

THE RESPONSE OF LONDON THEATRE TO VARIOUS SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES
(1890-1914)

Judith Ellen Dobbs
1974



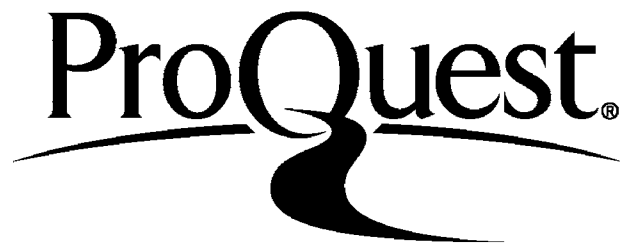
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Abstract

This thesis aims to present a broad view of some of the social and economic problems facing both theatre and society during the period 1890-1914. Focussing on London as an example of an area of intense theatre activity, such aspects of theatre as production, finance, construction, composition and censorship are explored in an attempt to discover changes from previous periods and what particularly characterised London theatre at this time. The role of the middle class in the development of modern British theatre was emphasized because of the greater amount of material available.

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The purpose of this paper to investigate Edwardian theatrical materials in order to discover the true size and nature of that of the century theatre.

In order to ascertain information about the general nature of theatre during this time, it has been decided to investigate as many areas of theatrical life as is practical instead of concentrating in depth on one particular aspect. In this way it is easy to see the pattern of increased financial antedecesse in social, economic and artistic areas of the theatre. The artistic developments, though small in number, stand out even more clearly against the background of growing theatrical commercialism. The paper confines itself to London and suburban London theatre for reasons of space, but more importantly to show how the growth and development of theatre at this time paralleled the growth and development of the culturally most important urban centre in Great Britain.

Because of the general nature of the thesis, a wide variety of source material was used. Plays, periodicals, autobiographies, reminiscences, histories, and newspapers were helpful in gathering information. The chief difficulty in obtaining unpublished source material came from the fact that the manuscript copies of plays submitted to the Censor after 1909 are still in the Lord Chamberlain's office and

Introduction

The period between 1890 and 1914 is often looked upon as a time of artistic invention and discovery in the theatre. Playwrights, actors and managers are seen to have discovered the illusive art of presenting literate and cohesive plays which also entertained hard-to-please audiences. Nostalgia for the Edwardian period is very much with us today and in the search for the security of the past a mythical image of Edwardian theatre has been created - an image which celebrates the "good old days" in an attempt to denigrate the continuing efforts of contemporary thespians to create a socially viable theatre. Despite the tendency of the present to gild Edwardian theatre, important developments were made during the period in such aspects of theatre as dramatic construction, scenic effects and theatre construction. It is the purpose of this paper to investigate Edwardian theatrical materials in order to discover the true aims and nature of turn of the century theatre.

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unavailable to researchers. Much of the material belonging to individual theatres has long since been destroyed and the bulk of the remaining material in such collections as The British Theatre Museum (London) is in the form of personal letters outside the scope of this particular paper. From the contemporary materials remaining it was nevertheless possible to obtain enough material to draw tentative conclusions about the development of Edwardian theatre.

Economically the period saw the development of the financial entrepreneur who was capable of running theatre as big business. As theatre became more and more a financial proposition the theatre increasingly began to mirror the social prejudices of its audience. And although there were great artistic strides in developing an intellectually viable theatre, these changes were at the time overshadowed by the large number of productions which catered for a growing demand for non-intellectual entertainment.

The tendency of the modern theatre critic is to bemoan exactly these tendencies in today's theatre. If the Edwardian theatrical myth can be shattered to reveal the constancy of certain theatrical problems, then perhaps it will be possible to come to grips with these difficulties and find a way to a truly vital theatre.

As the theatre grew in popularity and achieved a greater measure of respectability, businessmen began to see it as a profitable if risky financial investment, and were prepared to speculate on the off-chance of a spectacular theatrical success. The combination of financial interest and middle-class support created a demand for more plays and in turn for more theatres to house them. By 1890 a theatre construction boom was well under way which continued up until the First World War. Theatre construction during this period was not confined to the West End but extended into suburban London as well, and the large number of theatres built during this time, many of which still remain, are concrete evidence of the resurgence of interest in English theatre and its contribution to the fabric of Edwardian social life.

Although theatre construction was at its height during the Edwardian years, the change in legal and social attitudes towards new theatre buildings began with the passage of the 1843 Theatres Act. Up to that time only theatres with a Patent from the Crown were allowed to present stage plays. This meant that Covent Garden and the Drury Lane Theatre were the only authorized theatres, and that other houses could present only musical entertainments. The 1843 Act repealed all previous restrictive legislation and gave authority for the Lord Chamberlain in

Chapter One

Construction and Finance in Edwardian Theatre 1890-1914

During the Edwardian years the renewal of interest in theatre by the middle classes took more tangible forms than passive approval and appreciation as the new literary playwrights brought contemporaneity to an otherwise moribund drama. Encouraged by the re-emergence of quality theatre as well as by the continuing inventiveness of melodrama, and the development of musical comedy as a new form of musical theatre, new and larger audiences filled existing theatres as the demand grew for both relevant and spectacular theatre. In a world without television or the cinema, theatre was one of the principal means of entertainment and its growing respectability created a demand for theatre building which could house the more complex technical effects that the new plays demanded, and provide comfort and safety for the theatre-going public.

As the theatre grew in popularity and achieved a greater measure of respectability, businessmen began to see it as a profitable if risky financial investment, and were prepared to speculate on the off-chance of a spectacular theatrical success. The combination of financial interest and middle-class support created a demand for more plays and in turn for more theatres to house them. By 1890 a theatre construction boom was well under way which continued up until the First World War. Theatre construction during this period was not confined to the West End but extended into suburban London as well, and the large number of theatres built during this time, many of which still remain, are concrete evidence of the resurgence of interest in English theatre and its contribution to the fabric of Edwardian social life.

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central London, and Justices of the Peace, elsewhere, to license theatres for the presentation of stage plays. Between 1843 and 1890 many new theatres were built in London. From the two Patent theatres licensed before 1843, the number grew to approximately 36 theatres licensed in 1890. But this increase is not completely reflective of new building. Before the 1843 Act, many theatres circumvented the patent requirement by staging plays with music. These musical entertainments were not, legally speaking, stage plays, and needed no license. Therefore part of the increase in the number of registered theatres between 1843 and 1890 can be attributed to existing theatres becoming legally licensed. The real building boom came at the turn of the century when thirteen new theatres were built in a period of seven years (1897-1903).

The study of theatre construction and finance in London during this period (1890-1914) is certainly reflective of the general development of English theatre and is indicative of the change of attitude toward theatre-going by the growing middle classes. And because of the importance and popularity of music hall during these years, knowledge about the construction and finance of music hall buildings can add more information or offer a contrast to theatre development as a whole. Three aspects of theatre-building are dealt with here - 1. the statistics of construction, 2. aspects of construction and renovation and 3. the influence and effect of location. Other sides of the Edwardian building boom which are not covered here could add much information. An architectural survey or an analysis of new building devices and technical theatrical equipment would be complementary and further research into such areas might indeed help to answer the question of why there was such an increase of theatre building during these years. However the statistical evidence does show a significant net increase of theatres built during the period and the geographical evolution of the West End as it remains today. Thus theatre construction as well as theatre production kept pace with dramatic invention and the development of modern English theatre.

Collecting statistics relating to the number of theatres built during these years was a difficult process. London Theatres and Music Halls 1850-1950 (1970), compiled by Diana Howard for the Library Association, which lists the theatres operating during this time span, their opening dates, managements, and some construction information was of much help. However, even in this fairly complete study there were gaps which had to be filled in from such theatre periodicals as the Stage Year Book, or government publications as the various editions of London Statistics.

Even so it is difficult to claim complete accuracy, particularly in the case of music hall statistics. This is because of the large number of music halls opening and closing in a short period of time, especially in the suburbs. Another difficulty was defining the geographical limits of suburban London. For the most part the theatres discussed and included in the calculations are those licensed by either the Lord Chamberlain or the LIC. Theatres beyond the jurisdiction of these two authorities and licensed by local governments are only discussed as particular building examples.

In 1890 there were approximately 36 licensed theatres and 38 music halls in the greater London area. By the end of the period, in 1914, there were 55 theatres and 48 music halls. During these years 42 new theatres were built (including nine total reconstructions) and 59 music halls (including thirteen reconstructions). The net increase of theatres is nineteen, an increase of almost one-third, and the net increase of music halls is ten or almost 25%. While these figures indicate that a certain number of new theatres were merely replacing old ones, which were closed or torn down, they show an overall increase greater than any in previous years. The greater percentage of new theatres being built as opposed to music halls may show a shift in entertainment building in the London area. Although more music halls were actually built, a higher percentage were replacement structures, leaving a lower net increase.

Breaking down the theatre construction figures into suburban and West End categories, it is easy to isolate the rise of suburban theatre construction during these years. Fifteen of the forty-two theatres built were constructed outside the West End. Approximately 23 of the 55 theatres licensed in 1914 were suburban houses. A competition between the West End and London suburban theatres is one result of suburban competition.

It was difficult to be complete or precise in obtaining figures for the cost of land and construction of the theatres. Such periodicals as The Builder or The Era sometimes gave estimates of land and construction costs. Personal reminiscences of builders, theatre critics or historians were also helpful in obtaining figures, but sometimes susceptible to errors. To complicate the statistics, the figures given for the cost of construction often included the price of the land, or lease, as well, making it difficult to separate the two. Of actual figures obtained, the cost of construction ranged from £11,000 for the Royal Artillery Theatre built in 1905, to £200,000 for the Stoll Theatre built in 1911. That

alterations could be often as expensive as construction is seen by the £25,000 spent on alterations at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane in 1904. Some theatres underwent several alterations during these years at extremely high cost.

To the actual how and why of construction, there was no set pattern. In 1907, William Archer, a well-known critic, and Harley Granville Barker, a playwright and actor, brought out a volume titled A National Theatre. In it they described a scheme to build and house a national theatre, and more importantly, how they would finance the venture. They estimated a cost for the site of the hypothetical theatre between £50,000 and £100,000¹ and for the building, between £50,000 and £80,000². Although they hoped for some government assistance in purchasing the site, they felt the rest of the project could be financed by private subscribers.

The closest this scheme came to reality was in a project formulated by the Shakespeare Memorial Committee, who felt a national theatre would be the proper commemoration of the 300th anniversary of the playwright's death. Before being stopped by lack of money, they obtained an option on the Spring Gardens site (between Cockspur St. and Carlton House Terrace) that once housed the County Hall. But even a £70,000 gift by an anonymous donor could not provide enough of an incentive successfully to raise the additional £180,000 needed for the building and site. Money for theatre building was more effectively raised by commercial entrepreneurs who had greater experience with theatrical finance.

One such man was George Edwardes, a theatrical entrepreneur, who was very successfully running the Gaiety Theatre. He heard that Augustin Daly, an American impresario, was interested in building a theatre to house the Daly company when they came to London. Edwardes, having the money and a keen business sense, offered to build a theatre and lease it to Daly at the extremely high rent of £5,000 a year.³ Despite the hard terms set by Edwardes, Daly agreed to the project and negotiations with the Marquess of Salisbury, who owned a proposed site, began in 1889. By 1890, a building lease had been secured, and alterations required by

¹Archer, William and Granville Barker, Harley A National Theatre (1907), p. 5.

²Ibid., p. 6.

³Forbes-Winslow, D. Daly's The Biography of a Theatre (1944), p. 14.

building regulations had begun on the site now bordered by Lisle St., Ryder's (now Leicester) Court, and Cranbourne St. The theatre opened in 1893 at a cost of £60,000. Daly himself only used the building for a few years, but the theatre continued to bear his name. Daly's Theatre along with the Gaiety Theatre, became the center of musical comedy in London under the direction of George Edwardes.

Another example of shrewd theatrical finance was Her Majesty's Theatre, the fourth theatre to be built on the Haymarket site. When the third theatre burned down, the land had been negotiated for by a company who planned to erect an opera house on the site. However they failed to raise enough capital and the lease was eventually secured by Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, a famous actor-manager of the period. Tree had always wanted to build a theatre of his own and he saved his share of the necessary capital from his theatrical successes during the years he leased the Haymarket Theatre. Hesketh Pearson, in his biography of Tree, explains how Her Majesty's was financed:

The enterprise was financed by a company known as The Playhouse Ltd. The capital was composed of debentures. Tree subscribed £10,000, his debentures ranking against the rest for the payment of interest. Ernest Cassel, a large subscriber obtained others, such as Lord Rothschild, Carl Meyer, Mrs. Bischoffsheim and half a dozen more, all of whom had reason to be satisfied with their investment. Tree was the proprietor of the theatre, having to pay just under £6,000 a year for ground-rent and interest on mortgages and debentures. The original estimate for the structure was £55,000, and this was exceeded by less than £3,000.⁴

The theatre opened in 1897 with Tree as its actor-manager and he remained so until his death during the First World War.

While Her Majesty's Theatre was built and run by Tree, a man completely committed to the theatre, other buildings were constructed by men interested in theatre building purely as a financial investment. Both the Globe and the Queen's theatres on Shaftesbury Avenue were built by Jack Jacobus, a boot and shoemaker. In 1904, Jacobus, in conjunction with Sydney Marler, an estate agent, bought an 80 year lease on the part of Shaftesbury Avenue bounded by Rupert St., Upper Rupert St. (now Winnett St.) and Wardour St. Their plan was to enlarge Jacobus's shop

⁴Pearson, Hesketh Beerbohm Tree: His life and laughter (1956), p. 101.

and to build two new theatres as well. Under the arrangement, the first theatre to open was the Globe Theatre built for the American entrepreneur, Charles Frohman and an actor-manager, Seymour Hicks, in association with the now incorporated Jacobus-Marler Estates, Ltd. It opened as the Hicks Theatre in 1906. The second theatre, the Queen's Theatre was opened later in 1908.

While some theatres such as Daly's and Her Majesty's were financed by private individuals, and some like the Globe and the Queen's by businessmen, other theatres and particularly music halls were financed by companies. By 1914 there were at least eight such theatre companies, as well as seven music hall companies, registered and dealing with theatres in the London area. One of the early companies was the Drury Lane Theatre Royal Ltd. which became incorporated on June 28, 1897. By and large, the music hall companies were the bigger concerns and often large syndicates would take over several smaller companies to enlarge their holdings. (One example of this was Variety Theatres Consolidated, Ltd., which was formed as the result of amalgamations between New South London Ltd., Chelsea Palace Syndicate Ltd., and Walthamstow Palace Ltd. on August 12, 1904).⁵ The story of the London Palladium illustrates the role of companies and syndicates in the financing of music halls.

When Nellie Payne, the daughter of George Adney Payne, a famous variety manager, married Walter Gibbons, the two men took advantage of the marriage to become partners in a plan to resuscitate old music halls and work out a variety circuit. They were joined by Arthur Copson Peake, a lawyer specialising in company legislation, and Sidney Marler, the auctioneer and estate agent who was also involved with the Globe and Queen's theatres venture. In March 1908, the four men formed the London Theatres of Variety Ltd., with a starting capital of £200,000. Working through various syndicates they arranged for the company to take over fourteen music halls in the London area.⁶ They hoped to raise the money for the running of these halls by public subscription, but this effort was not successful. One of the few major investors was George Dance, a song-writer turned manager who replaced Payne in the syndicate when Payne died.

⁵Theatre Ownership in Britain: A Report Prepared for the Federation of Theatre Unions (1953), pp. 86-120, 131-148.

⁶Bevan, Ian Top of the Bill The story of the London Palladium (1952), pp. 31-2.

Later, in 1908, Gibbons became interested in the site occupied by the now defunct Hengler's Circus. Located in Argyll St. near Oxford Circus, the site alone was worth £112,000. Undeterred by the difficulty of raising the necessary funds, Gibbons felt this was the ideal spot for a new music hall to rival the Hippodrome and the Pavilion. "It would be difficult to imagine an amusement center more felicitously placed for drawing extensively and continuously upon precisely the class of patrons which should permanently assure its prosperity."⁷ Won over by Gibbons's argument the four men (Gibbons, Payne, Peake and Marler) formed Capital Syndicate Ltd. for the project and bought an option on the Argyll St. site. To finance Capital Syndicate Ltd., they needed another £100,000 in shares from London Theatres of Variety Ltd., but were hard pressed to find the money.⁸ Collecting from various sources, the goal was finally reached when Joseph Beecham invested £10,000 in LTV. In return the directors had to sign a contract for the Beecham Opera Company to do half-hour opera condensations when the Palladium, as the new music hall was to be called, was opened.⁹ The Palladium finally opened on December 26, 1910.

Gibbons had as much financial difficulty running the Palladium as he had in building it. He simply did not have the know-how to compete commercially with other music hall giants such as Moss and Stoll. In 1911 Oswald Stoll took over the Palladium and because of his lack of faith in Gibbons, insisted that Gibbons resign from the board. Charles Gulliver was appointed as the new manager and soon made profits from the Palladium. His financial reforms also reduced the initial debts. The Palladium was still in troubled financial waters. Because LTV was financially unable to take over all the liabilities of the original syndicate, control of the Palladium passed back to Capital Syndicate Ltd. and LTV became a shareholder. Beecham was again approached for money, but despite a loan of £56,000, the mortgage was not paid off until 1926.¹⁰ Financing music halls could become an expensive proposition.

⁷Ibid., p. 24.

⁸Ibid., p. 32.

⁹Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 40.

Theatres which were financed by companies rarely had so complicated a history. The Ambassadors Theatre, located on West St. was opened in 1913. The lease was held by Ambassadors Theatre Ltd., a company originally registered in 1912 as the Casino Theatre Ltd. They arranged to take over a 99-year lease at £600 per annum of the West St. site. The Ambassadors Theatre Ltd. was a private company from the beginning, controlled by J.H. Jay and his family, with most of the remaining capital being held by Frank Littler, Prince Littler's father.¹¹ Theatrical empires were often built by such family shareholdings.

Although many theatres were incorporated after their construction, few were actually financed by companies. And of these few, private companies were more common to assure control of the theatre by those personally involved in running it. Music halls more frequently took advantage of impersonal company investments to finance new buildings.

Before the buildings could be constructed, access to the land on which they were to be built had to be obtained. Much of the land on which the new theatres were built was part of old estates and complicated manoeuvrings often took place before a lease was granted. Other potential theatre sites were owned by the LCC, part of the land acquired for redevelopment schemes. Even when the land had been obtained, there might be other complications. In many cases, if the land was acquired as leasehold property, the person holding the lease was different from the person actually running the theatre. Sub-leases were common and could run for very short periods of time. Despite the large number of leasehold theatres, some theatres were built on freehold property. The Apollo, the Palace, and the Princes Theatre (now Shaftesbury) were all freehold theatres.¹² But whether freehold or leasehold, the acquisition of land and drawing up or renewal of leases was often as complicated and personal as the financing of construction.

One case where the freeholder was personally involved in the construction of the theatre was that of the Little Theatre. This theatre was converted from the old banking hall of Coutts and Co, plus a portion of No. 17 John St. on the Adelphi and opened on October 11, 1910. All the expenses were paid for by the freeholder, one Mr. George James Drummond. But by 1912, the expenses of building and maintaining a theatre began to show and alterations were being carried out and paid

¹¹Theatre Ownership in Britain, p. 64.

¹²Ibid., pp. 47-8.

for by the lessees. Generosity had its limits.

The rebuilding of the Vaudeville Theatre in 1891 was delayed due to an existing sub-lease. The original theatre on the Strand was built in 1870 by William Wybrow Robertson on the site of a billiards club of which he was the proprietor. After its completion, he leased the theatre to three actors, H.J. Montague, David James and Thomas Thorne, but by 1882 Thorne was the sole remaining lessee.¹³ After a time Thorne wished to renovate the theatre, which occupied 404 Strand. Although Thorne's lease included two old houses fronting the Strand, which he could pull down to expand the theatre, the adjacent 403 was held on a sub-lease which prevented either a complete renovation or expansion of his theatre. Thorne did not gain possession himself of this restrictive sub-lease on the site until 1889. Alterations were finally completed and after the new theatre opened, Thorne renewed his lease until 1914. But he was soon troubled by a noisy electrical generator next door run by Agostino and Stefano Gatti, themselves also theatre managers and owners. To avoid litigation the Gatti brothers managed to purchase the lease from Thorne in 1892 and much later in 1916 they acquired the freehold.¹⁴ Thorne had scarcely a year to profit from his hard-won new theatre.

The LCC was involved in several theatre constructions because it owned the land on which the theatres were to be built. The Metropole Theatre, located between Denmark Hill and Coldharbour Lane was built in 1894 on land leased from the Council.¹⁵ When the LCC acquired land for the construction of Kingsway, it had in its possession land that was later leased to Oscar Hammerstein, the American entrepreneur, for the construction of the Stoll Theatre or London Opera House. The land was leased to Hammerstein for ninety-nine years at a rent of £4,875 a year.¹⁶ The theatre was never a commercial success, but the Council continued to benefit from the rent.

Two of the large estates which extended into the newly developing theatre-land were those of the Marquess of Salisbury and the Duke of Bedford. Both these gentlemen were involved in leasing land for both new and established theatres.

¹³Francis Shephard, editor, The Survey of London (1970), v. XXXVI, p. 243.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵The Builder, November 18, 1893, p. 377.

¹⁶The Era, October 22, 1910, p. 25.

Wyndham's Theatre, on Charing Cross Road, which opened in 1899, stood on the Marquess of Salisbury's property. In 1897, one Joseph Pike tried negotiating for the site to build a theatre, but the Marquess, who was a great admirer of the actor Charles Wyndham, said the theatre could only be built for Wyndham. Pike approached Wyndham with a business deal. If Wyndham could put up £10,000, he Pike would advance the rest of the building money at 6% interest, holding the mortgage as security. Wyndham had no money himself, but his wife, the actress Mary Moore, found ten friends to each put up £1,000.¹⁷ The theatre, under Wyndham's management, was fortunately a success, in fact so successful that he later went on to build the New Theatre on St. Martin's Lane.

Negotiations with the Duke of Bedford did not go so smoothly. In 1893 it was clear that the Duke of Bedford was reluctant to renew the lease at the Drury Lane Theatre due to end at Christmas, 1894. The rent at that time was £6,000 per year, augmented by £10 for each performance after the first 200.¹⁸ The reason for the Duke's reluctance was that the Drury Lane was in great need of repair, and he was afraid of the expense. He finally agreed to renew the lease when Sir Augustus Harris, then general manager, offered to pay for all necessary repairs and alterations. In return, Harris would be granted the lease directly, he would pay a sum of £5,000 as rent, and would absolve the other ex-renters from any responsibility for the dilapidations.¹⁹ After Harris's death late in 1896, a more formal agreement was drawn up between the Duke and Arthur Collins, the new manager. The lease was extended for forty years at a yearly rent of approximately £6,550.²⁰ This lease was bought from Collins in turn in 1897 by the newly formed Theatre Royal, Drury Lane Ltd. for £85,000.²¹ In 1901 the lease was extended for an additional forty years in exchange for more alterations to be undertaken by the company.²²

As can be seen from the Drury Lane negotiations, renovations played

¹⁷Mander, Raymond & Mitchenson, Joe The Theatres of London (1961), pp. 217-8.

¹⁸The Builder, July 29, 1893, p. 82.

¹⁹The Era, August 4, 1894, p. 9.

²⁰Ibid., March 29, 1897, p. 8.

²¹Theatre Ownership in Britain p. 58.

²²The Era, August 24, 1901, p. 11.

an important role in the success and future of a theatre. There were as many reasons for alterations as there were for constructions. Conversion of theatres to music halls, fires, aesthetic remodelling, and the LCC requirements were all reasons for alterations, often expensive and a reason for disputes.

The old Olympic Theatre on Wych Street, destroyed by the construction of the Aldwych was the subject of a conversion scheme in 1893. Although the theatre had been rebuilt in 1890 for £21,577, it was not doing very well.²³ In an attempt to make the theatre more profitable a company was formed in 1893 to run it as the Olympic Music Hall. The theatre was held on a sixty year lease from December 25, 1889 worth from £45,000 to £50,000 at a rent of £3,000 per year. The estimate for the proposed alterations was £4,600, so the investment was a substantial one. However, even as a music hall, the Olympic Theatre had no success, and in 1894 the property was offered for sale at auction.²⁴

A backstage fire in 1904 was the reason for alterations at Drury Lane. The LCC prescribed certain improvements including a new ceiling fitted with electric lights, new flies, a new gridiron and new staircases, all of which would cost between £25,000 and £30,000.²⁵ The management of the theatre felt this amount excessive and the case went to arbitration, the result being that Drury Lane was spared £15,000 in alterations outlay. The Era comments on what was considered the Council's interference with theatrical affairs.

That the attitude of the theatre company towards the London County Council in opposing all suggested alterations which were considered vexatious or unnecessary was warranted is abundantly proved by the fact that they have been spared by arbitration an outlay of £15,000, the difference between the total cost of the London County Council suggestions and the actual work ordered to be done by the arbitration.²⁶

It is interesting to note that the architect who designed the improvement scheme, Mr. Philip E. Pilditch, was also consulting architect to the Marquess of Salisbury and the Duke of Bedford.

²³The Builder, March 12, 1904, p. 275.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵The Era, November 26, 1904, p. 21.

²⁶Ibid.

The LCC inherited its power to demand alterations from the old Metropolitan Board of Works. Under section 11 of the Metropolitan Management and Building Amendment Act, 1878, the Board was empowered to enforce remedies for certain structural defects in theatres. When the 1888 Local Government Act was passed, this power was transferred to the newly formed London County Council. The power derived from the old board was extended and amended providing even stricter control over buildings and theatres. New standards for safety and hygiene raised the level of London theatres, though the Council regulations indirectly caused the destruction of the old Lyceum, the theatre so often used by Sir Henry Irving.

When the LCC demanded certain alterations to the old Lyceum, the company controlling the theatre was forced to make a decision. An excerpt from the August 1902 issue of The Builder explains the financial situation surrounding the alterations.

We understand that the shareholders have finally resolved to dispose of the property rather than carry out the structural alterations required by the London County Council at an outlay estimated to exceed £15,000. The company was formed in March, 1899, to acquire for £275,000 the freehold estate—covering 22,700 ft. superficial and valued at £26,000 — of the theatre, with rentals of adjoining premises, and the interest of Sir Henry Irving as lessee.²⁷

The company simply could not afford to carry out the needed alterations. The theatre was destroyed and the freehold was bought by a company which built a music hall, the present Lyceum Theatre, on the site.

But not all alterations undertaken were required by the LCC. The rebuilding of the Adelphi Theatre was considered a financial investment by the lessees. The theatre was owned by the Gatti brothers, yet in 1901 a lease of the premises was taken by a limited company, the chairman of which was Mr. Walter Well, a well-known member of the London Stock Exchange. Other members of the board included Mr. Tom B. Davis, who was to work with Mr. George Edwardes (who was already the successful manager of the Gaiety and Daly's theatres) in managing the theatre. The aim of the enterprise was to outclass the Gaiety and Daly's and to make the Adelphi the leading musical comedy house in London. As The Sketch said,

²⁷The Builder, August 9, 1902, p. 122.

The rivalry which has hitherto existed, not always to the public benefit, between the producers of musical comedy at one and another of the London theatres is likely to come to an end at the birth of the new Adelphi Theatre, because, if Mr. Edwardes and Mr. Davis work in harmony, as there is every reason they should, they may practically monopolise the management of this class of entertainment.²⁸

Nothing could oust the popularity of the 'Gaiety Girl', but the new Adelphi quickly established a reputation and proved the investment was a shrewd one.

Sometimes alterations were financed by personal friends of the management. Lily Langtry (with the aid of her current lover Edgar Cohen), bought the lease of the Imperial Theatre in 1900 for £3,000 a year. She completely re-built the interior on a grand scale. Supposedly the alterations cost Mr. Cohen £40,000.²⁹

The LCC was a powerful factor in theatre construction as well as alterations. In addition to the power to inspect already constructed theatres, a license had to be procured from the Council before a new theatre could be built. The Council had a Theatres and Music Halls Committee and in 1890 on authority from the Council, they were empowered to employ inspectors to visit new and old theatres to ensure sanitary and safety standards. Inspection of the older theatres raised an outcry which was only mollified by the greater attention the newer theatres paid to hygiene and safety. A report by Mr. Lennox Brown, "The Sanitation of Theatres" at the Seventh Annual Congress of Hygiene and Demography in 1891, talked of poor sanitary conditions in many London theatres. But Mr. Brown noted, "In the later-built or reconstructed houses, such as the Adelphi, Vaudeville, Haymarket, Comedy and St. James (...) there is good dressing-room accomodation, with sufficient air-space, ventilation and light for the occupants."³⁰

The LCC regulations as to how much frontage a theatre was required to have, often delayed construction and increased expenditure on new theatres. Increased frontage was seen as one answer to congestion, a perpetual fire hazard. Fire was the greatest destroyer of theatres in

²⁸The Sketch, March 6, 1901, p. 270.

²⁹Mander, Raymond & Mitchenson, Joe The Lost Theatres of London (1968), p. 214.

³⁰The Builder, March 27, 1897, p. 19.

the nineteenth century. In the case of the Shakespeare Theatre and Opera House, which opened in 1896, extra land had to be bought to form a new side road.³¹ This was to comply with an LCC regulation that a theatre had to be isolated from other buildings. This regulation sought to decrease the chance of fire and to prevent any fires from spreading to neighbouring buildings. Permission to build the proposed Regent Theatre was delayed by the Council because the thoroughfares surrounding the theatre did not conform to the necessary 40 ft. and 30 ft. wide.³²

The LCC was also concerned with the effect new theatres would have on traffic. Before permission was granted to build the Apollo Theatre in 1900, there was a debate on the amount of increased traffic another theatre on Shaftesbury Avenue would create. A Mr. Beachcroft thought the Council's -

...main object should be to get the theatres as far apart as possible, and on the ground of health they should object to so many in one spot. If they had the power he would like the Council to say there should be no more theatres, inasmuch as those now existing could seat a total of 400,000 or 500,000 persons. That was enough; and he submitted that the Council should if it could exercise a restraining influence on these new theatres.³³

Mr. Beachcroft could not singlehandedly fight the powerful financial interests, and he was powerless to intervene as the Globe and Queen's theatres presented their shining fronts on Shaftesbury Avenue. The Council's power was not absolute, but in general provided a regulatory effect on theatre construction, preventing many profiteering ventures, and maintaining health and construction standards.

The case of the Gaiety Theatre shows another influence which the London County Council exerted on theatre construction during this period. When the LCC undertook the Aldwych-Kingsway-Strand redevelopment project in 1899-1900, the area now comprising the Aldwych was a terrible slum area that was to be cleared as part of the plan. The Council acquired the property and buildings in the area, including the old Gaiety Theatre which stood between Wellington St. and Catherine St. In return, and

³¹The Builder, January 4, 1896, p. 20.

³²The Era, March 27, 1897, p. 19.

³³Ibid., April 14, 1900, p. 7.

incorporated into the London County Council Improvements Act, 1899, which authorised the construction of Kingsway, was a clause which made provision for the building of a new Gaiety Theatre.³⁴ The new theatre was to have an area of at least 12,000 square feet, to be built according to the regulations of the Council and in all respects an equivalent of the old theatre.³⁵

The Council very carefully scrutinised the planning of the new theatre to ensure a harmony of architectural design in the new Aldwych area. A design by Ernest Runtz was submitted to the LCC, who then called upon the famous architect Norman Shaw for an opinion on what effect the new building would have on the architecture of the other buildings being erected in the area.³⁶ Shaw saw no architectural discrepancies, Runtz's design was approved, and construction went ahead on the new theatre.

The LCC were not as eager to help with the payments as they were with the planning. Although they were quite prompt with compensation payments - an item of £25,525 appears on the balance sheet of the 1901 Gaiety Company report paid by the LCC towards rebuilding the theatre, aesthetic improvements were another matter. The 1899 Improvements Act had an additional clause stating

...if the Council shall require such elevations on any of them to be of a different and more elaborate or more costly character, design or materials, the company shall comply with the Council's requirements on condition that the increased cost, if any, thereby entailed shall be paid by the Council.³⁷

The Gaiety Company felt this applied to the building of the new theatre and claimed an additional £17,217 in 'aesthetic' costs. Not everyone felt the new Gaiety theatre was worth this additional money including a Mr. Hunt on the London County Council. This excerpt from The Builder puts his point of view:

As regards the architectural features of the theatre, he did not wish to indulge in any comments, beyond saying that he did not regard it as a thing of beauty and a joy for ever, and if really 18,000l. had been expended on architectural improvements, he failed to discover the point where it could be shown on the building.³⁸

In the ensuing litigation, the decision went against Mr. Hunt and the

³⁴The Era, August 3, 1901, p. 9.

³⁵Ibid., March 24, 1900, p. 8.

³⁶Ibid., August 3, 1901, p. 9.

³⁷The Builder, February 4, 1905. p. 122.

³⁸Ibid.

LCC. The Council had to pay the full amount claimed by the Gaiety company. The theatre was a success and the legend of the Gaiety Girl continued at the new location.

The mechanics of theatre construction and renovation can thus be seen to be somewhat arbitrary. Although there was a definite increase in the number of theatres being built or altered, there is no pattern as to how money was obtained for any construction or alteration work. Private individuals, newly formed companies, both private and public, and even the LCC all played their part in producing capital for theatre construction. The end result was that a string of new theatres in and around London sprung up and reactions, both pro and con, to this building wave, were inevitable.

The first and perhaps most important reaction was a new awareness by the public of theatres as places of entertainment, and the attendant problems that went along with such buildings. Mr. Turner's speech on sanitation in theatres referred to earlier, outlines the problem of making the public aware of hygiene, and in terms of theatres, of constructing new theatres to include modern sanitation features.

I do not for a moment mean to imply that the introduction of modern appliances, good plumbers work, and well-laid and ventilated drains, would not do much to improve the sanitary condition of many theatres, but on the other hand, I feel sure that you will agree with me that many of the rooms are, from their position and surroundings, totally unfit for the uses they are put to, and that they call for abolition, re-arrangement, or reconstruction.³⁹

The increased number of new theatres impressed upon the public the role of the theatre in providing a variety of entertainments. Not everyone was pleased with the greater amount of entertainment choice these new theatres presented. Echoing Mr. Beachcroft and his objections to the Apollo Theatre, an editorial in The Era stated, "My belief is that we have too many theatres, and that too many of these theatres are under the control of commercial syndicates."⁴⁰ Some people could still not see the theatre as a viable commercial force.

Architecturally the period saw a new interest in how theatres looked, and an attempt by architects to develop a new theatre style and create a new theatre of comfort as well as one of aesthetic value. There were

³⁹Ernest Turner, "Diagrams Illustrative of the Sanitation of Theatres" The Builder, April 22, 1891, p. 153.

⁴⁰The Era, February 29, 1908, p. 17.

problems independent of design. Often sites were irregularly shaped and a design which looked well on paper, was out of proportion when erected. European architecture was admired, particularly that of municipal theatres, such as those in Germany. The English were often chided by foreigners for their preoccupation with theatres as a business venture and their lack of consideration for aesthetics. Men like Edwin O. Sachs spoke to the Architectural Association and similar groups, and published books, in an attempt to awaken interest in theatre-building as an architectural venture. There is no doubt that theatres became more comfortable, and indeed The Era felt comfort was a reason for increased theatre-going.

Much of the increased popularity of theatre-going during the last two decades had resulted from improvements in accommodation, which have made a visit to a theatre pleasant and agreeable, independently of the entertainment supplied; whereas in former days the entertainment had to atone for much that was coarser, troublesome and unpleasant.⁴¹

So far only the question of construction had been dealt with. But the factor of location was also a growing concern during this period, both in terms of West End and suburban areas. The development of the modern West End began during these years and it is possible to see how certain areas became centres of theatrical entertainment. Changes in theatre concentration were often a result of London local government redevelopment schemes, particularly the cases of the Shaftesbury Avenue development plan and the Aldwych-Kingsway-Strand scheme. An examination of these two projects demonstrates how these areas changed to form part of the modern West End.

Although the Shaftesbury Avenue development project began earlier than 1890, it has close bearing on theatre development after that date. The Metropolitan Board of Works had received permission in 1877 from Parliament in the Metropolitan Street Improvements Act to construct Charing Cross Road and Shaftesbury Avenue. This was to develop improved east-west roads in London from Shoreditch to Bloomsbury. The Board started to acquire land, but it was ten years before demolition actually began. This was due to a stipulation in the act that new working-class accommodation had to be provided for those dwellings destroyed in the construction of the road. It took until 1886 for the Board to come to an agreement concerning the erection of new working-class dwellings.

⁴¹The Era, June 27, 1891, p. 15.

Also in the original act was a clause which authorised the Board to "let on building lease all surplus lands, or to sell them, but within ten years from the completion of the improvement all reserved ground rents and free-hold interests had to be sold."⁴² This was the clause which most interested theatre investors. Shaftesbury Avenue was a new thoroughfare, centrally located, and a very good site for a theatre. By the time the LCC came into existence most of the excess land had been sold; a good proportion of it to theatre developers.

The Shaftesbury Theatre was the first theatre opened on the avenue. The land for this theatre was leased to John Lancaster, a Manchester merchant who built it for his wife, the actress Ellen Wallis. It is said to have cost £20,000.⁴³

The Lyric Theatre was the second new theatre to be opened on Shaftesbury Avenue. The land was leased to H.J. Leslie from the LCC for 80 years. In 1887, Leslie acquired the freehold of the adjoining site which housed the Hôtel (Café) de L'Etoile in Great Windmill St. Having acquired enough land for the proposed theatre, building began. The Lyric Theatre opened in 1888 and is said to have been financed by the profits Leslie made from his production of Dorothy when it was playing at the Prince of Wales Theatre.⁴⁴

Richard D'Oyle Carte, of Gilbert and Sullivan fame also acquired land from the LCC at the head of Shaftesbury Avenue, for the construction of what he hoped would be a new London Opera House. Actually it later became the Palace Theatre, a centre of variety entertainment, but not before D'Oyle Carte had bought the freehold from the Council for £32,240.⁴⁵

By 1914, the Globe, the Queens and the Apollo theatres had taken their place on Shaftesbury Avenue, making a total of six theatres built since 1888. The old Metropolitan Board of Works provided the means, but the theatre builders provided the funds. The new avenue soon became a valuable extension of the Haymarket area theatre group. The newly created Aldwych served the same function by becoming an extension of the Strand area theatre centre.

⁴²Shephard, Francis editor, The Survey of London (1963) v. XXXI, p. 71.

⁴³Shephard, Francis editor, The Survey of London (1963) v. XXXII, p. 304.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 300.

As in the case of the building of Shaftesbury Avenue, there were many delays before the Aldwych-Kingsway scheme was put into operation. As early as 1890, the Strand District Board was petitioning for the widening of the Strand, and for demolition of the notorious slums around the Catherine-Wych St. area. But it was not until 1889 that the LCC submitted a bill to Parliament that would re-develop the eastern end of the Strand. The main sections of the bill provided for the widening of the Strand, construction of the semi-circular Aldwych, and the building of a street from Holborn to the Strand (now Kingsway). As part of the scheme, Wych St., Holywell St., Newcastle St., and various courts and alleys were to be destroyed.⁴⁶ The development actually began in 1900.

While the construction of new theatres was not an intrinsic part of the scheme, offers to build new theatres in the area were not discouraged. It was certainly a good way for the LCC to sell or lease the extra land after the construction had finished. It was felt this area was good for new theatres. When Mr. Alexander Young, valuer to the LCC was asked if the site between St. Clement Danes and Wellington St. was a good place for theatres, he replied, "Yes. This central site will be one of the architectural features of London, which will be visited by people coming from east and west."⁴⁷ The scheme was often thought of as an inducement for a theatre investor to build new theatres in the area.

As it turned out, there was no significant increase in the number of theatres in the area. Four old theatres were totally destroyed by the scheme - the nearly defunct Olympic Theatre, the old Globe on Holywell St., the Opera Comique and the Royal Strand Theatre which was cleared for the construction of an Underground railway station.⁴⁸ None of these theatre had been very successful, and all were generally in need of repair. The only successful theatre, the old Gaiety, was relocated, as indicated above.

The three new theatres built along the Aldwych were successful examples of modern comfort and design. The new Strand Theatre which opened in May, 1905, was quickly followed in September by the Aldwych Theatre. The Stoll Theatre on Kingsway which opened in 1911 was also built as a result of this scheme.

⁴⁶Mander & Mitchenson The Lost Theatres of London, p. 132.

⁴⁷The Builder, April 29, 1889, p. 418.

⁴⁸Ibid., October 21, 1905, p. 412.

In terms of theatre location, the Aldwych-Kingsway scheme cleared a section of old run-down theatres and promoted the construction of an aesthetic and modernised theatre area.

In addition to the Aldwych construction, there were other changes in theatrical character along the Strand. Between 1890 and 1914 both the Vaudeville and Adelphi theatres were extensively altered. The old Lyceum was taken down and a new music hall erected. Terry's Theatre was also demolished, but in its place was built the new Little Theatre (1910) on John St. The Strand became a modernised theatre area with greater public appeal.

Similar changes took place in the Leicester Square area. Although this area was better known for variety theatres, many new theatres joined both old and new music halls as building extended beyond the square to Charing Cross Road and St. Martin's Lane. Wyndham's (1899), the New (1901), the Duke of York's (1892), the London Coliseum (1904), flanked by the Ambassadors' (1913) all formed a new theatre complex, easily accessible to transportation, as well as being centrally located. The Playhouse Theatre (1907) on Northumberland Ave. was the furthest point in the grouping, yet was still very close to Charing Cross Station. The construction of such theatres as Daly's (1893) and the London Hippodrome (1900) improved the somewhat dubious character of Leicester Square, when modern buildings took the place of run-down music halls. The central location of this area was a probable spur to construction and at least six new theatres sprung up during the period. A contemporary definition of the West End appears in the 1905 volume of The Era:

A theatre must be in a main and well-known thoroughfare, says Mr. W.G.R. Sprague, the well-known architect, in reply to a query; and it must also be within the area of theatre-land, that is to say, so far as London is concerned from the Strand to Piccadilly, embracing Shaftesbury-Avenue, Regent-street, and the Haymarket. I think Oxford-street is better for music halls than theatres.⁴⁹

In addition to the consolidation of the West End theatre district, there was a large amount of suburban theatre construction going on during the pre-war years. From Wimbledon to Richmond, from Kilburn to Hammersmith, new theatres catered for the growing suburbs of London. They had several advantages to offer suburban audiences. They could be built on spacious

⁴⁹The Era, May 27, 1905, p. 15.

plots of land as opposed to the narrow West End sites. They were modern, clean and comfortable. The Era outlines the reaction of the suburban middle-class to these new theatres.

The great middle-class of the suburbs, educated by the aesthetic movement, keenly susceptible to grace and beauty, and intolerant of dinginess and squalor, would not have been won over so quickly and thoroughly as it has been had not its tastes been appealed to as powerfully as possible by the comfort, cleanliness and grace of the modern suburban playhouse, which with its handsome outlines and spacious surroundings, reminds the travelled beholder of the municipal theatres in the smaller towns of the continent.⁵⁰

One example which shows the advantages of suburban building is that of the Fulham Grand which was completed in 1897. This theatre was built and managed by Alex F. Henderson who gained his theatrical experience in the West End under Charles Wyndham at the Criterion and later at the Vaudeville Theatre.⁵¹ It cost £30,000. The Sketch points out all the advantages of this kind of suburban building.

The situation that has been acquired is freehold, and its perfect adaptability for the purpose of a theatre (being absolutely isolated on all sides from public thoroughfares) has enabled the architect to design a most perfect and complete system of entrances and exits...⁵²

Besides aesthetic value, these suburban houses provided a place of entertainment for those unable to afford, or unwilling to undertake, the long and often difficult journey into town. The mushrooming of suburban theatres provoked a certain rivalry between suburban and West End managers.

London theatre managers were afraid suburban theatres would take away their audiences, while suburban owners felt there was no room in a congested central London for any more theatres. Henry Irving, when laying the cornerstone for the Brixton Theatre summed up the feelings of London managers:

⁵⁰The Era, August 5, 1889, p. 15.

⁵¹Ibid., May 29, 1897, p. 11.

⁵²The Sketch, July 15, 1896, p. 500.

Now there is no reason why people who live in Brixton should not have a theatre of their own, a wholesome entertainment within easy reach of their own doors and I hope they will count it to me for disinterestedness that I am encouraging this particular venture with cheerful resignation to the thought that it may sometimes keep Brixton playgoers from visiting certain areas of the Strand. I cherish the idea that the Lyceum will not be altogether forgotten when this theatre of yours is opened...⁵³

Music hall construction in suburban London was also very active. These halls were often controlled and built by suburban syndicates specifically for a suburban audience. Cheaper prices prevailed at both suburban theatres and music halls than the West End, another factor of substantial appeal to local audiences.

Growth of urban transport aided the growth of both suburban and central London theatres. The suburban theatre builders were often more concerned with choosing a locale close to public transportation, for their audience (outside the local population) had to be lured to the new theatres. The extension of the London Underground to the suburbs during this period no doubt aided and influenced the growth of outlying houses. In return, increased receipts were another factor spurring the development of better transport facilities. The Era speaks of the location of the King's Theatre, Hammersmith, erected by Mr. J.B. Mulholland who thought seriously about transportation facilities when he was building his theatre.

He had long felt that this particular quarter of town, which is an important centre in itself, and is less a suburb than a continuation of the fashionable district, afforded an admirable opening for a theatre of the highest class, and he secured the present central site close to three important railway stations on the Broadway, and within easy reach of Addison-road, West Kensington, and the terminal station of the "Tube", Shepherds-bush.⁵⁴

The question still remains as to why there was an awakening interest in theatre construction at this time. As has been shown, there is no one answer, only a combination of factors, all helping to change the theatrical complexion of London. The availability of capital, whether from theatre

⁵³The Era, May 5, 1894, p. 15.

⁵⁴Ibid., January 3, 1903, p. 15.

profits or independent donors is certainly one important reason, and in conjunction with this, the desire by businessmen to invest or reinvest in the theatre.

One can perhaps see the increasing availability of capital as stemming from the re-emergence of theatre as a middle-class entertainment. When the theatre began once again to draw an audience prepared to pay more than pit prices, the chances of making a profit were increased. As a larger variety of plays were produced, most of which were directed to the new middle-class audience, the tone of the theatre also improved. Therefore, the actor-manager or lessee of an existing theatre might have thought it a profitable venture to build a theatre of his own, where he would have the opportunity to select and produce those plays which he thought would be successful. Other investors or speculators, seeing the success of new theatre-building, invested capital to receive a share of the profits. As the building boom in theatre construction coincides with that of building in London generally, there was evidently surplus capital to be had for this kind of building programme.

The fact that excess capital was available shows the growing interest in theatre and the realisation that profits were to be made from this kind of financial investment. This links with the construction of new theatres in several ways. The success and development of late-Victorian melodrama required more mechanically complex and sensational effects. The older theatres could not house such comprehensive equipment. It became necessary to either alter or rebuild theatres to accommodate the new machinery demanded by the new melodrama. That these alterations took place indicates in part the confidence felt by the investors that their loan would be repaid. In addition, to lure the new middle-class audience into the theatre, more comfortable seating with more luxurious interiors were required. This kind of investment was to enhance the pleasure of theatre-going and to increase the number of middle-class customers. New and more literary playwrights also needed a showcase and a number of smaller theatres built or renovated during the period show the growing interest in their kind of experimental theatre.

The availability of transport stimulated theatre growth as larger audiences became potentially available. In addition, the push to the suburbs by the middle-class, aided by the expansion of the railways and the Underground, opened up suburban areas as potential theatre sites. Similarly, the central London theatres profited by new and better railway locations. A suburban housewife could include a theatre matinee in a day's shopping in London, or meet her husband for an evening performance.

While the central London theatres could largely draw audiences by reputation or theatre personalities, the suburban theatres depended on transportation opportunities to draw a large house. Most of the new theatres built outside the central London area were near an Underground or railway station and frequently near a junction of the two. Their advertisements almost always indicated this fact. The suburban theatres depended on a large suburban audience, many of whom relied on public transportation to take them to and from the theatre. It is difficult to say that improved transportation facilities directly caused the construction of new theatres, because some of the railway lines were constructed many years before the theatres were built. But there is no doubt that theatre builders relied on new railways and stations as a means of developing a large potential audience.

The role of the London County Council in theatre-building cannot be ignored. The various re-development schemes sponsored by the LCC made new and central sites available and LCC regulations ensured alterations at inadequate theatres. It is difficult to see just how much the LCC approved and encouraged increased theatre building during the period. Possibly a great deal of the building could just be the result of speculators taking advantage of the availability of freehold land as in the case of the Shaftesbury Avenue scheme, or the opportunity to build on centrally located sites, as in the Aldwych re-development project. However, that they chose to build theatres on these sites indicates their confidence in theatre as a profitable financial investment. The large number of new safety and building regulations which applied directly to theatres indicates a growing interest and concern in the comfort and safety of theatre-going. These regulations might also have instilled confidence in those investors not directly involved in the theatre and made it easier for builders to acquire capital.

The increase in the number of theatres also meant an increase in the amount of seats available. Although some of the new theatres were on the small side, not seating the large numbers that such theatres as the Drury Lane could, they replaced theatres with limited seating capacity, so that there was a net increase of one-third in seating capacity, corresponding to the one-third increase in the number of theatres.

In spite of some outside attempts at theatre finance, successful theatre building was primarily undertaken by those working inside the theatre. There are many good reasons for this. Those who understood the intricate business of running a theatre and producing plays stood a better

chance of making a new theatre a success. Only someone in the theatre could understand the alterations necessary (besides those required by safety regulations) to improve the theatre's chance as a money maker. That is why many theatres were built by actor-managers wishing to run and operate a theatre. Outside investors who loaned capital to such men were more successful in making money on their investment.

Companies, which came into existence during this period, did not play a large part in theatre construction except in the case of music halls. Rather, incorporation took place after the theatre was built or altered as a means of assuring sufficient capital for productions mounted by the managers. Music hall syndicates controlled both the construction and production of chains of music halls and ensured a coordination between member theatres. In the case of theatres, the companies were sometimes owned by a very few share-holders to ensure a strict watch and control over the theatre.

These are but a few reasons for the increase of theatre building. As can be seen, the increase in theatre building is largely tied up with the awakening interest in theatre during these years. Therefore before any definite statement can be made about theatre building itself, it will be useful to look at theatre production, for example, as another means of measuring the new response to theatre during the Edwardian years. Even by itself, the diversity of factors concerning theatre construction underline the growing importance of theatre during the Edwardian era.

1893-construction

Daly's £50,000
Empire, Woolwich (reconstructed) £11,000-£12,000
Oxford (reconstructed)

1895-renovations

none

1896-construction

Empire, Shoreditch (reconstructed)
Metropole (Gambrell's Empire)

1894-renovations

Evilton

1897-construction

Borough, Stratford £25,000
Milbury £17,000

1895-renovations

Alhambra Palace

Table I: Major Theatres and Music Halls Constructed and Renovated
1890-1914 With Some Costs (An asterisk differentiates the theatres)

1890-construction

Grand, Streatham
*Olympic (rebuilt) £21,500
*Parkhurst
Tivoli

1890-renovations

*Vaudeville

1891-construction

Palace £150,000 (opened as the London Opera House)

1891-renovations

*Lyceum
*Lyric-Hammersmith
Middlesex Music Hall
Pavilion

1892-construction

Alhambra Palace (reconstructed)
*Duke of York's £21,000
*Kingsway

1892-renovations

none

1893-construction

*Daly's £60,000
Empire, Woolwich (reconstructed) £11,000-£12,000
Oxford (reconstructed)

1893-renovations

none

1894-construction

Empire, Shoreditch (reconstructed)
Metropole (Camberwell Empire)

1894-renovations

Pavilion

1895-construction

*Borough, Stratford £20,000
*Kilburn £17,000

1895-renovations

Alhambra Palace

Table I cont'd

1896-construction

*Brixton

Grand, Croydon (Grand)
Lyceum, Richmond

*Shakespeare £25,000

1896-renovations

Holborn Empire

1897-construction

*Alexandra, Stoke Newington

Broadway, New Cross (reconstructed) £21,150
Collin's (rebuilt)

*Grand, Fulham £30,000

*Her Majesty's £55,000-£60,000

Metropolitan (rebuilt)
Empire, Islington (reconstructed)

1897-renovations

none
Empire, Islington (rebuilt)
Metropolitan (reconstructed) £40,000

1898-construction

*Coronet £25,000

Dalston Theatre of Varieties £14,500

Empress Theatre of Varieties £17,500

Gaumont, Notting Hill

Granville Theatre of Varieties - about £20,000

Hammersmith Theatre of Varieties (reconstructed)

Hippodrome, Peckham (reconstructed) about £12,000

*Princess of Wales

Queen's, Poplar (reconstructed)

Variety, Hammersmith £30,000

1898-renovations

Olympic

1899-construction

*Bedford (rebuilt)

Camberwell Palace £25,000

Crown, Peckham £35,000 (building alone)

Empire, Bradford £30,000

Empire, Holloway

Empire, Stratford East

Empire, New Cross

Palace of Varieties, Kilburn £30,000

Royal Duchess, Balham (Euston Theatre of Varieties) £35,000

*Terriss', Rotherhithe £25,000

*Wyndham's £30,000 (reconstructed)

1899-renovations

*St. James (reconstructed)

Table I cont'd

1900-construction

Grand, Clapham
Hippodrome, Woolwich (Grand)
London Hippodrome
London Pavilion
*Regent

1900-renovations

*Kingsway
*Covent Garden

1901-construction

*Adelphi (reconstructed)
*Apollo
Camden £50,000
Empire, Islington (reconstructed)
Empire, Hackney
Grand, Islington (rebuilt)
*Imperial (reconstructed) £40,000
*New

1901-renovations

*Drury Lane
Sadler's Wells

1902-construction

*Elephant and Castle (reconstructed) about £12,000
Grand, Woolwich
*Kings, Hammersmith

1902-renovations

none

1903-construction

Chelsea Palace
*Gaiety
*Marlborough
Opera House, Norwich
Shepherd's Bush Empire

1903-renovations

*Savoy

1904-construction

*Haymarket (reconstructed)
London Coliseum
Lyceum (reconstructed)
Orient £45,000
*Surrey (reconstructed)

London Hippodrome

Table I cont'd

1904-renovations

- *Drury Lane £25,000
- *Royal Court
- *Royalty (rebuilding on site)

1905-construction

- *Aldwych
 - Empire, Croydon
 - Prince's, Poplar (Poplar Hippodrome)
- *Royal Artillery Theatre £11,000
- *Scala (rebuilt)
- *Strand Shaftesbury (New Princes)
London Opera House

1905-renovations

- Empire
- *Terry's

1906-construction

- *Globe
 - Hippodrome, Putney (formerly Palace)
 - Hippodrome, Tooting

1906-renovations

- *Borough, Stratford
- *Broadway
 - Holborn Empire £30,000
- *Regent

1907-construction

- Empire, Willesden
- *Playhouse (rebuilt)
- Princess
 - Hippodrome, Golders Green

1907-renovations

- *Kingsway
- *Princess'

1908-construction

- *Queen's

1908-renovations

- Palace
- Metropolitan

1909-construction

- New Kilburn Empire

1909-renovations

- *Shaftesbury
 - London Hippodrome

Table I cont'd Showing Changes In Theatre Concentration - Central

London Area

1910-construction

Finsbury Park Empire

*Little Theatre

London Palladium (rebuilding on site)

1910-renovations

Adelphi

1911-construction

Lewisham Hippodrome

Middlesex Music Hall (rebuilt)

*Princes-Shaftesbury (New Princes)

*Stoll £200,000 (London Opera House)

Victoria Palace

Wimbledon

1911-renovations

Collin's

*Comedy

Hippodrome, Greenwich (formerly Palace)

*Surrey (reconstructed)

1912-construction

Chiswick Empire

*Palaseum

1912-renovations

Alhambra

1913-construction

*Ambassadors

Hippodrome, Golder's Green

1913-renovations

none

1914-construction

none

1914-renovations

*Little

Table II: Maps Showing Changes In Theatre Concentration - Central London Area

- LEGEND
- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Gaiety Theatre | 11. Theatre Royal, Haymarket |
| 2. Empire Theatre | 12. Theatre Royal, Drury Lane |
| 3. Alhambra Theatre | 13. Theatre Royal, Covent Garden |
| 4. Shaftesbury Theatre | 14. Theatre Royal, Haymarket |
| 5. Lyric Theatre | 15. Theatre Royal, Haymarket |
| 6. Palace Theatre | 16. Theatre Royal, Haymarket |
| 7. Gaiety Theatre | 17. Theatre Royal, Haymarket |
| 8. Gaiety Theatre | 18. Theatre Royal, Haymarket |
| 9. Gaiety Theatre | 19. Theatre Royal, Haymarket |
| 10. Gaiety Theatre | 20. Theatre Royal, Haymarket |



Table II: Maps Showing Changes in Theatre Concentration - Central

London Area

1. Lyric Theatre

2. Apollo Theatre

THEATRES IN LEICESTER SQUARE AREA CIRCA 1900

- 1. Daly's Theatre
- 2. Empire Theatre
- 3. Alhambra Theatre
- 4. Shaftesbury Theatre
- 5. Lyric Theatre
- 6. Palace Theatre
- 7. Wyndham's Theatre
- 8. Duke of York's Theatre

9. Garrick Theatre

10. Alhambra Theatre

11. Wyndham's Theatre

- 9. Garrick Theatre
- 10. Prince of Wales Theatre
- 11. Comedy Theatre
- 12. Criterion Theatre
- 13. Haymarket Theatre
- 14. London Hippodrome
- 15. London Pavilion

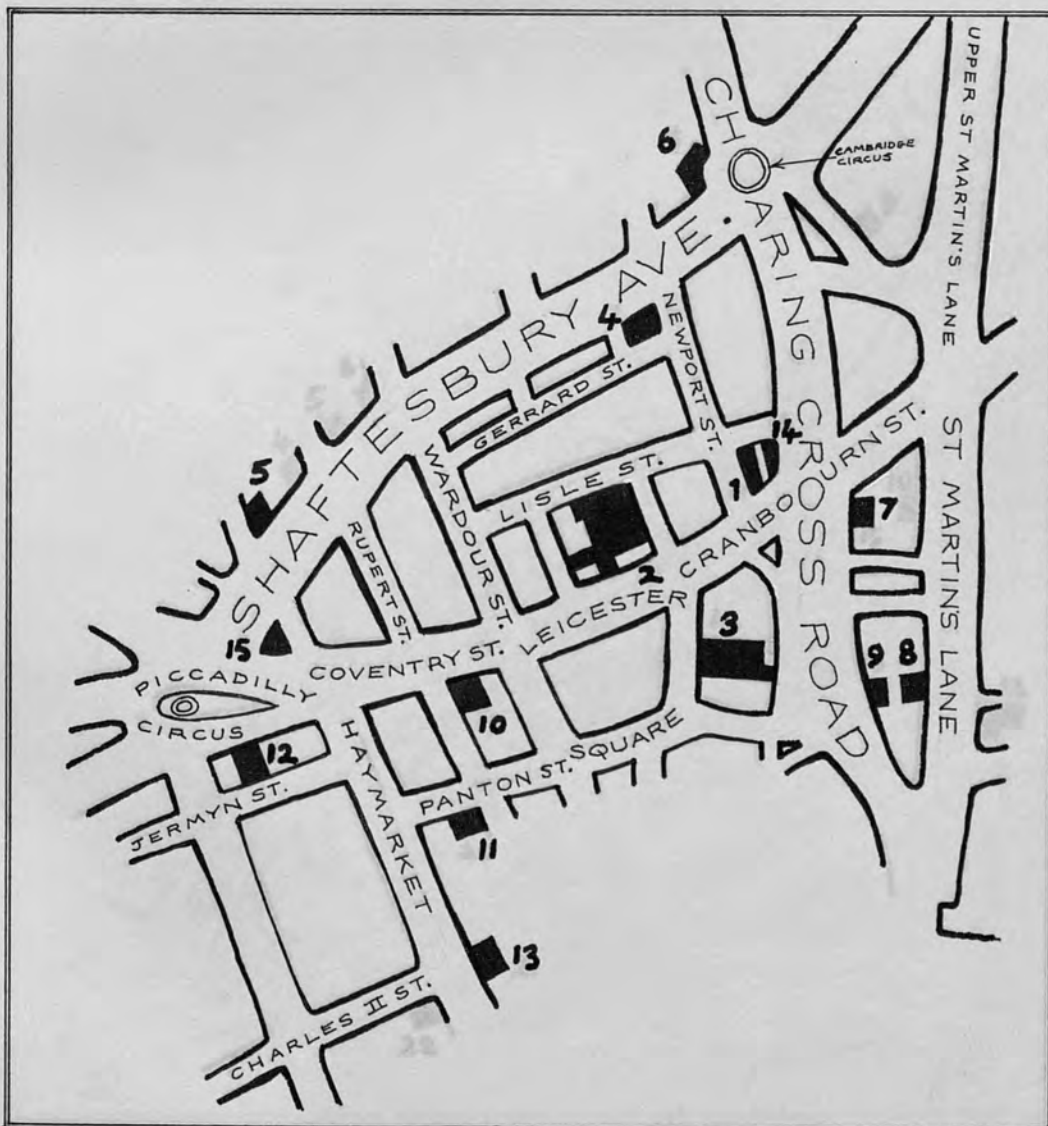
12. Criterion Theatre

13. Haymarket Theatre

14. London Hippodrome

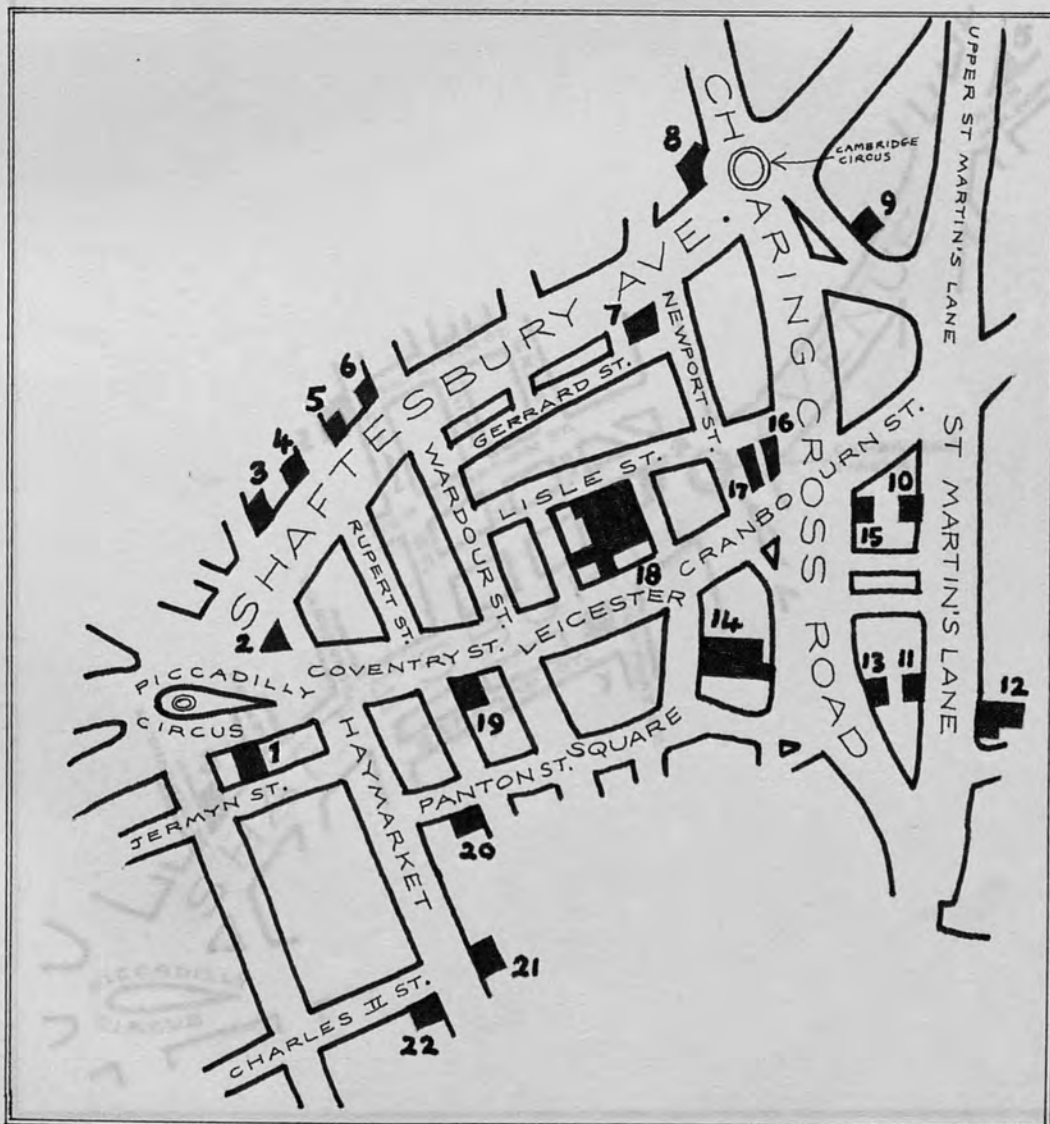
15. London Pavilion

16. Playhouse Theatre (not on map) -
situated at Northumberland Ave.



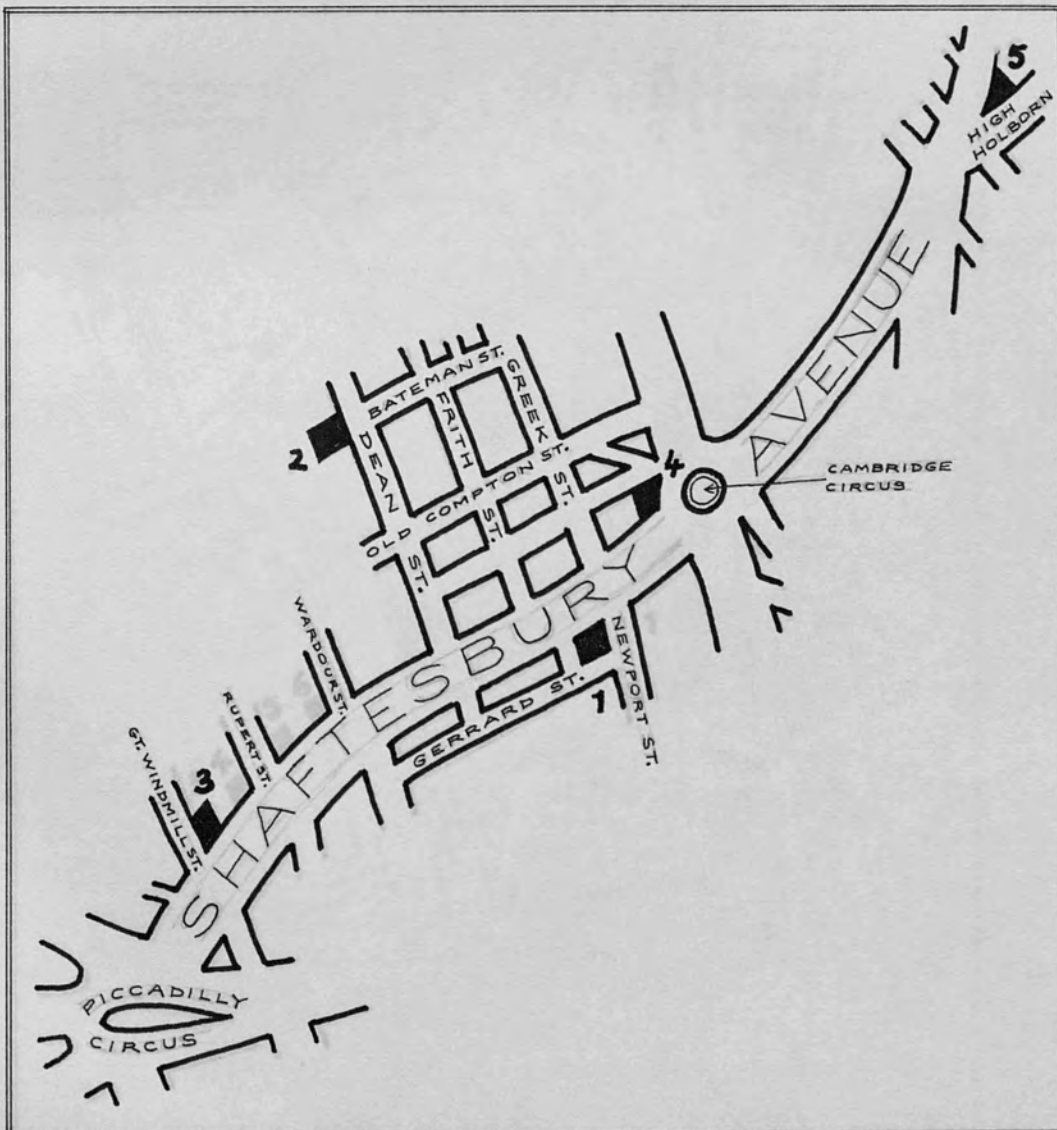
THEATRES IN LEICESTER SQUARE CIRCA 1914

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Criterion Theatre | 12. London Coliseum |
| 2. London Pavilion | 13. Garrick Theatre |
| 3. Lyric Theatre | 14. Alhambra Theatre |
| 4. Apollo Theatre | 15. Wyndham's Theatre |
| 5. Globe Theatre | 16. London Hippodrome |
| 6. Queens Theatre | 17. Daly's Theatre |
| 7. Shaftesbury Theatre | 18. Empire Theatre |
| 8. Palace Theatre | 19. Prince of Wales Theatre |
| 9. Ambassadors Theatre | 20. Comedy Theatre |
| 10. New Theatre | 21. Haymarket Theatre |
| 11. Duke of Yorks Theatre | 22. His Majesty's Theatre |
- Playhouse Theatre (not on map) situated at Northumberland Ave.



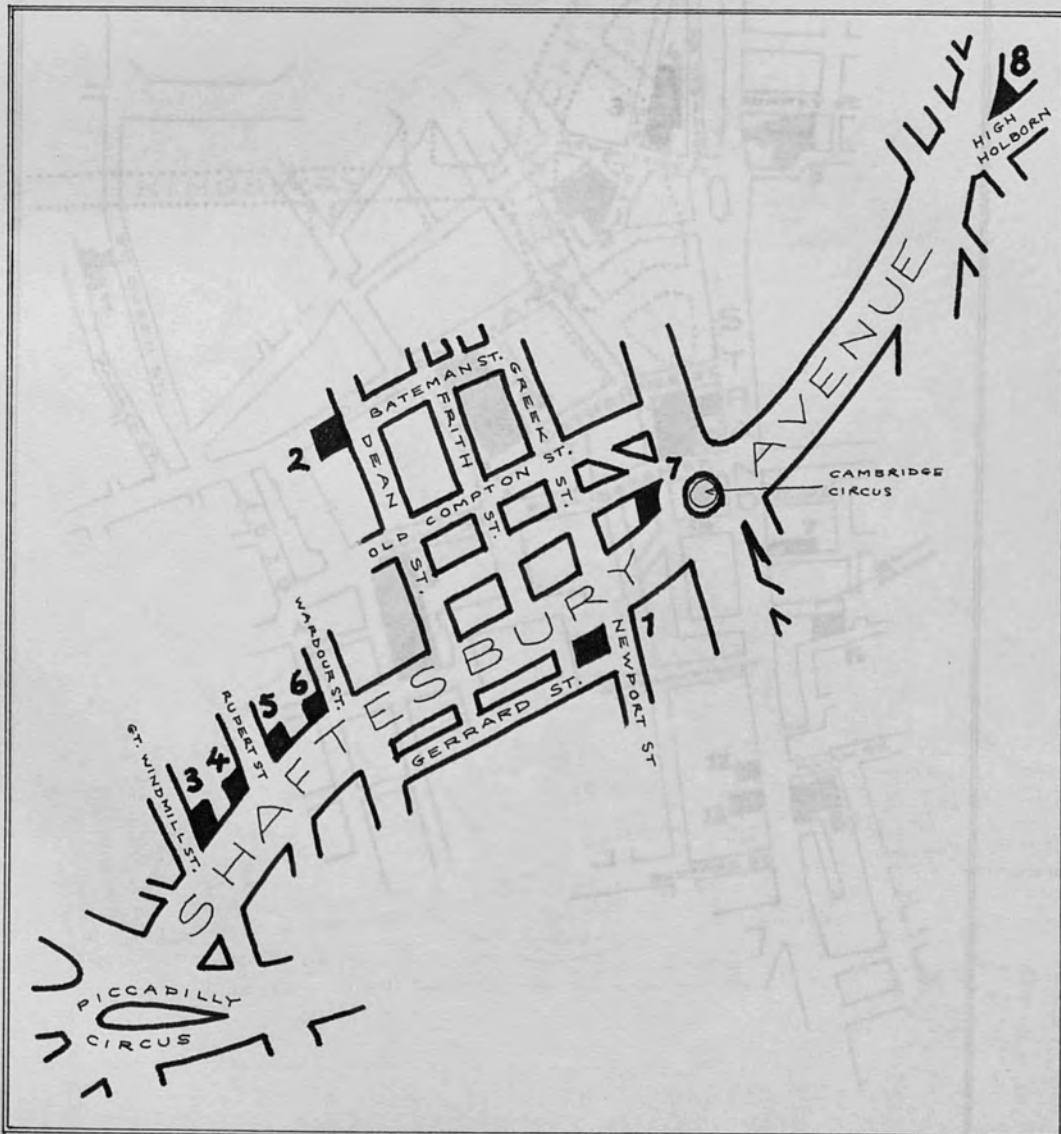
THEATRES IN SHAFTESBURY AVENUE CIRCA 1914
THEATRES IN SHAFTESBURY AVENUE CIRCA 1900

1. Shaftesbury Theatre
2. Royalty Theatre
3. Lyric Theatre
4. Palace Theatre
5. Prince's Theatre
7. Palace Theatre
8. Prince's Theatre



THEATRES IN SHAFTESBURY AVENUE CIRCA 1914

1. Shaftesbury Theatre
2. Royalty Theatre
3. Lyric Theatre
4. Apollo Theatre
5. Globe Theatre
6. Queen's Theatre
7. Palace Theatre
8. Prince's Theatre
11. Savoy Theatre
12. Vaudeville Theatre
13. Adelphi Theatre
14. Lyceum Theatre



THEATRES IN THE STRAND AREA BEFORE STRAND, ALDWYCH & KINGSWAY DEVELOPMENT
SCHEME CIRCA 1900

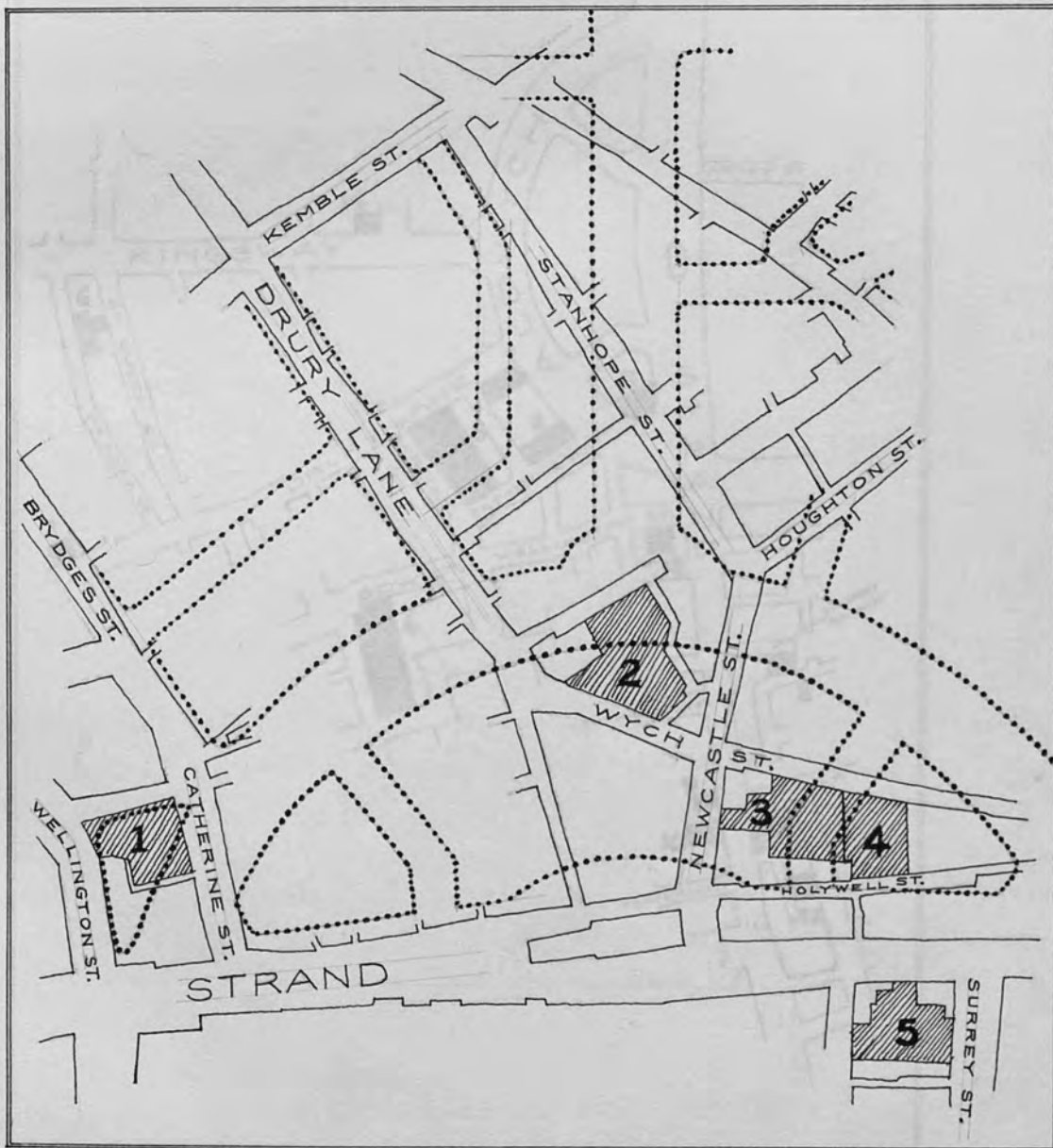
1. Kingsway Theatre
2. Olympic Theatre
3. Globe Theatre
4. Opera Comique
5. Royal Strand Theatre
6. Gaiety Theatre
7. Terry's Theatre
8. Tivoli Theatre
9. Covent Garden
10. Theatre Royal, Drury Lane
11. Savoy Theatre
12. Vaudeville Theatre
13. Adelphi Theatre
14. Lyceum Theatre



THEATRES DESTROYED BY STRAND, ALDWYCH & KINGSWAY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

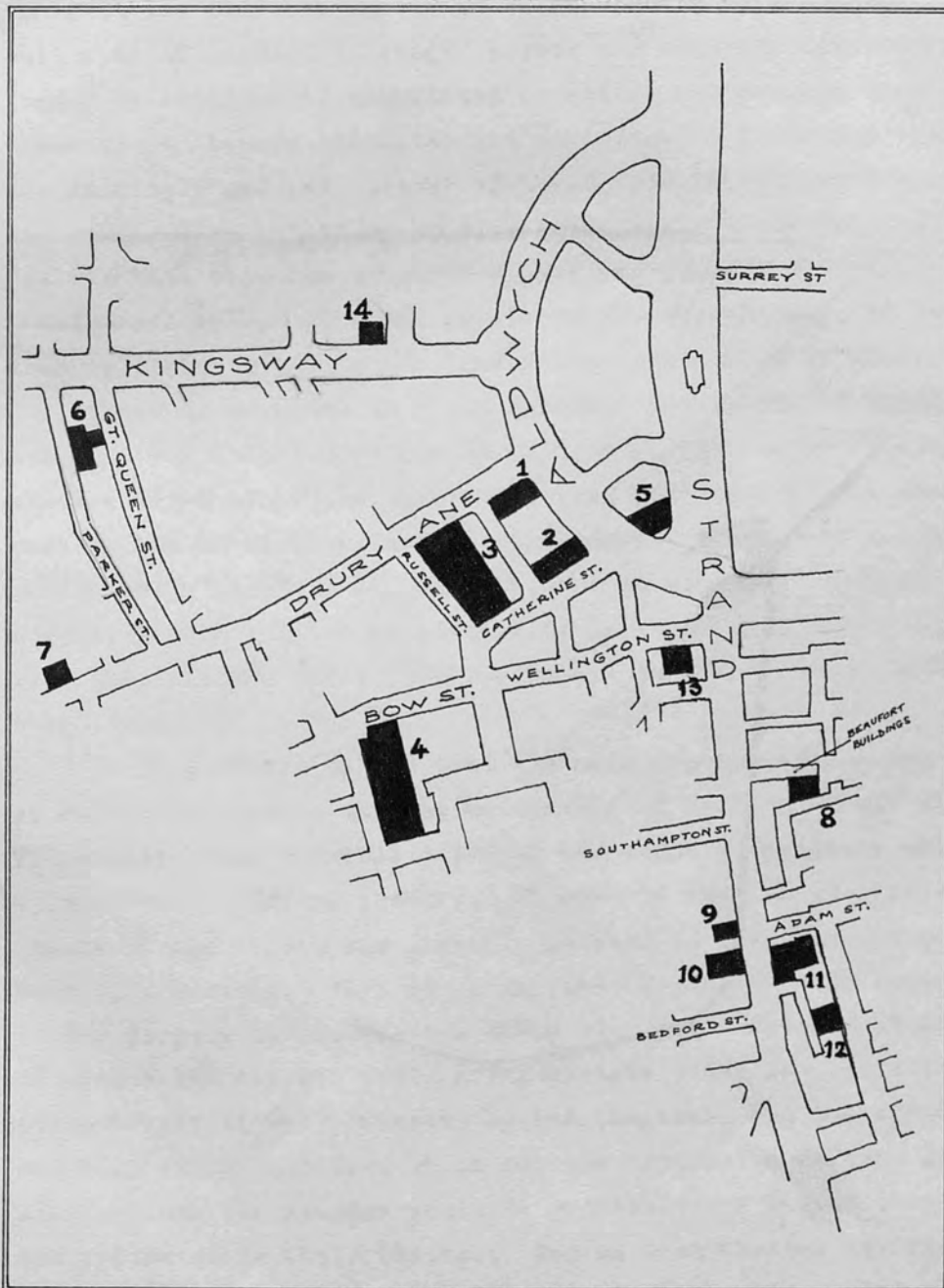
1. Gaiety Theatre
2. Olympic Theatre
3. Globe Theatre
4. Opera Comique
5. Royal Strand Theatre

6. Savoy Theatre
7. Vaudeville Theatre
8. Adelphi Theatre
9. Theatre Royal
10. Lyric Theatre
11. Theatre Royal
12. Theatre Royal
13. Theatre Royal
14. Theatre Royal



THEATRES IN THE STRAND AREA CIRCA 1914

1. Aldwych Theatre
2. Strand Theatre
3. Theatre Royal, Drury Lane
4. Covent Garden
5. Gaiety Theatre
6. Kingsway Theatre
7. Winter Garden Theatre
8. Savoy Theatre
9. Vaudeville Theatre
10. Adelphi Theatre
11. Tivoli Theatre
12. Little Theatre
13. Lyceum Theatre
14. Stoll Theatre



Chapter Two

Aspects of Production in London Theatre (1890-1914)

I. Types of productions and producers

When they braved the dangers of squalid alleys and uncertain transport to visit the theatre, Victorian theatre-goers were treated to a rather dull diet of melodrama, staged novels and amended Shakespeare; a diet framed by settings of mismatched furniture and painted backdrops. To a nostalgic theatre historian the emergence of Edwardian theatre with its seemingly endless variety of theatrical entertainments in realistic and imaginative settings, appears a veritable theatrical renaissance. Yet did this plethora of novel theatrical forms really signify an artistic renaissance or did form and spectacle obscure the real if less spectacular changes taking place in the fundamental conception of theatre?

There is no doubt that the 'modern' conception of theatre which explores the function of man in society and his understanding of himself which arrived after the somewhat barren Victorian years, dates from this period, but in terms of actual performance, were these new ideas made artistically viable? Or, in fact, was it not entertainment rather than education that was the chief concern of the average Edwardian playgoer with artistic and intellectual elements left to show themselves as best they could?

It is possible to say that the main impetus behind the development of Edwardian theatre was the acceptance of theatre by the middle-class. The middle-class provided a larger and educated audience which could appreciate a reformed theatre. It must be remembered, however, that the extent of the reform was directly related to the aims and purposes of bourgeois society. That is to say that a middle-class society still living largely by the Puritan ethic with its overtones of the importance of commercial success would not immediately embrace socialism however attractively it was presented by the theatre. And the economic security and high social position which was the aspiration of many successful middle-class businessmen would be precisely the values they wanted to see reflected in their theatre. And as most theatre was financed by middle-class patrons in or out of the theatre, these aims and purposes

were backed by the power of the pound.

But the middle class was not altogether an inhibiting factor in the development of Edwardian theatre. Released from the confinement of Victorian morality, they provided a measure of support for plays dealing with social and moral issues. In the 1890's, Pinero's The Second Mrs. Tanqueray (which dealt with the marriage of a prostitute to a gentleman of social position) was considered scandalous. By 1914, adultery, divorce, and amour in general were subjects of light-hearted musical comedy pieces.

For many Edwardian productions, spectacle was considered more important than content. The electrification of theatres in the late 1880's brought not more artistic effects, but more spectacular ones. In melodrama, the plot simplified as the scenery and effects became more complex. In the more serious plays, the heroine continued to cry over the vicissitudes of society and her dresses also changed at every whim of fashion. And as Shakespearean productions became more textually precise, the credibility of the production was lost in the overly realistic settings which included in some cases real rabbits hopping around potted shrubs.

Despite these distractions to the integrity of theatre, Edwardian theatre holds much nostalgia for theatre historians, theatre biographers, and the social writers of the pre-World War I years. The myth of the Gaiety girl retains tremendous power today, as does Mrs. Patrick Campbell's reputation as an actress or the productions of Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree. According to some writers, nothing has ever been as lyrical as the Edwardian musical, as powerful as Edwardian drama, or as all around brilliant as Edwardian acting. To be fair, this is not the viewpoint of all those interested in theatre history, but somehow the Edwardian theatre is still surrounded by an aura of brilliance. There could be several explanations for this. In the first place we have no real evidence of Edwardian productions. A few scratchy records and several hundred feet of silent film give no accurate idea of what the productions were really like. And when there is no means of faithfully recording artistic performances, over a period of time distortions naturally take place. It is very difficult to get more than a subjective picture of a performance from a reviewer's words, which may be the sole remaining evidence of the nature of the performance. Therefore, adequately to differentiate long-term, or even modern values from those considered adequate within their own particular period, is extremely difficult.

Nevertheless the myth of Edwardian theatre survives, but perhaps for reasons other than the quality of the productions. It could be argued

that the reputation of Edwardian theatre is directly related to its ability totally to satisfy the theatrical requirements of Edwardian audiences. In other words, the conventional 'success' of Edwardian theatre may be related solely to its ability to satisfy the desires and whims of its audience.

The Edwardian theatre above all was a commercial theatre, and as such, a successful theatre meant a commercially viable theatre. This does not mean there was no experimentation, but theatre had to pay its own way without state subsidies, and since experiments usually had limited public appeal, they were a losing proposition. This meant that successful productions tended to be popular productions which had succeeded in reflecting public taste.

The public was helped to find the kind of theatrical production it wanted to see, by the classification of theatres according to the kind of production they staged. Classification of theatres was not a new thing, nor has it entirely disappeared from today's theatres. One can usually anticipate which theatres will show musicals, sex comedies or dramas in the West End. However, in the Edwardian period, these ready classifications were assisted by the tendency of actor-managers (and their supporting companies) to become identified with one particular theatre (though managers not owning their own theatres were forced to take leases for varying periods of time at assorted theatres). Not only could one be sure of the kind of production appearing at a particular theatre, but also be fairly sure of the cast appearing in the play. This nearly complete classification of theatres was in effect a simplification of the process of theatre-going. The theatre-goer need take no risks in being disappointed on his night out - he knew in advance exactly what was to be performed at any particular theatre. Exploration into any new experimental branches of theatre was only for the brave and adventurous and the timid could select with confidence a variety of drama which would not offend. This was surely detrimental to the development of Edwardian theatre, for it made the theatre-goer too complacent with the kind of theatre he was used to and it discouraged any experimentation on the part of the actor-manager or producer.

This is not to say that there were no experimental productions at commercial theatres, but suggests that they were not nearly as experimental as they might have been. Sir Herbert Tree's 'experiments' with Shakespeare (which included extremely realistic settings) were calculated to appeal to public taste and not to new dramatic theory as

were the Shakespearean productions of Harley Granville Barker.

The success of the plays which easily satisfied Edwardian audiences does not completely overshadow the attempt to produce theatre of a more experimental nature. Several repertory companies were set up to produce a more demanding kind of theatre - the most famous being at the Royal Court Theatre from 1904 to 1907, under the direction of J.E. Vedrenne and Harley Granville Barker. Yet the relative commercial failure of such ventures inhibited other attempts to produce new and controversial plays. The difficulties of establishing a National Theatre which would produce more educational theatre during the period were, in a sense, a reaffirmation of the commercial system by the theatre-going general public.

Yet despite financial failure and public indifference, some productions still managed to deal with the fundamental changes which were taking place in the conception of theatre. These productions are a tribute to the writers and artists who produced them for they were not in demand by the commercial theatre. Largely ignored at the time this experimentation at the turn of the century was utilised later by playwrights and actors as the basis for our contemporary theatre. Because of their importance in the history of theatre, the experiments of the Edwardian years have been covered in depth by theatre historians. There are numerous books on such artists as Shaw and Gordon Craig which accurately trace any new developments in dramatic construction and theatre design. What is generally ignored in these discussions is the more general theatrical milieu of which these new developments in production were only a part.

To get some idea of how these new dramatic theories changed the nature of drama, it is necessary to understand the kind of theatre the new theorists took exception to, because it was the predominant and successful theatre at the time. The wide variety of successful theatrical forms is no myth and a general resumé of the types of productions seen in London at the time may help to put the nostalgic view of Edwardian theatre into perspective.

Popular theatre during the Edwardian era comprised seven main varieties: musical comedy, melodrama, the 'problem play', pantomime, Shakespeare, verse drama, and comedy. Avowedly different in purpose, each of these forms nevertheless managed to conform to the specifications of the Edwardian theatre-goer.

Born and developed during the period, musical comedy is one of the perfect expressions of Edwardian fantasies. Singing and dancing had always been a part of theatrical entertainment in music halls and

pantomimes etc., but it was not until the early 1890's that a semi-integration of plot, music and dance reached the popular stage as a form of its own. In Town, an early musical comedy which opened at the Prince of Wales Theatre in 1892, showed the possibilities of this Edwardian derivative from such earlier forms as the comic operetta and minstrel show.

The combination of fashionable costumes, beautiful girls, tuneful songs and clever lyrics quickly caught on. Under the patronage of George Edwardes, the musical comedy blossomed at the Gaiety and Daly's theatres. The growth of the Gaiety company shares after the productions of A Gaiety Girl (1893) and The Shop Girl (1893) show how quickly the musical comedy became one of the most popular forms of entertainment. Shares which had been standing at 3 shillings grew rapidly to over £1, showing investors that there was big money in this new form of entertainment.¹

The plots of the Edwardian musical comedies were similar. They were all love stories, with the heroine in such a character as a shop girl who is really a princess or a princess who has become a shop girl to win her lover. The attraction of the shop girl (who was usually well-born if not an actual lady in disguise) who married the peer in Edwardian theatre, was perhaps the unconscious wish of the audience to believe in a social mobility which many of them knew outside the theatre to be non-existent. The shop girl was in all probability the only member of the working class (apart from servants) that many members of the leisured middle classes ever met.

The development of the musical comedy story often hinged upon a misunderstanding between the hero and heroine based on the heroine's pride, the hero's flirtation with another woman or circumstances so tangled that it was a wonder the hero and heroine were ever reunited. Foreign locales were often used and the vogue for the 'Chinese' or 'Japanese' musical lasted at least through Chu Chin Chow in 1916.

Although the musical comedy was certainly an advance over its counterpart - the Victorian burlesque - it lacked sophistication and continuity. Although the theatrical form supposedly comprised words and music, the dialogue in musical comedies was poor or even non-existent. Owen Hall, a prominent librettist of the period, was interviewed before the opening of his musical comedy, The Geisha, when he told the reporter that in The Geisha, dialogue was not the main consideration. He explained for a comfortable night's entertainment, the entire piece could not last over three hours. With one 20 minute interval, the musical itself could

¹Short, Ernest Sixty Years of Theatre (1951), p. 73.

last for only 2 hours and 40 minutes. If this time was divided equally between the author and composer (which it frequently was not), the plot must be outlined in 1 hour and 20 minutes. Added to this was the unwritten stipulation that there must be as many characters in a musical as in a serious play (which had large casts for the most part).² It is small wonder there was so much confusion in the plots of most musical comedies, some of which defy comprehension. Song lyrics often had no relationship to the plot and were used as show pieces for the star. And if the music was tuneful, it often lacked either the development or the style of such operettas as The Merry Widow.

Although the first musical comedies produced on the English stage were written and composed by Englishmen, producers were not averse to translating and rearranging foreign works. Comic operas from the French, such as Messenger's Veronique (1904), adaptations of German successes such as The Girl in the Train (1910), and straight importations of American musical comedies as The Belle of New York (1898), were all successful on the London stage.

Despite the tremendous number of musical comedies produced before the First World War, many among them achieved long runs in the London theatres. A record of some of the productions and runs of musical comedies produced at Daly's Theatre from 1898-1912 shows the staying power of the musical comedy at its most successful: An Artist's Model (1895) - 405, San Toy (1899) - 768, A Country Girl (1902) - 729, The Cingalee (1904) - 363, Les Merveilleuses (1906) - 196, The Merry Widow (1907) - 778, The Dollar Princess (1909) - 428, The Count of Luxembourg (1911) - 345, and Gypsy Love (1912) - 229.³ (Although The Merry Widow and The Count of Luxembourg were operettas in the original German, the English translations and adaptations transformed them into something akin to the native musical comedy). From the length of these musicals' runs, it can be seen that musical comedies were looked upon as a successful theatrical investment. In fact they were one of the mainstays of Edwardian theatre.

The popular Victorian melodrama was able to adapt itself perfectly to Edwardian demands. Using advances in stage technology, melodramas offered more exciting spectacles than ever, with realistic train crashes, earthquakes and horse races enacted before the eyes of the audience.

²Forbes-Winslow, D. Daly's The Biography of a Theatre (1944), p. 55.

³Ibid., pp. 33 & 55.

The melodrama also adapted itself to changes in theatrical thematic material. Instead of the woman wronged, melodrama turned its attention to the woman who did wrong. As M. Willson Disher puts it in his book on melodrama,

The period (turn of the century) mainly expressed itself, ... in plays which are melodramas disguised as advanced thought. "Problem play" was their current label. Though accepted as "New" they were drawing-room dramas with no other difference than that the chief character was a female sinner instead of a male sinner, and the old notion that sins had sex still prevailed.⁴

While musical comedies dealt with the lighter side of life and love, some melodramas delved into things polite people would not talk about, but loved to see. The intimation of scandal and fall from moral righteousness delighted Edwardian audiences, and with the new freedom of what was allowed on stage, melodrama exploited the public's moral voyeurism. Both melodrama and musical comedy appealed to the eye, but spectacle was the main drawing card for melodrama. How could sound dramatic construction compete with real horses racing on stage in The Whip (1909), or a true-to-life avalanche in The Marriages of Mayfair (1908)? Religion was another favourite theme in melodrama and when combined with a hint of sex as in The Sign of the Cross (1896), its appeal doubled.

The Drury Lane melodramas were melodrama at its most spectacular. Based on plots that were complicated enough to take the hero and heroine from one exotic location to another, they always included at least one fire, earthquake, or similar natural disaster. The characters were cardboard figures dwarfed by elaborate changing backdrops and complicated transmogrifying machinery. But the continuing success of the Drury Lane melodramas - The Sins of Society (1907), The Marriages of Mayfair (1908), The Whip (1909), and The Hope (1911), indicated that this was precisely what the public wanted to see.

When Sir Henry Irving's Lyceum Theatre burned to the ground, a new theatre was erected and originally used as a music hall. When the profits proved too small, the theatre was taken under the joint management of H.R. Smith and Ernest Carpenter in 1907, who then formed a company called Popular Playhouses, Ltd. dedicated to producing popular theatre at popular

⁴Disher, M. Willson Melodrama: Plots that Thrilled (1954), p. 153.

prices.⁵ As might be anticipated "popular theatre" meant melodrama. The project was a commercial success, and if the reviewer from The Graphic did not see the first production, Her Love Against the World, as reason for rejoicing, he clearly pointed out the reasons why the Lyceum management drew crowds.

Many may regret that the mighty have fallen, but there is no doubt that the new managers of the Lyceum have done a wise thing in halving the prices and reintroducing substantial and sound melodrama to the West End of London. And melodrama is, at any rate, several stops higher than the two shows-a-night music-hall to which the famous old theatre descended a little while ago. In visiting Her Love Against the World you leave your critical functions at home. There is no use for them at the new Lyceum.⁶

Melodrama satisfied the public's desire to be shocked, frightened, amused and most important, to be entertained. Although melodrama was a Victorian phenomena, it paid lip service to the changes in Edwardian society, and drew packed houses throughout the period.

The 'problem play' was the dramatic exposition of changes in the Edwardian conception of society and propriety. This was the most middle-class theatre of all. With the new freedom which allowed the discussion forbidden in Victorian times of such subjects as adultery, sexual freedom, and divorce, the theatre quickly presented plays with these new themes. Because these themes were primarily middle-class preoccupations, the theatre presented them with the current middle-class accent. Certainly not all dramatists catered to middle-class prejudices. True innovators like Shaw, Ibsen, Brieux and Granville Barker tried to present real problems with true if painful solutions, but the majority of plays conveyed pathos in a setting of misty tears rather than the reality of social problems.

One of the prime exponents of this kind of playwriting was Alfred Sutro, who in his plays worked and reworked the themes of power, society honour and love in such a way that the Edwardian (née Victorian) virtues of commercial success, chastity and social conformity always triumphed. From his first success, The Walls of Jericho (1904) to his last play in the period, The Two Virtues (1914), he gave the middle-class audiences

⁵Wilson, A.E. The Lyceum (1952), p. 153.

⁶Ibid., p. 154.

exactly what they wanted to see - their own prejudices confirmed while portraying the titillating consequences of those who did not conform to their morality.

In 1908, the Stage Year Book called Sutro the best dramatist of 1907 due to the success of his two plays, John Glayde's Honour and The Barrier. Of John Glayde's Honour, it said,

His John Glayde's Honour was the best modern play of the year, and its merits, in the face of the unconventional ending that Mr. Sutro had the courage to adopt, secured for it at the St. James' the largest run of the twelve months to serious drama.⁷

The 'unconventional ending' was that the hero, John Glayde debases his wife and then offers her to her lover. He says, 'This woman loves you. She used to be my wife. She loves you beyond everything else- honesty, truth, shame. She has made the greatest of all sacrifices for you - she has lied and betrayed...Take her away.'⁸ What he does not say is that for the past few years he has totally ignored his wife for the sake of his business and encouraged her to find solace elsewhere but then, money before love and the sanctity of marriage were the rules and all 'good' characters had to play by them.

Some other 'problem plays' invoked conventional morality and the consequences of unconventional behaviour including Pinero's Mid-Channel (1909), which dealt with the break-up of a marriage due to a lack of understanding; St. John Hankin's The Return of the Prodigal (1904), about the return of a wayward son and his relations with people; and Hubert Henry Davies', The Mollusc, the story of the empty shell of a marriage.

Other 'problem plays' were more humorous. The early plays of Somerset Maugham took a witty approach toward the sombre problems of the more serious plays. Loaves and Fishes (1902) makes fun of the clergy, greed and affectation of social position while underlining the need for reform. Other Maugham plays such as Lady Frederick (1909) and Jack Straw (1909) dealt with sex and flirtation in an equally humorous manner.

There were many other varieties of the 'problem play' from the seriously intellectual to the maudlin - verging on melodrama. The appeal of this kind of theatre was extremely wide, but in its more socially

⁷Stage Year Book (1908), p. 15.

⁸Sutro, Alfred John Glayde's Honour (1907), p. 95.

and theatrically ambitious form it was particularly embraced by middle-class audiences with a yen toward greater permissiveness and indeed was the major part of the staple diet of the 'serious' middle-class playgoer.

Pantomime was a seasonal diversion (lasting from Christmas time until late February or early March) during Edwardian days, just as it is today. As was the case in melodrama, pantomime made use of new mechanical inventions for more spectacular productions. The most famous pantomimes were the Drury Lane Christmas shows with their casts of famous performers in spectacular settings. From a tradition started by Sir Augustus Harris in the late nineteenth century, the new manager, Arthur Collins, continued to import music-hall artists for his pantomimes - with a resulting highly polished production. No expense was spared on production and several elaborate settings dominated each production. Jack and the Beanstalk (1899), was a tribute to the Boer War. When the giant was slain, one of the characters opened his pocket and exclaimed, 'He's got the British Army in his pocket'. Hordes of children in military uniform poured out to the cheers and delight of the audience.⁹ The 1900 production, Sleeping Beauty, celebrated the serenity of fairyland and had several beautiful garden scenes with an illuminated fountain.

Other pantomimes which had a great public success were those produced by the Melville brothers (who were also famous for their melodramas), at the Lyceum theatre. A.E. Wilson describes the Melville formula for melodramatic success.

The palace scene had to be painted first and the rest of the show was always more or less built round it. The scenery was mostly newly built and painted for each production at the Lyceum studios and workshops in Holborn. That their methods were well-judged is shown by the fact that before the current pantomime had ended its run, letters were arriving from patrons asking for tickets for the next year's show.¹⁰

The Christmas pantomime was more than a show for children. It embodied all the more refined elements of the music hall and the melodrama and parents were often as entranced as their children. Its spectacles matched those of musical comedy and melodrama.

There was a renewed interest in Shakespeare before the war due to the tri-centenary of his death in 1916. The problem of how to commemorate

⁹Dobbs, Brian Drury Lane, Three Centuries of the Theatre Royal (1972), p. 165.

¹⁰Wilson, A.E., pp. 161-2.

this milestone led to many schemes, including a fruitless attempt to start a National Theatre. Nevertheless much of the attention paid to the production of Shakespeare was aimed at rectifying the excesses of the Victorians. No longer was Shakespeare to be bowdlerised as mercilessly as he had been in previous years, and a great deal of care was lavished on the settings for the plays.

An attempt to produce Shakespeare as the Elizabethans had was undertaken in 1894 by William Poel when he founded the Elizabethan Stage Society. In 1895 he presented Twelfth Night on a reconstructed Elizabethan stage. His reforms were based on careful attention to the plays themselves;

He was convinced that Shakespeare and his fellow Elizabethans could not adequately be contained within the limits of the proscenium stage; that they were harmed by realistic scenery; and that the rhythm of the plays was destroyed by the intervals that these accessories imposed.¹¹

Other producers had a completely different conception of Shakespeare. Certainly the Sir Henry Irving productions of Shakespeare did not reflect Poel's ideas of Elizabethan production, but rather used scenery and lighting to enhance the mood of the play as interpreted by Irving. This sometimes led to productions of Shakespeare as melodrama.

Starting in 1905, Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree responded to the Edwardian interest in Shakespeare by holding a series of Shakespeare matinees. Among his presentations were Much Ado About Nothing (1905), A Winter's Tale (1906), The Merchant of Venice (1908) and Henry VIII (1910). Tree's conception of Shakespeare was the direct opposite of Poel's.

He (Tree) believed thoroughly in his pictorial Shakespeare, with the stage as a built-up area. Many of the pictures and effects are remembered - the undulating grass terraces of Olivia's garden, the Alma-Tadema architecture of Caesar's Rome, the fauna of the Wood Near Athens - but the plays had to be cut to make time for them.¹²

So although innovators like Poel were relying solely on the play when producing Shakespeare, men like Tree were perpetuating the Victorian method of cutting the play to fit the production.

¹¹Speaight, Robert William Poel and the Elizabethan Revival (1954), p. 43.

¹²Trewin, J.C. The Theatre Since 1900 (1951), p. 75.

Although the verse play did not have a major influence on Edwardian theatre, its brief but great popularity on the commercial stage shows the change from the amateur status of the Victorian verse play. In Victorian years, the vogue for writing verse plays on heroic themes had inspired efforts from established poets like Tennyson yet these plays were either produced by amateurs, or were relative commercial failures. Perhaps the successful revival of some of the Tennyson verse plays by Sir Henry Irving led the Edwardians to renewed interest in the form and particularly in the verse plays of Stephen Phillips.

Phillips appears to be the most successful verse-play writer of the period. His themes were all tragic, and his verse lyrical and importantly for theatrical production - his plays were not totally undramatic. His most popular offering, Paolo and Francesca (1902), was written for George Alexander and produced at the St. James's Theatre. It ran for over 100 performances. The use of verse made its adulterous story seem that ^{much} more respectable so that it achieved a commercial and artistic success. Phillips also wrote Ulysses (1902) and Nero (1900).

Edwardian comedy was closely related to Edwardian melodrama in that comedy was melodrama with humour. The 'problem play' was a first cousin. In the comedies of the period the same stock situations were used over and over again and the emphasis was more on farce than on the comedy of manners. There were some very fine comic plays written during the period, but most of their relations had a terrible predictability that made them crass, rather than comic.

English comedy writers often wrote about the vagaries of middle and upper-class life with the emphasis on complicated misunderstandings or characters in disguise. Other comic plots were borrowed from French farces, and translations and adaptations from the French formed a large part of the Edwardian comic diet.

So far I have dealt with the commercially successful theatre, a theatre built and developed to suit the needs of a middle-class entertainment-minded public. But there were attempts, both by experimental repertory theatres and even the commercial theatre itself, to present plays of higher artistic standards. The relative commercial failure of these plays does not detract from their impact on modern theatre.

The most famous experiment aimed at raising the artistic level of Edwardian theatre was the repertory season at the Royal Court Theatre from 1904-1907. This resulted from Harley Granville Barker's idea to present new and artistic plays at a series of matinees at the Court Theatre.

With the help of J.H. Leigh, the owner of the theatre, and J.E. Vedrenne as business manager, Barker managed to raise enough money to start producing plays in October 1904.¹³ During the next three years, there were 32 plays produced by 17 different authors for a total of 946 performances.¹⁴ Among the plays produced were Shaw's Man & Superman, Candida, and The Doctor's Dilemma - Galsworthy's The Silver Box - Ibsen's The Wild Duck and Barker's The Voysey Inheritance. Others were less illustrious, but the seasons gave Edwardian audiences an alternative to the endless stream of musical comedy and melodrama on the commercial stage. The producers themselves were in debt at the end of the experiment, but the development of modern theatre is in their debt for the production and encouragement of serious modern English playwrights. C.B. Purdom, Granville Barker's biographer, wrote of what he considered were the results of the Court season:

Dramatists of importance in John Galsworthy, St. John Hankin, Laurence Housman, John Masefield, and Granville Barker himself were introduced to the English stage, while Greek drama was for the first time made practicable for modern audiences in the verse translations of Gilbert Murray. Among foreign dramatists, works by Ibsen, Maeterlinck, Schnitzler, and Hauptmann were brought before the public. Bernard Shaw, though by no means a new dramatist, was established in the forefront of English playwrights. When all is said, of course, his plays were the major element in the enterprise.¹⁵

After the Court management foundered on a lack of money and disagreements between Granville Barker and Vedrenne, there was no serious attempt at experimental repertory until 1909, when two repertory schemes were announced simultaneously. One was to be at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket - produced by Herbert Trench in association with Frederick Harrison, and the other was to be produced by the American producer-manager Charles Frohman, at the Duke of York's Theatre. The Haymarket venture ceased to be repertory and returned to commercial production after the first unsuccessful play, so the Frohman scheme was the true successor to the Court season.¹⁶

¹³Purdom, C.B. Granville Barker (1955), p. 26.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 97.

The repertory theatre at the Duke of York's was produced by Frohman, directed by Granville Barker and the season ran from February 21, 1910 until June 17, 1910. During that time such plays as Granville Barker's The Madras House and Shaw's Misalliance were produced. But despite the high quality of the material presented, the season was not a success. There are several reasons for this. Daniel Frohman, Charles's brother and also a successful producer, felt the season was disrupted by the death of King Edward VII and unable to revive successfully thereafter.¹⁷ The idea of repertory theatre was given insufficient time to catch on. A contributing factor to the failure was the unsuitability of the Duke of York's theatre for repertory. It had no accommodation for scenery, which had to be moved after each performance, and stacked outside the theatre or stored over the river.¹⁸ This continual movement and storage of scenery added to the cost of the production and made repertory at the Duke of York's uneconomical. Also, public taste was not for the experimental and the appeal of the ever popular musical comedy proved stronger than Shaw. And yet the season was not a complete failure.

The Duke of York's was, however, while it lasted, a true repertory, and proved that the system was practicable, though unfamiliar to modern London. Its failure was due to confusion of aims, as Shaw had pointed out, and because a much longer time was required than commercial management is able to allow to establish a theatre with purposes not wholly commercial.¹⁹

Among the other groups dedicated to the production of serious and artistic drama, was the Stage Society established in 1899 and incorporated in 1904. Producing plays on Sundays, when the commercial theatres had no regular productions, they introduced such works as Shaw's You Never Can Tell to British audiences. In the 1906 edition of The Green Room Book, they listed their objectives.

To promote and encourage Dramatic Art; to serve as an Experimental Theatre; to provide such an organisation as shall be capable of dealing with any opportunities that may present themselves or be created for the establishment in London of a Repertory Theatre; and to establish and undertake the management and control of such a Theatre.²⁰

¹⁷Frohman, Daniel and Marcossou, Issaac F. Charles Frohman: Manager and Man (1916), pp. 249-51.

¹⁸Purdum, p. 104.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 106.

²⁰The Green Room Book (1906), p. 435.

The part of the commercial theatre in producing theatre of quality must not be neglected. Plays by Pinero, Barrie, Wilde and Shaw, produced at commercial theatres for commercial purposes, gave audiences the chance to see theatre of quality. And there is no doubt, even in commercial theatres, that this period was a time of experimentation - in lighting techniques, staging, setting, and musical arrangements. It was also a time of regimentation, as each theatre had a definite image, and some the services of a resident actor-manager to stamp his personality on each production.

The Green Book of London Society, a Who's Who of fashionable London society published in 1910, gave a listing of the primary London theatres. Under a heading - 'Nature of Performance' the guide classified each theatre according to the type of entertainment which was usually presented there. Here is the list, omitting the theatres for which there was no designation.

Adelphi	- Melodrama
Aldwych	- Drama
Apollo	- Burlesque
Court	- Free Theatre
Criterion	- Comedy
Daly's	- Musical Comedy
Drury Lane	- Drama
Duke of York's	- Repertory (this was compiled during the ill-fated short repertory season in 1910)
Gaiety	- Musical Comedy
Garrick	- Comedy
Haymarket	- Comedy
His Majesty's	- Shakespeare, comedy and drama
Kingsway	- Comedies and romantic plays
New	- Romantic drama
Playhouse	- Comedy
Prince of Wales	- Musical pieces
Queen's	- Drama
St. James's	- Comedy
Savoy	- Comic Opera
Shaftesbury	- Musical plays
Vaudeville	- Comedy (farcical)
Wyndham's	- Musical Comedy
King's - Hammersmith	- Weekly changes with West End successes
Fulham	- West End successes ²¹
Kennington	- West End successes ²¹

As can be seen, the categories are fairly arbitrary, for what is to distinguish 'musical plays' from 'musical comedy' or 'drama' from 'romantic drama'? Yet the fact that the list was compiled at all shows that the compartmentalisation of theatres was considered of sufficient interest to

²¹The Green Book of London Society (1910), p. 449.

readers of The Green Book to be included. From the reading of other contemporary accounts and histories of various theatres, the notion recurs that there was something special and individual about the kind of production produced at each theatre. The problem is to find out how accurate these designations were, and unfortunately insoluble because of the impossibility of seeing the original productions.

In the case of Daly's and the Gaiety theatres (both classified as 'Musical Comedy' theatres), there does seem to be a small difference between the natures of the musical comedies produced at each theatre. Although both theatres were managed by George Edwardes, each theatre projected its own image. Havana, a musical comedy originally planned for Daly's had to open at the Gaiety Theatre due to the long run of The Merry Widow at Daly's. It did not succeed with the Gaiety Theatre audience. This may have been due to the actual quality of the production, but Ernest Short, who wrote his reminiscences of Edwardian theatre in many theatre books, felt the psychological atmosphere at the Gaiety was different to that at Daly's.²² He felt a difference between the Gaiety and Daly's existed because, 'In general, the music at Daly's called for more skilled singers and the plots of the operas (Even writers about Edwardian theatre are ambiguous about the terminology of early musical comedy, sometimes calling it opera, sometimes operetta, and sometimes burlesque.) were somewhat better defined and more dramatic in treatment.'²³ Short also felt that a Gaiety musical comedy had an intangible something which differentiated it from all other musical comedy on the London stage.

As for the brand of vaudeville which Edwardes made his own, it is impossible to define the dividing line between Gaiety and non-Gaiety musical comedy. A Gaiety mood was recognisable; that is all that can be said, and this mood differed in some subtle way from the mood which could be aroused in a playgoer at Daly's, the Adelphi, the Prince of Wales, the Lyric, or the Shaftesbury. Authors, producers, and players were dimly aware that a reasoned and reasonable plot had little value in creating the Gaiety atmosphere, so librettists and composers tended to reserve their more ambitious efforts for some other stage where principals and chorus were attuned to a higher level of singing and acting of a less go-as-you-please order.²⁴

Perhaps there really was a formula for musical comedy success which George

²²Short, p. 90.

²³Ibid., p. 89.

²⁴Ibid., p. 87.

Edwardes used at the Gaiety and Daly's theatres. Certainly these theatres had an amazingly high rate of theatrical successes during the period.

As there were many kinds of musical comedy, so there were many kinds of melodrama, each theatre specialising in one particular kind of emotional reaction. The Adelphi theatre, before it turned to musical comedy, presented melodramas of the thriller variety. The Fatal Card, written by Haddon Chambers and B.C. Stephenson and presented at the Adelphi in 1894, was the story of a scoundrel, set in Colorado, and presented plenty of action of the old West. William Terriss appeared in many of the Adelphi melodramas including the hit, Secret Service (1897), before he was tragically assassinated in real-life by a madman.

The Drury Lane melodrama had a definite formula, determined by Augustus Harris in the latter part of the nineteenth century when he wrote and produced melodramas, as well as managing the Drury Lane theatre. There was a gentility about the 'tear-jerker' that Harris and his successor, Arthur Collins, produced.

Rather than present any more common-or-garden heroes, he retired from the stage and transferred his place in the limelight to gentlemen. As poverty was not respectable, the lowly of heart henceforth consisted of well-bred people afflicted with gaming debts or dressmaker's bills, and owning nothing except racing-stables occupied by the Winner of the next Classic event. Villainy came in the shape of creditors who argued that because of the large sums owing to them they were legally entitled to the horse. Such iniquity brought down upon them social ostracism instead of, or as well as, capital punishment. Sometimes there was no horse. Even, without sport as an excuse, the new spirit insisted that Norman blood was more than simple faith where female virtue was concerned.²⁵

This Harris and Collins ethos is borne out by a review in the Illustrated London News about the 1911 Drury Lane melodrama, The Hope, by Cecil Raleigh and Henry Hamilton.

That they (Raleigh and Hamilton) have not neglected what is, after all their prime function, that of telling a tale of the life of fashion in terms of sensational incident and spectacular realism hardly needs saying, or that they have sought to show here, as heretofore how the leisured classes spend their days and find occupation and amusement.²⁶

²⁵Disher, p. 155.

²⁶Illustrated London News, September 23, 1911, p. 480.

Melodrama as written by the Melville brothers and produced at the Lyceum theatre was of a different order.

They had the courage to talk about things people did not talk about. They could write about that moral abyss as familiarly and intimately as Dante wrote about the domestic economy of the Inferno. With the power of righteousness behind them, for virtue triumphant was ever their theme, they boldly exhibited life's seamy side on the stage. Their popularity, which was enormous, largely sprang from the public's readiness to be shocked.²⁷

The success of both the Melville brothers and the Lyceum venture proved the public was not only ready, but quite eager to be shocked.

While theatres like Daly's, the Gaiety and Drury Lane were catalogued according to the type of performance presented at them, other theatres had their images shaped by the personality and preferences of the actor-manager and he had a large part in shaping the direction of Edwardian theatre. Because he was the man responsible for choosing, casting and acting in the plays he presented, his power in the theatrical world was enormous. Actor-managers came primarily from the ranks of actors anxious to increase their security in a precarious profession. In order to gain a place in theatre management, money was carefully raised from salaries, cash investments from non-professional fans, and savings from individual productions managed by the actor. There is hardly room to discuss all of the actor-managers of the period, but an analysis of several successful ones may clarify how they shaped the image of the different theatres.

Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree was one of the greatest and most influential actor-managers of the period. His first major success was in 1883 when he played the stuttering parson in Charles Hawtrey's The Private Secretary. In 1887 he took over the management of the Haymarket Theatre, where he presented among other successes, George du Maurier's Trilby, with himself in the famous role of Svengali. He then went on to build Her Majesty's Theatre which he opened in 1897. From then until his death in 1917 he presented plays at Her Majesty's Theatre, which had great dramatic pretension without the necessary brilliance to make them monumental.

Tree's productions were noted for their naturalism. Although Tree himself was not a brilliant actor, his experiments with make-up, movement and costume made him a very proficient character actor. His greatest

²⁷Disher, p. 165.

personal successes were in flamboyant character roles like Shylock in The Merchant of Venice (1909), Beethoven in Louis Parker's Beethoven (1909), and Fagan in J. Comyns Carr's adaptation of Dicken's Oliver Twist (1905).

So far as production itself was concerned, Tree's taste was for grand productions, with exaggerated naturalism as the key note. Every detail was planned and perfectly executed upon the stage. Unfortunately in execution excessive attention to production detail often detracted from the merits of the play itself.

Although Tree was no innovator, he was in earnest because he only produced plays that he thought had merit. One of the defects of the actor-manager system was that his productions often reflected his faulty judgement. His revivals of the lesser known Shakespearean plays - Henry VIII (1910), King John (1899), and Much Ado About Nothing (1905) and some of the better known classics - The School for Scandal (1909), widened the horizons of his audience. But his over-attention to the visual aspects of production gained him an audience weaned on mediocre plays in spectacular settings. It is sad that the one play he produced which had the greatest artistic merit (other than Shakespeare) was the one play he had the greatest difficulty producing and understanding. This was Shaw's Pygmalion, which was produced in 1914.

Sir George Alexander, who was actor-manager at the St. James's Theatre had the image of a debonair, good-natured gentleman who had somehow strayed into the acting profession. Although a list of productions put on by Alexander at the St. James's is very similar to those produced by Tree, at the St. James's, there seems to have been more lighter, cleverer and wittier plays. While Tree emphasised the more spectacular side of production, Alexander was more concerned with a tightly-knit, well-run production. He had a physique and acting style particularly conducive to drawing-room comedy or drama, relying on his natural urbanity and charm, where Tree needed the heavily dramatic nature of character roles to make a similar impact, and so unlike Tree, Alexander did not have to turn to character roles. His system of management was based on competent well-acted plays rather than on experimental productions.

London, Harry The St. James's Theatre, Its History and Revivals
History 1805-1902 (1904), p. 218.

Ibid., p. 218.

His policy and organisation which developed as they progressed were based on three principles: British before foreign; well-balanced dramatic characterisation instead of centre-of-stage star actor manager high over minor players and parts; perfectly cogged and oiled wheels back and front of the curtain.²⁸

Alexander's encouragement of British playwrights was his greatest contribution to the English stage. His patience in dealing with Oscar Wilde was rewarded by having the premieres of two of Wilde's plays, Lady Windemere's Fan (1892) and The Importance of Being Earnest (1895), at the St. James's Theatre. Pinero also wrote plays for Alexander including the two successful plays, The Second Mrs. Tanqueray (1893) and His House In Order (1906). Stephen Phillip's verse play Paolo and Francesca ran for over 100 performances at the St. James's in 1902, a very good run for a play in verse.

Although Alexander encouraged British playwrights and produced some plays with artistic aspirations, he also produced plays that were nothing but high class melodrama. Two of his biggest successes, Bella Donna (1911) and The Prisoner of Zenda (1900) were inferior plays with appealing themes of murder and romance. Yet one can hardly blame Alexander for occasionally resorting to potboilers when he was often in a precarious financial position. He had 27 financial failures among the plays he staged during his years at the St. James's.²⁹

Seymour Hicks was an unusual actor-manager, for he not only produced plays and acted in them - he wrote his own plays as well. He had particular interests in two theatres, the Aldwych and the Hicks Theatre (which later became the Globe). With his wife, the versatile Ellaline Terriss, Hicks produced, wrote and acted in some of the best known musical comedies of the period.

The musical comedies which Hicks wrote were light, romantic, comedy pieces easily digested by audiences. Among the successes in which he had a hand were Bluebell in Fairyland (1905), The Gay Gordons (1907), and The Beauty of Bath (1906). Hicks also acted in straight plays and is particularly remembered for his performance as Valentine Brown in J.M. Barrie's play, Quality Street.

²⁸Duncan, Barry The St. James's Theatre Its Strange and Complete History 1835-1957 (1964), p. 218.

²⁹Ibid., p. 213.

There were many other actor-managers of equal stature and importance besides the three mentioned above. Cyril Maude at the Playhouse Theatre, Frank Curzon at the Prince of Wales Theatre and Charles Wyndham at Wyndham's Theatre were among the men who shaped their theatre productions to what they thought was proper and popular entertainment. In no period since the Edwardian years has the role of the actor-manager been so important. There are several reasons for this. The advent of World War I changed the shape of London theatre, as theatrical efforts were geared toward elaborate productions for servicemen on leave. The gentle drawing-room comedy which most of the actor managers produced did not have the right kind of appeal during this time of crisis. By the end of the war, the majority of the great actor-managers were growing old and there was no-one to replace them. As Ernest Short also wrote, the actor-manager was losing his grip on the theatre.

By 1919, Tree, Lewis Waller, Alexander and Wyndham were dead. In the absence of others with the necessary gifts of showmanship, the theatrical syndicate developed. This meant that a man of the theatre, not necessarily an actor of note, collected money from a few wealthy people and presented a play or some stage star in the hope of sensational profit.³⁰

The syndicate method of production had begun before the outbreak of war, and perhaps the most famous entrepreneur of them all was Charles Frohman. Frohman was an American producer who expanded his operations in London. In 1897 his real career as an English producer began when he leased the Duke of York's Theatre for 19 years. The Duke of York's became his centre of operations in London, although he was connected with many other theatres.³¹ A sample year (1908), shows the extent of Frohman's operations in London. Although it was not as prolific as some other years, the quality of the plays he produced is somewhat higher.

<u>1908</u>		
<u>Lady Barbarity</u>	Feb 27	Comedy
<u>The Admirable Crichton</u>	March 2	Duke of York's
<u>A Waltz Dream</u>	March 7	Hicks
<u>Mrs. Dot</u>	April 27	Comedy
<u>What Every Woman Knows</u>	Sept 3	Duke of York's
<u>Paid In Full</u>	Sept 26	Aldwych
<u>Sir Anthony</u>	Nov 28	Wyndham's ³²

³⁰Short, p. 198.

³¹Marcosson and Frohman, p. 236.

³²Ibid., Appendix B.

Frohman was not an intellectual producer. His productions were put on to please the general audiences and become commercial successes. When asked by Paul Potter about the star system and his reasons for using beautiful women as a commercial pull, Frohman replied,

'My dear Paul,' said Frohman, solemnly, 'they (the critics) call me a 'commercial manager' because I won't play Ibsen or Maeterlinck. They didn't help me when I tried for higher game (the repertory season at the Duke of York's in 1910). I had years of poverty, years of privation. To-day I take advantage of a general feminine desire to view Miss Tottie Coughdrop; and to the critics, I'm a mere Bulgarian, a 'commercial manager'. So was Lester Wallack when he admitted 'The World' to his classic theatre. So was Augustin Daly when he banished Shakespeare in favour of 'The Great Ruby'. If the critics want to reform the stage, let them begin by reforming the public.³³

There is no room for a discussion of the kind of theatre which set the pace for modern theatre, after the war. To repeat, many books and articles discuss in depth the contributions of Shaw, Pinero, Wilde, Synge and Gilbert Murray to the development of modern theatre. But it must be remembered that these men were in a minority. The majority of Edwardian productions had nothing to do with exploring new ideas in play construction, acting techniques, or the purpose of drama. It was these elaborate theatrical productions without artistic or real intellectual inspiration, which were the backbone of Edwardian theatre, and as such reveal a valuable amount of information about what people wanted to see at the theatre.

It can be seen from this brief review of the kinds of theatre presented before the war, that the emphasis in the commercial theatre was on entertainment rather than on art. Commercial theatre was dedicated to spectacle, song and dance, while fundamental changes in the nature of theatre were underway in special repertory seasons or with the aid of special societies dedicated to the production of new or classical works. When Charles Charrington and his wife Janet Achurch (who also played Nora) produced the first English production of Ibsen's A Doll's House in 1889, it was announced for 7 performances only. But because of the demand, the run was extended to 24 performances and they thought they had a hit.³⁴

³³Marcosson and Frohman, p. 324.

³⁴Short, p. 104.

When this is compared with the run of the opening production at the new Gaiety theatre in 1903, The Orchid (559 performances), one can see how small Ibsen's influence was on the average Edwardian playgoer.

In spite of the emphasis on spectacle instead of content, the commercial middle class theatre had a greater scope and inventiveness than its counterpart in Victorian days. There was more reason to go to the theatre and more kinds of theatre to which to go. Consciousness of social change had promoted the 'problem play' and in most cases the play and plot lacked sophistication - it was a step in the direction of using the theatre as a backdrop for discussion of relevant social problems.

The nostalgia which this period so often excites is justified because of the variety and innovation which existed in the popular theatre. But in terms of performance, production standards, and content of material in the commercial theatre, the period has been vastly over-rated. What has to be understood, is not how the productions of the time appear to us, but how they appealed and were enjoyed by people at the time. In this light, Edwardian theatre despite its inconsistencies was nevertheless a popular and growing form of entertainment. What kind of standards were demanded by the public and how these standards differ from what we think of today as 'artistic standards' will be dealt with more fully later. In the meantime a look at the commercial side of production might help to explain how the investor dictated the kinds of production which dominated the theatre.

Chapter Three

Aspects of Production in London Theatre (1890-1914)

II. The commercial side of production

Edwardian theatre was a commercial venture. Whatever artistic pretensions a play had, what really mattered was whether it could draw an audience and make a profit. There were no state subsidies; no national theatre; all theatre had to pay for itself. Edwardian theatre was run on Victorian economic laissez-faire principles and was consequently a precarious enterprise. One of the differences between Victorian and Edwardian theatre was that Edwardian theatre was run increasingly as big business. The purpose of Edwardian theatre was to draw a large audience, and many artistic considerations were scrapped because they were thought lacking in universal appeal.

Some producers spent heavily on productions not only to attract an audience hungry for spectacle but because they truly thought such expenditure would enhance the quality of the production. This was a time of extravagant beautiful productions which meant that producers had frequently to risk much money before a play had opened. For the successful producer it was a calculated risk. Having discovered a successful formula for the kind of plays he produced, he nearly always recouped his investment. For many others it was a very risky business. Even if the production was a success there was still the problem of whether the money brought in by full houses would be enough to pay the initial and running costs. With increased mechanisation of theatres, more spectacular effects were possible, but these effects cost money. With the new vogue for stage realism came increasing costs in props and scenery. And while making leading actresses fashion plates helped pack the theatres, it also added a heavy burden to costume costs. Meanwhile, salaries, both of actors and stage-hands climbed as the theatre became a more respectable profession, and its various branches became unionised.

The sophistication of productions brought about a sophistication of financial techniques in running theatres. The aim of the producer was a long run and in order to make the long run pay, he had to be exceedingly careful in how he managed his financial assets. The Edwardian years were also the years in which businessmen not previously connected with the

theatre realised that the theatre could be a profitable investment, both in terms of building and production. With their additional money available, there was a greater chance for more spectacular profits, but also the prospect of more spectacular failures. Even if a producer was artistically and intellectually motivated, once he accepted money from non-theatrical business sources he became responsible to his investors, and he had to gear his efforts primarily towards making a profit for them.

The gamble for profits caused many changes in how producers handled money. For example, many theatres employed accountants to keep track of the finances and to show producers how they might better handle their investments. The publication of volume five of The Accountant's Library, Theatre Accounts by W.H. Chantrey shows in 1902 there was a need for such a volume. Chantrey gives his reasons why theatres should employ professional accountants:

A/ X
The erection of new Theatres in London, its suburbs and the provinces; the enormous amount of money expended on the lavish decorations and costly productions; the talented artists, and the correspondingly large salary lists, are all accompanied by a keenness of competition in the theatrical world that would scarcely have been dreamed of a short time ago...

One of the results has been the investment in theatrical ventures of "foreign" capital or, more correctly speaking, "city" capital under the protecting wings of the Companies Acts and limited liability.

Which of these facts has been most prominent in the introduction of accountancy to the theatrical profession it is difficult to say, but certain it is that now most of the more important Theatres have their books and accounts regularly kept under the supervision of Professional Accountants, and it will be generally conceded that managers have not been slow to appreciate the advantages which accrue from expert advice in matters of bookkeeping.¹

As can be seen from this quotation, the successful protection of invested capital from increased competition was one of the keys to success. Competition came from many sources. The increased number of theatres and the growing number of fashionable music halls were all rivals for the same middle class audience. The birth and growth of the cinema became another threat to anxious producers. The reaction of the producer to such competition was most often the production of even more sensational and expensive plays. The result of this move was seen by

¹Chantrey, W.H. The Accountant's Library, V.5, Theatre Accounts (1902), Introduction.

some critics as detrimental to the production of many worthwhile plays. One solution offered to the problem of increased competition was the lowering of seat prices to attract a larger audience.

Many a charming play is refused—unless it happens to be a commission given to a well-known author — because under the existing conditions of things a manager does not see that it would make a sensation and establish a run out of the ordinary. He must produce something phenomenal or else he cannot command the support of the public. He refuses to realise that the theatre has formidable rivals, nowadays, and which he can rival, year in and year out, by giving a good entertainment at a moderate price.²

But the possibility of tremendous profits proved too enticing to most producers and they continued to gamble huge amounts of money on spectacular productions.

There were many factors which went into making a play a West End success. The first and most important factor was public appeal. But almost as important was the capital means to mount the production and to ensure that it continued to pay. An excerpt from a short piece in the 1910 volume of Play Pictorial shows how these two factors had to interact.

If a piece is not a colossal success at the outset it seems to make no appeal to our playgoers. There is no happy mean. Short runs, however, are to a certain extent due to the enormous expenses which present-day managements have to incur. Rent, rates and taxes, scenery, mounting and salaries are far in excess of what they were a score of years ago.

Nowadays a manager cannot afford to run a play at a leading West End theatre unless he is playing to something like £800 per week, and in the case of elaborate musical comedies, and magnificent productions such as we get at His Majesty's Theatre the sum is much larger. In some respects this is the fault of managers themselves, as they are most to blame for their expensive productions.³

It can be seen from this excerpt that having the capital to mount a production was not enough. The producer had also to have enough money to either buy, lease or rent a theatre. This was the advantage of the actor-manager owning his own theatre. In this way he was able to avoid paying the very high theatre rents of the period. These high rents

²Findon, B.W. "Fair Play and Fair Trade", in The Play Pictorial (1907), v. 10 no. 59.

³The Play Pictorial (1910), v. 16 no. 96.

were partially the result of theatres being sub-let more than once, the actual producer being several rentees away from the owner. This system of multiple sub-letting was another form of theatre investment, but by creating falsely inflated rents it also jacked up the cost of the actual production.

Another factor which limited the amount of money which could profitably be spent on a production was the amount of money a theatre was capable of bringing in each night. A careful producer would want his expenditure to be paid back within a reasonable period of time. Therefore a calculation of the money a theatre was capable of bringing in each night was another guideline as to how much money could reasonably be spent on a production. *Where?* Table I ^{p. 27} gives the £ takings when full of the major theatres of London at the end of 1910. These prices are for seats only and do not include additional takings from standing patrons.

From the information deduced about the kind of productions at each theatre during this time, it can be seen that those theatres with the greatest values when full were those theatres most famous for their elaborate productions. The Drury Lane melodramas were mechanically complex and required a great deal of money for their spectacular scenic detail. Such expenditure could only be undertaken with the hope of not only recouping the initial investment, but also going on to show a great profit. With a possible nightly taking of £781, the Drury Lane theatre had a greater chance of being financially successful in a short period, than if it had a lower value. This was also the case of His Majesty's Theatre which could bring in £406 each night. A capacity audience was very much needed to pay for the realistic settings and numerous scene changes in most of Sir Herbert Tree's productions. Other theatres like the Gaiety, the Adelphi and Daly's had slightly lower values. These theatres also mounted expensive, elaborate productions, but counted on extremely long runs to recoup expenditures and to show a profit.

Table I also shows the approximate seating capacity of each theatre. By comparing the seating capacities with the values when full, it is possible to see the difference in prices between the West End and suburban theatres. Because suburban audiences would not pay high prices, suburban theatres often were only able to reproduce tried West End successes with cheap hired sets or touring companies. Although occasionally some of these suburban theatres were used for experimental purposes, most of them were closed for a good part of the year because of the difficulty of finding productions which would make a profit. For the West End theatres,

the price of seats was approximately the same in most of the theatres. The major exception to this was the Lyceum theatre, which had a policy of low prices. In general, seat prices before the war were stalls - 10s 6d, dress circle - 7s 6d, upper circle - 4s, pit 2s 6d, and gallery - 1s with private boxes ranging from 1 gn to 4 gns.

To determine what percentage of attendance would ensure a profit at each theatre is very difficult. It is dependant on the cost of each production, the time of the production, how the theatre was managed, etc. Some historians feel that in the 1890's, a house needed to be only half full to pay ~~its~~ way until a more successful play could be produced.⁵ By 1908, the figures had changed, but only slightly. Alfred Sutro, the playwright, learned theatre economics from the production of his plays. In an article in The Era, he gave what he felt were the financial mechanics of theatre production in 1908, so far as the author was concerned.

From that callous and entirely unemotional machine (i.e. the box office) he learns that the expense of running a theatre amounts to £800 or £900 a week, and that taking into account the sum spent on production, the receipts must average £1,100 or £1,200 a week as a minimum for his play to enjoy a run. This means that 6,000 people must elect every week to go to his play.⁶

If the figure of £1,200 is taken as the minimum receipts a play needed to survive, and if the play was given 7 times a week (assuming an average of 6 evening performances and one matinee), the minimum receipts at each performance would be about £170. If the average £ value of the major West End houses when full is taken as £300, then the necessary attendance must be approximately 56%. This is of course assuming that all seats are the same price. In reality the difference in price between a stalls seat and a gallery seat was so great - 10s vs 1s - that one member of the stalls would equal 10 members of the gallery. Nevertheless the figure of 56% provides a workable mean which would vary according to the number of people who bought seats in each price category. If the play were not successful, probably a larger proportion of the less expensive seats would be bought and the percentage would be slightly higher. Using these calculations, only approximately 4,200 people would need to go to the particular theatre each week, but of course this figure would vary according to the theatre and the number

⁵Mason, A.E.W. Sir George Alexander & the St. James's Theatre (1935), p.2.

⁶The Era, March 21, 1908, p. 15.

of seats purchased at each price range. Nevertheless, despite the difficulty of obtaining precise figures and the large margin for error, it does seem reasonable to expect the producer to have his theatre at least 56% full in order to keep his play running.

How many performances constituted a long run in the Edwardian period is also a difficult question. In his book on theatre accounts, W.H. Chantrey felt that the most successful production might run for two years, but this was quite unusual and a good run for a play was closer to nine to twelve months.⁷ But even if a piece did have a long run, this did not necessarily ensure financial success. In some cases, the American or Australian rights were sold for extra money, but more often producers hoped to make up any financial deficit by touring the play in the provinces. Chantrey also saw the hinterland as untapped non-discriminating theatre audiences.

It is not unusual for a piece to be played in London without much financial success, while in the provinces large profits are earned, and for this reason a piece is often continued at a West End Theatre, even at a loss, in order that it may be well advertised and so enable provincial tours to be booked.⁸

An example of a successful tour of an unsuccessful play was that of Pinero's play, The Princess and the Butterfly, first produced by Sir George Alexander at the St. James's Theatre. During its run in London it lost £1798, but after a successful tour, Alexander was left with a profit of £794 after he had wiped out the London deficit.⁹

It is difficult to come to any conclusion about methods of production in London at this time, for although certain practices were common to most theatres, there was still a great deal of individualism. Fortunately there is enough evidence about several producers and theatres so that some comparison can be made of ways of financing a production. Two books about the famous actor-manager, A.E.W. Mason's Sir George Alexander and the St. James's Theatre and Barry Duncan's The St. James's Theatre Its Strange & Complete History 1835-1957, provide detailed financial information about the Edwardian period, and show the difficulties of running a theatre successfully.

⁷Chantrey, W.H. The Accountant's Library, Volume 5, Theatre Accounts (1902), p. 46.

⁸Ibid., p. 40.

⁹Mason, p. 128.

Alexander became the actor-manager at the St. James's theatre in 1891 after making some money at a season at the Avenue theatre, despite the unfortunate discovery that his business manager had absconded with £700. However, because one of his productions, Dr. Bill, made £3,669, Alexander made considerable profits.¹⁰ With the money he made from the Avenue venture, he leased the St. James's Theatre directly from its proprietors (thereby eliminating the costly middle-men), and proceeded to produce plays which were to put him in the forefront of popular Edwardian theatre.

From 1891 until 1914 Alexander produced 53 plays at the St. James's theatre. In spite of his great popularity with Edwardian audiences, 27 of these plays ended in a loss, showing how fickle (or indeed how astute!) Edwardian audiences were. Fortunately for Alexander the 26 successful plays returned six times as much as the failures, making him one of the financially successful producers. His seven most successful plays earned him a great deal: Pinero's His House In Order - £35,000, Fagen & Hickens's Bella Donna - £25,748, Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest - £21,942, Pinero's The Second Mrs. Tanqueray - £21,342, Gordon Lennox's The Thief - £19,460, Hope's The Prisoner of Zenda - £18,132, Wilde's Lady Windermere's Fan - £15,631. His total net earnings for the period, including his salary came to £269,400/12/6.¹¹

Alexander was lucky in the long run. An analysis of one of his productions, Anthony Hope's Rupert of Hentzau, shows how easily he might have ended in the red. Rupert of Hentzau ran for 51 performances in 1900 and this is how the costs broke down:

rent, rates, taxes, insurance	£1064
salaries - company	£2253/17/ 4
salaries - house staff	£ 447/ 7/ 9
wages (stage hands)	£ 618/ 1/ 7
wardrobe	£ 143/16/ 2
orchestra	£ 386/18/10
lighting	£ 127/16/11
advertising - bill posting	£ 818/10/ 2
printing and stationary	£ 32/16/ 3
author's fees	£ 429/16/ 5
auditor's fees	£ 38/10/ 9
miscellaneous	£ 77/14/ 1
	£6470/ 6/ 3

¹⁰Short, p. 28.

¹¹Mason, pp. 213-5.

The takings were £7701 (or £126/17/4 per night) which were increased to £7781/3/6 by renting the bars to an outside concern. Therefore there was a profit of £1310/17/3. However, the original cost of the production - sets, scenery and props etc. came to £1126/4/5. This gives an actual profit of £184/12/10. However, all this money had to be used on reopening the show after it had gone on tour, so it all cancelled out.¹² The cost breakdown of this play makes sense of Mason's statement that '...a hundred performances were enough as a rule to ensure a reasonable profit at the St. James's.'¹³ Rupert of Hentzau fell 49 performances short.

A further breakdown of Alexander's financial year in 1900 shows how skillfully he managed his funds, and still made a profit out of a year that had only one relative success (A Man of Forty).

<u>Prisoner of Zenda</u>	+ £ 23/ 5/8
<u>A Man of Forty</u>	+ £1593/ 4/2
<u>A Debt of Honour</u>	+ £ 174/ 9/4
	+£1790/10/2
<u>The Wisdom</u>	-£2069/10/5
	-£ 278/11/3

However Alexander drew a salary of £2558/6/8 which gave him a profit of +£2279/15/5.

	+ £2279/15/5
outlay on future plays	- £1249/10/5
	+ £1030/ 5/0
profits of tours of <u>Rupert of Hentzau</u> and <u>Prisoner of Zenda</u>	+ £ 473/12/5
profits from shares in other touring companies	+ £1506/19/3
hiring out scenery for <u>As You Like It</u> and selling dresses	+ £ 207/ 9/9
	+ £3217

From these figures it can be seen that Alexander made most of his profits from tours. He could not have managed to make a profit from his London productions alone.

Alexander wanted to produce plays which he thought had integrity. That is why he spent so much on options for plays he thought he would produce later. He encouraged British playwrights particularly and advanced

¹²Mason, p. 146.

¹³Ibid., p. 119.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 74.

money to playwrights he felt had potential. One of these playwrights was Oscar Wilde. This letter from Wilde to Alexander shows how Wilde depended on Alexander's generosity:

...Well, I think an amusing thing with lots of fun and wit might be made. If you think so too, and care to have the refusal of it - do let me know - and send me £150. If when the play is finished, you think it too slight - not serious enough - of course you can have the £150 back.¹⁵

As it turned out, it was a very profitably investment for Alexander, for the 'amusing thing' turned out to be The Importance of Being Earnest.

Alexander also had profitable dealing with A.W. Pinero. The 227 performances of Pinero's The Second Mrs. Tanqueray yielded a profit of £36,688:13s.¹⁶ And this was only for the London production, for Alexander also made a great deal from the tours. One of Pinero's more successful plays, His House In Order ran for 57 weeks, from January 31, 1906 until February 27, 1907 for a total of 727 performances. The total receipts for the production were £78,189/12s, leaving a net profit of £23,443.¹⁷

A.E.W. Mason gives several reasons for the high profits Alexander made at the St. James's. Firstly he held the lease directly from the owner, and avoided the expenses of subletting. Secondly his business manager was directly employed by Alexander and worked solely for Alexander and the St. James's theatre. Alexander owned, rather than rented the furniture, scenery, etc. for his productions. Furniture could therefore be re-used, avoiding additional expenses. Finally, Alexander took his plays off before they began to lose money, and replaced them with revivals instead, while he rehearsed the next production. This way he could be sure of a certain income from a tested piece as he mounted his next new production.

The running of Daly's theatre was a more expensive proposition. Because this theatre depended on stunning musical productions to attract its audience, its running expenses and initial investments were higher than those of the St. James's. George Edwardes was not an actor, but had the difficult job of running both Daly's and the Gaiety theatres. The expense involved in running such a complicated enterprise and the

¹⁵Mason, p. 74.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 63.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 180.

dependence on the provincial tour can be seen in this excerpt from W. Forbes-Winslow's book on Daly's theatre.

In George Edwardes's days, Daly's Theatre employed about 200 people other than the artists and chorus. At pre-war rates, this staff involved a weekly expenditure of £1,600, added to which had to be found, say, another £1,500 for artistes's salaries. No wonder Edwardes said he made all his money in the provinces.¹⁸

With such high overheads, Edwardes counted on profits from touring companies to keep him afloat. And he considered himself doing only 'moderately good business' when his company was playing to at least £2000 a week.¹⁹

Edwardes was a more extravagant manager than Alexander. It is said that he once paid £300 for a settee for the stage, and in 1908 his bill for costumes alone was £10,000.²⁰ Nevertheless these expenses must have been worthwhile for people kept returning to his most successful plays. A list of the estimated repeat visits of patrons to Daly's theatre is perhaps somewhat exaggerated, but nonetheless gives some idea of the importance of theatre-going in the life of the young man-about-town: The Merry Widow - 70, The Dollar Princess - 200, A Waltz Dream - 50, The Count of Luxembourg - 35, Gipsy Love - 100, and The Maid of the Mountains - 400.²¹

The Merry Widow was one of Edwardes's most successful productions. It ran for 778 performances in London from June 8, 1907 - July 31, 1909. It produced a craze for 'Merry Widow' hats and the waltz was the favourite of organ grinders and was played on every street corner. The rights to the London production were secured by "Pat" Malone, who was sent to Vienna (the birth-place of Lehar's famous operetta) on the behalf of George Edwardes. Edwardes, with Malone's help secured the piece for £1,000 for the Gaiety company. However the production was considered unsuitable for the Gaiety theatre (showing the importance producers placed in the image of their theatre) and was purchased by Daly's. Edwardes wanted the original widow, Mitzi Miller, to play the title role in London, but dismayed at her homeliness, he sent her back to Vienna. Miss Miller did not take the insult lightly - she sued and won damages.²²

¹⁸Forbes-Winslow, W. Daly's The Biography of a Theatre (1944), p. 34.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 46.

²⁰Ibid., p. 46.

²¹Ibid., p. 34.

²²Hibbert, H.G. A Playgoer's Memories (1920), pp. 184-5.

The part of the widow was played instead by the very attractive Lily Elsie. Edwardes continued to invite financial trouble by hiring two adaptors of the original German libretto. Displeased with the work of the first adaptor, he hired Captain Basil Hood to do the second translation. The first man took the case to court and as a result both authors had to be paid.²³ Fortunately, all these additional expenses were a drop in the bucket when The Merry Widow became a tremendous success. It was seen by 1,167,000 people and King Edward VII liked it so much that he saw it four times. All in all it brought in over £1,000,000.²⁴

Among Edwardes's other successes at Daly's theatre was A Country Girl which opened in 1902 and ran for 720 performances. The first year Edwardes grossed £100,000 on this production, and the second year £70,000. These figures do not indicate the cost of the production, nor the running expenses which took a great deal out of the gross amount, but show how much money Daly's was able to take in from a successful show. Profits did outrun expenses for Edwardes made £100,000 from the hit.²⁵

Edwardes was equally successful at the Gaiety theatre. The new Gaiety theatre opened in 1905 with a production of the musical comedy The Orchid. The production at the new theatre took in over £80,000 in the first eight months and the first year's profit was £13,811.²⁶ Dividends paid by the Gaiety Theatre Company from 1902-1906 show the success of Gaiety style productions. The absence of dividends in 1907 was seen by contemporary sources as part of a general financial set-back in the theatre during that year.

1902	20
1903	20
1904	20
1905	15
1906	15
1907	nil
1908	15% average 1904-8: 13 ²⁷

Although the Gaiety theatre paid its artists at reasonable rates, wages were not the major production expense. When Ellaline Terriss

²³Hibbert, pp. 186-7.

²⁴Forbes-Winslow, p. 78.

²⁵Ibid., p. 34.

²⁶Ibid., p. 128.

²⁷Green Room Book (1907), p. 482.

was engaged by the Gaiety theatre to become one of their leading ladies, they offered her a contract for three years with a salary of £25, rising to £30 and then £35 per week. This was by no means the highest salary offered an artiste, but higher than the £11 a week she had been receiving at the Court theatre before she signed her Gaiety contract.²⁸

Ellaline Terriss's husband, Seymour Hicks was an actor-manager. When he went into production with Charles Frohman at the Vaudeville theatre, they made an agreement to draw £75 joint salary per week plus one-third of the profits. Among the productions produced by Frohman and Hicks were Quality Street and Bluebell in Fairyland. Hicks made enough money to build the Hicks theatre which was later renamed the Globe. Confident from these triumphs Hicks over-extended himself and lost £13,000 on a trite musical comedy, The Dashing Little Duke. By the middle of 1914 Hicks was facing a loss of £47,000 with an additional £14,000 in liabilities. In order to avoid a bankruptcy, his wife played sketches in music halls for handsome fees, and Hicks himself went on tour. Fortunately between them they were able to recover their losses, although it took them six years.²⁹ There was no security in past successes with fickle theatre audiences.

Robert Courtneidge was a producer who had one spectacular hit during the period. This was The Arcadians, which opened at the Shaftesbury theatre in 1909. The theatre historian A.E. Wilson gives details about the investments and salaries in the production.

The Arcadians ran for two and a half years and, as it cost Courtneidge only £8,000 to put on it must have shown a tidy profit. Artistes's salaries in those Arcadian days were quite modest. According to that knowing theatrical writer H.G. Hibbert, the principal salaries were: Dan Rolyar, £50 a week, Phyllis Dare £45, Alfred Lester £35, Florence Smithson £30, Harry Welchman £10 and Nelson Keys, £5. They were then, of course, comparatively unknown in the West End.³⁰

Members of the chorus received the much less princely salaries of £2 a week.³¹ Courtneidge's next production, The Mousme was not so lucky. It lost him £20,000.³²

²⁸Hicks, Seymour Me & My Missus 50 Years on the Stage (1939), p. 133.

²⁹Short, pp. 157-161.

³⁰Wilson, A.E. Edwardian Theatre (1951), p. 232.

³¹Short, p. 166.

³²Ibid., p. 167

Although Chu Chin Chow was produced on August 31, 1916, its production costs were similar to those for the musical comedies before the war.

Scenery, wages, materials and paintings	£1438/13/6
Properties-wages, materials and purchases	334/13/5
Costumes "	1858/ 1/9
Electrics, wages and materials	50/ 6/4
Rehearsals-artist's salaries	116/ 9/6
Rehearsals, limelight and lighting	46/13/6
Rehearsals, orchestra	235/16/9

The whole production cost more than £5,000, and when it opened, each performance involved an outlay of £200. In the first three years Chu Chin Chow brought in over £150,000, returns it would have been difficult to reap elsewhere.³³

The question of where the money come from for the production of plays is a difficult one to answer. In the case of companies, like the Gaiety Theatre Co., or Theatre Royal Drury Lane Co. Ltd., money was raised through the sale of shares, and with the profits from previous successful productions. Sometimes a private company was formed with the sole purpose of producing one particular play. The Stage in 1908, cites one such production.

Among private companies recently registered is "Eternal Question Limited", with a capital of £3,000 in £1 shares, to carry on the business of producers of stage plays, etc. The Eternal Question is down for production at the Garrick on Aug 27 with the cast as given here last week.³⁴

Many productions were financed by the producers themselves. One such successful partnership was the Melville brothers who wrote and produced both melodrama and pantomime at the Lyceum theatre.

The pantomime rarely made an annual profit of less than £10,000, and often the figure was nearer £20,000 and £25,000. Here it should be said that the Melvilles never had a financial backer. They provided the capital for all their productions.³⁵

Sometimes the money came from interests not directly connected with the theatre. If the 'city man' was lucky he could make a fortune as

³³Hibbert, p. 152.

³⁴The Stage, August 18, 1910, p. 14.

³⁵Wilson, A.E. The Lyceum (1952), p. 163.

did a Mr. Hartmont, a businessman who helped finance the 1892 production of Brandon Thomas's Charley's Aunt at the Royalty Theatre. W.S. Penely was the producer.

Penley was financed by Hartmont a well-known city man who agreed to put up £1000. Hartmont was bluffing. Due to losses in the city he only produced £650 in small amounts obtained from a money-lender. One wished out but stuck to his investment and made upwards of £60,000.³⁶

Not all such stories were success stories. Mr. Oswald Stoll, who managed and opened the Coliseum from 1904, was forced to close the theatre due to lack of money. This excerpt from The Green Room Book of 1907 makes it clear this was not due to poor management, but because the actual building costs exceeded the estimates and ate up the running capital.

Mr. Oswald Stoll, whose shrewdness and ability have been so well proved, has stated that the reason of the financial difficulties which overtook this enterprise was not bad management or a slump in music-hall enterprise, but that the Coliseum was a couple of years in advance of its time. Admitting this was the case, it must also be remembered that the company was handicapped from the beginning, as the cost of building exceeded the estimate by no less a sum than £80,000. This practically ran away with the working capital of the company, which led to a hand-to-mouth existence almost from the outset.³⁷

Sir Herbert Tree financed his productions from the profits of past productions. When he started producing and he needed more funds than he had at hand, he borrowed money from friends. His costs were particularly high because he insisted on the highest quality sets and costumes. Alma Tadema was commissioned to design sets for one production and in this excerpt from The Tatler concerning costume costs in Tree's production of Henry VIII at His Majesty's, one can see how Tree's insistence on naturalism ran up the bills.

³⁶Hibbert, pp. 97-8.

³⁷The Green Room Book (1907), p. 480.

³⁸The Tatler, no. 411, September 14, 1894, p. 19.
³⁹The Era, January 11, 1894, p. 16.

The magnificent colourings and the beautiful materials of the costumes in evidence in Henry VIII, now being played at His Majesty's Theatre, remind one of the Orient. The fashions of the sixteenth century are faithfully presented, the Persian note being manifested on the embroideries. Marvellous indeed was Cardinal Wolsey's (Sir Herbert Tree) Cardinal's robe; the silk was specially woven and cost £1 a yard. There is 16 yd. double width in the silk cappa magna or long train alone and 40 yd. in the entire robe. The material for Henry VIII's (Mr. Bourchier) shot silk costume was also specially woven and cost £2 a yard, while for the brocade on the robe in the first act 30s. a yard was paid.³⁸

Repertory and experimental theatres did not have the necessary funds to produce such elaborate productions. They were further limited by constant changes of programme and the difficulty of storing elaborate sets, scenery and costumes. Some men involved in experimental theatre felt that the spectacular productions of the West End were unnecessary and unfaithful to the real purpose of theatre. One was the critic J.T. Grein who devised a scheme of production to cut costs to a minimum. Impressed by the economies practised by the German theatre in London, he sought to emulate them in his outlines. From the figures below one can see that one saving in Grein's scheme was to give actors very small salaries. However they were compensated by having a share in the annual profits. Below is the estimated cost for one production in Grein's Repertory Theatre.

Rent (less hire bars)	£120
Salaries-artistes	£150
Orchestra (not absolutely necessary)	£ 20
Front of House	£ 28
Stage and stage manager	£ 40
Supers and small parts	£ 5
Advertising	£ 60
Printing	£ 15
Hire of Costumes	£ 30
Lighting	£ 15
Licence of Plays	£ 2
Author's fees	£ 40
Insurance	£ 2
Sundry extras in front and on stage	£ 10
Warehousing	£ 1
Washing and cleaning	£ 5
Hire of Furniture	£ 10
General and petty expense	£ 10
Production exclusive of scenery	£ 25
Scenery	£ 12
	£600 ³⁹

³⁸The Tatler, no. 481, September 14, 1910, p. iv.

³⁹The Era, January 21, 1905, p. 19.

This is certainly a far cry from the £5,000 spent on Chu Chin Chow, but a practical and economical costing for men dedicated to an artistic and intellectual theatre. Actually it was a great deal more than was allowed on any single production at the Royal Court theatre during the Vedrenne-Barker season, from 1904-1907.

The plan of manager J.E. Vedrenne and producer Harley Granville Barker was to present in repertory, new plays by unknown English playwrights and by well-known European playwrights whose plays had not been seen before in England. Although the Court experiment was not subsidised it was hoped that even if the enterprise did not make a profit it would at least come out even. To this end a rule was adopted that a limit of £200 would be allocated to each production.⁴⁰ This theoretical limit was not always kept in practice. Other financial stipulations were included in the agreement signed by Granville Barker as producer and J.E. Vedrenne as business manager.

It was to last for three years, until 1 May 1908, subject after that date to six months notice by either partner. The capital was to consist of "such sums of money as shall be required" for the carrying on the business, and to be contributed by each partner in equal shares, but no sum was mentioned. The partners were to share equally in the profits or losses, and were entitled to draw £20 a week in anticipation of profits. Vedrenne was to be responsible for the business management and Barker for the artistic management, fees were to be paid in respect of any interest in plays, and for acting in any play.⁴¹

Financing plays at the Court was therefore often a personal business. Funds might be secured from wealthy playwrights who were being produced at the Court, or from wealthy friends of the producers. The financing of the Housman-Barker play, Prunella, shows how casual many of the financial arrangements were. This first letter from Granville Barker to Gilbert Murray, the translator and Greek scholar who also had plays produced at the Court, shows Barker asking for funds in anticipation of a high return from the play.

⁴⁰Purdom, C.B. Granville Barker (1955), p. 36.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 38.

Do you still care to find me £200 for the production of the Housman-Barker play at the Court. It is to be done about Dec 22 for 3 weeks certain - 2 performances a day. Its gross cost will be I think £1,400-£1,500, and £1,000 capital is being found. Leigh £600 - Vedrenne £200, and myself £200. A quarter of this is to be called up at once (next week) to commission the music and pay an advance on the play and I suppose partly book the theatre with.⁴²

Granville Barker was over-optimistic, for the play was not a success. Business was slow initially, and the play never found the public support to make up its initial investment. On December 29, 1904, Barker wrote another letter to Murray telling him of the financial failure of Prunella.

And while we're on this unpleasant subject - prepare for the worst over Prunella - the business is awful - so bad that we've seriously discussed to-day whether not to close on Saturday and cut all the loss we could. But it will cost so little more to keep open another week that we shall do that - I cannot understand it - the people who come seem most enthusiastic - yet so few of them come. One can only conclude that it's a real failure. I saw the first part of Act I from the front this afternoon, and it is quite good - I enjoyed it. We've done our best and there it is. Of course your loss is at worst limited to £200 - but oh my dear Murray £200! I shall never forgive myself - I thought that £50 was the most you might drop.⁴³

Fortunately, other plays were more successful. However, the final financial statement of the Court experiment showed that in the Edwardian period, experimental repertory theatre, even of high artistic quality, would not pay. In most cases it still does not, but without the help of government subsidies, one had to be especially dedicated to produce plays that had a good chance of losing money. The financial partnership of Vedrenne and Barker continued until March 1911, although the Court season was their only large venture. In the end they lost a great deal of money on their experiments. Though there was cash in the bank totalling £484 3s 10, George Bernard Shaw had advanced the enterprise at least £5,250, so he was given the outstanding cash, along with all the other assets, which were minimal.⁴⁴ The Court season gave many excellent plays to the London theatre public, but only at the personal expense of many private individuals.

⁴²Purdom, p. 27.

⁴³Ibid., p. 31.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 87.

The cost of productions, experimental and commercial alike, were very high during the Edwardian period. Naturally in such a situation producers or actor-managers looked for any additional profits. One way a producer could make some extra money, was to hire out the theatre bars, cloakroom facilities and programme concessions to contractors. This way the producer was saved the expense of running such facilities as well as making a small profit from the rental. In the average West End theatre, the cost of renting such facilities was £40 per week. In a theatre presenting musical comedy, the cost was often more.⁴⁵

Advance booking of seats could assist a producer to calculate his future earnings in a production. Seats for future performances could be obtained from the box office, but many seats were bought from 'theatre libraries' or what we call now theatre agencies. According to W.H. Chantrey, Keith Prowse & Co., Mitchell, Ashton, Laeon & Ollier and Gastrell were the principal libraries⁴⁶ and theatre management and library cooperated in selling seats. First the library phoned the box office, asking which seats were left for any particular performance or series of performances, which they felt they could sell to their own patrons. Then the library asked the box office clerk to mark off certain seats which were sold to the library. Those 'library' seats were marked on the Advanced Booking box office sheet with a coloured pencil with the initials of the particular library. Before each performance the libraries would send to the theatres a list confirming the seats they had booked. The libraries would profit on these transactions because the management of the theatre often allowed a 5%-10% discount on library seats. Together with the booking fee the library charged its patrons, it could stay in business. Sometimes the library would make a 'deal' with a theatre and buy seats for several weeks in advance for an especially successful play and risk them remaining unsold.⁴⁷ This happened before the opening of The Count of Luxembourg at Daly's theatre. The libraries were so sure that the production was going to be successful, there was a great rivalry among them to see who could purchase the most seats from the

⁴⁵MacQueen-Pope, W. Carriages at Eleven; the story of the Edwardian theatre (1947), p. 26.

⁴⁶Chantrey, p. 8.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 7-8.

manager George Edwardes. These particular 'deals' were said to have made the libraries as much as £50,000.⁴⁸ On other less successful premonitions, the libraries lost money.

The libraries were an important factor in the selling of bookable seats. If the libraries bought a number of seats, the theatre was sure of a certain income, whether or not the seats were re-sold by the libraries thereafter. The libraries also helped advertise plays, thus selling more seats to the casual theatre-goer. But there were some seats in the theatre which were not bookable - the seats in the pit and the gallery. Chantrey explains the system in use in 1902 for selling these seats.

The most usual system in vogue now is that of the Accurate Checktaker Co., Lim. The "Accurate Checktaker" system consists of a machine that throws out checks, or passes, by turning a handle. The checks cannot be replaced on the machine, and are of such a size as to preclude their being taken back, or handled in any way by the money-taker. They are marked so as to distinguish the Pit from the Gallery, and also to avoid their being used for any night other than that for which they are issued. The number of checks thrown out is automatically recorded by the machine, from which the money taker makes his return.⁴⁹

The Upper Circle seats were not booked by libraries either. According to Chantrey they were generally sold after the opening of the house at a separate entrance.⁵⁰

Since the information available as to costs of productions is so limited, it is difficult to formulate any definite conclusions as to what was the usual cost of production, and how the money was spent on the various production aspects. What is clear however, is that a great deal of money was invested in spectacular productions in the hope of returning and making a profit on the original investment. Musical comedies and melodramas were known for their expensive productions, although Tree's dramatic productions at His Majesty's were equally elaborate. It is equally difficult to assess what percentage of productions actually made a profit for the investor. A play might be doing fairly good business, yet the operating costs could be eating up any profits for the investors. Nevertheless, productions that were successful could make tremendous

⁴⁸Forbes-Winslow, p. 33.

⁴⁹Chantrey, pp. 10-11.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 10.

profits for lucky investors. The cost of elaborate productions were high and they required more scenery, costumes, and sets than Victorian plays. The public was eager for more and more spectacular productions and these effects had to be paid for. Many producers had integrity when it came to producing, but in order to succeed financially, they had to give the public what it wanted. In an age where financial success was one of the major factors in determining future productions, the maxim of actor and producer Henry Irving seems to have been taken too much to heart -

"The drama must succeed as a business, if it is not to fail as an art."⁵¹

Alexandra	1770	108
Apollo	984	364
Britannia	1218	-
Brixton	1186	56
Comedy	854	273
Criterion	638	217
Dalston	1512	-
Daly's	1223	311
Duke of York's	1119	381
Elephant & Castle	1542	25
Society	1267	325
Garrick	1241	503
Globe	1009	274
Haymarket	1085	393
His Majesty's	1720	406
Kennington	1842	112
Kingsway	764	159
Lyceum	3010	362
Lyric	1170	294
Marlborough	1830	180
New	1242	392
Pavilion	1316	87
Playhouse	650	211
Prince of Wales	985	277
Queen's	1161	303
Regent	434	-
Royalty	657	137
St. James's	1203	301
Savoy	986	361
Scala	1148	-
Shaftesbury	1106	296
Strand	1193	325
Terry's	888	211
Variety	839	-
Vandeville	741	193
West London	872	73 (2x slightly)
Wyndham's	846 (excluding boxes)	263
(under the jurisdiction of the London County Council)		
Broadway	1372	107
Cornet	1143	113
Court	642	177
Grand	980	-
Greenwich	730	-
King's	1786	178

Table I. Principal London Theatres, Approximate Seating Capacity and
£ Value When Full

<u>Theatre</u>	<u>Approximate Seating</u>	<u>£ Value When Full</u>
(patent theatres)		
Covent Garden	1952	1416
Drury Lane	2516	781
(under the jurisdiction of the Lord Chamberlain)		
Adelphi	1303	314
Aldwych	1178	314
Alexandra	1710	126
Apollo	954	264
Britannia	1818	-
Brixton	1125	59
Comedy	854	273
Criterion	685	217
Dalston	1518	84
Daly's	1223	311
Duke of York's	1119	281
Elephant & Castle	1549	95
Gaiety	1267	326
Garrick	1241	309
Globe	1009	274
Haymarket	1085	263
His Majesty's	1720	406
Kennington	1347	118
Kingsway	564	159
Lyceum	3016	262
Lyric	1170	294
Marlborough	1886	189
New	1242	302
Pavilion	1316	87
Playhouse	650	211
Prince of Wales	985	277
Queen's	1161	302
Regent	434	-
Royalty	657	137
St. James's	1208	301
Savoy	986	261
Scala	1148	-
Shaftesbury	1196	296
Strand	1193	325
Terry's	888	211
Variety	830	-
Vaudeville	741	198
West London	872	73 (2x nightly)
Wyndham's	846 (excluding boxes)	263
(under the jurisdiction of the London County Council)		
Broadway	1372	107
Coronet	1143	115
Court	642	177
Grand	980	-
Greenwich	730	-
King's	1786	178

Table I cont'd

<u>Theatre</u>	<u>Approximate Seating</u>	<u>£ Value When Full</u>
Lyric Opera House	915	47
Shakespeare	1205	96
Royal Kilburn	514	-
Royal Woolwich	1450	-

(from Stage Year Book 1911, pp.331-4. 'A. "London Statistics" issued at the end of 1910 by Local Government and the Statistical Department of the London County Council.')

to commercial managers and industrial managers who were not concerned with quality plays which contributed to their professional careers. However, as theatre began to flourish, artists produced more adventurous and original plays. In 1870, efforts which they felt had been made by the theatre retreated into the province and into the hands of the amateur societies which emerged in the 1870s. In London, with a few notable exceptions, such as the Lyric Opera House, the pound as the arbiter of dramatic taste.

Although the literary theatre rose to prominence in the period saw a rise in the status of the playwright, the heroic verse plays or popular melodrama. The playwright had been considered merely a necessary appendage to the actor and his performance. He was poorly paid if at all and until the first dramatic Copyright Act was passed in 1833, it did not give the playwright any legal protection. Consequently, abuses were frequent. In 1833, the playwright rarely had a hand in the interpretation of his play and in some cases he was considered fortunate if his name appeared on the playbill.

In the 1860's, the advent of Tom Robertson set the way for serious dramas such as East (1863) and John Bull (1864) and the serious drama and drama after a long barren period to which the theatre had returned. This higher regard for drama was perhaps the result of the efforts of Robertson's parallel efforts as stage manager of the Lyric Opera House productions of his own plays.

Other playwrights followed the lead of Robertson and the playwright's theatre soon separated itself from the commercial theatre of the 1860's ground out by such authors who rarely reaped the rewards of their industry. By the 1890's the London theatre was based in the hands of the playwrights like Pinero and D.A. Jones were able to make their reputations as artists

Chapter Four

The Plays

The Edwardian period (1890-1914) marks both a beginning and a temporary end of the commercial theatre's interest in progressive and experimental theatre. The dramatic renaissance of the 1890's appealed to commercial managers and furnished numerous actors and actor-managers with quality plays which contributed to their successful theatrical careers. However, as theatre became big business, theatre producers became less adventurous and confined their choice of plays to mediocre efforts which they felt had popular appeal. Much progressive and literary theatre retreated into the provinces and into the fold of the numerous amateur societies which emerged at the time. Commercial theatre, with a few notable exceptions, sank into dramatic doldrums, with the mighty pound as the arbiter of dramatic taste.

Although the literary theatre remained commercially nonviable the period saw a rise in the status of the playwright, whether he wrote heroic verse plays or popular melodramas. The Victorian playwright had been considered merely a necessary appendage to the star player and his performance. He was poorly paid if at all and although the first Dramatic Copyright Act was passed in 1833, it did not give the playwright complete protection. Consequently, abuses were frequent. Needless to say, the playwright rarely had a hand in the interpretation of his play and in some cases he was considered fortunate if his name appeared on the playbill.

In the 1860's, the advent of Tom Robertson and his cup and saucer dramas such as Caste (1863) and School (1869) had reunited literature and drama after a long barren period in which the two had drifted apart. This higher regard for drama can perhaps be further demonstrated by Robertson's parallel efforts as stage manager to ensure adequate productions of his own plays.

Other playwrights followed the lead of Robertson and the playwrights' theatre soon separated itself from the multitudinous mass of melodramas ground out by hack authors who rarely reaped the success of their labours. By the 1890's the London theatre was tamed to the extent that playwrights like Pinero and H.A. Jones were able to make their reputations on plays

which elevated social concern over melodramatic spectacle. In musical theatre, the success of the early musical comedies showed the importance of the "team" comprised of writer, lyricist and composer.

The playwright helped and was himself aided by the growing respectability of the theatre. As the plays produced in the London theatre became of higher quality, the middle class ceased to view the theatre as the centre of irreligious vice that made their mid-Victorian ancestors frequently forgo dramatic entertainment for the safer, if less exciting pleasures of the drawing-room musicale; and was lured back into the theatre (although it must be noted that other changes including better transport and increased leisure time helped to renew middle class interest in theatre). With a growing market for their wares, producers were able to keep plays running for longer periods. Theatre production acquired a measure of stability which helped the playwright gain a reputation for quality plays. A better educated audience had some discrimination when going to the theatre and producers soon learned to gear their productions to the desires of their audience. Audiences learned discrimination between playwrights, and the popular playwrights quickly discovered what kind of play was going to appeal to their audiences.

It was this kind of theatrical atmosphere which helped the production of plays like Pinero's The Second Mrs. Tanqueray (1893) and Jones's Mrs. Dane's Defence (1900). These plays exposed social hypocrisy and dealt 'theatrically' with new ideas concerning morality and social reform. Neither Pinero nor Jones sprang fully armed from the forehead of Thespis to initiate the writing of Edwardian 'problem plays'. Both served a long apprenticeship in the theatre before writing their famous works. After a few years as an actor, Pinero began his playwriting career with farces in 1877, but it was not until 1885 that he had a major success with his play The Magistrate. He quickly followed The Magistrate with a succession of popular farces and it was 1889 before he wrote a straight dramatic play in Sweet Lavender. The Second Mrs. Tanqueray, the play which solidified his position as a social dramatist followed four years later in 1893. It took him sixteen years of playwriting to become a major serious dramatist. Jones spent ten years as a commercial traveller before writing his first play, It's Only Round the Corner in 1878. Pinero made his reputation with farces, and Jones started as a writer of melodrama. His first success was The Silver King (1882) which was produced by Wilson Barrett. One of Jones's first major successes as a serious dramatist was The Dancing Girl (1891) which ran for 310 performances but it was 1897 before he emerged

as a serious dramatist with his play The Liars and 1900 when his best known work Mrs. Dane's Defence fulfilled his full dramatic potential.

These two men are examples of playwrights able to make a living writing for the theatre. Most playwrights were not so lucky. Although curtain raisers provided the opportunity for dramatists to present one-act plays, producers and actor-managers were soon content to let the same successful playwrights provide them with dramatic productions. Aspiring playwrights found it increasingly difficult to get their plays read by producers and as a result turned to the amateur and semi-professional groups who were willing to produce their plays. Even fairly successful playwrights were not free from worry. Although the copyright laws had been amended, in 1907 the playwrights still felt threatened by copyright abuses and formed a Copyright Play Protection Association to look after their interests, especially in the provinces where plagiarism was common. One such case was *Thomas v. Bell* heard on April 30, 1907 concerning the accusation by Brandon Thomas that his play, Charley's Aunt was being performed by the defendant in the provinces without his permission. Taking advantage of an earlier copyright law which gave the author the right to recover 40s. in respect of each unauthorised performance of the play, Thomas asked for and received £60 in damages for the 30 illegal performances of the play.¹

With the increase of foreign plays produced in England and of English drama produced elsewhere, playwrights had to be extra vigilant to make sure they were getting royalties from other countries. There were international copyright agreements which recognised English laws and agreed that a play acquired copyright when it was first performed in England. Unfortunately the Americans did not subscribe to these agreements and a play had actually to be performed in America in order to acquire copyright there. This meant that British plays were frequently 'stolen' and that the playwright did not share in profits from American productions. In 1909 this situation was remedied with the passage of an American copyright bill which conformed more closely to European laws. Further steps to

¹Carson, Lionel ed., Stage Year Book (1908), p. 188. Other cases involving infringement of copyright during this period include *Curzon v. Carlile* (July 27, 1910-involving an injunction against a sketch based on a play) and *Jones v. Saphrini and Bell* (June 20, 1908-involving illegal performances of Henry Arthur Jones's play, The Silver King).

help the position of the playwright were undertaken in 1911 with the passage of a new Copyright Act. This Act stated that plays did not actually have to be produced to acquire "stage-right". This protected the rights of the published or manuscript playwright whose play had not been produced.

The playwright was also helped by the re-emergence of literary dramatic criticism and by the publication of theatre books which explored the position, role and future of theatre during the period. Critics were impressed by some of the dramatic works produced in the 1890's and their own works created interest in what they considered the 'new' or 'modern' theatre. This helped to create a climate of opinion in the new century which encouraged a playwright's theatre. The playwright, of whatever kind, was now considered to have a profession and gained respect.

Unfortunately, the playwrights and writers who hoped and worked for the emergence of a truly modern and revitalised theatre, worked alongside playwrights and writers who catered for a more and more frivolously entertainment-oriented audience. The hopeful start of the 1890's was eroded by playwrights who put commercial considerations before artistic merit.

The conflict of forces in Edwardian theatre is symptomatic of the conflict of forces in everyday Edwardian life. The vitality and energy of the theatre echoes a period of intense scientific, economic and social change. A new freedom which included suffragettes, divorce reform, trade unionism and a change of life style battled against Victorian mores. New ideas about the nature of society and man's role in the 'new' society were making headway in the middle classes. With a new literate class of playwright, the theatre was able to voice these new ideas and in some cases helped spread them among audiences who knew no other disseminator of social theory.

While many playwrights used new ideas about social change in their plays, other playwrights used the theatre as a retreat for audiences who did not wish to confront the turbulence of their society. With the advent of new mechanical stage devices, cleverly constructed scenery and fashion plate actresses, the theatre became the means of escaping the problems of a society in flux. In this kind of theatre, the real social concerns of literary playwrights were paralleled by popular plays which titillated the audiences without deeply touching the problems which pervaded society.

The lessening of the Puritan influence on the theatre gave aspiring playwrights greater scope on subject and plot development. While literary playwrights used this growing freedom to explore new dramatic possibilities, many playwrights saw the removal of moral censorship as an excuse to play upon their audiences's repressed desire to see enacted in the theatre the very sins and vices denounced so vehemently in church and chapel. The titillating quality of much second-rate Edwardian theatre reflects the church's defeat at the turn of the century as the great arbiter of moral behaviour.

The burst of creative theatrical activity in the 1890's gave many reason to believe that a genuine English theatrical renaissance was at hand. The influence of Ibsen and other foreign playwrights was giving English dramatists ideas about the construction of plays which dealt with the inter-relationship of people in a tight, closed society. In his plays Ibsen challenged the Norwegian status quo - Nora in A Doll's House is not content to remain the plaything of her husband and so she leaves him - and English writers began to challenge the status quo in their own society. Much too often playwrights unconsciously parodied Ibsen and wrote plays which belied their artistic intent. One such play was H.A. Jones's adaptation of A Doll's House called inappropriately enough Breaking A Butterfly.

Some plays tried earnestly to say in English terms what Ibsen said in Norwegian. Pinero wrote this kind of play. In plays like The Second Mrs. Tanqueray and Iris (1901), he did not challenge the rules of society, but tried to show that hypocrisies were inherent in a society which tolerated no deviations from the norm. In The Second Mrs. Tanqueray, Paula, Tanqueray's second wife, is condemned by her demi-monde past in spite of her resolution to adopt middle class values. Middle class society ignores Paula and her attempt to help Ellean, Tanqueray's daughter out of a difficult love affair fails. Paula is alone - condemned as the past mistress of Ellean's lover and she commits suicide. Paula is punished for her past sins according to the rules of society, but Pinero clearly puts some of the blame on those members of society who would not forget Paula's past. Iris in Iris is condemned for her greed, and her inability to wait for her lover to make his fortune, but just the same we pity her for falling into the clutches of the evil Malanado. Pinero is able to strip enough of the stereotype from the character so that the audience can feel sympathy for the inadequacies of Iris and the situation in which she finds herself.

H.A. Jones was very much in sympathy with the ideas of Pinero. In his own plays such as The Liars (1897) he was concerned with the effect of hypocrisy on society. Jones did more than write plays about a society which needed reform. He concerned himself with the reform and future of the theatre itself and wrote books and articles on this subject. In one of his books on theatre, The Renaissance of the English Drama (a title revealing in itself) he spoke of the currents in modern drama.

As in philosophy the pendulum, which after the disturbances caused by the discovery of the law of evolution, swung for more than a generation towards materialism and towards a materialistic interpretation of life, is returning now towards a spiritualism and towards a spiritualistic interpretation of life, so the stage, which has falteringly and fitfully begun to follow the main forces and currents of national thought - the stage is, I think, as I write - returning towards a representation of the more imaginative and mysterious aspects of human life. And realism is quite powerless to deal with these.²

To Jones, a theatrical renaissance meant new plays exploring the mysteries of human relationships.

There were, moreover, playwrights and people interested in the theatre who could not accept a wholesale denunciation of realism on the stage. They felt that the commercial stage was over-run by sickly melodramas and 'problem plays' which did not deal with the real problems of society. In order to present English and foreign experimental plays, play societies emerged dedicated to producing plays which had a true understanding of the mechanics and problems of society and which would show them realistically. Two such societies were J.T. Grein's Independent Theatre which opened with Ibsen's Ghosts in 1891 and which presented 26 plays in its 7 year life, and the Stage Society, which was inaugurated in 1899 with a presentation of Shaw's You Never Can Tell. These societies, which usually gave Sunday and weekday matinees, brought many foreign dramatists such as Ibsen, Gorky and Brieux to the attention of an interested audience, and cultivated English dramatists who wanted to write a socially-oriented drama. Thomas Dickinson, in his analysis of the dramatic movement of the nineties, refers to the efforts of these people in his book, The

²Jones, Henry Arthur, The Renaissance of the English Drama (1895), p. ix.

Contemporary Drama of England (1917).

The end of the century produced a new social program for the theatre. Now began public discussion of the obligation of the State to make the drama a fitting servant of the people, the obligation of the people to use the drama for their own upbuilding. Censorship, national theatre, social dramatic therapeutics were much written about. Criticism awoke to a new power. Newspapers opened their columns to the discussion of dramas. Plays were thinly disguised tracts. The drama was being evangelized. More than one writer promised that the theatre should usurp the place of the church.³

In general however, the new English school of social realism took its inspiration from abroad, and from those social problems which sprung from the middle class inability to come to terms with changing social relationships. The vivid realism of such playwrights as Gorki in whose plays the living conditions of the poor were portrayed realistically were both horrifying and uninteresting to audiences more concerned with improving their own social positions than with helping the mass of humanity to get their feet on the bottom rung of the economic ladder. The reports of such reformers as Booth and Rowntree provoked indignation, horror and general concern, but for the most part were not considered proper material for theatrical treatment.

The theatre of social realism was not the only dramatic movement to appear in the 1890's. Under the aegis of George Edwardes, musical comedy matured into a popular theatrical form. Producers discovered that a combination of pleasing plot and merry melodies could charm the weary businessman and man-about-town into returning innumerable times to see the latest star of the stage sing sweetly into the stalls. Early vintage musical comedy included The Belle of New York (1898) (what could be more charming than a Salvation Army lass playing the 'flirt'?) and The Geisha (1896), which played upon the period's fascination with things oriental. Plots were minimal, but the form itself promised a better integration of plot and music.

The 1890's were not entirely a time of dramatic renaissance that many theatrical writers looked back upon with such tremendous nostalgia. It was a time not only of renaissance but of great theatrical activity both artistic and frivolous. If Shaw was busy putting the economic and social

³Dickinson, Thomas H., The Contemporary Drama of England (Boston: 1917), p. 134.

problems of the age into play form (i.e. Widowers' Houses and Mrs. Warren's Profession) then Arthur Collins, the manager of the Drury Lane theatre was busy putting the last touches to the most spectacular melodramas that had yet been presented. If Pinero and Jones were taking a tentative step in the right direction for interpretative drama, then the chorus girls at Daly's and the Gaiety theatre were singing blithely about the joys of a Japan they knew nothing about. There is no doubt that many promising starts were made in the 1890's, but dramatic activity became less progressive as profit margins became greater.

The key to the understanding of Edwardian theatre is the realisation that it was a middle class theatre from inception to production. Middle class values not only controlled the economics and production of plays, but also their artistic origins. Both changing and stable middle class values alike conditioned the theatre from the most trivial melodrama to the most socially conscious drama. All plays did not present the same values. But the spectrum of social attitudes presented by both the semi-professional art theatre and the wildly spectacular melodrama, faithfully echo the sentiments of the growing educated bourgeoisie. During the Edwardian period the middle class once more dominated the theatre, as it had in such periods as the Elizabethan and early Victorian, and in so doing made it their own.

Alfred Sutro is one Edwardian playwright who achieved success by appealing to the middle class desire for discussion of social change without seriously challenging the basic tenets of a stratified society. Sutro, like most of the successful Edwardian playwrights had a middle class background. He was born in 1863 the youngest son of Siglomund Sutro M.D., an authority on continental spas, and was educated at the City of London School and then in Brussels. When his education was completed he became a clerk and at 20 he joined his brother in a business of wholesale wine merchants. This did not dampen his longtime interest in the theatre and in 1895 his first play, The Chili Widow, co-authored by Anthony Burchier, was produced. This was the start of a flourishing dramatic career and by the time his play The Walls of Jericho appeared in 1904, Sutro was recognised as a social dramatist. Although Sutro's own plays appealed to the more popular elements of Edwardian audiences, Sutro himself was in contact with artists who were building the foundations of modern drama. He spent much time in Paris and when he was there, he made the acquaintance of Maeterlinck. He was to do many translations of the

French playwright's works for the London stage. He was friends with William Archer, George Moore, Stanley Houghton, and many others interested in the future of the theatre. In 1909, Sutro and Sir Arthur Pinero started the Dramatist's Club, a forum for dramatic authors of the period.

Sutro's success as a playwright came largely from his ability to challenge the hypocrisies of society within the kind of theatrical environment which presented no threat to the social values of the major part of his audience. By using upper-middle class and aristocratic characters he was able to produce a social environment which was envied by his audiences yet which was confronted with social problems that threatened the whole of society. The social situations in the plays lacked reality but closely conformed with the middle class idea of what upper class society was like. Writing in 1933 about the success of The Walls of Jericho (1904), Sutro indicated he was initially doubtful about his characterisation.

I was doubtful myself. In the fashion of those days I had peppered the play with marquisses, earls and the like; my dames were all of high degree; and I had never mixed in those exalted circles, nor did I number among my acquaintance any person of higher rank than a knight. I was doubtful.⁴

Yet, Sutro's conception of upper-class society, viewed through middle class eyes, closely conformed with the way the majority of his audiences viewed the social movements of the aristocracy. The play was a total success.

The Walls of Jericho is about Frobisher, an Australian millionaire discontented with the London 'Smart Set'. He is especially upset by the flirtation of his wife, Lady Althea with Henry Dallas, another member of smart society. The evils of a purposeless London society are shown in the conduct of Lady Luch Derenham who marries Hankey Bannister, another Australian millionaire solely for his money, and when Lady Althea's brother marries a girl he has seduced only on Frobisher's insistence. Frobisher is finally so incensed by his wife's flirtation that he plans to return to Australia to seek a purified way of life with or without his wife. Despite the interference of Lady Althea's father, the Marquis of Steventon, the couple are finally reconciled and they both return to Australia to find a better way of living.

⁴Sutro, Alfred, Celebrities and Simple Souls (1933), p. 143.

In this play Sutro introduced several elements of social behaviour which appealed to his audience's latent sense of puritanism without interfering with their desire to watch the evil pursuing their wicked ways. First, he presented the 'Smart Set' as a hedonistic group of men and women bent on their own destruction. Religious and moral strictures have been discarded as greed and pleasure dictate behavioural patterns. Although basically good, Lady Althea has been corrupted by her environment. Here, Jack Frobisher speaks about membership in the 'Smart Set' and the cause of his wife's corruption.

Yes, but she is more than beautiful - she has a soul. Only she has been brought up in this miserable set- where women do nothing but gamble and bet and flirt and talk scandal, and she can no more shake herself free than you and I can become "gentlemen", and talk with an infernal drawl. We've a little son, but it's considered bad form to bother about your baby. It's bad form to think, or feel, or have an idea; you must make love to every woman you meet, or else she votes you a bore. You must wear the same grin on your face from morning to night, you musn't be what you are, you musn't be at all; you must ressemble the others, dance with the others, laugh with the others, and if you don't, they call you extreme, and say you're a crank!⁵

Secondly, Sutro never questions the correctness of basic moral dicta. Lady Althea cannot leave her husband without coming to ruin. The sanctity of the family must prevail and cannot be threatened by the whim of a certain segment of society. Thirdly, Sutro presents the often repeated theme in Edwardian literature that society is too far corrupt to be reformed and that his characters have to search for a purified life in the wilds of Australia. The 'back to Nature' movement occurs quite frequently in the plays of the period, but in Sutro's play, England herself has been too corrupted by wealth without purpose, and the frontier of Australia must serve as the breeding ground for a better race of people. In a tirade to his wife, Jack Frobisher speaks of his own success in Australia and of how his marriage cannot survive the empty social whirl of London.

...The people around you - the poor, the helpless, the sick - to these you gave never a thought. You're a peer's daughter, sent into the world to enjoy yourself, have a good time, with Dallases round you to flirt with. It's

⁵Sutro, Alfred, The Walls of Jericho (1904), p. 30.

been pleasure, pleasure, pleasure from morning til night, from one year's end to another. You and your friends forget for what purpose God made you and turn to mere empty dolls. Well, I say to hell with all this! You're my wife, not my mistress; I married because I wanted a mate and a partner, and I'm tired of the life we've led, in which you've been neither. And so we'll go, we two: we'll leave this rotten West End; we'll go back to Nature, and start things over again!⁶

The critical reception to Sutro's play was favourable and reflected the playwright's skill in handling a popular theme. Only A.B. Walkley, in contrast to many critics recognised the contemporaneity of the play and wrote in The Times that Sutro, on both a conscious and unconscious level, was giving the public exactly what it wanted.

Now of course we have heard all this sort of thing before. Frobisher, in fact, whether he knows it or not, is a Corellian "Lashing the vices of Society" (which) is nowadays a popular parlour-game. It is one of the most valuable assets of the circulating libraries and the suburban book-stalls. And now Mr. Sutro shows us that he can play the game as well as another. Is he the dupe of his own imagination? Or has he simply set out to give the public what he thinks (pretty accurately) the public wants? When, for instance, he gravely offers the Garrick audience a marquis who bids a commoner remember "the difference between our stations", is his gravity real or assumed?⁷

Most of Sutro's plays deal with the problems of marriage in contemporary society. Sutro points out clearly the problems that changes in social behaviour have wrought and he demonstrates his own attitude towards the solution of these problems. In The Cave of Illusion (1900), David, a married poet, runs off to France with Gabrielle, a vain foolish woman who has been using him. As any moralist would predict his poetry becomes risqué under Gabrielle's influence, but when he wishes to return to his wife, Gabrielle tells him that she is pregnant. David is trapped without love or creative inspiration. In Sutro's plays wrong-doing men are punished as well as women. Other Sutro plays which achieved popularity were The Perplexed Husband (1911) and Mollentrave on Women (1905).

Hubert Humphrey Davies was another playwright who achieved a great deal of success with plays which appealed to the sentiments of the

⁶Sutro, The Walls of Jericho, p. 86.

⁷The Times, November 1, 1904, p. 9f.

public. He was born in 1869 in Cheshire the son of a man who had started an iron foundry and ended up the master of his own iron works. In 1893 Davies went to America and worked in Chicago and San Francisco. In 1898 his first play A Dream of Love was produced in San Francisco. It was not until Daniel Frohman decided to produce one of Davies's plays in New York that Davies became a theatrical success. He stayed in New York where he wrote his first London success Mrs. Gorrings Necklace (1903) until his return to London in 1901. Davies died in 1917. Hugh Walpole, Davies's biographer, seems to think that in the later years Davies was working "towards more serious themes and a deeper presentation of life."⁸

In his early plays, Davies veered toward pure melodrama or light farcial comedy. Mrs. Gorrings Necklace concerns the theft of a necklace by David Dairn, a weak and poor man in love with Isabel Kirke. Captain Mowbray also in love with Isabel shields David and confesses to the crime when he learns that David has secretly married Isabel. When David realises the enormity of his deed and what repercussions it has had on all those around him, he commits suicide. Cousin Kate (1903) is a comedy about Heath Desmond, an artist who has second thoughts about his coming marriage to Amy Spencer. Cousin Kate is sent for to deal with Heath and Amy and unknowingly falls in love with Heath while sharing a railway carriage with him. The rest of the plot concerns her discovery of who he really is, and the reshuffling of couples, with Heath discovering that Kate is his ideal wife. But underneath this froth lies a social lesson, especially for the women's liberationists of the time. Kate is a successful novelist who comes to the realisation that all she really wants is a husband and children.

In his later plays Davies tried to deal with the underlying motivations in the relationships between men and women. The Mollusc (1907) deals with a lazy wife and the efforts of her brother from Colorado (the frontier and 'new' society once again) to show her how she is ruining her marriage. Doormats (1912) presents the premise that all people are either boots or doormats. When a selfish wife takes up with another man, her husband sacrifices everything for her happiness. But the wife soon realises that both she and her lover are boots, so she returns to her doormat husband.

In The Outcast (1914) which has many melodramatic qualities, Davies comes closest to confronting real social questions. The plot concerns

⁸Walpole, Hugh, ed., The Plays of Hubert Humphrey Davies (1921), p. xx.

Geoffrey Stonor who has been jilted by Valentine who marries another man. Geoffrey then takes a girl off the streets and proceeds to educate her and take care of her. Valentine then comes to the discovery that she does not love her husband and returns to Geoffrey. Their happiness at being together is spoiled when they discover that they both have responsibilities - Valentine to her husband and Geoffrey to his mistress Miriam and so they separate. Beyond presenting the idea of moral responsibility, this play does not go beyond the social conventions presented by so many other plays. Miriam, Geoffrey's mistress, cannot marry Geoffrey because of her position. A mistress, no matter how exemplary her conduct cannot be rewarded for her trespasses. Davies is saved from becoming a titillating moralist because he is concerned about the relationships between people and the responsibilities these relationships require. Geoffrey, quite unlike Professor Higgins in Shaw's Pygmalion, realises the consequences of involving oneself in the lives of others. In spite of his love for Valentine, he realises he is responsible for Miriam.

I've been trying to persuade myself that I am under no obligation to Miriam - that I have undertaken no responsibility because I have made her no promises. I'm wrong. I am responsible for what I have made of her. I musn't drag her out of the depths, encourage her to do her best, then leave her to go back to where she came from. I ought never to have helped her to rise at all if I wasn't prepared to see her through. I ought to have left her alone.⁹

Sutro and Davies are just two of the many playwrights who felt some responsibility for the development of theatre. Their plays were not of great artistic merit, but they fulfilled the desire of their audiences for drama which tackled various social and sexual relationships without seriously challenging the social code. Other playwrights such as C. Haddon Chambers e.g. Passers-By (1911), and Jerome K. Jerome, e.g. The Passing of the Third Floor Back (1908), fulfilled the same function. Although these plays had great popular appeal they disappointed the hopes of more perceptive writers who sought a more energetic social drama during the pre-war years. To these men it seemed as if the social drama had lost all its vitality and desire to deal with real social issues.

Other theatrical forms produced during the Edwardian era had no pretensions to any exploration of social conditions and change. This was

⁹Davies, Hubert Humphrey, The Outcast (1921), p. 284, in The Plays of Hubert Humphrey Davies with an introduction by Hugh Walpole.

the age of the mighty melodrama, made even more spectacular by the advent of electricity. The Whip (Drury Lane, 1909) was one of many equine dramas presented to a sport and spectacle hungry public. The aim of these dramas was to present as many spine-chilling and spectacular scenes as possible in the course of an evening. The Whip contained 13 scenes including a train crash, the chamber of horrors at Madame Tussaud's and an actual horse race (though much to the chagrin of the producers, 'The Whip' a racehorse, came in a poor fifth on the opening night and the race had to be re-run).

Even these melodramas made a slight concession to social change. Where the Victorian melodrama had been mainly concerned with the woman wronged or the evils of urbanisation, the new Edwardian melodrama dealt with the woman who did wrong or the financial swindler. Never had there been such a profusion of evil women bent on destroying lovers, animals and the sanctity of the British Empire. English theatre had never seen such a large number of crooked businessmen willing to sell their wives, their daughters and their country for the sake of a few pounds. The Sins of Society, and The Marriages of Mayfair, also Drury Lane melodramas, pictured the corruption flourishing right in the middle of highest society.

The musical comedy was another form of Edwardian entertainment which had no avowed social function. But even through these pieces of fluff the winds of social change blew softly. The Edwardians enacted many of their fantasies in musical comedy theatres like the Gaiety and Daly's, and shop girls either married peers or came into huge inheritances night after night. Edwardians also liked their heroes and heroines in disguise and favoured musicals like Our Miss Gibbs (1909) where the shop girl is in love with a peer who has disguised himself as a bank clerk - or The Girl Behind the Counter (1906) where a rich girl becomes a shop girl to catch her fiance in his part-time pursuit of flirting. The shop-girl motif also appeared in the non-musical theatre. Diana of Dobsons (1908) by Cicely Hamilton concerns a shop girl who spends an inheritance on one month's glorious holiday and in the process reforms a wealthy but indolent young man. Reform in the musical comedies chiefly concerned the manners of wealthy young men attempting to kiss shop girls. Foreign locales were also popular in musical comedies, particularly the Orient, and the trials and tribulations of the poor Japanese geisha were well-known to Edwardian audiences through such musical comedies as The Geisha and The Mousme.

The structure of most of these musical comedies was roughly the same. The Quaker Girl (1909) is a good example of the genre. In this particular

musical comedy there are two sets of romantic couples, Mathilde, a Parisian princess and her lover, Captain Charteris, an English gentleman, and Prudence the Quaker girl and her intended lover, Tony, an American friend of Charteris. A third couple, Jeremiah, a lapsed Quaker, and Phoebe, the maid, provide the comic relief. The Gilbert and Sullivan dame figure, transformed into the comic chaperone of the musical comedy, is presented in the form of Mme. Blum, the owner of a Parisian salon. Jealousy and intrigue, and the insinuation of villainy are found in the characters of Diane, a Parisian model and Monsieur Le Rose, a lame Parisian detective.

The simple plot involves the elopement of Mathilde and Charteris. They marry in England because the princess has been banished from Paris - only to find that Charteris, an officer in the army, has been stationed there. Meanwhile Prudence and Jeremiah have been ostracised by the Quakers for their joyful approach to life and the whole company goes to Paris. The intrigue between the detective and the Princess Mathilde who is hiding in Madame Blum's salon and the developing love affair between Prudence and Tony constitute the rest of the story. In this particular musical comedy Prudence is the shop girl figure and once she has been miraculously transferred to Paris the ugly duckling becomes the swan. Madame Blum's fashion salon provides scenes with many girls in beautiful costumes, including the Quaker Girl costume which takes Paris by storm. The Prince of Paris is the deus ex machina who pardons the Princess and provides a spectacular ball for the closing scene. The lovers are united including Tony and Prudence and one is left feeling that it is the spirit of the Quaker girl which has caused all these nice things to happen. The songs are all tuneful and simple and the audience undisturbed by musical discord.

A formula for musical comedy quickly became an economic necessity. So much money was being spent on dressing the chorus girls and erecting sets to match their splendour that the producers had to ensure a return on their investment. When they learned that audiences were satisfied with a girl meets boy, misunderstanding between girl and boy, and boy gets girl plot, they saw no need for further experiment with the musical comedy. Indeed, experiment with a money-making formula was to be resisted as economic folly.

The musical comedy, like the 'problem play' titillated its audience by mentioning social scandals like divorce and adultery. In the musical comedy, however, there is no doubt that all social scandals arise merely from a misunderstanding and that the heroine is always actually as pure as snow. The plot of The Girl in the Train (1914) revolves around a

heroine mistakenly locked up for the night with the hero in a railway compartment. The hero is subsequently sued for divorce by his wife but due to the machinations of the heroine, the wife's jealousy vanishes and the hero and his wife are reconciled.

The Edwardian musical comedy was purely escapist theatre. In social terms this meant a temporary suspension of class barriers so that the shop girl could marry her prince. Exotic locales were another way of escaping from society. The Edwardians also enjoyed pure fantasy. Just as J.M. Barrie captured an adult audience with Peter Pan, musical comedy writers scored huge successes with such works as The Arcadians (1909) which dealt with a fantasy land where the truth was always told. The musical comedy filled a definite niche in the Edwardian theatrical world. Unfortunately it did little to improve the form and function of Edwardian theatre.

From this brief survey it is clear that most commercial theatre was neither experimental nor progressive. Instead, it catered for an audience which enjoyed social scandal providing its basic assumptions about society remained unchallenged. It was also middle class theatre in spite of the profusion of aristocratic liaisons, shop girl transformations, Australian millionaires, and racing scenes which dominated the plays. It was society as seen through middle class eyes, both the way they believed it to be and the way they hoped it would become. The behaviour of most stage characters, no matter what their station, was dictated by the men and women who controlled the purse strings and dominated the audiences of Edwardian theatre.

Much experimental theatre was therefore produced by non-commercial play groups who could afford to produce unsuccessful plays by unknown playwrights. The Independent Theatre, and the Stage Society already mentioned were two of many play societies which sprung up during the period. The Elizabethan Stage Society organised by William Poel in 1895 tried producing Shakespeare and other Elizabethan playwrights on an Elizabethan stage. Other play groups like the Play Actors, the Oncomers Society and the Drama Society presented the works of advanced contemporary English and foreign playwrights. Another result of the commercialisation of London theatre was that many playwrights of merit started their careers outside of London. The Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, managed by Miss A.E.F. Horniman was famous for the production of new English playwrights. Stanley Houghton whose play Hindle Wakes (1912) advanced the conception of English realistic drama, started his career in Manchester. Despite the commercial atmosphere of London theatre, the hopes of progressive critics of the nineties for the future of English theatre had not been completely disappointed. There were

still some imaginative and creative playwrights producing works for the commercial theatre. The artistic success of these plays was perhaps mitigated by their earnestness and social propaganda, but they nevertheless did much to introduce the notion that theatre could propagate social messages without losing its ability to entertain.

The most important commercial venture in introducing experimental theatre to the London public was the Vedrenne-Barker season at the Court theatre (1905-1907). During the three years the two leased the theatre they presented 92 plays by 17 authors for a total of 946 performances. The venture was not really a commercial success, but it made its mark on theatre history by bringing Shaw to the attention of Edwardian audiences. In the production of such plays as Man & Superman, Candida, and The Doctor's Dilemma, Shaw made the Court season an artistic success. Shaw for all his popularity was not considered by many to be a great dramatist. To a great number of Edwardians he was simply the enfant terrible of the theatre, who provoked and satirised society for the fun of so doing. Max Beerbohm compared the treatment of St. John Hankin's The Prodigal Son with the way Shaw would have tackled the same subject. The theatricalities which Beerbohm associated with Shaw are unmistakable.

Mr. Hankin does not set out to prove anything, or to probe anything. He merely observes what is going on in the world, and is moved to communicate to us his good-natured amusement. Mr. Shaw, observing a prodigal son, would have knitted his brows, outstretched his index finger and harangued us to the effect that the prodigal was perfectly right, as a citizen, in his refusal to work under the present conditions of labor, and that these conditions are irrational, dangerous and ought to be abolished.¹⁰

Shaw's popularity with Edwardian audiences can be explained for the same reasons as the popularity of Sutro and Davies; he titillated and shocked his audience without seriously challenging their views on society. Caricature and ridicule which add up to good-natured fun is considered the essence of Shaw's Fanny's First Play which The Times reviewed in April, 1911.

Evidently he has subjected himself to no very severe mental stress in its composition, or rather its improvisation. He gently caricatures one or two of his critics. He propounds a few views about prison as a cathartic, in what his friend Mr. Trotter would (it seems) call the Aristotelian sense. Certain social prejudices and snobberies of the half-educated are mildly ridiculed. It is all very harmless, good-humoured, middle-aged fun.¹¹

¹⁰Beerbohm, Max Around Theatres (1953), p. 394.

¹¹The Times, April 20, 1911, p. 8.

The reform of society according to Fabian Socialist principles does not make a theatre of revolt. Shaw's idea of the Life Force may have shocked some and amused others, but for the most part it gave no reason for alarm.

Even the fundamental thesis of the play-(Man and Superman) the hunting of the male by the female under the impulse of the "life-force" is only a topic of conversation.¹²

The crux of Shaw's plays was not the reform of society although frequently the chauffeur talked back to his master. Instead Shaw tried to explore the interpersonal human relationships which he felt must be reformed for a better society. The implications of such a total reform of society were only realised by a few of the more intelligent critics and theatre-goers. It was Shaw's acid wit and gift for standing a conventional situation on its head that claimed the larger portion of his audience.

His greatness lies in the complexity of his plays. Although the majority of his characters were symbolic rather than fully rounded emotional beings, he managed to touch a whole range of philosophical as well as social problems to give his plays depth. Man and Superman deals with class, education, the role of women etc. as well as spinning out a simple love story which climbs to the heights of the fantastic. It is a pity that other playwrights with a better sense of character development could not match Shaw's greatness in play construction.

Among the other playwrights produced during the Vedrenne-Barker season were John Galsworthy, Laurence Housman, John Masefield and St. John Hankin. St. John Hankin's play, The Return of the Prodigal, first produced at the Court theatre on September 26, 1905, is an example of a play which put message before merit. Like the plays of H.A. Jones, The Return of the Prodigal is about hypocrisy - specifically the hypocrisy of the middle and upper middle classes. Eustace, the ne'er-do-well son of a middle class merchant returns home after a long absence, and creates a huge disturbance including a flirtation with his brother's fiancée. He finally promises to leave home and stay away from the family providing his father will reward his absence with a secure income for life.

This play is an examination of the middle class Edwardian family and the social pretensions of the middle class who had gained a substantial income and comfortable life style. Much of the plot concerns the efforts

¹²The Times, September 27, 1911, p. 8.

of the prodigal's father, Samuel Jackson, owner of a clothmaking business, to get his eldest son married to Stella Faringford, the daughter of Sir John Faringford, a local magnate. Stella's mother, Lady Faringford, is the mouthpiece for the social attitudes of the nouveau riche. She challenges the pernicious new notion that perhaps the baker and the gentleman are equal. When her daughter asks why her family should not agree with this assessment, Lady Faringford replies,

Because we have everything to lose by doing so. We were born into this world with what is called position. Owing to that position we are received everywhere, flattered, made much of. Though we are poor, rich people are eager to invite us to their houses and marry our daughters. So much the better for us. But if we began telling people that position was all moonshine, family an antiquated superstition, and many duchesses far less like ladies than their maids, the world would ultimately discover that what we were saying was perfectly true. Whereupon we should lose the very comfortable niche in the social system which we at present enjoy and - who knows? might actually be reduced in the end to doing something useful for our living like other people. No, no, my dear, rank and birth and the peerage may be all nonsense, but it isn't our business to say so. Leave that to vulgar people who have something to gain by it. Noblesse oblige!¹³

Hankin weakens his social message by putting it into the mouth of a character he parodies. Unsure that the message will be conveyed by implication, he weakens the structure of the play by parading his social doctrines in the guise of stock characters. Nevertheless the play succeeds because Eustace, the prodigal, and Stella, the magnate's daughter display human characteristics.

Hankin is eager for the reform of the Edwardian social structure, but The Return of the Prodigal gives no hints of a style of life to replace the one restricted by status and a feudal aristocracy. Hankin made fun of those social notions which many held sacred. He showed the family establishment to be as full of hypocrisy as the business establishment and that it took as much effort to run a family as it did to run a successful business.

The Court Theatre venture exposed Edwardian audiences to many of the better plays written during the period. It was also important in trying to present new plays by English and foreign playwrights in a season of

¹³Hankin, St. John, The Return of the Prodigal in Edwardian Plays ed. Gerald Weales (1962), p. 107.

repertory. Another attempt at a repertory season presenting new English plays was the 1910 season the commercial impresario Charles Frohman gave at the Duke of York's theatre. Not even Frohman's commercial astuteness could make this season a success. A theatre ill-suited for repertory, and the death of King Edward VII, were two reasons for the failure of the second most ambitious commercial attempt at a London repertory theatre during the period. Nevertheless, the season did introduce plays as Shaw's Misalliance and Granville Barker's The Madras House to the public.

The Madras House is an interesting play by a man who did much to direct the course of Edwardian theatre. Granville Barker was an actor, a producer and a playwright in addition to business associations with J.E. Vedrenne at the Court theatre that have already been mentioned. He collaborated with William Archer on a book exploring the possibilities of a national endowed theatre and he acted in some of Shaw's plays. His production of The Winter's Tale at the Savoy Theatre in 1912 showed how the Elizabethan drama could be adapted for production in a modern theatre. Simplicity of the set and non-mutilation of the text was a welcome contrast to the overly spectacular productions of the past years. In his own plays he tried psychologically to probe social attitudes. In The Madras House he explored sexual conventions and the business ethic in an attempt to show how men can be shackled by outmoded moralities.

Ostensibly the play is about the sale of a business, but it probes much deeper. It is an attempt to show how a restrictive society means a barren society on all levels. Gerald Weales in his introduction to Edwardian Plays speaks about the play and its relationship to sexual conventions.

All that happens is that Philip Madras sells the dress business, but that is hardly what the play is about. Granville-Barker sets up four scenes, only vaguely connected by the presence of Philip, in which he exposes the audience to a wide variety of attitudes toward sex and suggests how those attitudes are formed through personal psychology, conventional expectation, economic pressure and on and on. It is one of the subtler examinations of sex in the English theatre, one that - alas for the success of the play - made and makes great demands on an audience conditioned to think of sex in terms of melodrama or the open zipper.¹⁴

In the play, Granville Barker examines the various sexual attitudes found in the prosperous middle classes on several levels. The six Huxtable daughters are the children of Henry Huxtable the man who runs the Madras dress business. The remnants of Victorianism which Huxtable

¹⁴Weales, Gerald Edwardian Plays (New York: 1962), p. x.

and his wife parade as 'respectable behaviour' preclude any chance of the daughters finding happiness. They cannot marry below themselves so they do not marry at all. Because they are women, they are unable to take any sort of satisfying job and they are left to wither as old maids. In contrast to them is Jessica, the wife of Philip Madras, the owner of the business. She is the 'new' woman, liberated, with a mind of her own. Yet society has frustrated her in the same way as the Huxtable daughters. Because she has not been trained to use her energies for a useful purpose, she seeks amusement in flirting with other men. Philip's preoccupation with the business and his intellectualisation of love leave him so little time to be concerned with his wife that their marriage is endangered. Marion Yates is a shopgirl who has become pregnant and refuses either to reveal the father or to be ashamed of her condition. She is rather a simplistic representation of the new morality, and Philip's hesitation to fire her from her position in the shop indicates the confusion which intellectual Edwardians felt about the new sexual ethics.

Philip's ability to be perceptive about sexual problems, even if he feels somewhat helpless in dealing with them, leads to a questioning of the society which allows such inequitable situations to develop. He realises that the commercialisation of his dress business is just another way of degrading women by using them for their purchasing power. The mannequins who display the dresses are dolls, things to be manipulated by men who hope to make huge profits out of business.

Granville Barker clears up Philip's confusion about sex and society by bringing in an alien character who is familiar with Edwardian society. In this case it is Philip's father, Constantine, a man who has left his English wife and gone to live in some Arabian paradise with another woman. (Charges for bigamy are avoided because Constantine Madras has become a Moslem). Constantine has dealt with the shallowness of Edwardian society by simply refusing to take part in it. He retains the old idea of Victorian manliness complemented by an eastern idealisation of the form and function of women. In more real terms, he is a lecherous old man who has fled from England to an environment where the pursuit of many women can be legalised through polygamous marriages.

In many ways Constantine is the last straw for Philip in his attempt to live with Edwardian social attitudes. Philip is amused by his father's peccadillos, but shocked to learn that Constantine is the father of the shop girl's unborn child. At the same time he realises that unlike Constantine he cannot run away from society. Instead he must stay where

he is and reform society from inside.

Philip (happily, too). That's it. And I want an art and a culture that shan't be just a veneer on savagery...but it must spring in good time from the happiness of a whole people.

Jessica gives herself one little shake of womanly common sense.

Jessica. Well, what's to be done?

Philip. (nobody more practical than he). I've been making suggestions. We must learn to live on a thousand a year... put Mildred to a sensible school...and I must go on the County Council. That's how these great spiritual revolutions work out in practice, to begin with.¹⁵

Philip's solution to the problems of society is the Edwardian middle class intellectual one. It is the responsibility of the educated, the rich and the intelligent to act. Philip decides to leave the dress and clothing business and to become a member of the County Council. Granville Barker does not see politics as the remedy to social problems, but Philip will be making a start to rid the social system of inequalities.

The Madras House goes beyond the more normal 'problem plays' in discussing the fundamental problems in human relationships. Granville Barker's attempt to show the need for more human relationships between men and women does not succeed on all levels. It is perhaps too disjointed and he only presents a possible solution for Philip and Jessica. His play is still valuable because he attempts to make his characters real people not stereotypes.

Even The Madras House does little more than mention the social problems of poverty, ignorance and social welfare. Few playwrights wrote plays on these themes and John Galsworthy's Justice (1910) was probably the only play in the period actually to provoke social reform.

Justice is about a man who commits forgery for the woman he loves. She is not his mistress, but is married to another man, and he is sent to jail for his crime. His time in prison ruins him and his chances ever to find another job. Galsworthy, like Shaw, was greatly influenced by Beatrice and Sydney Webb, and although his plays lack Shaw's wit and humour they also carry the Fabian Socialist viewpoint. Like Shaw, Galsworthy was concerned with the personal relationships of people and the manipulation

¹⁵Weales, p. 427.

of their lives by a society which had grown too large to care about the individual. The social themes he presented within this larger context, e.g. prison reform in Justice and the battle between capital and labour in Strife were quickly picked up by critics and admirers of his plays. Samuel Hynes in his book, The Edwardian Turn of Mind speaks of the impact of Justice on the politicians who saw it.

...Winston Churchill, then Home Secretary and Ruggles-Brise, head of the Prison Commission saw Justice and were moved by it (or by the publicity it was given) to modify the rules for solitary confinement in British prisons. But this is rather a special case: Galsworthy had a peculiar obsession with solitary confinement; it was, he said, his nightmare and sworn foe, and he managed to get some of his horror into the play, though solitary confinement is not really what the play is about.¹⁶

Galsworthy touched on real social issues only tangentially but he was one of very few playwrights to do so at all. The social and more experimental playwrights did little more than the popular playwrights to explore the complex range of growing social problems during the period and to proffer possible solutions. Many playwrights were concerned with the failure of the theatre to deal with the real problems. Some considered that the playwright was being hindered by a heavy-handed censorship and by a public uninterested in anything but light-hearted plays. In an article in The Stage Year Book of 1913, Laurence Housman, an intellectual playwright, considered the effects of what he called 'man of the world drama' on the creativity of playwrights.

The true dramatist is always looking at life both individual and communal. If he studies the individual only, he may startle, amuse, excite; but it is not till he studies life in its groupings that he becomes socially valuable; and the more broadly he can group the more likely is his work to become of real and permanent value. But you can't group broadly without coming on social problems, the unsolved evils of civilisation; and so just when the dramatist is finding his real stride, and going where Heaven meant him to go, up comes your man of the world and says, "Where are you off to? What are you after?" And when he points to those darker places of civilisation, where the grouping of life is densest and where the conditions obtaining are most obviously evil and corrupting, is not the advice of the "man of the world" almost sure to be "let sleeping dogs lie," "not to stir muddy waters," or some conventional plea of that sort?¹⁷

¹⁶Hynes, Samuel, The Edwardian Turn of Mind (Princeton: 1968), p. 83.

¹⁷The Stage Year Book (1913), pp. 19-20.

Somerset Maugham is the kind of playwright that Housman is discussing. Maugham's greater success during the Edwardian period included such plays as Lady Frederick (1907), Jack Straw, Mrs. Dot and Grace. These pieces, comedies and tragedies alike, are distinguished only because of the versatility of the author and his ability to tell a good story. A lesser success, but perhaps a better play in terms of social satire is Maugham's Loaves and Fishes (1902). This play ridiculed the clergy and religion as they became infected with middle class ambitions and snobbery.

The plot concerns the machinations of the Rev. Canon Theodore Spratte, Vicar of St. Gregory's, South Kensington, to engineer his son's, his daughter's and his own marriage, and to become bishop of Colchester. He is motivated by the knowledge that his grandfather was once the Lord Chancellor of England (actually Spratte's sister suggests grandfather was "a bill broker and a rather seedy one at that"¹⁸). Spratte's attempts to keep up the family name naturally backfire. His son is uninterested in the rich girl Spratte wants him to marry, his daughter wants to marry a socialist tract writer instead of a rich lord, and rumour has it that the bishopric has been given to someone else. By the end of the play everything has been sorted out with Spratte getting both the bishopric and his son's intended wife. He even pairs his daughter with the young lord of his choice by appealing to her innate snobbery. Her infatuation with the problems of the poor has been a pose, calculated to gain her the attentions of the poor young man who fascinated her with his different ambitions and background. The possibility of a cosy home in Peckham proves too much for her, though to be fair Maugham makes the personality of the young labour man so irritating that we can sympathise with her for giving him up for his own sake. Here she explains why she is breaking off the engagement.

It was only a pose when I enthused about labour and temperance. I wanted you to think me clever and original. I don't like the poor. I don't want to have anything to do with them.
r/ I dare say poverty and crime are very dreadful, but I want to shut my eyes and forget them. I hate grime and dirt. I think the slums are horrible. Can't you see how awful it would be if we married? I should only hamper you, and we'd both be utterly wretched.¹⁹

Maugham's play satirised not only the snobbery of the middle class, but snobbery in any strata of society. Loaves and Fishes defends the structure of society simultaneously ridiculing the poses which a structured society

¹⁸Weales, p. 17.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 70.

forced on its members.

Despite the confusion between social reality and fantasy and an inability to confront the economic problems of society, social plays made some important progress during this period. Although the majority of plays maintained the idea of the family, the institution of marriage was not seen as the ultimate aim in life for either men or women. Instead these plays brought to the attention of the general public, that within marriage - or indeed outside it - there was a need for a re-examination of interpersonal relationships. Most of these playwrights believed that such an examination would lead ultimately to the discovery that the whole idea of woman's place and role in society would have to be changed. Whether the ultimate aim was suffrage or not, the plays indicated that women would have to be placed within the context of society instead of existing far above it on useless pedestals.

Playwrights also began using theatre to re-examine current events although they often translated the events into theatrical terms. In general this was a good thing because it placed theatre within the context of contemporary events and removed it from artistic isolation. Unfortunately as in the case of many social plays, the zeal was more inspired than the artistic interpretation. Many of these plays hinged upon some spectacular happening as say a divorce trial, and cashed in on the sensation instead of the underlying causes. G.F. Sturgis, an American writer on the theatre here discusses "The Play and the Issue of the Hour".

The playwright who deals with plots founded upon incidents of current history, the latest divorce trial, the most recent case of murder, the investigation of public officials and heads of corporations, knows that his work will have no lasting value as a play, and that it is only a question of a few months, possibly two or three years, and his work will have been forgotten. Such work has its advantages in that the writer is likely to secure a generous financial return, and will not have to suffer the pain and humiliation of having his work constantly rejected, only to have it commended when too late and the laurel wreath has been laid upon the mound covering his decaying bones.²⁰

The public was definitely more receptive to such popular plays and it was the play of the hour which reaped the greatest financial rewards. Nevertheless this period saw the development of a small critical audience who were not content with commercial plays, but sought a creative theatre

²⁰Sturgis, Granville Forbes, The Influence of the Drama (1913), p. 81.

which would do more than blandly comment on social issues. William Archer as early as 1896 sought an endowed theatre which would remove the financial burdens from the development of such a theatre.

Theatre Censorship 1896-1914 Simply the fact that the modern English drama has outgrown the great public, and must on pain of dwindling away for lack of sustenance, find a medium through which it can appeal to a lesser, but still very considerable public, which is ready and eager to respond to the appeal.²¹

The literary theatre of the Edwardian period did not achieve the high artistic standards which it set for itself. Nevertheless the possibilities which theatre offered excited a great many people and laid the foundations for more creative theatre in the future.

²¹Archer, William, The Theatrical 'World' for 1896 (1897), p. xii.

Chapter Five

Theatre Censorship and the Anti-Censorship Movement of the Pre-War Years
1900-1914

Although dramatic censorship had been an established form of theatrical supervision for centuries, it was not until the early twentieth century that the assumptions behind such a censorship were openly challenged by men of the theatre. Led by a group of dramatists who felt that governmental censorship of plays was a violation of literary freedom, the anti-censorship^{movement} resulted in a joint parliamentary committee as numerous articles and books on the pros and cons of a dramatic censorship. The anti-censorship movement was one sign of a revitalised theatre - a theatre where traditional mores were probed by social and moral questions. It also demonstrated the fervour of a new generation of playwrights unable to accept that the theatre's role was one of pure entertainment without substance. And finally the movement led to a polarisation of interests in the theatrical world as actors, managers and playwrights clashed over their different ideas about the role of censorship in the theatre. Discussion of the censorship question was practically limited to those involved in the theatre and most of the general public knew little of the dispute. However, extra-theatrical interests, some governmental and some literary, also became involved in the issue. Theatrical censorship was not actually abolished until 1968, yet the demonstration of anti-censorship sentiment before 1914 shows another facet of the complex nature of Edwardian theatre.

Although a form of theatrical censorship can be seen in the functions of the Master of Revels of Tudor times, the powers of a censor were confirmed and extended by Walpole's Theatre Act of 1737. Walpole, fearing what he considered the political nature of theatre particularly in the satires of Gay and Fielding, placed the licensing of plays under the jurisdiction of the Lord Chamberlain. This aspect of Walpole's statute was further condoned and confirmed by the Theatres Act of 1843.

The 1843 act was the particular target of the Edwardian playwrights's protest. Among its stipulations it created an assistant to the Lord Chamberlain, responsible only to him and paid from the civil lists to be called the Reader of Plays, or the Censor. Before a play could be staged publicly, the manager of a theatre had to send the text at least seven days before the production with an accompanying fee of not more than two guineas

to the Lord Chamberlain's office for its approval, revision or rejection. There was no form of appeal and the playwright had no way of making personal representation to the Censor. Only the managers of the theatre where the play was to be produced could contact the Censor personally. Under this act the playwright became an invisible man.

From the time of Walpole to the 1890's, the censorship changed to place less emphasis on political protection and more on basic morality with political overtones. This was a combination of a reflection of Victorian mores, the personality of George Colman, the Censor, and the Puritan attitude the middle classes held toward the theatre during the greater part of the nineteenth century. References to angels were banned and it became the convention that plays with Biblical characters would not be permitted on stage. Yet there was little conflict between the Victorian theatre and the Censor, perhaps because of the poor quality of Victorian plays which did not challenge the status quo and the lowly position theatre had come to as a form of entertainment. Nevertheless, before 1900 the question of censorship provoked three censorship and licensing enquiries - in 1853, 1866 and 1892, which pronounced the existing censorship system as a workable and satisfactory form of theatrical supervision.

Not until the 1909 Joint Committee on Stage Censorship was the censorship system questioned from both an ethical and legal standpoint, so that the 1892 Select Committee on Theatres and Places of Entertainment presents a sharp contrast in aims and procedure to the later 1909 committee.

The 1892 committee was mainly concerned with the question of regulating theatres and music halls and the criteria which should differentiate between a theatre license and a music hall license. The issue of censorship was secondary. The committee was formed after Sir John Lubbock (on behalf of the LCC) proposed a Theatres Bill in Parliament in November 1890. This bill, if enacted, would have placed the licensing, control and regulation of all theatres under the supervision of the London County Council. This was perhaps a desire to extend the provisions of the 1888 Local Governments Act, which gave the Council the right to license and regulate all music halls, and those theatres not under the Lord Chamberlain's supervision. A new law would therefore deprive the Lord Chamberlain of the right to license theatres in the metropolitan boroughs - a right granted to him in the 1843 Theatres Act. The passing of the new bill would have meant that the same authority (the LCC) would license both music halls and theatres, and this to many theatre managers seemed to be an unwelcome attempt to blur the distinctions between theatres and music halls.

The question of censorship was peripheral to this debate. There were at least two versions of the Theatres bill, one proposed in 1890, and one in 1891. As a concession to the Censor, the 1890 version of the bill suggested an extension of the censorship to cover songs in music halls, but this was later seen as too difficult due to the tremendous number of songs performed each year and was deleted in the 1891 version.¹

Set up to investigate the need for a new Theatres Act, the 1892 committee was ordered on March 4, 1892 to "inquire into the operation of Acts of Parliament relating to the licensing and regulating of Theatres and Places of Entertainment."² The committee sat for fourteen sessions, from March 28 - May 25, 1892, and heard thirty-six witnesses, mostly theatre managers, lawyers or politicians. The Censor, Mr. Piggot, gave testimony as did Sir Henry Irving and Sir John Hare, both actor-managers of the period.

Like the proposed theatre bills of the 1890-1891 Parliamentary sessions, the 1892 committee was primarily interested in the questions of licensing and structural supervision. The question of censorship arose in discussions of how censorship was to be continued if the control of the theatres was passed to the London County Council. It was agreed by all witnesses save one that the system of censorship by the Lord Chamberlain's office was perfectly satisfactory, and notwithstanding differences over the question of licensing theatres, the Lord Chamberlain should retain the right to license plays. Only William Archer, a prominent drama critic, felt the system of censorship an unethical and an inhibitory influence on the theatre.

The recommendations of the committee as to censorship echo the general sentiments of the witnesses.

We consider that the censorship of plays has worked satisfactorily, and that it is not desirable that it should be discontinued; on the contrary, that it should be extended as far as practicable to the performances in music halls and other places of public entertainment.³

However, coinciding with the advent of Ibsen and the forces of social realism in the drama, the English stage began to change and a more literary and better educated group of playwrights began to write for the theatre. As they wished to tackle the more complicated questions of divorce, prostitution, and the general question of man's social condition, conflict

¹Select Committee on Theatres and Places of Entertainment, Parl. Papers, 1892 (8), xviii, Report, p. 5.

²Hansard, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 4th ser., 4 March 1892, 134.

³Select Committee 1892, p. vii.

between them and the Censor became inevitable. Each believing himself the true moral spokesman for the era, the writer and the Censor battled for the next fourteen years not only over the censorship question but over the very aim and function of the theatre.

By 1900, the licensing of plays was less a system of political control than one of moral purification. The Censor had an absolute veto power over the play against which was no appeal. He could suggest changes or advise the play be withdrawn or simply refuse to license it. And following the unwritten Victorian tradition (for exactly what would be censored was never codified), no plays with religious characters or subjects were even considered by the Lord Chamberlain's office. The Lord Chamberlain was nominally the head of the censorship proceedings, though all the work was done by the Censor. Plays censored before 1900 included Shaw's Mrs. Warren's Profession, Ibsen's Ghosts, Brieux's Maternity, and Shelley's The Cenci. Music hall sketches, notwithstanding the recommendations of the 1892 Committee, escaped the watchful eye of the Censor for they came under the jurisdiction of the London County Council according to the extension of the Disorderly Houses Act of 1751 made by the Local Government Act of 1888. So arbitrary a system of censorship was clearly incompatible with the new social and moral theories of Shaw, Harley Granville Barker and John Galsworthy.

The first definite challenge to the censorship came as early as 1886 with the appearance of an article by William Archer entitled "The Censorship of the Stage" in a book of collected theatre articles, About the Theatre. In this article Archer challenged the role of the Censor as the nation's moral guardian. But when the 1892 Censorship Committee justified the existence of the censorship, the article appears to have been ignored until later agitation brought it back into notice.

The 1892 Committee's only criticism of the Censor was that he appeared to be morally lax and had licensed plays that the committee members felt were not fit to be seen by the general public. In 1900, one Samuel Smith, an MP from Flintshire, proposed a resolution calling for stricter theatrical supervision because of what he felt was the growing moral depravity of the theatre. Ironically foreshadowing the battle cry of more liberal playwrights, and echoing the politicians of the 1892 committee, he felt the Lord Chamberlain's powers were inadequate and said that control of the theatre should go to the London County Council.⁴ The ensuing Parliamentary debate was a confused discussion of theatre censorship by

⁴Hansard, LXXXI, 9 April 1900, 1521-2.

uninformed men who seldom went to the theatre, and was eventually adjourned without a vote being taken. Parliament came to no conclusions regarding censorship, but nonetheless felt the theatre was capable of asserting a great moral influence on the public. As Mr. Smith himself put it, "I am sure that the House will agree with me that this is no light matter, because the moral standard of a country is largely affected by the drama, especially among the young."⁵ The moral dangers presented by the acting profession to young working-class girls was a good enough reason for purifying the theatre explained on Mr. Maddison to the Commons.

It is all very well for honourable Members to laugh at what they consider prudish and puritanical narrowness, but I stand here as a working man, and I say that the working classes have a vital interest in a pure drama, because an impure drama means the sacrifice of the purest daughters of the people to the passion of the wealthy classes.⁶

Even so supposedly irreverent and satirical a journal as Punch advocated puritanical theatre, for even it objected to the use of scriptural quotations in a production of Haddon Chambers's, The Awakening. Such quotations from the Bible were "calculated to make the thoughtless smile, but the judicious grieve."⁷ The Censor was criticised for letting these quotations go through. And yet, as early as 1901, the realisation that the Censor could go too far in his role of moral arbiter was seen by more enlightened men like J.T. Grein. In a review of Pinero's The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith, he commented on a scene in which the heroine, Agnes, throws a Bible into the fire:

But wait! yonder in the distance, in the nebulous court of the stable-yard walks a destroyer, the Censor; he will not license a play in which the Bible is outraged. If the effect is to pass, penance must be done, and thus Agnes reopens the stove, rescues the volume from the flames and clasps it to her heart.⁸

Protest against censorship was strengthened when playwrights realised that whereas indecent French farces were being licensed and religious allusions were being approved, the wrath of the Censor fell on more socially critical plays like Ibsen's Ghosts and Laurence Housman's

⁵Hansard, LXXXVIII, 15 May 1900, 276-7.

⁶Ibid. p. 300.

⁷Punch, v. CXX, Feb. 27, 1901, p. 168.

⁸Grein, J.T., Dramatic Criticism 1900-1901 (1902), p. 152.

Bethlehem. One of the first signs of a more intellectual protest to the Censor was seen when the avant garde play societies gave private performances of the forbidden works, it being possible to evade the Lord Chamberlain's jurisdiction by presenting private instead of public performances of a play. For a nominal fee or the price of a ticket people became members of such societies and might then see performances of a censored play. One such group was J.T. Grein's Independent Theatre which presented Ghosts on March 1, 1891.⁹ But in 1907, after the censoring of Edward Garnett's The Breaking Point and Granville Barker's Waste, private performances were considered inadequate and more organised protest to the Censor began. It was further strengthened by the "Mikado incident".

In late April 1907, the Lord Chamberlain, Viscount Althorp, withdrew permission for a revival of Gilbert and Sullivan's The Mikado. The cited reason for its withdrawal was "buffoonery in certain parts"¹⁰ but in actuality the government had intervened because of the state visit of Prince Fushimi, the representative of the Mikado. It was felt the Prince might object to the Japanese satire. The censorship of The Mikado in 1907 posed two fundamental questions about the political role of drama. First, could a dramatic representation be deemed an expression of the political sentiments of a government? Could therefore Gilbert's satire of Japanese life and customs in The Mikado be construed as representing the sentiments of the British government? Secondly, did the government have a moral or legal right to interfere with a production once it had been licensed?

The censorship of The Mikado was a subject of Parliamentary questions from late April until mid July 1907. The affair was further complicated by the fact that not only was the play and libretto temporarily banned, but bands were also forbidden to play musical selections from The Mikado. Ironically during the series of Parliamentary questions addressed to Mr. Herbert Gladstone, Home Secretary, it was ascertained that the Japanese had never been consulted about the propriety of The Mikado. Many MP's sensed the ridiculousness of the situation - "Will the licence be withdrawn for H.M.S. Pinafore which is satire on another place?"¹¹ as the debate dragged on. The Lord Chamberlain, on whose weak shoulders the whole affair rested, was hardly vindicated when it was discovered that Japanese bands on warships were playing selections from The Mikado to visiting English dignitaries. During the later 1909 Censorship Committee, Sir William Gilbert commented on the possibility of The Mikado creating a diplomatic incident.

⁹Dickinson, T.H. Contemporary Drama of England (Boston: 1917), p. 157.

¹⁰The Times, May 3, 1907, p. 5f.

¹¹Hansard, LXXXIII, 6 May 1907, 1348.

I do not think the Powers were concerned at all. The music of The Mikado was being played on the Japanese ships in the Medway during the prohibition of the play - a sort of musical comment on the absurdity of the prohibition.¹²

The Lord Chamberlain's decision was not considered absurd by everyone. Mr. De Saumarez, ex-Secretary to the legation in Tokyo, said in a letter to The Times that The Mikado was as distasteful to the Japanese as a musical comedy titled The Pope of Rome would be to the English.¹³ Nevertheless, upon closer inspection the government saw no further need for the embargo and permitted The Mikado to be performed once again.

The return of the license did not mitigate the circumstances of its abrupt removal. Once again during the 1909 inquiry, Gilbert spoke of the manner in which the Lord Chamberlain censored The Mikado. "I was not communicated with by the Lord Chamberlain; he did not refer to me at all; he simply took my property and laid an embargo upon it."¹⁴

The The Mikado affair did not provoke any formal protest to the government or the Lord Chamberlain nor did it have any lasting repercussions. But it did make it clear to the House of Commons that the Lord Chamberlain possessed arbitrary powers concerning the theatre.

Although censoring The Mikado demonstrated certain inadequacies in the censorship system, it was the censoring of Edward Garnett's The Breaking Point and Granville Barker's Waste that led to organised theatrical anti-censorship protest. The core of this anti-censorship group included such men as John Galsworthy, Gilbert Murray, Granville Barker and J.M. Barrie, and the group became quite active by the end of 1907.

Early in 1907, Edward Garnett's play, The Breaking Point was refused a license because the play dealt with the suicide of a young unmarried girl who feared she was pregnant. Garnett went to John Galsworthy with the idea that a society of playwrights and authors should be formed, whose purpose would be to protest against the censorship.¹⁵ Although no formal committee was instituted until Barker's Waste was censored in early October, Galsworthy took steps to get Parliamentary machinery in motion. His contacts in the Commons included A.E.W. Mason, who volunteered to ask in Parliament about the "position of the licences of plays."¹⁶ Galsworthy also tried to sound

¹²Joint Select Committee of the House of Lords and the House of Commons on the Stage Plays (Censorship), Parl. Papers, 1909 (303), viii 451, p. 190.

¹³The Times, May 7, 1907, p. 12f.

¹⁴Joint Select Committee 1909, p. 191.

¹⁵Marrot, The Life and Letters of John Galsworthy (1935), pp.216-

¹⁶Garnett, Edward, Letters From John Galsworthy (1934), p. 145.

political opinions about the censorship by dining with certain government leaders including Winston Churchill (whom Galsworthy liked better than he had expected!).¹⁷ Garnett himself decided to publicise his censored play The Breaking Point by publishing it with a preface attacking the prerogatives of the Censor.

Granville Barker's Waste was censored in early October supposedly because the heroine of the play dies from an illegal abortion. But the play is also about politicians and political questions such as church disestablishment, which might well have also influenced the decision of Mr. George Redford, the Censor.¹⁸ As if this was 'the breaking point' for articulate dramatists, Galsworthy, with the help of Gilbert Murray and J.M. Barrie, founded a provisional committee for protesting the censorship. They were aided by William Archer, Granville Barker, Sir W.S. Gilbert and Sir A.W. Pinero. Galsworthy quickly set to work and drafted a circular letter protesting arbitrary censorship which was signed by seventy-one dramatic authors.¹⁹ This letter which appeared ⁱⁿ The Times on October 29, 1907 formally protested the censoring of The Breaking Point and revealed that a delegation of playwrights planned to see the Prime Minister in November about the censorship question. This letter angered many theatre managers who felt protected by the censorship (they were unlikely to be prosecuted by angry theatre-goers if the Censor approved a play) and a resolution which praised the existing censorship was passed by the Theatrical Managers Association on November 20, 1907.

After the letter of October 29 was published, the anti-censorship committee met again, to restructure the organisation and to plan a new strategy. In a letter dated November 30, Granville Barker wrote to Gilbert Murray about the formation of an author's committee against the censorship.

¹⁷Garnett, Letters From John Galsworthy, p. 143.

¹⁸Purdom, C.B. Granville Barker (1955), p. 74. N.B. In Samuel Hynes's book The Edwardian Turn of Mind (1968), he includes a chapter which intelligently discusses the censorship as one aspect of the theatre's determination to reflect the status quo. Mr Hynes feels Mr. Redford implicitly backed the existing order... "Redford's actions consistently imply the assumption that knowledge of the public good resides in official minds and is not to be foolishly questioned. Second, their acts of censorship can be read pretty consistently as acts in defence of an established order, and therefore as fundamentally political and social in nature." (p. 217).

¹⁹Marrot, The Life and Letters of John Galsworthy, pp. 216-7.

²⁰Purdom, op. cit., p. 75.

A committee luncheon party, present Barrie, Cannan, Galsworthy, self and hosts took place at the Shaw's on Friday. Two things were mooted: (1) the formation of a playwright's Society, Cannan to sound the Seventy and One (the signers of the October 29 letter) on their attitude towards a general treaty. (2) Suggestions of Barrie's that we should now proceed to get as many signatures of important and celebrated persons as possible to a version of the manifesto adapted to them and not to the playwright...²⁰

In other words, by December 1907 certain playwrights were determined to change the existing nature of the censorship.

But if the need for a change was clear to these playwrights, precisely what changes were needed was somewhat harder to define. John Galsworthy felt the Censor should be replaced, but was perplexed about the proper replacement and his dilemma must have been common among those on the playwright's committee. In a letter to Edward Garnett, Galsworthy wrote,

You probably don't realise that I never have any convictions as to the best way of doing things. I only have convictions when a thing excites my feelings - thus I have a down on the Censor because I detest tyranny of any sort, but I haven't the vaguest conviction as to the best substitute for him.²¹

The difficulties of obtaining public sympathy for a little-known cause were also clear to these men. They realised that anything having the government's sanction as well as an aura of tradition might be defended by the public. Joseph Conrad commented on the conservative British public in a letter to Edward Garnett. "Most of them have never heard of the Censor of plays and when they hear of his existence will become at once instinctively his warm partisans."²²

In spite of doubts as to what exactly should be done about the Censor, plans for more letters of protest and petitions were made and executed. A second petition in the form of a letter to the editor appeared in The Times on February 24, 1908. This was a petition by prominent persons in sympathy with the dramatic authors and included such names as Max Beerbohm, Walter Crane, Winston Churchill, and Sidney and Beatrice Webb.

The playwrights hoped to provoke governmental action by sending a deputation to see the Prime Minister on February 2, 1908. Owing to Mr. Asquith's illness the visit had to be postponed and the playwrights eventually

²⁰Purdom, Granville Barker, p. 75.

²¹Garnett, p. 154.

²²Conrad, Joseph, Letters from Joseph Conrad 1895-1924 (Indianapolis, 1928), pp. 205-6.

were seen on February 25 by the Home Secretary, Mr. Herbert Gladstone instead.²³ The dramatists had decided to ask for a court of appeal to decide if censored plays were really offensive. The movement had not become radical enough to ask for the total abolition of the censorship, but pressed only for some modification in the system. The idea of a court of appeal was however, in the nature of a compromise, for Mr. Gilbert Murray and some of the more radical members of the deputation wished to abolish the censorship altogether. Mr. Gilbert Murray's parting speech to Mr. Gladstone indicates that many dramatists felt no compromise could be made with the Lord Chamberlain. "Mr. Gilbert Murray, in thanking Mr. Gladstone for receiving the deputation, expressed the view that this proposal was really in the nature of a compromise, and that a great many dramatic authors seriously disliked the censorship altogether."²⁴ Gladstone tried to appease the delegation and promised to think about the Court of Appeal, but the matter was soon apparently forgotten by all save the disgruntled playwrights.

Seeing that petitioning had proved ineffective, the 'abolitionists' decided to try parliamentary action. They were lucky to have an ally in the House of Commons - Mr. Robert Harcourt - who was a keen sympathiser and crusader for their rights. Harcourt, the son of the Rt. Hon Sir William Harcourt, was educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge, and served in the diplomatic service before becoming involved in the theatre. He wrote two unsuccessful plays and doubled as the Parliamentary correspondent and drama critic of The Tribune before he entered Parliament himself as a Liberal.²⁵ His interest in the theatre was a personal one and his first major action in the censorship controversy was the introduction of a Proposed Theatres Act in 1908. The two main clauses of this bill provided for the abolition of the Lord Chamberlain's right to censor plays and the transfer of the Lord Chamberlain's power to license theatres in certain parts of London to the appropriate local authority (Theatres Act 1843 - Finsbury, Marlebone, Tower Hamlets, Lambeth and Southwark). In this bill, Harcourt was supported among others by Alfred Mason (later on the Joint Committee 1909), Mr. Pensonby, Sir Gilbert Parker, Mr. T.P. O'Connor and Mr. Ramsay MacDonald.²⁶ The bill was unsuccessful and was given only one reading before it was dropped. The agitators had to wait until 1909 before any governmental action was taken.

The year 1909 saw the culmination of the anti-censorship agitation of

²³Purdom, p. 78.

²⁴The Times, February 26, 1908, p. 18f.

²⁵The Liberal Yearbook 1910, p. 50.

²⁶Public Bills, 1908, v. 551, Bill 411, p. 553.

the preceding years. By 1909 the agitators had put enough pressure in the government to have a Joint Select Committee on Censorship and Licensing appointed to investigate the question. The difficulties in getting such a committee appointed further illustrates the intrigues involved in getting the government to take definite action on the censorship question.

Undaunted by the failure of his 1908 Theatres bill, Harcourt introduced a revised Proposed Theatres and Music Hall Act on April 22, 1909. The novel feature in this bill was the inclusion of music halls in a discussion of censorship. Because music halls were under the jurisdiction of, and licensed by, the London County Council, they did not come under the auspices of the Censor, and consequently music hall entertainments were not licensed. However, by law the music hall owners were forbidden to produce legitimate plays, and the only narrative entertainment they could present was the music hall 'sketch'. Although there was no legal distinction between a sketch and a play, the description of a sketch found in the 1892 Committee's recommendations was frequently used as the basis for legal decisions. The Committee said a sketch could be performed in a music hall...

...if the duration of each such performance shall not exceed forty minutes, and no more than six principal performers take part therein, and if there shall be an interval of at least thirty minutes between any two such sketches, and no two sketches performed on the same evening at such place of public entertainment shall have a connected part.²⁷

This definition was further clarified by a 1906 agreement between theatrical managers and music hall proprietors which redefined time and dramatic limits to stage play presentations in music halls.²⁸ Although this agreement was frequently broken, out of 169 legal cases involving the theatre in 1908, there was only one prosecution for a stage play being performed in a music hall. This was the case of the stage play Sally In Our Alley being performed at the Hippodrome Music Hall, Cambridge. The prosecution was brought by the Theatrical Managers Association, but the proprietor of the building was fined only five guineas for the offence.²⁹ However the threat of prosecutions by legitimate theatre owners was sufficient to make music hall proprietors call for one licence for both dramatic theatre and music hall performances. This would greatly increase the Censor's duties, for if the music halls came under his jurisdiction, he would be forced to license all music hall sketches as well as legitimate plays, creating an overwhelming

²⁷Select Committee 1892, p. vi.

²⁸Carson, Lionel ed. The Stage Yearbook 1911 (1912), p. 207.

²⁹Carson, Lionel ed. The Stage Yearbook 1909 (1910), pp. 308-9.

amount of new work. But it was argued that a single licence would place theatres and music halls on an equal footing legally and for that reason advocates of the single licence were also inclined to favour the abolition of the censorship and freedom of dramatic production.

The clause which provided for the single licence was only one aspect of the bill. The other objectives of Harcourt's bill were to "abolish the censorship of plays exercised in Great Britain under the authority of the Lord Chamberlain and second to make in all cases the councils of counties and county boroughs, both in London and elsewhere in England and Scotland, the licensing and controlling authorities for both theatres and music halls.³⁰" If Harcourt's bill had been passed not only would the Lord Chamberlain have lost the right to license plays, but he would also have lost his jurisdiction over the theatres themselves. This bill, like the first in 1908, was dropped after one reading, but this time Harcourt refused to admit defeat. Instead on May 26 and June 22, he asked for the establishment of a committee to examine his bill. (Bernard Shaw, in a letter to The Times, noted ironically that because of the position of the Lord Chamberlain as a member of the royal household, Harcourt could only legally bring the question of English censorship to the attention of the Commons by asking a question about foreign censorship.³¹) Finally, on July 1, Mr. J. Pease moved that a Joint Committee be selected. The Earl of Plymouth, Lord Willoughby de Broke, Lord Ribblesdale, Lord Newton, Lord Gorell, Mr. Robert Harcourt, Mr. Hugh Law, Colonel Lockwood, Mr. Alfred Mason and Mr. Herbert Samuel were selected as committee members and the first meeting was held on July 29, 1909.

This 1909 Joint Select Committee on Censorship and Licensing attempted a thorough examination of censorship practice despite the fundamental difficulties with which the committee had to cope (and indeed some of which they created for themselves). In their examination they refused to hear any testimony concerning controversial plays which had been censored, and while they heard testimonies from men and women in every walk of theatrical life, the Censor's superior, the Lord Chamberlain himself was never examined. Also, in the process of trying to clarify and reorganise the censorship, compromises had to be made so that the committee eventually produced only a very weak and inconclusive document as the possible basis for later legislative action. Yet despite these self-imposed restrictions the published minutes of the committee are an excellent guide to the conflict between the Victorian notion of theatre, which saw the theatre as the

³⁰Public Bills, 1909, v. 329, Bill 160, p. 329.

³¹The Times, May 29, 1909, p. 10f.

upholder of a defineable standard of morality, and the new idea that theatre should have the freedom to discuss the sometimes unpleasant circumstances of modern life. Implicit in these two views is the conflict between a paternalistic theatre with a Censor setting the rules and ensuring decency, and the idea of local government control, with legal action taking place after production, and public law, not private opinion responsible for public morality.

The main issue before the committee was the fundamental nature of theatrical censorship. This included moral and legal implications as well as possible alternatives to the existing structure. But the committee also discussed the problem of licensing music halls for stage plays and whether a legal distinction should be made between the theatre and the music hall. Other questions considered during the hearing included the question of smoking in the theatres, and who should control the physical aspects of theatres and music halls. The committee held fifteen sessions beginning on July 29, 1909 and ending on September 24, 1909, and heard testimony from 49 separate witnesses.

The witnesses before the 1909 committee contrasted strongly with those before the 1892 investigations. Besides politicians and solicitors, the 1909 group also contained a large number of playwrights, actor-managers, and theatre union representatives, the people most directly affected by the censorship. Of the 49 witnesses, 27 were for censorship of some kind, 19 against the censorship altogether, and 3 witnesses not examined on the issue (See Appendix I.). The committee also heard representatives of different religious factions in an attempt to define morality on religious grounds.

The first thing that can be seen from the testimony, is that all the witnesses believed the theatre a very unique art form, quite different from the press or from literature. The effect of the stage on people was considered to be different from that of a book, requiring a different kind of supervision.

Moreover scenes in a play may stimulate to vice without falling into the legal definition of indecency; they may include personalities so offensive as to be clearly improper for presentation yet are not punishable as libellous; they may outrage feelings of religious reverence without coming within the scope of the Blasphemy Law; and they may give occasion for demonstrations injurious to good relations between this country and Foreign powers without coming within the purview of any law whatsoever.³²

³²Joint Select Committee 1909, p. 8.

To the committee the drama was capable of morally or immorally influencing an audience not consciously aware that its members were being influenced. Consequently the audience had to be carefully protected from any possible injury to its virtue. Political or moral propaganda might be presented on the stage, and could be an unwholesome influence. At one meeting of the committee, W.S. Gilbert elaborated on the dangers of exposing doctrine to an audience. When asked why he favoured censorship of some kind, he replied,

Because I think that the stage of a theatre is not the proper pulpit from which to disseminate doctrines possibly of anarchism, of socialism, and of agnosticism, and it is not the proper platform upon which to discuss questions of adultery and free love, before a mixed audience composed of persons of all ages, and both sexes, of all ways of thinking, of all conditions of life and various degrees of education.³³

While the protection of public morality served as a convenient reason for the continuation of the Censor, there was also the protection of financial interests to be considered. Both theatrical managers and actors argued in favour of the Censor, for he provided them with a sense of security. If he licensed a play, it was doubtful that anybody would prosecute for obscenity or immorality. And as the Censor tended to be lenient toward big money-makers like racy French farces and 'naughty' musical comedies, actors and managers were satisfied with the Censor's decisions. It was feared that if the local authorities became the censors, a harder line would be taken with those immoral imports and burlesques.

Those who argued against the Censor also saw the theatre as something unique and for this very reason sought to ensure its freedom from any kind of interference. Hall Caine, an author and playwright, testified that to censor current morality is to legislate future morality and the function of theatre ought to be more than a presentation of conventional morality.

I hold that to say that the theatre ought not to be a pulpit, a platform for the discussion of moral, political and religious questions, such as Ibsen is constantly dealing with, is to insult the memory of nearly all the great dramatists. The moral conscience is written all over the great dramas of the past in all ages and in every country.³⁴

Granville Barker went one step further and said that one should not represent immorality on stage (a direct comment on the indecent French

³³Joint Select Committee 1909, p. 190.

³⁴Ibid., p. 309.

farces passed by the Censor) without showing the consequences that follow.³⁵ For this reason he felt that the reference to abortion censored from his play Waste, was vital to the morality of the drama.

The playwrights also held that the threat of censorship inhibited their creativity in playwriting, and the unpredictability of the Censor gave them no guide as to what would be licensed. Laurence Housman, whose religious play, Bethlehem, was censored because of its religious subject matter, spoke about the inhibitory nature of the censorship. "My third point is that the censorship in its present state has a withering effect upon productive effort, and that withering effect is not limited to plays which deal in personalities, in sex problems, or in international politics, but touches even the historical drama."³⁶ An example of the vagaries of the Censor is seen in the censored lines of Shaw's play, The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet. Speaking of God, one of the characters says, or, rather, was not allowed to say, "He has not finished with you yet; he always has a trick up his sleeve."³⁷ Statistically the argument that the Censor prevented the best efforts of playwrights appeared absurd, for during the Edwardian period up until 1909 only 27 plays out of 4232 plays were censored.³⁸ But the fervent testimony by playwrights indicates that the psychological deterrent of the censorship greatly influenced their writing.

While the playwrights consistently argued against the prevailing censorship, they also had individual proposals for an alternative system. Actually the variety of alternatives proposed was but a divisive factor, destroying the unity of the protest. The simplest alternative was the idea of an appeals court which could overrule the Censor's decision. But this was felt by many to be too arbitrary.

John Galsworthy's idea of a workable system was to abolish the system of licensing altogether, and have the theatres under local control. In the event of the production of an indecent play, complaints could be lodged with a public prosecutor by an individual or the government, and prosecutions would only occur after the production had been seen and judged.³⁹ Laurence Housman, on the other hand, felt that the public should be protected before the performance of a play. He suggested the substitution of a King's Proctor for the Censor, with the submission of a play manuscript becoming optional. He felt the incentive to submit plays would be sufficient for

³⁵Joint Select Committee 1909, p. 75.

³⁶Ibid., p. 146.

³⁷Ibid., p. 138.

³⁸Ibid., p. 87.

³⁹Ibid., p. 129.

most plays to be submitted to the Proctor. However, the option would remain open for those plays which were better seen and then judged in performance.⁴⁰ Gilbert Murray's proposal was that there should be a clarification of the criteria to be applied in censoring. Then he proposed an optional censorship, wherein it would be the Examiner of Play's duty to see whether a play broke any existing law.⁴¹

The conflict over the single license, that is, the right of music halls to perform stage plays also emphasised what Edwardians considered was unique to the theatre and was more than a conflict of financial interests. Although legitimate theatre managers feared the loss of an audience to the music hall should the single licence be adopted, they also made a very definite moral distinction between the theatre and the music hall. Contrary to the large amount of testimony about falling standards in the legitimate theatre, Lena Ashwell, a popular actress of the day, still felt, "...in the music hall it is merely an entertainment for people who do not wish to think, whereas the theatre is very often an entertainment for the helping of thought."⁴² Colonel Dawson, the Comptroller of the Lord Chamberlain's department, went further and said music hall audiences and theatre audiences were two different breeds and thought "any attempt to combine the two in London would certainly be a mistake."⁴³ It was only Granville Barker who made the crucial distinction between theatre and music hall audiences by saying it depended on what was being presented onstage. "As was put, I think, in a question to the last witness, there is much less difference between the average musical comedy and a high class music hall performance than there is between the musical comedy and a performance of a serious drama, either a classical drama or a modern drama."⁴⁴

At times the committee hearings degenerated to the level of those farces the more literary playwrights decried. The clash between the more conservative members of the committee and George Bernard Shaw did not help the cause of anti-censorship, yet shows the misunderstandings and personality conflicts that went on during the meetings. Shaw, referring to the precedent set by Sir Henry Irving and Sir John Hare during the 1892 investigation, wished to submit a written document (which he had printed privately) instead of replying orally. The blue pamphlets were given to the committee members and various other important personages. They soon became a prestige item, and were collected by everyone who could lay hands on one or more copies

⁴⁰Joint Select Committee 1909, p. 147.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 215.

⁴²Ibid., p. 210.

⁴³Ibid., p. 98.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 70.

and reached a saleable value of about five guineas. During his testimony (the committee refused Shaw's request and asked him to reply orally) Shaw completely alienated the conservative faction by his testimony and implied that the committee had been treating his pamphlet as a collector's item and that some members had more than the one copy he had given them. The committee, in order to clear themselves of this charge, planned to cut Shaw's testimony short and return the pamphlets in question. But Shaw still had the last word:

When Mr. Samuel had informed me that the Committee had no further questions to ask me with an urbanity which gave the public no clue as to the temper of the majority; when I had jumped up with the proper air of relief and gratitude; when the secretary had handed me his little packet of books with an affability which effectually concealed his dramatic function as executioner; when the audience was simply disappointed at being baulked of the entertainment of hearing Mr. Robert Harcourt cross-examine me; in short, when the situation was all but saved by the tact of the Chairman and secretary, Colonel Lockwood rose, with all his carnations blazing and gave away the whole case by handing me, with impressive simplicity and courtesy, his two copies of the precious document.⁴⁵

The committee attempted to go beyond the direct testimony of the witnesses. A questionnaire was sent by the committee to boroughs throughout England inquiring about the licensing authority in each borough and asking for suggestions about the censorship system. Questionnaires were also sent to diplomatic representatives overseas asking about the regulation of stage plays abroad.

Although the censorship inquiry was overshadowed by the notoriety of Lloyd George's 1909 Budget, each session was covered by the major newspapers, with comments and criticism. For the most part the newspapers and journals favoured abolition, seeing theatrical censorship as an extension of control of the press. In an editorial published on July 31, The Daily News used the testimony of Mr. George Redford, the Censor, as an example of the absurdity of the institution. "The cross-examination of Mr. Redford before the Joint Committee has made it evident that the Censorship of Stage Plays in its present form has become a mere arbitrary farce. It is arbitrary, because by Mr. Redford's own admission, no definite instructions are given to the Censor as to the way in which he is to exercise his powers."⁴⁶ In addition to such editorial comment, the testimony of each session was recorded

⁴⁵Shaw, George Bernard, The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet: a Sermon in Crude Melodrama (1913), p. 315.

⁴⁶The Daily News, July 31, 1909, p. 4c.

verbatim in The Times and other newspapers.

The Censorship Committee showed the public how the Censor and the Lord Chamberlain were protected by the Crown and permitted to practise an arbitrary censorship. As members of the King's household paid from the civil lists, the Lord Chamberlain and the Censor were outside Parliament's domain. Many of the acknowledged guidance lines to theatrical censorship (e.g. no religious subjects, rulings on morality) were but conventions dependent on the Censor's personal bias. The playwright had no way to plead his own case, as communications took place only between the theatre manager and the Censor. Finally, music hall productions were not considered by the Censor and music halls were unable to present legitimate plays. Because of the real anomalies the Censorship Committee was able only to make recommendations to Parliament that smacked of compromise.

The committee did however make several major decisions concerning censorship in theatres and music halls. First of all they suggested that the Censor be retained in his present form, not accountable to Parliament, but with the stipulation that "it should be optional to submit a play for licence and legal to perform an unlicensed play."⁴⁷ The danger of having immoral plays in production would be reduced by a manager's natural caution in producing an unlicensed play when only an unlicensed play could be prosecuted. The committee also felt that the Censor should have the power to rule on all productions and enforce penalties on theatres, managers and authors of prosecuted plays. To ameliorate the arbitrary nature of the censorship a more direct contact with the Lord Chamberlain as well as the Censor was recommended, and scriptural subjects should be allowed onstage.⁴⁸ In the case of music halls, the single licence should be adopted, allowing legitimate plays on the music hall stage.⁴⁹ The committee's recommendations embodied an uneasy compromise which was bound to be ineffective in practice. The Censor still existed although optional, yet the pressures of the modern stage would continue to place theatre production under his arbitrary control. Because managers would be afraid to present unlicensed plays, the majority of plays would still be submitted to the Censor. The committee tried to appease the writers of the modern social dramas that the Censor had refused to license by saying in their recommendations:

⁴⁷Joint Select Committee 1909, p. xxviii.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. xxvi-xxx.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. xvi.

In the future performance of his duties the Lord Chamberlain should not, in our opinion, be led to act with greater stringency than hitherto in dealing with serious plays touching on moral problems, by the consideration that under our proposals such plays would be able, without his license, to appear on stage.⁵⁰

Despite the liberality of some of their recommendations, the committee still believed that "The freedom designed for the 'drama of ideas' may be made an opportunity for a drama of indecencies and personalities."⁵¹

When the committee was drawing up its final report, Robert Harcourt persistently tried to re-word the recommendations to make them more acceptable to the anti-censorship playwrights. It seemed as if he alone had to battle for a more liberal censorship when an unexpected motion by Lord Gorell showed that Harcourt had an ally and that Lord Gorell had been converted to an anti-censorship stand.

We consider that an optional censorship is not logical, although it might work, if the powers of licence and of prohibition subsequent to performance were in the same authority with adequate competent advice. Rather than separate these powers as was suggested by some witnesses, it would be advisable to abolish prior licence altogether...⁵²

In the vote that followed only Gorell and Harcourt voted for the motion, yet it shows that the evidence given during the meetings was capable of changing someone's basic preconceptions about the censorship.

The change in attitudes toward the censorship can be seen in the differences between the 1892 committee and the 1909 committee.. The large amount of press coverage in 1909 compared with the almost total lack of interest by the press in 1892, indicates the growing interest in the censorship debate as a news item. Secondly, the wide range of opinion from a more varied group of witnesses in the 1909 hearing brought to the attention of the public new thoughts about theatrical supervision. The change in emphasis from one of licensing procedure in 1892 to censorship in 1909 or from legal issues to ethical issues is also indicative of the changing conception of theatre. The most striking example of this change is the number of witnesses who spoke against the censorship in 1909 compared with the lone voice of William Archer in 1892. Also, throughout the testimony of the 1909 hearing, one can see the growing consciousness that playwriting and play production was an art form, with existing

⁵⁰Joint Select Committee 1909, p. xiii.

⁵¹Ibid., p. xxvii.

⁵²Ibid., p. xxviii.

conditions of the censorship acting as a deterrent to artistic creation. It is not that theatre had achieved total respectability by 1909, but that it considered itself capable of making some sort of moral statement.

Besides meetings of the committee there were other events in 1909 which dealt with the censorship. First, Mr. Redford, the Censor, refused to license two of Shaw's plays, The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet and Press-Cuttings. This led to a series of letters to The Times by Shaw condemning the censoring and drawing attention to the problem of censorship during the year of the Joint Committee. One of these letters dealt with the fact that while Redford accepted a fee for one of Shaw's plays, he did not give Shaw a licence in return. Mr. Shaw was quick to act. "The statement in my letter of 13th that 'Mr. Redford's fee has been paid' requires an additional piece of information which did not reach me until today. It seems that Mr. Redford, apparently in a fit of remorse, has returned the twenty-one pieces of silver."⁵³ Two pamphlets attacking the institution of censorship also appeared, The Censorship Muddle and A Way Out of It by Henry Arthur Jones; and A Justification of the Censorship, the latter appearing anonymously but which the British Museum catalogue attributes to John Galsworthy.

There were many reactions to the 1909 committee though no action in Parliament on their proposals. It was generally conceded that the published report was too much of a compromise. Some playwrights, Pinero, Shaw, Barrie, etc. felt the changes proposed not radical enough and reiterated their desire for an end to the established censorship.⁵⁴ On the other side, the Society of West-End Theatre Managers felt the recommendations were too liberal, and passed a resolution condemning the suggestions embodied in the Censorship Committee report.⁵⁵ And in the middle, an article in The Quarterly Review urged the adoption of the 1909 committee's proposals because, "While stoutly convinced that the ideal step would be the abolition of the Censorship, we may still welcome the proposals of the Select Committee as likely to provide through experience the information needed. In any case, they offer the best we are likely to get."⁵⁶

These matters remained until the Censor refused a licence to Laurence Housman's play, Pains and Penalties. This was a play about the divorce of Queen Caroline from King George IV and was refused a licence by the Lord Chamberlain's office because "it dealt with a sad historical episode of comparatively recent date (about 100 years ago!) in the life of an unhappy

⁵³The Times, July 16, 1909, p. 13c.

⁵⁴Ibid., Nov. 19, 1909, p. 10.

⁵⁵Ibid., Jan. 7, 1910, p. 9c.

⁵⁶The Quarterly Review, v. 213, July-December 1910, p. 376.

lady."⁵⁷ More likely the refusal once again indicates the Censor's disinclination to license plays which might be in any way critical of Crown and government, no matter how remote. Housman, incensed by the Censor's action, published in The Times all his correspondence with the Lord Chamberlain's office in an attempt to publicise the Censor's usual manner of having matters "privately and confidentially attended to".⁵⁸ This provoked a rapid exchange of letters, including one from a gentleman who felt that Housman's play about George IV was damaging to the present dynasty! And on October 3, 1910 yet another protest against the censorship was published in The Times signed by a number of playwrights including Arthur Conan Doyle and W.S. Maugham. Housman published the play in 1911 and included a preface denouncing censorship in England. His main opposition to the censorship was the secrecy of the Censor's methods.

And the only thing I wish to add here is my hope that the Lord Chamberlain keeps an uncooked record, not only of the published, but also of the private and confidential communications which pass between his officials and others in connection with the suppression of modern drama, and that a time may soon come when those documents will be collated in the light of day.⁵⁹

As in the case of many other censored plays, a play society was formed (in this case the Pioneer Players) and Pains and Penalties was performed privately on November 25, 1911.⁶⁰

In early November 1911 the Lord Chamberlain's office took an action which seem designed to forestall any Parliamentary action. On November 12, The Times announced that the Lord Chamberlain's office had instituted an Advisory Board to help the Censor with his duties. The active members of the Board included Sir Squire Bancroft, Professor Walter Raleigh (a prominent English professor), Sir Edward Carson and S.O. Buckmaster.⁶¹ It was a conservative group and, as an editorial in The Times noted, likely to excite the opposition all the more.⁶²

In November 1911, showing that the Advisory Board was not an indication of changes to come, the Censor once again showed inconsistency in dealing with submitted plays. About November 18, John Halpin, a theatre manager, received word that his proposed production of Bataille's La Vierge Folle (in French) would not be allowed. It seems the Censor was

⁵⁷The Times, Nov. 17, 1910, p. 12f.

⁵⁸Ibid., Sept. 29, 1910, p. 12d.

⁵⁹Housman, Laurence, Pains and Penalties— the Defence of Queen Caroline (1911), p. vii.

⁶⁰The Times, Nov. 27, 1911, p. 8.

⁶¹Ibid., Nov. 12, 1910, p. 13d.

⁶²Ibid., Nov. 14, 1910.

unsure of the decency of the production and certainly meant to delay the production until he was sure. In a letter to Mr. Halpin he said,

Referring to your list of French plays in your forthcoming repertoire, I am afraid I must ask you to ascertain from some published list whether these plays have been performed in England. I am extremely busy just now, and really cannot afford the time to search the register at the Lord Chamberlain's office...⁶³

Mr. Halpin postponed the play, but was much surprised to learn from the Lord Chamberlain's office that if the play were resubmitted it would receive a licence. The play was performed without incident. The Times reviewer provided the key to this little puzzle when he wrote that he felt that the difficulties stemmed from Redford's trouble with French! "Seeing that the Censor's inconsistency in regard to plays of this class has been more than usually conspicuous when they happen to have been written in French, it has been conjectured that his difficulties have been really linguistic."⁶⁴

The cause célèbre of the censorship struggle in 1911 came with the appointment of Charles Brookfield as co-Censor with George Redford. Brookfield was a popular and urbane playwright who had none of Redford's difficulty with the French language, having himself translated various French plays. His appointment was odd, for he had achieved a certain notoriety during the 1909 hearing, when his play, Dear Old Charlie was cited as an example of the kind of indecent play the Censor let through. His parody of Granville Barker's Waste, entitled Sewage, did not endear him to many of the anti-censorship faction, but may have helped him in changing his theatrical image. Despite his dislike of Granville Barker, he was hardly the man to preach strict morality in contemporary theatre. The theatrical world, therefore, read with some surprise an article by Brookfield in the November 1911 issue of The National Review entitled "On Plays and Play-Writing". This article was almost a complete negation of the principles of the anti-censorship faction. Brookfield praised the theatre of his youth for its 'merry farces', encouraged the old British practice of stealing and adapting foreign plays, and above all else chastised the modern playwright who felt he had a social and moral message to give the world.

His only equipment for his self-imposed task is a morbid imagination - an ingenuity for conceiving horrors in the way of unusual sins, abnormal unions, inherited taints.

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⁶³The Times, Nov. 18, 1911, p. 12f.

⁶⁴Ibid., Nov. 27, 1911, p. 10.

And this is the kind of young man who inveighs against the discretionary powers of the Lord Chamberlain, and cries out against the merry humours of Labiche.⁶⁵

It was as if Brookfield was proving himself competent to continue the tradition of incompetent censorship. Unsurprisingly, the appointment of Brookfield as co-Censor with George Redford, caused consternation among those who opposed the censorship, a consternation reflected in theatrical circles and in the press.

During a private performance of Housman's censored play, Pains and Penalties, Granville Barker proposed a resolution absolutely condemning Brookfield's appointment. It was duly passed by the audience.⁶⁶ The Observer summarised the press response by saying that the Daily Graphic and Sporting News were the only two newspapers which seemed to approve of the appointment.⁶⁷ A comment by Shaw, in an Observer interview, was typical of many newspaper editorials and letters to the editor.

I should, in fact, reject it without question or hesitation as a particularly absurd invention if it were not for the fact that the present Lord Chamberlain is capable of anything. One cannot, therefore, help the horrible suspicion that he may be even capable of this. All I can say is, if he has done it he has even surpassed himself - a feat I should have supposed to be impossible.⁶⁸

Robert Harcourt initiated a discussion in Parliament of Mr. Brookfield's suitability for the appointment. Mr. McKenna cut the discussion short by saying that Brookfield should have a chance to defend himself.⁶⁹ The denouement came in late December when Redford resigned, leaving Brookfield as the sole Censor.

Although there were many incidents involving the playwright and the Censor, Lawrence Cowen was the only playwright who brought his case to court. In November 1911, Cowen submitted two pieces to the Censor, one act from The Pity of It, a four act play which had been already licensed and produced and Tricked, a one-act play. Both plays were returned to Cowen with one line underlined in The Pity of It and passages marked in Tricked. Cowen made the requested changes and resubmitted the plays only to be told the Censor did not recognise the playwright. When the newly

⁶⁵The National Review, v. 58, September 1911-February 1912, pp. 419-435.

⁶⁶The Times, November 27, 1911, p. 8d.

⁶⁷The Observer, December 3, 1911, p. 16b.

⁶⁸Ibid., November 25, 1911, p. 9g.

⁶⁹Hansard, December 1, 1911.

formed Advisory Board refused to license his plays, Cowen took the case to court on the grounds that the Lord Chamberlain refused to return his manuscripts. A long court case followed in which the Lord Chamberlain agreed to be summoned to court. Cowen's argument was that a play licensed four years ago should certainly be allowed to be performed and since he made the changes the Censor required, the Censor could only be acting in a capricious and unfair manner. But the case was decided for the Lord Chamberlain on the technicalities of the Theatres Act which only recognised relations between theatre managers and the Censor. "The plaintiff, by his own act sent in a document not signed by the manager. It was the copy plaintiff himself sent. There was no proof by the plaintiff that the defendant was wrongfully detaining them."⁷⁰ Although Cowen lost the case, it increased public interest in the censorship. Even the presiding judge agreed half-heartedly, "I cannot say that it is a case of public interest, although it has attained a great deal of notoriety."⁷¹ Following the trial, the capricious Censor granted Cowen a licence for Tricked.

In the two years before the war, there were continued incidents like the Cowen and Housman confrontations. Newspapers published protests and counterprotests were signed by all sorts of influential people inside and outside the theatre. The combatants changed slightly. Ernest Alfred Bendall was appointed to fill Redford's place, and in 1913, when Brookfield died, his place was filled by George S. Street, but neither of these new appointments raised a furor^e like Brookfield's. It became fashionable to go to private performances of censored plays. Among those present at a private performance of Eden Phillpott's censored play, The Secret Woman, were Lord and Lady Grey, Priscilla Lady Annesley, Lady Ponsenby, Mr. George Moore, Mr. H.G. Wells, and Mr. Bernard Shaw.⁷² And while there was no legislative action, there were longer and more frequent discussions in Parliament, including an interchange in the House of Lords. Robert Harcourt kept the controversy alive in Parliament only to be dealt by the government who had too many other important matters at hand.

Harcourt's ethical, if not legal, victory is shown in the general change of sentiment in Parliament towards the censorship right before the war. In April 1913, he brought a motion before the House:

That the attempt to maintain by means of antiquated legislation a legal distinction between a theatre and a music hall, and to differentiate between productions called stage plays, and other dramatic performances, is
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⁷⁰The Times, March 13, 1912.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 7.

⁷²Ibid., February 23, 1912.

unworkable; that the system of licensing plays before production in Great Britain, though not in Ireland, by means principally of the perusal of a manuscript should be abolished; and that, as regards stage exhibitions of whatever kind or wherever given, reliance should be placed on subsequent effective control.⁷³

The following debate emphasised the issue of morality versus immorality in the modern theatre. However the motion was carried and echoes the changing sentiments of Parliament if not the government. One motion was not enough to initiate legislation, because there was not enough pressure to change the system. Mr. Ellis Griffith, the Undersecretary of State for the Home Department spoke on Mr. Harcourt's motion. "As far as I am able to gauge the opinion of the public, they are not greatly concerned about this matter. They have maintained a very discreet attitude, both one way or the other, and they have kept perfectly calm in the face of tonight's Debate."⁷⁴

With the outbreak of war, nothing was done about the censorship. Towards the middle of 1914, the letters to the editor, magazine articles, and protests seemed to stop and the matter seemed to have been postponed along with suffragette and trade union issues as the more immediate issue of national defence took precedence.

Although it held great significance in the development of modern theatre, the anti-censorship movement was a minority movement, led by a group of intellectual elitist playwrights. The majority of the theatre world was behind the Censor, both for reasons of financial security and moral unanimity. And it would appear that the movement for censorship reform was accelerated by the exceptional clash of personalities. If Redford had been more communicative with the playwrights, or if Brookfield had not taken such a hard line on the morality issue after 1911, the movement might never have gathered the momentum which brought it to the attention of the public. Yet the changing circumstances of theatre must clash with an authority which seemed set against the emerging vitality of the social drama. John Palmer, in his book, The Future of the Theatre (1913), spoke about this change.

The revolt against the censorship of the stage synchronises with the renaissance of English drama. It is no mere accident of chronology that agitation against the absolute rule of the Lord Chamberlain's clerk dates from the appearance of Mr. William Archer before the Committee of 1892 as a solitary witness on behalf of a free theatre, or that these witnesses in 1909 swelled to a host.⁷⁵

⁷³Hansard, LI, 16 April 1913, 2036.

⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 2054-5.

⁷⁵Palmer, John The Future of the Theatre (1913), pp. 93-4.

Palmer's "renaissance of English drama" meant the frank dealing with the social forces, manners and morals the new playwrights considered to be the new theatre. The conflict with the Censor began when these playwrights, critics and audience began to see theatre as a possible means of discussing new social, moral or political standards of the public. This enlargement of the role of theatre led to a greater possible subject matter for plays. If death by illegal abortion happens in a society which refuses to forgive moral trespasses, then it should be permissible to portray the implications of this in the theatre. The playwrights did not dispute the Censor's intention, (to place only drama with integrity on the stage) only his inability to distinguish between obscenity and moral treatment of disagreeable subjects. John Galsworthy said the censored plays were censored "not for treating vice in a light attractive way, but for following out its consequences with grim indelicacy or for offering severe criticism of current standards of morality, both of which elements in a work of art are natively offensive to the normal sentiments of man."⁷⁶

A frank dealing with social realities does not necessarily mean a high artistic standard. Few of the censored plays save Shaw's Mrs. Warren's Profession or Ibsen's Ghosts are performed today and for modern readers it is difficult to see either the moral objection posed by the Censor or the artistic justification found for their presentation in private performances by contemporaries. The moral fervour of the dramatists who dealt with social realism can be seen as a growing awareness of modern society and another factor in the unique composition of Edwardian theatre. Max Beerbohm wrote of the conflict between this excessive morality and the effect of the censorship.

Not merely to depict life as it is, but to point therefrom some moral, is the aim of all dramatic authors who count for anything at all to-day. Very often their moral fervour, their wish to do good gets in the way of their artistic achievement. Their anxiety to be helpful to mankind does very often make their work clumsy. Propagandism in drama is a passing fashion, I daresay, and the playwright of the future will be as little anxious to do good as they will be to do harm. Meanwhile, being even more definitely moralists than artists, our playwrights have especial reason for resenting an official whose effect is so often to prevent them not merely from depicting life, but from exerting a moral influence.⁷⁷

The question of censorship also involved the role of theatre in society. What comes out of the debate is the sense that theatre of all the art forms

⁷⁶Galsworthy, John A Justification of the Censorship of Plays (1909), p. 12.

⁷⁷Beerbohm, Max "The Censorship Report" in The Saturday Review, November 20, 1909, p. 625.

is capable of affecting people uniquely. During the 1909 committee, it was noted that it is easier to close a book than walk out of a theatre and that actual representation is more vivid than text alone. Therefore protectors of the status quo felt the theatre must be closely watched lest it corrupt moral standards or preach revolutionary propaganda. The banding together of playwrights to place the theatre under legal instead of paternalistic control seems a move to make theatre a living and growing art form, not something subject to one man's whim. The success of these groups in censorship reform was slight. Loosely bound together, fragmented by different solutions, they nevertheless showed a new unity in the theatrical world, where art was more important than profit.

In spite of their fervour, the playwrights were still able to laugh at the censorship. J.M. Barrie wrote a short playlet entitled "The Censor and the Dramatists" parodying the censorship system. A review of the playlet (produced in New York) gives a synopsis of the action.

Mr. Carle and Miss Williams appear as vaudeville acrobats engaged by an anxious author to play the leading roles in his modern drama in its trial performance. The censor (Will West) on this occasion happens to be an architect occupying a seat in the orchestra. He finds nothing to object to until Miss Williams announces her intention of retiring to her own room. This arouses him. No reasonable built house, he says would have a bedroom on the ground floor. He is an architect, and he knows. He insists, therefore, that the play should be rewritten. Disheartened by his decision, dramatists and players commit suicide. Which, as has been written, is a killing finish.⁷⁸

Despite ridicule and argument, the censorship remained and any possible reform was cut off by the advent of war. However, the controversy which surrounded its action, demonstrates that the theatre, like many other branches of English life, was changing and rebelling against tradition and convention.

⁷⁸Munsey's Magazine, v. 50, October 1913-January 1914, p. 477.

(NB. After the first draft of this chapter had been written I came across a chapter on the theatre and also dealing with the censorship in Mr. Samuel Hynes's book, The Edwardian Turn of Mind (1968). Using such evidence as the Report of the Joint Select Committee (1909) and other articles and reports, Mr. Hynes suggests that the censorship was a function of officialdom and acted "in defense of an established order, and therefore as fundamentally political and social in nature". (p. 217) I was pleased to find confirmation in Mr Hynes's scholarly work of some of my own conclusions e.g. the indifference of the Liberal government to censorship reform and the role of the Censor as defender of the status quo.)

Appendix I.

1909 Committee - List of Witnesses and Position on the Censorship

(in order of appearance before the committee)

Mr. W.P. Byrne-Under Secretary of State for the Home Department	pro-censorship
Mr. G.A. Redford-Censor	pro-censorship
Mr. William Archer-drama critic	anti-censorship
Mr. George Bernard Shaw-playwright	anti-censorship
Mr. W.F. Fladgate-solicitor	pro-censorship
Mr. Granville Barker-playwright	anti-censorship
Col. Douglas Dawson-Comptroller, Lord Chamberlain's Department	pro-censorship
Mr. J.M. Barrie-playwright	anti-censorship
Mr. J. Forbes Robertson- actor-manager	pro-censorship
Mr. Cecil Raleigh-playwright	anti-censorship
Mr. John Galsworthy-playwright	anti-censorship
Mr. F. Whelen-founder Incorporated Stage Society	anti-censorship
Mr. L. Housman-playwright	anti-censorship
Mr. Herbert Beerbohm Tree- actor-manager	pro-censorship
Mr. Bram Stoker-theatre manager	pro-censorship
Mr. W. Bealtes Redfern-theatre manager	pro-censorship
Mr. P. Hedderwick-solicitor for Theatre Managers Association	pro-censorship
Mr. F. Mouillot-theatre manager-Theatre Royal Dublin	anti-censorship
Mr. J.H. Savile-theatre manager	pro-censorship
Mr. W.L. Courtney-playwright	anti-censorship
Mr. T.P. le Fanu-Chief Clerk Irish Office	anti-censorship
Sir William Gilbert-playwright	pro-censorship
Mr. C. Derwent-representative Actors Association	pro-censorship
Mr. A.B. Walkley-drama critic <u>The Times</u>	pro-censorship
Miss Lena Ashwell-actress	pro-censorship
Prof. Gilbert Murray-professor and playwright	anti-censorship
Mr. J.B. Mulholland-actor and manager	pro-censorship
Mr. George Alexander- actor-manager	pro-censorship
Mr. G. Edwardes- actor-manager	pro-censorship
Mr. M.V. Leveaux-theatre manager	pro-censorship
Mr. J.W. Comyns Carr-playwright	anti-censorship
Mr. F. Gerald-representative Actors Union	anti-censorship
Mr. Herbert Samuel-speaker 1909 Censorship Committee	pro-censorship
Mr. H. Tozer-director music hall	pro-censorship
Mr. O. Stoll-director music hall	pro-censorship
Mr. P.J. Rutland-solicitor	pro-censorship
Mr. A. Moul-chairman Alhambra Co.	anti-censorship
Mr. P. Akerman-secretary and solicitor Music Hall Sketches Artistes	neutral
Mr. P. Carr	anti-censorship
The Right Rev. The Lord Bishop of Southwark	pro-censorship
Mr. J.G. Snead-Cox editor magazine <u>The Tablet</u>	pro-censorship
Mr. Hall Caine-playwright and author	anti-censorship
Mr. G.L. Gomme-clerk London County Council	neutral
Mr. Israel Zangwill-playwright and author	anti-censorship
Sir Squire Bancroft- actor-manager	pro-censorship
Sir Arthur Pinero-playwright	anti-censorship
Mr. W.H. Clement-secretary Variety Artistes Fed.	neutral
Mr. G.K. Chesterton-author	pro-censorship
Mr. P. Yorke-lessee Aldwych Theatre	pro-censorship

Chapter Six

The Actor in the Edwardian Theatre World

The Edwardian actor's world was very similar to the actor's world today. The perils of frequent unemployment, low wages and a constant turnover of rivals in the labour pool had to be acknowledged by the would-be thespian. For the successful there would be star parts, high salaries and audience adulation. For the less fortunate, a career was likely to consist of a fruitless tramp from one theatrical agency to another - in such cases, even the occasional small role meant little money, long hours, dingy boarding house accommodation and deplorable working conditions. The Edwardian actor had no union like today's Actors' Equity to turn to in times of trouble. Actors were not paid during rehearsals, and if the play was a failure they were dismissed with little notice and no compensation for their efforts. In smaller theatres and touring companies, actors were often required to supply their own costumes, and the supporting actors often had to survive on salaries ranging from about 75 pence to £2 or £3 a week. Working conditions were often poor, especially in the provinces. There, the company was most likely to be an impromptu one, with one or two men acting as an entire stage crew. Even in the West End some theatres had filthy dressing rooms, permeated with the smell of leaking gas and sewage.

For the actor who managed to move into the ranks of the secondary and leading parts, the profession had more security. With a bit of luck this actor would be able to build a reputation for himself and be in work all the time. For these 'working actors' the profession became a club, a replica of comfortable bourgeois society, which moved in perfect harmony with the middle class giants who were producing plays and building theatres. It is a peculiar phenomenon of the Edwardian period that the actor, producer and builder could be the same person.

The theatre actor-manager has been written about frequently in terms of his artistic conceptions, the plays he produced and the kind of roles for which he was reknowned. Sir George Alexander the actor-manager of the St. James's Theatre was known as the debonair man-about-town, the actor who always looked perfectly at ease in a dinner jacket. Sir Herbert Tree of

Her Majesty's Theatre was the emotional actor, who played character parts in high drama with the right amount of melodramatic flair. Harley Granville Barker was known as the pioneer who promoted Shaw and who experimented with new ways of producing Shakespeare. Despite their different ways of interpreting and producing theatre, these men were all part of the powerful theatrical fraternity which could and did exert a great deal of pressure on the entire theatrical profession.

Such organisations as the Society of West End Theatre Managers and the Suburban Theatre Managers Association served these men as employers's unions, laying down policy on employment, salaries and working conditions. Masonic Lodges connected with the theatrical profession such as the Drury Lane Lodge, and theatrical clubs like the Garrick, the Savage and the Eccentric further cemented friendships and business relations between the men with power in the theatrical fraternity. For all the talk of the unsavoury actor and his rogue and vagabond ways, the theatre was actually controlled by a staunchly middle class elite.

Sir Herbert Tree, who has been discussed earlier and who built and managed and acted at Her Majesty's Theatre until his death in 1917, epitomises the middle class spirit which dominated English theatre before the war. He was born in London in 1853 the second son of Julius Ewald Beerbohm, a London grain merchant of mixed German, Dutch and Lithuanian extraction. Tree was educated in England and at Schnepfenthal College, Thuringia and afterwards entered his father's business. He soon became fascinated by the theatre and as early as 1876 he was acting in amateur productions. He received good reviews for his characterisation of Grimaldi in The Life of an Actress and this brought him an engagement with Henry Newbolt at the Olympic Theatre in July 1878. His career well underway, he continued to excell in character parts and during the eighties his chief success was the role of the amusing Rev. Robert Spalding in The Private Secretary. As has been mentioned, Tree's first foray into theatrical management came in 1887 when he produced the popular success The Red Lamp at the Comedy Theatre. This initial success encouraged him to try to manage the Haymarket Theatre which he took over in the same year. His productions at the Haymarket were sufficiently successful to enable him to build Her Majesty's Theatre in 1897. At Her Majesty's Tree presented a varied programme including many productions of Shakespeare, Stephen Phillip's verse plays and works of Shaw besides many now-forgotten pot-boilers. In 1904 he helped found the Academy of Dramatic Arts, a training school for young actors. He was also a trustee and vice-president of the Actors' Benevolent Fund and president of the Actor's Association and for his contributions

to the theatrical profession and to charity, he was knighted in 1909.¹

To all intents and purposes, Tree was a captain of industry - albeit the theatrical industry. His business career followed all the precepts of the protestant ethic - industry, discipline and expansion. He even had the businessman's ignorance of theatrical reality. His step-brother Max Beerbohm once said, "He disliked slang. And especially did he dislike theatrical slang. To him the theatre was always a thing romantic and marvellous. 'Knowingness' about it jarred his sensibility."² Despite his propensity to see theatre through rose-coloured spectacles he knew almost instinctively how to tailor his productions to fit the desires of the Edwardian audiences. This is not to say that Tree had no concern for the artistic function of the theatre. It was merely that as a romantic and gregarious man, he, more than most echoed the temper of the time so that his productions appealing more to emotion than to intellect, were ones to which his audiences were particularly sympathetic. Desmond MacCarthy, the playwright and critic, outlined the different elements in Tree's nature when he wrote about the productions at Her Majesty's.

His Majesty's, (the name was changed with the death of Queen Victoria) under Herbert Tree's management, frankly forewent the claim to be the last word in dramatic art. It stood instead for the grandly, lavishly popular in that line. For years it represented the central British conception of the drama when it is taken seriously, just as the Savoy Hotel represents the British conception of magnificence taken seriously; that it also reflected Herbert Tree's ideal is both true and untrue.³

In matters theatrical, social or political, Tree was staunchly on the side of the establishment. He opposed any move to end the censorship or to grant women suffrage. Lena Ashwell, a popular actress wrote about what happened when one of Tree's treasured precepts was challenged.

One when I went to see Tree I had in my hand a book called "The Soul of a Suffragette", by W.L. Courtney. Tree picked it up and with a magnificent gesture of contempt flung it into the far corner of the room.⁴

Tree married the actress Maud Holt in 1882 and lived a secure middle-class life with her and their three children in London. Although he did little

¹Dictionary of National Biography (1853-1917), pp. 531-33.

²collected by Max Beerbohm, Herbert Beerbohm Tree - Some Memories of Him and His Art (1920), p. 199.

³Ibid., p. 217.

⁴Ashwell, Lena Myself a Player (1936), p. 167.

for the artistic future of British theatre, his stylised portrayal of such character parts as Svengali in Trilby won him the applause of his audiences without damaging his reputation as a respectable businessman of the theatre.

Sir Frank Benson is not really a London actor-manager, but one of the foremost managers of the many touring companies which concentrated on the provinces and which occasionally came to London for a season. The Benson company was known for its productions of Shakespeare and for the famous London actors who got their start under Benson's tuition. Benson himself was born in Tunbridge Wells, brought up in Hampshire and educated at Winchester and Oxford. While at Oxford, he produced and acted in a successful and innovative production of Agamemnon which drew the attention and encouragement of Sir Henry Irving. With an Irving testimonial in his pocket Benson overcame his family's objections to the stage, and trained under Irving and other famous actors of the time. When a provincial company with which he was touring went bankrupt, he borrowed money from his father and took over the company. It took further financial injections from his father before Benson ran his own touring company successfully. Once fully launched Benson soon proved his ability to present Shakespeare in an exciting if perhaps over-athletic fashion. In 1886-7, his productions of Shakespeare were greatly praised and he was asked to work with Mr. Charles Flower at the Shakespeare Festival at Stratford-on-Avon. In 1890, he had his first London season at the Globe Theatre. Between 1890 and 1916, when he was knighted by King George V during a Shakespeare Tercentenary performance at the Drury Lane Theatre, Benson was busy with his company, training new actors, and making numerous appearances at the Shakespeare Festival at Stratford-on-Avon. He was also involved in the formation of the Actors' Association, a semi-union theatrical organisation.

Benson's theatrical popularity came not so much from his acting talent or business sense as from his typically middle class attitudes arising from an Oxbridge education, a gentlemanly demeanor⁵ and a substantial supply of money. He ran his company rather as the muscular Christians ran public schools - athletic ability taking precedence over intellect. Speaking of athletics on the stage he said,

When I became my own manager they used to say that I was mad on the subject; that I acted more with my muscles than with my mind; but the fact remains that I did something to keep alive the athletic habit of body tendered necessary for the wandering actor in early days by the requirements of the caravan, scene-shifting, dance, pantomime, harlequinade, circus and sword play.⁵

⁵Benson, Sir Frank My Memoirs (1930), p. 178.

Benson's lasting fame came from his generous tuition of actors in the company. He often signed up inexperienced actors and gave them a firm grounding in the trade. Benson's company became a training school as well when it took on students in 1901. Among the actors in Benson's company who later achieved success on the London stage were Oscar Asche and Lily Brayton. But despite the rigours of the touring life and the low status which actors held in the provinces, the Benson company remained a middle class preserve. Lady Benson wrote with pride of the background of the actors in the Benson company.

In these days (early 1900's) most of the men were old Public School boys, and many came to us straight from Oxford and Cambridge, some with degrees, but the majority without.⁶

Sir Frank Benson's touring company undoubtedly play an enormous role in taking Shakespeare to the provinces, but his important contribution to the theatrical establishment lay in providing a way for young middle-class actors to get proper theatrical training before they set out to conquer the London stage.

H.B. Irving was the eldest son of the illustrious actor, Sir Henry Irving. He was born in London on August 5, 1870, but saw little of his famous father for his parents were separated during his childhood. He attended Marlborough College and New College Oxford where he was awarded a B.A. in Modern History. While at Oxford he was a member of the Oxford University Dramatic Society and when he left Oxford he had to choose between the stage and the bar. He tried the stage first and made his opening appearance with Sir John Hare in a revival of The School for Scandal at the Garrick Theatre in 1891. Then, discouraged by the lack of further opportunities in the theatre, he studied law and in 1894 was called to the bar. But in that same year the lure of the stage proved too much for him and he obtained an engagement with Ben Greet's touring company. Greet provided Irving with the necessary experience and reputation for in 1896 he was able to join George Alexander at the St. James's Theatre and remained with Alexander for five years. 1896 was also the year in which he married Dorothea Baird, an actress whose success as Trilby to Tree's Svengal had made her a star. In spite of his theatrical success Irving did not forget his legal training and retained a fascination with crime and justice throughout his life. In 1898 he published The Life of Judge Jeffreys, and in the following years did much theatrical and legal research. In 1902, he received critical acclaim for his portrayal of Bill Crichton in J.M. Barrie's

⁶Lady Benson Mainly Players: Bensonian Memories (1926), p. 138.

The Admirable Crichton at the Duke of York's Theatre. In 1908 Irving rented the Shaftesbury Theatre, where he produced and acted in a season of Sir Henry Irving's successes, including The Lyons Mail. H.B. Irving was an intelligent and thinking man and if not a great actor, through his lectures, writings and characterisations he nevertheless brought theatrical ideas closer to a wider audience. He died in 1919.

H.B. Irving is a good example of an actor who was helped along by his father's fame and connections for in the theatre, as in most businesses, an illustrious relative was no handicap. In a joint biography of "H.B." and Laurence (Sir Henry Irving's second son), Austin Brereton put it like this.

His parentage meant that all London was open to the young actor. The distinction which he derived from his father was of priceless value. It placed him upon a sure footing in social circles. In 1895, Lord Rosebery's birthday list of honours contained the name of Henry Irving. Although this recognition was accepted by Henry Irving as an honour to his calling rather than a high compliment to himself, it was something to be the elder son of Sir Henry Irving.⁷

In fact, H.B. Irving was a competent actor and theatre business-man in his own right. His legal writings and research made him seem more detached from the theatre than most actors. But he wrote articles on the theatre and on the status of the actor. He was elected to the Athenaeum Club and lectured to many theatrical societies. It appears that Irving had as much personal success off the stage as onstage and posterity regards him as one of the great 'gentleman-actors' of the Edwardian age.

Oscar Asche is an example of the actor who worked his way up from the bottom. To begin with, Asche had the disadvantage of being Australian. He was born in Australia in 1871, the son of a Norwegian barrister who went to Australia and became a pioneer. As a young man Asche decided he wanted to become an actor and so he went to Norway to study with the playwright Bjorn Bjornson in Christiania. He then came to London and after a hard time trying to find a theatrical engagement, he managed to find a place in Benson's troupe where he met and married the actress Lily Brayton. Asche's 'break' came when he joined Sir Herbert Tree's company at Her Majesty's where he was to produce as well as act in many plays, including Richard II and The Merry Wives of Windsor. Asche became an actor-manager in his own right when he became a partner with Otho Stuart at the Adelphi Theatre. Asche was to produce the plays, his wife Lily Brayton was to star, and Stuart was to put up the money. The good idea prospered and among the successes at the Adelphi was The Virgin Goddess by Rudolph Beiser. Today, Asche is chiefly

⁷Brereton, Austin "H.B." and Laurence Irving (1922), pp. 49-50.

remembered for his portrayal of Hadji the beggar in Kismet, and his production of Chu Chin Chow (which he also wrote and acted in).

Although Asche was born in Australia, he quickly learned and adopted the standards of Edwardian English theatre. From Tree he must have acquired his theatrical business sense (though in private life he was very free with money partially due to his fascination with greyhounds), and his appreciation of Edwardian middle class theatrical taste. His production of As You Like It was very reminiscent of Tree's arboreal A Midsummer Night's Dream.

In the setting of the Forest of Arden scene, I entered into a contract with a Covent Garden firm of florists. We used two thousand pots of ferns, besides large clumps of bamboos. The floor of the forest was covered over with cartloads of last autumn's leaves and moss grew on the fallen logs. It was admitted that there had never been a more natural forest scene on the stage before, and I know there has not been since. The characters in one of the big forest sets walked through the ferns of places two feet high. Many were trodden down in the course of a week, calling for a fresh supply of about 600.⁸

Asche, like Tree, had an instinctive grasp of what his audiences wanted and pleased them most of the time. One of his great successes, Kismet, was only four weeks in rehearsal, cost only £3,530 to produce, and yet it ran from April 19, 1911 to January 20, 1912.⁹ Asche was a popular theatrical personality both through his efforts as an actor and his ability to conform to the standards set by managers and audiences alike.

The reins of actor-management were not entirely in the hands of men. Women were able if they had the persistence and the money, to try their luck at acting in and producing plays. One of the best examples of an actress-manager was of course Lily Langtry, who was financed into management and stardom under rather special circumstances. Lena Ashwell's venture into the world of management is perhaps a more realistic picture of what the actress-manager could expect.

Lena Ashwell was born in 1872, the daughter of a Navy Captain who became a clergyman. She lived and was educated in Canada until her mother died, when the family moved to Switzerland. Miss Ashwell was fascinated by the stage but hoped for a singing career. She attended the Royal Academy of Music, but after an unexpected meeting with Ellen Terry, the actress, she was advised by Miss Terry to abandon music for the theatre. By 1895 she had joined Irving's company at the Lyceum where she was Elaine in King Arthur. She made herself a modest stage reputation and first ventured into

⁸Asche, Oscar Oscar Asche His Life (1929), p. 120.

⁹Ibid., p. 137.

management with a production of McLellan's Leah Kleschna. Her success with this production pleased her and when she received financial backing from a friend, she decided on a more ambitious project and leased the Kingsway Theatre. The first production, Irene Wycherly was a success, and the Kingsway venture was established. There was trouble ahead when the chief backer withdrew his support after an argument with Miss Ashwell. With reduced funds the theatre had a terrible financial time and was saved only by the success of The Earth, a play by James B. Fagan.

Lena Ashwell, because she was a woman, was not part of the recognised theatre establishment, but for many women she symbolised the ability of a woman to achieve commercial success. She was an active supporter of women's suffrage and because of the difficulty she had in divorcing a drunkard husband, she was an advocate of divorce law reform. Her earnestness and gentle manner won her tremendous admiration from the Edwardian audience, yet being a woman actor-manager frequently placed her in awkward positions with authority. An encounter with the Lord Chamberlain over the play Irene Wycherly is one example.

As Irene Wycherly I returned to my husband because he had had a shooting accident and was blind. There was a scene when the blind man, whom she hated, tried to make love to Irene and arouse her pity, and drew her on to his knee. I was sent for to the Lord Chamberlain's office. The noble lord had had complaints and asked if it were true that during the play I sat upon a man's knee. I explained that the man was supposed to be my husband, that the action was really essential to the scene and could not be considered offensive, and asked him if he could not come to the theatre and see for himself. He replied that he did not care for the theatre and could not in any case spare the time, but it must be quite understood that I must no longer sit upon the knee in question. The Lord Chamberlain had to be obliged as he could withdraw the licence and close the theatre; but it was very trying when the Press told the public how vastly inferior we were in real passion and vigour.¹⁰

Tree, Benson, H.B. Irving and Asche are a few of the actor-managers who achieved success, middle class respectability and power. Others like Sir George Alexander extended their activities beyond theatrical politics to local government. Alexander was the representative for South St. Pancras on the LCC from 1907-1913 as well as serving as the president of the Royal General Theatrical Fund and vice president of several theatrical benevolent funds. These successful actor-managers were men who thought of themselves as the head of a large theatrical fraternity and consolidated their power through presidencies and interest in both theatrical and non-theatrical organisations. It was a benevolent despotism for these men thought they

¹⁰Ashwell, Lena, p. 109.

represented the interests of the entire profession. Their influence crops up time and time again, in the censorship/ hearings, and in debates over the licensing of music halls and smoking in theatres. They had the respect of the public and when the public sought information about the theatrical profession, it was to these men that it turned.

The style in which these men lived was imitated by those actors who were successful, yet not in management for sustained periods of time. Lewis Waller, regarded as the "ideal wearer of cloak and rapier"¹¹, was originally destined for a commercial career and spent five years as a foreign correspondence clerk in his uncle's firm in the City before becoming a professional actor. After his success as an actor, came short periods of management at the Imperial and Lyric theatres. There seemed to be a theatrical pattern that, once successful as an actor, you tried your hand at management. Only the ladies, with certain important exceptions, had to depend on the male actor-managers for jobs. Many popular actresses overcame this difficulty by marrying actors who became successful actor-managers and assured themselves of a long career (e.g. Winifred Emery married Cyril Maude, Ellaline Terriss married Seymour Hicks and Lily Brayton married Oscar Asche). Such marriages often produced popular acting teams and reinforced the couple's individual popularity. In spite of the Edwardian flirtation with scandal in the content of their plays, they still liked to see respectability in the real lives of their players.

The theatrical profession in the Edwardian years contained a large number of men and women who were middle class and perpetuated middle class attitudes both on and off the stage. Many of them came from acceptably middle class backgrounds and many had had a good education (See Appendix A). Those not quite middle class soon learned the 'proper' attitudes if they achieved success. The acting profession did not consciously mimic bourgeois life, but its more successful members introduced middle class manners in what had once been a less respectable and lower class profession, thus raising its social status.

It was fairly easy to find out about the successful middle class actor and actor-manager, because these thespians were often prolific writers and published articles, autobiographies and reminiscences. The life of the less successful actor who played secondary roles and who might be frequently out of work is more difficult to trace. Because the theatre was not a 'closed shop' it is difficult to get an idea of the size of the labour pool, let alone what percentage were casual workers or unemployed.

¹¹"Lewis Waller" in Parts I Have Played (1909-), pt. 1.

Still, the bits and pieces which can be gleaned from theatrical journals and contemporary novels about the theatre, indicate that life for the secondary actor was a series of frenetic searchings for jobs coupled with poor conditions once in work. There were exceptions of course. The chorus girl at the Gaiety Theatre had a better time of it than a chorus girl at a small suburban theatre, as did the character actor who worked continually for the same actor-manager. Unfortunately, the job of trying to numerically define and describe these gradations was too involved and time-consuming for the purposes of this chapter. Hopefully, further research will clarify the entire labour structure of the Edwardian actor's world, and give more information about the secondary actor on whom the entire structure rested.

The status of the actor changed during the Edwardian years and this was partially due to the enterprise of the successful actor-managers. For most of the nineteenth century apart from the occasional Macready's and Irving's, the actor had been viewed in some quarters with suspicion and disrespect. People looked askance at him for his style of life, his frequent provincial tours, and what seemed to them a disregard for the conventional virtues of the homely life. To the religious, playgoing and playacting remained works of the devil not to be tolerated. Actors were frequently refused rooms at good hotels and were treated with disdain by the more 'proper' members of society. When such actors as the Kembles brought respectability to the stage in the late nineteenth century in the form of 'cup and saucer' dramas, and their own personal virtuosity, the actor began to be viewed in a new light. And when a number of middle class men and women entered the profession, the established actor gained considerably in status. Unfortunately, during the Edwardian years this change in attitude mainly confined itself to London and the suburbs. Small touring companies found little cheer in the provinces.

While the general public were changing their minds about the renegade actor during the Edwardian years, the theatrical profession was for the first time, taking a good hard look at itself. Actors began taking pride in their ancestry, their traditions and in the professionalism of the actor himself. The actor began to see himself as a professional and recognised the necessity of behaving like a professional.

One way the profession consciously (or unconsciously) sought to raise its status was by reflecting the virtues and attitudes of middle class society. Actors arranged a social order of their own with the actor-manager at the top of the ladder and the itinerant actor at the bottom. The actor-managers were knighted and then became the natural aristocracy. In such a society ancestry became of prime importance, and long-standing

theatrical families provided impressive genealogies. Acting families such as the Batemans (see Appendix B) could trace themselves back to the early eighteenth century. In the 1912 edition of Who's Who in the Theatre, (inclusion in such books was another way of attaining social prominence in the theatre), in an article entitled "Famous Theatrical Families", John Malcolm Bullock wrote of the ancestry of the actor.

The oldest house is undoubtedly the Kembles, the founder of whom, Roger Kemble, produced a remarkable family, including Mrs. Siddons. The histrionic instinct must have been strengthened in them through their mother, who was an Irishwoman. Indeed, the ranks of our actors, as has frequently been pointed out, are very largely made up of people of Celtic or Jewish origin. To take a modern example, Sir Henry Irving himself, born at Kinton in Somerset, had a Cornish mother and his wife was Irish; the famous American family of Booth was Jewish; and the Comptons bear the fine Highland name of Mackenzie.¹²

The idea that an actor could take status from being a member of an old theatrical family was a new one. It had to do with the pride of being an actor and with acting as a socially acceptable profession. However, some people saw the influx of middle class actors as being detrimental to the art of acting. H.B. Irving, in his book Occasional Papers, included a lecture he gave entitled "Art and the Status of the Actor" where he spoke about the decline in the art of acting.

We sometimes come across the complaint, not only outside but inside our calling, that the art of acting is steadily deteriorating, because the stage is being nowadays invaded by a number of well-born, well-bred, or well-educated young men and women, who are represented as being totally ignorant of their business, and apparently incapable of ever learning it.¹³

Irving believed that the deterioration he saw in the standard of acting was due to a lack of facilities for training the actor rather than to the changing social class of the would-be thespian.

The middle class actors became absorbed into every sphere of Edwardian theatrical life. Even the Cinderella story of the working-class Gaiety chorus girl marrying into the aristocracy was all but a myth. Although several chorus girls did marry titled men (Rosie Boote, who became the Marchioness of Headfort, or Gertie Millar, who became the Countess of Dudley), at the time of their marriages these women were out of the chorus

¹²Who's Who in the Theatre (1912), p. 627.

¹³Irving, H.B. Occasional Papers (1906), p. 71.

line and into the spotlights. George Grossmith, actor, writer and sometime producer at the Gaiety Theatre saw the Edwardian chorus girl as a hard-working member of the theatrical profession, earning her money by long hours and attention to her work. And many of these girls were as middle class as the actor-managers.

"It is possible," Grossmith admits, "that some of the girls in our musical plays are daughters of small suburban grocers, like Sir Arthur Pinero's heroine in 'The Mind-the-Paint Girl.' But it is also a fact that many of them are ladies of good birth and education who fare considerably better on the salary they receive from the theatre than they would if they were governesses." ¹⁴

How did the theatrical profession view itself and how were its views corroborated by outsiders? The actor began to see himself as the equal of anyone doing a job demanding skill and professionalism. The rest of society began to see the actor as a skilled workman, but there was still a long way to go before the actor was accepted as part of society. H.B. Irving wrote of the status of the actor in Edwardian society.

There is no question that, though greatly diminished in extent and power of recent years, there still exists a feeling of hostility on the part of certain classes of men against art and calling of the actor. Though these are, no doubt, shared to some extent, even by a number of men of intellectual distinction, I believe them to be, for the most part, the outcome of ignorance of the real nature of the art and the real conditions of the calling. The best proof, to my mind, that they are not rooted in truth and justice is the fact that the position of the actor has been advanced in this country to a higher level than in any other country in the world. ¹⁵

Despite the increase in self-esteem, people in the theatre were still sensitive to what the rest of society thought of them. The first knighthood conferred on an actor (Henry Irving) came as late as 1895. People still sometimes thought of actors as a race apart, prone to eccentricities and childlike ignorance of the problems of the real world. Margot Asquith was considered an intellectual - a shining light in Liberal circles. Yet she, too, had a distrust of 'bohemian' theatrical enclaves. Excluding the actors she considered her friends (who were either successful actor-managers or leading actresses), she accused the rest of the theatrical profession of dullness.

¹⁴Naylor, Stanley Gaiety and George Grossmith (1913), p. 120.

¹⁵Irving, H.B. p. 89.

When I was not hunting or entertaining or being entertained by my intellectual friends I went through a short period of stage fever and was at the feet of Ellen Terry and Irving: I say "short" advisedly, for then, as now, I found Bohemian society as dull as any English watering-place. Everyone probably has a different idea of hell and few of us connect it with flames, but stage suppers in a mild way have brought me punishment and, with a few classical exceptions - Irving and Ellen Terry, Irene Vanbrugh, Mr. Gerald du Maurier and the Beerbohm Tree family - I have seldom met the hero or heroine off the stage that was not ultimately dull.¹⁶

Playwrights retaliated to social criticism by using the stage to air what they considered to be anti-theatrical prejudices. Pinero's play, Trelawny of the 'Wells' is about an acting troupe in the late 1860's. Rose Trelawny is giving up acting to marry a man from a 'respectable' family. She is put on a period of probation by the young man's aunt to make sure she can resist the temptations of the stage and conform to bourgeois standards. She soon rebels against the stuffiness of the young man's relatives and leaves him to return to her first love - the stage. He, in turn is saddened by Rose's dismissal and becomes under an assumed name a successful actor. The two lovers are reunited at a rehearsal of one of the first 'cup and saucer' dramas - a tribute both to their emotional growth and to the coming of age of English theatre. Although Pinero is writing of an earlier period, the sympathy he shows for the actors's lives and their rejection by 'proper' society was just as applicable in the 1890's as in the 1860's. Another of Pinero's play, Letty, shows contemporary prejudice against actors just as clearly. One of its characters, Hilda, becomes an actress and tells of her search for lodgings.

Hilda. Well, the best end of Oxford Street is good enough for me notwithstanding the rents. Two-hundred-and-fifty a year for three rooms you couldn't swing a cat in!

Marion. Dreadful!

Hilda. And a quarter always paid in advance. And would you credit it - I'm not allowed to pick out the simplest tune on the piano after twelve-thirty A.M. and why? Because I happen to be an actress!¹⁷

The majority of actors had more important things to think about than social slights and status seeking. The business of earning a living in the theatrical profession was no easy one. Low salaries, and uneven work periods made the acting profession the most precarious of careers. And until 1907 there was no organisation that really attempted to help the fundamental

¹⁶Asquith, Margot The Auto-biography of Margot Asquith (1920), p. 261.

¹⁷Pinero, Sir Arthur W. Letty (1919), p. 220.

plight of the actor - helplessness over salaries and working conditions.

Numerous theatrical charities operated during the Edwardian years. The Actors' Benevolent Fund, established in 1882, helped 'distressed actors' and generally relieved the plight of actors who were sick or handicapped and while the Actors' Benevolent Fund ministered to the body, the Actor's Church Union ministered to the soul. The Actor's Orphanage Fund, founded in 1869 by Mrs. C.L. Carson, aimed "To board, clothe and educate destitute children of actors and actresses, and fit them for useful positions in after life."¹⁸ It had as its distinguished patrons the Queen, the Princess of Wales and the Princess Royal. Mr. Cyril Maude, was as one of his benevolent roles, president in 1907. The Theatrical Ladies Guild also founded by Mrs. C.L. Carson in 1891 assisted maternity cases. It frequently held sewing sessions and collected subscriptions from its members. The Rehearsal Club, located at 29 Leicester Square was founded in 1892 and provided a quiet 'retreat' for minor actresses between matinees and evening performances. A subscription was 2s. a quarter.¹⁹ Even the King was not unaware of actors's needs, and in 1911 King George set up the first benefit for the Actors and Actresses Pension Fund. Held at His Majesty's Theatre, it made a net profit of £4,628.²⁰

The actors's organisation which concentrated its activities on the healthy working actor was called simply the Actor's Association. Incorporated under the Companies Acts, it was a loosely organised body consisting of actors and actor-managers. The little power which the Actor's Association exerted was held by the successful actor-managers and during the Edwardian years, it was particularly ineffective in bringing about any major reforms. The Actor's Association had spoken blandly for the entire theatrical profession until it got involved in organising the first Actor's Day, - held on October 18, 1906. This was a day when actors would donate their salaries to needy funds and charities. Not all actors were enamoured of the Actor's Association and the Association came under heavy fire from suspicious critics who saw Actor's Day funds allocated not primarily to needy charities but to purposes defined by the Association.

One result of this outcry was the organisation of a reform party within the Association. Including such theatre personalities as matinee idol Henry Ainley, and Granville Barker, the new group sought to break the hold of the actor-managers on the Association. They campaigned for a smaller executive council, so that decisions could be made quickly and effectively. They also

¹⁸ed. L. Carson Stage Year Book (1908), p. 50.

¹⁹Ibid., (1909), pp. 69-70.

²⁰Who's Who 6th edition (1930), p. 1376.

wished to expel all actor-managers who had not been members of the Association long enough to be in sympathy with the rank and file. But their most important aim was to press the Association to take a stand on salaries and standard contracts. In a letter to The Stage, the reform party said,

We wish to take the first step in the direction of abolishing starvation salaries by insisting that the Association Agency shall not deal with any offers of engagements for speaking parts carrying less than £2 (Two Pounds) per week.²¹

The reform party was successful at the Association's annual elections, gaining a majority of seats on the council. Now in a majority, the expelled the actor-managers, reformed the council by electing 8 'upper' and 25 'ordinary' members to it, and made the £2 per week minimum wage demand part of the Association's manifesto. Unfortunately they inherited severe financial problems from the unreformed body and the Actor's Association had to go through a period of severe retrenchment before it achieved financial stability. In the meantime, the new militancy was hampered by insolvency.

In June 1909 the Council of the Association drafted a Standard Contract. This included; 1. payment for matinees, and 2. payment for rehearsals $\frac{1}{2}$ salary after 3 weeks rehearsal in London and $\frac{1}{2}$ salary safter 1 weeks rehearsal in the provinces, and 3, £2 per week minimum wage.²² This contract was submitted to various managerial associations, each of which refused to consider it. In 1910, the Association tried again, issuing a facsimile Standard Contract and resubmitting it to the managers. The Stage Year Book of 1911 outlines its fate. "The Society of West End Theatre Managers rejected it, for instance, on the ground that the majority of managers had their own form of contract."²³

The Association was unsuccessful in reforming the profession because they were afraid to take any action in support of their claims. They remained a social body, occasionally suggesting constructive reforms which were turned down point-blank by unsympathetic theatre managers.

Music hall performers were not so acquiescent. When employers refused to grant them a living wage, they organised the Variety Artists' Federation in 1906. This was a real union, registered under the Trades Union Acts of 1871-1876 and affiliated with both the Trades Union Congress and other international variety unions. When conditions and salaries became intolerable in 1907, the union called its members out on strike and duly won their

²¹The Stage, February 14, 1907, p. 10.

²²ed. L. Carson Stage Year Book (1910), p. 93.

²³Ibid., 1911, p. 122.

demands. They demonstrated to the theatrical world that industrial action could yield positive results.

The variety performers were not the only theatrical group with a union. As early as 1890, the National Association of Theatrical Employees (stage hands, electricians etc.) was established, and affiliated itself with the General Federation of Trade Unions, the TUC, and London and provincial trades and labour councils. Entrance fees varied from 2s. 6d. to 10s and contributions ranged from 2d. to 1s.2d. a week.²⁴ In April, 1908, the N.A.T.E. decided to provide insurance for its members and established The Dramatic Variety Theatre (Employees') Provident Association. For an entrance fee of 1s.3d. and a contribution of 6d., the Association would pay sick or injured members 15s. a week for 13 weeks, and 7s.6d. for the following 13 weeks. In 1910 £233 was spent for such purposes.²⁵

But while the other theatrical bodies were taking advantage of the trade union acts and organising unions to represent them, dramatic actors were content to let the Actor's Association handle their complaints. Perhaps the theatre was so busy trying to attain middle-class respectability that it rejected working-class style organisation to attain better salaries and working conditions. Nevertheless in 1907, an attempt was made to form a genuine Actor's Union.

The Actor's Union seems to have been inspired by the activities of the Variety Artist's Federation during the Music Hall Strike of 1907. Dissatisfaction with the Actor's Association may also have spurred on a dissident reform group. Action to form an actor's union really started when Cecil Raleigh, a playwright and producer, began preaching the doctrine of trade unionism in lectures and in the daily papers early in 1907. This was an about-face for Raleigh, for ten years earlier he had been violently anti-trades unions.

Raleigh's articles provoked a swift response and on February 8, 1907 two meetings were held by actors, one in London (at 3 Bedford St., Strand) and one in Manchester (at the Salisbury Hotel) to discuss the formation of a union. At the London meeting, the actors agreed to rules for the new actor's union. These rules were published thereafter and included the provisos that 1. the sole object of the union was the welfare of its members, 2. that any member becoming an actor-manager was to be expelled, and 3. that all actors could become probationary members of the union, but five years' experience was needed to sit upon the Council.²⁶ The reform

²⁴ed. L. Caron, The Stage Year Book (1909), p. 136.

²⁵Ibid., 1911, p. 139.

²⁶The Stage, February 28, 1907, p. 13.

group of the Actor's Association also attended the initial meeting. They hoped the two groups would join forces and effect reform together. But the new actor's union would not come to terms with the AA reform group for some of the more radical members of the union disliked the middle of the road policy of the Actor's Association. This led some members of the AA reform group to become hostile to the new union. Other actors felt that the AA reform party was adequate and that another reform group should not compete with the established Actor's Association. In a letter to The Stage, Rose Matthew, a member of the AA reform group, wrote about the need to reform the Actor's Association instead of starting an actor's union.

As a matter of mere economy, both of time and money, the Association offers quicker and cheaper chances of economic protection than any newly formed union, seeing that we have 1,400 members, a building, an insurance scheme working, and a recognised position, all of which a new union has to build up. ...The ordinary actor cannot afford to subscribe to both, and he will have to choose between the two.²⁷

The unionists rejected a reform party invitation to attend their meetings and instead formed a provisional committee. The Manchester unionists joined with the London ones and at a general meeting, held at the Criterion Restaurant on March 11, Cecil Raleigh, the chairman was able to announce that "the Union was founded."²⁸ Raleigh also gave an address in which he talked about the need for an actor's union.

To-day, the actor in the matter of his employer did not meet the individual; he had to deal with the syndicate. That was a system which had resulted in their brothers and sisters of the music hall profession forming their Federation which had brought about such splendid and successful results.²⁹

The Actor's union registered as a Trade Union on October 8, 1907 and its first meeting as a registered union was held at the Criterion Restaurant on October 21, 1907. Mr. Bowerman, M.P. presided and there was a large number of actors present. All the speeches spoke of the need for a union and the chairman in particular spoke of the necessity of a union to provide financial support for underpaid actors. Mr. Frank Gerald, one of the chief organisers and the actors's delegate to the TUC, suggested that a basis of agreement had already been formed between the union and the Managers's Association. He felt that a minimum wage should be the central

²⁷The Stage, March 21, 1907, p. 12.

²⁸ed. L. Carson Stage Year Book (1908), p. 31.

²⁹The Stage, March 14, 1907, p. 14.

plank in the Union platform and that the actors now had a union which could use the weapon of the strike, should it become necessary.³⁰ He also spoke of the actor's duty in terms of the greater trade union movement; although actors were part of the middle class, they had obligations to the workers and the Actor's Union was the first step in fulfilling these obligations.

The great middle class has been told to wake up, assert itself, and look after its interests...Can you hesitate to say that your interests are with the worker, and not with the capitalists? ...The actor nowadays does not bear the same relationship to society as he used to. He no longer lives in an atmosphere of mystery; he wears no halo of romance; the days of dear Bohemia are past and gone, and now is the time for him to take upon himself the share of work it is his duty to take and prove his usefulness more to the State than he has done in the past.³¹

The Actor's Union may have sown the seeds of destruction from the moment of its formation. Not everyone felt as militant as Mr. Gerald - The Stage pointed out reasons why actors might object to the Actor's Union being registered as a trade union at all.

Actors fear some loss of status, though whether there is anything more in this objection than a sentimental feeling does not appear. There is a fear, too, that actors may be drawn into disputes not their own.³²

The Union also rebuffed some of its keenest supporters - the militant actresses - by banning them from the board of the Actor's Union. As a result, their enthusiasm and industry was channeled into other outlets.

In its first year of existence the Union put forward some very worthy goals. It would try to establish an adequate minimum salary. It would try to establish bargaining relationships between manager and actor and between actor-manager and actor. It hoped to present a united front to improve the status and position of the actor. And it also hoped to abolish all abuses existing in the acting profession. To this end, funds collected would be used to provide legal assistance, a pension fund and a journal.³³

Yet by November, 1909, two scant years after its formation, the Union was finished. True, it had tried to act as a pressure group for such causes as the registration of theatre agencies, but it seemed incapable of achieving anything through its own efforts. It soon foundered on apathy and defections, for, as Rose Matthew predicted, many actors preferred the

³⁰The Times, October 22, 1907, p. 15d.

³¹The Stage, October 24, 1907, p. 20.

³²Ibid., p. 16.

³³ed. L. Carson Stage Year Book (1908), p. 31.

middle class security of the Actor's Association. An article in The Stage about the winding-up of the Actor's Union points this out rather dramatically.

Although during the existence of the Union some 910 members have joined, latterly only 92 members have been in full benefit. At the end of last year 350 members were in arrears, and a circular letter on the subject resulted in the gathering of £1 8s.³⁴

The reason for the failure of the Union was its bourgeois attitude towards industrial action - a similar attitude to that which incapacitated the Actor's Association. The Union was hindered by its own lack of power and by the reluctance of its members to use conventional trade union methods to improve conditions. After the demise of the Actor's Union there was no effective actors union movement until the organisation of Actors' Equity in 1929. In 1910 the Stage Year Book wrote the obituary of the dead Actor's Union.

Members apparently soon lost interest in the Union, and it died on November, 1909 with liabilities outweighing the assets by nearly £65. At the meeting called to wind-up the Union held at Hommun's Hotel on November 16, Mr. Henry Bedford supplied the inscription for the gravestone in "Killed by the apathy of the actor". Apathy on the part of the actor may have largely contributed to its decease, but the Committee were in the main responsible, for in the first year of the Union they made an order which practically prevented the affairs of the Union from being discussed by its members in the Press. Publicity among those interested was accordingly denied the Union, with the inevitable result.³⁵

Short-lived as the Actor's Union was, it did form one of the pressure groups which helped to change some inequities in the theatrical world. The problem of dealing with reputable agents was as important then as it is now. With the fierce competition for jobs, the agent played an important part in securing employment. Too often, these agents used their agencies as a way of extracting money from unwary actors without getting them a suitable job. Sometimes women were promised employment on the Continent and ended up in European brothels.

By 1905 there was an act concerning the licensing of agencies, but it exempted all theatrical and music hall agencies unless they charged a preliminary fee. In 1908 there was only one agent registered. The LCC decided to change this stage of affairs and set up a Public Control Committee to investigate. Petitions to the committee by such theatre groups as the Actor's Association and the Actor's Union added support to the inquiry. In

³⁴The Stage, November 18, 1909, p. 25.

³⁵ed. L. Carson Stage Year Book (1910), p. 94.

May, 1909, the committee submitted its report, which was adopted by the ICC. Among its recommendations was that agents should be licensed instead of merely being registered. The LCC sent the report on to Parliament. The Home Office procrastinated and said nothing could be done about such a bill in 1909.³⁶ In 1910, however, a General Powers Act was passed in Parliament which empowered the LCC to license agents. From then on it was illegal for any person to run an employment agency without a license and books had to be kept recording the business transacted.³⁷ This licensing act did a great deal to regulate theatrical employment and to eliminate some of the hazards presented to novice actors.

Corrupt agents were not the only misfortune of an actor's life. Because the bulk of actors travelled a great deal and were not householders, they did not have the franchise. Agitation for the vote came not from travelling actors however, but from militant actresses who formed an Actresses Franchise League as part of the suffrage movement. The League was founded by Mrs. Forbes-Robertson, Miss Winifred Mayo, Miss Sine Seruya and Miss Adeline Bourne, and by 1910 had over 450 members.³⁸ By 1911, the number had grown to 700 members.³⁹

The League's major activity was the presentation of suffragette propaganda plays at special matinees, the profits being used to benefit the movement. In 1912, one matinee programme included The First Actress by Christopher St. John and a tableau by Sir George Frampton titled, 'The Awakening of Woman'.⁴⁰ The actresses also appeared in demonstrations, as in this deputation to Downing Street described by Lena Ashwell.

Despite the unpopularity of the cause, we had an Actresses Franchise League, and when the Women's Suffrage Deputation was received in Downing Street, as I was the only woman then in management, I was asked to represent our society. The whole affair was irresistibly comic because it was so tragic. We were just a very ordinary little group of women, received by the flunkeys as if we had a strange odour and been temporarily released from the Zoo. We were ushered into a room where rows of chairs faced a door at the end. As we sat patiently waiting a head was thrust round the edge of the door and stared contemptuously at us, then the door was shut, but presently the other door, by which we had entered, was opened and again this hostile person surveyed us - Mrs. Asquith, the wife of the Prime Minister!⁴¹

³⁶ed. L. Carson Stage Year Book (1910), pp. 27-30.

³⁷Ibid., (1911), pp. 100-101.

³⁸Ibid., p. 129.

³⁹Ibid., (1912), p. 106.

⁴⁰The Times, November 25, 1912, p. 10c.

⁴¹Ashwell, Lena, p. 164.

Until the First World War, the theatrical world continued to emulate bourgeois Edwardian society. The actor-manager establishment cared for the needs of the profession in a 'Tory Democratic' way, while realising great profits on its own theatrical investments. Attempts at reform and unionism were sporadic and failed due to lack of financial resources and apathy on the part of the majority of actors. The period ended sadly with the Edwardian actor working hard at respectability, without the initiative and resources to make a better life for himself.

Adrian Ross (Acting Secy. Theatre)

Edinburgh

Sir James Harris

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Manchester

Ashley Dukes

Oxford

Max Beerbohm (Regent)

Sir Frank Benson (Dean)

J.B. Fagan (Theatre)

John Galsworthy (New Theatre)

Sir John G. Goll (Theatre)

Anthony Hope (Theatre)

Charles Mackay (Theatre)

G.S. Ogilvie (Theatre)

Heidelberg

Rudolf Heiser

Arthur Collins

Gordon Craig

V. Somerset Maugham

Munich

Ashley Dukes

Public Schools

Bradfield

Gordon Craig

Charterhouse

Max Beerbohm

Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson

Cyril Maude

City of London

Henry Kendall

Alfred Sutro

Appendix A. Educational background of some prominent Edwardian theatrical figures

(from Who's Who in the Theatre - 1930, pp. 1207-1215)

Universities

Cambridge

F. Anstey (Trinity Hall, B.A. L.L.B.)
Desmond MacCarthy (Trinity, B.A.)
Adrian Ross (King's, M.A. Fellow)

Edinburgh

Sir James Barrie
Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Manchester

Ashley Dukes

Oxford

Max Beerbohm (Merton)
Sir Frank Benson (New)
J.B. Fagan (Trinity)
John Galsworthy (New, M.A.)
Sir John M. Gatti (St. John's, M.A.)
Anthony Hope (Balliol, M.A.)
Charles Maude (Brasenose, B.A.)
G.S. Ogilvie (University, B.A.)

Heidelberg

Rudolf Beiser
Arthur Collins
Gordon Craig
W. Somerset Maugham

Munich

Ashley Dukes

Public Schools

Bradfield

Gordon Craig

Charterhouse

Max Beerbohm
Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson
Cyril Maude

City of London

Henry Kendall
Alfred Sutro

Appendix A. cont'd

Eton

G.P. Bancroft
Desmond MacCarthy

Harrow

Sir Gerald du Maurier

King's College School

F. Anstey

Marlborough

Anthony Hope

Queen's College (for Women)

Lady Tree

Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts

Iris Hoey
Charles Maude

Royal Academy of Music

Lena Ashwell
Phyllis Neilson-Terry
Marie Tempest

Rugby

G.S. Ogilvie

Stonyhurst

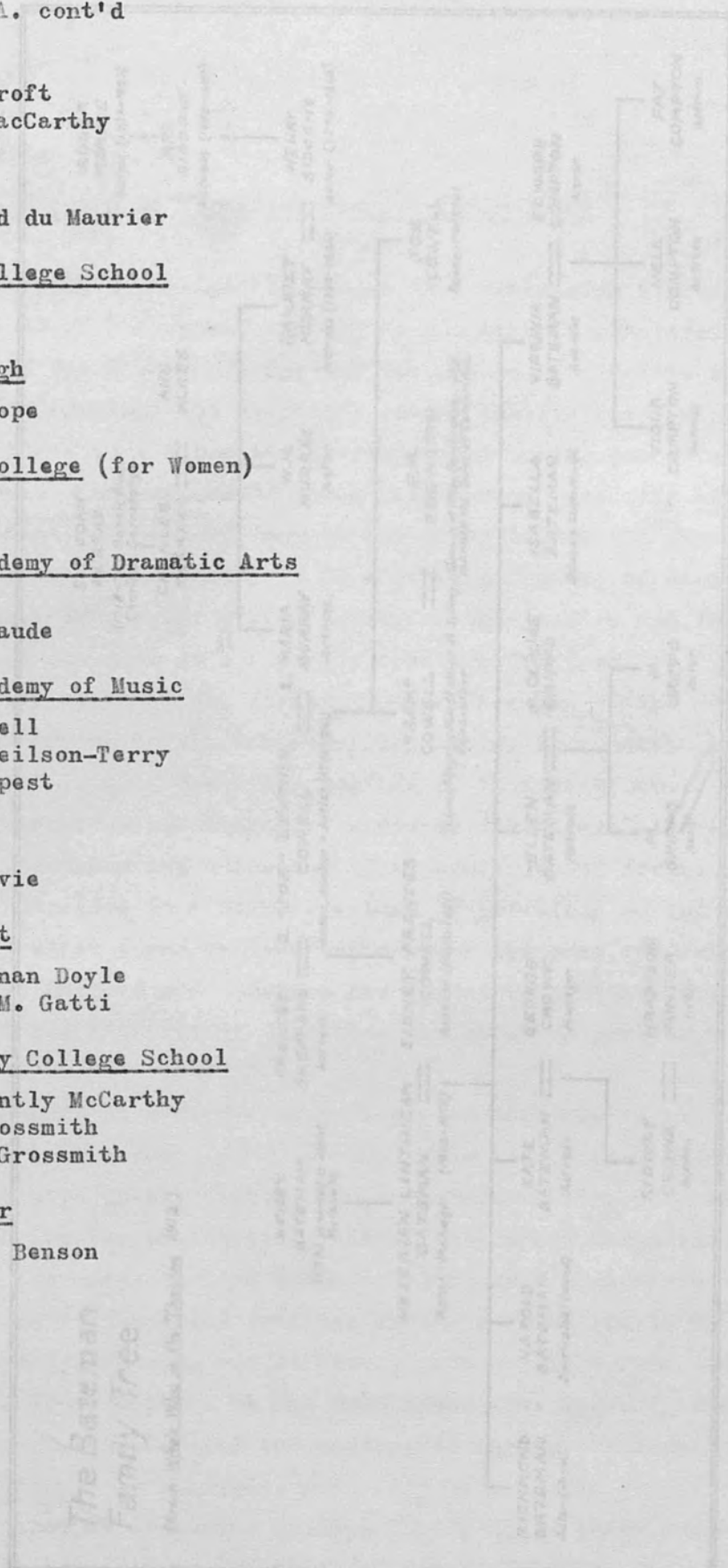
Sir A. Conan Doyle
Sir John M. Gatti

University College School

Justin Huntly McCarthy
George Grossmith
Lawrence Grossmith

Winchester

Sir Frank Benson



The Bateman
Family Tree

Chapter Seven

Dramatic Criticism in Edwardian Theatre (1890-1914)

The 'rising of the middle class' is a continuing historical phenomenon which has caused endless frustration to scholars. Every century has provided the background for the invincible bourgeoisie to once more gain social, economic and political power, until a fresh historical analysis moves the focus to a subsequent period, thus making possible their next great ascent. However, while these hardworking merchants are struggling to put their feet on the next rung of the power ladder the theatre, in the eyes of scholars and enthusiasts, is in a continual state of decay. Actors and critics alike bemoan the present state of the theatre and look to a past when theatre was seen as a vigorous creative art form.

Both the myths of the rising middle class and of the declining theatre are ways of trying to explain recurring social phenomena. As 'the rising middle class' blandly describes periods of intense economic activity so 'the declining theatre' disguises a deeper discontent with the development of social attitudes and concerns. The popularity of certain theatrical forms is indicative to a certain extent of prevalent social mores, but the critique of these forms and the espousal of the past and future theatre by contemporary critics and scholars can reveal to us today the aspirations - both social and theatrical - of those who cared deeply for both theatre and society.

The origins of modern theatre began in the 1890's, with a resurgence of interest in the function of drama. This led to comparisons with past theatre but more interestingly, and more importantly, to a comparison with non-English theatre of the time. Inevitably these comparisons usually denigrated Edwardian English theatre. But certain elements which turn up in contemporary theatrical writings indicate a new spirit in drama, a spirit uniquely pre-war, and different from any Victorian concept of theatre.

In previous chapters it has been shown that theatre construction and theatre finance accelerated and modernised during the Edwardian years. It is more difficult to attribute modernity to dramatic criticism, yet certain aspects of theatre criticism written during these years indicate a more contemporary approach to literary function and production. The critics

seemed to have been aware of a new feeling running through the drama. They wrote books with titles like The Drama of Yesterday and To-day, The New Spirit in Drama & Art or The Renaissance of English Drama. They analysed English drama with an incredible thoroughness - enlarging the virtues and exaggerating the faults. They were clearly men of their time - they were aware of social change and the role of England and her Empire - yet they regarded themselves as a bit visionary.

It is too easy to say that during this period dramatic criticism became literary. That would be ignoring the whole English tradition of dramatic criticism. What happened at this time, however, is that the critics began to challenge the traditional role of the dramatic critic as one who approved or disapproved of actor or production and tried instead to find a new place for theatre in terms of the changing drama itself. So the role of criticism changed to suit the demands of a developing modern theatre.

Introspection and self-analysis were not undertaken by every dramatic critic. The majority of theatre writers stuck to the same old formulas for reviewing and writing about the theatre. The theatre was seen as entertainment, and judged solely on its ability to amuse. Costumes and pretty legs were considered more important than scripts and the playwright was rated on how well he could translate from the French. The critic who worked for a newspaper was under the thumb of the editor, who in his turn was controlled by theatre managers who used paid advertisements as inducements to obtain good reviews. Some critics were not even particularly interested in theatre and were assigned to write reviews as a reporter might be sent to cover a fire.

There were however some critics who were passionately involved in theatre and saw the necessity not only of reviewing plays intelligently and with conviction, but also of questioning the state and direction of theatre. The function of criticism was in their eyes to direct the theatre to a better future. These men, though few in number, helped to change the image of the critic from that of a hack writer to a man with position and a measure of influence over the theatre and its audience.

In this chapter, four of these men will be discussed as representatives of the avant-garde critic. Another is discussed as a member of the old guard - critics who felt that modern theatre would do well to retain the spirit and aims of late Victorian theatre. Looking back seventy-odd years there is really nothing remarkable about what the progressive critics were advocating, but at the time some of their writings were considered revolutionary. Dedicated to the idea that theatre should not fall behind

the other literary arts, these men lent a measure of grace and intelligence to theatre criticism and helped adapt it to the modern era.

Clement Scott does not strictly belong to this period, and he was certainly not an avant-garde critic. He represented the critics of the old school, perceptive, yet resistant to change. His most important work was done during the 1860's-1880's when he wrote criticism for the Daily Telegraph and later for a periodical he edited, The Theatre. He also wrote several plays for the theatre, including translations of Sardou's Dora and Diplomacy.

Scott deplored the standards of mid-Victorian theatre. In his attempts to use criticism as a means of raising the level of the theatre, he encouraged such playwrights as T.W. Robertson, the inventor of the 'cup and saucer' drama, and the managements of such actors as the Bancrofts who performed many of Robertson's works. Scott also thought highly of Sir Henry Irving and of the plays he produced at the Lyceum Theatre. In Scott's opinion, by the 1880's, English theatre had once again become artistic and viable.

Unfortunately Scott did not continue with his progressive attitude toward the theatre. By the 1890's, productions of the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen were beginning to be produced in London. In 1891, the Independent Theatre produced Ibsen's Ghosts at the Royalty Theatre in London. This production created a tremendous uproar. Critical opinion was divided into two camps. The first group thought Ibsen the exponent of a new and vital drama in which such social issues as syphilis and insanity could legitimately be discussed. The second group were convinced that Ibsen was a dangerous man, propagating an obscene and morbid drama, not fit to be viewed by women and impressionable youths. Scott became the leader of the second group, and preached and tiraded against Ibsenism and the 'new' drama until his death in 1904. The keenness of his critical judgement was obscured by what he considered a moral issue. More progressive critics felt that Scott had outlived his usefulness. William Archer, one of the first proponents of Ibsen, felt that the theatre had surpassed Scott intellectually. Scott's cry for "The Stage for the People" (presumably meaning a stage without Ibsen) was seen by Archer as anti-intellectualism - an attempt to make mediocrity the byword in English theatre.

Mr. Scott represents to a nicety the average middle-class English-man, or in other words the immense majority of the playgoing public. He found the stage, in the 'sixties, beneath his intellectual level, and sought to raise it. From 'seventy to 'ninety (roughly speaking) it exactly came up to his intellectual and artistic requirements,
cont'd

and he was happy. In 'ninety it took a fresh start and left him (and the majority) behind, and he now shrieks to it to come back and "mark time", for he cannot follow it into "an atmosphere that is mephitic."¹

Despite his anathema to Ibsen and the new drama, Scott's achievement in dramatic criticism lies in his devotion to the theatre and his efforts to raise the standards of mid-Victorian theatre.

Scott's opponent in the Ibsen debate, William Archer, gloried in the rise of Ibsen and the 'new theatre'. Born in 1856, he travelled widely during his youth, from Edinburgh to Norway and to Australia; then back to Edinburgh via the United States, taking in as much theatre as he could. Some of his relations lived in Norway, and it was during summer visits to see them that Archer became acquainted with Ibsen. He learned Norwegian to study the plays better and made some of the first English translations of the playwright's works. After he moved to London, Archer became dramatic critic of the London Figaro then took up the post in other periodicals including The World, The Tribune and The Nation.

Archer believed in the 'new' English theatre, and in his criticism, he tried to show the direction in which theatre must go. Besides advocating Ibsen, he was very friendly with British playwrights including Shaw, Sydney Grundy, Sir Arthur Pinero, and Henry Arthur Jones and saw their work as evidence of a revitalised theatre. In 1894, he brought out some of his daily criticism for The World in book form. This was the first volume in a series of collected criticism which was to cover the years 1893-1897. Archer felt that 1893 was a watershed in English dramatic history. "'Never within my living memory,' he wrote, '-not often, surely, in the annals of the English theatre - has the student of the stage had so much to 'break his mind upon' in a single season!'"²

Although Archer was impressed with the work of some of the new English playwrights, he was quick to criticise any work which he felt was not up to his standards. Banality and mediocrity were two qualities he could not abide in theatre and for him there were no sacred cows. He even felt obliged to criticise two of Ibsen's last works, The Master Builder and When We Dead Awaken, for not being up to the standards of the earlier plays.

Archer also gave support to the movement for a national theatre, and gave much time to the Shakespeare Memorial Committee, an organisation which tried to find funds for such a theatre. In 1912, he published a book entitled Play-Making A Manual of Craftsmanship, where he tried to set down

¹Archer, William The Theatrical 'World' for 1893 (1894), pp. 246-8.

²Archer, Charles William Archer (1931), p. 192.

a set of rules and standards for aspiring playwrights and interested readers. He was a busy and untiring man and the root of his critical philosophy can be seen in the epilogue to the 1894 volume of The World criticism series. "The faculty for making the best of the actual without losing sight of the ideal", he says, 'lies at the root of the policy enforced in the foregoing pages.'³

Max Beerbohm was a different kind of critic altogether. The half-brother of Sir Herbert Tree, Beerbohm was born in 1872 in the comforts of Palace Gardens, Kensington. He was educated at Oxford where he became familiar with the 'aesthetes' including Oscar Wilde. His essay for the first edition of The Yellow Book, 'A Defence of Cosmetics' made him famous (or perhaps infamous) at a very early age, and he came down to London, the member of an urbane and witty set.

Beerbohm did not have the passion that Archer felt for the drama, yet he had the advantage of a tremendous familiarity with the theatre. Through his half-brother Herbert, he had seen and been involved with many of the productions at Her Majesty's Theatre. When Tree went on a tour of the United States, he took Max along as his secretary. Although Max was hardly a conventional secretary (he wrote out individual answers to enquiries in his elaborate longhand and spent hours polishing each letter), he learned much about the functioning of the theatre. His critical faculties were already keen. There is a famous story that during this trip, Herbert asked Max to see a play and report on its possibilities. Max went to see the play and told Tree that he thought it a real potboiler melodrama. Later, Herbert himself found he had some extra time and went to see the play, loved it and bought the rights for production at Her Majesty's. The play was of course Tribby, which was one of Tree's star parts and made him a fortune. Max, however, had shown his ability to discern.

When George Bernard Shaw resigned as drama critic for The Saturday Review in 1898, he asked that Beerbohm be appointed in his place. Although Beerbohm hated the idea of a weekly deadline, he needed the money and so he took the job. He remained drama critic on The Saturday Review until 1910 when he decided to live in Italy.

Beerbohm did not have William Archer's sense of mission when he wrote about the theatre. But he had a very good sense of judgement and his criticism had literary style. Beerbohm, like Leigh Hunt and William Hazlitt before him, transformed dramatic criticism into a literary art.

J.T. Grein was born in Amsterdam in 1862. His father was a merchant and sent young Grein to Germany for his education. His passion for the

³Archer, Charles, p. 203.

theatre began early in life and soon after his return to Holland he was writing reviews for Dutch newspapers. When he was sent to London to work in his uncle's bank, he learned English and applied himself to the English theatre. In addition to writing reviews for Life (not related to the Luce publication), and acting as a foreign drama correspondent for the Netherlands; Grein was instrumental in setting up the Independent Theatre, a theatre group which was devoted to producing plays which were considered too intellectual for the commercial theatre (both English and foreign). Grein's Independent Theatre was the group that produced Ibsen's Ghosts which created such an uproar in London in 1891. Among the other plays the Independent Theatre produced were a translation of Therese Raquin and Shaw's Widower's Houses.

In 1893, Grein resigned as the regular critic on Life and began to write criticism for The Sunday Special, a periodical which was bought by The Sunday Times in 1904. His most important criticism was done for these papers although he also wrote for The Financial Times, Lady's Field and The Independent Theatre Goer among other publications. In 1895 Grein resigned from active direction of the Independent Theatre because he had been made the London representative of a big Dutch East Indies firm. Like many other drama critics, Grein could not support himself by his reviews alone and worked at another job during the day.

Grein wanted ^{to} the end the isolation of English theatre and constantly promoted English theatre abroad. At home in London, he encouraged the work of new English dramatists and helped produce the work of some of the important foreign playwrights. In 1900 he helped to launch the German Theatre, a group which presented important German plays in German. Above all he sought the establishment of a vital English theatre. He deplored the absurd translations of French farces and the 'rule of the epigram' which dominated the English stage, and pleaded for a stage willing to present the works of new dramatists. He was depressed by the quality of theatre shown in London, and worked tirelessly for artistic and intellectual improvement.

Arthur Bingham Walkley was another spare-time theatre critic. His working day was spent as a principal clerk at the GPO. He was born in 1855 the son of a bookseller and was educated at the Warminster School, Balliol College, then Corpus Christi College, Oxford, where he was a mathematics scholar; he joined the GPO in 1877. He diligently attended the theatre and in 1888 when The Star was founded, he was appointed critic. From 1890-1899 he worked for a weekly, The Speaker. In 1899 he began working for The Times, and in 1900 he was formally appointed its theatre critic.

Although Walkley also crusaded for a revitalised English theatre, he was even more concerned with the function of the critic in the new century. In a volume published in 1903 entitled Dramatic Criticism, he posed the important question of what sort of a person a critic should be and how should he report his criticism to the public. He was concerned with the difference between 'impressionistic' and 'dogmatic' criticism, and seriously questioned the validity of each type though admitting himself to be mainly impressionistic.

His mathematical training could be seen in his criticism. The writer of his obituary in The Times saw that "Boundaries, precision and rational order were what he looked for constitutionally in the works of others and what he practised in his own writing."⁴ Walkley did not sponsor a particular dramatic cause. Instead, he tried to look at each piece of theatre objectively and judge it on its own particular merits.

This chapter is not intended as a debate on the existence or non-existence of a renaissance in English theatre during this period. It is rather to see how dramatic critics of the time perceived their theatre and how these perceptions fit in with other thoughts current at the time.

By a 'new' theatre, the critics seem to have meant a theatre which dispensed with artificiality, discussed social issues without hypocrisy, and in general provided a sounding board for many of the new ideas waiting to be heard. Like the painters who fought for the introduction of impressionism into England, and the novelists who copied French and Russian realism in their novels, the dramatic vanguard pushed for the free flow of ideas and inventions into English theatre. Their artistic success is less clear than their efforts to see English art in general freed from the shackles of Mrs. Grundy.

Ibsen became the personification of the 'new' theatre. To those worried about the decline of traditional Victorian values, Ibsen and the new dramatists became the prime exponents of immorality among the young, the decline of religion, and glorification of science. Clement Scott became their spokesman and in the preface to his book, Drama Yesterday and To-day, he outlined how the decline of moral values and the influence of Ibsen had ruined the contemporary theatre.

We may ascribe it to the change of tone and thought at our public schools and universities, to our godless method of education, to the comparative failure of religion as an influence, to this, to that, or the other. But there it is. cont'd

⁴The Times, October 9, 1926.

We cannot get away from it. Society has accepted the satire, and our dramatists of the first class have one after the other broken away from the beautiful, the helpful, and the ideal, and coquetted with the distorted, the tainted, and the poisonous in life. Any appeal to them in the name of art is vain. According to their utilitarian creed, all must be good that pays; and so for the moment our theatres are crowded to excess to see "snap-shot society dramas" with their pronounced vulgarity, their hideous presentments of men and women, and their cheap satire.⁵

This was as much a criticism of society as of theatre. The theatre became the show-case of society, and of a society which had lost its ideals and its sense of order. Scott was afraid of the reality of men and women. To him art had to be beautiful, and if men and women were portrayed on the stage in their true colours, with a hint of their true vices, then the theatre ceased to be art. To men like Scott, the theatre was more a place of entertainment and moral edification, than a place for exploring the true nature of man. To them it was frightening to see actual representations of their fears acting out moral predicaments which many tried to ignore in the hope they would go away.

If men like Scott were afraid of the possibilities of drama, other critics were rather too optimistic about the new theatre. In the epilogue to his 1895 volume of criticism, William Archer spoke of the terms "problem plays" and "sex plays" as being demeaning descriptions of a theatre that "is at last beginning to sieze upon and interpret the genuinely dramatic aspects of modern life."⁶ He went on:

The dramatist's province has now been extended so as to include every form and phase of the relationship between man and woman; or, in other words, the stage has at last entered into a really intimate and vital relationship to life. That is why - if the movement be left unhampered from without - one looks with some confidence for a steady development of drama; keeping pace with the development of social life and thought.⁷

The still rather stilted behaviour of men and women on stage had actually neither a really "intimate" nor a "vital" relationship to life. Yet critics with Archer's convictions were ever searching for new and important developments in the theatre. They waded with continual vigour through the prevailing morass of stilted dialogue and artificial situations and when

⁵Scott, Clement The Drama of Yesterday and To-day (1899), v.1, pp. x-xi.

⁶Archer, William The Theatrical 'World' for 1895 (1896), pp. 386-387.

⁷Ibid.

they found the few examples of theatre which really did begin to relate to social life and thought, they over-optimistically proclaimed these plays as the beginnings of a new modern theatre.

Even Max Beerbohm was not immune to these kinds of proclamations. Though much later in life he told S.N. Behrman that he thought most Edwardian plays were written by either 'Naomi Greckle' or 'Mr. Thompkins'⁸ he was not above making wide claims for Gilbert Murray's play, Carlyon Sahib.

It is, I think, the first play in which we have had the problem of the great man's right to override for the good of his country, the ordinary laws of humanity.⁹

Both Beerbohm and J.T. Grein believed that important social and moral issues should be discussed on stage, but they based their criteria on different concepts of the theatre. Beerbohm looked at the stage as it had become - basically a place of entertainment and made his judgements on how well a play instructed or propagandised as long as it did not forget also to entertain. Grein believed in a political theatre - political in the sense of being a moral or social instructor - and made his decisions on whether the proposition was worth discussing. In this light, Beerbohm's reason why religion should not be permitted on the stage does not deal with the Censor's right to forbid the portrayal of religious figures, but rather with the prevailing climate of the theatre.

The theatre itself is not essentially ignoble, not essentially unfit for the presentation of the highest themes. But unfortunately in modern England, the theatre has become a place of dubious repute, with which it is hard to associate aught but what is tawdry and cheap and foolish...In these circumstances how could we expect a theatre to be adjudged a fit and proper place for the presentation of anything howsoever remotely connected with religion.¹⁰

On the other hand, when J.T. Grein criticised Shaw's Mrs. Warren's Profession, it was not on how well it entertained, but whether it said something worth discussing. Grein was actually a bit shocked at the boldness in Mrs. Warren's Profession (Mrs. Warren has run a brothel to pay for her daughter's education) particularly because there were women in the audience. "The main point is whether the problem is worth discussing and whether it has been dealt with in an adequate and convincing matter. I say no on both counts."¹¹

⁸Behrman, S.N. Conversation with Max (1960), pp. 131-2.

⁹Beerbohm, Max More Theatres (1969), p. 161.

¹⁰Beerbohm, Max Last Theatres (1970), p. 106.

¹¹Grein, J.T. Dramatic Criticism v. III 1900-1901 (1902), p. 294.

Although Beerbohm, Grein, Archer and Walkley may have differed in their personal interpretations of theatre, they tried to be fair to new developments in Edwardian theatre. They gave encouragement to experimental new managements such as the Vedrenne-Barker management of the Court Theatre (1904-1907), which produced many new English plays. Even though Archer abhorred the pretension of William Poel's Elizabethan Stage Society (which produced Shakespeare and others as they presumed the Elizabethans had), he gave encouragement to the actors and their efforts. Foreign plays which tackled social problems were also seen as important and valuable theatre even if audiences had to make an extra effort to understand the cultural differences. A.B. Walkley wrote of the artistic value of Gorki's The Lower Depths, as an example of an important foreign play.

For that matter, it demands a serious effort from every individual playgoer - the effort to overcome the instinctive preference for the merely agreeable and to recognise that human misery and pain also have their claims to be interpreted in terms of art.¹²

The basic contribution of these critics to the 'new' theatre is that they were not afraid of change. They saw the theatre as something flexible that could adapt to new demands of society and indeed had an obligation to represent faithfully the problems which society faced. How well the theatre actually presented issues and how the critic interpreted these productions is another key to the role and function of the critic in Edwardian society.

The problem in a majority of the Edwardian 'problem' plays is the problem of women. The era of the strait-laced, cloistered woman was over - at least in progressive fiction. H.G. Wells sang the triumphs of the socialist-oriented woman who gloried in free love (exactly how much freedom Ann Veronica gained is indicative of Wells's own limitations) and Eleanor Glyn gave her fictional women the freedom to hold opinions about love, men and themselves. Novelists and playwrights alike suddenly found the question of the position and role of women a fascinating one and filled reams with their personal theories. In the real world, too, times were changing. Divorce reform made divorce less taboo and more of an acceptable solution. Although the movement for women's suffrage had begun many years before, the activities of Mrs. Pankhurst and the WSPU were gaining publicity (with a good deal of notoreity) for the movement and both women and men began to explore the possibilities of 'the vote'. The opening of women's colleges

¹²The Times, December 4, 1911, p. 6.

at both Oxford and Cambridge exposed the daughters of the middle and upper classes (after all, who made up at least half of West End theatre audiences?) to new ideas and the possibility of a different life from their mothers's. If women had not broken entirely loose from the shackles of home, husband, and family, they were at least beginning to talk about the alternatives.

The theatre was keen to follow the lead of the novelists and numerous plays were written on every aspect of the woman's dilemma in modern society. Many of these were earnest attempts to write about real problems and how women actually coped with them. It was the job of the critic to sort out the real thing from the many hopeless imitations which exploited the problems of women in an attempt to jump on the commercial bandwagon. William Archer was able to see the difference between those plays which dealt with the 'new' woman as she was, and the 'new' woman as she was paraded in the commercial theatre. In a review of Sydney Grundy's play, A New Woman, he shows how even an attempt to show that the 'new' woman is really the 'old' woman in another guise, can fail miserably.

9/ So far as the dramatic action is concerned, Agnes Sylvester is not a "New Woman" at all. She is any woman of brains pitted against any woman of beauty; and even her brains we have largely to take on trust. Her conduct is in no wise conditioned by anything which even purports to be a "New" morality. So far as her relation to Gerald goes, she might be a woman of fifty or a hundred years ago. The fact of their collaborating in a book on the ethics of marriage is the only think that is new in the situation; fifty years ago she would have found another excuse for meeting, just as she would have worn another style of bonnet and done her hair differently. Mr. Grundy may say that it is precisely his point to show that there is nothing new in the "new woman"; but I think he proves more than he intends. If the substance is always the same, its modes are different, and we find in Agnes Sylvester scarcely any of the differentiae by which we recognise the specifically "new woman".¹³

The struggles between capital and labour which dominated the Edwardian scene did not escape the scrutiny of the theatre. But sometimes the critics were over-eager to see the class conflict in some of the plays they reviewed. Max Beerbohm, in reviewing John Galsworthy's play, Strife, felt that the struggle between capital and labour was the crux of the play.

Essentially, as I have said, the dramatic conflict of the play is between capital and labour. Mr. Galsworthy shows us, as it were, a corner of the battle field, not for the mere spectacle of that corner, but to give us a dim sense of the whole vast appalling fight.¹⁴

¹³Archer, William The Theatrical 'World' for 1894 (1895), pp. 230-231.

¹⁴Beerbohm, Last Theatres, p. 441.

William Archer agreed with Beerbohm that this was so, until he heard 'on the best authority' that Strife was concerned with other issues altogether.

I learn on the best authority, that I am wrong, in point of fact, as to the origin of Strife. The play arose in Mr. Galsworthy's mind from his actually having seen in conflict the two men who were the proto-types of Anthony and Robert's, and thus noted the waste and inefficacy arising from the clash of strong characters unaccompanied by balance. It was accident that led him to place the two men in an environment of capital and labour. In reality, both of them were, if not capitalists, at any rate on the side of capital. This interesting correction of fact does not invalidate the theory above stated.¹⁵

These critiques show two things about criticism and the theatre. Firstly, they show that by this time the figures of the striker, representing labour, and the boss representing capital, could be incorporated into dramatic fiction in such a way that the problems of both sides could be presented with a measure of sympathy. Unlike Victorian melodrama, the boss did not necessarily have a Simon Legree (the villain of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel Uncle Tom's Cabin, which became a popular melodrama of the period) temperament and the labour leader did not have to be a revolutionary anarchist. But these reviews also show that the capital and labour struggle had become such a stock situation in the theatre by this time that when a play presented the issue intelligently, other dramatic criteria such as the clashing of different personalities, were overlooked in favour of the more directly political issue. It must be said to the credit of Beerbohm - despite Archer's intimate knowledge of Galsworthy's true intentions - that Strife is a difficult play in which to separate the two.

The Edwardian age also saw the beginnings of modern sociology. The aftermath of middle-class and aristocratic "slumming" was being found in books offering embryo theories about poverty, unemployment and standards of living. The middle-classes were also taking a serious look at exactly where they stood in the social scheme. The loosening of Victorian moral strictures (aided by the 'fast' living of King Edward and his social set) spurred the interest of the middle classes in the socially prominent and laid down new social guidelines for the aspiring bourgeoisie. A feeling of modernity caused by advances in science and industry brought about curiosity about changing modern life and an interest in how scientific and economic advances would influence everyday living.

The 'new' society became another focus for the Edwardian playwright.

¹⁵Archer, William Play-making A Manual of Craftsmanship (1912), p. 15.

Most critics applauded the courage of the playwright in showing the faults and foibles of modern society. But others saw through the hypocrisy of productions which used modernity as an excuse for theatrical (in the worst sense of the word) inventiveness. J.T.Grein detected such theatrical pretensions in the Drury Lane melodrama, The Price of Peace.

I admire the patience of a public that tolerates in "a play of modern life" - modern life, if you please!- the suggestion that an M.P. should attempt to sell his country, aided and abetted by the daughter of a Cabinet Minister, or the representation of a religious function in melodrama.¹⁶

Grein was perhaps being overcritical, for Drury Lane melodramas never claimed to carry social messages for the public. At the Drury Lane, 'modern life' may have been disrupted by a profusion of earthquakes and fires, but the public knew what they were getting. It was a different case when serious playwrights claimed they were getting to the nitty-gritty of modern life. It took a perceptive critic to see the difference between the genuine sociological study and the play which presented sociology as interpreted by the disinterested affluent audience. A.B. Walkley saw through the sociological pretense of H.A. Jones's play, The Middleman:

It is astute of Mr. Jones to claim for his recent plays that they are in intention serious studies of modern social and commercial life. The claim whets public curiosity at a time when sociology is being brought home to all our doors and economics are served up hot with the morning muffin. It excites a little flutter of expectation among a considerable number of guileless playgoers, who are led to suppose that here at last is a dramatist who means to throw the searching glare of the footlights upon the laws of wealth distribution, capital and labour, supply and demand, and other high matters. But Mr. Jones's claim, when brought to the proof, breaks down.¹⁷

Edwardian critics had to deal with many different kinds of productions. Shakespeare, melodrama, musical comedy, drama, farce and verse plays were all staples of the repertoire. It is always difficult for the critic to get a sense of perspective when often he is forced to write his review directly after the performance. These four critics were not infallible. Often they saw significance in what was ordinary. What is remarkable is how well they were able to discriminate between what was relevant to the development of theatre and what was ordinary popular commercial theatre.

There was a renewed interest in the production of Shakespeare during the

¹⁶Grein, Dramatic Criticism (1902), p. 13.

¹⁷Walkley, A.B. Playhouse Impressions (1892), p. 116.

period. Though these productions were less mutilated and rearranged than Shakespeare was during the Victorian period, cuts were certainly not unknown, and the text was sometimes buried under extraneous scenery and costumes. William Poel and the Elizabethan Stage Society led a movement to produce Shakespeare in his original form, but other producers still rearranged the plays to suit their interests. William Archer protested that there were too many cuts in Sir Herbert Tree's production of Henry IV. Tree wrote back to Archer and said without the cuts, the play would take too long to produce. Here is Archer's reply to Tree:

You say that if you produced the play in the shape I suggested, it would occupy "considerably over three hours and a half." If it did - and here lies the very gist of my argument - that fact alone would sufficiently prove that the method of production was somehow defective. It would prove (1) the scenery was too elaborate and unwieldy; or that (2) the "business" was needlessly protracted; or that (3) the actors' delivery was slow, hesitating and spasmodic.¹⁸

As in today's theatre, many of the dramatic 'hits' were no more than sophisticated melodramas. It was disheartening for the critic who campaigned for serious plays with a message to see poorly constructed melodramas winning the support and enthusiasm of the London playgoer. One of the great successes of the period was an adaptation of Sherlock Holmes that successfully managed to mutilate the character of the famous detective. J.T. Grein was disheartened to say the least.

To see the Lyceum degraded to melodrama of crime is sad enough; but to have to sit out in that famous play-house a concoction which falls below the low level of the transpontine is something more than sad. It is positively disheartening to feel in how poor an estimation some people hold the intelligence of the London playgoer. For here is a play that has not even skilful workmanship to recommend, nor yet thrilling situations to redeem it. It is a penny dreadful minus the coherence which is to be found in even that very cheap product of scybbleship.¹⁹

Musical comedy was in great plenitude and was often reviewed in the critics's columns. Of course the majority of critics found the form a delight. Easy to watch and listen to, the bevy of beautiful girls made it an easy evening at the theatre. But some critics took the musical seriously. Although they saw most musical comedies as being in poor taste, without any real purpose, they did not dismiss them as a passing phase in theatrical

¹⁸Archer, The Theatrical 'World' in 1896 (1897), pp. 104-5.

¹⁹Grein, Criticism (1902), pp. 257-8.

form. As early as 1896, William Archer was able to write a prophecy of musical comedy which came to pass only in the 1940's with the advent of the more sophisticated Oklahoma! To him, musical comedy was merely a 'spectacular display' but with the possibility of dramatic maturation in the future.

I even believe that, in spite of its slowness of development and its apparent retrogression; it contains the germs of better things. The evil lies, not in its existence, not in its popularity, but in the sheep-like rush of theatrical speculators into this form of enterprise, to the exclusion (we may almost say) of all others.²⁰

Commercialism in Archer's eyes was part of the ruin of musical comedy. And although it is true that theatrical speculators could make the largest amounts of money from investment in musical comedy, speculation caused the profusion of another type of theatre as well.

The 'social' or 'problem' play, as an example of dramatic invention and resourcefulness by serious playwrights has already been discussed. But it must be realised that these serious plays were imitated by the score by untalented hacks, filling the theatres with plays carried only by the whiff of scandal which was so commercially profitable. A.B. Walkley must have seen hundreds of these plays, where divorce, the hint or reality of adultery, or some scandal or another formed the backbone of the play. In 1904, in a review of Alfred Sutro's play, The Walls of Jericho, he challenges the ability of the theatre to present society with any depth at all. He attacks Mr. Sutro's play, not by itself, but as a representative of plays that have no validity because they hide social realities behind a smokescreen of popular prejudice.

The common weakness of these plays is that they are in essence fantastic. They seize upon a partial truth and present it as a truth of sweeping generality; they are not founded upon a conscientious and cool observation but rather upon popular prejudices and especially the popular appetite for crude exaggeration. This weakness seems inherent in the subject, for our playwrights who have handled that subject - playwrights of established fame - all misrepresent it. Those of us, for instance, who wish to know the "true truth" about Georgian "society" will seek it in Walpole's letters, and not in The School for Scandal. Nor will those who yearn for the true truth about Victorian "society" find it in London Assurance or Money. Will anyone pretend that The Walls of Jericho gives a true unvarnished picture of Edwardian "society?"²¹

²⁰Archer, Theatrical 'World' (1897), p. 304.

²¹The Times, November 1, 1904, p. 91.

If one takes Mr. Walkley at his word, then theatre has no value for the historian. But much of the value of theatre for the historian is precisely in Walkley's implied misrepresentation. It is this misrepresentation in manifesting certain aspects of popular opinion which shapes the more popular commercial theatre.

Certain dramatic movements were also considered important by the critics. It has already been shown that the European movement of realism influenced English theatre. But realism was not seen as the ultimate dramatic experience by all critics. No sooner had realism caught on in England, than certain critics were attacking plays for have 'cinematographic qualities'. In a review of Galsworthy's play, Justice, Max Beerbohm wrote that critics were sometimes incapable of viewing theatre objectively:

We are getting on. Time was when our drama was so utterly divorced from life that the critics never dreamed of condemning a play for artificiality. It is but a few years since they acquired the habit of judging plays in relation to life. And now (so fast has our drama been moving) they are beginning to decry plays on the ground that they are indistinguishable from life.²²

It is only possible to present a few examples of criticism for there are so many types of production. But from these examples it can be seen how clearly these critics were able to distinguish between the essence of theatre, and the trappings which indicated their particular age.

In spite of the efforts made by most of these critics to get good foreign drama performed on the English stage (French farces were generally not included in this category), their prime objective was really the creation of a new English drama. They saw progressive English drama as lagging behind that of the continent and attributed this to fundamental differences between English and continental audiences. The continent was seen as having a theatrical tradition which England lacked. It was not that such countries as France lacked for undistinguished popular theatre. It was rather that France maintained a high level theatrical workmanship which showed in all productions, and her middle class audiences, with a long uninterrupted tradition of theatre-going (which was not the case in Victorian England) had a greater sense of discrimination than English audiences. A.B. Walkley felt able to discern the difference between theatre in Paris and theatre in London.

²²Beerbohm, Max AroundTheatres (1953), p. 565.

There (Paris), also, the cafe-concert triumphs over the playhouse. There, also, the theatre of ideas has to maintain an incessant fight for life. But it continues to keep its flag flying. The Francais has its habitués as well as its subvention, Antoine, and Lugne Poe have their subscribers as well as their intelligent and audacity. And the merely frivolous theatres, whatever we may think of their ethics, maintain a level of workmanship which, compared with that of our "musical comedies", may almost be called intellectual. ...By tradition and temperament, the Parisian is a playgoer, and, from practice, an expert playgoer. Herein he differs from an Englishman of the same class.²³

The idea of the cultivated European playgoer was the model for the rejuvenation of the English audience. Whether such a model indeed existed was irrelevant to the critics. The French and Germans were held to have a certain intellectual sophistication which the English lacked and envied, and it was envy that the critics tried to evoke for the purpose of developing the new English theatre. The question of whether there were significant changes and progressions in the concept of European theatre must here lie unanswered. But for the purposes of this discussion it is important to realise that these English critics believed that significant changes were taking place on the continent and they wished to see English theatre benefit from these changes. By refusing to acknowledge such playwrights as Ibsen, English theatre was, as these men saw it, in an unnecessary state of artistic isolation. They did not want English playwrights to copy Continental playwrights, but rather to use the new theatrical ideas seen in Continental plays for the benefit of a revived English theatre. William Archer wrote about his ideal English theatre which would take inspiration from English life instead of imitating foreign frivolities.

What we want is English plays, not Ibsen's nor another's - plays which mirror our own life, utter our own thoughts, deal with our own problems, satirise our own foibles, interpret the character, the ideals, the genius of our race. It is true that a worthy English theatre would give hospitality to the classics of foreign drama - such of them as could be translated without losing all their grace and savour. But that is a totally different affair from confessing a shameful spiritual vassalage to France by rushing and wrangling for the latest Parisian novelties, forcing them neck and crop into an English garb, and thus robbing them of whatever truth to nature and literary charm they may originally have possessed.²⁴

²³Walkley, A.B. Drama and Life (1907), p. 47.

²⁴Archer, William Study & Stage: A Year-Book of Criticism (1899), p. 40.

Some critics did even more than write about the problem of a new English theatre. J.T. Grein tried to end the isolation of English theatre by promoting the production of English plays in the Netherlands and by promoting both foreign and English plays in London through the resources of the Independent Theatre. He also accompanied Sir Herbert Tree when the Tree company visited Germany. Max Beerbohm covered the Parisian theatre when he was in France and all the critics reviewed foreign artists when they came to London.

The internationalism of the critics was a very modern phenomenon. It was almost as if they foresaw the decline of Empire, and with it the loss of economic, political and artistic self-reliance. Post W.W.I life, of necessity was to be more international and these critics seemed to realise that some amount of cultural isolation had to be discarded before a modern theatre could develop.

While the critics were trying to build a 'new' theatre, they were also trying to create a 'new' criticism. The English theatre had a strong tradition of theatre criticism, but during the Victorian years, the standards had slipped. With the poor quality of most Victorian plays, criticism was more an appraisal of the actor than of the play. After all, there was not much that could be said about the innumerable imported French farces, tear-jerking English melodramas, or productions of Oliver Twist or Uncle Tom's Cabin that made up most of the diet of the popular theatre-goer. Critics were often not even particularly interested in the theatre. But as theatre-going became respectable again, the public became more and more interested in what was happening at the various theatres. The newspaper became important, both as a means of advertising productions and reviewing them. As the number of West End productions increased, competition became greater and what the critic had to say assisted the public to discriminate between various plays. If the critic wrote an article about a particular actor or production, it was a free advertisement. Actors and actor-managers themselves frequently submitted pieces of theatrical gossip they wanted printed. One of those actor-managers was Arthur Bouchier who inundated Max Beerbohm with press announcements to the point of diminishing returns. Wrote Beerbohm:

I look forward to the time when in every dictionary there shall be, between the explanation of 'BOTTONY' and 'BOUCHET', BOUCH, v.n. To advertise oneself with great industry, but without discretion; to advertise oneself in such a way as to make people sorry for one. Deriv. = Bouchier an English actor. BOUCHER, S. One who bouches.²⁵

²⁵Beerbohm, Last Theatres, p. 262.

In addition to pressure from ambitious actors, the critic was also under the thumb of his editor. Theatres had to pay for the spaces which advertised their productions and felt the newspaper was correspondingly under an obligation to give them good publicity. Bernard Shaw felt ignorance of the true nature of the critic was frequent in journalistic circles and that generally the editor either did not understand the function of theatre criticism or had no editorial policy on the treatment of art. Shaw also felt that some critics had their opinions formed for them by their editors.

Add to this that if he (the critic) has the misfortune to be attached to a paper to which theatrical advertisement are an object, or of which the editors and proprietors, or their wives, do not hesitate to incur obligations to managers by asking for complimentary admissions, he may often have to choose between making himself agreeable and forfeiting his post.²⁶

The combination of inexperienced critics, editorial overseers, and favour-courrying seeking actors produced an apathetic critic who was not disposed to question or challenge current theatrical productions. In 1889 J.T. Grein wrote about the duties of a critic and gave the profile of what he considered was a typical English critic.

To many the duties of dramatic criticism are irksome; they go to the theatre because they are paid for it. They do not love their work. No enthusiasm swells their breast. They know well enough that the majority of new productions are not worth the money wasted, nor the ink spilled on them. And their work bears the traces of this mental state. Moreover, they have been accustomed to certain hard and fast rules. The actor-manager and his lady are always to be treated with a certain deference, for his name is a trade-mark, he has large risks at stake and is a patroniser of the advertisement column. The second-rate manager is to be treated with condescension, occasionally with severity. The innovator, habitually called revolutionist or faddist, is to be treated with all the scorn becoming to an authoritative critic. And the Drury Lane shows are always record triumphs as those at the Gaiety are ever a new artistic success for the manager; while the Adelphi melodramas are invariably evidence of the wholesome taste of the British public.²⁷

How then did the 'new' criticism differ from such lowly run-of-the-mill criticism? Firstly, although it recognised the importance of the actor, it considered the whole production of paramount importance. The play, the scenery, the costumes and the actors were all components in the finished product and each element had its part to play in the whole.

²⁶Rowell, George Victorian Dramatic Criticism (1971), p. 361.

²⁷Grein, J.T. Dramatic Criticism (1899), p. 200.

Therefore the critic did not look solely at the intrinsic value of one part of production, but rather how each element related to the whole production.

Secondly, the 'new' critic had a new concept of reality in the theatre, and weighed each production against that concept of reality. It was no longer enough to have real cups and saucers on the stage. Instead, the new critic insisted that the whole range of the complex social and psychological factors that made up the human character be represented on the stage to the best of the playwright's ability. The critics did not necessarily dislike comedy or farce but insisted that there should be at least a slender resemblance to life (as he saw it in theatrical terms) in all theatrical forms. They heartily praised all the dramatists who they felt were starting to regard the theatre as a means of representing real human experience, and encouraged more and better works from these writers. Of course 'reality' to these critics is not the same 'reality' we see on the stage at present. Their 'reality' as ours, was a coming to terms with the changing relationships of men, but they presented this 'reality' in an acceptable form to a turn of the century viewer. Thus, their criteria for stage reality was conditioned by what society thought was that reality. Therefore their favourable reaction to Brieux's rather tame play on the destruction of social relationships by syphilis was still in advance of acceptable reality to the majority of playgoers. It was not that these critics felt plays must be instructive, but they tended to feel that plays which only entertained were not completely relevant to changing social conditions.

During these years the critic also began to see himself performing an important service to the drama. He was no longer the errand boy of the newspaper world. Instead, he was an artist, a person with responsibilities to both the theatre and to the public. Walkley's concern with the critic's perception of the theatre ('dogmatic' vs. 'impressionistic') in his book Dramatic Criticism, is only one of many examples of how seriously the critic was beginning to take himself. He was a truly independent member of the audience, with in many cases a different purpose for going to the theatre.

Well, the peculiar position, the differentia of the critic proper results from the fact that he has to be not only consumer but producer, not only observer but artist.²⁸

The rest of the theatre world was not always delighted with the idea of the omnipotent critic. Actor-managers were in the habit of writing directly to the critic to dispute a particular review. Producers with a lack of artistic pretension, but with a flair for spectacle or scandal,

²⁸Walkley, Dramatic Criticism, pp. 57-8.

laughed at the poor reviews - all the way to the bank. Nevertheless playwrights, producers and actors were beginning to take heed of the critic. Sometimes his intelligence was underestimated.

Mr. Jerome calls his farce "A (comparatively speaking) New and Original Play," and says this is done to "clinch" the critics, who, it seems, have a bad habit, whenever a new play is produced, of enumerating several old plays which it closely resembles. It is clear that Mr. Jerome (like most playwrights, and, indeed, not a few critics) misconceives the true function of criticism. Serviceable criticism traces the filiation of dramatic ideas, sorts and labels them, and cultivates a keen eye for family likenesses. Keeping this keen eye open, it observes the same motif persistently reappearing, under varying forms, throughout the ages.²⁹

As can be seen from this quotation, another function of the 'new' critic was to make order. He could place each of the multitude of productions in its proper category, imposing an order in terms of labelling and discrimination.

Unfortunately, the critic's hopes for the theatre were often not consistent with the reality. The earnestness of some of the critics made them feel that the drama was continually in decline. The standards the critics set for the theatre were very high and very few productions could reach them. Max Beerbohm here makes fun of the overly serious critic and points out that artistic work is usually never as bad as it seems to a contemporary observer.

A critic who wants the drama to be infinitely better than it is can hardly avoid the pitfall of supposing it to be rather worse than it is. Finding that it rises nowhere near to his standards, he imagines that it must be in a state of motionless prostration in the nethermost depths. He does not recognize the possibility that it has been creeping up.³⁰

Criticism during the Edwardian years was dual in purpose. First, it sought a 'new' theatre which would incorporate ideas of real life and society. The critic would be both the exponent and arbiter of this 'new' theatre and would provide a means for the public to make decisions about theatre-going. Secondly, criticism would become a new and viable way of discussing theatre theory and providing suggestions about the improvement of the current theatre. The critic was seen to be an artist, just as the actor or playwright was, and his writings therefore were to be treated with literary respect. Walkley, Beerbohm, Grein and Archer were not alone in propagating such ideas, but in their work, we can see ready examples of the new ideas which were circulating within the critical world.

²⁹Walkley, A.B. Playhouse Impressions (1892), p. 163.

³⁰Beerbohm, Last Theatres, p. 110.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion: The Future of Edwardian Theatre

At the beginning of the Edwardian period, theatre was in a state of change. New ideas about theatrical form and content were generating an excitement about the future of English theatre. Ibsen's and Chekov's preoccupations with the function and role of man in society were being handled by English playwrights in such a way as to reflect the nature of English society. Musical comedy was evolving from burlesque and pantomime and promised a more complete integration of music, lyrics and plot. And, as hopefully it has been shown, the theatre public was becoming more receptive to an interpretation and presentation of society's attitudes towards morality and other social issues. There was every reason to be optimistic about the future of English theatre.

But by about 1910 it seems that any such renaissance in English theatre was over. The promising beginnings made by such playwrights as Pinero, H.A. Jones and Bernard Shaw in the field of social drama were overshadowed by the return of overly sentimental and melodramatic theatre. The social or 'problem play' no longer explored or instructed, it either shocked for the sake of shocking or merely amused. And by the First World War it was beginning to be clear that the future of musical comedy was to be in the United States and not in England. Far from reaching an integration of music and theatre, the English musical had degenerated into a series of musical 'numbers' held together by the slimmest of plots. And finally it seemed that the theatre-going public was no longer interested in a vital theatre that explored and experimented. Instead, audiences demanded a theatre which only entertained and amused. Experiments in form and content continued, but without the general results and enthusiasm which characterised the earlier part of the period.

The explanations for this change in dramatic motivation are as complex as the society which produced it. Changes in the 'problem play' were in a good part prompted by changes in public attitudes towards the old conventions of sexual morality, which were themselves the focal points of discussion in the social plays of the 1890's. And these changes in the public's attitude toward such sexual-social problems as divorce, infidelity

and the role of women were in their turn prompted by changes in twentieth century life. Popular newspapers such as the Daily Mail gave greater exposure to divorce cases and under the influence of King Edward a certain laxness in moral standards prevailed over rigid Victorian codes. The greater exposure to sexual-social issues dulled the dual 'shock and instruction technique' of the early problem plays and mellowed their tone. When audiences ceased to regard the social issue as the crux of the play, the 'problem play' as a form began to suffer. Instead of trying to work out a new programme of social-sexual ethics, the problem play began to place greater emphasis on the situations and variations of social behaviour created by a particular social-sexual problem. The play maintained the shock, but not the instruction. In short it veered towards melodrama.

The obvious question is why the 'problem play' did not turn to other social issues as an alternative to sexual problems. Indeed, some plays did. However, it seems in most cases that the 'problem play' began as a theatrical form dealing with middle-class man and his attempts to live within the rigid closed society around him, and never went any further. Both playwrights and audiences were prepared to explore new notions of man's sexuality and how it related to his social environment, but beyond this they were not prepared to go. Plays dealing with man's coming to terms with himself, and with the social conditions he found around him, remained on a very experimental level and had an impact on a very limited audience.

The development or perhaps non-development of musical comedy demonstrated another aspect of the change in what audiences wanted to see on the stage. Instead of demanding theatrical-musical entertainment with a dramatic or social purpose, the later Edwardian audiences were content to watch time and time again the same skimpy outmoded plots and listen to simplistic music. This theatrical skeleton was draped with expensive and beautiful costumes and provoked marvels of modern mechanical scenery, yet this visual extravagance could not justify the lack of critical attention paid to plot and music. Clearly, as in the case of serious drama, the emphasis was on 'entertainment'.

To speculate on exactly what caused the development of this escapist attitude on the part of theatre audiences before W.W.I is a task involving all aspects of Edwardian life - including the political, economic and social pressures which put a strain on the middle-class theatre-goer. And to try to isolate how conscious people were of this strain and how it translated into a desire for escapist entertainment is even more difficult. Fortunately it is possible to see, if only indirectly, how the theatre itself no longer saw itself as a spokesman for new ideas and forms.

The decline in theatrical ambition can be most clearly seen from the points of view of those directly connected with the theatre - the critics, playwrights, managers and actors. Because of their deep involvement with theatre, these people were most concerned about the future of theatre and more prone to analyse what trends they saw in the theatre. The effect of outside influences on the theatre, particularly economic and social cannot be neglected, particularly as they changed the structure and mechanics of theatre production.

The prognosis for the theatre in 1900 was good. In the introduction to a souvenir book on the stage in 1900, a Mr. Hooper wrote favourably of the state of English drama in comparison to that of the Continent.

What is the exact value of our existing drama when measured against France, Germany and Scandinavia cannot be settled until we are able to regard it from a more distant standpoint. That we have a drama delightful to contemplate, and in some cases to read, we know, and we have reasons for a sanguine faith that it has not yet reached its highest development. In dealing with the stage we are on softer ground. We can point unhesitatingly to well nigh a dozen houses at which plays are mounted as well as any Continental theatre, and to half that number at which the acting is equal to the best that Europe or America can boast. Such is the condition of the stage in 1900.¹

Indeed some productions and theatrical experiments were keeping pace with those on the Continent. Newly-built theatres with the convenience of electric lighting and modernised stage machinery were showing innovative plays like The Second Mrs. Tanqueray (1893-revived 1895, 1901, 1903) or innovative musical comedies like The Belle of New York (1898). As new English playwrights attempted to write dramas and comedies in an English idiom, these optimistic about the future of English theatre felt sure this would mean the end of the numerous foreign translations and adaptations which flooded English theatres. A new national theatre would be born, dedicated to English ideals. Unfortunately, this theatre was not to materialise in its champions' lifetime.

The decline in theatrical values during the first fourteen years of the twentieth century does not mean that the theatre of 1890-1899 was necessarily superior to the theatre of 1910-1914. Evidence of precisely those hackneyed theatrical characteristics which dominated pre-war theatre can be found in earlier plays. And conversely, innovative ideas found in earlier works were developed in later pre-war plays. What is missing in

¹Hooper, W.E. compiler The Stage in the Year 1900: A souvenir (1901), p. 182.

the later theatre is the broad development of the early ideas into a cohesive school of theatre which was not merely English but universal.

Henry Arthur Jones, himself a noted playwright of early problem plays, saw a decline in English theatre from 1904, when his Foundations of a National Drama was published. He felt that only a national theatre would raise the declining standards of English drama.

Inasmuch we may say that the legitimate purpose of the drama, which is to paint life and character in a story, and the legitimate pleasure to be gained from the drama, the keen and intellectual delight in watching a faithful representation of life and character and passion - this legitimate purpose and this legitimate pleasure of playwriting are to-day swallowed up and lost sight of in the demand for mere thoughtless entertainment, whose one purpose is not to show the people their lives, but to provide them with a means of escape from their lives. That is to say, the purpose of the entertainments provided in our most successful theatres is indeed the very opposite to the legitimate purpose of the drama, the very negation and suffocation of any serious or thoughtful drama whatever.²

Although Jones' national theatre was not to materialise his astute comments about the entertainment demands of Edwardian audiences foreshadows the rest of pre-war theatre history.

It is of course difficult to define exactly what sort of demands audiences were making. However, a theatrical slump during 1907 indicates that many people preferred to patronise other forms of entertainment instead of theatre. Some blamed the poor business on the lack of 'attractive plays' in the West End³, but as the excerpt, from the Stage Year Book 1908, which deals with the effect of the slump on suburban theatres indicates, music halls were creating very effective competition for theatres.

The facilities for getting to the central highways of theatredom have greatly increased since the "boom" a few years ago in suburban theatres, the competition set up by the music halls has been very keen in the suburbs lately, and the theatrical supply - practically that of the provincial touring system - has not been altogether what was wanted by local playgoers, who are only local in the sense of being residents of the different districts and belong otherwise to the London public that furnishes the West-End with its audiences.⁴

This competition from the local music halls became an even more serious problem to theatre managers as time went on. They retaliated by campaigning to keep the existing laws which did not allow plays or excerpts from plays

²Jones, H.A. Foundations of a National Drama (1904), p. 11.

³Stage Year Book 1908 (1909), p. 26.

⁴Ibid.

on music hall stages, and by also changing the character of theatre productions to lure audiences away from the music halls. In this way some theatre productions echoed the gaiety and variety of the music hall, instead of concentrating on the development of dramatic form.

Another threat to the development of theatre came from the cinema. As early as 1905, there were Bioscope advertisements in such theatre periodicals as The Era and by 1907 Bioscope 'movies' were a feature of music hall programmes at the Palace. On the other hand, even in 1908, the theatre world still tended not to take the cinema seriously. They felt that movies were still only a feature of music hall entertainments and there were only two organised centres for the showing of movies.⁵ By 1910, the picture had changed substantially. By this time films were part of the entertainment life of London. They were reviewed and advertised in theatre periodicals and even more important, old theatres and music halls were being converted into 'picture palaces'. The popularity of the new medium was seen as a threat to the theatre and a 1910 issue of The Stage offered reasons why London audiences were patronising the cinema more and more.

Am
The want of plays - mark the hybrid lot with which the new season has opened - is the trouble on the artistic side, and on the practical side there is the question of prices. The prices are high in comparison with those of other kinds of amusement, and the accommodation, except for the stalls and the dress circle, is poor. It is the multitude that pays, and the West-End theatre has neglected studying the pockets and also the creature comforts of the multitude.⁶

To compete with the cinema, the theatre turned increasingly to extravaganza. Because the cinema could not duplicate colour or sound, theatre productions overcompensated on these facets to the detriment of genuine plot. In musical comedies, musical numbers became more and more important in attracting audiences. And in an attempt to beat the cinema on its own ground, such musicals as The Girl on the Film and The Cinema Star (1913 & 1914), which emulated the world of the film, made their appearances on the London stage.

The popularity of both music-hall and cinema shows a partiality to light entertainment on the part of Edwardian audiences. The response of the theatre was to provide light entertainment on its own terms. The revival of melodrama at the Lyceum in 1908 was one way of facing the competition.

After the success of the Lyceum theatre in offering melodrama to the public at popular prices, a whole wave of melodramatic and romantic

⁵Stage Year Book 1908, p. 48.

⁶The Stage, Sept. 15, 1910, p. 16.

offerings swept through London. The Lyons Mail, a favourite of Sir Henry Irving, was revived along with such new productions as The Duke's Motto, The Marriages of Mayfair and If We Only Knew. Some critics felt that continuing interest in melodrama was a vote by the theatre public cast against the new realism and one endorsing a constructive competition for the cinema and music hall.

Is the Whirligig of Time indeed bringing round its revenges, and is the great many-headed, and many-throated monster, alike so beloved and feared, the British Public, again taking heartily to the enjoyment of good, honest, straightforward, romantic drama and melodrama, as a change, at any rate, from the varied delights of music-hall entertainments and animated picture shows? ...We hold no brief for or against Ibsen, Problem Plays, the Naturalistic Drama, or any other Advanced forms of theatrical entertainment, but still we may be allowed to regard as healthy and commendable any such tendency as has been noted at the outset.⁷

Other critics, J.T. Grein for example, felt the skillful adaptation of melodramas explained their popularity with audiences⁸, yet agreed there was certainly a new vogue of melodrama at West End theatres. The great success of the Lyceum and Drury Lane melodramas completely re-established melodrama on the London stage.

The critics did not immediately see the move to melodrama as particularly retrogressive. It was by 1910, that the sheer volume of melodramas, romantic plays and banal musical comedies being produced was reflected in hostile critical opinion. Some critics as E.A. Baughan of the Daily News and Leader felt that the move to entertainment drama was a sign of mental stagnation in the theatre.

Light comedy, romantic melodrama, and musical comedy have made the real successes of the year. Our fashionable theatres have become more and more a place of mere entertainment, and in many cases they are simply withdrawing rooms for the fashionable restaurants. The curtain is raised at an hour which suits those who dine well, and naturally the type of entertainment is in accord. This is a curious and, I think, an unnatural state of things. It does not exist in music, for fashionable people will go without their dinner to hear Wagner's "Ring". In the reading world there is still a market for good novels and serious works of biography and history. Only in our theatre absolute mental stagnation.⁹

Baughan felt it was not only the comedies and light entertainment which were suffering from this stagnation. The serious drama, too, was not setting a high enough standard. He felt that non-commercial serious drama (e.g. repertory theatre) was simply not good enough and that serious

⁷Stage Year Book 1909 (1910), p. 24.

⁸Ibid., p. 7.

⁹Stage Year Book 1911 (1912), p. 8.

drama was too frivolous. "These serious plays for the ordinary theatre suffer from a conscious desire to make them a 'theatrical entertainment' rather than a work of art."¹⁰

J.T. Grein, more of an optimist, still had hopes for the future of English drama. "and at the close of the year that is waning the diagnosis is: that so far the output is not commensurate with the travail of the mountain, but that there is reason to maintain one's belief in sure but slow advance."¹¹

It is debatable whether there was any advance after 1910. One reason for the lack of progress may be that the public's desire for entertainment was intensified by the relative accessibility of technological achievements - e.g. the motor car which made life easier and provided an escape from daily drudgery. The theatre became even more a part of this escape. E.A. Baughan in 1912 very clearly explained how these developments influenced the theatre.

Moreover, we must admit that modern life, with its wonderful scientific aids to existence, is no longer a dull affair in itself, and serious drama is no longer required as a stimulant. More and more we are looking to the theatre as a means of entertainment. One section of the public may care for nothing but heart-easing plays, agreeing with Keats' definition of the function of the poet. Another section may welcome comedies which touch on serious aspects of life with lightness, wit and nimble intelligence. The ideals of the two classes are the same, however. Drama to both is an entertainment and this "entertainment" includes the sensation of melodrama, whether it be the elaborate crudeness of "The Hope" or the realistic picture of torture under cross-examination of "A Butterfly on the Wheel".¹²

Instead of looking for solutions or even discussions of social problems in the theatre, the public was looking for entertainment. Yet this desire for diversion was in one sense the result of restrictions the theatre imposed upon itself. Either because it was afraid to, or because it simply *could* not handle themes other than the socio-sexual ones of the 1890's, the theatre became repetitious. And as the moral outlook of the public changed, plays dealing with socio-sexual themes became outdated and boring. One result of the decline of the 'problem play' was that audiences turned to less serious theatre, as it provided entertainment without outdated sociological pretensions. Pre-war audiences were very conscious of their modernity, less inclined to be preached to, and musical comedies satisfied their entertainment demands.

¹⁰Stage Year Book 1911 (1912), p. 7.

¹¹Ibid. 1910 (1911), p. 8.

¹²Ibid. 1912 (1913), p. 6.

The whole moral outlook of the public has changed. Except in the far-off wilds of ultimate suburbia human actions are no longer judged according to the rules of old-fashioned conventionalism. The agonies of the young girl who has been deserted by a villain have long ceased to appeal to us... In a sense our morality has developed into a higher state. We do not judge people so much by their actions as by their motives and character. ...The bigger men of today are attempting to get away from all questions of sex, which are now seen to be more a proper subject for the physiologist and psychologist than for the dramatist, but the affairs of the world from which dramas can be made are difficult to handle if any ordinary theatre public is to interested.¹³

Although public opinion was a large factor in the development of Edwardian theatre, there were other more practical reasons for the decline in theatrical standards. Economics played a large role in determining which plays were produced at all. As productions became more elaborate the cost of each production grew rapidly and productions had to be that more successful to recoup an initial investment. This inevitably inhibited experimentation and made producers ultra-cautious in gauging public taste. Dramatic integrity became a minor factor when weighted against possible profits or losses.

Under such pressure, theatre economics neither encouraged nor presented many opportunities for young playwrights, and by 1910 it was clear that there was no longer a school of young playwrights. The established playwrights of the period (Shaw and Maugham being the great exceptions) had produced their best works by 1910 and there were very few who were prepared to take their place. A list of the non-musical plays designated by the Stage Year Book 1910 as "Plays of the Year" shows both the absence of new playwrights, and also the ephemeral character of most of the plays by established playwrights: False Gods-translated by J.B. Fagan, Mid-Channel-Pinero, The Whip-Cecil Raleigh and Henry Hamilton, Making a Gentleman-Sutro, Arsene Lupin-Franceis de Cresset and Maurice Leblanc, Penelope-Maugham, The Brass Bottle-F. Anstey, The Woman In the Case-Clyde Fitch, Don-Rudolf Beiser, Smith-Maugham, Samsen-Henri Bernstein, Mrs. Preedy and the Countess-R.C. Carton, and The Little Damezel-Monckton Hoffe.

The Whip was but the latest in a whole series of highly successful Drury Lane melodramas by Raleigh and Hamilton, which relied heavily on stage effects. False Gods was a turgid spectacular taking advantage of the large stage at His Majesty's theatre. Most of the other plays were stale drawing-room comedies, romantic dramas or 'problem plays' leaning heavily toward melodrama. Even Smith and Penelope were not Maugham's best works of the

¹³Stage Year Book 1912 (1913), pp. 2-3.

period. Only Pinero's Mid-Channel tried to deal honestly with a socio-sexual issue - this time, the difficulty of making a personal adjustment within a marriage. Even this play ultimately lost a great deal of integrity because of its melodramatic suicidal ending.

The desire to please the public was even more evident in musical comedies. Early musical comedies were motivated by a desire to provide simple light entertainment, with music, dancing, girls and the slightest of plots to provide a dramatic framework. Early musicals as The Belle of New York, San Toy or A Country Girl had pleasant music and scenic effects, and if the plots were contorted and contrived, at least they provided some dramatic unity. The tremendous success of the early musicals proved how popular the form was with audiences.

During the late Edwardian period the form did not progress. Instead, in the majority of musicals, the music became more simplistic, and the purpose of the plot, was to merely hold a series of 'numbers' together. Also, the contribution of English composers to musical comedies declined considerably as more and more foreign works were adapted to the English stage. By 1914 the musical was represented by slight offerings like After the Girl (music-Paul A. Rubens - lyrics-Percy Greenbank and Paul A. Rubens) where an errant schoolgirl was chased through Europe to excuse a series of various 'national musical numbers' or like The Marriage Market (adapted by G. Brady and F. Hartes) which told the improbably story of young ladies being annually auctioned off in Southern California. Notwithstanding the later wartime advent of Chu Chin Chow or Maid of the Mountains (and even here there are big questions about the integrity of the plot and music) the musical had degenerated. The case of the operetta, which was often produced in musical comedy theatres is more complex. The operetta for the most part was a foreign import and was generally adapted to the English stage. Such operettas as The Merry Widow were sometimes categorised as musical comedies because their English adaptations included more dialogue, but both in terms of plot and music, they remained foreign adaptations and of a higher musical standard than the musical comedy. The influence of these operettas on the development of English musical comedy was great, but this influence was felt chiefly after the first world war.

Some writers of the pre-war period felt the influence of the Viennese and French operettas helped the development of the early musical comedy. Adrian Ross who wrote the lyrics for the musical comedy Havana (1908-music Leslie Stuart) felt this musical comedy was almost a return to comic opera. He also saw the faults of other musical comedies.

Musical comedy has evolved along two main lines, the "comedy with music" type and the "variety with a thread of story" type.

The first species was practically comic opera without vocalists, or ambitious music. The second was burlesque without a travestied story. Now, however, the success of the German and especially the Vienna operettas, and the reaction from the invertebrate type of musical piece, have led to a return to what is nearly comic opera. In fact, Havana is as much light opera as The Merry Widow. There is a larger bulk of music and the choral effects of the finales and opening scenes, for instance, are more elaborate and effective.

Havana is a musical comedy overflowing into opera comique and very nearly into grand opera.¹⁴

Other musical comedies were not as ambitious as Havana. In a review of The Belle of Brittany (1908) one critic spoke of the role of plot in musical comedy.

However essential plot may be in drama, it holds no conspicuous position in musical comedy. There must, of course, be a story, but the author is only asked to unfold a sympathetic little love narrative and bring his slight inbroglio to a satisfactory ending: that accomplished, he has done all that the average pleasure-seeker demands of him.¹⁵

The problems of the musical comedy included ineffective music as well as non-existent plot. And despite the popularity of the idion, not everyone was satisfied with the progress it had made. As in the case of non-musical drama, critics felt the works of foreigners were superior to the English imitations and that progress must be made towards an English school of musical comedy.

There is no reason why our own composers should not easily surpass the work of foreigners, but our clever young men would consider it beneath their dignity to write musical comedies. They aim at being nothing less than a Wagner or a Strauss. However, the advance of musical comedy if very slow is none the less sure. If only a librettist of genius could be discovered this form of art would receive a new impetus. The public wants something new and better than it has been given.¹⁶

Buffeted on all sides by competition, economic pressures, audience demands, and the lack of new creative artists, the English theatre seems to have reached a crisis point by 1914. It had become frenzied along with the rest of middle class society - unable to preserve creativity and integrity

¹⁴The Play Pictorial, v. 12 no.70.

¹⁵Ibid., v. 13 no. 77.

¹⁶Stage Year Book 1913 (1914), p. 11-12.

in the face of new and dimly understood forces. Part of the frenzy can be explained in terms of the pre-war audience who were using the theatre to escape and in a way to soothe their fears of strikes, Ireland, political division and the threat of war. If the theatre could not make them forget their fears, it could at least reconfirm their prejudices. Such plays as An Englishman's Home with its anti-German warning dressed up in melodramatic patriotism appealed to a confused public.

A desire for escapism on the part of the audience is not the whole reason for the decline of English theatre. What really accentuates the decline is that audience escapism coincided with a natural lull in theatre development. It is impossible to have theatre activity showing continual progress. There needs to be a creative hiatus to understand and absorb past developments before further change can take place. Such an hiatus could be seen in the American musical theatre during the 1960's, until such experimental productions as Company (Broadway 1970) and Two Gentlemen of Verona (Broadway 1971) attempted to show further possibilities for the musical idiom. In pre-war London the demand for variety and spectacle during such a lull brought forth a theatre which was shallow and without purpose.

The coming of the war reinjected a measure of vitality to the theatre if not measurable artistic creativity. The robustness and popularity of wartime theatre indicates that the Edwardian death knell was premature. Mestyn T. Piggott's poem "The Drama's Death-Rate" symbolises the period's pre-occupation with its dramatic inertia.

I marked distinguished persons go
About the town in haggard bands
And saw them in the direst woe
Put sackcloth on and wring their hands;
And I confess this dismal sight
Filled me with pity infinite.

And as they dirged a requiem
Of gloom surpassing all belief
I ventured to go up to them
And ask the cause of all this grief
Feeling they would not take amiss
A well-meant action such as this.

They gazed on me with some surprise
As if they could not make me out
And then, as tears welled from their eyes,
They told me what they wept about:
In deep funereal tones they said,
"Alas! the British Drama's dead!"

Appendix
Determination
This answer did not seem to make
Precisely the desired effect;
My heart was not disposed to break,
Nor was my brow in sable decked;
Responding to their sad refrain
I simply said, "What! Dead again?"¹⁷

Pre-war theatre was in a state of decline but it was not dying. It would take a new audience - a receptive one - wanting to explore society instead of escaping from it to revive a floundering dramatic art. The apparent decline in the theatre as a dramatic art form appears to be one result of the increasing commercialism in theatre finance, theatre construction and the attitudes of the theatrical power structure. Such a decline coinciding with a lull in theatrical activity/created a moribund theatre which reflected the difficulty of society in adjusting to the changing circumstances of modern life.

¹⁷Stage Year Book 1910 (1911), p. 10.

Appendix I.

Determination of the Size of the Potential Theatre Audience - 1911

Measuring the impact of theatre on society is related to a definition of the audience. This poses a double problem, because an activity such as theatre-going is a matter of inclination as well as ability to pay. The difficulty in arriving at any numerical estimation is complicated by the problem of defining the inclination of those groups marginally able to afford going to the theatre. The numerical determination of such a subjectively based estimate, can at best be only a rough approximation and the validity of such an approximation is only doubtful.

The problem of defining the potential theatre audience was approached from two angles; those people able and inclined to theatre-going and the number of places available in the theatres. Calculating the number of people able to afford theatre-going posed the greatest problem, due to the difficulty of obtaining complete and precise statistics.

The year 1911 was chosen as a focal point for calculations. One reason for this choice was the publication of the 1911 Census, the most detailed breakdown of the London population to that date. Secondly, by 1911, most of the major theatre construction had been completed and accommodation figures more accurately reflect the entire period. This year also provides a convenient vantage point to survey the whole period.

The Census of 1911 and London Statistics-1911 were the primary sources used in attempting a breakdown of the London population into theatre-going vs. non theatre-going groups. Only the administrative county of London and the county of Middlesex were used in these tabulations. Therefore the total obtained is already inaccurate as it omits those theatre-goers coming to London from the provinces as well as tourists from abroad.

The population breakdown is in terms of occupations rather than incomes. This is partially because both the 1911 Census and the London Statistics-1911 did not print rate returns with the number of valuations in each valuation category. Instead, only total monetary values were published with no indication of the numbers included in each valuation class. Therefore it was difficult to separate an income group by virtue of rates paid on property.

The occupations compilation posed a similar problem. While the population was divided into the appropriate occupation categories, the scale of incomes within those categories was never recorded. This all writers are listed under the same heading, whether financially successful or not. This is where the distinction must be made between inclination

and ability. The unsuccessful writer is certainly likely to be aware of the theatre, even if at a specific time, he cannot go. He is perhaps more likely to spend any extra money on the theatre than other occupation groups. This of course makes the inclusion or exclusion of any occupation group a very subjective decision and adds significantly to the inaccuracy of the total audience number.

Potential theatre-goers were included in the list in terms of their financial ability, the status involved in theatre-going for the occupation group, and the awareness and inclination towards theatrical activity by certain economic segments of the population. There was no attempt to separate the theatre from the variety or music hall audience. Therefore, the estimate arrived at may be much larger than the actual audience for theatres only. If however an analysis of the music hall audience only were attempted, this would necessitate different criteria entirely.

While it was possible to work with the occupation figures given, another problem made the calculation more difficult. This was the determination of married non-working women. The number of married working women could be found, but there was no indication of how many women were married to the number of working men. Therefore it was difficult to know how many wives were to be added to those men who could afford theatre-going.

The income used as a cut-off was roughly £150-£200 per year. While this may be insufficient for a family, a single person could afford an occasional theatre visit on this salary. Using this very subjective determination, the figures are as follows:

1. Males earning enough for, or inclined to theatre-going:	390,810
2. Females earning enough for, or inclined to theatre-	
going:	<u>187,273</u>
Total:	578,083
Estimated wives:	<u>250,000</u>
Total:	828,083

The second method of determining potential audience size was more precise. The actual capacities of the theatres were available and on any given night there were 68,842 theatre places available (1910) and 91,910 music hall vacancies. According to these figures there were 160,752 possible seats for a London entertainment in either a theatre or a music hall.

However, not all these theatres were featuring productions at the same time. Using 1911 once again for a test year, it is possible to see the variation of theatres in operation.

The theatre section of The Times was used as a guide, so only primary West End theatres and a section of suburban theatres are noted. Still, even here it is possible to see definite changes in programmes and theatres in use. Lionel Carson's Stage Yearbook was used as an additional guide to theatre productions, both West End and suburban. However, as there are even discrepancies between The Times and the Stage Yearbook as to date and changes of programme, the Stage Yearbook is primarily valuable for noting general fluctuations.

It can be seen from these figures (noting the seasonal variations - for instance there are more theatres in operation on Boxing Day for the Christmas pantomimes) that roughly, including a possible additional 5,000 or 6,000 seats at suburban theatres, only half the possible theatre space was being utilised at any given time. Taking the proposed audience figure of approximately 800,000 and supposing hypothetically that all the seats were being filled at each theatre, each programme would have a run of 25 nights - a fairly healthy figure for the time. But it must be remembered that not all plays ran this long and theatres would profit at less than 100% attendance. Those in the audience who returned for a second viewing are not included in these figures, nor the audience outside London. This implies that a potential audience of approximately 800,000 in a population (greater London) of 7,252,963 was enough to support and encourage the operation of theatres within London.

Contemporary estimates seem to confirm this figure. William Archer, in 1897, trying to raise interest in a national theatre felt 25,000 "is the minimum audience that could be relied upon for any play that was not an artistic failure." (Era, May 29, 1897, p. 17) Alfred Sutro, the playwright, gave what he felt were the mechanics of finance in theatre production in 1908.

From that callous and entirely unemotional machine (the box office) he learns that the expense of running a theatre amounts to £800 or £900 a week, and that taking into account the sum spent on production, the receipts must average £1,100 or £1,200 a week as a minimum for his play to enjoy a run. This means that 6,000 people must elect every week to go to his play. (Era, March 21, 1908, p. 15.)

These contemporary figures are not conclusive either, but do work within the larger estimate. However nebulous this figure is in fact, it does show the smallness of the theatre audience in terms of the entire population.

Table I. Population Statistics - Administrative County of London and County of Middlesex

	London ^m		Middlesex	
	London	Middlesex	London	Middlesex
Total Males	2,126,341		525,431	
Total Females	2,395,344		601,034	
Females Married	809,751		214,032	
and Clerks	10,879	2,800	508	221
Total Population - Greater London	7,252,963			
Paor Law Services	1,838	489	4,584	720
Municipal, County & Parish Officers	7,575	2,059	539	58
Army Off. (Eff.)	1,867	141		
Army Off. (Ret.)	1,744	262		
Soldiers	11,594	2,387		
Navy Off. (Eff.)	300	42		
Navy Off. (Ret.)	393	52		
Men of Navy	1,503	187		
Officers Marines (Eff.)	27	3		
Officers Marines (Ret.)	23	3		
Men of Marines	101	15		
Barristers	1,900	227		
Solicitors	3,115	938		
Law Clerks	8,203	2,407	775	209
Physicians, Surgeons	4,469	900	147	21
Dentists (incl. Instn.)	1,179	269	60	9
Veterinary Surgeons	253	87		
Midwives			475	155
Schoolmasters, Teachers, Professors	1,803	3,114	18,921	8,817
Authors, Editors, Journ. Reporters	3,954	655	818	141
Scientific Pursuits	1,023	378	45	4
Others Connect. Lit.	1,786	478	1,312	254
Civil, Mining, Eng.	1,224	492		
Land, Naval Ship				
Surveyors	265	397		
Prof. Engineers, Assts.	309	116		
Artists, Painters, Sculptors	2,568	622	1,991	382
Architects	1,449	552	3	
Engravers	1,305	513	57	12
Photographers	1,529	324	767	337
Musicians, Singers	2,253	694	5,060	2,203
Actors	3,328	227	4,057	363
Art, Music, Theatre Service	4,406	788	1,154	133
Performers, Showmen	4,517	1,273	880	188
Merchants	1,700	400	15	
Brokers, Agents	9,103	3,022	488	97
Solemen, Buyers	279	71	89	5
Accountants	1,802	709	9	
Auctioneers, Appraisers				
Valuers	2,135	948	51	11
Officers of Commercial Guilds, Societies	824	264	130	48
Commercial or Business Clerks	83,037	22,531	22,893	2,381
Bankers, Bank Off.	8,509	3,843	257	73
Bill-Discounters, Brokers				
Financial Agents	234	270	120	12

Table II. Theatre-going Population of London and Middlesex in Terms of Occupation

Occupation	Males		Females	
	London	Middlesex	London	Middlesex
Civil Service—Officers and Clerks	10,670	2,820	903	221
Police	14,240	2,426		
Poor Law Service	1,896	489	4,584	750
Municipal, County & Parish Officers	7,575	2,059	530	85
Army Off. (Eff.)	1,667	141		
Army Off. (Ret.)	1,744	262		
Soldiers	11,504	2,307		
Navy Off. (Eff.)	366	42		
Navy Off. (Ret.)	308	52		
Men of Navy	1,503	188		
Officers Marines (Eff.)	27	3		
Officers Marines (Ret.)	23	5		
Men of Marines	101	14		
Barristers	1,969	227		
Solicitors	3,115	958		
Law Clerks	8,203	2,437	775	209
Physicians, Surgeons	4,488	909	147	21
Dentists (incl. Assts.)	1,179	369	56	9
Veterinary Surgeons	223	67		
Midwives			475	166
Schoolmasters, Teachers, Professors	7,803	3,114	18,921	6,817
Authors, Editors, Journ. Reporters	3,654	855	818	141
Scientific Pursuits	1,023	378	45	4
Others Connect. Lit.	1,784	478	1,312	284
Civil, Mining, Eng.	1,924	492		
Land, House Ship Surveyors	985	397		
Prof. Engineers, Assts.	309	116		
Artists, Painters, Sculptors	2,568	626	1,691	382
Architects	1,449	552	3	
Engravers	1,683	513	57	12
Photographers	1,929	824	757	387
Musicians, Singers	5,253	894	5,060	1,383
Actors	3,338	297	4,057	308
Art, Music, Theatre Service	4,486	758	1,154	139
Performers, Showmen	4,617	1,373	880	188
Merchants	1,796	430	15	
Brokers, Agents	9,109	3,022	438	97
Salesmen, Buyers	279	71	89	5
Accountants	1,892	709	9	
Auctioneers, Appraisers				
Valuers	2,195	948	51	11
Officers of Commercial Guilds, Societies	824	264	133	48
Commercial or Business Clerks	82,027	22,921	32,893	8,581
Bankers, Bank Off.	8,509	3,846	257	73
Bill-Discounters, Brokers				
Financial Agents	934	270	120	12

Table II. Cont'd

Occupation	Males		Females	
	London	Middlesex	London	Middlesex
Insurance, Off. Clerks	8,911	3,637	1,154	441
Insurance Agents	5,504	1,425	64	10
Dealers, Ironmongers,				
Hardware	3,814	1,047	213	53
Dealers, Metals Mach	2,896	765	367	93
Dealers, Precision				
Metals, Jewelry	2,855	865	436	121
Dealers, Instruments,				
Toys	1,823	380	429	92
Builders	5,776	2,558	21	8
Dealers Works of Art	1,312	315	252	53
Manufact. Chemists	3,072	906	2,194	417
Chemists, Druggists	4,877	1,145	1,201	106
Dealers, Chemicals	859	185	106	13
Dealers, Skins, Hair				
Feathers	2,357	417	415	63
Newspaper Pub.	735	172	27	4
Dealers, Dfapers, Linen				
Mercers, etc.	13,406	3,223	12,887	3,315
Textile Fabrics	4,662	1,283	611	127
Clothiers, Outfitters	3,714	1,132	2,238	528
Other Dealers in Dress	1,018	165	1,266	160
Inn; Hotel Keepers &				
Publicans	8,164	1,686	4,501	929
Multiple Shop, Store				
Prop.	720	81	231	20
Contract, Manufact.				
Managers	954	196	92	14
Private Means	<u>8,600</u>	<u>2,104</u>	<u>48,440</u>	<u>12,398</u>
Total	307,200	83,610	153,375	33,898
Pavilion				
Prince of Wales			863	
Queen's			1,151	
Royalty			657	
Sadler's Wells			1,114	
St. James			1,205	
Savoy			988	
Scala			1,148	
Shaftesbury			1,186	
Strand			1,193	
Terry's			963	
Yeads'ville			741	
Variety			338	
West London			872	
Wyndham's			848	
Broadway - Under Supervision of the LCC				
Greenwich			733	
Grsvact			1,143	
Royal Court			642	
Grand			933	
King's			1,760	
Lyric Opera House			918	
Shakespeare			1,208	
Kilburn			316	
Theatre Royal, Telfrick			1,450	
			Total:	68,642

Table III. Theatre Capacities - 1910

Theatre - Under Supervision of the Lord Chamberlain	Capacity
Adelphi	1,303
Aldwych	1,178
Alexandra	1,710
Apollo	954
Britannia	1,818
Brixton	1,125
Comedy	854
Covent Garden	1,952
Criterion	685
Crown	1,231
Dalston	1,518
Daly's	1,223
Drury Lane	2,516
Duke of York's	1,119
Elephant and Castle	1,549
Gaiety	1,267
Garrick	1,241
Globe	1,009
Islington Grand	1,589
Haymarket	1,085
His Majesty's	1,085
Holloway	1,210
Imperial	1,150
Kennington	1,347
Kingsway	564
Little	309
Lyceum	3,016
Lyric	1,170
Marlborough	1,886
Metropolitan	1,044
New	1,242
Pavilion	2,650
Playhouse	679
Prince of Wales	985
Queen's	1,161
Royalty	657
Sadler's Wells	1,114
St. James	1,208
Savoy	986
Scala's	1,148
Shaftesbury	1,196
Strand	1,193
Terry's	888
Vaudeville	741
Variety	830
West London	872
Wyndham's	846
Broadway - Under Supervision of the LCC	1,372
Greenwich	730
Coronet	1,143
Royal Court	642
Grand	982
King's	1,786
Lyric Opera House	915
Shakespeare	1,205
Kilburn	514
Theatre Royal, Woolwich	1,450

Total: 68,842

Table IV. Music Hall and Variety Theatre Capacities - 1910

<u>Theatre</u>	<u>Capacity</u>
Alhambra Palace	1,800
Balham Hippodrome	2,500
Battersea Palace	600
Bedford	1,168
Bow Palace	2,078
Camden Theatre	1,665
Chelsea Palace	2,524
Collin's	600
Empire	1,726
Empress	1,260
Finsbury Park Empire	2,000
Forester's	unknown
Gatti's	1,183
Fulham Grand	1,411
Grand	3,000
Granville	1,122
Greenwich Hippodrome	750
Hackney Empire	3,000
Hammersmith	2,815
Holborn Empire	2,000
Islington Empire	3,000
Islington Palace	unknown
Kilburn Empire	1,913
Kilburn Palace	514
King's	3,000
London Coliseum	3,389
London Hippodrome	2,020
London Paladium	3,435
London Pavalion	1,080
Metropolitan	1,855
Mile End	unknown
Montpelier Palace	622
New Cross Empire	2,000
Oxford	1,047
Palace	1,697
Peckham Hippodrome	2,600
Poplar Hippodrome	2,500
Putney Hippodrome	1,975
Queen's Poplar	1,360
Regent	1,310
Rotherhithe Hippodrome	2,087
Royal Artillery	1,000
Royal Cambridge	926
Shepherd's Bush	2,332
Shoreditch	1,000
South London	4,000
Star	1,395
Surrey	2,161
Tivoli	1,000
Victoria Palace	2,440
Wintergarden	1,200
Woolwich Empire	1,450
Woolwich Hippodrome	<u>1,680</u>
Total:	91,190

Table V. Comparison of West End Theatres in Operation March, July and December 1911

<u>Theatre July 1, 1911</u>	<u>Theatre December 26, 1911</u>	<u>March 1, 1911</u>
Playhouse	London Opera House	Comedy
Royalty	Duke of York's	Criterion
Duke of York's	Court	Duke of York's
Globe	Apello	Garrick
Apello	New	Globe
Garrick	Savoy	His Majesty's
Lyceum	Aldwych	Lyric
Savoy	Wyndham's	New
Court	Lyceum	Prince of Wales
Wyndham's	Whitney	Queens
Lyric	New Prince's	Court
Covent Garden	Drury Lane	Shakespeare
His Majesty's	His Majesty's	Royal, Woolwich
Haymarket	Haymarket	Kingsway
Shaftesbury	Queen's	Wyndhams
St. James's	St. James's	Drury Lane
Criterion	Playhouse	Haymarket
New	Comedy	Shaftesbury
Comedy	Criterion	St. James's
Little	Prince of Wales	Apello
Daly's	Daly's	Vaudeville
Gaiety	Adelphi	<u>Adelphi</u>
Adelphi	Vaudeville	24,261
Vaudeville	Little	
<u>Prince of Wales</u>	Garrick	
27,454	Royalty	
	<u>Covent Garden</u>	
	31,706	

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