

**"The Twin Sisters in the Family of Fiction":
Pirandellian Praxis and the Dramatic Narratives
of
Ngaio Marsh**

- Bruce Harding -

In aftermath of the Marsh Centenary [1995] I wish to explore, in a necessarily suggestive manner, the influence of Dame Ngaio's extensive involvement with the theatre upon her craft, her praxis if you will, as a front-rank detective novelist. I wish to propose an explicit relation between Ngaio Marsh's absorption in theatre and the narrative method and predominant themes of her detective novels. Aside from the works of Shakespeare (of whose plays she mounted over 30 productions in New Zealand), her favourite single play - as a challenging one to realise dramatically - would undoubtedly have been Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921). This was a text for which Marsh nursed a particular and lasting affection since she first saw it in a London production of Tyrone Guthrie in the 1932 season. The praxis of this play fascinated Marsh, as an experienced amateur theatre practitioner newly arrived in London, an absorption which lasted for decades. To adopt an unsubtle synecdoche, in my perspective *Six Characters* offers us both lock and key in gaining an oblique but immensely potent means of access to the heart of Dame Ngaio's inner-most perceptions and life-world.

In a number of papers and addresses over the years, Marsh insisted upon the fact that New Zealand theatre-goers (as members of a British colony) were steeped in the traditions of Victorian melodrama (inevitably so in a nation which was formally constituted in 1840 with the signing of The Treaty of Waitangi between Britain's Governor Hobson and many of the native Māori chiefs).¹ In 1965 Marsh, giving a talk entitled 'The Theatre in Australasia', noted that melodrama, "with its standardised figures of virtue and vice was a slightly ridiculous descendant of

the [mediaeval] Mystery", and that a key source of that form's attraction lay in its pandering to a "a dim wish to identify with good and have all the fun of seeing evildoers confounded."² I shall argue in this paper that the metaphysic (or, more correctly, the anti-metaphysic) of Pirandello's play *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (and *Enrico Quarto* [1922]) was a vital thematic influence upon Marsh's world-view, given that the earliest foundations of her sensibility as a theatrically aware being were laid in the highly-charged ambience of Victorian theatrics which found a natural complement in Pirandello's Sicilian enthusiasm. Quite clearly the strict binarism of Victorian ethical discourse as alluded to by Marsh constituted a clear imprinted influence upon the formal texture, the surface structure, of her exercises in prose fiction. Indeed, such an influence probably underlay Edmund Wilson's celebrated attack on Ngaio's eighth novel, *Overture to Death* (1939), for its provision of a ridiculous plot "embedded in the dialogue and doings of a lot of faked-up English country people who are even more tedious than those of [Sayers's] *The Nine Tailors*."³

It is well worth recalling the genesis of Ngaio Marsh's theatricality. Her father and his siblings were very keen on amateur theatricals - Henry Marsh even made grandiose scenery in the Servants' Hall at Woodside (Essex) which could not be extracted afterwards in one piece.⁴ Her mother, Rose Elizabeth Seager, was the daughter of an enterprising colonist who had used mesmerism and theatricals at the Sunnyside mental hospital (where he was the Superintendent) as a very advanced approach to mental affliction. Rose inherited her father's passion for acting: in the late 1880s she took the leading part in a local production of Victorian Sardou's comedy *A Scrap of Paper*⁵ and when the American Shakespearean actor George Milne visited Christchurch in June 1890 he persuaded Rose Seager, then aged twenty-five, to play Lady Macbeth with him; *The Weekly Press* averred that "Macbeth was fortunate in his Lady, on this occasion."⁶ In 1891, Miss Seager acted in *London Assurance* alongside Mr. Henry Marsh and three years later they were married. Ngaio later wrote that "One of the first things I remember was my mother and father rehearsing plays. I lived with the theatre from the day I was born. It was going on in the house all the time."⁷ As a result, friends considered Ngaio the product of an only child upbringing with two slightly odd and theatrical parents. One long-standing friend, Mrs. Bessie Seymour Porter, has observed:

It didn't matter where you went or what it was, [with Ngaio] it was immediately put 'on stage', even the planting of bulbs. I remember coming up one afternoon and she was out there making holes and putting them in. She said: "I know it's the wrong time of year, Bess', but in they went just the same. There we were - we were doing our 'planting bulbs act' you see!"⁸

Similarly, Marsh's work is replete with theatrical gestures, inflections and motifs: Earl Bargainer observed that "Marsh's theatrical career has contributed to the

scenic effect, which is characteristic of her novelistic technique; her fiction is largely dialogue presented in a series of drama-like scenes."⁹ For as Dame Ngaio once summarised "all the elements of theatre" in terms of "impersonation, speech, movement and the indication of place and time"¹⁰, so Bargainnier rightly insisted that Marsh's experience of the theatre has "enabled her to employ the theatre as an integral element of her detective fiction, involving plot, characterisation, and atmosphere, as well as setting."¹¹ But as I shall argue, a heightened sense of theatricality (or dramacality) mixed with a quasiGalsworthian prose style was central to all of Marsh's fictive products. As she once wrote, it seemed "that almost always a play was toward in our small family"¹² and she has described the "Dickensian cockney" antics of her father and the traumatic effects of her parents' rehearsal of a melodramatic French play, combined later with the torment engendered by reading of extreme Kentish horrors in *The Ingoldsby Legends*.¹³ Add to all of this Ngaio's extreme familiarity with the *theatrum mundi* topos in the work of the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists (e.g. Shakespeare, Jonson and Rowley) and her formative exposure to Pirandello, and much insight is gained into the deepest well-springs of her creativity as an author. Given the focus of this paper we must at this point ask: 'What, in fine, are the critical points of congruence between the Pirandellian outlook and that which we find to the fore in Marsh's work?' Apart from the fact that *Six Characters* was, on the level of plot, a highly melodramatic and highly-charged drama about corruption and scandal amidst a chronically disturbed home and hearth¹⁴, it can be described - as can all of Marsh's fictions - as ultimately a comic melodrama: as work which addresses strenuous (and often familial) tensions but within a dramatic form that is palpably secure (i.e. which explores extremities of human behaviour from within the secure framework of reassuring conventions). So just as Pirandello finally secured the composure of his shaken audiences after the demanding irruption of the six driven and Platonic characters, by returning them to the comfort of the everyday world of the theatre¹⁵, so readers of Marsh's narratives know that they too will always be returned to a rational "innocent society in a state of grace" having gleefully observed what W.H. Auden called "the sufferings of the guilty one" after enjoying the taste of conflict in the ongoing "dialectic between innocence and guilt" which is enacted in the detective novel.¹⁶ And on the level of core ideas it is clear that two of Pirandello's axioms appealed greatly to Marsh: firstly, his insistence on the sovereignty of the human self in taking the full measure of responsibility for shaping its path (including its progress as an ethically aware being) through the world; and, secondly, in Pirandello's words, his strong sense of the "deceit of mutual understanding irretrievably founded on the empty abstraction of words, [of] the multiple personality of everyone corresponding to the possibilities of being to be found in each of us..."¹⁷ Reflecting on his conviction that life is formless and illogical (from a teleological standpoint), Pirandello concluded that "There is nothing fixed and determined in us. We have within ourselves every possibility, and suddenly, unexpectedly, the thief or the lunatic can jump out of

any one of us...."¹⁸ The attraction of such ideas to a crime novelist concerned deeply with affirming the criticality for her culture of conforming to what Pirandello dubbed the 'rules of the game' is surely so obvious as not to require comment, beyond the point that for someone with such a heightened awareness of the irrational in human life it is not difficult to see why that person would construct ethical fables designed to demonstrate the vital importance of social form in what Robert Brustein has called "the theatre of existence."¹⁹ This is a vital component of what I have termed Ngaio Marsh's 'Pirandellian Praxis', well expressed by Francis Fergusson in describing the wider resonance of those "moments which the [six] characters must interrogate in the light of the stage, as we all must mull over (though in secret) the moments when our nature and destiny are defined."²⁰

Ngaio would certainly have concurred with sociologist Peter Berger's argument that,

To use the language of the theatre from which the concept of role is derived, we can say that society provides the script for all the dramatic personae. The individual actors therefore need but slip into the roles already assigned to them before the curtain goes up. As long as they play their roles as provided for in this script, the social play can proceed as planned.²¹

In the words of The Father in Six Characters, "We act that role for which we have been cast, that role which we are given in life."²²

Let us now summarily review Ngaio Marsh's involvement with Six Characters which she first saw in a London production "superbly directed by Tyrone Guthrie at the Westminster Theatre".²³ Guthrie had previously directed Characters for the 1929-30 season at Cambridge's Festival Theatre, but the production at the Westminster in London was staged in 1932.²⁴ Marsh has described her reaction to this play:

I hadn't read it. I knew nothing whatever about it and that is the ideal way of seeing this play for the first time. It takes you by the throat and shakes the daylight out of you. If you long above everything to be a director, this is the play that nags and clamours to be done. I was broody with it, off and on, for some eighteen years [sic] before I finally got it out of my system in a burst of three separate productions in three separate countries. It may be a phoney play, its theme - that reality exists only in the mind of the individual - may be inconsiderable, but it remains, to my mind, more absolutely the pure material of theatre than any other piece of twentieth century dramatic writing. One may discount its philosophy and dismiss its metaphysics (I do not altogether do so) but tackle it simply as something that happens in a

What, then, of the Pirandellian philosophy and metaphysic? In the programme notes to the Australian touring production (1949) the audiences were instructed that Six Characters "constantly draws our attention to the artificiality of the playhouse and invites us to examine the conventions and absurdities of the theatre." Here Marsh was clearly suppressing, with some timidity, her qualified attachment to the play's enduring thematics, for Robert Brustein has more robustly observed that Characters is "a probing philosophical drama about the artifice of the stage, the artifice of art, and the artifice of reality in generally suspenseful and exciting rhythm."²⁶ Similarly, Francis Fergusson, while acknowledging that the play "may seem, at first sight, to be shop-worn in its ideas and, in its dramaturgy, hardly more than a complex piece of theatrical trickery", realises that "Pirandello sees human life as theatrical."²⁷ Likewise, Elizabeth Burns considers that Pirandello "questioned the right of the ordinary world to be considered more real than the fabricated world of the play" (and of the imagination in general), so that, for Pirandello, theatricality is "only an emphasised exercise of the rhetorical conventions employed in social life."²⁸ For in the Pirandellian viewpoint, life is a succession of 'scenes' into which human beings fall victim in often contradictory, agonizing and inauthentic roles. Thus Eric Bentley refers to the Globe Theatre motto, totus mundis facit histrionem ('all the world plays the actor'), and states that Pirandello has "created a living image which can never die - the image of man as actor and of life as the game of roleplaying, il giuoco delle parti".²⁹ The influence of a pronounced exposure to such ideas cannot be over-stated, and I wish now to explore Marsh's personal engagement with Pirandello's most famous text (noting that she was well familiar with several of his plays), for Marsh's admission that she did not "altogether" discount Pirandello's metaphysic is important, in my judgement, in attending to her fiction and the thematic use of theatricality deployed therein.³⁰

When the theatrical régisseur Dan O'Connor brought London's Old Vic Theatre Company on to New Zealand in 1948, led by Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh (shortly after the filming of Olivier's Hamlet), Ngaio was requested to entertain the visiting company to an after-show sample of the Drama Society's work at the Little Theatre of Canterbury University College. She has written about staging the first act of what she termed "my obsession": Six Characters in Search of an Author.³¹ Thus on the evening of Monday 27 September 1948 Ngaio had her first experience of realising part of this challenging text following the Old Vic's evening performance of Sheridan's The School for Scandal. This was to be a private party and Characters must have meant a great deal to Ngaio for her to risk exposing herself and her actors (thoroughly versed in Shakespearean production) to the Londoners' critical gaze. Although Olivier "propped his leg on a footstool and from the effects of pain and pain-killers appeared to doze", members of the Old Vic jotted down several names for possible Old Vic studentships³² (three were

later successful). From this modest but important triumph, Dan O'Connor made his "golden offer"³³ of backing a summer tour of Ngaio's Canterbury Student Players to Australia (Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne). The tour (10 January - 10 March 1949) was a great success (Ngaio, aged 53, wrote to a confidant that it "was really exciting"³⁴) and it gave her the necessary fillip to contemplate producing Six Characters for a more discerning London audience after her return to the UK in July 1949 for the launch of "The Marsh Million" (of Penguin paperbacks) at The Dorchester Hotel (Park Lane, Mayfair). For instance, Ngaio could have been justifiably proud when The Canberra Times opined that "nothing like Six Characters in Search of an Author... has been seen before in Canberra"³⁵, and on the strength of this three-handed tour, O'Connor (its Honorary Director) asked Ngaio if she would like to "produce a company assembled in London from Commonwealth players and bring them out to Australia"³⁶ along the lines of The British Council Old Vic tour. Ngaio enthusiastically embraced the idea and committed herself to this synthesis of Commonwealth dramaturgical talent, and while assembling The British Commonwealth Theatre Company (BCTC) and following a short season of solicitor Owen Howell's stage adaptation of Marsh's novel Surfeit of Lampreys (a.k.a. Death of a Peer) at the Embassy Theatre, she was approached by Miss Molly May who, having heard of the triumphant Australian tour, asked Marsh to produce Six Characters at the same theatre. The Embassy, located in Eton Avenue, Swiss Cottage (on the southern fringes of Hampstead), was owned and run by Anthony Hawtrey with Molly May leasing it for occasional short seasons. The Embassy has been described as "formerly a venture for tryouts and short runs".³⁷ Returning to the Antipodes with the BCTC, Marsh ran an Australasian season from March to September 1951 as Artistic Director (for D.D. O'Connor Productions Ltd., London) which, yet again, featured Six Characters.

If I seem to have laboured the details of this production history, it is simply to amplify the point that from 1932 until 1951 the Pirandellian thread ran through Marsh's imaginative life in both a truly formative and informing sense, and that this general period spans the production of some of Ngaio Marsh's greatest (i.e. most daring or thematically innovative) novels of detection. Of course, quite apart from the influence of Pirandello one must take cognizance of the decisive (and earlier) imprint of William Shakespeare: Marsh's detective, Roderick Alleyn, was named in honour of Edward Alleyn, the Elizabethan actor-manager and old boy of Henry Marsh's Alma Mater, Duiwich College. Marsh was herself imaginatively steeped in the Bard's oeuvre and as Elizabeth Burns has observed, Shakespeare was "acutely aware of the fabricated nature of conduct both on and off the stage", extending the play metaphor to enlarge upon "the fundamental conception of life as dramatic invention" and transforming this classical commonplace "from a simple allegorical figure into a complex imaginative mode of expression" in which the theatre became morally emblematic of human beings as creatures "of a world of artifice".³⁸

My thesis is that Ngaio Marsh was the practitioner of an 'insinuating' method of

producing fiction (much as she produced plays): one in which often quite subtle and seminal ideas were artfully and gently inserted into the textual fabric and framework which she was so carefully (and craftily) fashioning for her readership/audience. In this reading of Marsh's detective narratives, a wider unity between the twin poles of her dual career as author and theatrical producer is proposed in terms of a highly fruitful homology, and one which strongly suggests that unity of life and art which can be summed up in the classic topos of 'Life as Theatre and Mask'. Certainly her biographer, Margaret Lewis, agrees that "crime fiction and the theatre were indivisible" in Ngaio's mind, citing that fusion in Marsh's final novel, Light Thickens (1982).³⁹ Many of Marsh's literary admirers enjoy the social interaction and detached, sardonic vision purveyed by her narrative persona, being heavily inflected by a Dickensian sense of the comic and a great love of Restoration wit. For Marsh was a compassionate ironist [eirone] who paraded her characters in their "theatre of existence" (Brustein)⁴⁰ and who used their multifarious conflicts to mock negative and operatically expressed emotions such as rage, jealousy, envy and revenge, all the while exploring what Anseim Strauss has delicately termed "the frequently unexpected results of interactional drama."⁴¹ Given the prominence in Marsh's fictions of what The Times used to haughtily call 'Top People', Ngaio seems to have been guided by Oscar Wilde's sly dictum that "What is interesting about people in good society is the mask that each one of them wears, not the reality that lies behind the mask".⁴² The phenomenon of mask-slippage has been nowhere better revealed than in Ngaio's novels Death and the Dancing Footman (1941), Final Curtain (1947), False Scent (1959) and Tied Up in Tinsel (1972) and her teleplay Evil Liver (1975).⁴³ Before making a glancing appraisal of some of these works we should look more deeply at Marsh's attraction to Pirandello's drama of the mask.

In producing Six Characters, Marsh used the original 1921 version but borrowed Tyrone Guthrie's very effective idea for revealing the six characters. Kurt Kasznar describes the device:

They started with an empty stage. The whole thing is an empty stage. The stagehands were going back and forth with ladders and flats and suddenly one flat goes by and there are six characters standing there.

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The Father soon establishes himself as Pirandello's virtual mouthpiece as he insists to the assembled actors and stage crew 'Now, if you consider the fact that we [indicates himself and the other five Characters], as we are, have no other reality outside of this illusion..'⁴⁵ This philosophical point has profound implications, for in the 1925 version the Stepdaughter rushes out, laughing shrilly, towards the audience and on into the real street outside the playhouse. As George Neveux rightly observed, "Except by a blunder we cannot drop the curtain on Pirandello's drama because there is no clear boundary between life and art."⁴⁶ There is, then, no clear discontinuity between the reality of the Characters and

that of the audience. If this kinship is correct and the professional actors are the phantasms, then we - as ordinary people - act assigned roles in life: a life which truly is theatre in a society that is surely an organised drama. That Ngaio Marsh veered towards this interpretation is proven in the fact that she cut out The Manager's final, anguished line: 'Pretence? Reality? To hell with it all!... I've lost a whole day over these people, a whole day!' This meant that in Marsh's productions the play ended with its melodramatic climax where the young boy shoots himself and elicits this reaction:

Other Actors: No, no, it's only make-believe, it's only pretence!

The Father: [with a terrible cry]: Pretence? Reality, sir, reality!⁴⁷

In Marsh's handling of the finale, the force of Cambon's judgement that "the end of the play is quite absurd; it's any old epilogue, stuck there just to wind things up and let the curtain fall"⁴⁸ loses its edge.

Remembering that Marsh saw Guthrie's production of Six Characters just before she began writing her first detective novel, we must ask if it is possible that the real cast of actors in this play influenced the handling of actors in her novels. What is certain is that Marsh's eleventh novel, Death and Dancing Footman (1941), was explicitly centred around the Pirandellian idea of a full-scale cathartic, real-life drama some seven years before she ever staged Six Characters for the Old Vic Company. This combination of intellectual drama and detective fiction may at first appear either misguided and/or pretentious, yet Robert Brustein's summary of the Pirandellian thematic allows some points of contact:

His plots are bursting with operatic feelings and melodramatic climaxes in an exaggerated Sicilian vein. Hyperbolic expressions of grief, rage and jealousy alternate with murders, suicides, and mortal accidents; wronged wives, maddened husbands, and bestial lovers foment adultery, incest, illegitimacy, plots and duels...The characters, furthermore, seem to lose psychological depth as they gain philosophical eloquence.⁴⁹

In short, the Pirandellian situation involves grand histrionics and dramatic conflict so that Pirandello's unabashed theatricality and the drowning, incest and suicide in Six Characters seems to have earned P.G. Wodehouse's quip about a best-seller called 'Six Characters in Search of an Undertaker'.⁵⁰

Although Marsh worked her experience of theatre into fiction in many stories with actual theatre settings - such as Enter a Murder (1935), Vintage Murder (1937), 'I Can Find My Way Out' (1946), Final Curtain (1947), Opening Night (1951), False Scent (1959), Death at the Dolphin (1966) and Light Thickens (1982) - it is not my purpose to appraise them there. Rather, we shall examine portions of

several novels which will better reveal the nature of Marsh's theatricality -- a word which actually appeared in her first novel, A Man Lay Dead (1934).

Man is at his most inventive, his most enfranchised, when he is 'playing the game'. It is only death that knows no rules, that insists, always, on winning. - George Steiner

Marsh followed the 'several characters in search of an undertaker' formula in Death and The Dancing Footman (1941). One notices in many of her novels the depiction of a nervously energetic and edgy world characterised by a deep air of unreality, with reality lurking to break through with often scandalous inappropriateness. The continuance of this precarious calm is usually effected with industrious role-playing, and the whole atmosphere - to use a word which Marsh has employed - is 'stagey'. In this sense we can see how indebted Ngaio Marsh was to the Pirandellian clash between Life (or naked reality) and Mask (social fiction). This point is well to the fore in her twenty-first novel, False Scent (1959), in which the corpse of the actress Mary Bellamy is discovered by a bevy of theatrical colleagues, one of whom admits: 'I don't like this sort of thing. I've produced it often enough, but I've never faced the reality'. Marsh's narrator then remarks that the family doctor "busied himself with masking the body" (FS, Four, I:98).

In the Dancing Footman. Marsh used the device of a mischievous bachelor creating a house party of eight, one of whom (Aubrey Mandrake) is a post-Surrealist playwright. This underscores the fact that Marsh's interpretation of Six Characters insists that 'dramacality' exists in real life and that, as in the Pirandellian original, it is the theatre professional (but an author this time) who plays second fiddle in nothing down the lines for a play from unrehearsed reality. For Jonathan Royal (the bachelor-sprite) explicitly conceives of his house-party in terms of a play; as Mandrake arrives, Royal thinks to himself: 'This is the overture. We're off' (DDF 1,I:9). Mandrake makes an "effective" entrance, yet his host is quick to inform him that 'Our customary positions are reversed. For tonight, yes, and for to-morrow and the next day, I shall be the creator and you the audience' (1,II:11). Royal claims for himself a 'sense of drama in the ordinary unclassy sense' (:12) and tells Mandrake of his new ideas of creating a 'cathartic' drama with flesh-and-blood characters who happen to be antagonists in every day life:

'One has only to restrict them a little, confine them within the decent boundaries of a suitable canvas, and they would make a pattern. It seemed to me that, given the limitations of an imposed stage, some of my acquaintances would at once begin to unfold an exciting drama, that, so restricted, their conversation would begin to follow as enthralling a design as that of a fugue...I would summon my characters to the theatre of my own house and the drama would unfold itself.'

‘Pirandello’. Mandrake began, ‘has become quite-’

‘But this is not Pirandello’, Jonathan interrupted in a great hurry, ‘No. In this instance we shall see, not six characters in search of an author, but an author who has summoned seven characters to do his work for him’ (:13).

Mandrake confesses, after routine qualms (which he calls ‘first-night nerves’), to a ‘violent interest’ in Royal’s idea. This contrasts notably with the sullen attitude of the Son in Characters towards his Father’s ‘Demon of Experiment’. However, predictably, Royal is unable to induce reconciliations between warring opponents and the whole exercise follows the logic of Anseim Strauss’ notion of "the fateful appraisals made of oneself and others"⁵¹ - so fateful as to climax in two deaths, underlining Steiner’s dictum that death ‘knows no rules’. The whole party is conducted as a macabre game, and as with the ironical charades in Surfeit of Lampreys. these games form ‘play within plays’, as it were. Royal unashamedly considers his party as living theatre. The mood is infectious, for Madame Lisse speaks to Dr. Hart about playing his ‘part’ (III, 111:49), Royal talks of ‘our cast of characters’ (III, V:53) and Mandrake watches the gamesmanship over cocktails in terms of a ‘conversation piece’, studded with effective entrances and cues (III, 1:42). Added to this, Mrs. Compline (the lady who suffers from ruinous facial surgery) is described as having a face like a "terrible mask" (II, 11:25) which also has the unfortunate aspect of "an exaggerated dolorous expression of a clown" (:26). As resentments steadily rise to the surface the atmosphere of the gathering is described in terms of "bathos which hung over them like a pall" (V, 11:71). As with all genuine bathos, the scene collapses into pitiful melodrama as the group begin to discuss attempts of violence (VII, IV:117). It is worth observing that while Pirandello’s six Characters act up their tensions in full view of others, quite openly, many of Marsh’s characters - whether actors or not - try to act them down in a dissembling strategy which is usually unsuccessful. This pattern is dominant in works such as Final Curtain (1947) and False Scent (1959).

In Final Curtain Marsh chose to write of the murder, after a Birthday Dinner, of Sir Henry Ancred, the veteran Shakespearean actor whose son Thomas dubbed him ‘the Grand Old Man of the British stage’ (I, 11:13). And in False Scent Marsh repeated the formula of death by homicide after a birthday toast to the darling of the West End stage, Mary Bellamy. In Final Curtain the Ancred family discharges an atmosphere of pure theatre; the daughters Millamant and Desdemona have obviously theatrical namesakes. Desdemona is, at the time periods described, working in a Group Theatre (2, 11:24) and the youngest grandchild, ‘Panty’ (so named because her bloomers were always dropping) performs coy theatrical antics for Inspector Alleyn:

When she saw Alleyn she swung herself into a strange attitude and screamed with affected laughter. He waved to her and she at once did a

comedy fall to the floor, where she remained aping violent astonishment (14, 11:212).

The drama centres on the will which Sir Henry has most indiscreetly revealed. Troy, who has been manoeuvred into painting a portrait of Sir Henry as Macbeth, observes wryly to herself when being escorted to dinner by the Grand Old Man, 'It's a pity that there isn't an orchestra!' (4, 111:56). The narrator informs us that

The first thing to be noticed about Sir Henry Ancred was that he filled his role with almost embarrassing virtuosity... He looked as if he had been specially designed for exhibition... You could hardly believe, Troy thought, that he was true (4, 111:55).

Thomas Ancred, the objective chorus to his family, tells Troy that they are all 'putting on the great Family Act, you know. It's the same on the stage. People that hate each other's guts make love like angels' (7, IV: 110). When, on the first evening of Troy's visit to Ancreton Manor, Fenella and Paul Kentish announce their engagement, she witnesses the phenomenon of the upstaged actor: Sir Henry becomes electric with rage. Yet Troy discerns that his 'first violence was being rapidly transmuted into something more histrionic and much less disturbing' (6, 1:87). This is because it was Sir Henry's intention to announce his projected marriage to his mistress with the phoney name of Sonia Orrincourt, a trumped-up Cockney caricature who possesses 'an entirely plastic loveliness' (:89). Shortly afterwards Sir Henry dies of poison, and so this was positively his last 'Big Exit' as Marsh's sardonic chapter title announces!

Peter Berger reminds us that "society provides us with taken-for-granted structures... within which, as long as we follow the rules, we are shielded from the naked terrors of our condition."⁵² The point is that behind all these affected scenes lies deep subterfuge and unseemly machinations. The biggest surprise of all comes when Millamant is proven to be a scheming murderess of great subtlety; she proves to be the greatest emotional 'technician', killing her father-in-law after keeping shy of 'scenes' and displaying great filial and domestic loyalty (akin, perhaps, to Goneril and Regan in the early phases of King Lear, but lacking the resources to despatch the despised patriarch under warrant of legal cover). False face must hide what the false heart doth know' in Macbeth's words (The Tragedy of Macbeth, I, vii).

The same sense of artfully masked revulsion and what Brustein has described as role-playing to conceal shame applies with great pertinency to False Scent. In fact this novel could well be claimed as the finest and fullest exhibition of fictional theatricality in Marsh's corpus (if the pun can be excused). The sociologist Anseim Strauss observed that, even in everyday terms, "face-to-face interplay is better conceived as a narrative or dramatic process,"⁵³ and Elizabeth Burns defines theatricality in ordinary life as "the resort to a special grammar of composed behaviour."⁵⁴ Burns describes as 'theatrical' those people who

knowingly assume roles and foresee and actively develop sequences of action because they fully realise that their actions and speech are analogous to those in the theatre.⁵⁵ False Scent bulges with theatrical motifs, including those of roles, masks, ritual, entrances and assorted theatre jargon. Miss Bellamy is a jealous and ageing actress described with characteristic acuity by Alleyn as a 'comedienne of the naughty darling school and not a beginner' (ES Four, IV:102). She flies into a manic rage on her birthday when she learns that her subordinate, Pinky Cavenish, has been offered a lead role with sartorial assistance from Bertie Saracen, Mary's personal designer. The prima donna throws one of her celebrated tantrums which are remarked to have "incalculable" sequels (Two, 1:37); indeed, it is this unruly display of temperament which launches Miss Bellamy out of this world.

Mary Bellamy's life is founded upon multi-layered pretence which extends beyond the world of her job in the theatre into her domestic arrangements. As 'Queen of the Household' Miss Bellamy treats Miss Plumtree as a character nanny (One, IV:25), on social occasions her husband, Charles, plays "his supporting role of consort" (Three, 111:85) and her son Richard Dakers plays "his established role of a sort of unofficial son of the house" (Three, 1:69). The crowning irony, however, is that the killer, Charles Templeton, is really an actor himself, a histrionic criminal, so that when he is confronted with the corpse of the woman he has murdered (albeit indirectly) Charles, greatly relieved, nonetheless fetches "his breath in irregular, tearing sighs" (Four, 1:97).

Prior to the death, Mary's acolytes Colonel Warrender and Saracen enter her upmarket home on a "comic entrance together": Saracen banters, 'God what a fool I must look! Take it [the gift], darling, quickly or we'll kill the laugh' (One, IV:28). Warrender has a tendency to utter time-honoured clichés like 'Bad show!' so that Timon Ganty, a noteworthy producer, is amazed at this larger-than-life specimen of the military:

'Are you true? Ganty asked suddenly, gazing at Warrender with a kind of devotion.

'I beg your pardon, Sir?'

Gantry clasped his hands and said ecstatically: 'One would never dare! Never! And yet people say one's productions tend towards caricature! You shall give them the lie in their teeth, Colonel. In your own person you shall refute them' (Six, 111:186).

Gantry later refers to Warrender as 'that monumental, that superb old ham, the

Colonel' (Eight, 111:240) and Alleyn has good cause to describe the whole stonewalling entourage of actors as 'that Goon show round the living-table' (Seven, II:212).

Mary Bellamy is a past-master at entrances, and on her birthday she executes a "comic-provocative, skilfully French farcical" one (One, 11:17). Later on her birthday Miss Bellamy receives a facial mask (Two, V:63); still to come is the ghoulish task of "masking" her dead body (Four, 1:98). Octavius Browne, Mary's innocent admirer, is shown when he smiles to have a face "rather like a mask of comedy" (Two, 11:45). And when Pinky and Bertie attend the Grande dame, we learn that Pinky plays the "role of confidante" and Saracen advises her about "the final stages of the ritual" (Two, V:64).

Ritual is precisely the right word to characterise Mary Bellamy's Birthday honours; when Old Ninn tactlessly lets Mary's age slip out after the birthday toast and reply, the lead actress is quick to rescue the sense of catastrophic gaucherie by plunging "the ritual knife" into the cake, thereby achieving "something of the character of a catharsis" (Three, 111:85). Indeed the whole party proceeds with a strict sense of theatre which is frequently remarked upon: a lull in the party is compared expressly to those which follow "the lowering of house lights in a crowded theatre" (Three, 11:79), and when Mary lets forth a torrent of vitriol behind the glassed conservatory wall, it is likened to "a scene from a silent film" (:79). And for the arrival of the birthday cake, all follows faithfully "according, as it were, to the script" (Three, 111:85). After Richard has had irretrievably harsh words with his hitherto unsuspected mother, he emerges from her boudoir looking akin to a harrowed melodramatic villain (Three, 111:89), and when Mary fails to reappear Pinky confidently declares that 'She won't miss her cue' (Three, IV:90). Similarly, Gantry unwittingly urges the 'show' to its ghastly denouement: 'Last act, ladies and gentlemen. Last act, please!' (:91). The guests arrange themselves "like a chorus in grand opera" and when Florence roars in to announce Mary's sudden demise, she does so in a "relentlessly theatrical" manner (:92). Even the element of farce is present, as when Warrender has to shock the intoxicated Dr. Harkness into action:

Maurice Warrender said to Florence: "Is it bad?" Her hand to her mouth, she nodded her head up and down like a mandarin. Warrender took a handful of ice from a wine-cooler and suddenly thrust it down the back of Dr. Harkness's collar. "Come on," he said. Harkness let out a sharp oath. He swung round as if to protest, lost his balance and fell heavily. Florence screamed. (Four, 1:94).

This is, in my view, admirable comic writing (seen in full context) and it speaks volumes about the tragic-comic nature of Marsh's detective novels with their frequent air of opéra bouffe, often in Gilbert and Sullivan high style.

The Bellamy household has lived precariously, and lest we simply interpret these

outbursts of sheer melodrama to human beings reacting under considerable duress, it is as well to remember that Mary Bellamy's temperament subsided when she was "bereft of an audience" (Two, 11:43). The fact is that her home has been built on a lie: Colonel Warrender is the father of her son Richard and Mary married Charles Templeton as a more suitable partner, in his earlier days, to match her ambitions for a high class lifestyle. The Pirandellian clash between Life and Mask inevitably arose and Richard's shocked appearance was caused by Mary having disabused him, in anger, of the long-held pretence that he was an orphan taken under her tender care. As Richard tells (in Allyen's words) his 'custom-built poppa', 'I remember that Mary once told me it was you who brought them [his parents] together. What ambivalent roles you both contrived to play. Restoration comedy at its most elaborate' (Seven, 11:209). Mary, in even hiding this truth from her husband Charles, demonstrates Erving Goffman's definition of poise: as "the capacity to suppress and conceal any tendency to become shamefaced during encounters with others."⁵⁶ Here is yet another repetition of Pirandello's thematic : that role-playing is a means to cover shame, and Goffman's essays in Interaction Ritual (1969) explore this problem in a most illuminating manner. Yet there are still other contexts where the circumstances of theatrical murder can be found in Marsh's writing. I have not the time to explore Marsh's use of shared cultic experiences which provide suitable occasions for ritualised murders which we find in Death in Ecstasy (1936), Spinsters in Jeopardy (1954), Off With His Head (1956) and Tied Up In Tinsel (1972).

Having established the centrality of drama in the artistic career of Dame Ngaio Marsh, it is worth remarking that all of her novels are replete with numerous theatrical motifs. Her detective hero, Alleyn, is a rabid Shakespearean who quotes phrases from the Bard of Stratford-upon-Avon on numerous occasions. Indeed, Marsh's cousins, the late Madeleine Seager, recalled with pleasure Ngaio's imaginative self-identification with William Shakespeare:

Ngaio used to say that she wrote for a living, but that her real love was producing plays - especially with students. Ngaio had an ongoing love affair with Shakespeare. She lived and breathed 'the Bard' - her birthday, 23 April, was the same day as his. She quoted him at the drop of a hat, often seriously as a comment, but more often as an appropriate whimsical remark.⁵⁷

And I have elsewhere suggested "that for Ngaio Marsh (to borrow Harry Levin's words) Shakespeare had become 'a sort of lay religion'."⁵⁸ However, to return these reflections to my central claim that Marsh's forte lay in the construction and production of 'dramatic narrative', it is worth reminding ourselves of Wilkie Collins' assertion that "the Novel and the Play are twin-sisters in the family of fiction" (Dedication of Basil [1852]).

It has also been noted of Charles Dickens, possibly Marsh's favourite novelist, that he "represents not life directly, as it were, so much as life mounted on the

stage."⁵⁹ Recalling that Collins' The Moonstone (1868) and Dickens' The Mystery of Edwin Drood (1870) were life-long favourites of Ngaio Marsh even before she put pen to paper with A Man Lay Dead in 1931-32, one should also call to mind John Ruskin's remark about Dickens' "circle of stage fire" (Unto this Last, I Cornhill Magazine [August 1860]) and Edmund Wilson's statement that Dickens was "the greatest dramatic writer that the English had had since Shakespeare."⁶⁰ Robert Garis argues that Dickens practised a "theatrical art", but warned that "There is a Dickens problem because we ordinarily do not regard the theatrical mode as capable of 'serious' artistic effects and meaning."⁶¹ Garis also makes the valid general point that the theatrical mode is not appropriate "for dealings with the inner life, nor is an artist who works in this mode likely to be interested in the inner life."⁶² When Garis adds that such artists usually possess a brilliant gift for mimicry, the idea freights home to what Marsh was essentially working at. She very perceptively transcribed outward actions and speech mannerisms (because of her strong, innate sense of the dramatic), whereas an artist like Virginia Woolf transcribes the chaotic inner world of consciousness - of ever-changing perceptions, thoughts and transitory emotions. In either case transcription is the operative mode, and in fact Woolf attempted to combine both approaches in her last novel, Between the Acts (1941). But the writer that most effectively demonstrated the possible affinity between drama and the novel was Henry James, who produced what Bernard Bergonzi has called the novel of "total dramatisation,"⁶³ most notably in The Awkward Age (1899). In February 1895 James hit upon what he called the "principle of the Scenario", the drama of consciousness.⁶⁴ In his 'Preface' to The Awkward Age James wrote of his new attempt to use dialogue as a fresh instrument to illumine his subject matter:

Each of my 'lamps' would be the lights of a single 'social occasion' in the history and intercourse of the characters concerned and would bring out to the full the latent colour of the scene in question and cause it to illustrate, to the last drop, its bearing on my theme...The beauty of the conception was in the approximation of respective divisions of my form to the successive Acts of a Play.⁶⁵

It is my contention that, in a different sense and on a more limited plane, Ngaio Marsh shares the label of 'theatrical artist', that her novels to an extent function as dramatic texts (which is why they translate so well into television adaptation) and that she has used a variant of the Jamesian formula for similar thematic purposes, limited in her characterisation only by what Marsh called the necessary 'cheap-jackery' concerning the guilty party in the classical mystery formula. For detective novels with a Golden Age imprint consist not so much of a series of events as much as of 'scenes', and like plays they have to be rigorously economical. Also, as in most drama, detective fictions are based on orthodox conventions of causality: on linear and continuous plots. The final parallel between drama and detective fiction comes with the legacy of melodrama, as remarked upon at the start of this paper. Several crime stories were popular

melodramas in the nineteenth century (e.g. Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street⁶⁶). The link with the theatricality of Marsh's novels is that therein life may be seen as a play where heroes/heroines and villains remain safely demarcated at the end of them. Northrop Frye made the crisp observation that "In melodrama two themes are important: the triumph of moral virtue over villainy, and the consequent idealising of the moral views assumed to be held by the audience."⁶⁷

To conclude these reflections on the theatrical paradigm in Marsh, one character decides that Roderick Alleyn has 'star quality' (Off With His Head, Seven, 11:122); Alleyn, besides being bookish and a lover of Shakespeare and drama in general, is himself something of an actor, and this is confirmed when he confides his relish for 'a dramatic close to a big case' (Death in Ecstasy). XXV:211) and talks about his 'beastly anticlimax depression' (:217). However Alleyn remains the 'star' of Marsh's narrative and he manages frequent dramatic entrances, like the one in Opening Night (1951):

'I won't be gagged! It drove my Uncle Ben to despair and I don't care who knows it.' It was upon this line that Alleyn, as if he had mastered one of the major points of stage technique, made his entrance (ON VII, IV:122).

In False Scent Alleyn arrived and stood on a hearthrug "like the central figure in some ill-assembled conversation piece" (Eight, 111:241). Alleyn also thinks very frequently of Hamlet, perhaps his favourite Shakespeare play. When eavesdropping on one occasion he observes wryly to Inspector Fox, 'Next stop, with Polonius behind the arras in a bedroom' (False Scent, Six, 11:174) and when he is asked to give advice by a Miss Destiny Meade, Alleyn reminds himself of 'a mature Hamlet' (Death at the Dolphin. 9, IV:216). Indeed, right at the commencement of Alleyn's fictional appearance he chided a journalist friend for his 'theatrically' (A Man Lay Dead, 1V:50), and when proposing to reconstruct the Murder Game called it 'Hamlet's old stunt' (XV:177) and the 'last act' of the drama (:182). Furthermore, when Alleyn was visiting New Zealand he recognised in himself 'a kind of nostalgia, a feeling of intense sympathy and kinship with the stage' (Vintage Murder, XVII:154).

Marsh also created a species of histrionic criminal: the false actor already met in Charles Templeton of False Scent and Nicholas Compline of Death and the Dancing Footman. In Marsh's oeuvre there is a pronounced congruence between the detective and the criminal as actors - those who seem but may not be what they project and who are locked in a combative relationship of sparring wits. This may be seen as a further legacy of Pirandello: of crime and its investigation conceived as game, albeit games in deadly earnest.

This conception of the criminal as an actor has distinguished antecedents, not least in Lady Macbeth's charge to her tormented husband to present the memory

of the murdered Banquo in

eminence, both with eye and tongue.
Unsafe the while, that we
Must lave our honours in these flattering streams,
And make our faces vizards to our hearts,
Disguising what they are (The Tragedy of Macbeth. III,ii).

The imagery of masking is very potent in Macbeth, and Horatio speaks of 'detecting' the false Claudius through the play 'The Murder of Gonzago' in The Tragedy of Prince Hamlet (III, ii).

Alleyn describes George Mason, the murderer in Vintage Murder (1937), as: 'a superb actor' (XXV:219) - the dyspeptic and grossly shocked long-standing friend being his chosen role. Similarly, Valmai Seaclyff, Marsh's prototype of the literal femme fatale, is a 'past-mistress' of good entrance (Artists in Crime, XX:249). In Death at the Dolphin (1966) the turbulent actor Harry Grove calls himself 'a rank outsider' to the public school network (and to conventionalised life in general), and kills a caretaker at the Dolphin Theatre whilst getting away with some Shakespearean relics which he had just stolen. Grove's histrionic skills came into play when after this crime, unperturbed, he went to a party where he played being its very "life and soul" (DAD 11, 1:248). In When In Rome the Baron Van Der Veghel, a blackmailed accomplice to murder, is described as having a mask (9,3:277) and his wife, the Baroness, is shown to have played a "part in the [homicidal] performance" (10,1: 283). But it is with the murderers Foljambe (Clutch of Constables [1968]) and Bruce Gardener (Grave Mistake [1978]) that the real actors are presented. Alleyn describes Foljambe's talent 'for typecasting himself' (COC, 4:72); that he is a 'masterpiece' of mimicry (1:9). At the end of the novel Alleyn confirms Troy's question that 'Caley Bard' was 'All an act' (10, One:221).

In Grave Mistake Sybil Foster's gardener, with the ironic name Gardener (the first possible hint his falsity), is a similar specimen of the histrionic homicide/killer. When Alleyn has found his man, this murderer is shown still bearing

the insecure persona - of his chosen role: red-gold beard, fresh mouth, fine torso, loud voice, pawky turn of speech: the straightforward Scottish soldier-man with a heart of gold (GM, IX,IV:244).

Alleyn tells Verity Preston that Gardener has long cultivated his air of 'the pawky Scot' and that 'By and large' he was 'a loss to the stage. I can see him stealing the show in a superior soap' (IX, V:250). Gardener over-reached himself with his synthetic Scots act, was uncovered by a master actor-detective and well illustrated Emerson's maxim, "Society is a masked ball, where every one hides his

real character, and reveals it by hiding."⁶⁸ This could well serve as an aperçu for Dame Ngaio Marsh's conspicuously theatrical fictional vision and, I would add, for much of her own life-conduct. Jonathan Royal, the house-hound Pirandellian espoused a theory of the mask which amounts to a form of anti-essentialism:

'No one person is the same individual to more than one other person. That is to say, the reality of individuals is not absolute. Each individual has as many exterior realities as the number of encounters he makes Does the actual 'he' even exist? May it not be argued that 'he' has no intrinsic reality since different selves arise out of a conglomeration of selves to meet different events?' (Death and the Dancing Footman. IV, 11:64).

I hold that there is a definable amount of discreet self-revelation in Dame Ngaio fiction, and this is an idea which has been picked up (from a different standpoint) by Marsh's biographer, Dr. Margaret Lewis. In Ngaio Marsh: A Life. Dr. Lewis argues that Dame Ngaio was "a basically insecure woman" who feared intimacy and engaged in "creating and recreating herself for every situation"⁶⁹, in a strategy of conscious image-management designed to mask her own diffidence and vulnerability. While I firmly believe that Dr. Lewis has over-stated Ngaio's loneliness and insecurity, I hope that I have demonstrated the relevance of the dominant theatrical paradigm to her writing as a first-class detective novelist whose achievements in that form we are rightly celebrating. I think we can relate Ngaio Marsh's innate simplicity of character and lack of pretension - behind the rather formidable public persona which she fashioned for self-protection - to the broad influence of Pirandello at a critical instant in her productive life.

Yet I cannot draw these scattered reflections to a close without making a small confession: which is that I am unable to banish the sneaking - and most respectful - thought that, in the final analysis, Dame Ngaio's greatest work of art in the theatre of life was herself: the self-styled "accidental woman"⁷⁰, whose life and work serve to confute that all too modest self-categorisation.

ENDNOTES

1. Cf. Marsh, A Play Toward: A Note on Play Production (Christchurch: The Caxton Press, 1946); 'Theatre: A note on the status quo', Landfall Vol.1:1 (March 1947), 37-43; Three cornered world [The Macmillan Brown Lectures, March 1962]: Typescript copy in The Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury (Christchurch, New Zealand).
2. Ngaio Marsh, 'The Theatre in Australasia': Address to the First Pan Pacific Arts Festival, Christchurch Cathedral, 1965 [Marsh's typescript, pp. 9 & 11].
3. Edmund Wilson, 'Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?', The New Yorker, 20 January 1945; rpt. in Wilson, Classics and Commercials: A Literary Chronicle of the Forties (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Co., 1950, Fourth Printing, 1958), p.260.

4. Marsh, Personal Interview with Harding, 18 January 1980.
5. Dorothy Crowther, 'Amateur Drama in Canterbury', New Zealand Listener, 8 December 1950, p.12.
6. 'Table Talk: Macbeth and Lady Macbeth', The Weekly Press [Christchurch], 6 June 1890.
7. Marsh, 'When You Take Up Writing You Are On Your Own', New Zealand Herald [Auckland], 26 May 1962 (Weekend Magazine); and Marsh quoted by Felicity Price, 'Dame Ngaio Marsh "piping down a bit at 80" ', The Press [Christchurch], 28 June 1979, p.17.
8. Bessie Seymour Porter to the author, 15 November 1992.
9. Earl F. Bargainnier, 'Ngaio Marsh', in (ed.) Bargainnier, Ten Women of Mystery (Ohio: Bowling Green University Press, 1981), p.94.
10. Marsh, 'The Theatre in Australasia', op. cit., p.2.
11. Bargainnier, op. cit., p.95.
12. Marsh, Black Beech and Honeydew: An Autobiography (1965; London: William Collins, 1966), p.30
13. Ibid. pp. 13-15.
14. Cf. Robert Brustein's excellent summary in his The Theatre in Revolt: An Approach to the Modern Drama (London: Methuen, 1965), Ch. VII; rpt. in (ed.) Glauco Cambon, Twentieth Century Views: Pirandello (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967), pp. 129-132.
15. Adriano Tilgher insisted that in Sei personaggi Pirandello wanted a riot of competing phantoms to form a final composure "in whose encompassing harmony what had initially flashed in the artist's mind as faintly distinguishable splotches of colour may find the proper balance in an ample, luminous, well organised picture" ('Life Versus Form'; rpt. in ibid., p.28).
16. W.H. Auden, 'The Guilty Vicarage', in The Dyer's Hand and other essays (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), pp. 150 & 147.
17. Luigi Pirandello, 'Preface' to Six Characters in Search of an Author (1925); Appendix I, (ed.) Eric Bentley, Naked Masks: Five Plays by Luigi Pirandello (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1952), p. 367.
18. Pirandello; quoted by Gaspare Giudice, Pirandello: A Biography (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 119. [Trans. Alastair Hamilton.]
19. Brustein, op. cit., p.132.
20. Francis Fergusson, 'Action as Theatrical: Six Characters in Search of an Author' rpt. in (ed.) G. Cambon, Pirandello (1967), op. cit. p.38.
21. Peter Berger, Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective (1963; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 112.
22. Pirandello, Three Plays (London & Toronto: J.M. Dent, Tenth Printing, 1934), p.27. [This was the edition which Marsh used for her productions.]
23. Marsh, Black Beech, op. cit. p. 215.
24. Alfred Rossi, 'Appendix' to (ed.) Rossi, Astonish us in the Morning: Tyrone Guthrie Remembered (London: Hutchinson, 1977), p.297.
25. Marsh, Black Beech, pp. 215-16.

26. Brustein, 'Pirandello's Drama of Revolt' (1965); in (ed.) Cambon, p. 132.
27. Fergusson, 'Action as Theatrical', op. cit. pp. 36-37. [1949]
28. Elizabeth Burns, Theatricality: A Study of convention in the theatre and in social life (London: Longmans, 1972), p.47..
29. Eric Bentley, The Life of the Drama (1964; rpt. New York: Atheneum, 1967), p.192.
30. Adriano Tilgher, 'Life Versus Form', in (ed.) Cambon, Pirandello, op. cit. pp.20 & 23.
31. Marsh, Black Beech. p. 247.
32. Garry O'Connor, Darlings of the Gods: One Year in the Lives of Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1984), p.144.
33. Marsh, Black Beech. p.247.
34. Marsh, Personal Letter to Charles Brasch (Dunedin), 15 March 1949 (Hocken Library [Dunedin, N.Z.], MS. 996. In September 1948, during the Old Vic visit, Ngaio's father had just died, aged 85, three weeks earlier (4 September), and O'Connor, a kind man, may well have seen this Australian project as a means of alleviating Ngaio's evident grief and terrible loneliness, quite apart from being fully convinced of the merits of such a tour on artistic grounds.
35. Quoted by Margaret Lewis, Ngaio Marsh: A Life (London: Chatto & Windus, 1991), p. 120.
36. Marsh, Black Beech, p.250.
37. Cf. Patricia Cooke, 'A life that remains incomplete', The Dominion Sunday Times (Wellington), 19 May 1991, p. 22 and Ian Norrie, Hampstead, Highgate Village and Kenwood: A Short Guide. with Suggested Walks (London: High Hill Press, 1977, p.11.
38. Burns, Theatricality. op. cit., p.10.
39. M. Lewis, op. cit., p.252.
40. R. Brustein, op. cit. p. 132.
41. Anseim L. Strauss, Mirrors and Masks: The Search for Identity (Illinois: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1959), p. 55. Strauss also observed that "face-to-face interplay is better conceived as a narrative or dramatic process" (p.62).
42. Oscar Wilde, The Decay of Lying (1889); in Oscar Wilde: Epigrams (New York: Peter Pauper Press, n.d.), p54.
43. 'Evil Liver', in (ed.) & Intro. Douglas G. Greene, The Collected Short Fiction of Ngaio Marsh (New York: International Polygonics Ltd., 1989, 1990), pp. 177-234.
44. Kasznar; in Rossi, Astonish Us In The Morning, op. cit. p. 200.
45. Pirandello, Three Plays (trans. Edward Storer), op. cit. p.57.
46. Neveux; in Prandello (Prentice-Hall, 1967), p.71.
47. Pirandello, op. cit. p. 71
48. Cambon; in Pirandello. p. 30.
49. Brustein, ibid., p. 110.
50. P.G. Wodehouse, The World of Mr. Mulliner (1935; rpt. London, 1972), p.390.
51. Strauss, Mirrors and Masks. op. cit., p.9.

52. Bergner, Invitation to Sociology. op.cit., pp. 168-169.
53. Strauss, op. cit., p. 62.
54. Burns, Theatricality. op. cit., p. 33.
55. Ibid., p.12.
56. Erving Goffman, 'On Face Work' (1955); in Interaction Ritual (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1967), p.9.
57. Madeleine Seager, Edward William Seager: Pioneer of Mental Health (Waikanae: The Heritage Press, 1987), p. 294.
58. Bruce Harding, 'In Memoriam: Dame Ngaio Marsh 1899 [sic] - 1982', Landfall 142 (Vol.36:2 [June 1982]), 243.
59. Robert Garis, The Dickens Theatre (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p.139.
60. Edmund Wilson, The Wound and the Bow (1941; Rev. ed. 1952; London: Methuen, 1961), p.3.
61. Garis, op. cit., p.31.
62. Ibid., p.53.
63. Bernard Bergonzi, 'The Advent of Modernism 1900-1920'; in (ed.) Bergonzi, The Twentieth Century (London: Sphere Books, 1970), p.28.
64. Henry James; quoted in Harry T. Moore, Henry James and his World (London: Thames & Hudson, 1974), p.77.
65. James, The Awkward Age (1899; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966), p.18.
66. Cf. Michael Anglo, Penny Dreadfuls and Other Victorian Horrors (London: Jupiter Books, 1977).
67. Northrop Frye, The Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p.47.
68. Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Worship' (1860); in 'Essays' and 'English Traits' (New York: Collier & Son [Harvard Classics series], 1909), p.285.
69. Margaret Lewis, Ngaio Marsh: A Life. op. cit., p. 146.
70. Ngaio Marsh, 'Three Several Quests' (NZBC 1966). [Interviewer: Alex McDowell]