AN ANALYSIS AND AN INTERPRETATION OF THE ROLE
OF DICKON IN THE SCARECROW BY PERCY MACKAYE

By

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PROJECT

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INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

The project presented for the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree consists of an analysis, preparation, and interpretation of a major acting role, that of Dickon in *The Scarecrow* by Percy MacKaye.

The problem has been divided into these aspects:

A. Preliminary preparation for the performance which has included research into the history of the play and the role, an analysis of the role, and an evaluation of the available materials that might assist in an actor's approach to the role.

B. Interpretation of the role with scheduled performances.

C. An evaluation and summary of the problem through the following written material.

This paper, then, represents the latter aspect of the problem and consists of three parts:

Chapter I The introduction to the problem, and the relation of such a problem to the actor and his approach to the role.

Chapter II An analysis of the role through a study of the play, the playwright, and the stage history of the play.

Chapter III Evaluation of the problem, the contribution of such a problem to the background preparation of a teacher of high school drama subjects, evaluations by critics, and final summary.
I. THE PROBLEM

Preparation for a stage performance is a problem which requires serious consideration. As the actor makes his initial approach to the role for which he has been selected, it is essential that he gain as complete an understanding of it as possible. It was the purpose of this study (1) to illustrate the several points to be kept in mind throughout the rehearsal and performance period; (2) to show the relation between a careful study in preparation for a role, and the contribution such study will make to the background of a teacher of drama subjects.

Through a study of an individual role as it relates to the play, one will find it advantageous to delve into the origin of the material and perhaps into similar characterizations. If time will permit before rehearsal begins, the actor may find it helpful to study the playwright and whatever notes he may have made concerning the play and its individual characters. There are times when an actor interprets a role in an entirely different way from that which the playwright intended. Consequently, understanding the playwright's thoughts, the emotions he wanted to portray, and the character he was attempting to create, all have a definite bearing on the actor's eventual portrayal of the character.

Reviews or criticisms of past performances of the same play may furnish helpful hints as to what the audience expects of the character. Since the audience is the sounding-wall against which the performance is played, it is necessary to create a compatible atmosphere. To develop the role to its fullest extent, the actor should read the script
carefully at least two or three times. In this way he can begin to form a mental picture of the story as a whole.

After determining that the story is clear in his mind, the actor then reads the script another time. With this reading, however, character selection is his foremost thought—for words alone are not enough to put across to the audience the emotions, the feelings, and the thoughts of the person represented. He must be able to pull the character out of the body of the play without disassociation of the two.

At this point it is necessary for the actor-reader to be extremely analytical of the lines, for from them the characterization slowly begins to develop. The reader must be able to see exactly how this one character contributes to the entire story. As the reader continues the study of the lines, he will begin to feel that the character is really alive, is, in actuality, himself. The role must be studied so thoroughly that the actor can give a genuine portrayal of that person as the audience must see him. As Irvine has said, "Acting is an art, and those who practice it are artists."¹ The actor must practice his art as the musician practices, or as the artist paints pictures over and over to get just the right effect. Necessarily, the actor cannot be an insensitive individual; he must be able to imagine so completely and so effectively as to make others around him believe he really is the person he pretends to be.² This transition from everyday


²Allan Crofton and Jessica Royer, A Book for the Beginner (New
life into perhaps a completely foreign characterization may not be an easy one for it often requires much work and concentration on the part of the actor. To act at all, the individual must be enthusiastic, for if enthusiasm is lacking, there is no motivating force. In creating the illusion of personage, an actor cannot rely on make-up and costuming to do all the work. The characterization must come from within much more than from without.

Imagination plays a most important part in the preparation for a role. One of the better methods for developing characterizations is the system of asking one's self questions concerning the character. For example: How would he walk? What would he wear? Would his voice be low or would it be high-pitched? As replies are formed in answer to these questions, they fall into place, making a reasonable logical pattern. Rearranging of the parts and pieces may be necessary before the picture can be classed as ready for showing, but with each rehearsal it becomes easier for the actor to understand and properly portray the character. Understandably, each character is composed of a series of details, but the actor should not become so engrossed with a profusion of fine points of his own portrayal that he can no longer see the overall picture of the whole story.

A really good actor is never conceited with regard to his own abilities. He must at all times be humble and approach each new role with a genuine humility. The actor should not shape the character to

his way of thinking and doing; he should, instead, bend himself to the will of the character. No longer will the actor move, speak, or breathe as he normally would. As a completely reoriented person, he uses only those gestures expressly suited to the role. The actor's voice quality must match the age, educational level, and social status of the person he portrays.

After becoming thoroughly familiar with the character, the actor should commit his lines to memory. Accurate memorization of not only the actor's own lines, but the cue lines preceding his speeches, should be completed as early as possible so the script may be put aside, affording the opportunity to suit appropriate actions to words or situations. If the actor is unsure of his lines, entrances, exits, or other pertinent stage business, he cannot improve his performance. As a result, not only his characterization suffers but the play as well.

There may be occasions when an actor is truly inspired in his portrayal of a role, but he cannot always rely on such inspirational measures to insure a good performance. There can well be times when his characterization might become flat and flavorless unless he has complete control over the mind, body, and voice. Without special attention to these categories, the actor could never be certain of the result when called upon to display a certain emotion, or to speak with one definite tone quality.

To be more certain of how an individual might react under various circumstances, the actor should build up a storehouse of material from which to draw at any time when an emotion or impression is to be created.
The material for such a storehouse can be gathered every day through observation of life and the situations surrounding him. All people are different, one from another, in many respects. Each has individual characteristics that set him apart from the others. The same is true of the characters in a play. Each one is an individual and does not conform to any standard pattern. At no time should an actor think of his role as "straight"—one in which he needs only to be himself.

The actor must keep the characterization foremost in his mind as the play progresses, building constantly to the original intent. There can be no deviation or relaxation in purpose. If the image the actor is attempting to create should become distorted, then the true perspective is lost, and the audience loses sight of the aim of the role. The use of gestures may add or detract from the characterization. Gestures, whether by eye movement or other means, should be so attuned to the lines or situation, and appear so completely natural to the actor, that the audience is not really conscious of them. They should never be overdone. One should recognize equally well those times when it is the better part of judgment to do absolutely nothing. There may be occasions when an actor would do more to obscure the meaning of the role with too many or, perhaps, unsuitable gestures, rather than emphasize it.

Although gestures are important, facial expressions are equally important. Regardless of the type of character the dramatist has written, there will be need for facial expression. Through muscle control the features can be moulded to suit the mood. The actor must develop control over internal as well as external muscles since both are so very
essential for complete mastery of the body, breathing functions, and vocal expressions. These muscles must at all times experience complete relaxation, for tension creates situations which can lead to poor performance. Arms or legs may refuse to move, or at best move in sticklike fashion. The voice may crack, perhaps choke down to a whisper. The backbone will appear to be ramrod stiff; the face may be strangely contorted. Early training of the inner and outer muscles to perfect coordination will assure the actor of control during any situation.

Throughout the play there will be occasions when the actor speaks no lines, yet he must remain on the stage. During such times he must be sure to maintain an attitude of being an active part of the scene; he cannot relax from character for one instant. His bearing must indicate that he is still a part of the proceedings, even though others are speaking. Here silent portrayal of emotion—whether anger, interest, sorrow, or whatever the scene requires for the particular moment—is as important as the spoken lines and can be just as effective if properly maintained. Relaxation from character during such moments may transmit to the audience the feeling that he only puts on the characterization for his speaking lines, losing the stage personality the moment a line is completed. 3 "Unity," as stated by Price, is "... the absolute and essential relation of all the parts to the whole ... is a fundamental

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rule in all art." In other words, all parts of a scene must be united, with no loose ends or characters at odds with one another and the situation.

In further projection of the characterization to the audience, the actor must remember that it is necessary for the rhythm and tempo of speech to conform to the word meanings lest the whole vocal expression become a senseless jumble. Emotion affects the speech pattern, speed with which words are spoken, and the inflection of the various sounds. To employ the wrong emotional effect creates an entirely different impression upon the ears of the listener than may have been desired. One may also apply the tempo-rhythm approach to movement on the stage. The art of proper breathing is the foundation for all muscle control. This extremely important function is highly necessary for correct voice projection with a minimum effort. Correct breath control naturally bears a close relationship to good posture. Without the one, the other is next to impossible. With the body in good position, well-regulated diaphragmatic support of the breath action will help proper projection and inflection.

While proper breathing and posture can aid in the correction of many speech faults, one would do well to remember that daily practice of the vowel sounds assists the actor immeasurably in the elimination of

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speech difficulties so many beginners experience. Articulation, pronunciation, and enunciation must be mastered at the same time for without any one of these the other two can accomplish little of real value in diction. Diligent attention to this phase of study will also aid in the elimination of speech dialects possessed by many actors at the outset of the training period, and which may prove to be a hindrance unless all traces are erased from the speech pattern. For most practical purposes, the accepted speech type is that which does not rely on any one region for its origination. Only when some form of eccentric expression is desired will the actor employ other than the standard language or accepted usage.  

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CHAPTER II

THE ANALYSIS OF THE CHARACTERIZATION

An actor must try to establish an empathic bond between the audience and the role he is playing. To insure creation of such a relationship, the actor must carefully analyze the role in order to bring out all factors pertaining to it. At no time may he permit his own personality to creep through that of his character portrayal. Through investigation of the history of the play and of the playwright and his views regarding the particular character being analyzed, the actor can arrive at a concept of the role.

I. THE PLAYRIGHT, PERCY MACKAYE

Percy MacKaye was born into the literary and dramatic traditions since his parents were Steele and Mary Medbury MacKaye, both noted for their abilities as writers as well as other achievements in the drama world. Mary MacKaye dramatized the great literary work, Pride and Prejudice, while Steele MacKaye composed such dramatic works as Hazel Kirke and Paul Kauvar. The latter was also noted, among other accomplishments, as a theatrical manager, producer, and architect. Percy was born at New York City on March 16, 1875, arriving in the dramatic world with a fervor which was never to leave him.

Young MacKaye's early education was obtained in a boys' school in New York, Groton, and Washington, D.C. Sources investigated were not explicit as to the names of these educational institutions. MacKaye
also spent a year of his early youth at the drafting boards and acted as secretary and confidant to his father. It was during this period that Steele MacKaye worked out plans for a Spectatorium overlooking the Great Lakes. The Spectatorium was a structural colossus intended for the staging of many theatrical projects. Idealistic in nature, it was not practical and eventually met with failure.

The elder MacKaye did not live to see his son enter Harvard University, for he died February 25, 1894. In that same year Percy enrolled at the famous Eastern university where he was to receive some of the greatest influences on his later life. Professor Baker, one of his instructors there, did much toward shaping the young writer's future. During Percy's junior year at Harvard, while working toward a Bachelor of Arts Degree, he wrote a poetic play entitled Sappho. This work was presented by students from Harvard and Wellesley. Commencement exercises in 1897 found Percy MacKaye delivering an oration on The Need of Imagination in the Drama of Today. Even at this early date, he was exhibiting the intense feeling he held for the theatre, and which he demonstrated in his writings as well as in numerous speeches. Regardless of innumerable defeats, MacKaye never gave up the struggle for higher standards in the theatre.

MacKaye has said of himself that he was "a young man, groping in the mystery of our life." No statement could ever be more descriptive.

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8 Dickinson, op. cit., p. 1.
of the man, for though throughout his life he struggled for goals completely out of reach, working so hard to reach them he often overlooked a more obvious and much easier method for obtaining the same results. He was a dreamer, an idealist in many respects, but his dreaming gave the first breath of life to much that is of value in the theatre today.

Following his marriage to Marion Homer Morse on October 8, 1898, Percy MacKaye toured Europe, furthering his education with study at the University of Leipsig. He resided also at Rome, London, and Brunnen, Switzerland. It was during this period that he gathered material which was to result in the writing of Fenris the Wolf. Upon his return to New York, MacKaye accepted a position as a teacher in a private school and remained there until 1904. He continued to write plays and, at the end of four years of teaching, decided to devote his time entirely to dramatic work. In that same year he joined the Cornish, New Hampshire, Colony and made his home there. From 1906 to 1913 Percy MacKaye lectured on the subject of the theatre at Harvard, Yale, Columbia, and many other universities. Here again the world saw Steele MacKaye’s vigorous tradition of theatrical innovation. Like his father, Percy MacKaye never considered drama as a pure form of art, but rather as an art in which he visualized an Utopian dream. The young idealist traveled throughout the country appealing to audiences everywhere for a new kind of theatre. In this he was eloquence personified, whereas, in conversation concerning his own plays, MacKaye was actually a timid
person, almost at a loss for words.\(^9\)

MacKaye stepped earnestly into the field of writing at a time when very few playwrights were college men; however, his eyes were not closed to the disadvantages of his position, and he applied himself vigorously to his chosen field. Since a higher education was looked upon as a handicap in the theatrical world, it did much toward the alienation of MacKaye from the interests of the American stage. He delved into the classical traditions of the Old World, made a study of ancient myths and fables, and of the theatre as it had been in those days long past.\(^{10}\) He had hopes that the ancient type of theatre would be the theatre of the future, but such was not to be. Struggle as he might, the minds of his audiences could not be swayed to accept the standards of that early theatre.

It was always MacKaye's feeling that there was an urgent need of higher standards in the composition and criticism of modern dramas. He questioned whether or not the public possessed a clear and correct appreciation of what drama really should be. Upon investigating the principles which governed the theatre of the early 1900's, MacKaye tested them against his own standards and found the principles of the theatre lacking in many respects and inferior to the standards which he had set up for himself.\(^{11}\) The playwright firmly believed the theatre

\(^9\)Ibid., p. 28.

\(^{10}\)Ibid., p. 5.

\(^{11}\)Ibid., pp. 1-2.
should not be so operated as to appeal only to men's imaginations; instead, it should reach into the very center of their beings, to keep them in a constant state of expectancy. This was the attitude which eventually influenced a new movement in the American theatre. MacKaye further believed the playhouse should hold as vital a position in society as did the university. He felt that both were educative in function and that the worthwhile influence of the theatre was not to be minimized.

That particular era in the history of the theatre was overrun with speculators who cared little for real art in drama; and, while MacKaye's efforts to elevate the theatre may have accomplished little in many respects, he did much of the groundwork toward the eventual reclamation of the playhouse. With this thought uppermost in his mind, MacKaye wrote two books, The Playhouse and The Play and The Civic Theatre.

The rapid pace of the growing mechanized world oppressed the sensitive spirit of the playwright. His aim was to create an entirely new social structure, centered around the theatre. Filled with idealism he preached eloquently for his dramatic art form on a national scale. MacKaye earnestly desired to reach the masses of the people, yet failed miserably more often than not because he could not express himself in a way these levels could comprehend.

Too often, even in his writings, Percy MacKaye used verbose and imposing phrases at the loss of good sense. Possessed of an excellent verbal gift, he seemed more concerned with word sounds rather than selection and meaning. To him life was a complex thing; therefore, the
complexity must find expression in his writings and lectures. In time MacKaye was to learn that truly good plays required much more than a preponderance of extremely formal language. He discovered factors of expression were involved which transported deeper, more delicate meaning to the listening audience than any flowery speech was able to do.

MacKaye's earlier plays show exceptional command of resources essential in stage technique. In his theatrical work, the playwright demonstrated not only the training he had received under Professor Baker of Harvard, but also techniques flavored with the ideas of the late Steele MacKaye. His tremendous energy and resourcefulness proved too much for the confines of the professional theatre, bringing about a change in his methods of operation. He broadened the practice of the theatre and went outside the realm of the theatre for a part of his work. During this period MacKaye called others to collaborate in his works, artists adept in painting, sculpture, and music. His dependence upon outside artists began with Barry Faulkner, whom he had called in for scene designing, and F. S. Converse, for incidental music, in Jeanne d'Arc. From that time MacKaye used many of the leading artists of the day, as well as artists in the fields of drama, dancing, and production. This, then, was the period in which the theatre began to realize and enlarge upon its potentialities, a tribute to MacKaye's greatness.

The playwright's heart-felt desire to work for and with large groups of people found expression in his masques. He did more to . . . further the interests on this form of theatrical presentation than any
other person. It is most clearly evidenced in the magnitude of Caliban, first presented in 1916 at Lewisohn Stadium in New York. The original cast included two thousand five hundred members, while a year later this same masque experienced a three-weeks run at Harvard Stadium in Cambridge with a cast numbering five thousand.

MacKaye felt that a play was a worthwhile contribution to society in many ways. The time used in planning and rehearsal could never be considered wasted because it meant a joining together, a fellowship of the people, while the actual stage performance definitely enriched the life of each individual who trod the boards. MacKaye has written "that neighborliness in a little town may beget the neighborliness of nations." Percy MacKaye gained a deep personal satisfaction from his many festivals and pageants in that he felt they had contributed greatly to him, if not he to them. It seemed a realization of his dream of a day when all peoples of the world would develop an attitude of we, not I.

MacKaye's published works encompass more than seventy titles, including collected editions of his works, six volumes of poems, four volumes of essays on the civic theatre and on social ideals. Also among his writings are fifteen volumes of plays, four volumes of operas,

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12 Ibid., p. 47
14 Ibid., p. 22.
twelve volumes of masques and community dramas, plus a score of miscellaneous works and editions. All these show great variety, even though most of the earlier writings were based on old fables. In *A Letter from Percy MacKaye*, published in *Theatre Arts* magazine, he writes of the "pageant ear", an original device created by the playwright which enabled more of the audience to hear the voices of the players. This device was first used in 1914 at the St. Louis Masque for an audience of two hundred thousand. MacKaye went on to state that every pageant is different and creates its own theatre. His masques were fundamentally related in structural fashion to Greek forms of drama in which the spoken word played a very important role.\(^\text{15}\)

MacKaye's usual procedure when writing was to forget the characters in his consuming passion for the theatre. In *The Canterbury Pilgrims*, however, written as a tribute to the poet Chaucer, MacKaye reversed his style and showed great interest in the characters, much to the delight of the audience.\(^\text{16}\) Too many of his presentations were filled with stage devices such as a voice issuing from a bell, or a figure painted on glass speaking to the actors. At a loss to represent pure, deep emotion at the critical time, MacKaye used such stage devices apparently as substitutes. This unfortunate choice only detracted from the story rather than adding to its effect.\(^\text{17}\)


\(^{16}\) Dickinson, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., p. 16.
Many of MacKaye's writings tend to follow a social vein. This seemingly is the result of his belief in the theatre as an agency of society. But at the same time, his writings fell into more or less definite patterns. For example, at one time a portion of his work closely imitated the Elizabethan or Shakespearean era. At another time the writing followed closely on the lines of Scandinavian myths or other timeless fables. With The Scarecrow, as with Yankee Fantasies, the playwright displayed a rather playful quality of the imagination with touches of the grotesque which were so evident in much of his writing.

According to Dickinson, The Scarecrow is unquestionably the most significant of MacKaye's dramatic works, not only as a play, but as well from the point of ideas governing composition of the whole. Dickinson continues by saying that, "MacKaye fails to touch the sympathetic nerve of the audience by induction of too many tricks and clowning of an Elizabethan type; nonetheless, the play has characteristics which will keep it alive in the minds of the people."

In 1922 Percy MacKaye and his wife toured the Kentucky mountains to obtain background material on folklore, myths, speech mannerisms, and other related factors. Following this sojourn, the playwright

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18 Ibid., p. 23.
19 Ibid., p. 31.
20 Ibid., p. 33.
21 Ibid., p. 36.
sketched a series of plays on the region but again failed to reach his audiences, as had been the case oftentimes in his earlier works. MacKaye lacked power of discretion or selection and was unable to determine that point at which an audience approves a play or, by one word too much, completely disapproves.22

MacKaye, according to Moses, walked in the shadow of Harvard, was possessed of an academic command of literature, and was possessed also with an elaborate though not spontaneous poetic quality.23 It may have been this poetic aura which filled MacKaye that did so much toward shaping his life. He wanted to be many things, wanted to do many things.

Last Words
Of One Who Shall Sermonize, Unheard, at His Own Funeral

Dear, wonderful Death! Never
Have you failed anyone, God has blessed you forever!

These lines were written June 23, 1956, just a few weeks before the death of the poet-dramatist.

22 Ibid., p. 53.

23 Montrose J. Moses, Representative American Dramas, National and Local (D. C. Heath and Company, n.d.)
II. THE HISTORY OF THE PLAY

The Scarecrow, or The Glass of Truth, received its creative stimulus from Feathertop, a story written in 1852 by Nathaniel Hawthorne. In commenting on the differences between the two works, MacKaye has stated that "the scarecrow Feathertop is ridiculous as the emblem of a superficial fop; the scarecrow Ravensbane is pitiful, as the emblem of human pathos."25 Ravensbane is the individual who has been created from odds and ends of junk by the devil and his witch companion, Goody Rickby, the village blacksmith.

MacKaye did much more than build a play from a story. He recreated almost completely the entire theme and came up with a work which has lived through the years as a near masterpiece of imaginative writing. MacKaye called this work a tragedy of the ludicrous and skillfully maneuvered his characters through seemingly unrelated situations until, at the end of four acts, all parts and pieces become a whole. He very ably carried on a series of plots and situations throughout the course of the play with each coming to its own conclusion, not interfering with the others, and yet each definitely having a bearing upon the outcome of the others.

MacKaye, it seems, made a wise choice by opening the play in a blacksmith shop, thus creating an atmosphere of witchcraft, mystery, and even vapors of the nether world by bringing the devil onto the scene.

The devil, or Dickon as he is known throughout the play, is for the most part a very agreeable and most likable character. Toward the end of the play, however, when his plans are thwarted, the true colors of the devil show through and the audience sees him for the black knave he really is.

From a small pamphlet giving a sketch of his life come these words by MacKaye: "Behind the Scenes at The Scarecrow -- half a dozen stage hands furiously puffed corn-cob pipes, to keep the DEVIL supplied with brimstone for LORD RAVENSBANE; one stage hand, horned, and hairy to the waist, portrayed the 'dummy' in the magic mirror." ²⁶

The Scarecrow was published for the first time in 1908, with a preface in which Mr. MacKaye explained his attitudes toward the material. He noted the differences between the original story as written by Hawthorne and the play as he, MacKaye, had presented it. The play was first produced by the Harvard Dramatics Club on December 7, 1909, while the first professional performance was presented at the Middlesex Theatre, Middletown, Connecticut, on December 30, 1910. The professional cast was as follows:

Justice Gilead Merton
Goody Rickby (Blacksmith Bess)
Lord Ravensbane (Marquis of Oxford, Baron of Wittenberg, Elector of Worms, and Count of Cordova) their hypothetical son
Dickon, a Yankee improvisation of the Prince of Darkness

Mr. Brigham Royce
Miss Alice Fischer
Mr. Frank Reich
Mr. Edmund Breese

²⁶Ibid., p. 193.
Rachel Merton, niece of the Justice
Mistress Cynthia Merton, sister of the Justice
Richard Talbot, Esquire betrothed to Rachel
Sir Charles Reddington, Lieutenant-Governor
Mistress Reddington and Amelia Reddington, Sir Charles' daughters
Captain Bugby, the Governor's secretary
Minister Dodge
Mistress Dodge, his wife
Reverend Master Rand, of Harvard College
Reverend Master Todd, also of Harvard
Micah, servant to the Justice

Miss Beatrice Irwin
Mrs. Felix Morris
Mr. Earl Brown
Mr. H. J. Carvill
Miss Zenaidee Williams
Miss Georgia Dvorak
Mr. Regan Hughston
Mr. Clifford Leigh
Miss Eleanor Sheldon
Mr. William Lewis
Mr. Harry Lillford
Mr. Harold N. Chesir

The first professional premiere of The Scarecrow given in New York was under the management of Henry B. Harris at the Garrick Theatre January 11, 1911, and it held the boards for two years on the road. The same cast appeared in the Harvard Dramatics Club production with the exception of the role of Rachel. Miss Fola La Follette replaced Miss Beatrice Irwin as the Justice' niece.

Muriel Pratt produced The Scarecrow at Bristol, England, November 30, 1914, with the Theater Royal as the playhouse. By 1910 the play had been translated into French by Charles-Marie Garnier of the Sorbonne, and given the title L' Epouvantail. Translated into German by Walter Fischer and entitled Die Vogelscheusche, it was produced under the direction of Max Reinhardt at the Deutsches Theatre in Berlin, with Rudolf Schildkraut starring. The play has also been presented in
Russia. Copies of the work appear in collections of drama by Moses, Representative American Dramas - National and Local, and Quinn's Representative American Plays.

III. THE LOCAL PRODUCTION

On July 26, 27, and 28, 1956, the Associated Students of Sacramento State College, in cooperation with the Division of Humanities and Fine Arts, presented MacKay's play, The Scarecrow. The cast of characters, in order of their appearance, included:

Goody Rickby
Dickon
Rachel Merton
Richard Talbot, Esquire
The Image
Justice Gilead Merton
Lord Ravensbane
Mistress Cynthia Merton
Micah
Captain Bugby
Minister Dodge
Mistress Dodge
Sir Charles Reddington
Mistress Reddington
Amelia Reddington
Kit Selvig
George Evans
Judie Niederloh
Will Hodges
Ernest Hatheway
Gene Boger
Jerry Jensen
Lavonne Larison
Dick Boyd
Brad Barrows
Don Long-Hurst
Arliene Weatherhead
John Lewellen
Barbara Hansen
Anne Hatheway


28 Moses, op. cit.

29 Quinn, op. cit.
IV. THE ACTOR’S INTERPRETATION OF THE ROLE

Acting is a very human thing, dealing not with interpretation of types, but of individuals. Consequently, in the recreation of the role of Dickon in *The Scarecrow*, it was the aim of the writer to portray him not as a stereotype of all devils but as an entity, a being in his own right. Necessarily the writer had to think and plot as Dickon would have done. Timing of each action was quite important; without spontaneity of motion and speech the expressiveness of dramatic moments would have been lost, and the whole would have become a farcical exhibition.

It was the opinion of the writer that Dickon, on the whole, was a likable character and that Percy MacKaye had intended he be viewed in such a light. Dickon appeared at most times to be quick of wit, jocose, and with an almost flippant attitude toward persons of high social state. A gracious attitude colored all of Dickon's associations with others in the story; this graciousness was an important facet of his character, one not to be overplayed to the point of stickiness nor underplayed to the end of appearing viciously evil. Underlying the smooth covering was a barbed wit which necessitated perhaps more than average spontaneity of word-gesture relations. The role required a rather wide range of voice tones as well as more expressive body movements that might have been demanded of a lesser characterization. At no time could Dickon be permitted to become uninteresting or dull.

At those points in the course of the play where Dickon was to appear from a puff of smoke, it was doubly essential that timing be
perfect and that the actor display more than average agility. Since the role required Dickon to appear from the blacksmith's forge and to make leaping entrances or exits from that point, or to appear quite suddenly from other strange and unexpected places, the writer felt the necessity for maintaining a constant air of fluidity of motion. At no time could Dickon seem to be awkward, for to appear in that manner for even short moments would be ruinous to the characterization of the role.

Dickon was the sort of character who maintains perfect control regardless of the situation. Only for a few moments near the end of the play did Dickon lose his usual aplomb, when the thwarting of his carefully laid plot stirred him almost to anger. However, realizing that this was to no avail, he regained control of himself and quite graciously accepted defeat. During those brief moments a rather rapid transition from one emotion to another was required, reversing again for the final portion of the scene.

The writer feels that a role of this type, while perhaps more difficult to play than most, offers a wide variety of emotion, expressive action, and general extension of character. As each role in a play has a definite bearing upon the others, so the role of Dickon influenced the other characters in The Scarecrow, causing them to grow and develop as the story progressed. Some of the traits which blossomed under Dickon's influence were not the most desirable, while others were much more pleasing to behold. In much the same manner humans grow and change in their daily contact with others. Perhaps the change is only minute and apparently of little consequence; nevertheless, a change is affected
and influences each individual in the relationship.

Each role is a challenge as life is a challenge. Through thorough study of one, the actor develops a better understanding of the other. Each compliments the other. In this manner individuals may learn to cope with, or utilize, the wide variety of characteristics and mannerisms available on every hand.
CHAPTER III

EVALUATION AND SUMMARIZATION OF THE PROJECT

When an actor prepares for any type of role, valuable hints for future performances may be obtained from the comments of critics. As an integral part of the writer's project, evaluation sheets were completed by several members of the audience and the results incorporated into this work. The following is a copy of the evaluation sheet, along with generalized comments from the criticisms:

I. EVALUATION SHEET ON ACTING FOR CHARACTER OF DICKON

A. Voice: Distinct? Was the rate too fast or too slow? Variety in rate? In phrasing? In inflection? Pronunciation correct for character?

B. Characterization: Was there complete bodily and mental recreation of the character by the actor? Do we "believe" the actor's characterization all the time?

C. Movement: In keeping with the character? Pantomime accurate and convincing? Was body well-controlled and poised for this character?

D. Contrast: Contrasting moods in speeches? Were the emotional transitions natural and effective? Was there a monotonous feeling?

E. Ensemble: Was there smoothness of action indicative of teamwork between Dickon and the other characters?

F. Timing: Did Dickon pick up cues, lines, movements accurately for this character?

G. Motivation: Was there a clearly discernible reason for all business and movement by Dickon?

The general consensus of opinion was that Dickon had been characterized
in a most believable fashion, with volume, rate, and intensity of speech showing more than adequate variation for the role. The critics agreed that the actor portrayed the role of the devil with such naturalness as to carry the audience into a feeling of reality in the part. According to other comments on the evaluation sheets, contrast in mood and appropriate emotional transitions were a notable part of the characterization, as was well-controlled pantomime which lent itself ably to the execution of the performance. Each evaluation showed that cues were never "stepped on" nor picked up too late, and that there was an excellent display of teamwork on the part of Dickon with the other members of the cast. It was further agreed that in motivation Dickon seemed always to do the right thing at the right time even though there were many difficult aspects encountered in this characterization.

II. EVALUATION OF THE ROLE AND THE PLAY

"SSC Stages Simple, Direct Version of The Scarecrow." The foregoing statement headlined a review by William C. Clackin, drama critic for the Sacramento Bee newspaper, and appeared in his column of July 27, 1956. The critic's comments read as follows:

Charles V. Hume of Sacramento State College has given the city an extremely interesting piece of theatre in Percy MacKaye's Scarecrow, which opened a three night run last night in the SSC Little Theater as the major production of the summer season.

Hume, an authority on the history of Sacramento Theater, believes this is the first local performance. Beyond that, however, the play has special interest as the work of a rather distinguished American poet-dramatist who is very little known these days - although he died, if memory serves,
only a couple of years back after a very long life.

The Scarecrow tells a story of Massachusetts in the days when witchcraft was in flower. For plot purposes, it presumes those tales were true.

Goody Rickby, a rare combination of blacksmith and witch, conspires with her familiar, a handsome devil (literally) named Dickon, to wreak revenge on the pompous justice who long ago seduced her in the days of their youth.

Together they create a living man from a makeshift scarecrow and send him to woo the old fool’s niece. As a bogus London lord, the scarecrow progresses swimmingly until he encounters one of Goody’s knicknacks — a mirror which shows people what they really are.

The play’s main interest lies in the fact that it proceeds clearly and effectively on three levels at the same time. There is first of all the surface story. Secondly, there is a good deal of social satire in the impression the scarecrow makes on an unwitting society. Finally, there is MacKaye’s main message, which involves the fact that the scarecrow, given a little life, shows signs of becoming a real man — and in the process, points up how difficult it is for any of us to be a real person.

If the play has a major fault discernible on one viewing, it is that MacKaye sometimes makes his points in rather an obvious fashion, both philosophically and theatrically. And for a poet, his language sometimes seems oddly flat rather than arrestingly inspired. On the whole, however, it is a worthwhile product; his story holds you on all its levels, it is enlivened by some shrewd theatrical tricks and it has something to say.

Hume’s staging has an admirable simplicity and directness which seems perfectly in keeping with the author’s style, and the production technical director Larry Shumate has designed is notable for a superb Act I set for the blacksmith shop.

Jerry Jensen plays the title role well, on the whole, with a properly stiff, dreamy quality which gradually becomes more real; the final big scene seemed last night a little beyond him, however. Similarly, the Dickon of George Evans, while notable for the actor’s force, presence, and admirable air of relish, could use a more definite flair — something it takes a good deal of stage technique to accomplish.
Kit Selvig brought a fine, vivid quality to Goody, but both she and Evans were hard to understand at times. Not so, however; Judy Niederloh, whose action and speech are the clearest in the cast. Brad Barrows contributed an amusing bit as the fop, and of the others, Lavonne Larson and Gene Boger seem particularly noteworthy.30

III. CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY TO THE BACKGROUND OF A TEACHER OF HIGH SCHOOL DRAMA SUBJECTS

By learning the process of analysis in connection with plays and other literary works, the teacher may transmit to the student the need for developing this ability not only with reference to reading material, but in everyday living. All situations with which a person meets require some sort of analysis. How this is done will depend extensively upon the earlier training of the individual. Similarly, by studying characterizations in a play, the student can learn to analyze the persons with whom he comes in contact from day to day and perhaps temper his judgment of them through a wider understanding of their problems. And as these students learn to understand others, so they learn to work with others. They grow to a realization that no one individual is complete in himself, that there are others all around him who have a definite bearing on his life and are to be considered a part of that life.

Concurrently with the consideration of individuals and the impressions they may make upon each other, one must remember the demands of the ever-increasing social world. The present day pressures of society

require an unhesitating command or control of both voice and body. One of the major aims in a well-rounded drama course is to establish good control over voice and body through thorough training and practice. The voice creates such a marked impression upon the listeners and can do much toward making or breaking a relationship, whether business or friendly. As the student becomes assured of full command of the foregoing factors, the feelings of insecurity which he may have experienced will fade away.

Of almost equal importance with the vocal expressions is the body movement, or language of the body as it may be termed. The body training received in the drama class can carry over into every-day living with very effective results. The teacher can effect many changes from the awkward postures exhibited by a large number of teen-age students and bring about a feeling for more harmonious movement which is much more pleasant to behold, whether on the stage or in the family living room.

As voice and body control are developed through a careful study of emotions, contacts with other individuals, and consistent practice, the mind will also grow and develop. The wise and well-prepared teacher can lead the students toward an appreciation for the better forms of drama. In order that this may be more readily accomplished, a comparison may be made of the different types of drama with mediocre classifications coming into classroom discussions as well as the better forms, thus enabling the students to better understand the drama as an art. Through learning to differentiate between the good and the mediocre in
drama, the student quite probably will carry over into other areas this same learning process, and eventually the student may become a more refined individual because of the original classroom training.

The school can be said to have a marked influence on the stage, for without the schools and their students there could not very well be educated, cultured, and well-trained actors for the stage. By the same token, the stage has a marked influence on the school; how many students have not succumbed in some manner to the lure of the lights, the smell of the greasepaint? It is because of this lure that the teacher can do so much toward shaping the personalities of most of the students. By careful maneuvering on the part of the instructor, the conceited individual can be taught that he is not the only person in the cast. The shy student can be brought to a realization that there is a position which was made just for his particular talents and that there is no one else in the whole class or group who could possibly handle the duties involved. From the start of casting to the closing of the final curtain, the students learn to work together as a team in order to bring about an effective dramatic presentation. Not all the class members want to be actors, nor can they all be; however, when the occasion arises in which someone insists on acting when he has no ability in that direction, the teacher must exercise a great amount of tact to steer such an individual where his talents can be more readily used. In these instances the teacher's past dramatic training can be put to good use. Such situations will require a ready control of not only the mind but expression as well—in the form of persuasion.
One could give detailed explanations of all the positions of the back-stage crew as well as the various members of the cast; but the most important fact to be gained from the whole study is the value of teamwork, learning to respond the right way at the right time, no matter what the situation may be nor what may be the circumstances of the moment. Each and every life is played upon a stage with all those surrounding figures a part of the act, whether the individual wills them to be or not. What each person learns to do with and for those figures will determine extensively what his life's particular outcome will be.

IV. SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT.

While investigating the various works necessary to the fulfillment of the writer's project, one thought became firmly entrenched in the mind—that in order to fully appreciate the value contained in and to be obtained from a role, the actor must study that role from every conceivable angle. He cannot consider merely his own interpretation of the character; the playwright's life, his thoughts and feelings, his beliefs all bear heavily on his writings, and because of these influences the interpretation of the role may differ widely from the original concept of the actor. Such influences were felt in studying the life and works of the remarkable poet-dramatist, Percy MacKaye. The writer feels, too, that in learning the methods of approaching a role in order to gain the most from it, the actor may learn as well a deeper appreciation of the problems of humanity. The writer's several years as a professional actor have failed to give the personal satisfaction which
has been experienced throughout the course of study for the project.

The searching of such great works from an academic standpoint has greatly increased the writer’s appreciation of and interest in the American heritage of the theatre. It is a sincere hope and belief that the values gained from this study will prove of benefit to the writer in teaching drama and speech courses on a secondary school level.
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