

"MADAME X" OPENS SALTY FLOODGATE

French Melodrama, with Dorothy
Donnelly's Fine Lead, Has
Audience in Tears.

WILLIAM ELLIOTT SUPERB

For Emotional Sincerity Young Actor
Could Not Be Excelled—Others
in the Cast.

MADAME X, a drama, in prologue and three acts, by Alexandre Bisson, adapted by John N. Raphael, American version edited by William Henry Wright. New Amsterdam Theatre.

RoseChristine Blessing
Dr. Chesnel.....L. Rogers Lytton
Louis Floriot.....Robert Drouet
Jacqueline.....Dorothy Donnelly
NoelRobert Paton Gibbs
LaroqueMalcolm Williams
VictorHarry C. Bradley
PerissardW. H. Denny
MerivelCharles E. Verner
MarieDeirdre Doyle
HeleneCecil Kern
Raymond Floriot.....William Elliott
Clerk of Court.....Frank Wright
President of Court.....Charles C. Brandt
FontaineB. S. Higgins
Valmorin.....John McKee
An Usher of the Assize Court..Walter F. Tuley
Foreman of the Jury.....Floyd K. Brown

What is the fascination about the morbidly melodramatic, or the melodramatically morbid? For you can put it either way. Madame X. is both. And people will rush to see it. Nor can you blame them, human nature being what it is, and most people being human, though some of us might prefer to take our pleasures with a few less tears. However, as women often say, everybody needs a good cry once in a while. And everybody may find it at Madame X. But they'd better take their overshoes along.

Paris had Madame X. and then it had its flood. Maybe there's a connection between the two. So it might be well to prepare for the worst. With tears flowing as freely as they did at the New Amsterdam last night gondolas may soon be at a premium in Forty-second Street. Never was there such a snivelling. Even the men got the habit, and were asking for their handkerchiefs back before the final curtain fell.

There is an old story about the German gentleman who remarked with pride that his sister was an actress, and, he said further, "she played her part so natural dot dose tears of der ordinance ran down and drowned der orshester." The orchestra at the New Amsterdam, by way of precaution, had better buy some mackintoshes.

Now let it be freely confessed that the seemingly flippant mood is really the natural reflex action of a state of harrowed nerves. For this play of Alexander Bisson's certainly has power to move. At bottom its strength comes from a primal instinct, the love of parent for child, and the theme has been dexterously woven into the fabric of the piece. It is melodrama, to be sure, with plenty of melodramatic license, with the long arm of coincidence about twice its normal length, in fact, and with introductory episodes that would destroy illusion for even the least sophisticated of playgoers. But, nevertheless, when it gets going, it goes hard, as the saying is, and there is no let up to the end. There is an initial difficulty that requires skill and powerful acting to finally overcome. Nowadays, when you see the words "prologue and a lapse of twenty years" it generally looks dubious for the playwright at the outset. But M. Bisson overcomes a little thing like that. His theme is rather commonplace, and much of his matter trite, but he has arranged several scenes of great theatrical effectiveness, and a final act that piles agony on agony.

Briefly, as most people must know by now, the story deals with a M. Louis Floriot, whose wife has left him for another man. Absent two years, her lover dead, she now returns to beg forgiveness and to learn that her little son has been near death's door. She pleads to be allowed to see him, the husband is deaf to her entreaties and turns her out into the streets. So much for the prologue.

When she is next seen, in company with a rascally adventurer, she is a drug fiend, an ether inebriate, a wretched, broken creature. At some moment she has let fall a hint of her earlier position, and her companion, conspiring with a pair of confidence men, determines to blackmail the husband. In a struggle to prevent him from carrying out this design she kills him, is arrested and brought to trial. There her husband, now the President of a French court, and on the bench by invitation of his colleagues, to hear his son make a maiden speech in criminal defense, sees the woman, and gradually comes to know her, while the boy, still ignorant of his relationship with the prisoner, delivers an impassioned address in her behalf. She is acquitted, the son finally learns who she is, and she dies while he rushes to bring in his father for a last word of farewell.

The climax of tears is reached as the boy sinks weeping beside his mother's prostrate form.

There are several tender little scenes, one in which the wretched outcast, telling her fortune at cards, sees another woman about to commit the same folly as her own, and tries to dissuade her from it. Also there are various episodes of comic relief of rather an awkward kind, but at least of some use in lightening the otherwise grim tale. And there is the force of contrast and of irony, notably in the scene toward the end in which the son, still ignorant of the exact situation in which he has played a part, thanks the woman for the chance she has given him to make a name for himself. Also, there is the fragment of a love story.

There can be no doubt that with actors of less skill and power than appeared last night the play would seem far more cheap and tawdry, but in its main parts is played with so much sincerity and emotion that it ultimately produces a remarkable effect. Nothing in Miss Dorothy Donnelly's career heretofore has conveyed a suggestion of the ability which she reveals in this play, and, though the role of the erring wife is rich with opportunities—almost actor-proof, in fact—there are dangerous places now and then where the actress's discretion count for much. Sometimes laughter and tears lie perilously close together, but Miss Donnelly safely skirts the one, and brings about the other. Her make-up as the bedraggled outcast is superb, and in innumerable little ways she conveys the impression of mental and physical fatigue and, worse, the loss of the natural faculties, the slow, certain, hideous undermining of the woman's constitution by misery and drugs and drink, bringing at the end, as well, a touch of beautiful tenderness and mother's pride to complete the complex picture.

There is no young actor on the American stage to-day—in fact, it is doubtful if there is one on the English speaking stage—who could equal Mr. William Elliott's performance of the son, with its beautiful show of impassioned oratory in the trial scene, with its tremendous effect of emotional sincerity and earnestness. Playing elsewhere in a key of natural boyishness—youthful, fresh, and buoyant—he approaches with perfect and sure art these difficult scenes, when not to cry from the very soul—or seem to—would be fatal to effect. A young man in tears is not often a successful experiment on the stage, but this actor has such a gift of tense and true emotion that his appeal cannot be resisted. It was with difficulty, in fact, that the audience could be stilled at the end of his speech to the jury so that the play might go on to the end.

To these two chief honors fell, but there were several other excellent performances, notably a very well played bit by Mr. Harry Bradley, who passed very skillfully from the scene of quiet comedy to a little passage of genuine and moving sentiment. Mr. Robert Drouet was vigorous and dignified, Mr. Robert Paton Gibbs was earnest and pleasing, and Mr. W. H. Denny handled the comedy relief with good effect. The others were equal to their tasks.