

XIV

Eclecticism and the 'Producer': Reinhardt

THE last fifty years has witnessed the rise of a new kind of theatrical figure whose growing influence had a profound effect upon the whole conception of theatrical presentation. In the nineteenth century the 'actor-manager' had dominated the stage. He still survived into the following century, but it became increasingly plain that his reign was over. The new monarch was not necessarily the leading actor; indeed, he did not need to be an actor at all, although most producers have been actors at some period of their careers. He was essentially a man capable of seeing the 'production' as a whole, choosing his actors, or using a school of actors trained by himself, selecting the play, deciding on the artists to devise the décor and costumes, rehearsing the play himself, and presenting it to the public as a unity, a work of art bearing the impress of his own personality.

There have been many producers in the last fifty years, and some of them have been so anxious to impress their own personalities on their productions that very little of the author's original intention remained. But this is to misunderstand the great services which the producer can render to the theatre. Such a man should be an eclectic in the best sense of the word, and if he is so, his productions will not only bear his signature as it were, but will satisfy the public as the best possible production, at the time, of the great works of dramatic literature.

The supreme example of such a Grand Eclectic was Max Reinhardt, and his career may therefore be taken as typical of the tendencies we have been discussing. He was indeed particularly suited by both training and his own genius to sum up in himself the whole range of theatrical possibilities.

The modern theatre is an extremely complex thing. In part it is descended, as we have seen, from the Elizabethan stage, with its multiple setting, its verbal rhetoric, its comic interludes in the midst of sacred or serious passages. Into it has flowed all the impulse of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, the improvised theatre of the Italians; but its main strand is neither the medieval nor the Elizabethan, nor the popular Italian theatre, but the Baroque theatre, the theatre of the small Italian Courts, and from this it drew, until almost the end of the nineteenth century, its conception of staging, its theatrical machinery, its costumes and its whole attitude to life.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Vienna saw some of the most striking manifestations of the Baroque theatre, and in Austria as a whole the tradition of carrousels, mascarades and operas, all mounted with incredible magnificence and taken seriously as a manifestation of the national life, lasted until the first World War.

This element is essential to the understanding of Reinhardt. He was born at Baden, near Vienna, on September 9, 1873, and some of the most impressionable years of his early life were passed at Salzburg, a city which, with its cathedral, its churches, its citadel and its archiepiscopal palace, might well be a permanent setting for a Baroque opera. Hohen-Salzburg, Mirabell-Schloss, the rebuilt abbey church of St. Peter—all these intensify the impression of theatricality in the seventeenth-century sense; while a mile and a half to the south-west lies Schloss Leopoldskron, a palace which the young Reinhardt must often have regarded with admiration, and which he one day came to inhabit.

When Reinhardt was young, however, the Baroque tradition was languishing. Few but specialists admired its architecture, and only the ghost of its scenic impulse remained to animate the stage. Reinhardt was anxious to become an actor and joined the dramatic school of the Vienna Conservatorium. After a short time on the Viennese stage, he appeared in 1893 at the Stadt Theater, Salzburg, and it was while playing here that he was seen by Otto Brahm.

Now Brahm represented a quite different theatrical stream. He was the founder of the Freie Bühne, and after 1895 was in control of the Deutsches Theater in Berlin. This famous theatre, founded in 1883, was the citadel of the new literary movement, the platform of Ibsen, Hauptmann and the German Naturalists, and it was at this theatre that Reinhardt, as a young actor, was invited to appear. He made a success in Hauptmann's 'The Beaver Fur' and played 'old man' parts for some years. But there was one side of his nature that remained unsatisfied, that side which made him demand, later in life, that we should 'banish from the theatre not merely the traders and money-mongers, but also the over-zealous high priests who desire to rob the theatre of all its brilliancy and sensuousness, who would like nothing better than to turn it into a preacher's pulpit.'

Reinhardt began a cabaret in the Lessingstrasse, the success of which led him to found the famous 'Schall und Rauch' in the Künstlerhaus in the Bellevuestrasse. Both these enterprises were semi-private, but excited so much public interest that their creator was able to build an intimate theatre for himself on Unter den Linden. In the Kleines Theater he turned back for a moment to realistic methods, but in 1903 his association with Brahm came to an end. He had made the great discovery, the vital discovery of his career: that the two traditions, the Baroque tradition which he had learnt in Vienna, and the literary and intellectual tradition which was dominant in Berlin, were not incompatible, were indeed complementary, the South supplying the North with a garment,

and the North endowing the South with a voice. In 1903 he took over the Neues Theater as well as the Kleines, and two years later he moved to the Deutsches and inaugurated the long series of productions which made it the centre of theatrical activity in Berlin and one of the most influential theatres in the world.

He was fortunate in his moment. There was already a reaction in Europe against the drabness of the intellectual and realist stage. New movements were on foot in different countries. Stanislavsky was already pushing realism to the verge of symbolic pattern, and simplifying the ensemble of acting to a degree hitherto unknown. The Russian ballet, fertilized by its contact with the new Russian school of painting, was about to put forth new and vivid blooms. Appia had demonstrated the value of simple masses and the dramatic possibilities of lighting; Lautenschläger had invented the revolving stage. Edvard Munch had shown by his designs for 'Ghosts' that it was possible for the decorator to interpret the mood of a drama and to play a more important part in production than had hitherto been suspected. Gordon Craig, on the invitation of Count Kessler, had visited Germany in 1904 and had shown his designs for 'Hamlet.'

The vexed question of Reinhardt's debt to others will probably never be settled. It was his business to be receptive, and to blend all these influences into one single impulse. In his blood was the Baroque tradition; at his door was the Berlin public, avid of novelty and trained to regard the theatre as an intellectual necessity; to his hand lay all the new weapons forged during the early years of the century, and a group of young artists busy with the creation of a new decorative style. Reinhardt's genius lay in his power of synthesis, in his creation from all these disparate elements of that unity which is the essence of the work of art.

He saw in the theatre boundless possibilities. No longer confined to the box-stage of the realists with their doctrine of the missing 'fourth wall,' theatrical action, borrowing its means from the Baroque pageant, from the Elizabethan apron-stage, from the medieval mystery, from the theatre of the ancients and from the Nō plays of Japan, could spread over the footlights into the audience, out through the doors of the theatre and into the street, bringing the entire community into its orbit and deepening the whole rhythm of life. To do this all the arts should be called into service; the tyranny of the spoken word (but not its proper function) should be abolished and the ballet-master, the composer, and the scenic designer should contribute in due proportion to the grand result.

It was a tempting prospect, and the greatness of Reinhardt was shown in nothing more plainly than in his power of resisting temptation. He, the producer, was the new autocrat, and autocrats are proverbially liable to abuse their powers. In our own day we have seen Russian producers impose their style upon a play with such completeness that, in the end, as they themselves proudly claimed, 'no trace of the original plot remained.' From these absurdities Reinhardt was

saved by his modesty, his indifference to style as such, and his abnormally sensitive reaction to the *dominant flavour* of a masterpiece. In so far as his method may be summed up in a phrase, it was to discover this dominant flavour first of all and then to intensify it by every means at his disposal; and this method, while it laid him open to the charge of inconsistency and eclecticism, was undoubtedly responsible for his eternal freshness, the constant surprises which interested and stimulated his public, while the methods of some of his competitors hardened into a formula and wearied by unending repetition.

Reinhardt's doctrine of absolute loyalty to the intention of the dramatist did not mean any attempt at archæological reconstruction. 'Our standard,' he declared, 'must not be to act a play as it was acted in the days of its author. How to make a play live in our time, that is decisive for us.' Yet obviously an old play lives much more completely on the modern stage if it is somehow possible to suggest the whole aura of its period, to use what historical sense the audience may possess to reinforce its mood. 'Every masterpiece has its own style, in action as well as in decoration,' and it is the business of the producer to evoke this style, taking advantage of the emotional atmosphere created in men's minds by the very names of Shakespeare, Molière, Wilde, Courteline and Wedekind.

It was at the Kleines Theater, Berlin, in the autumn of 1902 that Reinhardt started his career as a serious producer. His repertoire included works by Strindberg, Wilde, Wedekind and Gorky, and it was his production of Gorky's 'Nachtasyl' ('The Lower Depths') which first awakened the Berlin public to his quality. The method of presentation was realistic, the common lodging-house in which the action takes place being shown in all its detail. At the Neues Theater, in the following spring, he produced Maeterlinck's 'Pelléas et Mélisande,' and for the next two years kept both theatres going together, enlarging his repertoire to include such writers of the French school as Henri Becque and Robert de Flers; the Russians, represented by Tolstoy's 'The Fruits of Enlightenment' and Chekov's 'A Bear'; the Scandinavians, including Ibsen and Björnson; the German classics 'Minna von Barnhelm' of Lessing and Schiller's 'Kabale und Liebe'; plays by the modern German authors Schnitzler, Hartleben, Hermann Bahr and Max Halbe; Euripides' 'Medea'; several plays by Shakespeare, and Shaw's 'Candida' and 'The Man of Destiny.' Amidst this amazing torrent of interesting productions, 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,' presented at the Neues Theater in 1905, stands out by its blend of realism and fantasy, a realism which substituted for the usual painted cut-cloths plastic trees and a carpet of tall grass, and a fantasy which breathed new life into old conventions—Puck, till then a ballet-girl, becoming a real creature of the woods, and Oberon and Titania spirits of another but credible world.

In the autumn of 1905 Reinhardt assumed control of the Deutsches Theater and so arrived at the very centre of Berlin's theatrical life. At the Deutsches and the Neues he continued his policy of offering to the public a cosmopolitan

repertoire, revivals of the classics mingled with plays by modern authors. Kleist's 'Käthchen von Heilbronn' was followed by 'The Merchant of Venice,' Maurice Donnay's 'Amants' by Wilde's 'A Florentine Tragedy' and Synge's 'The Well of the Saints,' two plays of Courteline's by Shaw's 'Cæsar and Cleopatra,' 'Tartuffe' by Offenbach's 'Orphée aux Enfers.' The feat was, of course, only made possible by the German system of a more or less permanent company reinforced by the school which Reinhardt was careful to establish at the Deutsches as soon as he assumed control. The list of his actors is as impressive as his list of plays. In 1905 he had already gathered round him a company which included Eysoldt, Durieux, Schildkraut, Heims and Moissi, and the absence of the star system enabled him to employ distinguished actors and actresses in small parts as well as large. From the first he took infinite pains with his ensembles, and in his management of crowds and minor characters rivalled the triumphs of Stanislavsky.

The talent of his decorators was no less remarkable. He believed in employing artists who were not primarily scenic artists as long as their style was capable of translation into terms of the stage. It was, perhaps, playing for safety to entrust the costumes for 'Minna von Barnhelm' to the veteran Menzel, but for his first 'Merchant of Venice' he brought in Emil Orlik and for 'Ædipus and the Sphinx' he employed Alfred Roller. Lovis Corinth and Karl Walser both worked for him during his first season at the Deutsches, and at the very end of the season, in his production of Offenbach's 'Orphée,' we see for the first time the hand of Ernst Stern, a brilliantly imaginative artist who was to become Reinhardt's favourite decorator.

For the next season he gave up the Neues Theater, but, feeling the need of a really intimate playhouse, opened the Kammerspiel and produced there, among other pieces, Wedekind's 'Frühlingserwachen' and Shaw's 'Man and Superman.' Shaw's European reputation may be said to date from this Berlin production, and to owe not a little to the vision and enterprise of Reinhardt.

Meanwhile Reinhardt's own reputation was expanding, and 1909 he was invited to Budapest, Breslau, Munich and Frankfurt to produce 'The Doctor's Dilemma,' three Shakespearean plays, Schiller's 'The Robbers' and Aristophanes' 'Lysistrata.' This tour spread Reinhardt's fame throughout Germany and beyond and henceforth hardly a year passed without a series of important productions away from his headquarters. 'Ædipus Rex' was produced first in Vienna in October, 1910, then in Budapest, and in the following month in Berlin, and was an important milestone in Reinhardt's development. For instead of staging it at the Deutsches Theater he chose to present it in the vast Zirkus Schumann.

The hall was capable of seating some five thousand spectators. There was no proscenium arch, and the scenery was of the simplest: the huge four-pillared façade of a primitive Greek palace, with a door in the centre of the back wall. A flight of steps divided in the middle by a kind of promontory forming a rostrum, descended to the floor of the circus, the acting-space of which was

flanked by two semicircular wings. The rest was a matter of lighting and the handling of crowds, which Reinhardt trained with a care unknown before except at the Moscow Art Theatre. He treated the crowd as an orchestra, giving each small group a different phrase to be spoken in a different tone, with the result that the crowd was both intensely real and dramatically significant. The whole production was purposely pre-Hellenic in feeling, savage and primitive like the old myth itself, and it not only made a great impression on the public, but revealed to Reinhardt infinite possibilities for the future.

The success of 'Œdipus Rex' determined a whole series of Reinhardt's later productions. He had seen the possibilities of the circus theatre, the power which it gave the producer of stepping outside the frame of the proscenium, and reuniting the stage of today with the theatre of the Greeks and with the great Baroque pageants. Reinhardt now turned his attention to the theatre of the Middle Ages in the hope that the new methods he had discovered would prove equally valuable in the revival of moralities and mystery plays. Hugo von Hofmannsthal adapted for him the old drama of 'Everyman,' and this was given in the Zirkus Schumann at the beginning of December, 1911. It was not the most suitable stage for the old morality—Reinhardt was later to offer a more striking production in an altogether more impressive setting—but it was a necessary part of his progress, for it led directly to the most famous of all his productions—'The Miracle.' As 'The Miracle' was a mime play there was no difficulty in transporting it to foreign countries, and Reinhardt found the most suitable building for its presentation, not in Germany, but in London, at Olympia in December 1911.

It is hardly necessary to do more than revive the memories of this famous theatrical event. Reinhardt had always been fascinated by the pageantry of the Catholic Church, and his study of the medieval drama had inspired him with the desire to produce a play in a real cathedral—if necessary built for the purpose—where there should be no gulf between actors and audience, but only such division as exists between the celebrants of a mystery and the faithful who play a silent but none the less real part in religious rites. There was to be no audience at Olympia, only a single communion. 'The Miracle' was to be performed in the midst of a believing multitude, and those who were present are almost unanimous in declaring that a miracle really happened. The whole course of the action was interpreted and reinforced by music, and the eye was led on from one impressive pageant to another, until the spectacle culminated in the return of the Madonna to her pedestal and the final triumph.

Of the religious value of 'The Miracle' opinion will probably always be divided; there could be no disputing its effectiveness as a piece of dramatic production. London flocked to see it, and the immense cost of staging the piece was quickly repaid. 'Œdipus Rex,' given at Covent Garden early in 1912, was not quite so successful, as the theatre was unsuitable, but productions of the

piece quickly followed at St. Petersburg, Moscow, Riga, Warsaw, Kieff, Odessa and Stockholm, and Reinhardt's reputation became European. 'Sumurûn,' a mime play like 'The Miracle,' extended his fame to America; it had already been given at the Coliseum, London, the only theatre in England which at that time possessed a revolving stage.

The use of this device is so closely bound up with Reinhardt's methods that it is necessary to say something of the manner in which it was handled. The simplest way to use the revolving stage is to divide it into two by a cloth and to employ an army of scene-shifters to set the scene behind while the previous scene is being played in front. For Reinhardt the revolving stage became a kind of Chinese puzzle, as many as four scenes being set upon it at once, the main architectural features of one forming the subsidiary architectural features of another. For 'Penthesilea' the setting consisted of two solid hills divided by a deep valley, and a change of scene was made by turning different parts of this geological formation towards the audience. For Shakespeare's Italian plays a regular miniature town was constructed, enabling the actor to walk direct from piazza to senate house, from terraced garden to palace interior. Ernst Stern was an acknowledged master of this kind of ingenuity, and the little drawings and plans at the end of his book on Reinhardt give a far clearer idea of his methods than could be gained from a whole volume of descriptions.

Reinhardt, however, while he made such good use of the revolving stage, did not become its victim, and was perfectly willing to abandon it, if he thought the spirit of a play demanded something different. 'George Dandin' was played before the permanent setting of a little Louis Quatorze pavilion set in a formal garden; and the revolving stage was naturally useless for 'Œdipus Rex' and 'The Miracle,' the essential quality of which was due to the abolition of the proscenium arch.

These great spectacles absorbed so much attention that it is sometimes forgotten that during their staging all over Europe the ordinary seasons at the Deutsches Theater and the Kammerspiel continued uninterrupted, with a constant expansion of repertoire and an unending search for new talent. The new authors, up to the 1914 season, included Sternheim, Thomas Mann, Knut Hamsun and Sacha Guitry, and the new plays 'The Blue Bird,' 'The Yellow Jacket' and 'Androcles and the Lion'; and in addition the plays of Shakespeare, Lessing, Ibsen and Strindberg continued to be revived in a series of productions every one of which was marked by some stroke of originality.

The European war cut Reinhardt off from the allied countries, but in 1915 he organized at Stockholm and Christiana a season which included two plays by Shakespeare as well as works by Goethe, Schiller, Lessing and Strindberg. A very similar repertoire was presented the following year in Holland and in 1917 in Switzerland, the Scandinavian countries and Bucharest. The end of hostilities enabled him to revive his more grandiose schemes, and in the newly built Grosses Schauspielhaus in Berlin he was able to present the 'Oresteia' of Æschylus,

Hasenclever's 'Antigone,' Shakespeare's 'Julius Cæsar,' and most important of all, Romain Rolland's 'Danton.' In the last named the whole theatre became the revolutionary assembly with actors in costume sitting among the audience, and with the tribune, from which Danton made his defence, pushed right out into the centre of the stalls.

The Grosses Schauspielhaus, however, did not prove entirely satisfactory, and Reinhardt was already dreaming of moving out of the theatre altogether into the open air. For this project he returned as if by a natural instinct to Salzburg, and in August, 1920, 'Everyman' was presented for the first time in the Domplatz against the Baroque façade of the cathedral. The Archbishop and the Chapter collaborated; there was a choir in the Cathedral, the organ played and the bells of all the churches in the city pealed out at the appropriate moment. Criers were stationed on the church towers, on the summit of the citadel and on a neighbouring hill; the Devil entered from among the spectators, the Angel from the Cathedral itself. The theatre had returned to the very doors of the Church.

In 1922 it was actually inside it, for the Archbishop allowed the Kollegiankirche to be used for the production of Calderon's 'Great World-Theatre' in a version by Hofmannsthal. Voices of angels were heard from the balconies, and the choir sang Gregorian chants. The audience was indistinguishable from a congregation, participating in a real religious rite.

Reinhardt planned for Salzburg a great festival playhouse which should attract visitors from all over the world, but this project, in the difficult times following the war, proved impossible to realize. The old riding-school in the inner city was used as a temporary substitute, and having made Schloss Leopoldskron his headquarters, Reinhardt staged there an intimate and completely satisfactory production of 'Le Malade Imaginaire.'

Once more in the heart of the Baroque tradition he turned naturally enough to Vienna, where the fall of the Habsburgs enabled the city authorities to make over to him the Redoutensaal, the old ballroom in the Hofburg, in which he erected a formalized, permanent stage harmonizing with the character of the room, and presented on it 'The Marriage of Figaro,' 'The Barber of Seville,' two plays by Goethe, one by Calderon and one by Rey. For the right kind of play the Redoutensaal offered the perfect setting, but its scope was obviously extremely limited. A more extended repertoire was possible in the Theater in der Josephstadt.

So many interests in Salzburg and Vienna naturally made it impossible for Reinhardt to devote much of his attention to the Deutsches Theater in Berlin, but he returned there in October, 1924, with a production of Bernard Shaw's 'St. Joan,' with Elizabeth Bergner in the title role. The rest of his work, during the 1924-5 season consisted for the most part of revivals, the exception being Pirandello's 'Six Characters in Search of an Author' at the Kammerspiel, a

theatre of a size particularly well suited to the intimate psychological method of the Italian dramatist. In the next season he added 'Der Kreidekreis' and 'Juarez and Maximilian,' as well as plays by Galsworthy and Maugham, but for the greater part of the next few years the Deutsches was given over to other producers, and the history of this theatre is no longer the history of Reinhardt.

However, in early 1929, after a tour to America with the Deutsches ensemble, he took over the personal direction in Berlin once more, his first production being a version of 'Die Fledermaus.' The piece was largely rewritten and the décor by Ludwig Kainer emphasized the epoch of the action by a brilliant series of stylized scenes: the cloak-room, the buffet, the garden, the ballroom in Prince Orlovsky's palace, the last of which, with its Viennese ball of 1850 danced on the revolving stage, proved one of the most successful of all Reinhardt's theatrical effects.

'Die Fledermaus' was closely followed by Shaw's 'The Apple Cart,' played in Germany under the title of 'Der Kaiser von Amerika'; and at the new Komödie Theater built by Reinhardt he produced plays by Knut Hamsun and Somerset Maugham.

During all this time Reinhardt seems scarcely ever to have repeated himself. A revival of a play meant nearly always an entirely different method of approach. One has only to compare the 1904 production of Shaw's 'Cæsar and Cleopatra,' decorated by Karl Walser, with that of 1924, decorated by Georg Gross. He produced 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' in the classical manner with Stern, and in the Baroque style with Strnad. Walser's 'Romeo and Juliet' of 1907 differs profoundly from Ernst Schütte's staging of the same piece in 1928.

It is interesting, in turning over the photographs of Reinhardt productions, to note the number of innovations for which he has been largely if not entirely responsible, never allowing any of these to dominate his future style or to become an obsession. Solid trees mounted on the revolving stage appear in Orlik's design for 'The Robbers' in 1908; the semi-permanent setting in the same year; simultaneous settings—two rooms and a street shown together—in 1907. The run-way was employed for 'Sumurûn' and never used again. 'Hamlet' was produced in modern costume in 1920 and started a large number of similar attempts all over the world. Reinhardt's importance, however, lies less in his actual innovations than his capacity for using all the possible means of theatrical presentation, each at its appropriate moment, in order to get the maximum effect from each piece, and to fuse the manifold ingredients of theatrical production into a single jewel. No one has quite taken his place.