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ANNE GREENE

## Bridie's Concept of the Master Experimenter

In his essay "Equilibrium," Bridie names Calvin, Huxley, and Hegel as three "radio-active" influences on his thinking, and explains the nature of each: From Calvin he absorbed the doctrines of the Absolute, Election, and Predestination;<sup>1</sup> from Huxley he absorbed the idea of man as a step in an evolutionary process; and from Hegel he learned a principle of dialectic—thesis, antithesis, synthesis—by whose means he tried to reconcile the other two. Thus he evolved the concept of a Master Experimenter who is in a sense his Father, and of man as one of the experiments and a tool of the Experimenter.<sup>2</sup> This paper will discuss six plays in which he deals with the problem of evil in relation to these ideas.

In his first play, *The Sunlight Sonata or To Meet the Seven Deadly Sins*<sup>3</sup> (1928), the idea of man's heart as innately evil is suggested in the prologue by Beelzebub, a fatherly Devil who stands against a background of Highland scenery brooding over mankind. Beelzebub understands man's little hypocrisies and secret motives, and as he watches a group of Glasgow citizens having a picnic he knows what is in the heart of each. He knows that the Reverend Somerled Carmichael is proud of his goodness and handsome appearance, and that the avaricious Mr. Marcus Groundwater is an elder in Mr. Carmichael's church for only two reasons: it is good for trade and he is afraid of God. Beelzebub also knows that man's God is really the Devil:

Man. Man. Man.  
You're feart o' me, you're feart o' me,  
Droll wee slug wi' the shifty e'e!  
Raise your praise to the Ancient of Days.  
I prevent you in all your ways.  
Your heavy hosannas sink to me.  
To me you pray in horrible psalm

<sup>1</sup> He should have included *Original Sin*. The omission was no doubt an oversight.

<sup>2</sup> James Bridie, "Equilibrium," *The London Mercury*, 39 (April 1939), 585-89.

<sup>3</sup> *The Switchback and Other Plays* (London, 1930). Date following title of each play is date of first performance.

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For the single eye and the grasping palm—  
"Play the game, Lord, play the game.  
Commit us not to the worm and the flame.  
Save us from boils and leprosy,  
Prosper our cheating and let us be!"

He sends his seven prankish little children, the Deadly Sins, to pervert the picnickers, one Sin against each. Although each mortal has his own besetting sin, all have a share of all, as indicated in the report of the Sins to Beelzebub. Superbia says, for example:

You'd hardly believe how proud they are.  
They're proud of their accents or having a car,  
Or of knowing a knight or the name of a winner,  
Or of putting on hardboiled shirts to dinner.

Three fairies—Faith, Hope, and Charity—rescue the mortals and then wonder what can be done to improve the manners and morals of the little Sins. The problem is solved when Elsie, the minister's daughter, agrees to take them all in her personal charge.

Five years later striking changes are seen in the mortals. Groundwater has become aimless and no longer cares what happens to his business. His wife, always a lover of good food, no longer pays attention to the menu. The minister has developed an inferiority complex and is thinking of retiring. All, in fact, have become the exact opposite of what they were except Elsie, who bears the signs of *all* the sins. When the group re-convenes and the little Sins rush in, Elsie feels the "virtue" go out of her as the others return to normal.

Thus in a sparkling, nonsensical manner the play makes the point that sin is an indispensable part of humanity. When Carmichael loses his pride he loses his usefulness as a minister. When Groundwater loses his avarice he loses the quality which made him a successful business man. The epilogue, spoken by Accidia ("I suppose, strictly speaking, I am the Author of this piece"), is the dramatist's admission that he is no exception to mankind.<sup>4</sup> Accidia acknowledges her indebtedness to Pride, Envy, and Avarice, without whose continual encouragement the play would never have been written, and to Beelzebub, "that great Patron and Master of all young dramatists."

In including among Groundwater's charities the "Do-you-believe-in-fairies Guild," the dramatist is satirizing Barrie, of whose Peter Pan he wrote: "Barrie should have been better grounded in the doctrine of Original Sin than to have invented such a character."<sup>5</sup> The portrayal of

<sup>4</sup> Bridie always claimed accidia as his special sin. (James Bridie, *One Way of Living* (London, 1939), p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

the fairies supports the satire, especially Hope, with her trite, lipping optimism, and Charity, who thinks the little Sins are "such darlings" and agrees with Hope that although they are "trying" now and then, yet "naughty children make the finetht men."

*The Amazed Evangelist: A Nightmare*<sup>6</sup> (1932) approaches the problem of evil from an entirely different standpoint. It tells of a pair of Glasgow newlyweds who fall into the clutches of a Cummer who quickly calls up the Devil. When the couple assert that they do not believe in a Devil, having recently read "A Popular Synopsis of the Views of the Neo-Mechanists," the Devil feels obliged to prove his existence. But he finds that in order to do so he must explain his opposite:

I suppose you admit an eternal purposiveness, a majestic plan, or, if you go to the theatre, a life force. You will admit that this force is making for order, righteousness, and perfection, and further, that it has been here since life began on this planet. That is a long time ago, Aggie Martin. . . . Such a long, long time it is, Aggie, that we should have had perfection long ago if there hadn't been a something. What is this something? What is this reaction to eternal action, this drag on the wheel of progress?

Thus God is explained as the evolutionary principle, or progress toward perfection, and evil as whatever hinders that progress.

In *A Sleeping Clergyman*<sup>7</sup> (1933) the evolutionary principle is dramatized on the biological level. It tells the story of three generations of Camerons. In the first two, evil hinders progress, but in the third the social impulses harness the anti-social ones, genius takes control, and the wheel moves forward.

The first Charles Cameron, a brilliant medical student but a moral and physical wreck, dies of tuberculosis. His illegitimate daughter, born after his death to the sister of his friend Dr. Marshall, is carefully brought up by Marshall; but following in her mother's footsteps she makes a liaison with an unscrupulous medical student, and then poisons him to be rid of him. Six months later she gives birth to twins, Hope and Charles ("C. C."), and commits suicide. Hope becomes principal secretary of the League of Nations, and C. C. becomes a brilliant bacteriologist who discovers an antiviral which ends a great epidemic of polio-encephalitis.

The thesis of the play is stated by Dr. Marshall, the mouthpiece of the playwright, who in private life was himself a physician. Marshall says that "to make for righteousness is a biological necessity." The thesis is attacked on two grounds—that of religion and that of eugenics. The religionists are represented by an elderly relative of Dr. Marshall who says

<sup>6</sup> *A Sleeping Clergyman and Other Plays* (London, 1934).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

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"The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth shall be set on edge." The eugenists are represented by two other relatives, one of whom in speaking of heredity says "it's awful. You have it running through generation after generation." The second speaks of the wretched people in slums who hand down diseases and all sorts of criminal tendencies. Dr. Marshall takes issue with her:

Marshall: There aren't many diseases they can hand down very far, Agnes; and "criminal tendency" is a very vague expression.

Agnes: Well, insanity.

Marshall: That's another vague expression.

Agnes: You can't bamboozle me that way, Uncle Will. . . . Two bad people getting married can go on and on till, after two or three generations, you've got thousands of criminal lunatics. It should be stopped by law.

Marshall: How?

Agnes: There are loads of ways. That's eugenics.

Bridie's genuine concern regarding this matter is evidenced by a letter he wrote to *The Spectator* in reply to a suggestion that the Government establish a commission to go into the question of the sterilization of the unfit. He declared that such a move would be "a fresh piece of abominable tyranny" and that those who advocated it were "cranks."<sup>8</sup>

In view of the play's thesis, one is surprised by C. C.'s cautious marriage proposal:

C. C.: Oh, by the way—

Katharine: What?

C. C.: You've always b-been a pretty fair sort of girl, haven't you? I m-mean you were in the Open Golf Championship or something, weren't you?

Katharine: Or something. Yes. Why?

C. C.: No fits of insanity in your family?

Katharine: What is this questionnaire? Are you doing a little life insurance on the side?

C. C.: No. I want to know.

Katharine: We're a very healthy family. Hundreds of years of us.

C. C.: I know. I thought of that. . . . I say, K., I'd like you to marry me, if you would. . . . I mean to say—you've got a small head and long legs and an eye like a good race horse. I thought with your breeding and my—

Katharine: That'll do.

But the young doctor's caution is simply a reminder that the play does not *deny* heredity. Although there are poisoners and libertines in C. C.'s ancestry, there are also genius, imagination, and talent for hard

<sup>8</sup>"On Sterilization of the Unfit," *The Spectator*, 151 (Nov. 3, 1933), 623.



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work. The play dramatizes the possibility that the *good* traits might combine instead of the *bad* ones. Bridie's letter to *The Spectator* points out that genetics is not an exact science. Biologists, he says, know more about it than either clergymen or playwrights, but he adds that even biologists do not agree among themselves.<sup>9</sup> C. C.'s marriage proposal may be seen as a recognition of this uncertainty. The play dramatizes what *could* happen.

The story of the three generations of Camerons is represented as being narrated by one doctor to another in a men's club in Glasgow while a huge white-bearded clergyman sleeps in an armchair near by. Bridie explains his intention thus: "I showed a wild horse after three generations or incarnations finally harnessing itself to the world for the world's good. God, who had set it all going, took his ease in an armchair throughout the play."<sup>10</sup> From a dramatic standpoint the enveloping device is unnecessary and cumbersome, but it lends support to the play's thesis and is an attempt toward a synthesis of the dramatist's religious and scientific faith.

Mr. Bolfry<sup>11</sup> (1943) makes the point that good and evil are reciprocating opposites on both the individual and the cosmic level, and that both elements are necessary in the process of evolution. Principally, however, it attacks the joyless, repressive influences of Calvinism as Bridie had known them in the Free Kirk,<sup>12</sup> and presents a Blakean-Shavian Devil whose function it is to set the individual free.

The action takes place in the Free Kirk manse at Larach, in the West Highlands. Three young people are guests of the Reverend Mr. McCrimmon—his niece and two English soldiers billeted here. It is Sunday, and the young people are bored because there is nothing to do. The Minister allows no singing, smoking, or whistling, and no Sunday papers. When the soldiers think of going for a walk, Mrs. McCrimmon asks them not to go anywhere they might be seen during the evening service. "There might be talk, and you living with the Minister." She is alarmed when Jean and Cully start out as a twosome: "It's all right in England, dearie, . . . but surely you know what sort of place this is?" Jean does know, and her answer implies that the strictness of the "Wee Frees"

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *One Way of Living*, p. 278.

<sup>11</sup> *Plays for Plain People* (London, 1944).

<sup>12</sup> *One Way of Living*, pp. 15-16. Richard West, in "No Heart in the Highlands?" *The (London) Sunday Times* (Nov. 11, 1962), pp. 9-13 (color section) describes the Free Kirk influence in the West Highlands much as Bridie does in *Mr. Bolfry*.

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leads directly to immorality: "It's got the best record for church attendance and the highest illegitimacy rate in the Kingdom"—the charge that O'Casey made against the Catholic influence in Ireland. When the Minister finds the young people joking over their tea, he rebukes them sternly:

I have found you eating and drinking at unsuitable hours and indulging yourselves in unseemly levity and in that laughter that is like the crackling of thorns under a pot; and this on a day that we are enjoined to keep holy.

Jean accuses her uncle of hypocrisy, and echoing Beelzebub of *The Sunlight Sonata*, she says the God he worships is really the Devil. The young people decide to perform a midnight ritual and call up the Devil so that he can speak for himself. On the stroke of midnight Mr. Bolfry walks in, a beaming little gentleman dressed exactly like the Minister. The sound of merriment brings the McCrimmons into the parlor, and for the rest of the night the Minister and Mr. Bolfry argue.

Mr. Bolfry represents the vigorous, positive qualities which the Minister lacks, his freedom from repression being symbolized by his reaching for the Minister's medicinal whiskey and leaning over occasionally to pat the knee of the maid. The keynote of his philosophy is the freedom of the individual. He refers to the war in Europe and to the "lunatic" who is trying to regiment mankind, but the war that really interests him is a "Holy War"—a war to free man from his load of guilt and his fear of Hell and make him an *individual*, no longer one of a timid, trudging horde of "Christian Soldiers." He says his war is fought also for the freeing of man's genius—for the freedom of the artist and the poet. These points of concern suggest the dramatist's affinity with Shaw, as does Bolfry's emphasis on the creative impulse. Jean and Cully are wasting time, he says; why don't they fall in love? He is interested in such experiments, and as Devil from the Machine he offers to marry them—

Why is the blood galloping through your not unsightly limbs? Why are the nerve cells snapping and flashing in your head if you are to wrap this gift of life in a napkin and bury it in a back garden.

He claims to be a minister himself. To demonstrate his powers of exhortation he dons the Minister's second-best robe, takes a text from "the Gospel according to William Blake," and lashes the timid, negative virtues of his opponent and all his kind, scorning their hate and lies and fear, their superstition and their lack of charity. As he reaches his climax—

How long, O Lucifer, Son of the Morning, how long? How long will these fools listen to the quavering of impotent old priests, haters of the Life they never know?—

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the Minister seizes Cully's knife and starts after Bolfry, chasing him out of the house and to the edge of the precipice, where he "kills" him.

In this encounter the dramatist argues on both sides. Bolfry is his mouthpiece against the Minister's timid, repressive qualities; yet the pride of the dramatist is revealed no less than that of the Minister in McCrimmon's declaration that three hundred years of discipline in body, brain and soul has produced in Scotland "a breed of men that has not died out even in this shauchly generation." As the Minister explains the great principles of Calvinism, his language becomes that of a doctor whose long experience with human frailty has taught him to interpret these mysteries in terms of everyday life. Of Original Sin, for example, he says that anyone who has ever had a baby knows it "has every sensual vice of which it is anatomically capable with no spirituality to temper it." Of the division of mankind into the sheep and the goats—the Elect and the Damned—he tells his niece she need only look about her: "You pity the Damned—and inded it is your duty so to do. But you cannot deny that they exist." As for Predestination, if she does not believe in it, it is only because she will not face uncomfortable truths, just as she does not like the dentist's drill or the tax-gatherer's demand—for like these it is a fact.

The portrayal of the Minister is not satire on Calvinism but on what the Free Kirk has made of Calvinism, while the portrayal of Bolfry is a reminder that Calvinism originated in a spirit of freedom and rebellion which animated the sermons of John Knox but has been lost in the Free Kirk. This interpretation is supported by Bolfry's claim to have been ordained at Geneva about 1570 and to have preached, "among other places, in the High Kirk at North Berwick." It is supported by the fact that the protagonists agree on essential points of doctrine, and even by the fact that the Minister feels Bolfry to be his own heart speaking evil: "We've got the queer, dark corners in our mind and strange beasts in them that come out ranging in the night." Their reciprocal aspects are emphasized when Bolfry points to a portrait on the wall and remarks that its lineaments would not be recognizable if there were no sharp contrasts of black and white with some admixture of gray. Thus the play achieves what might be called a Hegelian synthesis.

Bridie's view of the Devil is kaleidoscopic, however, and changes within the play. Bolfry is not satisfied to be merely the Minister's other self. He reminds Jean that the Kingdom of Hell is within her as well as the Kingdom of Heaven, "and a number of other irrelevancies left over in the process of Evolution." He says she can never be happy until she reconciles these elements, but he warns her that they are irreconcil-



able. It is the *struggle* toward purpose that makes for progress rather than the *achievement*, he says. Denying the Minister's accusation that he is a Manichaeon, "full of Dualistic sophistications," he identifies himself with that instrument of Providence who afflicted Job's body for the good of his soul; with the enemy who makes progress difficult but without whom there can be no victory. Bolfry thus represents one aspect of the evolutionary concept as defined in *The Amazed Evangelist*.

Bridie's last two plays, though rich in comic detail, show a deeper concern with evil than any of the others. *The Queen's Comedy*<sup>13</sup> (1950), based on the fourteenth and fifteenth books of the *Iliad*, is a sharp satire on war, the Greek soldiers being portrayed as British "Tom-mies" and the Greek generals as British "military brass." The play gains impact with the knowledge that during World War I the dramatist served in France as a medical officer in charge of advanced dressing stations,<sup>14</sup> and with the further knowledge that he lost a son in World War II.<sup>15</sup> It raises the question "What is God and what is man's relation to him?" Until near the end, the answer is summed up in the play's epigraph:

As flies to wanton boys are we to the Gods:  
They kill us for their sport.

But in Jupiter's last speech there emerges an evolutionary concept in which war is seen as a temporary evil in a long process of development.

In an introductory scene, Jupiter, in the guise of an octopus, assures Thetis that he has not forgotten his promise to punish the Greeks for annoying her son Achilles. Meanwhile, in a Greek hospital tent an orderly dresses an infantryman's wounds while a dying man groans nearby. The orderly explains that a chariot wheel went over the "poor sucker." "Makes you think, doesn't it?" says the infantryman. "Makes you wonder what it's all for." The orderly answers that the Greeks have an ideal to fight for. "We got the right idea and they haven't, see? There's no place for blocks like them in the modern world." Nestor enters supporting young Dr. Machaon, great-great-grandson of Apollo. As the nurse Hecamede takes him in charge, Nestor says there has been a bit of a breakthrough and the general will have to act quickly to restore the situation. Agamemnon, Ulysses, and Diomed enter, unfold a map, and talk things over. Ajax is still holding the Y sector, says Nestor, but the Trojan chariots are concentrating behind his left flank and he is being harried by sharpshooters. As the staff officers leave, Agamemnon

<sup>13</sup> London, 1950.

<sup>14</sup> *One Way of Living*, p. 233.

<sup>15</sup> Winifred Bannister, *James Bridie and His Theatre* (London, 1955), p. 10.

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notices that the soldier on the stretcher is dead. "They ought to bury him," he says. "Depressing object for a hospital."

On Olympus the gods amuse themselves. As in the *Iliad*, Juno plays a trick on Jupiter in order to give the Greeks an advantage, and as in the *Iliad*, Jupiter is furious when he discovers what has happened. But he assures Juno that he has no malice whatever toward the Greeks, and that after he has fulfilled his promise to Thetis he will put Achilles into the battle "and give your fellows a really resounding victory." Acting on Jupiter's orders, Juno restores the "status quo ante."

Suddenly a number of shadows pass over the stage—"A convoy of Shades," explains Mercury, "on their way to the Styx and Avernus." To satisfy the curiosity of Venus he goes out with a butterfly net to catch a few. Meanwhile Nestor's voice rises from below, praying to the gods, reminding them of their promises that the Greeks should return to their homes. "Turn off that horrid thing!" says Juno. Mercury returns with four torn and bloody shades—Machaon, Hecamede, the orderly, and the infantryman. Juno thinks it may be possible to do something for Machaon since he had a god's blood in his veins, but with distaste she orders Mercury to restore the others to their convoy. But the orderly interrupts, and as the shadows continue to pass he bounds up to Jupiter's empty seat and in scathing language passes judgment on the gods. Jupiter, who has entered unobserved, now speaks, but no longer in his mythological character. Remarking that the Shades have missed their convoy, he says he will turn them into three stars and call them the Rebels. "They will be very interesting to astronomers in a few thousand years."

The satire on war is expressed through the humanity of the Rebels: through the idealism of the orderly, who thinks he is fighting for a way of life; through the bewilderment of the infantryman as to what concern it is of theirs that "One of them there Trojan Gussies pinched a general's Judy"; through nurse Hecamede's lack of enthusiasm for the "victory" which passed half the army through her hospital tent. The play satirizes the callous attitude of the General Staff toward the common soldier. It satirizes the shallow heartiness of Nestor, who tells the dying boy they'll get him patched up all right, "and you can have a spot of leave at Lemnos and buck around a bit with the girls and then come back and have another slap at them." It satirizes the snobbery of Juno: "Were the other persons of any importance?" she asks Machaon. "Of no great importance, my Lady," he answers, "except to themselves and to those who held them dear." There is satire and shock in Vulcan's rambling explanation of a gadget the size of a fist, equipped with a mechan-

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ism which, when released, will "split the atom and loose enough energy to lift Olympus off its hurdies."

The Rebels express various attitudes towards the gods. The faith of the orderly knows no bounds after Juno appears to him in a vision saying, "Charley boy, take it easy. I'm here to see your push through." The infantryman, more skeptical, asks what's to keep her from coming back tomorrow and saying, "Sorry, . . . I made a mistake. Forget it." Machaon believes everything that happens is part of a chain of cause and effect, and that if we go back far enough we get a First Cause. And he believes the gods are the First Cause. But Hecamede does not believe the gods "give a damn." She thinks the creative impulse itself is a great deception of the gods:

Hecamede: I think they make the birds sing and build their nests and the stags go crazy and the flowers blossom. And we and the birds and the stags and the flowers feel the Spring and the gaiety in us and think the gods must be good after all. Then the birds are netted and the stags are torn by hounds and the flowers are trampled, and we know what it all means.

Machaon: What does it all mean?

Hecamede: It means they want to make more birds and stags, flowers and people to be trapped and trampled and torn. That's really what they want. . . . What do they care?

The groping and striving and misplaced faith of the Rebels are all the more poignant in the light of the duplicity and frivolity of the gods. The character of Jupiter, however, requires special consideration. Early in the play there is a suggestion of another mythology when in response to Thetis' concern for Achilles Jupiter says he must think of all: "There are quarter of a million men in the Dardanelles, all made more or less in my image and capable of rejoicing and suffering, of foresight and afterthought." Most striking is his duality, a quality suggested by his appearing "in two minds about something" and emphasized in the words of Juno: "It is not possible to understand you. . . . You are . . . the inscrutable Master of all things. The sower, the reaper, the dishevelled, the builder-up." The idea of duality is further supported by the words of the scene shifters, with implications of long centuries of building and destroying:

We are the scene shifters.  
Ages after ages,  
Centenary after centenary  
We ha'e shifted the scenery.  
We heaved up the Pyramids;  
We dinged doon Persepolis;  
We hung the Hanging Gardens;



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We made Atahualpa's Palace,  
And here one for Solomon,  
And there one for Semiramis.  
Hamburg and Hiroshima  
We blasted into shards. . . .

Finally, Jupiter speaks in the accents of a Master Experimenter—one who does not himself know the final shape of things but is compelled by his very nature to keep on experimenting. He tells of his restless childhood, and of a day when his mother pulled off a chunk of Chaos from the round on the kitchen dresser and threw it at him. "There," she said, "Sonny, take that into the yard and do whatever you like with it." He tells of moulding his bit of Chaos until it looked "something like an egg and something like a sausage." He called his little toy the Universe. But he found his Universe hard to control because it was full of "mad, meaningless, fighting forces." He kept working, however, until by arranging the forces in a certain way he got a thing called Life. "Life is very interesting," he says. "I am still working on its permutations and combinations."

On being questioned by the Rebels, he says, he does not pretend to understand these matters, but he has noticed that the little lump at the end of the spinal cord of some of the higher apes has taken on "extensive and peculiar functions," one of which "appears to consist in explaining me and my little Universe. . . . Perhaps, in time, these little objects will attain to the properties and activities of the Immortal Gods themselves." This is the concept of a Master Experimenter "who is in a sense my Father" and of man as one of the experiments and a tool of the Experimenter. "I have not nearly completed my Universe," adds Jupiter. "There is plenty of time. Plenty of time. You must have patience."

In *The Baikie Charivari* or *The Seven Prophets*<sup>16</sup> (1952), the evil with which the dramatist is concerned is the disorder in modern society. This disorder is viewed through the eyes and mind of Pounce-Pellott, Britain's erstwhile representative to India, who has come home to Baikie to retire. But Baikie has changed greatly since he left, having discarded its old values and adopted new ones. "Allah, the Disheveller, had been there afore him." The play dramatizes the role of Pounce-Pellott as rebel, judge, and truth-seeker as the prophets of confusion pursue him, each on behalf of his own ideology.

The play moves back and forth from naturalism to fantasy and makes considerable use of expressionistic devices. The hero is named for two of his famous ancestors—Pontius Pilate, who was both judge

<sup>16</sup> London, 1953.



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and seeker after truth, and Punch of Punch-and-Judy fame, a born rebel against authority.<sup>17</sup> The wife and seventeen-year-old daughter of Pounce are Judy and Baby of the Punch legend, and the seven prophets are derived from the same source, though greatly transformed.

The pursuit theme is established in the Prologue. A devil mask appears in the moon, and the Devil, like Beelzebub of *The Sunlight Sonata*, broods over his town and its inhabitants:

This is my Baikie. . . .  
Lulled by the wash of the waves of the Clyde  
And soothed by the sight of white sails and the cries of the sea  
birds. . . .

When Dr. Beadle appears the devil mask vanishes, but the Devil's voice comes down to him, speaking the words God spoke to Job's Satan:

Hae ye considered my servant Pounce-Pellott?  
There isna his marrow in a' the yerd—  
A wyse, independent, sel'saining carle,  
Wha gangs his gate and lippens to nane. . . .

Beadle supposes the voice to be that of the Almighty himself—a supposition which supports the assertion of Beelzebub in *The Sunlight Sonata* that the God men worship is really the Devil—and promises to do his best to shake Pounce-Pellott's spiritual pride.

One by one the seven prophets pay a visit to Pounce, who invites them all to a symposium at which they are to teach him how he and his family can best adjust themselves to their new life. But at the gathering five nights later confusion knows no limit. Each prophet champions his own cause and attacks the others. They interrupt and insult each other; they indulge in irrelevancies; they introduce arguments within arguments. Pounce tries to understand all viewpoints but finds no sense in any of them. Baby wails, "I didn't want to be born into this bloody world." Finally, as rainbow lights flicker to Punch-and-Judy music, Pounce lays about him with his stick and kills all the prophets. Then, as in the legend, the Devil appears:<sup>18</sup>

Pounce: Have you come to take me?  
Devil: I was wondering.  
Pounce: I'm ready.  
Devil: I'm thinking you've jouked me for the moment. It may be you've jinked me a'thegither. Time will tell us.

<sup>17</sup> Bridie notes a tradition that Pontius Pilate was a Scotsman, and another tradition that Punch is a projection of Pontius Pilate. "Note on *The Baikie Chari-vari*," *Ibid.*, xiii-xiv.

<sup>18</sup> Walter Elliott notes the similarity between this encounter and that of Peer Gynt with the Button-Moulder. *Ibid.*, Preface, ix.

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Pounce: Can I wait for time?

Devil: I dinna ken.

A major aspect of the play is its satire on the values of the modern world. The power of Money is represented by Mrs. Jemima Lee Crowe, an American woman publisher who offers Pounce \$10,000 for the world rights of his Indian reminiscences, with more to come. The authority of Science, with emphasis on Psychiatry, is represented by Dr. Jean Potheary, who sees Pounce's return to his mother country as a "regression to foetal life." When Pounce expresses dismay at the scientist's invention of methods to destroy mankind, she exclaims defensively, "But we don't *control* them."

Joey Mascara represents Anarchism, whether in art, morals, or government. When he nominates the artist as the truest interpreter of God's meaning, Mrs. Crowe remarks that art is "inferentially unintelligible" and he had better provide them with a code. His moral anarchism is suggested by the circumstances which caused him to lose his job as organist in Beadle's church. ("What do the wee girls join the choir for?" he asks. "It's not as if they could sing.") His political anarchism appears in his debate with Mr. Copper, Controller for the Ministry of Interference, who represents the authority of Government. When Copper speaks pompously of the thousand "channels" that must be constantly checked and controlled, Mascara retorts that the Government should "let us alone." He objects especially to "wee bullies" who "take the law into their own hands." Thus the mutual recriminations of these two satirize the extremes of authoritarianism and anarchism.

The sanctions of Religion and Communism are represented by Dr. Beadle and Ketch the plumber, each of whom accuses the other of adherence to plain dogma. As the argument moves into fantasy, Mascara sums up the distortions of both ideologies:

Old Beadle found a baby in a byre  
Who grew to be a poet and talked sense.  
Beadle forgot the sense  
And he twisted the poetry till no sane man  
could believe a word of it. . . .  
Young Ketch found a hope for the poor and wretched  
In a system for binding the bullies in chains.  
And now, by Heavens, we're all in chains. . . .

But the main interest centers in Pounce-Pellott as he rejects all these forces that would dominate and regulate him. When he has killed all the prophets except Beadle and Ketch, he declares that he will not lie down and be crushed:

BRIDIE AND THE MASTER EXPERIMENTER

I must stand up against the millstones.  
I must split them in four with my human hands.  
I must breathe once more.

Pounce is not only a rebel; he is a *concerned* rebel—concerned not so much for himself as for the next generation. His concern is symbolized by a dream in which he sees Baby about to be initiated into a coven of witches. Just as the Devil is about to give her the pinch that will make her membership official, Pounce awakes terrified.

As truth-seeker Pounce gets no answer but "I dinna ken." These words, usually spoken by a minor character, are frequently heard in Bridie's plays. In *The Kitchen Comedy*,<sup>19</sup> as a materialist, a serialist, and a traditionalist discuss theology, one turns to the village idiot and asks: "What do you think about it all, Hughie? What do you think we are here for, and what do you think is going to happen to us?" "I dinna ken," giggles Hughie. In *John Knox*,<sup>20</sup> someone asks a mulatto clog-dancer, "Jerry, what do you think is the meaning of religion?" "I dunno," answers Jerry. In *The Queen's Comedy* Jupiter himself does not know the answers, nor does the Devil in *The Baikie Charivari*. The pressure of time gives special urgency to Pounce's questions:

Pounce: Can I wait for time?  
Devil: I dinna ken.  
Pounce: If you don't know, who knows? Nobody knows. Nobody knows.  
I've killed all those fools who pretended to know. And so—  
and so—  
With the soothsayers littered about the stage  
That I slew in my rage,  
Who did not know—and no more do I—  
I must jest again and await my reply.

The last line, expressing Pounce's courage as well as his frustration, makes the point that Jupiter makes with the Rebels and truth-seekers of *The Queen's Comedy*: "You must have patience."

But hope dawns as young Toby the plumber's apprentice appears out of nowhere and asks to marry Baby—

Pounce: I don't know who you are.  
Toby: Neither does anybody, Mister. Neither do I. You see, I've no richt begun, yet.

But as Baby is willing, Pounce gives his consent. Professor Renwick sees this detail as an expression of faith in life which defeats the Devil.<sup>21</sup> It is the Master Experimenter's newest experiment.

<sup>19</sup> *Susannah and the Elders and Other Plays* (London, 1940).

<sup>20</sup> *John Knox and Other Plays* (London, 1949).

<sup>21</sup> W. L. Renwick, "James Bridie the Playwright," *The College Courant*, 3 (1951), 98.

#### STUDIES IN SCOTTISH LITERATURE

The six plays that have been discussed show Bridie himself as truth-seeker. They show his persistent effort to synthesize the Calvinist idea of God with the Huxleian concept of an evolutionary process. They also show his effort to include in the evolutionary concept both good and evil as reciprocating opposites, thereby denying the idea of a dualistic universe with evil as an independent force. He comes near achieving a complete synthesis of these ideas in *The Queen's Comedy* with the portrayal of Jupiter as a Master Experimenter who combines the functions of creating and destroying and is in a sense his Father, and of man as one of the experiments and a tool of the Experimenter. It must be admitted that the Calvinistic aspect of this portrayal is weak. Frequent references to Calvinistic doctrine and the frequent appearance of fantasy devils reveal the dramatist's profound moral and emotional involvement with Calvinism; but the core of his thought, his experimental approach, and his suspension of final judgment are Huxleian.

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