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Introduction: the inter-war years

When the second war broke out in Europe, the French theatre had come to the end of an era. The inter-war period had witnessed the triumph of literary drama and poetic production style; Jouvet, Dullin and other outstanding directors had achieved world-wide fame with glittering productions of plays by a new school of playwrights led by Giraudoux, Cocteau, Salacrou. By the end of the thirties, this literary and poetic theatre was firmly established in the public eye as the distinctive French contribution to modern drama. It received the official seal of approval when Jacques Copeau, the man who was considered to be its chief architect, was appointed director of the Comédie Française in 1940.

Four decades earlier, at the time of *la belle époque*, Copeau had set himself the task of purifying the decadent elements of the French stage. His career in the theatre started, not as a director, but as an author and critic. In the early years of the century he published a series of theatre reviews in which he developed a searing criticism of the state of Parisian theatre. The terms of his attack were more moral than artistic: he claimed that the modern theatre was guilty of cunningly corrupting the public's tastes in order that they might more easily be satisfied. He accused the actors of vanity, the theatre managers of rapacity, and claimed that 'fine craftsmanship' and 'aesthetic dignity' were dead (see Borgal, 1960: 29–42). He was offended by superficial bedroom farces, and by lavish productions in which sensational stage effects were sought as ends in themselves.

In place of this corruption, he wanted to see a theatre that was simple but inventive, one in which the play and its performance became an integrated whole, and in which the audience's attention would be directed towards the playwright's ideas rather than towards the effects displayed by actor or designer. He could see no evidence of good playwriting among his contemporaries, and claimed that the only way to make a new beginning was to return to Molière and Shakespeare. He valued these playwrights, not only for the quality of their ideas, but also for their ability to write plays that found natural expression in performance, plays that did not call for extraneous spectacular effects: 'with them there is no intermediary between poetic creation and its true theatrical realisation. Dramatic invention and stage production are merely the two phases of a single action' (Borgal, 1963: 18).

In 1913 Copeau founded the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier in the student quarter of Paris, far from the fashionable boulevard theatres, where he hoped to produce a repertoire of plays combining revivals of the classics and good

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plays of the previous decades as well as occasional new plays of quality. For a theatre that is now considered to have been so influential, the Vieux-Colombier company had a remarkably short and troubled existence. It played for only one season before war broke out, then spent two seasons (1917–19) in America before returning to Paris, where it performed for only four and a half seasons before its final dissolution. Moreover it did little to reveal vigorous new playwrights: the only new play of lasting merit ‘discovered’ by Copeau was *Le Paquebot Tenacity* by Charles Vildrac (1920). But for Copeau the founding of his theatre school was more important than the success or failure of these professional seasons, since he believed that the profound transformation of the French stage would take a generation. This theatre school flourished alongside the theatre in the early twenties and it followed Copeau to his home in Burgundy when he withdrew from the Vieux-Colombier in 1924.

The training given at the school was based on a quasi-religious search for truth through a mystical trinity of qualities: *le Beau*, *le Bien* and *le Vrai*. Emphasis was laid on cultivating the complete man, not just the technical faculties, and on training actors to work for the group rather than for themselves. Discipline was harsh, control of the body a major priority. The early stages of training relied solely on physical exercise and cultivation of expressive faculties of the body, with an absolute ban on using words. After he had left Paris, he continued to work along similar lines with a shifting group of followers known for a while as *Les Copiaus*, later branching out on their own as *La Compagnie des Quinze*.

One of Copeau’s central preoccupations was with the need for the skills of playwright, actor and director to be so closely integrated that they became indistinguishable. Another was the need to develop a new performance vocabulary of modern types similar to the old masks of the *Commedia dell’arte*. In both these respects, though he himself failed, he anticipated later developments. The *Compagnie des Quinze* helped to realise the first by taking on André Obey as resident dramatist and working closely with him on a number of plays, the most successful of which was *Noé* (1931). The practice of employing a resident dramatist has become much more common since the war, especially in some of the decentralised companies. The second aim was to be fulfilled, quite literally, by the *Théâtre du Soleil* in 1975 with their play *L’Age d’or* (see chapter 9). In order to achieve these aims, Copeau believed that the Italianate theatre with boxes, footlights, and *trompe-l’oeil* scenery must be abandoned in favour of something more like the Elizabethan stage. His architectural restructuring of the stage of the Vieux-Colombier became a model for later directors, actors and designers with similar aims.

During the 1930s Copeau occupied a more marginal position in the French theatre, acknowledged as the originator of a great movement of renewal, but doing relatively little in the way of production work. There were some notable exceptions however, especially two open-air festival productions in Florence of large-scale plays on religious themes. In their attempt to do more than just entertain, and in their use of multiple acting areas, these productions also anticipated the work of the *Théâtre du Soleil*. Copeau’s name was often

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mentioned during this period, as a likely director of the Comédie Française. When his appointment finally came, it was in 1940 as the replacement for Edouard Bourdet, knocked down by a car in the black-out. Bourdet had been appointed under the Front Populaire to reform the old institution. He had initiated a system of inviting in guest directors (of whom Copeau was one) and survived the fall of the Government that appointed him. But 1940 was the worst possible time for someone with Copeau's reforming zeal to take over that post. He was not prepared to treat the Vichy authorities with tact and only kept the post for a few months.

At the end of the thirties, Copeau's authority was considerable and his reputation high. He was respected by the public for having tried to make long-term changes in the standard of French theatre. He was respected by actors and directors, many of whom he had taught, for having set his standards high and having restored some dignity to the profession. But this did not prevent him from becoming caught, early in 1940, in an uncomfortably contradictory position. As director of the Comédie Française, he was expected to foster the tradition of preserving high culture for the Parisian upper bourgeoisie. But as early as 1924, his rationale for a school had included the necessity of decentralisation, so that the theatre could escape from the destructive influence of Paris. After his short term at the Comédie Française, it was this second aspect of Copeau's work that reaffirmed itself in his publication of *Le Théâtre populaire* (see chapter 2).

Copeau had many disciples, among whom he considered the most important to be Louis Jouvet and Charles Dullin. Both had broken away from the Vieux Colombier at a relatively early date, Jouvet in 1922 and Dullin in 1918. Dullin, in fact, performed for only one season with Copeau, though he afterwards claimed that he had learned more from Copeau in that year than in the whole of his previous career (Borgal, 1963: 106), and like Copeau he set up a school which functioned alongside the theatre. But it was the establishment of the Cartel in 1927 that has rightly been seen as one of the chief factors in prolonging and confirming Copeau's ideas. The Cartel was a loose association between four theatres, run by Jouvet, Dullin, the Pitoëffs and Baty. All four agreed to a common policy which was summed up in a manifesto which appeared in *Entr'Acte*, a review published by Jouvet's theatre. The values expressed in the manifesto are similar to those of Copeau's 1913 manifesto ('Un essai de rénovation théâtrale'): respect for the text, simplicity and truthfulness in staging, the search for poetic impact rather than spectacular effect. Their attitude towards the public was also similar. They asked for intelligent participation, offered lectures and other supplementary events, and insisted on starting punctually. At a time when theatres were not expected to start for at least half an hour after the advertised time, this was quite a bold step and involved Dullin in a prolonged battle with the press when a critic arrived to find the doors closed and the play begun. The four Cartel directors also pledged themselves to publish each others' programmes and so to try to extend the audience that each was building up.

In the late 1930s, Jouvet had built up almost as much prestige as Copeau. He

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had been a teacher at the Conservatoire since 1934, and had been offered the directorship of the Comédie Française in 1936 (he refused, suggesting that Bourdet be asked to direct, taking on Copeau, Dullin, Baty and himself as guest directors, a solution that was accepted). He was known as the director who had revealed Giraudoux to the theatre-going public and who continued a fruitful collaboration with him, but who also triumphed with classical productions, such as his 1936 *L'École des femmes* and with modern comedies such as Jules Romains' *Knock ou le triomphe de la médecine*. Jouvet had more of the showman and less of the professor in him than Copeau, but he retained from his period with Copeau an emphasis on the coming together of text and performance in a united artistic whole: 'I only discover the meaning of a play through the work of staging: sets, movements, rhythms and diction are all essential elements for me in the discovery, experience and understanding of a play' (Borgal, 1963: 80).

In his partnership with Giraudoux, Jouvet had achieved what Copeau had only dreamed of: a working relationship with a writer such that writing and staging became two parts of the same creative process. Some of the plays produced by this tandem still seem masterpieces of theatrical invention – *Intermezzo*, for example – while others now seem excessively wordy. Jouvet and Giraudoux's biggest success of the 1930s, *La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu* is one of those that now seem wordy. The scenic inventiveness of Jouvet helped to put across plays of the latter kind, where the dramatic action is weak. Jouvet did not regard the lack of action as a serious weakness provided that the literary qualities of the text were sufficient. He always insisted that good drama was, in the first place, good writing. But his idea of good writing included notions of rhythm, poetry, pace etc. He claimed that the theatre's job was not to make its audience understand something but to make them feel it deeply. In *L'Impromptu de Paris* Giraudoux wrote a dialogue between Jouvet and his lead actor Pierre Renoir, in which Jouvet poured scorn on the idea that the function of the audience was to *understand* and Renoir agreed: 'Luckily the best theatre audience does not respond with its intellect but with its feelings . . . People who insist on understanding a play in the theatre are people with no understanding of theatre' (1982: 708). For the next generation of writers and directors the example of the collaboration between Giraudoux and Jouvet became an important encouragement.

Another aspect of Jouvet's work was also to be taken as an example by directors in the post-war period: his film career. At a time when there was almost no public subsidy at all for theatres like those of the Cartel, one way to subsidise theatre production was to take on a film role during the summer months when the theatres in Paris are closed. Jouvet, who excelled in comic roles on the stage, had an extraordinarily powerful screen presence. Where his acting style on stage was large, even grotesque, his film style was restrained, muted, with a constant hint of mystery beneath the surface. His face became extremely well known in the late thirties through taking roles in a number of films such as Renoir's *Les Bas-Fonds* (1936) or Carné's *Hôtel du Nord* (1938). His example was followed by several post-war directors for the same reasons, notably Barrault and Dasté.

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Dullin, like Jouvet, had a conception of theatre that was not content to mirror reality, but that viewed it as a world apart governed by its own laws, a poetic world in which the life of the imagination took precedence. He claimed to find his models in the Commedia dell'arte and the Japanese theatre, from which he also borrowed some of the techniques fused in his school. An impression of work at the school given by Artaud: 'We act with our deepest hearts, we act with our hands, our feet, all our muscles, and all our limbs. We feel the object, we smell it, we handle it, see it, hear it . . . and all the time there is nothing there, no accessories. The Japanese are our immediate masters, our inspiration, and so is Edgar Poe. It is wonderful!' (cit. Knowles, 1972: 19).

As well as Artaud, Dullin attracted Jean-Louis Barrault, André Barsacq, Roger Blin, Jean Vilar, Maurice Sarrazin, Claude Martin, Alain Cuny, Jean Marchat, Madeleine Robinson, Jean Marais, Marguerite Jamois and many others to his school. He made it possible for Barrault to try out his early experiments in total theatre: *Autour d'une mère* (1935) and *La Faim* (1939). Through this school, and the example of his productions, Dullin influenced a very large number of the young generation of actors, directors and writers. His conception of the theatre was demanding and all-embracing. He saw it as a force for cultural and social regeneration. Not finding many modern plays that matched these ambitions, he produced many versions of plays from the classical repertoire, particularly the Greeks and the Elizabethans, with maximum use of colour, mime, music, and a rich deployment of stage resources. His most famous productions of the period were probably *Volpone* (first produced in 1928) and *Richard III* (1933).

Being interested in a global all-inclusive theatre, he naturally laid some stress on the ancient Greeks, producing two of Aristophanes' plays. Sartre gave some lectures to his school in the early years of the Occupation and *Les Mouches* was a natural choice for production by Dullin. Sartre records that he learnt his craft as a dramatist through watching Dullin rehearse. He would say to the actors: 'ne jouez pas les mots – jouez les situations' (do not act the words – act the situations. Sartre, 1969). Sartre made this his guiding principle as a playwright, as he showed by his constant references to 'un théâtre de situations' (see chapter 3).

Among the modern authors regularly produced by Dullin before the war were Pirandello and Salacrou. Salacrou also showed how much he learnt from Dullin about theatre as a total art form in the prefaces and notes to his plays. These present striking similarities with pronouncements by Sartre at the same time, demonstrating the influence of Dullin on both writers. But something shared even more strongly by all three was the conviction that the theatre could not survive without broadening the social basis of its audience. This was one of Dullin's favourite themes and in 1937 he was commissioned by the Front Populaire government to write a report on the decentralisation of the theatre. The report produced no action at the time, but was influential after the war (see below pp. 14–15).

Georges Pitoëff and his wife, Ludmila, shared with Dullin and Jouvet a belief that theatre is not best suited to the naturalist mode of representing reality. Before coming to Paris, the Pitoëffs had worked for several years in Russia

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(where the father of Georges had been manager of the Tiflis state theatre), had undergone and rejected the influence of Stanislavsky, and had worked as producers in Geneva for seven years. In the theatre which they directed from 1922–39 they therefore brought to the French audiences many plays by foreign authors, especially Chekhov, Pirandello, Shaw, Schnitzler and Molnar. But their stage style was characterised by simplicity and imaginative qualities closer to the work of Copeau or Jouvet than to the Expressionists in Germany or their contemporaries in post-revolutionary Russia. They held that the production of any given play had to give scenic form to the invisible forces contained in that play. A famous example of this was their setting for Shaw's *Saint Joan* (1925) which stressed the idea of saintliness by using a permanent scenic structure reminiscent of an altarpiece: a central gothic arch with two half arches on either side, and stage groupings that concentrated the audience's attention on the upward thrust, suggesting a constant movement heavenward. The Pitoëff couple also put on a large number of plays by contemporary French authors, including Lenormand, Cocteau, Anouilh and Claudel, but failed to find an author with whom to work on a regular basis as Jouvet did in Giraudoux.

The fourth member of the Cartel was Gaston Baty, whose productions were responsible for bringing the stage techniques of Expressionism to the Parisian theatre. His general tendency was away from the simplicity and dependence on the actor that characterised the other three members of the group and towards complex staging using multiple levels and picturesque settings. Like Craig, he had a life-long interest in puppet theatre and shared with him an ambitious view of the role of the producer. Unlike the other three Cartel members, he was not an actor and this perhaps explains why he paid as much if not more attention to the pictorial elements of staging as he did to the actor. He was particularly remembered for his attack on the excessive verbosity of French theatre, an attack that had something in common with Artaud's later fulminations. His choice of emphasis was expressed as follows: 'Painting, sculpture, the dance, prose, verse, song, music, these are the seven chords stretched side by side on the lyre of drama (cit. Knowles, 1967: 36).

The work of Copeau and the Cartel has been exhaustively studied by French theatre historians and large claims have been made for it. Undoubtedly, it succeeded in establishing high standards of acting, production and design, during the inter-war period. It also succeeded in broadening the outlook of the French theatre, showing that foreign plays (e.g. Pirandello or Chekhov) and foreign classics (e.g. the Elizabethans) could have a popular appeal and could be made to speak in a direct way to contemporary French audiences. These were lessons not lost on French theatre after the war.

The Cartel directors did not wait for theatre historians; they made large claims for themselves. Dullin wrote that in the renewal of French theatre the directors had come to the rescue of the authors, teaching them the forgotten skill of writing for the theatre: 'authors seem to have lost contact with the theatre ... It is they who are responsible for the excessive, sometimes damaging importance of theatre directors. It is from this misfortune that we have the new barbarism "retheatricalisation of the theatre". To speak plainly,

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the directors are forced to teach the authors what they no longer know, that is to say the rules of the theatre game' (cit. Gouhier, 1943: 228–9).

This claim can probably be justified. On his own admission, Sartre learnt how to write for the theatre by watching Dullin. He had written only fiction and essays before the war; afterwards he was to become one of France's most successful dramatists. In a more general way, the tendency of authors to write plays that seem to require performance is a great deal more marked in the post-war period than it was in the inter-war period. The point can be rather sharply exemplified by contrasting Giraudoux with Genet, both authors brought to the stage by Jouvet. While Giraudoux's work always remained essentially that of a man of letters, Genet's is unmistakably that of someone who has a very sophisticated grasp of the nature of a performance art. It seems likely that by the end of the thirties the reforms and innovations brought about in the art of the theatre by Copeau and the Cartel had become sufficiently embedded in the consciousness of playgoers, playwrights and professional theatre workers to bring about that *rethéâtralisation du théâtre* claimed by Dullin.

What neither Copeau nor the Cartel could bring about was the larger cultural revolution that they had aimed at. The subsidies they received were almost non-existent, their theatres were small and depended on a regular audience of well-educated middle class Parisians. In these circumstances, it was not possible for them to become centres of social and cultural regeneration. But it is to their great credit that they understood this clearly and pointed towards the solution, especially Dullin in his report and Copeau in *Le Théâtre populaire*. The programmes of the successful decentralised theatres of the fifties were modelled very closely on the kinds of repertoire that had characterised the work of the Cartel between the wars, a fact that the directors of these theatres have been the first to recognise. Jouvet, Dullin and Baty all gave their active support to the establishment of these centres, as will be seen in chapter 5.

Less influential at the time than the tradition of Copeau and the Cartel, but equally efficient at capturing the headlines was a tradition of avant-garde theatre which looked back to Apollinaire and to Jarry. The performances of *Ubu Roi* at the Théâtre de L'Oeuvre in 1896, which had provoked Yeats' famous dictum, 'After us, the savage god', were venerated by the inter-war avant-garde as the first manifestation of a truly modern consciousness. *Ubu Roi* still retains its aggressive and subversive power. In the course of its brief parodistic action, everything is distorted, vilified, denounced. Its spirit is well summed up in Jarry's own comment: 'We must get rid of certain notoriously horrible and incomprehensible objects, which uselessly clutter up the stage, particularly the sets and the actors' (1962: 140).

Jarry died young in 1907 but his writings were admired by Apollinaire, who also wrote a Surrealist play *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, and by the Surrealist group, who republished some of Jarry's more obscure works. Breton, the leader of the Surrealists, who maintained a dictatorial control over the movement, always admired *Ubu Roi*.

This admiration was shared by Antonin Artaud, whose first theatre project

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was named 'Le Théâtre Alfred Jarry'. Artaud's life and work belong almost entirely to the period before the war, and yet, by 1939, he was still a relatively unknown figure. His influence did not extend beyond a narrow circle of Parisian friends until after the war, but since then it has assumed ever greater proportions, until he is now seen as the most influential French man of the theatre this century. His work has been interpreted by innumerable critics and there is no study of the modern theatre that does not devote a section to him. It will therefore not be necessary to summarise his work here. What we shall discuss, in later chapters of this book, is how his ideas have been interpreted and used, sometimes misinterpreted and misused, by theatre practitioners since the war.

In the theatre since the war he has chiefly been known through his collection of essays *Le Théâtre et son double*. This book, almost unnoticed at its first publication in 1938, only became generally known after its re-issue in 1944. It is not a simple theatre handbook, but a visionary work, in which Artaud proclaims an entirely new conception of theatre. He shares Jarry's desire to sweep away all the trappings of the French stage as he found it in the twenties and thirties. But he goes beyond Jarry for he also has a positive vision of what should exist in its place. It is an idea of theatre that is fundamentally religious, although it does not proceed from any established religion. It assumes that the function of theatre is to group people together in order to touch and release the hidden springs of life and the dark wells of emotion that the routine of so-called civilised life normally obscures.

In order to achieve this, Artaud insists on the necessity of doing away with the rationalistic theatre of the word as enshrined in the classic French tradition. Instead (like Mallarmé in his *Crayonné au théâtre*, 1887) he stresses the ways in which theatre can release irrational forces and communicate by means other than words. In a much more violent, apocalyptic tone, he echoes Baty's call for the expressive use of sounds, lights, colours, movements and appeals to complex sign systems that would enable the actor to become a moving hieroglyph. Suffering and cruelty are never far from his preoccupations and a number of critics have suggested that although he failed in productions like *Les Cenci* (1935) to bring his 'theatre of Cruelty' to fulfilment, he achieved it in his own life. This idea was suggested by Gide, by Barrault and by many others, and given detailed expression by Alain Virmaux in his definitive study *Antonin Artaud et le théâtre*. It is summarised by Esslin, following Virmaux: 'The plays Artaud wrote and produced were far from perfect, but his own life was the perfect tragedy perfectly enacted. That is why its impact continues beyond the grave' (1976: 115).

Artaud was expelled from the Surrealist movement by André Breton in 1928. After his departure, the official Surrealist group made little contribution to innovation in the theatre, partly because of Breton's mania for poor melodrama. It is a curious fact that Jarry and Ionesco, the two major dramatists whose work would seem to qualify as Surrealist, were both active outside the inter-war years, when the impact of Surrealism on poetry and painting was so decisive. Throughout the inter-war years, the main centre of Surrealist

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experimental theatre was the Laboratoire de Recherches Art et Action run by Madame Akakia-Viala, Louise Lara and Edouard Autant. Their aim was:

Renewal of theatre, both form and content . . . creation of synchronism between the different forms of dramatic expression; evocation of the abstract by concrete means; use of old themes and myths, not disinterred and restored but brutally renewed . . . recourse to the fantastic and the grotesque to convey thoughts of gravity and concepts of the deepest pathos (cit. Vais, 1978: 35).

This programme suggests clear affinities with Ionesco's stated aims in the theatre and so it is not surprising to learn that his first acting role (in 1948) was in a production by Akakia-Viala and that his first play was produced by Nicolas Bataille, who had also worked with members of Art et Action. This group had a long life, beginning before the First World War, and only coming to an end in 1952, when the New Theatre was almost established.

Among the various experiments in Surrealist playwriting that took place between the wars, the work of Vitrac stands out. His *Les Mystères de l'amour* produced at Artaud's Théâtre Alfred Jarry in 1927 had been an attempt to construct a play using the principles of automatic writing. His *Victor ou les enfants au pouvoir* (1928, also Théâtre Alfred Jarry) was a parody of the bourgeois *drame* in which the sordid greed and licentiousness of the French middle class mentality was exposed by the naive view of a precocious boy genius, only nine years old but already six feet tall. This play also looks forward to Ionesco's early work and has been successfully revived a number of times since the second war. Vitrac continued to write until his death in 1952, using a farcical, music-hall style to satirise the bourgeoisie, though his plays did not at first reach beyond avant-garde audiences.

Cocteau was known as a playwright on the fringes of Surrealism but his light-hearted early works such as *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel* (1921) had given way to ponderous reworkings of Greek myths and so, despite his tendency to shock, and the whiff of scandal that always surrounded his activities, he was not seen as a threat to the traditions of French literary theatre. In fact it was quite the reverse: he and Giraudoux were seen as the chief standard-bearers of the new literary revival, in which poetic plays on classical subjects were once more holding the stage as they had done in the *grand siècle*. It was Cocteau's film *Le Sang d'un poète* (first released 1932) that qualified for the epithet Surrealist rather than any of his recent plays.

Cocteau's interest in adapting Greek myth was shared by other writers, notably Giraudoux, Gide and Anouilh who, along with other authors, whose reputations have not survived, were thought of as a new school of literary dramatists. It is perhaps natural that in a culture so dominated by the awareness of its neo-classical writers, especially Racine and Corneille, any literary revival should also turn back to the classical myths. They offer a chance to deal with the great subjects and an escape from the apparent mediocrity of contemporary life. For theatres appealing to the educated class they also offered something familiar, an assurance that the quality of 'culturedness' was being preserved despite occasional anachronisms, vulgarities, or hints at contemporary events,

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like the long scarf of Cocteau's *Jocasta*, so reminiscent of the one that strangled Isadora Duncan when it became entangled in the wheel of a sports car.

But by the end of the 1930s, the strains imposed on the classical material by successive adaptations were becoming too great. The only successful attempts after 1939 were Sartre's *Les Mouches* and Anouilh's *Antigone*, both of which in different ways challenge the assumption that classical material makes for literary quality (see chapter 3). However, it did not become immediately apparent to many people involved with French theatre that the classical adaptation had seen its best days. The matter was complicated by the association of classical material and the verse play. Various attempts at verse drama, particularly those of Claudel during the war and T. S. Eliot after the war (Eliot's work had a considerable vogue in France just after the war) led many people to believe that the literary/verse/classical play was in the vanguard of French theatre. This helps to explain why, when the New Theatre of Genet, Adamov, Ionesco and Beckett first appeared, it took so many people, especially the critics, unawares.

At the outbreak of war, Anouilh was just becoming known as one of the most important young French dramatists. In some respects his early plays seem very clearly a part of the inter-war literary theatre movement. His dialogue displays a debt to Giraudoux in its use of wit and whimsy, and his frequent use of a play within the play shows that he had also learnt from Pirandello. But there are other aspects of these plays that look forward to the theatre of the forties and explain why Sartre was able to claim him as an Existentialist playwright (1973: 55–67). They are partly a matter of theme and partly of style. In theme, Anouilh's early plays develop with some bitterness a protest against class distinctions and a belief that someone who has had to suffer the privations of poverty in childhood can never entirely break free from the experience. In *Le Voyageur sans bagage* (1936), Anouilh also develops the idea that we have no fixed centre to our identity, but are the victims of the images that others have of us. This theme is developed in a manner reminiscent of Pirandello but which also looks forward to Sartre.

In style, Anouilh's early plays make a clear departure from the psychological case-study drama that was common between the wars. His characters are not subtle or rounded individual case histories: they are much more like types or masks. In fact, as has frequently been pointed out, they exist by virtue of their relationship to the other characters, the young innocent girl contrasting with the corrupt old baroness and so on. Their qualities appear in their actions and encounters rather than in soliloquies or investigations and for this reason they appealed to Sartre. Above all, Anouilh's work of this period was significant in establishing a style that was dramatic, playful, poetic, able to deal with contemporary subjects without being simply mimetic or naturalistic.

For the first collected publication of his plays in 1942 he divided them into *pièces roses* and *pièces noires*, and it was his first *pièce rose*, *Le Bal des voleurs*, that made a hit with the public. It was produced by André Barsacq with the Compagnie des Quatre Saisons in 1938 and revived by him in 1940 as his first production at the Atelier theatre, where he had succeeded Charles Dullin.