There have been, here at Delaware, during the last year and a half, exactly four dramatic presentations.

The production of Bernard Shaw's "Pygmalion" was undertaken by the members of the Women's College dramatic organization, supported with a male cast from Delaware College. The play was given, therefore, under the auspices of the Women's College and is not strictly considered under the list of plays produced by the men students. It was given for one performance on December 13, 1923, at Wolf Hall.

The play itself, if a criticism of Shaw is permitted at this late date, was not a brilliant work. Neither was the way in which it was produced. The influence of the manner, probably, in which it was enacted, may have been the cause for its dullness. The same play, it will be remembered, when translated into French and produced at Paris, was a marked success. The reason, no doubt, is that the text calls for a saucy rendering of the lines and a certain buoyancy of the action which is more under the control of the French and their attitude toward life than with the students of this university.

Nevertheless, taken all in all, it was, at least, an ambitious attempt on the part of the students to present a serious-farcical play in a farcical-serious manner. Miss Wigley was a trifle above par in her rôle of the little ignorant street urchin and her leading man, Mr. Frederick Smith, had no difficulty, except with the love scenes, which were just the least bit crude, in rendering a convincing type of stage hero. Miss Louise Jackson, serious and patient to the point of admiration, did her utmost with the directing of this play.

It is with the contemplation of the next play, this time given by the members of the Footlights Club, that one is at a loss to know how to treat such a bizarre affair.

The play was "The Night Cap," by Guy Bolton and Max Marcin. It, too, was presented in Wolf Hall in April, 1924. It can readily be seen that a radical jump was taken by the play-reading committee, whoever they are, or is, when this play was selected as a representation of the histrionic abilities of the students. From Shaw to Bolton and Marcin! Shaw, the greatest satirist of the age, gave place this time to two of the best-known hack-writers along Broadway. As dramatists they register zero; as playwrights they are fairly good first-rate fourth-rate stage technicians.

The play, in itself, was, at best, nothing more than cheap, gaudy, puerile, melodrama with a mystery theme and two or three murders every half-hour or so thrown in for good measure.

The play was eventually produced. That evening after the first act the house was in an uproar. The actors, unfortunately, suddenly forgot their lines and the voice of the prompter was distinctly heard in every part of the house; two of the wings nearly fell down and might have done serious injury to the inspiring Thespians. But, alas! ironical as it was, the audience, who were under the impression that they had come to see a mystery play, realized that here was one of the greatest farces that had
ever been put on the boards in the vicinity of Newark. Those who had paid their money were satisfied. The play was, in short, a decided success. Everyone had gotten a good laugh. The stock of the Footlights Club shot up. All the critics were unanimous in its favor. There was one, of course, who riled it in the pages of The Review. He knew of what good drama should consist.

The honors of the evening, for the acting, were hard to dispose of; for, in the words of the writer in The Review, they were all so bad that it was difficult to pick the worst. Hyman Yanowitz, who had been given the measly role of the butler, ran off with the show and his acting was beyond reproach. After some thought, the same can be said, not as it seems so long ago and a certain mellowness has set in which places a halo around the memories of yesterday, that everyone did his best. Nothing more can, therefore, be said about the play. The members of the Footlights Club did the best that they knew how to do. The fault rested in the selection of the play and the manner of its direction.

Both Miss Frances Worthington and Miss Louise Brooks, who had kindly consented to lend their services, played the female rôles very well. The others who at this late date should be given some recognition for their services were Charles Green, Paul Leahy, William Hill, James Deputy, and Clifford Smith.

On the following May the members of the Footlights Club decided to present a musical review. There was to be no attempt whatever at anything that smacked of the high-brow or the classical. They succeeded. And, furthermore, it was one of the best productions that the Footlights Club ever put on. There were a number of different acts and each one was different. There were song and dance numbers. There were little skits that evoked thunders of merry laughter and repeated curtain calls.

The honors of the evening went to Messrs. Deputy and Hobbs. These two young men had written a gentle satire on the performance of “Romeo and Juliet,” as it had been produced by Jane Cowl and Rollo Peters in Wilmington the preceding month. Of course, as the sober minded among us reflected, it was absurd. But its absurdity was well-founded. It was, to say the least, quite the cleverest thing of the evening. Mr. Hobbs, in exact imitation of Miss Cowl at her Wilmington performance, made a delightful curtain speech wherein she (he) apologized for spoiling that lovely balcony scene. The book of etiquette had warned her not to cough in public, but chewing tobacco is not a simple matter and if one swallows the juice, then, she felt entirely innocent of maliciously conspiring against Mr. Shakespeare. The songs of the evening were fine. The dancing was well-ordered. The character sketches were as well done as one sees in vaudeville.

In short, it plainly pointed out the fact that when left to select their own form of amusement the students were quite in their native element: burlesque. But, as has been said before, it was polite burlesque. It appealed, paradoxically as it may seem, to the professor of ancient languages, and the agriculture students alike. A reaction remarkable in itself. That is, it clearly manifested its “universal-ity,” which, as it is constantly taught in the classroom, is the first requisite of any great art. Ergo, “Smacks and Cracks,” as the performance was
labeled, must, out of necessity and logic, be called great art. There were no more performances until the next school year commenced in the fall of 1924.

The theory that everything travels in cycles was once more clearly shown by the next play that was put on. It was no other than Ibsen’s “Ghosts.” This production was remarkable in that its entire period of rehearsal, as well as the performance itself, was entirely cloaked in mystery. No one knew when it was to be offered. It wasn’t. That is, it was not a public affair. The student body was not allowed to attend, except a private showing, at which time invitations were sent to some of the Seniors and the members of the faculty. Whether or not it was thought advisable not to corrupt the minds of the young with such a sinister theme as this play put forth is, even at this late date, unknown. Nevertheless, only the chosen few witnessed “Ghosts.” But, as it has often been pondered over, if the reason for not allowing the student body to view the play was, as has been pointed out, the fear of corrupting their minds, why, then, was it that the males of the cast were entirely Freshmen? But that, it is feared, will remain one of the great mysteries that defy solution.

“Ghosts” was produced by the Women’s College. Male students, freshmen, supported them. Whether or not the production was a success had better be left unsaid. It wasn’t, by the way.

The Footlights Club were at a loss for their next performance. There was some rumor of a play being produced which was written by a student, James Grant; but through disinterest and the consumption of time by the other activities around the campus, it was never even sent into rehearsal.

The English department connected with the university thought it advisable to take the reins in their hands. The result was that a new system was organized at Delaware. School credits were to be given for work in dramatics. One credit was to be given for those who played the major roles and half a credit was to go to those who played minor parts. Like all other sports at the university, the whole affair was to be based on a purely competitive scale. For every play that was to be produced there were to be two casts. Each character of the play was to be understudied. The student whose acting showed up best in the rehearsals was to be given the part. The other one was, however, to receive the same scholastic credit whether he appeared in the production or not. And, if necessity demanded, he or she would be able to jump right into the part of the student selected should he or she be suddenly taken ill, or by some other means should be unable to appear.

The plan, as it is, is excellent. It plainly shows that some steps are being taken to place Delaware on a firm basis as far as theatrics are concerned. It was through the diligent labor of Professor Van Keuren that all this was made possible and to him should go the rewards for making possible this organized treatment of a vital activity of college life.

At the time the Blue Hen went into print “The Dover Road,” by A. A. Milne, had been selected and had gone into rehearsals for an early spring production.