

ABSTRACT

CORNELIA OTIS SKINNER AND HER ART-FORM OF MONOLOGUE-DRAMA

by G. Bruce Loganbill

This study examines the monologue-drama of Cornelia Otis Skinner. As the originator, writer, and performer of her art-form she has made a unique contribution to English-speaking theatre. Through her six monologue-drama productions on Broadway, throughout the United States, and in England, her name has become synonymous with solo-performance.

Chapter One is an introduction to the unique character of Miss Skinner's art-form, and presents an outline for the following investigation. Chapter Two sketches the early life and career of Miss Skinner so as to reveal the influences which contributed to the development of monologue-drama. Special attention is given to those factors shaping her own personality since it is so much a part of the unique character of her art-form. In the third chapter the art-form of monologue-drama is compared and contrasted to full-cast plays, reading theatre, oral interpretation, and various other types of artistic platform performance. How her art of playing compares to that of her predecessors is studied,

as well as her own principles and ideas about her art and its performance.

The analysis of her first historical monologue-drama script, The Wives of Henry VIII, constitutes Chapter Four, while an analysis of the latest and most complex script, Paris '90, forms the content of the chapter which then follows. Because a primary objective of the investigation has been to evaluate her contribution as a writer of the material she performs, these two chapters have concentrated on this phase of her work. Criteria of analysis are based upon characterization, dialogue, and unified dramatic action which are basic to unity of form, content, and theme. Chapter Six considers the critical reactions to Miss Skinner's monologue-drama productions. The professional drama critics' opinions of her art-form, scripts, and performances are reviewed and summarized. Again special attention is given to the two monologue-dramas, The Wives of Henry VIII and Paris '90. The concluding chapter summarizes the findings and evaluates Miss Skinner's contribution to theatre.

The study reveals that monologue-drama is an art-form unique to Miss Skinner. Through it she has been able to combine facets of the character sketch with elements inherent to a full-cast play. The study further discloses that through her ability as a writer, as well as a performer, she gave the solo-performance prominence which it never before experienced. Imagination, intelligence, technical skill, and

artistry are basic to her theatrical effectiveness. Her success with the new and untried gave her stature as the mistress of her art-form. It reminds us that the theatre is alive and receptive to innovations if the talent is genuine.

Cornelia Otis Skinner is an actress, playwright, novelist, essayist, and solo-performer. Although in each medium she is recognized as an individual of uncommon talent, this study has concentrated on the last ability. As originator, writer, and performer of monologue-drama, she earned the esteem of the theatre public and critics, and it is in this capacity as well that she is worthy to be remembered in theatre annals as one of the 20th century's most talented and gracious solo-performers and a unique contributor to theatrical art.

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MONOLOGUE-DRAMA

By

G. Bruce Loganbill

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To Bruce Loggins
with warmest greetings
Cynthia H. Skinner

Brookline
Mass.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Cornelia Otis Skinner is a dynamic force in the 20th century American scene and especially in the theatre. For thirty years she has been a featured actress or star in professional productions, and she has played throughout most of the English-speaking world. Theatre audiences in the United States, Canada, England, Australia, and Alaska have witnessed her stage performances. She is the playwright or co-author of three plays which were produced professionally. She has written ten novels based upon the vagaries of modern life. Her witty and urbane essays have appeared for over twenty-five years in The New Yorker, The New York Times Magazine, and other leading periodicals. These accomplishments alone would stamp her as an eminently successful actress and writer. But her greatest and most singular contributions have been as a writer and performer of monologue-drama, a form of theatre which she may be said to have originated.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the art of Miss Skinner as a writer and a performer of monologue-drama. Although she was preceded in the area of solo-performance by such notable figures as Beatrice Herford, Dorothy Sands, and Ruth Draper, Miss Skinner was dissatisfied with the limitations which her predecessors had accepted.

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Their performances consisted of a series of more or less unrelated character sketches which lacked the continuity and thematic unity of a fully developed dramatic script. The characterizations which Miss Skinner's predecessors played were not unified, for they had little if any commonality or relationship. Although she based her early career as a solo performer on similar sketches, which she wrote for herself, she soon turned from them in order to set out in a new direction. With such scripts as The Wives of Henry VIII, The Empress Eugenie, The Loves of Charles II, Mansion on the Hudson, Edna His Wife, and Paris '90, she added to the scope and dramatic power of solo performance by creating a unified script constructed around a central idea. This form of drama, written for herself as the solo performer of all the roles, is known as monologue-drama.

Miss Skinner wrote these monologue-drama scripts and performed them successfully in New York and on tour both in and outside of the United States. As dramatist and performer, her own personality, writing skill, and acting talents have blended so completely that it is difficult if not impossible to separate completely the various facets of her unique contribution. She is credited with creating a tour de force because of her characteristic and unique treatment of material which she has written, together with her distinctive mode of presentation.

Part of the uniqueness of the monologue-drama is attributed to Miss Skinner's own unique personality. For this

reason a review is made of the early life and career of Miss Skinner as they relate to the study of monologue-drama. The biographical material is confined to that information which helps to reveal and clarify the work of Cornelia Otis Skinner as a writer and performer of monologue-drama. This treatment is not intended to be an exhaustive biography of Miss Skinner. Such complete biographical data is readily accessible in Miss Skinner's own autobiography, Family Circle. Instead the material is included to show the influences which aided the later development of her career. To review chronologically her background, training, and career serves to show the pertinent factors of her theatrical family background and childhood which equipped Miss Skinner and helped prepare her for a career of the monologue-drama. Those significant attributes and circumstances are noted to re-create a part of the environment from which came her unique contribution to theatre. The biographical review also reveals the warmth of Miss Skinner, her wit, intelligence, personality, and humanity for which she is noted. Illustrations, drawn from the many which exist, reflect these qualities which are a part of her life and career. In addition, the stature which Miss Skinner has attained is illustrated. Through her intelligence, personality, and unique theatrical talent for the monologue-drama, Miss Skinner has been honored for her contribution to the theatre and admired for her life apart from the stage.

As evidence of her skill and intelligence as an

actress, a major section is devoted to Miss Skinner's theories and observations on acting for the purpose of discovering how the monologue-dramas are performed. She has denied any systematized theory of acting, but sufficient material is available in scattered sources that a comprehensive summary of her principles of performance may be assembled. Of particular importance are her observations regarding the differences between acting in regular drama and monologue-drama. Moreover, how her art of playing is similar to, and yet different from, that of her predecessors is studied.

The next major section reviews and analyzes in detail two of her most important monologue-dramas, The Wives of Henry VIII and Paris '90. The Wives of Henry VIII is significant because it was the first monologue-drama, it was one of her most successful productions, and it brought her prominence in the theatre as a performer and writer of monologue-drama. Paris '90, besides being the latest of her monologue-drama scripts, was the vehicle for the longest run on Broadway by a solo-performer, the most detailed production ever attempted by Miss Skinner, and included more characterizations and scenes than she had ever previously attempted in a single production. The scripts are analyzed on the basis of characterization, dialogue, and unified dramatic action. The latter includes consideration of those elements of plot structure, script compactness, and thematic unity.

Such a study would not be complete without also considering the critical reactions to Miss Skinner's work. The primary purpose of this section is to show the characteristics of Miss Skinner as a performer although, for a total view, her ability as a writer cannot be entirely separated from the performance. Because the monologue-drama is the ephemeral art that it is, this study must rely upon the opinion of the drama critics for evaluation of the performance of Miss Skinner. Comments about Miss Skinner's art are drawn from newspaper, journal, and magazine reviews. In the critics' reactions to the monologue-drama, Miss Skinner's first monologue sketches and her early monologue-dramas are treated, but Paris '90, for the reasons detailed above, receives the major attention. The drama critics' reaction to Paris '90 is divided into criticism of Miss Skinner's technique of playing, reaction of the audience as noted by the drama critics, and the notices of Miss Skinner as a person and performer by the drama critics.

Finally the study is concerned with an evaluation of Miss Skinner and her monologue-drama. In this last section, attributes of Miss Skinner and elements of her art are brought together to show how she has expanded theatrical art by writing and performing monologue-drama.

The materials used for this study have come from various sources. Cornelia Otis Skinner and her secretary, Eleanor Walsh, have generously supplied the scripts of The Wives of Henry VIII and Paris '90. From Miss Skinner's New

York City office also have come unpublished source materials about Miss Skinner and her art of the monologue-drama, including a souvenir book and photographs. The Paris '90 Souvenir Book was compiled by Miss Skinner and her staff and was made available upon request for this study. The publication gives a glimpse into the training and career of Miss Skinner and is, of course, oriented primarily to Paris '90. The contributing writers were Miss Skinner, her father, Otis Skinner, and drama critic Norton Faust. Photographs included are by John Erwin and Dorothy Wilding, along with other photographs from Miss Skinner's collection. Other primary source material used for this study is information from personal interviews and conversations with Miss Skinner and her secretary, and published biographical and autobiographical material written by Miss Skinner and her father, Otis Skinner. Secondary sources used are newspaper and periodical reviews of Miss Skinner and her art of the monologue-drama.

With these preliminary statements as introduction, there follows a brief summary of Miss Skinner's background and early career in order to reveal the influences which were to effect her development as an actress and writer of monologue-drama.

CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHICAL REVIEW OF CORNELIA OTIS SKINNER

Family Background

Cornelia Otis Skinner has not always had professional success although she has always borne a professionally acclaimed name. Otis Skinner and Maud Durbin Skinner were her parents. Both were actors in the legitimate theatre, and Otis Skinner was also a silent motion picture star. Similar to Cornelia, "her father began his career as a monologist and became one of the most popular players in the history of the American stage."¹ Otis Skinner spent fifty years in the theatre and played 325 roles. His career on the stage brought him fame and wealth. He retired in 1932 and died ten years later. One account of his passing read, "Richest Actor Dies!"² His talent indeed made him a wealthy man. "His estate included more than \$750,000 in cash and securities, a castlelike duplex in a co-operatively owned East Side apartment house, and priceless mementos of stage history. The

¹Arthur Mann, "Honor of the Family," Colliers, 114 (December 16, 1944), p. 88.

²"Otis Skinner," Theatre Arts Monthly, 26 (April 1942), p. 216.

bulk was left in trust for Cornelia."³

Perhaps Otis Skinner's most famous roles were in Blood and Sand, the motion picture, Kismet, and the play, The Honor of the Family. As an actor, he was the idol of Broadway in the years preceding World War I. Otis Skinner was admired by his wife and daughter as being not only a famous actor, but a devoted husband and father.

As a husband, he was always "dear Otis," an everloving spouse who never missed writing a daily letter home while on the road. As a father, he was "gay, funny" ... He taught his only child to read, using an abridged Shakespeare as a primer.⁴

Miss Durbin and Mr. Skinner met in 1893, when Maud Durbin joined Madame Helene Modjeska's theatrical company in which Otis Skinner was Madame Modjeska's leading man. Later, Miss Durbin became Skinner's leading lady in his own theatrical company, and then his leading lady in life, for they were married in 1895. Mrs. Skinner gradually retired from the stage to rear her daughter, Cornelia. "Needless to say, Maud brought Cornelia up to be a 'lady.'"⁵ Mrs. Skinner became active as a socialite in Philadelphia and New York City. "Yet it was Maud Skinner who insisted that the Skinners must be a down-to-earth family, with a 'real' home ... no

³Mann, loc. cit.

⁴"Skinner's Family Circus," Newsweek Magazine, 79 (September 6, 1948), p. 79.

⁵Ibid.

living in a trunk for them."⁶ Mrs. Skinner was always known and remembered by her many friends as "the beautiful and gifted Maud Durbin Skinner."

Early Life and Education

Miss Skinner was born on May 30, 1901, in Chicago. Soon thereafter the Skinners moved to New York where they lived in a small hotel on Gramercy Park. She was not accorded the ordinary childhood that most children know, with brothers and sisters, and public school education. "When I was four I started being yanked about Europe. It was part of mother's cultural plan to expose me at a tender age to cathedrals, palaces, and art galleries. I don't believe I enjoyed it very much."⁷

Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, became the childhood home for Cornelia. While her father was on the stage in New York and on tour throughout the country, Mrs. Skinner and Cornelia stayed behind, except for an occasional tour with Otis. At the Baldwin School for Girls, in Bryn Mawr, Cornelia received her elementary education. She loved to see her father come home on Sunday, and "he looked forward to the end of each busy week, and a quiet Sunday at home. He enjoyed life in the little house on the college campus, enjoyed the

⁶Ibid.

⁷Cornelia Otis Skinner, Family Circle, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1948), p. 129.

pleasant faculty folk who were our neighbors."⁸

School for Cornelia was not entirely pleasant, at least not at first. "The cultural improvements of our European trip served not at all to improve my school marks which maintained their level of near-arrested development."⁹ Also, she did not win new friends easily because she was used to being with adults rather than with other children. Cornelia was shy, and reported later, "I spoke with a broad a and didn't rip out the letter r in orthodox Main Line fashion."¹⁰ In school, Cornelia's name even provoked mirth. A fellow school girl nicknamed her "Chameleon Ogre Skinny," "...an inspirational epithet which her [the school girl's] cohorts took up like a chant whenever I emerged for recess."¹¹ Cornelia's first favorable recognition from the girls at school came when she, on one occasion, got a bowler hat, put it on, and performed a comedy routine sung to "Rufus Rastus Johnsen Brown."

Even at this early age, Cornelia delighted her school friends with her entertaining and acting ability. At home, she was given piano lessons, and each week she learned a poem which she usually recited on Friday afternoons, at tea-time. To encourage her daughter in this memory work, Mrs.

⁸Ibid., p. 197.

⁹Ibid., p. 214.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 164.

¹¹Ibid., p. 165.

Skinner would give Cornelia ten cents for a quatrain, twenty-five cents for a sonnet, thirty-five cents for Shelly's Skylark, and one dollar for the Eve of St. Agnes.¹² Yet, the choice of selections was left to young Cornelia. She humorously relates that, on one occasion when her mother was entertaining two proper spinsters, she was called upon to recite. Cornelia decided upon a poem, "The Price He Paid," by Ella Wheeler Wilcox, which she had found in the Philadelphia Evening Bulletin. "Whatever inspired me to choose it I can't imagine, for I could not have remotely known what it was about..."¹³ She learned only later that venereal disease was the topic of the poem.

At the Baldwin school, Cornelia's mother directed the Dramatics Club in Macbeth. Lady Macbeth was played by Cornelia, while Ann Harding played the role of Macduff. Otis Skinner later underlines the significance of this production, for in Cornelia, "the urge to act was born."¹⁴

After Baldwin, Cornelia entered Bryn Mawr College where she remained for two years.

At first she chafed somewhat at the prospect of a further educational grind. Latin, physics and the advanced mathematics had not so much charm in the light of her new found joy in acting. She was soon won over by the college spirit. She immediately found herself in the midst of the

¹²Ibid., p. 217.

¹³Ibid., p. 219.

¹⁴Otis Skinner, as told in "Paris '90" Souvenir Book, p. 9. This memento gives a glimpse into the training and career of Miss Skinner, and focuses upon the essential factors of Paris '90. The Souvenir Book was compiled by Miss Skinner and her staff and loaned for this thesis.

dramatic activities of the college. She shared in the writings of the class plays and burlesques.¹⁵

School life at Bryn Mawr did not diminish Miss Skinner's enthusiasm for the stage; the summer before her sophomore year she made her professional debut in George Tyler's company in Washington, D. C. "My Thespian Initiations, instead of getting the theatrical bee out of my bonnet, merely whetted my ambitions to become an actress ..."¹⁶

Her parents conceded that she should leave school to study in Paris, for her father would not allow her to go to a dramatic school. When friends asked her what she was to study in Paris, she would reply "with a vague gesture and an exalted expression, 'Oh, you know. Drama. The Theatre. Things.'"¹⁷

Professional Stage Debut and Early Roles

At the end of Cornelia's study at the Sorbonne, the Skinners toured Spain and then returned to New York where, in 1921, Otis Skinner produced Blood and Sand by Blasco-Ibanez at the Empire Theatre. In this drama, Miss Skinner played the lead, and he assigned to his daughter the part of a Spanish aristocrat. "I was to have in all three speeches

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Cornelia Otis Skinner, op. cit., p. 284.

¹⁷Ibid.

to say. I blush to recall the fact that I referred to it as 'my role'.¹⁸ The tryout city was Buffalo, and this was followed by taking the play on a few weeks' tour. Cornelia received sixty dollars a week remuneration. Her father paid her meals and hotel bills, but for this he charged her five dollars a week. She recalls how she rated no privileges as the star's daughter, nor any excessive comment from him except regarding make-up, for she applied her make-up without restraint, using all colors of shadowing which she possibly could.

Father stood it for about ten days and then he sent his valet with a summons for me to report to him in his dressing room immediately ... "Sit down," he ordered preremptorily, indicating the chair in front of his make-up mirror. Then in a loud, practical tone he remarked, "You look like hell," and with several vigorous swipes of towel and Albolene, cleaned off my lurid layers. Then using his own grease sticks and liners, he showed me a make-up which he said looked more like a human being and less like a face on a totem pole. I was subdued and after a time, grateful.¹⁹

Cornelia said that for the premiere of Blood and Sand, her mother probably thought that Otis would forget his lines and that she would fall on her face. Fear of the latter was shared by Cornelia. But the performance played without a hitch, and it was well received by the smart Empire audience.

During one of his [her father's] calls he caught sight of me standing off at the side, came over

¹⁸Ibid., p. 305.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 309.

to me, snatched up my hand, and to my panic and delight led me onto the set and down to the footlights, where he made a gesture which indicated that he was therewith introducing his daughter to the public and we both bowed, first to the house, then to each other.²⁰

Otis Skinner had given his daughter her theatrical start, but he realized that only on her own initiative would she advance. After the Blood and Sand season he said to her, "Daughter, you are an actress. And from now on you must work out your own destiny. Don't stay with me; it would be a handicap. Go get your own jobs."²¹

Before Miss Skinner was really "on her own" she began and ended her film career in the same season. She appeared briefly in the silent film of Kismet with her father. The following is a story which Miss Skinner has told about the role, and her account of it illustrates both her wit and her sincere effort to be an actress. Due to her ambiguous part as general messenger of the harem, she was instructed in a particular scene to approach a negro guard and improvise a question. Confidently she strode to him and inquired, "'Who is yon stranger I saw within the palace gates? Thou knowest all secrets of Mansur's palace. Speak or your life shall be forfeited.' The guard looked at her in blank perplexity and said: 'You can search me, lady.'"²² This was the first and

²⁰Ibid., p. 310.

²¹Otis Skinner, "Paris '90" Souvenir Book, p. 9.

²²"Cornelia Otis Skinner," Current Biography, 1942, p. 770.

last motion picture in which Cornelia Otis Skinner played.

The parts on the Broadway stage which she managed to get by herself were small, and the casting agencies began to type her as "the sophisticated, Park Avenue or snobbish type," because of the roles which were given her to play.

In the guise of a supposedly aristocratic and slightly acid character, wearing as chic clothes as the management could afford, I'd come on at the beginning of the first act ... and make my final exit before a good portion of the audience had even been seated.²³

However, Miss Skinner does not describe herself as chic when she recalls how she must have appeared in those early days of job hunting. At that time in her twenties, she says that she was thin and gawky; she wore old clothes, and her hats were from Macy's trimming counter. She tried to maintain the fashionable "slink" of the period, facial expression like Anita Stewart's rosebud mouth and distressful eyebrows.²⁴

Winthrop Ames is credited with giving Cornelia her first role without an assist from her father.²⁵ She appeared in Will Shakespeare, playing the following bit parts: a boy-alto in tights, a boy acting Juliet, an audible part (she was heard and not seen) as the voice of Juliet, a person applauding in a London audience and, finally, as a maid in waiting

²³Cornelia Otis Skinner, "The Bard And My Father," The New Yorker, 26 (November 18, 1950), p. 45.

²⁴Cornelia Otis Skinner, "Those Starring Days," The New Yorker, 27 (October 27, 1951), p. 28.

²⁵Ibid.

to Queen Elizabeth.

After Will Shakespeare came Tweedles, by Booth Tarkington and Leon Wilson, in which Miss Skinner was cast as a divorced socialite appearing only in two scenes.

The Wild Westcotts is recorded as the second socialite part which won Cornelia Otis Skinner her first press mention, "nicely acted and beautifully dressed."²⁶ She still was not discouraged and tackled the part, small as it was, with all her forces.

Still dedicated to Stanislavski, I did my best to live my part, bringing to it the sultriness of Olga Petrova, the worldly chic of Mrs. Ludwig Hoyt, and my lovable Anita Stewart expression. This characterization was lost on the director, who, during a break in the dress rehearsal, called out to me for the love of Mike to stop making that face.²⁷

The Next Room, In His Arms, and White Collars followed in succession, but. "none of these plays was of especial value except...Will Shakespeare... In several of the plays there had been unintelligent direction and lost opportunities."²⁸ While these plays were not great stage successes, they were the training ground for the star-to-be. "Cornelia chafed under the obvious inadequacy. She commenced to see a widening of her horizon, a medium wherein she could express her original

²⁶Ibid., p. 31.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Otis Skinner, "Paris '90" Souvenir Book, p. 10.

conceptions and creative powers."²⁹

Try as hard as she would, Cornelia Otis Skinner did not gain in popularity with the New York audiences. The roles which she received in the second-rate plays did not help in her struggle. "She seizes a role with all her senses and plays it with great energy. It is possible that blase Broadway saw in this a technique of the older school which has since given way to a more anemic type of acting."³⁰ In the early 1920's, whatever the explanation, Cornelia Otis Skinner was still not a stage star nor even a starlet. The cool reception of Broadway prompted her to seek audiences outside the Eastern metropolis which she describes as "the kind of people who invite her to receptions and feed her nothing more substantial than a lady-finger and a cup of tea excepted."³¹

Emergence As A Writer

The year 1925 marked a significant step for Miss Skinner because, when the parts she was given did not bring her either audience or critical notice, she began to write. Some of her poems were published in national periodicals. In 1925, Miss Skinner had her play, Captain Fury, produced.³²

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Current Biography, 1942, p. 770.

³¹Ibid.

³²Captain Fury Of The Holy Innocents (complete title), a comedy in four acts, copyrighted on May 16, 1925.

The New York Times reported in November, 1925, "Otis Skinner, it is announced, will be seen here this season in a play entitled 'Captain Fury,' written by his daughter, Cornelia Otis Skinner. It is a first play by Miss Skinner..."³³ The play had its premiere at the Belasco Theatre in Washington, D.C., December 28, 1925.³⁴ The review the following day stated that Antoinette Perry, who was in the production, "stole the show"³⁵ and that "Janney's production is magnificent and looks like real money."³⁶ Miss Skinner's first play did attract interest among her friends and the admirers of her father.

There was considerable added interest in the advent of Otis Skinner in a new play by his daughter. It was the sort of thing that attracts a high hat audience, a rather rare thing of late hereabouts for the new ones. As a demonstration of parental indulgence it takes top honors.³⁷

The critical review stated that "it was depicted with loosely connected character and situations even more rambling..."³⁸ yet, the reviewer encouraged, "Miss Skinner should try again."³⁹

³³"Otis Skinner In New Role," The New York Times, LXXIII(November 5, 1925), p. 28.

³⁴Meakin, "Captain Fury," A review from a Washington, D.C., newspaper of December 29, 1925, quoted in Variety (January 6, 1926), p. 25.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

No doubt Otis Skinner did the play partly as a favor to his daughter. "If anyone but a daughter had asked Mr. Skinner to play this part it is a 100 to 1 shot he would have turned it down."⁴⁰ Captain Fury never reached Broadway, yet the production of Miss Skinner's own play was encouraging to her ambition as a writer. It showed her that the public was far from indifferent to the product of her writing. She began to speculate how she could combine her writing and her acting talents. She continued to write stories and dramatic scenes, and in 1929 she began to write character sketches.

In her college days she had written monologues on intimate subjects and impersonated them to the delight of teachers and fellow students. Why not turn this talent into the channel of finished art? Three years in the theatre had given her its technique and taught her the power of projecting. She could people her stage with her own creations and be a whole company in herself.⁴¹

Even though Cornelia had not become a leading actress on Broadway, she was determined to continue her acting. Broadway producers "largely estimated players on what they had done, and had small time or inclination to find out what they were capable of doing."⁴² Miss Skinner wrote her own character sketches and, through her own efforts, created acting opportunities throughout the United States, Canada,

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Otis Skinner, "Paris '90" Souvenir Book, p. 10.

⁴² "Cornelia Otis Skinner Created Own Opportunities," from the office of Miss Skinner, 22 East 60th Street, New York 22, New York.

and England.

The result was a series of sketches, humorous, pathetic, tender and satirical, which her photographic eye had caught. She had found her medium, she was her own dramatist and impersonator....The original character sketches which she had done first for her friends were vigorously acclaimed in the theatre.⁴³

Cornelia Otis Skinner was about to prove the old adage that there is more than one way to reach the top.

The Monologue-Dramas

Upon the suggestion of a friend of Maud Durbin Skinner, Cornelia wrote The Wives of Henry VIII and produced it in England and, subsequently, in the United States. It had a long run in New York, 1931, and, following the New York engagement, "Miss Skinner played it to packed houses all over the United States in the worst year the American Theatre has ever known."⁴⁴ This was the first monologue-drama ever to be seen on the American stage, and it was the vehicle that established Miss Skinner as the foremost performer of historical drama.

The Wives of Henry VIII was such a notable success that Miss Skinner wrote two more similar historical monologue-dramas, The Empress Eugenie, 1932, and The Loves of Charles II, 1934.

⁴³Otis Skinner, "Paris '90" Souvenir Book, p. 10.

⁴⁴Millicent Eames, "Creating a New American Art," The Independent Woman, 14 (October, 1935), p. 344.

The Empress Eugenie was a sorrowful woman who, although her marriage to Napoleon III made her the ruler of French society, suffered deeply when the mob burned the Tuilleries after Sedan. In the monologue-drama, Queen Victoria comes to console Eugenie after the death of her only son, the Prince Imperial. In the final scene, the Empress is old, no longer beautiful, and alone. As both provinces, Sedan and Alsace-Lorraine, are restored to France, she hears the Marseillaise ring forth in triumph. "Vive la France," cries Eugenie, who had once been its Empress.

The Loves of Charles II was Miss Skinner's third monologue-drama. In this, she again portrayed the roles of several women. They are "grouped about that king who shares with Mary of Scotland and Bonnie Prince Charlie, the compelling charm and fascination of the Stuarts."⁴⁵ This Restoration King is the central figure of the monologue-drama although he is never actually on stage. The women who surround him are his mother, a Dutch wench, Lady Castlemaine, Louise de Queroalle, and Nell Gwyn. The production at the Forty-Eighth Street Theatre in 1934 showed that "Miss Skinner still evokes the sense of multiple reality with uncanny perfection."⁴⁶

The year 1935 brought another monologue-drama by Miss

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 359.

⁴⁶Richard Dana Skinner, "The Loves of Charles II," The Commonweal, 19 (January 12, 1934), p. 302.

Skinner, Mansion on the Hudson. The characters which she played are united by the plot which tells, in six scenes, the story of the Howland family who own "Tall Trees," a mansion on the Hudson. The characters are the several mistresses of "Tall Trees," The story tells of the family who own the estate and who, because of their financial reverses, are forced to relinquish it to outsiders. The play ends with the portrayal of the last two mistresses of "Tall Trees." The first is the wife of an unscrupulous political boss, and the second is the wife of an Italian bootlegger who turns the house into a tavern and night club, the final downfall of the once stately and aristocratic mansion. This solo-drama depicting the disintegration of a once noble family was played in New York to receive endorsements such as, "In Mansion on the Hudson, her performance and achievement as a playwright are both remarkable."⁴⁷ In 1936, the production went on tour of the Atlantic seaboard, to Georgia, Alabama, Texas, Oklahoma, Philadelphia, Minneapolis, and St. Paul.

Miss Skinner had four successful monologue-dramas to her credit when she wrote, acted, and produced a fifth the following year, 1937. She adapted Margaret Ayer Barnes' novel, Edna His Wife, as a solo-drama of the same name in which she portrayed women of three generations. On Broadway there were mixed reactions. One said, "Miss Skinner can be

⁴⁷ Barnes, op. cit., p. 359.

all things to all men ..."⁴⁸ Another, George Jean Nathan said, "She is not an actress. She is rather simply the impersonator of and commentator on an actress."⁴⁹ Following the New York engagement of Edna His Wife, a twenty-five to thirty week tour was made in the United States and Canada. As a result of this tour, the size of her audiences increased. The spectators admired her talents as a solo-performer and dramatist.

In 1938, not resting on her laurels, Miss Skinner toured in the play, Romance, by Cavallini, and in 1939 did a new production of Shaw's Candida. This was her first assignment as a star with full company. As the leading actress of Shaw's play, her wit and personality are exemplified in an exchange of cablegrams with the playwright following the play:

Shaw to Skinner: Wonderful the GREATEST
 Skinner to Shaw: Undeserving Such Praise
 Shaw to Skinner: I Meant the Play
 Skinner to Shaw: So Did I.⁵⁰

In 1941, Cornelia Otis Skinner appeared in W. Somerset Maugham's and Guy Bolton's play, Theatre. The production opened in Chicago and then was played in New York at the John Golden Theatre. "Not itself regarded as a masterpiece,

⁴⁸Current Biography, 1942, p. 771.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰From the Roster of Major Barbara. This story was printed in the program notes to Major Barbara, performed by Miss Skinner and company. The source is the Michigan State University Donald Buell Theatre Collection.

it called for considerable display of Miss Skinner's ability ... the critics voiced almost unanimous approval."⁵¹

Again on Broadway in the following season, 1942-1943, she starred in The Searching Wind by Lillian Hellman. Between 1943 and 1946, Miss Skinner made short tours with her monologue material, made frequent personal appearances, wrote and acted in a series of Mary-and-Bill radio sketches, and was active in the Red Cross and charity projects. She also published two books, and co-authored with Emily Kimbrough a book, Our Hearts Were Young and Gay; the novel was filmed in Hollywood in 1944, and dramatized by Jean Kerr in 1946. In 1946, she starred in Oscar Wilde's Lady Windermere's Fan, which role she played for a season on Broadway and during a year's tour throughout the United States.

Miss Skinner revived another of George Bernard Shaw's plays, Major Barbara. Until 1952, Miss Skinner traveled the theatre and concert circuits of the United States as she made preparation for her latest solo-production, Paris '90.

Paris '90

Paris '90 opened in March, 1952, at the Booth Theatre and, after a seven months' engagement, was taken on tour. For Paris '90, Miss Skinner used a complete staff of technicians. Her fourteen costumes were designed by Helene Pons, her stage sets by Donald Oenslager. A complete musical score

⁵¹"Paris '90" Souvenir Book, p. 1.

was composed by Kay Swift, and the orchestra was directed by Nathaniel Shilkret. In the first two acts of the three-act production, ten different women in Paris were portrayed. The third act brought on stage four models of Henri Toulouse-Lautrec. Miss Skinner got the idea for a monologue-drama, based completely on Lautrec's women friends, toward the end of World War II when the French artist and his art received increased recognition.

Miss Skinner conceived the idea of creating a full-length solo-drama about the various women --mostly entertainers of the bal musettes and cabarets--so magnificently portrayed in the posters and canvases of the misshapen little artist who moved through the night life of Paris like an obsessed archivist.⁵²

After completing research on Paris society between 1870-1900, Miss Skinner decided to expand the idea of portraying only Lautrec's flamboyant women to include other types of women to give a more accurate picture of Paris in 1890. Preparation for the solo-drama lasted two years, including a trip to France in 1951 for personal interviews and research, before she wrote the monologue-drama. Another year was spent on production details. The premiere of Paris '90 was at the Academy of Music in Northampton, Massachusetts, on Saturday, January 12, 1952. The complexity of characterization demands analysis which will follow in chapter four of this study.

After Paris '90, Miss Skinner co-authored with Samuel

⁵²Ibid.

Taylor the play, The Pleasure of His Company. In this play she co-starred with Cyril Ritchard. The comedy-drama opened Wednesday, October 22, 1958, at the Longacre Theatre. After a long run in New York, Miss Skinner and Mr. Ritchard toured the play during the 1959-1960 season; in 1960, they took the play to Australia for a four-month engagement.

Professional Activities Outside the Theatre

In addition to her stage career, Miss Skinner has taken time to write novels and magazine articles, and she has lived a well-balanced, abundant, and rich life as a homemaker. As a novelist, her contribution includes: Tiny Garments, 1932; Excuse It Please, 1936; Dithers and Jitters, 1938; Soap Behind The Ears, 1941; Our Hearts Were Young and Gay, in collaboration with Emily Kimbrough, 1942; Popcorn, 1943 (British publication); Family Circle, 1948; That's Me All Over, 1948; Nuts In May, 1950; Bottoms Up, 1955; and The Ape In Me, 1959. Her numerous contributions to periodicals include articles in such magazines as The New Yorker, Harper's Bazaar, The Saturday Review of Literature, Reader's Digest, Good Housekeeping, Ladies Home Journal, Vogue, and The New York Times Magazine. She also has made television appearances on such programs as the Ed Sullivan Hour, the Perry Como Show, and the Arthur Murray Dance Party.

For her contribution to American culture, Cornelia Otis Skinner was awarded the honorary Doctor of Letters degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1938. Other

honorary degrees were conferred upon her from Rochester, Tufts, Temple, St. Lawrence, Clark, and New York universities. During 1944, she was president of Actor's Equity.

Life Apart From The Theatre

Miss Skinner lives a full and diversified life apart from the stage. She has been married for thirty-three years to Alden S. Blodget, a former banker who is now her business manager and theatrical producer. The Blodgets have one son, Otis Skinner Blodget, who was married in February, 1960, to Mariamna Jacqueline Bertin.

Home to Miss Skinner is an exclusive New York apartment which belonged to her father, and a 90-acre estate on Long Island's fashionable North Side. "Alternating between her Manhattan apartment and her Long Island home, Miss Skinner is one of the most gracious hostesses in the East ..."⁵³ Miss Skinner's country house is in St. James, not far from Smithtown, New York.

The Blodget homestead--and Cornelia ... is always Mrs. Blodget on Long Island--is called the Kinderhoek House, which means ... the Children's Corner. For all its charm, the name is misleading.

It is a pretty large dwelling--if it were on the Hudson River, instead of Long Island Sound, it would be called a mansion.⁵⁴

⁵³"One-Woman Show," The American Magazine, 161 (June 1956), p. 45.

⁵⁴Emily Kimbrough, "She Follows Her Heart To The Country," House And Garden, 85 (March 1944), p. 47.

Miss Skinner's career has had astute financial management. Plays in which she performed brought her, in 1944, a weekly income of \$1,000.00 while her monologue-dramas grossed \$10,000.00 weekly; of her income 80 per cent is taken for taxes.⁵⁵ Her monologue-dramas are profitable because "she seldom takes less than a performance guarantee of \$2,000.00 against 70% of the gross, has no author's royalties, no cast or union scale ..."⁵⁶

Miss Skinner's wealth and fame have not overshadowed her generosity and democratic personality. "The added affluence made no difference in the tenor of Miss Skinner's life, and less in her personal wardrobe, for she remained one of the ten worst-dressed women in the Social Register."⁵⁷ Among her friends and professional associates, Cornelia Otis Skinner is admired for her talent, wit, personality, and charm. "All tales concern her jovial nature, her unostentatious generosity ... and her infectious humor."⁵⁸ Emily Kimbrough, one of Miss Skinner's personal friends and co-authors, has written what she believes epitomizes the particular quality of Miss Skinner which has won her admiration.

I have said before that Cornelia has the capacity for Work and the concentration upon it of a scholar. Of all her talents, which I despair

⁵⁵Mann, loc. cit.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 19.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 88.

⁵⁸Ibid.

even of enumerating, much less emulating, this is one which I admire inordinately. I think it comes--this particular greatness of hers--from her respect for a job competently done, and her distaste of anything less than that.⁵⁹

Summary

In preparation for the study of the monologue-drama of Cornelia Otis Skinner, this chapter has presented information on Miss Skinner's background, personality and attributes, and stature. She inherited a respect and deep love for the theatre. Her parents were not only instrumental in her career, but they also equipped her with basic foundations which have helped her throughout life. The warmth of her personality, her wit, intelligence, and fortitude make Miss Skinner a distinctive individual both in and out of the theatre; both on stage and off she is recognized as a woman of character and stature. Miss Skinner used her resources to expand theatrical art by creating a new dramatic form for the solo-performer, the monologue-drama. How she departed from her forebears in the theatre and her theories as a performer are treated in the following pages.

⁵⁹Kimbrough, loc. cit.

CHAPTER III

THE MONOLOGUE-DRAMA AND MISS SKINNER'S THEORY OF ITS PERFORMANCE

Cornelia Otis Skinner brought to the professional English-speaking stage the art of the monologue-drama. Her skill as a performer was complemented by her ability as a writer of her own monologue-drama material.

This section considers the unique bases which comprise the monologue-drama itself and explores Miss Skinner's theory of performing it. First, the nomenclature for Miss Skinner's solo art is reviewed in order to provide a basis for definition. Recognition, then, is given to her predecessors and her heritage from these earlier solo performers. How her art of monologue-drama is similar to and yet different from that of her forerunners and contemporaries is studied.

Third, the performance of monologue-drama, of course, is similar to that of acting in a play and also to oral interpretation, the art of reading from the printed page to an audience. But each has its own unique characteristics which bear detailed consideration.

Finally, Miss Skinner's views regarding both acting

and solo performance are studied so as to illuminate the special elements of the monologue-drama and Miss Skinner's art of playing it.

Monologue-Drama Nomenclature

Miss Skinner's unique art of the solo-drama is known by many names including monologues, monodrama, readings, character sketches, one-woman shows, and solo-dramas. It does not seem surprising that she has been called a reader, impersonator, actress, monologist, monologist, and interpreter, for these terms are similar. She has said, "one of her chief problems is finding the appropriate title for her unique form of theatre, the one-woman show."¹ The two terms which are sometimes used to describe Miss Skinner's performances, but which are said to cause her distress are the words "readings" and "diseuse."

Why anybody should call it, Readings, I cannot imagine. You might think that I got out my glasses, sat down in an easy chair under a good light, and read aloud from a book or manuscript in a cosy fashion, to an inanimate audience of a thousand people.²

Therefore, she denounced the idea that she is a reader and that her performances are readings. The word "diseuse" is not really an incorrect term, but she tends not to use the term because it is a French word and the public is often

¹A press release from the office of Cornelia Otis Skinner, 22 East 60th Street, New York 22, New York. This was given as Miss Skinner's statement on the subject concerning a name for her art.

²Ibid.

reluctant to use a foreign word with which they associate affectation.³ Another reason why she is reluctant to use it is that it has caused slightly ludicrous mishaps. Once in England, and later in Boston, a type-setter fixed a statement to read that "Cornelia Otis Skinner, a well-known disease, was appearing in London."⁴ Ruefully, Miss Skinner says, "I can only hope the disease is contagious."⁵

Monologist or monologist appear to be correct academic terms, but for the reasons that they sound too academic and also because they might be confusing since they each can be pronounced two different ways, Miss Skinner uses them infrequently.⁶ She prefers that the general theatre public call her performances "One-Woman Dramas."⁷ For the purpose of this study, the term "one-woman drama," while correct, does not necessarily distinguish Miss Skinner from other solo performers. The term monologue-drama signifies more clearly what is unique about her art. While the performer may consider it a bit "high brow," the term itself states that the unique theatrical medium under consideration is a combination of solo performance and legitimate drama. Miss Skinner's highly specialized art need not be assigned

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶In an interview with Miss Skinner, Shubert Theatre, Detroit, Michigan, April 18, 1960.

⁷Ibid.

only one name, for various terms apply. Throughout this study some of the terms cited, such as monologue-drama, monodrama, one-woman drama, and solo-drama are used interchangeably.

Miss Skinner and Her Predecessors

The most recent of Miss Skinner's predecessors in the playing of the character sketch was Ruth Draper. Miss Skinner began with sketches much in the style of Ruth Draper. Unlike Miss Draper who deviated little from character sketches, Miss Skinner soon in her career departed from them for the monologue-dramas which had a unity and continuous theme not possible in the sketch. She credited Ruth Draper as being indeed a wonderful artist and performer from whom she inherited a rich tradition in the solo-performance.⁸

Miss Draper was born in 1884 and lived until 1956. She performed professionally, but limited herself mostly to private and public gatherings in homes, small concert halls, schools, and the courts of European royalty. Her monologues were short, and she called them "character impressions."⁹ Her programs were composed of a series of ten-minute individual sketches. "She is the pioneer author-disease, and no American has bettered her in either fine achievement so far

⁸Ibid.

⁹Millicent Eames, "Creating a New American Art," The Independent Woman, 14 (October, 1935), p. 360.

as the character sketch form is concerned."¹⁰

Miss Skinner benefited from Miss Draper in that Miss Draper stimulated a wide public appreciation for monologues or what she referred to as, "Je suis seule."

The dramatic monologue was in doubtful repute when Ruth Draper set out on her career; even in vaudeville its vogue was waning; and she must have begun her work convinced that something new in the way of taste, skill, and refinement was needed to make a serious art of it.¹¹

In fact, one of the ardent admirers of Ruth Draper's performances was Otis Skinner. In a letter to Miss Draper, he wrote:

Neither age nor custom can take away my amazement at you ... But I have one serious quarrel with you. You carry one of the largest supporting companies I have ever seen. In each of your sketches you have surrounded yourself with a group of actors whose art is perfected and whose presence is compelling and hypnotic. And yet you pay them nothing!! Do you think that is fair?¹²

Ruth Draper used a minimum of costumes and properties in her performances. Usually she appeared in a tan or brown dress of simple style and accented her gown with jewelry, fans, umbrellas, hats, and shawls for appropriate characterizations. She became famous for her adroit use of the shawl, which after her death served "as the mantle for her bier ..."¹³

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Morton Dauwen Zabel, The Art of Ruth Draper (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1960), p. 99.

¹²Ibid., p. 74.

¹³Ibid., p. 114.

She traveled extensively throughout the world to perform for countless audiences. Some of her character sketches were done in French and German. She never used material written by another, not even when Henry James wrote a monologue for her.

Miss Draper appeared in only one full-length play, A Lady's Name (1916), by Cyril Harcourt. In 1917, she adapted The Stronger, a one-act play by Strindberg, which she entitled An Old Story. It was severely criticized by critics as "'ill advised,' 'singularly misguided and tedious,' and Ruth wrote it off as 'A loss!' in her record book."¹⁴ Only one other time did she share the stage with other actors. This was in Winthrop Ames' all-star program for the Duse Fund in 1929, when she played Juliet.

Ruth Draper was not the originator of the character sketch. The woman solo-performer who preceded her, and to whom she gave much credit for the inspiration afforded her, was the Englishwoman, Beatrice Herford. "I saw Beatrice Herford perform her monologues and realized what could be done,"¹⁵ Miss Draper explained. Miss Herford was born in 1868 and lived until 1952. She performed her monologues for private gatherings, at the London Lyceum, at the New York Palace in vaudeville, and in various Broadway revues.

It will be noticed at once that her [Miss Herford's] subjects were very like those Ruth Draper later developed. Their difference from

¹⁴Ibid., p. 54.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 31.

Ruth's lies chiefly in their comparative narrowness of range. All are humorous or satirical in key; most of them tend toward a gentle or indulgent malice of attitude. There are no moments of pathos, grief, or tragedy. In fact, Miss Herford's voice and mannerism did not lend themselves to these contrasts and variations. She was essentially a comedienne and always adhered to that vein. But in her time she was a brilliant exponent of the genre. It is easy to see why Ruth Draper found her stimulating, and saw in her work an encouraging example of what her own talent might become.¹⁶

Ruth Draper never studied acting, although Paderewski suggested that she might contemplate the possibility of study in Paris. She did, however, follow this noted musician's suggestion when he advised her after one of her amateur performances, "You must do this professionally."¹⁷

She believed that her success was due to three elements, two of which were, "curiosity and energy in herself, and imagination in her audience."¹⁸ Her third principle was excellent physical health. As a child she would pretend or make-believe. It was the childlike ability of pretending that she tried to retain throughout her career as a solo performer. "If you give yourself completely to what you pretend you are, you will convince other people that it exists, and only then. Children do this spontaneously, without self consciousness."¹⁹ Miss Draper never wrote any theories of

¹⁶Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 91.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 91-2.

her art, but she believed that the solo-performer had to identify closely with the part. "I know no way of explaining it. One must simply become the person one depicts."²⁰

Certainly her performances were never bombastic nor in a florid grand style. They were intimate, coming from within, and rang true. "It was on that original instinct of 'becoming' that her artistry relied, and it was her special fortune that she never lost it."²¹

The illusion that Miss Draper produced came from the audience. She was said to believe that the audience had to imagine and make-believe too. Once she remarked that

they [the audience] are expected to share in what I create, and to their amazement they discover that they can do so. What holds their attention most is what they themselves are able to give.²²

She thought that to "put it over" was wrong. Rather, she believed that she should share and bring the audience into the illusion. "It is the audience that must supply the imagination. All I can do myself is to make the audience give it to me."²³

The third tenet of Ruth Draper's monologue performances was vitality and physical health. Giving a performance taxed one's energy, and she learned if the artist was

²⁰Ibid., p. 94.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., p. 93.

²³Ibid., p. 94.

not physically alert, he would fail. "All actors must have vitality. The moment it fails them they lose their power to transform and project themselves."²⁴

Ruth Draper certainly was a key figure in the solo-drama even though she did not create it or monopolize it. As for subject matter, she could not completely escape from Victorian culture.

Her "Miner's Wife" is in the Dickensian tradition, and so are some of her satires of society and "culture." But most of her sketches are explicit in their repudiation of exaggerated caricature and melodrama.²⁵

Such people as Beatrice Herford had helped to "span the gap between Victorian extravagance and modern irony."²⁶ Miss Herford was contemporaneous with other solo performers such as Yvette Guilbert and her vocal style of impersonation, and even with Cissie Loftus "with her brilliant caricatures of stage types."²⁷

Dorothy Sands also performed alone and was a popular one-woman attraction in the United States. She was an impersonator and mimic rather than a monologist. For example, Miss Sands was well known for doing the sleep-walking scene in Macbeth as she believed it would be done by Haidie Wright, Ethel Barrymore, Laurette Taylor, Mary Boland, and Mae West. Besides her skilled impersonations, Miss Sands read monologue

²⁴Ibid., p. 92.

²⁵Ibid., p. 99.

²⁶Ibid., p. 100.

²⁷Ibid.

selections from plays of Henry Arthur Jones, Dryden, Congreve, Shaw, and O'Neill.

She differs from Miss Draper and Miss Skinner in that they are preeminently monologists while Miss Sands is an actress with an uncanny gift for impersonation. They create and set their own characters. Miss Sands, though she arranges her programs and writes the connecting link between her numbers, impersonates other actresses in roles which they have made famous. She is original in her idea. Differing widely from the others of the trio, she owes nothing to them.²⁸

Yvette Guilbert, Cissie Loftus, Beatrice Herford, Dorothy Sands, and especially Ruth Draper have left their mark in the history of the solo-performance into which Cornelia Otis Skinner brought new dimension. Each used the monologue form in a very different way.

Cornelia Otis Skinner greatly admired Ruth Draper, and it took courage not only to follow in her path but to develop and explore the untried. Miss Draper was said to have

a profound sense of tragedy, a lovely note of womanly tenderness and compassion ennobling everything she does. In this amplitude and depth she approaches that truly great artist and diseuse, Yvette Guilbert.²⁹

As Ruth Draper was at the height of her career, Miss Skinner was pioneering in her monologue-drama. Yet, it was said by the same critic who wrote the preceding critique of Miss Draper, that Miss Skinner's

²⁸Eames, loc. cit.

²⁹Ibid.

material, her method of approach to it [the monologue-drama] and its projection are necessarily colored by her markedly original mind and charming personality.... Gradually Miss Skinner's creative genius evolved and shaped her new medium.³⁰

Although she won acclaim throughout the United States and Canada for her sketches, she was too ambitious for such sketches to satisfy her fully. "Still, had she been content to confine herself to this type of monologue [character sketches] she would have challenged Miss Draper as premiere American diseuse, but nothing more."³¹

Similarities exist between Miss Skinner, Ruth Draper, and Dorothy Sands. All three performers received excellent education and opportunities provided them by their families. Miss Skinner attended Bryn Mawr, while Miss Sands went to Radcliff, and Miss Draper was privately tutored. "Knowledge of music, of painting, the ability to make historical characters of their periods vivid and authentic, are all based on hard work and an excellent education."³² All three of these women performers wrote their own material. Miss Sands also performed monologues written by important playwrights. However, they all had the ability to write material which best suited them. Besides giving their solo-performances, Miss Sands and Miss Skinner frequently acted in plays, and as we have noted Miss Draper was once in a

³⁰Ibid., p. 342.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid., p. 360.

professional stage play. They created characterizations which portrayed their feelings without the help of any fellow actor on the stage, and each had the ability to create imaginary persons on stage with such dimension that the audiences could interpret their characterizations. Miss Draper, Miss Sands, and Miss Skinner have developed the monologue, and have become well-known performers through the monologue.

They have already enriched the monologue, making of it a new, delightful, and creative force. They have taken something time-worn and frayed and endowed it with a fresh vigor and fascination. Thanks to these great artists the monologue is no longer the Cinderella, but the Proud Princess of the American theatre.³³

Contemporary Solo-Performers

Not only does Miss Skinner have forebears in solo theatre, but she also has her contemporaries. In an interview, she distinguished herself from other solo-performers such as Charles Laughton and Mort Sahl because Mr. Laughton reads from the manuscript or performs with other actors in a reading theatre, and Mr. Sahl is a night club entertainer.

The reading theatre is associated with solo performance because, like the monologue-drama, it is a hybrid type of theatre. The reading or chamber theatre, as it has been called, has become popular in the United States in recent years largely due to The First Drama Quartette. This group

³³Ibid.

gave their reading, as they called it, of G. B. Shaw's Don Juan In Hell at Carnegie Hall, October 22, 1951; later the production toured the United States. In a review, one critic wrote, "I put the word 'reading' in quotation marks, because, while that is what the performance basically is, it is also considerably more than that."³⁴ Four actors, Charles Boyer, Charles Laughton, Cedric Hardwicke, and Agnes Moorehead, were dressed in evening clothes and stood, or sat on high stools, before microphones. With scripts before them, they pretended to read their parts, but departed from them at times to move toward each other or toward the audience. Mr. Laughton or Mr. Hardwicke read Shaw's stage directions, the side remarks.

The result is very much like sitting in your living room and listening to four charming talkers, who have just read a great book, discuss it, conveying its quotable lines most effectively.³⁵

Following this production, similar professional reading groups took form, such as the reading theatre presentation of John Brown's Body which toured the United States. In like manner to the first quartet, four men and two women read the first of Sean O'Casey's autobiographies, I Knock At The Door. The cast headed by Aline MacMahon and George Brenlin read

³⁴Richard Watts, Jr., "A Rare Evening With Bernard Shaw," The New York Post (October 23, 1951), from The New York Drama Critics Review, 1951, p. 195.

³⁵Robert Coleman, "Drama Quartet Scores In 'Don Juan In Hell,'" The New York Daily Mirror (October 23, 1951), from The New York Drama Critics Review, 1951, p. 195.

Paul Shyre's adaptation of O'Casey's book at the Belasco Theatre in 1957. A still more recent example of reading theatre on the American stage was during the 1959-1960 season when Norman Corwin's The Rivalry was presented. Raymond Massey, Martin Gabel, and Agnes Moorehead were the readers who toured this drama based on the Lincoln-Douglas debates. Cast in the New York production at the Bijou Theatre were Gabel, Richard Boone, and Nancy Kelly. The theatre was arranged like a meeting hall, and no sets or front curtain were used. The production was termed a "modern genre of a dramatized reading."³⁶ It was criticized as being a "studious and brilliantly executed exercise in elocution;"³⁷ another critic said "'Rivalry' belongs on the book shelf, not the stage."³⁸

Compared with the performer in the reading theatre, Miss Skinner, as a monologist, never performs with a manuscript. She memorizes her scripts and acts them. Another distinction is that she performs entirely alone.

Unlike solo performers such as Mort Sahl, Shelly Berman, and Bob Newhardt, Miss Skinner's dramas are not cynical

³⁶Lewis Funke, "Lincoln-Douglas 'Rivalry'," The New York Times (February 9, 1959), from The New York Drama Critics Review, 1959, p. 382.

³⁷John McClain, "An Experience To Be Cherished," The New York Journal American (February 9, 1959), from The New York Drama Critics Review, 1959, p. 381.

³⁸Frank Aston, "It's Lincoln vs. Douglas In Bijou Meeting Hall," The New York World-Telegram (February 9, 1959), from The New York Theatre Critics Review, 1959, p. 379.

commentaries on modern life. They rather are based upon characterizations which are seen in the light of history or a chronicle situation. Her programs are not conceived solely as entertainment whose aim is laughter as are the comic routines of the solo-performer, Victor Borge. Mr. Borge made his Carnegie Hall debut, 1945, as a comedian and pianist who "interspersed favorite comedy routines with his serious piano-playing and conducting of a forty piece orchestra."³⁹ The Unmelancholy Dane, as he is sometimes called, also has performed in night clubs. Miss Skinner limits her performances to the theatre and concert hall environment.

Contemporary solo-performers who more closely follow Miss Skinner's style as a monologist are Emlyn Williams and Hal Holbrook. As a solo-performer, Mr. Williams is remembered as impersonating Charles Dickens giving one of his famous readings. Emlyn Williams was a popular reader in this role which he performed at the John Golden Theatre in 1952 and on tour. He reads alone and "appears on stage dressed as Dickens in a frilly waistcoat, the traditional white carnation in the buttonhole, and performs behind a replica of the author's favorite reading desk."⁴⁰ Later, in 1957, at the Longacre Theatre, he appeared in a solo-performance called A Boy

³⁹"Victor Borge," Current Biography, 1946 (New York: The H. W. Wilson Company, 1946), p. 63.

⁴⁰"Forecasts and Side Glances," Theatre Arts Monthly, XXXVI (March, 1952); p. 13.

Growing Up, which was a "one man story-telling session."⁴¹ He used a chair and a folding screen in his entertainment from stories of Dylan Thomas. Better known for Dickens, "he sets and shapes a scene and makes transitions from character to character which are instantaneous and persuasive."⁴²

Hal Holbrook, like Emlyn Williams, impersonates a famous person, Mark Twain. His resemblance in looks to Twain is remarkable, and he thought it to be an important factor in his effectiveness; he spends three hours and ten minutes in making up before each performance. Mark Twain Tonight played in New York at the Fifty-First Street Theatre from April, 1959, through the summer, and then was taken on an extensive tour of the East, Midwest, and Pacific Coast. Holbrook was called a "monologist,"⁴³ and presented "a program of reading from the humorist's works in which [he] the monologist impersonates Twain."⁴⁴

These two are similar in performance to Miss Skinner for they appear in the theatre, are soloists, use costumes and properties, and are talented and remarkable performers. However, unlike her, they act only one role, depend on impersonation, and at times read from manuscripts.

⁴¹"A Boy Growing Up," Theatre Arts Monthly, XLI (December, 1957), p. 27.

⁴²John Mason Brown, "Mr. Dickens Reads Again," The Saturday Review of Literature, XXXVI (February 23, 1952), p. 28.

⁴³"Twain To The Life," Theatre Arts Monthly, XLIII (October, 1959), p. 71.

⁴⁴Ibid.

Miss Skinner's monologue-drama is unique to her, although she no doubt has influenced contemporaneous solo-performers. Unlike the theatre of her contemporaneous soloists, her art is not a character sketch, a type of reading theatre, a night club routine, a story-telling session, or an impersonation.

As a monologist she has been called an oral interpreter and an actress also, yet both are different from the performer of monologue-drama. As Charlotte Lee has written, "Somewhere between acting and the oral interpretation of drama comes the art of ... monodrama."⁴⁵

Monologue-Drama Versus Oral Interpretation

Cornelia Otis Skinner's monologue-drama is unique in form and differs from, yet is similar to, both oral interpretation and stage drama.

The reader, or oral interpreter, and the monologist employ similar artistic expressions to present characters, situations, and their related feelings and attitudes, yet there are significant differences which necessitate separating the two for clarity in explaining Miss Skinner's monologue-drama performances. This discussion is not intended to place a comparative value or judgment on the two. Each has its place as a means of artistic expression. To compare, yet to distinguish between, the art of oral interpretation

⁴⁵Charlotte I. Lee, Oral Interpretation (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959), p. 294.

and the art of the monologue-drama is intended to reveal the unique aspects of the latter and the relation it has to other dramatic forms.

The task of the reader or oral interpreter is to re-create for an audience what the author has written. Use of imagination is a necessary element for the interpreter and the monologist. Each "perceives the meaning which the author describes by recombining sensations in his experience through the process of imagination."⁴⁶ The monologist uses his imagination and, by recreating, is an interpreter of characterizations and situations. Imagination is extremely important in working on the subtle suggestions of emotions and attitudes. Both the monologist and the oral interpreter are concerned with human emotions and motivations in performing their arts.

The oral interpreter does not try to reproduce reality, but instead merely to suggest it. He knows that it is impossible to play all characters simultaneously. So by changes of voice, facial expression, and bodily expression he suggests various characters. The actor does not merely suggest, but he literally acts out one characterization in a particular situation. "In performance, the actor strives for the utmost physical explicitness, while the interpreter relies upon suggestion."⁴⁷ The monologist does more than

⁴⁶Sara Lowrey and Gertrude E. Johnson, Interpretative Reading (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1953), p. 30.

⁴⁷Lee, p. 294.

suggest a character, but he cannot go as far as the actor in a stage play. He has no other actors on stage to help him, so he has to suggest them by himself. The monodrama "is more direct and involves a more complete characterization ... fullness of facial expression and of bodily gesture and great liberty in moving about the platform."⁴⁸ His characterizations must be graphic so as to leave no doubt as to whom he is playing or what situation is being presented. He acts one character at a time and suggests imaginary characters, thereby combining the art of the actor and the interpreter.

The monologist, then, like the oral interpreter uses suggestion to indicate and place the imaginary characters. This is the greatest similarity between oral interpretation as an art and that of monologue-drama. Interpretation has been described as "a study in creating an illusion."⁴⁹ Both the oral interpreter, or reader, and the monologist depend on suggesting other characters so that the audience will clearly understand the illusion and imaginatively see it. The monologist, then, like the oral interpreter uses suggestion to indicate and place the imaginary characters. They accomplish this by placement of characters. With a slight turn of the head and sometimes the body and by directing the eyes to specific areas of the audience, the characters

⁴⁸Charles H. Wollbert and Severina E. Nelson, The Art of Interpretative Speech (New York: F. S. Crofts), p. 6.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 28.

are placed so that the audience is able to understand, without effort, who is speaking. The "monodrama assumes the presence of one or more other characters, who move in and out of the scene and motivate changes in the speaker's thoughts and actions."⁵⁰ For example, the monologist in Paris '90 suggests as many as three characters at the same time. In the Berthe La Sourde scene of act three, the audience is led to imagine they see two women fighting, although only Berthe is seen. In other scenes various types of people of many different sizes are suggested. The audience has to be able to distinguish how tall Henri Toulouse-Lautrec is in comparison to the height of Yvette Guilbert so they will believe she is talking to a dwarf.

In order to suggest imaginary characters, both the interpreter and monologist use pantomime. Since the interpreter never uses properties he depends completely on pantomimic gestures.

He is the instrument through which the printed page comes alive for the audience, and, through him, the audience mentally recreates the details which are explicitly and physically present in a dramatic production.⁵¹

Pantomime helps the solo-performer to time reaction of lines and suggest other characters. Technique in it is enhanced by the performer's analytical observation of life. In monologue-drama, however, the performer may use real

⁵⁰Lee, loc. cit.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 295.

properties rather than suggest them by pantomime, or he may combine the use of actual properties with pantomime; he is costumed while the oral reader is not. "The mono-actor ... selects and uses appropriate details of properties, costumes, make-up, and scenery."⁵²

Both the oral interpreter and the monologist recognize that transitions between characters must always be clear because the scene will fail if the audience is confused and cannot keep pace. It matters not how true, intelligent, and witty are the lines if characterization is not immediately established. Experience as a performer and a very quick responsiveness of mind encourage skillful transition. The performer must "put on" a new mental condition and indicate the change by his voice and relevant bodily movement. He has to consider not only the transition from character to character, but the transition focusing attention from one imaginary person to another. Precision in transition is of utmost importance to both the monologist and oral interpreter. Part of their ability to effect transitions is in the natural sequence of attention of eye, head, and body.

The oral interpreter and the monologist each use their voice and body in such a way as to suggest concisely, cogently, and richly all the meaning which the individual has found in the printed creation of the author. Both the oral interpreter and monologist use the exact words of the

⁵²Ibid.

writer and the meaning found therein. Bodily activity of the interpreter and the monologist should be integrated to the presentation. The interpreter does not have the freedom of activity which the actor and monologist have. The oral interpreter retains reference to a manuscript and is confined to the area close to his reading stand or podium. The reading stand or manuscript is the frame for the oral interpreter. This frame says, psychologically, that this is an art which the spectator is beholding. It promotes a feeling of detachment from emotional material read by the interpreter. The interpreter, then, proceeds according to the limits of his aesthetic frame in seeing that his movement, posture, gesture, and activity conform to the reading stand. To overdo his movements breaks the aesthetic distance which his art tries to set.

The monologist uses no reading stand as a physical means to set aesthetic distance. He uses instead the proscenium arch in a theatre as his frame to establish aesthetic distance. He, too, uses aesthetic principles of unity, variety, balance, harmony, and proportion, in relation to stage and setting. His movement, as a monologist, has far greater range than that of the oral interpreter.

Miss Skinner is a monologist rather than an oral interpreter. Like an oral interpreter she depends upon imagination and suggestion in presenting imaginary characters, performs alone, uses pantomime, effects skillful transitions of characters, and is technically adept in bodily

activity and vocal effectiveness. The audience must never doubt what role she is playing. Her imaginary characters must be so well defined in performance that it is difficult to imagine that they do not exist. She has to rely on well-planned and well-timed pantomime and movement to hold her audience and to keep her solo-drama exciting and vivid.

As a monologist, Miss Skinner has unique characteristics which distinguish her from an oral interpreter. Unlike the interpreter she plays only one character at a time, uses a combination of pantomime and properties in her scenes, and employs costumes and scenery. She takes greater freedom of bodily activity than an interpreter, never reads from a manuscript, memorizes her material, uses the whole stage area if she so desires, and is not bound to a podium or reading stand.

Acting and Playing Monologue-Drama

Acting in a play and acting in a monologue-drama are not the same, but the two are closely related. The monologist is an actor of a single role.

The actor actually is, for the time being, the person whose part he is taking. He wears the clothing, uses the properties, and assumes the character of that person. He behaves in relation to other actors as one real person acts in regard to other people.⁵³

⁵³Moiree Compere, "Curriculum Guide For High School Interpretation," (Michigan State University, Department of Speech, 1958), p. 7. (Mimeographed.)

A monologist presents the monologue-drama by taking the role of a single character in each scene in sequence.

The mono-actor ... concentrates on only one character ... and creates the other actors in imagination, while keeping the focus of attention constantly on the single character that is visible to the audience.⁵⁴

The monologist, like the actor, is the person whom he portrays, but unlike the actor, he suggests the other characters. The actor does not have this task for he performs with other actors, unlike the solo-performer.

Characterization of a monologist, then, is unlike that of an actor in a play because "an actor usually portrays only one character and is vocally and physically explicit in that portrayal, aided by make-up, costumes, scenery, and the presence of other actors."⁵⁵ A monologist is not a character playing a continuous role throughout, but he is a series of characters in succession. "In this form of presentation [monologue-drama], a single person presents material which focuses attention on a single character in a single situation."⁵⁶ Paris '90, for example, demands the playing of thirteen different women during the two-hour program. The art of a monologist uses "dramatic technique which creates the illusion of the dramatic relation of all the people."⁵⁷ He has to appeal to the imagination of the audience far more

⁵⁴Lee, op. cit., p. 295.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 294.

⁵⁷Compere, loc. cit.

than does the actor in a play. All the other characters of the monologue-drama are imaginary, and they are suggested by the performer who must react realistically to imagination and space. The monologist has to be skilled in order to suggest supplementary people so that the audience is motivated to imagine a character and situation.

The monologist relies upon distance and timing of voice, body, and eyes to create illusion. In order to place an imaginary person in a down-right stage area, the sense of distance and timing of the performer has to be accurate in suggesting a person at that particular place; a place that is more flexible than it is literal. Miss Skinner emphasized that it is important to master this technique for, even though the imaginary character is vividly set in the performer's conception, speaking into space does not employ the same technique as speaking directly to someone.⁵⁸ The solo-performer cannot wait in silence for a reply the length of time it would take for a person to answer. Yet, the solo-performer must pause or signify to the audience that there is someone to whom he is addressing his remarks, that he is not just talking to himself. In preparing her monologue-dramas, Miss Skinner makes certain that every unseen person making an entrance and exit during the action is conceived as a fully-rounded individual.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Interview with Miss Skinner at the Shubert Theatre, Detroit, Michigan, April 18, 1960.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

I know the complete biography of each one. I know all of their physical characteristics--whether they're tall or short, blonde or brunet, nice-looking or unattractive, relaxed in speech and manner or high-strung and jumpy. I know how they spend their time, how they dress, whether they're close friends, casual acquaintances or strangers.⁶⁰

Miss Skinner wrote briefly about the visual illusion which she has tried to create in her performance of the monologue-dramas.

Every one of their [the imaginative characters] speeches and stage movements is written out and rehearsed. I can watch them and listen to them and speak lines to them as intelligently as I would to a "regular" actor. It isn't really much different, except for the attempt to create greater visual illusion, than playing a realistic scene on a stage telephone--with only an imaginary caller at the other end of the line.⁶¹

The whole performance of the monologist, therefore, tends to be geared to a higher imagination level than does the stage play. The solo-performer must adjust his use of dialogue. Dialogue in monologue-drama is one-sided, which defines its basic difference from a play. While the term dialogue usually implies discourse between two or more persons, in one-sided dialogue the solo-performer does all the speaking. The presence or vocal intercourse of another is implied by the solo-performer's actions or words. The actor's dialogue, on the other hand, is an interactive process with the other actors in the play. The monologist

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Cornelia Otis Skinner, A Statement about illusion from Miss Skinner's New York office, which she entitled "Unseen Cast 'Flesh and Blood People.'"

speaks to an imaginary character whom he must place and whose presence must be sensed by the audience.

Another factor which distinguishes monologue-drama from acting in a play is that the solo-performer, unlike the actor, is always on stage. He makes an entrance as the scene opens, must supply the dialogue with no help, speaks nearly continuously, and can leave only as the scene closes.

He uses his voice to its full potential to identify the different characters. This mastery of range and variety in voice is another exacting demand made upon the artistry of a solo-performer. The correct usage of tone and rhythm of voice brings freedom from monotony and has almost endless variations of pause, pitch, inflection, timbre, movement, and intensity. It is extensive training of the mind, imagination, and feeling that enables the monologist to grasp and give such a flood of intermingling impressions.

The monologist is an actor in the solo-performance, yet there are differences, which have been indicated, between acting in monologue-drama and in stage plays. As a monologist he plays a series of successive roles rather than just one. He portrays a particular character and at the same time suggests other characters on stage who are imaginary. He focuses attention on the character whom he is playing, and his imaginary characters complement him. Part of his skill is due to precise timing and placement of characters. He carefully rehearses how to create the illusion of other

characters being on stage. The whole performance depends upon great imagination and invention, for he must produce an illusion of other people being on stage at the same time. Dialogue must seem natural, but is actually one-sided. His art calls for him to remain on stage, for he is the whole show. Such performance requires not only great mastery of the art of acting, but a tremendous flexibility and precision not ordinarily required in other sorts of acting.

Miss Skinner's Theories of Performance
and Monologue-Drama

There is a varied complexity in Miss Skinner's performance of monologue-drama which at first makes it baffling, then fascinating. Her ideas regarding monologue-drama performance and acting in general have developed from experience.

Miss Skinner holds that acting is not a simple assignment.

Acting is a difficult, sensitive and complex art. It is also an illusive one, and the fact that it is illusive may be the reason so much has been written about it by people who never act. To create a part takes weeks of study and rehearsals.... It's a hard job and each actor has his special approach to it which is his individual problem, and I'm willing to wager that none of them approach their task with a textbook on acting in their hand. The simple attack is the best.⁶²

As a performer, she has encountered factors which make acting difficult.

⁶²Cornelia Otis Skinner, "Crying In The Dark," The New Yorker, 26 (January 20, 1951), p. 27.

One of her anxieties as an actress of both monologue-drama and plays has been the harrowing experience of first nights. She has explained that the audiences are late, and the critics in order to meet their deadlines have to leave early. The first-nighters tend to be more concerned with other first-nighters than with the performance. "The play is definitely not the thing on these occasions; it's the audience, and to go to the theatre in order to see an audience seems rather cockeyed."⁶³ As a result, the performer is in agony on first nights, far from the exhilarated feeling which some textbooks report.

He [the actor] wonders whatever made him want to be an actor, whatever made him think he is.... He tries to think of his opening lines and can't ... It's a replica of an actor's nightmare, only worse; because in the typical actor's nightmare things of a fascinating nature occur such as finding one's self playing Hamlet stark naked. I suppose the only reason any of us live through opening after opening is that the relief when it's over is so great that even adverse notices can be endured.⁶⁴

So, in her opinion, the premiere of a Broadway production is an unfair trial on which to base the success and failure of an actor and his show. Miss Skinner has suggested that the most unreceptive of the opening-night audiences are those of Broadway.

⁶³Cornelia Otis Skinner, "First Night: On Both Sides of the Curtain," The New York Times Magazine, XC (September 29, 1940), p. 8.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 9.

The birth of a [Broadway] play for those concerned is a harrowing experience and there is something about this ultrasmart, self absorbed audience that recalls those fashionable and heartless get-togethers at Versailles on the occasion of the Queen's "accouchements." It was all very jolly for the spectators but a bit tough on the Queen.⁶⁵

Miss Skinner has not been the least bit hesitant to speak of her own stage fright during opening nights for she believes it to be common to most performers. Even Sarah Bernhardt is supposed to have retorted to an overly confident young actress who boasted of no stage fright, "Wait until you become a good performer, my girl, and you'll find out."⁶⁶

Otis Skinner once reminded his daughter that she was not the only one to fear that first entrance.

Kiddie (a term of endearment he used even after I was well on to maturity), I have been in the theatre for fifty years and I've never outgrown it. Any actor who claims he is immune to stage fright is either lying or else he's no actor. ... What's more ... the longer you stay in the theatre, the worse it becomes, because you learn more and you know all the mistakes you can make.⁶⁷

The pressures and anxieties of Miss Skinner increase as the opening night approaches. Regardless of which monologue-drama or play she has been rehearsing, on the night before the premiere she has a disconcerting dream.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Cornelia Otis Skinner, "Why First Nights Seem Like Last Nights," The New York Times Magazine, CVII (October 19, 1958), p. 25.

⁶⁷Ibid.

In this [dream] I am standing on a rickety platform without walls or railing, which, as it rises up a dingy shaft, wobbles and shudders, until at last I stare in horror down a yawning gap across which, the operator informs me, I must step or else plunge some twenty stories to my doom.⁶⁸

During the nights of rehearsal her stage fright relinquished its grip somewhat. She has described her hectic procedure on opening nights at the theatre.

In my dressing room, where I arrive long before it's necessary, I go through the mechanics of making up, an especially complicated process for me because I suffer from shaking hands which, under stress, become practically uncontrollable.⁶⁹

For years Miss Skinner has had shaky hands when put under stress. Trying to conceal her trouble was discarded because, "since modern psychiatry advises us to flaunt our disabilities with a 'Hey, look at my tick!' bravura, I might as well come clean."⁷⁰ She was able to look humorously on her problem when the doctor told her that it was congenital and would not get better. Yet she has regretted the condition on occasions. "It is in my life on the stage, however, that my hands have been a real liability, and never more than on an opening night."⁷¹

Unfortunately her stage fright has not been limited to opening nights, but it has occurred unexpectedly. She

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 88.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Cornelia Otis Skinner, "My Quaking Hands," The Reader's Digest, 7 (August, 1958), p. 164.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 165.

related that she occasionally

becomes the victim of another long-run neurosis, namely the dirty-word complex, in which one realizes that by the mere changing of a letter or two, or the shifting of a simple noun or mild adjective, the most innocent of speeches might be deformed into something censorable in the extreme.⁷²

Despite the physical and mental strain of being an actress and monologist, Miss Skinner has remained true to her theatrical art. Her life-long dedication to this medium is reflected in her statement,

but the very disappointment and misery seem eventually to rouse a doggedness, a determination to go on and try to make a go of it the next time. I guess what it comes down to is a simple and honest love of one's trade -- for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, and even, for some, till death do them part.⁷³

The problems which Miss Skinner has encountered as a performer have never assuaged her dedication to monologue-drama. Moreover, she has accepted the difficulties of her theatrical art and, in spite of them, has given her audiences impressions which were logical, historical, fanciful, humorous, and sympathetic.

Miss Skinner has her own ideas concerning her acting and her monologue-dramas, yet she has been careful not to over-theorize her art. Even as a student of acting and the theatre in Paris, Miss Skinner objected to formalized theory and codified rules for what acting technique should be. Her

⁷²Skinner, The New York Times Magazine, CVII, loc. cit., p. 90.

⁷³Ibid.

studies with Dehelly of the Comedie Francaise produced dissatisfaction which prompted a letter to her father. Otis Skinner replied with the following, now famous lines:

Take it easy, Kiddie. That's all fine training, exaggerated as you think it is. It's a loosening up process, like a pianist stretching two notes above the octave. Don't make fun of it. It's a grand old school to learn--and then forget!⁷⁴

Mr. Skinner realized that it was important for his daughter to have sound training as well as actual experience in theatre. His astute judgment parallels Garff B. Wilson's idea that "Training and experience will teach an actor how to use his endowments."⁷⁵ Moreover, when Cornelia wanted to quit school for the stage, Otis Skinner persuaded her to wait awhile.

When I decided to leave college for a stage career, father thought I was too young and inexperienced to attempt professional roles without better preparation. Admiring French acting as he did, he arranged for me to study in Paris.⁷⁶

Today, a professional, successful, and honored performer, Miss Skinner at times is asked to explain how she succeeded. She gives no rules, but her answers reflect the theories of her art. "I like students but they get me down. They have a way of asking about acting which is beyond the

⁷⁴Otis Skinner, as quoted by Cornelia Otis Skinner in "Paris '90" Souvenir Book, p. 11.

⁷⁵Garff B. Wilson, "What Is Style In Acting?" The Quarterly Journal of Speech, XLV (February, 1955), p. 132.

⁷⁶"Paris '90" Souvenir Book, loc. cit.

comprehension of the average simple actor."⁷⁷ To substantiate her feeling, she explained that students are apt to pose such questions as, "'How do you develop the dynamics of such-and-such a scene?' and they fling a lot of terms concerning 'timing,' 'shading,' and 'mood' which are terrifying."⁷⁸ Perhaps Miss Skinner remembered her own early years on the stage when her ambition to act led her to accept minor roles. In Tweedles, she recalled, by understatement, that after a brief opening scene, "...the duration of the second act [I] sat in my dressing room reading Stanislavski."⁷⁹

Actually, Miss Skinner feels very strongly about trying to over-theorize acting. She told the story of an aspiring actress student of a dramatic school, who came to her dressing room to ask a few questions. The questions which the girl asked Miss Skinner were,

At the end of the second act--how do you build the curve of dynamics? ... It must have taken you weeks of planning.... There's such a definite succession of dynamics there.... And you've linked them all together so wonderfully with that... that curve! How on earth do you do it?"⁸⁰

Miss Skinner's answer was, "'My dear young lady,' I said, 'I haven't the remotest idea of what in God's name you're

⁷⁷Cornelia Otis Skinner, "It's Summer But Is It Theatre?" The New York Times Magazine, XCI (August 10, 1941), p. 21.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Cornelia Otis Skinner, "Those Starring Days," The New Yorker, 27 (October 27, 1951), p. 30.

⁸⁰Cornelia Otis Skinner, "Actors Just Act--Or No 'Pear-Shaped Tones'," The New York Times Magazine, XCII (December 13, 1942), p. 14.

talking about! ... all I know is that I just act, or try to.' I have too high a regard for my profession not to have answered her honestly."⁸¹ Despite this student interviewer's reference to "Madame X ... the well-known Russian teacher of the drama--'all good actors develop a part consciously along a curved line,'"⁸² Miss Skinner insisted that her acting did not involve curves or other esoteric trimmings.

She has acknowledged the Moscow Art Theatre School, but she does not profess to be a part of it in any way.

The Moscow Art theory is most admirable, although to tell you the truth, I'm not just sure what it is. Certainly the actors of the Moscow Art Theatre are about the finest company in the world. But they're fine because they act, and they've been acting as a team for years. Russians are born good actors. They go ahead and act (under excellent direction, of course), and they act so magnificently people write books about them and credit them with a lot of obscure esthetic motivation and involved theorizing of which I'm willing to wager, most of them haven't the remotest notion. And people who run dramatic schools use the books as their Bibles for teaching you young gullible aspirants a lot of theory which is all very interesting, but it won't make you act. Actors who overtheorize lose all ability to act.⁸³

Moreover, she is not sure but that the public thinks that actors are more intellectual than they are. Then, too, there are those times when the public, she believes, thinks that theatre people are "pleasant folk but not quite bright."⁸⁴

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid., p. 15.

⁸⁴Skinner, The New Yorker, 26, loc. cit., p. 27.

The drama students who flood her with theoretical questions have an "upsetting effect"⁸⁵ upon her because she realizes that famous performers have attained their prominence due to their acting, even though they have not read Coriolanus or knew that "Shakespeare had written such a play as 'Timon of Athens.'"⁸⁶

Miss Skinner has had no director for her monologue-dramas because her theory has been that a director can be of help only for a stage drama. Such a person can be beneficial if he "tells you what he wants in language a child could understand."⁸⁷ Arty expressions, which some directors use, scare the actors because they do not comprehend them, she has stated.

Then there is the story, which is fairly hackneyed in the theatre world, of a director who asked the actor if he would please say a certain speech in a "pearshaped tone"; to which the actor replied, "Certainly. Just which end of the pear would you like to have come out first?"⁸⁸

Her theory embraces the idea that a performer needs not get into a mood before an entrance. "I do not get into any mood! I tell you I just act!"⁸⁹ Miss Skinner has wagered that Helen Hayes or Lunt and Fontanne, Ellen Terry, Bernhardt or Duse did not waste their time over complicated and involved

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Skinner, New York Times Magazine, XCII, loc. cit., p. 15.

intellectual theories. Miss Skinner has drawn upon her father's experience as an actor to illustrate this idea that she and other real actors "just act." Otis Skinner, as a young actor playing Laertes to Edwin Booth's Hamlet, learned a lesson. His role called for an early appearance, then a two-hour wait before another entrance. During this time off-stage, Otis Skinner tried his best to "keep in character" and to "live the part" to the point of agony and exhaustion. Then one night the elder Booth gave young Otis some advice.

Sit down, Skinner ... Young man ... you're killing yourself. I've been watching you. You've got some high-toned notion that you're supposed to be Laertes! Even during your two-hour wait! You're going to end up in a lunatic asylum. Relax! During that wait, read a book or write letters, or play pinochle with the stage hands. Then come down to the stage. Loaf about in the wings. Talk to whoever's loafing there too (providing you don't disturb the other actors). Don't try to "work yourself up." It can't be done. Just wait quietly for your cue, then when you hear it, go on the stage and act!⁹⁰

Miss Skinner believed in this advice Booth gave her father many years ago. She discarded any claim that she must have a technique of living the part and accepted the idea of acting the part so as to create an illusion. She learned from Booth that a bad performance was due to

living the part--instead of acting it. Cry real tears and an audience never cries with you. An actor certainly has to be capable of understanding the emotions he portrays. He has to have the capacity of feeling them,

⁹⁰Ibid.

even. But when he presents them to an audience he has to act them.⁹¹

The art of supplying an illusion far out-distances presenting reality.

A part of her conception of the monologue-drama is that it should employ the production elements of a stage play such as music, scenery, costumes, and lighting. "Perhaps all such extraneous accoutrements savor of theatricality," she has written, "but theatricality is more or less what I am seeking."⁹² She does not deny that "it is my hope to see the 'character sketch' become theatre."⁹³ Theatricality gives her art-form a variety which she says is essential. "There must be contrast; there must be variety. No one character can hold, sway, and amuse an audience for two hours without chameleon-like variation."⁹⁴

Realizing the pitfalls which her art-form presents, Miss Skinner has told how she thinks it is possible to have variety of character in a one-woman performance and yet maintain an underlying purpose, attain a multiplicity of mood and situation, and maintain a theme that binds the performance into a complete unit. "The nearest solution I have found--one that is by no means completely satisfactory, but

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Cornelia Otis Skinner, "Monologue To Theatre," The New York Times, LXXVIV (December 27, 1931), p. 4.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Ibid.

is none the less encouraging--lies in the presentation of the subject."⁹⁵ When the material is written adroitly and performed with skill, then "I see no reason why this form of dramatic presentation should not in its collateral way develop in proportionate measure with the modern theatre."⁹⁶ Writing and acting ability and theatricality of production are imperative to the monologue-drama whose merit "lies largely in the ability to evoke the fantasy of an audience until it sees not merely the imaginary characters, but the complete setting and the change of apparel in the performer."⁹⁷

The audience is an important factor in her theory of monologue-drama. Miss Skinner has wanted her acting to produce a desired response from the audience and she has suggested that this can happen when the actor does not completely submerge himself in the role; the audience wants to see the actor and the part integrated but not as one and the same.

We like our players to be characteristic of themselves. The anticipated appearances of a well loved star, looking just as we'd hoped he or she would look, only more so . . . [arouses a] sort of breath-catching emotion.⁹⁸

Although the audience is always a composite of professional and amateur critics who scare her, she would never

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Skinner, The New Yorker, 26, loc. cit., p. 27.

accept advice to ignore the audience.

To pay no attention to the audience would, in my opinion, be to violate one of the principal tenets of acting. For a good performance requires a constant give and take between players and public.⁹⁹

Miss Skinner first won her public and critical approval out of New York, and this no doubt has influenced her ideas toward the out-of-town audiences. Reasons why the hinterland audiences have endeared themselves to her are that they are appreciative, arrive on time, stay until the end of the show, are sober, are discriminating, have literary opinions, and are better mannered.

The audiences for her monologue-dramas have varied, for she has acted in theatres, greenhouses, roller-skating rinks, churches, schools, auditoriums, state penitentiaries, clubs, and colleges. She found that, as a general rule, audiences did not vary regionally.

I find myself happiest when performing in the large co-educational universities. These audiences are alert, discriminating and wonderfully enthusiastic, and the slight tempering of just enough of the academic is a challenge to do one's best.¹⁰⁰

Miss Skinner has attributed a large part of her success with the monologue-drama to the belief that audiences enjoy using their imaginations.

⁹⁹Skinner, New York Times Magazine, CVII, loc. cit., p. 25.

¹⁰⁰Cornelia Otis Skinner, "Long Live the Sticks!" The New York Times Magazine, XC (April 28, 1940), p. 7.

The main reason for the successful acceptance of solo drama is that audiences like to use their imaginations. Think back to your own childhood and what exciting flights of fantasy you had when someone told you, or read you, a blood-tingling fairy story. Your mind's eye conjured up every character in detail. Your own creation was always the most vivid, and the best. It was nearly always disappointing to see the same characters later, reproduced in an illustration or on a stage, because they never had the reality you endowed your figures with.¹⁰¹

Miss Skinner, then, holds that her theatre should be a tool of release as well as entertainment.

If the art of the theatre--or even the schmalz of the theatre (and who is to say that good schmalz is not art?)--can give us such honest and humanizing means of release, may we not welcome them amid the exigencies of a world grown too terrible for tears?¹⁰²

Summary

If other actors can and want to talk theoretical curves and dynamics with students and actors, then that is well, says Miss Skinner. She has chosen an opposite position; for anyone to explain how one acts by a theoretical observation without actually being an actor is too great a responsibility to assume.

That people do want to write books about theatrical esthetics shows a keen interest in the theatre, which, as an actress, I think is a good thing. But as an actress I don't want to have to read them. Not because I consider

¹⁰¹Skinner, "Unseen Cast 'Flesh and Blood People,'" loc. cit.

¹⁰²Skinner, The New Yorker, 26, loc. cit., p. 27.

myself in any way advanced beyond such things, or even a particularly good actress. But they get me mixed up. If I start thinking about theory I become like the centipede who started thinking about which leg to lift and never walked again.¹⁰³

Nevertheless, Miss Skinner has her own theories of performance as they apply to acting in general and to the monologue-drama. These ideas have developed from her own experience on the stage.

As a monologist she has realized that it is obligatory for her to know the imaginary characters, as well as those whom she portrays: how they look, move, and talk. Her more complete understanding of characters has developed beyond the vocal and physical signs. In order to recreate honestly a role, she has had to understand the character's environment, intellect, emotions; in short, his whole personality.

Regardless how deeply the monologist feels the part, his first duty is to the audience. To meet artistic objectives, Miss Skinner's goal has been to project understanding of characters and situation to the audience. Since this has occurred, she has been able to communicate as a monologist and thereby has fulfilled the purpose of her monologue-drama.

Her role as an actress and monologist has not been an easy one. She admits to long hours of study and rehearsal

¹⁰³Ibid.

in order to present most effectively her art. She has had qualms as to the success of her acting ventures. The sleepless nights during rehearsal, stage fright of first nights, fear of not performing to the height of her capacity, indicate that she is one who takes her art seriously. Her sincerity concerning her art has helped her succeed. Her theories revolve about certain principles which are the crux of her approach. These ideas have not been codified, but nevertheless exist. She believes that her success in monologue-drama has resulted from the idea that a monologist must act rather than theorize how to act, that the audience likes to use its imagination, that fine training is basic, that creating illusion is more important than presenting reality, that the actor must admit and respond to the audience, and that theatre should be a release and a means of edification as well as a form of entertainment.

Miss Skinner's goals for her career in the theatre were expressed in a commencement address to the graduating class of Mills College, 1950. She advised to "maximize one's life." As a historian, Tweedsmuir, in reference to Arthur Balfour, British philosopher, used this phrase, and Miss Skinner applied it

as being one of the objectives we might set ourselves. It is a highly individual objective and we must each go about its attainment according to our individual lights, and I need not point out, that those lights radiate from the inner and individual vision.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴Cornelia Otis Skinner, "Life Is Simple," Vital Speeches, 16 (August 15, 1950), p. 662.

Living is the greatest of the arts and by vision of an ideal do we meet our objectives, she said. To maximize life in terms of art, "Every pursuer of art must enter his or her own relentless school of technique."¹⁰⁵ Certainly, Miss Skinner knew from life's experience that it grants no leaves of absence until the technique is grasped. It takes courage to pursue an objective when one is aware that rarely perfection is obtained.

Public opinion is the strongest, dangerous when it's over favorable, brutal when it is not, when we have the bitter experience of realizing that people fail to understand what we are trying to convey.¹⁰⁶

But, according to Miss Skinner, if one keeps on trying he will not experience one of the pitfalls of life, to be "too late."¹⁰⁷ For an artist to set standards for himself will result not only in self-improvement, but this striving for self-betterment will tend to influence others.

Elie Faure has said that "art is the appeal to the instinct of communion in man." ... To make it so, you will need your certainties, which are all you can count upon ... your honesty, your integrity, your courage and ... your vision.¹⁰⁸

And these are the goals which Miss Skinner has found to be important essentials in her career of art in the theatre.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 663.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

As an analysis to two of her monologue-drama scripts and as an examination of the critics' reviews are made, in the following sections, it is well to remember the basis of Miss Skinner's unique contribution to the theatre, expressed in her own words: "For honesty is the great requisite of art. If we remain honest with ourselves, art, which is always there, never lets us down."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

THE WIVES OF HENRY VIII - Script Analysis

As would naturally be expected, public attention to Miss Skinner's art has been focused principally upon her talent as a performer, but the importance of her ability as a dramatic author should not be overlooked. Undoubtedly one of the primary reasons for her success with the monologue-drama is that she conceives and writes them, as well as plays them, herself. With the exception of Edna His Wife, a chronicle monologue-drama adapted from Margaret Ayer Barnes' novel, Miss Skinner has performed only those monologue-dramas of which she has been the sole originator.

Miss Skinner has tried to establish a pattern whereby she can best contribute to the theatre. It is not only her success as a performer which has encouraged her to develop the art of the monologue-drama, but also the fact that she has found a medium in which she has been able to express her own ideas.

And she'll tell you it's not only the applause that means so much, but also the opportunity to develop a medium in which she can most satisfactorily express her original and creative ideas.¹

¹"One-Woman Show," The American Magazine, 161 (June, 1956), p. 45.

In her six monologue-dramas, she has written scripts combining keen characterization, excellent dialogue, dramatic build, strong unity, and an intelligent point of view towards life and man. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze in detail one of the most significant of her dramas.

Miss Skinner has been known to write the first drafts of her monologue-dramas in longhand while on tour. Not always were they easily and quickly written. In fact, more often, weeks of research in history have preceded the writing. "However, writing seems to be a torture for Miss Skinner everywhere except on a speeding train.... She does her best longhand first drafts in the sublime comfort of dishabile."² Exaggerated though this statement may be, it illustrates that writing was done whenever she could find quiet and privacy.

Miss Skinner is a scholar and her aim is for perfection. "I have said before that Cornelia has the capacity for work and the concentration upon it of a scholar."³

Because Miss Skinner insists that her monologue-dramas be competently written, she likes peace and quiet while composing. One of her favorite places for writing is at her country estate, Kinderhoek House. In the early 1940's, she built a cabin on a location a short distance from the

²Arthur Mann, "Honor of the Family," Colliers, 114 (December 16, 1944), p. 19.

³Emily Kimbrough, "She Follows Her Heart To The Country," House And Garden, 85 (March, 1944), p. 84.

main house. The cabin overlooking the Hudson River was built as a retreat for Miss Skinner. It is here that she has written some of her monologue-dramas.

That, I think too, is why the roots of her affection lie deepest in this cabin. No one intrudes upon her here with a distraction which might smudge a job, even a little. No wonder I respect her excursions to this place, and wait her return with anxious excitement. A job will have been done there and done superbly.⁴

Background To The Wives of Henry VIII

The scripts of the monologue-dramas have never been published or otherwise made available to the public except through Miss Skinner's performance. She knows her particular talents and limitations as a performer and writes the material solely for herself. Miss Skinner, however, has graciously made available her monologue material for this study, and two of her personal rehearsal scripts were loaned for the purpose.

The Wives of Henry VIII was the first of Miss Skinner's monologue-dramas. Previously she had written a few character-sketches, a play, and several poems. She tried out the sketches on her friends who persuaded her to write and perform them professionally. However, as a dramatic form, the sketch did not fully satisfy her. She began to realize that, while she could write sketches for herself, she could not find in them the unity and coherence of a play.

⁴Ibid.

Following the suggestion of a Philadelphia friend of Mrs. Otis Skinner's, she began to write her first monologue-drama. The friend had suggested that she do a series of character sketches about the wives of this Tudor king.⁵ Miss Skinner liked the idea but admitted that she did not know much about the hapless spouses of English history. However, after a few months of intensive study and research, Miss Skinner had completed her script.

During a tour in England in 1931, Miss Skinner gave her new script its first trial. Lady Sackville arranged that Miss Skinner premiere her monologue-drama in the castle of the Sackville family at Sevenoaks in Kent. The castle, known as Knole, was once the property of King Henry VIII. There in the Great Hall where the reigning monarch had dined, Miss Skinner presented her first monologue-drama. A raised platform at one end of the Hall served as the stage. Near the fireplace were the original andirons which bore the initials of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn. "Miss Skinner never ceases to be astonished that the premiere of a successful production took place in the exact spot where the idea was born."⁶

⁵From the office of Cornelia Otis Skinner, 22 East 60th Street, New York 22, New York. This is a part of the material which Miss Skinner, her press and secretarial staff compiled regarding "The Wives of Henry VIII." It represents Miss Skinner's official and valid statement which she gave for the use in this study.

⁶Ibid.

The private performance given for a small group of friends was so well received that Miss Skinner presented it in London where it again proved successful. It was given as part of her solo performance as the playing time was only forty-three minutes. "Presented first in England and then for a long run in New York, 'The Wives of Henry VIII' was an immediate success and has kept a high place in Miss Skinner's repertoire."⁷

Significance and Framework of an Analysis of
The Wives of Henry VIII

The Wives of Henry VIII was chosen for analysis because it is a prime example of Miss Skinner's monologue-drama. It is based on historical fact, has eight well-written characterizations, and is one of the least complex of her solo-drama productions. It is serious in tone and displays the author's ability to write dramatic material.

Preceding the analysis of each of the six scenes, an historical precis of each character, a description of the scene, setting, and costume, and a summary of the action are presented. Statements from the script are quoted in order to provide examples of Miss Skinner's style of composition.

The analysis will treat characterization, dialogue, and unity of dramatic action which are as essential to the monologue-drama as they are to the play, possibly even more so. Characterization in the monologue-drama needs to be

⁷"From Lady Macbeth to Yvette Guilbert," "Paris '90" Souvenir Book, 1952, p. 10.

particularly well planned, written, and performed because the author is not able to delineate the character through the dialogue and action of other actors. Instead he must define the character so well that no other actors seem to be required. Superfluous details are discarded in order to focus all attention on the one character. The characterization must be so written as to be credible, lifelike. This occurs when the character is intelligently motivated so that he reacts in a lifelike way. The writer of monologue-drama must be able to employ imagination in order to give the characterization a distinct personality.

Part of characterization is accomplished by the dialogue. The dialogue for monologue-drama must be convincing. It must be interesting and vivid. Alliterations, succinct language, choice of terms, and dialect are some devices of dialogue which help to capture the attention of the audience. Clarity and literary finesse can heighten the characterization and dramatic action while creating artistic values.

The unity of dramatic action gives emphasis and continuity to the solo-drama. The creation of unity of action "is the process of eliminating the unessentials from the plot."⁸ The dramatic action in a scene can only comprise one short moment of the life of the character. Dramatic

⁸Roger M. Busfield, Jr., The Playwright's Art (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), p. 116.

action in a monologue-drama can use all the devices of clarity, preparation, suspense, and crisis found in a drama. The difference is that the dramatist must be so skilled that he can condense the action to a scale of one character, one situation, seen for only a few brief minutes by the audience. Unity is achieved by a thread of continuity which occurs through the entire performance. Transitions blend or isolate scenes. They can be physical, emotional, or intellectual, but they should relate what has gone before to what is happening and what will happen.

The analysis of The Wives of Henry VIII will note characterization, dialogue, thematic unity, and dramatic action as seen in this monologue-drama. By this procedure, Miss Skinner will be studied as a writer of monologue-drama.

Outline of the Wives of Henry VIII

The Wives of Henry VIII is written in six scenes to depict, in chronological order, the six wives of Henry. Two of the queens were executed by Henry because he suspected them of infidelity. These were Anne Boleyn, his second wife and mother of Elizabeth I, and Kathryn Howard, his fifth wife. The author does not pass judgment upon Anne Boleyn as guilty or innocent of the charge placed against her. Instead Anne emerges as a moving characterization, a person with whom the audience tends to sympathize whether or not she is guilty. Kathryn Howard is clearly presented as a girl who is unfaithful to Henry. Her infidelity is due to the repulsive

behavior of the irascible and disease-ridden monarch. Catharine of Aragon, the first wife of Henry and Queen of England for twenty-four years, is presented as a proud Spaniard who loves her husband and is forbidden by her religion and sense of duty to give him a divorce although she knows that he no longer cares for her. Jane Seymour, the third wife of Henry, appears as a tender, lovable, and pathetic child bride. This scene reveals the naiveté of Jane and the awkward situation which results from her considering Henry more as a father and monarch than as a lover and husband. In contrast, Anne of Cleves is a comic character whom Holbein had misrepresented in his portrait of her. Katherine Parr, the last wife of Henry, outlived him, and the scene shows her at his deathbed.

Miss Skinner adroitly chose an event which reveals the personality of each woman. The script has continuity because all the women are wives of Henry VIII; he is the imaginary character whom Miss Skinner paints through the words of his wives. Through them Henry is seen in various successive phases of his life from the vigorous young monarch to the dying old king.

Catharine of Aragon, Scene One

The first queen to reign with Henry VIII was Catharine of Aragon, and it is with this character that Cornelia Otis Skinner began her monologue-drama.

Catharine, the daughter of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain, was the mother of Princess Mary, known to history as "Bloody Mary." Catharine ruled as Queen of England for twenty-four years. Although Henry had long desired a divorce, Catharine would not sanction it. Her stubborn refusal to dissolve their marriage prompted Henry to obtain a legal separation from Catharine on the technical grounds that she had been married first to his brother, Prince Arthur.

Catharine was his brother's widow, and the law of the church forbade the marriage of a deceased brother's wife. To make the marriage [to Henry VIII] possible, the pope had issued a decree which dispensed with the law in this particular case. Henry contended that this dispensation was invalid.⁹

During the last years of her life, Catharine was ostracized from court, failed in health, and even experienced poverty. While married to Catharine, Henry fell in love with Anne Boleyn. This infatuation, together with the hope that perhaps she would bear him a son, resulted in his obtaining the divorce. In 1536, three years after the divorce was granted, Catharine died at Kimbolton Castle. During this three-year interlude she had been deprived of seeing her only child.

Although scenery was not used in this monologue-drama, a list of various properties which suggested settings, apart from those noted in the stage directions, is given in the

⁹W. E. Lunt, History of England (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), pp. 306-307.

script. The first scene calls for a high-backed throne-chair with arms, in the Tudor style or that of the Spanish Renaissance. The backdrop for all the scenes was of a dark colored velour. Lighting was accomplished by "Red, white & blue footlights and overheads, all working on separate circuits; two olivettes (floodlights) with straw gelatin, four balcony spots with surprise pink gelatin."¹⁰

For the first scene, Miss Skinner chose for Catharine a jeweled velvet gown of Tudor design. Her hair was covered with a richly jeweled Spanish snood of the sixteenth century. A diamond cross pendant hung from her neck.

As the scene opens, Catharine of Aragon enters. The audience is led to imagine that the child, Mary, is with her. She speaks to the child and tells her that they must find the princess' father before the hunt. Suddenly Catharine turns and sees Anne Boleyn. She pauses and then impassively greets Anne and tells Mary to say good-morning and to offer her hand to Anne for a kiss.

Catharine wastes no time in questioning Anne as to why she is up so early when she had stayed up so late the night before. "Last night a dream troubled us and to clear our brain we walked on the terrace, two persons were below in the rose-garden. We think one was you and the other - (keenly scrutinizing her) - the other was a young man."¹¹

¹⁰From the office and personal records of Cornelia Otis Skinner, 22 East 60th Street, New York 22, New York.

¹¹Cornelia Otis Skinner, The script of "The Wives of Henry VIII." Additional quotations from the script are given without footnote reference.

She describes the man as being rather heavy-set. Anne denies this accusation, and Catharine tactfully says that perhaps she was mistaken, knowing all the while that it was Henry whom she had seen with Anne. She dares not openly say so but does let it be known that she is aware of the intimacy between Anne and Henry. To Anne's casual inquiry as to her state of health, Catharine replies that she is as well as might be expected, but tired, and that Mary, too, is frail. The assumption is that Anne politely wishes Catharine good health and comments that Mary is pretty. "How kind of you! They taught you in France, Mistress Boleyn, to lie most charmingly." Catharine also acknowledges the comment about her child's "beauty": "You know as well as we do the lady Mary is not a pretty child." Ironically she adds, "But better still she [Mary] is a good and pious girl." It was no secret that Henry wanted only a son, so Catharine rationalizes her feelings with a statement reflecting premeditated thought, "A pity she is not a boy.... Women have ruled as well as men. Our mother, Isabel la Catolica, was a queen."

As Anne is dismissed, a Spanish usher enters; Catharine speaks sixty-eight words of Spanish to him. A translation reveals the following dialogue:

Good day, Montoya. What news do you bring?
 Don't be afraid to tell it to me. It's a
 thousand times worse not to know it. You,
 Montoya, are an incorrigible optimist; oh,
 for goodness sakes, I'm not making up ideas!
 Bad, very bad, Montoya. I don't sleep, I'm
 not eating--the vineyard is corrupt. I don't

know. Thanks, dear friend. You well know I'll fight to the bitter end. The Holy Father will not allow it to be carried out. It's best that you go, Montoya. It's his Majesty.

Henry enters and kisses Catharine hastily. When Mary demurs at embracing her father, Catharine assures him that the child's reluctance is due to her so seldom seeing him, not that the child is afraid of her father. The script notes "considerable emotion at sight of him" at this point in the scene.

Catharine pleads with Henry to say mass with her, that it has been two months since he has done so. She begs him to go with her, saying, "Your conscience over having married your brother's widow is roused after fifteen years, Henrique? For Cristo, I am afraid I do understand. I will go into a convent, Henry, when you take orders in a monastery."

Supposedly Henry says that he does not wish to hurt her. "Is that why you are away so much? Why you no longer share my bed? Affairs of state? We do not call them so in Spain."

After a pause, Catharine mentions to Henry that Anne Boleyn was up early. With this, Henry starts for the door, Anne's door. "But the hunt meets in the Great Court. That door does not lead to the Great Court. (Smile) Your father was subtle, Henry. You do not favor him."

Henry leaves, and Catharine prepares to take her daughter into the chapel when Mary supposedly asks why her

father did not stay. Catharine answers, "Because he has no time for us, my dear. You are too young and I am too -- aie Jesus! Yes, little Mary, your father is very handsome. He is very magnificent. Come, hija mia! We shall go pray for him." They exit and the curtain falls on the first scene.

Throughout the scene Spanish words and phrases have been inserted to remind that Catharine is Spanish, a royal daughter of the benefactors of Columbus. To help establish further the Spanish characterization, one passage in the dialogue is completely in Spanish. A definite reference to her background is the strong portrayal of Catharine's catholicism and her devotion to the church. "For Cristo," she says, and she talks much of going to prayers and pleads with Henry to hear mass with her.

Miss Skinner would have the reader imagine four different unseen persons in the scene with Catharine, namely, the child Mary, Anne Boleyn, the Spanish usher, and King Henry. At no time do more than two of these additional imaginary persons appear together. Actions in the script are noted in parentheses such as, "Enter," "Sees Anne," "She extends her hand," "She follows the little girl's gesture, smiling wanely," "Pause," "Smile," and "Sigh."

Catharine is written as a beautiful queen, who is charming and strong enough to retain her head but not her husband. Although she was exiled, she accomplished the feat of not being executed as were some who succeeded her to the

throne. The situation dramatized occurs toward the end of her regal career. Catharine is clearly depicted as a stunning woman of queenly bearing, serious and melancholy. The climax of the scene occurs when she reveals that she is cognizant of the relationship between her husband and Anne Boleyn, but perceives that she is powerless to allay her approaching fate.

Anne Boleyn, Scene Two

Scene two presents Anne Boleyn, the second wife of King Henry VIII. Anne, who was queen for only three years, was the mother of Elizabeth I. Because she failed to bear Henry a son and because she was accused of intimate relations with other men, she was beheaded. The accusations of infidelity, with such men as Mark Sweaton, Sir Henry Norreys, and others, were never proved and remain a moot question. Anne was an English girl, educated in France at the court of Francis I, under the patronage of Queen Claude. Because Anne loved fine clothes and the luxuries associated with the extravagances of the French court, she was resented bitterly by many of Henry VIII's subjects.

The second scene is set in the Tower of London, in the prison where Anne is awaiting her death. It is the morning of the execution, May 19, 1536. Only four years later than the setting of the first scene, it is the same year in which Catharine of Aragon meets her death from natural causes. The only property in the scene is an imitation stone bench. The description of Anne Boleyn states,

in part, that she is "discovered sitting in a sort of a stupor after being awake all night. The mind is dulled and strangely suspended after the long strain. She sits for a time staring before her at the oncoming day."

Anne is pictured as a beautiful young lady. Her face is without wrinkles, and there are signs of sophistication due to her heritage and training. Her long hair is parted on the side and falls upon her left shoulder. She wears a square-necked gown of velvet with an underskirt of satin brocade. The frilly sleeves of her white blouse extend from the velvet dress sleeves and the gown has white trimming at the neckline. She holds a white scarf.

After a long pause, Anne speaks as if in a trance. Her speech is nearly poetic and very ethereal in character. Her first word is "Ah" followed by a description and a stage direction: "(Her voice is strange and ghostly) (An attendant asks if she spoke)." She assures the servant that she wants nothing. Anne recalls mornings in France "when the chestnut trees were all candles. That was in May. It's May now ... the merry month of May. Ha!" (This exclamation uttered in derision.)

She muses whether her cousins think on her imprisonment in the tower. If they are they are probably saying, "Nan Bullen's up there! Nan Bullen the whore--poor wretch, she's losing her head today." But, even though she is to lose her life, she finds that she cannot weep. She realizes

that she is almost in a trance, and she feels strangely peaceful, "like sleep after a wild dark dream."

Anne will take no food, for it would sustain her and she wants nothing that will make her "tough." She takes a cup of wine, then raises her hands to her throat with a short gasp of horror. She rises and paces the room, clasping and unclasping her hands. She thinks of the King and recalls that he once loved her throat for "He used to stroke it. (Then viciously). And he used to bite it."

She wonders if it could be that Henry is only testing or proving her love. She tells herself it is only his jest to have her imprisoned, for she has done nothing, "nothing but laugh with my dancing men. They loved me -- I thought he'd like their loving me."

Mark Sweaton and Norreys, whom she calls "Norris," were her friends, yet she wonders, "Oh, my dears, was it worth it? If only you can think it was worth it!"

Anne learns that her executioner from Calais has arrived. "Always I've had my luxuries from France--my gowns, my perfumes, and now my executioner." Anne laughs bitterly and predicts that people will call her "Headless Anne" and write ballads about her, almost as though she had a premonition about this.

Anne goes to the window and hears the crowd. Then, stifling a cry, she leans out of the window, sees the block and recoils with a gesture of horror. "O God! Master

Kingston, Master Kingston, there isn't much time," she cries.

Her next thoughts are for her daughter and her husband, as she realizes that soon her life will be ended. "Tell my child, tell Elizabeth to say her prayers and learn her lessons. Poor little wretch! What star can guide her course?" Anne commands that the King be told that she loved him and that she cared. She says that, when his lust flickered out, she only smiled; and Henry had said, "To cut your head from your body will kill your smile." Anne vows that she will be brave and smile forever, that Henry will see that smile when he is with Jane Seymour.

Mockingly, Anne asks if her neck is bare enough and demonstrates how they will hold her hair when she is put on the block. Her mocking and laughter soon change to dreadful sobbing. She asks for more wine to steady her. Then she asks how she looks. "Do I look young? Do I look beautiful?" As she is about to make her exit, she recoils with a groan. "Oh God have pity on my soul! Have pity on my soul. (Then gathers self and makes a grand exit.)"

Anne Boleyn is written in such a way as to gain much sympathy from the audience. The question of Anne's unfaithfulness to Henry is left unanswered. This is accomplished by a contradiction of Anne's words. She recognizes her friends call her "a whore"; she wonders whether Sweatons and Norris, whom she calls "my dears," think she was worth loving, although she never actually says she loved them.

In fact, she says, "I've done nothing." Yet another time Anne says, "Oh, I have been loved! They never tired of me. I can hold any man as long as I stay his mistress." Finally, Anne utters a final wish that Henry will know she loved him. Whether or not Anne is guilty is left to the audience to ponder.

In support of Anne's being educated in France, the script calls for French words such as "Ma foi" and "Voila le monde qui continue comme toujours."

Miss Skinner has indicated gestures and movement in the manuscript. Anne pauses, puts her hands to her throat, paces, wrings her hands, gives a toast, drinks, sways "with the volupte [sic.] of remembered caresses," stifles sobs, leans from a window, laughs hysterically, moans, recoils, and makes a grand exit. These directions in the script not only indicate movement and gestures, but they also punctuate various emotions. Anne runs the gamut of emotions. Initially, in a trance-like condition, she is presented as a study in contrasts. She is rational and hysterical; she laughs and she cries; she is strident and quiet; she is nervous and serene; she exudes pride and is remorseful.

The scene builds in emotion when Anne speaks of her child, Elizabeth, and of Henry VIII. As the time of her execution is at hand, her spirit breaks and she becomes hysterical. Her recoil and her moans as she starts for the door climax this scene. But the dramatic fervor is not over because she pulls herself together and makes the grand exit

befitting a queen.

Miss Skinner again preserves unity in her script by presenting the wives of Henry VIII in chronological order, and rigidly adheres to this order. No transition to what will follow is evident at the close of the first scene, nor is Catharine of Aragon mentioned in the first few lines of the second scene. The Anne Boleyn scene is slightly longer than the first scene, for it has 521 words as compared to 382 words in the first scene.

Anne is written as a beautiful, questionably innocent young woman. The script asks the audience to sympathize with Anne who loves the luxuries of life, cares for her child and wonders what the future will hold for her, says she loves her husband who is having her executed, breaks down when faced with the time of execution, and yet has the courage to go to the block bravely with a smile on her face.

The scene is graphic in character portrayal and dramatic action. "It is here that Miss Skinner reaches the heights. She presents a picture of dark despair, tenderness and beauty."¹² Indeed, the script effectively presents an indelible portrait of a beautiful and ill-fated young woman. It tends to be a complete drama in itself for the plot outline is thoroughly and thoughtfully constructed. The

¹² Author unknown, part of the material from the office of Cornelia Otis Skinner which was offered for this study and documented as a valid statement concerning Miss Skinner and her monologue-drama.

dramatic action builds until it reaches a point of climax in Anne's hysteria. The dramatic resolution shows Anne approaching her execution as a courageous victim of a jealous king. The characterization is intense, honest, and reaches beyond surface superficiality. The rise of pathos from the reader's identification with the character tends to show the ability of the author to conceive strong passion and to determine audience response.

Jane Seymour, Scene Three

Scene three of The Wives of Henry VIII is in vivid contrast to the two preceding scenes and presents Jane Seymour, the third wife. Jane was the daughter of an English nobleman. She was married to Henry VIII shortly after Anne Boleyn's execution. She was a young and passive person. Yet it was this submissive country girl who bore Henry a son in October, 1537. He was christened Edward VI. Henry insisted that Jane attend the christening four days after she gave birth to the baby. The christening was so sumptuous and so exhausting an affair that Jane died a few days later.

The third scene takes place in the Garden of Hampton Court, in October, 1537. A bench is on stage. Jane appears in a pastel gown of velvet and brocade. She is a blonde and wears a caplet over her short hair. A large and burdensome gold chain is suspended from her neck. She carries a single rose. Her clothes, intentionally, are too elaborate for

this country maiden. They help to make her seem out-of-place. With her is her four year old step-daughter, Elizabeth. Jane is described as "young and shy--a type of English country girl, very pure and quite bewildered by her surroundings."

Jane's first words are to Elizabeth. "Come along, my love! Come to mummy Jane! Elizabeth, darling, do come!" Jane tells Elizabeth that she will play hoop or hot cockles with her, but Elizabeth prefers to pull the heads off the flowers as though they were the subjects and she the Queen. Elizabeth cries and screams to get her own way and, presumably, proposes that Jane pay her to stop the screaming. Elizabeth only wishes to play one game which she calls Tower of London. "Oh, no, sweet! That's not a nice game!", Jane tells the child. But, finally, Jane concedes and plays the part of the prisoner while Elizabeth assumes the role of the headsman. Jane kneels and pleads for her life. "Please dear, kind master headsman spare me! What would my poor dog and my miserable cat do without me?" She breaks out in laughter and, supposedly, Elizabeth does too. Then, the script notes that "In the midst of the second peal of laughter a shadow crosses the path. It is Henry."

Jane explains to her husband, the King, that they were playing. She is like a little child herself, and Henry tells her to get up. Jane relates to Henry that the silly game, Tower of London, was invented by the four-year old and that Elizabeth meant nothing by it. "(Elizabeth says she did)

No, you don't, Elizabeth," Jane reprimands.

The child leaves and, after an awkward pause, Jane tells Henry that she feels sorry for the little girl, that "she seems so lonely and with no mother (gasp)." Jane finds it hard to call her husband anything but "your Majesty," and it is almost agony for her to say "Henry." She explains that this is due to the fact that she does not call her father, John. She realizes this was the wrong thing to say and tries to modify it by saying that she does not call the Pope, Paul; but this is only making matters worse.

Henry tells her to sit down, and she does so obediently; then she says that she loves him. After another awkward pause, she asks if she can gather a spray of St. John's for him, for it wards off sweating sickness. Each word Jane says is the wrong thing, and Henry seems to be amused at his child bride.

The king inquires of her health. Jane says that she feels faint at times, but other women have borne babies. She starts to ask him, "but I say, if it should be a girl you won't (hand steals to throat) I don't know--this October weather. It makes me a little gloomy."

Again she declares her love for Henry, endeavoring to convince herself at the same time. Jane experiences her first labor pains and gives a little cry, for which she excuses herself:

I shouldn't have mentioned it. Perhaps I had better go in. What a pity it's such a lovely

day! And the last of the roses are such darlings.
Do you remember my father's garden in Wiltshire?
Sire, if anything should happen to me--do forgive
me. Go in? Oh, yes your--Henry.

With these lines the scene closes.

Jane is written as a shy girl who is more at ease playing games with a four-year old child than she is in the role of Queen conversing with her husband. The script implies that while Jane's love for Henry is sincere and true, it is more like the love she has for her father, or for the Pope. In other words, she thinks of Henry as an old man and a monarch much more than as her lover and husband.

The childish, naive character of Jane is plainly indicated in the script by such instances as her preference for gathering flowers, or her facility for saying the wrong thing even though her words speak the truth. Jane's unfamiliarity with Henry and the ways of the palace are indicated in the dialogue by her awkward speech, her hesitation and long pauses, and her forced participation in declaring her love for the aging Henry of whom she is a bit afraid.

Miss Skinner has inserted in the dramatic action ironical elements such as having Elizabeth insist on playing "Tower of London." The script indicates that Elizabeth has a mind of her own and wants to pick the heads off of flowers. "But, dear, that's very naughty. Your papa does it? I know sweet, but only when the subjects are wicked." It is Jane who has to play the role of prisoner seeking mercy from Elizabeth, which Henry witnesses. Jane seems to realize that

this is only a game she is playing but that it may very well come true if her unborn child is not a boy. The dramatic action catches Jane in one moment of her life where she tries to find her own harmonious place in the milieu of Henry's world. The dialogue indicates that Jane feels pity for Elizabeth, whose mother is dead, yet she is aware that Henry had her executed and, were it not so, she would not be Queen. Jane had never been trained to be a Queen, and she is bewildered by the palace. For solace, her thoughts revert to her parents and her father's garden.

The climax of this third scene occurs when Jane experiences her first labor pains and leans for support on Henry. The denouement resolves the scene while accurately picturing a painfully shy and innocent child bride who is not on sufficiently familiar terms with her husband to call him by his first name, yet entertains fears concerning the child she will bear him.

Anne of Cleves, Scene Four

The fourth wife of Henry VIII was Anne of Cleves. Miss Skinner writes the role of this German maid with a character that is forthright, honest, and outspoken, with some comic overtones.

Anne of Cleves was a Lutheran and the daughter of a German Duke. For political reasons, Henry sought a German wife of Lutheran faith. He saw Holbein's portrait of Anne

and arranged a wedding before personally seeing the woman. Unfortunately, Holbein's portrait was a misrepresentation of the real Anne, and Henry was so repulsed that, although he had to go through with the marriage, he divorced her immediately.

The setting is laid in Rochester. Anne of Cleves is waiting for Henry VIII to be presented. With her are two of her ladies-in-waiting, Schwartzbrock and Willik. As the scene opens, Anne asks them if she is wearing the right gown, and she has them adjust her dress so she will be well groomed and attractive to Henry when he enters. This conversation of fifty-five words is in German. The author has translated them into English.

The script indicates that Anne of Cleves wears a heavy, cumbersome and unattractive costume. Although it is made from rich and heavy tapestry, it does not enhance the figure. Her hair is completely covered with a white mantle tied under the chin, which was characteristic of a Lutheran lady of the sixteenth century.

A young man enters; his name is Fitzwilliam. He kisses her hand, and she "gets quite a kick from it." He informs her that Henry is coming. This she explains in German to her ladies. She then tells Fitzwilliam that in Cleves they do not see too many young men for "most von time ve are all maidens togedder."

Anne hopes that Henry will be impressed by her

countenance, saying, "It is hoping so I am he's going to like me!" She confesses that she is afraid Holbein has flattered her in his portrait, but then she consoles herself that her father had told her that, whatever one says of her looks, she is to remember that she is a good "goil."

Anne is very excited and becomes even more so as she hears the approach of Henry's horse-drawn carriage. Anne wonders if he will kiss her when he enters. "Thirty-four years haf I lifed and no man should kiss me already." Presumably, Sir Anthony Browne enters and announces that the King is outside. There are four imaginary people on stage. Anne receives Sir Anthony with a deep curtsey, but as soon as she learns that Henry is outside she flutters about the room, talking wildy in German to her maids. She asks if she looks all right, if her skirt hangs straight in back, and so on.

Henry enters, and Anne bows low, obviously hiding her face. She retains this position, indicating that Henry is speaking a few polite remarks. With face lowered, she says that she is honored and then recites a memorized speech. "In asking for my hand you have bestowed the greatest favor on me and on my Brothers und on de Duchy of Cleves! In return I can only gif you my maiden's heart and my womanly devotion!"

The script indicates then that Anne rises, and beams, and Henry sees her face for the first time. There is a long pause, the smile on her face gradually fades. Then "Henry

rushes to her, kisses her hand and plunges out of the room."

Anne of Cleves is surprised at Henry's action and asks Fitzwilliam and Sir Anthony what is wrong with the King that he should run away. "Was he frightened of me? Or was he shy? ... Ach, how sweet! He loves me already, maybe." She is not sure why he left so quickly but, with a reassuring smile blurts, "It's time he must haf--time to collect himself. Schwartzbrock! Osenbruch--come mit me in de next room. Ven Heinrich comes I am with my ladies, ja? Ach! I am so happy! He is so sweet!" Anne of Cleves then makes her exit coyly and the curtain falls on the fourth scene.

The script makes of Anne a comical character. She is delineated as overly-thrilled and excited that at last she knows she is going to get a man. The dramatic action is confined to the situation when Anne and Henry first meet. The climax is reached when Anne reveals her face to Henry and he beats a hasty retreat. Anne's excitement in anticipation of meeting her future husband and her obvious misunderstanding of his reaction are laugh-producing. The script suggests a lot of comical physical action for this scene, with Anne portrayed as an earthy, awkward bumpkin.

The dialogue has some German phrases, such as, "Ach Himmel!", "Ach Gott!", "Heiliger Bisbam!", "So schnell!", and "Guten Tag!" The twisting of the English sentence structure to conform to German grammar is an amusing device of the author. Examples are, "It's outside he iss already,"

"I think I hear de horses yet!", and "it's so nervous I am!" The script is written to indicate a German accent by suggesting pronunciations of the English words such as "Vater," "Dot's vonderful!", and "vot it iss?"

Miss Skinner wrote the characterization of Anne of Cleves to reveal her as an ugly duckling. She is aware that "The Flanders Mare," as Anne was called, did not share the tragedy nor gloom of her predecessors. Miss Skinner retains historical validity and yet uses this unusual female to serve as a comic relief for the whole monologue-drama.

Katheryn Howard, Scene Five

The fifth scene contrasts the old monarch to his young bride. While he was once a handsome man, now he is slovenly, irascible, disease-ridden, and, as the script has it, disgracefully crude.

Henry VIII's fifth wife was Katheryn Howard, a girl of fifteen when she was married to Henry, then forty-nine. She was a first cousin to Anne Boleyn, Henry's second wife and the mother of Elizabeth I. Katheryn's father was of the nobility, but he was very poor. Henry was said to have been infatuated with this young girl; when she was charged by Archbishop Cranmer with immorality before their marriage and infidelity with Thomas Culpepper and others during her marriage to Henry, the king bewailed his misfortune. He could not reconcile himself to her reported unfaithfulness and had her beheaded, by order of Parliament, when they had

been married scarcely two years.

The fifth scene takes place in York, during the Royal Progress of 1542. No scenery or set pieces are used. The script calls for Katheryn to be dressed in an elegant riding or traveling costume of the sixteenth century. This dress featured a bejeweled panel running from the center of the neckline to the hem of the skirt. Her hat was designed with a rolled velvet brim, a plume on the crown, and a scarf flowing from the back of the hat.

The scene opens when Katheryn runs onto the stage breathlessly, asking "Is he here yet?" referring to Culpepper. She describes her husband, who has gone hawking, as "the old pig" and grimaces as she tells how Henry dropped food on his chest as he ate and let the sack run off his beard.

Katheryn believes that no one will discover her rendezvous as she runs to greet her lover whom she sees approaching. "She is mad about him. She takes him by the hand and pulls him," the script reads. Katheryn explains to Culpepper that Lady Rochford found this place for their meeting and that she has agreed to stand at the top of the stairs to serve as a look-out.

As soon as Lady Rochford leaves, the script indicates an amorous scene between Katheryn and her lover. Katheryn is seized by her lover and kissed, and in turn she kisses his hands. She had not seen Culpepper for some time, for Archbishop Cranmer was watching her too closely and "(an

expression of repugnance) big-bellied Henry wanted me. He kept me with him all day while he grizzled [sic.] and snored and complained of the sores on his leg."

Katheryn produces a spice ball which she carries to ward off Henry's stench, while she says that she has him believing it is her conceit that makes her carry it. She avows her love for Culpepper but warns they should not meet that night. "Yes, he sleeps after he eats, but then when he wakes (grimly) he always wants me there. He whimpers for me ... and I must say 'yes, my own,' and 'I'm at your side, my pet.'"

Katheryn does not want to run the risk of their being found together, for "He's spring-cleaning the Tower these days." She says Henry has her worried, for he called her his pretty witch. "Darling! Holy writ says 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live!'" Culpepper says he is not afraid; he assuages her fears, and they agree to meet after supper.

Suddenly, Katheryn hears someone on the stairs and finds that it is Cranmer, the Archbishop. She is informed that Henry did not go hunting and that he wishes to see her. "Very well," she says. But as she turns to leave, she discovers that Lady Rochford is not at her watchpost. She learns from the Archbishop that the guards have captured her. The scene closes as Katheryn repeats the word "Guard."

The Gua'--(She looks about her with dreadful apprehension. Two beefeaters have come up behind her.) Who are those men? What are they doing here? Oh, no! (She stifles a scream.) I shall go to the King. (Cranmer goes on. She seizes Culpepper's hand for a moment. A look of fatal understanding passes between them. Then she courageously follows Cranmer.)

The author has a tremendously difficult task to write a love scene for the performer to portray single-handed. Miss Skinner wrote the scene so that the solo-performer could rely upon pantomime followed by audible love speeches. Unity and economy of action are effected by eliminating many historical details so as to focus upon Katheryn and Culpepper. Katheryn is revealed in the script as definitely in love with Culpepper, and therefore, the author leaves no doubt but that she is unfaithful to Henry. Yet, Miss Skinner's script does not criticize Katheryn's behavior; rather, the tendency is to effect a characterization which will draw sympathy toward the young lovers and their rendezvous. To accomplish and project this feeling, the dialogue describes Henry as a completely intolerable and filthy person. Miss Skinner has characterized Katheryn as being a fun-loving girl who is forced into indiscretions by the swinish king; the climax occurs when the lovers are discovered together. As the dramatic action resolves, Katheryn realizes that her penalty for loving another is the execution block.

Katharine Parr, Scene Six

The last scene of the play not only presents Henry's

last wife but serves as a summary for the entire monologue-drama.

Henry VIII was the third husband of Katharine Parr. Twice before she was widowed, and now she is to see Henry die. She outlived Henry and four months after his death married the handsome Sir Thomas Seymour. Katharine was Queen of England for four years. She was said to have influenced political concord and popular welfare. She also accomplished the feat of motherhood and thus established a home for the three children by Henry's former marriages.

The setting for this scene is in Whitehall. Katharine Parr is at the deathbed of Henry VIII, on January 26, 1547. Katharine has a strong intelligent countenance. She is dressed in a sombre velvet gown. The V-neck reveals a lovely necklace of many strands. Her hair is tightly wrapped and then covered by a long headdress with a rolled halo which frames the face. She sits in a heavy wooden chair of antique design.

Scene six begins with Katharine sitting at Henry's bedside. An hourglass, presumably, is near although it is not actually on the stage. Katharine tries to make Henry more comfortable. His mind starts to wander, and she tells him that she is Katharine, his wife. "But you haven't cut off my head. No sweet, that was another Katharine--that was Katheryn Howard."

Because he is in an almost delirious state, she talks

to him as though he were a child. When he speaks in Spanish, she responds, "But you needn't speak to me in Spanish, dear. This is Katharine Parr. The Spanish Catherine? She's dead, my dear." Henry is assured that he did not kill her and it was not his fault that she died at Kimbolton Castle. "It was a healthy enough place for an English person. You're hardly to blame if she happened to be Spanish." She agrees with Henry that Catharine of Aragon was a headstrong and stubborn Catholic. "I'm quite sure she never got to heaven."

Henry groans, and she asks him to try to keep still. The next person he calls for is Anne Boleyn, for he wants her to sing a French song. "No, love! I wasn't brought up in France. You're thinking of that horrid Anne. She was a dreadful creature! I shouldn't think of her if I were you."

Henry, presumably, says that Anne Boleyn was beautiful, but Katharine Parr quickly says that it was not a lasting beauty, yet more attractive than the "Flanders Mare," she admits. She tells Henry that Anne of Cleves is happy with her pots and pans at Bletchingly. "She's perhaps the only (she stops short)--nothing, dear. You're quite mistaken, I said nothing."

When the pains become worse, Henry wonders if they are as bad as Jane's. "(A sweet serious look comes over Katharine's generous countenance.) Let's hope not, my dear. You loved her. Yes. I know. Dead? Yes, Henry, she's dead."

Katharine offers to summon Prince Edward, but Henry asks her to say a prayer instead. Mechanically, she begins to recite a Latin prayer looking ahead as she does so. The end of the prayer is done with the "frozen realization of what has happened." Katharine is aware that Henry has died. She leans over him, calls his name, pauses, then goes to the door and calls for Archbishop Cranmer. After a short black-out, the light returns as she cries, "The King! The King!" Then Katharine turns to the audience and says to it and to herself, as if not realizing it, "He's dead! He's dead!"

The final scene presents not a characterization of a stylish woman, an arrogant woman, a beautiful woman, a comical woman, a young woman, nor a fun-loving woman. Katharine Parr is written as being a subtle, quiet, and perceiving person. The dialogue implicitly reveals that she realizes her position as the sixth wife of Henry VIII, accepts her duty as his Queen, and tries to make the most of it. She is not happy, for Katharine almost completes the sentence that Anne of Cleves is perhaps the only happy one of Henry's wives. Yet, Katharine exercises more control over Henry VIII than her predecessors could manage. As a detail of characterization, the author has Katharine personalize her statements with such affectionate phrases as "sweet," "dear," and "poor dear," when talking to Henry. She shows respect to him by frequently asking his opinion as, "don't you think?" The easy conversational lines of dialogue

which the author gives to Katharine display her character traits of intelligence, astuteness, and perception.

Summary

This short monologue-drama, with a playing time of forty-three minutes, presents vignettes of six women who were prominent in history. The author seems to say that these women, the wives of Henry VIII, are remembered not as queens and personalities due to their public deeds, but because they played the roles of pawns to a willful and feared sovereign. The subject matter is based upon one man and his six wives. None of the wives was an important monarch, rather their collective importance in history was their sharing successively the same husband.

Each woman describes Henry in a different way and their descriptions define his personality. Catharine of Aragon loved but distrusted Henry, Anne Boleyn thought him handsome, Jane Seymour was afraid of him, Anne of Cleves admired him, Katheryn Howard hated him, and Katharine Parr controlled him. Henry is the connecting link of the scenes and, "although he speaks not a line, can be seen in bold and obscene outline under Miss Skinner's craftsmanship."¹³ Because Henry, as an historical figure, provides the subject matter for the script, transitional passages are not supplied to suggest what will occur in the following scene or what had

¹³From an anonymous London review found in Miss Skinner's personal files.

occurred in the scene before. The title of the monologue-drama itself states the subject matter, and it would seem unnatural to see anyone portrayed except these six women. The audience can grasp the relationship among the characters, for as informed spectators they know the destiny and fate of each queen and think of each as contributing her part to the personality of Henry. All the characterizations speak of him and show their existence revolves about him. The subject matter, then, in itself provides the chief element of continuity.

Within the subject matter, the structure of the monologue-drama can be seen. Each of the six scenes treats one queen. There are various arrangements by which the six women could have been presented other than the existing chronological order. But once the script begins with Henry's first wife, then the second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth have to continue in this order.

Another part of the structure of this monologue-drama is the situations in which the characters are seen. Miss Skinner's choice of situation for each scene does not follow a consistent design. The major crisis in the life of each character does not provide the material for every scene. Nor are the scenes structured so as to present the early, middle, or late years of the queens, their marriages, coronations, deaths, or moments of supreme joy or sorrow. In other words, the situations are not similar, and thereby

the basic structure has a tendency to pull apart rather than unite the scenes of the monologue-drama. Even though the main story line, the portrayal of Henry's wives, has continuity throughout, the situation structure of the individual scenes has little parallelism. The situation of the first scene is Catharine's realization that she has no control over Henry and that he no longer cares for her and their child, Mary. Very different are the situations of the second scene which shows how Anne Boleyn spent the last moments of her life before her execution, and the third scene where Jane Seymour experiences her first labor pains.

Each scene does have unity of action, however, due to eliminating the non-essentials and concentrating upon the essential element of situation. Never are there more than one or two situations depicted in a scene. Miss Skinner is consistent in adhering to one idea and to one situation in portraying each wife.

Even though there is little similarity in situations among scenes, the monologue-drama does not fall apart. This is due to the strong historical story-line which proceeds chronologically, the unity of action, and the variety of the individual scenes. The scenes have variety because they treat dissimilar circumstances, rather than similar ones. One scene is serious, another approaches the tragic, and others are pathetic, comic, and romantic. These differences enhance the script more by giving it variety than they weaken it by

showing the characters in dissimilar situations. The author carefully chose varied incidents which would delineate distinctive characterizations.

Characterization becomes the most singular element in the monologue-drama. The varied situations are backgrounds against which to view the characters. It is true that historical fact limits the characters portrayed, but this boundary does not keep character from becoming most prominent. Miss Skinner selected only one or two brief moments in the character's life by which she expresses her personality. Monologue-drama is limited in time as to how extensive a characterization can be; therefore, extreme selectivity must be exerted by the dramatist. Each character is written to portray a predominant trait. The strong personality trait of Katharine Parr is intelligence, that of Catharine of Aragon is pride, and that of Katheryn Howard is love. "The queens had traits which not only permit this charming dramatic actress to display her rare talents in arresting manner, but constitute a challenge to her abilities as a writer."¹⁴

In selecting character traits, Miss Skinner was cognizant of the importance of variety between the characters. One had to be different enough from another so that each would be distinctive. Costumes and makeup help define this externally in performance, and of course voice and

¹⁴"Cornelia Otis Skinner Relives Past In Her 'The Wives of Henry VIII,'" from Miss Skinner's New York Office.

bodily movement are basic. But internally, within the script, the writer provides for variety of character, too. Catharine of Aragon is written as a stunning and rather stern Spaniard who was able to predict her own fate; Anne Boleyn is shown dramatically as a grieving person who was loyal to and in love with Henry; Jane Seymour is depicted as a naive and painfully shy person, a paradox to her queenly surroundings and powerful monarch; Anne of Cleves is written as the country bumpkin, inexperienced with romance and thrilled and excited at the prospect of being a bride; Katheryn Howard is set forth as a young, romantic girl who awaits a rendezvous with her lover; and Katharine Parr is written as a serene, dignified, and intelligent queen who was a comforting force to Henry during his last moments.

As a writer Miss Skinner showed restraint in not overdramatizing her subjects. Because of careful, scholarly research, her characterizations are written so that they conform to actual recorded detail. The scenes are historically accurate, but they never seem tedious or so scholarly that they are not effective theatre. Each woman, in turn, steps from her page of history and lives again for a few brief moments. These historical portraits were said "to assume life, vigor, and reality."¹⁵ Though the scenes are short in length, they are penetrating in unity of dramatic action

¹⁵Ibid.

and in quality of insight into character on the part of the writer. She does not fabricate characters, but instead presents them so that they are historically correct. From her research she was able to invent parallel characteristics and situations which would be plausible. Her inventiveness of characterization is illustrated by drawing Anne of Cleves as a comic figure.

Miss Skinner presents the characterizations from different viewpoints. Catharine of Aragon seems to be partly to blame in her inability to hold Henry's love; Miss Skinner places no judgment on the innocence or guilt of Anne Boleyn, but leaves the decision to the audience; Jane Seymour is written to express sharp incongruities in the same character such as naiveté and sophistication, youth and motherhood, and love for life and fear of life; Anne of Cleves is written entirely from a comic viewpoint; Katheryn Howard is pictured sympathetically as a young woman who is almost justified in her infidelity; and Katharine Parr is written as an objective and discerning woman who understood and exerted control over Henry.

The dialogue of this script is adroitly written to strengthen the characterization and dramatic action. Two of the characterizations are noted by their dialogue which include foreign words and phrases. Catharine of Aragon is Spanish, and Anne of Cleves is German. In the script both are given lines in their native tongue which indicates their

cultural backgrounds. In such cases Miss Skinner did not have to assume that the foreign dialogue would be understood. The foreign sentences are used for purposes of characterization and atmosphere. Anne of Cleves also has lines in mixed German-English phraseology which evoke comedy.

The dialogue of each scene is written to produce the illusion of actual conversation. This was accomplished by writing sentences which were short and simply constructed. Often phrases rather than complete sentences appear so as to suggest the way people actually speak. Often the imaginary people are addressed by means of questions. Then a pause follows as if an answer were being given. The characters seem to be in conversation because at least one imaginary character is always on stage. Never does a character give the impression that she is talking to herself or to the audience. The conversation, excluding the foreign language sections, is composed of simple but expressive words which a person of average intelligence would use. In this way the audience can identify with the characters, and thereby Miss Skinner establishes a rapport between the audience and each character. The dialogue shows the six queens of England to be very human individuals. They are not austere, but are depicted to have emotions which are common to most people. The dialogue helps to portray their various moods of happiness, anger, and sorrow.

Although succeeding monologue-dramas were added to

Miss Skinner's repertoire, The Wives of Henry VIII was the pioneer of this dramatic form. The script had to be well written and performed for it to be accepted by a public unacquainted with the monologue-drama and for it to exist as a type of theatre in itself. Those monologue-dramas which followed gave Miss Skinner further dramatic opportunity as a writer and performer. The Wives of Henry VIII set the pattern of what was to follow, and it has remained as one of the foremost contributions made by Cornelia Otis Skinner to the theatre.

CHAPTER V

PARIS '90 - SCRIPT ANALYSIS

Introduction and Background to Paris '90

The second example of Miss Skinner's work to be analyzed in detail is Paris '90, the latest solo-drama which she has written.

The Parisian atmosphere of Paris '90 was, of course, familiar to Miss Skinner from her childhood travels with her parents and her days there as a student. She has given her father a great deal of the credit for the idea of the play. Because of his love for Paris, he became familiar with its people, sections, buildings, theatre, art, and general culture. He met other famous people while in Paris. One such friend was Henri Toulouse-Lautrec, and the actor "was completely captivated by the paintings and drawings of Lautrec."¹ Miss Skinner observed:

There has been only one major disappointment for me in presenting this play [Paris '90]. Father and M. Lautrec should have been in the audience on opening night. I would have urged them to take a bow. I don't know about Lautrec, but I know father would have taken one--grinning like an imp.²

¹ Cornelia Otis Skinner, as told to Norton Faust, "Prelude: The Francophile and the Dwarf," Cornelia Otis Skinner - "Paris '90" Souvenir Book, p. 11.

² Ibid., p. 15.

Otis Skinner brought an understanding of the Parisian atmosphere to his own roles, and was well known for his French portrayals. With his brother, Charles, Otis wrote a play based on Le Roi S'amuse by Victor Hugo. It was called The King's Jester, and he starred in a successful production of it. Later he co-authored another French play, Lazarre, with the dramatist, Aubrey Boucicault.

Otis Skinner found that a French part was right for him. He played a large number of roles as a Frenchman before he acted in the translation of actual French plays. One such early starring role was in His Grace de Gramont, by Clyde Fitch.

Mr. Skinner kept his interest in Paris and the French stage by frequenting the theatre in Paris. He brought a translation of the successful French play, Le Chemineau, to the United States, re-titling it The Harvester.

His swashbuckling role of the scalawag, Col. Brideau, from a Balzac story translated by Paul Potter into The Honor of His Family, brought him fame, and it was said by Miss Skinner to have given him much delight. "His love of France and the French theatre was bountifully rewarded by the acclaim he received in this Charles Frohman production."³

Otis Skinner also appeared in Marious by Marcel Pagnol, a French play adapted by Sidney Howard and produced by Gilbert Miller. Later, it was produced as a motion picture.

³Ibid.

Miss Skinner inherited more than her father's name. She also inherited his avid interest in Paris and the French theatre. Commenting on her father's French roles, she remarked, "But, I think I have said more than enough to explain why Paris '90 was more or less inevitable. How could it be otherwise, with such infectious lifelong conditioning?"⁴, and, "I knew that someday I would have to portray those colorful women."⁵

Otis Skinner delighted in the posters of Lautrec and appreciated him as an artist as well as a person. Miss Skinner was told many anecdotes by her father about the little French artist and his Parisienne friends.

On various trips to Paris we went all over the city to see Lautrecs that father had discovered. The posters of Yvette Guilbert and LaGoulue -- characters who appear in "Paris '90"--were among the scores of items I gazed upon with great pleasure.⁶

Mr. Skinner transferred his zest for the French to his young daughter by telling her about Paris, the people, and the theatre. When they were in Paris, they would go together to the theatre. He even sang French ballads and nursery songs to her. He liked French music and was a devotee of the works of his friend, Jean Richepin, poet and playwright. Many of the songs of Richepin were introduced to

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., p. 11.

the public by Yvette Guilbert and Aristide Bruant; Lautrec even illustrated some of them. Otis Skinner was given some songs by Richepin, and his daughter is now the proud owner of them. The songs in the last scene of Paris '90 are originals of Bruant and Guilbert, with English lyrics by Kay Swift.

It is common knowledge that Otis Skinner encouraged his daughter to study acting in Paris. Cornelia, as a young girl, studied acting from a private tutor, Dehelly, a Societaire of the Comedie Francaise. Here she was trained in the classical style of performance. Later that same school year, she transferred to the more modern theatre school of the Theatre du Vieux Colombier. This school run by Jacques Copeau was "very entertaining,"⁷ but, Miss Skinner adds, "I can't say that I learned very much during my stay there."⁸ All the great French actors in Paris were seen that year by Miss Skinner, and she became skilled in her mastery of the French language. As a result, she speaks equally well in French and English.

Paris '90 was first presented on Saturday, January 12, 1952, at a 2:30 matinee performance, and in the evening at 8:30, at the Academy of Music, Northampton, Massachusetts. After touring eight weeks in the Middle West and East, the

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

one-woman drama opened at the Booth Theatre in New York City on March 11, 1952. Seldom before has just one person attempted to hold a sophisticated Broadway theatre audience for an entire performance. The production ran for seven months in New York to set the record as the longest run of a one-woman show, and it played 368 performances in sixty-three cities in the United States.

Paris '90 was the most ambitious undertaking of a solo-theatre-performer ever to come to Broadway. For the monologue-drama, Miss Skinner wrote thirteen different characterizations of women who were prominent in Paris during the 1890's. For the full-scale production, she used comparatively elaborate sets, lighting, costumes, make-up, and music to picture vividly each character.

Miss Skinner accomplished some almost unbelievable costume and make-up changes during blackouts between scenes. Music bridged each scene break while Miss Skinner made her changes and the scenery was being shifted on stage.

Kay Swift wrote the music and lyrics to Paris '90, excluding the music of the original songs of Aristide Bruant and Yvette Guilbert for the last scene. Miss Swift has had a varied musical career as composer-lyricist for musical comedies such as Fine and Dandy and The First Little Show. She composed the ballet, Alma Mater, for George Balanchine's first American ballet production. Radio City Music Hall occupied her time for two years as staff composer for the

revues. The motion picture, Never A Dull Moment, was based on her autobiographical novel, Who Could Ask For Anything More. In the film, Irene Dunne sang three of her songs.

Musical director for Paris '90 was Nathaniel Shilkret. At the age of twenty, Shilkret had become musical director of the Victor Talking Machine Company, and he made over 30,000 recordings in twenty-two years. His Victor Salon Orchestra records were popular successes. He has composed songs, scores for commercial radio programs, motion-picture scores, and classical works. He has also been active as guest conductor with various symphony orchestras.

Miss Skinner had other competent individuals to assist her in making Paris '90 successful. Donald Oenslager, well-known Broadway stage-designer and professor of drama at Yale University, designed the Paris '90 sets. He also designed for Miss Skinner her solo-production, Edna His Wife, and the plays Candida and The Pleasure of His Company.

One of the highlights of Paris '90 was the costumes which were designed by Helene Pons. She had designed and executed costumes for previous performances by Miss Skinner. These included The Wives of Henry VIII, The Empress Eugenie, The Loves of Charles II, Edna His Wife, and Candida. Miss Pons has also designed for other professional drama, ballet, and opera.

Significance and Framework of Analysis of Paris '90

Paris '90 is significant to the study of monologue-drama because it is the most complete and extensive example of its type of theatre. It is the latest example of a well-known solo-drama; it had the most successful Broadway engagement of any solo-drama ever to appear on Broadway; and it is the most complex monologue-drama ever written by Miss Skinner, for it has fourteen vivid characterizations, fifteen scenes, and three acts.

The framework for analysis of Paris '90 is similar to that of The Wives of Henry VIII. A description of the setting and costume of each scene is given, and each is then outlined and analyzed. The outline of the dramatic action is intended to give an accurate summary of the plot. Statements from the script are quoted to illustrate examples of Miss Skinner's style of composition. The analysis appears together with, rather than separate from, the outline of content to facilitate reviewing of the lengthy script.

The Paris '90 script seems to indicate that thematic unity, characterization, and dialogue are the basic elements on which the playwright relied. The dramatic action is a means rather than an end in itself; it is used to reveal characterization and to give the various scenes continuity. It presents the situation at hand, but it is secondary to characterization. The analysis will indicate how the writer

presented her premise, made an application by illustration through characterization, indicated the situation with which the character is faced, and resolved the conflict or interpreted the incident. The continuity of the script was adroitly planned, for it unified the characterizations of the women through whose eyes is seen a composite picture of Paris in 1890. Following the outline and analysis are concluding statements and summary about the script of Paris '90.

Outline of Paris '90

Not all the characters in Paris '90 are famous individuals, as in the last act which depicts four of Lautrec's familiar models. Each of the women in the first two acts is an imaginary character and a distinctive Parisian type.

The solo-drama is designed in three acts. The first act is set on the Champs Elysées where five characters are seen successively: the Nou-Nou, a Fashionable Parisienne, La Duchesse de Vertpres, La Belle Conchita, and the New Woman. The second act, introduced by a monologue of an Angel from her niche in a portal of Notre Dame, presents the women of the Left Bank. They are a Laundress, a Boston School Teacher, a Woman of Virtue, and a Professor's Wife. The third act portrays the women of Montmartre, friends of Toulouse-Lautrec including La Goulue, a Lion Tamer of the

Medrano Circus, Berthe La Sourde, and Yvette Guilbert.

Act I: Champs Elysées
The Nou-Nou, Scene One

Paris '90 opens with the character of a Nou-Nou, or French Wet Nurse, on the Champs Elysées. She is costumed in a long conventional French-governess uniform. The dress has a striped shirtwaist with long puffed sleeves. The skirt is covered with an apron of white eyelet embroidery designed with a large flounce of the same material. A frilly "cream puff" bonnet with long gay streamers completes the costume.

The Nou-Nou holds a pillow edged in lace; upon the pillow is lain a long piece of linen and lace as though it covers an infant. This Wet Nurse sits on a park bench; the background is a set-piece which suggests a guignol playhouse.

The first scene, 540 word monologue, descriptively depicts the Nou-Nou talking to her "Monsieur Bebe" while she watches the people of Paris parade by on wheels.⁹

Her first comment is upon the traffic made by the horses and carriages which pass back and forth. "Wheels! Wheels! Wheels! Baby, all of Paris going on wheels!"

The first adult whom she acknowledges is a man selling wafers. The Nou-Nou is not inclined to buy as she says that the cookie may choke the baby. She plays a bit with the infant and makes a cooing noise, "Ooh."

⁹Cornelia Otis Skinner, script of "Paris '90." Additional quotations from the script are given without footnote reference.

The first comic note comes in the seventh sentence of the monologue. The line is preceded by a gesture which is noted in the script: "LAUGHING AS BABY GRABS AT FRONT." This action of pantomime is followed by, "Non, non, non, Monsieur Bebe! Not yet! It's not time for your lunch yet."

The Nou-Nou continues by explaining that, although the baby is quite a glutton now, he was once a sickly infant. This change of health is due to her nursing the baby rather than the baby being nursed from his "Maman's fashionable front."

She calls to Georgette, a four-year-old sister of the baby, playing nearby. The Nou-Nou pretends to see her and talks to her. The little girl wants money for the guignol show; however, since she has seen it several times, has bought a balloon, and has ridden the carousel, she is pacified by Nou-Nou who takes some money from the pocket of her apron to buy from the wafer-man a crisp gaufrette covered with powdered sugar. She cajoles the man into being generous with the sugar. Now, the sugar is all over the child's mouth, and the four-year-old is happy as she sits beside Nou-Nou eating her wafer.

The attention of the Nou-Nou then reverts temporarily to the baby. Subsequently, in rapid succession, the Nou-Nou's attention goes to the passing horses, to Georgette, and then back to the horses which they have been watching, "Out there on the Champs Elysées where Paris goes by on wheels." Here for the second time appears this significant motif. It

marks the half-way point of the scene and introduces the song, "Paris Is My Love," which the Nou-Nou sings. She explains that Paris is everyone's love--her love, baby's love, Georgette's love--and bears the love of all the people who ride and walk by.

Descriptive words are used cleverly to suggest the sounds of various conveyances such as the "clap-clap" of the "swell-ones," the "klok-klok" of the "rickety fiacres" and old nags, the "tickie-tickie-tickie-tickie" of the tiny goat hooves, the "Pa-ta-poum! Pa-ta-poum!" of the omnibus, and the "trr-trr" of the carriages of the gay gentlemen coming from a night's rendezvous. Then, in the early morning the Nou-Nou describes the sounds of the Paris Champs Elysées as the "crumpf-crumpf" of the delivery wagons and horses.

Nou-Nou calls the attention of Georgette to the various people who pass by, such as the window-pane mender with his wheelbarrow, "calling out 'Vi-i-i-i-itrrier!'" the elegant equipage with the pretty lady who is "like Maman!", a grand dame in a funeral carriage, a fancy lady, and a woman and a man on a bicycle-built-for-two. For the third time, it is emphasized that all these people are conveyed by "Wheels! Wheels!" These words appear at the close of the first scene to substantiate the premise that "Paris goes by on wheels." Some of the people whom the Nou-Nou has mentioned, such as the pretty lady, the mourning lady, the fancy lady, and the lady on a bicycle, are subjects of the ensuing

monologues, scenes of Act I.

From her musings on the wheels of Paris, the Nou-Nou is brought back to reality by giving attention to the hungry baby in her arms. Thus, the scene ends by the Nou-Nou saying, "You big glutton, you! Tres bien! You may have your dejeuner!!!" She starts to unbutton her blouse--BLACK OUT.

Here, then, in this scene the author has sought to establish the setting and atmosphere for Paris '90 by delineating, through a Nou-Nou's eyes, the types of people as they pass by.

The character of the Nou-Nou was typical of Paris society of the 1890's, and it seems an excellent device to evoke the desired atmosphere. "The 'Nou-Nous,' with their cream-puff bonnets streaming yards of bright color, provide a note of gay color in the pedestrian traffic of the parks."¹⁰ The Nou-Nou was a socially accepted necessity of the French family of prominence and fashion. The character here is earthy, young, perceiving, and warm-hearted. Almost any American theatre-goer would instantly recognize this figure and identify her with Paris society in the 1890's.

Not only is the Nou-Nou characterization typically French in conception, but so is the dialogue. This is accomplished through the use of French words, phrases, and speech sounds inserted in the script. The French words are those which scarcely require elementary French, yet they tend

¹⁰Skinner, "Paris '90" Souvenir Book, loc. cit., p. 2.

to establish authenticity to the character and the situation, thereby setting the Parisian atmosphere. Examples of obvious French word inserts are, "Non, non, non, Monsieur Bebel," "Ah, mon p'tit coco!," "hein?," and "dejeuner(s)." More subtle devices in the script are French names such as Georgette, the guignol show, Parisienne, Champs Elysées, gaufrette, President Carnot, and the like. These words are devices which tend to establish a common-ground with the theatre-going public. Another device to help establish the French atmosphere is the suggestion of the risqué. This is accomplished by the straightforward gesture and talk about nursing the baby and by the Nurse's unbuttoning her blouse at the close of the scene.

The main premise of the first scene is "Wheels! Wheels! Wheels! Paris goes by on wheels!" Here is a topic that produces nostalgia or expectant excitement. It is logical that the premise be expounded by the Nou-Nou, the first of several portrayals of typical French women. References to French vehicles and familiar street types also act as supports to the premise.

The Nou-Nou scene furnishes the complete exposition for the four scenes which follow. The introductory statement suggests the connective device of the dramatic action of the first act. The scene itself, is also a complete monologue sketch for which the opening statement, "Wheels! Wheels! Baby, all of Paris going by on wheels!" is the introduction or exposition for the first vignette.

Miss Skinner designed the Nou-Nou script deductively, by stating the premise that Paris goes by on wheels, then proceeding to amplify this by having the Nou-Nou observe various instances of Paris life and by her descriptive commentary on them. Suspense of the scene is in the anticipation of what will happen next and whom the audience will see through the Nou-Nou's eyes.

The author has adroitly used transitions to unify the scene of the Nou-Nou. She begins the scene with the word wheels; she sees other people, imaginatively, by the wheels of their conveyances; one of her closing statements is a repetition of the opening lines of the scene. This design is artistic besides making for excellent continuity of dramatic action. This first characterization appeals to the audience as a common French type of the '90s. The imaginary characters which the Nou-Nou sees passing by are widely varied, with reference to such types as a fine lady, a bicyclist, and a mourning grand dame in a funeral procession, all tending to broaden the scope of interest. The baby bundle is a visible device for the Nurse's audible remarks, and the eager curiosity of a companionable four-year-old girl introduces the audience to an imaginary character who is so realistic that she could actually be on stage.

A Fashionable Parisienne, Scene Two

After a blackout and a very fast costume change, made in three minutes while gay music is played by the orchestra, a Lady of Fashion appears on stage. The Fashionable Parisienne is seen in a cut-out, profile carriage. She is one of the persons seen by the Nou-Nou in the previous scene. This second scene of approximately 630 words pictures a woman of Paris who primarily is concerned with fashion, social calls, parties, and romantic rendezvous. The cut-out, in which she seems to be riding, gives the effect of a carriage like the leather guard of a landau.

The Lady of Fashion is seen as a fluffy blonde. Her fashionable clothes are of a candy-box color scheme. She wears a fluffy dicky at the neck. Her hat is small and perky with flowers and ribbons. She wears long gloves, carries a frilly umbrella, and is wrapped in a feather boa.

As the scene opens, the Lady of Fashion is talking to her cousin who is supposedly beside her in the carriage.

Her opening statements establish the fact that she is from the city, and her cousin, whom she often calls "cherie," is from Rouen, the "country" because it is not Paris. The connecting transition from the previous scene is accomplished early in the monologue. The Lady says, "How can any woman live in any city except Paris?" This corresponds to Nou-Nou's sentiments in her song, "Paris Is My Love." From her carriage, the Lady of Fashion points out

houses and people as she passes, much as the Nurse is wont to do in the preceding scene, the house of an Orleanist baron, the Palais de Glace, and so on. As she passes a Marquise and Marquis, the script directs the Lady to acknowledge them "BOWING TO PASSING CARRIAGE." Each of these places and people is flippantly dismissed with witty and curt remarks: two of those women who pass by are Refane, the actress, and "the fabulous Liane de Pougy ... breaker of hearts and bank accounts. She's looking so well since her suicide." The Lady continues with an account of the dancer, Liane de Pougy, explaining to her cousin that "Night after night to have to be seen at Maxim's ... and of course what they have to do when they're not being seen! ... Not for all the gold in the Transvaal!"

Soon we are told that the Lady of Fashion is so because she manages to have her "four to five ... the hour of the rendezvous." She seems shockingly frank and completely objective on matters of love. The Lady of Fashion expresses her view that an hour is as long as any affair should last because "deep felt emotion ... is so bad for facial muscles ... the charming and practical game of love without love ... nothing's more becoming."

She then confides to the cousin her affair with a "captain of Cuirassiers." The tone here is light, flippant, and witty. It is in the style Oscar Wilde endowed to the women of fashion in his plays. One of the Lady's stipulations

to meeting her lover is that he have on hand a maid, "Because, chérie, I simply haven't the strength to undress and then dress again all by myself." When she tells of her suggestion that an expert hair-dresser be on hand too, the lover "assured me that he wouldn't dream of disarranging a single strand ... to which I countered ... wasn't that as much up to me as it was to him and wasn't he rather taking for granted my immobility." She succeeds in shocking her cousin while amusing the audience, and then adds, "a shocked mind is never a thinking one."

Upon the account of her contemplated rendezvous, the script indicates "(LOOKING OUT)" and seeing a funeral procession. This introduces the next scene as one of the carriages bears the Duchesse de Vertpres, a tyrant and headmistress of the Old School who speaks "only to the deity and the Orleanists ... preferably the latter."

The dramatic action of the second scene proceeds naturally from the first and leads on to the third. However, each of the characters is an entirely different type of French woman. The Lady of Fashion is a cold, shallow, snobbish social climber who wishes to be stylish and shocking, and succeeds in being both. "A predominantly female contingent formed the ultra-smart portion of the carriage parade that rolled along the Champs Elysées on sunny afternoons, vying for attention with their elegant equipage."¹¹

¹¹ Skinner, "Paris '90," *Souvenir Book*, loc. cit., p. 2.

The script is clever without being startlingly original. The style of diction establishes the artificiality of fashionable discourse. The scene is a bit longer than the first, and the exposition is extended while the Lady comments on other people. By nodding to passing carriages and pointing to passers-by, she clearly establishes the connection which this scene has with the first, which the playwright considered necessary for the continuity of the script. French terms such as "ma chere cousine," are used more sparingly in the dialogue of this second scene; French name-dropping such as the Duc de Morny, Rejane, Polaire, and Otero, are common.

However, it is when the Lady of Fashion speaks of her own life that she is most entertaining. In that part of the script where she explains her ideas of a rendezvous, the Lady of Fashion uses the personal pronoun "I" some twenty-seven times, thus displaying her self-centered personality. The Paris code of fashion at the time presented a paradox to the fashionable lady, for fashion is indicated to be a nuisance. It is the discouraging factor for the Lady's rendezvous with her lover. Yet, at the same time, to be fashionable a woman must have a rendezvous.

The Lady of Fashion, a member of the French "upper crust," le gratin, is in sharp contrast to the Duchess of the aristocracy depicted in the next scene.

La Duchesse de Vertpres, Scene Three

While costume and scenery are rapidly changed, the orchestra plays an interlude of music which serves as the transition between scenes. The third scene presents to the audience another woman of Paris, the Duchesse de Vertpres. The Duchesse is in an upholstered carriage, facing front center on the stage. The carriage is suggested by a set-piece which is heavily tufted. In front of and against this sits the Duchesse on a padded seat, as in a carriage.

The Duchesse is a well-preserved dowager in her 60's. She wears a conservative black dress and a severe mourning hat with veil. Her skirt is covered by a black lap robe on which is a large silver royalist insignia. She holds a prayer book and her handkerchief.

The Duchesse has been mentioned twice before, once in the first scene by the Nou-Nou, and in the conclusion of the second scene by the Lady of Fashion. So the audience has been prepared for seeing in this third scene the lady of aristocracy. Indeed, it might be surprised not to see her.

No time is wasted on lengthy exposition in this third scene as the entrance and scene have been adequately laid. Each of the scenes has an extremely forceful opening line of dialogue which effectively sets the mood of the entire scene. The first scene began with "Wheels! Wheels! Wheels! Baby, all of Paris going by on wheels!" which is the premise of the

immediate character, the scene, and the entire act; the second scene began by the line, "Oh, what a lovely day, ma chère cousine!" reflecting trivial comment on weather as a fashionable phrase, and indicating the light, flippant, and fashionable style of the character and scene. Now, the third scene begins by the line, "Oh, it's so dreadful! So dreadful! Hand me the smelling-salts, Eulalie." Here, the concepts such as dreadful, smelling-salts, and Duchesse are natural and seem to belong together. That which is so dreadful, we do not learn until later. The mourning Duchesse is a lady strictly trained in protocol. She is one of the last of her kind, and her determination to maintain this position in society takes precedence over all else with her.

Through the discourse, the imaginative person, Eulalie, is a grand-niece of the Duchesse. Of course, the Duchesse is not really mourning, but she is so dressed because manners, society, and protocol demand it of her. Each of the three times that she speaks of her departed brother, the Baron, the script indicates that she cross herself. The Duchesse is more concerned with such earthly matters as who will get the Gobelin tapestries, and their conduct upon meeting the widow to show the proper deference but, at the same time, indicating that "we shall no longer leave our calling cards." But, primarily, she is disturbed by the "outrage" and who is responsible for putting her carriage third in line in the cortege. This latter alludes

to the reason for her opening statement, "so dreadful." Sincere sympathy for the deceased is not displayed, for she dismisses matters of the soul by "I daresay that will be attended to by the Bishop of Paris." The Duchesse cannot tolerate the fact that ahead of her in the funeral procession is her nephew and his wife, particularly because his wife is an "American heiress whose millions were derived from ... I can hardly say the word ... Pork!"

At this moment, the script reads: "(A YELLOW ROSE IS TOSSED IN THROUGH THE SIDE WINDOW)." This action is vocally signified by the Duchesse so that the audience will have no doubt as to what has happened. She asks who threw it, and Eulalie tells her grand-aunt that it came from a racing barouche that is passing. To this the Duchesse exclaims, "Do you suppose it was that ... that ... oh! ... that CREATURE who's in it? Don't look, Eulalie! Put your eyes on your prayer-book while I lower the shade ... and hand me the smelling-salts."

So, very artistically, the scene closes with the lines with which it opened and at the same time succinctly gives a hint to the character of the next scene, the "CREATURE" who threw the yellow rose.

The Duchesse represents the Old School of French society, the Royalists. At one place in the script she exclaims, "Paris is the aristocracy. God will never allow a republic to last." The author reveals her insight in not

forgetting this segment of society in the '90s; they were a minority group but influential in the social structure.

Fashion of manners is as important to the Duchesse as to the Lady of Fashion, yet in a very different way. The former is the proud and proper dowager who clings to prestige and position, while the latter represents the nouveau riche, openly shocking and objective in manner.

The dialogue of the scene uses no French words nor phrases, and only a few French proper names. The discourse seems to have little comedy and little penetrating dramatic value. The scene is brief, being approximately 450 words in length. No doubt the chief value of this characterization lies in the contrast it presented to other characters.

La Belle Conchita, Scene Four

La Belle Conchita is the fourth characterization in Paris '90. She is described as "a combination of La Belle Otero, Gaby Deslys, and the American Business Man's Idea of a 'Foreign Adventuress.'"¹²

The costume which La Belle wears is a magnificent, extravagant, and gaudy red gown of the Gay '90s. Her red hat is very large and has many black plumes.

La Belle sits in a red profile cut-out carriage. She has a bright lap robe which is the reverse of the lap robe in the previous scene. She holds two yellow roses and

¹²Skinner, "Paris '90" Souvenir Book, loc. cit., p. 3.

a carriage whip.

As the scene begins, La Belle has just thrown the yellow rose into the carriage of the Duchesse and is about to toss another. Her first lines are, "What a way to epater [sic.] the bourgeoisie! ... the aristocracy rather ... Why not, cheri? The aristocracy attack La Belle Conchita with harsh words ... La Belle Conchita attacks them back with roses." And thus, she throws another yellow rose, against which attack the Dowager lowers her carriage shades. With the opening lines is provided a connection with, and also an interruption from, the sombre influence of the Duchesse. At once it is established that La Belle is a person beneath the social notice of women of the aristocracy.

La Belle notes that the deceased was a baron whom she calls "my distinguido," saying that she was afraid that he would die in her bed rather than quietly in his own. She then muses to her friend in the carriage that a dancer of luxury must cater to old men because they are the rich ones, while young men are not in a financial position to "enjoy the favors of La Belle Conchita."

She then acknowledges the "rrrrreech" young cadet beside her as being the exception in her amours. The script calls for him to make an advance, at which she says he must be patient. "So you have seen me to dance at the Folies Ambassadeurs?" she asks. La Belle tells how she wears, on occasion, her genuine diamond corselet "(INDICATING SHAPE)" which was a gift of an Indian "Rrrrajah" and how it arrived

at the theatre in an armored coupe. She also boasts that the Police Commissaire caters to her.

Again, she restrains her cadet, then proceeds with a clever discourse.

But not yet! Not yet! However, you may kiss the opening in my glove ... just the opening, darling. The rest comes grrrrradually! Starting with the lunch I have planned. After the oysters, you may kiss my wrist. After the filet de sole, my arm. After the coq-au-vin, you may kiss my shoulder. After the salade de laitue, the back of my neck. After the pechs [sic.] flambee, you may kiss the front of my gown ... and after the cafe diable, you may care for a glass of Napoleon's own brandy.
You are so handsome! With such a soft young moustache! And such a pretty baby beard ... like a little billy-goat.

Conchita learns that the young cadet from the Military Academy of Saint Cyr is not rich; that the money which he gave her is from the whole military academy; that he happened to draw the lucky number in a "lotteria" to have an amour with her. "How beautiful! Oh I am so touched! So moved! ... I too will make a sacrifice. I shall re-imburse ... to you ... your ten francs! (CRYING SOFTLY) Oh I am so moved by the young man's devotion ... and by my own generosity! (POWDER PUFF) And now! We approach my house."

She then sees a "femme cyclist," whom she calls a "New Woman--those sporting creatures." She says she knows a better way to get exercise! Then she tosses her last rose to the man on the bicycle built-for-two who looks embarrassed and tired. As she flings her rose, the scene ends.

La Belle Conchita is a delightful characterization. She is a gay, outwardly hard, woman-of-the-world with a warm heart and a great talent for flamboyance and display.

The scene is clever and original. The discourse is suggestive without offending. It contains about 775 words and is slightly longer than the other scenes. It offers a penetrating look into the character. We see that La Belle is a famous entertainer, on the stage and off, in the theatre and after the theatre. She is cognizant of her place in society. She is a rich woman because men shower her with wealth to win her favors. When she first discovers the young man beside her is not wealthy, she instinctively withdraws from him. However, when she learns that an entire military academy desires her, she is flattered and even moved to pseudo-tears.

With this scene, the author brings into focus another type of woman of Paris in the '90s. La Conchita is a Spanish "lady" who has gained her fame and wealth in her adopted Paris.

The New Woman, Scene Five

The fifth and last scene of Act One presents the New Woman Bicyclist. On stage is a tandem bicycle bearing a small British flag and a horn on the handle bars.

The New Woman is a British tourist in Paris. She is described as a "Hearty" who wears bloomers, black stockings,

plaid shirtwaist and a fedora hat.

As the scene begins, the Hearty is sitting on the front seat of the bicycle. Her friend's name is Hyppolite, which no doubt was chosen for the obvious comic effect the name in itself produces. The scene's premise is completely comic as the New Woman says, "Oh, I do enjoy Paris. It makes one appreciate London all the more!"

She acknowledges the yellow rose by exclaiming, "Oh! Whatever was that? ... That rose. Cette rose. D'you suppose it was tossed to us? How rather sweet! I say, Hyppolite, can't you go a bit faster." Thus, the author quickly dismisses the former scene, and, after the brief transitional introduction, the New Woman launches into the heart of the final monologue of the first act with typical British vigor.

As they ride along, the British Hearty shouts comments in French text-book phrases to the French, talks over her shoulder to Hyppolite, and toots her horn. The discourse jumps from comments on the rose to a surprise awaiting Hyppolite, to Paris and its people, and so on. She is dedicated to the female cyclist notion which she says will put women "on a par with men." She declares that the bicycle will "create a third sex! Jolly idea, isn't it?"

As she breezes along it does not tax the imagination of the audience to sense her enthusiasm as well as her partner's exhaustion. It is through her complete naivete and sportive quality that she is revealed as extremely comical.

During the discourse, she expresses delight over their engagement and launches the idea, "I say, Hyppolite, don't you think it'd be rather smashing if we were to spend our honeymoon on a bicycle trip?--Notre lune de miel." Suggestive technique is employed in this scene; Miss Skinner has her character express an idea and then repeat it, for emphasis, in a short French phrase. This divulges the intellect of the New Woman and the vogue current in England, to be able to express oneself in French. It also serves to remind the audience of the Paris locale. Typical English words and phrases as, "Chin up and all that sort of thing," "smashing," "tea," "ripping surprise," and "rather beastly," offer delightful contrast and create a picture of an English woman on French soil.

Finally, the duo arrives at the big surprise, just when Hyppolite is about to faint. "(GAILY PAINTED CAPTIVE BALLOON APPEARS)," reads the direction in the script. "Slow down, hup! Swing off in unison, hup! (SWING LEGS OFF) And isn't she a beauty?"

At this point, Hyppolite can stand no more and takes flight. The Hearty says, "Oh well, what can one expect from a man? Especially a French man! Possibly good riddance. Daresay it'll be a bit of a blow for Papa! Especially as it's the second time such a thing has happened."

Left alone, this female is undaunted as she climbs in the basket of the balloon, and as it ascends she waves, "God

save the Queen and vive la Femme Nouvelle." She throws out a sand bag, gives a wild whoop, and the balloon rises as the curtain falls.

The finale of the fifth scene uses a bit of deus ex machina and spectacle in the launching of the balloon which carries off the character. The scene seems to move quite rapidly and sustains interest. The situation, characterization, and discourse are all cleverly conceived and written.

Act II: Niche In a Portal of Notre Dame
and the Left Bank

The Angel, Scene One

The first scene in Act II begins as surprisingly as the balloon ascended at the close of the first act. The curtain opens to reveal a dark stage. Gradually the audience discovers what looks to be a stone statue of an angel on a pediment of the western portal of Notre Dame. As the small light from the overhanging stone canopy glows, the Angel comes alive.

The costume of the Angel is complete with wings, although actually they are fastened to a stand rather than appended to the actress. She stands in front of the stand, and the wings look as though they were attached to her; thus, there is no distracting movement of the wings which there might be if the wings were a part of her dress. The costuming appears to be very sculpturesque as if it were actually carved from stone. Her wig is of large ringlets which aid

in producing the sculptured appearance.

As the Angel begins to move, she says, "Psst! St. Marcel! Psst! St. Marcel! Do you feel like talking? (PAUSE) Psst! St. Jacques! Psst! St. Jacques! Are you awake? Oh, dear! How dull! Is everybody astone?"

The Angel reveals herself to be quite a human being, and she displays a fine sense of humor as she jests with the other cathedral figures. The Angel titters over St. Denis who holds his dissevered head in his hands. She wonders if he really walked about Paris that way, for she says, "Seems rather silly, doesn't it?" The Angel prefers to come to life at night rather than in the daytime as it precludes her having to look at the sight-seers.

Reminiscent of the women of the first act, the Angel also loves Paris. She expresses her feelings by saying, "Oh I am enjoying myself. I do love my niche. I get such a good view of all that goes on along the river. I can watch it for centuries and never get bored." Later, she says that Paris is not more sinful now than it ever was, because "It's like the river. It's there, and everyone sees it his own way."

The Angel not only titters over St. Denis, but she also sympathizes with the gargoyle who is so nervous from "The tourists and this camera craze.... and they laugh and call him hideous. And the Americans scratch their names and addresses on his back which tickles him horribly."

But the Angel realizes that, along with the people who are most annoying, there are the pigeons. She explains, "I had a nest on my shoulder last March and for weeks I was simply drenched with blasphemy."

From her pediment high, the Angel watches the night life of Paris. She sees a laundress, two women students, "a man and woman counting money," and a mother who cries as she watches her sleeping boy. These women are thus introduced to the audience by the Angel; the next scenes of this act will feature each in turn.

The Angel feels a chill wind as if "a wind of hate" were present. She moralizes in the next few lines as, perhaps, an Angel has the right to do. She remarks that during the revolution the goddess of reason was brought to the altar. "She didn't last long. What made them think that reason could ever take the place of faith?"

Then, in a play upon words, she closes her discourse by saying, "It's growing early, Stephen. We'd better be going back to stone."

The character, Angel, is as novel as any of the Paris '90 women. She transcends the others literally and figuratively. From her position above the city, she watches her beloved Paris and its native inhabitants. Those she sees late at night are different from those women portrayed in the first act. The Angel sees the poorer, bourgeois society and, to a great extent, sets a mood which is serious

and contemplative. Throughout the scene, the reader senses a change of atmosphere from the fashionable, comic, and romantic women of the first act, to a more common type of average female, as the Angel sees them, and in this approach they are nonetheless entertaining.

Miss Skinner gives her Angel a personality and wisdom and does not make her appear formal or "churchy." She personifies dignity, yet exudes mirth and exuberance. Her speaking to the other saints of the church is humorous in its fantasy.

The Laundress, Scene Two

A Laundress is the characterization of the second scene. She is conceived as "YOUNG AND FRESH ... THE TYPE STEINLEN USED TO DRAW." The scene is a Cafe set-piece. A table and chair are placed to the right of center stage. The cafe suggests a cheap district of Paris. The Laundress is plainly costumed, befitting her position. She wears a print blouse with push-up sleeves, a dark, long, full skirt and long, checkered apron which is wrinkled. She carries a large round wicker basket of laundry.

As the Laundress enters she calls out her trade, "Blanchissage! Laundry! Blanchissage! Laundry! White, smooth blanchissage! Laundry called for and delivered."

The French Laundress is definitely a common woman. She is the sort who lives each day at a time, works hard at

making a living but intimates that she lays a little by toward a marriage one day. She is garrulous and makes it her business to know about her customers and hypothesizes about them from the laundry which they send to her, for "very little escapes the good-natured observation of the Laundress."¹³

She flirts with a song writer at the cafe, is saucy with a student. She shows the song writer a petticoat of a blonde, whose "husband's gone on a trip to Lyons and she insists she wants this today ... (SHRUGS) J'sais pas! None of my affair." Another bit of apparel which he produces from her basket is a suit of long underwear that belongs to a female Boston school teacher. She holds the underwear in one hand, points to the owner who lives on the second floor of the apartment house down the street, and calls such women, "queer ducks! ... Hoo! What a ceinture de chastete! Not that she's [sic.] ever need any ... she'll never land a man." The Laundress also takes from her basket a white shirt which belongs to the son of a Jewish professor.

Having given glimpses into the lives of her various customers, she decides to hurry on with her laundry. The song writer gives her a copy of his song to which she says, "How does it go? 'Turn Me Little Mill Wheel; song by Maitre Charlot dedicated to the mill-wheels of the Butte Montmartre'

¹³Skinner, "Paris '90" Souvenir Book, loc. cit., p. 4.

... ca c'est du propre! The Moulin de la Galette, Hein? Say this is cute! Start it again, Maitre, and I'll sing it along with you." The Laundress sings the song as she makes her exit.

The Laundress serves an important purpose for the writer in providing an introduction to the next scenes. The characterization gives the performer a chance to sing a gay song composed by Kay Swift, and it shifts attention back to the lower strata of Parisian women, as with the Nou-Nou, lest all the characterizations be of the upper class, or fashionable society.

The discourse serves more to expose the women who follow than to portray the personality of the Laundress. Comedy comes about by her producing a suit of underwear and a petticoat from the laundry basket in an outdoor cafe, of all places. The song is a clever one, but it seems only partly integrated with the script and, therefore, a bit contrived. Yet, for this type of show, the song is not at all out of place in the total scheme. Otherwise, the scene is simply straightforward exposition.

A Boston School Teacher, Scene Three

While it is conceded that the monologue of the Laundress might get a bit tedious were it any longer, the opposite is true of the following scene depicting a Boston Female School Teacher. The set is a French window piece with

shutters which open onto a balcony with railing. The monologue of about 775 words is extensive enough to capture the character of the School Teacher, described as follows:

THE FEMININE ONE OF THE TWO MASCULINE WOMEN.
SHE WEARS A SHIRTWAIST AND SEVERE TAILORED
SKIRT AND YET THERE IS SOMETHING GENTLE, AL-
MOST WEAKLY APPEALING ABOUT HER. SHE IS
LEANING ON A RAILING OUT OVER THE STREET ...
AS THOUGH ON A SMALL BALCONY OFF A BEDROOM.

This description not only presents the character objectively, but also reveals a subjective attitude which the author seems to have for her.

The Bostonian School Marm's opening line is, "Agatha, d'you know it's going to be a perfectly lovely day?" She senses this because a woman on a barge is seen to hang the canary cage outside. The Teacher then speaks romantically of the setting which reminds her of a scene from The Three Musketeers, reflecting her Alexander Dumas mood.

Following this eager, romantic statement showing her youthful ideas and a bit of her literary taste, she abruptly pauses, as if to ponder on what she has let herself say. Her next thoughts are less idealistic in tone, "The sun's already drying up the gutters." The words seem almost ironic--the scene "drying up"--and she may wonder if her own life is doing the same.

The Teacher then talks about a picnic she and her friend are taking. She cannot refrain from remarking,

You know, Agatha, I wish some day we could be
true Bohemians and take along a lunch of French

bread, cheese and a bottle of wine instead of Peter's chocolate, mineral water and Educator crackers ... French bread can't all be covered with germs. People here seem to thrive on it ... Couldn't we build up an immunity too? Sometimes I wonder if it's worth while being so antiseptic.

These words seem so appropriate to the character for they reveal that even for a brief sojourn in Paris the Teacher cannot break from an established routine and rules which govern her life.

She plans to take along a list of irregular verbs, a book of French idioms, and her crocheting. She is crocheting a gift for a Professor friend. She becomes a bit embarrassed and defensive at the mention of crocheting for the Professor, which brings a laugh from Agatha. "Crocheting does quiet my nerves. I wish I didn't have nerves. I'd give anything to attain your intellectual detachment." If it is intellectual detachment that Agatha has, the feeling is projected that luckily the other Teacher does not possess this quality.

Agatha wants to wear her rubbers, for the paths might be wet; the other Teacher does not agree. To this she retorts, "Must we always do everything alike?" She realizes her self-assertion and apologizes with, "I didn't mean that ... I didn't mean it, Agatha. You believe I didn't mean it, don't you, Agatha?"

She tries to explain that the study for a Ph.D. has made them both touchy and that they should not be on such a beautiful day when "Paris smells so deliciously of lilacs and

acacias." But Agatha can only remark about the smell of the drains, for she is a realist, "and it's awfully clever of you." However, Zola is not a favorite with our Boston School Teacher; she prefers DuMaurier.

Another inner thought of the Boston School Teacher is expressed when she mentions men. "I can't help thinking it would be part of our European experience to make the acquaintance of some nice, studious Frenchmen ... I can't believe all Frenchmen have diseases, Agatha." But, again, she is cowed by Agatha, who calls her "man-crazy."

Suddenly she stops talking, covers her face in shame, and exclaims, "Oh!!! Oh, how awful!" She has glanced down the street at the very time the Laundress is showing the union suit, her union suit to a man in the cafe. She sees the Laundress laugh and point in their direction. This is too much for the Teacher to endure, and she releases her emotions in an extremely well-written and sympathetically revealing climax to the scene. She cries in agreement, "We're precious intellectuals and dowdy, ridiculous fromps!" She assures Agatha that she is not hysterical, just scared. She has been scared since one day when a pupil sent her a Valentine with a "horrible picture of a horrible school-marm," which she does not want to be, but actually is and has little chance of changing at this late hour.

Agatha laughs at her rather than comforts her. "Some feelings simply can't be controlled. It's weak, I know, but

don't despise me for it. Don't despise me, Agatha! I couldn't bear your contempt."

The scene ends with the Boston Teacher piteously begging for forgiveness from Agatha. The scene decreases little in intensity from the preceding emotional outburst and closes with the following:

Wait, Agatha. Don't go without me. Wait! Please! I'm coming right along. I'll do anything you want me to. I'll even wear my rubbers. And I'll help you on with yours. (KNEELING ABJECTLY) I'll put them on for you. Hold out your foot. I'll put them on for you. Only don't leave me, Agatha! Don't ever leave me!

The School Teacher is the most sympathetically written scene thus far. The author reveals both the exterior veneer and the inner feelings of a pathetic woman. The contrast between her and Agatha is wide, yet, as the directions read, they both represent types of unmarried women: "A thoughtless act produced a touching revelation from the weaker of the two."¹⁴ The Teacher, a product of her protected environment, is limited in her scope; she is insecure and feels the need to be accepted, even dominated, by Agatha.

The characterization is so different from that of La Belle Conchita, the Angel, and so on, that the author's skill in presenting such a variety of people and the contrasts between them is appealing to the audience.

¹⁴Skinner, "Paris '90," Souvenir Book, loc. cit.

Even while concentrating upon her portrayal of character, the playwright never forgets the Paris locale. She keeps in mind the situation and circumstances which integrate the character with the play in its entirety. Paris, a city of beauty, of romance, of learning, of escape, and of sorrow, is captured in this scene.

A Woman of Virtue, Scene Four

Following a blackout and a fast change of scene and costume, the next scene presents a Woman of Virtue. The stage set is a fan-covered screen, suggesting the interior of a bourgeois apartment. A chair is on stage. The character, a blonde, is dressed in a pale blue peignoir which covers a fancy camisole. The mood of this scene provides a sharp change from the dramatic seriousness of the preceding scene. In the interest of variety, a feminine and frilly young woman appears. She inspects the petticoat which the Laundress has just delivered and, at once, tries to get some money out of a coin purse to pay her.

The first thirty-seven words are spoken in French. She counts out the money for her delivered laundry, explains that her husband is away, and thanks the Laundress. She then places the petticoat on the chair and gazes at it, as though she were trying to decide whether to start dressing. She is startled by a knock at the door and responds by partially opening the door. The slight opening reveals an

Englishman. She appears surprised to see him and horrified at not being dressed, but she asks him in. She takes his silk top hat and his cane which she lays on the petticoat "IN MANNER OF LAUTREC'S COVER TO 'ELLES'."

This Woman of Virtue closes the door quickly and explains that two American school teachers live across the hall, and "they think the worst of every French woman."

This girl's French accent is extremely broad, and she displays it with such abandon that the audience begins to sense its artificiality. For the first time in the script, the accent is written into the English words. Examples of this are: "Ozerwise," "Ees" for "it's," "zat," "eef," "'usband," "somesing," and the like. The Woman of Virtue comments that her caller is a "British object."

Before long, she tells the caller to leave, saying (with wide-eyed innocent expression) that just because her 'usband is gone, and just because she gave this man (a perfect stranger) her name and address, and just because she is home from four to five (the enchanting hour), he has no reason to think that she has planned this rendezvous.

When her caller presses the matter, she asks for a token to prove his love. He produces his "beeg, beeg diamond" ring. However, she says, after putting it on, that she is a woman of virtue and cannot keep the ring, although she leaves it on her finger. She then accepts his diamond stick-pin but pretends outrage and exclaims, "Monsieur!!

Just because you remove your stick-pin is no reason why you should also remove your necktie and collar."

Just when it seems that she may not be able to keep her "virtue," someone is heard on the stairs, at a very convenient time. Then a key is heard being placed in the lock of the door, and she knows it must be her husband. The English caller escapes by way of the back door. After he leaves, the directions in the script indicate: "(OPENING DOOR. PAUSING WITH FINGER TO LIPS FOR MOMENT, MAKING SURE ENGLISHMAN HAS GONE. THEN BREAKING INTO GRIN AND BROAD COCKNEY ACCENT) Cripes! 'ello, 'Erbert."

The Woman of Virtue turns out to be a fraud, not a coquette. She is a dishonest English girl working with 'Erbert as an accomplice. She has kept the caller's diamond ring and stick-pin. The scene ends with a bit of comedy and a song. "Some 1300 francs worth 'o diamonds, and me virtue intact! Look! The bloke left 'is things behind. 'Ow's this for a Cissy Loftus?" She sings a song, "Lend Me A Bob," dancing in her dressing gown and with her caller's silk top hat and cane in hand.

Miss Skinner wrote this fourth scene monologue with a surprise ending. Whether or not this girl is a Woman of Virtue the audience is left to decide. Certainly she is an enterprising woman of Paris. The scene is near farce or melodrama due to the exaggerated circumstances, accent, and characterization.

A Professor's Wife, Scene Five

The fifth and last scene of Act II portrays an incident in the life of a Jewish professor's wife. It is serious in mood, treating an enigma of society, the prejudices against and persecution of the Jewish race. The script makes it clear that such discrimination has occurred in Paris and depicts "the victimization that befell thousands of Parisians, native and alien-born."¹⁵

The setting is the home of a professor in Paris. The window from the third scene of this act is used here in reverse. The screen from Scene Four is also used in reverse. A wicker arm chair is placed left of center stage. The Jewish woman wears a white blouse with a long dark-colored skirt.

The opening of the scene reveals the professor's middle-aged wife sitting in the chair. Supposedly her small boy is sobbing with his head in her lap. In one hand she holds the remnant of his newly laundered shirt. "It's all right, son. They didn't hurt you. Stop it! Stop it, Isaac! (SHAKING HIM) Stop it, I tell you." As she tries to comfort him, he relates that a dozen or so boys had accosted him, that when the laundress saw what was happening she called the gendarme and the boys ran away.

She soothes the boy, tells him that she will make him

¹⁵Skinner, "Paris '90" Souvenir Book, loc. cit., p. 5.

a new shirt if she has to stay awake all night, so he will be ready for the Bar-Mitzvah tomorrow. They will take him to the temple, and there he will be safe.

The mother admonishes him that, even if they call him names such as "youpin" and "sheenie," he should be proud that he is a Jew. The reason that times are difficult for the Jews is because a Jewish captain, by the name of Dreyfus, is believed to have sold secret military plans to the Germans. Although the Jews believe he is innocent, he is being used as a scapegoat for hatred and prejudice by the anti-Jewish movement.

The mother has confidence that Paris will be cured of this disease, for it is a free city. She recalls the time the Catholics were hated by the Huguenots. "We must believe those words we see written on all the public buildings ... liberty, equality, fraternity."

Her husband comes home and learns what has happened to their son. Until then she has been strong and confident in order to allay her son's fears. Now she asks questions of her husband as the son did of her. "Will it become here as it was in Warsaw?" and "How can you say it still is when the intellectuals are afraid to open their mouths?"

She stares at him and sees for the first time since he has come in that his eyes show he is excited about something. He refers to the paper, which she then reads aloud: Emile Zola has written an editorial in defense of Dreyfus.

"He dares to come out for Dreyfus against his own government. Against most of Paris." Here in the script, a sentence is crossed out and another is inserted, so that it appears this way: "And he himself is facing exile because of the stand he is taking. You're right. Where but in Paris could it happen?"

Again, Paris takes on greater scope and dimension; it is a city of refuge and freedom for the suppressed and minority groups.

The mother calls to the boy and joyously exclaims, "And what I told you of Paris is true. It is a city of freedom! Listen! The band of the Garde Republicaine ... on their way to the public concert. And the tune they play is a tune of freedom. That's right, son, you wave to them! We'll all of us wave to them."

This speech before the curtain is very dramatic and climatic. It builds in momentum and tends to appeal to concepts of freedom, equality, and fraternity. The scene is an indictment against anti-Semitism. This scene would almost surely arouse an American theatre audience with its traditional sympathy for the oppressed and its sense of fair play.

In this scene, another nationality is added to the spectrum of Paris '90 characterizations. As a serious scene, the script shows the facility and ease with which the author presents Parisian women.

Act III: Montmartre, Friends of Toulouse-Lautrec
La Goulue, Scene One

Women of Paris, as suggested by the lithographs and paintings of Toulouse-Lautrec, comprise the characterizations for Act III of Paris '90. The first is La Goulue, a girl who gives the impression of being a continuous talker. The scene is a 900-word portrayal of the coarse but attractive blonde who was a glutton for food and liquor. Because of an insatiable appetite she later became fat and ended her career as a vulgar dancer with a cheap carnival outfit.

The first scene is in the small garden of the dancer, and a painted backdrop represents a high wall. On stage there is a rustic chair without arms. Upon the chair is a trowel, and beside it is a tub of lillies. A ladder leans against the wall.

Reminiscent of the Moulin Rouge poster, La Goulue is found on stage striking a pose which shows her skirts pulled up so that her petticoats and black stockings are in full view. Her skirt is striped, and her blouse is of a polka-dot pattern designed with a low-cut, heart-shaped neckline.

La Goulue is weeding in her garden while nursing a hangover. "Working off last night's champagne," is the way the author describes the circumstances of this scene. La Goulue's maid announces that she has a caller. The caller has a name like a camel, the maid says. La Goulue finally guesses that it is Lautrec. "Is he a queer looking guy?

Stumpy legs? Looks like a dwarf? Terrible face? ... He's a friend of mine. Show him out here ... He's not going to bite you! Damn it, he's an artist!"

Henri, as she calls him, gets a warm reception from La Goulue. It is mid-morning, but she tells him to help himself to a drink and then give her "a swig of that cognac. I'll never make the Moulin tonight." Lautrec says that he has been at the Moulin, too, the past night. She says she can never do the splits feeling like this. "Aw Henri, why do I drink so much? ... and why do I eat so much? ... and why do I ... (COARSE LAUGH) Scared you, didn't I?"

She takes a few more drinks of cognac and feels better. La Goulue asks the artist why he plans to paint a lion-tamer. She says that he could be a good painter, "... but Holy name of a cucumber. Look at the muck you paint! Me, I'm bad enough ... but those girls! ... Those public girls! They're awful! And you make them look even more awful!" She cannot understand why he paints that awful looking singer, Yvette Guilbert, with "a face like hers."

To La Goulue, the subject of an artist is what determines whether or not the work is artistic and well done. "Well, I'm no art critic, but your stuff, Lautrec (HOLDING NOSE). But I like you. (LAUGH AND TAKING ANOTHER SWIG)"

She then goes into description of a visitor at the Moulin Rouge the previous evening. The man who caused the commotion with his presence was the Prince of Wales or, as she

refers to him, "Big Eddie," or "Edward the Caressar." She goes through a vigorous reenactment of her dance which she did in front of his table. She has on her "fancy pants ... you know the ones with the red heart embroidered on the seat." At the end of her dance she leaned over his table and called out, "Hey, Wales, they say you wear your heart on your sleeve, well I wear mine' ... and I showed him!" With this accounting of the incident, she believes herself to have been quite daring and quite the entertainer because the Prince laughed long and heartily. "Well, Henri, when I dance, I got the nerve to do anything. And when I dance at the Moulin, the mill is red, the air is blue, my petticoats are white, and it's the tricolor of France!" It was La Goulue's "uninhibited and vigorous agility [which] won her a job as dancer."¹⁶

As some weeds are thrown over the wall, La Goulue climbs the ladder to see what "damn cochon's throwing his rubbish into my garden." She is about to call him a "son of a ..." when she sees that he is a priest in the next yard. She apologizes and tries to make polite conversation, but everything she says has double meanings or is colored with the invectives that she does not want to use in the presence of a priest. "Does my language shock you, Father? ... I don't even know when I'm talking that way ... it's the damndest thing!" Later, when she is commenting on his

¹⁶Skinner, "Paris '90" Souvenir Book, loc. cit.

garden and asks him to look over at hers, she says, "Step up on your ladder and take a look. Wait a second while I pull down my skirt ... I've been entertaining a gentleman friend here ... and that isn't what it sounds like either."

La Goulue tells the priest she makes soup from her vegetables and will give him some. "I can brew a hell of a good soup ... I mean a good, good, soup, Father! Because I love to eat ... that's how I got my nickname of The Glutton ... I'm the dancer, La Goulue ... the Queen of the Moulin Rouge. And this is my friend, M. Henri Lautrec." During the '90s she was Queen of the Moulin, quite in contrast to her original job as a laundress.

She invites the priest to take in her act at the Moulin, for "you'll get a hell of a lot of material for a sermon." She arranges with the priest that every time he hears her use bad language, she will cook him some soup. When he agrees, she exclaims, "You will? Well, I'll be God (HAND OVER MOUTH)."

As this dancer climbs down from her ladder to start the soup, she hears the circus calliope and remarks, "Listen! Lautrec! There's your circus music!" As the calliope song continues, there is a blackout and a quick costume change, and the scene shifts to the circus. Kay Swift's music again acts as a bridge between scenes.

The La Goulue monologue contains exposition material for the third act. The Lion Tamer and Yvette Guilbert are specifically mentioned to prepare us for the following scenes.

Berthe La Sourde, the central figure for another scene of this act, is not specifically mentioned but suggested when La Goulue talks about "those girls! ... those public girls!" whom Lautrec paints. Another part of the exposition is the introduction of Henri Lautrec, the physical placement of him and the description of this dwarf artist. La Goulue introduces him with "A monster? What in Satan's name are you talking about? I thought I was the only one seeing animals today ... Did you let the monster in? ... Oh wait a second, Julot. Is he a queer looking guy? Stumpy legs? Looks like a dwarf? Terrible face?"

The script reveals the warmth and genuine affection of La Goulue toward Lautrec, although she shows, at the same time, that La Goulue does not understand Lautrec's artistry. La Goulue merely realizes that he is a friendly dwarf who can draw pictures of some of the women entertainers of Paris.

Miss Skinner has made La Goulue an energetic comedienne. In the part of the scene where La Goulue describes the previous night at the Moulin when she danced for the Prince, the dancer vividly re-enacts the whole incident.

The comic detail is especially emphasized in the part with the priest. The invectives are much milder, we imagine, than the actual dialogue of La Goulue. The author, however, has used restraint in portraying this vivid and earthy dancer, and if the monologue is a bit tame and mild compared to real life, it is nevertheless entertaining and humorous.

A Lion Tamer of the Medrano Circus, Scene Two

Next the writer presents a dramatic characterization of the Lion Tamer, Erica. She is a very striking individual, a woman in her middle forties and very handsome in her green military coat with gold frogging, black tights, black boots, and white astrakhan hat.

This performer is seen in her dressing room which is suggested by a make-up table and a wire-protected gas jet. The seated figure wears black gloves and holds in one hand a trainer's whip, in the other hand a cigarette which she is smoking. Erica is German and speaks with an accent, sometimes reverting to her native language, "Ach, Gott in Hemmel! Dann gehen sie weiter."

Erica's opening lines are directed to the police; at the same time, they tell the audience that she is a lion tamer, that her name is Erica, her age is 45-46, and that Max was her apprentice. It was the duty of "my assistant" to stand outside the cage with a pistol. In the first page of the scene, she explains the fate of Max. "Everybody saw it happen ... It was no accident. I knew what I was doing ... Max killed my lioness. I killed him ... What other motive could there be?"

She says that it will do no good to ask Herr Lautrec, who is also in her dressing room, about the relationship between her and Max. "Our relationship had nothing to do with it." She says that Lautrec "saw us only to draw sketches

of us."

At this point in the monologue, the directions in the script read, "EFFECT OF DOOR OPENING, SHAFT OF LIGHT AND MUSIC OF DISTANT PERFORMANCE." This signifies that the police go and that she is left with Lautrec. Of him she asks, "Do they give you special permission to stay behind ... and draw my portrait? ... You may go, you may stay ..."

Lautrec actually went to this smart circus very often. The audience of the Nouveau Cirque attended the show in evening dress.

Erica is more concerned with getting the body of Fricka, her dead lioness, than she is of inquiring about Max. She has nothing to say to Lautrec and, when he offers a picture to her, responds, "So you are making me a gift of it! This is one of your famous jokes, I suppose. It is not very funny."

When she looks at the drawing, she becomes soft and feminine and her emotions are touched, for the picture is of Fricka, her dead lioness. Herewith follows a lengthy story of the life of Fricka from a cub to death from the bullet in Max's pistol.

She loved Fricka and calls Max a coward; he mistrusted the lioness and hated her. He was jealous of the love which Erica had for Fricka instead of for him.

Erica then takes the chair and whip in hand and illustrates her routine. She demonstrates how, after Fricka's

death, she managed the other cats, then she went outside the cage, "BUSINESS OF RIPPING OFF HAT--HAIR FALLING OVER FACE" Dramatically, she narrates how she took her whip and with the lead handle beat him until he was dead, in view of the audience.

From this moment, the monologue builds dramatically and emotionally to the point of hysteria from Erica.

He killed my lioness! He killed my lioness!
What have they done with Fricka? They won't
cut up that beautiful body.

.....
I must get out and tell them that they can't!
Let me out! Let me out! They'll be cutting
up my baby for lion food. Let me out! Let
me get to Fricka! Police! Police! I must
see Fricka! Then you can take me away! You
can take me straight to the guillotine! But
get me out of here! Get me out of here!
Get me out!

Miss Skinner wrote Erica as a very dramatic role. The situation is a most unusual one for emotional and dramatic display. A woman's love for a lioness could be comic, but in the monologue-drama it becomes a pathetic, eerie, and a serious incident. This backstage occurrence seems plausible, and it does not strain credibility to imagine such a situation.

The monologue calls for a portrayal of a self-reliant, dominating woman who becomes so attached to her cats that, when the assistant kills one in her defense, she turns and kills him, then becomes hysterical as she thinks of what will happen to the body of her beloved animal.

The scene, based on a fictitious episode, is very

.....

direct from the outset and symbolizes the direct character of the Lion Tamer. It is a one-sided account; there is no objective judgment as to whose action was correct, the Lion Tamer or Max. The Lion Tamer is the heroine, rather than a murderess.

The scene has continuity with the preceding scene as Lautrec is written into both monologues. Because of the highly dramatic climax, no hint of the following scene is given.

Berthe La Sourde, Scene Three

The third friend of Lautrec's is Berthe La Sourde. Berthe is initially pictured as a very coarse prostitute, with little allure. She represents a type which Lautrec found in Parisian houses of ill fame. Gradually we are led beyond her "profession" to see her in light of her past and present. The author gives one incident which might explain why such a woman would be chosen for Lautrec's portraits. Miss Skinner reveals some of the beauty, hopelessness, vulgarity, and boredom that Lautrec's brush captured.

The scene is in two parts, the first set in a receiving-room or salon suggested by an ottoman and rubber plant. Deaf Berthe appears in "DRESS ... OR UNDRRESS ... AS LAUTREC'S GIRL IN 'AU SALON' ... SLOPPY CHEMISE, BLACK STOCKINGS, DIRTY MULES."

Berthe's first lines reveal her coarseness. "Ah, zut,

alors! She gives me a pain, Old Pickle-nose. She does not know the first thing about running a decent establishment. Weather like this, even a sailor would not come in till 8 ... 9 ... o'clock. (SCRATCHING) Hm! Tell it's spring all right ... my first flea-bites ..."

She mentions the dwarf painter and asks that his favorite song be played. "For a time, Lautrec even lived in one of the houses, sketching the girls."¹⁷ It is now that we learn some more facts about Lautrec; Berthe is impressed that his father is a count. She likes him and admires him because he paints her, is nice to her, and makes nice conversation while painting, "Not like the customers."

She yawns and wishes for a day off like last week, but she will have to work even on her approaching birthday. "Who said that? (RISING) Who said it'd take my mind off my age? Was that you, Nini, you old bag?" A fight starts between Nini and another woman. The music builds so as to indicate a great free-for-all. Berthe jumps upon the ottoman and spars off opponents as if in a melee.

A man enters and the girls stop their fighting. Berthe strides over to him in a "SADIE THOMPSON FASHION." She greets the man. "Good evening, chérie! Buy me a drink, mon p'tit coquin? (ELBOWING THE OTHER GIRLS AWAY)" But Berthe is mistaken in the man, "What do you mean you're not

¹⁷ Skinner, "Paris '90" Souvenir Book, loc. cit., p. 6.

here for any ... (MAN HANDS OVER THE LETTER) What's this? ... A per ... Now who in hell'd be sending me a personal note? Fancy stationery!" The note is from Lautrec. It is a very proper one written in a respectable tone. She reads it aloud. He says in the letter that he remembered it was her birthday and asks if she would spend the day with him and two artist friends along the river on a "purely pla... pla...platonic basis." He says that he will settle the cost with the Madame if she is reluctant to give Berthe the day off. Often Lautrec was said to buy presents for his models and to entertain them with parties on their birthdays. Berthe is overjoyed and amazed.

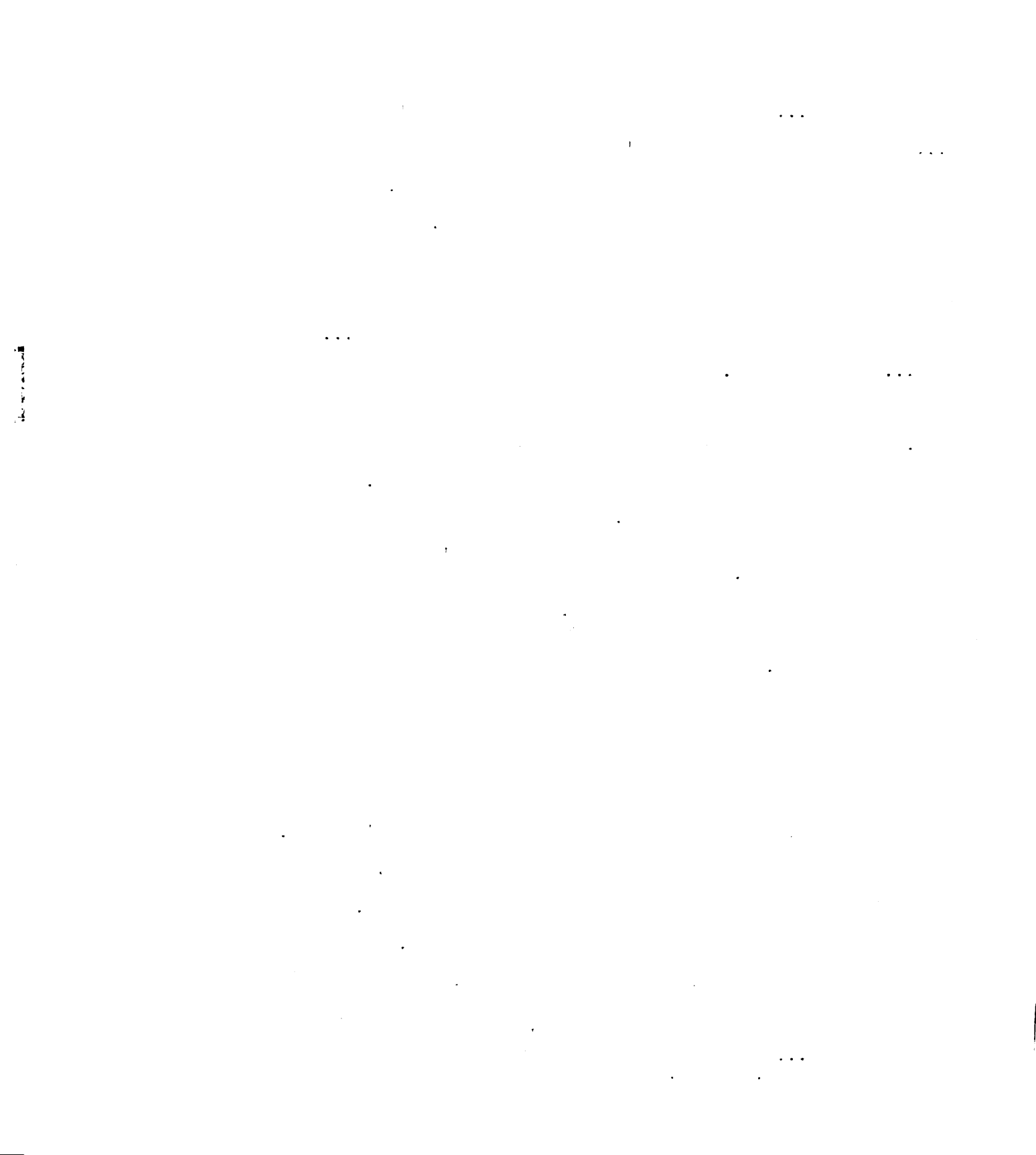
He's paying for services even if I don't have to give any. My birthday! And a day off! (With full pay and no work!) [This phrase was deleted from the script.] Spent respectable! And with an aristocrat! If only we'd run into Maman! I shall go assemble my wardrobe. If King Leopold of Belgium drops in, you may send for me!

Berthe La Sourde, Scene Four

After a fast scene and costume change during a musical bridge, Berthe reappears sitting on an artist's stool. She has a large umbrella and a fish pole with a fish. Her dress is very proper with a frilly lace yoke and cuffs. Her hat is a large picture hat of lace and flowers.

She is fishing and having a good time.

Such gents! I never knew people who could talk so cleverly about things I don't know what they mean ... and all day treating me just like a real lady. Why M. Maurice said my ankles were



so pretty he bet the rest of me was pretty, too, and he never so much as started to investigate. What a treat this day is!

Berthe gets to reminiscing of her childhood home and tells how she got her nickname. When her mother would call her to work, Berthe would hide and her mother would "yell 'Berthe! Berthe! Are you deaf?' That's how I got my nickname, Deaf Berthe ... Berthe-la-Sourde." She continues by telling how and why she had to run away from home.

The scene closes with Berthe's asking M. Lautrec to sketch her as she is now. Because Lautrec's pictures are appearing in public, her mother might see "my picture dressed up nice like I am today and she'd think I was all right ... and just in case, call it ... call it by my nickname, Deaf Berthe, hein? ... Oh you're sweet, M. Lautrec ... and I'd kiss you ... only it's my day off." She assumes the pose of Lautrec's famous painting of "Berthe La Sourde."

The story reveals the reasons for Lautrec's painting, "Berthe La Sourde." In doing so, the author paints a portrait of a stupid, immoral woman who likes to be treated like a lady. The monologue is informative rather than dramatic, exciting, or comic. This would be a typical dumb-blond type (were it not that she is described as being a brunette!), symbolizing another type of Paris woman and another of the friends amassed by Lautrec.

Yvette Guilbert, Scene Five

For the last scene of Paris '90, Miss Skinner turned to perhaps one of the most distinguished Parisian performers of her day.

The scene is set with only a velour backdrop, and the black gloves of Yvette Guilbert emerge through the center. Gradually, she peers out "IN AN ATTITUDE LIKE THE LAUTREC DRAWING." Her dress is a white jersey evening gown which is designed on straight lines. The only decoration on the dress is a black net puff-bow at the top of each shoulder strap.

Yvette calls for her accompanist and asks if he has the new music for her act. She says that they have little time to rehearse, so she will do only the two new songs. The first song is by Aristide Bruant, and the lyrics are about a sordid affair. The girl in the song is writing a letter from the prostitute's prison, called Saint Lazzare. The song is sung in the style of Miss Guilbert.

Yvette peers out into the audience and asks, "Who is that out there?" It is Henri Toulouse-"Lautrrrrrec!" as he comes down to the footlights. She says, "I did not ask for any Boldini portrait ... but I hardly expected a Daumier caricature ... Retit [sic.] monstre! ... Yes, just what you are ... in appearance." She realizes what his audacity made her say and she apologizes and tells him only he would have

dared to draw her so hideously.

Yvette is the only one of the characters who is cognizant of Lautrec's artistry. "I realize the poster will be a major work of art." She says she will keep it as her "passport to immortality" along with "prostitutes, circus performers and the more garish dancers of the Moulin Rouge." By this line, the author brings together the scenes of this act. Yvette then praises Lautrec very generously. It would seem to be an eulogy, Miss Skinner's sincere sentiments in behalf of Henri Toulouse-Lautrec.

Your art will forever preserve the spirit of Paris at this close of our century ... No! ... I don't think you are a good artist ... I think you are a great one ... not merely on paper and canvas ... great in spirit. That's why I can call you "little monster" and you can laugh ... both to put me at ease after such a faux pas and to conceal your own inner pain. The courage of Charles le Temeraire and the wit of Rabelais ... in the body of Quasimodo. This happens to be your price. Every artist has some deformity to bear ... you may perhaps be fortunate ... in that yours is only physical.

She then says that, if he has his sketch brush handy, he may continue his "outrageous immortalizing." And with this she sings a song called "Madame Artur," for which Miss Guilbert herself wrote the music.

In this scene we learn little of the character of Yvette from the script itself. The songs are expressive, and the second was actually composed and sung by Yvette Guilbert when she was a famous singer. The script tells little about Miss Guilbert other than that she is a famous

singer whom Lautrec paints. It is perhaps unfortunate that the script did not bring to focus some of the interesting features of her unusual career. As an unattractive cabaret singer in Lyone, Yvette was actually booed from the stage. Refusing to imitate other performers' style of singing finally brought her success. The climb to stardom was a difficult one for she really did not have a singing voice and would not use a lot of gestures. It was her distinctive style of facial expression and effects which made her famous in Liege, at the Moulin Rouge and, later, at the Divan Japonais.

Lautrec was not the only artist who appreciated her. Musicians, writers, intellectuals, and aristocrats clustered about her. Clemenceau has described Lautrec's drawings of her as "one of the greatest of all social documents."¹⁸

She won her fame by singing bawdy, comic, and sophisticated songs. Later she became a foremost interpreter of French folksongs and ballads. She devoted much of her life and time to scholarly research in music history. "Yvette Guilbert epitomized much that was good and much that was zestful in the magnificent era of the '90s."¹⁹

This last scene, then, is devoted to Lautrec as seen through the eyes of one of his most celebrated models. The praise of Lautrec builds up and might be a bit overwhelming

¹⁸ Skinner, "Paris '90" Souvenir Book, loc. cit.

¹⁹ Ibid.

if one is not a devotee of Lautrec's art, as Miss Skinner is.

The finale song leaves the reader with no doubt but that the show is about to end, for where else could it go? Any further characterization by one woman is inconceivable.

Summary

Paris '90 presents a series of fifteen complete vignettes, as the preceding analysis has exemplified. Each scene is complete in itself yet it contributes to the whole monologue-drama. Unity of form is evident because each scene has continuity, the scenes together form a unified act, and the acts combine to form a complete action. Miss Skinner plotted Paris '90 so that each vignette is an entity in itself, and yet each contributes to her complete design.

Each scene has a central incident upon which the action is based. The La Conchita vignette treats one particular rendezvous which the principle character has with a military cadet. The central incident of the Duchesse scene is the funeral procession; the School Teacher scene is built around a contemplated picnic; and the situation of the Lion Tamer is a confession of a murder. The emergence of the central idea of each scene is direct and is stated in the opening lines most often. The Nou-Nou's first lines indicate the focus of the whole act, "Wheels! Wheels! Wheels! Baby, all of Paris going by on wheels!" The Lion Tamer immediately states, "Erica ... I tell you my name is Erica." In a few

seconds she tells in a succinct statement the issue of that scene, "I knew what I was doing ... Max killed my lioness. I killed him ... What other motive could there be?" The opening dialogue tends to capture the listener's attention. Yvette Guilbert starts by asking, directly out-front, "Are you there, Monsieur l'accompanist? Have you the music for to-night? We have only a few minutes for rehearsal."

Not only does each scene have one situation which is its central idea, but each has a single character. Even though several imaginary characters are introduced in the scene, only one character is actually visible on stage. Each character is appropriate to the act in which she appears. Each represents a type of woman, whether famous or not, French or foreign, who finds Paris to be attractive.

The dramatic action of each scene has an effective sense of progress and movement. The introduction and conclusion are generally vivid and concise, and the main part of the vignette has a sense of build. This is accomplished in the script by first presenting a premise, then making an application by illustration through a characterization, next indicating the problem, or more often, conflict, and finally resolving the conflict or interpreting the incident. To illustrate, in act one the premise is that all of Paris goes by on wheels. The application is by illustrating with characterizations of the Nou-Nou, the Fashionable Parisienne, La Duchesse, La Belle, and The New Woman. The conflict in

the Duchesse scene is regarding the manners and protocol among the aristocracy. La Belle's conflict is when she discovers that her young escort is not rich, which places her in a predicament. The resolution of these two conflicts, for example, is that La Belle, in an off-guard tender moment will let her heart rule her head, while the New Woman retains her role of non-conformity and her independence.

Dramatic action implies selectivity, and Miss Skinner kept to a minimum interference with the central idea. Because of the absence of superfluous details of situation, the attention of the audience is focused primarily on one character and one incident which provides the dramatic action. By removing extraneous detail, the action has movement throughout the script. A few times the dramatic action of the monologue-drama seems slow, especially in the Nou-Nou and Laundress scenes which were primarily expository material for the following scenes. In the main, however, the scenes are short enough in length so that the action has to have direction and set a pace in order to accomplish anything. Miss Skinner saw that this was done, for in her script she eliminated most non-essentials and included the best incidents that would provide the most effective material for dramatic action. Specific ways in which dramatic action is aided are by attention to comedy and dramatic moments. Devices for dramatic action serve as motivational appeals tending to attract and sustain interest in the monologue-drama.

The dramatic action is aided by the introductory dialogue which states the scene's central idea. The introduction is followed by the statement of the premise which is developed deductively in the citing of character and situation to illustrate assertions. Relevance tends to be high, for the scenes do not ramble with irrelevant dialogue material. Each scene proceeds deductively from the generalized statement to the particular theme. In the Nou-Nou scene, the dialogue about Paris going by on wheels occurs at the beginning, in the main part of the monologue, and at the close. By the end of the scene this phrase of dialogue had been stated three times. With this repetitious treatment the dialogue helps to give the scene a sense of direction and make it a compact drama.

Another example of this sense of build in individual scenes is that of the Woman of Virtue. The introduction sets the scene and introduces the main character. The caller, seemingly unexpected, is the principal imaginary person in the scene. His advances become more insistent and her trickery more cunning until a knock is heard at the door which prompts the caller to leave hastily. The true character of the woman of virtue is then revealed in the denouement, and the scene ends with her doing a dance wearing her caller's hat, diamond pin, and ring which he has left behind.

The main part of each scene is of insufficient length for involved plots, or for deep insight and psychological

probing into each character developed. Statements must be taken on face value without proofs being exhibited.

The conclusions are sometimes very dramatic, such as the scene of the Boston School Teacher, a Professor's Wife, and the Lion Tamer. Other scenes end with a song, as those of a Woman of Virtue, the Laundress, and Yvette Guilbert. The author employed spectacle for the conclusion of the New Woman scene. Most often the conclusions were written so that they refer to the subsequent scenes, such as the Nou-Nou, a Fashionable Parisienne, La Duchesse de Vertpres, La Belle Conchita, the Angel, and La Goulue.

The use of transitions within a scene contribute to the coherence of the script. The transition from the exposition to the main incident is often slight and quite subtle. In the New Woman scene, the transition from the exposition about the rose is accomplished through one sentence of dialogue, "I say Hyppolite, can't you go a bit faster." At times the transitions are apart from the dialogue, as in the Woman of Virtue scene where the transition from the exposition of paying the Laundress is all physical action in pantomime. The Woman places the petticoat on the chair as if trying to decide whether or not to put it on. Then she hears a knock on the door, and the central action begins. More often the transitions are verbal. In fact, another device of dialogue which is used is to ask a question introducing a new idea, then proceed to answer it. The

Boston teacher asks, as a transitional device of dialogue, "Must we always do everything alike, Agatha?" La Belle Conchita asks her young escort, "You are not telling me you have no money?" The question is transitional and introduces a new sequence in the script.

Contributing to the unity of form of Paris '90 is the fact that the scenes are skillfully written so as to unite them into a complete act. The unity of the scenes of an act is accomplished by the author stating the proposition and then proceeding to illustrate it. An example is the second act which is introduced by a Notre Dame pediment Angel who told that she had "such a good view of all that goes on along the river. I can watch it for centuries and never get bored." She then points out people who illustrate her statement that life along the Left Bank is interesting and shows that Paris life in the 1890's is not "more sinful than it ever was." She sees a Laundress, a Boston School Teacher, an Adventuress, and a Jewish Wife and mother, who are the characters for the following scenes. In like manner, each of the other acts also has an introduction. The women of the first act are introduced by the Nou-Nou. In the third act, the first character, La Goulue, unobtrusively prepares the way for three other friends of Lautrec whom the audience is to meet.

Not only does each act have an introduction, but each scene also has a bit of exposition which ties it to the

other scenes. This way of connecting the scenes was used consistently by Miss Skinner. LaBelle Conchita relates that she had just thrown a rose at the Duchesse in the preceding scene. A Woman of Virtue tells her caller to shut the door quickly, for two American school teachers live across the hall. The teacher portrayal was, of course, the focus of the previous scene.

The acts themselves are logically integrated as a unified sequence of situations and characters. The locale of Paris during the 1890's is the unifying factor of the three acts. The scenes illustrate the various facets of this cosmopolitan center. A city is only what its inhabitants make it, and each of the characters of the monologue-drama views Paris in a different way. For example, one character sees her city through the wheels of the vehicles which pass by, while others see it as a city of romance, fashion, as a refuge for the persecuted, a vacation spot, a cultural city, and a city of pleasure. Regardless of which particular Parisian attitude is expressed, each scene contributes to the general purpose of showing what life was like in 1890 Paris and thereby provides the monologue-drama with a coherent unity.

On the basis of the analysis of the script of Paris '90, it is apparent that besides unity of form there is a unity of content. The content is based upon character which is itself the strongest element in the script. Within the

setting of the Paris locale and the variety of situations which are presented, character treatment is the crux of the script.

Each scene presents a single, recognizable character. Each character is seen through dramatic action which suggests her personality. Only by seeing individuals as they are, by recognizing their potential worth as well as acknowledging their shortcomings, can one agree with the premise that Paris in the '90s was a veritable melting pot. Miss Skinner has an accurate comprehension of those about whom she writes. Her research into history of Parisian culture and the specific lives of Lautrec and his friends give her play validity. She had Yvette Guilbert describe Lautrec as having "The courage of Charles le Temeraire and the wit of Rabelais ... in the body of Quasimodo." Such a statement reflects the authoress' intelligence and literary background and lets the characterization make reference to her contemporaries of 1890 Paris. Miss Skinner wants her characters to be accepted for what they were. She consistently illustrates, in each scene, an awareness for the worth of a person whether she be a laundress or a lady of fashion, an aristocrat or a prostitute.

The audience is motivated to identify with any of a variety of these characters and thereby with the drama. Miss Skinner appeals to many kinds of people in her characterizations of a Jewish mother, a nursemaid, a woman of the aristocracy,

a Boston school teacher, a lowly laundress, an adventuress, a couple of entertainers, dancers, singers, a prostitute, an athletic female, and an angel. Through the content of Paris '90, the author makes no great effort to prove anything or to analyze, but has sought rather to entertain, amuse, and stir emotionally. Her characterizations have unity and variety and therefore are effectively conceived and written. No matter how comic or bawdy the characters, they have dignity and simplicity which set the general motivational and emotional moods. To illustrate, the Angel scene is artistic in organization and selective in use of language. The Angel first speaks softly as if not to awaken the other stone figures. The pigeons "drenched me with blasphemy," she says. She feels "that horrid breeze again! It feels like the beginning of a wind of hate." Such examples of one of the characterizations display artistry, humor, and dignity. An artistic quality is even seen in the characterization of comical Deaf Berthe when she appreciates the fact that Lautrec let her escape, if only for a day, from the shackles that bound her to her sordid life, and that he treated her as a lady. "What a treat this day is! The sun, the river and a forest without a fence or a gendarme."

The content of the monologue-drama is instantly intelligible, for the ideas of the characters are expressed in simple and expressive dialogue. Clear and concise sentences

communicate to the audience with ease and perspicuity. The script avoids artificialities of discourse that lead to confusion. She wrote the dialogue in short sentences or even many times in fragments. She used the ellipse often, for the intention of the writer was not to produce a script to be read but a scene to be performed before an audience. The ellipse indicated conversational speaking, the way a character would actually tend to talk.

The very choice of content produces comedy or subtle humor, and sometimes sincere emotion. The author's selection gives each character a personality. The Angel moralizes, "What made them think that reason could ever take the place of faith?" She closes the scene by a play upon words, "It's growing early, Stephen. We'd better be going back to stone." Yvette Guilbert's dialogue is artistic in appraising Lautrec: "I am quite willing to share their timelessness," she tells Lautrec, "as long as it is through your interpretation ... your verve ... your humor ... and your suffering pity." The dialogue content in Paris '90 is always in good taste, and the invectives never are used in excess. The content defines a variety of characterizations, motivates the audience to identify with the characters, and unifies the scenes and acts thereby being an element uniting the whole theme with its structural parts. The dialogue is intimate and conversational. Ideas are stated with utmost clarity. There is never any doubt what the particular character was saying.

Miss Skinner is a creative artist and her script of Paris '90 is comical, sometimes moving and dramatic, but always clear in idea, unity, and purpose. Her clear thinking, forcefulness, vividness, adaptiveness, and freshness of dialogue go together to produce a stimulating, unified, and entertaining script.

Further analysis of this solo-drama indicates that the script has unity of idea or theme. Each scene illustrates the major premise that Paris is a cosmopolitan city. Through the people of Paris, whether natives or visitors, an attitude toward the metropolis is revealed. The character of Paris is illustrated by depicting famous French personalities and also by characterizing types of women of Paris. The famous women presented are four of the models which Henri Toulouse-Lautrec painted. The third act shows the character of Lautrec, and all three acts show the character of Paris.

Unity of theme for the script was accomplished with artistry, function, and simplicity. It displays artistry in the choice and arrangement of material and detail. Simplicity of plot structure seems to be Miss Skinner's virtue in her monologue scenes in order to elicit the desired response from the audience. The exposition establishes the continuity, commands the attention and interest of the audience, and summarizes or prepares the way for the central characterization; the script states deductively the premise and then elaborates upon and illustrates it through the use of carefully chosen details; the denouement or conclusion of each scene serves to

produce comic delight, amplify the subject, prepare for the following scene, excite the emotions, or resolve the conflict. The conclusion is always the natural outcome of the premise. It is seldom profound, but Paris '90 does not require profundity.

The productional elements such as costumes, settings, music, make-up, and properties strengthened the unity of theme. These production elements help to establish place and circumstances of the scene and implement the text so as to provide a close rapport between the actress and her audience. She carefully chose properties such as the white cloth to represent the infant for the Nou-Nou, the whip for the Lion Tamer, and the bicycle for the New Woman, so that the audience would make associations. This device of high selectivity of instantly recognizable elements apparently was intended to motivate and to increase the audience's tie with the script so that it might say, "Yes, how true!"

Unity of form, content, and theme are integral elements which make Paris '90 an effective monologue-drama script.

The variety which the characterizations have, and the use of imagination which the writer has been able to use throughout, are two of the outstanding qualities of the script. No two characterizations are repetitious. In fact each reflects a different type of woman. Miss Skinner's selectivity and imagination are evident in creating the

characterizations and in the treatment of the situations. The dialogue is written with an understanding of the personality of each woman. It is sparkling, intelligent, humorous, and sincere. It shows off the distinctive qualities of each personality.

The characterizations are not profound, but the writer does not try to explain why such women exist or to show more than one or two principal facets of a particular character type. Her objective is entertainment, not profundity but rather gaiety and variety. Since she is writing monologue-drama, it seems wise for her not to try to present problems and grapple with their conclusions which she could not achieve in the short time period inherent to this art-form. The production elements give the scripts the glamour of a stage play and certainly help to underline the locale and atmosphere.

Miss Skinner has provided charming vignettes which are a part of the major premise. Never do the scenes or situations or characterizations seem out-of-place with Paris of the 1890's. Her unity of theme, characterization, and selectivity of situation and dialogue make the script extremely effective monologue-drama.

Earlier in this study it was stated that Paris '90 was more complex than The Wives of Henry VIII. The most evident added complexity of Paris '90 is that it is a complete production with musical score, orchestra, and many settings,

properties, and elaborate costumes. The Wives of Henry VIII was costumed, but it used only a minimum of properties and scenery. Beyond these physical differences, Paris '90 was much more lengthy, having a playing time of two and a half hours rather than forty-three minutes. There were fourteen characters written into fifteen scenes in Paris '90 compared to six characters in six scenes of The Wives of Henry VIII.

Such elements of Paris '90 are not merely superficial distinctions. To write and portray twice as many characters in quick succession is a task for only the most versatile and experienced writer and solo-performer, and it certainly signifies a great complexity. This inherent complexity also makes the analysis of Paris '90 seem more extensive in nature.

Comparison of the two analyses shows that the author gives a greater sense of locale and atmosphere to Paris '90 than to her first monologue-drama. This difference tends to point up the conclusive nature of the latter script, Paris '90. Many types of characters, situations, and production elements give this script broad scope, and through the breadth of material a penetration of the Paris of the 1890's seems to be revealed. On the other hand, an account of English life during the days of the Tudor king is not quite so evident in The Wives of Henry VIII. The script limits its scope to one segment of society, royalty, and six examples of that class are pictured. A minimum of properties was used for The Wives of Henry VIII compared to a complete

production of Paris '90 where full-scale theatricality gives the audience a more comprehensive sense of the atmosphere of the time. Therefore, it is not unexpected that the impression of atmosphere and locale of Paris '90, achieved by Miss Skinner through many different characters and situation types as well as production elements, add to the complexity of analysis of the script, as compared to that of The Wives of Henry VIII.

Miss Skinner had a free range in selecting characters and situations for Paris '90; whereas, The Wives of Henry VIII, by its very nature, imposed a limit to the number of characters which could be portrayed. But, in this process of selection for Paris '90, the result had to have that unity of theme and continuity of dramatic action which was inherent in the strong story line of The Wives of Henry VIII. The final script of Paris '90 attests to the achievement of unity both in theme and dramatic action.

For both scripts, Miss Skinner did careful research to give the monologue-drama validity and accuracy. In the first instance, the results of the research had to go through a process of strict selectivity in isolating those situations and character traits which would make the wives of Henry effective monologue-drama. A similar process was involved with the friends of Lautrec, but the first two parts of Paris '90 were completely the products of Miss Skinner's creativity in depicting representative individuals and situations of

Paris during the 1890's.

Another difference between the scripts is that the first is serious in tone and only lightly injected with comic elements. The latter script is light, gay, and comical in tone interspersed with serious and dramatic scenes.

There is greater variety in the characterizations in Paris '90. Not only is one level of society, the aristocracy, depicted, but also the common people such as a laundress, a wet-nurse, and a prostitute. Some of the characterizations in Paris '90 are of very young women, others are of matrons and even an old woman such as the Duchesse. This difference in age of the characters presents a great challenge to the solo-performer. The English queens were not the same age, but the range in their ages was not as wide as those of the Parisians.

Because of these complexities of Paris '90, it is not difficult to understand why this script was written after the experience of five other monologue-dramas. After thirty years as an experienced solo-performer of monologue-drama, Miss Skinner accomplished the most extensive example of her art ever attempted. There is no doubt as to its effectiveness as theatre, for it enjoyed the longest run on Broadway for a solo-performance.

The complexities of Paris '90 do not necessarily accord an inferior position as drama to The Wives of Henry VIII. This was the first of the monologue-dramas, and it was

immediately accepted by the public. If it had not been as well written as it is, so as to have earned such success, perhaps Paris '90 would never have resulted thirty-three years later. The characterizations of The Wives of Henry VIII correspond accurately to history, yet they have qualities of vitality, freshness, and are written not only as historical queens but as human beings. The incidents which comprise the situations exemplify the basic personality of each queen. Imagination and intelligence of the writer are evident in both characterization and situation. The Wives of Henry VIII has a very strong unity of both subject and theme, and as a dramatic script it is comprehensive. The imaginary character of Henry appears as the connecting link throughout the monologue-drama, and this imaginary character strengthens the already inherent unity. Paris '90 does not have one such character which unifies the scenes and acts. Instead it has found coherence by transitions in the dialogue and by setting, properties, and music which give it a unity of its own. Such a treatment of unity, of course, demanded detailed analysis. The third act does have an imaginary figure of Lautrec which connects the five scenes.

The characterizations and dialogue of both monologue-dramas were written with the performer and audience in mind, and they have appealed to the 20th century audience.

Without excellent scripts, the monologue-drama may not have succeeded. Miss Skinner wrote her own scripts, but

her talent as an actress has sometimes over-shadowed her ability as a writer. From these analyses of The Wives of Henry VIII and Paris '90, her competence and importance as a writer may be seen as an essential attribute to the success of her art.

CHAPTER VI

CRITICAL REACTION TO MISS SKINNER AND HER MONOLOGUE-DRAMA

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the professional drama critics' reactions to Cornelia Otis Skinner's monologue-dramas and to summarize their evaluations of her art-form, scripts, and performances. The effectiveness of Miss Skinner and her monologue-drama in the theatre can be seen through their criticism.

Audiences do not always agree with a review written by a critic, nor do the critics always agree with each other. Nevertheless, they are a powerful influence on whether an actor, a playwright, or a performance is accepted and if the result will be a success at the box-office.

In Miss Skinner's experience, her solo performances have always shown a profit in box-office receipts; they have been financially successful. A solo-performer, of course, does not have as heavy production costs as does the play with a full supporting cast. Yet, even this solo art-form has expenses involved in theatre rental, costumes, and production staff. With Paris '90, the salaries of the scene designer, composer, musical director, orchestra, and others

had to be deducted from the gross receipts. The financial successes of Miss Skinner's solo-performances include her Broadway engagements as well as her performances on tour.¹

Financial gain, while reflecting audience acceptance, does not necessarily correlate directly with critical reactions. As may be seen, not all the reviewers were complimentary to Miss Skinner, although the majority of critiques and reviews were favorable both to her as a performer and writer and to her monologue-dramas.

Monologue-Sketches

Miss Skinner's early monologue-dramas, such as The Wives of Henry VIII and The Empress Eugenie, were quite brief, so a group of sketches was included in her program along with each historical monologue-drama. Presented with The Wives of Henry VIII was a "program of original sketches given by Miss Skinner which included 'Homeward,' 'In A Gondola,' 'The Eve of Departure,' and 'A Southern Girl In the Sistine Chapel.'"² Numbering among other sketches which she has presented from time to time are the comic "Motoring in the 90's" and "Home Work"; the genial satire sketch called "Being Presented"; and the dramatic "Lynch Party" and "Hotel

¹From an interview with Cornelia Otis Skinner, Detroit, Michigan, April 7, 1961.

²"Cornelia Otis Skinner Gives New Sketches," The New York Times, LXXVIV (September 5, 1931), p. 6.

Porch." In 1956, Miss Skinner appeared in several monologues at the Phoenix Theatre. Her program was fourth in the season's series of Monday night "Side Shows" at this Second Avenue Theatre. Fred Keating, a magician, was billed on the same program with her, but he had nothing to do with her portion of the program. Miss Skinner did the "Boston School Teacher" which was taken from her 1952 Paris '90 monologue-drama. Three favorites of her audiences, "Hotel Porch," "Facts of Life," and "Being Presented" were included. "In 'Hotel Porch' she presents an aging, selfish, tyrannical woman who manages not only to interfere in the affairs of others, but also to destroy the spirit of her spinster daughter."³ In contrast to these serious sketches were "Facts of Life" and "Being Presented."

In these, Miss Skinner is not so much interested in drawing character as in having a good time with such subjects as a mother telling her son about the birds and bees and a woman going through with a presentation at Buckingham Palace for the sake of her home town and the Sunday roto-gravure section.⁴

For further variety in the Phoenix program, she did "Americans in Paris," which was described as being

rich in its satire of those citizens who are "doing Europe," but it manages to find a place, too, for the couple who has managed to get to the Paris of their dreams and delight in the pleasures they find.⁵

³Lewis Funke, "Theatre: Miss Skinner," The New York Times, CV (January 24, 1959), p. 26.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

It was this variety of sketches that caused at least one critic to comment that Miss Skinner's program "offered a nicely sorted array of monologues from her wide collection," and to write of her, "a first class performer, smooth and easy in ... informal setting, and the results were droll, moving, and on the whole most gratifying."⁶

Early in her career, when Miss Skinner had received but scant attention of the critics for her minor roles in Broadway plays, she had resorted to these sketches. They were presented to her friends, and later she took them on tour where they "were vigorously acclaimed in the theatre."⁷ Such sketches as "Being Presented" and "Hotel Porch" won for her much popularity and gave her national recognition. Recently, she has frequently performed sketches for private groups and organizations. This year, for example, she appeared for the Detroit Association of Contributors to the Archives of American Art. "Cornelia Otis Skinner--herself a walking archives of American theatre arts--will give her famous spoof on 'Geneology.'"⁸

⁶Ibid.

⁷Otis Skinner, as told in "Paris '90" Souvenir Book, 1952, p. 10.

⁸Kathie Norman, "This Meeting Is a Must!" Detroit Free Press, (March 3, 1961), p. 20.

The Wives of Henry VIII

The Wives of Henry VIII was the first monologue-drama to be brought to the stage. The six wives of the Tudor king were portrayed by Miss Skinner in England and later in the United States. The reaction of the English audience to Miss Skinner was that an American had grasped the meaning and had gained insight into a part of their historical background as few others had done. She was accorded a warm reception and shortly after the premiere was the guest of honor of the English Speaking Union at a reception given by Lady Swaything at Dartmouth House.⁹ Seemingly the English society was so pleased with the American artist that its members thought it befitting to honor her.

Two days earlier than this reception, London received an announcement of Miss Skinner's first monologue-drama which stated that the performance was to occur at Knole Castle.¹⁰ As we have noted, Knole Castle was an appropriate location for the premiere performance, for it once belonged to Henry VIII.¹¹

⁹"Cornelia Otis Skinner Honored," The New York Times, LXXVIV (June 5, 1931), p. 33.

¹⁰"Miss Skinner To Play Wives of Henry VIII," The New York Times, LXXVIV (June 4, 1931), p. 31.

¹¹Knole Castle, one of England's loveliest, has been owned by the Sackville family since 1586. Lady Sackville, who formerly was Anne Meredith, the American actress, was the hostess to Miss Skinner's performance. In 1856 the castle was given by Queen Elizabeth to her cousin, Thomas Sackville, Earl of Dorset. Earlier it was the property of the Archbishops of Canterbury but when, in 1539, it took the fancy of Henry VIII, Archbishop Cranmer was compelled to present it to him.

Two weeks following this private performance at Knole, Miss Skinner brought the monologue-drama to the public. She included this forty-three minute drama as a part of her program of sketches. A brief critical review of it on June 16 chronicled the first public performance of a monologue-drama, for it stated that, at a matinee at St. James Theatre, she presented "the series of imaginary portraits of the wives of King Henry VIII."¹²

Her premiere of this first monologue-drama in the United States at East Hampton, Long Island, was noted in The New York Times. The September 4, 1931, review read like a society column as those first-nighters were mentioned by name in the review. The only statement about her premiere performance itself was that it was a "dramatic success."¹³

The drama critics of London and Broadway began to take notice of Miss Skinner as they had not done previously. She had quickly won her London audience, for one drama critic explained that "London audiences flock to see her."¹⁴ It did not take long for Miss Skinner to win further recognition from the public in the United States. On Broadway the critics now responded to The Wives of Henry VIII and to Miss Skinner

¹²"Miss Skinner Gives Program In London," The New York Times, LXXVIV (June 17, 1931), p. 32.

¹³"Cornelia Otis Skinner Gives New Sketches," The New York Times, LXXVIV (September 5, 1931), p. 6.

¹⁴Mildred Adams, "The One-Woman Theatre Casts A Spell," The New York Times Magazine, LXXVIVI (December 18, 1932), p. 19.

when they had not remembered her as an actress in the few poor roles which marked the beginning of her career. From this one monologue-drama she was described as a "widely known monologist."¹⁵ Her characterizations were played well, for she portrayed the queens "forcefully yet without abandoning her methods of suggestion."¹⁶

Another part of her distinction which the critics described, aside from being a talented performer, was her ability to write a script of dramatic worth and entertainment value. They credited her with having made a profound study of her material before writing her play, and they admired her for it. The subject matter and characterizations constituted a challenge to her abilities as a writer, and the critics said that as an author she brought "life and visual clarity to an important period of history."¹⁷

The reviews credited the dialogue of the script with seeming like actual conversation, although, of course, only one character was being portrayed. They noted that the dialogue permitted the audience readily to identify the characters as they appeared while it also created the illusion of real conversation. One drama critic commented that

¹⁵Robert Disraeli, "Meet the Authors," The Saturday Review of Literature, 14 (October 10, 1936), p. 8.

¹⁶"Miss Skinner Gives Program in London," The New York Times, LXXVIV (June 17, 1931), p. 32.

¹⁷Richard Dana Skinner, "Miss Skinner Carries Forward," The Commonweal, XVI (July 27, 1932), p. 332.

the dialogue was "sprinkled with Spanish, French and German, the last being used extensively in her portrait of Anne of Cleves."¹⁸

As a writer, Miss Skinner had created a script of vivid characterizations and expressive dialogue, for which feat she was proclaimed to be an artist. "'Miss Skinner is an artist,' The London Times reviewer will say tomorrow."¹⁹

The art-form of the monologue-drama made an impression upon the critics as something which was unique.

To the new form Miss Skinner has created she brings her really remarkable gift as a dramatist, her authentic flair for the theatre, an astonishing interpretative range, her unerring and distinguished taste. She uses every adjunct ... that the stage affords.²⁰

As a new art-form The Wives of Henry VIII brought recognition to Miss Skinner as its creator. "In the series of full costume sketches of 'The Wives of Henry VIII,' ... Miss Skinner ... achieves something of real importance in her own right."²¹

Not only did the drama critics recognize the art-form of monologue-drama, but they "expressed the hope that she would make this field intimately her own by continuing to

¹⁸The New York Times, LXXVIV, loc. cit.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Millicent Eames, "Creating a New American Art," The Independent Woman, 14 (October, 1935), p. 344.

²¹Richard Dana Skinner, "The Monologues of Cornelia Otis Skinner," The Commonweal, XV (December 2, 1931), p. 135.

create for modern feeling many of the famous women of history."²² She was encouraged by the critics to continue her new art-form, for one said that "any woman who can put across the footlights ... the gist of the whole historical drama, has made a contribution."²³

Miss Skinner's name became associated with this art-form, and it became the vehicle for her artistic theatrical contribution. Soon after the public saw The Wives of Henry VIII, she was recognized as having "established a wide reputation for her 'solo-drama,' of which she is both author and interpreter, as well as general director, star, and company."²⁴

The art-form was admired because Miss Skinner was able to bring an era of history to the theatre through it. "On the stage, history too often becomes ponderous.... Miss Cornelia Otis Skinner has grasped this truth and is originating an exciting form of one-man drama that is history too."²⁵ Certainly her early training, education in the theatre, and experience as an actress helped her in launching this unique theatrical art and in creating monologue-drama; she was accredited as being thoroughly versed in theatre.

²²Richard Dana Skinner, "Miss Skinner Carries Forward," The Commonweal, XVI (July 27, 1932), p. 332.

²³Euphemia Van Rensselaer Wyatt, "History In Vignette," The Catholic World, 136 (January, 1934), p. 462.

²⁴"They Stand Out From the Crowd," The Literary Digest, 118 (September 1, 1934), p. 10.

²⁵Euphemia Van Rensselaer Wyatt, The Catholic World, 136, p. 461.

"Here is a specialized field, requiring a thorough knowledge of the theatre from every possible technical angle."²⁶

The Wives of Henry VIII brought Cornelia Otis Skinner recognition as the originator, writer, and performer of monologue-drama. In turn, she brought her art-form success and public acceptance. The critic who reviewed the premiere of her monologue-drama in the United States was as interested in the society figures who attended the performance as he was in the performance. However, soon thereafter, other drama critics realized that Miss Skinner's contribution to theatre was significant and encouraged her to continue the monologue-drama. In their reviews they wrote of her performance, her script, and her art-form. The Wives of Henry VIII was the beginning of Miss Skinner's fame which was to link her name permanently with this unique type of theatre which she created.

The Four Monologue-Dramas from 1932-1952

Following The Wives of Henry VIII and preceding Paris '90, Miss Skinner presented four monologue-dramas including The Empress Eugenie, 1932; The Loves of Charles II, 1934; Mansion On The Hudson, 1935; and Edna His Wife, 1937. A brief overview of the critics' reactions to these four scripts is given here. These references are indicative of

²⁶The Literary Digest, 118, loc. cit.

of her career in monologue-drama during the twenty-year span, 1932-1952.

Having already seen Miss Skinner in The Wives of Henry VIII, the drama critics now generally admired her and knew what to expect from her. The criticism reflected their ideas concerning the performances, scripts, and art-form.

The Empress Eugenie, 1932, was performed with costumes and a minimum of scenery and properties as was The Wives of Henry VIII. As the second script which Miss Skinner gave her public, it followed the pattern of being based on a historical theme and dealing with royalty, this time a single French monarch. She was portrayed first as a young girl, then as a mature woman, and finally as an old woman. This monologue-drama played in London and the United States and was called a "masterpiece."²⁷

The Empress Eugenie was described as "an achievement with which nothing can quite compare."²⁸ In it Miss Skinner was given credit as an author and actress whose "art had reached its perfection before her present appearance and loses nothing by 'The Empress Eugenie.'"²⁹

The professional critics realized that she was making

²⁷The London Morning Post, as cited by Richard Dana Skinner in The Commonweal, 16 (July 27, 1932), p. 332.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Brooks Atkinson, "Violets and Vervain," The New York Times, LXXVIVI (November 23, 1932), p. 15.

a unique contribution to theatre. Indicative of their approval of monologue-drama are their reviews of her first two examples of it. Representative of their enthusiasm is the comment from one critic who wrote:

Perhaps we are meant to understand that the theatre is never so clearly the place for released imagination as when we see it reduced to its last essential of one human being-- who is also an artist.³⁰

In her third monologue-drama, The Loves of Charles II, 1934, Miss Skinner again effectively created historical characterizations. Her ability to interpret characters, as well as to portray them, and her talent for maintaining a sense of multiple reality were elements which were again evident. Some of the following statements are representative examples of her ability to create a tour de force. The New Yorker described The Loves of Charles II as "Incomparable"³¹; the reviewer for The New York Sun wrote, "Few crowded stages are better worth watching than that on which she walks alone"³²; and Time Magazine said her talent was as a "top notch sorceress."³³

Perhaps one of the finest tributes to the art of

³⁰Richard Dana Skinner, "Miss Skinner Carries Forward," The Commonweal, 16 (July 27, 1932), p. 332.

³¹Wolcott Gibbs, The New Yorker, from the program of The Loves of Charles II, Michigan State College (Thursday, October 17, 1934).

³²Richard Lockridge, The New York Sun, from the program of The Loves of Charles II.

³³Time Magazine, from the program of The Loves of Charles II.

monologue-drama was written by John Mason Brown in a review of The Loves of Charles II. "Miss Skinner is within herself a complete theatre, a whole tragic, comic ... theatre, and a theatre incidentally that offers far more entertainment than can be found in most of the playhouses in town."³⁴ Certainly her performance was effective, for in this play her entertainment was said to have been "remarkable,"³⁵ and "whether grave or gay, she never lost her grip on the audience."³⁶

In 1935 Mansion On the Hudson was Miss Skinner's new monologue-drama. This time the script was based purely on fiction and did not draw upon actual historical events. Her characters were the successive mistresses of an old country house called "Tall Trees." The play was well received by the drama critics, and their reviews were generally favorable. The script was noted for its "dramatic contrasts"³⁷ which were based, according to one reviewer, upon the plan to take "the best of the past and the poorest of the present."³⁸

Occasionally, a drama critic compared her to Miss Draper, and one said that although she could not "people an

³⁴John Mason Brown, The New York Post, from the program of The Loves of Charles II.

³⁵London Daily Mail, from the Program of The Loves of Charles II.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Euphemia Van Rensselaer Wyatt, "The Drama," Catholic World, 141 (May, 1935), p. 216.

³⁸Ibid.

entire stage as Miss Draper can," she proved with Mansion On the Hudson that "her work develops and widens every season."³⁹

Only two years later, 1937, Edna His Wife was produced. The story for this monologue-drama was not original with Miss Skinner, but instead was based on the novel by Margaret Ayer Barnes. Miss Skinner tailored it to fit her own talents as an actress. Her power of characterization was reviewed by some critics as never before being done "with so much talent and intelligence."⁴⁰

Yet Broadway was not unanimous in its praise of this script. A review described the characterizations as "superficial."⁴¹ Brooks Atkinson lauded Miss Skinner's performance, but was unimpressed with the script.

It is a sentimental and surface chronicle, without illumination of character or keen perspective, and the dialogue is prosy chatter. As a dramatic exercise, "Edna His Wife" is lacking in distinction.⁴²

He further wrote of his disapproval of the novel as theatre material, for he said that although Miss Skinner's place was on the stage as the mistress of her art-form, Edna's place was in the home.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Brooks Atkinson, "Cornelia Otis Skinner Extends the One-Woman Theatre To A Full Length Drama," The New York Times, LXXXVII (December 8, 1937), p. 30.

⁴¹"Full-length Skinner," Time Magazine, 30 (December 20, 1937), p. 33.

⁴²Atkinson, loc. cit.

Miss Skinner's material is so confined to one side, like one end of an interminable telephone conversation, that the characterizations never go much deeper than flat drawing.⁴³

A few other critics doubted that monologue-drama was an effective theatrical genre. George Jean Nathan wrote sarcastically about the art-form in his review of Edna His Wife: "A woman talking steadily for two hours ... is not my idea of entertainment, whether in the theatre or in private."⁴⁴ This script provoked severe criticism of the art-form. "Apart from polite entertainment, there is no artistic future in this sort of thing,"⁴⁵ a drama critic reported. Another wrote, "In spite of, or because of the fact that Miss Skinner is the hardest-worked actress now playing on Broadway, her entertainment has a large element of stunt-appeal."⁴⁶

Those critics who negatively criticized the script and art-form of Edna His Wife were in the minority. Seemingly others felt differently about the drama and praised the dynamics of the genre and its performance because of its emotional power and characterizations. On the road, this monologue-drama was well received, and the actress-dramatist

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴"Cornelia Otis Skinner," Current Biography, 1942, p. 771.

⁴⁵Atkinson, loc. cit.

⁴⁶Time, 30, loc. cit.

"found solace from New York's comparative indifference."⁴⁷

Although the professional critics were not all enthusiastic over all phases of Miss Skinner's art-form and certain scripts from 1932-1952, the negative comments were very few in number and confined mostly to Edna His Wife. Indeed, by 1930 Miss Skinner had become known as "the mistress of her medium."⁴⁸

Her writing ability, technique, characterizations, poise, and charm made the four monologue-dramas acceptable theatre with audiences. During these years the public for the art-form increased, Miss Skinner gained a loyal following and a solid identification with this type of theatre, and she and her art-form were called the "greatest single attraction of the American theatre."⁴⁹

Paris '90

Cornelia Otis Skinner, in 1952, performed her monologue-drama, Paris '90, consisting of fifteen scenes, three acts, and fourteen characters. It played for seven consecutive months on Broadway. Subsequently, the production was taken on tour for 368 performances in sixty-three

⁴⁷Current Biography, 1942, loc. cit.

⁴⁸Atkinson, loc. cit.

⁴⁹Paul Harrison, NEA Service, from the program of The Loves of Charles II.

cities in the United States. Miss Skinner made recordings of Paris '90 for RCA, but "other than perhaps to do excerpts from the show, it will never appear again as it did in 1952."⁵⁰

The drama critics never cease to be amazed at Miss Skinner's technique in doing these multiple and varied characterizations along with her ability to hold her audience and win its applause. Their reviews also noted the art-form of the monologue-drama and the scripts, besides its production and performance. Some heartily endorsed Paris '90, while others proffered some negative reactions along with favorable criticism. It is significant to note that none of the theatre critics gave the play or Miss Skinner's performance a minus rating.

The press welcomed back Miss Skinner as "absent from Broadway much too long.... It's a joy to have the talented Miss Skinner back in a diverse and diverting evening."⁵¹

Her versatility received the critics' praise. "Cornelia Otis Skinner, whose prowess, expressive talents and versatile scope are unique, reaches new heights in delight in her enchanting new solo production."⁵² Another

⁵⁰From an interview with Miss Eleanor Walsh, secretary to Miss Skinner.

⁵¹Hal Eaton, "Cornelia Otis Skinner A Joy in 'Paris '90,'" Long Island Daily Press, (March 5, 1952).

⁵²Rowland Field, "'Paris '90,'" Newark Evening News, (March 5, 1952).

critic wrote that "it [Paris '90] reveals Miss Skinner a fine artist at the top of her form."⁵³ Moreover, still another reported,

She became everything ... she must have spoken as many lines as the entire cast of "Guys and Dolls" and worn almost as many costumes. For sheer strength and durability, I would rate her up there with Bronko Nagurski, a football mastodon who delighted in running into rather than around the opposition.⁵⁴

Her versatility received attention by some critics as one who noted, "In three full-length acts she portrayed fourteen highly diverse characters, taking only a matter of seconds between scenes, and changing pace and mood to present an entire evening of extraordinary entertainment."⁵⁵ Her characterizations were said to be diversified and to have given the audience "a series of characterizations to suit every taste."⁵⁶

The drama critics wrote of her ability as an actress who could make the imaginary characters as real as those which she actually portrayed. "She peoples the stage with these colorful characters ... sketches in such vivid colors that he [Lautrec] is virtually a participant of Miss Skinner's

⁵³Ward Morehouse, "Cornelia Otis Skinner's One-Woman Show Has Plenty of Variety and Style," New York World-Telegram and Sun, (March 8, 1952).

⁵⁴John McClain, "Miss Skinner Shines As 14 Characters," New York Journal-American, (March 5, 1952), p. 20.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ethel Colby, "Pleasing Monologues Make Up 'Paris '90,'" Journal of Commerce, (March 5, 1952).

dramatic impression."⁵⁷

Other terms applied to Miss Skinner's performance were: "It's a beautifully done thing,"⁵⁸ "an impressive range of versatility,"⁵⁹ and presented in an "entertaining fashion and sometimes with brilliance."⁶⁰ One critic said of her characterizations, "there can be no doubt concerning the skill and variety that she brings to them."⁶¹

A few drama critics expressed negative reaction to parts of her performance of the characterizations. Robert Coleman reacted against some of her details of characterization which seemed somewhat contrived, such as her Boston accent which "must be punched for laughs, just as the insistent hints of naughtiness that Miss Skinner drops in an apparent effort to be awfully French have to be underlined."⁶² Walter Kerr said in his review of Paris '90 that "As an actress of prostitutes Miss Skinner, a born lady, is not very happy. Her devotion to sin is basically genteel."⁶³

⁵⁷ Thomas R. Dash, "'Paris '90,'" Women's Wear Daily, (March 5, 1952), p. 48.

⁵⁸ Louis Sheaffer, "Enjoyable Time in Old Paris With Miss Skinner at Booth," Brooklyn Eagle, (March 5, 1952), p. 10.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Richard Watts, Jr., "Cornelia Otis Skinner in Paris," The New York Post, (March 5, 1952), p. 45.

⁶² Arthur Pollock, "Cornelia Otis Skinner Shows Her New Collection, 'Paris '90,'" The Daily Compass, (March 5, 1952).

⁶³ Walter R. Kerr, "Paris '90," The New York Herald Tribune, (March 5, 1952), p. 18.

One criticism was directed toward her performance technique on the opening night of Paris '90:

If there is an integral fault in the show it is a lack of brilliant variety in the performing. Since Miss Skinner is the first to confess that she flies apart with nerves on first nights, this may explain the surface sameness of her opening show. She has a trick of talking in little disconnected spurts of words, which cuts the flow of thought, and relates all her characters.⁶⁴

In contrast, William H. Beyer praised her for performance technique, saying, "One of Miss Skinner's major accomplishments is technical--a matter of stage timing."⁶⁵ Generally, it was clearly discernible that few criticisms were directed against Miss Skinner's performance of Paris '90.

The professional critics were impressed with Paris '90, for their use of superlatives was generous and implied that Miss Skinner played everything "in her latest, most ambitious and most elaborate solo presentation ... which happens also to be the most enjoyable of all the one-woman shows she has yet put on."⁶⁶

After seeing Paris '90, John Mason Brown paid a high tribute to Cornelia Otis Skinner. "She is ... one of the remarkable women of our time, dazzling, endowed, strong in

⁶⁴William Hawkins, "Cornelia Tours Paris Verbally," World-Telegram, (March 6, 1952).

⁶⁵William H. Beyer, "The State of the Theatre," School and Society, LXXV (March 22, 1952), p. 185.

⁶⁶Sheaffer, Brooklyn Eagle, loc. cit.

courage no less than looks and charm."⁶⁷ Courage and talent are a combination that indeed conceived and produced such an elaborate monologue-drama as Paris '90. "Since solo performances are the acid test not only of talent and personality but of imagination and originality, Cornelia Otis Skinner, who possesses all of these attributes, occupies a rare position among actresses."⁶⁸ Credited with a great amount of talent, ability, skill, and technique, she "acts with a grace and poise which merits the bravos that were her tribute at the curtain's fall."⁶⁹

As the writer of her own script, Miss Skinner's contribution as a dramatist, as well as a performer was also weighed. Harold Clurman, drama critic, was not favorably impressed with the plot outline of Paris '90. Rather than giving her credit for the unity and coherence of the fourteen scenes, he was critical of her writing and said that the outline could have been improved. "Miss Skinner likes to disengage the sharp character traits of an environment and thrust them into the narrow framework of a theatrical period."⁷⁰ He also suggested that the material be more

⁶⁷John Mason Brown, "Seeing Things - Women of Paris," The Saturday Review of Literature, 35 (March 22, 1950), p. 28.

⁶⁸Beyer, loc. cit.

⁶⁹John Mason Brown, from the roster Cornelia Otis Skinner.

⁷⁰Harold Clurman, "Theatre," The New Republic, 126 (March 17, 1952), p. 22.

contemporary. Arthur Pollock, however, observed that the subject matter was apropos, for it included a good deal about Toulouse-Lautrec who was "having a vogue now and Miss Skinner is getting into town with the first dramatics concerning him."⁷¹ Similarly another critic described the script as "a nostalgic tour through a period and a place currently enjoying a wave of wide interest."⁷² Chapman added that all "three sets of sketches" were written "observantly, pithily and humorously."⁷³ Still Mr. Clurman insisted that the script was too far removed from the modern audience to appreciate it, and that perhaps it could be improved if she "yielded to the real sources of her theatrical urge and recreated for us the image of New York '90 of the theatre and time of Otis Skinner."⁷⁴

In direct contradiction, the reviewer for the financial newspaper, The Wall Street Journal, reported a favorable reaction to the content of Paris '90 for a monologue-drama script. "France of 60 years ago seems, in retrospect, to provide a much more beguiling atmosphere than France of today, with its political and money troubles overshadowing everything else."⁷⁵ The critic recognized the

⁷¹John Chapman, "Skinner's 'Paris 1890' Charming," The New York Daily News, (March 5, 1952).

⁷²Hawkins, loc. cit.

⁷³Chapman, loc. cit.

⁷⁴Clurman, loc. cit.

⁷⁵Richard P. Cooke, "Miss Skinner and M. Lautrec," The Wall Street Journal, (March 5, 1952).

script and purpose, for he said that it was "not an exhibition to weep at, but rather to admire as bright and intelligent sketching of things which have passed."⁷⁶ In the words of another, the "total effect is to distill the gaiety, the frivolity, the flippancy of that memorable period known as the fin de siecle."⁷⁷

John Mason Brown also believed the script to have been generally well written. "Miss Skinner's script is adroit in its connectives, and though it is bound to have its ups and downs, it includes some of the most incisive writing she has done."⁷⁸

Commenting on the Paris '90 script, Newsweek Magazine said that the script showed evidence of "a good writer's appreciation of documental nostalgia."⁷⁹ Yet, with reservation, this critic said that the writer "skitters through the period with more attention to atmosphere and attitudes than to profound characterization,"⁸⁰ and he desired a script which would have more depth of material and characterization.

It was suggested that Miss Skinner cut the number of portrayals in Paris '90, for "I enjoyed all of them, though

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Dash, loc. cit.

⁷⁸John Mason Brown, The Saturday Review of Literature, 35, loc. cit., p. 27.

⁷⁹"Theatre," Newsweek, 39 (March 17, 1952), p. 87.

⁸⁰Ibid.

I found some more stimulating than others which seemed a bit labored and too long."⁸¹ Another critic said, "Not all the monologist's grand dames and cocottes are more than superficially interesting."⁸² A similar reaction was that she spend more time with certain of the Paris characterizations, because "The skits simply state that such a person existed, without commenting from any particular point of view about him."⁸³ The reviewer believed that the Angel or Saint of the cathedral was "Miss Skinner's most striking invention,"⁸⁴ but, he added, "Miss Skinner's talent is reproductional rather than creative. Few of her monologues have much form, and the characters rarely change at all from the beginning to end."⁸⁵ This argument is refuted, in part, by the same critic who stated that he liked many of the script's scenes. The "New Woman" is comical with militant feminism, "and her Yvette Guilbert asserts herself with the superior glow of an artist who is unshakably arrived."⁸⁶

The choice of language which the author employed received critical notice. "And in each ... Miss Skinner's

⁸¹Eaton, loc. cit.

⁸²Newsweek, loc. cit.

⁸³Hawkins, loc. cit.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Ibid.

facility in wording and performance is a joy."⁸⁷ The atmosphere was partly due to the wording. "Her dialogue is interspersed with enough French to maintain the illusion without becoming unintelligible to those who failed French II in school. Each scene has a satisfactory plot."⁸⁸

Variety was the key to the Paris '90 script, another drama critic reported, and he praised the writer for offering so many different types of situations and scenes. He pointed to the extremely varied characterizations which the author wrote, such as the "nervously arrogant lion tamer,"⁸⁹ the hearty English woman, the Angel, and "the pitiful gaiety of a prostitute."⁹⁰

As a writer, Miss Skinner was able to write a script which was played for a record run on Broadway for a monologue-drama. While the drama critics speculated about how part of the script could have been improved or which scenes they most preferred, they were of the general opinion that the script was "overwhelming with sheer wealth of material,"⁹¹ and by Miss Skinner's treatment of it, the monologue-drama "reveals Miss Skinner a fine artist at the top of her form."⁹²

⁸⁷Chapman, loc. cit.

⁸⁸Pollock, loc. cit.

⁸⁹Morehouse, loc. cit.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Hawkins, loc. cit.

⁹²Morehouse, loc. cit.

Even though Paris '90 was a monologue-drama it competed for attention with complete-cast plays on Broadway. It proved to be the most elaborate production of the art-form which a solo-performer had ever attempted. In other words, this monologue-drama was a full-scale theatrical production written and acted by one person. Never before had Miss Skinner or any solo-performer put her art-form to such a test. To win the approval of the drama critics and the acceptance of the public, she had to display a unified script and a flawless performance. She met the challenge and gave the art-form of monologue-drama a prominence it had never known. The critics, in reviewing Paris '90, realized it to be a unique type of theatre, and wrote about the pros and cons of it as an art-form with an abundance of theatricality.

Harold Clurman gave proof that the art-form was theatrical, for he called the production a "glamorous, full-bodied, theatrical expression."⁹³ Robert Coleman also noted the theatricality and production aspects of the art-form, for he said that Paris '90 "proved to be, by all odds, the most elaborate and ambitious of her series of one-woman shows."⁹⁴

⁹³Clurman, loc. cit.

⁹⁴Robert Coleman, "La Skinner Saucy, Satiric, Sophisticated in 'Paris '90,'" The New York Daily Mirror, (March 5, 1952), p. 38.

Such representative statements from critical reviews of this monologue-drama demonstrated that greater use of production elements was accepted generally as being a satisfying addition to the art-form, the critics could not help but comment on them. She spared no attention to make her production capture the spirit and mood of Paris of the 1890's.

Kay Swift composed the musical score of Paris '90, which helped to give Parisian atmosphere and a unity to the show. One reviewer said the production was evocative, for the setting and music "suggest the enchanting gas-gaiety and charm, and the mood is rounded out by an admirably theatrical musical score."⁹⁵ Another said that she had "combined the period and a modern point of view in the music."⁹⁶ The music by Kay Swift was an integrated part of the art-form, for it was "there all evening, sometimes as a distinct number sung by the principal, other times to serve as a bridge, and again as mood background. It struck me as being constantly appropriate and charming."⁹⁷ The complete original music score was an innovation in itself.

For the first time in the Skinner solo program, music and a group of songs have been incorporated with delectable results into the star's one-woman performance. Kay Swift has written a most charming little score that greatly enhances the wide variety of characters and moods in the play. It is constantly on hand, augmented by several

⁹⁵Kerr, loc. cit.

⁹⁶Brooks Atkinson, "At The Theatre," The New York Times, CX (March 5, 1952).

⁹⁷McClain, loc. cit.

traditional French airs of the period, and it is magically played by an exceptional orchestra.⁹⁸

To increase the theatrical appeal, Miss Skinner used the best talents she could find. Besides Kay Swift, she engaged Donald Oenslager as set-designer and Helene Pons as costume-designer. "Miss Skinner is deeply indebted to ... Donald Oenslager."⁹⁹ The curtain was designed by Oenslager and consisted of French lithographs of the 90's. This was used with blackouts to reveal new scenes.

Miss Skinner has, in this instance, surrounded herself with a full-scale production. Donald Oenslager has designed warm and affectionately detailed portals, poster-studded drop curtains, and delightfully fanciful cut-outs which pass for barouches, cathedral statuary ...¹⁰⁰

Her monologue-drama was thought to be a colorful one because she used ornate costumes and imaginative scenery, and "altogether the production effects are so alluring optically that they counteract the drabness that sometimes creeps into monodrama."¹⁰¹

Helene Pons was commended for the costumes which she designed for the production. "Apart from the obvious taste and imagination she must have invented a zipper that never gets stuck."¹⁰²

⁹⁸Field, loc. cit.

⁹⁹McClain, loc. cit.

¹⁰⁰Kerr, loc. cit.

¹⁰¹Dash, loc. cit.

¹⁰²McClain, loc. cit.

Some of the properties were suggested by pantomime while others were actually on stage; her use of props was not always consistent. At times they were real, as the whip of the Lion Tamer and the yellow roses of La Conchita; other times they were imaginary, as when she read from Zola's newspaper article. Such technical matters came under the scrutiny of one critic, who wrote,

I bring up the matter merely to show that I was not a willing victim of Miss Skinner's art. It is possible, therefore, that it may be all the more a tribute to her for me to admit that, before the evening was half over, I was perfectly willing to accept all the conventions of her show.¹⁰³

Again and again Paris '90 was described as a "production," "and I use the word intentionally, for she has really 'made a production' of it. Her new show has all the trappings of a regular, full-sized Broadway show."¹⁰⁴

Despite the theatricality of the performance as seen through the vivid description of the fetching music and graceful and expertly planned scenery and costumes, the production was considered by John Chapman as merely "a charming theatrical novelty."¹⁰⁵ John Mason Brown seriously questioned the entertainment value of the monologue-drama in the professional theatre. He was careful not to generalize his

¹⁰³Richard Watts, Jr., The New York Post, (March 5, 1952), p. 45.

¹⁰⁴Sheaffer, loc. cit.

¹⁰⁵Chapman, loc. cit.

views, but to state them as a matter of personal opinion. Brown voiced two reservations about the art form of monologue-drama, one being the tendency to view the action externally.

But the limitations of the medium bothers me ... They [mono-dramas] invite even when they do not demand, an external approach. So much must be done instantly in the way of establishing a period of a person that little time is left for getting beyond appearances into essences.¹⁰⁶

The second reservation which Brown had was that the monologue-dramatist must not only be able to portray many characters, but also has to suggest all the interlocutors. "There is another hazard. The monologist faces a twofold task. She must not only create the people she is playing, she must also create the unseen person to whom she is supposed to be speaking or listening."¹⁰⁷ Arthur Pollock's review also noted his reservations toward this art-form.

All her characters must be set quickly, for we meet each of her women for only a few minutes. The mechanics stick out, and give the acting and the plotting a hackneyed air. The point of view must be the most obvious one, the emotions conventional.¹⁰⁸

Another critic thought that the monodrama tended to be an artificial form of theatre.

There is something a little antiquated about this kind of protean entertainment in 1952 but

¹⁰⁶Brown, The Saturday Review of Literature, 35, loc. cit.

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸Pollock, loc. cit.

of those who still like to provide it Miss Skinner is one of the cleverest. She cannot, however, stop its seeming a stunt.¹⁰⁹

Although drama critics Chapman, Brown, and Pollock wrote about their own reservations of monologue-drama as an art-form of the theatre, they did not reject Miss Skinner's production of Paris '90. In fact, John Mason Brown said, "Its being so plainly a stunt is one of the reasons that so many people enjoy it."¹¹⁰ He said his own criticisms of monologue-drama as theatre apparently were not shared by "most of the people in a large and enthusiastic first night audience."¹¹¹

With these exceptions, the other drama critics gave credit to Paris '90 as being unique theatrical entertainment of which they and the audience approved. The first nighters did not stay away from Paris '90 although the weather was unfavorable.

Miss Skinner has developed a large and smart following for her solo presentations. The aficionados fortunate enough to obtain tickets for the opening showed their appreciation of the artist's versatility via robust applause. It was evident that they enjoyed the evening immensely.¹¹²

The attention of the audience was sustained by the monologue-drama for two and a half hours.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

¹¹⁰Brown, The Saturday Review of Literature, 35, loc. cit.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Coleman, loc. cit.

To undertake a solo production in the legitimate theatre is a colossally ambitious business. How tragic or comical can one person be for two-and-a-half hours? How long can the average audience look at one face? And how restless can they get if you leave the stage to make changes? It seemed to me that Cornelia Otis Skinner answered these and all other questions ... in her new vehicle, "Paris '90."¹¹³

The audience reacted favorably to Miss Skinner's theatrical art-form because Paris '90 fitted "every taste,"¹¹⁴ and as another critic foretold, "it should win her a good many more new admirers."¹¹⁵

Summary

The New York drama critics have been an influence in the career of Miss Skinner. Partly because of their indifference to her as a beginning actress of professional theatre, she decided to write and perform character sketches. Later she made a unique contribution to theatre by way of the monologue-drama, and thereby through this art-form won their endorsement as the foremost woman monologist of the era. As originator, writer, and actress she was accepted as its first exponent by the same critics who earlier gave her little critical attention. If it had not been for the critics' discouraging effect upon her early career, she may

¹¹³McClain, loc. cit.

¹¹⁴Ethel Colby, "Pleasing Monologues Make Up 'Paris '90,'" The Journal of Commerce, (March 5, 1952).

¹¹⁵Sheaffer, loc. cit.

never have turned to solo performance. The critics later influenced her box-office success by their critiques.

In this section, the critical reaction to Miss Skinner and her monologue-drama has been reviewed. The drama critics' opinions have been the criteria for judging her acceptance in the theatre. They chronicled each step in her theatrical career and were actually the recorders of her contribution to entertainment.

On the basis of critical reaction and material covered, it is apparent that Miss Skinner is respected as a performer and writer of the art-form which she created.

She performed her plays with a skillful technique which included a combination of production elements as make-up, costumes, and scenery; vocal and physical performance elements such as accent, variety, voice quality, and expressive movements; and personal attributes such as her poise, beauty, and dynamics. All these she brought to the script in order to make the characterizations individualistic and expressive. It became normal to find a critic writing about her performance technique which displayed that she "possesses beauty and distinction of bearing, but these also are only the tools for her imagination, her subtlety of understanding, her emotional power, her intellectual insight."¹¹⁶ Through her performances she became the mistress

¹¹⁶Grenville Vernon, The Commonweal, 15 (April 19, 1935), p. 710.

of her medium, as noted in the same tribute to her theatrical contribution.

There are those who would say that Cornelia Otis Skinner is in interpretive power the leading actress on the American stage. I am not sure that I am not one of those who hold her thus.¹¹⁷

All her monologue-dramas were accredited as being written from an original viewpoint, and the critics admired Miss Skinner's talent for using history effectively and creatively as the subject for theatrical entertainment. Her selectivity of dramatic action was pointed to especially in The Wives of Henry VIII. Originality in variety of situation and character were admired by the critics in Mansion On the Hudson and Paris '90.

In each script, the critics noted the excellent dialogue treatment and were generous in their use of superlatives to describe it. The author made it seem as conversation, gave it variety, humor, and dramatic coherence. The connectives between scenes in Paris '90 were original and gave the script coherence, the drama critics wrote.

But the critical reaction to the scripts was not always favorable. Edna His Wife received more negative criticism than the others, and it was said to lack character and perspective. Some critics thought this script, as well as parts of Paris '90, were superficial in drawing characterization, and that Miss Skinner seldom penetrated the surface.

¹¹⁷Ibid.

Their reservations were that the writer gave more attention to atmosphere, attitude, and variety than to profound characterization.

Nevertheless, most of the critics repeatedly did give much credit to the scripts' characterizations, and several were singled out for particular commendation. Favorite characterizations were Anne Boleyn and Anne of Cleves of The Wives of Henry VIII, and The Boston School Teacher, The New Woman, and The Angel of Paris '90. The critics seemed divided in their preference for the Lautrec scenes and the other parts of Paris '90. The distinct connective or unifying factor of the historical dramas and Edna His Wife was one imaginary character who appeared throughout the monologue-drama; of Mansion On the Hudson, a house; and of Paris '90, a city.

It is evident that as an art-form, the monologue-drama drew varied opinions from the professional drama critics. Generally they were in agreement regarding theatrical elements of the art-form such as costumes, scenery, and music which were well integrated throughout. "What is the secret of Miss Skinner's art? ... In short, her art is truly protean, and her ability is to make a monolog seem a living play."¹¹⁸

Representative reviews indicated that through

¹¹⁸Ibid.

suggestion Miss Skinner gave the art-form extraordinary powers of appeal. A unique appeal of the art-form which the critics often noted was that, through suggestion, the imaginary characters seemed to be present and almost as equally living as the actual characterization being presented.

While some thought that this art-form was the most basic kind of theatre, other critical reaction was that monologue-drama seemed to be a stunt, novelty, or concert drama rather than theatre. Whether or not the critics agreed that the art-form was theatre per se or was their favorite type of entertainment, they all acknowledged Miss Skinner as the originator of the art-form which made successful entertainment and for which she won a wide public.

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CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, EVALUATIONS

Summary

Cornelia Otis Skinner occupies a unique position in the theatre. Her name is almost synonymous with solo-drama. As a young girl in her late teens, Miss Skinner sought a career in the theatre. Her intense desire for a stage career gave her courage to meet the disappointments that she encountered. When she began to act, the Broadway drama critics did not praise her as they had lauded her father, Otis Skinner. Even though her father had made the name of Skinner famous in the theatrical arts, Cornelia's efforts received little recognition from the theatre-going public during her first several years of experience playing on Broadway. The drama critics only rarely noted her acting and gave her no hope of becoming a star or even a recognized player on the professional stage.

To follow in her father's footsteps was difficult, and Miss Skinner came to realize that if she were to become a great performer, she had to make a place and a name for herself. The early roles which were given to her by the Broadway producers did little to exploit her talent.

Nevertheless, she believed in her ability as an actress, and she was determined to continue with her stage career.

Not only was Miss Skinner undefeated by the obstacles which she encountered early in her career, but she channeled them to sharpen her powers of analysis which later led to creating astute characterizations. She retained her zest for living and relied upon her intelligence, excellent family up-bringing, and keen wit to carry her through her unsuccessful years as an aspiring actress. These personal attributes tended to make her popular with her associates.

When Broadway paid little attention to her as an actress, Miss Skinner decided that she would try to write for national periodicals. The publication of her poems and stories gave her encouragement. Her efforts soon resulted in a play and later were crystallized into dramatic or humorous characterizations. These sketches were initially performed for her friends. They recognized her ability both as a writer and as a performer. They persuaded her to leave New York and to tour the concert circuit performing in the character sketches she had created. The people of the "hinterland," approved of the young solo-performer. She brought another type of theatre to them, and they obviously appreciated her ability to act so many diversified parts in one evening. The press also began to take notice of Miss Skinner and to recognize her performances as she toured the country; some critics even suggested that Miss Skinner might

some day challenge Ruth Draper's undisputed position as the diseuse of character-sketches.

Miss Skinner acknowledged these tributes paid her, for she had always admired Ruth Draper's form of theatre, yet at the same time she was dissatisfied with the limitations it imposed upon her. She believed that, no matter how excellent the characterization might be, the character sketch in itself could not reach the vibrant quality of dramatic action and unity which are the integral parts of any play. How Miss Skinner could combine her solo sketches with the qualities of legitimate drama, she had yet to discover. Again her friends encouraged her to write and perform a new type of solo entertainment which would unify dramatic action and characterizations supplied through historical continuity. One of her friends even suggested as a topic the wives of Henry VIII. Miss Skinner confessed her lack of knowledge of English history, yet she was aware of the possibilities in the proffered topic, that it could be used for writing not simply another monologue but a unified monologue-drama. After doing careful research, she wrote The Wives of Henry VIII. Her first performance of this solo-drama was before a private audience of friends. Because Miss Skinner was appearing in a series of sketches in England at that time, her friends for whom she had tried out the script suggested that she include it in her current program. Thus, the monologue-drama was first presented to the public in England; later

Miss Skinner performed The Wives of Henry VIII in the United States. Her new form of theatre was instantly accepted and won admiration and praise for her as a writer and as an actress.

The theatre critics did not readily distinguish between Miss Skinner's art of the unprecedented monologue-drama and the more familiar character-sketch. The reviews continued to refer to her as an interpreter, actress, monologist, and diseuse, and they alluded to her art as being sketches, monologues, plays, and dramas. But the people did realize that in Miss Skinner's contribution something new and different had come to the professional stage. "Both in the writing of these sketches [The Wives of Henry VIII] which are extraordinary in their compactness and for their revelation of character, and in the acting, Miss Skinner reaches a real height of dramatic intensity."¹

The Wives of Henry VIII brought Miss Skinner distinction as a writer and a performer, and it won for her a place of her own in the theatre quite apart from the style associated with Ruth Draper.

It has, as I have said, the advantage of being quite distinctive from anything Ruth Draper has attempted and thus gives Miss Skinner a chance to create in her own right without the odium of comparison.²

¹Richard Dana Skinner, "The Monologues of Cornelia Otis Skinner," The Commonweal, XV (December 2, 1931), p. 185.

²Ibid.

Although Miss Skinner inherited a rich theatrical background from Otis Skinner, she did not use his fame for self-advancement. Instead she created a unique place for herself. Her monologue-dramas, "a shrewd combination of acid, honey, and plain common sense, have made her a renown of her own which in no wise borrows from the luster of her beloved father, Otis Skinner."³

Subsequently Miss Skinner wrote five more monologue-dramas and performed in them. She increased her repertoire by the completion of a two-and-a-half hour production of the monologue-drama, Paris '90.

This study has considered Miss Skinner primarily as the writer and performer of her own unique monologue-drama. With its inception and performance, she enriched the 20th century theatre. Her family background and education proved to be significant factors aiding her career of monologue-drama. As a child, her parents gave her careful training in a home environment filled with an abundance of love. In her youth they provided her with the best education possible and continued to offer their own encouragement and advice so that she would become a person of intelligence, culture, and refinement. This home environment supplied her with stability and courage for her career in the theatre and her life apart from it. Her dramatic talent was recognized at school where

³"The Art of Cornelia Otis Skinner," The Literary Digest, CXIX (April 13, 1935), p. 23.

she had opportunities to perform for her classmates. Hearing her parents talk about the theatre, plus having chances herself to act in school productions, increased her love for the stage and made her determined to pursue a stage career. A review of Miss Skinner's family and education reveals the significant factors which helped prepare her for a career of the monologue-drama. It also reveals that Miss Skinner has qualities of wit, intelligence, personality, and humanity. In part at least, because of these attributes she was able to achieve great stature in her monologue-drama career and also in her personal life apart from the stage.

Miss Skinner is not without her ideas regarding the performance of monologue-drama, as reviewed earlier, but she is careful not to over-theorize her art. Her ideas about acting came not from codified rules, but from the practical sources which she learned from her training for and experience on the stage. By performing in solo-drama she found that acting in a monologue-drama and in a play, although similar, are not alike. It was for her pioneering adventure in monologue-drama, wherein she combined the elements of a play with those of a solo sketch, that she won distinction from her predecessors. Miss Skinner's dissatisfaction with the imposed limitations of the character sketch prompted her to draw upon her observation, imagination, and intelligence so as to expand the character sketch to the dimension of monologue-drama.

In creating the monologue-drama, she revealed considerable talent as a writer of her own material, earlier sharpened in the writing of her brief character sketches. She brought to her monologue-dramas rich characterizations, as well as witty and moving dialogue. Her monologue-dramas have compactness, unity of dramatic action, clarity, and strong thematic situations. These elements are clearly seen through detailed analysis of two of her most effective monologue-dramas, The Wives of Henry VIII and Paris '90. Each reveals her competence and talent as a dramatist.

Without the success of her scripts in such elements as characterization, dialogue, compactness, unity of dramatic action, clarity, and thematic situations, her scope as a performer may well have been hampered. She wrote the material with herself in mind as the performer. As a performer of monologue-drama she became expert and received high praise from the drama critics. Their criticisms of her performances supply ample evidence of the effectiveness of her performance of monologue-drama. The critics, in their reviews, refer to her high level of performance technique, characterizations, and writing ability. Together these elements won for Miss Skinner and her art-form a stature built solidly on her combined writing and acting talents and on her personal attributes.

Cornelia Otis Skinner has distinguished herself also as a playwright, novelist, essayist, and actress in

conventional plays. But it is through her monologue-dramas that her unique contribution to, and place in, the theatre is undisputed. Therefore, the study has concentrated on this facet of her career, as a writer and performer of monologue-drama.

Conclusions

As a monologue-dramatist, Miss Skinner has the faculty for observation and imagination. She uses her observations to create accurate characterizations and a living atmosphere on the stage. Through training, her personal sensitivity has been sharpened so that she can sense the values of observing, subconsciously or consciously record it, and then reproduce it, in the most direct, economical, and concentrated way, for the monologue-drama. Her observation captures characteristics of human strengths, weaknesses, attitudes, and foibles.

The monologue-drama scripts of Miss Skinner also reflect her wealth of imagination. Her imagination exists not in a vacuum, but is surrounded by a supply of data gathered from reading, conversation, and travel. From the mental digestion of these sources, she is able to recreate persons in believable situations as they would appear in real life. As she writes, she has learned to identify herself with her characterizations and to think, feel, and subconsciously react as they would. Through imagination, as well as conscious

and unconscious recorded life experiences, the true essence of a character rises. If, as a dramatist, Miss Skinner could not imaginatively live her characters in their world, it is doubtful if she could project them and vitalize them so well as a performer.

The principal facet of Miss Skinner's monologue-dramas is characterization. Her monologue-dramas are satisfying because they are based on her accurate imagination and observation. Miss Skinner's scripts reflect that character is her surest foundation for the monologue-dramas. The scripts imply her ability to feel from within what each character is thinking, doing, and desiring. She also gives dimension to the imaginative characters who are never seen on stage. Miss Skinner uses these imaginative people as an emphasis for the visible characters, as a part of the atmosphere, and as a technique of solo-performance which simulates talking to some one particular person rather than to oneself or to the audience.

Although the characterizations are of first importance to Miss Skinner's monologue-dramas, she does not let them take full-run of the production. They are controlled by dramatic unity, thematic situation, and dialogue which, in turn, give the characterizations greater dramatic impact. In other words, each character of the monologue-drama is seen not for itself but to heighten the dramatic incident. Usually the compactness required of the monologue-drama

necessitates that Miss Skinner assign only one incident per characterization rather than a succession of dramatic incidents. The combination of the incidents and the characterizations give continuity to the monologue-drama. The dramatic unity of her scripts depends upon the selection of an incident and its relation with other incidents. The subject matter in The Wives of Henry VIII is historically based, and rests on the marriage of six women to the same monarch; in Paris '90 the principal unifying element is that of place, the city of Paris. Moreover, in each play, a unified theme gives coherence to the characterizations thereby producing a logical and artistic design.

The dramatic unity is clear, for Miss Skinner has a sharply trained sense of selection. Her scripts are vivid and exciting because they attract to themselves impressions of life around them. She has learned to discard inconsequential and superficial human intercourse and to concentrate on elements of value. Her ability to discern the crux of a character's life and to develop it could be credited to her power to research the particular environment, traditional values, and the historical evolution of the character. Such actual experience of research, plus knowledge from sound education and experience in the theatre, are her acquired tools with which Miss Skinner gives dramatic unity to her art-form.

Along with dramatic unity and thematic comment, dialogue also defines her characterizations. Dialogue helps establish characterization, dramatic situation, and the scope of the scene and entire monologue-drama. Miss Skinner's dialogue is distinctively governed by her personality, her wit, and her way of seeing and expressing herself. The dialogue in each scene is immediately clear so that it never lets the audience become puzzled or uncertain as to who is the character, what she is doing, and what the situation is. The establishment of atmosphere and the creation and maintenance of illusion both largely depend on the consistent and astute use of dialogue.

Miss Skinner is significant, too, as a performer of monologue-drama. As a solo-performer she is unequalled. She can make believable an array of characters in succession. The true test of performance is the ease in which it is accomplished, and Miss Skinner never lets the audience think for a moment that her performance is not the easiest of assignments. True, the audience may at first be overcome by her ability which enables her to perform so many roles successively. They may wonder how one individual can accomplish so much. But they never think that it is not an easy assignment for Cornelia Otis Skinner. As the audience appraises her, they sense the true nature of this artist. Miss Skinner's personality and charm on the stage radiate a magnetism. She subjects her own personality so that it will

not interfere with the interpretation of the characterization, but not so much that the audience forgets entirely that they are watching Cornelia Otis Skinner.

Miss Skinner's acting is not consciously based upon a theoretical method. She commands by no stilted movement or trick of voice or gesture. She acts by earnestness and concentration on portraying a particular character in a particular situation. Her physical charm and manner, her vocal expression, her projection and movement have been perfected so as to make the monologue-drama effective and successful theatre. Miss Skinner has the added advantage of being both writer and actress. In herself she is a harmonious unit. Each talent is fused into the other so there is little indication where one begins and the other ends. As a performer of monologue-drama, she competes with no other performers, and she knows exactly what the author has conceived; she can critically direct herself in fulfilling obligations of dramatist and performer.

Evaluation

Miss Skinner has expanded theatrical art by writing and performing her original idea of monologue-drama. To have analyzed Miss Skinner's two scripts and to have viewed professional criticism of her performance, does not permit one to suggest a formula for monologue-drama. One must realize that it is not possible to reduce essentials of Miss

Skinner's art to a formula for future monologue-dramas, for even after choosing the essentials for such a formula, the sum of the parts probably would not equal the whole. To write and perform effective monologue-drama, the individual must have the creative spirit which begins where the rules end. Whether Miss Skinner's contribution in this area will encourage other solo-performers of monologue-drama, only time will tell. Whatever the results may be, Miss Skinner must be given credit for expanding theatrical art.

The combination of dramatic unity together with the compactness of each situation helps her to set characterizations instantly. As a performer, her accurate attention to detail, her technique, grace, and acting ability tend to captivate her public. With her monologue-dramas, she furthered the solo-performer's position in theatrical art. Unaided, she became the leading theatrical solo-performer. It was said after The Wives of Henry VIII, "there no longer can be any question: Miss Skinner is a remarkable mistress of keen exciting characterization."⁴ She expanded the character-sketch to the monologue-drama

perfectly aware of the severe drain on her talents and strength,... works which required quick changes in personality, approach, and costume, and which held her on the stage for nearly a whole evening.⁵

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

Her ability to transform herself from character to character has been described as "incredibly complete and subtle."⁶

Her art is a strenuous one and one that requires great imagination, sensitivity, and fortitude. "It was, no doubt, exhausting, but the feat, coupled with intelligent writing and inspired performance, put her in an especial and enviable theatrical niche."⁷

The monologue-drama devised by Miss Skinner admirably serves to illustrate the very essence of the theatre's spell, which is illusion. She and her art are graphic examples of that strange alchemy by which an audience and a solo performer combine to create the real from unreal. Miss Skinner, as an actress and writer, can evoke from an empty stage a whole gallery of living people, characters who, though often unseen, are intimately felt and understood. The audience tends to share in creating this magic of illusion by using imagination. It is the impulse that stirs this imaginative response, however, which emanates from Miss Skinner who is the actress, mime, and dramatist. "I have rarely seen as brilliant and intuitive an acting impersonation ... there is something very close to genius in her concept ... I can think of no more refreshing form of entertainment ..." ⁸ wrote one drama critic who had witnessed Miss

⁶R. D. Skinner, loc. cit.

⁷The Literary Digest, loc. cit.

⁸R. D. Skinner, loc. cit.

Skinner's monologue-drama performances.

Miss Skinner proved that she could succeed in the theatre. "I'm going to be an actress. A good one. I won't let father down,"⁹ she confided many years ago to her friend. That friend, Emily Kimbrough, many years later remarked, "In the years that followed she had become an actress and so good a one that she stood almost alone in her field as a writer and interpreter of monologues."¹⁰ Miss Skinner is not the first solo-performer, nor, indeed, will she be the last. In the medium of writing and performing monologue-drama, however, Miss Skinner was the first; today she is acknowledged as the leading exponent of her own theatrical art. Certainly, Cornelia Otis Skinner has demonstrated by her career that, in studying the theatre of the past and relating it to its future, she succeeded in making a contribution to the theatre of the present; that the present contribution has fulfilled the promise of the past; and it is in both the past and the present that the vitality and scope of all theatre resides.

⁹Emily Kimbrough, "The Silent Toast," The Reader's Digest, LVXXII (March, 1958), p. 222.

¹⁰Ibid.

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