the wanderlust! You stumble over hot dusty roads...there burst into view the sunlit valley below... (III, p.145)

Perhaps everything ends too neatly, but that's Corbett; he draws on his "Pocketfull of Dreams" and makes a play which strikes a chord in the readers' or viewers' hearts. Corbett's plays, like Green's, are rich, though in a different way. Green's affinity toward symbolic allusions gives depth and meaning to his plays. In Corbett's work, the action and dialogue carry the play, and authentic references to the environment add richness. The Rolling Stone deals with many facts of twentieth-century society, not only in the context of the Thirties, but in a general sense reflecting the universality of certain humanistic characteristics.

The lack of money, and the hope of attaining it, were no doubt the preoccupations of many minds during the Thirties, particularly in the context of the country's depressed economic state. In Corbett's Lucky Dollars, there is a parallel to the current Canadian dream of

becoming instantly rich, a dream which one wistfully propagates by the purchase of one or more lottery tickets currently made popular by the Canadian government. "It's my turn" is the theme of that dream, repetitious television advertising making it all seem so plausible. The price of one, or five dollars, today, seems reasonable to buy such hope such dreams. During the Thirties, the purchasing power of two dollars was almost enough for a week's rent or a two-week laundry bill. To spend two dollars on an Irish Sweepstake ticket, the big lottery of the times, was a gamble. But many succumbed to that tantalizing idea of buying an inroad to instant riches. The protagonist in Lucky Dollars, Jimmy, is unemployed, and in debt for the rent he owes Mrs. Boley, proprietor of a rather elite boarding house. Jimmy takes his last two dollars to buy an Irish Sweepstake ticket, not because he expects to win, but because the girl who approaches him to buy has eyes like the girl he loves, another boarder of Mrs. Boley's, Eileen Whitney. The inclusion of this romantic gesture, so indicative of Corbett's style, establishes a characteristic of Jimmy's -- an impulsiveness and lack of practicality. He puts the ticket in his pocket and forgets about it until he is informed that he is a winner of forty thousand dollars. Jimmy's generous nature is revealed, when he promptly insists that the girl who sold him the ticket take five per cent for herself. Although he is a generous person, Jimmy has a bitter attitude to people's general reaction to money. In this speech Jimmy reflects his bitterness, which may have been representative of Canadians in his circumstances, at a time when so many were unemployed:

Jimmy: (bitterly) Over here the aristocracy is the dollar sign.

Everybody worships wealth. They give me a pain...kow-towing to the man that's got it, and deserting him like a shot when he loses it. If I had dough I'd keep it quiet; and then I'd find out who my friends were, who I could trust and who likes me for myself, after all.³⁰

Jimmy's feeling is aggravated because Eileen quite willingly is being squired about by the rich Mr. Van Norman. Jimmy thinks that Eileen, and all other women, are only interested in men who have money. "Love is a twin and the other twin is money", he quips.

Another boarder in the house, Mr. Hardy, a retired businessman, has taken a fatherly interest in Jimmy. Hardy overhears the news about Jimmy's good fortune, and offers a wager of ten thousand dollars that Jimmy cannot keep his winnings a secret for a year. That Hardy can afford such a wager surprises Jimmy, but Hardy explains that he has property holdings and investments. To win a bet from a rich man gives Jimmy the incentive.

The wager provides the complication, compounding the conflict established by the rivalry for Eileen between Van Norman and Jimmy. By the various problems which arise from the wager, such as Jimmy's wanting desperately to spend some of that money, the tension in the play is developed. Jimmy cannot buy anything expensive for fear of being found out. In forcing his character to project a facade of continuing poverty Corbett keeps Jimmy from moving out of his class, regardless of his wealth. In this there is a similarity to the philosophy, being that one is bonded to the class in which one is born. As the play progresses, this philosophy will become more apparent. Jimmy gives a lot of his money away, and in the conclusion he will indicate that he does not expect the rest of it to last very long. One of Eileen's speeches to

Jimmy foreshadows this idea:

Eileen: (looks at him and shakes her head) You'll never have it, Jimmy. If you DID have it you'd throw it away. Unless something disciplined you. Seems to me there are two kinds of people in this world: the Winners and the Losers. The Losers are not always failures who can't make money: they make it and throw it away. The Winners make it and it sticks to them. Van is like that. He'll always be a winner. (II, p.52)

Mrs. Hardy also thinks that Jimmy should not expect to move out of his class. Jimmy had complained about not being able to go out with Eileen. Mr. Hardy encourages him to stay within bounds by going out with Milly, a poor girl who clerks in a candy counter, and another boarder at Boley's. Mr. Hardy says:

Yep, there's your chance Jim. Trouble is you got too high ideas. You want to reach for the moon. (I, p.16)

Jimmy will begin to feel that he is indeed bonded to his class as the author forces him to an even more lowly position. Jimmy's personal appearance becomes shabbier, as he has inadvertently burned a hole in his trousers and must wear them patched. Also Mrs. Boley makes him take a back room on the third floor, because he cannot pay the rent on his main floor room. Besides, she wishes to rent the room to Mr. Van Norman for a higher rent. Van Norman has to move out of his house for a while and has indicated he would find it convenient to stay at Mrs. Boley's, in order to be near to Eileen. The insult is compounded when Van Norman teases Jimmy about his demotion:

Van: (patronizingly, pulling back for him to pass and "taking him in" -- clothes, general appearance, etc.) Well, how's the Third Floor Back. (II, p.46)

The wager between Jimmy and Hardy is also a device for a process of maturation which Jimmy must go through. He must learn more about

women and their attitude to money, and this he will do through Milly. Milly initiates a relationship with Jimmy; unable to afford anything else they take walks in the park. She likes him very much even though she is quite aware that he is in love with Eileen. Jimmy learns through Milly that girls can be loyal to men who are poor. She says:

I for one don't expect you to be dressed up when you are out with me. In fact it makes me all the more loyal, when you're down and out, (II, p.58)

Milly and Mr. Hardy are Jimmy's teachers. Hardy is the symbol of the self-discipline that Jimmy must learn. The older man's presence reminds Jimmy of their bet, and prevents him from weakening, regardless of the hardships he must endure. Jimmy has another friend, Syd, a crippled newsboy, who, in a minor way, is also his teacher. Syd is an example to Jim of someone more unfortunate than he who does not gripe bitterly about the effects of wealth, but strives to earn a living the best way he can. The theme of maturation goes beyond Jimmy to affect the other characters. Eileen must learn about values, standards, and her own feelings toward the different social classes. This will occur when she must make a decision to postpone her engagement to Van Norman while she tries to help Jim out of what she believes to be the accusation of a felony. Milly will learn from old Mrs. Peake, another boarder at Boley's, about men and love.

Mrs. Peake: (wisely) Ah love always expects perfection, young love, that is. (Crocheting) Old love is wise and puts on glasses. (II, p.41)

Mrs. Peake thinks Milly is wasting her time on Jimmy and wants her to get interested in Syd, even though he is handicapped. She suspects Jimmy of lack of ambition. Since there is no indication in the play

that Jimmy is looking for a job, the old lady's assessment of him appears valid.

Jimmy does nothing but wait for chances to spend his money. He performs acts of magnanimity toward his fellow man which endear him as a character, regardless of his faults. He sends Syd an anonymous gift of money to buy suit samples, something that must be done in order to gain employment as a clothing salesman. Syd becomes very successful at this venture through his hard work. Later Jim arranges for a doctor to operate on Syd, a procedure which corrects his deformity. When Mrs. Boley reveals that she is about to lose her boarding house for mortgage payments, Jim secretly pays off the mortgage. He also sends Milly a gift of a dress, and buys needed medicine for Mrs. Peake, all anonymously.

By Jim's magnanimity, the author, besides dealing with themes of maturation, social-class distinction, and the wisdom of the elderly, turns the play to one of his favorite themes, similar to that in The Rolling Stone. Corbett likes to show that when a poor man attains good fortune, he becomes a ubiquitous benefactor. On the other hand Corbett does not portray Jimmy's generosity without the humanistic element of selfhood. Jimmy is shown as counting his money carefully* and looking wistfully at his own shabby clothing and environment. His strong desire for a good suit of clothes draws him to negotiate with Syd for an outfit. Syd, still believing that Jim is broke, offers him a suit free of charge, saying that it was an order upon which someone

*Jimmy has kept his money in his possession for he is afraid that his secret may be revealed if he banks it.

had reneged. Corbett reinforces the theme of the generosity of the poor.

Act III takes place six months later. Jimmy is still being put to the test by yet another personal demotion. Mrs. Boley asks him to move to a little room in the basement.

Mrs. Boley: (softly) Ah Jimmy. Ye wouldn't mind moving down to that little room I have in the basement...seein' I'm givin' yer rent so low an' it's an expensive neighborhood ye are... (III, p.77)

Jim takes this demotion more graciously than previously, for he is learning something, as he says to Hardy, who, knowing Jim's secret, has guessed that he is the big benefactor.

Jim: Yes, I'm behind it; and gosh! I'm glad. I've found out the biggest happiness is to "give" people things. (III, p.78).

He is also learning about the effects of achievement:

I'm sorry to take this bet off you, Mr. Hardy. - But that isn't the only reason I want to win. I want to feel that I have Will Power to Do something. It seems like a hard thing to do and I'm getting proud of myself. "Achievement," that's me! (III, p.81)

Eileen all this time has been keeping company with Van Norman. When faced with making a decision on their engagement she becomes introspective. Her dialogue with Van also shows vacillation, and her growing awareness of herself. Van unhappily notes an element of impracticality in Eileen.

Van: Why, girl, I've increased my business abilities a hundred fold since meeting you. You know I can guarantee you a fine home with comfort and security...there's always been an impractical side to you Eileen.

Eileen: (repeats dreamily) "Security," (smiles benignly at him) Yes I think I'd have "that" with you, Van. I'd be a show window to show off your prosperity. If I went with

you I know I would be solid and safe. (change of tone)
And yet sometimes I get a hope that something would
wake up in me, and I'd accept a challenge. Sometimes I
wonder if there is another side of me. Something with a
little bravery...and foolishness... (III, p.88)

Eileen vacillates because she is not sure of her feelings for Van or for Jimmy. She is jolted out of this indecisiveness by what happens in the concluding scene. A detective, Regan, who is investigating Jimmy's former employer about a theft of a large sum of money, links Jimmy with the case. The investigation has revealed the large sums of money spent on Syd's operation and the purchase of the mortgage. Eileen, who is present when Regan explains his position, believes herself responsible for Jim's having become involved in the felony, because she has spurned his love. She offers to help him by turning over her savings to pay the debt. During Regan's interrogation of Jimmy all his good deeds are revealed to the recipients who have been allowed by Jimmy's request to remain in the room during the investigation. Everyone wishes to help. Mrs. Boley wants to take the mortgage back to save Jim from going to jail.

It is Mr. Hardy, who started the chain of events leading up to the culminating incident, who now ends it. He wants to break the bet so as to be able to explain the circumstances of Jim's wealth to the detective. When Jim refuses, Hardy explains that he is not a rich man, that he is poor, and could not pay the wager anyway. He also explains his motivation for making the bet. As a youth he had inherited a lot of money and spent it recklessly. Consequently he must spend the rest of his days in poverty "an old codger in a rooming house -- alone" (III, p.100). Jim has learnt a lesson about discipline, but a different

one than that which Hardy had hoped for. Jim explains:

I've learnt a big lesson by all this. I've learnt it is a pretty tough job -- a mean trick to keep good things from those you love. They belong to you just as you do yourself - your friends, your intimate world; they rejoice with you in good fortune, and sink down with you in bad. I haven't enjoyed this money very much, only the odd good turns I did... (III, p.100)

Jimmy has also learned something about Eileen:

The only happy moment I really had was just now when Miss Whitney did what she did. That was fine. After all I haven't been quite fair to her...I thought she was just a fair weather sailor. (III, p.100)

Eileen who had left the room to get her cheque book so that she could turn over her savings to help Jim demonstrates that she too has learned something. The maturation of characters culminates in their consideration for each other:

Eileen: (softly) Jimmy...I who have had so many big ideas for myself -- but I've suddenly decided it's a woman's place to "share fortunes" with a man -- down or up -- to be a stormy weather friend as well as fair; so -- (looking at him) -- though you are down now, I'll be a sportswoman and certainly give you that "chance" -- as you call it. You can have me! It seems to make me a new person; as if I've been brave at last. (III, p.102).

Jim responds to Eileen's confession by telling her about the Sweepstake money. Eileen is shocked and disappointed, because, she says, "It spoils everything. Don't you see, everyone will think I married you for your money" (III, p.103). Jimmy's reply shows that Hardy's motivation for initiating the bet with Jim, that is, to teach him the discipline of not squandering his money, is futile: "Don't worry, it will soon go and anyway what do we care" (III, p.103).

The concluding dialogue between the couple and Regan is humorous, as Regan says: "Hey!!! You two better come to the Court House

for questioning."

Jimmy: Court House? (He and Eileen look at each other, an intuition growing)...Isn't that where -- (She nods eagerly in agreement)...where they get the er, licenses? -- You know where you sign your names and - and --

Eileen: That's it, Jimmy. Let's go! (III, p.104)

The limits of this paper do not allow further discussion of Corbett's handling of minor characters, his drawing everyone logically into the plot, and bringing all of them into a satisfactory position at the conclusion. Corbett had the talent for providing entertainment while creating a well made play topical for those times and all time. Lucky Dollars reflects a humanistic approach to the subject of money, when it is lacking, and when it is available, its virtue and its evil. There is dramatic irony, but enough suspense to keep an audience wondering what will happen next. Only the omniscient author knows that in its finality the play will show us that the good intentions of those who give lessons are never fulfilled as they are intended.*

The plays of Maurice Corbett all seem to contain something of the author's own life. The preceding plays show a progression toward self-realization, awareness of one's own point of view and an evaluation of attitudes particularly about money. It seems as though the author were working through certain conflicts of his own. In the third and final play chosen, Broken English, the author concentrates on class distinction between the foreign born and the indigenous British subject. The Merinos are an Italian family whose lives become enmeshed with an

*The analysis of this play is based on the original 1934 publication. the play was subsequently revised in 1953.

upper-class family of British background, Hamilton Ormby and his Aunt Belinda. The Merino father, Tony, runs a grocery store; his daughter Anita is a secretary, his son Tommy, a pilot and inventor, and the youngest, Augusta, a high school graduate who is going to be a teacher. Tony has encouraged his family to excel educationally, he has given them love and a sense of moral righteousness, but at the same time he is awed by their knowledge, intelligence and integration into Canadian society. He says, "They are not like me -- joosta a wop. They are real peoples...They are like da English kids..."³¹

The polarization of the foreigners and the Anglo-Saxons in Winnipeg was manifested by district. Anita, who works for Hamilton Ormby, a lawyer, and who has fallen in love with him, says, during an argument, "You must remember that I'm only a girl from the north end" (I, p.16). Anita wants Hamilton to allow himself to respond to her love. She knows that he hesitates because he is caught up in the net of class structure, and she is angry because he does not seem to have the will or inner strength to break out. She is right, as demonstrated by this dialogue between Ham and a friend who is of the same social class. Geoff, the friend, suggests the probability of Ham's falling in love with Anita. Though Geoff is more liberal-minded, he uses a common expression of the day applied to foreigners -- the word "hunky".

Geoff: And in the meantime little Hammy is in his office falling in love with his hunky stenographer.

Ham: Don't be a silly ass...I certainly am not going to form any attachment of the kind. It's not done... (I, p.4)

When Geoff meets Anita he is impressed by her beauty and charm and invites her to lunch. Ham's admission of jealousy about Geoff's

attentions to Anita establishes his mixed feelings for the girl. But he lets his Aunt Belinda arrange his social life, and obediently meets all the eligible girls from suitable families.

As the play progresses, Aunt Belinda will later meet Anita and her father, Tony, by far the most colorful character in the play. Belinda will have to come to terms with the alliance between her nephew and Anita, a girl whom the aunt, before her experience with Tony, would never have considered suitable. Tony as the motivating influence in the play first appears as a client of Ham's. Their meeting is filled with humor and contrasts. Tony has beat up his neighbor and wants to know his rights in the face of the neighbor's threat to sue. "Where do you stand" asks Ham. "I stand him on his head" quips Tony. Other expressions like "salts and battery" evoke laughter, and the entire interview shows that Tony is a spunky individual who will stand up for his rights. As the events of the play unfold, it will be Tony who penetrates the veneer of Aunt Belinda and Ham. Tony's wisdom will far overshadow his broken English and lack of sophistication. He will establish a plateau for himself and the Aunt, from which each can see the other's point of view more clearly. Belinda will come to realize that what Tony says is true, that it is the elders of society who inflict their prejudices upon the youth and engender segregation. The author, through Tony, shows his distaste for class distinction, and proceeds in his play to establish that all people are the same "under the skin". This idea is different than his thoughts in Lucky Dollars where there were references to one's bondage to one's class. Corbett shows in the concluding act of Broken English that the bonds can be severed

through understanding.

Geoff initiates the action by coming to visit Anita, knowing she has left her job with Ham because she could no longer endure the propinquity. Anita is too upset to be sociable, so her younger sister, eighteen-year-old Augusta, entertains Geoff. This is the set up for the future development of their own affair when Anita and Ham are finally reconciled. During Geoff's visit, Tony, who feels he and his foreign background are responsible for Anita's unhappiness, asks Geoff to teach him "how I can be a better man and have da class like resta da peoples" (I, p.15). The dialogue between the two is very humorous, potently satirical and one of the best scenes in the play. Geoff will use his own father as an example of what people think class is. Geoff sees the duplicity in his father's behavior, but Tony accepts it verbatim, interpreting it in his own way and finding many similarities to himself. For instance:

Tony: What kinda business your fader in?

Geoff: He is in the grain business.

Tony: What's a that? Sella da chicken fee. No difference...
How do da besta peoples spenda their time? (II, p.17)

Geoff's answer provides a satirical jibe.

Geoff: (puzzled) Well, I'm not sure who exactly are the best people in the country...do you mean college presidents ...or judges, say...Bishops...or millionaires...or --
(II, p.17).

Tony wants to know how Geoff's father occupies his time, and finds a similarity in Geoff's answer.

Geoff: All he thinks about is making money. He spends long hours in his office.

Tony: (gesturing store-ward) Well I spends long hours in my store. Try to make money too, (II, p.17)

As the dialogue continues, the gap begins to close, but there are differences, such as clothing, and particularly in the facade or "bluff" in his father's behavior, Geoff pointing out with disgust how his father "raises cain" with the servants, while behaving admirably when someone of "importance" is around. Geoff does not respect his father; yet devoid of ambition himself, he lives on the allowance his parent gives him. His parasitic feelings lead to self-disgust, a nuance which adds to the author's negative comment on the upper-class.

Tony is interested in knowing what Geoff's father would do if Ham's Aunt Belinda came to visit. Geoff explains in detail, acting out the procedure, using Augusta, who has been observing, in the role of the Aunt. Tony will have an opportunity to mimic this procedure when he is confronted by the Aunt in a later, very humorous scene. As Geoff continues to explain how his father would treat a guest like the Aunt, there is a play on words, the result of Tony's "broken English".

Tony: (surprised) A rubber on da bridge!

Geoff: No no, you know: The indoor National Pastime (pantomime bus of dealing).

Augusta: (rather peeved) Dad! You know bridge; we were playing it the other night, you and I and Tommy and Anita.

Tony: Oh sure. Bridges. Dat's da game where you make da "bid", like at da Used Car Sale.

Geoff: (laughs) That's it -- and when you trump your partner's ace, why they kick you in the running board. (II, p.18)

The dialogue continues to mention many of the "right" things which the upper class believes to be exclusive to its way of life. When Shakespeare is mentioned Tony says:

What's dis Spokeshave stuff?

Augusta: (rising) I took it in High school. You know, you tried to read it...Here's a book here.

Tony: Oh, yeah, thatsa that love poetry acting stuff. One fella say 'Speaka to me, Juliet'...

Geoff: Well the best people think they should know all this stuff. In secret they read detective stories, but a lot of them go down to the Little Theatre and dote on Shakespeare or Noel Coward or whatever's being done. (II, p.20)

Geoff includes golf and polo in his list of pastimes, and Tony answers with humorous misapprehensions. Finally they come to a consensus.

Geoff says, "The Colonel's lady and Rosie O'Grady are sisters under the skin"; and Tony puts it:

By golly, dese people just d'same anybody else...And they for silly classa extinction idea would thinka my family not so good as theirs. We liva nica cleana life... (II, p.19)

While Geoff is visiting the Merino family, Aunt Belinda and Ham are on their way to the Country Club to meet Millicent Townes, daughter of a big English publisher "jaunting through this country, going to vacation at Banff..." Belinda looks upon the girl as "a catch". Ham, on pretense of discussing a business problem with his secretary, asks his aunt to call back shortly while he confers with Anita at her home. Ham asks his secretary to "take back her decision to leave the job" (II, p.23) but she refuses. Their dialogue reflects Anita's growing strength as she realizes the compensation provided by a home "filled with love" and "as good as a palace". But Ham shows no indication of change; he cannot answer Anita's question, "What is the

matter with me", replying that the person to answer her question is Aunt Belinda. His comment reinforces Tony's idea about the elders keeping the young people enmeshed in prejudice. Ham's presence in the Merino home brings a tense and serious tone to the scene; the writer never allows the play to bog down with a lengthy serious discussion or with didacticisms. The play quickly returns to a lighter tone, in keeping with the fast moving pace of this comedy. When Aunt Belinda returns for Ham, and parks her large Packard Eight outside the Merino home, someone in the neighborhood lets the air out of the tires. There ensues expletives from Tony about the neighborhood. In the meantime the Aunt must await the repairs in the Merino home. Her impending entrance causes alarm and a flurry of action among the family members and Ham, who cries, "Good Heavens!...Aunt Belinda is here!". Tony shouts excitedly, "Sure. Bringa her in -- we hava da rub-down...Rub-down of Bridge!" (II, pp.25,26).

Corbett has a talent for introducing each event with logical motivation, thus providing a smooth transition to each scene. The variety of events and quick changes at the appropriate times to high and low points, make this a very fine comedy. When Belinda enters the Merino home, the preceding flurry of action comes to a dead stop and an aura of tension prevails as she looks everyone over and takes in the surroundings. Then the tension subsides and the tone of the play relaxes when Tony brings out a bottle of Amontillado. The Aunt, impressed by the quality of the wine, mellows considerably after several glasses, and the play begins to move to a smooth denouement and a happy conclusion. In the interim, Tony's attempts to put Geoff's

lesson to practical use keeps the humor effervescent. He deals with the subjects of Shakespeare, polo, bridge, and so on, in a gallant attempt to prove that his family has just as much "culture" as the Ormbys. Corbett satirizes ignorance and lack of understanding among the classes when Aunty, duly impressed, remarks, "My, I never would have thought I'd find such culture up here" (III, p.9). The Aunt is further impressed when Tommy, the brother, makes an appearance here to let the family know that his aeronautical invention was approved. Nevertheless, Aunt Belinda, now aware that Anita is in love with her nephew, lectures her about "little office girls who read too many books, who build too many castles in the air, who don't know their place." Anita responds defiantly with "I'm white, human, decent" (III, p.7). The irony in the remark about the castles will become obvious when the Aunt later invents an ancestor's castle.

Corbett smoothly arranges the exits of the four young people when Geoff and Ham get permission from Aunty to take Anita and Augusta for a drive in the Packard. The ensuing scene between Tony and Belinda is another one which is rich with humor and pathos. It also shows how perceptions differ among different groups. Aunt Belinda, recalling her holidays in Italy, finds Tony quite charming as she projects him into the aura of "Venetian moonlight, gondolas, soft music and gondoliers." Tony, who perceives his country differently, observes, "I say...well you have to watch yourself, some of those boys over there carry guns" (III, p.11). The conversation turns to brigands and Tony in a moment of uncontrollable exuberance confesses that his cousin was a brigand. Realizing that this might reflect negatively on his family,

he weaves a story about a princess whom his cousin captured and held for ransom, and whom Tony rescued. He embellishes the story with love and romance about his and the princess's falling in love. The princess, of course, became the mother of his children. Aunt Belinda is very impressed, having noticed, she says, Anita's regal bearing; then, not to be outdone, she tells Tony of her background:

My ancestors held the largest castle on the border of Scotland and England, the Castle Ormby...They were driven from it... during the days of the pretender...came over to seek refuge in this country. (III, p.13)

Tony and Belinda are carried away with the romance of their stories. Tony demonstrates the brigand's method of capturing the princess by lifting Belinda high off the floor. Her delight is interrupted by Tommy's entrance. When Belinda explains why his dad had her in his arms, Tommy, astounded, cries, "Mother a princess? Goodnight no! Why she and Dad met in town here" (III, p.16). This admission brings Tony to an embarrassing low point as Aunt Belinda, pursing her lips, caustically observes, "Hmm, I see it all. The usual low comedy one might expect" (III, p.16). As she continues to express her displeasure at Tony, and at the prospect of the union of Ham and Anita, the four young people enter, Ham and Anita have resolved their differences and declared their love. The Aunt attempts to dissuade her nephew by telling him about Tony's false representation of the family. Although the daughters are appalled at their father, Anita also defends him. Anita's speech is one of the areas where pathos follows humor making a very effective scene. Anita explains in her father's defence that by this story and "putting on other things too" he was only trying to help her. Tony appreciatively agrees, and his answer brings a quick

reversal. It will now be Belinda who is embarrassed while Tony regains his advantage. He says:

Yes, justa "pretending". (Smiles) Calla me da pretender lika dis fella who you say caused da Ormsby family to leave Scotland. (III, p.19)

Ham, like Tommy, sets the facts straight, reminding his Aunt that the Ormsbys didn't have any castle, only a flour-mill. Aunty is appropriately disconcerted:

Mr. Merino had started something by his princess story... I thought I should keep my end up by -- stretching a few points...I've seen pictures of the old Great Grandfather Ormsby Mill over there -- and it didn't look unlike a castle. (III, p.20)

Ham demonstrates his awareness of the kind of enclosure the people of his social class create for themselves by imagination and pretentiousness:

Auntie if we want to we can build our vanity up sky-high... trying to be superior to someone else...as if any one has the right to be. (III, p.20)

The concluding scene resolves the dissension between the families and brings a happy ending. Ham invites the Merino group to join him and his aunt at the Country Club. The girls accept but Tony declines; he watches the car fade away. When he is left alone he takes his wife's picture and says to it "Mama this is a great thing happen to us." The next and final line in the play is sentimentally delivered according to the directions for the actor: Tony wipes the picture with a red handkerchief softly. Sits beside it. Looks up, wipes a tear as he gazes at it with a kind fine look...and says, "But you were a da 'princess' justa da same" (III, p.20).

Modern critics may approach evaluation of this conclusion

negatively for its sentimentality - perhaps even for the implication of the directions to "milk the scene". One might respond that in context of the times the ending is appropriate, sweet sentiment being common fare in the novels and movies of the times. But the pathos with which the audience is faced is more than just a device to evoke an emotional response from the audience. When Tony calls his wife "a princess" he reinforces the theme of the play that people are basically the same "under the skin."

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The introduction to this thesis argued that the Winnipeg authors, Harry A.V. Green and Maurice Shannon Corbett, should be recognized for their contribution to the history of Canadian drama. It would be more accurate to state that these writers should be recognized for their significant contribution to the history of Canadian drama and that their plays are of a quality which merits further study and analysis. Both writers had a talent for providing fine entertainment with well-rounded plays which could evoke both an intellectual and emotional response from an audience. Each had his own way of engaging these qualities, equally effectively.

Green's stark prairie play the Forerunners, dealing with death, isolation, and murder evokes sympathy, compassion and understanding for the unfortunate murderess Mary. Her circumstances would be well-understood by those who knew the prairie, or by those who had ever lost a child or known loneliness. One could also look beyond the emotional aspects to the intellectual dimension of the play's enrichment by Christian symbolism. The Forerunners certainly compares favorably with Denison's Marsh Hay, which was praised by William Solly.³²

Green's excellent poetic play The Death of Pierrot stands apart as a delightful piece of theatre with interesting allusions and imagery.

It is creditable that the playwright was able to establish so many appropriate concepts within the limits of one act, bringing a full measure of theatre to the stage. In A Miracle Play of Manitoba the author does not deal with an ethnic segment of the country simply in an expository way, but delves to the heart of their European ancestry. From that core he draws on the essence of their beliefs and faith -- their inner fortitude. In this way he portrays their strength as a people. The play Low Life by Mazo de la Roche, also about the non-indigenous Canadian, is weak in comparison, lacking a similar depth of feeling.

Green's talent for diversity and relevance to the times shines in his comedy Good Times are Coming. This is a play with references to the Depression, but Green uses humor to make an intelligent statement about the attitudes to the unfortunate poor, about bribery and other deviant behavior of the "solid citizen". His plays, like Corbett's, are valuable reflections of the social history of Canada in context of the times. His various settings, rural, urban, upper-class homes, and the garret, are populated by equally diverse characters indicative of the many faces of Canadian society.

The comedies of Maurice Shannon Corbett are equally reflective of the Canadian scene. Corbett's urban settings reveal a good deal of the life style in Winnipeg and other such cities, its social relationships, mores, and moral values. His plays bring as well an insight to the economics of the times and its effect on the people. From this point, however, it is unfortunate that many of Corbett's earliest plays have been lost. The author often used a common pattern of characters,

young men and girls, and parent figures, who would provide a framework for the romantic comedy, his forte. He created plots about ordinary people, but his talent gave it all a fresh and unique approach. The boy-meets-girl-loses-girl-gets-girl theme which was the popular fare of the movies, and which Corbett also used, was never handled mundanely in his plays. The author's talent for humorous dialogue and hilarious situations, combined with the uniqueness of his plots, should have given him more importance as a Canadian playwright. His comedies are in three acts, comprising many of the ingredients of the well-made play. He makes good use of dramatic irony, conflict, minor climaxes and a denouement which unravels everything in a logical way, usually with some element of surprise. Both Corbett and Green sparked their plays with the vitality of their creative imaginations and their practical sense of theatre.

I question the apparent neglect among Canadian anthologists, critics, and scholars, of these early Winnipeg writers. It is difficult to believe that Green and Corbett were, and are, completely unknown. Green's The Death of Pierrot was included in the Hart House book of Canadian plays, Green having won an honorable mention in a Canadian authors' playwriting competition. Both he and Corbett had their plays produced elsewhere, as well as in Winnipeg, and had many write-ups and reviews in the papers. They were also known to other writers and actors who had worked with them and who had moved to Toronto to further their careers in theatre arts.* Some reasons for

* N.B. Zimmerman, Ted Allen, Robert Ayre, Neil Le Roy, Nancy Pyper, and others.

their neglect do occur, one in particular. Canadian scholars have concentrated their research of English Canadian dramatists mainly in the Ontario area, understandably, for in the Twenties and Thirties Toronto, then as now, was the major Canadian centre for theatrical activity. The playwrights of that time received more notice in their day because of the theatrical activity in Toronto, and their names have been kept in the fore.

My purpose in this paper has been to determine, first, whether Winnipeg in the early days had any noteworthy playwrights, secondly, to determine the quality of these plays by thematic and dramatic analysis. Thirdly, I was interested in how these plays compared to those from the Toronto area, plays which consistently appear in anthologies and reviews.

The results of this research have shown that indeed noteworthy playwrights existed in Winnipeg, that their plays were meritorious as good theatre as well as being reflective of the temper of the country in context of the times. As such, their contributions to English Canadian drama should be recognized. Perhaps scholars will discover and take note of other early Winnipeg playwrights and their work, for certainly there are more. It is to be hoped also that other writers will wish to do further study on the plays of Green and Corbett.

NOTES

¹ Chad Evans, "Herman Voaden and the Symphonic Theatre", Canadian Theatre Review, 5, Winter 1975, p. 41.

² Ibid., pp. 40-41.

³ Merrill Denison, "Nationalism and Drama", Canadian Theatre Review, 8, Fall 1975, p. 75.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Sir Barry Jackson Theatre Bill, 1931-32.

⁸ William Solly, "Nothing Sacred", in William H. New, ed. Dramatists in Canada, Canadian Literature Series (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1972), p. 39.

⁹ Fred Jacob, "Stage", Canadian Forum, Vol. V, No. 53, February 1925, p. 188.

¹⁰ E. Dale, "The Drama in North Dakota and Elsewhere", Canadian Forum, Vol. III, No. 35, August 1923, p. 342.

¹¹ Jean Burton, "The Little Theatre in the Country", Canadian Forum, Vol. VII, No. 19, April 1927, p. 212.

¹² Fred Jacob, Canadian Forum, Vol. V, No. 54, March 1925, p. 284.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ An interview with Mr. Corbett, by this writer, at Victoria, British Columbia, November 23, 1977.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Merrill Denison, Brothers in Arms (Toronto: Samuel French Company of Canada Ltd., 1923), p. 1. Subsequent quotes from this play will be noted parenthetically by page number in the text.

¹⁸Fred Jacob, Man's World, One Third of a Bill, Five Short Canadian Plays (Toronto: The MacMillan Company of Canada Ltd., at St. Martin's House, 1925), p. 90. Subsequent quotes from this play will be noted parenthetically by page number in the text.

¹⁹H. Borsook, The Three Weddings of a Hunchback, Canadian Plays from Hart House Theatre, Vol. I, Vincent Massey, ed. (Toronto: The MacMillan Company of Canada Ltd., at St. Martin's House, 1927), p. 117. Subsequent quotes from this play will be noted parenthetically by page number in the text.

²⁰Harry A.V. Green, The Death of Pierrot (Winnipeg: The Community Players of Winnipeg, 1923), pp. 1, 2. Subsequent quotes from this play will be noted parenthetically by page number in the text.

²¹A letter from Mr. Green sent to this writer, August 1977.

²²Harry A.V. Green, Forerunners, typescript copy 1923, p. 2. Subsequent quotes from this play will be noted parenthetically by page number in the text.

²³An interview with Mr. Green by this writer in Vancouver, British Columbia, November 1977.

²⁴Garret Players Theatre Bill, Manhattan, Brooklyn, 1934.

²⁵Harry A.V. Green, A Miracle Play of Manitoba, typescript copy 1924, p. 6. Subsequent quotes from this play will be noted parenthetically by page number in the text.

²⁶J.G. Frazer, The Golden Bough, A Study in Magic and Religion (London: The MacMillan Press, 1971), p. 157.

²⁷Ibid., p. 835.

²⁸Harry A.V. Green, Good Times are Coming, Typescript copy, 1934, I, p. 11. Subsequent quotes from this play will be noted parenthetically by page number in the text.

²⁹Maurice Shannon Corbett, The Rolling Stone (Dayton, Ohio: Paine Publishing Company, 1931), II, p. 50. Subsequent quotes from this play will be noted parenthetically by page number in the text.

³⁰Maurice Shannon Corbett, Lucky Dollars (Rock Island, Illinois: Fredrick B. Ingram Productions Ltd., 1934), I, pp. 13, 14. Subsequent quotes from this play will be noted parenthetically by page number in text.

³¹Maurice Shannon Corbett, Broken English, Typescript copy, 1937, I, p. 13. Subsequent quotes from this play will be noted parenthetically by page number in the text.

³²Solly, "Nothing Sacred", p. 39.

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