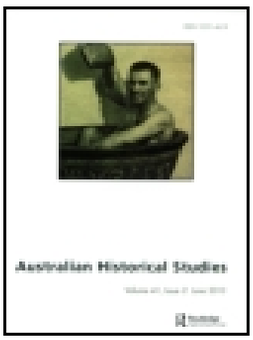

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THE PURITANS AND THE THEATRE[1]

Then to the well-trod stage anon
If Jonson's learned sock be on
Or sweetest Shakespeare . . . . .

Milton

I

NO period of English history has been more closely studied than that of the Puritan Revolution, and yet, when all is said and done, know we the land where the Puritans dwelt? Indeed, as knowledge increases, so does doubt, for much that we once held as certain has proved unsure. Once we thought of Puritanism as something we could divide into three sections, rather like a cake. The slices were of unequal size, but all were solid and distinct at the edges, here the Presbyterians, there the Sectaries, with the Independents in between. Now we must relinquish that comfortable image of the cake, or think of it as it was before it was baked, the ingredients fluid and confused, Presbyterians with Independent leanings, Independents who were not separatists, and sectaries so diverse that a common name hides rather than discovers them. No living historian would venture to dogmatize about the contribution of the Puritans to the achievement of religious and political liberty; we only know enough to say that Puritanism contained both authoritarian and liberal elements, and the most learned writer on this subject finds 'unresolved conflict'[2] between them.

Leaving aside such large questions, I think we can say with safety that as we are coming to know them better the Puritans are steadily growing less odd and more credible. We are coming to know them better by asking about them questions of reasonable dimensions, for the answers to which evidence is available. Dr. Percy Scholes asked one such question—Were the Puritans hostile to music? He discovered that they were not, and proved it with so much wit and learning that this particular charge is not likely to be made again in any serious book. In the course of his enquiry Dr. Scholes learnt many other things about the Puritans, which led him to believe that generalizations concerning them have too often been based on the eccentricities of individuals and minority groups, and to conclude that most Puritans were, 'in the affairs of everyday life, perfectly normal citizens.'[3]

1. I wish to acknowledge the help given me, particularly in calling my attention to relevant material, by two of my former students, undergraduates in the University of Melbourne, Messrs. C. M. Williams and N. D. McLachlan.
2. Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty*, intro., p. 83.
3. Percy Scholes, *The Puritans and Music*, p. 116.

The Puritans have often been charged with destroying the English drama. Its death—or eclipse—certainly happened in suspicious circumstances.[4] The Puritans are known to have threatened it, even to have taken hostile action against it, and it is natural and proper to suspect them. But however natural it is not proper to base judgment on suspicion alone. This paper raises the question —Did the Puritans destroy the drama? Much careful research has already been done on this subject; the purpose of this paper is to synthetize the already known.

II

No one can contest the truth of the statement that the English drama reached heights before the Puritan revolution which it never regained. Before we leap to the conclusion that the Puritans were to blame for this we should remember Dr. Scholes's demonstration that the age of Italian madrigals came to an end, just as did the age of English madrigals, but without any Italian Puritans to serve as scapegoats. Golden ages come to dust. Great periods of art have their own life-spans but we do not know the laws that govern their mysterious births and deaths. It seems probable that apart from the passing away of great exponents of any given art, we should seek the explanation of the ending of an artistic epoch either in the exhaustion of the form itself, or in changes in society to which it cannot adapt itself. I shall leave aside the question of the exhaustion of the form of the Elizabethan drama as the province of historians of the drama and turn to social changes unfavourable to its continuance.

At least from the fourteenth century we know the English to have been lovers of plays and playacting, and according to E. K. Chambers records going back to 1378 reveal 'a vigorous and widespread dramatic activity throughout the length and breadth of the land,' not only in great cities, but even in insignificant villages.[5] London was not, he says, one of the most dramatic of the English cities in the middle ages. Chambers dates the change in this state of affairs from the middle of the reign of Henry VIII, the year 1528. The decay in the provincial drama is contemporaneous with the rise of the new centralized form of government to which we attach the convenient label of 'Tudor despotism' and with the growth of London which is one of the most characteristic features of Tudor history. Just as the Tudor prince amassed his prerogatives

4. e.g. 'Puritanism was fatal to the two great arts in which the English people had delighted, vocal music and the drama.' H. J. C. Grierson, *Cross-Currents in English Literature in the 17th century*, p. 13.

5. E. K. Chambers, *Mediaeval Drama*, ii. 109.

by the destruction of feudal liberties, so was London launched on its career as the great wen by draining away the cultural life of the provincial cities. By the beginning of the reign of Queen Elizabeth the London theatre *was* the English theatre. It is in London alone that we need to seek for social conditions at one time favourable and at another hostile to the existence of the theatre.

In London public performances of plays were given in the yards adjoining inns and the combination of refreshment and entertainment proved popular and drew crowds. 1564 was a plague year, and it seemed to the city fathers likely that the infection might be spread by these crowds. Accordingly they issued an order that no public theatrical performance was to be held without special license. Next year the plague raged again. Schools and colleges were closed, ministers advised their congregations to stay at home, and the city government prohibited the public performance of plays.[6] Soon after this, it came to the notice of the authorities of the city that the inns where plays were given were becoming the haunts of prostitutes, and in consequence they decreed in 1569 that plays given in inn-yards might be acted only in the afternoons, between three and five o'clock, and during those hours access to private rooms in the adjoining inns was forbidden. In 1574 the Common Council of the City of London issued a licensing order[7] which required that plays, actors and places where plays were to be held should be approved by it before any theatrical performance was held. The preamble to this enactment is a justification of the licensing system on grounds of public order, health and decency. It is specifically stated that the city authorities are only concerned with public performances, and the licensing system is not to be extended to plays given in the private house of any nobleman, citizen or gentleman. No hostility to the drama is expressed in this piece of municipal legislation; it merely seeks to ensure the 'lawful, honest and comely use of plays.' This is to be brought about by the application of a system of controls of the type considered necessary to security by all members of the governing classes in Tudor times. Several of the arguments used against an uncontrolled stage in this document could fairly be described as 'bourgeois' but none as 'Puritan.' It was not necessary to be a Puritan to agree with the Common Council that theatrical performances incited the poor to expenditure they could not afford; Tudor moralists were eternally reproving the poor for extravagance. Only one item in the Common Council's preamble to its licensing order could con-

6. William Ringler, *The First Phase of the Elizabethan Attack on the Stage, 1558-1579* (*Huntington Library Quarterly*, July, 1942).
7. Text in W. C. Hazlitt, *The English Drama and Stage Under the Tudor and Stuart Princes, 1543-1664*, pp. 27-31.

ceivably be regarded as religious. This was the objection to the holding of theatrical performances on Sundays in the time of divine service. But every good Anglican and citizen must have agreed with the Common Council on this point, since it was not only a matter of religious duty but of civil obedience to attend the service of the state church.

William Ringler has put it beyond doubt that there is no evidence worth mentioning of hostility towards the theatre in England on the part of Puritans or anyone else before the year 1577. The simple and sufficient cause of its beginning then was the erection of the first commercial theatres built in London. This brought the 'question of the theatre' to the fore; before that, there had been no permanent theatre and therefore no question of it—as for the drama itself, that never was seriously in question. The problem of the theatre raised in 1577 was not a religious but a civic one, concerning public health and order. It was a question, at first, of bringing the theatres into a condition which the city fathers considered satisfactory, and later, when their efforts had failed, of closing them as disorderly.

Dover Wilson, in his *Life in Shakespeare's England*, has a section headed 'Puritan Opposition To The Theatre' which is introduced with the statement—

> From the erection of the theatres in 1576 to their suppression at the outbreak of the Civil War, the Puritan party waged an unceasing warfare against the stage. But for the protection of the court the Elizabethan drama would have come to an untimely end before Shakespeare reached London.

Shakespeare probably reached London in 1586. Before that date several sermons which made hostile references to the drama had been delivered at St. Paul's Cross. The clergymen who delivered them may have been vaguely Puritan in sympathy. It is quite certain that had they belonged to any 'Puritan party' the Privy Council would not have permitted them to preach at Paul's Cross. Before Shakespeare came to London two important books had appeared which attacked the public theatres openly. The first was John Northbrooke's *A Treatise Wherein Dicing, Dauncing, Vaine playes or Enterludes, with other idle pastimes, &c., commonly used on the Sabbath Day, are reproved by the Authoritie of the word of God and auntient writers.* The title describes the contents accurately. Northbrooke did not attack the drama as such, but objected to lewd plays and to the social disorders of the playhouses. He may have been a Puritan, but there is nothing in his *Treatise* but what many orthodox Anglican clergymen would readily have endorsed. Soon after Northbrooke's *Treatise* there appeared Stephen Gosson's *The Schoole of Abuse*, which denounced the social evils

associated with the new public theatres. Gosson was no Puritan; indeed, he was their implacable enemy, and Ringler has established that his abuse of the theatres was ordered and paid for by a group of London citizens.[8]

Even if it could be demonstrated that the preachers at St. Paul's Cross, Northbrooke and Gosson and Stubbes with his *Anatomie of Abuses* (1583) thrown in, were all convinced Puritans to a man, it would not prove that 'the Puritan party' nearly succeeded in closing the London theatre before Shakespeare came to town. Hard words from religious persons proscribed by law would have closed no theatres in Queen Elizabeth's England.

III

It was from the municipal government of the City of London that the real threat to the theatres came. There is no evidence that a majority of the city fathers was Puritan in Queen Elizabeth's day. It is true that they seem to have been predominantly of the Presbyterian or right-wing branch of Puritanism in the Civil War period, but this does not prove that they were so fifty or sixty years earlier. They were, above all, men of substance, among whom radical notions do not commonly thrive. When Shakespeare saw them, it was their air of grave responsibility which impressed him—

> The Mayor and all his brethren in best sort
> Like to the senators of the antique Rome.[9]

There is no reason to believe that the municipal campaign against the public theatres was Puritan in origin, although the city fathers were willing, on occasion, to make use of arguments with which the propaganda of some Puritans furnished them.[10] The concern of the men of property who formed the Common Council of London was with the peace, order and good government of their city. Dover Wilson writes of the capital as it was in Shakespeare's day—

> No doubt the tiny city of London, with its spires nestling about old St. Paul's with its green fields to the north, and with the clear unembanked Thames lined with the palaces of the Queen and her great nobles, would have seemed very beautiful to us.[11]

8. Unfortunately William Ringler's *Stephen Gosson: A Bibliographical and Critical Study* (Princeton, 1942) is not available here; I have taken this information from the article cited in footnote 6.

9. *Henry V*, Act V.

10. As in a letter from the Lord Mayor and Aldermen to the Privy Council, 28 July 1597, when among other reasons in support of their policy of suppression of public theatrical performances they stated that—'neither in policy nor religion they are to be suffered in a Christian Commonwealth, specially being of that frame and matter they usually are, containing nothing but profane fables, lascivious matters, cozening devices, and scurrilous behaviours, which are so set forth as that they move wholly to imitation and not to the avoiding of those faults and vices which they represent.' *Malone Society Collections*, Vol. 1, Part 1, pp.78-9.

11. John Dover Wilson, *The Essential Shakespeare* (ed. 1943), p. 32.

It seemed beautiful to those who lived in it, but with a troubled, wayward beauty. No one knew it better than Dekker, who apostrophized it thus—

> O London, thou art great in glory, and envied for thy greatness; thy towers, thy temples and thy Pinnacles stand upon thy head like borders of fine gold, thy waters like fringes of silver hang at the hems of thy garments. Thou art the goodliest of thy neighbours, but the proudest; the wealthiest but the most wanton. Thou hast all things in thee to make thee fairest, and all things in thee to make thee foulest; for thou art attir'd like a Bride, drawing all that look upon thee to be in love with thee, but *there is much harlot in thine eyes*.[12]

The Common Council of the City of London was responsible to the dread Privy Council for the peace, health and security of a dangerously overcrowded city. Stow wrote of the London he loved that it was—

> an ornament to the realm by the beautie thereof, and a terror to other countries by reason of the great wealth and frequencie.[13]

This 'frequencie' was also a terror to its own rulers. The highly centralized form of government which the Tudors had established had its seat in London, and government and court were still hardly distinguishable. The immense commercial and industrial development of England in the sixteenth century conspired with the Tudor despotism to enhance the importance of London. The Port of London throve mightily and after the sack of Antwerp in the war of Netherland independence London succeeded Antwerp as the busiest port in Europe. When a Parliament was held, it met in London, and there too were the Inns of Court, the training ground not only of common lawyers but of those who wished to be statesmen. The court, once itinerant, was now permanently seated in London, and was a magnet which drew the nobility and country gentry to town; Stow noted with disapproval that 'the Gentlemen of all shires do flie and flock to this Citty.' He believed that one consequence of this was the decay of retail trade in the provincial towns, and the migration of those who had depended on it for livelihood—

> Retaylers and Artificers, at the least of such thinges as pertayne to the backe or belly, do leave the Countrie townes, where there is no vent, and do flie to London, where they be sure to find ready and quicke market.[14]

London was the only place for wits and penmen to make their way, for printing and publication were subject to rigorous state control, and the government did not permit the use of printing presses outside the capital, except one for each of the Universities. Playwrights and actors flocked from the provinces to London, where they could be assured of audiences. Not only the hopeful but the hopeless took

12. Thomas Dekker, *The Seven Deadly Sinnes of London.*
13. John Stow, *A Survey of London* (Kingsford edition, 1908), ii. 203.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 212.

the road to London. Changing methods of production were driving peasants off the land, and they crowded into the capital, seeking work. In Elizabethan times London had become the haunt of masterless men, sinking, many of them, into roguery and vagabondage. Old soldiers from the Netherlands, and after the Armada the sailors who had saved England from invasion, wandered the streets and, when they could evade the magistrate's eye, begged their bread. The city fathers provided relief by a compulsory poor rate, but this only made London more attractive from the point of view of the unemployed.[15]

For a time the press of population found living space in the lands which had come on the market as a result of the dissolution of the monasteries,[16] but soon the monastic lands were filled up, and Stow lamented that London was losing its green spaces, and even the town ditch was full of houses. No longer could youth go a-maying in 'the sweete meadowes and greene woodes' and for lack of space for manly sports lads began to—

> creepe into bowling Allies, and ordinarie dicing houses, nearer home, where they have roome enough to hazard money at unlawfull games.[17]

But still more people came to live in London, and by 1600 three times as much grain was needed for the daily bread of the city as had sufficed in 1500.[18] The national government tried to thin the population of London by issuing proclamations ordering the gentry to get down to their shires and attend to their estates, and by pulling down houses erected in London against its orders, but the gentry would not go and the people evicted from the destroyed houses merely moved in with their relations.

In such conditions plague and riot might flare up at any moment, and it was with this practical consideration rather than with nice points of doctrine that the Common Council was concerned. Public theatres, from the point of view of the worried city fathers, formed a real menace; they were literally plague-spots and rallying-points for masterless men, rogues and vagabonds, thieves, prostitutes and political malcontents. E. K. Chambers believes that—

> as far as the external abuses of theatres go, the complaints of their bitterest enemies are fairly well supported by independent evidence.[19]

It was only an aggravation of the problems facing the Common Council that the first permanent theatres had evaded their jurisdiction by being built in Middlesex and across the river in Surrey. The play-haunters were still Londoners and streamed back across

15. E. M. Leonard, *The Early History of English Poor Relief*, p. 40.
16. E. Jeffreys Davis, 'The Transformation of London,' in *Tudor Studies*, ed. Seton-Watson.
17. John Stow, *op. cit.*, i. 19, 99-104.
18. Norman Scott Brien Gras, *The Evolution of the English Corn Market* (Harvard University Press, 1926), p. 76.
19. E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, i. 264.

London Bridge when the plays were done. Moreover, plays were still given in inn-yards within the city. Chambers has established that it is a mistake to think that players were expelled more or less permanently from the city in 1575 and that this expulsion led to the building of the *Theatre* and *Curtain* in 1576. 'It is certain,' he writes, 'that the players were not permanently excluded from the city.'[20] Since the Common Council, for lack of jurisdiction, was unable to regulate the Middlesex and Surrey theatres, and at the same time was forced to cope with the problems arising from them, it began, from about 1582, to press upon the Privy Council the policy of the total suppression of the theatres. The only answer that the city fathers received was the withdrawal of the last power over the theatres which they still possessed, a share of responsibility for the censorship of the contents of plays. From 1598 the Privy Council, through the Master of the Revels, an officer of the royal household, exercised sole control of the theatres.[21]

For the time being, the city had taken a beating at the hands of the crown. It had made enemies of the playwrights, who rubbed salt into the wound by their constant efforts to humble London pride. This was a dangerous game to play. Lewis B. Wright points out, after an exhaustive study of the source materials, that—

> no characteristic is more significant of the quality of the Elizabethan middle-class than the self-respecting pride of the citizenry in their own accomplishments and in the dignity of their position in the Commonwealth.[22]

Stow observed that in so 'frequent' a city as London there were naturally some idlers and bad citizens—'Such as be naughty packes,' but these, he said, were exceptional—

> seeing the multitude and most part there is of a competent wealth, and earnestly bent to honest labour. I confesse that London is a mighty arme and instrument to bring any great desire to effect, if it may be woon to a man's devotion.[23]

Shakespeare and Heywood and Dekker always showed respect to the city, but in Jacobean and Caroline times the dramatists not only failed to win it to their devotion, but mocked it more and more flagrantly.

Ben Jonson, unlike Shakespeare, was a gentleman born, and perhaps his social lapse into the occupation of bricklaying made him the more anxious to underline his own gentility by gibes at the citizenry both in *Every Man In His Humour* and *Every Man Out Of His Humour*. Beaumont's witty and not ill-humoured satire of city manners in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* did not amuse the London citizens and the play failed for lack of an audience. Massinger's 'comedy of manners' is really a comedy of class. His

20. *Malone Society Collections*, i. 2 (Notes to Dramatic Records in the Lansdowne MSS.).
21. E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, i. 300.
22. Lewis B. Wright, *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England*, p. 19.
23. John Stow, *op. cit.*, ii. 206.

City Madam is the saga of a merchant's family which had once lived, as in Massinger's opinion such people should, on—

> roots and livers
> And necks of beef on Sundays

but had since developed ideas above their station. The comedy consists of the steps by which the merchant's wife and daughters are brought down to earth again, and in case the moral is missed, heavy-handed Massinger writes it out clear; his purpose, he says, is to show 'the distance 'twixt the City and the Court.' He was one of those who helped to widen the distance. In his *New Way to Pay Old Debts* his villain is a city man who makes a fool of himself when he attempts to set up as a country gentleman, and his hero is Lord Lovel, who refuses to 'adulterate his blood' by marriage with the city man's rich and beautiful daughter. Jasper Mayne was a dramatist and an Oxford divine, celebrated for his 'seraphical' sermons which were much admired in the University in the reign of Charles I. In his *City Match* Mayne mocked the bourgeois and technical education which London citizens were providing for their sons, including the study of 'French, Italian, Spanish, and other tongues of traffic.' The thrift of the London middle-class also amused Mayne mightily. He pictured a merchant's son as wearing shirts made from sacks in which cochineal had been imported and his sister as provided with smocks made of currant-bags.

It is instructive to compare the manner in which Shakespeare addressed his audience in the reign of Elizabeth with the way in Jasper Mayne did the same thing in the reign of Charles I. The Chorus in *Henry V* appeals to the 'gentles all' to join with the playwright in a dramatic adventure. True it is, he says, that the 'wooden O' of the *Globe* theatre is not much like the field of Agincourt, but it will become so if the spectators will use the imaginations which it is assumed they have. Members of the audience are addressed as equals, even as superiors, and prayed, 'gently to hear, kindly to judge our play.' Jasper Mayne, on the contrary, had a short way with audiences. He told them that he was not a professional playwright, and his 'unbought muse' was indifferent to the fate of his play. Nor did he care a rap what the audience thought of it—

> Not that he fears his name can suffer wrack
> For them who sixpence pay and sixpence crack,
> To such he wrote not.

His play was acted, he said, simply because the king had commanded it—

and the same
Power that makes laws redeem'd this from the flame.[24]

The late Jacobean and the Caroline drama became steadily more courtly in tone, more openly scornful of the bourgeoisie who had been welcomed in Shakespeare's theatre. Not only were the manners of the citizenry mocked, but their sense of the proprieties was outraged. It is not only in their scorn of the middle and lower classes but in the content of their plays that the late Jacobean and Caroline dramatists resemble those of the Restoration. As George Pierce Baker puts it—

the men and women of Etheredge, Wycherley, and above all Vanbrugh, have the same ideals, or rather lack of them, the same absorption in mere pleasure, the same underlying brutality which were characteristic of the people in Shirley's and in Brome's comedies of manners.[25]

Massinger has justly been described as 'foul both in phrase and thought'[26] and Ford as 'an apologist for sin, an advocate for the sinner.'[27] Of Middleton's *A Mad World, my Masters* Professor Gayley writes that its verbal humour 'is normally pornographic, but it achieves the latrinal' and of his *A Tricke to Catch the Old-one* that it 'flowers with less obscenity than is usual with Middleton, but it is rotten at the root.'[28] No decent person would willingly sit through a performance of Middleton's *The Family of Love*. A writer of 1616 stated—

Player is now a name of contempt, for times corrupt men with vice, and vice is growne to a height of government: so that whereas before men were afraid to offend, they now thinke it a disgrace to be honest: whence the eie must be satisfied with vanitie, the eare with bawdery, the hand with obscenitie, the heart with lust, the feete with wandrings, and the whole body and soule with pollutions: in all which Players are the principall actors.[29]

Ben Jonson confirmed this criticism in the very same year by protesting in the preface to *Volpone* against—

the use of such foule and unwash'd baudry as is now made the foode of the scene.

Professor Gayley believes that respectable English people had ceased to go to the theatre in the latter part of the reign of James I. The audience had become—

a theatre-haunting mob which recognized its image in the gallant, morbid with megalomania, the drunkard, gambler, cozener, shopkeeping libertine and light o' love wife, strumpet, roarer, cuckold, wittol and gull . . . No wonder decent Jacobeans denounced the play-house, and modest women never frequented it.[30]

24. Jasper Mayne, *The City Match* (Dodsley's Old English Plays, ed. W. C. Hazlitt, xiii.).
25. George Pierce Baker, *Critical Essay on Brome in Representative English Comedies* ed. Charles Mills Gayley, iii. 428.
26. Brander Matthews, *Critical Essay on Massinger*, Ibid., iii. 318.
27. E. C. H. Oliphant, *Shakespeare and His Fellow Dramatists*, ii. 17.
28. Charles Mills Gayley, *A Comparative View of the Fellows and Followers of Shakespeare* in *Representative English Comedies*, pp. xiii-xxiii.
29. From *The Rich Cabinet etc.* by T. G. 1616, quoted W. C. Hazlitt, *The English Drama and Stage Under the Tudor and Stuart Princes, 1543-1664*.
30. Charles Mills Gayley, as in footnote 28, p. xxiv.

If this be true, it was not the Puritans but the dramatists who were responsible for the closing of the London theatres in 1642 when the crown could no longer protect them. Self-respecting citizens had long boycotted the theatre. The Citizen's Wife in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* said that she 'was ne'er at one of these plays, as they say, before,' but there is nothing in her conversation or manners to suggest that she was intended to be a Puritan matron. Lewis B. Wright tells us that—

> As the Puritan Revolution approached, there was a rush to take sides, and every man's partisanship developed bile: but during most of the preceding period, London citizens found moderate Calvinism best suited their inclinations.[31]

'Moderate Calvinism' and 'Puritanism' are not synonymous; moderate Calvinism, as set out in the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Lambeth Declaration of 1595, was the official dogma of the established church. The Jacobean and Caroline theatre offended both the pride and the sense of decency of the citizens of London. Queen Elizabeth's government was too strong for the city to dispute with, and in any event all the Tudor princes were careful to preserve good relations with the city. James I and Charles I were aristocrats and never appreciated as the bourgeois Tudors did the necessity for having a loyal as well as an obedient city. The city watched and waited, and in the reign of Charles I 'that mighty arme' was too strong for the government. In these few words not only much of the story of the overthrow of the theatre but of that of the Stuart despotism itself is told.

IV

So far I have been concerned to show that the really formidable opposition to the theatre was not Puritan but middle-class. This is not to deny the existence of an opposition which really was Puritan. A whole book, and a very interesting one, has been written about the Puritan attack on the theatre.[32] An authentic Puritan hostility to the theatre expressed in sermons and pamphlets can be discerned in the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and James I, and reaches its climax in the reign of Charles I, in, as has been said 'the phase of systematic recapitulation and vituperative crescendo.'[33] *A Short Treatise against Stage-Playes* appeared in 1625, Richard Rawledge's *A Monster Late Found Out and Discovered* followed soon after, and Prynne said the last word (in some six hundred pages) in *Histriomastix* in 1632.

31. Lewis B. Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 268.
32. Elbert N. S. Thompson, *The Controversy Between the Puritans and the Stage* (*Yale Studies in English, 1903.*)
33. Joe Lee Davis, *The Case for Comedy in Caroline Theatrical Apologetics* (*Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, Vol. LVIII, 1943).

I have not found it possible to discern any doctrinal basis for hostility to the theatre in the theology of the Puritans. A recent writer thinks differently and says—

> Fundamentally, the reason why the more extreme Puritan could not abide the theatre on any terms or accord even faint praise to any kind of drama is to be sought in the premises of Puritan theology, between which and those of orthodox Anglican doctrine the main difference lay in the nuances of emphasis distributed amongst the world of nature, the processes and expression of right reason, the miracle of grace, and the authority of the Bible as sources of religious knowledge.[34]

A nuance (or even a number of them) seems to offer too shaky a basis to support the long-sustained Puritan propaganda against the theatre. The 'premises of Puritan theology' were the same in the Reformed Churches of the continent as in England, but on the continent a demand for the suppression of the theatre did not follow from them. Plays were not forbidden in Calvin's Geneva, and his successor, Theodore Bēza, himself composed a tragedy. There was indeed, as Knappen pointed out,[35] one original element in English Puritanism; the stress on strict Sabbath-keeping was not imported but of native growth, and as a 'bit of English originality' strongly insisted upon. The earliest Puritan attacks on the theatre were directed against the profanation of the Lord's Day, and E. N. S. Thompson believed that this was the chief cause of Puritan hostility to the theatre.[36] Important as the influence of Sabbatarianism must have been in fostering hostility to the theatre it will not, however, account for the adoption by the Puritans of a policy of total suppression.

It appears to be necessary to distinguish between the few Puritans who, on grounds of principle, were hostile to the theatre and even the drama as such, and the many Puritans who came in time to support or at least to acquiesce in the suppression of the theatres. As for the few, they might more properly be called 'ascetics' than Puritans. There have always been, and I suppose there always will be, some individuals who are less 'worldly' than others. There is nothing specifically Puritan or even specifically Christian in such an attitude. Its roots lie in a belief that matter itself is evil and this belief has been widely distributed through time and space. Most men do not believe that matter is evil, but they cannot help being fascinated by and to some extent revering those who can renounce a world that enchants as well as enchains themselves. In times when material values most prevail the ascetic is moved to raise his voice in protest and to preach other-worldly values.

Art is matter refined, and to the true ascetic it is more dangerous

34. *Ibid.*
35. M. M. Knappen, *Tudor Puritanism* (University of Chicago Press, 1939), p. 78.
36. *Op. cit.*, pp. 39-40.

than matter in the raw. When Shakespeare holds the mirror up to nature he shows us something more alluring than we can see for ourselves, makes us more in love with our world than we would be without his help. From the point of view of the ascetic all art is dangerous, but the art of the theatre is peculiarly so. To survive it must be entertaining, and it must set out to catch and hold its audience by any means which will serve the purpose. It must be deliberately sensual in its appeal to the ear and the eye, and it must deliberately deceive by giving to appearance a fictitious reality. This deception is a very innocent affair, intended only to induce a temporary suspension of unbelief that an actor is a king, and painted cardboard his castle, but it is this element of imitation, of the pretence of nature which seems more than any other characteristic of the theatre to have offended ascetics widely separated in time. One could hardly describe Tertullian in the second century A.D., Augustine in the fourth century, or the present Pope in the twentieth century as Puritans, yet all share the objection to the theatre on the ground of its deceitfulness. Tertullian wrote that—

> The Author of truth hates all the false; He regards as adultery all that is unreal. Condemning, therefore, as He does, hypocrisy in every form, He never will approve any putting on of voice, or sex, or age; He never will approve pretended loves and wraths and groans and tears.[37]

Both in his *Confessions* and the *City of God* Augustine denounced play-acting as idolatry. The present Pope does not denounce the theatre; on the contrary, according to press reports he received actors and actresses at the Vatican in 1945 as a mark of favour of the establishment of the Catholic Actors' Guild. Nevertheless, he did not, it would seem, wholly relinquish the old view that there is an inherent impropriety in the art of acting. According to the press report of the visit of the theatrical people to the Vatican—

> It was their intention to give a normal performance as a display of their art, and they had rehearsed accordingly.

However, a normal performance was not permitted; a compromise was reached and—

> They spoke scenes from Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi* but for the sake of decorum did not use actions or wear costume.[38]

Almost any English Puritan would have been willing to admit such a performance as this; an unexceptionable text, given in private, without the concomitants of heterogeneous audience and worldly play-house, and without the elements which most distressed Tertullian, the deceitful gestures and costumes.

37. Quoted from *De Spectaculis* by Thompson, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-4.
38. Melbourne *Argus*, 28 September 1945.

Turning to the rank-and-file Puritan, the problem of his hostility to the theatre is much more difficult than that of the born ascetic of all times and climes. Put as briefly as it can be, I believe the answer is that, for most people, convictions arise out of their experience of life and are not unalterable. The rank-and-file English Puritan was not by nature or religion or principle hostile to the theatre. Circumstances made him so.

English Puritans were Protestants who wished to push the reformation of religion further than the ruler of the church, the secular prince, desired to go. Such people were to be found in England from the time of Henry VIII, but they were not always opposed to the theatre; indeed, they were at one time willing and able to make use of the dramatic medium themselves. John Rastell, More's Puritan kinsman, was in all probability the author of the famous *Interlude of the Four Elements.*[39] It was from the stage that John Bale, through the mouth of St. John the Baptist, spoke these typically Puritan words—

> I say unto you: your observations are carnal
> Outward works ye have, but in spirit nothing at all
> Ye walk in the letter like painted hypocrits.[40]

In another of his plays Bale enquires—

> Where is now free-will, whom the hypocrits commend?
> Whereby they report they may, at their own pleasure,
> Do good of themselves, though grace and faith be absent.[41]

In the reign of Queen Mary the Puritan Foxe lamented the hostile attitude towards play-acting taken by the Catholic Bishop Gardiner, and attributed it to the Protestant tendency of the stage—

> He thwarteth and wrangleth much against players, printers, preachers. And no marvel why, as a triple bulwark against the triple crown of the Pope to bring him down: as, God be praised, they have done already.[42]

The earliest English Puritans were Lutheran, but by the middle of the sixteenth century Lutheranism had failed in England. It would be tempting, as E. K. Chambers points out, to explain the development of Puritan hostility to the theatre as the result of the substitution of the austerity of Calvinism for the humanism of Lutheranism, but, as he goes on to say, the antithesis must not be pressed too far.[43] Indeed, in view of our lack of evidence of Calvinist hostility to the theatre we have no right to press it at all. A more prosaic but more probable hypothesis is available; it is that the English Puritans had no settled objection to the theatre

39. A. W. Reed, *Early Tudor Drama*, p. 12.
40. John Bale, *St. John Baptist's Preaching in the Wilderness, a brief Comedy or Interlude* 1538 (*Early English Dramatists*, ed. John S. Farmer, 1908).
41. *The Chief Promises of God Unto Man, a Tragedy or Interlude*, 1538. *Ibid.*
42. John Foxe, *Book of Martyrs*, vi. 57.
43. E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, i. 243.

until the government which controlled it had a settled objection to them. Such a government existed from the latter part of the reign of Queen Elizabeth until the outbreak of the Civil War. There is nothing really surprising in the change of Puritan attitude towards the theatre; history yields many examples of similar re-alignments. Thus Protestants who held the doctrine of non-resistance firmly under the sympathetic government of Edward VI broke the law to the number of eight hundred in the reign of Queen Mary by leaving the realm without the consent of their now hostile prince.[44] In the same way, more than a century later, bishops who professed to believe in the divine right of kings invited a usurping ruler to seize the throne of England when they found that James II was the enemy of their church. Circumstances alter doctrines.

The Elizabethan theatre would have perished under the attack of the municipal government of London had it not been for the protection of the crown, and dramatists and actors knew well enough that their bread was buttered on the side of the government and the established church. Dramatists were subject to rigorous political censorship and actors could avoid falling under the statutes against rogues and vagabonds only by being the licensed 'servants' of a nobleman. When the Puritans set the press censorship at defiance with the *Marprelate Tracts* the government used the theatre as a propaganda agency by calling on the players for help. They replied by making a jest of the Puritans from every stage in London, carrying matters to such extremities that the government had at last to call its dogs off. The Puritans clearly recognized that the players, being dependent on the crown for survival, had to echo its sentiments, and in one of the *Marprelate Tracts* we read of—

> Stage-players, poore seelie hunger-starved wretches, marveilous fitte upholders of Lambehith palace, and the crowne.[45]

Just like Bishop Gardiner in Mary's reign, the Puritans were now beginning to wrangle against the players, not because they were players, but because they were on the other side.

The bond between crown and theatre was drawn still tighter in the time of James I. One of the early acts of the reign was that by which the Lord Chamberlain's Company, to which Shakespeare belonged, became the King's Players, holding a licence which bade all and sundry—

> not only to permit and suffer them herein without any your lets and hindrances or molestations during our said pleasure, but also to be aiding and assisting to them if any wrong be to them offered.[46]

44. M. M. Knappen, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-1.
45. Quoted Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 115.
46. John Dover Wilson, *Life in Shakespeare's England* (Pelican ed.) pp. 178-9.

The Admiral's Men became Prince Henry's Company, and the Children of the Chapel were now known as the Children of the Queen's Revels. New licences were issued to the Duke of York's players (1610), to the Lady Elizabeth's Players (1611), and the Elector Palatine's Players (1613).[47] The theatre was thus publicly taken under direct royal patronage. Performances at court increased apace. Between Christmas 1598 and March 1603 the Chamberlain's Men had played fourteen times at court and the Admiral's Men twelve times, whereas in the first few years of the new reign the King's Players performed forty-one times at court, and Prince Henry's Players twenty-five times.[48] In the ten years before the outbreak of the Civil War the King's Players made more than a hundred recorded appearances before royalty, and it is known that the record is incomplete. Jonson's learned sock was not very often on in the late Caroline theatre, and Shakespeare's native wood-notes wild were silenced by more sophisticated voices. Shakespeare and Jonson were both in the repertory of the King's Men, Shakespeare being represented by thirteen plays and Jonson by nine, but there were forty-eight plays by Beaumont and Fletcher and twenty-three by Massinger in their repertory. Gerard Eades Bentley lists eleven dramatic companies in the Jacobean and Caroline period. Of these none except the King's Men had any play by Shakespeare in their repertory; *As You Like It* is listed in the repertory of the Elector Palatine's Company, but this is believed to be a modern forgery. Jonson's name appears in the repertory of only three of the eleven companies and once in an unfavourable connection. On one occasion his *A Tale of a Tub* was acted at court by Queen Henrietta's Company, 'and not likte.' Marlowe, Chapman, Peele and Greene were occasionally but very infrequently played. In Caroline times Queen Henrietta's Company was second in importance only to the King's. There is hardly any drama that could be described as 'Elizabethan' in the repertory of this company; the favorite plays were contemporary, and James Shirley easily led the field in the company's repertory, with twenty-five plays.[49] It was not the Elizabethan theatre that was closed in 1642.

V

Queen Elizabeth had, ordinarily, discouraged religious discussion on the stage; the license permitted during the Marprelate crisis was exceptional and for a special purpose. It was the politics and not the religion of her subjects that interested the queen. The Puritans were politically dangerous—'a sect of perilous consequence, that

47. *Malone Society Collections*, I. iii. 272-7.
48. G. B. Harrison, *Elizabethan Plays and Players*, p. 296.
49. Gerard Eades Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, i. 108-34; 156-7; 174-5; 194-7; 214-7; 250-9; 300-1; 322-3; 337-42.

would have no prince but a presbytery' as she warned her cousin of Scotland—but as for non-political Puritans, she had no wish to provoke them unnecessarily. While the queen lived the stage Puritan was a figure of harmless mirth, with no vice in him. Malvolio is vain, melancholy and pompous, but not a bad man, and Olivia thinks he has been 'most notoriously abus'd' by the pranks played on him. Chapman in *A Humourous Days Mirth* has a female counterpart of Malvolio, a Puritan woman all compact of folly and scruples but quite without guile. Even a Puritan could have smiled at Shakespeare's and Chapman's Puritans, seeing in them not himself, but some good foolish brother or sister of the congregation.

James I revelled in religious disputation and from the moment when he undertook to make the Puritans conform or to harry them out of the land they became fair game for the playwright and actor. Indeed, the year of James I's accession was marked by the performance of a play containing what is probably the most revolting caricature of a Puritan ever seen on the English stage, Snuffle in Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy*. All students of this subject are indebted to A. M. Myers for his careful listing of plays in which Puritans appear in the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and the early Stuarts.[50] Although the title of his work suggests that he is only concerned with the Elizabethan drama the Puritan was both more represented and more misrepresented under the early Stuarts than under Queen Elizabeth, and in fact Mr. Myers includes both the Jacobean and Caroline drama under the misleading title of 'Elizabethan.' Good-humoured joking at the Puritans, although still found in the bourgeois dramatists Dekker and Heywood, gives place under the more courtly Jacobean and Caroline dramatists to joking which leaves an unpleasant taste behind it. Middleton specialized in satire on female Puritans. In his inappropriately named *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* there are two of them who, despite their canting and saintly conversation are gluttonous and drunken when they get the chance. In *The Family of Love* the Puritan matron is depicted as a harlot and the sect from which the play takes its name is represented (without any foundation in fact) as a mere cloak for sexual promiscuity. Fletcher and Massinger also made very offensive references to Puritans in their plays, and in the period immediately preceding the Civil War Brome, Davenant and Randolph ceaselessly harried the Puritans, accusing them of hypocrisy, greed, drunkenness, dishonesty and incontinence.

From the point of view of posterity, the real hammer of the Puritans is Ben Jonson. From *The Alchemist* in 1610 to *The Mag-*

50. Aaron Michael Myers, *Representation and Misrepresentation of the Puritan in Elizabethan Drama* (Philadelphia, 1931).

netick Lady in 1632 Jonson threw mud at the Puritans, and it still sticks, for it was thrown by a great artist. Indeed, the stock Puritan figure of popular history and of histories of literature is largely drawn from Jonson's immortal but untruthful stage Puritans. The Puritans of *The Alchemist* make a great deal of fuss about trifles, such as the use of 'that idol, starch' for stiffening ruffs, and the deacon Ananias addresses a non-Puritan in these terms—

> Avoid Sathan!
> Thou art not of the light! That ruff of pride
> About thy neck betrays thee
> Thou look'st like antichrist in that lewd hat!

but Jonson does not leave the jest here, as Shakespeare would have done. His Puritans are knaves as well as fools and they use their religion as a cover for fraudulent money dealings. Zeal-of-the-Land Busy in *Bartholomew Fair* is unquestionably a great comic creation. The parody of Puritan oratory put into his mouth on his arrival at the Fair is irresistible—

> I was moved in spirit, to be here this day, in this Fair, this wicked and foul Fair; and fitter may it be called a Foul than a Fair; to protest against the abuses of it, in regard to the afflicted saints, that are troubled, exceedingly troubled, with the opening of the merchandise of Babylon again, and the peeping of popery upon the stalls here.

Zeal-of-the-Land is not purely comic, however; he is a swindler, a glutton and a hypocrite. *Bartholomew Fair* is magnificent, but it is war. When it came to Puritans Ben Jonson forgot his own excellent axiom that the proper function of comedy was to sport with human follies, not with crimes.

Probably no element in the Caroline comedy was more offensive to the Puritans than the constant attacks on New England made by the dramatists. To the seventeenth century English Puritan, New England was what Palestine is to the Zionist and Russia to the Communist in the twentieth century—the great good place, the spiritual home, the land of dreams come true. The dramatists stopped at nothing in their misrepresentation of New England. In Mayne's *City Match* Amelia says—

> I do not mean to marry
> Like ladies in New England, where they couple
> With no more ceremony than birds choose their mate
> Upon St. Valentine's day.

In Cartwright's play, *The Ordinary,* three disreputable Londoners, Slicer, Shape and Hearsay, finding London too hot for them resolve to migrate to New England—

> Hear. It is but getting
> A little pigeon-hole reformed ruff
> Slicer Forcing our beard into th' Orthodox bent

Shape Nosing a little treason 'gainst the king,
Bark something at the bishops, and we shall
Be easily receiv'd.
Hear. No fitter place
They are good silly people; souls that will
Be cheated without trouble. One eye is
Put out with zeal, th'other with ignorance,
And yet they think they're eagles.
Shape We are made
Just fit for that meridian. No good works
Allow'd there: faith—faith is what they call for
And we will bring it 'em.

It is said that King Charles I wore mourning when William Cartwright died in 1644; if he did so he was wiser than he knew, for Cartwright was one of those who helped him to throw away a kingdom.

Puritans were habitually and maliciously misrepresented on the Jacobean and Caroline stages. Elizabethan dramatists had sported at the follies of the more precise Puritans, at their dress and manners and foibles and habits of speech. Jacobean and Caroline dramatists habitually accused them of the sins of the flesh—drunkenness, gluttony and sexual immorality—of which history shows them to have been in fact singularly free. Nor was it true, as Jonson and Randolph constantly suggested, that it was a Puritan characteristic to be dishonest in money matters. The Puritan of the Jacobean and Caroline stage is invariably of the lower classes. Myers points out that in Brome's and Randolph's plays Puritans are always poverty-stricken, and he comments—

> History does not confirm the charge, but tells us that most often the Puritan was a thrifty, hard-working individual, who, because of his frugality and abstemiousness came to be possessed of rather more than an average share of this world's goods and was on the whole a substantial citizen among the middle and working classes of English society.[51]

We cannot set out statistically the class composition of the Puritan body, but we know that its leaders did not come from the working classes. Both R. G. Usher and more recently M. M. Knappen tell us that the strength of Puritanism, in the days of its growth, was in the gentry, yet not one Puritan gentleman (unless Sir Christopher in *The Ordinary* be intended for one) is to be found in the dramatic literature of Jacobean or Caroline times. The stage Puritan is invariably a sectary. This is no true picture. Just how many sectaries there were before the outbreak of the Civil War we cannot say, but it is certain that there were far more Presbyterians and Independents. The stage Puritan is by no means an 'average' Puritan but an unsympathetic portrait of eccentric individuals and minority groups within a movement as broad as English life itself.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

The stage Puritan is almost invariably unlettered. One of Jonson's most frequent jibes is at the Puritan's lack of culture, and this charge is common in Randolph, Brome and others. In the upside-down world which Brome pictures in *The Antipodes* 'all the poets are Puritans' and in Randolph's *Hey For Honesty* Puritans are men who—

> of all the languages of Babylon think it a heresy to understand any but their native English.

The Puritan attitude towards learning is admittedly a vexed question. Knappen is of the opinion that—

> The Puritan cannot be said to have had the broad interest in pure learning, as such, which was the glory of the Erasmian humanists.[52]

I confess that I do not know the meaning of the phrase 'pure learning, as such.' All learning, it seems to me, has some end in view, and none more so than that of the Erasmian humanists. (Even Lord Acton intended to write and publish, that is, to communicate and teach *The History of Liberty* for which he spent a life-time in accumulating material. That he failed of his purpose does not make his learning purer, but only more ineffectual.) One of the distinctive marks of the seventeenth century English Puritan was his zeal for education. It is true that he had an end in view, to bring men nearer to God and to make them lead better lives. Was not this also the purpose of the Erasmian humanists, and is not the real difference that they addressed themselves to an aristocratic audience and the Puritans to a popular one? Ben Jonson was a learned man—no one has told us so oftener than himself—but was he more learned than the Puritan John Milton? Ben Jonson stuck to his last, for which no one can blame him; but are we forbidden to praise Milton for having devoted so much of his time and genius to the humble task, as Landor puts it, of illuminating and liberating with patient labour the manacled human race? Archbishop Bancroft admitted the justice of the Puritan complaint that the Anglican clergy were too ignorant to preach when at Hampton Court Conference he advised ministers to read standard sermons 'until such time as learned and sufficient men'[53] could be found to replace the blind mouths in the pulpits. As William Haller has shown,[54] the University of Cambridge was the intellectual headquarters of the Puritan movement, and from Cambridge, in the first part of the seventeenth century, a continuous stream of Puritan divines poured out to teach the people. Royalist wits sneered at the ignorance of the populace; Puritan wits bent to the irksome task of curing it.

52. M. M. Knappen, *op. cit.*, p. 466.
53. J. R. Tanner, *Constitutional Documents of the Reign of James I*, p. 65.
54. In *The Rise of Puritanism.*

VI

To the spate of calumny which the theatre showered on the Puritans they could make no answer in kind. The theatre was a government monopoly and dramatists and actors were necessarily Royalist. There was a stronger Puritan argument for closing the theatres than any Puritan ever dared to use—that the theatre was controlled by a government which became ever more and more hostile to them and which encouraged the use of stage as well as pulpit as a propaganda agency in the war against them. All that the Puritan could do in the period before the Civil War was to stay away from the theatres and to induce as many other people as possible to do likewise. They could not state their true objection to the theatre, which was, in effect, a political objection to a government hostile to them; hence they pushed, even to absurdity, such arguments as were available to them. 'No Bishop, no King,' James I had said, paying tribute to one of the supports of his throne. 'No King, no theatre,' the Puritans replied grimly in their day of power, striking away another of the supports of the government.

When the Civil War began, middle-class opposition to the theatre adopted a Puritan point of view which suited its own purpose, taking over arguments and phraseology which give, at first glance, a Puritan air to what are really only bourgeois attitudes. The immediate occasion of the closing of the theatres in 1642 was the existence of a state of civil war. The Parliamentary Ordinance which closed the theatres stated that—

> Whereas public sports do not well agree with private calamities, nor public stage-plays with the seasons of humiliation . . . while these sad causes and set times of humiliation do continue, public stage-plays shall cease and be forborne.[55]

No objection to the drama or the theatre as such is expressed here, and the closure of the theatres appears to have been intended as a temporary measure. It was not wholly effectual; had it been, Leslie Hotson would have found nothing to put into the first half of his book on *The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage*. Hotson shows that although ordinance after ordinance was enacted, and the troops were called out against the players, the public theatre never wholly ceased to exist. He believes that the government connived at the breach of its laws against play-acting, with an occasional raid 'to appease the Puritan die-hards.'[56] Nevertheless, the theatre led an unhappy and precarious life under the Commonwealth and Protectorate Governments. The *Globe* was pulled down in 1644, and in 1649 the *Fortune*, *Cockpit* and *Salisbury Court* were rendered useless as theatres by the dismantling of their stages,

55. S. R. Gardiner, *History of the Great Civil War*, i. 17.
56. Leslie Hotson, *The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage* (Harvard University Press, 1928), p. 51.

boxes, seats and galleries. Only the raffish *Red Bull* contrived to carry on until the Restoration, performing short plays called 'drolls' under cover of rope-dancing and other diversions against which the law did not provide. Actors suffered long periods of unemployment and were regarded by authority as disreputable persons and were lucky if they did not find themselves sentenced to degrading corporal punishment or imprisonment under the *Elizabethan laws against rogues and vagabonds*. Gone were the golden days when a dramatist could retire on his earnings and set up as a country gentleman, and the actors were shabby whose very servants had once gone in silk. The mighty river of dramatic art had shrunk to a trickle.

Nevertheless, it would not be true to say that the government in the days of the Puritan ascendancy ever showed itself hostile to the drama as such. Throughout the interregnum books of plays were published without let or hindrance by the Government. Lewis B. Wright, who has examined this subject carefully, has found no evidence that the authorities bestirred themselves to check the circulation of printed drama.[57] Indeed, he is inclined to think that the Puritan government was lax to the point of imprudence in permitting the free circulation of plays which were strongly Royalist in tendency, since—

> practically all the drama, both that written before the closing of the theatres and that written afterwards, presented the Cavalier point of view.

Wright thinks it probable that the Royalists were deliberately using printed plays as a propaganda medium as an examination of the plays published between 1642 and 1660 shows that they contain a large measure of abuse of the Puritans. Some of this occurs, of course, in old plays reprinted, but a good deal is new, appearing either in new plays or in new interpolations, prologues and epilogues to old plays. The government could not have relished this state of affairs particularly, but neither can it have been unduly troubled by it, or it would have made efforts to suppress the publication of plays. No doubt the authorities recognized that a printed play is a poor, weak thing in comparison with the theatrical performance of it, with its direct aural and visual appeal to the emotions.

There seems little reason to doubt that the hostility of the Interregnum governments to the theatre was based on expediency rather than on principle. Cromwell's government was never politically secure, and it dreaded all public assemblies. The Venetian ambassador wrote—

> As the government dreads gatherings of people, all conventicles and meetings are

57. Lewis B. Wright, *The Reading of Plays During the Puritan Revolution* (*Huntington Library Bulletin*, November 1934).

forbidden, and plays and parties in particular, from fear that under the guise of recreation they may be plotting something against the present rulers.[58]

Had the Puritans ever succeeded in establishing a stable government, it seems likely that the theatres would have been permitted to re-open. Indeed, during the Protectorate the Royalist poet, Sir William Davenant, was permitted by the government to begin the production of opera, and by 1658 his company was playing regularly at the old *Cockpit* theatre in Drury Lane. Davenant had succeeded in persuading the government that the provision of harmless recreation would be politically beneficial as it would help to banish the 'melancholy that breeds seditions.' He also offered the services of his theatre as a propaganda agency for the government and kept his bargain by putting on *The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru*, an opera which justified Cromwell's war against the Spanish colonies.[59]

There was a major difficulty in the way of a general re-opening of the theatres during the Interregnum. Existing dramatic literature was strongly Royalist in sentiment; Lewis B. Wright points out that most of the plays published even during the Puritan Revolution were—

filled with the conventions and atmosphere of a royalist background, or contained outspoken satire of the Puritans and their ideals.[60]

A Puritan dramatic literature simply did not exist. This cannot be explained by a lack of aesthetic interests or powers among the Puritans. The creative effort of the Puritan artists flowed in other channels than the drama, but it flowed. As George Moore puts it—

The Puritans closed the theatres, an act which I don't pretend to sympathise with; but England's dramatic genius had spent itself, and for its intolerance of amusement Puritanism made handsome amends by giving us Milton, and a literature of its own. Of course everything can be argued, and some will argue that Milton's poem was written in spite of Puritan influence; but this I do think, that if ever a religious movement may be said to have brought a literature along with it, Puritanism is that one.[61]

Not, however, a dramatic literature.

When we seek an explanation of the lack of Puritan drama before the Civil War practical reasons at once suggest themselves, such as the lack of a market for Puritan plays in a theatre rigidly controlled by a hostile political censorship and widespread Puritan repugnance from the theatre as it then was. But the explanation probably lies at the deeper level. The true Puritan had enough drama in his own life without seeking it in the playhouse. The world was indeed his stage, on which he must give ceaseless battle

58. *Ibid.*, quoted from *Cal. S. P. Venetian* 1655-6, p. 165.
59. Hotson, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-163.
60. As in footnote 57.
61. George Moore, *Hail and Farewell—Salve* (Ebury ed.), p. 179.

against God's enemies and protect God's people, and in his own heart the curtain never fell on the struggle with the devil within. The pious Puritan kept a diary and each night, as Haller tells us,[62] he cast up his spiritual accounts, and wrote, as he had already enacted, the latest scenes of the drama in which he was always the hero. The writer of great drama must achieve an almost god-like detachment from the men and women of his play; he must be able to enter into each with sympathy, but to give his heart to none. It is probable that had a stable Puritan England emerged from the Revolution the conditions of such a detachment would gradually have come into being. They did not exist in the period of struggle. Shirley, the Caroline dramatist, put his finger on the point when in 1647 in his preface to a new edition of Beaumont and Fletcher he wrote of 'this Tragicall Age where the Theatre hath been so much out-acted.'

VII

We return at last to the question posed at the beginning. Did Puritanism destroy the English drama? The answer seems to be—No, the English drama rushed headlong to its own destruction. In fact it had no choice, being driven by mighty forces beyond its control. It saved its skin but lost its soul by its alliance with the crown. As it became more courtly it lost touch with its roots in English life and forfeited the support of decent middle-class people, whether they were Puritan or not. In Caroline times it had nothing to give to a people soon to face issues of life and death.

It was not the Elizabethan but the Caroline theatre that was closed in 1642. The closing of the theatres was not the work of fanatical sectaries but of the Long Parliament of gentry and burgesses, supported by the Corporation and the citizens of London. When truth is not to be had, a confirmed error does well, as Ben Jonson tells us. For the confirmed errors about the Puritans which have so long held the field we have to blame the dramatists before and after the Civil War, the Anglican divines of the Restoration,[63] and the Whig historians who have tried to appropriate the Puritan Revolution while disowning the Puritans, like a son who is ashamed of his parents but not ashamed to live on them. Samuel Pepys, that notorious play-haunter, had more justice and gratitude in him. Eight years after the Restoration he saw *Bartholomew Fair* acted and went home and wrote in his diary—

> And it is an excellent play; the more I see it, the more I love the wit of it; only the business of abusing the Puritans begins to grow stale, and of no use, they being the people that at last will be found the wisest.

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62. William Haller, *op. cit.*, p. 100.
63. De Quincey, *The Falsification of English History, Collected Writings*, ed. Masson, ix.