AN ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF THE ACTING CAREER
OF TALLULAH BANKHEAD

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AN ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF THE ACTING CAREER
OF TALLULAH BANKHEAD

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CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNING OF SUCCESS

Tallulah Bankhead's family tree was filled with ancestors who had served their country; but none, with the exception of Tallulah, had served in the theatre. Both her grandfather and her mother's grandfather were wealthy Alabamians. The common belief was that Tallulah received much of her acting talent from her father, but accounts of her mother's younger days show proof that both of her parents were vivacious and talented. A stranger once told Tallulah, "Your mother was the most beautiful thing that ever lived. Many people have said you get your acting talent from your father, but I disagree. I was at school with Ada Eugenia and I knew Will well. Did you know that she could faint on cue?"¹ Tallulah's mother possessed grace and beauty and was quite flamboyant. She loved beautiful clothes and enjoyed creating a ruckus in her own Southern world. Indeed, Tallulah inherited her mother's joy in turning social taboos upside down.

Tallulah's father, uncle, and maternal grandfather were all United States Senators. This fact explains Miss Bankhead's continual interest in politics on all levels. It has been noted that of all the speakers of the day on the Senate floor, the Bankheads were most acknowledged for their eloquence and theatricality. They spoke freely and usually held their congressional audiences spellbound by sheer personality;

this same type of personality would later make Tallulah renowned. The Bankhead dynasty held one other trait in common. They were adamant on any subject in which they believed, despite any unfriendly circumstances. Tallulah retained this drive and the force of the Bankheads on stage and off.

Tallulah's father, William B. Bankhead, had a great effect on his daughter's early years, and he undoubtedly influenced her toward an exciting career. As a young man just out of law school, he had attempted to begin his professional practice in New York. He was defeated in this endeavor but soon discovered a newer, and, for a while, more exciting vocation—the theatre. He accidentally found employment with a Boston stock company and had just begun his theatrical career when his mother vetoed the whole idea. He later told his daughter that if he had had more money and thicker clothes, he would have rebelled against all authority and stayed with the company; but as it was, he complied with his mother's wishes and willed his theatrical dreams of success to his daughter. Once, after he saw his daughter perform in The Little Foxes, Tallulah quoted him as saying, "Oh, Tallulah, if I had only had one whack at it!"² His marriage to Tallulah's mother made William Bankhead's life stable and secure. The Bankheads had one daughter before Tallulah's birth. Only one year after giving birth to her first child, Adelaide Eugenia Bankhead gave birth to Tallulah and died three days later.

Christened beside her mother's casket on January 31, 1903, the child was named Tallulah Brockman Bankhead. When her father named her after her paternal grandmother he had no idea that this child would one day be

²Thid., p. 46.
a famous actress known across two continents by her first name. "Speaking of Tallulah," says Miss Bankhead, "it has been argued that had I been christened Jane or Julia it is unlikely I would ever have gotten out of Huntsville, Alabama, place of my birth. Of one thing I'm certain. 'Tallulah' has been no handicap to me."\(^3\) Her Aunt Marie once informed her that Tallulah was an Indian word for the "tone of a bell."\(^4\) During her early teens, Tallulah often worried about her outlandish name and once requested that she might change it. Her father quickly refused. Years later, Ethel Barrymore suggested that she find a name that would be easier for theatre patrons to remember. But the name stayed and the legend grew around Tallulah. At one flourishing point in her career, she wanted to sue the massive Procter and Gamble company for one million dollars when they attempted to use her "original" name in a shampoo commercial. It was little wonder that the name, Tallulah, was continually in the news.

Tallulah and her sister spent their childhood with their grandparents in Jasper, Alabama. Her grandmother spoiled Tallulah unmercifully, and more than once she cooled the tyrant's temper by splashing her with a bucket of water. Tallulah was well known for her childish rages. Once, because Tallulah was sick and had to be cured with mustard plasters, she was extremely jealous of her older sister. She would scream to her grandmother, "Burn sister too!"\(^5\) During healthy rages, Tallulah was

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 23.
\(^4\)Ibid., p. 24.
\(^5\)The New York Times, February 27, 1944, Sec VI, p. 19.
fond of lying on the floor, kicking fiercely and yelling incessantly to avenge the wrongs she felt she had encountered. A great many directors would feel the fiery temper during her acting career, for she was considered to be one of the last prima donnas who would scream in rage until given their ultimate victory.

Tallulah named as her first theatrical performance, one that occurred at a party given by her Aunt Marie. The affair was given in honor of two famous men, Orville and Wilbur Wright. Since the Wrights were also the judges for the best entertainment given at the party, they awarded Tallulah the first prize for an imitation of her kindergarten teacher. Later, she became fascinated by a contortionist she saw at a circus in Birmingham. Impressed by the agility of the performer, she recalled: "within a week I mastered cartwheel and backbend, added a third stunt to my repertory, standing on my head." After this brief attempt for contortion fame, Miss Bankhead was entranced by a young girl who jumped from a balloon at a county fair and floated to the ground in a parachute. But when she attempted this same feat with one substitution, that of her grandmother's parasol for the parachute, she fell from her father's hayloft to receive a splintered coccyx.

While still a young girl, Tallulah heard someone report that she had a "gracious smile." Needing no further encouragement, she practiced for hours in front of mirrors to perfect her beauty and her impersonations. She had no idea at that time that she was beginning her acting career. Her father, who enjoyed these antics thoroughly, was continually lifting her up on the dining room table to perform for him and his

Bankhead, op. cit., p. 15.
fellow guests. During a lull in the program of a school sponsored
talent show, she dragged her sister to the stage, and together they re-
cited one of her father's favorite poems, "Old Ironsides." Later, she
recalled:

Oliver Wendell Holmes must have spun in his grave.
My recitation caused a storm of applause and
laughter. The cheering did things to my spine,
to my mind. I felt consecrated. I felt I was fated
for the purple, that neither fire nor flood nor
pestilence could stay me.7

The emotions that lay dormant in Miss Bankhead were awakened by
her father's recitations of Shakespeare, Biblical stories, "Hiawatha,
"Little Orphan Annie," and "The Spell of the Yukon." She remembered all
the works her father had readily quoted. She later became known in
New York as that young, beautiful girl who could, upon invitation, recite
poetry for almost two hours straight. One Christmas, her father took
her to see a production of The Whip, a blood and thunder melodrama at
the Manhattan Opera House. The impressions she received from this show
were stamped deeply in young Tallulah's memory.

The curtain hadn't been up five minutes before Sister
and I were on the verge of hysterics. By the end of
the first act both of us had wet our pants. Daddy's
suggestion that we retire to the ladies' room for
treatment was scorned. When the careening car smashed
into the bridge at the start of the second act, we be-
came so overwrought Daddy had to hang onto our collars
to keep us from tumbling out of the box. At the final
curtain I didn't sleep for two nights running. When I
did nod, the treacherous marquis intruded on my dreams.
Nothing I had ever seen or heard or read had made
such an impact on me.8

7 Ibid., p. 17.
8 Ibid., pp. 39-40.
Soon after seeing The Whip, she saw "The Good Little Devil," a haunting fairy tale which was staged and produced by David Belasco. Although Mr. Belasco's production did not induce the traumas encountered by the production of The Whip, it left another mark, and soon Miss Bankhead became dedicated to her chosen career.

As a student in a rather sedate Catholic school, Miss Bankhead became known for her low, throaty voice, which was the result of a tonsillectomy at an early age. She achieved notoriety as the rowdy child who was never quite under the control of her veiled teachers. She was a prankster who delighted far more in mimicking the cloaked nuns than in listening to their dull lectures. Her education was embellished and broadened by her father's entertaining reading of Shakespearean works and Grimm's Fairy Tales. Disciplined, formal education never attracted her; nor did it break her spirit. Her childhood discipline was also lax in regard to financial matters. Because of this same lack of discipline, she was continually spending enormous sums of money while working and during the off-season, pawning every valuable item that she owned. She once told Meyer Berger that she hated bickering over the price of anything. "I never got into that habit, started charging things to Daddy when I was six, and never did like bothering with petty financial details, that's Bankhead tradition." This complete absence of control in almost every area was to become one of the major problems that Tallulah's critics recognized when they viewed her acting. John Mason Brown would report of Tallulah: "... although her acting is

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enormously skillful, it is sadly lacking in discipline. This lack of discipline prevents her either from giving a definite design to one of her characterizations or from sustaining it as well as she otherwise might.\textsuperscript{10} But discipline or no discipline, Tallulah's childhood was one of cotton-senators and hoydenish impersonations of anyone Tallulah felt was worthy of the somewhat questionable honor.

In her early teens, Miss Bankhead spent endless hours reading movie-star magazines in a local drugstore. One day she came across an article in \textit{Pictureplay} magazine announcing a beauty contest. The purpose of the contest was to locate the ten most beautiful young female aspirants for roles in films. She quickly entered with a photograph that concealed one of her best features, her lavish and beautiful hair. After watching the magazine for several months without locating the name of the winner, she lapsed into despair and gave up the entire idea as a hoax. Her dream of acting was given up as a delusion. Not long after forgetting about the contest, Tallulah was enjoying a coke and magazine in a Washington drug store. Suddenly she realized that she was staring at the same photograph she had mailed to \textit{Pictureplay} magazine. The underlying caption read "Who is She?" In the excitement of mailing her entry, she had failed to identify herself. The magazine announced that if the contestant would identify herself, she would immediately be named a winner. Tallulah's account of the story is as follows:

Well I guess that was the happiest moment in my life, she told a reporter in one breath, although I suppose I shouldn't say that because happy is such a big word and we're never really happy anyway . . . but I stole

the magazine and didn't pay for the coke I didn't know what I was doing and rushed out of the place to the hotel Daddy was staying at the Willard. It was a very elegant old place knocking over three old women I rushed upstairs screaming Daddy Daddy I won I won and everyone said oh my God Tallulah is having one of her spells but I showed them the picture and they said well now I guess we'll have to let her be an actress because she's no damn good for anything else anyway!11

Although he was inwardly pleased, her father's reaction was stern. After her claim to the award had been verified, a family conference decided that Tallulah's career in movies should be given a trial run. Despite his many reservations, Tallulah's father sent her to New York accompanied by a maiden aunt who would act as her chaperone. Thus, at the age of sixteen, Tallulah's destiny began to emerge.

Upon their arrival in New York, Aunt Louise decided that they should reside at the Algonquin Hotel. She was unaware when she made the decision that most of the theatre's great professionals were frequent patrons of the eloquent hotel. Tallulah managed to meet most of them eventually, but only knowing actors was not acting. After waiting for several weeks, Tallulah was marched to David Belasco's office one day by her Aunt. The first Tallulah heard from Mr. Belasco was when he looked at the young girl's bitten fingernails and exclaimed, "Ah, temperament."12 Belasco's secretary later told Tallulah that after she had left, her Aunt had returned to Belasco's office and assured him that Tallulah had no real talent and was only being humored by her family. With little hope for immediate employment, Miss Bankhead consumed most of her time

11Ted Shane, "Tallulah To You," Collier's, CXIX, pt. 2 (April, 1947), 74.

12Bankhead, op. cit., p. 56.
by finagling invitations to theatrical parties from her Algonquin friends. Charlotte Hughes spoke of her at the time, "When the golden-haired sixteen-year-old Tallulah first invaded our streets twenty years ago she had a throaty voice and tawny beauty that caused cab drivers to faint." By simply meeting the great names in theatre, Miss Bankhead felt she was getting into the theatrical business, if only through a social door rather than through a working door. Luckily, her aunt returned to Alabama, and left Tallulah in the care of the hotel manager. Unhampered at last, Tallulah really turned on the charm and met her future confidant, Estelle Winwood; the great Barrymores, Ethel, John, and Lionel; and a devoted friend, Frank Crowninshield. The latter was enticed to sneak Tallulah into many more theatrical parties, and thus provided a multitude of free meals. Through this lessening of eating expenses, she hired a French maid, one of her incessant splurges. Zoe Akins wrote,

She was a no good, beautiful, put-upon creature deserving the fair awards. Hers was to be no Cinderella fairy tale. She had neither the patience nor the intention of waiting for opportunity. She was driven by forces of her own stronger than chance. When Tallulah, who looked exactly like a child's dream of a Christmas doll, talked of the theater one noticed an intensity greatly at variance with the cover-girl face. One realized nothing existed for her except the stage. She was obsessed.

As soon as her aunt had left Tallulah alone in New York, the letters from home became more concerned about her welfare. Therefore, her first role was received just in time. With the help of one of her father's acquaintances, she was cast as one of several mute walk-ons in a play

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14 Bankhead, op. cit., p. 60.
called The Squab Farm. Unfortunately, the play was panned by critics as "... a garish travesty on life in the movies, all in bad taste."\footnote{The New York Times, March 14, 1918, Sec. II, p. 1.}

Only one critic dared to notice the play in his column. Tallulah's first theatrical review read: "There are three or four young girls in the company who might better be back in the care of their mothers."\footnote{Bankhead, op. cit., p. 85.}

Because of Tallulah's obvious lack of stage experience and several other severe handicaps such as top billing as a "society girl" who attempted acting, hoping to fool a family into thinking she was doing more than a mute walk-on part, and the loneliness of knowing almost nothing about the stage, Tallulah gave the theatre her resignation. But since the play was already a terrific flop, in reality, she lost nothing but her dignity.

The young actress was to concentrate very diligently upon acting before receiving her next acting role, for she suddenly realized that she desperately needed experience on the stage. Having never been to acting school and lacking the requirements of stage etiquette, she failed to know the first thing about the customs or taboos of the theatre. She proved her ignorance while working on The Squab Farm by whistling in the dressing room, an act that almost cost her a week's salary. But as Richard Maney said of Tallulah, "If she lacked experience, she boiled with confidence. Cynics hinted that she would have a one-year vogue, then fall into obscurity. In rebuttal she swore that she would be wheeled through an entrance at eighty."\footnote{The New York Times, March 14, 1918, Sec. II, p. 1.} Her next attempt for fame

\footnote{The New York Times, March 14, 1918, Sec. II, p. 1.}
was as unfruitful as her first, for Tallulah was to embark upon an acting career in the silent movies.

After two silent movies, *When Men Betray* and *Thirty-a-Week*, she read for the part of Miss Binney in *39 East* and was immediately cast by the playwright, Rachel Crothers. After capturing her first speaking role, she was beginning to find her place in the theatre. But fate was devil and angel; for Tallulah and her play, along with all the other plays in New York, were immediately halted by a union strike. Miss Bankhead remained undaunted and took advantage of the strike to meet the theatre's elite at the frequent Equity benefits. She furthered her cause by becoming extremely ill while working at one of these benefits. Her illness was acute gangrenous appendix, complicated by peritonitis. The suffering she encountered from her burst appendix was compensated by thousands of actors envisioning Tallulah as a St. Joan of the theater. Things became even better when she emerged from the hospital because the strike had ended. Escaping the road tour of *39 East* because of her illness, Tallulah sat back to watch directors fight for her talent. When given her first lead in *The Hottentot*, she again basked in her success, but not for long. After two days' rehearsal she was handed her notice because the director said her voice was too weak for the role. Miss Bankhead returned to the ranks of the unemployed. During her unemployment, she acquired the citation of being a wit by remarking after the first act of an opening performance of Maeterlinck's *The Burgomaster of Stilemonde* that "There's less in this than meets the eye." 18 Her

18 Bankhead, op. cit., p. 82.
escort happened to be Alex Woolcott, dramatic critic for the *Times*. The following morning her remark was in the front page critic's column.

Again Miss Bankhead was given the chance to make her place in the theatre with Zoe Akins' play, *Footloose*. Throwing herself into her role, she was successful to a degree. After seeing *Footloose*, Burns Mantle of the *Evening Mail* wrote, "A most promising young ingenue who is Tallulah Bankhead, with only a year's stage experience, was able to inject a telling realism into a difficult role." Miss Akins later remarked that what interested her most about Tallulah was her agile mind that could remember lines after only a very few rehearsals. Although *Footloose* was crucified by the critics, Miss Bankhead derived needed experience from working in the play, not to mention greater knowledge about theatrical taboos. She was almost fired by the stage manager when she was caught eating the stage properties, a three course meal. After *Footloose* closed, Tallulah was forced to return to the wings of her father because of lack of funds. For eleven months she dwindled in spirit until she received her next summons.

Rachel Crothers again came to her aid and cast Tallulah for the part of Hallie Livingston in Miss Crother's play, *Nice People*. Another young and up-coming actress, Miss Katharine Cornell, was cast in the play. Since the play was branded by the critics as a bomb, both actresses received only mediocre reviews. After a partially successful run, considering the reviews of the critics, Miss Bankhead performed in *Everyday*

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by Rachel Crothers, and replaced Kathlene MacDonnell in Danger. Another adequate part came her way in The Exciters. Unfortunately, Miss Bankhead received one bad play after another, only managing to save her skin by giving competent acting performances in badly written plays. Ted Shane, a New York critic, wrote of Tallulah's career at this point; "In eight plays between 1918 and 1922, Tallulah gained little theatrical but much social success . . . . But being witty, beautiful and talked about didn't make her happy." The experience gained did one other thing; it taught her the fundamentals in theatre and soon her actual career began.

During a lull after The Exciters, Charles Cochran who had been an old acquaintance at the Algonquin Hotel wired the young actress from England about a rather obscure chance she had for the part of Maxine in The Dancers. The play was to be produced by Sir Gerald du Maurier and was to open in London. Immediately she borrowed a thousand dollars and wired Cochran that she was on her way. Then, almost as soon as the telegram had left New York, she received a second telegram stating that Du Maurier's plans about the lead had changed. Taking the advice of Estelle Winwood, she wired Cochran that, despite the circumstances, she was coming anyway. Tallulah was off to London.

After her arrival and after checking into the Ritz Hotel, the wheels for success were set into motion by this vibrant actress. She was determined to be a success on the London stage. By a few carefully maneuvered plots, she succeeded in not only receiving the part of Maxine in The Dancers, but in replacing the girl whom Du Maurier had previously

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Shane, op. cit.
cast. At this point, the career of Miss Bankhead received three proper vehicles—a fair play, a receptive audience, and the London critics. She was on her way.
CHAPTER II

ACTING, ACTORS AND THE THEATRE

An actor, whether or not he admits the fact, has certain attitudes about the theatre. As shown in Toby Cole's book, *Actors on Acting*, he may base his theory on the theatre's importance to society, his theatrical goals, or whether the theatre promises personal satisfaction in opposition to other professions. He usually has definite ideas concerning the welfare of the theatre. As an actor or actress, he also has certain theories pertaining to the technical aspect of acting which he uses to achieve his art. The experienced actor develops these acting techniques in much the same manner as an artist would develop a style of painting. The end result is the same; the actor evolves into his own mature style of acting. It is not fashioned for anyone other than himself—it is his trademark, his style. It is not comparable to another actor, if the style is honest. There cannot be two John Barrymores, two Laurence Oliviers, or two Tallulah Bankheads. True actors are not mimics, they are truthful developers of their art—true to themselves and the theatre.

In this chapter we shall be concerned with two aspects of Tallulah Bankhead's career. The first aspect is her attitude toward the theatre as a profession and her theories on technical acting. The second aspect contains the reflections of theatrical personages in reference to Miss Bankhead's attributes as a theatrical celebrity and performer.

Tallulah Bankhead was repeatedly evasive about the most important aspect of her life—the theatre. When asked to comment on her
fascination for her profession, she became flippant. Nevertheless, she always remained steadfast in her devotion to her craft.

Despite her devotion, Tallulah Bankhead was never an actress to remain silent about the weaknesses of the acting profession. One of her most relentless aversions was the continual high rate of unemployment among actors in America. She observed,

It's one of the tragic ironies of the theater that only one man in it can count on steady work—the night watchman. . . . Acting is the most insecure of all the trades, the most risky. In their professional lifetime most actors rehearse longer than they play, spend more time traipsing from office to office in search of jobs than they rehearse and play combined.

During the 1940's, when the U. S. Government began to reject the Federal Theatre Project as a Communistic guise, Tallulah traveled with other actors to the nation's capital and voiced her disapproval of the government's actions. Her main argument for the maintenance of the project stemmed from the large unemployment rate among American actors.

Having no idealistic conceptions about the theatre and the workers who lived in its realm, Tallulah also harangued the directors, playwrights, producers, and technical figures. She once stated: "The theater has always been the foe of change, of progress, of innovation. I'm surprised it ever conceded the electric light." She observed:

Producers, actors, directors, and authors are all victims of excessive advice. . . . They listen to everyone. Too often they are impressed by the last man they talk to. In their attempts to please all the kibitzers, they only succeed in pleasing no one. It's only through a miracle of miscalculation that together they put over a hit.

1 Tallulah Bankhead, Tallulah (New York, 1952), pp. 7-8.
2 Ibid., p. 249.
3 Ibid., p. 306.
It is evident that Miss Bankhead's respect for the men and women behind the scenes was not awe-inspiring.

Although Tallulah was never treated harshly by the critics without cause, as in Antony and Cleopatra, she defiantly believed that the critic's circle knew absolutely nothing about excellent acting. She, along with many of her acting colleagues, detested the power of the critic to prove a show a success or failure. She often outwitted the critics by making a show, which was branded as an outrageous hoax, an outrageous success.

Being a forthright person, at times, she attained an interesting, truthful, and amusing insight into the actress's personality, as the following comment shows:

In the theater lying is looked upon as an occupational disease. Actresses lie about their age, their salaries, their arteries, their offers, as part of professional routine. Since I blurt out the truth, or what I think is the truth, on all occasions, I'm looked upon as an insolent lunatic. A half-dozen actresses of my acquaintance say they never read reviews of their plays or performances. They lie in their teeth. . . actors live for applause, printed or vocal. Without it we'd perish. My sisters could no more ignore the reviews than they could shrink from a raise in salary.4

Included in her autobiography was Tallulah's sworn statement that she would never act again. Published in 1952, the statement later had to be refuted with an article in The New York Times. For after 1952, she performed in eight Broadway plays and summer theatre. Thus, theatrical professionals were slightly sceptical when they read statements such as, "I loathe acting . . . I detest acting because it is

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4 Ibid., p. 308.
sheer drudgery. She was an actress of great dedication. Perhaps she was overly truthful when she stated,

Acting is the laziest of the professions . . . . The demands on an actress consist of learning the role, interpreting to the best of her ability the intent of the author as outlined by the director. When not on the stage? She toils not, neither does she spin. She may fume. She may even read. But she doesn't practice. Cooking? Writing? These require powers of concentration and industry which I don't possess. The theater has spoiled me for the more demanding arts . . . .

She once reflected that she should have been a dancer, as she was always gifted with a great sense of movement and rhythm on stage. But her heart was planted firmly in the theatre, and she would always return.

The profession of acting breeds personages of extremes. Unfortunately, Tallulah usually spoke in extremes when she discussed her technical acting abilities. Occasionally, she would refute her outlandish statements with rational ones. For example, when she was asked about her technical approach to acting, she usually denied having any. It was quite evident that she almost believed the following statements:

I was born an actress. I never had any formal instruction, never cased a drama school. Acting is an astonishingly easy profession. I've given no more thought to my best roles than I have to my worst. Asked about my technique, I grow evasive. I'm not aware I have any. I'm violating no confidences, least of all my own, when I say my performances have saved many a frowzy charade, prolonged their runs long before their deserts. I have a dark suspicion that only ersatz actors can explain the thing called technique. I could list a hundred right here, but . . . I have enough feuds on my hands.

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5 Ibid., p. 4.
6 Ibid., pp. 13-14.
7 Ibid., pp. 4-5.
Her rational attack on acting was hinted at in an interview with Charlotte Hughes when she stated that "If you act on emotion, you do it beautifully one night and the next it just doesn't come, I did that once, but now I know I can reproduce the effect every night and it will be right. You must be conscious of yourself." During the same interview she spoke of the problems of interplay between the actors and of timing and business. She talked very little of herself in a role but remained continually concerned about the difficulty of getting a play to merge as a whole. She also discussed the importance of the actress's respect for the character that she was portraying. She concluded, "... the people you play. They have to be real and not phony to you." It was in the latter part of her career that she realized the importance of discipline to her capabilities as an actress. In 1954, she stated, "The discipline of the theatre is my salvation. Its rigid demands are my anchor." From serious and rational comments, such as these on theories of acting, Tallulah was quoted by Lawrence Langer as haphazardly stating, "The curious thing about me, darling," said Tallulah, quite seriously, "is that I give my best performances when I am slightly ill, because then my diaphragm is not quite so powerful."

Tallulah chose quite a few bad plays as vehicles throughout her career. Nevertheless, she did have a certain philosophy about the parts

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8 New York Times, Jan. 4, 1941, Sec. 7, p. 10.
9 Ibid., p. 11.
that she played. Tallulah's philosophy of meaty roles for an actress was as follows:

Now actresses, modern playwrights being either delinquent, sterile, or frying fish in Hollywood, often add to their prestige, bolster up their budgets, by enlisting a revival—something out of Ibsen, Sheridan, or that rake from Stratford. This feigned interest in the classics adds a cachet to their reputations. But no actress in her right mind, least of all Tallulah, elects to toil in the renewal of so feathery a trifle as Private Lives from choice. Creating a role is an actress's most rewarding experience. To duplicate, with such variations as suggest themselves, a role created by another, is not my idea of paradise.\(^{12}\)

If given a preference between comic and tragic roles, Tallulah would have chosen comedy. In an interview with Eugene Archer, she stated, "Comedy is the only creative aspect of acting, but no one ever gets awards for it. Comedy is tragedy."\(^{13}\) Despite her love for comedy, her favorite single role was that of Regina Giddens in Lillian Hellman's drama of southern life, The Little Foxes. She once told Richard Maney in reference to the character, "It's good to be in a play in which I can lean on the author. Regina's real, and needs no cartwheels, no handstands to validate her."\(^{14}\) Perhaps the fondness Tallulah felt for her role of Regina included the fact that The Little Foxes lifted her in the eyes of the critics to a position of esteem. She reveled in the fact that she finally had created a role in a play that the critics would respect; she could also prove that she was an actress who could perform a role that did not readily reflect her own personality. She disciplined her acting ability with Regina.

\(^{12}\)Bankhead, p. 9.


\(^{14}\)New York Times, Aug. 27, 1939, Sec. 9, p. 2.
Miss Bankhead was a traveler. She flourished when she took her shows on the road, relishing the fact that her fellow actors lacked the dedication that she felt she had attained. She never ignored the chance to call this to their attention. Once Tallulah played in *Private Lives* for over two hundred performances throughout the United States. When she spoke of her experiences, she bemoaned the facts that hotels refused to cater to her pets, restaurants closed at early hours, and bridge games came to a standstill. But after returning from her out-of-town tours, she praised the audiences as continually superior to the New York patrons:

"The truth is that out-of-town theatregoers are the hardiest of the species and the most loyal. For all the humiliations they have suffered, for all the swindles they have sat through, let a good play with a top-drawer cast come along and they'll crawl over broken bottles on their hands and knees to see it. In the interest of a balanced diet they could do with a few of the stage's round actors instead of the screen's flat ones. They'll portage their canoe around the rapids, get the last cough out of their '41 sedan, miss the last suburban train, and sleep on a bench in the depot to spend an evening under the same roof with live players."

She played summer theatres frequently, always giving exciting if not demanding performances as an actress and a personality.

Shall the verdict show that Tallulah worshipped acting, and that she would have been miserable without her theatrical career? Fortunately, she relinquished her devilish capacity for cynicism in her autobiography to make the following assertion:

I would be an ingrate and a liar did I give the impression that I've never had any thrills in the theatre. There's a large dash of show-off in me, as there is in every actor worth his salt. I'm intoxicated by applause. It's my nectar. For all my griping, nothing has so tingled my spine as stepping down to the foots after the fall of a first-night curtain to be greeted by the acclaim of my peers, or an approximation thereof. . . . For all its stupidities, the theatre will outlive all the mechanical contraptions schemed to ape it.16

When Miss Bankhead finally decided to be honest with her readers and fans, she gave the verdict to a definite answer of . . . "yes!"

It is now beneficial to examine what theatrical personages of Tallulah Bankhead's very distinctive era of theatrical history have said in relevance to Tallulah's overall talent and dedication to the theatre. Essentially, Tallulah permitted the critics and her close alliances to discuss her acting and her dedication to the theatre in her stead. She never denied a general statement that was made in relationship to her talent. She may have disagreed with the opinions expressed, but her respect for the critics, playwrights, producers, and actors who are to be cited was generally constant. Therefore, when they criticized, she listened, and, in most cases, remained silent, which was quite uncommon for the actress's outspoken personality.

John Mason Brown usually remained constant in his admiration of Miss Bankhead's acting ability, but his opinions varied in enthusiasm. In reference to her technical ability, he reflected in 1938, "She gestures with extraordinary grace. She has eloquent hands and wrists. She moves with an ease few actresses can match. And her husky voice, which in reality is no instrument at all . . . is one of the most flexible

16 Bankhead, Tallulah, p. 11.
He was always aware of her wide range of acting ability, and reflected on the fact that she could change emotions rapidly when performing. He especially felt that she was gifted in her creation of comic roles. For John Mason Brown, Tallulah's most arresting quality was her energy level on stage, and yet he was skeptical about the same quality which he praised. He considered the fact that her great energy might also be a hindrance to the actress's acting ability. He feared "The pacings, the over-confidence of her playing, the very boldness of her ease upon the stage, which sometimes makes you feel as uncomfortable in her presence as you do when you see a person making himself too much at home in another person's house . . . ."18

He concluded in 1938, after Miss Bankhead had been acting for twenty years:

... Miss Bankhead needs to be protected against this fretful energy of hers. It makes her wasteful of her gifts. It leads her into overdoing. It persuades her to be indiscriminate in her use of emphasis. It keeps her unsteady in her playing. Although her acting is enormously skillful, it is sadly lacking in discipline. This lack of discipline prevents her either from giving a definite design to one of her characterizations or from sustaining it as well as she otherwise might.19

While George Jean Nathan referred to Tallulah Bankhead as an actress with "considerable natural ability,"20 he concurred with John Mason Brown when he spoke of her spontaneous vitality as a drawback as well

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18 Ibid., p. 234.
19 Ibid., p. 235.
as an asset. He also stated of the actress, "Miss Bankhead's intuitive command of the stage, plus her impressively flexible voice, make the characters usually believable and always a delight to watch."

Helen Ormsbee examined Tallulah's technical acting in 1938 and reached the following opinion:

Tallulah Bankhead is particularly gifted at using imagination so that she extends the reality of a scene beyond the limits of the stage setting. Every time she comes in or goes out at a door, that next room, that hallway, that sidewalk which cannot be seen, all become existent in the story. She makes you believe that they are there, just out of view. From the first moment she steps into a play, she brings with her a conviction of the reality of events that have been happening off-stage.

Morton Eustis remarked in 1939 that Tallulah achieved success before she had had an opportunity to analyze the weaknesses and the strengths in her own acting talents. Therefore, he believed that she had a tendency to rely upon her energy and command of the stage to achieve her characterizations. Eustis spoke of Tallulah's vibrancy on stage as "... at once her greatest asset and her greatest liability as an actress. It is a force ... that rivets the attention of an audience from the moment she takes the stage; ... Invaluable, this gift of God, ... But dangerous, too, ..." He later observed that, "She had an instinctive sense of the theatre and of stage technique; there were inspired flashes in all her portrayals; scenes that

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21 George Jean Nathan, "The Eagle Has Two Heads," Newsweek, XXIX (March 31, 1947), 84.


stood out as sharply as etchings; but the Bankhead portraits lacked the strokes to give them rounded substance."

After Miss Bankhead returned from her success in the London theatre, Brooks Atkinson observed that she was

... a brilliant actress of bits. She could act individual scenes with daring and bravura, but she could not act a whole character at full length with a beginning and a conclusion and a logical line of development between the two. Like many celebrated personalities of the stage and screen she had come to depend on her buoyant mannerisms and her nerves, hoping for the best in the interludes in her acting when she was not exactly sure of what she was doing.

He saw things somewhat differently after Miss Bankhead gave a brilliant performance in *The Little Foxes* and made observations such as, "... she always puts on a performance with dash and gusto and raises the mean temperature of the neighborhood." He continuously praised Tallulah for never "short-changing" her customers; he professed the belief that she gave as much to her soundly written roles as she did to her mediocre and badly written characters. Yet Brooks Atkinson had reservations about Tallulah's ability to be versatile. He observed, "She cannot play everything: she is too undisciplined for the classics, as her tin-type Cleopatra proved ... ."

His largest complaint against Miss Bankhead, as an actress, revolved around her choice of vehicles. He stated that she, along with other actresses of her day, failed to choose their plays wisely and with honesty:

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24 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
When a good actress stoops to bad plays, or considers plays only in terms of the stellar part, we all feel that she has let us down. . . . we all know when an actress is merely appearing. . . . For one of the things we now expect of our finest actresses is a sense of responsibility.  

But despite the fact that Atkinson disapproved of her vehicles, he concluded in 1935, "Miss Bankhead is a dynamic actress of remarkable versatility with great powers of character description."  

Wilella Waldorf gave Miss Bankhead the praise of being "... an actress of great technical skill, with a personality that is in itself dramatic."  

John Chapman stated, "Miss Bankhead is a thoroughly expert comedienne; . . . she can bellow one line and throw away the next in a whisper and make each sound funnier than it really is." He was overwhelmed by Tallulah's voice: "Gracious, what a voice that woman has! It's a baritone, mostly--but with it she can wheedle and simper and entice as well as bellow. . . . She can wear clothes very well. She can also make her clothes work for her."  

In this same vein, one theatrical critic for Time magazine stated, "What helps make a Tallulah filibuster spellbinding is the famed voice that can bounce a whisper off the balcony walls. Husky and vibrant . . . . ,

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30 Theatre Critics' Reviews, edited by Rachel W. Coffin, II (Dec. 29, 1941), 161; hereafter to be referred to as TCR.  
31 TCR, XV (Sept. 6, 1954), 316.  
32 TCR, IX (Oct. 5, 1948), 211.
it can shift without notice from a sigh in a rain barrel to a hoot in a hollow . . . ."\[33\] He also stated,

But she lacks the stability and discipline to keep her gift under control over a long period. Her performances fluctuate more than most after the opening night. Says a friend: "The longer she plays in something, the less you see of the play, the more you see of Tallulah.\[34\]

Tallulah Bankhead was unanimously conceded to be a "quick study" actress with an amazing amount of energy to be poured into her work.

Producer John C. Wilson stated of the star:

I've never seen her equal for pure physical strength. Noel Coward is a dynamo like Tallulah. He'll work around the clock, drive himself at rehearsals, go without sleep. But I've seen Noel get tired. I've never seen Tallulah get tired. No other human body could withstand the punishment she visits on herself.\[35\]

Maurice Zolotow spent a day following the actress as she amazed him with her ceaseless energy. She flippantly spent the entire morning in an undisciplined fury. But when she reached rehearsals, he witnessed a decidedly different Tallulah: "... when Tallulah works, she works hard and is deadly serious about taking direction and remembering suggestions and improving the reading or the inflection of a line."\[36\]

Tennessee Williams stated that he wrote several plays for Tallulah Bankhead, among them were A Streetcar Named Desire, Sweet Bird of Youth, and The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore. He met her and first saw

\[33\]"One-Woman Show," Time, LII (Nov. 22, 1948), 76.

\[34\]Ibid., p. 82.


\[36\]Ibid., p. 18.
her act while he was an unknown playwright. Of this first encounter with Miss Bankhead, he stated:

... this response was delivered in a voice that, having once heard, I would never stop hearing inside my head as I wrote lines for ladies that had somehow resulted from the fantastic crossbreeding of a moth and a tiger ... I was more than just properly awed, I was virtually dumb-struck.  

Despite his original intentions, once the playwright became well known, the writer and Miss Bankhead seldom coincided in their work. She did perform in the revivals of *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*. After Tallulah portrayed the character Blanche du Bois from *A Streetcar Named Desire*, she and Williams indulged in a running battle, using the *New York Times* as their means of communication. The dispute was over her questionable competence in the role of Blanche. In a letter of apology published in the same newspaper, Tennessee Williams wrote, "I doubt that any actress has ever worked harder, for Miss Bankhead is a great 'pro,' as true as they make them." Three years later, after the battleground had cleared, and after Williams had rewritten *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*, he asked Tallulah to play the leading role of Mrs. Goforth. Before the play opened, he wrote of the actress:

... she isn't a Method actress and she is no more a member of the New Wave of theater personalities than I am. We are both veteran performers in our respective departments of the English-speaking theater. And if I should say that I hated writing plays it would be as reliable a statement as Tallulah's statement that she hates the theater.

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She loves it with so much of her heart that, in order to protect her heart, she has to say that she hates it. But we know better when we see her onstage.  

Tallulah had stated that her best role appeared in the character of Regina from The Little Foxes, which was written by Lillian Hellman. However, simply because the playwright wrote her favorite role did not imply that Tallulah considered Lillian Hellman her favorite person or playwright. There was never any fondness surrounding the actress and Miss Hellman, and at any instant they were each ready to express their opinions of their respective talents and personalities. They also relished being quoted. At one point, Miss Hellman stated, "Tallulah is a good actress, a very good actress, but she is also the biggest bore God ever created."  

This type of bickering between playwrights, directors, and producers was constantly fed by Tallulah, especially in relationship to Broadway's "top" producers and directors. Several of these important people vowed they would never again work with the temperamental Tallulah. Time magazine once quoted an unidentified director as saying, "The woman is constitutionally unable to fit harmoniously into a group effort." The article further stated:

She has quarreled with almost every producer, director and playwright who has crossed her path in recent years. Oddly, the bitterest feuds have involved her best plays. She does not speak to The Little Foxes' Producer-Director Herman Shumlin and Playwright Lillian Hellman. ... She does not speak to The Skin

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41 Time, LII (Nov. 22, 1948), 76.
Tallulah once called Billy Rose, the producer of Clash By Night, a "loathsome little bully." She also accused Michael Myerberg of being, "... a stupid and incompetent little madman who knows nothing of the theatre." In spite of the seemingly endless arguments that she was a torment to everyone on the stage with her, she was also reported to be generous with her stage experience that had been gathered over a forty-year period in the theatre. Jean Dalrymple, who worked with Tallulah's publicity for several years, remained faithful to the star's reputation as a reliable and compatible worker. She stated of the actress,

Most of the people who cried out loudest against Tallulah because of her so-called temperament had never met her, never seen her on the stage and, in many cases, never even had seen her in films. Certainly they had never worked with her. She is an exceptionally gifted actress and a real pro. I have worked, I suppose, with hundreds of stars and world-famous artists and very few of them can match her when it comes to hard, grueling work and complete concentration. And I have never known her to be "difficult" when she feels what is being done to and around her is right.

Even after the much publicized ruckus between Hermin Shumlin and Tallulah, he was capable of objectively praising her ability as an actress. He stated, "Like every actress, Tallulah is an exhibitionist, but, in

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42 Ibid., pp. 76-77.
43 Ibid.
44 Zolotow, p. 16.
her, exhibitionism is carried to a fanatical degree, and it makes her exciting to watch on a stage." The producer further stated, "Like all important people, she is always filled with fear—the gnawing, consuming fear that she may not be quite good enough." Ted Shane also commented on Tallulah's seemingly endless ability to argue with the management:

The only other actresses whose drawing power is as equally magnetic are Helen Hayes, Katharine Cornell, Lynn Fontanne . . . and Gertrude Lawrence. But of them all, Tallulah is the only vivid prima donna in the gusty tradition of eccentricity and crazy temperament. Compared with sedate Helen Hayes, sober Miss Cornell, quietly sophisticated Gertrude Lawrence and safely married Mrs. Lunt, Tallulah is dangerous, daring, unpredictable, dynamic, whimsical, unconventional and quite utterly mad.

Because of her vivid personality, on stage and off, the question arises, in relation to Miss Bankhead's technical ability as an actress, whether or not she acted in accordance with her own personality or in accordance with the personality of the character she was playing. Garff B. Wilson has stated:

The personality school has many successful exponents, particularly among actresses. Such eminent and greatly admired performers as Lynn Fontanne, Katharine Hepburn, and Tallulah Bankhead belong in this group because, with rare exceptions, they substitute their own unique individualities for the dramatic character they are playing or they portray those characters which exactly suit their own individualities.

Tallulah is usually considered a "personality school" actress but conclusions must wait for further exploration into her success as an

46* Time, p. 80.

47 Ted Shane, "Tallulah To You," Collier's, CXIX (April 26, 1947), 19.

actress. Unfortunately, it is true that she was better known for her performances off stage rather than her performances on the stage. Because of this situation, she unknowingly complicated the task of removing herself from the personal image in the audience's conception of her characters on stage. In reply to a questionnaire on the subject of Miss Bankhead's acting ability, several critics who viewed her performances have stated their opinions on the subject.

Beginning with her career in London, Ivor Brown of the London Observer stated that she "... made experiments to escape from being type-cast." In his opinion, she did not act roles that were closely aligned to her own personality; he considered her "... an able actress with a vivid and memorable personality." He also stated that she was a great actress because of her "... enthusiasm, energy and hard work. She combined great application with her own remarkable vitality giving free play." While she was performing in plays, he always believed he was watching Miss Bankhead as well as the character which she was portraying.49

Another London critic, William Darlington, considered Miss Bankhead's roles as always being closely aligned with her personality. He was confident that he was always watching Tallulah Bankhead, the personality, when she was performing, and stated, "She was never a great actress unless she became one later in America. In England, she was a vivid personality with a fabulous ruckus on and off stage." He considered Miss Bankhead a great personality and not a great actress.50

Brooks Atkinson asserted,

It is impossible to separate an actor from his personality—particularly if he is a stimulating actor. . . . A first rate actor has a personality too dynamic to be hidden. I think her acting was a succession of exhibitions of an electric, witty and powerful personality. But it seems to me that does not constitute great acting. She was thinking of herself, not the character.51

John Gaver, critic for the United Press International, believed that Tallulah was no different from any other great stars such as Ethel Barrymore, Helen Hayes, or Mary Martin, in that the audience is always aware of the presence of the star. He stated in relation to her personality:

A star without a dominant personality is impossible. There are some with whom you may be more conscious of this than in others, but it is always there in every case. According to role and play, any actress's personality may seem more dominant at one time than at another.

He further declared that Tallulah Bankhead had, "... authority, and if that means personality, so be it. But none of the great ones have succeeded without that one thing—authority."52

George Ace denied the idea that Tallulah acted parts which were mostly Tallulah. He believed, in relation to the question of whether she was an actress or a personality, that she was "... a little of each, she could assume both." He developed the point that "... the excitement she engendered when she first came on stage ... electricity ..." was the quality that made her a great actress.53

53 Letter from George Ace, theatre critic, April 7, 1969.
Ethel Colby concluded that Tallulah was more of a personality than she was a great actress. She also stated, "... but that was also true of Ethel Barrymore whose own personality was stronger than most of her assigned roles." She acknowledged that Tallulah always portrayed characters that fell close to the actress's own personality. Miss Colby thought of Tallulah Bankhead as a great personality, not as a great actress. She confirmed her belief by stating, "She was never a great actress--just good and colorful."  

Joseph Wood Krutch viewed Tallulah Bankhead's roles as similar to the actress's personality "when successful." He believed that she was not a great actress, and usually remembered that he was watching Miss Bankhead when she was performing, not the character in the production. He made an analogy to explain his attitude. "It was said of John Drew that he didn't act; he just behaved. Most of the time Miss Bankhead just misbehaved."  

Richard Watts, Jr. was always impressed by Miss Bankhead's performances, "... though usually as a personality. I don't think she was a 'great' actress;" he stated, "she was a magnetic and powerful one, and it sometimes over-dominated her play." In reply to the question of whether or not she was a great actress or a great personality, he concluded that she was "... a powerful and fascinating personality with great personal warmth."  

54 Letter from Ethel Colby, theatre critic, April 7, 1969.  
56 Letter from Richard Watts, Jr., theatre critic, April 5, 1969.
Realizing that Miss Bankhead's career never achieved the artistic success that was promised from her early successes in London, Walter Kerr acknowledged, "She was nowhere near a great actress, though once in a while a surprisingly good one... most of her energy seemed poured into her flamboyant private life; after a while she was having to borrow back on the flamboyance to get her through a performance."\(^{57}\)

John Chapman replied to all questions with this statement. "Tallulah Bankhead was a wonderful drinking companion but not a very good actress."\(^{58}\)

Lewis Funke replied, in contrast to many others, Tallulah was a great personality and not a great actress, yet he believed that she did not act characters that were closely aligned to her own personality. He observed that when she was performing, the character was the dominating force, and yet he also stated that he always remembered that he was watching Miss Bankhead when she acted roles. He rationalized this attitude by stating, "This you couldn't help--she was a star with all that implies."\(^{59}\)

Relevant to the question of personality is Tallulah Bankhead's own comment on the subject:

Personality has something to do with inner fire, competitive spirit, defiance of the norm, solo effort, showmanship, in the ability to transform a liability into an asset. There were many better singers than Mary Garden or Geraldine Farrar, but their color, their professional tricks and antics, set them apart from the run of divas, fascinated idolators unable to distinguish an oboe from an


\(^{58}\) Letter from John Chapman, theatre critic, April 1, 1969.

\(^{59}\) Letter from Lewis Funke, theatre critic, May 6, 1969.
ocarina. In the argot of the theater, people possessed of personality are loosely called characters. In Paris they're types. They've even been called screwballs.

Personality? Even the hostiles concede I have it. There are any number of actresses with as much technical skill, but few can cause such a page-one commotion.60

After viewing Miss Bankhead's attitude toward her profession and her acting theories, along with the comments of her colleagues in reference to these same aspects, it is interesting to note the single portion of advice that Tallulah gave to young actors and actresses who aspire to become professionals: "Though I'm not one to dish out advice, I would say to anyone who hopes to prosper in the theater to stick to his standards, whatever they be. Raise them! Never lower them. Success is too hard won to be siphoned off in compromises."61


61 Ibid., p. 314.
CHAPTER III

THE ROLES SHE USUALLY SHOULD NOT HAVE ACCEPTED

Tallulah Bankhead became a theatrical star in England after her first two plays. She remained a star until her death. Even though she was a personal success, this did not necessarily ensure critical acceptance of the plays she appeared in throughout her forty years in the theatre. Unfortunately, the majority of her vehicles were not critically successful plays. Tallulah devoted a great deal of her acting ability to poorly written plays. In her entire career, she acted in only six plays which actually received outstanding critical approval when relying on their own merits. These were Antony and Cleopatra, The Little Foxes, Clash By Night, The Skin of Our Teeth, Private Lives, and A Streetcar Named Desire. Because of the large number of second and third-rate plays that starred Tallulah, these will be assembled first to examine the critical reviews of her acting career, while the six plays mentioned above will be examined in chapter four. This first examination will include her London period, only closely considering her most important plays and her career on the New York stage. Greater importance will be placed on the critical comments after 1939 since she became recognized for her acting ability after her success in The Little Foxes.

When Tallulah Bankhead arrived in London, she had neither financial security nor an acting position. But she was not to be denied success and soon she landed her first role in Sir Gerald Du Maurier's production
of The Dancers. The play by Hubert Parsons was hailed by the London critics as a complete fiasco. Only one critic commented on Miss Bankhead's performance. James Agate stated in The Saturday Review: "Do Canadian light-o-loves become French dancers and refuse English Dukes offering their coronets, castles and grouse-moors in marriage? Miss Tallulah Bankhead makes us feel that they do, and that right charmingly."\(^1\) Tallulah enjoyed a long run in The Dancers; two months of the role of Maxine placed her in contention for the lead in an even more negligible play, Edward Knoblock's Conchita.\(^2\) Once again, the London critics failed to notice the actress with the exception of Charles Morgan of The Times. He commented: "Miss Tallulah Bankhead--whose first name is in itself a melodious romance--was a lithe and lovely Conchita, a good dancer, and what her compatriots would call a 'good-looker'. . . ."\(^3\) After receiving a great deal of public success from Conchita, Tallulah plunged into an equally poor play called This Marriage by Eliot Crawshay-Williams. Frances Birrell in The Nation and The Athenaeum stated, "Miss Tallulah Bankhead, as the cocotte, has an easier part, because it was more satisfactorily realized by the author, but she did not let her chances slip.\(^4\) For The Spectator, the critic Tarn concluded, "The acting of Miss Tallulah Bankhead is one of its strong points."\(^5\) Ivor Brown commented: "..."
Miss Tallulah Bankhead accommodates herself to the lacquered boudoir and encompassing divan. Perhaps it was not her fault that the seduction episode nearly drove me to impenetrable slumber.\textsuperscript{6} The London critics did notice that Miss Bankhead had succeeded in being a bright spot in three consecutively wretched plays. Evidently Miss Bankhead failed to continue her promising performances since only one critic mentioned her role in The Creaking Chair by Allene Tupper Wilkes,\textsuperscript{7} and the critic, Charles Morgan, was not complimentary. He wrote, "Miss Tallulah Bankhead has a part so enigmatic as to be a perpetual irritation."\textsuperscript{8}

At this point in her London career, Noel Coward became interested in the young actress and brought forth the script of Fallen Angels.\textsuperscript{9} Her popularity skyrocketed and the British public lined the streets in front of her theatre for several days to gain admission to the opening. Luckily, Tallulah was more successful in the play than its playwright, Noel Coward. The critics were not impressed with Fallen Angels.\textsuperscript{10} Ivor Brown dubbed the play "a trifle," but he spoke of Tallulah and her counterpart in the play, Edna Best, with admiration. "As the daughters of the game, Miss Tallulah Bankhead and Miss Edna Best achieve marvels of unpleasantness, clawing and scratching as only friendly women can: and also, as I saw it, marvels of unhappiness."\textsuperscript{11}

\begin{itemize}
  \item[Ivor Brown,]"Deadly Nightshade," \textit{The Saturday Review}, CLXIV (May 17, 1924), 304.
  \item[Allene Tupper Wilkes,]\textit{The Creaking Chair} (London, 1926).
  \item[The Times,]July 23, 1924, p. 12.
  \item[Ted Shane,]"Tallulah to You," \textit{Collier's}, CXIX, pt. 2 (April, 1947), 74.
  \item[Noel Coward,]\textit{Fallen Angels} (London, 1925).
  \item[Ivor Brown,]"Much Ado About Noel," \textit{The Saturday Review}, CXLI (May 9, 1925), 486.
\end{itemize}
Spectator who signed himself as R. J. was even more enthusiastic about Tallulah. He stated, "... the scene is saved, by the quite sufficiently restrained acting of Miss Bankhead and Miss Best." James Agate ruled to give "All praise to Miss Bankhead ... who impersonated to the life a joyless creature whose spiritual home was the gutter." Ernest Short later commented on Fallen Angels and Miss Bankhead's role:

The virtue in Fallen Angels was that the play gave Edna Best and Tallulah Bankhead opportunities for displaying their pleasant talents ... Miss Bankhead's success was particularly welcome to her dramatist as she took up her part in Fallen Angels when Margaret Bannerman had a nervous breakdown during rehearsals. In two days Tallulah was word-perfect and Noel Coward later described her first-night performance as a "tour de force" of vitality, magnetism and spontaneous combustion." The critics allowed their veiled amusement to filter through to the public and thus assured a profitable run.

At the same time that Katharine Cornell was portraying the ingenue role of Iris March in New York, Tallulah accepted the same role in the play, The Green Hat, by Michael Arlen. London critical opinions were mixed as to the quality of the play. For example, R. J. of The Spectator candidly stated, "I gathered, from the loud approval of all the ardent green hatters in audience for Miss Bankhead, that this pretentious "movie" drama, seasoning cant with spice, may quite possibly be in for a long run." James Agate wrote, "Miss Bankhead brought all her husky charm

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12 R. J., "Fallen Angels," The Spectator, CXXXIV (May 2, 1925), 719.
16 R. J., "The Green Hat," The Spectator, CXXXV (September 12, 1925), 405.
to the part of Iris, and acted pleasantly and competently without making
one feel that the character could have moved in any mentionable society."^{17}
A critic named Omicron observed in The Nation and The Athenaeum that,
"Miss Bankhead works hard, but Iris remains obstinately a novelist's,
not a playwright's, heroine . . . "^{18} Ivor Brown concluded: "There is
a certain tragic quality about the decline and fall of Iris March, be-
cause Miss Bankhead acts the part with an unforced sincerity which has
power and beauty. Apart from her performance the play is occasionally
noisy and frequently dull."^{19}

Scotch Mist, written by Sir Patrick Hastings, was Tallulah's seventh
public triumph in England. Ivor Brown led the critical blackmark that
finally killed the two-month run. He protested:

If I complain that Sir Patrick's play is vulgar, it can
be answered that the Lord Chamberlain has approved it.
If I further suggest that his characters are bores, it
can be answered that a first-night audience clapped
heartily and called the author for a speech. If, still
querulous, I hold that the piece was only moderately
well acted, it can be answered that Sir Patrick described
Miss Bankhead as the most brilliant actress on our stage
or something of that sort. Let us leave it at that.^{20}

Frances Birrell agreed with Ivor Brown's opinion of Scotch Mist but
fortunately for Miss Bankhead, he praised her acting. He stated,

"Scotch Mist was rather well-produced and acted (particularly by

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^{17} Agate, p. 133.

^{18} Omicron, "From Alpha to Omega," The Nation and the Athenaeum,
SLII (March 10, 1928), 847.

^{19} Ivor Brown, "Green Field and Green Hat," The Saturday Review,
CXL (September 12, 1925), 184.

^{20} Ivor Brown, "Some Sinners and a Saint," The Saturday Review,
CXLI (January 30, 1926), 119.
Miss Tallulah Bankhead), but the whole business was too revolting for any but physical reactions."21 Charles Morgan spoke of Miss Bankhead's performance thus: "... the lady with the rebellious hair and the hoarse voice is Miss Tallulah Bankhead, ... she was quite adequate to the emotional demands of the part. Her hoarseness, her very breathlessness suggest fathomless depths of passion."22

The London opening of the American play They Knew What They Wanted, by Sidney Howard,23 provided Tallulah with the best part that she would receive in London for featuring her legitimate acting talents. The character of Amy proved to be a mild critical success. Omicron stated of the acting cast: "Mr. Basil Dean's production is also highly tactful and the acting throughout is so excellent and convincing that to pick anyone out would be invidious."24 Ivor Brown was extremely amiable to Tallulah.

They know what they wanted; perhaps they got what they deserved; certainly they receive the acting which any author would rejoice to obtain for his creation. Miss Tallulah Bankhead has in Amy the best part which the English stage has so far offered her. The character is an exquisite study in mixed motives. Miss Bankhead fills the part with nervous actuality and her acting grounds upon truth from start to finish.25

21 Frances Birrell, "The Drama," The Nation and the Athenaeum, XXXVIII (February 6, 1926), 646.


23 Sidney Coe Howard, They Knew What They Wanted (New York, 1931).

24 Omicron, "Plays and Pictures," The Nation and the Athenaeum, XXXIX (May 26, 1926), 207.

These critical opinions of *They Knew What They Wanted* were not complemented by the next four plays in which Tallulah appeared. For the plays completely lacked the quality found in *They Knew What They Wanted*, and, therefore, remained almost critically unnoticed.

The *Gold Diggers*, an unpublished play by Avery Hopwood, *Blackmail*, *Mud* and *Treacle* and *Her Cardboard Lover* were box office successes only because of Tallulah's popular following. For example, Omicron wrote of *Blackmail* by Charles Bennett: "Theatre audiences are notoriously credulous section of the community, but they will hardly swallow *Blackmail*. ... Miss Bankhead has little to do but gasp, which she does very nicely." Omicron unenthusiastically noticed Miss Bankhead's redeeming qualities in *Mud* and *Treacle*: "Moreover, Miss Tallulah Bankhead acts extremely well as the ruination of Solomon Jack, ..." Omicron panned *Mud and Treacle*, stating, "Unfortunately, ... the characters in the tragedy never came to life. It was impossible to discover even vaguely what the author meant them to be."

When Charles Morgan reviewed *Her Cardboard Lover*, written by P. G. Wodehouse, a French comedy which concurrently starred Jeanne Eagels in America, he made an interesting observation about Tallulah's acting in relation to her public image in London. He stated:

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Miss Bankhead is an actress. Her performance in They Knew What They Wanted suggested that she was an actress of genuine ability. But in the present piece, vigorous and energetic though she still is, she seems not to care very much for the finer points of character or delivery. She throws her part at the audience, trusting to her personality to win their approval, and she stoops to ridiculous scenes.30

He's Mine, a French play written by Louis Verneuil, was adapted by Arthur Wimperis for the English stage. Tallulah's starring role was tactfully described by the critic for the Illustrated London News.

Miss Tallulah Bankhead plays the lead as a young woman who, when told by her lover that he cannot marry her, intrigues to make him change his mind. Obtaining the entree to his home by a bogus motor accident, she masquerades as a Serbian princess, and begins by "vamping" his elderly male relations.31

Ivor Brown treated He's Mine and Miss Bankhead's acting as two totally different subjects. Of Miss Bankhead, he stated:

Fortunately, America steps in to help out the sad routine of French fun. Miss Tallulah Bankhead's amazing energy and command of a dozen swiftly variable moods gives some sort of life and lustre even to this stuff. Miss Bankhead hits off the toughness and tenderness, the cheek and the charm of the husband-hunters with an easy passage up and down the scale of waywardness. Miss Bankhead never walks through a part: her simulations of caprice are triumphs of conscientiousness. Like all great players she is not so much the public's servant as its drudge, and I never see her act without respecting the diligence as well as the virtuosity of one who gloriously seeks to please.32

As Charles Morgan began to obtain insight into Tallulah's dangerous public image during Her Cardboard Lover, Ivor Brown also began to realize the extent to which public sentiment colored Tallulah's plays and performances.

31Illustrated London News, CXLVIII (October 19, 1929), 508.
32Ivor Brown, "Building Notes," The Saturday Review, CXLVIII (November 2, 1929), 509.
Attempting to secure a part that would insure her critical acceptance as an actress of genuine ability, Tallulah attacked The Lady of the Camellias, by Alexandre Dumas, which had been one of Sarah Bernhardt's favorite plays. The critics admired her bravery, but they remained unenthusiastic about the chances for her success. The critical comments were varied. Alan Parsano in The Daily Mail called the performance "... simple, sincere and beautiful." In opposition, Omicron rejected Miss Bankhead's performance, stating:

There is a large gap in the middle of the jig-saw, and Miss Tallulah Bankhead's Marguerite will not fit into it. In some ways the production is unworthy of her, as it allows her performance to stick out uncomfortably where it need not; but the dropping of some of her mannerisms on this occasion makes no less trying the retention of some others—her delivery, for instance, which in spite of occasional aptness becomes very monotonous and often verges, towards the end of sentences, on a drawl.  

Charles Morgan tempered his criticism of Miss Bankhead's Camille with praise:

... the performance is an extremely creditable one. Miss Bankhead, moreover, is as Marguerite a careful and serious actress. Her melancholy in the last scene loses much of its effect because her voice is monotonous, and she lacks the particular simplicity of sentiment that could make Marguerite's softer nothings ... acceptable. Her set speeches are, moreover, marred by her tendency to begin each period loudly and instantly lower her tone; the rhythm is wearisome and its regularity destructive of sense. But through all these defects emerge a great vitality and a genuine understanding of the emotional opportunities of the part. This Marguerite holds the stage when she is on it, and that is more than half of any Marguerite's battle.  

33 New York Times, March 6, 1930, p. 16.

34 Omicron, "Plays and Pictures," The Nation and the Athenaeum, XLVI (March 15, 1930), 801.

35 The Times, March 6, 1930, p. 12.
Only once again in her career would Tallulah attempt a classic role, and she would not be as successful with Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* as with *The Lady of the Camellias*.

Rachel Crothers, who was responsible for one of Tallulah's earlier characters in *Nice People*, wrote the last play which Tallulah performed in London. Her swan song was *Let Us Be Gay*. Unfortunately, Miss Crothers' play was not suitable for the English critics; however, as usual, Miss Bankhead was. Omicron observed "... the play contains some delicious American jokes, which Miss Bankhead got the most out of. Unfortunately, her enunciation was often very faulty, and though I am used to an American accent I could not catch many of her words from the fourth row..." Gilbert Wakefield, writing for *The Saturday Review*, was precise in his appraisal of her acting in *Let Us Be Gay*. He stated, "Miss Bankhead found fewer opportunities than usual for displaying her idiosyncratic personality." The critic for the *Illustrated London News* found that "Miss Bankhead incongruously introduced serious scenes, she more than atoned by her brightness in the lighter ones."

If Tallulah did not receive overall critical praise for her London period of acting, she did receive great public admiration. For example, two accounts of opening nights for a Tallulah vehicle serve to illustrate

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the intensity with which her popularity flourished. The first account
was written by Arnold Bennett after the opening night of *The Lady of the
Camellias*:

... until she comes the play is reduced to a mere pro-
logue, has no general interest. Tallulah, and nobody
and nothing else, is the play. Her entrance is imminent.
The next second she will appear. She appears. Ordinary
stars get "hands." If Tallulah gets a "hand" it is not
heard. What is heard is a terrific, wild, passionate,
hysterical roar and shriek... the play stands still.
Tallulah stands still. She is a little unnerved, and to
be unnerved becomes her. The tumult dies.

I have never seen Tallulah in a good play. This
play (*The Lady of the Camellias*) is not bad. It is merely
dead ... But no dullness of a play can impair the
vogue of Tallulah. At every opportunity, and especially
at the ends of the acts, the roars and shrieks recur in
fullest volume. Hundreds and hundreds of robust young
women are determined that this first night shall be a
deafening success and it is. The play is the minor item
of the entertainment.40

Charles Morgan gave the second description of the opening night of *The
Gold Diggers*:

Chorus girls prepared the way by ample discussion for
the appearance of Jerry Lamar or to put the emphasis
where the gallery put it—on Tallulah Bankhead. Cheers
began sometime before her entrance; when she entered
they became deafening...; there seemed to be a
reasonable possibility that the play would be prevented,
by so much enthusiasm, from proceeding further and
that we would be left to rejoice in the fact that
Tallulah Bankhead was Tallulah Bankhead.

The question arises—will it as a show succeed?
Up to a point—Miss Bankhead has a strong following.
It is not a very discerning following, for it will cheer
her performance in a play of this kind as loudly as it
cheered her work, which had signs of genuine distinction,
in *They Knew What They Wanted*.41

40 Arnold Bennett, cited in Tallulah Bankhead, *Tallulah* (New York,
1952), p. 120.

In eight years Tallulah had risen to great prominence in the London theatrical world. She had appeared in sixteen plays which were all doomed for disaster. Tallulah explained her predicament in her autobiography: "But the critics chanted that, aside from They Knew What They Wanted, I had not had a play worthy for my yet untested talent. For all my reputed beauty, my excitements, my ability to stimulate box-office trade, my position in the theater was yet to be established." Therefore, because of her constant state of near poverty, when Paramount offered her a sizeable, long-term contract, she reluctantly left the English theatre and returned to the United States to act in motion pictures.

After making six motion pictures, Tarnished Lady, My Sin, The Cheat, Thunder Below, The Devil and the Deep, and Faithless, Tallulah left Hollywood for the preservation of her career. After a ten-year absence from New York, Tallulah began her second crusade for critical and popular success on Broadway. She had returned from London as a star, acted in six worthless motion pictures, and had never been accepted as an actress with great ability by the New York drama critics. Therefore, the state of her career at this time was extremely crucial. She described her plight thus: "Heady tales of my triumphs on the Thames had seared the cables, but New York settled for no alien endorsement. I must prove myself all over again. My screen scuffles were regarded as professional slumming." Therefore, in her haste to find a vehicle,

43 Ibid., p. 203.
Tallulah chose a mediocre play called *Forsaking All Others*, written by E. W. Roberts and F. M. Cavett.

Itching with enthusiasm to conquer Broadway, Tallulah rashly decided to secretly produce *Forsaking All Others*. She spent enormous sums of money on set designs, costumes, and publicity; but despite her ambitious bid for a successful production, the play itself failed to measure up to the necessary requirements of quality. The production of *Forsaking All Others* was received with dubious praise by the New York critics.

Brooks Atkinson from the *New York Times* observed that Miss Bankhead saved the show:

> It is a cheerful little earful of bright retorts and verbal fencing numbers . . . and it gives Miss Bankhead free rein to undulate around, turn a handspring or two, cry, laugh, waggle her head and behave herself like a personable and accomplished young actress. Beneath the modish shuffle of her stage manner she is a dynamic sort of person. She is an amusing young lady with an enlivening style of acting. She can underscore a line with true stage sagacity. She can keep a play and a performance on their prospective toes.\(^{44}\)

Mr. George Jean Nathan was suspicious of Miss Bankhead's production of *Forsaking All Others*. He stated:

> The stellar figure of *Forsaking All Others* is Miss Tallulah Bankhead . . . . This Miss Bankhead, it seems to me, is simply another in the long procession of performers who, though they may hardly with any precision be described as actresses, are yet currently accepted and admired above many of their sisters with real acting talent. I have viewed Miss Bankhead now in some half dozen exhibitions here and abroad and though in none of them did she offer anything that I, for one, was brought up to regard as acting, her audiences nevertheless appeared to be enchanted by her . . . . Perhaps the public is tired of competent actresses and wants merely eccentric personalities. . . .\(^{45}\)

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\(^{44}\) *New York Times*, March 2, 1933, p. 21.

One critic, Walter Winchell of The Daily Mirror, enthusiastically welcomed Miss Bankhead's acting and her play. He wrote:

Forsaking All Others, in fewer sentences, is the sort of smart talk you could hear a second time, which is exactly what one reviewer intends to do at the next opportunity. That's how funny Forsaking All Others really is, and how human and genuine are its people, particularly Miss Bankhead. You probably can't recall ever ever witnessing an actress who played her role as though she loved every moment of it. Tallulah plays Mary with such abandon and with such energy... that the spectator is tempted to reach across the bulbs and pat her on the cheeks. In admiration, of course. It was Miss Bankhead's triumph last night. And her co-authors, newcomers, merit equal honors... She is a star!  

The majority of the New York critics did not agree with Mr. Winchell's concept of the play; thus, Tallulah's successful return to the New York stage was almost overcome by her vehicle. Tallulah Bankhead was the victim of her own impatience. 

After Forsaking All Others, Tallulah found herself in financial danger, and, for survival, she performed in an unsigned complete disaster, fiscally and critically, called The Snob. The critics ignored both the play and Tallulah. Failing to learn from one catastrophe, she chose her next play with as little or less progress. Dark Victory, written by George Brewer and Bertram Bloch, received the following review in Time:

"As her present vehicle, Dark Victory won no critical nominations for the Pulitzer Prize, but audiences stood up and shouted their admiration for an authentic exhibition of oldtime theatrical glamour. Nothing like it

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47 George Emerson Brewer and Bertram Bloch, Dark Victory (New York, 1930).
had been seen since Jeanne Eagels died. The previously indignant George Jean Nathan was slightly more enthusiastic about Miss Bankhead's acting. He wrote: "The joy was considerably dampened last week by the grim vehicle in which Tallulah Bankhead made her first New York appearance in over a year. New Yorkers resented the play, but even this death treatise could not dull the brilliant charm of the star." Tallulah's success held Dark Victory intact for several weeks before its inevitable failure.

When Somerset Maugham had first announced the London production of Rain, written for the stage by J. Colton and Clemence Randolph, Tallulah Bankhead was seriously considered for the role of Sadie Thompson. However, she was rejected for the English actress, Olga Lindo. After her return to the American stage, Tallulah's love for the role of the South Sea island strumpet remained strong. Therefore, her next play was a Broadway revival of the role which Jeanne Eagels had made immortal in New York and throughout the country. Every person who had seen Jeanne Eagels perform Sadie was skeptical about Miss Bankhead's chances of success, but they awaited the opening night with a curious excitement. When the curtain fell on the first performance, Tallulah's Sadie was accepted as comparable to Jeanne Eagel's portrayal in quality, but the play did not prove to be as successful as it had previously been. Ward Morehouse later observed: "Tallulah was a hoarse and fiery Sadie, but the years

48 Time, XXIV (November 19, 1934), 41.
50 J. Colton and Clemence Randolph, Rain (New York, 1923).
had taken a great deal of the sting out of Rain." The critical opinions centered around the fact that Tallulah Bankhead acted a different Sadie than Miss Eagels', but Tallulah's Sadie was quite acceptable.

Edith Issacs of the Theatre Arts Monthly wrote, "If Jeanne Eagels made the part of Sadie Thompson her own through a run of 648 performances, Tallulah Bankhead makes it her own at the first playing. Perhaps it is a part that plays itself; perhaps it happened to be within an easy range for both Jeanne Eagels and Tallulah Bankhead." The critic for the Literary Digest concurred in the belief that the performance was not the Sadie of Jeanne Eagels: "... but it was one of power and superb proportion ... leashing herself for the first act, withholdng force until she was perfectly sure of herself. She relaxed at the beginning of the second act, and, when the third act came, was completely mistress of herself and the role." Brooks Atkinson followed suit by submitting the following review:

... the facts remain that Rain is still a good play with a fierce and biting final act, and Miss Bankhead is a vastly interesting actress. Miss Bankhead is a dynamic actress of remarkable versatility with great powers of character description. In the first act she plunges into the part with the raffish, wabbly gusto of a gaudy strumpet. She has a savage attack for the climaxes. Being an actress of extraordinary range, she has the proper equipment for every situation the play invents ... What leaves this commentator unwillingly reluctant about her Sadie is Miss Bankhead's failure to fuse all the details into

the wholeness of a human characterization. At the final curtain there is still the impression that the part had been played by a turbulent actress but that Sadie has not been fashioned whole.  

In a later review of the play, Atkinson stated: "... Tallulah Bankhead plays with the resourceful vitality that has made her one of the mettlesome actresses of the day. She has force and audacity, uncommon stage intelligence and great talent for descriptive acting." An article in Newsweek brought all the critical views into focus and stated, "In accounting for Miss Bankhead's failure to shade her various denunciations of the preacher who wanted to bring Sadie to salvation ... most commentators fell back on the observation that Miss Eagels' Sadie was 'mental' where Miss Bankhead's is 'physical.'" Rain was not a box office success, yet Rain did prove Miss Bankhead's ability to portray a character that was written with merit. However, the play was not invulnerable to the test of time, and Miss Bankhead's hopes for the revival of Rain did not prosper to their imagined heights.

Her next four plays were surrounded by fluctuating and unresponsive results. Either Miss Bankhead failed in acting, as in Antony and Cleopatra, or the plays themselves failed, as in the anonymously written Something Gay, I Am Different, or George Kelly's Reflected Glory. Brooks Atkinson reviewed Something Gay as "... an empty witted disturbance in the sphere of polite phrase-making--old in theme, parsimonious in

56 Newsweek, XXV (February 25, 1935), 56.
Here, for the first time, Mr. Atkinson rejected Miss Bankhead's acting:

And, if there is any excuse for frankness this morning, it is incumbent on this column to confess that the performance is no great shakes, either. There being nothing to act, Miss Bankhead and her colleagues make a desperate show of rattling skeletons in the comedy closet . . . . This is one of the occasions on which the variety show the actors put on merely accents the poverty of the script.58

I Am Different was right down Tallulah's seemingly endless alley of badly written plays, bringing Lewis Nichols of the New York Times to a conclusion: "Miss Bankhead is all she has ever been: beautiful, brilliant, fluent, lovely to look at and to listen to. . . . she has not yet found that ideal vehicle for which her admirers have been praying these many years."59 Of these four plays, Reflected Glory by George Edward Kelly60 was the most successful play that she performed, and yet, Reflected Glory was not a great play. The playwright, George Kelly, had won the Pulitzer Prize in 1925 for Craig's Wife, but he apparently lacked the ability to repeat his excellence in Reflected Glory. But for the first time, Tallulah at least had the services of an adequate playwright, if not a good play. Edith Issacs stated that the play "... is certainly cut to fit the pattern of her personality and her playing. What both playwright and player lack is the creative imagination that stimulates an audience to forget that there are wheels going round. Sometimes we call this

58 Ibid.
Speaking of Miss Bankhead, the critic for the Literary Digest stated, "It required of her a consistently brilliant performance, and she gave it, playing the role with gusto when the play turned weak, holding back when the play was running strong." Richard Lockridge, of the New York Sun, stated: "By a happy, if not particularly astonishing coincidence, Miss Bankhead plays in it, giving a vivid performance for upward of two hours and so almost concealing the fact that Mr. Kelly is not in one of his more animated moods." Lewis Nichols stated: "Miss Bankhead plays according to the script. When it reads 'tempestuous' she is tempestuous and swell; her solemn moments are lingering." Of the West Coast opening, Brooks Atkinson wrote, "Mr. Kelly caused his theatrical heroine to be so completely the actress that it was hard for a mere theatergoer to tell when, if ever, the Muriel of the play was speaking . . . Miss Bankhead's acting matched the character in hard brilliance and beguiling artifice. Her Muriel was constantly fascinating." The critic for Time magazine concluded that the play "... exhibits temperamental actress Tallulah Bankhead cast as a temperamental actress ... Reflected Glory at least has the distinction of being Tallulah Bankhead's most creditable vehicle since her repatriation five years ago." Even if Reflected Glory was not an overall

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62 Literary Digest, CXXII (October 3, 1936), 19-20.
63 New York Sun, September 23, 1936, p. 21.
66 Time, XXVIII (October 5, 1936), 42.
success, Miss Bankhead did gain critical and public notice as a vibrant and exciting actress. As the critic in *Newsweek* reported, "In the role of star-haunted Muriel Flood, Miss Bankhead--after several unhappy experiences in Hollywood with bad picture productions--radiates the brilliance that made her London's favorite actress." The review given by critic Stark Young gives insight into the type of recognition that Miss Bankhead was beginning to receive with roles such as Muriel in *Reflected Glory*. He stated:

> I should not be surprised if Miss Bankhead learned at least one bad lesson from her experience on the London stage, . . . Her performance in *Reflected Glory* shows much more stage projection, consciously undertaken on the stage, than of old. The variety however farcical, possible to this role, is good for her and may teach her to watch her hand for every second's playing.

> In general Miss Bankhead is definitely acquiring what has commonly been known as glamor, a quality that for some time now has seemed to be found less and less in theatre and opera. It may be this very touch of glamor in her as much as anything else that makes you wish her performance were more even and fluent, less spasmodic and more steadily projected. The mere association of such terms with her playing, of course, casts upon it a certain starriness.

After *Reflected Glory*, Tallulah attempted to portray Cleopatra. She was a complete failure along with the play. The critical comments regarding the play will be given in Chapter Four.

After twenty years of roles that were almost nonexistent in quality when compared to the roles that were being written on the American stage during the time, *The Little Foxes* by Lillian Hellman gave Tallulah her

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67 *Newsweek*, VIII (August 1, 1936), 22.


first role of real quality. After she appeared in the play successfully, the critics were naturally extremely interested in the star's ability at acting excellence. Tallulah followed the success of *The Little Foxes* with a Clifford Odets play, *Clash By Night*, which added further quality material for Tallulah's truthful acting ability. Her luck remained constant when she received the character of Sabina from Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth*. After these three successive critically accepted plays, Tallulah Bankhead was considered one of the first ladies of the American theatre. Perhaps her place was not as permanent and steady as the ones held by Helen Hayes, Katharine Cornell, or Judith Anderson, but the critics could not deny that she had become a prominent figure on the acting scene in America. It was unfortunate that before her career ended on the legitimate stage, Tallulah would encounter six other plays that were rejected as being critically unacceptable. These six were *Foolish Notion*, *The Eagle Has Two Heads*, *Dear Charles*, *Eugenia*, *Midgie Purvis*, and *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*. Unfortunately, one would expect an actress of Miss Bankhead's stature to use more selectivity when she accepted roles, especially after her success with the splendid roles of Regina and Sabina. Therefore, these last six plays are distinctly important to the study. What type of plays she accepted and with what type of distinction she acted her characters, especially since she was capable of accepting only the best vehicles, reflect upon 

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70 Clifford Odets, *Clash By Night* (New York, 1942).

the final question of her contribution to the American theatre. As Brooks Atkinson once stated,

For one of the things we now expect of our finest actresses is a sense of responsibility. No one can fairly exist by himself in such an entangled profession as the theatre; everyone in the profession is affected either vitally or remotely, by what his colleagues are doing.\textsuperscript{72}

\textit{Foolish Notion}, written by Philip Barry,\textsuperscript{73} was a poorly written comedy about an aging actress. The critical comments definitely illustrate the weaknesses inherent in both the play and the role. Several critics applauded Miss Bankhead's acting ability while they remained skeptic about the play's worth. For example, Howard Barns of the \textit{New York Herald Tribune} wrote:

Tallulah Bankhead works valiantly to illuminate a murky script in \textit{Foolish Notion}. Never has she been more assured, versatile and properly exhibitionistic than she is in the new Philip Barry play. . . . she is serene and magnificent. She never forsakes a scene. Her performance is a veritable triumph of the season. Only Miss Bankhead, I think, could have made so many of his rag-tag, bobtail notions . . . stand up in dramatic structure. If it were not for the star, \textit{Foolish Notion} would be a rather lamentable tour-de-force. As it is, she brings such radiance and feeling to the part . . . that the piece has genuine fascination.\textsuperscript{74}

John Chapman observed that while the play was worthless, "All the players are good fun, relishing their varying moods, and Miss Bankhead is as always a woman of vivid, disturbing charm and sharp, sure humor."\textsuperscript{75}


\textsuperscript{73}Philip Bary, "Foolish Notion," \textit{The Best Plays of 1944-45 and the Year Book of Drama in America}, edited by Burns Mantle (New York, 1945).

\textsuperscript{74}Theatre Critics' Reviews, edited by Rachel W. Coffin, VI (March 14, 1945), 254; hereafter to be referred to as TCR.

\textsuperscript{75}Ibid., p. 255.
critic for the Nation, Joseph Wood Krutch, remarked, ". . . she discovered
the delight of mocking herself and her profession, and she does it again
superbly, reaching the climax in an almost farcical scene . . . . To a
certain extent she saves the evening. But she cannot save the play . . . ." 76
Ward Morehouse was content to praise the worth of Miss Bankhead's acting.
He concluded:

The evening is hers . . . and her performance is far superior to the play.
Miss Bankhead plays a series of roles. She is humorous, she is emotional, she is brittle, she is maternal. She is called upon to play comedy and tragedy and whimsy, and there is never enough of one thing or the other. But the pride of Jasper, Alabama, is fascinating throughout and gives just another reminder, if it be needed, that she has come a long way as an actress. 77

George Jean Nathan observed: ". . . Miss Bankhead goes to town in a role that has little depth but considerable histrionic elbow room. Fortunately for the Theatre Guild, there is always Miss Bankhead cutting fast and lucid." 78 The critic for Time conceded that, "For its best moments Foolish Notion can thank deep-throated Actress Bankhead--a tiger in her wrath and also (with a funny line) a tiger in her timing." 79

John Mason Brown, reviewing for the Saturday Review of Literature, approved of her performance completely:

She is one of the truly extraordinary performers of our stage and screen.

77 TCR, VI (March 14, 1945), 255.
78 Nathan, Newsweek, XXV (March 26, 1945), 88.
79 Time, XLV (March 26, 1945), 70.
Miss Bankhead's range is wide as her powers are exceptional. She is as superb at straight playing as she is at spoofing. When her voice goes slumming in her boots, it is one of the surest invitations to laughter that our theatre knows.

Miss Bankhead can change her moods as swiftly as a chameleon adapts itself to colors. She is the world's only volcano to have been dressed by Mainbocher. She is worth seeing in any play, because she is a whole theater in herself.80

Wilella Waldorf concluded:

... even Miss Bankhead's best efforts seemed wasted on much of it, and there were times when she was absent from the stage far too long, especially in the second act. Fortunately, even a little bit of Tallulah in her best form is enough to entertain this department enormously ... .81

Stark Young commented: "Miss Bankhead gives a kind of houseparty cutting up by way of performance ... . She is engaging and magnetic, and she is such a good sport about letting the whole works romp, that you end by accepting her as highly entertaining."82 Other critics disapproved of both the play and Miss Bankhead's performance. Robert Garland, in the

New York Journal-American, stated:

From the moment Tallulah who is my and everybody else's favorite actress, appears on the stage, until the final curtain falls, she never seems to care whether she is a real person or not. Never since she played around with a Mr. Shakespeare's "Cleopatra" has she done so bad a job.

Right about here I break down and confess that if Tallulah Bankhead came out on the stage and reread the New York Telephone Directory, I would think she was wonderful. Tallulah does that to me, and, I hope, even

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81 TCR, VI (March 14, 1945), 255.

82 Stark Young, "Foolish Notion," The New Republic, CXII (March 26, 1945), 421.
after having seen her at her worst, as Cleo, she is my favorite actress.

But she strains my devotion a bit as the Sophie Wing in Foolish Notion...Tallulah goes a wee bit ham on her customers.\(^83\)

Louis Kronenberger of the New York newspaper PM stated: "Miss Bankhead does all she can to pump life into it, and has her fine termagant and capital comedy moments. But her role lacks fullness and continuity, and she can only send out passing sparks, not kindle a steady blaze.\(^84\)

Lewis Nichols made the following incisive comment:

Miss Bankhead's role is not satisfactory, nor can she be so in it. Her best quality is a down-to-earth matter of factness, and when she can use that manner she holds the play on the line. Too often, it gets out of reach, so she stands about seeming a little out of place, not happy.\(^85\)

Finally, critic Burton Rasco of the New York World-Telegram rasped:
"...I haven't the slightest idea what it is about and I was bored stiff by it."\(^86\) Tallulah emerged slightly victorious from Foolish Notion, for the majority of the critics felt she had acted her role admirably. But her victory was dulled by the disappointment that followed the opening of her next vehicle, The Eagle Has Two Heads, adapted from a French play by Jean Cocteau.\(^87\)

If a majority of the critics approved of Tallulah's acting in Foolish Notion, an even greater majority of the critic's disapproved of

\(^{83}\)TCR, VI (March 14, 1945), 256.
\(^{84}\)Ibid.
\(^{86}\)TCR, VI (March 14, 1945), 255.
\(^{87}\)Jean Cocteau, The Eagle Has Two Heads, adapted by Ronald Duncan (New York, 1948).
the actress's performance in *The Eagle Has Two Heads*. However, they were completely unanimous in their dislike of the play. Surveying the favorable critical reviews first, few though they may be, one finds the star's dignity emerged only slightly dampened. Brooks Atkinson delivered the following verdict:

Our Tallulah is an actress and the role of the Queen fairly bulges with richness--tragedy, passion, nobility, imperiousness, bravado, cruelty and loneliness. To Miss Bankhead's credit let it be said that she plays the Queen brilliantly enough to take the trick fairly. With all that Patrician blood in her veins she is a Queen; she is beautiful and commanding; her throaty voice is high born and persuasive; she can assume the perogatives of royalty without disenchantment, and she can make the audience believe everything except the dialogue. In fact, our Tallulah is the chief element that distinguishes the two-headed eagle from "The Black Crook."\(^88\)

Howard Barnes of the *New York Herald Tribune* concurred with Atkinson by stating, "The star is more radiant and resourceful than ever. . . . She quickens the play with majesty . . . . It is a personal triumph against considerable odds . . . the play is worth witnessing merely for Miss Bankhead's consummate acting. Performing such as hers is rarely seen on the stage."\(^89\) The critic for *Newsweek* also praised Tallulah, remarking that her "... intuitive command of the stage, plus her impressively flexible voice, make the character usually believable and always a delight to watch. Her contribution is emphasized by the way the action degenerates into dramatic bombast the minute she leaves the stage."\(^90\) Richard

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\(^{89}\) *TCR*, VIII (March 20, 1947), 424.

\(^{90}\) *Newsweek*, XXIX (March 31, 1947), 84.
Watts, Jr., writing for the *New York Post*, observed: "... in the Cocteau play even this resourceful and electric star is so entangled in the monotony of her role that it is not until the third act that she manages to demonstrate her celebrated prowess at shooting the works." With the exception of these critics, what followed the opening night of *The Eagle Has Two Heads* was instant death for the play's success. For example, John Chapman stated of the play:

... Tallulah Bankhead does just about everything but a sword-swallowing act. If the bravos of last night's first audience meant anything, Bankhead fans may now line up for a rare treat; but if what is left of my mind makes any sense, Jean Cocteau's incredible portion of horseradish is either a hellish practical joke or the hokiest play since 1875. ... Tallulah damn near pulls the Plymouth Theatre down with her as she plunges down the staircase of what she calls her cahstle.  

Robert Coleman of the *Daily Mirror* wrote, "No recent whodunit has posed a greater mystery than why Tallulah Bankhead chose to waste her gifts on such dreary hokum ... ."  

Robert Garland, who had previously stated that Bankhead was his favorite actress, could not bring himself to approve of her performance. He stated,

Why should the great Tallulah waste her time on such poppycock as this? Frankly, I don't think she's as good as she should be as the Queen. ... last night, she played with a chip on her shoulder and a determination not to be heard beyond the eleventh row. She was beautiful. She was glamorous. She was almost anything but every inch a queen.

Throughout the years, in private and in public, I've pointed out that Miss Bankhead could come out on

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91 TCR, VIII (March 20, 1947), 423.
92 Ibid., p. 424.
93 Ibid., p. 423.
a lighted stage and, thanks to her talent, temperament and personal attractiveness, read the New York Telephone Directory out loud and get away with it . . . . After The Eagle Has Two Heads, I wish to God she would!94

Rosamond Gilder reported for the Theatre Arts Monthly that Miss Bankhead "... achieved several effective moments. The famous throaty voice came into play appropriately enough in the love scene . . . which she performed with restraint and dignity. But elsewhere the monotony of her delivery lulled the mind and obscured the meaning of the play."95 William Hawkins in the New York World-Telegram wrote:

... she limits her fascinating voice to a monotonous range of about three tones. The result is that she sounds as if she did not in the least care what she was talking about. It has frequently been said that the glamorous Tallulah is better than her current vehicle. To repeat the comment now is at best a back handed compliment.96

Louis Kronenberger found the play "a resounding bore" and he stated that "... even the electrical personality of Tallulah Bankhead fails to be very important particularly since Miss Bankhead provides something less than an electrical performance. . . . she lacks the stylized manner for the part as a whole."97 Joseph Wood Krutch reviewed the play with tongue in cheek as he wrote:

... her interpretation is unique--alternating as it does a hauteur that is as queenly as all get out with sudden apparently involuntary lapses into that

94 Ibid., p. 422.
96 TCR, VIII (March 20, 1947), 422.
97 Ibid., p. 421.
rowdy bonhomnie which is her natural manner. Its effect is, indeed, a good deal like the one achieved by her delightful interpretation of her role in The Skin of Our Teeth, . . . But it did seem more appropriate in that play. 98

Ward Morehouse began his review by stating, "In the worthy Little Foxes there was no better actress in the land. But she can't do much with, or for, The Eagle Has Two Heads. In fact, she frequently becomes pretty monotonous." 99 The drama critic for Time concluded: "Nor, for all her fire and force, can Actress Bankhead act it the one way that might be effective—with high artifice, in the immensely grand manner." 100 The most scathing review for the play and its star came from George Jean Nathan. He termed the play "melodramatic luggage." As for Tallulah Bankhead, he stated:

There is today something a little ridiculous in seeing an actress costumed to the ears, clinging to the center of the stage, and reciting enough lines to a helpless cast to suffice half a dozen actresses in any more reputable play . . . . This Tallulah, let it not be mistaken, is an actress with a considerable natural ability. Her model appears to be not a Rejane or Duse, but Eva Tanguay. Vitality . . . is not always identical with histrionic art, and, if she will permit a mere critic to say so, a bit more modesty and restraint would no end help her.

Miss Bankhead still has some personal drawing power, as her previous road tour attested. But the play after all, as Donald Wolfit has lately been heard to remark, is the thing, and personal drawing power in time has a way of dwindling and expiring when that thing is not present. 101

98 Krutch, "Drama," The Nation, CLXIV (April 5, 1947), 404.
99 TCR, VIII (March 20, 1947), 421.
100 Time, XXXIX (March 31, 1947), 78.
It is quite evident that the play and the actress could not escape being affected by such criticisms as the majority of New York critics gave.

Tallulah performed in one other play after her failure with The Eagle Has Two Heads before she became the radio personality of "The Big Show." Her role, Amanda in Noel Coward's comedy, Private Lives, will be discussed in Chapter Four. Tallulah flourished on the air and after she became a celebrity of radio, she once again returned to Broadway in 1954. As usual, her vehicle was incapable of confining the brilliance of the star in its realms.

Dear Charles, written by Marc-Gilbert Sauvajon and Frederick Jackson, was not a great play, but according to the New York critics, Tallulah Bankhead was great in it. Of the eight critical reviewers, Tallulah captured their hearts totally. Not one dissenting critic hinted that her acting was below par. William Hawkins stated, "She looks slim as a whistle, is magnetic as the pole, and acts with more composure than she has had in some years . . . . I don't believe she enjoys it nearly as much as she is good enough actress to pretend she does." The drama critic for the New York Post, Richard Watts, Jr., stated that the play was "... a laborious, heavy-handed and mechanical farce, with an occasional comic line but an utter lack of humorous freshness." Of Miss Bankhead, he decreed that the actress "... has a tumultuous skill at making something from nothing . . . . She is looking extremely well

103 TCR, XV (September 6, 1954), 318.
104 Ibid., p. 316.
these days, her vitality has certainly suffered no decline, and her electric quality is something the stage needs in these quiet times."\textsuperscript{105}

John McClain wrote in the \textit{New York Journal American}:

\ldots she has apparently accepted her chores with the knowledge that the play is no great shakes but she'll give you your money's worth if it kills her--and it almost does, dahlings.

She pulls out all the stops--high soprano, basso profundo--she resorts to long silences and moments of unintelligible chatter; she pushes her people around the stage like pawns; at one point she stares vacantly at the audience for several seconds when one of her confreres has left her with an unanswerable exit line.

\ldots it's really Miss Bankhead's show--it could just as well be called "An Evening with Tallulah." And it's my guess she'll get away with it.\textsuperscript{106}

Walter Kerr gave his opinion in the following manner: "I'd say that every single Bankheadism worked. I'd say that the star won an undivided, uncontested, thoroughly unrigged verdict. I'd say that the play was appalling for this day and age, but that it is difficult to remain appalled while rapt in admiration."\textsuperscript{107} Brooks Atkinson praised Miss Bankhead as the professional actress that never allowed a play to fall in intensity. He stated, "Under the impact of Tallulah's performance, the play does seem to be a little more unsubstantial. The dialogue is not audacious or witty enough for her tempestuous personality, and the play gives an impression of not keeping pace with her."\textsuperscript{108} In a later review of the same play, he further stated,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{106} Ibid., p. 317.
  \item \textsuperscript{107} Ibid., p. 318.
\end{itemize}
Batting those big eyes with the long lashes, ... roaring, putting saucy inflections into innocuous lines, she plays with gusto and wit and the authority of a trouper. She presides over the play as if she were a fabulous hostess who is also the life of the party. [109]

John Chapman observed: "The lady was playing at the top of her form and voice, ... There are no surprises on this plot, but since Tallulah is the heroine, there are enough surprises in the performance to make an enjoyable evening." [110] Robert Coleman wrote, "Miss Bankhead ... acts with devastating authority ... The Bankhead fans rocked ... with laughter and applause." He concluded his review with the common belief of all the critics: "We can only regret that our Tallulah didn't return to us in something more worthy of her talents." [111]

After achieving personal success in Dear Charles, Tallulah appeared in a Tennessee Williams' revival of A Streetcar Named Desire. [112] Her acting in this play will be discussed in Chapter Four. In 1957, she performed in a play called Eugenia. The play was adapted by Randolph Carter from a novel by Henry James. Tallulah again brought the critics to that state of puzzlement which so often revolved around a Bankhead opening. Why does an actress of Tallulah Bankhead's reputation and talent accept a script that is less than mediocre? Eugenia was a critical bomb, and Tallulah's acting reputation fared only slightly better. Richard Watts, Jr. stated:

[110] TCR, XV (September 6, 1954), 316.
[111] Ibid., p. 317.
Miss Bankhead strutted and fretted, and gave out occasional roars, in her highly specialized and approved manner, and it is always entertaining to see her in action. For an outspoken lady, she has turned into rather a mushmouth, and it was sometimes surprisingly difficult to understand what she was saying last night, but, on the basis of the dialogue that was audible, I venture to suggest that this was one of the virtues of her playing. Eugenia is amazingly pallid.

Walter Kerr reflected in his article:

Miss Bankhead is an irresistible force, but in Eugenia she has flatly, finally and irrevocably met an immovable object. Mr. Carter has neither fashioned the Jamesian fable to fit his star's more spectacular talents nor created an honest version that would challenge her to stand up and fight.

The drama critic for the New York World Telegram and The Sun, Tom Donnelly, branded the play as "excessively dull." As for Miss Bankhead, he reported, "Occasionally she strikes a spark with her familiar guffaws and snarls and sinister shouts. By and large, however, her vivacity rings hollow, and her heart doesn't seem to be in what she is doing."

Brooks Atkinson gave Miss Bankhead a back-handed compliment in his review by stating:

Neither Henry James nor Mr. Carter is sturdy enough to sustain one of the Bankhead tornadoes . . . . Miss Bankhead gives a bold and booming performance . . . . No one has to be reminded now that she is a great performer in a theatrical tradition. She is emphatic about everything—emphatic in entrances and exits, emphatic with seemingly innocent phrases in a dialogue, emphatic with umbrellas or scarves or whatever hand props she has access to, emphatic with the lady-like though devastating glance that destroys the propriety of social conversation, emphatic with her rolling walk, emphatic vocally.

113 TCR, XVIII (January 31, 1957), 366.
114 Ibid., p. 368.
115 Ibid., p. 367.
Robert Coleman reviewed the play in awe of the "fascinating Tallulah." He concluded, "It's like watching a one-woman vaudeville act churning up the dust in a literary desert... one of the most amazing bravura performances of the semester. A tour de force in the grand manner."^117 John McClain questioned the quality of Eugenia as a play and stated: ". . . it gives Miss Bankhead few moments in which to display her true talents, her gift for humor and heart, and it seemed to me that even she was aware of the faltering battle she was fighting before the evening was out of short pants."^118 Charles McHarry pinpointed the condition of Eugenia when he stated in the Daily News that "Beautifully costumed and at her vocal best, Miss Bankhead was handicapped... she was... burdened by a ream of the flattest lines in recent theatrical history."^119 After the failure of Eugenia, Tallulah ignored Broadway for four years. But the magnetic forces were at work, and when she returned, she carted another script similar to Dear Charles and Eugenia.

Tallulah starred in Midge Purvis, written by Mary Ellen Chase, as an aging mother who is unloved because of her eccentric behavior. The mother runs away from her family and finds peace in a new home with two orphan boys. Most critics agreed with Frank Aston's decision written

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117 TCR, XVIII (January 31, 1957), 367.
118 Ibid., p. 366.
119 Ibid., p. 369.
in the *New York World-Telegram* and the *Sun* as he stated, "It is hardly necessary to report that Miss Bankhead as an individual is consistently uproarious. For the understatement of the year, let it be said the play is negligible."\(^{120}\) Richard Watts, Jr. praised Miss Bankhead's performance as "delightfully expert." He continued, "Playing with a comic exuberance that never gets out of hand, and combining wildly humorous exaggeration with credibility and sympathy, she gives not only a good show but also a characterization of depth and strength."\(^{121}\) John McClain applauded verbally as he stated, "Despite the slow deterioration of the play, it does provide Tallulah with a whooping field day in which to frolic, and she has never been more effective, or in more complete command."\(^{122}\) Walter Kerr concurred with McClain by reporting, "Let me mention, that what the good lady is doing is not one of those flash-of-personality jobs in which she has sometimes specialized. It's a performance, something with a little care and kindness and truth in it . . . Tallulah Bankhead's best performance in years."\(^{123}\) John Chapman revealed his approval by saying, "Miss Bankhead's performance is a job to behold and hear, for it bubbles with the comic spirit and falls in perfectly with the playwright's nutty notions."\(^{124}\) Two dissenting critics were Robert Coleman from the *New York Mirror* and Howard Taubman from the *New York Times*. Coleman stated,

\(^{120}\) *TCR*, XXII (February 2, 1961), 376.
\(^{121}\) Ibid., p. 375.
\(^{122}\) Ibid., p. 378.
\(^{123}\) Ibid., p. 377.
\(^{124}\) Ibid., p. 378.
"Midge Purvis has Bankhead and some good ideas. But the magnetic star and megaphoner Meredith just haven't been able to jell them into a hilarious and rewarding evening of theatre."^125 Howard Taubman submitted Tallulah's worst review. He remarked:

As an actress Miss Bankhead has a marked personal style. In the right role she can be superb, as she was in The Little Foxes. She can also play with touching modesty and sensitivity as in the final moments of Midge Purvis prove. But through most of the play she shuttles between character and caricature.

Instead of a free, childlike creature, Midgie Purvis has become a vulgar clown. She has been turned into a product of show business. The public personality of Miss Bankhead as it has manifested itself on radio, television and the gossip columns has been catered to. If there was freshness in Midgie to begin with, it has been dissipated by a pursuit of the commonplace.^126

Fortunately, the majority of the critical reviews were not of this belief.

Tallulah Bankhead's last performance given on the Broadway stage was in the unpublished play, The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, by Tennessee Williams. The play had been written for her by Tennessee Williams but the original production starred Hermione Baddeley as Mrs. Go- forth. Because of the weaknesses of the script, Williams later rewrote Milk Train before it was revived for Tallulah. Unfortunately, the play was in better condition, but Miss Bankhead failed to live up to the performance that Miss Baddeley had given with the first and weaker script. All the critics felt Tallulah's characterizations were slipping, and apparently they were. Only two critics gave her passable reviews. They were Richard Watts, Jr. and John McClain. Richard Watts, Jr. wrote,

^125 Ibid., p. 377.
The tale of the last days is presented chiefly in a mood of sardonic comedy, and, with Miss Bankhead waging the outrageous Mrs. Goforth's war of insult in her best savage manner, the dying lady is a striking, courageous and infuriating figure.

Miss Bankhead's gift for comic ruthlessness is helpful to the part of the woman meaningfully named Goforth although she tends to be inaudible in the scenes in which she is dictating her memoirs.\textsuperscript{127}

John McClain submitted the opinion that "... last night she seemed to rush some of her early speeches to the point that they were barely audible ... Later, she was her magnificent self--lending added lust to some of the dialogue at which the author excels."\textsuperscript{128} The other critical opinions were less than agreeable to the actress. For example, Howard Taubman found, "... even in Miss Bankhead's brave effort to suggest a woman with tenderness and courage ... Flora Goforth remains essentially a creation for the stage. Try as hard as she will, Miss Bankhead cannot make Flora Goforth as moving as she might be."\textsuperscript{129} Norman Nadel remarked:

The avalanche of stage calisthenics (you'd hardly call it acting) destroys any semblance of continuity or meaning.

Tallulah Bankhead, of course, cannot be dismissed. She presents a colorful woman, malevolent, shrewd, carnal, selfish, cruel, diseased and terrified. What makes her Flora Goforth vivid rather than just nasty, is the exuberant, what-the-hell fillip Miss Bankhead gives to the role. Nevertheless, she lacks the range, the variety and the subtle development which Hermione Baddeley brought to the first Mrs. Goforth.\textsuperscript{130}

\textsuperscript{127} TCR, XXV (January 2, 1964), 397.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., p. 398.
\textsuperscript{129} New York Times, January 2, 1964, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{130} TCR, XXV (January 2, 1964), 397.
John Chapman agreed with Nadel as he wrote, "Tallulah Bankhead's performance of the central character seems plaintive, whereas the original Flora Goforth, . . . by Hermione Baddeley, was heroic . . . . She did not arouse in me the pity that Williams originally wrote into her part, and often she was unintelligible." The final blow fell when Walter Kerr, a personal friend of Tallulah's, but a critic first, was forced to deliver this decision:

This is not a performance, it is an appearance. Miss Bankhead can stand center and hold light. But she cannot make a center out of . . . a woman who, as the text has it, moves back and forth and here and there with no purpose at all. It is possible that purposelessness itself can be dramatically defined. Miss Bankhead does not try to define it, to whip-crack it into some sort of shape . . . . She seems to coast with it, collapse what may.

Perhaps the collapse of the lady's diction, so that "warrior" becomes "wiyah," does not matter much.

. . . nearly all Miss Bankhead's more successful effects are vaudeville effects, and beneath Mr. Williams . . . . When only this kind of effect is real, the role deteriorates into an occasional stunt. Miss Bankhead does not truly offer us any reason for being interested in her other than the fact that she is, to be sure, Miss Tallulah Bankhead.

Apparently, after her experience with Mrs. Goforth and The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, Tallulah Bankhead never attempted or never succeeded in gaining another role on Broadway. She worked in summer stock for a small time, but, for the most part, she spent the rest of her career making television appearances in shows such as "Batman" and the "Merv Griffin Show." She did make one movie called Die, Die, My Darling.

131 Ibid., p. 399.
132 Ibid., p. 400.
It is evident that the latter part of her career definitely shows a decline in her ability to take bad plays and produce successes. She could, in her younger years, "make something out of nothing" from pure energy and vitality. However, Walter Kerr stated that "in her later plays she sometimes seemed to be parodies of herself or, as in the case of The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, merely listening to herself."\(^{133}\) In almost every critical review dealing with one of the poorly written plays in which she appeared, the reviewer mentioned the fact that Miss Bankhead probably realized how bad her vehicle was; therefore, Tallulah might have been objectively leaving the success of the play to her own personal drawing power. John Mason Brown wrote disparagingly of this personal drawing power in 1935. To a certain extent, he foretold the latter years of her career when he observed:

> Miss Bankhead . . . needs to be protected from the dolts who worship her completely. They will ruin her if she listens to the idiotic applause with which they greet her each and every mannerism; her playing of every scene; her gallops up a flight of stairs as fervently as if Duse and Bernhardt had come to life in one person.

> She is so gorgeously endowed that it will be one of the tragedies of our time if, before it is too late, and owing to faults in her own temperament, or to the deficiencies in her playwrights, or to her lack of a Clyde Beatty of a director, she fails to take her place in our theatre as the really important performer she might so easily have become.\(^{134}\)

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\(^{133}\) Letter from Walter Kerr, drama critic, April 9, 1969.

CHAPTER IV

SIX WITH MERIT

After the opening night of The Little Foxes, critic Brooks Atkinson made the following observation:

That sigh of relief that has been sweeping across the country is reflex action caused by the fact that Tallulah Bankhead has found a good play. Lillian Hellman's The Little Foxes is worth acting and worth serious discussion. None of the new plays in which Miss Bankhead has appeared in this country has escaped so completely from mediocrity and buncombe. After six years of rattling around on the boards in rickety vehicles and floundering through one Shakespearean play, she has shaken off the jinx that has been dogging her heels in her own country and proved to every one's satisfaction that she can act a part with integrity. In view of her good sportsmanship all these years, that is reason for general rejoicing.¹

That "sigh of relief" which Mr. Atkinson commented on must have also been experienced by Tallulah Bankhead. She, also, was probably aware of the shabby quality of her vehicles before her performance in Lillian Hellman's The Little Foxes. The facts were that she had appeared in over twenty plays in England and America, and only one of the plays, They Knew What They Wanted, by playwright Sidney Howard, had received critical acceptance when relying on its own merit. Thus, despite the quality of most of her vehicles, Tallulah Bankhead managed to salvage her career, not only once, but several times. Other stars in her position and in her same theatrical period became the subjects for trivia

experts when they were subjected to misfortunes similar to the ones Tallulah Bankhead had encountered. But Tallulah not only became a star in America, she became a legend because of her eccentric antics as a personality of the stage. Brooks Atkinson, in his review of The Little Foxes, also reflected on Tallulah's situation as a star and as a personality:

When she returned to the United States after a period of fabulous popularity in London she was a brilliant actress of bits. She could act individual scenes with daring and bravura; but she could not act a whole character at full length with a beginning and a conclusion and a logical line of development between the two. Like many celebrated personalities of the stage and screen, she had come to depend on her nerves, hoping for the best in the interludes in her acting when she was not exactly sure of what she was doing. It was acting from the outside.2

With her performance of the role of Regina in The Little Foxes, Tallulah Bankhead became a recognized actress of critical excellence. Also, after her success in Lillian Hellman's play, which possessed critical merit, she received four other plays similar in quality. A Streetcar Named Desire, by Tennessee Williams, Clash by Night, by Clifford Odets, The Skin of Our Teeth, by Thornton Wilder, and Private Lives, by Noel Coward were either unanimously successful critically, or they won a favorable majority vote from the dramatic critics. For this reason these five plays, including The Little Foxes, occurring after the year 1939 will be grouped together to examine Miss Bankhead's critical success when enacting characters which possessed their own individual virtues. One other play which was produced before the production of The Little Foxes will be

2 Ibid.
included in this group. Because *Antony and Cleopatra*, which was produced in 1937 and starred Miss Bankhead, was accepted by the critics as a play of excellent quality, and since *Antony and Cleopatra* constituted Tallulah Bankhead's only attempt to portray a classical role on the American stage, the play meets the established requirement of quality, and it is also necessary to note her success with the demands of the Shakespearean character of Cleopatra. Thus, these six plays will be viewed in relation to the critical opinions of Tallulah Bankhead's acting merits as the plays chronologically appeared in the actress's career.

Tallulah Bankhead appeared in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* in 1937, two years before she would receive the role of Regina in *The Little Foxes*. The critics were unanimous in their total rejection of her portrayal of Shakespeare's classic female temptress, Cleopatra. George Frazier began the deluge of outstandingly bad reviews by stating, "*Antony and Cleopatra* was so God-awful that, had Shakespeare seen it, he would gladly have settled the Bacon-Shakespeare controversy by waiving the authorship." Critic George Jean Nathan evidently maintained his reputation for wit when he reviewed Miss Bankhead's performance:

> I have seen the Cleopatras of any number of other girls, belle and not so belle, among them Modjeska, Blanche Walsh, Julia Marlowe, Jane Cowl, and Margaret Anglin, and certainly Miss Bankhead's does not in any way resemble "them." If it weren't for the Bard's familiar lines and the juxtaposed presence of a character here and there referred to as Mark Antony, it would at times be difficult to make out whether the fair Tallulah, like the fair Cora Potter before her, hadn't advertised the Shakespearean classic as her vehicle and then suddenly decided to play "Diamond Lil" instead.\(^4\)

\(^3\)George Frazier, "Tallulah Bankhead," *Life*, XIV (February 15, 1943), 52.

\(^4\)George Jean Nathan, "The Bard and the Dizzy!," *Newsweek*, X (November 22, 1937), 35.
The dramatic critic for *Time* referred to Tallulah's Cleopatra as a "flouncing Cleopatsy." After beginning his review by stating, "Tallulah Bankhead barged down the Nile last night as Cleopatra--and sank," John Mason Brown continued his verbal castigation of Miss Bankhead's performance in an even less serious tone, but no less uncomplimentary to the actress:

... for many years now we have been haunted by the vision of the queen and woman Shakespeare drew. His Cleopatra is not Miss Bankhead's... as the Serpent of the Nile she proves to be no more dangerous than a garter snake. As the... heartsick heroine of the tragedy, she seems nearer to a midway than to Alexandria. She is beautiful. Yet her Cleopatra has no authority. Although she has a few, scattered moments of pathos toward the end, her performance is apparently designed without any dominating idea or any real comprehension of the character. She strikes some Egyptian poses. She screams termagant-wise when angry. But she cannot keep pace with Cleopatra's changing moods, or suggest her flaming tragedy. The truth is Miss Bankhead is never regal and seldom appears to have peeked with one eye closed into the complex and fascinating heart of Egypt's monarch.

The dramatic critic for *Nation* magazine, Joseph Wood Krutch, described his conception of the actress's performance by asserting:

... I do not want to minimize the star's own shortcomings as a Shakespearean actress. If there is any one way of reading Shakespeare's verse more unsuitable than any other conceivable way it is probably the one Miss Bankhead chooses when she employs the broken rhythms and husky tones of the blues singer.

And finally, Brooks Atkinson spoke of the actress's character of Cleopatra by utilizing such phrases as, "definitely not her dish," "the

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5 *Time*, XXX (November 22, 1937), 43.


garishness of a night-club queen," "neither Cleopatra or Tallulah," and, "cannot be understood." He concluded his review of her role by stating, ". . . in all conscience it is difficult to find anything to praise in her performance except her courage. For Miss Bankhead's experience in the theatre has been no preparation for acting in a poetical tragedy."  

It is evident that these reviews were not an entire listing of the critical opinions that were written on Miss Bankhead's Antony and Cleopatra, but the critics and the public were undivided in their verdicts. The proof for this defeating consensus of opinion can be found by recognizing the fact that Antony and Cleopatra closed after only six performances. As to the reason of why the actress failed to succeed with her character of Cleopatra, the critics were generally in agreement. Tallulah Bankhead had attempted a classical character and fallen on her face. The critics blamed her failure on Miss Bankhead's lack of classical training in theatre, and they also blamed her lack of discipline as an actress. Whatever the reasons for her failures were, and the critics were in all probability correct as to the origins of those failures, Tallulah Bankhead, during her entire career, never suffered a more ignominious defeat than with her performance in Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra. After performing for six humiliating nights as Cleopatra, the actress would never again attempt another classical role.

The first role which Tallulah accepted that was to become a complete success for Miss Bankhead and her playwright, Lillian Hellman, was Regina Giddens in The Little Foxes. The role was dramatic, with no

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comic undertones. The complete seriousness of tone that revolved around the character of Regina was enhanced by a group of well-written supporting characters. This group of characters, with the added performances of excellence by Patricia Collinge and Bankhead, gave The Little Foxes an overwhelming critical triumph. But the critically astounding factor involved seemed to become the whole-hearted welcome for Tallulah Bankhead's successful attempt at proving that she definitely possessed the ability to give an excellent performance of character analysis within an excellent character and play. For example, critic Morton Eustis of the Theatre Arts Monthly wrote of Miss Bankhead, "... not until she appeared in The Little Foxes, did she really get to the root of a characterization, giving a performance which was not simply an exhibition of many virtuoso gifts . . . ." Critic Brooks Atkinson commented: "Sometimes our Tallulah walks buoyantly through a part without much feeling for the whole design . . . . As the malevolent lady . . . she plays with superb command for the entire character--sparing of the showy side, constantly aware of the poisonous spirit within." In a later review, Atkinson reinforced his original conception of Miss Bankhead's acting ability with an even greater fervor:

... Miss Bankhead, in a remarkably well-directed performance by Herman Shumlin, expresses the heat of an avaricious woman with the coolness of an actress who has mastered the whole part in all its dramatic implications. There was a suggestion of the old Bankhead wobble when she made her entrance on the opening night--like the signature of a sketch artist. But the rest of the performance was entirely fresh . . . . It is a superb example of mature acting that

is fully under control. . . . her Regina Giddens . . .
is not only the finest thing she has done in this
country but brilliant acting according to any stand-
ards. It explains why this hateful woman has to be
respected for the keenness of her mind and the force
of her character.11

Writing for the magazine, The Stage, Louis Kronenberger concluded:
"Tallulah Bankhead and Patricia Collinge are two superb actresses who
add to the magnificence of The Little Foxes. Miss Bankhead as Regina
. . . cruel, and cold as Bethlehem steel."12 Stating that he had been
curious before the curtain of The Little Foxes to note Miss Bankhead's
success when enacting a role that was less sympathetic than the characters
she had previously portrayed, Joseph Wood Krutch concluded, "Miss Bank-
head acquitted herself very well, . . . ."13 The wry critic who had
almost continuously written negative reviews in relation to Miss Bank-
head's performances, George Jean Nathan, bowed low as he made the follow-
ing decision about her performance:

In The Little Foxes, Tallulah made your Solon eat a
slice of humble-pie. Her performance . . . was a
capital job, admirably poised and excellently de-
tailed, and in addition, devoid of all the hitherto
cut-and-dried Bankhead quirks and mannerisms.14

Tallulah Bankhead undoubtedly savored and enjoyed this critical review
of Nathan's, relishing in critic's humble acknowledgment of respectful
admiration for the actress's talents. The dramatic critic for Time
stated, "For Tallulah Bankhead--who, since her return from England in
1933, has floundered around in uncongenial roles--The Little Foxes offers

12 Louis Kronenberger, "Greed," The Stage, XVI (April 1, 1939), 37.
13 Joseph Wood Krutch, "The Little Foxes," Nation, CXLVIII (Feb-
uary 25, 1939), 244.
14 George Jean Nathan, Encyclopedia of the Theatre (New York, 1940),
p. 47.
a chance for powerful acting, and she takes it. She plays the masterful Regina with authority and insight." After giving a lengthy portrait of the qualities of acting excellence that the critic had previously anticipated that Miss Bankhead was capable of, John Mason Brown then presented a second portrait of her fulfillment of those qualities of excellence with her character of Regina:

... she gives the performance we have been waiting impatiently for her to give. She creates the kind of villainess even the Gran Guignol has never matched. Her technical resourcefulness is put to superb use. Her smoldering strength galvanizes the attention. Her quality of immediate ignition, of incessant combustibility enslaves the interest. One watches her fascinated, as if confronted by a cobra. To see her is to see Sargent's Madame X come to life, possessed of a clammy heart into which flows the black blood of Clytemnestra, Medusa, Lady Macbeth, and Mrs. Danvers.

If one has the time, even while sitting breathlessly before The Little Foxes, to keep on thinking of how magnificent a Hedda Gabler Miss Bankhead would make, the fault is not Miss Bankhead's. Hers is a brilliant performance throughout.

Otis Ferguson, dramatic critic for The New Republic, reluctantly gave Miss Bankhead a vote of approval for her performance, but he tempered his praise with criticism for her vocal capabilities. He decided that the actress "... is there all right: as the evil female she holds the play around her. But she should not have been told of this, for it can do no more than aggravate her apparent conviction that acting is great according to how low a girl can go in the baritone register."
Declaring that Tallulah was "perfectly fitted to the part," Rosamond Gilder continued to praise Miss Bankhead's performance:

She moves and speaks with the requisite Southern charm, but under the delicate drawl, the gracious gesture, can be seen the firm harsh steel of her will. She radiates ruthlessness; she is seductive and dangerous. When, in the last act, she sits motionless and menacing while her husband dies in front of her eyes, you are convinced that the woman Miss Bankhead has built up would have done just that.

Thus, as these reviews reflect, Tallulah Bankhead made the critics take notice of her power of characterization with her performance of Regina Giddens. As the actress stated, "The Little Foxes justified my hopes. Overnight it blotted out memory of the bad plays in which I had been imprisoned. . . . it established me as a dramatic star, an emotional actress worthy of the critical halos voted me." This critical success in her career was also important because of the distinguishable difference in the type of role which she played in The Little Foxes, as contrasted with her previous characters. Heretofore, she had usually been cast in the lighter roles, with the exception of her roles in Rain, They Knew What They Wanted, and Antony and Cleopatra. Refusing to remain type cast, Tallulah Bankhead successfully proved herself quite capable of the change in role types, and, therefore, when Clifford Odets finished his play, Clash By Night, she was given her another chance to portray a character which held similar dramatic possibilities to the ones which prevailed in the character of Regina.

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19 Ibid., p. 240.
The critical reviewers were divided as to their opinions of Miss Bankhead's overall success in her portrayal of a Staten Island housewife named Mae Wilenski from Clifford Odets' *Clash By Night*. But the majority of the New York dramatic critics praised her performance. John Anderson of the *New York Journal-American* wrote, "Miss Bankhead is sultry and fascinating as the lovelorn Staten Islander, and, while she seemed more Manhattan than Richmond, this may be merely interborough jealousy." The dramatic critic for the *New York Herald Tribune*, Richard Watts, Jr., asserted, "Although Miss Bankhead hardly manages to seem the rebellious Staten Island housewife, she plays with that vibrant air of excitement which makes her so fascinating to watch." Concluding that she was exceptional in her characterization of Mae, Burns Mantle wrote, "In the matter of individual performances, actors and actresses for miles around can go to the Belasco and take lessons from Tallulah Bankhead as a poor, drab, unhappy Polish girl." Writing for the *New York Sun*, Richard Lockridge described the actress as "... a woman disputed with sultry brilliance ..." He continued with his critical conception of her performance, declaring, "Miss Bankhead has never, even in *The Little Foxes*, played better, with more sense of character or with more feeling and intensity." In the *Theatre Arts Monthly*, Rosamond Gilder tagged Miss Bankhead's performance as "fascinating." She continued:

20 *Theatre Critics' Reviews*, edited by Rachel W. Coffin, II (December 29, 1941)

21 Ibid., p. 163.

22 Ibid., p. 162.

23 Ibid., p. 163.
Tallulah Bankhead plays Mae Wilenski, whose restless discontent forms the pulsing core of the play... a fascinating example of presenting the essence of character with very little regard to external trappings. Like Odet's words, her performance expresses the thing itself... Lightly criticizing Tallulah Bankhead for her habit of "tossing around her nicely waved hair," Brooks Atkinson stated of her character, "... Tallulah Bankhead is giving a glowing performance of a forceful character who is shaken out of irritated indifference into surrender and decision... She convinces you that the woman in the case is a highly complex and tempestuous person." While he praised all the actors within the play, critic Joseph Wood Krutch remained silent with regard to Miss Bankhead's individual performance. Two critics were undecided about the validity of Tallulah's performance. They were John Mason Brown and Louis Kronenberger. For the New York newspaper PM, Kronenberger commented on her overall success with the character of Mae, "Miss Bankhead has her decidedly brilliant moments, but she fails to give the heroine a convincing outline, or fit her into a drab and proletarian background." Showing a slight disrespect for Tallulah Bankhead's portrayal of Mae, John Mason Brown announced that "Tallulah Bankhead... is on hand to smolder, coo, pout, and erupt with all the extraordinary powers at her command in a part in which she is bound to seem slightly unbelievable."
Only two New York critics rejected her performance in the Odets' play almost entirely. Wilella Waldorf, dramatic critic for the New York Post, blamed Clash By Night as being an inherently weak play, and, therefore, not suitable for Miss Bankhead's talents. She continued, "Even the presence of such a vital, electric actress as Tallulah Bankhead on the stage does remarkably little to bring the stagnant script to life. . . . when she is ill at ease in a part, as she sometimes seemed to be . . ., the entire performance naturally suffers." The second critic who rejected Miss Bankhead's performance was John O'Hara. Writing for Newsweek, he had little praise for her characterization of Mae Wilenski. "The wife . . . was completely false, and I don't merely mean in her marital relations. . . . I never believed that that attractive dame would be ending up in a tumbledown shack on Staten Island." Although Tallulah Bankhead did not receive the critical ovations comparable to the ultimate perfection of the opinions of her character of Regina in The Little Foxes, she did score a second critical success in a critically successful vehicle. Clifford Odets' role of Mae provided enough dramatic fuel for Tallulah to defend her talent adequately. Nevertheless, this state of adequacy was exceeded by Tallulah's portrayal of her next role. Sabina, the comic maid in Thornton Wilder's The Skin of Our Teeth, became an overwhelming critical success and provided an excellent portion of theatrical fuel for the actress's comic possibilities.

29 Ibid., p. 161.

Burton Rascoe, from the *New York World-Telegram*, examined Tallulah Bankhead's performance in Wilder's play and her character of Sabina and stated, "Tallulah Bankhead had the time of her life in the first part she has ever had that has allowed her to be the sardonic wit she is off stage and that has given full scope to her great natural sense of comedy." Rascoe awarded the evening to Miss Bankhead. Critic George Jean Nathan once again gave his sweeping approval as he submitted his belief that "... it is with the casting of Tallulah Bankhead as Sabina that the producer becomes inspired ... her perennial 'other woman' is a superb comedy performance." Nathan concluded his observations on Wilder's play by stating, "... the ex-villainess of *The Little Foxes* sustains *The Skin of Our Teeth* with a gusty, irresistible humor that is almost sufficient, in itself, to justify Wilder's theatrical jump over the moon." The dramatic critic for *Time* used superlatives in describing the actress's performance: "... the hocus-pocus--with superbly vivacious Actress Bankhead handing most of it out--is often extremely funny." Lewis Nichols, from the *New York Times*, depicted Tallulah Bankhead's acting of Sabina in magnificent terms: "... magnificent--breezy, hard, practical by turns. She can strut and posture in broad comedy, she can be calmly serene. It is she who steps out of character to discuss the play, marvelous interludes, all of them." John Anderson,

31 *TCR*, III (November 19, 1942), 174.
33 *Time*, XL (November 30, 1942), 57.
34 *New York Times*, November 19, 1942, p. 29.
of the New York Journal-American, gave Tallulah the credit for the play's successful production.

Though Tallulah Bankhead, Fredric March, and Florence Eldridge are all starred in it, it is Miss Bankhead, as the eternal hussy, who gives it vitality and warmth, and puts humanity into its carefully naive laughter... it is the Bankhead who gives the proceedings the gusto and broad-beamed humor of a superb performance, ... . She is irresistibly comic and endlessly entertaining, but when she is out of sight the play sags badly. ... 35

Writing for the New York Daily News, Burns Mantle praised the "individual performances" of the cast and then informed his readers, "... Miss Bankhead has the flashiest part, and plays it to the hilt. A fine comedienne emerges from the solemn, sentimental and emotional parts that Tallulah has played."36 Richard Lockridge described Miss Bankhead as "... having a singularly radiant evening." According to critic Lockridge, Tallulah Bankhead brought out the better qualities of the Wilder script. He stated, "It could hardly be better acted. Miss Bankhead, as may have been guessed, runs through it brightly, sparkling wherever she is."37 Louis Kronenberger, dramatic critic for the New York newspaper PM, was resolved that in the character of Sabina "... Mr. Wilder has come off with a first-rate theater character; and Tallulah Bankhead has played the creature with brilliant verve and vivacity. So much so, that one does not so much follow the play, at times, as wait for Sabina to come back on the stage."38 The respected and esteemed critic for The New

35 TCR, III (November 19, 1942), 175.
36 Ibid., 173.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., p. 176.
Republic, Stark Young, came to the following conclusion in regard to Tallulah's capabilities of acting the character of Sabina and toward her relationship to the overall merit of the play:

And in case anything else fails, Miss Tallulah Bankhead . . . comes to scatter the shadows from the stage and audience. She saves the day for play and playwright, she saves the whole millennia, in fact, from time to time. Her general method is that of the Charlot's Revue Ladies, with a good deal of those English performer's houseparty charade effect, but with more of a certain personal style than they had. Miss Bankhead has, too, a serious scene in the last act which she plays extremely well.39

Joseph Wood Krutch, of Nation, found the entire experience of The Skin of Our Teeth slightly phenomenal, but he stated, "No doubt the personal following of Miss Bankhead and the delightful performance she is giving have something to do with the phenomenon."40 The dramatic critic for the New York Herald Tribune, Howard Barns, focused his review almost entirely on Miss Bankhead's performance. He found that she "... with her splendid asides to the audience, dominates the production as Sabina. Her metamorphosis from an ice-age maid of all work into a bathing beauty siren is marvelously modulated, and her final scenes are nothing short of stirring."

Brooks Atkinson, rejoicing in the Bankhead success, wrote, "As the eternal wanton, Tallulah Bankhead gives a breezy, immensely comic and bridling performance. She makes the transitions between burlesque and honest drama with astonishing virtuosity."42 The final

40 Joseph Wood Krutch, Nation, CLV (December 5, 1942), 629.
41 TCR, III (November 19, 1942), 176.
review from Wilella Waldorf of the *New York Post* found the critic, along with her contemporaries, welcoming Miss Bankhead's Sabina as the saving grace in *The Skin of Our Teeth*. She concluded:

... actually it is Miss Bankhead's Lily Sabina who does most to keep *The Skin of Our Teeth* from dis-integrating into a waggish and rather heavy-footed bore.

... it is Miss Bankhead's irrevalent interuptions that provide the merriest moments of the evening.

... the evening is saved ... especially by the fact that Miss Bankhead is on hand to chatter and flounce her way through the ages, complaining bitterly to the audience every thousand years or so. 43

It is evident from the critical estimations of Miss Bankhead's performance in Mr. Wilder's play that she completely astounded the New York critics with her natural ability for comedy. Further proof of their approval was given when the role of Sabina was voted the best performance of the year, 1942, by an actress. Her judges were the New York Drama Critics Circle. The coveted award greatly enhanced Miss Bankhead's career. As the actress stated, "If I had been validated by Regina Giddens, I was canonized by Sabina." 44

Tallulah Bankhead's success with the characters of Regina, Mae, and Sabina proved to bring further prosperity to the actress's career. They led her in a triumphant march to consequent success in the media from which she had fled fifteen years before; Miss Bankhead returned to Hollywood. Previously, Tallulah Bankhead's name in Hollywood was en-shrouded with the six movie fiascos that she had made immediately after

her return from England. But the memory of those six movies became almost nonexistent when she captured the role of Connie, a newspaper correspondent, in an Alfred Hitchcock movie, *Lifeboat*. For her outstanding portrayal of the character, she was awarded the honors bestowed for the best performance by an American actress in motion pictures for the year 1944. The award was presented by the New York screen critics. Thus, these years of Tallulah Bankhead's professional career were rewarding and almost entirely successful for the actress, critically and publicly.

Noel Coward, an English playwright and actor, wrote *Private Lives* in the early 1930's. Originally, the lead roles in the play were performed by Laurence Olivier and Jill Esmond in England. After this production, Noel Coward starred in the play with Gertrude Lawrence on Broadway. Although *Private Lives* had not escaped the wear and tear of time, it was certainly adequate in 1948, for almost fifteen years after it closed on Broadway, Tallulah Bankhead and Donald Cook brought *Private Lives* to the American public. They toured in the show for almost two years before they returned with the Noel Coward comedy to Broadway. There they defied the sceptics by enjoying a continued successful engagement for a complete season on Broadway. Critic Brooks Atkinson commented on the state of Noel Coward's play when *Private Lives* was revived for the New Yorkers:

Today no one could write as trifling a farce as *Private Lives* with the assurance and elan that Mr. Coward had for it in 1930. It belongs to the brief era of jeunesse doree which is visibly tarnished now. Although no one could write it today, anybody can enjoy it with no trouble at all. For this swift portrait of impudence and egoism is an ingenious
vaudeville that is just right for the theatre and is stuffed full of spare but astringent phrases.\textsuperscript{45}

Despite these inherent inadequacies of \textit{Private Lives} as cited by Brooks Atkinson, Tallulah Bankhead managed to fashion the play into an extremely successful vehicle. Also, it provided a role which allowed her to reveal her fantastic talent of modeling a character of excitement and theatricality for the stage. The majority of the critical reviewers were favorably impressed with this talent. Most were slightly sceptical about whose character the actress was portraying, Noel Coward's Amanda or Tallulah Bankhead's conception of Amanda. An example of one such sceptic was Joseph Wood Krutch, who wrote:

Miss Bankhead treats the whole thing merely as an occasion for a romp in her raucous style.

The . . . audience howled with delight at her antics, but it was at Tallulah enacting her favorite stage role, not at any character in a play, that it was laughing. Miss Bankhead can be wonderfully funny when she is given something in her line to do . . . but one is tempted on occasions like this to revise only slightly the old crack about John Drew and to say: "She doesn't act. She merely misbehaves on stage."

. . . but wonderfully.\textsuperscript{46}

Robert Coleman of the \textit{Daily Mirror} observed: "Tallulah Bankhead gave a dazzling performance, a performance for the all time record books. As Amanda, Tallulah is nothing short of terrific. Her bag of tricks is limitless, her resource amazing and her authority awesome."\textsuperscript{47} John Chapman agreed with Coleman: "Miss Bankhead had a good time. I had a good time . . . the hag-voiced Miss Bankhead struck me as an expert. As I watched her I wondered how it was that she missed the role of


\textsuperscript{46}Joseph W. Krutch, \textit{Nation}, CLVII (October 16, 1948), 444.

\textsuperscript{47}TCR, IV (October 5, 1948), 211.
Placing the true merit of *Private Lives* as a play in a questionable state, William Hawkins wrote in the *New York World-Telegram*: "This is Tallulah's show from start to finish. Clearly she knows where what was once wit now seems merely arch. To combat this state of affairs, she never once leaves a line to fend for itself for laughs."

The critic remained constant in his praise for her ability to reveal her comic resourcefulness by concluding, "... more often than not Bankhead disdains the questionable comedy of the written words, the draws howls from the audience with her own sarcastic laughter of significant grunts." John Mason Brown bestowed his complete support for Miss Bankhead's performance:

Demure is scarcely the word for her, but genius is, however violent or sometimes uncontrolled. She does not bother to play the Amanda Mr. Coward wrote or that Miss Lawrence acted. She tosses both... right out the window. In their place, she plays Tallulah. That is something; in fact, it is a great, great deal.

Part of the audacity, hence the fascination, of Miss Bankhead's Amanda is that she acts her not only as if Mr. Coward must have had Tallulah in mind but as if he should have even if he didn't.

Robert Garland, critic for the *New York Journal-American*, asserted his belief that "Tallulah Bankhead pulls out every stop in the actorial arts, she under-acts, she is acutely arch about it." Also, critic Garland

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accused Tallulah of packing her first night audience because of the numerous and enthusiastic peals of laughter which welcomed each comic line she delivered. Reviewer for the New York Herald-Tribune, Otis L. Guernsey, reported that the actress "... strides into the part of Amanda with gusto." He concluded that Tallulah Bankhead "... demonstrates that much of Coward's flickering dialogue can be rounded into husky, full-throated gags ... The play breaks down easily; and there remains the vision of its star meowing like a kitten and roaring like a lion in a defiant one-woman show." The only critic that mentioned the possibility that Tallulah may have copied Gertrude Lawrence's performance of Amanda was John Lardner of the New York Star. In spite of this criticism, Lardner stated, "Miss Bankhead and Mr. Cook are loud, skillful kidders, ... they provide entertainment at least as good as any you will find at the Danbury Fair ..."

Ward Morehouse viewed Miss Bankhead's characterization of Amanda with fascination. "Bankhead is changeless and unchanging and by sheer gusto she succeeds in turning a dated comedy into a rather satisfactory entertainment. She coos at one moment and detonates the next; she is purring at one instant, and the next exploding." Richard Watts, Jr., critic for the New York Post, found Miss Bankhead's performance in Private Lives "... a fascinating one-woman show." He continued his assessment of the actress's success as Amanda by commenting that "... she is incomparable, and she gives

53 Ibid., p. 211.
54 Ibid., p. 212.
the proceedings the benefit of that superb vitality of hers." Watts concluded his review by stating of the actress, "... she is always a delight to watch, and that air of excitement and glamor—that much misused word—which she brings to the theatre, is a quality that it too rarely possesses in this rather humdrum day through which it is passing." Finally, Brooks Atkinson commended Tallulah's performance with ardent admiration for her personal verve:

Miss Bankhead's current tussle with Private Lives began in the draughty summer theatres in 1947. Encouraged by the susceptibility of the summer boarders, she barnstormed the country in it last season and came back to New York in rude health. ... this is Miss Bankhead's party. Dressed as expensively as possible, she gives an exciting and hilarious performance. "Ferocious" might be the word. It would be dangerous to stay away.

The two critics who dissented from the majority opinion of Miss Bankhead's performance in Private Lives were the dramatic critic for Time, and Harold Clurman. It is illuminating to note their opinions of Private Lives as a play as well as their estimation of Miss Bankhead's performance. For example, the critic for Time wrote that the actress "... in general portrays what appears to be the love of Mt. Vesuvius for a mortal. Her performance reduces Private Lives to boisterous burlesque, which is probably no worse than to have tried to revive it as acidulous comedy." Harold Clurman asserted that Mr. Coward's Private Lives "... is an actor's play to which Gertrude Lawrence and the author

57 Time, LII (October 18, 1948), 82.
brought the perfect tone of combined theatrical scampishness and snob-
blish high life." Of the performance that was currently being enacted
by Miss Bankhead, he stated:

I found Miss Bankhead's performance in Private Lives painfully obscene. It is aggressively lacking in charm. It is . . . self-destructive; a sacrilege against sex. Miss Bankhead has become a victim of her legend. She imitates Tallulah. She throws herself away--as if experimenting in how far she dare go. Her adorers seem bent on abetting this self-massacre. If you tell me audiences are wild about her performance I can only reply with Bernard Shaw, "It is the business of the dramatic critic to educate these dunces, not to echo them."58

Despite the negative verdicts of Harold Clurman and the critic for Time, Tallulah Bankhead successfully revived Private Lives in New York and the majority of the critics were very receptive with their reviews. She stated of her role in Private Lives, "I'm Tallulah in this play, and I'm not a bit ashamed of it." Thus, she established her fifth critical success in a period of nearly eleven years. But Tallulah's public and critical success with Private Lives did not compensate for the actress's boredom with the character of Amanda. Miss Bankhead calculated that she had played the role of Amanda for over two hundred performances.59 Thus, during her performances of Amanda, she evidently impressed the radio producers of "The Big Show" with her personality, for they offered her the position of moderator for the program. Suffering from stagnancy in Private Lives, she accepted her new role as a radio personality and left the theatre for the medium of radio. She later returned to the

59 Bankhead, p. 9.
legitimate stage after an absence of four years. And, in 1956, she performed in her last critically accepted play of quality. But the revival of *A Streetcar Named Desire* written by Tennessee Williams was not as successful as Tallulah Bankhead had anticipated.

Tennessee Williams stated in an article which he wrote in admiration of Tallulah Bankhead:

> Tallulah says to me: "Every good female part you've ever written you've written for me!" Tallulah is more than slightly right about that, despite the fact that I have written only four parts for her. Myra Torrance in *Battle of Angels*, Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Ariadne Del Del Lago in *Sweet Bird of Youth*, and . . . Flora Goforth in *The Milk Train*.60

After the playwright witnessed his character of Blanche, as portrayed by Tallulah, he was dissatisfied with the final product. Following a long battle of vicious attacks which were exchanged in public and private between the actress and playwright, Williams wrote a letter of apology to Tallulah Bankhead which was published in the *New York Times*. Included was his account of a meeting which occurred after the opening performance of *Streetcar* between Mr. Williams and Tallulah Bankhead:

> If you know and love Tallulah as I do, you will not find it reprehensible that she asked me meekly if she had played Blanche better than anyone else had played her. I hope you will forgive me for having answered, "No, your performance was the worst I have seen." The remarkable thing is that she looked at me and nodded in sad acquiescence to this opinion.61

In addition to this, the playwright also stated that Miss Bankhead was working against immeasurable handicaps as an actress in the role of

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Blanche. He concluded his public apology by stating:

The human drama, the play of a woman's great valor and an artist's truth, her own, far superseded, and even eclipsed, to my eye, the performance of my own play. Such an experience in the life of a playwright demands some tribute from him, and this late, awkward confession is my effort to give it.\(^2\)

Unfortunately for Miss Bankhead, the majority of the critical opinion concurred with Mr. Williams' verdict. Three critics, Richard Watts, Jr., William Hawkins, and John McClain, found the actress's performance noteworthy. Richard Watts, Jr., stated, "It is a compelling and dynamic performance that rivets the attention at all times, and . . . commands considerable respect. . . . It soon became clear that a real characterization was being offered. . . . A performance that has very definite merits." The critic's only criticism of Tallulah's performance was in relation to the underlying strength of Miss Bankhead's own personality which protruded as she enacted Blanche. With grave resolve, he observed, "Excellent actress though she is, Miss Bankhead finds it much easier to be commanding than to seem lost, pitiful and appealing . . . while her portrayal is likely to fascinate you, it is far less apt to break your heart."\(^3\) In his review for the \textit{New York Journal-American}, John McClain rendered his opinion that "... she has rolled up her sleeves and plunged into the part with both fists. The performance can be regarded generally as thoughtful and vibrant. Her delineation of the frayed schoolteacher is always compelling, visually exact."\(^4\) Echoing critics

\(^2\)Ibid.

\(^3\)TCR, XVII (February 16, 1956), 363.

\(^4\)Ibid.
Watts and McClain, William Hawkins of The Sun conceded that Tallulah Bankhead "... employed a superhuman degree of taste, restraint and control. What she delivered was one of the most extraordinarily shattering performances of our time." He found her characterization of Blanche to be "... so clear that it sometimes seems indecent to watch and listen. As no other actress has ever done, the star understands what it means to be a Southern lady, without any regard whatsoever for immediate circumstances." The remaining critics found Tallulah Bankhead's character lacking usually because of Tallulah's failure to submerge her own forceful personality beneath the character of Blanche. Walter Kerr, critic for the New York Herald Tribune, was confident that Tallulah was definitely struggling to "... sink that fabled reputation into the broken and self-pitying private terrors of the character called Blanche du Bois." But the critic also stated:

... there are three or four times in the second act when it is played with the tenacity, and the jungle honesty, of a tigress.

... the actress is miscast ... because she is as a person and as a performer, notoriously indestructible. The pretentious side of a complicated girl is never brought through the surface at all.

Robert Coleman of the Daily Mirror, while reserving a stunning amount of respect for the actress, gave his verdict a negative conclusion:

A fascinating figure, one Tallulah Bankhead, turned in the neatest trick of the season. She took the first act of Streetcar, and kidded the pants off it. She satirized it unmercifully, stimulating gales of laughter ... But she played the second stanza

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65 Ibid., p. 362.
66 Ibid., p. 364.
as though she were Sarah Siddons leveling with Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth. She turned on her powers in a devastating display of virtuosity. She wasn't the frail femme known as Blanche. . . she was the terrific Fable bent on spellbinding an audience.

La Bankhead is bringing the grand manner to a minor play. She's overwhelming it with versatility and resource. She's throwing its values completely out of key with her brilliant and undisciplined histrionics.⁶⁷

Critic John Chapman accused Miss Bankhead of making "a novelty" of her characterization of Blanche and Tennessee William's play. His review read: "She treats the Williams work with respect and great earnestness. But, valiant though she is, Miss Bankhead can't quite manage to be the troubled and tremulous nymph whom the author created. She just isn't vocally equipped to quaver."⁶⁸ Brooks Atkinson began his review of Miss Bankhead's performance by asserting, "... no one has a clearer idea of what she is doing than Miss Bankhead, who has entertained audiences for years with her brash honors, her animated acting and her startling voice." While asserting that Bankhead was miscast as Blanche, Atkinson lay the blame for her failure on her producer. According to the critic, "There may be a scene or two when Miss Bankhead expresses something of the loneliness of a woman rejected by the world. But Miss Bankhead has a personality that cannot be masked easily. It is a personality that is antipathetic to Blanche du Bois." He concluded his review of her performance by respectfully stating, "... the fabulous vitality of Miss Bankhead's style of acting has nothing to do with the neurotic

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 368.
terrors of Blanche du Bois. In this case, it is the natural gusto of Tallulah Bankhead that crushes her." Therefore, in regard to the opinions of the New York drama critics, Tallulah Bankhead's last performance in a play of critical merit was not a critical success. The opinion of the majority of critics rested on the premise that Tallulah's basic talents as an actress, her excitement, force, and theatricality, incumbered her characterization of Blanche du Bois. Also, the task of isolating her personal image as a "living legend" from the actress who appeared on the stage as Blanche du Bois was almost unfeasible.

Thus, Tallulah Bankhead excelled in four plays which were, in varying degrees, accorded critical success. The Little Foxes, Clash By Night, The Skin of Our Teeth, and Private Lives, according to the judgment of the New York drama critics, were plays with merit, and Miss Bankhead was, in varying degrees, critically successful with her characterization of her roles within these plays. In the two plays remaining, Antony and Cleopatra and A Streetcar Named Desire, the critics found Tallulah's performances inadequate with regard to her ability as an actress to acquire the correct characterization demanded by the role. Tallulah Bankhead's failure with Antony and Cleopatra was, according to the critics, because of the actress's lack of classical training and because of her lack of discipline and control. In the general consensus of critical opinion, her failure to establish a truthful portrayal in the role of Blanche was attributed to the interference of the actress's dominating and forceful personality which acted in direct opposition to the weak and tender character written by Tennessee Williams.

CHAPTER V

IN SUMMARY OF TALLULAH

According to the individual judgments of the dramatic critics for monthly and weekly American magazines and the New York newspapers, Tallulah Bankhead performed in a large number of mediocre or inferior plays with an almost inconceivable amount of success. But, according to the same critics, the actress performed with degrees of excellence in only four plays which possessed true qualities of merit. The Little Foxes, Clash By Night, The Skin of Our Teeth, and Private Lives were four of the plays that provided characters which allotted the actress unrestricted freedom to excel in her powers of characterization. As these four plays are placed in perspective with the amount of numerous roles in which she performed, it remains apparent that there was an uncommon amount of mediocre or inferior plays which starred Tallulah Bankhead. Yet, in the four plays of merit, the actress carved a definite mark in the history of American Theatre. In answering the question in regard to which of these four plays gave Tallulah Bankhead her highest degree of critical success, valuable critical opinion can be gleaned from a questionnaire which was sent to several critics of her era in regard to this question. The answers varied only slightly from the original conception which the critics formed of her acting in these productions.

George Ace wrote that her most artistic success was in "the theatre." He stated that "... in Skin she was Tallulah the character, also Rain."
In *Little Foxes*, she was great, and believable."¹ Brooks Atkinson con-
cluded that "Tallulah Bankhead gave only two memorable performances in
my opinion--once in *The Little Foxes* when Herman Shumlin directed the
living daylights out of her, and again in *The Skin of Our Teeth* when Elia
Kazan scared her and made her behave."² Richard Watts, Jr., wrote that
only in *The Little Foxes* did the actress ". . . submerge herself com-
pletely in the role." He also concluded that her most artistic success
was in *The Little Foxes*.³ Ethel Colby appraised Tallulah's most artistic
success as *The Skin of Our Teeth*.⁴ Jack Gaver gave his vote for Regina
in *The Little Foxes* and observed, "In this she was not Tallulah Bankhead
but Regina. I would say that she was more the character than Bankhead
in *The Skin of Our Teeth*."⁵ While Lewis Funke voted for *The Little
Foxes*,⁶ Walter Kerr decided that ". . . surely *The Little Foxes* was her
luckiest play, though I do remember liking her very much in the lighter
and I am afraid unsuccessful Midge Purvis."⁷ Joseph Wood Krutch stated
that her best performance was in *The Skin of Our Teeth*.⁸ Thus, because
at the time of the performances of *The Little Foxes* and *The Skin of Our

¹ Letter from George Ace, theatre critic, April 7, 1969.
³ Letter from Richard Watts, Jr., theatre critic, April 5, 1969.
⁴ Letter from Ethel Colby, theatre critic, April 7, 1969.
⁶ Letter from Lewis Funke, theatre critic, May 6, 1969.
⁷ Letter from Walter Kerr, theatre critic, April 9, 1969.
the critical opinions were undivided and no negative critical opinions were voiced, it is evident that both plays were of the highest artistic success for the actress. Therefore, in the opinion of the critics questioned, the judgment remained, with the exception of Walter Kerr's vote for Midge Purvis, in favor of the performances of Sabina in *The Skin of Our Teeth* and Regina in *The Little Foxes* as Tallulah Bankhead's most outstanding portrayals.

As discussed earlier, Tallulah Bankhead's talents were relatively unproven until her role of Regina in *The Little Foxes*. Immediately after Regina, she had, almost consecutively, four other critically successful roles before she became the hostess for the television spectacular, *The Big Show*. Therefore, it was within this ten-year time span, from 1939 until 1949, that Tallulah established her reputation as an actress of outstanding ability. From almost the first moment that she arrived in New York, she was considered an interesting personality. Regarded as exciting and beautiful, the actress was always a person who was in demand. But her eccentric personality was almost replaced within this ten-year period by the emergence of a serious, disciplined actress, determined to portray outstanding characters whenever she performed. But when Bankhead accepted the position as hostess for *The Big Show*, she became for the world of entertainment a biting, satiric, and continuously witty and outrageous personality. After she returned to the legitimate stage, the television personality of Tallulah Bankhead continuously haunted the actress, making her acting attempts tightropes of personality which collided with the character she was portraying. For a period of time, the actress fought with desperate fury to bury that image of
Tallulah Bankhead, the personality, while on the stage, but the roles which she undertook were never successful in being stronger than the actress's personality. After her failure in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the critics became more and more disgruntled with her characterizations, and it was soon evident that the actress was not winning her battle. As Walter Kerr stated, "In her later plays, she sometimes seemed to be parodying herself, or as in the case of *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Any More*, merely listening to herself."^{9} Several years previous to this battle of personality versus her acting character, John Mason Brown, George Jean Nathan, Charles Morgan, Brooks Atkinson, and Stark Young had each warned the young actress to beware of the evils involved in assuming a public personality that became too strong. But Tallulah Bankhead, as an eccentric personality, was a sellable commodity in the world of theatre. Therefore, she was either prostituted by her producers or by her own ambition, and thus acted in inferior plays which were beneath her artistic ability. The question then remains, was she ever a great actress in the American Theatre? Although, as shown in Chapter Two, the critics who replied to this question within a questionnaire gave a negative opinion, the critical reviews of her performances in *The Skin of Our Teeth, The Little Foxes, Private Lives*, and *Clash By Night* spoke of the actress in superlative praises for her talent. She induced the majority of the critics to call her a "genius, superb, brilliant, torrid, excellent, masterful, irresistibly comic, endlessly entertaining, versatile, radiant, vivacious, and marvelous." Perhaps, after the immediate impact of the success of Miss Bankhead's talent had

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9 Letter from Walter Kerr, theatre critic, April 9, 1969.
been colored by her extremely forceful personal stardom, the critical concepts of her acting became cloudy. This result is undoubtedly conceivable, for Tallulah Bankhead was the lead actress in four great American theatrical ventures. One of these, The Skin of Our Teeth, by Thornton Wilder, was a fresh and original conception of theater and its intimacy with the ideals of mankind. Thus, the play was a risky venture which owed much of its acceptance to Miss Bankhead's performance. Therefore, the theatrical scholar can concede that at one point in Tallulah Bankhead's career she could have been a "great actress." It is evident that this greatness did not encompass her entire career, but no actress is consistently great in every role she plays. As discussed by the great American actress, Alla Nazimova, in Toby Cole's Actors on Acting, the actor is a human being, capable of the same foibles as his fellows who happen to be in other occupations. 10 But, despite Tallulah Bankhead's failures in the theater, she remained on top of a list of truly great stars in the American theater for thirty years. Walter Kerr observed after the actress's death:

Tallulah was a special kind of theater person. Failure, for instance, never diminished her. She could go year after year turning up in disasters--plays that slapped her down savagely and wrapped themselves up in a matter of weeks--and remain Tallulah.

... there is such a thing as a flash-in-the-pan performer, the star who excites us tremendously and then, after a couple of failures, loses all fascination for us. Performers of that kind are being washed out every year. But Tallulah wouldn't wash out, or didn't. Each new graduating class coming out of high school had to find out who this witch was, hear her voice, grin back at the skeptical, wicked, and yet in some way wistful, smile. ...
career seemed irrelevant. Even strict professionalism seemed irrelevant. Tallulah was always something To Be Continued."

Tallulah Bankhead died on December 12, 1968. Behind her she left an exciting and stimulating acting career. But did Tallulah leave any true aspect of permanency in the field of acting? What, if any, was her contribution to the American theater? In reply to this question, the following critics ventured these opinions.

The English critic for The Daily Telegraph and Morning Post, William A. Darlington, stated that her contribution lay in the outstanding performance given in The Little Foxes. Although he wrote that "she hadn't much to do with art," that he didn't think she was "worth much critical study," and made the inquiry, "Must you waste your time on her," he included in his appraisal his remark that, "She was lively, beautiful, witty, kind and outrageous."  

Brooks Atkinson found that she gave two memorable performances. He concluded that her characterizations of Regina in The Little Foxes and Sabina in The Skin of Our Teeth had such qualities of excellence that they would remain permanently noteworthy in the annals of American acting.  

Joseph Wood Krutch, after seeing Tallulah Bankhead in all of her appearances between 1924 and 1950, found that Tallulah Bankhead was part of a dying era of star actresses in the American theater. He asserted

that she possessed the quality which new actresses lack. He stated, "Personality is always a sure way to popularity." He also concluded that Tallulah Bankhead's contribution to the American Theater lay in the fact that, "She embodied a type of insouciance and somewhat bawly exuberance in a form just to the taste of her time."\(^{14}\)

George Ace, a dramatic critic, wrote several television shows for Tallulah while she was appearing on The Big Show; he commented in the questionnaire that "Aside from one other, she was my favorite actress to write for." He felt that she could never be included in a group of dying star actresses in the American Theatre because of her great "vitality." He concluded, "A star who can keep an audience alive, no matter what her play is, for three acts is a rare contributor to the theater. I could go on for hours, but I don't have too many to spare."\(^{15}\)

Considering Tallulah as a part of a dying era of the actress as known to the American Theatre in the past, Lewis Funke also considered her as a contributor of "excitement and theatricality" to the American Theater.\(^{16}\)

Jack Gaver saw Tallulah Bankhead in all the plays that she appeared in after returning from her success in England, and believed that she definitely was part of a dying era of actresses in America. He also remarked that her contribution to the American theatre was simply in her work as an actress. He stated, "She gave pleasure, entertainment, 


\(^{15}\)Letter from George Ace, theatre critic, April 7, 1969.

\(^{16}\)Letter from Lewis Funke, theatre critic, May 6, 1969.
which is all you can ask of any actor. No actor has ever advanced thought, social gains or whatever." Critic Caver gave a word of advice to the writer. "Don't make her out to be some sort of freak. She was no more so than Lynn Fontanne or Siddens or Bernhardt."  

Describing Tallulah Bankhead as a "good and colorful actress," Ethel Colby also believed that she was a part of a disappearing type of actress that was prevalent in American Theatre during her era. Her reason for this answer lay in her statement that "Few actresses are that magnetic." Ethel Colby asserted that Tallulah's contribution to the American Theatre was "some stimulating and interesting performances."  

Richard Watts, Jr., after witnessing all of the actress's performances in which she appeared in New York—as well as in her motion pictures, pictured Tallulah Bankhead as a "magnetic and powerful" actress. He observed that her presence on stage was so powerful that in her performance of Sadie in Rain, "Ironically, . . . she was so dominating that she seemed to terrify the Reverend Davidson who was supposed to be bullying her." He felt that "... it appears to be true at the moment, that Tallulah Bankhead was part of an era of American actresses that was coming to an end," but he also stated, "... the trends in the American theatre change rapidly." Along with the "personal warmth" of the actress, Critic Watts felt that her contribution to the American Theatre remained her theatrical "excitement."  

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18 Letter from Ethel Colby, theatre critic, April 7, 1969.  
19 Letter from Richard Watts, Jr., theatre critic, April 5, 1969.
Walter Kerr sent his appraisal of her contribution in his obituary of Tallulah Bankhead which was written after her death. He stated:

She reminded us--and this was her value--that theater is a personal matter: face-to-face, tone-to-tone, toe-to-toe. She made the theater personal, carrying it out into life and back onto the stage again. She made us feel personally about it, about her. We didn't say to ourselves, "Would I wish to meet her?" or "Will I like her when I do?" We said, "She'll come--around a corner, around someplace, and when she does, she'll be exactly the way she is!"

In relation to her place in the closing era of American actresses, he wrote, "I think Miss Bankhead belonged to an odd tribe—a peripheral tribe and yet a valuable tribe—that never did interest us in acting as such. I don't think we expected to see her give a good performance. I think we expected to meet her some day. In person."

Tallulah Bankhead was a "living legend." She was not content with being just an actress. She was a whirlwind of eccentricity. For example, a writer for Time was once led to comment of the actress:

Tallulah is not the first lady of the theater. She is the theater's first personality. The theater's current first lady is a kind of composite of Helen Hayes, Katharine Cornell, Judith Anderson, Lynn Fontanne—and Tallulah. But Tallulah does not fit neatly into a category, and other ladies of the stage, whatever their virtues as actresses, pale beside her as stars pale when a bonfire is lighted.

At 47, after three decades in the dazzled public eye, Actress Bankhead is one of the few people in the English-speaking world instantly and unmistakably identifiable by her first name. Her lounging, lioness-like vitality, her insatiable lust for life and her contempt for all forms of humbug have inspired a large body of legend. Her egomania is about as extreme as "the artistic temperament" can produce. She is

21 Ibid.
exhibitionistic, extravagant, self-indulgent, unpredictable—and full of whims, radiant good humor and terrible rages. She is all these things in a very fulltime, wholehearted way.\textsuperscript{22}

Tallulah Bankhead relished this image of herself and her career. An example of her pride can be seen within the following anecdote. Once, after visiting her apartment the previous day, Frank Sinatra appeared on The Big Show with Miss Bankhead and commented on the fact that the actress-hostess had a black flag at half mast in her home. Tallulah informed Sinatra that it was because her favorite baseball team—the Giants—once again had lost the pennant. To this, Sinatra said, "Oh, I didn't know that you were interested in the national pastime." The quick-witted Tallulah cut the singer short, stating, "But dahling, I am the national pastime."\textsuperscript{23} The actress chose her route. She, by choice, after becoming a fine actress, became an even greater personality.

When any writer attempts to place into perspective the life of an individual, regardless of who the individual may be, he is, in reality, limited in his breadth of scope. The entire individual and his life remain to a great extent inaccessible to the written word. Thus, the ability to capture the essence of a human being is a problem which leaves a scholar with true feelings of inadequacy. This problem is undoubtedly inherent when speaking of a person such as Tallulah Bankhead was. To add to the inadequacy, an even greater problem lies in the writer's ability to sum up or conclude his conception and research of a person who possessed genius. This problem is particularly acute when Miss Bankhead

\textsuperscript{22}One-Woman Show," \textit{Time}, LII (November 22, 1948), 76.

\textsuperscript{23}Ted Shane, "Tallulah To You," \textit{Collier's}, CXIX (April 26, 1947), 19.
is the subject, for Tallulah Bankhead was many different things to many
different worlds. She was a personality, a wit, a beautiful woman, a
basis for outrageous tales, a leader of actors, a television and movie
star, and an actress of uncommon potential in the legitimate theater. In
the field of legitimate theater, for the theatrical scholar, certain
qualities of this actress can be pinpointed. First, although she lacked
certain necessary qualities of discipline, she possessed a great gift
for acting, especially when the role was strong in characterization.
She reached the apex of her artistic success with her roles of Regina
in Lillian Hellman's The Little Foxes and Sabina in Thornton Wilder's
The Skin of Our Teeth. Thus, she did her greatest acting in both a
comedy and a melodrama. Second, according to the consensus of critical
opinion, she left a great legacy to the American Theatre with her in-
tense spirit of excitement and theatricality. Qualities such as these
are rarely seen in the American world of entertainment today, be it in
motion pictures, television, or the legitimate stage. The ironic tragedy
of Tallulah Bankhead was in the sad absence of a much greater number of
plays which would have proved capable of matching her talents that con-
sistently overbounded the realms of three acts. As Walter Kerr wrote of
Tallulah Bankhead after the actress's death, "She was a presence who in-
sisted upon being present. The theater begins in this kind of astonish-
ment." 24

APPENDIX
QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Did you see Tallulah Bankhead in any play? Which one(s)?
   all of her appearances between 1924 and 1950

   a. Were you a critic or a patron at the time of the performance?
      Yes
   b. Were you impressed by her performance?
      Yes
   c. Did you believe her as the character she portrayed or did you always remember you were watching Miss Bankhead?
      Usually the second; I thought her best performance was in
   d. Other comments: The Skin of Our Teeth

2. What aspect of Miss Bankhead's talent made her a great actress in your opinion?
   Not a great actress. It was said of  John Drew that he didn't act; he just behaved. Most of the time Miss Bankhead just misbehaved.

3. What role in legitimate theatre do you consider Miss Bankhead's most artistic success?
   See Above

4. Did you consider Tallulah Bankhead as a part of a dying era of star actresses in the American Theatre?
   Personality is always an even surer way to popularity

5. Did you consider the roles Miss Bankhead created always closely aligned to her own personality?
   When successful.

6. Did you consider Tallulah Bankhead as a great actress or as a great personality?
   See above

7. What contribution do you think Miss Bankhead gave to the American Theatre? Please use the back of this paper if necessary.
   She embodied a type of insouciance and somewhat baudy exuberance in a form just to the taste of her time.

Signed
Miss Ethel Colby
44 W. 44th St.
New York, New York 10036

Dear Miss Colby;

As a graduate student at North Texas State University in Denton, Texas, I am writing a graduate thesis in the field of Drama. My major concentration is in acting and I have chosen the late American actress, Miss Tallulah Bankhead, as the basis for a critical thesis in acting.

I have been familiar with your critical reviews in The Journal of Commerce and would be grateful if you gave me assistance in my research. When the critics have written of Miss Bankhead, they have seemed to be more involved with her as a personality than as an actress. The problem of making a thorough critical evaluation is inherent.

As you are considered a major American critic in the field of Drama, would you please fill out the attached questionnaire for my study. I would be truly indebted to you if you would very briefly answer these questions.

I am extremely excited about this study of such an actress as Miss Bankhead was. But the brevity of material in critical analysis is a very crucial problem for me at this point in my work. Your help could be great in redeeming my plans for this thesis. I could only repay you by doing the best work possible and by leaving a truthful, objective view of a great figure in the American Theatre.

Thank You,

Jan Buttram Ratterree
Mr. Lewis Funke
233 New York Times, Inc.,
229 West 43rd St.
New York, New York 10036

Dear Mr. Funke;

As a graduate student at North Texas State University in Denton, Texas, I am writing a graduate thesis in the field of Drama. My major concentration is in acting and I have chosen the late American actress, Tallulah Bankhead, as the basis for a critical thesis in acting.

I have been familiar with your critical reviews in the New York Times and would be grateful if you gave me assistance in my research. When the critics have written of Miss Bankhead, they have seemed to be more involved with her as a personality than as an actress. The problem of making a thorough critical evaluation is inherent.

As you are considered a major American critic in the field of Drama, would you please fill out the attached questionnaire for my study. I would be truly indebted to you if you would very briefly answer these questions.

I am extremely excited about this study of such an actress as Miss Bankhead was. But the brevity of material in critical analysis is a very crucial problem for me at this point in my work. Your help could be very influential in redeeming my plans for this thesis. I could only repay you by doing the best work possible and by leaving a truthful, objective view of a great figure in the American Theatre.

Thank You,

Jan Buttram Ratterree
Mr. Ivor Brown
% The Observer
160 Queen Victoria St.
London ECl, England

Dear Mr. Brown;

As a graduate student at North Texas State University in Denton, Texas, U. S. A., I am writing a graduate thesis in the field of Drama. My major concentration is in acting and I have chosen the late American actress, Miss Tallulah Bankhead, as the basis for a critical thesis in acting.

I have been familiar with your critical reviews for the Observer in London, which our library subscribes to, and would be grateful if you gave me assistance in my research. When the American critics have written of Miss Bankhead, they have seemed to be more involved with her as a personality than as an actress. The problem of making a thorough critical evaluation is inherent.

As you are considered a major English critic in the field of Drama, and since Miss Bankhead spent eight years of her career on London stages, would you please fill out the attached questionnaire for my study. I would be truly indebted to you if you would very briefly answer these questions.

I am extremely excited about this study of such an actress as Miss Bankhead was. But the brevity of material in critical analysis is a very crucial problem for me at this point in my work. Your help could be very influential in redeeming my plans for this thesis. I could only repay you by doing the best work possible and by leaving a truthful, objective view of a great figure in the American Theatre.

Thank You,

Jan Buttram Ratterree
April 1, 1961

Dear Miss Ratteree:

I'm sorry, but I gave up filling out students' questionnaires a good 25 years ago. Tallulah Bankhead was a wonderful drinking companion but not a very good actress.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

John Chapman
Drama Critic
April 5, 1969

Dear Jan Ratterree:

I don't mean to evade your questions. But the subject is complicated and I can't give simple answers.

It is impossible to separate an actor from his personality—particularly if he is a stimulating actor. An actor who can disguise his personality is a second-rate actor, strange though that may seem. A first-rate actor has a personality too dynamic to be hidden. His performances are variations of his personality in the light of his skill, intellect, culture, and character. Laurence Olivier is unmistakably Olivier in every part but he can create character by his incomparable skill and the clarity of his mind. He knows what he is doing; he does it deliberately. But he can't deceive us into thinking he is not Olivier.

Tallulah Bankhead gave only two memorable performances in my opinion—once in The Little Foxes when Herman Shumlin directed the living daylights out of her, and again in The Skin of Our Teeth when Elia Kazan scared her and made her behave. Otherwise, I think her acting was a succession of exhibitions of an electric, witty and powerful personality. But it seems to me that does not constitute great acting. She was thinking of herself, not the character.

Sincerely yours,

Brooks Atkinson
QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Did you see Tallulah Bankhead in any play? Which one(s)?
   In all of them in which she appeared in New York—as well as in her motion pictures.
   a. Were you a critic or a patron at the time of the performance? First, movie critic, then drama critic.
   b. Were you impressed by her performance?
      Always, though usually as a personality.
   c. Did you believe her as the character she portrayed, or did you always remember you were watching Miss Bankhead? Only in "The Little Foxes" did she submerge herself completely in the role.
   d. Other comments:
      Ironically, in a revival of "Rain" she was so dominating that she seemed to terrify the Rev. Davidson who was supposed to be bullying her.

2. What aspect of Miss Bankhead's talent made her a great actress in your opinion?
   I don't think she was a "great" actress; she was a magnetic and powerful one, and it sometimes over-dominated her play.

3. What role in legitimate theatre do you consider Miss Bankhead's most artistic success?
   "The Little Foxes," by all odds.

4. Did you consider Tallulah Bankhead as a part of a dying era of star actresses in the American Theatre?
   It would appear so at the moment, but the trends in the American theater change rapidly.

5. Did you consider the roles Miss Bankhead created always closely aligned to her own personality?
   Yes, but I think that has been frequently true among actresses who are authentic stars.

6. Did you consider Tallulah Bankhead as a great actress or as a great personality?
   A powerful and fascinating personality with great personal warmth.

7. What contribution do you think Miss Bankhead gave to the American Theatre? Please use the back of this paper if necessary.
   Excitement.
QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Did you see Tallulah Bankhead in any play? Which one(s)?
   - "The Skin of Our Teeth" - "The Little Foxes" - "Another Part of the Forest"
   - "Antony and Cleopatra" - "Private Lives"

   a. Were you a critic or a patron at the time of the performance? 
   b. Were you impressed by her performance? 
   c. Did you believe her as the character she portrayed or did you always remember you were watching Miss Bankhead? 
   d. Other comments: 
      - "She was never a great actress - just good - colorful"
      - "Stronger than most of her assigned roles"

2. What aspect of Miss Bankhead's talent made her a great actress in your opinion? 
   - "None!"

3. What role in legitimate theatre do you consider Miss Bankhead's most artistic success? 
   - "Skin of Our Teeth"

4. Did you consider Tallulah Bankhead as a part of a dying era of star actresses in the American Theatre? 
   - "Yes! Few actresses are that magnetic"

5. Did you consider the roles Miss Bankhead created always closely aligned to her own personality? 
   - "Yes!"

6. Did you consider Tallulah Bankhead as a great actress or as a great personality? 

7. What contribution do you think Miss Bankhead gave to the American Theatre? Please use the back of this paper if necessary.
   - " Stimulating, interesting performance"
   - "Pom"
QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Did you see Tallulah Bankhead in any play? Which one(s)?
   LITTLE FOXES, SKIN OF OUR TEETH, DARK VICTORY, RAIN

   a. Were you a critic or a patron at the time of the
      performance? PATRON

   b. Were you impressed by her performance? ALWAYS ONE WAY OR
      ANOTHER.

   c. Did you believe her as the character she portrayed
      or did you always remember you were watching Miss
      Bankhead? IN "SKIN" SHE WAS TALLULAH THE CHARACTER, ALSO RAIN
      IN LITTLE FOXES SHE WAS GREAT, AND BELIEVEABLE.

   d. Other comments:
      SHE WAS MY FAVORITE ACTRESS TO WRITE FOR,
      ASIDE FROM JANE.

2. What aspect of Miss Bankhead's talent made her a great
   actress in your opinion?
      THE EXCITEMENT SHE ENGAGED WHEN SHE FIRST CAME ON STAGE...ELECTRICITY

3. What role in legitimate theatre do you consider Miss
   Bankhead's most artistic success?
      THE THEATER...ALSO ON A RADIO PROGRAM I WROTE FOR HER.

4. Did you consider Tallulah Bankhead as a part of a dying
   era of star actresses in the American Theatre?
      NOT WITH HER VITALITY

5. Did you consider the roles Miss Bankhead created always
   closely aligned to her own personality?
      NO.

6. Did you consider Tallulah Bankhead as a great actress or
   as a great personality?
      A LITTLE OF EACH, SHE COULD ASSUME BOTH.

7. What contribution do you think Miss Bankhead gave to the
   American Theatre? Please use the back of this paper if
   necessary. (NO MATTER WHAT HER PLAYS IS)
      A STAR WHO CAN KEEP AN AUDIENCE ALIVE FOR THREE ACTS
      IS A RARE CONTRIBUTOR TO THE THEATER I COULD GO ON FOR HOURS BUT I DON'T
April 9, 1969

Miss Jan Buttram Ratterree
1607 W. Oak
Denton, Texas 76201

Dear Miss Ratterree:

Many thanks for your letter, and good luck on your thesis. I am not sure I can remember offhand all of the times I saw Tallulah Bankhead, but surely "The Little Foxes" was her luckiest play, though I do remember liking her very much in the lighter and I am afraid unsuccessful "Midgie Purvis." In her later ones, she sometimes seemed to be parodying herself or, as in the case of "The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Any More," merely listening to herself. But earlier she was great fun.

As for an overall impression of her and her meaning in the American theater, I am asking Clara Rotter, the drama secretary at the Times, to send you a copy of the short piece I did immediately after Miss Bankhead's death.

All best wishes,

Sincerely,

[Signature]

WK:mc

"ALL THE NEWS THAT'S FIT TO PRINT"
April 11, 1969

Dear Mr. Rafferty,

Here is your questionnaire.

You say you are familiar with my work for The Illustrated London News, which is clever of you since I have never in a long life written one word for that paper. I have been on the Telegraph for just on 50 years.

I hope that when you come to write your thesis that you will be more accurate.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]
**May 3, 1967**

**QUESTIONNAIRE**

1. Did you see Tallulah Bankhead in any play? Which one(s)?

   All that she appeared after returning from her English period in 1932 or thereafter.

   a. Were you a critic or a patron at the time of the performance? Extend for all plays.

   b. Were you impressed by her performance? By some, she wasn’t.

   c. Did you believe her as the character she portrayed or did you always remember you were watching Miss Bankhead? And unfair question. E.g., Bankhead, Helen Hayes, Mary Martin, etc., any now you’re always conscious of watching Bankhead etc.

   d. Other comments:

   A star without a dominant personality is impossible. There are some with whom you may not care much of that, even in others, but at times and in some cases. According to selected plays, such as personality may seem more dominant at one time than at another.

2. What aspect of Miss Bankhead’s talent made her a great actress in your opinion?

   She had authority, and this means personality to be it. But most of the great ones have succeeded without it, hence—authority.

3. What role in legitimate theatre do you consider Miss Bankhead’s most artistic success? Raging in “The Little Foxes” in this she was not T.B. But Raging I should also say that she was more the character than Bankhead in “The Skin of our Teeth.”

4. Did you consider Tallulah Bankhead as a part of a dying era of star actresses in the American Theatre? Yes.

5. Did you consider the roles Miss Bankhead created always closely aligned to her own personality? Not always.

6. Did you consider Tallulah Bankhead as a great actress or as a great personality? There is no great actress who is not a great personality. (See above)

7. What contribution do you think Miss Bankhead gave to the American Theatre? Please use the back of this paper if necessary.

   Good luck! Don’t make her out to be some sort of actor. A actor has even advanced thought, social gains, or whatever.

   (Signature)

   (Address)
QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Did you see Tallulah Bankhead in any play? Which one(s)?
   a. The Little Foxes
   b. "Queen of our Teeth"
   c. "The Eagle Has Two Heads"
   d. "Dear Charles"
   e. A Tramp Named Desire

   a. Were you a critic or a patron at the time of the performance?
   b. Were you impressed by her performance? 
   c. Did you believe her as the character she portrayed or did you always remember you were watching Miss Bankhead?
   d. Other comments:

2. What aspect of Miss Bankhead's talent made her a great actress in your opinion?

3. What role in legitimate theatre do you consider Miss Bankhead's most artistic success? "Little Foxes".

4. Did you consider Tallulah Bankhead as a part of a dying era of star actresses in the American Theatre? 

5. Did you consider the roles Miss Bankhead created always closely aligned to her own personality? 

6. Did you consider Tallulah Bankhead as a great actress or as a great personality?

7. What contribution do you think Miss Bankhead gave to the American Theatre? Please use the back of this paper if necessary. 

   [Signature]
QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Did you see Tallulah Bankhead in any play? Which one(s)?
   - The Dancers
   - Fallen Angels
   - The Green Hat
   - La Dame aux Camelias
   - Other

   a. Were you a critic or a patron at the time of the performance?
   - Comic Critic (The Manchester Guardian) and Polemical Observer
   - Usurper, "La Dame aux Camelias" was a mistake

   b. Were you impressed by her performance?
   - Yes

   c. Did you believe her as the character she portrayed or did you always remember you were watching Miss Bankhead?
   - Both

   d. Other comments:

2. What aspect of Miss Bankhead's talent made her a great actress in your opinion?
   - Enthusiasm, energy, hard work.
   - She combined great application with appearances written in a variety of parts while giving her own remarkable vitality free play.

3. What role in legitimate theatre do you consider Miss Bankhead's most artistic success?
   - In my limited experience, I saw her in "The Green Hat."

4. Did you consider Tallulah Bankhead as a part of a dying era of star actresses in the American Theatre?
   - I do not know enough about the American Theatre to answer that.

5. Did you consider the roles Miss Bankhead created always closely aligned to her own personality?
   - No. She made experiments to cope with type-casting.

6. Did you consider Tallulah Bankhead as a great actress or as a great personality?
   - An able actress with a vivid and memorable personality.

7. What contribution do you think Miss Bankhead gave to the American Theatre? Please use the back of this paper if necessary.
   - See answer to 4.

May 20, 1969
QUESTIONAIRE

1. Did you see Tallulah Bankhead in any play? Which one(s)?

   Yes. Everything she did drive except "They Know What They Wanted."
   a. Were you a critic or a patron at the time of the performance? Critic
   b. Were you impressed by her performance? Not often
   c. Did you believe her as the character she portrayed or did you always remember you were watching Miss Bankhead? Always Miss Bankhead
   d. Other comments:
      "I don't think she is worth much critical study. Must you waste your time on her?"

2. What aspect of Miss Bankhead's talent made her a great actress in your opinion? She was never a great actress unless she became one later in America. In England, she was a virtuoso of personality, with a talent for making people laugh on and off the stage.

3. What role in legitimate theatre do you consider Miss Bankhead's most artistic success? She didn't need to do much acting, anywhere.

4. Did you consider Tallulah Bankhead as a part of a dying era of star actresses in the American Theatre? No.

5. Did you consider the roles Miss Bankhead created always closely aligned to her own personality? Yes.

6. Did you consider Tallulah Bankhead as a great actress or as a great personality? As a personality. She was lively, beautiful, witty, kind, and outrageous.

7. What contribution do you think Miss Bankhead gave to the American Theatre? Please use the back of this paper if necessary. I have little knowledge of her career after her return to America, but I am told she was very good in "The Little Foxes".
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