GRAND-GUIGNOL

The French Theatre of Horror

Richard J. Hand and Michael Wilson

Grand-Guignol

The Théâtre du Grand-Guignol in Paris (1897–1962) achieved a legendary reputation as the 'Theatre of Horror', a venue displaying such explicit violence and blood-curdling terror that a resident doctor was employed to treat the numerous spectators who fainted each night. Indeed, *grand guignol* has entered the English language to describe any display of sensational horror.

The first part of this book, 'An Introduction to the Grand-Guignol', reconsiders the importance and influence of the Grand-Guignol within its social, cultural and historical contexts. It is the first attempt at a major evaluation of the genre as performance: since the theatre closed its doors forty years ago, its plays have been generally overlooked by critics and theatre historians. The authors give full consideration to practical applications and to the challenges presented to the actor and director.

The second part of the book, 'Ten Plays of the Grand-Guignol', provides outstanding new translations of a selection of Grand-Guignol plays. The presentation of these plays in English is an invitation to theatres to revive them as well as an implicit demand for a total reappraisal of the Grand-Guignol genre, not least for the unexpected inclusion of two very funny comedies.

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The façade of Théâtre 347 (formerly the Théâtre du Grand-Guignol), cité Chaptal, Paris, at the time of writing this book (Collection of Hand and Wilson)

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UNIVERSITY
of
EXETER
PRESS

First published in 2002 by
University of Exeter Press
Reed Hall, Streatham Drive
Exeter, Devon EX4 4QR
UK
www.exeterpress.co.uk

Reprinted 2003, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2010

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record of this book is available
from the British Library

Paperback ISBN 978 0 85989 696 2
Hardback ISBN 978 0 85989 695 5

Typeset in Sabon 10/12pt by Exe Valley Dataset Ltd, Exeter

Printed in Great Britain

To Sadiyah, Shahrazad, Jayne, Phillip,
Gemma and Hannah

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Preface

The phrase 'grand-guignol' has entered the language as a general term for the display of grotesque violence within performance media, but it originates in a specific theatre down an obscure alley in Paris. The Grand-Guignol[1] was a remarkable theatre. For more than six decades it thrilled its audiences with a peculiar blend of horrific violence, the erotic and fast-paced comedy. In its time it achieved international notoriety and became one of the most successful tourist attractions in the French capital.

It is, therefore, all the more extraordinary that, both in its lifetime and since its demise, the Grand-Guignol has been virtually ignored by academics and today has the status of one of the world's great forgotten theatres. It is not difficult to lay the blame for this neglect at the door of institutional conservatism and general disdain in the past for the serious study of popular theatre in academic circles. For many years the Grand-Guignol was simply deemed unworthy of serious consideration and the very recipe for its success with the public was sufficient to secure its dismissal by theatre historians. It is, therefore, to be welcomed that recent years have witnessed a growing interest in popular culture; the horror genre, in its many forms, has now entered the arena of scholarly debate. This book has been prepared in that context and, partly at least, in response to the lack of material available on the Grand-Guignol, particularly to the English-speaking reader.

The Grand-Guignol emerged at a crucial and exciting time for theatre. It was conceived in the nineteenth century, directly from the ground-breaking work of André Antoine and his fellow naturalist radicals at the Théâtre Libre. In fact, it grew up to become a child of the twentieth century, emerging as a complex and seemingly contradictory mixture of theatrical traditions and genres characterized by its use of both horror and comedy plays, incorporating melodrama and naturalism, and going on to reflect the influence of Expressionism and film. Yet at its heart it always remained a *popular* theatre and, more crucially, a *modern*

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[1] 'Grand-Guignol' appears in both its hyphenated and non-hyphenated form in equal measure in previously published material. However, the current trend amongst French scholars would appear to favour the hyphenated form. This is certainly the case in Agnès Pierron's substantial collection of Grand-Guignol plays (Pierron 1995) and follows the advice given to us by Professor Claude Schumacher. In this book we have, therefore, used the hyphenated form unless, of course, quoting from sources which use the alternative.

theatre. If the dawn of the twentieth century was a critical period in the development of European theatre, then the same can be said for the horror genre itself. As Paul Wells states:

> As the nineteenth century passed into the twentieth, this prevailing moral and ethical tension between the individual and the socio-political order was profoundly affected by some of the most significant shifts in social and cultural life. This effectively re-configured the notion of evil in the horror text . . . in a way that moved beyond issues of fantasy and ideology and into the realms of material existence and an overt challenge to established cultural value systems.
>
> (Wells 2000, 3)

The Grand-Guignol only became *what* it did because it emerged *when* it did and *where* it did. When talking of a 'Theatre of Horror' one might imagine the monster-iconography and Gothic extravaganzas (ironic or otherwise) on display in Richard O'Brien's *The Rocky Horror Show* (1975), Andrew Lloyd-Webber's *Phantom of the Opera* (1986), and even Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976). But as a realist form that never strays far from a grounding in Zola-inspired naturalism, '*Grand Guignol* requires sadists rather than monsters' (Carroll 1990, 15). Although the Grand-Guignol steers well clear of all things super-natural, it pushes the human subject into monstrosity, extrapolating, as it were, *la bête humaine* into *le monstre humain*. André de Lorde sums up this aspect of the Grand-Guignol when he writes in the preface to *La Galerie des monstres* (1928), 'we have a monster within us—a potential monster' (quoted in Pierron 1995, 1339).[2] The psychological motivation of the Grand-Guignol protagonist/antagonist—in the comedies as much as the horror plays—is dictated by primal instincts, or unpredictable mania, the plots obsessed with death, sex and insanity and exacerbated or compounded by grotesque coincidence or haunting irony.

Aside from a few books on the subject, the Grand-Guignol's most substantial surviving legacy is the collection of scripts, housed at the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, fifty-five of which are contained in Agnès Pierron's *Le Grand-Guignol* (1995). There also exists a number of photographic stills, documentary footage, press cuttings, programme notes and eye-witness accounts. The most useful of these are the memoirs of Paula Maxa, the most celebrated Grand-Guignol actor (Pierron 1995, 1381–95); what she is able to tell us about performing at

[2] All translations are by the authors, unless otherwise indicated. References are to the original French.

the rue Chaptal is invaluable, in spite of her subjectivity and desire to create her own mythology. Apart from this we have very little to tell us about the nature of performance in relation to Grand-Guignol and we are left to our own hypothesizing. To this end we have established a Grand-Guignol Laboratory at the University of Glamorgan to investigate the performative nature of the form. Using student actors we have attempted to learn more about Grand-Guignol performance through the practical exploration of scripts and themes in the drama studio and many of the conclusions contained in this book are informed by that work. We would agree with Mel Gordon (1997, 40) that the Grand-Guignol greatly influenced subsequent horror films, even though it was, ironically, the cinema that contributed largely to the theatre's demise. In the Grand-Guignol Laboratory we have found films particularly beneficial as an entry point into our speculative study towards understanding performance practice at the Grand-Guignol. At the same time it would be a grave mistake to make assumptions about the Grand-Guignol based solely on cinematic evidence. Cinema and theatre are different forms and so we have always trodden with great care in this respect. It is a difference recognized by Maxa herself when she says:

> In the cinema you have a series of images. Everything happens very quickly. But to see people in the flesh suffering and dying at the slow pace required by live performance, that is much more effective. It's a different thing altogether.
>
> (in Pierron 1995, 1392)

This book is divided into two parts. The first part is a discussion of the Grand-Guignol, including an historical outline of the theatre's sixty-five-year existence, and an examination of key aspects and issues pertaining to the genre: location, venue, performance, technical considerations and audience. The second part, and the bulk of this book, is a collection of translations of plays performed at the Grand-Guignol. To date only a small number of English translations of Grand-Guignol plays have been available. Gordon has published three in the various editions of his book (de Lorde and Binet's *L'Horrible Expérience* and de Lorde's *Le Système du Docteur Goudron et du Professeur Plume* in the first edition, whereas the former was replaced by de Lorde and Binet's *Un crime dans une maison de fous* in the revised edition). Deák (1974) also includes a version of *Goudron et Plume* (ibid. 44–54) as an appendix to his article and Gerould (1984) does the same with translations of Méténier's *La Brême* (Gerould 1984, 20–23) and *Le Loupiot* (ibid. 24–27). A number of translations that were presented in London during 1920–22 are available in the Lord Chamberlain's Collections at the British Library.

Whilst all of the plays included here premiered prior to 1930, some of them were reprised at later dates and we have selected them for their importance within the Grand-Guignol repertoire as well as for the representation of the genre that they provide as a collection. We have included comedies as well as horror plays, although the emphasis is on horror, and we have chosen plays that deal with many of the key themes contained within the broad Grand-Guignol repertoire, such as madness, claustrophobia, infection, technophobia, exoticism, eroticism, infidelity, mutilation, revenge and so on. In addition each play is preceded by a preface that not only contextualizes the play historically, but also analyses it in relation to a theoretical consideration of the genre.

Practical exploration of the Grand-Guignol in performance is at an early stage. This volume's aim is to make a contribution to the nascent interest in the French 'Theatre of Horror'.

RJH and MW
April 2002

Acknowledgements

We would like to offer our sincere thanks to the following individuals and institutions:

Simon Baker, Paulo Biscaia Filho, David Cottis, Genevieve Davey, Kathryn Davies, Al Feldstein, Sadiyah Hand, Anna Henderson, Graham Ley, Steve Nicholson, Claude Schumacher, Mike Tarnower, Peter Thomson, Jayne Tucker

Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal
British Film Institute National Library
British Library
William M. Gaines Estate
School of Humanities and Social Sciences Research Committee and Teaching and Learning Committee, University of Glamorgan
Past and present members of the Grand-Guignol Laboratory
Staff at Pixies Holt Residential Centre, Dartmoor
Colleagues in Theatre and Media Drama at the University of Glamorgan
Theatre Museum

We would also like to thank the Arts and Humanities Research Board for a grant to support the writing of this book.

Part One

An Introduction to the Grand-Guignol

1
An Historical Outline of the Grand-Guignol

Hidden amongst the decadence and sleaze of Pigalle with its roughnecks and whores, in the shadows of a quiet, cobbled alleyway, stands a little theatre. The spectators take up their seats in the auditorium eager for the show to begin, if only to escape the eerie mood of their surroundings. At last the curtain rises . . . But this is no ordinary theatre, this is the Théâtre du Grand-Guignol: A prostitute is trapped in a bedroom with a psychopathic killer . . . A doctor replaces medicine with poison and injects his unsuspecting patient . . . A man embraces his daughter before blowing out her brains . . . Another father strangles his son to death . . . A woman's face smokes and melts as it is covered in vitriol . . . A man amputates his own hand with an axe . . . A woman is skinned alive while another watches in sexual ecstasy . . . Members of the audience begin to lose consciousness while a desperate house-doctor attempts to revive them . . . Our innocent spectators feel light-headed, morally outraged and yet guiltily stimulated as they stagger out of the theatre to join other people vomiting in the alleyway to the sounds of violent sex emanating from the darkest corners of the street . . .

Such is the sensationalistic myth of the Grand-Guignol, an extreme and unique mixture of the horrific and the erotic, of the graphic and the morally dubious, of *sang, sperme et sueur* (blood, sperm and sweat). Although an examination of the facts will prove the Grand-Guignol to be less colourful than its reputation, the legend has a basis in truth: all the horrific stage episodes outlined above—and more besides—occur in the plays contained in this volume.

Beginnings

When André Antoine founded the Théâtre Libre in 1887, one of his collaborators was a certain Oscar Méténier. Méténier, formerly a police secretary, provided Antoine with numerous *comédies rosses* (short dramatic pieces which looked at the lives and language of the Parisian underclass) as part of the theatre's naturalistic and experimental multi-play programmes. Antoine, of course, is one of the giants of modern theatre, above all in the contribution he made to the development of

stage naturalism and the role of the director. However, he was far too eclectic a director, actor and producer to be labelled exclusively 'naturalistic'; eventually he grew tired of the *rosse* genre and he and Méténier moved in different directions (Gordon 1997, 13). After the Théâtre Libre collapsed in bankruptcy in 1893, Méténier continued his investigations into the *comédie rosse* and naturalism and he opened the Grand-Guignol in 1897 with the Théâtre Libre model in mind.

The plays of his own which Méténier staged during the initial seasons are good examples of pieces expressing naturalist concerns. *La Brême* (translated by Daniel Gerould as *Meat-Ticket* in Gerould 1984, 20–3 —the title is a reference to the slang term used for the prostitute's identity card issued by the police), for example, which contributed to the Grand-Guignol's opening programme, concerns a middle-aged couple discussing their daughter's future with a friend at the time of her first communion. After much discussion of moral values, the daughter enters to declare that, upon the parish priest's advice to never abandon her parents, she intends to follow her sister into prostitution so as to make a financial contribution to the household, a selfless act for which she is congratulated by one and all. Shocking as some of these plays may have been to audiences of the time, 'Méténier's miniature dramas expose the fraud of bourgeois morality when foisted on the poor' (Gerould 1984, 18) whilst the working classes 'parody the values of their supposed betters by adapting the precepts taught by the church and state to their own lowly circumstances' (ibid. 18–19). Méténier also included his *En famille* in the Grand-Guignol programme of April 1898, a play which had caused such moral indignation and outrage when first presented at the Théâtre Libre. Méténier clearly established the Grand-Guignol as a theatre that challenged moral orthodoxy and would continue the *succès de scandale* of naturalism.

It appears that the Grand-Guignol proved a success from its opening and the reason why Oscar Méténier handed ownership of the Théâtre du Grand-Guignol to Max Maurey after only two years at the helm is a matter that remains unclear. Whilst Gordon, Callahan and Homrighous maintain, rather unsatisfactorily, that he simply vanished (Gordon 1988, 17; Callahan 1991, 167; Homrighous 1963, 7), Pierron suggests more credibly that Méténier's decision was motivated by ill health (Pierron 1995, VI), although he was a relatively young man and destined to live for another fourteen years. Even the exact date of the takeover is shrouded in ambiguity.[1]

[1] Whilst Pierron (1995, VII) and Deák (1974, 36) maintain that Maurey's stewardship dates from 1898, in Pierron's 'Calendrier des Spectacles' Maurey does not seem to produce his first season until October 1899 and Méténier was still in charge until February of that same year (Pierron 1995, 1404).

Whatever the exact truth, Méténier was handing over a success and he must have felt assured that his enterprise was in safe hands. Yet the theatre that Max Maurey inherited was not a theatre of horror *per se*, but a successful house of naturalism, dedicated to the true-to-life representation of a society dehumanized by capitalism and bourgeois morality. Although Méténier founded and named the theatre, critics agree that it is really after his departure that his successor, Maurey, identified the potential success of the theatre and developed it away from being a Théâtre Libre imitation into being its own unique, successful—and ultimately legendary—venue and genre. During Maurey's fifteen (or sixteen) year reign, the Grand-Guignol became established as a popular theatre with its distinctive programming, acting and production style, with a loyal team of actors, writers and audience members.

It would be wrong to think that these changes occurred all of a sudden and that Maurey set off in the opposite direction to Méténier. In fact, rather the opposite is true, for Maurey, in order to create his 'Theatre of Horror', simply identified characteristics within Méténier's enterprise and moved them up the production agenda. Plays such as *La Brême* and *En famille* with their vicious and 'shocking' condemnations of bourgeois morality would not look out of place within the Grand-Guignol programme under Maurey, although they are clearly plays that emerge from the naturalist tradition of the Théâtre Libre.

The fact that Méténier's naturalist experiment was able to be developed so seamlessly into Maurey's popular *théâtre de la peur* merely shows how this 'serious, pseudo-scientific dramatic form, could be exploited for sheer thrills and entertainment' (Gerould, 1984, 18). Thrill and sensation were also integral elements of the *comédie rosse* genre and the opening year of the Grand-Guignol produced thrilling and sensationalist plays by Méténier such as *Mademoiselle Fifi* (an adaptation of a Maupassant short story) and *Lui!*[2] Both plays deal with prostitution and feature on-stage (*Mademoiselle Fifi*) and off-stage (*Lui!*) murder. As much as they can be primarily viewed as naturalistic works, both plays establish what became the classic formula of the Grand-Guignol play: a combination, broadly speaking, of the erotic and the violent. In addition,

[2] In referring to plays performed at the Grand-Guignol, we have always used the original French title, except when making specific reference to a translation or an English language production. Hence, *Lui!* refers to Méténier's play which was produced at the Grand-Guignol in 1897, whereas *Jack* refers to the translation of that play which appears later in this volume. Whilst it is usual in French for each word in the title of a play to begin in the upper case until the first noun is reached, we have noticed inconsistencies in this usage. We have referred to Pierron's 'Calendrier des Spectacles' (1995, 1403–24) for guidance on specific plays. For this reason, for example, *La Dernière torture* becomes *La Dernière Torture*.

each evening in the opening seasons presented a selection of plays in a manner which became the Grand-Guignol's trademark: *la douche écossaise*, a 'hot and cold shower' of dramatic pieces interspersed with comedies.

Camillo Antona-Traversi distinctly labels Antoine and Maurey as emanating from the same naturalist tradition (Antona-Traversi 1933, 65) and, although he may have had his own personal reasons for doing this,[3] Maurey lost no time in acquainting himself with the key figures of the Montmartre artistic community, such as Antoine and, most importantly, the playwright and friend of Oscar Méténier, André de Lorde. As Frantisek Deák asserts, initially 'Maurey continued to present naturalist plays' (Deák 1974, 36), such as *Lui!* in January 1902 and a number of comedies from the pen of Georges Courteline, another favourite from the days of Antoine's Théâtre Libre. Nevertheless, the Grand-Guignol did develop significantly during the first few years of the new century and Maurey is generally credited with establishing the Grand-Guignol in five key areas, namely performance style, production style (especially in the development of stage trickery and special effects), programming, the importance of the playwright and the establishment of the Grand-Guignol as the undisputed 'Theatre of Horror'.

At the same time, every one of these developments had been previously signposted by Méténier and it was Maurey's legendary skills as an impresario and publicist which allowed him to recognize certain aspects of Méténier's naturalist experiment as having popular and commercial viability. In 1903 Jacques des Gachon praised Maurey as being a man 'who had very clear ideas' (quoted in Pierron 1995, VII), comparing him to Antoine himself. It was indeed fortunate that, so early in its life, the Théâtre du Grand-Guignol acquired a director with such financial acumen and artistic vision.

Performance Style

If Méténier's Grand-Guignol grew out of naturalist experimentation in the 1880s and 1890s, then it was also never entirely divorced from the great *popular* theatrical development of the nineteenth century, melodrama. Montmartre was home to the 'blood and thunder' theatres of the *boulevard du crime*, and the Grand-Guignol would, in its own time,

[3] Antona-Traversi was, for a while, the secretary to Camille Choisy, the third owner of the Grand-Guignol. In 1928 Choisy left the theatre after falling out with his partner Jack Jouvin, and the ever-loyal Antona-Traversi published his *L'Histoire du Grand-Guignol* (1933) as a tribute to his former boss and as an attack on Jouvin, whom he saw as the usurper of the Grand-Guignol tradition.

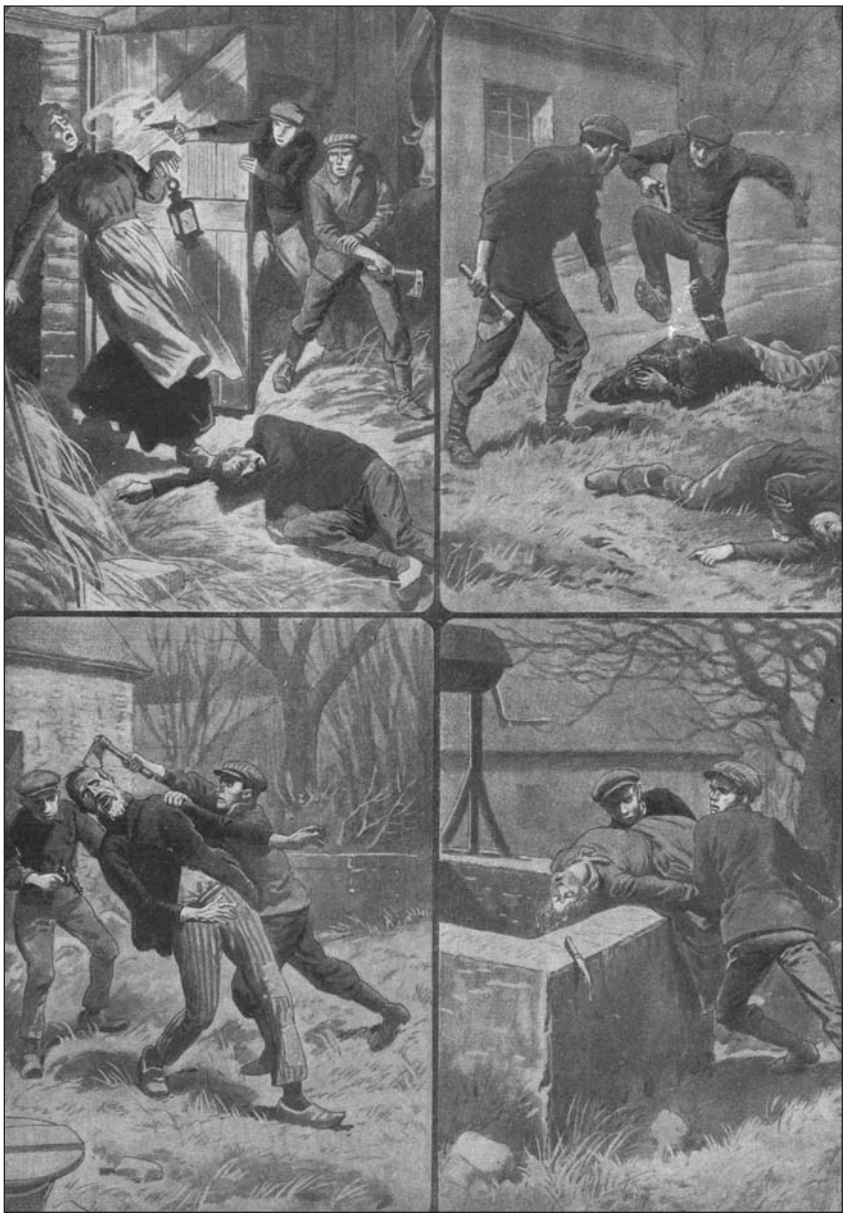

Figure 1. An example of the dramatic and gory illustrations typically used to accompany *fait divers* ('Un Crime Monstrueux commis par deux enfants', *Le Petit Journal*, 26 December 1909, 416) (Collection of Hand and Wilson)

become 'le théâtre de Montmartre' (Sabatier 1998, 141). Implicit in Sabatier's statement must be an acknowledgement that the Grand-Guignol remained inside, rather than outside, the area's melodramatic traditions.

Not unlike the great melodramas of the day, Méténier's *comédies rosses* drew their inspiration from, among other things, the *fait divers* of the Parisian popular press. These were short items of news (usually involving violent crime), gory and colourful illustrations of which often graced the front and back pages of *Le Petit Journal* and *Le Petit Parisien*. Here were documentary illustrations of vitriol attacks on former lovers (see front cover) and brutal murders by delinquent youths (fig. 1), which provided raw material for both forms. When Maurey took over and looked to develop the Grand-Guignol as a theatre of horror, he undoubtedly recognized the popular vein of melodrama that lay embedded within the material and sought to exploit it. Naturalism and melodrama used the same material in completely different ways. Whereas melodrama produced plays of sentimental and sermonising morality in a world where the righteous who suffered misery and poverty were rewarded in Heaven, naturalism was a far more radical doctrine, in which bourgeois society was blamed for the brutalization of humankind.

Mary Homrighous argues that the Grand-Guignol emanates from three separate traditions: naturalism, melodrama and the well-made play (1963, 25). Although these may be the key traditions amalgamated into the Grand-Guignol, it is worth noting how eclectic the theatre was and would always attempt to be. For instance, Symbolism too can be seen as bearing an influence. Indeed, the first successful attempt at a dramatized *fait divers* was *Intérieur* (1894) by Maurice Maeterlinck, the most celebrated of the Symbolist dramatists (Homrighous 1963, 23). As Claude Schumacher argues:

> [Maeterlinck's] theatre is a theatre of fear and a theatre of waiting —not the coward's obscene fear which expresses itself in histrionics, but hidden, internal and unutterable fear, which gnaws away at the soul and which stems from forces over which we have no control. Such waiting and such fear will only cease at the moment of death; life must be lived until then.
>
> (Schumacher 1984, 16)

The Grand-Guignol was even more famous as being a theatre of fear, and although there is very little 'waiting' in the exacerbated horrors of the Grand-Guignol, it displays a world governed by a similarly deep and unutterable fear, whilst resorting to the 'obscene' histrionics associated with melodrama.

Under Maurey, the performance style moved away from naturalism towards a more melodramatic approach, although the naturalist legacy (and maybe a touch of Maeterlinck's Symbolism) was never completely lost. By the beginning of the twentieth century, naturalism was practically a spent force as part of the artistic avant garde, whereas melodrama proved itself to be far more robust. Although the days of the great melodrama theatres were all but over, melodramatic styles of acting had found a new home in the silent film industry and were soon to influence the techniques of the Expressionists. It was under Maurey's stewardship, in 1909,[4] that the Grand-Guignol first began its uneasy relationship with the cinema industry with the production of a film version of de Lorde's adaptation of Poe's *Le Système du Docteur Goudron et du Professeur Plume* (Robert Saidreau 1909) with Henri Gouget, who had played the role of Goudron in the 1903 premiere at the rue Chaptal and was a key member of the resident company during this period (Pierron 1995, 1430). Maurey, it could be argued, was simply making the move towards a more popular style in keeping with the times. As the distinctive house performance style of the Grand-Guignol, melodrama tempered with naturalism, developed, it is in the production values of the time that the legacy of Antoine and Zola can be most readily perceived.

Production Style

As Maurey rebranded the Grand-Guignol as the 'Theatre of Horror', much time, effort and expense was invested in creating effects that were as realistic as possible: whilst a victim may die a melodramatic death, the means by which they met that death were as naturalistic as possible. A key figure in this was Paul Ratineau. It is Ratineau who usually receives the greatest credit for developing the repertoire of stage trickery, special effects and sleight-of-hand sequences, which made the audiences at the rue Chaptal gasp and faint. It is testament to his technical skill and creativity that he was able to develop devices and props that were undetectable to audiences in this small and intimate theatre space. This was achieved, in part, through the ingenious use of stage lighting and shadows, and a great deal of credit must also go to the virtuosity and artistry of the actors themselves in successfully executing the special effects.

François Rivière and Gabrielle Wittkop (1979, 84) identify Ratineau as the third personality, along with Maurey and de Lorde, in the team that was responsible for developing the form in the first decade of the

[4] In the same year D.W. Griffith produced *The Lonely Villa*, starring Mary Pickford and Mack Sennett, a version of André de Lorde and Charles Foleÿ's Grand-Guignol classic, *Au téléphone*.

twentieth century. Effectively Ratineau took on the role of stage manager, where he was able to put his skills and knowledge to good use. According to Henri-René Lenormand—who made his playwrighting debut at the Grand-Guignol with *La Folie blanche* (1905), but never contributed more than a few plays to the repertoire—in his book, *Confessions d'un auteur dramatiques* (1949):

> He knew more than anyone else in Paris about the technique of horror effects. He was an expert in stage weaponry, blood stains, acid burns, pestilent ulcers and severed heads, and he had the composure of a highly experienced stage manager, a wicked Montmartrean sense of humour and a memory which contained, in astonishing detail, everything about the theatre of fear.
>
> (quoted in Rivière and Wittkop 1979, 84)

It is worth mentioning that first and foremost Ratineau was an actor, notching up probably the longest continuous career on the Grand-Guignol stage as a performer in mainly supporting roles. It was a career that lasted well over quarter of a century and spanned the directorships of Maurey, Choisy and Jouvin. Amongst his multitude of credits are appearances in the premiere of de Lorde's *Le Système du Docteur Goudron et du Professeur Plume* alongside Gouget in April 1903, de Lorde and Morel's *La Dernière Torture* in December 1904 (again alongside Gouget), and as the Englishman John Matthews in Héros and Abric's *La Veuve* in March 1906. By 1924 he was playing alongside Maxa in André-Paul Antoine's *La Nuit tragique de Raspoutine* (later renamed *La dernière nuit de Raspoutine*)[5] and he can even be seen playing the role of Hippolyte in the 1930 production of Jean Sartène's *La Griffe*, once more with his old colleague, the veteran Henri Gouget, who made a brief reappearance on the stage at the rue Chaptal under the direction of Jack Jouvin. Arguably, Ratineau's success as a stage manager can be largely attributed to his ability to apply an actor's perspective to the development of special effects. This was a form which relied as much on the artistry of the actor to successfully carry out the tricks on stage, in front of an intimate audience, as it did on the ingenuity of the effects themselves.

Programming

We have already seen that it was Méténier who, from the very opening night with its programme of a prologue, two comedies and four dramas

[5] André-Paul Antoine (1892–1982) was the son of the founder of the Théâtre Libre.

or *comédies rosses*, introduced the concept of alternating different types of plays within a single evening's entertainment. However, *la douche écossaise* was not, as Rivière and Wittkop are at pains to point out, anything necessarily new; 'The system put in place by Méténier established the alternating of comedies and dark plays—this hot and cold shower, also represented by the famous masks which decorate Harlequin's cloak' (Rivière and Wittkop 1979, 76). Furthermore, as a programming structure, it is ideally suited to an evening of one-act plays, a dramatic form championed by Antoine at the Théâtre Libre.

Maurey's contribution was to recognize the importance of *la douche écossaise* to the effectiveness of a theatre of horror. Not only did it allow the theatre to take its audience on an emotional rollercoaster ride from erotic drama to sex farce and back again, but the horror plays were all the more successful for the comic relief provided by the comedies (and vice versa). The contrast between the styles exaggerated both the horror and the comedy and an evening was structured so that the increase and subsequent release of suspense was repeated, climaxing in the main horror at the end of the evening. In this sense, all the plays within an evening's programme should not simply be seen as a series of individual plays, but rather as equally important and interdependent components of the entire theatrical event. According to Pierron, 'From the rising of the curtain, the comedy prepares the ground for the horror' (1995, XIII). It is a technique of tension and release that has been put to good effect by a range of horror writers and film-makers, and Maurey consolidated the idea into the characteristic formula of the Grand-Guignol.

The Making of a Myth

Under Maurey the Grand-Guignol grew into an immensely popular theatre, drawing its audiences from all echelons of society. This was achieved through a combination of a concretization of the form and the shameless use of publicity stunts to create a theatrical genre that became shrouded in its own mythology. The concept of performance had never been restricted purely to the stage as far as the Grand-Guignol was concerned. Méténier had already built around himself a reputation for shocking and offending critics and audience alike, not least by famously arriving at the Grand-Guignol dressed in black, flanked by two bodyguards, and recounting to the audience, outside the theatre, the gruesome details of horrific crimes (Deák 1974, 36). He further sought to capitalize upon this by publishing a weekly journal, *Le Grand Guignol, Journal Hebdomadaire* in order to 'defend his position and also to publicise his reputation for scandal, contradiction, and a taste for the forbidden' (ibid.).

Maurey did not possess the public persona of Méténier, but must have recognized that the success of the latter's enterprise was, at least in part, due to his attempts at publicity. Maurey adopted another, and ultimately more successful, tack, promoting the Grand-Guignol as the unexpurgated 'Theatre of Horror' and creating a whole mythology around it. Maurey was not interested in experimental naturalism for its own sake, but wanted the Grand-Guignol to be seen as a popular, distinctive and profitable theatre, as much a genre in its own right as a theatre building. The other developments in performance, production and programming were all part of this, but Maurey recognized that his enterprise could only benefit from attention to the details of the whole theatrical experience.

When Maurey added a *médecin de service*, or house-doctor, to the permanent staff of the theatre to attend personally to members of the audience who were taken ill during the performance, it is more likely that this was a gimmick to publicize the anticipated horrors lurking inside the auditorium than a response to any real need to cope with an epidemic of faintings and vomitings. This suspicion is further confirmed by a cartoon by Abel Faivre, now famous in Grand-Guignol mythology. Published in *Journal* on 13 December 1904, it shows an anxious husband attending to his wife, who has fainted, calling for the help of the house-doctor. The scene takes place in the foyer of the theatre during a performance of *La Dernière Torture*, whilst a relaxed and nonchalant Max Maurey, hands in pockets, looks on and comments that the doctor himself is indisposed, having fainted like so many others (see Pierron 1995, XIV). Whether or not this is based on a true incident, as has been claimed, is open to debate, but Maurey did nothing (and quite the opposite, it would seem) to gainsay the story. A further example comes from a cartoon published in *Rire* from the same period,[6] which portrays a queue of audience members receiving a medical check-up from an aged doctor before being allowed admittance to the theatre. Maurey was so pleased with this piece of publicity that he took to reprinting it in the theatre programmes.

Maurey's great publicity success was to convince his audience—and some critics and commentators—that the Grand-Guignol was a theatre of physical violence where blood flowed by the bucketful (see Gordon 1997, 30) and the horror so intense that audiences would flee the auditorium or lose consciousness. He achieved this through a range of production techniques, alongside a mastery of public relations, whilst also shrouding everything in a kind of exotic secrecy, so creating a believable folklore around the Grand-Guignol.

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[6] This cartoon is reprinted in Gordon 1997, 19, although no date of publication is offered. It is also referred to in Deák 1974, 37.

As with all such mythology, there is clearly an element of truth within it. It may be that Maurey's myth-making was so successful that it became a self-fulfilling prophecy, but it is clear that acts of extreme violence *were* simulated on the stage and that members of the audience did faint. In the same way that we might nowadays be bewildered by how our ancestors laughed at what seem the weak or incomprehensible jokes of music hall and variety comedians, we must exercise extreme caution when making judgements about staged acts of violence which might today seem tame and unconvincing. There is enough evidence to suggest that the audiences of the Grand-Guignol genuinely did attend the theatre to experience the thrill of fear. Nevertheless, this was not achieved through a frenzy of uncontrolled violence as the myth might suggest. Behind the myth and the cloak of secrecy created by Maurey lies a truth of greater artistry and subtlety.

A Writers' Theatre

The third figure in the triangle, with Maurey and Ratineau, responsible for the creation of the theatre of horror, is the playwright André de Lorde, known as 'Le Prince de la Terreur'. De Lorde was not only the most prolific of all the Grand-Guignol writers, producing over 150 plays, novels and essays in his lifetime, but, from 1900 until his retirement in 1938, he was the writer most closely associated with the Grand-Guignol and his plays were still part of the repertoire well into the 1950s. Although it is his plays, above those of any other writer, that dominate the canon of Grand-Guignol classics, de Lorde's work was not exclusive to the Grand-Guignol, and he wrote for a number of other prestigious theatres, such as the Théâtre-Antoine, the Odéon and the Théâtre Sarah-Bernhardt. Nevertheless the 'Theatre of Horror' remained the spiritual home to the man who, in a remarkable testament to his contribution (which, in its turn, acknowledges the importance of writing to the Grand-Guignol as a whole), was even described as 'the inventor of the so-called "theatre of horror" or the "grand guignolesque"' (Sée 1933, 74). Even when criticizing the themes or morality of his plays, critics had to own, like Georges Bourdon in *Comoedia*, that 'nobody surpasses M. de Lorde in theatrical technique' (24 July 1921, 141).

Born André de Latour, comte de Lorde, in Toulouse on 11 July 1869 (Rivière and Wittkop 1979, 61) into a well-to-do family (his father was a doctor and his mother a pianist), de Lorde had, from an early age, a fascination with the macabre, which was merely fuelled by his father's somewhat unorthodox attempts to stifle it. Initially he trained as a lawyer and for a brief time practised at the bar in Paris and also worked in the Ministry of Finance, but his real passion was for the theatre. His

mother, having divorced his father, had remarried the famous actor Mounet-Sully, who had encouraged the young de Lorde in his passion. When he was appointed to the post of librarian at the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal[7] in 1892, a sinecure which he held for fifteen years, he began to devote himself to a career as a writer.

De Lorde sent his manuscripts to Antoine for consideration (Pierron 1995, XXXVI) and soon became known within the theatre community. He befriended Méténier and the two planned collaborative projects together. However, it was under Maurey that de Lorde got his first opportunity to write for the Grand-Guignol, making his debut in January 1900 with *Le Post-scriptum*, a comedy. Interestingly, many of his plays were collaborations or adaptations. A number of his co-writers were scientists, most notably Alfred Binet, inventor of the Binet Intelligence Test, adding authentic detail to the plays. De Lorde's work included adaptations of fiction, cinema and even historical events. This aspect of his output reminds us that the Grand-Guignol would always be a significant theatre of adaptation, giving rise to a number of fascinating examples of this process.

Not surprisingly, with the services of a talent like de Lorde, the writers of the Grand-Guignol under Maurey enjoyed a significant status, and yet scripts were not treated as sacred. Maurey himself, who also wrote a number of plays for the rue Chaptal, was renowned for taking a particularly close interest in the development of the scripts in rehearsal. Most illuminating in this respect is the playwright René Berton's account of rehearsals at the Grand-Guignol under Maurey, quoted in full by Antona-Traversi in his *L'Histoire du Grand-Guignol* (Antona-Traversi 1933, 30–36). According to Berton, Maurey would attend rehearsals and, with an enviable eye for detail, become increasingly involved, rewriting whole scenes and altering the way actors delivered lines, made gestures or moved on the stage. This did not always endear Maurey to his colleagues, and arguments regularly erupted during rehearsals, including an incident when Severin-Mars, a leading actor, threatened Maurey with a table. Gordon suggests that this tension was the basis of the undoubted bounty of creativity that existed under Maurey's stewardship, claiming that the 'atmosphere of barely restrained hostility and frustration probably improved the evening's work' (Gordon 1997, 18). Berton has only admiration for Maurey: 'What made Max Maurey's job easier was the spirit of discipline and commitment, the flexibility and endurance of the actors under his direction' (Antona-Traversi 1933, 35).

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[7] The Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal is now, rather fittingly, home to the Grand-Guignol archives in Paris.

Once again the creation of the Grand-Guignol as a writers' theatre was not an innovation of Maurey's. Méténier had also placed the playwright at the centre of the creative process. The differences between the two stem from the different agenda that they were trying to follow. Whilst Méténier was trying to create a theatre that dealt with social reality from a radical perspective, Maurey wanted to titillate and frighten. The Grand-Guignol writers often used the *faits divers* and other items of news for inspiration, but whilst Méténier's writers portrayed the bestial depths to which humanity had sunk under post-industrial capitalism, Maurey's team, led by de Lorde, sought to exploit contemporary fears. In this sense, the two regimes reflected two separate ages, divided by the turn of the century in which the obsessions of the nineteenth century gave way to the modernist concerns of *la belle époque*.

La Belle Époque

Politically, the closing years of the nineteenth century were dominated by the infamous Dreyfus Affair (Mayeur and Rebérioux 1987, 179) which involved the brief imprisonment of Émile Zola and which dragged on from 1894 to 1900, resulting in the victory of the generally left-leaning Dreyfusards and the pardoning of Captain Dreyfus. At the same time, in 1898, French colonial ambition had been dealt a bitter blow following the stand-off with Britain and the withdrawal of troops from Fashoda. With the humiliation of defeat at the hands of the Prussians still fresh in the memory, French self-confidence was at decidedly low ebb (Hayes 1992, 24–25). All this was set to change as the old century drew to a close; the carbuncle of the old order was seemingly lanced with the end of the Dreyfus Affair and the election of a left-wing government in 1902 (Mayeur and Rebérioux 1987, 220–22). The separation of church and state followed shortly afterwards in 1905 (ibid., 227–32).

The period from the turn of the century to the outbreak of war in 1914 was a period of stability, growth and prosperity in France, and particularly Paris, which 'was the scene of creative thinking and invention unusually rich in quantity and quality' (Cronin 1989, 15). It is nevertheless important to qualify such a perception of *la belle époque*. The France of this epoch was hopelessly divided along class lines, exacerbated by the national and international political crises outlined above. In 1900, scarcely one in every forty boys received any formal education beyond the age of eleven and the education of girls was statistically insignificant. As Theodore Zeldin puts it, secondary education was 'a luxury, an investment, a status symbol' (quoted in Schumacher 1984, 3). In the light of such facts, it is easy to understand the vehemence of the

attacks on bourgeois values and morality up to this point, whether in the novels of Zola or the plays of Méténier. Claude Schumacher reminds us:

> It is useful to remember that [the conventional image of *belle époque* France] as a country of song and dance, giddy with pleasure, belongs more to the world of myth than reality, and that the theatre in this period was an art form which of necessity could interest only a small minority of the population. In the troubled 1890s as well as during the years leading up to the First World War, the theatre catered to a middle-class audience looking for escapist entertainment.
>
> (Schumacher 1984, 5)

Schumacher illustrates bourgeois escapism with the massive success of Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* in 1897–98 (the same year as the height of the Dreyfus Affair and the opening of the Grand-Guignol), a play which was hailed by critics as the ' "triple protest of idealism, poetry and French *clarté* (enlightenment)" against the prurience of naturalism' (Schumacher 1984, 15). An example like this throws the nihilism and naturalism of the Grand-Guignol into an interesting light. It reflects, perhaps, that even a theatre of horror is escapist or, more likely, that its success was with an audience that was, at this time, distinctively Montmartrean: working class or avant gardist. Either way, it is interesting that Max Maurey's directorship of the Grand-Guignol coincides with *la belle époque*. What was produced at the Grand-Guignol at this time (and subsequently became defining characteristics of it) reflected the moods, anxieties and preoccupations of Parisian society during this complex and critical period.

The Golden Age of the Grand-Guignol

In August 1914 Europe embarked on a four-year war, fought largely in the fields of Northern France, which saw death and horror on a scale previously unimagined. Europe was to be changed forever, and within a year of the outbreak of war Maurey had withdrawn from the enterprise and handed over directorship of the theatre to Camille Choisy and his partner Charles Zibell. In her memoirs Paula Maxa suggests that the reason for Maurey's departure was a fear that, after the real-life horrors of the war, his audience would have no further appetite for the horrors of the stage (see Pierron 1995, 1383). Perhaps Maurey, privately a man of high morals and a deep sensitivity, lost that appetite himself.

It is still easy to underestimate Maurey's contribution to the Grand-Guignol form, not least because Choisy's stewardship is often described