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Spectacular Feasts: Herbert Beerbohm Tree
in the Mise-en-Scène of Consumption

by

David V. Schulz

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Approved by *Sarah Bryant Bertail*
Chairperson of Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

Spectacular Feasts: Herbert Beerbohm Tree
in the Mise-en-Scène of Consumption.

by David V. Schulz

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The production style of English actor-manager Herbert Beerbohm Tree embodied the mechanisms of conspicuous consumption. Producing spectacular Shakespeare, lavish historical melodramas, and high society dramas for English bourgeois audiences at the turn of the century, Tree filled his stage with scenery, props and supernumeraries that together testified to his wealth as a producer and his ability to consume. This study investigates Tree's apparati of spectacular production and consumption from the mise-en-scène on stage, a conglomeration of signs and sign-systems, to the various mises-en-scène of consumption that surrounded it, spaces designed for spectacular display: the ornate architecture of Tree's H Majesty's Theater, the neighboring West End Department Stores, and the enveloping Edwardian metropolis of London. Chapters 1 and 2 examine the 1906 historical melodrama Nero by Stephen Phillips to reveal the commodity-based mechanisms of Tree's production style, to describe the subject of its representation—not only the Emperor Nero, but also the celebrity persona of Tree—and finally to demonstrate how the subject it carefully constructed (the Imperial gentleman) was dramatically set against contemporary anxieties that threatened its consolidation: New Women, urbanization, and colonial and civil unrest. Chapter 3 moves through various spaces of consumption, Edwardian

spectacular topographies, to explore how they, in addition to the stage representation, operated within the signifying modality of consumption. These spaces include the city of London, the Edwardian audience, Harrod's Department and H Majesty's Theater, the principal focus of the chapter. Finally, Chapter 4 examines Tree's Shakespeare Festivals from 1905 to 1913 along with their rival festivals in Stratford-on-Avon as projects to revise the English national identity and their attempts to be subsequently institutionalized as the National Theater of England. Throughout, this study uses tools borrowed from semiotics, commodity theory, and critical theories of the subject. Moreover, this study approaches its spectacular subject spatially, not only as spaces to be described, but as a discursive field to move through. Both theoretically and historically it examines its subject, Herbert Beerbohm Tree, who is spatially and spectacularly configured.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures	ii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: <u>Nero</u> , Part I: Consuming the Imperial Mise-en-Scène	27
Moments of Conspicuous Consumption	37
The Commodity-Filled Mise-en-Scène	51
Roman Crowds: Properties and Supers in Abundance	63
The Psyche of the Mise-en-Scène	80
Neronian Fantasies	89
Chapter 2: <u>Nero</u> , Part II: Reading into the Space of Spectacle: (Edwardian) Female Trouble	108
Spatial Themes: Rising Above the Female Ground	112
Putting the (Monstrous) New Woman in her Place	127
Enacting the Desiring Field: Nero and Poppaea	134
Killing Mother Nature: The Death of Agrippina	139
The Consummation	148
Chapter 3: Spectacular Topographies: H Majesty's Theater in the London Metropolis	156
Walking to the Heart of London	166
Edwardian Audiences and Their Critics	175
An Excursion to Harrod's	201
A Landmark Theater: The Eiffel Tower	213
H Majesty's Theater	217
Haunting the Corridors of H Majesty's Theater	233
The Dome	242
Conclusion: The Proper Place of H Majesty's in London	248
Chapter 4: Nationalizing Identities: The Shakespeare Festivals, 1905-1913	254
A Country Excursion: the Shakespeare Festivals at Stratford	264
In Celebration of the Author(s): The 1905 and 1906 Shakespeare Weeks at H Majesty's	282
Institutionalizing Status: H Majesty's Festivals and the National Theater	295
Afterword	314
Bibliography	317
Appendix A <u>Ulysses</u> (Feb 1 to May 1902) Expenses and Revenue	327
Appendix B <u>Nero</u> (1906) "Production and Preliminary" Expenses	328
Appendix C <u>Nero</u> (1906) Expenses and Revenue	329
Appendix D Shakespeare Festival Expense and Revenue	330
Appendix E Profits and Losses, H Majesty's Theater	339
Appendix F <u>Ulysses</u> Property Plot	342

LISTS OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Herbert Beerbohm Tree as Nero	31
2. The death of Britannicus	50
3. <u>Spring</u> by Sir Laurence Alma-Tadema	56
4. The stage set for <u>Herod</u>	62
5. The aesthetic Emperor	69
6. An ancient Briton	74
7. Nubian dancing women	77
8. Constance Collier as Poppaea	105
9. Basil Gill as the manly Otho	119
10. Phyllis Embury as Octavia and Esmé Percy as Britannicus.....	120
11. Maud Tree as Agrippina	130
12. Dorothea Baird as Acte	149
13. H Majesty's Theater, c 1897.....	158
14. Map of the London Underground Railways, c.1906	171
15. The before-theater meal in a Soho café	187
16. The after-theater meal in a fashionable restaurant	188
17. "Not homeless, but first arrivals."	191
18. The peering gods in the gallery.	194
19. The Stalls Patrons and Pit Patrons	195
20. The carriage-crowd	200
21. Harrod's c. 1910	205
22. A Harrod's advertisement.....	209
23. Selling the mise-en-scène	211
24. H Majesty's Theater and Carlton Hotel	219
25. H Majesty's Theater facades, front and side.....	222
26. The floorplan of H Majesty's Theater	223
27. H Majesty's Theater auditorium	226
28. H Majesty's Theater proscenium	227
29. H Majesty's Theater vestibule and box-office	235
30. Gentlemen performers	253
31. The Shakespeare Memorial Theater, Stratford-on-Avon	279
32. H Majesty's Theater Shakespeare Festival Program, 1905	288
33. H Majesty's Theater Shakespeare Festival Program, 1906	292
34. H Majesty's Theater Shakespeare Festival Program, 1910	308

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This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of
Professor Michael Quinn

INTRODUCTION

Eating and drinking are one of the most significant manifestations of the grotesque body. . . . The encounter of man with the world, which takes place inside the open, biting, rending, chewing mouth, is one of the most ancient, and most important objects of human thought and imagery. Here man tastes the world, introduces it into his body, makes it part of himself. Man's awakening consciousness could not but concentrate on this moment, could not help borrowing from it a number of substantial images determining its interrelation with the world. . . . The limits between man and the world are erased, to man's advantage.¹

The production style of Herbert Beerbohm Tree embodied the mechanisms of Edwardian conspicuous consumption. Tree's production style encompassed a field of consuming practices: material, economic, social, semiotic and psycho-somatic types of consumption all were performed on stage, sometimes in a single gesture. Tree produced spectacular feasts. Gordon Craig, remembering Tree's The Merry Wives of Windsor of 1902, wrote:

Here was a banquet. Boar's head, miraculous stuffed peacock, fountains of wine and Shakespeare seemed to be in the wings cooking; and the incredible part of the whole evening was that we, the audience, all seemed to have huge appetites.²

Craig, notorious for writing impressionistic history, did not actually see a boar's head or fountains of wine or a miraculously stuffed peacock on stage—there are no indications of

¹Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1984), 281.

²Edward Gordon Craig, Ellen Terry and Her Secret Self (London: Sampson, Low, Marston and Co, 1931), 170-171.

any banquet in the most complete promptbook. For Craig, however, the production was a feast nevertheless: cooked by Shakespeare and served lavishly by the actor-manager. Craig's sumptuous description, written over twenty years later has more relevance to the entire repertoire of Tree's spectacles than this one Shakespearean production.

The leading actor-manager of turn of the century England, Tree produced enormous theatrical productions filled with stage properties, sensational lighting effects, hundreds of supers, and often live animals for a bourgeois public hungry for it all. Spectacular feasts, Tree's productions appealed to a range of senses, enticing audiences through their eyes and ears, in order to reach their physical bodies. To paraphrase Artaud, Tree's spectacles fascinated and ensnared as they moved into sensibility.³ Tree's spectacles, however, were not just about eating food. With his spectacles Tree metaphorically feasted on the various objects on stage, the London metropolis in which the stage was found, and eventually the British Empire London capitalized. Through their consumption he incorporated these spaces into the representations of himself which filled the space of the theater.

Though about more than eating, spectacular feasts begin with banqueting on stage. When Henry Irving, the leading English actor-manager of the 1880s and 1890s, revived the Beefsteak Club, an after-theater dinner society of artists and the social elite which met in the backstage areas of his Lyceum Theater, he brought socially defined consuming practices into the theatrical space. When these after-performance parties

³Antonin Artaud, The Theater and Its Double trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove P, 1958), 91.

spilled over from their backstage rooms onto the stage itself as elaborate celebrations of important occasions, the consumption of stage spectacle and spectacular feast blurred more significantly. Typically, these banquets, like the stage performances, were of considerable size. The hundredth performance of The Merchant of Venice was celebrated with a banquet for three hundred and fifty invited guests; while the same milestone for Romeo and Juliet was marked by a supper party for ninety-two.⁴

Notably, Irving's banquets were staged like performances, presented on their own set and comprised of rehearsed dramatic moments. For the celebration of Merchant, for example, the stage carpenters transformed the stage into a great scarlet and white pavilion, an unseen orchestra played in the wings, and Irving's toast was set against an unseen chorus singing the national anthem.⁵ The production costs of these feasts came from the Lyceum's, not Irving's, budget; the meals were part of the bill of fare of the theater, not a private party given by the actor. John Pick in his history of the West End deplores these expenditures, finally lamenting, "It is hard to find any memories of the West End theatre written since Irving which do not prominently feature expensive dining habits."⁶

Other actor-managers followed Irving's example. Often, their on-stage banquets celebrated events in the social and political spheres in addition to theatrical events.

⁴Laurence Irving, Henry Irving: The Actor and his World (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 353 and 391.

⁵Irving, 354.

⁶John Pick, The West End: Mismanagement and Snobbery (East Sussex: John Offord, 1983), 92.

Socialite Ethel Alec-Tweedie tells the story of a banquet hosted by George Alexander as part of the coronation celebrations of Edward VII in 1902. The occasion was in honor of the visiting delegation of Indian Princes and Colonial officials. "The St. James's presented a gay scene," Alec-Tweedie writes. "The Indian dresses, the diamonds, and extra floral decorations rendered it a regular gala performance." When the performance ended and the public left, the invited guests lingered in the auditorium while a "perfect army of stage carpenters and strange women" transformed the house and stage. She continues:

Within a few moments the whole place resembled a conservatory fitted up as for a rout. It was all done as if by magic. Methinks Mr. Alexander must have had several "stage rehearsals" to accomplish results so admirable with such rapidity.

Finally:

The curtain rose, the stage had been cleared, and there at the head of the staircase stood the handsome actor-manager in plain dress clothes, washed and cleaned from his heavy make-up, and with his smiling wife ready to receive their guests.⁷

Alexander was not the only actor-manager hosting dignitaries this coronation June of 1902; both Irving and Tree gave similar staged feasts. For Tree, the banquet followed the production of The Merry Wives, described so savorily by Craig. Ellen Terry, performing with Tree in this production, appeared still wearing the dress of Mistress Page. Apparently, the stage at Her Majesty's was not completely cleared of the preceding spectacle.

⁷Ethel Alec-Tweedie, Behind the Footlights (New York: Dodd Mead and Company, 1904), 127.

The theatrical performances, however, often featured represented feasts as well, aiding the transfiguration of the entire production into a staged banquet. The elaborate feasts after the performances assured this conflation. Dramatic action would pause as enormous feasts were represented and audiences were left to watch the actors consume with vigor. Shakespeare's plays provided most of the opportunities for elaborate banquets, though with society dramas frequent opportunities existed to demonstrate some type of consumption. Renovating their theaters as spaces of consumption, as large semi-private banqueting halls, the actor-managers announced that the expenditure on stage was presented to be consumed. For a privileged few, this promise became real. But for the rest of the public, that consumption was put off. Ambitious socialites could aspire to the time when they too would be invited on stage to consume orally what could until then only be consumed visually, audibly and imaginatively. The spectacles of the actor-managers, to use Brecht's term, were "culinary" through and through.

Perhaps the most culinary of them all, however, were the productions of Herbert Beerbohm Tree. Tree's spectacular productions with their lengthy property lists, elaborate stage sets, and multitudes of supernumeraries were enormous expenditures: satiating feasts for the eyes and ears. Representing consumption, Tree's productions seduced the bodies of audience members with enticing fantasies; on Tree's stage object-worlds became dream-worlds, and the dream-worlds entered the bourgeois bodies of the Edwardian audience through their collective imaginations. This study investigates those mechanisms in their differing varieties whereby the space of Tree's stage spectacles operated as spaces of consumption and the significance of their operations on the bodies that moved through them. In particular, this study begins with the

investigation of one *mise-en-scène* of consumption—*Nero*, a historical blank-verse melodrama of ancient Rome by Stephen Phillips produced by Tree in 1906—then moves outward into broader social spaces: the architecture of Tree's theater, *H Majesty's*,⁸ metropolitan London and finally into the space of English nationalism. According to Marxist materialist critic Mikhail Bakhtin, "[t]he feast (every feast) is an important primary form of human culture."⁹ Eating on stage, then, is a type of Brechtian *gestus* representing an entire production style and cultural activity.

In the broadest understanding, consumption is a generalized activity that is concurrently material, spatial and cultural. Consumption, a category that encompasses various cultural activities of engaging the material world, above all is an act of incorporation: to consume means to take something into a "body," whether a corporal body of flesh and blood, the cultural "body," a fantasy "body," or a particular space. Moreover, types of consumption vary as greatly the types of things being consumed. The consumption of food differs from the consumption of *objets d'art*; the consumption of clothes differs from the consumption of art in a museum; the consumption of signs differs from the sexual consumption of other bodies. Yet each type of consumption plays out a project of incorporation. Once consumed, food is distributed throughout a body to be used in various ways by the various organs; *objets d'art* are placed in a room

⁸Throughout this dissertation, the theater building will be referred to as "*H Majesty's*" rather than "*Her Majesty's*" or "*His Majesty's*." The building changed names to reflect the gender of the current monarch; to maintain consistency throughout while incorporating both versions, the abbreviation is preferred. "*H Majesty's*" also skirts the implications of gendering the theater by its name, though it will be argued later the building itself participated in gender difference.

⁹Bakhtin, 8.

to establish and maintain a decor; clothes are not only worn on the body but are subsumed by the fashion they collectively create; the collection of art grouped together spatially establishes a museum collection as well as the institution of the museum itself; the collective constellations of signs create meaning and ultimately language. In their various ways physical bodies, rooms, fashion, museums, and language are cultural bodies. The term "consumption," then, is used to indicate the many ways in which they engage the world. According to cultural theorist Michel de Certeau:

To a rationalized, expansionist and at the same time centralized, clamorous, and spectacular production corresponds another *production*, called "consumption." The latter is devious, it is dispersed, but it insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisibly, because it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through its *ways of using* the products imposed by a dominant economic order.¹⁰

First of all, theatrical consumption is material. One important motivation driving the representation of consumption on stage may relate to innovations used to heighten the realistic effect of the performance. The Victorian drive to assert the reality of the stage spectacle led them to copy life directly onto the stage. Graphic representation alone, however, could not completely satisfy the desire for reality. The representation had to be shown to be real. One means to accomplish this important task was to demonstrate the tangible qualities of the objects represented on stage. This applied not only to the stage properties, but the actors themselves. A staged banquet, then, anchors the spectacle phenomenologically. In other words, staged feasts allow for an additional "thingliness" to enter under the proscenium arch. By consuming food and

¹⁰Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life trans. Stephen Rendall (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: U of California P, 1984), xii-xiii.

drink on stage, actors assert what theater phenomenologist Bert States calls the "physical actuality of actor and stage . . . , the upsurge of the real into the magic circle where conventions of theatricality have assured us that the real has been subdued and transcended."¹¹ If food is actually consumed on stage the impact is more immediate; the spectacle and the bodies engaging it by consuming it seem more real to the viewers. Spectacle, according to Marxist theorist Guy Debord, is "where the tangible world is replaced by a selection of images which exist above it, and which simultaneously impose themselves as the tangible *par excellence*."¹² Object-laden spectacles, such as Tree's were, are grounded in a material phenomenology.

This realistic technique, however, was grounded in a cultural-economic condition. In other words, *object-laden theatrical consumption is an economic activity*. The spectacularization of an object-world on stage occurred during a time when consumer goods, through new advertising media, were increasingly generating their own spectacular productions, when "the permanent opium war which aims to make people identify goods with commodities and satisfaction with survival [and] that increases according to its own laws"¹³ began. The elaboration of an object-laden stage spectacle coincided with the growing domination of the commodity in the Western economy. Thus Tree's spectacle style participated in and even contributed to the present condition

¹¹Bert O. States, Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On The Phenomenology of the Theater (Berkley, Los Angeles and London: U of California P, 1987), 34.

¹²Guy Debord, The Society of the Spectacle (1967; Detroit: Black and Red, 1983), ¶.36.

¹³Debord, ¶.44.

of commodity proliferation. According to one critic of the current postmodern condition:

That the logic of commodification has come to structure every aspect of contemporary life, not the least the cultural-aesthetic, is now a commonplace of periodizing theories of postmodernism. Displacing the use values of objects and practices with an exchange value which erases immanent qualities and differences, this universal commodification of our object world is said to have drained things of their independent 'being' and reduced them to so many means for their own consumption, so many instruments of commodity satisfaction.¹⁴

Even as Tree spectacularized objects in order to increase the reality of the stage representation, his spectacles contributed to the project where objects are increasingly removed from reality through their commodification into a spectacle of consumption. In this sense, then, Tree's Edwardian productions were nascently "postmodern."

This material economic consumption was also social. Tree's spectacles were also designed as star-vehicles. Typically comprised of an abundance of elements carefully orchestrated for the aggrandizement of the actor-manager, like feasts testifying to the wealth of the host, Tree's productions testified to his "wealth" as a producer. In other words, not only concerned with the spectacularization of the object, *consumption on stage functioned as an ostentatious display of status and thus was a social operation*. Social and economic theorist Thorstein Veblen's Theory of the Leisure Class, which introduced the term "conspicuous consumption," illustrates this relation of consumption to social rank, including its theatricalism. Members in a class emulate the behavior of other members to equal or ultimately exceed their class colleagues. According to Veblen, "relative success, tested by an invidious pecuniary comparison with other men, becomes the

¹⁴David Bennett, "Wrapping up Postmodernism: The Subject of Consumption versus the Subject of Cognition," Textual Practice 1.3 (1987): 244.

conventional end of action."¹⁵ Moreover, wealth must be shown in order to constitute itself as wealth (as apart from mere accumulation of property):

In order to gain and to hold the esteem of men it is not sufficient merely to possess wealth or power. The wealth or power must be put in evidence, for esteem is awarded only on evidence.¹⁶

Thus at the heart of Veblen's model are two activities important to the theater: *imitation* and *ostension*, "showing."

Whereas displaying wealth is one highly effective means of asserting status, employing others to consume wealth asserts an even greater power. Thus for Veblen, *vicarious consumption*, consumption done on the behalf of someone else, is the ultimate sign of consuming rank. Vicarious consumption includes not only the consumption of guests at a banquet, but the fashion worn by wives, the labor of servants, even the witnessing of one's spectacular displays. In other words, the more wealth one has, the more help one needs to consume it. Second, Veblen's model posits that productive, industrious work is distasteful to a leisure class society. Even consumption, Veblen argues, requires some work. Therefore, in order to truly be at leisure one must avoid productive consumption as well as industrious labor. Thus the leisurely wealthy will employ others to consume for them. Ultimately vicarious consumption consumes the wealth of the host, the source of the expenditure: "For the end of vicarious

¹⁵Thorstein Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class (1899; New York: New American Library, 1953), 82.

¹⁶Veblen, 84.

consumption," writes Veblen, "is to enhance, not the fullness of the life of the consumer, but the pecuniary repute of the master for whose behoof the consumption takes place."¹⁷

When actors on stage consume conspicuously they also consume vicariously for the spectators. For audience members who wish to consume the spectacle for themselves but are loath to do so productively, they are comfortably distanced from it. They only consume representations. The representational mode of the staged feast maintains its essence as a vicarious feast presented for a leisure class. (In this case the leisure class is constituted by the audience, since for the duration of the performance at least all audience members are at leisure.) In addition, the actors on stage are consuming vicariously for Tree, the actor-manager, their host and employer shown to be the source of the elaborate spectacle. When Tree entered a crowded stage he asserted the magnitude of his wealth by the number of vicarious consumers he employed as well as by the magnitude of the objects to be consumed. As "sole lessee and manager" Tree was the host of the feast, the source of the expenditure.

Material, economic, and social, theatrical consumption is above all *semiotic*. Because the mechanisms of conspicuous consumption are geared to represent the host, this study examines the representation of Tree as seen through his spectacular productions. It begins by a careful analysis of the *mise-en-scène* of Nero, one of his largest spectacles. Theorizing about the production as reconstructed through the promptbook and press reviews leads to an analysis of the means whereby the *mise-en-scène* signified Edwardian consumption through its representation of Imperial Rome.

¹⁷Veblen, 157.

The *mise-en-scène*, a term used to indicate not only the physical spectacle, but more broadly the interaction of physical spectacle, text, actors and audience (thus the entire spectacle of performance) is analyzed as a semiotic apparatus—a *signifying machine comprised of various signs, codes and sign-systems which in space and time unfolds as one overall spectacular design*. The *mise-en-scène*, a hybrid signifier that in many ways is also a consuming agent, is constructed during performance as actors, scene, props, costumes, text, are interwoven by the perceiving audience into a corporate and incorporating body. According to theater semiotician Patrice Pavis, the *mise-en-scène* is "a structuring by the spectator of materials presented, certainly, according to certain guidelines, but whose linking together is dependent on the perceiving subject."¹⁸ Further, it is "a structural principle of organization which generates and creates the performance from projects/propositions of the stage and responses/choices of the audience."¹⁹ The term *mise-en-scène* translates to indicate not only the physical staging of performance but also the broader, mental image of a "scene." Thus throughout this study the term is used to simultaneously indicate both.

This study focuses on not only various types of consumption, but how those types manifest as *mises-en-scène*. *In other words, this study explores how consumption, like the mise-en-scène, is a material, spatial, temporal and cultural activity*. According to theater semiotician Sarah Bryant-Bertail, "Theater is experienced as a movement that seems to transport the reader or spectator through time and space and *towards* meaning."

¹⁸Patrice Pavis, *Languages of the Stage* (New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1982), 138.

¹⁹Pavis, 138.

Further, "This experiential event of moving towards meaning is the process of theatrical signification itself—a dynamic process, because the theatrical sign is always being performed."²⁰ Thus the *mise-en-scène*, as the embodiment of theatrical signification, exists in a spatio-temporal plane. Of the questions Bryant-Bertail poses, two emerge as significant for this study: "How does the spatio-temporal dynamic of each text and performance relate to old or new social and political structures 'outside'?" and "How is the spatio-temporal dynamic of a work affected as it is staged in changing historical and geographic contexts?"²¹ This study argues that the spectacular production style of Tree creates *a space of consumption that actively engages other spaces of consumption outside the theater*. In other words, the theatrical production practices of Tree, seen through their consuming practices, establishes the theatrical space as a space of consumption which directly relates to other spaces of consumption outside the theater—not only the cafés and restaurants but also the museums and department stores—through which the consuming bodies of the audience also move. Thus, "in analyzing the spatio-temporality of a theatrical work, we often find that there is one particular nexus through which the movements of diegetic and mimetic space/time intersect as a dynamic."²² In this case, that nexus is the cultural activity of consumption.

Because the *mise-en-scène* is constructed by the perception of the spectators, by their interpretations of its codes according to the codes they carry with them into the

²⁰Sarah Bryant-Bertail, "Spatio-Temporality as Theater Performance," Text and Presentation, ed. Karelisa Hartigan (Lanham, MD: UP of America, 1990), 1.

²¹Bryant-Bertail, 5.

²²Bryant-Bertail, 8.

theater, its hybrid signification includes, necessarily, the social context in which it occurs. Again according to Pavis, "a performance text is only decipherable in its intertextual relationship with a social discourse, an aesthetic and ideological project close to that metatext of the *mise-en-scène*" ²³ The *mise-en-scène*, then, occupies not only the space of performance but a social space as well. Moreover, the *mise-en-scène* defines the modality of signification: it defines how and when signifying agents move through it and act within its parameters:

The *mise-en-scène* is fundamentally a modalization of the dictum by the theatrical term. It is at this level that the director's metatext is uttered, either directly, clearly, almost over-insistently, as a commentary laminated to the text of characters and stage, or, on the contrary, uttered "in filigree" or even left to the spectator's own free search for meaning, if he is unable to detach such a metatext from the global discourse of the *mise-en-scène* and from what the text seems to be saying on the surface. ²⁴

In other words, according to Pavis, "the *mise-en-scène* decides who will speak and how, thereby modulating the meaning of the spoken text." ²⁵ The modality of the *mise-en-scène* of consumption determines/is determined by the various consuming practices of the engaged/engaging participants.

Therefore, *not only are objects consumed materially they can be consumed by signification: their objectivity becomes secondary to the meaning they carry, to what they represent.* In the theater, this is even more apparent as objects typically are not the actual thing itself, but often constructed representations. The objects which crowded Tree's

²³Pavis, 139.

²⁴Pavis, 148.

²⁵Pavis, 148.

stage included painted architectural forms, furniture, objets d'art, flowers, jewels, food items (both real and fake), animals, and supernumeraries. Further, these objects on the stage of H Majesty's like most theatrical objects played a double role: simultaneously things and signs of things. According to cultural semiotician Roland Barthes, "the object effectively serves some purpose, but it also serves to communicate information."²⁶ In other words, "there is always a meaning which overflows the object's use."²⁷ Tree's objects set the scene—they identified character, time, or place—as well as argued for the scene's realness by their tangibility. Thus stage properties—spectacularly physical and semiotic—resemble commodities off stage, similarly signifying objects. The supernumeraries on Tree's stage, however, played an additional role. They bridged the gap between the inanimate objects and the active subjects, the principal characters. Props with personalities, the supers on stage animated the objects (mostly by carrying them but also by eating them) even as their presence simultaneously testified to the object-ness of the actors (even as they were carried and eaten by the stage representation). A theatrical servant class, they were employed to not only consume the objects on stage, but existed as properties of the producer for whom they consumed vicariously and who, in turn, consumed their theatrical labor. In other words, Tree's *mise-en-scène* with its consuming modality engaged objects subjectively and subjects objectively.

²⁶Roland Barthes, "The Semantics of the Object," *The Semiotic Challenge* trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1988), 181.

²⁷Barthes, 181.

Consumption constructs a social relation materially realized. In one sense, objects substantiate a culture because they signify materially cultural information. According to consumer sociologist Grant McCracken, "One of the most important ways in which cultural categories are substantiated is through the material objects of a culture. . . . Objects contribute thus to the construction of the culturally constituted world precisely because they are a vital, visible record of cultural meaning that is otherwise intangible."²⁸ But objects also signify the social relations of culture. Thus, in the commodity spectacle, insists postmodernist critic Jean Baudrillard, the object is the product of discourse:

The empirical "object," given in its contingency of form, color, material, function and discourse (or, if it is a cultural object, in its aesthetic finality) is a myth. How often it has been wished away! But the object is *nothing*. It is nothing but the different types of relations and significations that converge, contradict themselves, and twist around it, as such—the hidden logic that not only arranges this bundle of relations, but directs the manifest discourse that overlays and occludes it.²⁹

Psychoanalytic theory, which explains the construction of subjects and their negotiations through an object-world, can be used as a model for the *mise-en-scène*, offering another type of consumption both semiotic and material: in other words, *psycho-somatic*.³⁰ For psychoanalysis, subjects are signifying agents, constructing themselves through an accumulation of mentally consumed objects and subsequently

²⁸Grant McCracken, Culture and Consumption (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1990), 74.

²⁹Jean Baudrillard, For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign trans. Charles Levin (Telos P, 1981), 62.

³⁰Throughout this study the word "somatic" will be used to refer principally to the physicality of the body, but also to the body's psychological, imaginative configuration.

organized by the marks that imaginative consumption leaves on them. According to feminist theorist Kaja Silverman, "Dream-work [appropriates an] extensive signifying network as a vehicle for satisfying a whole series of wishes, ranging from infantile to the commonplace."³¹ *The mise-en-scène, then, operates along similar principles as the psyche similarly translating an object-world into a dream-world.*

In the theater objects are consumed by their significance as they give over their thingliness to the mental image they provoke. This mental image is what the audience receives. In the psyche, the ego displaces an actual object with a representation which is then used to satisfy the id's desire for the object. But the ego's representation of the object is also a representation of itself. The ego identifies itself as the object in order for its own use in satisfying the id's desire. According to Freud:

The character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes and . . . it contains the history of those object-choices When the ego assumes the features of the object, it is forcing itself . . . upon the id as a love-object and is trying to make good the id's loss by saying: "Look, you can love me too—I am so like the object."³²

The subject is then constructed out of these series of identifications with objects consumed through representation, each object leaving its trace on the ego who incorporated its desirous qualities in its re-presentation of itself to the id.

Like the ego, then, the producer of the mise-en-scène can be identified in every object re-presented for consumption. In the construction of the mise-en-scène the producer first consumes the objects to be presented. Tree's finances purchased the materials; his ideas

³¹Kaja Silverman, The Subject of Semiotics (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983), 64.

³²Sigmund Freud, "The Ego and the Id," Standard Edition, Vol XIX, 29-30; qtd by Silverman, 134.

defined their form. As a producer Tree took the thingliness of objects and placed them in a representation, a *mise-en-scène* characterized not only by ancient Rome, but the leading character it ultimately represented: Nero. Each object, then, played a small part in the overall representation of the *mise-en-scène*. Thus, in a sense the ego of the *mise-en-scène*, Tree was represented through every object consumed and was thus consumed through every object.

The psychological consumption of objects marks the subject doing the consuming. It negotiates through its physical and psychological environment taking objects into its psyche through object-identifications through which it also projects itself into the surrounding environment. The subject finds itself in a field of objects it subsequently territorializes. The project is begun almost immediately after birth.

According to Silverman, following Lacan:

The territorialization of the infant's body provides the means whereby the outpouring of libido can be directed and contained. By indicating the channels through which that libido can move, the mother or nurse performs a social service, assists in the conversion of incoherent energy into coherent drives which can later be culturally regulated.³³

The project of territorializing a space, then, not only identifies the space as the subject's, but disperses the subject as a fragmented representation, a conglomeration of various object-identifications. *Thus, like the theatrical mise-en-scène, the subject occupies both an objective and semiotic space.* According to McCracken,

Consumers spend a good deal of time cleaning, discussing, comparing, reflecting, showing off, and even photographing many of their new possessions. . . . This process of claiming is not the simple assertion of territoriality through

³³Silverman, 155.

ownership. It is also an attempt to draw from the object the qualities that it has been given by the marketing forces of the world of goods.³⁴

Thus not only were Tree's elaborate expenditures spectacular feasts representing the host, they were dream-worlds of consumption mapped by the activity of the psyche. Infused with commodity-driven desire, the objects on stage contained the force of *fetishes*: metonymic signifiers ensnaring the libido. As projected representations of the producer, however, they ultimately fetishized Tree. Since the *mise-en-scène* represents the subject of the drama and the subjects of Tree's star-vehicles were typically himself, the subject of the fantasized *mise-en-scène* was Tree's celebrity persona, a fetishistic representation of the actor. This representation however, was thoroughly territorialized. Marked by fetishized objects, traced by desire, the celebrity persona represented in the *mise-en-scène* is divided into erogenous zones through which the audience members are seduced and ultimately engaged. The fantasized body of the producer couples with the fantasized/fantasizing bodies of the perceivers in a gentrified but a grotesque carnival.

The space occupied by the *mise-en-scène* exists, then, not only within space defined by the stage, but within the space defined by the collective psyches of the participants: producer and perceivers. Chapter 1 outlines in some detail the construction of the physical and fantasized *mise-en-scène* of Nero. An analysis of the historical melodrama of ancient Rome and its consuming Emperor, reveals not only the mechanism of the *mise-en-scène* outlined above but configures the *mise-en-scène* according to anxieties facing the Edwardian public. Like dreams, Nero articulates the

³⁴McCracken, 85.

repressed desires and fears of its subject. Chapter 2 examines these anxieties as they emerge from a reading of the *mise-en-scène* that incorporates both the text and its stage representation. A more complete portrait of the subject constructed emerges. In *Nero*, the subject represented was not only the imperial (male) consumer and the celebrity persona, but the fetishized urban gentleman the celebrity represented. Thus the fears and desires were, practically speaking, the fears and desires of the Edwardian gentleman. Remarkably, the villain in this historical melodrama turns out to be not the Emperor Nero himself, but rather the figure of the Edwardian New Woman.

The architecture of the *mise-en-scène* existed within another architecture structuring the practice of consumption. Like the spectacular productions it housed, H Majesty's Theater was a *mise-en-scène* of conspicuous consumption. Chapter 3, building on the explanation of what happens to the subject in the *mise-en-scène* of consumption, examines the space of the theater building as it existed in Edwardian London in order to further contextualize the mechanism of consumption Tree's object-laden style embodied. Like the *mises-en-scène* on stage, the theater building was territorialized by the consuming subjects who moved through it even as it territorialized those same consuming subjects. A monument to conspicuous consumption, the theater existed in the surrounding urban terrain. And, like the consuming subjects who moved through it, H Majesty's territorialized the city as it moved through the urban *mise-en-scène*.

Like the *mise-en-scène* on stage, the *mise-en-scène* of the theater building ultimately represented its owner, its principal inhabitant. In the case of H Majesty's the owner was the actor-manager Tree who not only built it but who dispersed his mark

throughout its public and private spaces. *The building was not only a monument of Edwardian conspicuous consumption; it was a monumental representation of the Edwardian consumer.* According to theater historian and theorist Marvin Carlson, "the articulation of space and the selection and arrangement of decorative elements may thus express a wide range of information about not only a society's view of the theatre itself, but also about all manner of social, political and economic concerns."³⁵ Again, that consumer was the fetishized urban gentleman Tree's celebrity represented. Thus, because London itself existed in an even greater mise-en-scène which it capitalized, the British Empire, by moving through and consuming the metropolitan space, the monumentalized subject also consumes imperially. Step by step, the Edwardian gentleman enthrones himself as Emperor.

The Shakespeare Festivals presented at H Majesty's from 1905 through 1913 were Tree's attempt to institutionalize not only his status but the production style that celebrated bourgeois consumption. The Shakespeare Festivals took to the national level the identity construction of the mise-en-scène. Not only did the various mises-en-scène of the Festivals configure the metropolitan, consumer-driven imperial gentleman; by being Shakespearean, they placed the urban gentleman at the mythic core of English culture. Chapter 4 investigates this project.

Thus the analysis of the theatrical mise-en-scène provides a context in which to approach other mises-en-scène of consumption, not necessarily theatrical but spectacular all the same. The department stores that emerged in London during this

³⁵Marvin Carlson, *Theater Semiotics: Signs of Life* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1990), 47.

period, for example, were similarly spaces that encouraged and defined spectacular consumption. Whereas in the theaters objects were used to increase the sensuality of the spectacle, in the department stores spectacle was used to increase the ability of objects to satisfy a wider range of desires, to entice a stronger attachment to the consumer's psyche. According to historian Rosalind Williams, in the department stores consumers were learning a new way to consume:

Active verbal interchange between customer and retailer was replaced by the passive, mute response of consumer to things—a striking example of how "the civilizing process" tames aggressions and feelings toward people while encouraging desires and feelings toward things. Department stores were organized to inflame these material desires and feelings. Even if the consumer was free not to buy at the time, techniques of merchandising pushed him [sic.] to want to buy *sometime*.³⁶

Thus the department stores illuminate from another angle the object-laden spectacle presented in the theaters. As much as the theatrical *mise-en-scène* represents the fantasized body of its star and its incorporation into the psyches of the audience—in other words, represents an engaged/engaging subject within the modality defined by its consumption—these other *mises-en-scène* of consumption *engage the bodies that move through them as subjects similarly modalized by the consuming activities encouraged*.

As indicated above, consumption is a generalized activity practiced by bodies. Bodies, therefore, are another *mise-en-scène* of consumption in as much as they can be broadly defined as spatialized signifying apparati. Moreover the topography of the body defines the *mise-en-scène* of consumption as much as the *mise-en-scène* of

³⁶Rosalind Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: U of California P, 1892), 67.

consumption defines the topography of the body. For architectural theorist Elizabeth Grosz, the city and the body overlay each other with their topographies. She states,

The body and its environment . . . produce each other as forms of the hyperreal, as modes of simulation which have overtaken and transformed whatever reality each may have had into the image of the other: the city is made and made over into the simulacrum of the body, and the body, in its turn, is transformed, 'citified,' urbanized as a distinctively metropolitan body.³⁷

Rejecting both causal and representational models of the relation between bodies and cities, Grosz argues for a model articulating a two-way interface—a mutual, inter-related co-building:

What I am suggesting is a model of the relations between bodies and cities which sees them, not as megalithic total entities, distinct identities, but as assemblages or collections of parts, capable of crossing the thresholds between substances to form linkages, machines, provisional and often temporary sub- or microgroupings. . . . I am suggesting a fundamentally disunified series of systems and interconnections, a series of disparate flows, energies, events or entities, and spaces, brought together or drawn apart in more or less temporary alignments.³⁸

In other words, Grosz describes a relationship between bodies and the urban milieu that parallels the relationship described between the actor's body and the *mise-en-scène* or the space of H Majesty's theater and the body of Herbert Beerbohm Tree.

The body, then, inscribes itself onto the landscapes it encounters even as that same landscape becomes inscribed upon the body. As bodies move through social spaces they become integrated into the surrounding milieu as they seek their own satisfaction and are given over to the satisfaction of others. As the means through which the world is

³⁷Elizabeth Grosz, "Bodies-Cities," Sexuality and Space (New York: Princeton Architectural P, 1992), 242.

³⁸Grosz, 248.

encountered, the body makes over the world into another body in order to approach it on its own terms. As bodies encounter space they infuse them with sexuality in a fantasizing process which makes over the world into another body to encounter for satisfaction. Fantasy thus creates nodes of satisfaction, fetishized spaces and productive and receptive orifices much in the same way that bodies are eroticized for the pleasure of other bodies. Social spaces, however, strive to contain this polymorphous perversity. By coercively suggesting the means of satisfaction, fostering certain desires and discouraging others, and above all *economizing the pleasures taken by the bodies (usually to the benefit of other bodies)*, social spaces control the integration of bodies into the prevailing power milieu. For Edwardian England, that power milieu was dominated by the consumerist interests of the middle class at home commodifying the Empire abroad.

The rise of the department stores, as spectacular landscapes of commodities, and the giving-over of theatrical representation to spectacular displays of conspicuous consumption and consumer goods, concurrently trained Edwardian bodies into metropolitan bodies. By the turn of the century England was a predominantly urban nation, its agrarian past abandoned during the Industrial Revolution. Edwardian bodies were more and more dependent on the body of the city, its groceries, shops, waterworks, and parks, for the basic sustenance once received from the land. Thus the "birth" of the metropolitan body as we know it today can be placed somewhere during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Clearly, then, *a spectacular feast embodies more than the practice of eating on stage, while the activity of conspicuous consumption has greater significance than the competitive display of wealth.* Both are endemic to the very construction of the bourgeois subject

through its representation on stage and its activity engaging the urban world that surrounds it. Through its investigation of one *mise-en-scène* of consumption and the *mises-en-scène* that surround it, this study then builds a theory that incorporates a history. In one sense, that history concerns the representation of a particular subject: the actor-manager Herbert Beerbohm Tree. This study, then, is a type of biography. But, as a biography, it is not concerned with the temporal progress of that subject through a series of events, causally linked by the narrative. Rather, it takes as its project the *spatial description of the field that subject occupies*. In this case, that field is defined first by the stage space, then the space of the theater, then finally the cultural space in which the theater and stage are found: bourgeois, metropolitan London at the turn of the century.

The theory, then, engages the *historical field* represented by explaining the operations within that field and placing those operations within a broader, *interpretative context*. The theory explains the historical field, illustrates by making broader comparisons possible, and finally contextualizes the historical field within its explanation. The theory this study builds begins with the simple activity of eating on stage and contextualizes it within the theory of conspicuous consumption. Further theorization of the *mises-en-scène*, the *mise-en-scène* as a psyche, and various spaces as *mises-en-scène* opens up further implications of theatricalized consumption and leads to "thicker" descriptions. Once engaged, the theory is carried through the broader fields under investigation: the architecture of H Majesty's and Imperial, metropolitan London. Theory and history are intimately combined.

The production style of Herbert Beerbohm Tree, embodying conspicuous consumption, embodied the fetishized bourgeois subject, dispersing its representation throughout various social spaces. This study, then, is about the mechanisms through which this subject was constructed and dispersed. Focusing on a particular production within particular contexts (in other words, only a partial representation) this study does its own fetishizing. The reader is warned, then, that the project is only an opening suggestion for the further possibilities of its movement.

CHAPTER 1

NERO, PART I: CONSUMING THE IMPERIAL MISE-EN-SCÈNE

The rapturous satisfactions of consumption surround us, clinging to objects as if to the sensory residues of the previous day in the delirious excursion of a dream. As to the logic that regulates this strange discourse—surely it compares to what Freud uncovered in *The Interpretation of Dreams*?¹

Herbert Beerbohm Tree's production of Nero in the winter of 1906 established the scene for the construction of an Imperial, consuming subject, marking out his social space. Despite the attention to exact detail in the reproduction of the mise-en-scène and the attempts of Tree and his production staff to assure audiences that the play was firmly rooted in history through program notes and press articles, Nero remained a contemporary fantasy based on a Roman theme. Constituted through commodities and shaped by fantasy, the subject constructed in performance was male, patriarchal and driven by the desire to consume.

Nero was the third historical verse melodrama by Stephen Phillips Tree produced. The other two, Ulysses produced in 1902 and Herod in 1900, were huge successes for the status-conscious Tree. Both led to long runs and significant profits. According to Tree's biographer, Hesketh Pearson, "They were staged with a luxuriance that matched the language, and audiences gasped at the scenes that made Jerusalem and Rome more marvelous on the stage than in the National Gallery."² Nero, commissioned

¹Jean Baudrillard, For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign, trans. Charles Levin (Telos P, 1981), 63.

²Hesketh Pearson, Beerbohm Tree: His Life and Laughter (1956; London: Columbus Books, 1988), 136.

by Tree in 1905 and tailored to his emendations proved another popular production, even if some critics faulted the spectacle for overpowering a weak story. According to The Pall Mall Gazette which bluntly called the play "no more than a hand-to-mouth melodrama published in an *édition de luxe*":

Truth to say, the story told by Mr. Stephen Phillips is not very engrossing, very plausible, or very coherent. It lacks what every good play has, and must have, a central idea pervading the whole play, an idea to which no character is an utter stranger, and no scene is wholly irrelevant. Several persons of note are murdered, and Rome is burnt, and you are generally right in guessing that Nero has a finger, a jewelled and scented finger, in the pie. But a succession of crimes rounded off by a general conflagration does not make a play. . . .³

According to the critic for The Queen, the various episodes in the play, "when massed together, result in little more than a lurid, though, of course, very artistically presented melodrama."⁴

The quality of the drama, however, did not reduce the production's popularity. Overlooking its dramatic weakness and four-hour length in favor of the spectacle and the celebrity of the actor-manager, Londoners kept the houses full. According to Douglas Crichton in his lecture to the "Playgoers Club,"

To say that the production of Nero as a whole far surpasses anything which even Mr. Tree has done is to give some idea of the scale of gorgeous magnificence which has been lavished on the scenery and dresses alike. The opening scene, the Palace of the Caesars, is one of stately beauty. . . . Later on the same groundwork of this scene is made the vehicle to convey the Court of Nero, for we see the statues gilded and decked with flowers, and every voluptuous and sensuous addition made to the furniture and trappings which the luxuriant East was able to furnish.⁵

³The Pall Mall Gazette, 26 January 1906.

⁴The Queen, [January 1906].

⁵Douglas Crichton, "Nero: The Roman Emperor and the Play," lecture ts., 19 February 1906, University of Bristol Theater Collection, The Beerbohm Tree Collection, 28.

In all, Nero ran for 127 performances over a course of 13 weeks and grossed over £37,000 at the box office becoming the fourth biggest career profit-maker for Tree.⁶ Costing approximately £24,000 to produce (including £2,000 for costumes and scenery each), the profit margin for Tree and his theatre was over £8,000 during a period when the average, comfortable middle-class income was £300 a year.⁷ Maud Tree, Tree's wife who also appeared in the play remembered fondly:

Oh, the happy days of Nero! How noble, how beautiful the play, how gorgeous the setting, how haunting the music, how full of excitement and glory the traffic of the stage! During the dream-like four months of its run I lived only for the theatre: everything else went by the board. The cup of my existence brimmed. The audiences brimmed, too: we never had a greater financial success—this in spite of the fact that it cost considerably over two hundred pounds a performance to (as they say) "ring up the curtain."⁸

Critics interpreted the leading character variously but for the most part rendered Tree nothing but praise. According to The Daily Telegraph Nero was "intensely modern," a condition configured as "intensely self-conscious, taking a morbid pleasure in analysing his own emotions, an epicure in sensations, revelling in each pleasurable instant as it passes before his feverish intelligence."⁹ Further:

[Nero] is a part after [Tree's] own heart, full of malign humour, full also of an artistic diablerie, in which the actor excels. Made up in striking resemblance to the well-known bust of Nero, an eager voluptuary in the earlier portion of the play, a tired voluptuary at the close. Mr. Tree holds the play together with quite

⁶His Majesty's Theater Ledger 1904-1906, University of Bristol Theater Collection, The Beerbohm Tree Collection.

⁷Donald Read, The Age of Urban Democracy: England 1868-1914 (1979; London and New York: Longman, 1994), 399. For an accounting of the expenses and revenue for Nero see Appendix A.

⁸Maud Tree, "Herbert and I," Herbert Beerbohm Tree: Some Memories of His Art, ed. Max Beerbohm (London: Hutchinson and Co. [n.d.]), 136.

⁹The Daily Telegraph, 26 January 1906.

one of the most successful of his impersonations, replete with those subtle touches which he knows how to impart to characters not naturally sympathetic, which, nevertheless, he manages to make interesting.¹⁰

The Times, however, concentrated more on Nero's animal behavior, finding a snorting, consuming beast:

Horror is the predominant feeling created. One shrinks and sickens at the monster. The actor always goes for this, the right effect; never for "sympathy" which in the presence of such a character would be outrageous. He has queer little grunts and snorts of rage; in his worst moments his very nostrils twitch, as the nostrils of a beast scenting its prey; sometimes by contrast, he displays a cold, suave "elegant" cruelty. Yes, Mr. Tree's Nero is quite Neronian.¹¹

The Athenaeum, however, diagnosed a deliberate attempt to portray Nero sympathetically, though with the word "*cabotin*" (French for a bombastic actor) might suggest an unflattering comment on the actor-manager:

A *cabotin* in the drama of Mr Stephen Phillips he assuredly is, and something almost of a sentimentalist; and as the period at which the action closes with the burning of Rome—which, however, is anticipated by the death of Poppaea—precedes the worst of the political persecutions of Nero, as well as his flight and suicide, a design is apparent to preserve for him a measure of our sympathies.¹²

While according to The Era, Tree's performance as Nero was "without doubt, the grandest achievement of his genius."¹³ According to Tree in a publicity interview, "Ah, Nero, Nero; he is a creature! A gorgeous butterfly lost in the night."¹⁴

¹⁰The Daily Telegraph, 26 January 1906.

¹¹The Times, 26 January 1906.

¹²The Athenaeum, [January] 1906.

¹³The Era, 27 January 1906.

¹⁴The Pall Mall Gazette, 24 January 1906.



Figure 1 Herbert Beerbohm Tree as Nero (University of Bristol Theater Collection)

In Nero the spectacle was overwhelming. According to The Times, in fact, the production was primarily "a spectacle, illustrating polychromatically the successive stages of Nero's madness."¹⁵ Tree, in fact, produced Nero to partially satisfy the popular demand for grand-scale historical spectacles lavishly produced: as a melodrama with interpolated tableaux that filled the stage with props, supers and animals. According to critic Harold Hodge, "Everything begins in some popular story of Nero and leads up to a tableau."¹⁶ Audiences witnessed a banquet scene with dancing girls, exotic dishes, and showers of rose petals falling from above; a procession through the streets of Rome involving over one hundred supers and three horses; and the ultimate spectacular climax, the burning of Rome on stage which provided the background to a raving Emperor driven to hysterics by remorse and revelling in a megalomaniacal frenzy of consuming destruction. According to The Times critic, "At the end of it all one gasps and is a little dizzy."¹⁷

Tree's production of Nero presented Edwardian audiences with a spectacular fantasy that, while based on Roman history, was operating within the current political, cultural, and economic mechanisms of bourgeois England, especially the mechanism of conspicuous consumption. Roman history, in fact, often functioned as a thinly coded representation of British Imperial culture. In art galleries and on the stage, Victorians and Edwardians frequently covered their own ideologies with a toga. According to

¹⁵The Times, 26 January 1906.

¹⁶The Academy, 3 February 1906.

¹⁷The Times, 26 January 1906.

David Mayer, these "Toga Plays" played with the perception of Rome as "a place of contradiction and paradox, uniting in one culture austerity and luxury, stoic endurance and excessive hedonism, law, architecture, heroism, conquest, vanity and decadence" thus safely presenting Imperialist ideologies.¹⁸ Thus Nero, a melodramatic spectacle of the ancient world, illustrates what Edward Said examines in other cultural formations during this period of expansive imperialism, namely:

. . . how the process of imperialism occurred beyond the level of economic laws and political decisions, and—by predisposition, by the authority of recognizable cultural formations, by continuing consolidation within education, literature, and the visual and musical arts—were manifested at another very significant level, that of the national culture, which we have tended to sanitize as a realm of unchanging intellectual monuments, free from worldly affiliations.¹⁹

According to Michael Booth, the taste for spectacular melodramatic productions cut across class divisions and was "a homogeneous, a ubiquitous taste."²⁰ Booth further suggests that the increased popularity of spectacular theater throughout the nineteenth

¹⁸David Mayer, "Toga Plays," British Theatre in the 1890s, ed. Richard Foulkes (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992), 71. Further, "Toga plays are dramas of high and heroic action, scenically vivid, well within the conventions of late Victorian melodrama. These plays confirm the military and financial power of the Roman Empire and, by implication, the corresponding wealth and might of the British Empire. There is enough slaughter, attempted seduction, political intrigue, orgiastic dancing, combat and torture to gratify the thrill-seeker for whom the pros and cons of Empire are a matter of indifference. But there are some citizen-spectators for whom being new Romans and citizens of a new Empire is pregnant with meaning—or antithetical meanings—especially as the Empire depicted on stage is the Roman Empire in decline." Mayer, 73.

¹⁹Edward Said, Culture and Imperialism, (New York: Vintage, 1994), 12-13. Nero is hardly an intellectual monument, though it certainly strove to be one. The argument holds. Said usefully distinguishes between imperialism and colonialism. Imperialism, he writes, "means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory; 'colonialism,' which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements in a distant territory." Further, "in our time, direct colonialism has largely ended; imperialism . . . lingers where it has always been, in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices." Said, Culture and Imperialism, 9.

²⁰Michael Booth, Victorian Spectacular Theatre 1850-1910 (Boston, London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 3.

century matched the spectacular changes in their environments, particularly the massive urban building projects:

The rapid growth of the metropolis and other cities, the concomitantly rising prosperity of the nation, and the spread of empire and mercantile imperialism meant the construction of docks, warehouses, bridges, factories, gasworks, railway stations, hotels, banks, department stores, office blocks, government buildings, insurance offices, and exhibition halls on a scale previously unimaginable: massive monuments to wealth, imperial glory, and commercial supremacy, self-important spectacle productions in real stone, brick, steel, iron and glass. . . . Conditioned to mass, grandeur, and elaborate ornamentation in the buildings about them, it is not surprising that the public responded enthusiastically to the same sort of thing translated into the values of theatrical production.²¹

The craze for spectacle, then, was related directly to the explosion that the modern commodity-based consumer culture underwent as a result of the Industrial Revolution. Spectacle, at the very least, complemented the new consumer power all classes enjoyed to varying degrees. At the most, it buttressed the consumer boom as Veblen's term "*conspicuous consumption*" implies: the socializing significance of consuming practices occur when they are seen by others.²²

As basic units of exchange both within a consumer-driven economy and a symbolic language shared by consumers, commodities like stage signs participate in a

²¹Booth, 3-4.

²²According to Veblen, "Goods are produced and consumed as a means to the fuller unfolding of human life; and their utility consists, in the first instance, in their efficiency as means to this end. . . . But the human proclivity to emulation has seized upon the consumption of goods as a means to an invidious comparison, and has thereby invested consumable goods with a secondary utility as evidence of relative ability to pay. This indirect or secondary use of consumable goods lends an honorific character to consumption and presently also to the goods which best serve the emulative end of consumption." Thorstein Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class (1899; New York: New American Library, 1953), 111.

materialist semiotics, making everyday environments and their characters "readable."

According to consumer sociologists Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood:

If it is said that the essential function of language is its capacity for poetry, we shall assume that the essential function of consumption is its capacity to make sense. Forget the idea of consumer irrationality. Forget that commodities are good for eating, clothing, and shelter; forget their usefulness and try instead the idea that commodities are good for thinking; treat them as a nonverbal medium for the human creative faculty.²³

Commodities, then, function at the intersection of the phenomenal world and semiotic activity, an intersection where theater philosopher Bert States places theatrical performance. According to States, theater "is really a language whose words consist to an unusual degree of things that *are* what they seem to be. In theater, image and object, pretense and pretender, sign-vehicle and content, draw unusually close."²⁴ When physical objects, props, become the signs they are "consumed" by significance:

Theater is the medium, par excellence, that consumes the real in its realest forms: man, his language, his rooms and cities, his weapons and tools, his other arts, animals, fire and water—even, finally, theater itself. Its permanent spectacle in the parade of objects and processes *in transit* from environment to imagery.²⁵

The spectacle of Nero, then, consisted of the conglomeration of props, supers, and animals which on one level represented ancient Rome, but on another represented their "owner," the producer Beerbohm Tree, in a similar way that objects in a room represent the consumer who bought them. But on stage each object also represented an entire world. Thus Tree's spectacular theater, relying heavily on the signifying

²³Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption (London: Allen Lane, 1979), 62.

²⁴Bert O. States, Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: U of California P, 1987), 20.

²⁵States, 40.

operation of objects (and in fact expanding that signifying operation extensively through the fetishization of objects), participated in the movement toward the present spectacular condition diagnosed by Marxist social critic Guy Debord where commodities and commodification dominate representation. "The spectacle is the moment," Debord writes, "when the commodity has attained *total occupation* of social life. Not only is the relation to commodity visible but it is all one sees: the world one sees is the world."²⁶

For Bertolt Brecht the type of "culinary" theater Tree produced:

. . . furthers pleasure even where it requires, or promotes, a certain degree of education, for the education is an education of taste. To every object it adopts a hedonistic approach. It "experiences," and it ranks as an "experience."²⁷

The play's educational value as an archeologically correct representation of ancient Rome thinly covered its sensationalist goal to represent the powerful consumer, as a character to, if not emulate, at least admire. It offered Edwardians a "taste" of Rome, thus as Brecht asserts educating their own tastes though chiefly providing only a stimulating, though mind-numbing experience. Tree's spectacular "culinary" production style was commodity-based, and Nero—written specifically for Tree—displays all the richness of this style, inherently coded for both its performance and reception. As such, the play is uniquely suited to illustrate the rhetoric inherent in commodity-ridden spectacle and its unique intersection of fantasy and materiality. Further, the play's representation of Imperial Rome, and of the Imperial consumer,

²⁶Guy Debord, The Society of the Spectacle (1967; Detroit: Black and Red, 1983), ¶.42

²⁷Bertolt Brecht, "The Modern Theater is the Epic Theater," Brecht on Theater trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), 35.

demonstrates how the commodity rhetoric performs in the rhetoric of the British Empire even leading to the conclusion that commodity rhetoric may in fact be another manifestation of imperialism.

This chapter will explore Nero as a social fantasy of Edwardian England, finding in the sensationalist portrait of the Roman Emperor, revelations of Edwardian culture. More specifically, this chapter, in describing the spectacle of Nero, will discuss how the commodity-form operated as the basic unit of Tree's stage spectacle and how the subject develops through fantasy over the commodity-laden and ultimately fetishized mise-en-scène. The subject represented will be shown not only to be Nero, characterized as an imperial consumer, but the celebrity persona of Tree, characterized as an urban gentleman. The following chapter will continue the discussion and show how the position of that subject, fortified and fed, was seriously threatened within its very construction by the emergence of a counter-space, feminine and revolutionary.

Moments of Conspicuous Consumption

The plot of Nero, such as it was, provided a skeletal structure on which could be hung moments of spectacle. The play begins with the death of the Emperor Claudius (Nero's stepfather) at the hands of Nero's mother Agrippina (played by Maud Tree, Tree's wife). Nero is pronounced emperor, but not without the manipulation of the Roman crowd. Dramatic tension builds as, five years later, Nero is more interested in aesthetics than politics and has succumbed to decadent pleasures while others, principally Agrippina, assert their influence over the business of state. Nero's ministers

urge him to throw off his mother, to be a man, and to rule on his own. This leads Nero into a quarrel with Agrippina, followed by Agrippina publicly renouncing Nero in favor of his step-brother Britannicus, Nero murdering Britannicus as a response during a spectacular banquet, and finally Agrippina's eventual murder. Sexual tension and rivalry is added with the Emperor's mistress Poppaea (played by Constance Collier, Tree's off-stage mistress) turns Nero's desire to her own advantage, persuading Nero to abandon his mother so that she, Poppaea, can become the next Empress.

According to The Times, "This is a play of artistic temperament 'thinking Imperially' in a rushing *crescendo* up to the wild ravings of megalomania."²⁸ A large number of elements carefully orchestrated for the aggrandizement of the leading character and, subsequently, star performer defined the spectacle in Nero. Tree's first entrance set the tone in a combination of chorus, star and grand-scale melodrama deliberately approximating an operatic style. As the curtain rises, the Emperor Claudius has breathed his last while Agrippina's poisoner slinks in the corner, Agrippina hovers anxiously, a physician confirms the poisoner's work and an astrologer reads the stars. Burrus, leader of the Praetorian guards, and the poet Seneca assure Agrippina that all is in place for Nero to become Emperor. Rome, they say, can be held back no longer and the time has come to announce Claudius' death and Nero's succession. Agrippina, though, confronts the astrologer:²⁹

²⁸The Times, 26 January 1906.

²⁹All quotes are taken from the final prepared promptbook at the University of Bristol Theatre Collection. The typed manuscript, which differs from the published text, compiled rehearsal notes and edits to be used by the prompter during performances. It is therefore as close an approximation to the actual event as is now possible. References following the quotes refer to the

Agrippina: How long till Rome shall greet her Emperor? When? When?

Astrologer: Behold the heavens! The moment!

(EXIT ASTROLOGER L.)

Agrippina: (To BURRUS) Give the sign! (I,7)

Burrus signals and a distant trumpet is sounded. The stage becomes active as a tide of supers surges forward. Six soldiers enter, "red and blue gaurds," and surround the body of the dead emperor. Courtiers gather while Agrippina veils herself in mourning and the other principals take their positions. Burrus, after conferring with the soldiers by the body, crosses to the upper platform and announces that the Praetorian gaurds are quietly marching through the streets of Rome which he simultaneously indicates with his drawn sword pointing off right. From the left a trumpet and off-stage cheers are heard indicating Nero's return. A herald enters, bearing a gold wreath, and announces Nero's arrival and his victory at the races, further signalled by even louder off-stage cheers. More Romans fill the stage as sounds of acclamation grow louder. Soon, everyone is on and in position, and Nero enters, dressed as a charioteer. All on stage erupt in a loud cheer, further punctuating this arrival.

The news of Claudius' death does not sit well with the crowd, particularly when Agrippina hails Nero as the next emperor. They signal their discontent with murmurs (a sign throughout the performance of their immanent dissolution). Nero crosses up right to the upper platform with the view of the city and is hailed "Caesar" by the soldiers who have moved into place off stage and have become, as Nero calls it, "this

forest of uprisen spears/Symbol of might." (I,8) The soldiers, not seen, were metonymically indicated by spears alone, two each held by 48 extras. Given a bowl containing gold coins Nero liberally and conspicuously scatters them among "the crowd" that has also gathered off stage, causing another loud cheer. These cheers, incidentally, were boosted not by live actors off stage, but by a novel technology Tree introduced for this production: they were recorded on phonographic records. Nero, in effect, has become Emperor.

The scene with the crowd concluded as the soldier Burrus takes Claudius' purple robe and, with Agrippina, drapes it on Nero while the Herald hands him the sceptre from the dead emperor, passing on the phallus as it were. According to the stage directions:

(... NERO then crosses up the steps and walks along the platform showing himself to the SOLDIERS who give terrific cheers. NERO then comes down steps again, the people on stage also cheering with arms extended, then exit up steps. When BURRUS has put the purple on NERO, he comes down and pantomimes to SOLDIERS who lift up the body and EXIT with it R.I.E lead by HERALD and followed by BURRUS)

(MUSIC & CHEERS die off. AGRIPPINA comes down and embraces NERO C.)
(I,9)

Another interpolated tableau illustrates the use of spectacle further. The procession into Rome at the end of Act III in one sense was designed to show off the number of people Tree could get on stage though it also signified Roman authority represented through pomp. Its absence in Phillip's original proposed scenario suggests that its inclusion was the idea of the actor-manager rather than the playwright. In fact, the scene seems barely connected to the plot at all. Thus it becomes another excuse for spectacle on a grand scale.

When the curtain rises a crowd has gathered on stage representing a street in Rome. Musicians are playing up right of a large triumphal arch, a group of girls are dancing, and courtiers and ladies are mingling up right on a platform. Christians are heard singing behind the arch, L.C. and the crowd, discovering them, gives a cry and drives them down stage and off right. The crowd then takes their positions for the procession. Over sixty-two individuals form the triumph, not including the crowd that has already gathered on stage at the beginning of the scene. Supers, extra gentlemen, and principals take part representing various elements of Roman government crossing the stage to the cheers of the crowd: red and blue guards, senators, standard bearers, praetorians, courtiers, nubians, parthians (and their chief), lictors, trumpeteers, gladiators and retari. Burrus, Seneca, the Physician and Anicetus are also marching. Finally Nero enters, in his grandest entrance yet, driving a chariot drawn by three horses. All on stage cheer. Nero driving the chariot in fact functioned as the marketing image of the production, featured on the cover of the souvenir program. That each horse was led in by a groom probably slowed things down and effectively suggested that Tree was really along for the ride, but the gesture was nevertheless made and the image formed. Once Tree has reached center stage the scene concludes and the curtain descends. A tableau is struck with the chariot still on and everyone cheering, totalling over 100 bodies on stage. The entire scene, in effect devoted entirely to a single entrance, was followed by its own call in front of the curtain. The audience applauded the spectacle, not the acting performance.

With the banquet at the end of Act II, Tree represented Roman consumption. In fact, the representation of the Roman feast proved the moment of spectacle that

illustrated Tree's culinary technique the most clearly. If Nero's first entrance demonstrates the aggrandizement of the leading character and the procession through Rome the magnitude of authority, then the banquet scene shows culinary spectacle in action: how objects were hedonistically approached and how experience dominated at the expense of dialogue or plot.

Critics and audiences responded positively to the banquet as the highlight of the production. The Era found the banquet scene "dazzling" as it "beggared description" with "its elaborate stage-management, and the sumptuous liberality of its arrangement."³⁰ Even the critic for the Pall Mall Gazette who was critical of the play admitted the brilliance of the scene.

On the other hand, the banqueting scene, both in the handling of the crowd and in the magnificence of the setting, was as wonderful, or perhaps more wonderful, than any of the many wonderful animated stage-pictures that Mr. Tree already has to his credit. The banquet, with its dances and other diversions, must have lasted ten minutes or more, during which the dramatic action was entirely suspended. That the audience was throughout that ten minutes delighted speaks volumes for the spectacle. But does it not cast rather a reflection on the drama.³¹

And according to Harold Hodge in The Academy, "Nothing could appeal more surely to the popular notion of Roman life under the empire. The shower of roses at the feast, the clouds of gold dust, the ballet-dancers, the peacock coming in to a fanfare of trumpets—everything was there."³²

³⁰The Era, 27 January 1906.

³¹The Pall Mall Gazette, 26 January 1906.

³²The Academy, 3 February 1906.

Edwardians, who enjoyed staging elaborate banquets for themselves on the slightest provocation, also enjoyed seeing banquets in the theater. In fact, the staging of banquets on stage combines theatrical consumption with the representation of somatic consumption. It was almost a requisite scene for any large-scale melodrama. Tree, at least, usually found a way to include banquet scenes in most of his spectacular productions.³³ Typically, audiences were primed before entering the theater with early press notices, indicating the importance of these scenes to the marketing of the production. For Nero, Percy Macquoid, the production's chief designer, promised a scene of magnificence. In an interview published shortly before the production opened he stated:

I have also in conjunction with Mr. Harker and Mr. Tree devised the arrangement of the great circular banqueting hall in which Britannicus meets his tragic fate. The scene is one of the most magnificent that has ever been produced on any stage. With its profusion of roses . . . , its groups of musicians and dancers, its rich carpets, and marble columns, it will doubtless recall to memory the famous description of Trimalchio's supper in the "Satiricon".³⁴

The Pelican, to supplement the performance and significantly increase potential audiences' experience of the scene, ran a column that explained Roman banqueting practices. The similarities between Tree's production and the aspects discussed in this "educational" publicity suggest coordination with H Majesty's Theatre's management

³³Tree's most spectacular banquet scene was probably the one produced for the 1910 production of Shakespeare's Henry VIII. Set in a reproduction of the banqueting hall at Hampton Court Palace, the tables were set with over 235 properties including fruit bowls, cold dishes, a boar's head, fish, sweet, goblets, knives and plates. According to Michael Booth, "the gold plate that gleamed from tables and dressers was particularly impressive, shining in the light of an ambler lime spot assigned to the dressers throughout the scene." Booth, 141. The 1904 production of The Tempest featured a more ephemeral banquet: it disappeared on Prospero's command.

³⁴The Daily News, 24 January 1906.

team eager to enhance the imagination of the spectators while in the process historicizing the production with fact. The columnist concludes by drawing a parallel between the Romans and the Edwardians, converging ancient and contemporary experience:

Altogether the Romans seem to have done themselves uncommonly well, and saving for the fact that modern diners wear starched shirts and black clothes and sit in stiff backed chairs and the ancients garbed themselves in easy fitting garments of many colours and reclined on divans, there does not seem to be any striking amount of difference between dinner chez Nero and dinner at, say—well, fill in the blank with your own favourite and particular restaurant in Town.³⁵

Ironically, Nero self-consciously represented the means of its own production, within its language explaining the theatrical nature of banquets. Reviewing the menu in front of the Imperial court, Nero uses the banquet as an opportunity to display his keen aesthetic awareness, an awareness firmly grounded in exotic taste. Because the play was written specifically for Tree, the scene comments ironically on the philosophy behind his production style as well:

Nero:	<p>You understand that in the perfect feast To please the palate only is not art. But we should minister to the eye and the ear With colour and with music. First introduce The embattled oysters with a melody Of waves that wash a reef (<u>Courtiers sigh</u>)</p>	whence do they come?
Steward:	From Britain, sir.	
Nero:	<p>From Britain? Britain is justified: she gives us oysters (<u>slight laugh from COURTIERs</u>) And therefore Claudius invaded her.</p>	

³⁵The Pelican, 31 January 1906.

(General laugh)
 (turning and looking at menu through eye-glass)
 Sausages upon silver gridirons?

Steward: Yes.

Nero: Dormice with poppies and milk honey,
 (A COURTIER who is standing down R. gives a hearty
 laugh. NERO turns very annoyed and gives him a long
 look through the eye-glass. COURTIER gets very
 nervous, his face twitching, then exits down R. NERO
 looking after him)

Nero: He is dead! - There
 A slumbrous music, heavy lingering chords.
 Opimian wine, a hundred years in age,
 Cooled with pure snow, raped from some Virgin Alp.

Steward: (still holding up Menu) 'Twas not forgot.

Nero: Then glorying peacocks:
 (rising and turning to Musician)
 here a sounding march,
 Something triumphal – even a trifle loud.
 (going up then turning suddenly)
 And, ah! the mullets! You've forgotten them!

Steward: (terrified) O, Caesar, no!

Nero: (leaning on ANICETUS' shoulder R.C.)
 Let these be introduced
 By some low dirge. And let us see them die
 Slow dying mullets within crystal bowls
 Dying from colour unto colour: first
 Vermillion death pangs fading into blue –
 A scarlet agony in azure ending.

Courtiers: Ah! Caesar (ALL bow)

Nero: Here we have colour! And last the tongues
 Of nightingales. What music there?
 (ALL come round)
 The tongues of nightingales
 Ah! silence with the tongues of nightingales.

Courtiers: Wonderful! Oh Caesar! (II,12)

By staging a procession of food for the banquet as if he were arranging a stage procession, complete with orchestral scoring and carefully thought-out color schemes, Nero merged a theatrical aesthetic with the actual practice of consumption. In fact, his staging indicates that Nero's aesthetics is grounded in somatic consumption to start. However, though it reveals its own theatrical "technology," it did not do so with Marxist intentions. Rather, the overt theatricalism of the banquet only leads to greater stimulation, increasing the culinary power of the spectacle. Nero's construction of the banquet appeals to the entire range of senses to be satisfied as a result of this feast; the actual consumption of the food will be enhanced further by aural and visual stimulation. For audience members in the theater, of course, aural and visual stimulation were the only types of consumption possible. By assigning specific theatrical signs (a certain type of music, a visual cue) to each food item before the actual banquet, when audiences saw or heard the cue, their visual or aural consumption could be enhanced by the imagined oral consumption thus increasing their experience as well. Nero's staging of the banquet was also clearly a performance for the attending courtiers. He displayed his own keen aesthetic awareness purposing a desired affect to be produced on those watching. In other words, Nero conflated aesthetic discrimination with eating by theatricalizing his "taste." Aesthetic awareness is buttressed by the power to consume.

All efforts then, from the publicity to the text itself, were marshalled to increase the experience of this scene. Audiences would be stimulated on all levels. The effect of

this stimulating experience, however, for one character at least proved fatal thus dramatically underscoring the effect of the spectacle on the bodies of the participants.

After Agrippina's public and politically threatening renunciation of Nero in favor of his step-brother Britannicus, Nero revised the staging of the banquet in order for it to conceal the murder of his younger rival:

I have conceived — not fully — but conceived
 The death-scene of the boy Britannicus.
 It shall be done —
 Tonight at supper: get you seats:
 It shall be something new and wonderful
 Done after wine and under falling roses
 And there shall be suspense in it and thrill:
 It shall be very sudden, very silent,
 And terrible in silence —
(crosses and stands with one foot on fountain)
 I the while
 Creator and arranger of the scene,
 Reclining with a jewel at my eye.
 This you may deem as yet a little crude,
 But other details I will add ere supper. (II,23)

Seneca, one of the men to whom Nero speaks, remarks as he is dismissed, "His eyes now! Yet how calm!/So steals the panther, stirring not a leaf!" Alone, Nero constructs the scene in pantomime, anticipating the experience in dumb show as he works out the details of the murder.

Nero, feigning reconciliation, invites Agrippina and Britannicus to the banquet and, when they arrive, leads them and Nero's silent wife Octavia (Britannicus' sister) to favored positions at his table. Nero orders the banquet to begin, causing a range of cascading activity transforming the space:

Nero: The feast! The feast! (claps his hands twice)
(GONG HEARD OFF: TWO CENTURIANS enter at back
and remove throne and footstool back to L.C. of platform.
TWO STANDARD-BEARERS who stand on steps L. & R.,

then NUBIAN CHIEF & FAN-BEARER carrying couch which they place C. TWO MUSICIANS who cross L. & R. with tapers lighting braziers. Then FIRST MUSICIAN followed by FIVE OTHERS who cross R.C. The TWO who have been lighting braziers exit with their tapers, then re-enter and join the other SIX. TWO GLADIATORS enter and stand back C. joining the TWO who have now come from behind the columns. ENTER from down L. & R. NUBIANS & STEEL GAURDS and set couches and tables . . . GUESTS enter from down R. & L. simultaneously. NERO receives them all, talking to them here and there . . .) (II,25)

Once everyone and everything is set, including Nero at the Royal table, the banquet begins just as Nero staged it:

(. . . MUSIC CHANGES. ENTER from down L. NUBIANS, carrying dishes which they present to NERO in the following order and then hand them to MAIDS who enter down R. and serve them round.)

(Oysters; Sausages on silver gridirons – two; Fish; Eggs; 2 Peacocks; Liver; Asparagus; lobster; Mulletts carried by 2 NUBIANS. After presenting them to NERO they cross down R. of fountain and across off down L. Tongue of Nightingales. At entrance of Tongues of Nightingale, NERO raises his hand and says Sh!! MUSIC ceases – dead silence, NERO speaks:-)

Nero: Silence for the tongues of Nightengales! (II,25)

At the clash of cymbals four women dressed as Nubian dancers enter, prostrate themselves in front of Nero and begin to dance. When they have finished, with a characteristic gesture Nero scatters gold among the guests.

Nero invites Britannicus to sing:

We have been pleased with odour and with dance,
Let us regale the mind: we all have heard
How our brother, Prince Britannicus,
Can stir alike to laughter and to tears
In passionate recital: if it please you,
I would entreat from him some scene or song.

(a general MURMUR of pleasure)

But first more wine, and let the roses fall.

(MUSIC. NERO brings BRITANNICUS down stage R. of fountain. Petals fall from front bridge and through holes in ceiling. FOUR NUBIANS, two each side, enter with wine-coolers and place them R. & L. down stage and EXIT again. ATTENDANTS re-enter at L. and waits as foot of steps with a jub of wine) (II,27)

Before he begins, however, Nero offers Britannicus wine from his chalice. When

Britannicus protests that the wine is too hot, Nero orders it cooled with snow which

Nero arranged to be poisoned. Britannicus innocently drinks the deadly wine.

Britannicus begins his song, sweetly lamenting his discarded state in a thinly disguised ballad of an exiled prince:

I, by a brother's cunning dispossessed
Crave for these languid limbs a place of rest.
Pity me robbed of all.

(BRITANNICUS gives a cry and falls headlong on steps. ALL GUESTS applaud.) (II,28)

The guests, ignorant of the murder, attribute Britannicus' strange conclusion of his performance to a seizure. The banquet resumes in full force. Nero exclaims, "More wine! Continue with the feast!" Loud music begins and more dancers enter with clashing cymbals. It was a stunning moment as the prone body of Britannicus was buried in an eruption of spectacular activity. He was literally consumed by the feast. Rose petals deluged the stage. All are abruptly silenced, however, when Agrippina discovers that the body of Britannicus does not move. The guests hastily leave the Great Hall. Center stage, Agrippina and Nero confront each other:

Arippina: What hast thou done! What art thou!

Nero: Mother, I am thy son!
(Red petals fall between them, and instinctively they recoil from each other) (II,28)

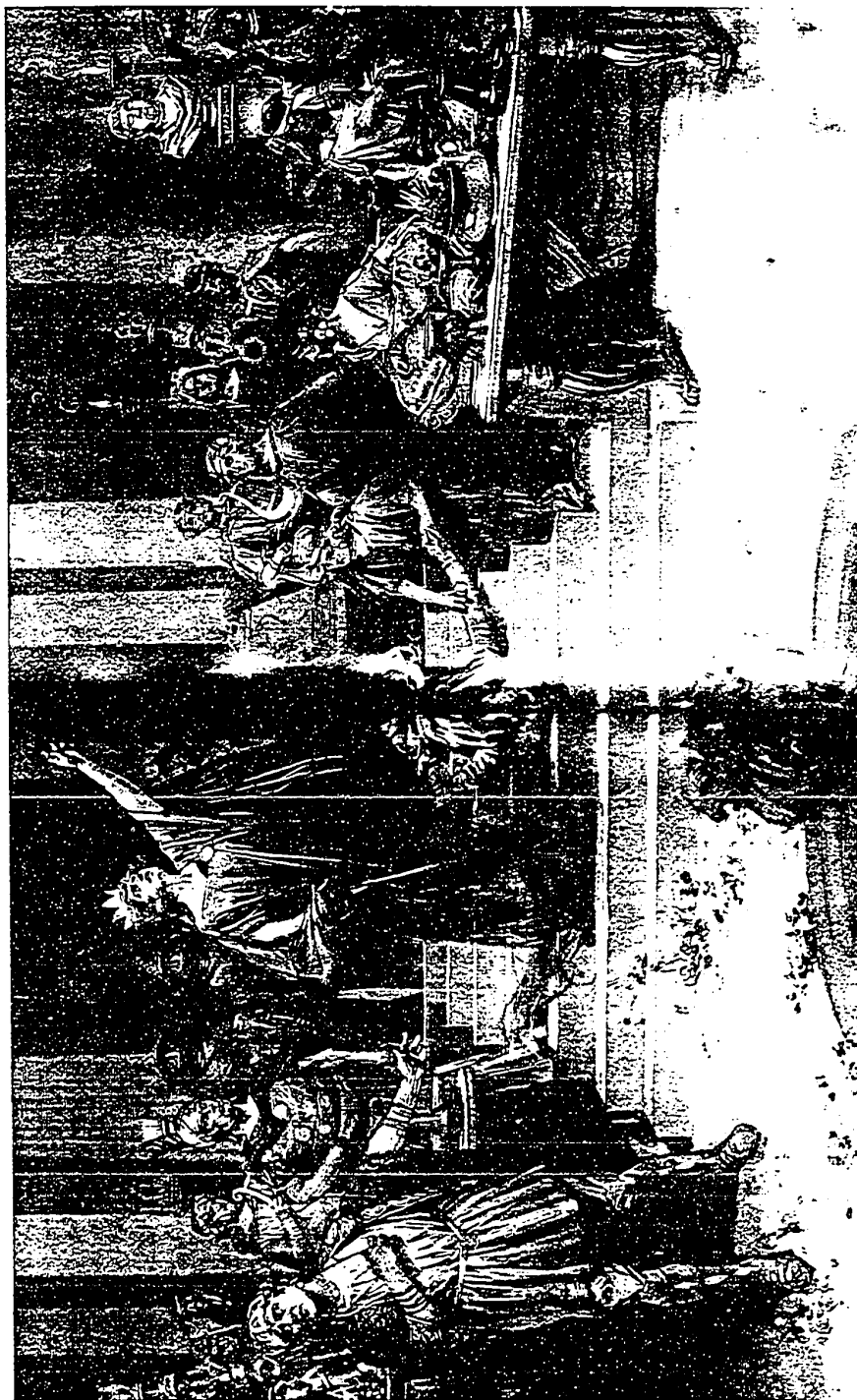


Figure 2. The death of Britannicus (Illustrated London News, 3 February 1906)

The Commodity-Filled Mise-en-Scène

The theatrical performance of Nero, like any other theatrical performance, was a semiotic apparatus: a complex assemblage of props, actors, costume, gestures and language generating meaning. The term *mise-en-scène* is used to indicate not only this system of signs, but more importantly the assembling of signs into a perceivable meaning. The term's translation "putting-into-scene/putting-on-the stage" can be further translated, then, as "putting-into-meaning."

The construction of a *mise-en-scène* of a theatrical performance begins with the interaction of text and spectacle. A coming together of these two systems of signs and the various sub-systems that comprise them, the *mise-en-scène* is both a spatial and temporal signifying operation. According to Patrice Pavis:

In the theatre, enunciating the text always means creating tension between it and what is shown on the stage, polarizing it between various sources of enunciation, spatializing the spoken word and conflicts--individual or collective--in a polyphony of sources of emission.³⁶

In other words, the *mise-en-scène* is more than the physical scenery, props and costumes used on stage and more than the specified locale the stage space works to represent (although these elements are its principal foundation), but rather the result of scenery, props and costume representing locale *placed in action* through their interaction with characters and events as articulated by the text. It is, Pavis doubly asserts, a semiological activity:

1. *Mise-en-scène* is semiological analysis in practice: hence the difficulty of talking about it *after* the event in a coherent metalanguage.

³⁶Patrice Pavis, Languages of the Stage (New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1982), 147.

2. Semiological analysis is a *mise-en-scène* (in space and in a system) of certain signs received from the performance.³⁷

More importantly, the *mise-en-scène* operates by drawing together several different codes (textual, spectacular, spatial and temporal, gesture and decor, for instance) and combines them into its own code, representing a fictional "world."

According to semiotician Keir Elam:

At each moment the spectator will have to assimilate perceptual data along diverse channels, perhaps conveying identical information (e.g. simultaneous pictorial and linguistic references to the scene of action) but transmitting different kinds of signal-information. The first characteristic of this discourse is thus its semiotic *thickness*.³⁸

The *mise-en-scène*, then, is a hybrid signifier working to establish a cohesive (or potentially dissonant) constellation of signifying codes feeding the dominant code of the "world" represented on stage. According to Pavis it is "a type of relationship between stage systems (such as decor, actor, music, etc.); it appears not as a miraculous fusion of different arts (music, painting, poetry, etc.) but as a combination of *codes*."³⁹ For Anne Uebersfeld, the spectator is bombarded:

As a matter of fact, there is no time to waste: the image is snatched from the torrent of signs, stolen from time; it is being done and undone at the same time, and the construction of the theatrical image (audio-visual) is an acrobatic pleasure.⁴⁰

³⁷Pavis, 134.

³⁸Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theater and Drama* (1980; London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 45.

³⁹Pavis, 138.

⁴⁰Anne Uebersfeld, "The Pleasure of the Spectator," *Modern Drama* 25.1 (1982): 130.

Because the *mise-en-scène* is a semiological activity, an exchange of meaning, both the senders and the receivers share in its construction as the meaning sent must be re-interpreted by those who receive it. Thus the audience perceiving the *mise-en-scène* finishes the job begun by the producers. In other words, the subjects who engage the *mise-en-scène* include not only the inhabitants of its space, both the characters in the drama and the objects that surround them, but also—and perhaps more significantly—the spectators who receive the stage significations and who are, as Pavis asserts, the ones who actually structure the *mise-en-scène* by completing its signifying practice as they perceive it and make sense of their perceptions:

From this point on, the *mise-en-scène* is no longer (or at least no longer entirely) an indication of the intentionality of the director, but a structuring by the spectator of materials presented, certainly, according to certain guidelines, but whose linking together is dependent on the perceiving subject. This notion of *mise-en-scène* operates a radical transformation, moving from the finalized exterior object to the structuring effort of the perceiving subject. It has become a structural principle of organization which generates and creates the performance from projects/propositions of the stage and responses/choices of the audience.⁴¹

In *Nero* the *mise-en-scène* signifies Imperial Rome, but draws from a variety of codes available to Edwardian spectators such as a Roman architecture, decor and lifestyles revealed through popularized archeology, Victorian classical-subject painting, other spectacular melodramas, verse drama, and the late-Victorian dramatic fad for "Toga Plays." Spectators also used codes drawn from Edwardian consumerism,

⁴¹Pavis, 138. According to Uebersfeld, "Theatrical perception, as we have seen, is a 'bricolage' in the technical sense of the word; it is made up of bits and pieces; it builds for another use—that of each spectator—a new ensemble with the pieces of the preceding ones a tableau, the verbal exchange and the gestures of two actors confronting each other, a lighting effect. The stage-director can only prepare the elements for possible combinations; he [sic.] cannot predetermine the combination itself, which is the work of each spectator. The spectator enjoys the specifically theatrical pleasure of doing "his [sic.] own thing" with the elements offered to him. [sic.]" Uebersfeld, 131.

principally those representing the body and the availability of goods. Constructing a Roman mise-en-scène for a British bourgeois metropolitan public, then, began with close attention to archeological detail without compromising sensuality.

The classical-subject paintings of Alma-Tadema represent the ideal the scene painters for Tree's production hoped to achieve. Alma-Tadema's paintings of middle-class Romans in domestic settings appealed to a late Victorian public who easily saw themselves as the veiled subject of Alma-Tadema's work since the Roman citizens looked remarkably English. The popularity of Alma-Tadema's work resulted from this mix of Victorian and Roman codes. According to art historian Jennifer Lovett, Alma-Tadema's paintings, "reinforced the Victorian notion that imperial Britain was a contemporary reflection of the great Roman Empire." Thus, "through images of glorious antiquity peopled with everyday Londoners, the view was not only connected to a literary and artistic tradition, but to the grandeur of the Roman Empire itself."⁴²

Alma-Tadema's paintings also introduce a theatrical code into their composition making them appear like stage settings. Alma-Tadema was no stranger to the genre of late-Victorian toga plays. Commissioned by Henry Irving in 1879 to design the scenery for Coriolanus (not to be realized on stage until much later), he continued to design scenery for Irving throughout the 1880s and later worked with Tree on his 1898 production of Julius Caesar. No doubt the actor-managers recognized the inherently melodramatic and beguiling style in Alma-Tadema's painting. According to Lovett,

⁴²Jennifer Lovett, "A Life Colored by Art" Empires Restored, Elvysium Revisited: The Art of Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema ed. Jennifer Lovett and William R. Johnston (Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1991), 17.

The vehicle for this seduction of the viewer was classical subject matter skillfully rendered with precise detail and archeological veracity infused with a modicum of sentimentality. It invited the viewer to become involved in the narrative, for Victorian audiences reveled in mystery and ambiguity. They enjoyed "reading" pictures and interpreting their hidden but suggested meanings.⁴³

However, most likely the combination of sentiment, pomp, opulence and sensuality appealed the most to Edwardian art audiences and theater-goers.

Alma-Tadema's painting Spring, for example, crowds a narrow passage between massive architectural forms with a procession of youths and maids carrying banners and bedecked with flowers. Barefoot young girls lead the way carrying baskets of brightly colored blooms accompanied by young women in thinly draped garments showing the contours of their bodies and revealing their pale flesh. Even the marble of the architecture seems fleshy with its deeply veined, smooth surface.

The designs of Nero were supervised by Percy Macquoid and carried out by Joseph Harker and Henry Emden, with Harker responsible for the principal scenes. The sets mimicked Alma-Tadema's popular style and its attention to sensual archeological correctness. The Sketch promised before opening night, "Not only is everything to be on the most lavish scale, but it is to be as accurate as patient and erudite research can make it."⁴⁴ Most critics remarked on the luxuriousness of the settings, the magnificence of the designs and the liberal use of color. The Era states, "So superb was the mounting of the play that a special notice is needed to do it justice. The beauty and the magnificence of

⁴³Lovett, 17.

⁴⁴The Sketch, 24 January 1906.



Figure 3. Spring by Sir Laurence Alma-Tadema

the scenes were overpowering, the luxurious life of the Roman Emperors being brought before us in all its lavish splendour."⁴⁵ According to the Daily Telegraph,

It would be difficult to say which of the pictures presented on the stage is the better or the more satisfying to the eye. The palace of the Caesars in the first two acts, relatively bare and cold when the drama commences, and after five years with gilded pillars and decorations of rose wreaths, is completed by the gorgeous spectacle of a supper party with Eastern dancing girls and all the artistic luxury of a degenerate Rome. Nor is Nero's villa at Baiae a less beautiful scene. We look across the bay, with all the twinkling lights of evening, and find ourselves engrossed in one of the great dramatic episodes of the play.⁴⁶

According to the Daily Graphic the scene painters successfully achieved the Alma-Tadema style. "... again and again one is fascinated by the scenes, which are like a brilliant series of Alma Tadema pictures, exquisite in colouring and beauty."⁴⁷

The Imperial palaces designed for the production of Nero provided the architectural base for the unfolding action. For the most part they consisted of platforms arching the upper portions of the stage space (one of the first in London to have been built without the traditional rake thus facilitating the construction of three-dimensional sets) with built-up pieces painted to resemble Roman architectural forms, usually columns and balustrades. More spacious than the drawing-room sets used in the popular society dramas of the day, they were dressed with furniture pieces as needed and contained the props necessary to signify abundance but for the most part they were kept empty enough to be filled with the onsurge of supers and the props they carried.

⁴⁵The Era, 27 January 1906.

⁴⁶Daily Telegraph, 26 January 1906.

⁴⁷Daily Graphic, 26 January 1906.

The platforms and architectural units, however, only specified a type of grand building. It remained for the backdrop to ultimately represent locale. In Acts I and II the backdrop presented a sprawling view of urban Rome. Steps lead to a platform upstage containing balustrades "opening on the air, whence a view of the City can be obtained."⁴⁸ In Act III for Nero's palace at Baiae, the backdrop represented an idyllic pastoral landscape of "extreme southern richness and serenity" suggesting water gently lapping close to the terrace and a curving bay in the distance with villas and temples "as in the pictures of Claude or Turner."⁴⁹ The critic for The Queen was moved by this scene more than others:

. . . and what a scene that is, a triumph of scenic art, the purple and blue waters of the Bay of Naples [sic.], the sunshine blazing, and the village nestling against the cliffs, the whole effect aided by the tone of shade of the foreground cast by the majestic branches of a huge cedar tree which obscures the greater part of the sky.⁵⁰

In both cases, these backdrops function more than mere settings against which the centralized mise-en-scène plays out. They enter the space of the action. The effect was noted by the critic for the Pall Mall Gazette:

Even when the apartment was comparatively plain and simple, as, for instance, Nero's villa at Baiae, the scene had some cunning touch—here the beautiful

⁴⁸"Nero" promptbook, I,1. Graphic illustrations of this scene that were published in the newspapers contradict somewhat the stage descriptions in the promptbook. Interspersed among the city buildings were shrubs and greenery, most specifically tall, narrow trees. The palace of the Caesars, then, was more suburban than urban, the landscape penetrated by phallic-like nature and the city at a greater distance. Illustrated London News, 3 February 1906; Daily Graphic, 26 January 1906; The Daily Chronicle, 26 January 1906.

⁴⁹"Nero" Promptbook, III,1.

⁵⁰The Queen, [January 1906].

turmoil of blue waters pictured in the distance—that filled the stage with enchantment.⁵¹

But the backdrops also provided an imposing threat to the onstage space. Containing potential disruption to the architecturally fortified stage space, particularly the representation of urban sprawl, these sites surround the action on stage and threaten its continuation. This imminent threat was perhaps the most dramatically realized with the conflagration of Rome at the conclusion of the performance.

The physical space of the performance was an active participant in the drama, actively signifying its part of the *mise-en-scène*. In particular, by transforming the stage space, Tree and his production designers were able to indicate temporal progression and character development. The change of the Great Hall of the Caesars dramatically illustrated Nero's slide into decadence. In Act I the set represented the stoic austerity of Claudius. However, five years into the reign of Nero, when Act II begins, this space was remarkably transformed showing, as indicated in the promptbook, "signs of profusion and decadence." The back cloth was changed to reveal gilded caps and bases to columns while a more elaborate stage cloth was laid out on the stage floor. Center stage was a low marble fountain while on the upper platform were set seven tables with seven fruit dishes and seven bowls of flowers (presumably one dish and one flower bowl per table), twenty plates and twenty drinking cups in anticipation of the banquet scene that ended the Act. Three busts of Nero were placed on pedestals on stage: down right a bust of Nero as Apollo, up right one of Nero as a charioteer, and up left a bust of Nero as a young boy signifying his vanity. The two braziers from Act I have been

⁵¹Pall Mall Gazette, 26 January 1906.

turned around to reveal their gilded side. Four more have been added on the upper platform. Burrus, one of Nero's military ministers, laments the change in the room, driving home the connection between space and character:

Ah, Seneca, five years since Nero climbed
The Throne: and in this very chamber now
So changed: this odour—Pah! This then was the place
Grim, bare, for military virtues apt. (II,3)

Seneca, the poet and philosophic counselor to the Emperor, replies:

And he how changed! The boy who dreamed so high
Of mightiest empire and unmeasured peace
All I had taught him lost: by flattery sapped
Jeweled and clothed as from the Orient
He sings and struts with dancers and buffoons. (II,3)

With the set for Nero's Villae at Baiae, Tree and his production team demonstrated a temporal change through lighting, a novel technique at the time. The same set was used for both evening and morning, giving Tree the opportunity to show off the implementation of the still novel electric technology and its ability to represent a natural environment. This was a favorite trick of Tree's. In his production of Much Ado About Nothing, audiences witnesses—without interruption—the progression from dusk to dawn interpolated as an interlude to a scene.⁵² And in Herod, the curtain descended

⁵²Barbara Kachur describes how Tree in Much Ado About Nothing underscored this lighting effect with its own musical score. "The music began with a graceful strain suggesting the stillness of night as the stage moonlight dwindled to darkness and noises of owls and nightingales resounded from the wings. Then came the bell signalling first two then three o'clock as the first signs of light appeared suggesting a few hours before dawn with its 'cold slate color' that warmed slowly to pearl grey. Next the clock struck four and 'a faint lemon tinge' crept in, changing to 'a saffron sky . . . over [the] purple horizon' as soft, sonorous music continued with intermittent sounds of the chanticleer. At length the stage became flooded with 'a golden glow' of sunshine that illuminated the picturesque woodland glade as a myriad of noises—barking dogs, twinkling cow bells, blasting hunters' horns—signified the start of the following morning's activities." Barbara Kachur, Herbert Beerbohm Tree: Shakespearean Actor-Manager, diss, The Ohio State University, 1986, 282. Kachur took her description from the newspaper reviews. Their use of

on a tableau of the grief-stricken King, transfixed in mourning for his dead wife in daylight, then rose again to reveal the King in the same pose but in evening night, suggesting the length of time Herod remained in that position.

In Pavis' description of the *mise-en-scène* a variety of codes come together in its not-quite-fused construction. Tree's elaborate sets were constructed from a similar conglomeration of piecemeal elements. The scene plots—which detail the actual pieces used to construct the set—no longer exist for Tree's production of Nero nor are there photos of the space though renderings appeared in the illustrated weeklies when the production opened. Another Phillips ancient world spectacle, Ulysses, however, may suggest the size of Nero's set. Boasting of seven different scenes—each a combination of painted clothes and built, three-dimensional sets—when taken apart and stored this 1902 production became a giant zig-saw puzzle of over 130 separate pieces for the built-up portions (wings, balustrade units, steps, rock and various pieces of scenic structures) and 35 painted clothes such as borders, painted gauzes, stage clothes and backdrops. The photo of the stage set for Herod, also by Phillips and produced by Tree in 1900, shows how all the pieces fit together to create the complete stage picture. Herod, in fact, was a much simpler production than Ulysses. It consisted of only one set with a change of scene conveyed through a change of lighting.

Nero might be considered to be somewhere between the two in terms of the amount of scenery. Not representing the exotic locales of Ulysses, Nero boasted of 6 separate stage scenes, two of which were large, open (and therefore simpler) spaces, two

consumable goods to indicate color—slate, pearl, lemon, saffron and gold—indicates how even the light signified consumption.

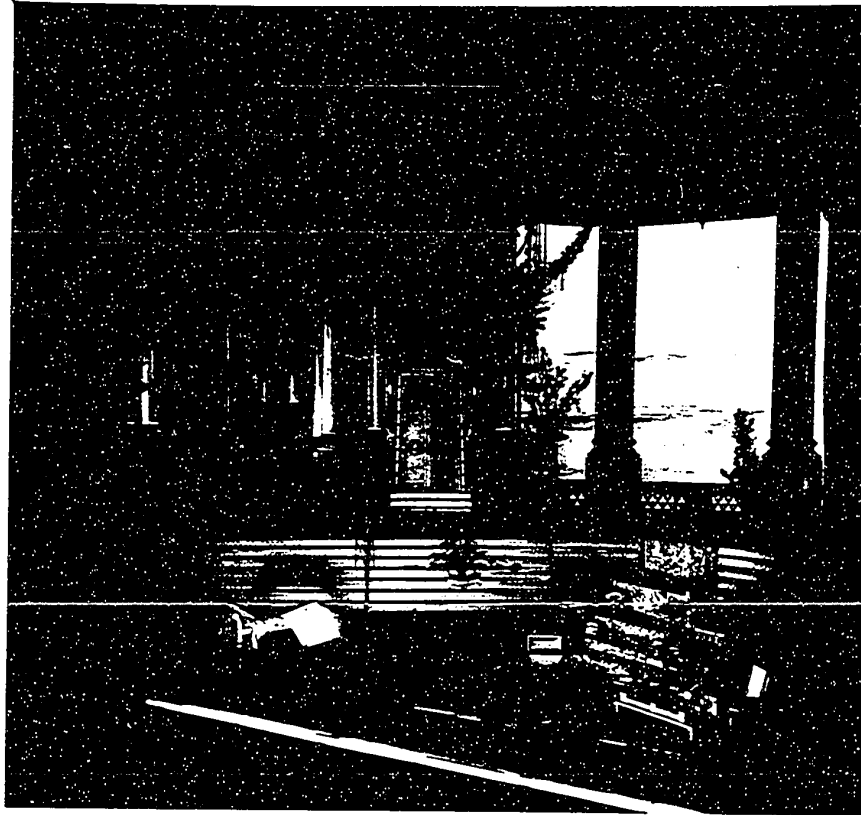


Figure 4. The stage set for Herod (University of Bristol Theater Collection)

probably created with painted stage clothes and a few set pieces, one scene representing a street in Rome, and another a room high up in Nero's palace from which he watched the city burn.

But the *mise-en-scène* was constructed not only with physical material but with signifying material as well, and the intersection of these two constructive units occurred in the properties. Props on-stage resembling commodities off-stage, as argued above are simultaneously physical and semiotic. Thus, chiefly through the use of properties, commodity-laden *mise-en-scène* was built.

Roman Crowds: Properties and Supers in Abundance

An object, according to Roland Barthes, "serves man to act upon the world, to modify the world, to be in the world in an active fashion; the object is a kind of mediator between action and man."⁵³ But for Barthes, the mediating function is not delimited by what is termed the object's "use value." Rather, objects carry a semiotic value as well. This, for Barthes, becomes the paradox of the object:

The paradox I want to point out is that these objects which always have, in principle a function, a utility, a purpose, we believe we experience as pure instruments, whereas in reality they carry other things, they are also something else: they function as the vehicle of meaning: in other words, the object effectively serves some purpose, but it also serves to communicate information; we might sum it up by saying that there is always a meaning which overflows the object's use.⁵⁴

⁵³Roland Barthes, "Semantics of the Object," *The Semiotic Challenge* trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1988), 181.

⁵⁴Barthes, 182.

For Barthes, an object's denotive function, its useful purpose, obscures its connotative operation, its discursive signification. To reveal the object's signification, Barthes recommends a detached, critical view similar to Brechtian alienation:

[I]f we are to study the meaning of objects, we must give ourselves a sort of shock detachment, in order to objectivize the object, to structure its signification: to do this, there is a means which every semanticist of the object can use; it is to resort to an order of representations in which the object is presented in a simultaneously spectacular, rhetorical, and intentional fashion, which is advertising, the cinema, or even the theater.⁵⁵

One could argue, especially the theater. Barthes seems to at least adapting Brecht's point:

. . . for the law of the theater is that it is not sufficient that the object represented be real, its meaning must also be somehow detached from reality: it is not enough to offer the public a really worn peddler-woman's jacket in order for it to signify wear-and-tear; you must invent, as a director, the signs of wear-and-tear.⁵⁶

Objects in the theater, then, as States similarly noted are both objects and the signs of objects—their tangibility emphasized by their encounter with the actor's live bodies, their semiotic value emphasized by their contribution to the *mise-en-scène*. While they help "set the scene" they frequently resist becoming entirely consumed into the theatrical semiotic systems, their objectivity, like lead, keeping them grounded. A savvy producer might take advantage of this objectivity. The tangible, useful purpose of objects, their denotivity, "objectifies" the *mise-en-scène*, arguing for its "realness" even if that argument may be a semiotic project as well. Not only did Tree use realism as an excuse to crowd his stage with objects, he used objects to argue for the realism of his

⁵⁵Barthes, 184.

⁵⁶Barthes, 185.

scenes. Emphasizing both their tangible qualities, but also when appropriate their historical qualities as artifacts, the props he placed on display authenticated his *mis-en-scène* even as they contributed to its representation.

The properties specified in the promptbook for Nero include a wide array of objects used to signify the glory and decadence of imperial Rome. Braziers, statuary, plates, cups, couches, exotic food, jewels, toiletries and cosmetics, even live horses driving a chariot were paraded across the stage in an attempt not only to construct the Roman scene, but also to make the *mise-en-scène* more real by their objectivity. While some critics faulted Tree for "over-stuffing" his productions, for many potential audience members Tree's use of properties constituted the principal attraction. In the pre-production publicity, Percy Macquoid promised a variety of props, an indication of their power to sell the production:

[A]ll kinds of furniture and ornaments [will be presented]: litters, tables, candelabra, wine-coolers, fountains, gold and silver plate in bewildering profusion. The various dishes [for the banquet scene] will be served just as they were in Nero's time. The peacock will be brought on the table in full plumage, and the sausage on the silver gridiron, as described by the contemporary of the Roman decadence.⁵⁷

Without existing property plots for Nero, a close estimation of number of properties used in performance cannot be known. However, for Ulysses the plot itemized over 120 separate objects. There were, however, more likely over 200 separate items, since the plot is rather vague on some of the numbers, particularly when it came to the food items. Each object used on stage, like the painted backdrops, specified locale, spatial and historical. Most were reproductions of original objects Tree's

⁵⁷The Daily News, 24 January 1906.

designers found in the British Museum, as Percy Macquoid assured audience members in the program: "Much of [Nero's] furniture," he wrote supplementing the stage props by citing their originals, "was of silver, bronze, or of wood overlaid with tortoiseshell and ivory, and inlaid with silver, so fine that it surpasses the work of the most skilled craftsmen of the eighteenth century."⁵⁸ Macquoid authenticated the spectacle of the Roman banquet with another citation of originals:

It is needless to describe the details of the Roman banquet. All parts of the world were ransacked for delicacies to be offered on these occasions, and the astounding expense of these entertainments was only equalled by the abnormal gastronomy of the guests. The tables, couches, plate, etc., used in the banquet scene, are an exact reproduction of those contemporary with Nero, whose banqueting hall was circular with revolving panels in the ceiling, through which flowers were scattered upon the feasters.⁵⁹

By implication, at least through the stage representation, Tree has ransacked the world and incurred an astounding expense to satisfy the "abnormal gastronomy" of his guests. Macquoid concludes by claiming the roman properties are the rightful inheritance of the British public. Thus the props not only provide an objective representation of ancient Rome, their tangibility bridged the temporal gap. "The personal possessions of these wonderful people have come down to us," he wrote, "their sculptures, mosaics, furniture, baths, plate, jewellery, and even toys and dolls, teaching us that their civilization was but little removed from our own."⁶⁰ Even outside the representation, the abundant properties signaled for Tree, the producer, a sign of status. As Veblen put

⁵⁸"Souvenir of Nero," performance program, University of Bristol Theatre Collection, The Beerbohm Tree Collection.

⁵⁹"Souvenir of Nero."

⁶⁰"Souvenir of Nero."

it, "So far as concerns the present question, the end sought by accumulation is to rank high in comparison with the rest of the community in point of pecuniary strength."⁶¹

Certain props stood out with increased semiotic value, taking on greater dramatic significance as they communicated condensed aspects of the *mise-en-scène* or revealed telling character traits while infecting the surrounding space with their codes. When Nero returned from the theater after performing costumed as Apollo, he carried a lily signifying his aesthetic proclivities. The lily, specifically indicated in the promptbook as "real," is anachronistic, making a specific reference to the aesthetes of the 1880s who were often characterized in rapturous adoration of these fragrant flowers. Following a chain of significance, Tree used the lily to connote Nero's sensual, even sexual, decadence since by 1906 these aesthetic young men were deeply associated with the gay sub-culture revealed during the trials of Oscar Wilde of the 1890s, the most famous Victorian aesthete of all. The Pall Mall Gazette makes this implicit comparison explicit, "Nero calls himself not only an artist, but an aesthete, a modern word which, perhaps, guides us to the brilliant but wayward person Mr. Phillips has in mind."⁶² Strangely, the critic prefers Wilde to Nero, indicting the Emperor with the word that trapped Wilde, "He [Nero] is not an artist, nor an aesthete of any substance, but only a *poseur* prolific of phrases such as his prototype might have coined when rather off colour. The last of the Caesars is indeed the last of the dandies."⁶³

⁶¹Veblen, 39.

⁶²The Pall Mall Gazette, 26 January 1906.

⁶³The Pall Mall Gazette, 26 January 1906.

In addition to the lily, Tree used another prop, an emerald eyeglass, to signify Nero's aesthetic consumption.⁶⁴ Tree fashioned this eyeglass into a modern monocle (not unlike the one he used as Malvolio in Twelfth Night) through which he enhanced his critical eye to examine objects more closely. However, the eyeglass not only focused objects for his consumption, it also effectively focused the Emperor's gaze. In one case, an ill-timed and slightly too enthusiastic laugh from a courtier provoked a stare through the eye-glass by an annoyed Emperor. According to the promptbook, the courtier "gets very nervous, his face twitching, then exits down R. Nero looking after him." Nero pronounces, "He is dead," demonstrating the fatality of Nero's gaze.

Gazing, in fact, was an important gesture throughout the play. Frequently characters gaze off into the distance. The opening moments of the play depict an astrologist gazing into the heavens and reading the fate of the Emperor and his mother. Nero gazed at the objects with an aesthetic eye, and, in the specific case of the emerald eye-glass and the unfortunate courtier even gazed through objects. Poppaea, the production's femme fatale, used a mirror to gaze back at herself as she prepared her body to be gazed at. And, in one of the most critical moments of the play when Agrippina crosses the bay in a boat rigged to kill her, the men involved in the plot gaze into the painted, electrically wired starlit bay in a tension-filled effort to witness the event while relaying what they saw to the audience whose vision is obscured.

In short, the characters' gazing mimicked the audience's gazing. The objects on stage were presented for the audience to gaze at as they witnessed the imperial

⁶⁴In popular historical tradition Nero was thought to have used a similar eyeglass. Thus Tree was also displaying his research.

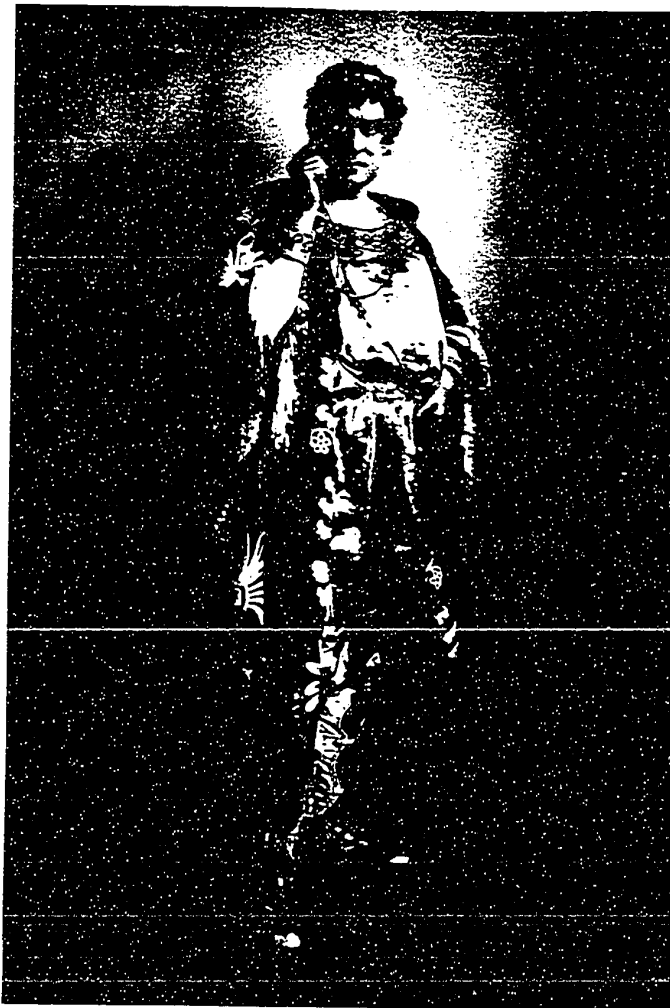


Figure 5. The aesthetic Emperor (University of Bristol Theater Collection)

decadence before them. When the actors used their gaze to actually consume objects, as Nero did with the eye-glass, they re-enforced the consuming gaze of the spectators, in some cases accomplishing for the audience the consumption they are unable to accomplish. Thus in the banquet scene all the audience could do was gaze while the characters were privileged to engage in physical consumption, even if, as in the case of the supers, that consumption was limited to apples and sponge cake scattered among the stage properties.⁶⁵

Another set of props, couches, were used to indicate the domestic Roman interiors. Couches, in fact, appear in almost every scene, frequently as the only furniture pieces. The production began with Claudius lying on a cedarn couch dying. Act III began with Nero discovered in his private chamber reclining on a couch playing a harp while an attendant with a cup of wine stood beside him. But couches in this production, like the eyeglass, had additional significance. While the couch was a sign for Roman interiors, it also functioned as a sign of Roman consuming practices configuring "Romanicity" as a function of both. Romans, according to popularized history, took their meals lying down. According to the pre-performance publicity article that appeared in The Pelican:

[In a Roman banquet,] the guests donned a dinner dress of bright colours, adorned with flowers, before sitting, or, rather, reclining at table. Previous to this, however, they removed their shoes for fear of soiling the couches, which were often inlaid with ivory or tortoiseshell, and covered with cloth of gold. They arranged themselves in an easy attitude, the head resting on the left elbow and supported by cushions. The customary fashion was for three persons to

⁶⁵In the banquet scene in Henry VIII, Tree distributed among the fake property food apples and sponge cake so that the actors could be seen actually eating on stage. See Booth, 142. According to the property lists for Ulysses, for its banqueting scene, "apples and buns abound." "Ulysses" Property Plot, University of Bristol Theater Collection, The Beerbohm Tree Collection.

occupy one couch, the centre being esteemed the place of honour. The dining room was always magnificently decorated, that in one of the palaces of Nero being provided with a species of stage equipped with scenery which changed with every course.⁶⁶

The writer, however, could not resist editorializing about the Roman dining habits:

It rather detracts from the poetry of the scene to learn that each guest in order to dine lay on his breast and stretched out his hand towards the table, usually a circular piece of furniture, around which the couches were placed, and having helped himself turned on his side.⁶⁷

Chiefly offended by the reclining position of the banqueteers, the writer reveals a prudish disgust for pliant bodies, preferring the starched stiff-backed British posture to the loosely draped and reclining Roman. The couches emphasized this difference. Couches change the actor's body position and therefore redirect how their bodies are represented on stage. Bert States argues that the introduction of the chair in the *mise-en-scène* radicalized theatrical production because a chair, which offers the actors a place to sit, to rest their bodies, changes the force of production from rhetorical and declamatory to physical and visual:

. . . to sit is *to be*, to exist suddenly and plentifully in the material world ("I sit, therefore I am *here*"); . . . when characters begin to sit as naturally as they stand, the body comes fully into its own center of a new spatial concern . . . What the chair made possible, in a word, was conversation: casual or exploratory talk leading to tension and crisis; the carving of the true subject out of the seemingly phatic encounter.⁶⁸

Actors, then, become more integrated into the scene around them than was possible when they declaimed their parts standing up. With chairs, however, actors are still

⁶⁶The Pelican, 31 January 1906.

⁶⁷The Pelican, 31 January 1906.

⁶⁸States, 45.

vertical (keeping emphasis on the head and neck) and presumably keeping both feet on the stage. Couches, however, force the actor into a horizontal position (changing the visual emphasis to the mid-section) while lifting their feet from the stage. No longer able to walk off with ease, the actor becomes an object, a reclining body. Further, with principal focus directed at the mid-section the actor becomes an object that consumes. With the couch, then, consumption replaces conversation as the principle dramatic mode; subjects are carved out of a somatic encounter rather than a phatic one. Couches, then, are a sign of bodily consumption whose code infiltrates and reconfigures the very mode of production. Aside from the banquet where all the guests sit on couches, the two actors who are most frequently found reclining on couches are Nero and Poppaea, the production's chief consumers.

Both the couches and the emerald eye-glass are signs of the modality of consumption in the *mise-en-scène* in Nero. In other words, they define how, when and by whom consumption occurs. Pavis argues that as a semiological practice where various stage and dramatic codes come together, the *mise-en-scène* establishes the modality through which codes interact, structuring the "how" and "when" of their organization. "From the very first, the *mise-en-scène* provides a framing device, a modality, and a key to the reading of the fictional world."⁶⁹ But the modality of the *mise-en-scène* is a function of the inhabitants of the fictional world. While the *mise-en-scène* begins with laying out the field of signification, it comes into being only when that field is engaged by signifying subjects who move through it and map its terrain by

⁶⁹Pavis, 147.

their actions. The eye-glass and couches, structuring the consuming practices of the agents in the drama, then, structure how those agents will interact with the surrounding space: whether they will take it in through a jewelled vision or through their bodies. In this sense, Nero's eyeglass and the Roman couches become signs of the modality of the *mise-en-scène* itself: the means of its consumption by gazing, consuming bodies.

In addition to the props, supernumeraries were used as objects in abundance decorating the stage and signifying Roman culture and its Imperial reach. Supers were dressed as Roman citizens (male and female), handmaidens, musicians, gladiators and centurians, senators, Praetorian guardsmen, persecuted Christians, ancient Britons, Parthian tribesmen, Nubian chiefs serving as slaves (usually carrying the Emperor about) and Nubian dancing women entertaining banqueteers. In fact, the supernumeraries as a number were the largest group on stage and offered a chorus of voices and bodies against which Tree could play. The best guess would suggest a cast size of approximately 120. This would include a total of approximately 55 supers, 17 speaking parts, and 30 to 40 Extra gentlemen and ladies.⁷⁰

In a token scene that demonstrated Nero's handling of the business of the Empire, supers portrayed the people under Roman rule. While the governance is

⁷⁰Like the props, the abundance of supers were a sign of status. According to Veblen, "The possession and maintenance of slaves employed in the production of goods argues wealth and prowess, but the maintenance of servants who produce nothing argues still higher wealth and position. Under this principle there arises a class of servants, the more numerous the better, whose sole office is fatuously to wait upon the person of their owner, and so to put in evidence his ability to unproductively consume a large amount of service. There supervenes a division of labor among the servants or dependents whose life is spent in maintaining the honor of the gentleman of leisure. So that, while one group produces goods for him, another group, usually headed by the wife, or chief wife, consumes for him in conspicuous leisure; thereby putting in evidence his ability to sustain large pecuniary damage without impairing his superior opulence." Veblen, 58.



Figure 6. An ancient Briton (University of Bristol Theater Collection)

The Roman Empire represented, however, was not balanced entirely on a mutually reciprocal economic alliance but was further structured on a two-tiered racial hierarchy of nations divided between a white commonwealth and black colonies not unlike the British Empire. Supers costumed as Nubian slaves signaled a colonial imperialism that subjugated darker-skinned people as a mute, servant class.⁷¹ The leopard skins they wore were signs of their barbarism aligning them with the exotic, potentially man-eating, animals of Africa. The black face worn by the caucasian actors who played them, incongruous with their physical features, further detached their skin as the metonymic sign of their difference. According to the critic for The Queen none of the actors' flesh appeared natural, suggesting that all flesh on stage was operating as an independent signifier. The remark indicates the importance of the general quality of flesh on stage to Edwardians. "The fleshings worn are like no skin under the sun, dark or fair, and consequently a certain realism aimed at is discounted by the unnatural flesh tint of what are supposed to be bare legs."⁷² Further, the Nubian servants, like the change of decor, signaled the temptations of imperial decadence. Seductive objects imported from the Imperial dominions, the female Nubian dancers, with their breasts clearly outlined by their costumes, fed Nero's wayward self-indulgence. With the Nubian dancing women, Nero found imperial succour on the commodities of dominion.

⁷¹According to Said, "Without significant exception the universalizing discourses of modern Europe and the United States assume the silence, willing or otherwise, of the non-European world. There is incorporation; there is inclusion; there is direct rule; there is coercion. But there is only infrequently an acknowledgment that the colonized people should be heard from, their ideas known." Said, Culture and Imperialism, 50.

⁷²The Queen, [January 1906]



Figure 7. Nubian dancing women (University of Bristol Theater Collection)

Effective use of crowds both scenically and as an underscore to the action was relatively new to English stages as late as the 1880s and 1890s. Their compositional integration into the stage picture was fairly innovative when Tree began to produce seriously as an actor-manager in the late 1880s, an innovation imported from Germany with the tour of the Duke of Saxe-Meinigen's company in England at that time. By the production of Nero in 1906, crowds were standard fare for large-scale melodramas and Tree had perfected the skill, despite stories of rehearsals at H Majesty's describing near chaos.⁷³

Even though for the most part the crowd functioned as a means of drawing attention to the single figure of Nero, it also proved a potential threat to that focus since so many figures on stage increased the possibility that someone or something might upstage the actor-manager. Well choreographed crowd scenes even in the best of productions never fully work given the fact that most of the individuals hired to play these roles were unskilled. Tree demonstrated his ability as an actor to remain the principal focus of the spectacle in the face of enormous competition.⁷⁴ In addition he

⁷³According to Robert Atkins, engaged as a super, the rehearsal period for Nero, in effect a "turmoil," included "many exciting events." To Atkins, "During the rehearsal weeks for Nero one saw every side of Tree's approach to the production of a play and players. He was magnanimous and petty, stormy and gentle, at times great beauty flooded his mind, childish, and wickedly sarcastic—with it all a great sense of humour. . . . The biting of his finger nails was always a sign of displeasure with a player and the turning his back to the stage and apostrophising the safety curtain was a prelude to tantrums." Robert Atkins, Robert Atkins: An Unfinished Autobiography ed. George Rowell (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1994), 28-29. Atkins played a Roman gentleman cheering the great triumphal entry and a courtier who "dallied with a lady upon a divan and between dallies and ordered interest in the scene ate grapes and drank wine—cold tea." Atkins, 27.

⁷⁴Tree had the help of his stage manager, Cecil King. According to Atkins, "Before the first rehearsal Mr. Cecil King, the stage manager, read a kind of riot act as to our behavior. Punctuality, to keep out of the way when not wanted on the set during rehearsals, no smoking, no watching in the wings, and during the run to remain in our dressing room when not occupied on

demonstrated his ability to take responsibility as a manager for an entire crowd, keeping the crowd from dissolving into the chaos it continually suggests. Burrus' reminder to the audience when the crowd first entered in Act I that the Praetorian guards were silently moving through the streets of Rome assures them that, at least within the world of the play, riot control was in place. Throughout the performance the dissolution of the crowd into chaos was auditorily signaled by their frequent murmurs, the extent to which they were allowed into the verbal discourse of the scene.⁷⁵

The supers as a group function within the *mise-en-scène* as live extensions of the physical space. According to Prague school semiotician Jirí Veltruský supers serve as human props, functioning primarily as part of the set, falling to a "zero level" semiotic value in a hierarchical sign series whose apex is the figure of the actor. Supers serve an important role in the continuum between actor and prop, object and subject:

Human parts of the set can of course no longer in any way be considered active performers. Their reality is likewise depressed to the "zero level," since their constituent signs are limited to the minimum. If we consider what are the carriers of these signs, we see that it usually is their posture, stature, make-up,

the stage, to obey the call boy and not wander along the ladies' corridors—if found doing so without permission, instant dismissal." Atkins, 26. Incidentally, the call boy to be obeyed was the future film star, Claude Rains.

⁷⁵Constance Collier's description of rehearsals at H Majesty's demonstrates Tree's leadership of the group, mysteriously attributing his power to subordinate adoration. His manipulation of crowd's details represents for Collier his productive energy. For Collier, this energy permeates the crowd as it censors. "He [Tree] was absolutely relentless," she writes, "but everybody adored him. He never seemed to want any rest at all. At the dress rehearsals he would keep us up till five or six in the morning, and the men at their posts on the limelight would drop off to sleep, and the actors would lie about in the circle or the boxes. Tree would disappear for hours to have supper or talk over some problem of the play, and return at three or four in the morning. The limelight men would spring to attention, the actors rush down on the stage, full of apologies for daring even to feel sleepy in his presence. And he would be as bright and energetic as ever, with an eye for every detail, every spark of light, every intonation of an actor's voice, infinitely patient when he knew he was getting response, terribly irritated by stupidity of any sort." Constance Collier, *Harlequinade: The Story of My Life* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1929), 95-96.

costume. It follows then that people in these rôles can be replaced by lifeless dummies. Thus people as part of the set form the *transition between the sphere of man and the sphere of the object*.⁷⁶

In effect live objects on stage, they personify the world of goods in which they are a part. They transfer a residue of subjectivity to the properties around them since their own partial subjectivity as non-speaking though animate objects (at least within the world on stage) argues for the potentiality of the subjectivity of all objects. They demonstrate as Veltruský argues that,

the sphere of the live human being and that of the lifeless object are interpenetrated, and no exact limit can be drawn between them. The series beginning with the figure of the actor thus continues without interruption into the sphere of the object.⁷⁷

The Psyche of the Mise-en-Scène: Objects and Subjects Interact

Nero dramatically operates as a character study with the purpose of the mise-en-scène to represent character. A star vehicle for the actor-manager Tree, the production created a spatial portrait of the Emperor Nero. But that spatial portrait, set in a Roman world of conspicuous consumption and constructed through various semiotic apparatus, placed objects and subjects not only in tandem, but merged them along a continuum. The mise-en-scène of Nero, then, argued for the discursive interaction of objects with the subjects that encountered them. In other words, Nero dramatically shows how

⁷⁶. Jirí Veltruský, "Man and Object in the Theater," A Prague School Reader on Esthetics, Literary Structure, and Style trans. Paul L. Garvin (Washington D.C.: Georgetown UP, 1964), 86.

⁷⁷Veltruský, 86.

physical objects impact subject formation and how objects become imbued with subjectivity, as acting agents in a discourse: how the *mise-en-scène* resembles the psyche.

Kaja Silverman explains the significance of the critical category of the "subject" and its effectiveness in the analytical evaluation of cultural discourses:

The term "subject" foregrounds the relationship between ethnology, psychoanalysis, and semiotics. It helps us to conceive of human reality as a construction, as the product of signifying activities which are both culturally specific and generally unconscious.

Once demonstrated to be the product of a construction, the subject is susceptible to further analysis:

The category of the subject . . . calls into question the notions of both the private, and of a self synonymous with consciousness. It suggests that even desire is culturally instigated, and hence collective . . .

She concludes, ". . . by drawing attention to the divisions which separate one area of psychic activity from another, the term 'subject' challenges the value of stability attributed to the individual."⁷⁸

Not only are subjects constructed through culturally specific and ideologically charged signifying practices, "discourse," objects are similarly the products of cultural signification. According to Baudrillard:

The empirical "object," given in its contingency of form, color, material, function and discourse (or, if it is a cultural object, in its aesthetic finality) is a myth. How often it has been wished away! But the object is *nothing*. It is nothing but the different types of relations and significations that converge, contradict themselves, and twist around it, as such—the hidden logic that not only arranges

⁷⁸Kaja Silverman, The Subject of Semiotics (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983), 130.

this bundle of relations, but directs the manifest discourse that overlays and occludes it.⁷⁹

For Baudrillard, commodities are semiotically charged objects, mechanisms administering an exchange, and thus a basic unit for a semiotic political economy. They are fundamentally social, participating alongside subjects in the constitution of culture:

It is because *the structure of the sign is at the very heart of the commodity form* that the commodity can take on, immediately, the effect of signification—not epiphenomenally, in excess of itself, as "message" or connotation—but because its very form establishes it as a total *medium*, as a *system of communication* administering all social exchange.⁸⁰

Thus both subjects and objects exist together in a cultural discourse that unites them.

The mise-en-scène, a semiotic apparatus, constitutes one such discourse placing props, supers, actors, scene and text into a field of interaction through which they emerge as a perceivable structure, a dream world.

In the mise-en-scène objects and acting agents exist along a continuum that connects the prop to the super to the star actor. The Freudian model of the subject explains how that continuum adheres together. In the basic Freudian model, the subject is divided between the ego and the id. The id operates according to the "Pleasure Principle" demanding immediate bodily satisfaction, the ego by the "Reality Principle" strategizing that satisfaction. In one technique the ego, negotiating the id's gratification, puts off the id's demands for an object by interposing itself between the id and the unattainable object through identifying itself as the desired object. The ego's object-identification thus displaces the desired object with a representation. The process not

⁷⁹Baudrillard, 62.

⁸⁰Baudrillard, 146.

only recedes the actual object but contextualizes it within a series of other displacements associatively related. Thus the ego's object-identification not only contains a condensation of the desired object's qualities but the paradigmatic condensation of other previous desired-objects within a discursive syntagm, the displacement, constructed by the ego. At the root of the chain of displacements is the unconscious wish.⁸¹ According to Silverman,

The ego is formed through a series of identifications with objects external to it. Freud argues that each of these identifications follows the same pattern, a pattern whereby an object is first loved and then taken inside the ego in the guise of a visual image, a voice, a set of values, or some other key features. That introjection provides the means whereby the id can be persuaded to renounce the object which has for one reason or another proved inaccessible. The ego refashions itself after that object, and offers itself to the id as a substitute.⁸²

Or, to quote Freud,

the character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes and . . . it contains the history of those object-choices . . . When the ego assumes the features of the object, it is forcing itself . . . upon the id as a love-object and is trying to make good the id's loss by saying: "Look, you can love me too—I am so like the object"⁸³

Thus, the subject develops in relation to the development of the ego, an accumulation of left over object-identifications undergone to satisfy the desires of the id.

⁸¹According to Silverman, "*Condensation* joins together in an abbreviated and highly compressed form selected elements from the dream-thoughts, and more remote memories with which they have some feature in common. It treats affinity as the basis for an absolute identification." On the other hand, "*displacement* makes possible the fulfillment of a repressed desire through a series of surrogate images, since it transfers to the latter the affect which properly belongs to the former. In other words, it obliges elements from the dream-thoughts to stand in for an unconscious wish, investing them with an importance which far exceeds them." Silverman, 91.

⁸²Silverman, 134.

⁸³Sigmund Freud, "The Ego and the Id," qtd Silverman 134.

The ego, and consequently the subject, is the collective result of this repertoire of representations, of objects cathected with condensed and displaced meaning, chained together syntagmatically and paradigmatically. Conversely, as much as the accumulation of object-identifications increasingly defines the subject, the process of representing the objects to the id invests them with qualities that lead to their misrecognition as projections of the ego, as discursive agents. Objects thus become enwrapped in the discourse made by the ego that also defines the subject. The ego and the objects through which it identifies itself become mirror representations of each other and their distinctiveness eludes perception. The ego disappears with the objects behind an infinite series of representations as discourse ensnares them both. Objects act like subjects and subjects like objects.

The desiring id demanding gratification with the surrounding object-world drives the process whereby objects and subjects interact. That the operation mimics shopping in a department store may have come from the historical moment in which it developed where many were bewildered by the explosion of objects available to satisfy everyday needs. As a model, then, it is both a theoretically and historically appropriate explanation for the fascination with commodities and their investment with desire. The merging of objects and subjects in this model is in many ways "sexual," configuring consuming subjects encountering objects that themselves are consuming subjects. Or, to use the terminology of materialist psychologists Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, commodities and consumers both function as "desiring-machines," material and semiotic apparati:

Everywhere *it* is machines—real ones, not figurative ones: machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections.⁸⁴

Territorialization, derived from the theories of Lacan who revised many of Freud's basic concepts, prepares the subject for its distinctive emergence into cultural discourse. For Lacan the subject emerges as a discursive agent by entering into a linguistic system which differentiates the perceived world into distinct units recognized for the first time as external objects. In this recognition, the burgeoning subject also sees its own body as another object in this world that, like the various external objects around it, is representable by discursive signs: "I", "it", "you." The perceived world is semiotically territorialized. Before, the subject existed in a state of non-differentiation, making limited distinctions between itself, its body and the surrounding world.

Silverman summarizes:

Its libidinal flow is directed toward the complete assimilation of everything which is experienced as pleasurable, and there is no recognized boundaries. At this point the infant has the status of what Freud describes as an 'oceanic self,' or what Lacan punningly refers to as 'l'hommelette' (a human omelette which spreads in all directions).⁸⁵

In this territorialization of the world into distinct objects, the emerging subject's body is likewise territorialized. Almost immediately the infant begins to prioritize its libidinal flow through learned distinctions, its mapped body, thus maximizing its pleasure. Through territorializing its body in a fashion subtly taught by its care-givers, the infant distinguishes the most effective regions for the experience of pleasure and

⁸⁴Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (1977; Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1990), 1.

⁸⁵Silverman, 155.

economizes how it takes in pleasure from the world around. These erogenous zones usually develop around a hierarchy of orifices: the mouth, anus, penis/vagina, eyes, ears, and skin. According to Silverman,

The territorialization of the infant's body provides the means whereby the outpouring of libido can be directed and contained. By indicating the channels through which that libido can move, the mother or nurse performs a social service, assists in the conversion of incoherent energy into coherent drives which can later be culturally regulated. Indeed, by organizing the infant's body in relation to its reproductive potential, the mother or nurse already indicates the form which that cultural regulation will take: the orchestration of the drives around sexual difference.⁸⁶

The territorialization of the infant's body begins the process whereby it enters into the more sophisticated scheme of differentiating its environment and ultimately enters into the linguistic cultural discourse (which Lacan called the "Symbolic Order") where it functions as a subject.

Both object-cathexis and territorialization occur in the *mise-en-scène* and explain the dynamics of its object-based semiotics. Both concepts demonstrate how the accumulation of objects and object-identifications (using objects to identify a person, place or time, in other words "to represent") develops the identity of the subject in whose name they are accumulated and further how that subject is differentiated into a discernable, spatial discourse. Each object on stage—property, super, backdrop, or actor—functions as a signifying sub-system, a semiotic machine, that combines and couples with other objects on stage accumulating into the conglomerate semiotic machine, the *mise-en-scène*. Further, certain points in the *mise-en-scène* are prioritized over others to economize the signification of its meaning. Through directorial composition certain

⁸⁶Silverman, 155.

props, areas of the stage, even actors, particular gestures and moments of language are made to speak louder than others: they are given more semiotic force. The subject that moves through this signifying space encounters these semiotic machines and couples them, though identification, with each other and with itself fusing a conglomerate machine that becomes the *mise-en-scène*. The subject both navigates an object-laden terrain and, in turn through the projection of itself throughout this space, exists as a terrain to be mapped.

A similar operation occurs in the consumer's world as well. According to sociologist Grant McCracken:

Let us, for instance, see the consumer as someone engaged in a "cultural project," the purpose of which is to complete the self. The consumer system supplies individuals with the cultural materials to realize their various and changing ideas of what it is to be a man or a woman, middle-aged or elderly, a parent, a citizen, or a professional. All of these cultural notions are concretized in goods, and it is through their possession and use that the individual realizes the notions in his own life.⁸⁷

A room may reveal a "life-style" as an object-laden stage reveals a character. The *mise-en-scène* is the space in which a consuming agent and the objects through which it negotiates emerge together as a subject. For Deleuze and Guattari, the result is the somewhat more delirious though similar "body without organs":

The body without organs, the unproductive, the unconsummable, serves as a surface for the recording of the entire process of production of desire, so that desiring-machines seem to emanate from it in the apparent objective movement that establishes a relationship between the machines and the body without organs. . . . But the essential thing is the establishment of an *enchanted recording or inscribing surface* that arrogates to itself all the productive forces and all the

⁸⁷Grant McCracken, Culture and Consumption (Bloomington and Indianapolis: U of Indiana P, 1990), 88.

organs of production, and that acts as a quasi cause by communicating the apparent movement (the fetish) to them.⁸⁸

Fetishization, in fact, is the basic technology that builds these machines driven by desire. The body of the subject is divided into erogenous zones which develop into fetishes. These fetish objects begin to seductively signify the fulfillment of desire and then substitute themselves as the desire itself. In other words a single body part is pathologically substituted for the entire complex of the sexual aim and overvalued as the aim itself, a metonymic compensation for the symbolic castration it represents as that body part is "cut away" from the body.⁸⁹ A similar operation occurs with commodities and their participation in the construction of a "lifestyle" and with objects on stage constructing the *mise-en-scène*. Baudrillard reminds that this process is a semiotic operation:

Thus, in the "fetishist" theory of consumption, in the view of marketing strategists as well as of consumers, objects are given and received everywhere as force dispensers (happiness, health, security, prestige, etc.). This magical substance having been spread about so liberally, one forgets that what we are dealing with first is signs: a generalized code of signs, a totally arbitrary code of differences, *and that it is on this basis, and not at all on account of their use value or their innate "virtues," that objects exercise their fascination.*⁹⁰

And further, he asserts, it is not the object that draws us to the fetishized commodity but the semiotic process itself, the passion for semiosis or for a code that similarly "cuts" as it makes distinctions, that territorializes according to ideological principles:

. . . the subject is trapped in the factitious, differential, encoded, systematized aspect of the object. It is not the passion (whether of objects or subjects) for

⁸⁸Deleuze and Guattari, 11-12.

⁸⁹Sigmund Freud, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, trans James Strachey (New York: Avon Books, 1965), 43.

⁹⁰Baudrillard, 91.

substances that speaks in fetishism, it is the *passion for the code*, which, by governing both objects and subjects, and by subordinating them to itself, delivers them up to abstract manipulation. This is the fundamental articulation of the ideological process: not in the projection of alienated consciousness into various superstructures, but in the generalization at all levels of a structural code.⁹¹

Neronian Fantasies

Commodities and fetishes are the stuff of fantasies, and Nero integrates characters' fantasies with the object-laden scene around them, resulting in a commodity phantasmagoria on stage. Through fantasy, the "heavy" materiality of the abundant props and supers fueled by fetishizing desire moved into the sphere of spectacle and imagination, into semiotics. Tree's use of fantastic stage spectacle consisting of very real props designed to be archeologically correct produced an evocative dramatic tension in the spectacle itself, a dialectic between a dream world and the material realm.

According to Judith Butler, fantasy and the real are interdependent:

Fantasy postures *as* the real, it establishes the real through a repeated and persistent posturing, but it also contains the possibility of suspending and interrogating the ontological claim itself, of reviewing its own productions, as it were, and contesting their claim to the real.⁹²

To discount Tree's stage settings as the height of over-produced realism—as his contemporaries often did—ignores the important aspect fantasy and imagination play even in the most historically accurate chronicle play. This dialectic was fundamental to

⁹¹Baudrillard, 92.

⁹²Judith Butler, "The Force of Fantasy: Feminism, Mapplethorpe, and Discursive Excess," Differences: A Journal of Feminist Culture Studies, 2.2 (1990), 108.

Tree's approach to spectacle; it is the dialectic of the commodity—the paradox recognized by Barthes. That fantasy occurs repeatedly in Nero as an intentional trope underscoring the transition from the material world to an imaginary one testifies to the importance fantasy played in Tree's object-filled spectacles. As in the scene where Nero stages the banquet, this trope reveals the operative mechanism of the means of production of *mise-en-scène*.

In Nero, the material world is consumed by the fantasies of the aesthetic Emperor who re-enforces his imagination with tangible political power. Seneca, one of Nero's ministers and the voice of reason throughout the play, worries early on about the dangerous mixing of art and politics, fantasy and reality. Conceding that Nero "lives but in the imagination" Seneca dreads the moment when Nero will "conceive a spectacle not witnessed yet":

By me he has been taught
And I have watched him. True, the harp, the song,
The theatre, delight this dreamer: true,
He lives but in the imagination: yet
Suppose this aesthete made omnipotent,
Feeling there is no bar he cannot break,
Knowing there is no bound he cannot pass:
Might he not then despise the written page,
A petty music, and a puny scene?
Conceive a spectacle not witnessed yet!
When he, an artist in omnipotence,
Uses for colour this red blood of ours
Composes music out of dreadful cries,
His orchestra our human agonies,
His rhythms lamentations of the ruined.
His poet's fire, not circumscribed by words,
But now translated into burning cities;
His scenes the lives of men, their deaths a drama,
His dream the desolation of mankind,
And all this pulsing world his theatre. (1,5-6)

In the course of the play, one of Nero's fantasies will actually be staged. Langour pervades the palace and the court seeks a new thrill for the remaining portion of the day, seeking stimulation through experiencing detached emotions:

Anicetus Now what to do? Still drags the o'er long day.

[A Courtier]

Remorse

(NERO shakes his head)

[Another Courtier] (Up R.C.) Jealousy then?

Nero

No, no—we have outlived

All passions: terror now alone is left us

I feel in me great capacities

For terror; fear, the last, the greatest passion.

Fear! (II,9)

As if to experience this one last passion, Nero fantasizes an all-consuming fire, not unsurprisingly gendered female, foreshadowing the play's conclusion:

such a fire imagine!

Born in some obscure alley of the poor,
Then leaping to embrace a splendid street,
Palaces, temples, morsels that but whet
Her appetite: the eating of huge forests:
Then with redoubled fury rushing high,
Smacking her lips over a continent,
And licking old civilisations up!
Then in tremendous battle Fire and Sea
Joined: and the ending of the mighty sea:
Then Heaven in conflagration, stars like cinders
Falling in tempest: then the reeling poles
Crash: and the smouldering firmament subsides.
And last, this Universe a single flame. (II,10)

This reverie ends to the exclamation of the courtiers. Nero coughs. Not only illustrating that the Emperor is prone to fits of fancy, this particular fantasy also shows how most

his fantasies revolve around consumption. His cough, like Barthes' "grain of the voice," brings the fantasy back into his body even as he seems to cough it away.

Nero's fantasy of his own newly-found imperial power is somatically-based.

The empire exists for the pleasure of his body even as that body transcribes the empire.

He dreams as he assumes the crown of Emperor:

O all the earth to-night into these hands
Committed! I bow down beneath the load
Empurpled in a lone omnipotence!
My softest whisper thunders in the sky:
And in my frown the temples sway and reel,
And the utmost isles are anguished. I but raise
An eyelid, and a continent shall cower.

(Coming slowly down steps a little)

I can dispearl the sea—A province wear
Upon my little finger:

...

There is no thirst which I may not assuage —
There is no hunger which I may not sate!
Naught is forbidden me under heaven!

(In a whisper)

I shall go mad — I shall go mad.

(Sits on couch, throwing the purple from him.) (I,13)

Adapting Laplanche and Pontalis' theories of fantasy that suggest fantasy to be the setting of desire, rather than its object, Judith Butler argues that fantasy "enacts a splitting or fragmentation" of the subject, "or, perhaps better put, a multiplication or proliferation of identifications that puts the very locatability of identity into question."⁹³

Yet she rereads this fantasy theory to include a Foucauldian discourse:

The multiple sites through which the subject is dissimulated are produced, then, by the regulatory discourse which would institute the subject as a coherent and singular positionality. The "syntax" and "sequencing" that stage the self-

⁹³Butler, 110.

dissimulating subject might then be reread as the specific rule-governed discourses of a given regulatory regime.⁹⁴

Or, according to Deleuze and Guattari,

The body without organs is an egg: it is crisscrossed with axes and thresholds, with latitudes and longitudes and geodesic lines, traversed by *gradients* marking the transitions and the becomings, the destinations of the subject developing along these particular vectors.⁹⁵

In Nero's fantasy, the regulatory regime is his consuming body, marked with the regime's gradients but also shaping the regime by its own somatic terrain, suggesting the territorialization of Nero as the Imperial Subject. The Empire, fragmented into consumable objects metonymically signifying entire regions, is mapped by the Emperor's physical pleasure; the Empire becomes identifiable by objects strategically placed over his body. As Nero fetishizes and commodifies the Empire it becomes topologically shaped by Nero's desire for somatic pleasure. The Empire is divided into erogenous zones; conversely, Nero's body is shaped by the political division of the Empire. Imperial consumption is a political activity.

In one instance this dispersal of the subject over a fetishizing scene occurred explicitly on stage. The scene exemplifies the operation of the *mise-en-scène* for the entire production and its territorializing prioritization of nodal points. The Great Hall of the Palace of the Caesars has been remarkably changed from austere stoicism of Act I to gilded orientalism of Act II. At the rise of the curtain, twelve maids enter from the upper platform, singing and drowsily strewing the Great Hall with flowers and flower

⁹⁴Butler, 111.

⁹⁵Deleuze and Guattari, 19.

garlands. They pay particular attention to three busts of Nero, one down right of Nero as Apollo, one up right of Nero as a charioteer, and up left a bust of Nero as a young boy. The maids, sensually dressed, strew flowers about the stage and wreath the three busts of Nero:

1st Maiden: O Lydia, I am drowsing and my hands
Can scarcely wreath the Emperor as Apollo

2nd Maiden: Ah, Crown this carefully! (Crossing down R)
Today he sings
In public: as Apollo will return
So crowned: so garbed

1st Maiden: How is that wreath disposed?

2nd Maiden: Excellent!

3rd Maiden: (R.C. up Stage) O please tell me how to droop
These scarlet flowers

2nd Maiden: About the lyre then, thus.

4th Maiden: (L.C.) This bust now of the Emperor as a boy?
(comes down L.C. and sits on fountain)

1st Maiden: (moving to right of fountain)
O covered with white flowers and birds of spring.
(They sing and dress busts)
(ladies R now cross to C.)

5th Maiden: This charioteer: with green I have dressed that.

3rd Maiden: Yes, for the Emperor's colour is green.

1st Maiden: Now all the busts are wreathed.

2nd Maiden: What more to do?

1st Maiden: All is arranged. How heavy are my eyes. (II,2)

The busts of Nero as various impersonations of the emperor fragments Nero as a subject represented throughout the stage. The character of Nero is played by not only Tree but these busts as well. The busts of Nero—simultaneously representing Nero from distinct temporal character frames—as a young boy, as Apollo (a poetic youth) and as a charioteer (an adult soldier)—distributed his life over the spatial scene. Moreover, the busts represent the character of Nero from the world of objects as Tree represented Nero from the world of subjects. When together on stage they form a character field—the busts act and Tree becomes an object, carried on by Nubian slaves, themselves as argued above, acting objects. Thus Nero is fragmented and dispersed spatially and temporally, in other words throughout the *mise-en-scène* and its operations as a discursive field regulating subjects and objects.

Further, the busts in their distribution ground the spectacle in several ways. First, as representations of what Nero looked like they authenticate the spectacle within a museum-like spatial history. In the souvenir programs photographs of similar busts were reproduced for audience members to examine at close range. On stage they have a photographic effect. Captured images from ancient Rome, they introduced the historical Nero into the fictional drama. In addition, within the representation, the busts mark the space as specifically Nero's. When Tree was not on stage, these busts could effectively take his place. Nero, in some form, was therefore continually present. Outnumbered three to one, however, the busts ground the spectacle within the object world. When Tree was carried on by the Nubians, he too seemed to be an object without mobility. Yet Tree rose from the couch on which he was carried. The busts remained inanimate. Further, without bodies, they were precluded from practicing

consumption and thus were on their own ultimately limited from the discursive field and its chief operation.

Also precluded from consumption were the maids, dressing the busts in a sensual langour, their drowsiness indicating their partial consumption, drained of energy to perform a simple and non-laborious task. As they adorn these objects with their flowers, fantasizing them as the Emperor himself, these women, like Tree as Nero, mediate between the object and subject world with their bodies. Their distribution throughout the stage space "feminizes" the spectacle.

The adornment of the various, fragmented representations of Nero (as busts they were physically only of his head and shoulders—"busted" off his body) not only "feminized" them, but by draping them in flowers (in fact, sexual organs from plants) suggests that the busts themselves might be, like the flowers, sexual organs as well. Yet as they adorn these representations of the Emperor, they sexualize them not only with the floral signs of fertility but also with their sensual interactions, as women heterosexually engaging the male body. Through this cathexis of both the flowers and eroticized female bodies, the thoroughly fetishized busts open up the space for fetishization. Thus the spatialization of the fantasized subject not only inscribes on the body a politically charged territory as in Nero's fantasy of his own political body, but also leads to the sexualization of the physical environment in which the subject is found, in this case the stage of H Majesty's Theater. According to Tracy Davis, "In many cases,

the sexual meaning encoded in costumes and gestures was further enhanced by sexual referents in the *mise-en-scène*.⁹⁶

In effect, the busts ultimately fetishize Nero. The very fragmentation of Nero's body through its representation as busts may in fact further lead to its ultimate fetishization, and consequently to Tree's fetishization as star actor. According to Baudrillard, fetishism creates a montage in compensation for its partitioning of a single object, castrated and substituted for the body itself:

It is always a question of substituting—for an erogenous body, divided in castration, source of an ever-perilous desire—a montage, an artifact of phantasmagorical fragments, an arsenal or a panoply of accessories, or of parts of the body (but the whole body can be reduced by fetishized nudity to the role of a partial object as well). These fetish objects are always caught in a system of assemblage and separation, in a code. Circumscribed in this way, they become the possible objects of a security-giving worship.⁹⁷

In other words, through the symbolic fragmentation of his body over a field of fetish objects placed as substitutes for it (in this case the busts, but the argument applies to any object in the *mise-en-scène*) the body of Nero is reassembled through the very process that fragmented it in the first place, its semiotic representation both causing and mediating its objective fragmentation through subjective constitution. And, when Tree as Nero is carried on for his entrance in Act II, he replaces these busts with his body, focusing the scene on his now vicariously fetishized body. Thus the montage of the *mise-en-scène*, enacting the space of fantasy, fetishized the body of the leading character and the actor-manager who played him. Or, as contemporaries expressed it, the *mise-*

⁹⁶Tracy Davis, *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 122.

⁹⁷Baudrillard, 95.

en-scène represents the magnetic personality of the producer. Thus the fetishization of the actor-manager ultimately drew audiences into the representation. According to Oscar Wilde's friend, Robert Ross, writing for The Academy, "It is a question of personality and magnetism, and the natural power to display those traits. It never matters, even, when, as is often the case, Mr. Tree does not know his part. You go instinctively to see Tree."⁹⁸ With the entire semiotic operation of the mise-en-scène given over to his vicarious representation it must have been difficult to see anything else.

Representing the personality of the producer in addition to the personality of the character performed was in some cases worked into the text of the play. Tree's magnetism was carefully enhanced by the roles he chose to play and how they were crafted for him. Tree is able, through most characters, to open a space for himself—or more likely for the signification of himself—creating a double vision each time he performs in spite of the fact that Tree would often radically transform his features with make-up.⁹⁹ With Nero, this was accomplished through self-referentiality deliberately worked into the text.

Irony permeates the characterization of Nero, particularly when referring to his vanity as an artist. In Act II after the maids have appropriately dressed the set, Nero returns from a command performance (that is, the audience was commanded present and under strict surveillance). Nero, dressed as Apollo and holding the lily is carried on

⁹⁸The Academy, 3 February 1906.

⁹⁹Or, perhaps, because of. The make-up, fetishized as Tree's gimmick, would be separated from the man underneath as an independent signifier of character. Tree could peel it off.

in a litter by four Nubian slaves. On stage are musicians, courtiers and, guarding the throne, two gladiators. Nero leans on a voice protector who ties a kerchief around his throat. After receiving from various courtiers the flattery he seeks, he consults with the spies he had placed in the audience, who not only took attendance, but gaged each audience member's reaction:

1st Spy	<u>(L.C. stealing forward)</u> Licinus smiled, sir, at thy final note.	
Nero	Nothing! An artist must bear ridicule. Were I incensed, I were ridiculous Myself.	
1st Spy	Shall nothing be done?	
Nero		Nothing!
2nd Spy	<u>(R.C. stealing forward)</u> Sir, Labienus, in thy second song Coughed twice.	
Voice Protector	<u>(Cringing)</u> Nay, Caesar, thrice.	
2nd Spy		What punishment?
Nero	None! <u>(Murmurs)</u> Interuption must I learn to bear. What patience must we own who would excel.	
Voice Protector	<u>(L.C. – creeping forward)</u> Sir, Titus Cassius yawned while thou didst sing.	
Nero	<u>(Starting in horror)</u> No! No! – <u>(murmur)</u>	
2nd Spy	Nay, Caesar, worse – he slept <u>(murmur)</u>	and must he live!
Nero	<u>(Gently)</u>	

No! he must die: there is no hope in sleep.
 Witness you gods who sent me on the earth
 To be a joy to men: and witness you
 Who stand around: if ever a small malice
 Hath governed me:

(turning to them L.)

what critic have I feared?

What rival?

(turning to them R.)

Ye gods, there is no rancour in this soul.

(THUNDER)

(Looking up towards R.C.)

Silence there while I am speaking.

(ALL COURTIERS look terrified)

(THUNDER)

Sh!—

(Slight thunder—NERO remains looking up until thunder
 dies right off, then turns to COURTIERS, who ALL sigh &
 exclaim in wonder)

No, this man must die

Because he is unmindful of your gifts
 And of the golden voice on me bestowed,
 To me no credit: and he shall not die
 Hopeless, for ere he die

(COURTIERS come round him)

I'll sing to him

This night:

(Murmur of approval from COURTIERS)

that he may pass away in music.

How foolish will he peer amid the shades
 When Orpheus asks "Hast thou heard Nero sing?"
 If he must answer "No!" I would not have him
 Arrive ridiculous amid the dead.

(ALL laugh) (II,7-9)

Tree, then, is able to represent a type of personality often associated with an actor-manager: vain, over-sensitive to issues of status, and ambitious beyond his means. Nero, afterall, commands the thunder to act on cue. Tree articulated this image in detail as he defended his position and production style against the onslaught of his critics who accused him of being a conspicuously consuming, status-conscious

gentleman of leisure. In imagining his own caricature, he attempts to place it at a distance. Tree's fantasy is remarkably Neronian:

For all the ills to which dramatic flesh is heir the actor-manager is held responsible: he is the evil genius of the theatre; a make-up of vanity, ignorance, and despotism; a kind of Bottom the Weaver without his wit. I can picture him, having condescended to give up an hour or two of his leisured life to the careless pastime of a rehearsal, standing in the centre of the stage, clad in costly furs, holding in one hand an *édition de luxe* of Shakespeare (without notes), wielding in the other a tyrannical sceptre in the shape of a blue pencil, while by flashes of limelight he mutilates, with a *fiendish, almost ghoulish, joy on his face*, all that portion of the text which he cannot with any show of ingenuity commandeer to his own part.

Further, Tree continues,

I can see him waving a recently manicured hand, flashing with precious gems, in lofty deprecation of honest merit gibbering in a corner. I can imagine him, leaving the half-finished rehearsal, *bent on some errand of gluttony, and oozing through the stage door, the decadent odour of his scented curls hitting the nostrils of the virtuous commentator* to whose muttered footnote he turns a deaf ear; I can see him *carelessly fling a handful of superfluous gold to a group of satellites who raise a hireling cheer* as he leaps into his triumphal auto-motor car, wherein, juggernauting with the relentless revolution of its gilded wheels, the prostrate figures of Literature, Art and Science, he is puffed away to his lordly mansion in Grosvenor Square. But away with him!¹⁰⁰

In Nero he effectively presented this same parody of his own position. But in presenting the parody of himself, he was able to distance himself from the parody since it, too, becomes a mere representation. What is significant, then, is not the nature of the role but the dynamics of representation it opens up, the split-subject represented. The fracture that erupts in the characterization of Nero through irony creates a hall of mirrors of disappearing subjects. Nero gives way to Tree who hides behind Nero and his parody of the actor-manager. But the eruption of subjects posits an agent behind

¹⁰⁰Herbert Beerbohm Tree, *Thoughts and After Thoughts* (London and New York: Cassell and Company, 1913), 54-55. Emphasis, mine.

both the character and the self-parody, an agent controlling and manipulating the representation. According to Michael Quinn the presence of the celebrity, the "personality" of the star that exceeds the figure represented on stage which cannot contain it, causes this eruption:

The shift of perception that celebrity allows is a key one, and is extraordinarily powerful; the audience's attitude shifts from an awareness of the presence of fictional illusion to the acceptance of an illusion, however false, of the celebrity's absolute presence. . . . [R]ather than a mere chameleon, a celebrity stands for the irreducibility of the individual being, becomes a stable signifier, apparently impervious to the gaps that might deconstruct presence because the role he or she inhabits is an acknowledged fiction.¹⁰¹

It is possible, however, to argue that the space the irony opens up—since it was carefully scripted into the text—makes it possible for a celebrity figure to emerge from the gaps. Thus the celebrity figure, as Quinn points out, is as much a product of semiosis as any stage character, is created and maintained by the text written as a star vehicle. In short, the text operates as a technology that signifies celebrity. Within star-vehicles at least, the celebrity figure may be constructed by the text even as celebrity tends to subvert textual authority:

The intrusion of the celebrity displaces authority from the creative genius of the author (or the interpretive genius of the director), so that the bid for absolute authorial presence in the ideal romantic creation and/or imagination is consequently subverted.¹⁰²

In other words, Tree as celebrity actor-manager becomes the "author" of the text through the help of the playwright. In case audiences forgot this, the press was there to remind

¹⁰¹Michael Quinn, "Celebrity and the Semiotics of Acting," *New Theatre Quarterly*, 6.22 (1990): 156.

¹⁰²Quinn, 157.

them. According to the designer Percy Macquoid in his pre-production interview, "I need not tell you," Macquoid concluded, "that Mr. Tree personally superintended the staging of Mr. Stephen Phillips' play with the most minute care for detail and unerring taste for the truly artistic and picturesque."¹⁰³ The fragmentation caused by the introduction of the externally signified celebrity figure further led to the fetishization of the celebrity like the busts of Nero fetishized the character within the scene of representation. Celebrity, then, is a type of semiotic montage, an oeuvre. More than any single prop, the celebrity figure operated as the most significant (and most signifying) commodity on stage.

Nero and Tree may fetishize objects within the stage space as the projected dispersal of his subjectivity, but for Poppaea—the sexual adventuress—the fetishized field is limited to her body. In one sense the fetishized body of Poppaea is substituted for the body of Nero as fetish object since male bodies, in theory at least, were protected from fetishistic objectification. In the scene which introduces her, she is being prepared by handmaidens like the stage was prepared for Nero's entrance in Act II. Poppaea's tiring chamber shows "signs of luxury" with "implements of a Roman lady's toilet of the period." Poppaea is seen reclining on her couch center stage while four maids apply cosmetics. Poppaea supervises her toiletries with the eye of a scene-painter. Her body becomes a *mise-en-scène* of sexual desire in which men are trapped:

Poppaea Lorilla, see, this henna is o'erdone.

Lorilla (At back of couch, R.C.)
O pardon, mistress.

¹⁰³The Daily News, 24 January 1906.

Poppaea And you, Lalage.
My lips more brilliant.

Lalage (Who has got pencil from table) Yet.
(paints POPPAEA'S lips. ALL hold up veil)

Poppaea (Looking at veil) How many struggling flies
This veil, the web of mine, hath struggling held
Which else were freed! (Gazing at her face in glass)
Ah this left eye-brow—who?
Who painted this?

Myrrha (Down R of couch—trembling) I, madam.

Poppaea You are young:
Else I would have you stripped and lashed till blood
Flew from you.

Maid Mercy!
(MAID falls flat on the ground in front of POPPAEA, who
kicks her)

Poppaea Call old Lydia.
(Turns to Lydia who has entered at back)
Lydia, this eye-brow—the old touch.

Lydia (Comes down steps L.C.) My hands
Tremble, but I'll essay.
(Bus: of painting eye-brow)

Poppaea (Gazing in glass) So—that is well.
(MYRRHA rises)
This face shall feel the ruin of the rose—
When time, howe'er light shall touch this cheek
Then quick farewell! Listen, I will not live
Less lovely, nor this cruel beauty lose—
(sitting up)
I'll pass upon the instant of perfection.
No woman shall hold Poppaea fade . . . (III,8)



Figure 8. Constance Collier as Poppaea (University of Bristol Theater Collection)

could effect this mediation. She made her body into a space to consume objects even as she presented it as an object to be consumed. As she supervises her own adornment, Poppaea acts out the process of territorializing that field for the entanglement of heterosexual male desire and its fetishistic consumption of detachable female parts: her lips or left-eyebrow. Her body, a fantasy representation, is emblematic of the stage space on which Tree built his own representation of Neronian Rome: a field of signification mapped by the Edwardian desire for commodity spectacles configured Imperially. Within this carefully constructed field, a space was opened—in Tree's case by his celebrity—into which a fetishized agent could operate seemingly untouched by the representation. Within bourgeois Edwardian culture that space was occupied by the urban gentleman, a role played by Tree when off stage. Because the object world configured itself as a female body, the agent operating within its spaces was self-configured within the fantasy of heterosexual patriarchy as male.

Thus the phantasmagoric body of the leading character and vicariously the star-performer provided a complex and ideologically-charged ground on which the *mise-en-scène* developed. Props, supers and scenic embellishments become various sites of identification for the chief subject of the drama, the character played by the actor-manager spatially configured. On a simpler level, however, another subject was formed in the course of the performance with specific significance for Tree's status in bourgeois culture. As the producer of the spectacle, Tree, the provider of the feast, could claim status through the enormous expenditure. As host, the spectacle emanated from his body of wealth, his capital, thus the entire world of objects constructing the *mise-en-scène* continually pointing back to its source testified to his power as producer.

According to The Times, "We have called the production tremendous. It calls for a tremendous effort from Mr. Tree, no less as actor than as producer; and he responds bravely to the call."¹⁰⁴

The representation of Tree as a celebrity host, configured the field of signification not only discursively within consuming practices, but within a consuming polity: male, Imperial, and patriarchal. Audiences, partaking in the spectacle, partaking in his body, were configured then, like the other semiotic apparati that constituted the *mise-en-scène*, in accord with the discursive field signified. They were placed within a consuming leviathan. While the dialectic of the commodity form provided the basis for Tree's use of spectacle, the ideologies of hosting (involving conspicuous abundance and loss) provided the means through which Tree sustained his status. According to Thorstein Veblen:

Conspicuous consumption of valuable goods is a means of reputability to the gentleman of leisure. As wealth accumulates on his hands, his own unaided effort will not avail to sufficiently put his opulence in evidence by this method. The aid of friends and competitors is therefore brought in by resorting to the giving of valuable presents and expensive feasts and entertainments. . . . The competitor with whom the entertainer wishes to institute a comparison is, by this method, made to serve as a means to the end. He consumes vicariously for his host at the same time that he is a witness to the consumption of that excess of good things which his host is unable to dispose of singlehanded, and he is also made to witness his host's facility in etiquette.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴The Times, 26 January 1906.

¹⁰⁵Veblen, 64-65.

CHAPTER 2

NERO, PART II: READING INTO THE SPACE OF SPECTACLE: (EDWARDIAN) FEMALE TROUBLE

What a spectator can understand . . . in a theatrical representation is not always obvious, nor is it programmed in advance. It is precisely the analysis of signs, the semiotic functioning, which enables the spectator to understand the mechanisms at work in any particular form of performance: it is interesting to understand how a particular sign has an ideological effect and sheds light on a particular ideological mechanism both in the practitioner and in the spectator. There is a semiotic strategy inherent in the reading of a representation which enables the spectator to understand the particular theatrical representation.¹

The *mise-en-scène*, carefully constructed, was more precarious than solid: a theatrical facade. The self-referential irony throughout the play underscored this fact. But other factors threatened the stability of the social, psychological and physical space the *mise-en-scène* represented. In the play, Nero is beset by a mother in rebellion against him, a city loyal only to the coins he throws at them, an ambitious mistress and her sexual prowess, unruly colonists (particularly the British with their upstart Queen), plotting ministers, and his own unsatiable appetite for consumption. As carefully as the play builds the *mise-en-scène*, it surrounds it with threats to its continuation, setting in motion the play's most significant dramatic conflict: the construction/deconstruction of the male (patriarchal) subject.

The stage re-presents the conflict other male subjects were experiencing outside the theater. In other words, Nero relies on the exploitation of several Edwardian anxieties to heighten its dramatic tension. These anxieties include the perceived

¹Anne Uebersfeld, "The Pleasure of the Spectator," Modern Drama, 25.1 (1982): 132.

dissolution of the British Empire into decadence, the eruption of rebellious violence in England, the contaminating effect of urban sprawl, and the disruption of traditional patriarchal institutions due to the growing agitation of women to assert their participation in the public sphere. By 1906 these tensions had almost reached the breaking point.

The years between the first Jubilee of Victoria in 1887 and the beginning of WWI in 1914 were times of impending social crisis. During these years the English middle classes began to see their economic, cultural and political advancements of the previous half-century seriously challenged. According to one historian,

The balances between various conflicting elements which had been precariously maintained in the third quarter of the century were no more: the age of equipoise was ended. In its place came the unsettlement of the late 1880s and 1890s, continuing until 1914. The jubilees of 1887 and 1897 presented a facade of national unity; but underneath, the nation was divided on the nature of the eternal social, religious and political certainties.²

The challenges brought on by the growing politicization of women over the suffrage question (an issue spear-heading the broader issue of emancipation and autonomy in public and private spheres), the insistence of the working classes for more control over their own economic conditions (manifested in frequent disruptive strikes), and the erosion of confidence in the British Empire (symptomatically exposed by the narrow victory of the Boer Wars and the heated debates over Irish home-rule), began to develop during the last years of Victoria's reign and finally erupted into terroristic violence during the last years of Edward VII's circa 1909. Riots and bombings were becoming

²J. F. C. Harrison, Late Victorian Britain 1875-1901 (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 209.

almost common, though the constant threat of them probably caused as much anxiety as their occurrence. During the intervening years these issues were sources of tension, particularly for the middle classes since they were signs of a growing hostility to the de facto hegemony they enjoyed since the industrial revolution. These issues, then, were readily available for a sensationalist performance such as Tree's production of Nero.

Women tended to be the scapegoats, the most obvious and vulnerable targets of blame. Not only were some women instigating misrule through sometimes violent protests for the vote, the causes of misrule in other spheres tended to be gendered female as well, thus blaming women for the entire disruption of society. Frankly, gender conflict preoccupied the Edwardians at home much like native revolution preoccupied colonialists abroad. Settling this conflict clearly became all the more important in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century since economic conditions on one level changed the traditional gender roles for both men and women:

The transformations within the bourgeoisie after the 1870s inevitably provided more scope for its women, and especially its daughters, for, as we have seen, it created a substantial leisure class of females of independent means, irrespective of marriage, and a consequent demand for non-domestic activities. Moreover, when a growing number of bourgeois males were no longer required to do productive work, and many of them engaged in cultural activities, which tough businessmen had been inclined to leave to the females of the family, the gender differences could not but seem attenuated.³

In Nero, at least, most of the conflicts used to heighten the dramatic tension can be traced to a feminine agent challenging the masculine order. According to Tree's program notes the problem can be traced to Nero's female rather than male ancestors:

The bad blood introduced into the Julian family by Livia and Julia, the wife and daughter of the comparatively upright and intellectual Augustus (Octavius

³Eric J. Hobsbawm, The Age of Empire 1875-1914 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), 202.

Caesar), reached its full development in the person of Nero, who combined with an unexampled propensity for evil the cultivated refinement of his ancestors, and represents a combination not found in any other member of his family.⁴

In fact Nero, though veiled in its representation of ancient Rome and its infamous Emperor, is thematically structured on "The Woman Question." Stephen Phillips' drama, however, unlike the liberal reformist society dramas of Pinero, Shaw, and Wilde, strikes a reactionary stance. In Nero, women do not pose a question to be liberally debated, they threaten calamity and chaos. They are dramatically portrayed as monstrous, almost unstoppable, threats to the men on stage.

Typical "Woman Question" plays require a long-suffering male, and Nero fills the role. In the play, patrician Rome is politically endangered by the too-powerful Agrippina, Nero's mother, who not only assumes a power reserved for men, but as a consequence compromises the Emperor's masculinity. Her contamination of the already precarious urban Rome with conspiring rebellion is emblematic of her contamination of Nero with femininity, a contamination with wide-spread implications. Nero's proclivity for aesthetics and passion for degenerate consumption is thus both the symptom and cause of his (and with him Rome's) femininization, the fault of the "bad blood" of his mother and grandmothers, as Tree pointed out. His taste for the exotic commodities from the east, including its people, reverses the usual imperial formula: the east practically consumes him. The Empire threatens to overwhelm its rulers. In short, the internal struggle of the leading character is a struggle between male and female subjectivities. But, as the previous chapter has shown, the leading character was

⁴"Souvenir of Nero," Performance Program 1906, University of Bristol Theater Collection, Beerbohm Tree Collection.

configured over a broader field than one body. Thus the gender battle waged within Nero was also fought over the entire polity Nero represented. The distant threat of revolution in ancient England voiced by an upstart Queen Boadicea, who incidently served as an icon for the Suffragettes in their political rallies, knolls an uncertain resolution as Rome burns. The conflicts of the twentieth century loomed ominously. This chapter will read Nero within this context, demonstrating the extent to which female trouble drives the play.

Spatial Themes: Rising Above the Female Ground

Women provide the stage on which the portrait of Nero develops. The languid women dressing the set at the beginning of Act II firmly root the spectacle in female subjectivity and desire even as they fetishize the Emperor and make the space a site of the male subject as fetish object. Further, when Poppaea is painted by her handmaidens, the spatial simile established between the two scenes and the *mise-en-scène* is linked firmly to the female body. Thus the very ground on which the play developed was feminine. As argued in the previous chapter, then, subjectivity is the product of a spatial discourse; thus the gender conflict not only permeates the *mise-en-scène* it begins there.

The danger of this ground is emphasized by the contaminating effects of the women who rise up and move through it spreading its disease, chiefly Agrippina. The opening moments of the play as Agrippina hovered over the dying body of her husband, the Emperor Claudius, established Agrippina's poisonous drive for power and

its cost to men. Moreover, the conflict between male and female was simultaneously represented in the scene through two minor characters: Locusta the poisoner and Xenophon the physician. Locusta, crouching behind the pillar—old, decrepit and female—not only represents the eventual decay traditionally associated with female bodies but also the contaminating effect these bodies have on men. Xenophon, who in this early scene ineffectually maintains the body of the prone Claudius, struggles as a physician against disease though his presence, like Locusta's, is a sign that decay is in fact present: together they operate as a dialectic of deconstruction and the struggle against it, male versus female. From the moment of the curtain rising, then, men are struggling against the contaminating effect of women. Xenophon and Locusta appear throughout the performance, their appearance symptomatically marking the progress of the gender conflict.⁵

The prize at stake in this conflict is, of course, the Emperor Nero himself. The greatest threat throughout the play is that Nero will become overly feminine. And, as long as Nero is the pawn of his mother, the tool of a woman's drive for power, his feminization is a fact. Even as she maneuvers him into the throne, she speaks of protecting him as a mother would protect her daughter from womanhood. She tells Seneca that Nero:

Should climb all virgin to the throne of the earth,
Not conscious of spilt blood; and I meantime
 (Crossing to L.)
Will sway the deep heart of the mighty world.
The peril is Britannicus: for Nero,

⁵That the women even move through this space at all suggests that they have traversed the passivity of their place, upsetting the usual order. The crouching Locusta, then, partially escapes the space over the dead body of the patriarch.

Careless of empire, strings but verse to verse.
How shall this dove attain the eagle cry?

The imagery of spilt blood invoked again moments later in this first scene becomes simultaneously menstrual and criminal. After the crowd has accepted Nero as its next emperor, Agrippina and Nero share a moment. Agrippina, still worried about the Astrologer's prediction that Nero will be Emperor but that he will kill his mother, reminds Nero of what she, as a mother, has done for him. Her reminder to Nero of the cost she has paid for Nero's aggrandizement is very specifically and strategically placed in terms of her body, thus placing Nero in the feminine body as well, almost back in its womb:

Agrippina

Mothers for children have dared much, and more
Have suffered: but what mother hath so scarred
(sits on couch L.C.)
Her soul for the dear fruit of her body as I for thee?
Thy birth pang was the least of all the throes
That I for thee have suffered –
But what was this to torments of the mind (rising)
The dark, imperial meditations,
Musing with eyes half closed in moonless night.
The crimes—yes, crimes,—the blood that was split
Why, I have made a way for thee
(crosses in front to R.C.)
through ghosts –
(turns to NERO)
Nero, you'll not forget?

Nero Ah! never mother, never.

Agrippina And yet, this very night it was foretold
 "Nero shall reign, but he shall kill his mother"
 (NERO starts)
 Tell me the stars have lied.

Nero (smiling) The stars have lied.

(ENTER BURRUS from down R. on upper platform, cross up a little then speaks)

repeated occurrence of characters described over a spatialized field, the repeated dramatizations of consuming practices, the repeated encouragement of gazing); it also integrates the way to maneuver out of its traps. For Tree, one way out was through the use of self-effacing irony which opened a space for his celebrity as an Actor-manager. Tree's agency—and, hence his masculinity—was protected by his position as "author" of the spectacle and chief gazer. Yet Tree further encouraged his own objectification in many roles by applying a physical *mise-en-scène* directly on his body with the elaborate, radically transforming make-ups that became his trademark. These contradictory tactics put the gaze into a "feedback-loop," short-circuiting its effects and confusing its operation. Perhaps this technique fueled the controversy of his production style among critics who complained of being distracted, not knowing where to look or to place their identifications.

Nero's feminization was signalled by the *mise-en-scène*. In fact, Tree, with his use of spectacle drove home Nero's precarious masculinity. When Burrus and Seneca in Act II lament the change in the space of the Great Hall of the Palace of the Caesars, Burrus' complaint is the loss of its "masculine" qualities: its former stoic grimness, bareness, "military virtues." The scene on which they gaze is, in contrast, filled with flowers, items from the Oriental regions of the empire, and languishing women. Each of which—the flowers, the women, and the Orient—signified femininity.⁷ In addition, it is

⁷Said's formulation of the western project to "orientalize" the east parallels the patriarchal project to "feminize" women. For example, "the very power and scope of Orientalism produced not only a fair amount of exact positive knowledge about the Orient but also a kind of second-order knowledge—lurking in such places as the 'Oriental' tale, the mythology of the mysterious East, notions of Asian inscrutability—with a life of its own" Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 52. Similarly women were analysed with a great deal of male cognitive energy yet their "hysterics" remained impenetrable. More to the present point, like women, the Orient provided a spatial *mise-en-scène* on which to gaze. "The Orient is *watched*,

occupied by fetishized men positioned as objects of desire. The Nubian slaves dressed in leopard skins and black face who wait on Nero and carry him in his litter and the gladiators in full armor who serve as Nero's personal guard testify obliquely to Nero's polymorphous desire. Tacit suggestions of Nero's bisexuality are furthered by his posture as an aesthete in the mold of Oscar Wilde, a subtlety not lost on several critics. According to The Athenaeum, "It is a bold experiment, for which there is, perhaps, a shadow of justification, to show Nero as the founder of the cult of aestheticism and the originator of the theory of art for art's sake."⁸ Even Britannicus in a Ganymede-like role during the banquet as he shares the Emperor's cup implicitly becomes the object of Nero's desire. The actor who played Britannicus, Esmé Percy, furthers this impression by claiming to have had been the object of Tree's off-stage desire:

A story has come down in theatrical circles, presumably by the late Mr. Percy, that Tree was attracted to him. He is supposed to have been having supper with Maud and Herbert, when she got up from the table, wished the two men good night and then turned and said: "Remember Herbert, it is *adultery* all the same."⁹

In an article that appeared in the pages of The Era, the professional journal of the British entertainment industry, Nero as played by Tree is specifically indicted as a degenerate with resonances to Oscar Wilde. The author writes:

since its almost (but never quite) offensive behaviour issues out of a reservoir of infinite peculiarity; the European, whose sensibility tours the Orient, is a watcher, never involved, always detached, always ready for new examples of what the Description de l'Égypte called 'bizarre jouissance.' The Orient becomes a living tableau of queerness." Said, Orientalism, 103.

⁸The Athenaeum, [January] 1906.

⁹Madeleine Bingham, "The Great Lover": The Life and Art of Herbert Beerbohm Tree (New York: Atheneum, 1979), 161. According to Hesketh Pearson, Tree "liked the company of young men, himself always the youngest among them." Hesketh Pearson, Beerbohm Tree: His Life and Laughter (1956; London: Columbus Press, 1988), 109.

What, then, is Nero, as written by Mr. Phillips and played by Mr. Tree? He is the Degenerate who has been so closely studied and analysed by modern science, and has figured so largely in the world of society—in the world of letters—above all, in the world of crime. We have seen the Degenerate in society—sometimes in what was supposed to be the best society; his name is synonymous with that of more than one brilliant man of letters; above all, we have seen the Degenerate in the Law Court.¹⁰

Further, while Nero's propensity to murder and "blood-lust" is denounced, there are other qualities that are more offensive, namely the implicit gender-bending that results from debauchery:

It is in these scenes that Mr. Tree reveals a splendid consistency and intelligence that are possible only to an actor of genius. The face is transformed. With puffy cheeks, with pendulous jaws, the loose and humid lips, with a curious leer at once tigerish and simpering, he brings before you one of *those wretched beings that come unbidden and unwanted into this world; who are neither man nor woman, but half one, half the other, and beast more than either*. See him under the influence of this fatuity grow gradually more and more the victim of his own inordinate self-conceit, until, in the end, he dreams of himself as the divine poet; as the greatest of all artists; as the ruler who can sway even the heavens, and bid the thunder cease.¹¹

The critical slippage between dual subjects in this passage, the reviewer confuses Tree and Nero as both "under the influence of this fatuity," demonstrates the danger of the representation to negatively configure into Tree's own persona even as it shows within the representation the subject position is split between actor and character. On a lighter note, the critic for The Queen, a newspaper intended primarily for women, wrote:

In the second and third acts Nero wears a notable tunic of cloth of gold. To the frivolous minded the idea immediately presents itself "What a lovely idea for a tea gown," while the still more frivolous cannot but mark the amusing similarity between him and a certain Duchess of our land.¹²

¹⁰The Era, 27 January 1906.

¹¹The Era, 27 January 1906 [my emphasis].

¹²The Queen, n.d.



Figure 9. Basil Gill as the manly Otho (University of Bristol Theater Collection)



Figure 10. Phyllis Embury as Octavia and Esme Percy as Britannicus
(University of Bristol Theater Collection)

ambassadors, rode about publicly (if reluctantly) and was represented on the coins. But the irony in this case is obscure. The play posits quite clearly that women rulers lead to disaster and disruption, as the recurring reminders of the revolutionary Queen Boadicea seem to argue. The sympathy generated for Nero as the pawn of a over-powering mother generates sympathy for Edward VII who as the Prince of Wales lived under his mother's censorious shadow.

Granted a moment alone with the Emperor, Nero's advisors work to persuade the emperor to deny Agrippina the power she has been assuming. They remind the young Emperor of his duty to the patriarchy, "the world":

Seneca	Your mother, sir, this very day intends To hear the Parthian and British chiefs To sit beside you. Know then that the world Will not endure to have a woman's rule. (SENECA crosses L.)	
Burrus	(L) No, nor the army.	
Tigellinus	(R) In public at thy verse.	And thy mother laughs
Nero	(Up R.C.) I pity her—Remember what she loses.	She has no ear
Tigellinus	(R. down stage) Ah, be not laughed at, be it not said Nero is tied unto his mother's robe, Be brilliant, cruel, lustful, what you will, But not a naughty child, rated and slapped.	
Seneca	(L. up stage)	Caesar, rise!
Burrus	(L) Rise—Rise, and reign!	
Tigellinus	(R) That dances while she pulls the string behind.	And be no more a doll

(II,12-13)

The men are encouraging Nero, in essence, to develop his own phallus, to become erect, to rise from a "naughty child" to a brilliant, cruel and lustful man. Nero responds, "Your words awaken in me a new thirst." (II,14) Determined, Nero summons the ambassadors from Parthia and Britain.

Thus the Emperor's feminization is not irreversible. Nero follows his counsellor's advice, and when Agrippina tries to listen to the British and Parthian ambassadors, Nero literally puts her in her place in a moment that engages phallic imagery. The ambassadors, their entourages, and the Roman courtiers have filled the stage. Agrippina enters and begins to climb the steps towards Nero as if to sit by him.

(Nero rises, puts out his hand, stopping her. MUSIC ceases. NERO leads her slowly down L. of fountain. Whispering in Court. NERO (L.C.) kisses AGRIPPINA'S hand then speaks:-)

Nero Mother, this is man's business.
You I had not imagined in this group.
You jar the scheme of colour, mar the effect.

(NERO crosses with AGRIPPINA to R.C. and hands her over in front of him to R. AGRIPPINA turns making an angry movement towards him. NERO draws himself up to his full height and gives her a crushing look, then sighs. NERO turns and goes slowly back to throne; as he passes all COURTIERs bow in dead silence PARTHIANS prostrating themselves again.) (II,15 [my emphasis])

Agrippina furthers the conflict. Once the embassaries leave, Agrippina confronts Nero who has exchanged his sceptre—which he held when he heard the imperial business—for the lily, returning to the aesthete perhaps to soften himself symbolically. Nero suggests she retires, telling her:

Nero 'Tis thought that neither Rome,
The provinces, nor armies will endure
To see a woman in such eminence.

(AGRIPPINA rises)

Therefore, it is advised that you retire
To Antium awhile, and leave Rome free.

Agrippina Leave Rome! Why, I would die as I did step
Outside her gates, and glide
(crossing in front to C.)

henceforth a shadow.

(Turning towards NERO)

Leave Rome-all without Rome is darkness: you will not
Despatch my shadow down to Antium? (II, p18)

Nero is unmoved by her pleading and Agrippina's anger builds while the advisors Seneca, Burrus and Tigellinus re-enter. The conflict between mother and son becomes an open, outright battle.

In performance the moment was Maud's finest, a rarity on the stage of His Majesty's since Tree tended to cast other women in the leading roles. As her rage builds and she begins to curse the men about her, Courtiers and Ladies enter slowly and quietly, witnesses to this now public outburst. In addition, a number of women slaves gather on the upper platform, standing behind the columns and whispering among themselves as they too witness the scene. Their presence, as other moments of spectacle throughout the drama, significantly comments on the dramatic action. Agrippina, the dangerously angry woman is counterbalanced by women, enslaved, barely audible and only allowed a few steps on stage. But the women also increase Agrippina's danger since they could potentially be influenced by her boldness.

Undaunted, Agrippina renounces Nero in favor of Britannicus whom she literally places forcibly on the throne. She draws his sword and stands in full fury, symbolizing her taking yet another borrowed phallus for power. Notably, her stand causes the eruption of the crowd itself from murmurs to a general uproar.

I'll go, but if I fall, Rome too shall fall: (Murmur)

I'll shake this empire till it reel and crash

On that ungrateful head: and if I fall,

The builded world shall tumble down in thunder.

(Loud murmur)

Ah! (seeing BRITANNICUS who has come to foot of steps L.)

To arms boy!

(AGRIPPINA makes movement towards him and clasps him to her breast. NERO makes angry movement up stage and moves down and does angry tiger bus.)

Tremble now and shake!

Here is the true heir to the Imperial throne.

Deposed by me, but now by me restored.

(Taking BRITANNICUS and forcing him down on throne)

(Uproar)

I'll to the Praetorians!

(AGRIPPINA draws BRITANNICUS' sword and stands—loud murmurs)

To the camp!

And there upon the one side they shall see

Britannicus the child of Claudius,

And me the daughter of Germanicus:

And on the other side a harp-player (Murmur)

A withered pedant and a limping sergeant (Murmur)

Disputing for the diadem of the earth (Murmur)

(AGRIPPINA crosses to L. of BRITANNICUS in front, taking his hand)

Come, Caesar, away to the Praetorians!

(General uproar—EXIT AGRIPPINA with BRITANNICUS L. followed by COURT, in great excitement. . .) (II,22)

Once provoked, then, Agrippina directly threatens the Emperor's rule and is no longer merely a bad influence. In addition, her space moves off-stage into the scene represented by the backdrop, the city. Nero's counselors warn him of Agrippina's growing conspiracy. According to Tigellinus:

Everywhere steal her agents and her spies

Gliding through temples, baths, and theatres.

Possess all angles, corners, noon-day halts,

And darknesses. They flit with casual poison

Softly: the city secretly is filled

With murmurs, with lifted eye-brows and with sighs.

The mischief's in the very blood of Rome

Unless the sore that feeds it is cut out. (III,1)

Nero adds, invoking a flacid phallic imagery:

Why, I myself have visited the fleet
 With Anicetus: sullen droop the sails
 Or flap in mutiny against the mast.
 Burdened with barnacles, the untarred keels
 Drowse on the tide, with parching decks unswabbed
 And anchors rusting on inglorious ooze
 Should any foe upon the sea line loom
 He'll light with ease upon a lazing prey. (III,1-2)

Agrippina therefore threatens not only the dissolution of a coherent urban landscape, but also the virility of Rome's fighting forces.

The linking of these two charges, poisoned urbanization and un-virile defense, was an anxiety felt by many Edwardians. The poverty and decadence of the city was thought to weaken the lower classes, the resources for Britain's army and navy. The extent of the urban decay in the working class men was revealed while recruiting the armies to fight in South Africa against the Boers, the ancestors of the Dutch colonizers. The degenerate city, then, was linked directly to the imminent decline of the English empire. According to one English landowner:

Look at the pure bred Cockney—I mean the little fellow whom you see running in and out of offices in the city, and whose forefathers have for the last two generations dwelt within a two-mile radius of Charing Cross. And look at an average young laborer coming home from his days field work, and I think you will admit the city breeds one stamp of human beings and the country breeds another. . . . Take the people away from their natural breeding grounds, thereby sapping their health and strength in cities such as nature never intended to be the permanent home of men, and the decay of this country becomes only a matter of time. In this matter, as in many others, ancient Rome has a lesson to teach.¹³

¹³Letter from Lord Walsingham to Henry Rider Haggard, 1899, qtd Alun Howkins, "The Discovery of Rural England," *Englishness: Politics and Culture* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 66.

Putting the (Monstrous) New Woman in her Place

The production of Nero, causally linking both urban decay and political dissolution to Agrippina, expressed the anxiety that the non-domesticated woman was a threat to the maintenance of the Empire. Also linked to urban degeneracy and mannishness, the "New Woman" was a popular, sensationalized media figure.¹⁴

According to Elaine Showalter:

The sexually independent New Woman criticized society's insistence on marriage as woman's only option for a fulfilling life. . . . Politically, the New Woman was an anarchic figure who threatened to turn the world upside down and to be on top in a wild carnival of social and sexual misrule. Journalists described her in the vocabulary of insurrection and apocalyptic as one who had "ranged herself perversely with the forces of cultural anarchism and decay."¹⁵

The caricature of "The New Woman" in the press was only one of many cultural responses to the change women were making for themselves during this time. On stage women were becoming increasingly a "problem" to be solved. Liberal playwright reformers represented the "woman-with-a-past" victimized by society sympathetically, though usually the problem was solved by their banishment or death. Nora in Ibsen's A Doll's House slams the door behind her. In Wilde's Lady Windermere's Fan, Mrs. Erlynne discreetly leaves the society her presence disrupts, while Pinero's Paula Tanqueray in The Second Mrs. Tanqueray just as discreetly shoots herself off stage.

¹⁴According to Judith Walkowitz, "The independent, 'advanced' woman constituted a small percentage of the female population in London; yet her public vitality and the discourses surrounding her exerted a powerful, informing presence in contemporary discussions of gender." Judith Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992), 72.

¹⁵Elaine Showalter, Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle (New York: Viking, 1990), 38-39.

Agrippina, frankly, lacks their discretion though not their drive for independent agency. In the play, the figure of Agrippina functions as the reactionary counter-argument, an anti-feminist representation, to the debate on the rights of women.

More a virago than a "New Woman," the physical presence of Maud Tree as Agrippina bears a remarkable resemblance, invoking her spirit at least. According to Showalter,

As women sought opportunities for self-development outside of marriage, medicine and science warned that such ambitions would lead to sickness, freakishness, sterility, and racial degeneration. In France, the *femme nouvelle* was often caricatured as a *cerveline*, a dried-up pedant with an oversized head; an androgynous flat-chested *garconett*, more like a teenage boy than a woman; or a masculine *hommesse*.¹⁶

A studio portrait of Maud Tree in costume shows the small woman made even smaller by heavy robes and sad, downcast eyes almost suggest the general nervous illness attributed to these women.

Critics were generally favorable when discussing Maud Tree in the role of Agrippina but usually noted with subtle surprise her ability to give a strong performance almost in spite of her physical stature. According to Robert Ross:

It is popular to say that she has not the physique for some particular *role*, and she is always spoken of as a Lady window *manquée*. As Agrippina her performance is masterly. By her elocution alone she gives to tawdry verse dignity, and her gestures are beyond all praise. In quality her acting is French.¹⁷

According to the critic for The Queen, Maud gave "a performance so full of grace and dignity and power as it overmasters a physical defect; never before has she acted with

¹⁶Showalter, 39.

¹⁷The Academy, 3 February 1906.

such intensity, nor, for that matter had she an opportunity of displaying her strength as an actress."¹⁸ The Daily Telegraph was almost patronizingly sympathetic stating, "Mrs. Tree has a more difficult task as Agrippina, because some of the masterful qualities of this reckless queen make great demands on the physique of an actress."¹⁹ While the Pall Mall Gazette was less encouraging through its faint praise: "Mrs. Tree has scarcely the physical volume that seems demanded, but she makes the most of herself, and is effective." Even the enthusiastic Era made some allusion to her apparent physical weaknesses:

Mrs. Tree astonished her warmest admirers by the vigour and vitality of her performance as Agrippina. Always distinct, dignified, and impressive, Mrs. Tree rose to unsuspected power in such intense efforts as Agrippina's desperate and almost tigerish denunciation of Nero's ingratitude in the second act, and in her denunciations of her son and his Ministers.²⁰

Through casting and through the critic's interpretation of Maud Tree's physical stature, the character of Agrippina was delimited by the body of the actress who played her, much like the caricatures of the "New Woman" that represented the early feminists as physically atrophied in an attempt to atrophy their assertions.²¹ The comments of the

¹⁸The Queen, [January 1906].

¹⁹The Daily Telegraph, 26 January 1906.

²⁰The Era, 27 January 1906.

²¹According even to Maud, her performance was limited. The part of Agrippina, she wrote, "called for great tragic acting, and naturally it was not in me to rise to the heights it demanded." Further, she attributed her success, if any to the intervention of two men: her husband, Tree, and friend the playwright Comyns Carr. She writes, "If I succeeded in it at all, I owe my success to the untiring patience and kindness of Herbert and Comyns Carr, who between them taught me a new low voice, between them watched that my gestures should be grand and few, between them imbued me with a spirit which was not altogether unlike the spirit of tragedy." Maud Tree, "Herbert and I," Herbert Beerbohm Tree: Some Memories of His Art ed. Max Beerbohm (London: Hutchinson and Co. [n.d.]), 136.



Figure 11. Maud Tree as Agrippina (University of Bristol Theater Collection)

critic for The Queen, though complimentary, suggest that Maud was overwhelmed by her costume which firmly grounded her in place, ironically when she was the most assertive:

her height, slimness and erect carriage all gain from the voluminous folds, and the sweeping veils and mantles which rest yards on the ground behind her make a picture to be remembered, especially when she, in the second act, mounts the steps and places Britannicus on the throne; a queenly figure in every line and true tragedy in every action.²²

By taking on "The Woman Question" Nero places itself in relation to much of the drama produced by Edwardians. The appearance of the debate in historical melodrama demonstrates the extent to which the cultural problem was repeatedly addressed, since on first inspection one would not expect its appearance. However, Toga Plays like Nero were partly developed specifically as an antidote to the scandalous "Pinerotic" problem plays that exploited the sex-gender conflict. Stirring the fashion for toga plays and their characters with pure, Christian virtue, Wilson Barrett the author and leading actor of The Sign of the Cross, the most sensationally popular Toga Play of them all, was quoted in 1896 as stating, "If Tanquerays are to be the fashion in drama--before we know where we are, we shall be in the swamp at the bottom. The subject here is an ugly social wound."²³ By focusing on the sexual purity of women, Toga Plays and Society Drama are directly linked. Noting that the "adventuress," a woman who manipulates and seduces her way into power, did not emerge as a melodramatic type until the question of women's emancipation arose in the 1890s, David Mayer argues that Toga Plays in fact

²²The Queen, [January 1906].

²³David Mayer, "Toga Plays," British Theatre in the 1890s, ed. Richard Foulkes (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1992), 85.

specifically work out issues pertaining to women's proper sphere. The debate, he notes, took a conservative bent:

Whereas the Christian female is self-sacrificing and, to some degree, accomodating to received domestic norms, the adventuress, Roman or Egyptian, is intelligent, humorous, power-seeking, and, like some males, a source of disruption and havoc which must be subdued. Therefore, to the extent that older female stereotypes are challenged by new or refashioned stereotypes, the melodrama of the 1890s and the toga film, as much as Society plays, serve as testing-grounds for acceptable models of female behavior.²⁴

Nero, however, lacks the moral simplicity of other Toga Plays like Ben Hur and The Sign of the Cross as well as their unmistakeably Christian point of view. However, it fits in the broader sense of the genre since it contains all the prerequisite elements even if only in secondary roles: a pure, virginal Christian female (Acte), persecuted Christians (briefly seen in Nero's triumphal entry), and togas. In fact, Nero borrows from the popularity of the Toga Play form without unequivocally condemning such Roman practices as conspicuous consumption and adultery. The play, then, might be said to have adapted the Toga Play for a more urbane, less staunchly moral audience. Nevertheless, it shared with its literary cousins the general bent toward conservatism even as it seems to resist being totally reactionary. Urbane or moral, however, placed outside of contemporary history, the Roman scene universalized the play's message. In this sense they shared a trait seen in the popular classical subject painting that have been revealed to be inherently misogynistic:

Nineteenth-century classical-subject painting depicted women in mythological situations to universalize masculine attitudes prevalent in the culture. Misogyny and gynophobia, manifesting themselves in the legal, educational, medical, and familial structures of Victorian culture, were universalized by mythological

²⁴David Mayer, Playing Out the Empire: Ben Hur and Other Toga Plays and Films (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1994), 15.

presentations of women as sensuous, death bearing, deceiving, or dependent. Classical-subject pictorial ideograms gave both eternity and universality to repressive icons of women, delaying if not preventing the improvements in conditions of women.²⁵

In the course of the drama of Nero, Agrippina, the lightning rod of the play's universalized misogyny, is repeatedly unpersuaded to accede to male authority, and the men begin to plot more drastic means to dispose of her, to find her appropriate space. Anicetus suggests that they send Agrippina to Britain, invoking a imagery that would disturb any good British subject though perhaps intended as ironic:

To Britain send her. There for Claudius
I fought; a melancholy isle, alone:
Sundered from all the world: and banned by God
With separating cold religious wave
And haunted with the ghost of a dead sun.
Her rotting people amid forests cower;
Their skies are drab and drear
And mad for color
They are forced to paint
Their bodies blue and red.
To Britain send her. (III,2)

Eventually, though, the men convince Nero that Agrippina must be killed. Nero is unwilling, citing the immensity of the space she occupies in his fantasy:

Ah, patience sir!
I cannot in one moment gird myself
To murder all those kisses, and she hath
A sweep magnificent about the earth. (III,3)

But he shows signs of wavering. He admits the city of Rome is somehow too feminine for his tastes. He fantasizes building a new environment somehow more male and

²⁵Joseph A. Kestner, Mythology and Mysogyny: The Social Discourse of Nineteenth Century British Classical-subject Painting (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1989), 62-63.

heterosexual with phallic trees standing erect in spacious avenues, buildings plunged sexually in "odorous foliage":

all the palace seems
 To me a hovel: scarcely can I breathe.
 I should be roofed with gold, and walled with gold,
 Should tread on gold: and if I cast my eyes
 Over the city, they should view a scene
 Of spacious avenues and breathing trees,
 And buildings plunged in odorous foliage
 ...
 This is a petty city. I have thought
 It might be well to raze it to the ground
 And build another and an ampler Rome
 More worthy site for this imperial soul –
 (BURRUS grunts)
 I go to Baiae, there to dream this dream. (III,3-4)

This architectural fantasy opens a space for Nero to emerge as a masculine agent, rising above the scene: scopically and physically. The way is paved for the murder of Agrippina and her replacement by a more pliant female ground eager to receive Nero.

Enacting the Desiring Field: Nero and Poppaea

The mise-en-scène representing the female ground constantly traps Nero as a representation of an emerging male subject. Agrippina almost refuses to give the Emperor birth, enwrapping him as a mother but also by surrounding him in the city space. Poppaea, on the other hand, traps him in a different way. She presents herself as a ground for him to act as a male agent, though just as eagerly lurks to consume his

phallus for her own ends.²⁶ In many ways, Poppaea presents the conventional melodramatic sexual adventuress, a quality some critics claimed Collier did not escape with her acting. "Miss Collier's performance," wrote The Daily Graphic, "was obvious and conventional, instead of subtle and human."²⁷ Further, "This woman, as drawn by Mr. Phillips, and played by Miss Constance Collier, is quite the old-fashioned wicked beauty of melodrama, whom one despises Nero for loving."²⁸ Acte described her with distaste in the beginning of Act II spatializing her like Nero and Agrippina:

A woman without pity, beautiful.
 She makes the earth we tread on false, the heaven
 A merest mist—a vapour. Yet her face
 Is as the face of a child uplifted, pure.
 But plead with lightning rather than those eyes,
 Or earthquake rather than that gentle bosom
 (Maids sing again up at back)
 Rising and falling near thy heart. Her voice
 Comes running on the ear as a rivulet
 Yet if you hearken, you shall hear behind
 The breaking of a sea whose waves are souls
 And in her lovely laughter is no joy . . . (II,3)

Like Agrippina, Poppaea is an ambitious woman. Unlike her, however, she does not step outside a female role to fulfill her quest for power. Rather, she tailors the role to her advantage finding agency in the construction of her own representation. Rather than stealing the phallus from men as Agrippina does symbolically when she takes Britannicus's sword (an act which eventually led to his consumption), Poppaea gives

²⁶Ironically, her husband's most significant regret about their failing marriage is their lack of children. Presumably, Poppaea is barren though the other implication is that once she consumes the phallus she refuses to return it in the form of a child.

²⁷The Daily Graphic, 26 January 1906.

²⁸The Daily Graphic, 26 January 1906.

men a phallus in the form of her own fetishized body which she maintains through her gaze reflected back in her mirror. Agrippina consumes men while Poppaea offers herself for consumption. Eventually, though, Poppaea will become trapped in her own representation. Thus under Agrippina's influence Nero's gender is disrupted as his castrating mother assumes the phallus for herself. But once Poppaea begins to dominate the scene, Nero's gender conflict begins to stabilize as she presents herself to Nero as the natural object of his desire, filled by his phallus. Mothers or mistresses, female subjects are configured in the play as fields either out of which, on which, or into which the male subject necessarily develops. While Nero will eventually transcend both, neither Agrippina or Poppaea escape this "service."

The one scene Poppaea and Nero appeared together on stage enacted the mechanism of male desire tracking the female subject presented as an object for consumption. At Baiae Nero is anxious to meet with Poppaea:

An hour since: yet she lingers while I ache
 With passion for her: yet she delays.
 To fly to her! No, 'twere unworthy of me —
 (Turning up stage)
 And yet—and yet—Ah! I must go to her.
 Poppaea, I come! (III, p. 14)

At that moment Poppaea, veiled, entered on a litter carried by four Nubians like Nero, who entered the same way in Act II returning from performing in the theater, ironically both object for consumption and consuming agent. Nero begins to hungrily stalk while the mildly protesting Poppaea strategically builds Nero's masculinity, flattering his manly and poetic prowess. The seduction is played out over, on and around the couch—

(NERO throws her violently on to couch with a snarl and crosses quickly down L. and up to foot of steps C.) (III, 16-17)

Her mild, disingenuous protestations not only fuel his desire by presenting him with obstacles to eliminate, first her husband then his mother, but suggest her affiliation with middle-class wives worried about "household cares." Edwardianism rears itself into the scene. Following this moment, Nero has crossed up stage to the foot of the steps center and performs, what the promptbook calls, "tiger bus[iness]." Poppaea begins to draw him in, referring to Agrippina. Her identification of herself with Nero

Nero can contain himself no longer, not surprisingly. The fantasy Poppaea described must be realised. He must have her. With consistent imagery, he configures his sexual desire as eating and drinking spatialized globally. Nero is at his manliness even to the point of rape:

Nero

All the east
Burns in me, and the desert fires my blood.
(NERO gradually puts Poppaea to L. of him)
I parch, I pine for you: my body is sand
That thirsts: I die, I perish of this thirst,
To slake it at thy lips: You madden me.
(He seizes POPPAEA'S cloak and snatches it from her—
POPPAEA drops back L. and stands revealed, holding
veil up above her head.)
Goddess! what shall I give thee vast enough?
I'll give thee Rome—I'll give thee this great world
And all the builded empire as a toy.
The Mediterranean shall thy mirror be
Thy jewels all the sparkling stars of heaven
The orb of all the earth! I toss it on thy lap
But for a kiss—
(Crossing and kneeling at her feet, then rising and putting
his lips close to hers as if for kiss)
one kiss.

Poppaea (Quietly)

Agrippina? (III,18-20)

Poppaea's calm and strategic remark next to Nero's passion emphasizes that at least one of them has kept their heads. Nero, not Poppaea, has been consumed. A slave to his passions, and beset by manipulative women, Nero's agency is still threatened. Their scene ends when a messenger enters announcing Nero is needed for urgent business of the state. Nero raises Poppaea with the single word, "Empress" and deposits her off-stage where she, unlike Agrippina, willingly goes:

(An expression of triumph creeps over POPPAEA'S face. NERO leads her over to door R. passes her in front of him & kisses her neck passionately. POPPAEA backs off slowly. NERO returns and stands L. of couch as in a dream, gives a sigh then sinks on couch. ENTER at back L. BURRUS, ANICETUS, SENECA & TIGELLINUS.) (III,20)

Killing Mother Nature: The Death of Agrippina

Nero becomes a man only after the sexual consumption of a female object. But, significantly, that consumption is only possible after the disposal of the his primary female object: Agrippina. To consolidate his male subjectivity, Nero must kill his mother. After Poppaea leaves, Nero's advisors confront him:

Burrus (coming down L.)

How long? How long sir? Agrippina
Is drawing to her net the dregs of Rome
(Nero makes weary gesture)

Seneca

And, sir, she has not scrupled to enroll
The ragged shrieking Christians, who wash not,
The refuge of the empire, all that flows
To this main-sewer of Rome she counts upon. (III,20)

Nero's advisors tell Nero that Agrippina has insisted on being present at the feast of Minerva in Baiae where Nero and the court have gone. While this may be her "greatest audacity" it also, according to the advisors, "delivers her into our hands." In Baiae, Tigellinus reminds Nero:

... no Praetorians are camped,
No populace inflamed in her cause
A solitary woman doth she come. (III,21)

Soon a plot is hatched and Nero is once again seduced over the couch, this time, though, by the male Anicetus:

Anicetus Caesar, a sudden thought hath come to me,
A pleasure pinnacle lies in Baiae bay
Built for thyself: on this let her return
In the deep night after Minerva's feast,
Or supper given in sign of amity.
(NERO turns face to audience)
I will contrive a roof weighted with lead
Over the couch whereon she will recline
(NERO puts his hands to ears and crosses to down R.
ANICETUS then crosses down to NERO. TIGELLINUS
drops down extreme R.)
(Close up to Nero)
Once in deep water at a signal given
The roof shall fall:
(NERO crosses up to C. again R. of couch. ANICETUS
crosses up to NERO L. of couch.)
and with a leak prepared
The ship shall sink and plunge her on the waves.
In that uncertain water what may chance?
What may not? To the elements this deed
Will be imputed, to a casual gust
Or striking squall upon the moody deep.

Nero (C. turning face to audience)
Wonderful! This gives beauty to an act
Which else were ugly and of me unworthy.
 (Moving down a little R. C.)
So mighty is she that her proper doom
Could come but by some elemental aid
Her splendid trouble asketh but the sea

For sepulchre: her spirit limitless –
(BURRUS comes down slowly L.)
 A multitudinous and roaring grave.
(Crossing to couch)
 Be the crime vast enough it seems not crime (sits)
 I, as befits me, call on great allies.
 I make a compact with the elements.
 And here my agents are the very winds.
 The waves my servants,
(Leaning forward and resting chin on hand)
 and the night my friend. (III,22)

Once the counsellors leave, however, Nero shows signs of confusion. Poppaea, enters again:

(POPPAEA enters quietly R. comes down to NERO R. of couch and touches him. NERO starts and rises as in a dream—turns, looking out to sea, moving up C. POPPAEA crosses up R. of couch and stops him; then takes him slowly towards entrance R. NERO looking out to sea bewildered—MUSIC swells) (III,23)

Tree, whose most popular role was the hypnotist Svengali in the profitable melodrama he frequently revived, Trilby, for once was playing the hypnotised subject. The role reversal also involves a reversal of gender, since the hypnotist in this case is his mistress Poppaea.

The scene of the attempted murder begins with an off-stage banquet indicated by seven Nubian extras who carried dishes across the stage from down left to up right. Considering the effect of the on-stage banquet in Act II, this off-stage one sets the stage for a deadly consumption. A Nubian slave enters with a jug of wine, pours a cup and leaves both cup and jug on stage, a libation of sorts, but also an indication of Nero's entrance. Incidentally, the set remained the same from the previous scene where Nero was seduced by Poppaea and his minister's plot, with a change in lighting signifying the change to night.

The glittering stars seen in the backdrop demonstrated Tree's mastery of the new electric lighting technology. As much a part of the impressive spectacle as the props, supers, and massive sets, creating atmosphere or imitating natural light with electricity dazzled Edwardian audiences and continued to prove the advancements of modern science in Britain. More significantly, though, Tree's ability to imitate natural light with electricity signaled technology's ability to mimic Nature, in a sense "naturalizing" itself. Again, as in other scenes, the spectacle coordinated with the action, providing a commentary. In fact, the scene that unfolds thematically depends on the irony of unnatural nature—both in the surrounding spectacle and in the unnatural act of the matricide depicted that relied on natural elements as a cover. Tree's spectacle relied on a thin veil of illusion covering the spectacle of stage technology that produced it.

The men enter from the banquet and briefly confer about the readiness of all aspects of their plot. Nero expresses some more reservations about sending his mother to her death, but is resolved nevertheless. The men exit and Agrippina enters. Mother and son share a tender moment, building the pathos. Agrippina is nostalgic, commenting on the scene:

Agrippina: This seemeth like to old days come again.
 Evenings of Antium with a rising moon.
 (NERO sits. AGRIPPINA strokes his hair)
 Do you remember many a night so thick
 With stars as this—you would not go to bed,
 But still would paddle in the warm ocean
 Spraying it with small hands into the skies.

Nero: I remember. (Drinks wine) (III,25)

The sentimental irony builds as Agrippina reminds Nero about the prophecy that he would kill his mother which now she sees, pathetically, as untrue. She tells him she is

happy because "tonight I am a woman and am with my child." Together they draw more attention to the night-time atmosphere Tree has created:

(A pause—MUSIC)

Agrippina: Beautiful night, that gently bringest back
Mother to son and callest all the stars
To watch it. Quiet sea that bringest peace
Between us two.

Nero: A sparkling starlight and a windless deep.

Agrippina: (Crossing up on to platform C. & looking up)
Never until to-night did I so feel
The lure of the sea that lures me to lie down
At last after such heat. Ah, but the stars

(MUSIC stops)

Are falling and I feel the unseen dawn. (III,26)

Agrippina is about to go, but Nero repeatedly detains her, demonstrating to the audience at least his personal remorse and reluctant involvement in the plot to kill her.

In Tree's version, Nero somehow manages to remain innocent and sympathetic, a long-suffering male. Finally Agrippina exits up center. Tigellinus, Burrus, Seneca and Anicetus enter on the upstage platform, anxious to witness the planned accident.

Tigellinus, a witness to the preceding scene, remarks on Nero's ability to act.

Nero responds however that what he displayed was genuine, emphasising the naturalness of his feelings:

That which I feigned
I felt, and when it was my cue to kiss her
The whole of childhood rushed into the kiss.
Did my voice tremble? Then it trembled true
With human agony behind the art.
Gods! what a scene! (III,29)

With Agrippina on the barge, the men can only wait and wonder when the fatal (staged) accident will happen. Nero invokes the elements that respond almost on cue while the men struggle with their ineffectual gazes. Nero also invokes the self-referential irony in which the performer Tree moved, placing him in the scene as well:

Nero	<p>How calm the night when I would have it wild! <u>(summer lightning)</u> Arise you veiling clouds, awake you winds! And strifle with your roaring human cries. Not a breath upon my cheek! I gasp for air <u>(turning face to audience & crossing down to others R.)</u> Do you suppose the very elements Are conscious of the workings of this mind? So careful not to seem to share my guilt? Yet dark is the record of wind and wave This ocean that creeps fawning to our feet Comes purring o'er a million wrecks and bones.</p>
Anicetus	<p><u>(Up R.C.)</u> But Caesar see, <u>(NERO moves to foot of steps L. SENECA moves up and stands on steps R.C. TIGELLINUS & BURRUS look out to sea also.)</u> a gradual cloud hath spread Over the moon—the ship's light flicks out <u>(slight pause)</u> She is vanished.</p>
Nero	<p>She is veiled from night.)</p>
Tigellinus	<p>She is enwrapped in mist</p>
Seneca	<p>A dimness and no more.</p>
Burrus	<p>And silence!</p>
Nero	<p>How wonderful this waiting and this pause Could one convey this in the theatre? This deep suspense: Hush! What was that?</p>
Tigellinus	<p>Nothing, sir.</p>

Nero In this thrill a leaf would thunder.

(A pause)

Burrus Would it were over. (III,29-30)

Nero's anguish at the elements not properly responding is, in light of Tree's technology to fabricate Nature on stage, somewhat of a fabrication. The elements may not cooperate with Nero, but Tree is able to make them perform on cue as the summer lightning indicated. Soon, however, the "swish of sea" is heard and a cry (from inside the property room) is heard. Ironically, Agrippina still alludes their gaze though Nero is able to fantasize:

Nero: It is done.
I cannot look: peer seaward one of you—
what do you see?

Seneca: (Up R.C.) Darkness and veiled stars.

Nero: Is there no shimmer of a floating robe?
Pierce through the darkness!

Burrus: Nothing visible!

Tigellinus: Nothing

Seneca: Nothing!
Anicetus: Nothing!

Nero: I seem to see her lying amid shells,
And strange sea-things come round her wondering,
Inspecting her—with cold and rheumy eyes.
The water sways her helpless up and down.
(Bus: with hands of floating body) (III,30-31)

The measure of Agrippina's strength lies in how difficult it is to kill her. Unlike other New Women of Edwardian drama, Agrippina does not willingly and tragically go off to a self-sacrificial death. Agrippina, in fact, tenaciously refuses to die easily

Nero

What catches at my heart?
I – I – her boy, her baby that was, even I
Have killed her! where I sucked there have I struck.
Mother! Mother! O, it comes
Upon me, this too natural remorse.
(sinks on seat L.C.)
Why! I am now no more than him who tills
Or reaps: (Rising) Mother! Mother!
O, all the artist in my soul is shattered
And I am hurled into humanity
Back to the sweat and heart-break of mankind.
(crosses to down R. and turns, back to audience looking
out)
I am broken upon the jagged spurs of the earth.
I can no more endure. Mother! Mother! Mother!
(ENTER slowly from the sea, AGRIPPINA, with dripping
hair, who stands for a minute on platform, then comes
slowly down towards NERO, who cries aloud and falls in
a swoon down R. AGRIPPINA comes down and stands
over him. A big flash of lightning. AGRIPPINA speaks.)

Agrippina Child!
(LIGHTNING AND CRASH OF THUNDER)

(CURTAIN)

Picture: (AGRIPPINA kneeling over him. She snatches the amulet from his arm and throws it into the sea. LIGHTNING & CRASH.)

(CURTAIN)

The unreceding threat of the aggressive, phallic-stealing, blood-dripping woman is spectacularly represented through Agrippina who refuses to stay in her place off-

stage, locked in the property-room. Unwilling to calmly rest on stage tamely positioned for the men to look at her, she storms off into the marginal space and besieges the men center-stage. The extent of the men's fear grows yet they remain powerless in light of her monstrous, elemental strength. Her vengeful, angry re-entrance—and her symbolic castration of Nero, snatching an amulet from his arm—dramatizes the men's nightmare. The repetition of this image, dramatically anchored in the stage tableau immediately following, strikes this terror home with melodramatic force.

Agrippina is eventually killed, though anti-climatically. The next morning (still on the same set, but with different lighting), when Nero realizes that Agrippina is not dead, he is relieved. Without his knowledge, however, his counselors, now more than ever afraid of Agrippina, dispatch a troop of soldiers to finish the deed. A distant trumpet signals her demise.

The male victory is only marginal though they pompously celebrate. In the following scene, Tree staged Nero's triumphal entry into Rome supposedly as a celebration of an Armenian victory. Though Nero is unaware of his mother's death, the procession—existing entirely of men, including the Physician who rides with Nero in his chariot—in fact, given its juxtaposition to the scene of Agrippina's demise, celebrates the triumph of male power over the female threat. Significantly, it is Nero's reclaiming of the city for himself. The presence of the Physician in the chariot is a subtle and otherwise inexplicable indication of the male victory. The stage picture struck at the conclusion of this scene balances the terror of the tableau of the monstrous, dripping female.

The Consummation

Act IV begins many years later. Burrus, Seneca and the Physician enter and discuss the dark times of the empire, "how dark the future of the empire glooms!" Nero is distracted though suitably male as he rushes about through foreign military campaigns while Poppaea slowly fades towards death. Seneca voices the sentence invoking an ironic causality, "Poppaea, empress made! Now must she die!" Poppaea enters, borne on a couch as she suffers from the Victorian malady of sexually aggressive women: consumption. Poppaea simply cannot escape convention. The men exit and Poppaea is left with the Physician and her handmaiden. As Locusta hovered by the poisoned body of Claudius at the beginning of the play, the Physician now hovers over the tubercular self-consuming body of Poppaea. Poppaea rues about Nero and her impending death:

I snared him, Myrrha, once: let him flutter away!
(POPPAEA sitting up—MYRRHA supporting her)
 But to relinquish the wide earth at last!
 And flit a faint thing by a shadowy river,
 Or yearning without blood upon the bank!
 Into a world of whispers.
(Looking at and lifting her hair)
 And this hair
 Rolling about me like a lighted sea
 Which was my glory and the theme of the earth.
 Look! Must this go? The grave shall have these eyes
 Which were the bliss of burning emperors. (IV,2)



Figure 12. Dorothea Baird as Acte (University of Bristol Theater Collection)

A slave enters and informs Poppaea that Acte, Nero's former "virginal" mistress, is waiting to see her.²⁹ Poppaea assumes she has come to gloat, to watch her die and then to become the next Empress. Acte, however, has come for other reasons.

Acte, the Christian, has come to convert Poppaea on her death bed, adding more sentimental pathos to an already pathetic scene. Her configuration of paradise foregrounds a purified and unhampered sensuality, the final spatialization of the subject:

Acte: Of late has been stealing on my mind
 A strange hope—a new vision.
(POPPAEA takes up mirror. MYRRHA kneels at L.
 corner of couch)
 Do not laugh out at me:
(She crosses to back of couch)
 A sect despised,
 The Christians, tell us of an after life—
 A glory on the other side the grave.
 If there should be a kingdom not of this world,
 A spirit throne, a city of the soul!

Poppaea: I want no spirit kingdom after death.
 The splendid sun, the purple and the crown.
(She drops glass and leans her head on head of couch—
 Sobbing)
 O Acte, to be numb and deaf and blind!

Acte: Or live again with more transcendent sense,
 Hearing unchecked, and unimpeded sight.
 If you who walk now, then should wing the air,
 Who stammer now, should then discard the voice,
 And grope now, then should see with other sight,
 And send new eyes about the universe!

²⁹In a highly symbolic moment at the end of Act I, Acte and Nero—youthful playmates—part ways. After the death of Claudius, Nero experiences a vision that consisted of the ghosts of the preceding Julian emperors parading across the stage. Acte, who represents Nero's moral conscious pleads with Nero to himself remain virtuous. Instead, after the vision, rather than leaving with the beckoning Acte, Nero deliriously follows the path of his predecessors, symbolizing his moral corruption. Acte is also present when the maids dress the set in the beginning of Act II. She sorrowfully exits the scene before the Emperor returns.

Oh, I have heard this ragged people say
There is a new air blowing on the world,
And a new budding underneath the earth.

Poppaea: (Sitting up)
Ah, Ah! The Sun! The sun! He goeth down.
How dark it grows: the night comes down on me.
I'll have no lamp:
 (Taking ACTE'S hand and leaning against her)
 But hold my hand in thine.

Acte: Sister, forget the world—it passeth.

Poppaea: (Rising) Rome! Rome!
(She falls back on the couch—Christians are heard in the distance singing.) (IV,3-4)

The anxieties which the production effectively exploited, New Women, Urban decay and rebellion in the British Isles, finally erupt in the great consummation scene that concluded the play: the burning of Rome. Nero enters from having gazed at the dead body of Poppaea when Seneca tells him of the revolt of the British Queen:

Caesar, for dark news prepare thyself.
Boadicea the British queen is risen,
And like a fire is hissing through the isle.
Londinium and Camulodunum
(NERO crosses to L.C. laughing quietly to himself)
In ashes lie: the loosed barbarians
In madness rage and ravish, murder and burn. (IV, p[5])

Nero, however, still thinks of Poppaea:

Beautiful on her bed Poppaea lay—
 I have begun to write her epitaph (Tries to write)
 Leave me. (Throwing tablets from him)
 Ah! blow supreme: Ah! ultimate injury!
 I can no longer write: my brain is barren—
 My gift, my gift, thou has left me.
 It is finished with me—
 And what an artist perishes in me!
 Catastrophe on catastrophe!
 (HORN heard in ORCHESTRA)
 Dead Agrippina rages unappeased.

At night I hear the rustle of a robe
 And the slain woman pauses at my door.
 O, she is mightier having drunk of death.

(MURMURS UNDER STAGE START AND CONTINUE THROUGH
 SCENE)

Now has she hailed Poppaea from my arms—
 Now does she quench the holy fire within me.
(LOUD MURMURS) (IV,[6])

Officers enter hurriedly and report that a fire has started to burn Rome. They blame the Christians who, in turn, blame the Emperor. Burrus enters and describes the scene more fully while the murmurs under the stage become louder screams:

Caesar, what shall be done? Still spreads the fire!
 A quarter of Rome in ashes lies already
 And like a blackened corse: stifled with smoke,
 The population from their houses reel.
 Meantime the Christians prophesying woe
 And final doom upon a wicked world.
 To thee they point! To thee the source of fire
 Who has drawn down on them celestial flame.
(LOUD MURMURS & SCREAMS) (IV,[6])

Seneca adds:

They are crying the world shall crumble and the skies
 Fall, and their God come in the clouds of heaven
 To judge the earth.
(LOUD MURMURS & SCREAMS) (IV,[7])

The fire spreads and soon steam and flames rise from the upstage area. Nero interprets the flame less theologically than the Christians: it is his mother's revenge. More to the point, however, the fire is a consuming, feminine rage. The very *mise-en-scène* is in revolt against him: visually burning behind him, audibly screaming below him. A chorus of voices cries to Caesar. Nero responds:

Let it rage!
 This fire is not the act of mortal mind,
 But is the huge conception of a spirit.
 Leave me to this imagination.

This is the awful vengeance of the dead.

This is my mother Agrippina's deed.

I will not baulk the fury of her spirit.

(Takes up harp from table L. C.)

Let the fire rage and purge me of her blood!

Rage!

Rage on!

See, see!

How it eats and eats!

How it drinks!

What hunger is like unto the hunger of fire!

What thirst is like unto the thirst of flame!

(The flame flashes up L.)

I, I too have felt it!

To destroy—to destroy!

To leave behind me ashes, ashes.

(Crosses to R.)

To dance over the world as a frenzied dancer

With whirling skirts of world-wide flame!

(FLAMES ON BACK-CLOTH—MUSIC)

Blaze! Blaze!

(Comes down steps)

Thou, thou didst create the world

In the stars innumerable smiling

Thou art light

Thou art life—thou art God—Thou art I!

(STEAM COMES UP)

Hast thou sated thy vengeance yet?

Oh, now am I free of thy blood.

I have appeased and atoned.

I have given thee flaming Rome for the bed of thy death

Here is thy funeral pyre.

O Agrippina! Mother! Mother! (IV,[8])

The burning of Rome was Nero's greatest expenditure, and for Tree's production it was the climactic tableau in a play existing practically for spectacle's sake. The scene inspired Robert Ross to remark, ". . . I think in the last act Mr. Brock (the manufacturer of fireworks, not the sculptor) might be called in to act Beaumont to the Fletcher of Mr. Stephen Phillips."³⁰ But even this spectacle, like all others in the play, existed within the

³⁰The Academy, 3 February 1906.

play's discourse. With Agrippina and female political subjectivity dangerously looming in the margins, and with increasing insistence on taking center stage, the male subject carefully constituted is seriously threatened. Nero blames his mother for the destruction, yet he begins to admire the flames and identify with them as powerful consumers, providing the play's penultimate fantasy. Things, however, rarely go as planned. According to Constance Collier, on opening night the fire refused to take and the great effect existed primarily of a few pops and sparks and then one loud explosion that sent soot into the air covering all on stage.³¹ Nero coughed.

Nero proves an ideal vehicle to analyse Tree's use of spectacle. Written specifically for the type of theatre Tree produced, it incorporated in the language the rules governing spectacular production providing an important map for its analysis. Fantasy, commodities and desire intermingled in service of the aggrandizement of the producer who not only provided the feast for consumption but was in turn the chief consumer. Contemporary anxieties were played out on stage to be purged or heightened for dramatic effect. In all, the production was an evocative performance

³¹"We had a terrible misfortune on the first night," writes Collier. She explains how the effect was supposed to work. "Here and there little sparks appeared as the fire broke out . . . [and] gradually the whole city began to burn, bursting into flames which mounted higher and higher as the curtain descended. I lay dead upon a couch; Nero stood watching the licking flames, reciting verses and playing upon his lyre." However, when the moment came for the climax, nothing happened. "Tree began to get nervous, and so anxious was he to keep his eyes on his effect that his fingers never touched the strings of the lyre, but plucked away in mid air. Never a flame appeared—only a few pops and sparks! He grew frantic, twanging wildly at nothing and reciting his verses. I opened my eyes in my anxiety. Although I had been dead for some time this got a titter from the audience. Suddenly there was a loud explosion, and everything went up in soot as the curtain descended." Constance Collier, Harlequinade: The Story of My Life (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1929), 176.

geared to appeal to the current culture of the time: Imperialistic, lusting after commodities, and anxious about the chaos promised by a new century.

CHAPTER 3

SPECTACULAR TOPOGRAPHIES: H MAJESTY'S THEATER IN THE LONDON METROPOLIS

The floodlights have moved away from the actors who possess proper names and social blazons, turning first toward the chorus of secondary characters, then settling on the mass of the audience. . . . We witness the advance of the number. It comes along with democracy, the large city, administrations, cybernetics. It is a flexible and continuous mass, woven tight like a fabric with neither rips nor darned patches, a multitude of quantified heroes who lose names and faces as they become the ciphered river of the streets, a mobile language of computations and rationalities that belong to no one.¹

. . . if we wish to consider the semiotics of the actual theatre performance, we must of course bear in mind that the performance itself, while it is the central object of investigation, is only part of the total experience of attending the theatre and of making sense of what happens when we undergo such an experience.²

The principal functions of H Majesty's Theatre within the city of London were to, first, attract audiences and, second, to reinforce with its structure the theatrical experience. Of course, these general functions of any theater vary greatly depending on the particularities of the theater building itself. Those particularities can include the architectural design, the location of the building, a style of production, the star in residence (if there is one), and the type of audience usually in attendance. All these factors contribute to the significance (or rather, *signifiance*, the operative signification) of the building and its relationship to the city around it since through its signifying activity it both attracts audiences and structures their collective experiences often, in fact,

¹Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: U of California P, 1984), frontis.

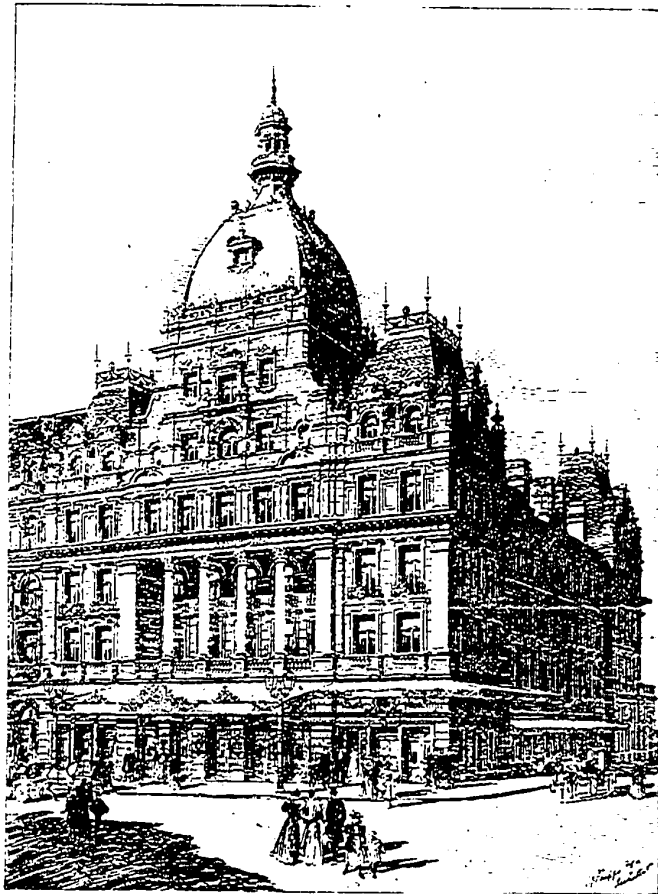
²Marvin Carlson, Theatre Semiotics: Signs of Life (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1990), 41.

simultaneously. In other words, reinforcing a particular theatrical experience through the semiotics of the theater building and its site, by representing that experience architecturally, usually proves to attract audiences in and of itself since desire for that experience typically brings them to the theater in the first place. Further, the theater's efforts to form a collective society then influence them, as a group, towards a particular experience not only necessarily places the operation of theater within the society it represents in its very architecture, but also clearly means the architecture of the theater is itself a social mechanism. According to theater scholar Marvin Carlson whose semiotic analysis of theater buildings provides a theoretical skeleton to this chapter:

Thus a semiotic perspective should urge us to consider that the theatre, an architectural object found in a variety of societies and historical periods, can be expected to offer a rich selection of connotations beyond its basic function of providing a space for the encounter of spectator and performer.³

Attracting audiences from the outlying suburban districts of an expanding London, West End theaters, particularly H Majesty's, functioned as landmarks in a landmark district. An imposing monument on two prominent street corners—the theatre found itself where Charles II Street met Haymarket Street but was architectually linked to the corner of Pall Mall and Haymarket through the adjacent and structurally identical Carlton Hotel—H Majesty's Theatre argued for prominence by its very structure and location. While it never achieved the significance of Nelson's column in Trafalgar Square, St. Paul's, or the Houses of Parliament in Westminster monumentally defining mental constructs of "London"; and while it failed to maintain a lasting cultural

³Carlson, 43.



H. MAJESTY'S THEATER, LONDON.
GENERAL VIEW.

Figure 13. H Majesty's Theater, c. 1897

status like the Covent Garden Opera House, H Majesty's Theatre was in its time, nevertheless, an important element in the London urban fabric. An architectural monument of Edwardian culture, the building was constructed to attract a public dazzled by their own ability to consume objects even as it structured through the theatrical experience how those objects could be consumed. Sitting in the West End, the neighborhood of conspicuous consumption and the home of most of London's imposing landmarks, H Majesty's, like the other large commercial theaters in the same area, contributed to the conspicuousness of the consuming practices of the bourgeoisie (and their demand for overflowing sensuality) while assuring in its monumentality that the West End would be the home of this socio-economic and ultimately hegemonic spectacle.⁴

Like most theaters of the period, H Majesty's Theater built by Herbert Beerbohm Tree was a place of and for the consumption of commodities reified into spectacle. As such, it performed a social duty. Introduced to a growing abundance of commodities manufactured by industrialized capitalism, bourgeois consumers increasingly found themselves lost in a sea of objects through which it became increasingly difficult to navigate. In response, places developed where a variety of commodities could come

⁴According to Baudrillard, adapting Veblen's political economy of conspicuous consumption according to current semiotic discourse, "In the economic order it is the mastery of *accumulation*, of the appropriation of surplus value, which is essential. In the order of signs (of culture), it is mastery of *expenditure* that is decisive, that is, a mastery of the transsubstantiation of economic exchange value into sign exchange value based on a monopoly of the code. Dominant classes have always either assured their domination over sign values from the outset (archaic and traditional societies), or endeavoured (in the capitalist bourgeois order) to surpass, to transcend, and to consecrate their economic privilege in a semiotic privilege, because this later stage represents the ultimate stage of domination." Jean Baudrillard, For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign trans. Charles Levin (Telos P, 1981), 115-116.

together for the convenience and efficiency of the consumer. Notably, these places created an aura of commodity abundance, overloaded as they were through accumulation and centralization. Of course not everyone who entered these new spaces could afford to buy what they saw, even with a general decrease in prices in the economy and generally stable wages. But according to Rosalind Williams, the aroused envy could be temporarily assuaged by the mere spectacle of these commodity constellations even as they intensified the desire for the objects displayed. " . . . [T]he consumer revolution . . . brought an anodyne in the form of environments of mass consumption, where envy is transformed into pleasure by producing a temporary but highly intense satisfaction of the dream of wealth."⁵

H Majesty's Theater principally attracted audiences because of Beerbohm Tree's status as the leading actor-manager, himself a kind of landmark, in addition to the popularity of his commodity-laden spectacular style. Thus the building with its palatial presentation of sensual abundance not only structured and reinforced a theatrical experience defined by a commodity aesthetic, but also reinforced as a theatrical experience the personality of Beerbohm Tree presented in abundance, literally crammed into practically every available wall space. What is unique about H Majesty's Theater is that it was built during the height of this commodity boom, unlike other theaters that adapted to it. With characteristic opportunism, Tree opened his theater during the Diamond Jubilee year, 1897. According to the fondly nostalgic historian Macqueen-

⁵Rosalind Williams, Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: U of California P, 1982), 92.

Pope, "For [Tree] himself created that theatre . . . , and it was the very essence of Edwardian Theatre, as he was the very embodiment of the actor-manager."⁶

While the previous chapters examined the representation of the actor-manager within the *mise-en-scène* on stage and the threats to that construction, this chapter examines his representation within the context of the theater building and its relation to the surrounding urban environment. Principally, this chapter will examine the significance (*signifiante*) of H Majesty's as another spatial representation of Herbert Beerbohm Tree, this time architecturally rather than dramatically configured, and will place that representation within an urban landscape defined semiotically as a discursive "text," a topography. In the process, this chapter will also argue that through this spatial representation within the theatrical architecture of H Majesty's, the actor-manager as a discursive subject becomes a type of urban topography as well and as such functions as a representative of other urban bourgeois subjects also configured as urban topographies, though of lesser varieties. The urban topography may in fact be another Imperial topography since, as Said points out, the great European empires of the period were dominated by their metropolitan centers. "We may thus consider imperialism," writes Said, "as a process occurring as part of the metropolitan culture, which at times acknowledges, at other times obscures the sustained business of empire itself."⁷

Typically most everything in theater is done for an audience of some kind so that audiences form the principal context of most discussions of a theatrical event. At the

⁶W. Macqueen-Pope, Carriages at Eleven: The Story of the Edwardian Theater (1947; Port Washington, NY: Kennikat P, 1970), 31.

⁷Edward Said, Culture and Imperialism (New York: Vintage, 1994), 51.

very least they are, through their perception of it, the principal carriers of the mise-en-scène into the surrounding social milieu; at the most, in Patrice Pavis' formula they in fact construct it, putting together its meaning in their perceptive consumption of its individual parts.⁸ While they may carry the code of the mise-en-scène into their everyday lives, changing their everyday perceptions, they also carry the code of their everyday lives into the mise-en-scène, influencing how they will ultimately put it together and shaping the meaning they will draw from it, i.e., its critical significance. The surrounding architecture of the theater building also presents a code for the audiences to use as they construct their perceptions, its code the semiotic reinforcement of the theatrical experience. But, like the code of the mise-en-scène, the code of the theater space can also become infected with other codes audiences carry from other experiences in other spaces, even as it infects the codes of those other spaces when the audience members enter them after attending the theater. This argument suggests, then, not only the inescapability of communicative subjects from semiotics, but the direct communication between diverse spatial sign-systems linked by the subjects who move through them. Thus, because its audiences existed in an urban, metropolitan environment, *H Majesty's* necessarily and intricately existed in that same environment, constantly infecting and infected by urbanity.

In other words, the commodity-laden mise-en-scène existed in another commodity-laden spectacle: the London Edwardian metropolis. In fact, it could not have existed outside of this urban context. Urbanization and commodification were

⁸See Patrice Pavis, Languages of the Stage (New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1982), cited above.

complementary, inter-dependent processes which not only radically changed the nature of modern economic practice, but the very nature of subjectivity as well. Citizens became consumers. As the actor-manager moved through the fetishized stage spectacle to become the spectacle of the consumed, fetishized subject, the spectator moved through the spectacle of the city, consuming (buying, looking, using, eating, signifying) becoming a manifold subject as well. Both were object-laden spatial operations.

Another landmark within the urban text of Edwardian London with a significant influence on commercial theaters were the new department stores planted alongside them throughout the West End. Overtly concerned with the spectacularization of consumption—one of their innovations was to display items where they could be seen—these burgeoning spaces filled with conspicuous commodities encouraged casual walking through as they enticed their visitors with objects placed strategically within miniature domestic or exotic "scenes." Like the actor-manager moving through the theatrical *mise-en-scène*, customers moved through the space of the department stores and their *mises-en-scène*, projecting fantasized subjectivities through territorializing object-identifications. In the process, consumers became territorialized as these objects left their marks on their fantasized bodies, forming a semiotic code they carried with them.

Department stores like the theaters were teaching Londoners new ways to encounter space. Department stores made over urban subjects into aimless consumers, flâneurs passing through. As urbanity was increasingly defined by the consumption of commodities, the city could mark itself more completely on the body and the bodies

could become more integrated into the commodified terrain. According to Elizabeth

Grosz:

. . . the city is . . . the site for the body's cultural saturation, its takeover and transformation by images, representational systems, the mass media, and the arts—the place where the body is representationally reexplored, transformed, contested, reinscribed. In turn, the body (as cultural product) transforms, reinscribes the urban landscape according to its changing (demographic, economic, and psychological) needs, extending the limits of the city, of the sub-urban, ever towards the countryside which borders it. As a hinge between the population and the individual, the body, its distribution, habits, alignments, pleasures, norms, and ideals are the ostensible object of governmental regulation, and the city is a key tool.⁹

For Michel de Certeau, whose critique of spatial discourses includes an exegesis of the city, the elementary spatial operation practiced on and in the city is walking. "The ordinary practitioners," he writes, "live 'down below,' below the thresholds at which visibility begins." At ground level, "They walk—an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, *Wandersmännner*, whose bodies follow the thick and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it."¹⁰ The translation of the

⁹Elizabeth Grosz, "Bodies-Cities," *Sexuality and Space*, ed. Beatriz Colomina (New York: Princeton Architectural P, 1992), 249. Grosz's definitions of the body and the city, though lengthy, are informative. In her terms, both emerge as spatial semiotic apparati. "By *body* I understand a concrete, material, animate organization of flesh, organs, nerves, muscles, and skeletal structure which are given a unity, cohesiveness, and organization only through their psychical and social inscription as the surface and raw materials of an integrated and cohesive totality. . . . The body becomes a *human* body, a body which coincides with the 'shape' and space of a psyche, a body whose epidermic surface bounds a psychical unity, a body which thereby defines the limits of experience and subjectivity, in psychoanalytic terms, through the intervention of the (m)other, and, ultimately, the Other or Symbolic order (language and rule-governed social order)." Grosz, 243-244. "By *city*, I understand a complex and interactive network which links together, often in an unintegrated and de facto way, a number of disparate social activities, processes, and relations, with a number of imaginary and real, projected or actual architectural, geographic, civic, and public relations. The city brings together economic and informational flows, power networks, forms of displacement, management, and political organization, interpersonal, familial, and extra-familial social relations, and an aesthetic/economic organization of space and place to create a semipermanent but ever-changing built environment or milieu." Grosz, 244.

¹⁰De Certeau, 93.

spatial city in fact into a "readable" discourse, an "urban text," occurs at the dialectic intersection where the experience of walking becomes representable by a city map—where topology (walking, practice) becomes topography (mapping, discourse). For de Certeau, whose own discourse looks for a "free" space of operation within totalizing discursive networks of power—thus offering an important revision to the work of Michel Foucault—walking is forever elusive and potentially transgressive to the discourse of the city. De Certeau writes:

[I]f in discourse the city serves as a totalizing and almost mythical landmark for socioeconomic and political strategies, urban life increasingly permits the re-emergence of the element that the urbanistic project excluded. The language of power is in itself "urbanizing," but the city is left prey to contradictory movements that counterbalance and combine themselves outside the reach of panoptic power. The city becomes the dominant theme in political legends, but it is no longer a field of programmed and regulated operations. Beneath the discourses that ideologize the city, the ruses and combinations of powers that have no readable identity proliferate; without points where one can take hold of them, without rational transparency, they are impossible to administer.¹¹

Because walking is the point where the discourse of the city potentially dissolves, administering the movement of the *Wandersmänner* is where ideology begins.

Ultimately, then, this chapter will show, by in some cases literally walking through various urban topographies, how the theater of H. Beerbohm Tree became an urban topography within the city of London and how as a topography it engaged, administered and grounded the urban subjects moving through it. By describing the topography, this study moves towards re-constructing the experience of attending the theater, the topology of Edwardian theater-goers. In other words the "map" will be used to approximate the practice. Thus the historian can only re-trace a trajectory of their

¹¹De Certeau, 95.

movements as a means of moving toward the experience itself. That experience, however, is forever elusive, as de Certeau notes, "these thick or thin curves only refer, like words, to the absence of what has passed by."¹²

Walking to the Heart of London

The first urban topography explored is the city of London itself. Typically, London is divided between the East End and West End named simply by their relation to the officially incorporated mile-square City proper. According to the popular Baedeker's tourbook of 1905:

The *City* and the *East End*, consisting of that part of London which lies to the East of the Temple, form the commercial and money-making quarter of the Metropolis. It embraces the Port, the Docks, the Custom House, the Bank, the Exchange, the innumerable counting-houses of merchants, money-changers, brokers, and underwriters, the General Post Office, the printing and publishing offices of *The Times*, the legal corporations of the Inns of Court, and the Cathedral of St. Paul's towering above them all.

The West End, by contrast:

. . . [T]hat part of the town to the west of the Temple, is the quarter of London which spends money, makes laws, and regulates the fashions. It contains the Palace of the King, the Mansions of the aristocracy, the Clubs, Museums, Picture Galleries, Theatres, Barracks, Government Offices, Houses of Parliament, and Westminster Abbey: and it is the special locality for parks, squares, and gardens, for gorgeous equipages and powdered lackeys.¹³

¹²De Certeau, 97.

¹³Karl Baedeker, London and Its Environs: A Handbook for Travelers (London: Karl Baedeker, 1905), 104.

As one Japanese tourist wrote, excluding the commercial center that divides them, "the West End represents wealthy London; the East End stands for poor London."¹⁴ The East and West Ends, however, were only the central division of the official city boroughs; the surrounding London suburbs throughout the late nineteenth century continued to expand the actual urban landscape, gobbling outlying towns in all directions as the middle classes migrated toward them. Baedeker cites the 1901 census to estimate the population of London as over 4,500,000. Including the surrounding suburbs that population, however, increases to over 6,500,000 making London one of the largest metropolitan areas in the world.¹⁵ In 1905 London was a site of tremendous architectural expenditure. The physical structure of London consisted of over 600,000 buildings including 1,500 churches, 7,500 pubs, 1,700 coffee houses, and 500 hotels and inns all tied together by 7,000 miles of meandering streets. According to Baedeker, over 900,000 residences housed the London population which doubled in size since 1851 including the addition of 2,000 miles of streets.¹⁶ Growing London was becoming more and more crowded.

G. W. Steevens, no doubt using the experience for literary purposes, decided one morning to walk across the entire metropolis of London, from suburb to suburb. While the typical suburban theater-goer would probably take the bus or one of the newly finished underground trains, Steevens' journey offers a progressive panorama of the city

¹⁴Smimasa Idichi, *My London Year*, (Tokyo: Eigokenkyr-Sha, 1914), 150.

¹⁵Baedeker, 106.

¹⁶Baedeker, 106.

these commuters traversed. Steevens' walk marks out the social terrain from the suburban perspective. With some irony, he borrows from the literary travel genre of the jungle explorer, a genre particularly popular during this colonizing period.¹⁷ He begins:

At half-past nine, on a dull, close morning, I set out, alone and unarmed, to cross London on foot from end to end. The feat may have been performed by other explorers, principally tramps, but few, if any, have lived to think it worth mentioning. I would be the Nansen or Stanley of London.¹⁸

Steevens' trek took him from his southwestern suburban home just outside of Merton to the northeastern suburb of Epping Forest. Of the southwestern suburbs he writes, "Nothing ever happened at any of them except rare and transitory murders, and they are not peopled by saints and heroes and men of genius, nor yet by melodramatic blackguards and victims. They are quite commonplace—in short, suburban."¹⁹ Yet even these districts, in their unbothered conditions defining comfortable neighborhoods, according to Steevens have a decipherable meaning. In spite of their commonplace qualities, "you find yourself giving them, as members of London, a significance and even a distinct individuality apiece"²⁰ even if, like Steevens, one finds oneself at home. In short, these neighborhoods can be classed even as they class their inhabitants by lending the name "suburban" to the sub-set of the bourgeoisie found there.

¹⁷According to Judith Walkowitz, "The fact and fantasy of urban exploration had long been an informing feature of nineteenth-century bourgeois male subjectivity. . . . It established a right to the city—a right not traditionally available to, often not even part of, the imaginative repertoire of the less advantaged." Judith Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992), 16.

¹⁸G. W. Steevens, "The Crossing of London," London Described by Great Writers ed. Esther Singleton (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company), 160.

¹⁹Steevens, 161.

²⁰Steevens, 161.

Steevens reaches Battersea, just south of the Thames. Unlike the more middle-class suburbs that Steevens found unremarkable, this lower-class suburb is notably marked by the signs of its poverty, labor and industry: the chimneys, the railway viaducts and "goods-stations":

Now I came down into Battersea—down the gradient and down in the world. Hitherto London had grown comelier towards its rich centre; now comes a header into poverty. Dingy and hard-working and poor—here was the poor man's suburb, a new phenomenon. Highly honest and respectable, the Queen's Road, with well-built houses, is as clean as anything could be among so many chimneys. It is a poor quarter, but not a slum—the home, not of vice, but of honourable labor. Choking in the reek of the town, seamed with railway viaducts, pitted with goods-stations, Battersea yet commands at least as much respect as pity.²¹

The abruptness through which these districts change from poor and run-down to rich and privileged is illustrated once Steevens enters Chelsea, on the other side of the Thames: "Round a corner, in a second, you are out of the suburbs and in the centre. Behind you flannel petticoats are drying from the windows. Before you roll the carriages of the Belgravians, under the wing of Buckingham Palace."²²

Steevens constructs an image of the city not only through writing, but principally by walking. According to urban semioticians who divide cities into discreet units—pathways, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks—the images these units construct help subjects find their way by constructing a legible image, a cityscape to be read. "Just as this printed page, if it is legible, can be visually grasped as a related pattern of recognizable symbols," writes Kevin Lynch, "so a legible city would be one whose

²¹Steevens, 164.

²²Steevens, 165.

districts or landmarks or pathways are easily identifiable and are easily grouped into an overall pattern."²³ The significance of the city image is that it places the subject within it, working with the walking/reading subject to prevent the disaster of becoming lost.

According to Lynch:

In the process of way-finding, the strategic link is the environmental image, the generalized mental picture of the exterior physical world that is held by the individual. This image is the product of both of immediate sensation and of the memory of past experience, and it is used to interpret information and to guide action. The need to recognize and pattern our surroundings is so crucial, and has such long roots in the past, that this image has wide practical and emotional importance to the individual.²⁴

In other words, the city image operates as a practiceable discourse helping subjects to navigate an urban landscape, to find their way. The semiotic city image operates as an interpretative guide to the physical environment. Subjects, then, are both shaped by the city—distributed throughout its districts, nodes, paths, edges and landmarks—but also shape the city by their practice, by their interpretative image, writing the text as they go.

According to de Certeau, "The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered."²⁵

But Steevens' image of London is clearly influenced by other semiotic codes outside the semiotic code of his walking observations. In other words, the route of Steevens' journey from suburb to suburb is conditioned by more than the geography of expanding London. In one sense, the journey is from one middle class topography to

²³Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (1960; Cambridge, MA and London: The M.I.T. Press, 1975), 3.

²⁴Lynch, 4.

²⁵De Certeau, 97.

another, assuring the readers that the whole of London is hemmed in by the suburban, working and commuting middle classes. This topography wants the best of both worlds: the convenience of the city and the environment of the country, the privileges of the aristocracy and the self-righteousness of workers who earn a living. Surrounding London on all sides, the city belongs to them even as they choose to live outside it. Further, cautioned by the fear of a working poverty, but drawn to the opulent, leisured life of the classes above, Steevens' trek is a trek in status, marked by his clothes which are transformed chameleon-like in each neighborhood: "the clothes which had been seemly in Balham and offensively rich in Battersea seem a kind of nakedness in St. James's Street."²⁶ In other words, his clothes displayed the markings each new urban environment left on his body. He not only traced his route on the city, the city traced itself on him as he walked through it.

His suburban middle-class prejudice is apparent when he reaches the "center" of London, or the West End:

In the centre, the real London, along Pall Mall, through Trafalgar Square, along the Strand and Fleet Street, I noticed I noticed nothing. In the suburbs, whether poor or well-to-do, I found things worth remarking, even when I knew the districts quite well. But the heart of London gave no such suggestions: it was just there to be accepted.²⁷

This portion of London, where H Majesty's Theatre is located, is for Steevens a district that exists more for the spectacle of Society than for any real social purpose:

These streets are not especially beautiful or supremely important. They are not so elegant as Mayfair [the home of aristocratic London], or so imperial as Whitehall [London's governmental neighborhood], or so rich as the City [the

²⁶Steevens, 165.

²⁷Steevens, 165.

place of commerce]. Yet, somehow, they are the heart of London. To them and from them sets the full tide of London's blood. Clubs and theatres and newspapers are their chief feature—parasitic institutions all, in their way. They are not elements of the city's life, but amenities of it: they reflect rather than constitute London. We do not live there, and most of us do not work there. Yet if you wanted to lay an ambush for a man your likeliest place would be there: you would get him in time, between St. James's Palace and Ludgate Circus. You can hardly ever pass along this line without seeing somebody whom you know if only by his portrait.²⁸

Notably Steevens' description is marked by a smug dismissal, a grudging acknowledgement of the district's cultural centrality, and an unrelenting fascination verging on jealous desire. The negative elements of his text is matched by the fetishizing fascination for the spectacle the West End provides. The "we" of this passage—his fellow suburbanites—is inextricably drawn to the core even as it recognizes that for them the district holds nothing, what could only have been a continual frustration for those who wanted to cash in on the great middle class promise of upward mobility. In short, the suburban middle classes go to the West End as tourists to witness a spectacle of high society—either on the streets themselves or, more conveniently, in the theaters that are distributed throughout the district.

In many ways, the West End theatricalizes the city. The site of spectacle, not only in the theaters it contains, but also the department stores, restaurants, clubs and street life, the West End offers a representation of England's core: upper class, Imperialist, and propertied. Passing itself off as the heart of London it encourages its misrecognition as all of London, as its fetish. This misrepresentation, in fact, continues today. Ironically, the West End, even as it transplants itself for the city, adopts the

²⁸Steevens, 165.

veneer of a country estate. The West End, until the late nineteenth century, was the home of London's wealthy elite and aristocracy who moved there in order to be close to the courts of St. James' or Buckingham Palace. Shops, clubs and semi-public gathering spaces like the parks and theaters developed to serve their life-styles. By the end of the century, however, the West End underwent significant renovation as the expanding needs of the empire meant their homes became the law offices, government departments, and places of commercial administration of the growing bureaucracy. In addition, department stores, museums, and theaters (as well as other entertainment centers like concert halls and art galleries) located themselves there, adapting the semiotic codes of the architecture of the wealthy townhouses that defined the neighborhood, though their audiences were equally from the new class of civil servants who worked there.²⁹ Thus, underneath the exterior that resembled the great country estates of the aristocracy,³⁰ the British middle classes administered the Empire and reproduced its representation. Those theaters that began as "neighborhood" theaters for this wealthy class, like Tree's first theater the Haymarket, soon became theaters of the nation. According to Carlson,

Clearly, those theatres seeking to attract the attention and patronage of the general public will locate, whenever possible, near important nodes, along major paths, and perhaps close to prominent landmarks, while a theatre tied to a specific segment of the population will likely be found in a district congenial to that segment, either because the theatre was consciously placed there to share

²⁹See Walkowitz, 24.

³⁰Leonore Davidoff, The Best Circles: Women and Society in Victorian England (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1973), 31.

the connotations of the district or because, once established, it came to be associated with the district.³¹

Thus H Majesty's, like its neighboring private clubs and theaters, architecturally represents a manor house more than a metropolitan theater. The West End is constituted for tourists.

In spite of Steevens' suburban middle class prejudice, the West End of London, because it was the capital city's capital of spectacle, is the subject of the remaining portion of this chapter. Steevens' journey continued until he reached his destination, the green country of Epping Forest. He took the train home. The journey of this chapter now pauses to discuss the audiences who attended the theaters in the West End Steevens so despised.

Edwardian audiences and their critics

The audiences whom H Majesty's attracted and structured and who ultimately carried out its business were, like Steevens' image of London, configured by an experiential code. In some ways appealing to their desire to consume objects, Edwardian theaters, especially H Majesty's, constructed experience-defining architectural codes according to the new commodity aesthetic. Adapting to the rules of conspicuous consumption was a marketing strategy as much as a cultural configuration. Since the description of a cultural configuration, the subject of H Majesty's Theatre, remains the goal, this chapter examines the practice of Edwardian theater audiences as

³¹Carlson, 48.

seen through their critics. And, since Steevens and other city walkers demonstrate that practiced experience becomes fodder for discursive maps, topographies of activity, the Edwardian audience forms the next discursive topography to be passed through.

According to Macqueen-Pope, Edwardian audiences of all classes were chiefly interested in consumption, "For it is a curious fact in British play-going that no playgoer can support a couple of hours or so at the theatre without almost constant nourishment. It has always been so."³² With a subtle reference to the type of consumption Bakhtin admired, he implicitly describes a civilizing evolution that culminates in the Edwardian period:

The theatres of the actor-manager had banished oranges, though at certain of them you could still smell them, and see them being consumed, in the galleries. Especially at Christmas time. Nuts, too, were not encouraged and seldom eaten, although popcorn was chewed and at the end of the period, pea-nuts got in. However, there were abundant selections of chocolates with which to regale yourself, and the young ladies who showed you to your place carried trays of enticing-looking boxes, which they sold freely.³³

A subtle sexuality emerges from his description, particularly the "young ladies" with "enticing" boxes of chocolates sold freely on which one (presumably male) could "regale." Equally subtle is the management of the audience's consumption. Oranges are "banished," nuts are "not encouraged" and peanuts, somehow, "got in." As a consolation, more refined, quieter chocolates were offered as a suitable alternative outlet. Nevertheless, even these proved disruptive. According to Macqueen-Pope, "So great was the appetite for chocolates, and sweets out of paper bags, that the rustling

³²Macqueen-Pope, 24.

³³Macqueen-Pope, 25.

caused by making a selection in the dark often offended the few who were more intent on the play than eating and a good deal of 'shushing' would ensue."³⁴

The prevalence of consumption to the experience of attending the theater led many writers to frequently invoke consuming bodies when describing Edwardian audiences, and in some cases forming their many consuming bodies into a single, consuming topography: a single consuming constellation of bodies, the body of the audience. According to the actress Gertrude Kingston, the British public was voraciously biased towards their own moralistic provincialism:

Raw meat, uncooked, unseasoned, without sauce piquant or gravy, that is what the British lion roars for and roars at. Serve him up a fillet neatly trimmed, fried in butter, garnished with a truffle, and he turns away from it with a growl as a "nasty French dish"! But give him all the Ten Commandments broken up into bisquit, make it hot with mustard and cayenne, and his bellow of delight can be heard from St. Clement Danes to St. James's Church.³⁵

The public's contempt for the theater she diagnoses is refected back in her own contempt of them. "But as long as the paying public demands adulterated artificial alcohol that poisons the tongue and destroys the taste," she writes, "you cannot expect the caterer to expend thousands in pure, bright wine that is not asked for by the consumer."³⁶

Kingston, of course, is speaking metaphorically but the metaphor is not accidentally chosen. Further extending her image, the audience as a consuming body is

³⁴Macqueen-Pope, 26.

³⁵Gertrude Kingston, "The Public as Seen from the Stage," *The Nineteenth Century*, 57 (1905): 602.

³⁶Kingston, 608.

susceptible to disease in addition to its undiscerning appetite. According to Kingston, ". . . it is probable that whereas the solitary spectator receives a literal record on the clean wax of his unbiased mind, in a crowded house the receiver becomes blurred and blotted by the manifold impressions around him." She explains:

In a large concourse of humanity contagion, both physical and moral, is inevitable, and if we accept the theory of the physical bacillus of disease overcoming the weaker microbe in its life-and-death struggle, then it is also possible that the bacillus of discontent engendered by the huddling together of a vast body of people is stronger and more combative than the bacterium of content.³⁷

Another author's, Clayton Hamilton's, diagnosis of American audiences, written for the The Forum in 1907, concurs with Kingston's. He states, "Successful dramatists play upon the susceptibility of a crowd by serving raw morsels of crude humor and pathos for the unthinking to wheeze and blubber over, knowing that these members of the audience will excite their more phlegmatic neighbors by contagion."³⁸ Hamilton, in fact, was something of an expert on audiences, having written several articles for American publications dealing with their psychology and "economy of attention," and "emotional contagion."³⁹

Hamilton's opinion of the crowd is not very high:

The mental qualities in which men differ from one another are the acquired qualities of intellect and character; but the qualities in which they are at one are the innate basic passions of the race. A crowd, therefore, is less intellectual and

³⁷Kingston, 611.

³⁸Clayton Hamilton, "The Psychology of Theater Audiences," The Forum, 39 (October 1907): 240.

³⁹In addition to the already cited "Psychology," see "Economy of Attention in Theatrical Performances," North American Review, 187 (April 1908): 513-522; "Organizing an Audience," The Bookman 34 (October 1911): 161-166; and "Emotional Contagion in the Theater," The Bookman, 39 (April 1914): 139-147.

more emotional than the individuals that compose it. It is less reasonable, less judicious, less disinterested, more credulous, more primitive, more partisan; . . . a man, by the mere fact that he forms a part of an organized crowd, descends several rungs on the ladder of civilization.⁴⁰

The essay is his attempt to articulate this mass and characterize its qualities. The act of writing is an attempt to ground this uncivilized mob into an organism that is analyzable and eventually controllable, to discursively transform a topology into a topography. Emotional, susceptible to further emotions like the spread of diseases, the crowd is also more sensual than the individual:

It has the lust of the eye and of the ear—the savage's love of gaudy color, the child's love of soothing sound. It is fond of flaring flags and blaring trumpets. . . . Color, light, and music, artistically blended, will hold the crowd better than the most absorbing story. This is the reason for the vogue of musical comedy, with its pretty girls, and gaudy shifts of scenery and lights, and tricky, tripping melodies and dances.⁴¹

For Horace Hutchinson, throwing sarcasm and mild resignation into the state of affairs of his fellow audience members, theater was relegated to an after-meal event and restricted by the physical and mental strain of digestion:

It is just because it does not go too deep that its audiences will be big, for its humor is of the kind that men and women who have dined generously and are not in the mental condition for keenest thought can perceive and then go away with the agreeable impression that they have been remarkably clever in perceiving it. That is always so satisfactory. It places us at once among the elect.⁴²

The writer E. Aria seems to echo Hutchinson's analysis by describing the unfocused attention of audiences as a post-consumption delirium anticipating Brecht's gripes

⁴⁰Hamilton, "Psychology," 236.

⁴¹Hamilton, "Psychology," 240.

⁴²Horace Hutchinson, "About People who go to Plays," *The Living Age*, 261 (June 1909): 616.

against the Culinary Theater. "The power of concentrating their thoughts elsewhere than upon themselves," writes Aria, "is perhaps the one grace denied to our latter-day omniscients, for, even while confronted with the work of their crowned king of dramatists, A. W. Pinero, they fail to mark and comprehend his meaning . . ." Their condition can only be assuaged by seducing them with more stimulation that only further obscures mental acumen. "No, the average playgoer does not listen," Aria complains, "and he must be persuaded, or lured, or forced, to take heed, lest this sleeping sickness of indifference, which now but stifles his desire to observe, should come to kill his capacity for perception."⁴³

This indifference to the intellectual merits of drama forms Aria's chief complaint against an audience more interested in the social occasion the theater provides than its artistic products. The audience in Aria's description resists the most modest efforts at control, including the scheduled beginning of the performance that reveals a smug sense of ownership:

The popular custom of tardy arrival is as noticeable upon a first night as on any other; and no matter at what hour the curtain may rise—at 7:30 or at 9:15—people will stroll into their seats at their leisured pleasure. . . . "I have paid for my seat, and I shall use it at my convenience": that is the attitude of the Briton who never will be a slave, even to courtesy; so the nuisance is perpetually committed, and this primary act of callousness to the play and the players is a prelude to others scarcely less offensive.⁴⁴

Extending his annoyance to the behavior of the audience during the performance, particularly the behaviour of women, he writes:

⁴³E. Aria, "About Playgoers," *The Nineteenth Century*, 52 (July 1902): 77.

⁴⁴Aria, 79.

These occupants of the stalls and the dress circle arrive in large or small parties, and seem to find the theatre a most convenient place for gossip. They will, during the progress of the play, discuss with each other such vital points as the departure of a housemaid, the delinquencies of a lover, and the extravagance of a dressmaker, while they devote of course their best attentions to the appalling misdemeanors of some other woman. Any attempt to hush them into silence is met with indignant insult, and the prattle proceeds through the entire evening; while during the last moments of the last act it is diversified by an openly expressed anxiety for supper, and a noisy rustling into cloaks.⁴⁵

He concludes about the present condition of theatrical performances in London, "Here in town we seem to grow yearly more frivolous and flippant, and less sincere, while an engrossing egotism combined with flagrant commercialism stultifies a sense of appreciation of the fine arts, of which, by the way, Voltaire accounted acting the finest."⁴⁶

These writers were fighting an uphill battle since the causes for their complaints were rooted within the structure of the theaters themselves. Their criticisms, however, may have been somewhat extreme. The theaters were, after all, like the societies from which they sprung, thoroughly regulated. The somewhat unruly consuming body of the Edwardian audience was fit into a structure as fortified as the bodices and stiff collars of its members, though naturally of course, like them adequately dressed by lace and elegance.

One means through which English theaters attempted to control the contagion of intermingling bodies was to segregate them by class. Thus the topography not only resembles a consuming body, but was dressed according to the class codes of

⁴⁵Aria, 79-80.

⁴⁶Aria, 82.

Edwardian society. When Clayton Hamilton visited London in 1910 he was practically in rapture over the discreetly genteel organization of the public. He assures his American readers, "that they may, in spite of being strangers, enjoy the fine flavour of the aristocratic life of the metropolis by the simple process of going to the theatre."

Further:

There is about the mere act of theatre-going in London an aroma of gentility which is not appreciable elsewhere and which is a source of charm quite unrelated to the merits of the play. For whatever critical opinions one may form concerning English plays and English acting, there can be no denying that the mere experience of going to the theatre in London is immeasurably more pleasing than the analogous experience in America. The reason is not only that the audience, which contributes so much to one's enjoyment of a play, is far more elegant in appearance and in atmosphere, but also that the theatres themselves are conducted with a delicacy of taste which is almost unknown in New York.⁴⁷

Hamilton is assured by the gentility of the experience from the moment he approaches the box office window. Hamilton writes:

For the ordinary American visitor, the special pleasure of attending the theatre in London begins at the moment when he books his seats—or, as we should say it, buys his tickets. When he steps up to the box office, he will discover with pleasant surprise that it is conducted by a gentleman who speaks the English language, wears the clothes appropriate to the varying hours of the day, and receives him with courtesy and consideration.⁴⁸

In underscoring the quaint difference between "booking a seat" and "buying a ticket," Hamilton targets the first of many biases that construct the Edwardian audience and their participation in the theatrical event, namely the difference between renting a small piece of property for the evening ("booking seats") or gaining admittance by

⁴⁷Clayton Hamilton, "Going to the Theatre in London," The Bookman, 31 (August 1910): 601-602.

⁴⁸Hamilton, "Going to the Theatre," 603.

purchasing a piece of paper ("buying a ticket"). The distinction is subtle, but Hamilton's deliberate underscoring of the jargon emphasizes its significance. Hamilton concludes affirming that the box office personnel are "intellectually and socially" of the same class as the genteel actor-managers, "it is, for an American, a pleasant adventure to discover that in London the theatre business is, in all its branches, a business of gentlemen."⁴⁹ In other words, the English theater-goer is a guest of the propertied, leisured gentry.

American John Corbin, writing for the Scribner's Magazine in 1904, describes for his readers a London audience gathering for a performance and the gulf that separates its members:

The spreading marquee that shelters the entrance from the damp of fog and the drizzle of rain is lined with the carriages of the rich and great, out of which issues a stream of men in full evening clothes, and of women from beneath whose silks, laces and furs gleams the allurements of white necks and shoulders—an unbosoming of self that in all other lands is permissible only in the most exclusive gatherings.

In contrast,

Just beyond the marquee is a narrow pent-house, under which gathers a queue of men and women in the clothes in which they have worked all day, carrying umbrellas that only half shield them from fog and drizzle, and shifting from tired foot to tired foot. When the door is at last opened they file into the pit for half a crown, where the white shoulder of luxury and fashion displays its soft curves between them and the stage; or into the gallery for a shilling, from which the white shoulders are the wings of seagulls, spread out in flight toward the footlights.

He concludes, "The voluptuous splendor of wealth and fashion, with the hungry eyes of the many peering above—that is the symbol of all one finds in the London theatre."⁵⁰

⁴⁹Hamilton, "Going to the Theatre," 602.

⁵⁰John Corbin, "Play-going in London," Scribner's Magazine, 35 (April 1904): 395.

Corbin's gulf, however, is not only symbolized by where the patrons enter the theater, but notably by the commodities that engage their bodies: the carriages of the wealthy, the men's evening clothes, the women's bosom-revealing gowns of silk, lace and fur or the working-clothes of the poor, their feeble umbrellas and tired feet. The topography of the Edwardian audience was not only spatially demarcated by class, but by the consuming practices signaled by commodities that ultimately signal class. According to Baudrillard, consumption is in actuality a "restrictive social institution."⁵¹

Corbin emphasizes the social distance within London audiences by widening the gap between the wealthy, upper-middle and aristocratic class and the working, lower class. He notes that the working middle class do not usually attend the theater: "Three-fourths of the English people, and those numbering the most sober, intelligent, and vitally alive, enter the theatre not at all, or only on the rarest occasion; and so, when they come are ignorant of true dramatic art." No doubt Steevens, the suburban middle-class walker, numbers among these. Rather, "[t]he commercial manager of to-day stands between the devil of the rich and the deep sea of the poor."⁵² Implicitly then, in his admiring, slightly eroticized descriptions, the London audience for Corbin exudes decadence. With an American, middle class readership Corbin finds in the theater, as in the center of the London metropolis where only the very poor or the very rich resided,

⁵¹Baudrillard, 31. Further, "the *distinguishing function* (*distinctive*) of objects (as well as of other systems of signs relevant to consumption) is fundamentally registered within (or flows into) a *discriminating function*: thus the logical analysis (in tactical terms of stratification) must also open onto a political analysis (in terms of class strategy)." Baudrillard, 53.

⁵²Corbin, 396.

the decay of the poor matched by the moral corruption of the idle rich. Corbin's description flavors the London theater as simultaneously exotic, foreign, dangerous and desirable.

Once in his seat, Clayton Hamilton reveals how social contiguity can be smugly self-defining as he reveals his own snobbish class bias:

Looking about him in the stalls, the visitor perceives that everybody, without exception, is in evening dress and is the sort of person he would gladly ask to dinner. He feels like a member of a large theatre party; he is among his own people; and there arises a delightful sense of being at home which he can rarely experience in New York. Such conversation as he overhears does not jangle on the auditory nerve; he knows that the names of the people beside him are easily pronounceable by the Anglo-Saxon tongue; he suspects even that they know who wrote the play.⁵³

Hamilton, like Corbin, also recognized that he and his fellow patrons in the stalls were not the only class in the theater. Behind him, "walled off by a barrier, or fence, that stretches clear across the theatre"⁵⁴ lies the pit. According to Hamilton, at pains to describe it positively, "The pit is patronised by people of a very estimable class, and is often frequented by well-educated men and women who wish to save money and do not care to dress."⁵⁵ The representation of class in Hamilton's topography, like Corbin's, is spatially and sartorially defined.

Thus both Americans identify class segregation as the chief characteristic of Edwardian audiences. Taking its cue from its place in the city, Edwardian West-end audiences were defined by the spectacle of the gentried class of the surrounding

⁵³Hamilton, "Going to the Theatre," 604.

⁵⁴Hamilton, "Going to the Theater," 604.

⁵⁵Hamilton, "Going to the Theatre," 604.

neighborhood and the prevailing rigid class hierarchy that kept all others at a safe distance. According to John Pick, "Essentially the West End existed as a form of social contract between an elite of some twenty to thirty West End managers and an affluent, influential audience who either naturally enjoyed, or taught themselves to enjoy, the new refinement of theatre-going."⁵⁶ The contract between the management and stalls established a closed relationship, exclusive and snobbish. Other classes attending the theater could only peer at the relationship.

According to Pick, "the solemn rituals of snobbery . . . extended far beyond the reaction to the play and involved dressing-up, the gathering together of the theatre party, the dining-out, the foyer conversation, and the care in saying the 'correct' thing afterwards."⁵⁷ Thus all aspects of theater consumption could be used to define class. Such is the case with Corbin's description. Drawing a parallel between his two classes of audience members, Corbin distinguishes class through the digestion of the before-theater meal. He imagines what the lower of the two classes had for dinner, on the outskirts of the West End in bohemian Soho:

If he has dined at home he has dined amply on boiled mutton and potatoes. And there are French restaurants in Soho, where one may dine in no little elegance for eighteen pence (thirty-five cents) among newspaper men, painters and actors, on a meal that begins, perhaps, with escargots from across the channel, and ends with a delicious Parisian *pâtisserie*. The dinner may not be as digestible as boiled mutton and as sustaining of life as boiled potatoes; but it is fertile of dreams, and that, as I have said, is what the play-goer is after!⁵⁸

⁵⁶John Pick, *West End: Mismanagement and Snobbery* (East Sussex: John Offord, 1983), 103.

⁵⁷Pick, 108.

⁵⁸Corbin, 397.



Figure 15. The before-theater meal in a Soho cafe (Scribners, April 1904)



Figure 16. The after-theater meal in a fashionable restaurant (Scribners, April 1904)

In contrast, the wealthy play-goer has another experience. Rather than ephemeral dreams, the wealthy patron consumes materially:

Before the play one catches at most a lightning glimpse of the wealthy play-goer as he dashes up to the marquee, torn from the luxury of his evening food and drink, and already late, perhaps, for the rise of the curtain. A decorous matron ushers him to his seat, selling him a programme for sixpence on the way. Between the acts she serves coffee to those whose dinners have been curtailed; and in the back of the house is a bar at which a barmaid dispenses drink and tobacco.⁵⁹

The absence of a detailed description of the meal presumes a familiarity on the part of his readership, and is therefore rhetorically unnecessary.

In a democratic gesture, Corbin describes the working poor who are safely separated from their betters in the stalls. For Corbin they remain somewhat unknowable—thus discursively distanced—but nevertheless defined by their place in the auditorium from whence they derive their names (a "pittite" sits in the pit, while the "gods" are found in the uppermost gallery). More importantly, however, they are defined by the desire that brought them there. Corbin may not know who they are, but he knows why they are there—to escape into a "dream":

Who are the pittite and the god? The one thing certain is that they have worked hard through long hours, and are hungry for something that will release them from weary, workaday realities. It is with reason that Shakespeare has been called the dramatist of dreams; and to this day the tired Briton hungers for such stuff as dreams are made of.

Corbin makes a pointed comparison, "The queue at the doors of those druggists must have looked very much like the queue that nightly gathers at the pit and the gallery

⁵⁹Corbin, 400.

doors beneath umbrellas in the rain; and the object of its patient waiting was the same."⁶⁰

Incidentally, the effort needed to enter the theater defines the class as much as where they sat in the auditorium. Though the lower classes were allowed in to watch from a distance, it was not easy to enter nor were they made to feel particularly welcome. Long waits before admittance to the theater form much of the experience of the lower class of playgoers. Tickets for other portions of the house could be leisurely bought in advance, either at the theater box office window, through the mail, or in the various "libraries" or ticket agencies throughout the city. The cheaper seats in the pit or upper gallery, however, could only be paid "at the door" and were not reserved. Paper tickets were not even given in exchange for the price of admittance, but rather metal discs that were given back when entering. Thus those who waited in line entered the Edwardian theaters without a sense of ownership, either symbolically marked by a piece of paper or more tangibly by a marked-out space guaranteed to each person, since the pit and gallery were filled with benches without division. The opening illustration of Corbin's article illustrates the pit and god's "propertyless" situation. Three figures, a woman and two men are huddled in a doorway while a cartoonish policeman walks by eyeing them with mild suspicion. The caption reads, "Not homeless, but first arrivals."⁶¹ Those audience members who sat in the cheaper parts of the auditorium were barely tolerated transients.

⁶⁰Corbin, 396.

⁶¹Corbin, 395.



Figure 17. "Not homeless, but first arrivals." (Scribner's, April 1904)

Further, an entertainment industry, haphazard and spontaneous, grew out of the opportunity of the long lines and a captured audience. Street theater became an important aspect of the experience of those waiting to see West End performances cheaply, though in most cases it was merely thinly veiled begging. According to Macqueen-Pope, "this theater of the gutter was a scratch affair and frowned on by the police. But there was quite a lot of it notwithstanding the fact that it had to be somewhat furtive and intermittent on account of the minions of the law."⁶² Corbin colors the experience in a thinly ironic language of petit-luxury:

Even as he stands in line, wearily waiting, the pittance has his little luxuries. A seedy fiddler scrapes a tune to put the dance joyance into his stiffening legs. A young music-hall artist, out of a job, with a rim of felt that he twists into the likeness of many hats, and with a mobile face upon which he pulls many grimaces, gives you imitations of anyone from Napoleon Bonaparte to Samuel Weller. Up comes an old actor, his coarse, red face betraying all too plainly the cause of his poverty and decay. He boasts of his many appearances on the stage with the mightiest of the land of dreams; but he will admit, if you ask, that his best role was the Deck Steward in "The Overland Voyage."⁶³

Corbin concludes, "These are privileges and delights unknown to the fair and great who float by in lace and ermine!"⁶⁴ The subtle implication is that the street performers and their begging is more appropriate entertainment for these lower class patrons, both are treated as transients barely within the boundaries of authority.

Nostalgia is the hallmark of historian W. Macqueen-Pope's description of the spontaneous society that forms in line:

⁶²Macqueen-Pope, 15.

⁶³Corbin, 398.

⁶⁴Corbin, 398.

The regular cheap price playgoers, having got into position, began to enjoy themselves. They all had food, for that is an essential part of theatre-going. Many of them came equipped with reading matter. . . . But mostly they talked. And they talked about the Theatre, plays and performers. There were discussions into which those near them would be drawn. Many a friendship was made in the pit and gallery queue, and many a marriage, too.⁶⁵

For a popular production the line could form hours before the theater opened, a fact that discredits to some degree the certainty that those who worked could afford the time for an evening's entertainment, though on Saturdays most Londoners enjoyed a half-day holiday. This society contains the potential for mob frenzy, a fact that lies behind both Corbin's and Macqueen-Pope's descriptions. Macqueen-Pope describes the anxious response from the crowd when the doors are about to open:

But now the queue has closed up. Those nearest the door have heard the sounds inside the theatre. Books, newspapers and magazines are pocketed or put in handbags with what remains of the refreshments. There is an air of being "greyhounds in the slips, straining at the start."

Once the doors are open, however, the genial society becomes a mob:

. . . the playgoers surge forward, to plank down their half-crown or shilling, snatch up their checks, rush up or down stairs, according to whether they are pittites or gallery-goers, and at last into the empty auditorium. A race down centre aisle, if any, for the best seats, a more frenzied rush round for seats at the ends, the gradual filling up of the whole place as the queue gets in and accomodates itself. Then you would settle down, and if you had been early comers, congratulate yourself on the excellent position you had got "just as good as a stall."⁶⁶

Aside from the fact that pittites or gods were more likely a middle class patrons looking for a cheap seat or a way to "rush" a popular performance than actual members of the working class, their consumption experience defines them within the parameters of

⁶⁵Macqueen-Pope, 14-15.

⁶⁶Macqueen-Pope, 18.

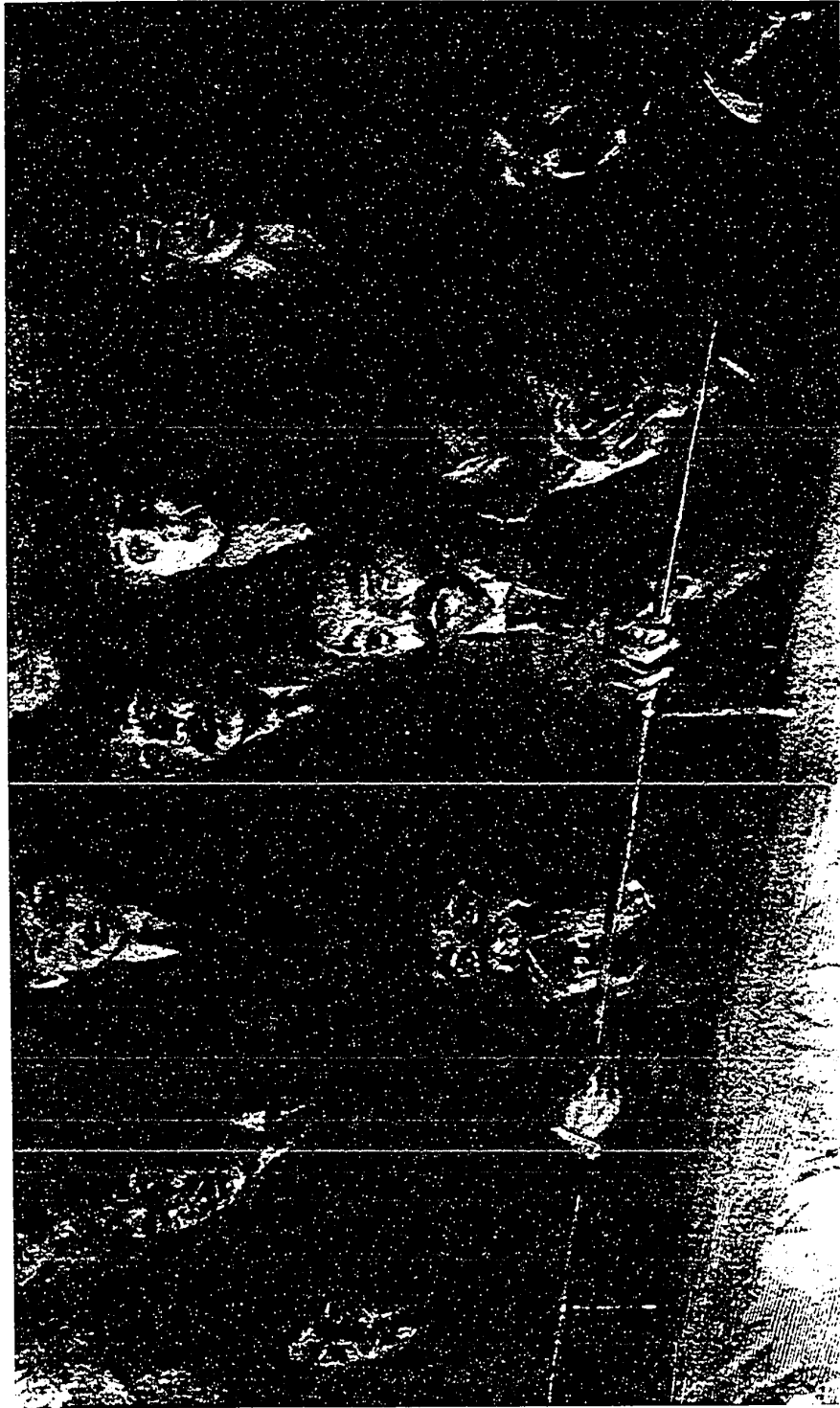


Figure 18. The peering gods in the Gallery (Scribner's, April 1904)



Figure 19. The Stalls patrons and Pit patrons (Scribner's, April 1904)

working class existence: unpropertied, living in the streets, spontaneously affable, and given to voracious consumption and mob-like, frenzied determination.

While Corbin is unable to know anything definite about the pittite or god except for their working condition and their hunger for spectacle, he is nevertheless able to know a great deal about those who sit in the stalls, boxes or dress circles. He conjures a typical, "ideal" subject. Corbin's audience member (male), "may be a successful barrister, a Member of Parliament, a country gentleman, a peer of the realm; but he is far more likely to be a merchant who has risen from a commercial traveller, a successful broker, an adventurer from Africa or Australia—not the exponent of English life and feeling, but the outsider, who is eager to catch its point of view and make a way into it."⁶⁷ Thus going to the theater is a way of entering into society, to take one's place in its spectacle. Further,

He pines for something that will fill his lazy eye, aid digestion by rippling his diaphragm, and put no strain upon either his sympathies or his understanding. The women folk he takes with him are of better taste and intelligence in the world of art; yet on average they are below, rather than above, the general level of the British matron and the maid. Sentiment for them must be pink, and all emotion represented must be such as they imagine to be felt and talked about in polite society. Above all the actress's gowns must be modish, the stage settings elaborate.⁶⁸

However, despite the marked distinction in both identity and identity-forming experience, Corbin drives home the commonality of the pit crowd and the stalls.

"Different as is the point of view of the stalls from that of the pit, what they demand is the same—an entertainment that has the ease and felicity commonly attributed to a

⁶⁷Corbin, 399-400.

⁶⁸Corbin, 401-402.

dream, even though it has also its unreality."⁶⁹ In other words, audiences for Corbin on both sides of the class gulf, find "their lazy eyes swimming in the glitter of light, their undiscerning senses swooning in a riot of color."⁷⁰ Thus, while particular consuming practices define the audience, the stage spectacle levels the audience into one crowd. A dialectic exists, then, between a strictly defined and enforced hierarchy of consumers and their egalitarian consumption in the spectacle. While distinguishing themselves through consuming practices, they were in Corbin's formula equally consumed by the spectacle witnessed.

Back in the Stalls, Hamilton justifies the pit's existence at length, emphasizing its "tradition" and universal history—and subsequently emphasizing the universal history of the English class system—while also arguing for its dubious advantages, including the freedom of choice. Not surprisingly he colors the limitations that freedom hemmed by affordability with opportunity:

Of course the real reason why there is a pit in London is that there has always been a pit; that in itself is sufficient for the British mind; but it must be admitted that the system is, on grounds of common sense, an exceedingly good one. It serves to dress the house, by providing one place for people who are in evening dress and another for people who are not; it places one of the most desirable sections of the auditorium at the service of that important class of the theatre-going community that cannot afford to pay more than sixty cents; it makes it possible for a person who is willing to wait a long time in the queue to see an exceedingly popular play on any evening that he chooses, even though all of the reserved seats for that performance may have been sold out many days in advance⁷¹

⁶⁹Corbin, 402.

⁷⁰Corbin, 402.

⁷¹Hamilton, "Going to the Theatre," 604.

Hamilton unequivocally praises the separation of classes architecturally reenforced by the theatre auditorium. Thus the class gulf is orderly maintained and with it the social identity of the audience member:

It will be seen, therefore, that just as one may travel first, second, or third class on a British railway, so one may go to the theatre first class, in the stalls or the dress circle, second class, in the pit, or third class, in the shilling gallery. There is no pretence at a general and democratic commingling of upper, middle, and lower classes in the auditorium . . . [T]he visitor must admit that the class system is greatly conducive to the comfort of the individual. He can choose his own place and can be sure of feeling at home with his neighbors.⁷²

In his article critiquing the psychology of American audiences, cited above, Hamilton reached a principal characterization that could shed some light on the rigidity he admires so much in the English system. Namely, for Hamilton, audiences were comprised chiefly of a mob of women; women therefore were responsible for the audience's decline. He states, "It is to an unthinking and over-feminine mob that the dramatist must first of all appeal; and this leads us to believe that action with passion for its motive is the prime essential for a play."⁷³ Hamilton explains his reasons:

For nowadays at least, it is most essential that the drama should appeal to a mob of women. Practically speaking, our matinée audiences are composed entirely of women, and our evening audiences are composed chiefly of women and the men that they have brought with them. Very few men go to the theatre unattached; and these few are not important enough, from the theoretic standpoint, to alter the psychologic aspect of the audience. And it is this that constitutes one of the most important differences between a modern theatre audience and other kinds of crowds.⁷⁴

⁷²Hamilton, "Going to the Theatre," 604-605.

⁷³Hamilton, "Psychology," 245.

⁷⁴Hamilton, "Psychology," 245.

Thus, "since women are by nature inattentive, the feminity of the modern theatre audience forces the dramatist to employ the elementary technical tricks of repetition and parallelism, in order to keep his play clear though much of it be unattended to."⁷⁵ Thus the appeal of a theatre run through and through by gentleman shows both gendered and classed biases.

Faced with a topography of a fickle, inattentive, consuming, disease-ridden, not to mention potentially revolutionary, feminine body, theaters were faced with a daunting task if they hoped to tame this body within their structure. The feminine characteristics attributed to the theater audience sprang not only from a quantitative assessment of its principal members (a disingenuous justification), but from misrecognizing its principal activity—consumption of the spectacle—as a female activity, passive and receptive. It also misrecognized that men, too, participated within the consuming culture of the period though public recognition as a male consumer risked wearing the signs of the criminalized dandies and aesthetes. More importantly, however, the configuration of the audience's topography as female placed audiences within a phallic economy where the possessors of the phallus provide the objects for those who lack it to consume. Thus, producing economically remains dependent on having a penis, despite growing evidence to the contrary. Controlling its emotional reactions, regulating the bodies that comprise it, yet keeping it satisfied with the material provided for its consumption become the dominant concerns of the (male) producers. Engendering the audience as female, however, had the added effect of

⁷⁵Hamilton, "Psychology," 245.



Figure 20. The carriage crowd (Scribner's, April 1904)

engendering the architecture of the building as male, as that which acts upon pliant bodies. Operating these spaces, then, greatly contributed to the phallic significance of the actor-managers. Thus ultimately the buildings themselves not only buttressed the consuming activities of bourgeois culture they welcomed, but fortified the phallic economy on which that culture was based.

An Excursion to Harrod's

As significant as the audience's "taste" (or lack of it) was in shaping performance events at the West End theaters, the audiences were themselves shaped by the theaters they entered. While the *mise-en-scène* on stage established the subject of the actor-manager/producer, the *mise-en-scène* of the theater space (auditorium, foyer, box-office and passage-ways) established the audience as subject, distributing its parts and shaping its collective experience. But audiences did not arrive at the theaters as neutral material to be shaped into a compliant subject. They arrived partially shaped by other spaces through which they moved, spaces whose influence formed their subjectivities as well, whose codes they collected. They carried the marks of these other urban topographies on them as they entered the theater space. They even applied these codes to the spaces they entered, productively reshaping the spaces, making them habitable. One such topography, one more closely tied to the theater space than some others, was the department store, like the theaters a site of ocular and material consumption.

The commodification of the theater space corresponded with the theatricalization of spaces where one found actual commodities. To support its

increasingly commodity-based economy, the city gave rise to spaces that promised a diversity and abundance of objects with a satisfaction of the desire for spectacle.

Commodities seen or bought in stores operated like props as much as properties on stage functioned like commodities. In the theaters, the commodification of properties within the spectacle increased the spectacle's sensual effect. In the department stores, spectacle gave commodities an aura that increased their already fetishized status as they promised the consumer greater satisfaction of a wider range of desires. In both spaces, object-identification cloaked in desire and dispersed throughout the field of items to be consumed territorialized both the space and the subject who moved through it founding *mises-en-scène* of various subjectivities. According to Rosalind Williams, "As environments of mass consumption, department stores were, and still are, places where consumers are an audience to be entertained by commodities, where selling is mingled with amusement, where arousal of free-floating desire is as important as immediate purchase of particular items."⁷⁶

The Great Exhibition of 1851 was a watershed moment in English and European commodity culture. Under a single structure the products of the Victorian Industrial Revolution were brought together and displayed for a marvelling public, effectively inciting a concomitant Consumer Revolution. The greenhouse environment of the Crystal Palace—the home of the exhibition—gave a decidedly home-grown effect even as it "naturalized" the technological achievements of England with its Hyde Park setting.⁷⁷

⁷⁶Williams, 67.

⁷⁷According to Thomas Richards, "In the Crystal Palace there was monumental architecture and elaborate scenery, and there was fountains, locomotives, gasworks, and more—all meticulously staged. The Exhibition not only placed itself at the aesthetic confluence of these

Other exhibitions—most notably in Paris—followed regularly, setting accessible objects in exotic locales thus contextualizing European technological and colonial achievements within the economy of the commodity and placing the commodity within the context of "Western progress." The burgeoning department stores of the 1870s and 80s, heavily influenced by these exhibitions, similarly relied on placing commodities within exotic mises-en-scène, creating dream worlds and fantasy environments to entice consumers to buy the products, now fetish objects of the scene in which they were placed.⁷⁸ Entire departments and in some cases shops began to specialize for particular consumer identities, providing all the necessary props needed to reconstruct for example Japanese, Moorish, or sporting scenes.⁷⁹

Spouting the dictum, "Omnia Omnibus Ubique" (everything for everybody everywhere) Harrod's Department Store grew from a tiny grocer's shop in Knightsbridge just off of Hyde Park, the site of the commodity explosion of the Great Exhibition of 1851, into the Department Store of and for the Empire. Harrod's not only brought the empire's goods to London's middle classes and aristocracy, but promised to deliver those goods anywhere in the Empire and beyond. During much of the Victorian period, Harrod's remained a local grocer to the increasingly gentrified neighborhood of Knightsbridge. However, by the early 1890s, when it ceased to be in the hands of the

popular forms of spectacle; it also succeeded in making commodity culture virtually coterminous with the symbolic apparatus of spectacle." Thomas Richards, The Commodity Culture of Victorian England (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990), 58.

⁷⁸Ultimately that structure would include the body of Queen Victoria whose image—particularly during the Jubilees of 1887 and 1897—was used to sell commodities as diverse as black velveteen fabric, perfume and soap. Richards, 73-118.

⁷⁹Alison Adburgham, Shopping in Style (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), 156.

founding Harrod family and became a limited company, the store grew exponentially, adding departments and increasing the range of goods provided for consumers. During the period from approximately 1894 through 1909 the store changed dramatically as it bought up more and more of the surrounding neighborhood on Brompton Road and reconstructed its facade from a collection of low store fronts to the impressive terra cotta fortress—complete with imperial dome and cupola—it remains today. During the Edwardian era, Harrod's was transformed from a haphazard collection of store fronts into a self-contained singular palace of consumerism—a city unto itself.

The mini-imperialist project of Harrod's along the neighborhood of Brompton Road in Knightsbridge only expanded the store's ability to become a site for social gathering, spectacular displays of consumer goods, and a tourist destination unto itself. The expansion was spurred on by competition from other department stores—its old competitor Whiteley's and the new American immigrant Selfridge's in Oxford Street. Its ability to attract day-trippers and tourists increased when its neighbor, the South Kensington Museum, became the Victoria and Albert, itself a congregation of everyday items and curiosities from the across the Empire and globe.

In 1884 the expansion was well underway as the owners capitalized on a devastating fire to bring back a new Harrod's, larger than its predecessor. A review of the new store by the local Chelsea Herald describes not only the new premises but approximates consumers' experiences as they wander through the store. The review, like a theater review, described what customers would experience when they too, like the critic, entered the space. As well, the review demonstrates, like Steevens' trek into the West End and beyond, how spatial codes combine. The writer maps the store like

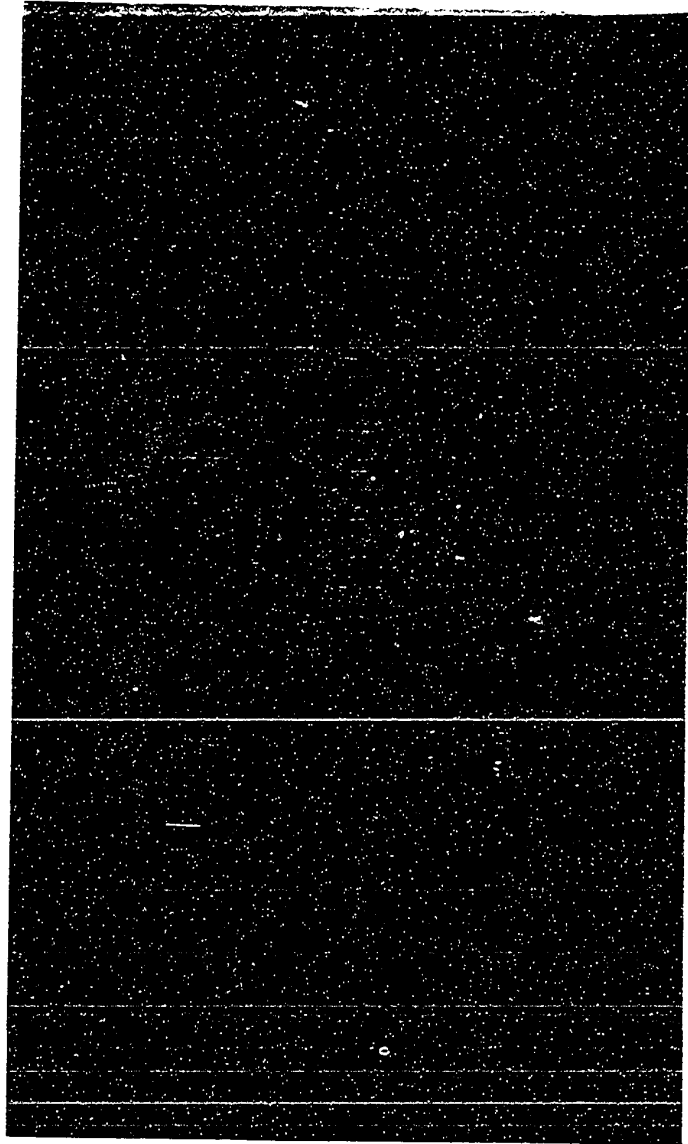


Figure 21. Harrod's, c. 1910

an explorer, describing vistas, long distances and landscapes of commodities. He proceeds immediately to the heart of the jungle, the base commodities upon which not only Harrods but the British Empire was founded, which in the store were in the basement:

As we enter from the street we are struck by the vast area that opens to our view, but we proceed at once to the basement and here we find strong rooms where the silver goods kept in stock can be placed safely after closing hours; here too are cellars built purposely for the storing of sugar, others for provisions, and bins by the score for the varied assortment of wines and spirits. There are also tea rooms piled up with chests from the lowly 'mixed at two shillings per pound' to the aristocratic 'scented pekoe' and another 'all the sweet perfumes of Arabia' containing the spices and other condiments of an appetizing nature.⁸⁰

Not surprisingly, even the tea is divided by class from the "lowly" to the "aristocratic."

The Empire of commodities, however, is centrally administered. Once up-stairs, the writer describes a circular counter where orders were written out and given to the army of staff who filled them, a type of bureaucratic distribution. From there he continues, specifically invoking metaphors of landscapes—man-made and natural—to describe an eclectic abundance of goods. In the process, he participates in the Victorian mania for naming:

Stretching from here a long way into the distance is the tea and grocery counter where pyramids of tea and sugar, mountains of coffee are mixed up with tins of bisquits, breeches' pastes, blancmange, glycerine, lobsters, plate powder, sugar candy, boot top powder, wax vestas, salt, prawns, phosphor paste, oysters, milk, knife polish, house flannel, dog bisquits, mustard and a thousand and one other articles of a heterogeneous nature, but all of which meet in the store room of any well ordered household.⁸¹

⁸⁰qtd Tim Dale, *Harrods: The Store and the Legend* (London: Pan Original, 1981), 12-13.

⁸¹Dale, 13.

The writer specifically uses the Empire's topography to emphasize the vastness of this remarkable grocery store through describing "pyramids" (recently acquired by the English when the ownership of Egypt was transferred from the French) and "mountains" of items. But most remarkable of all—and perhaps the most telling—is the way the abundance of goods and the Empire that supplies them is condensed into the store room of the middle class "well ordered" household. The promise of Harrod's is implicit: even the middle class insurance clerk working in the city can have a micro-British empire at his daily disposal. The writer remarks about what seems to him an over-abundance. The response implies a mob mentality assumed for the consumers and their demand:

As we look around this ground floor we are quite surprised as the enormous quantities of each article that it appears necessary to keep ready, but it is explained that often, and more particularly at holiday times and on Saturdays, there is such a rush of customers that unless this precaution was taken it would be impossible to serve quickly enough to keep the place even moderately clear.⁸²

Ascending the grand staircase, the writer enters the second floor, "a spacious warehouse where we find an amazing show of sterling and electro goods. . . somewhat more than one would expect to find in any retail establishment of ordinary dimensions." The rhetoric, no longer based on empire since now the emphasis is on technologically manufactured items—the new electro-plated dinnerware—is underscored by a language of showmanship rather than shopping, seeing rather than somatic consumption:

There are spoons and forks of all sorts, tea services, trays, biscuit boxes, soup tureens, kettles and stands, but a very noticeable feature is a splendid assortment of the goods that are now somewhat the rage, namely, jugs, flagons, salad bowls, trays, etc. made of oak and mounted in electro. These of themselves are worth

⁸²Dale, 14.

seeing, and will, we doubt not, attract a good many people to take a lounge on this floor.⁸³

In addition, on this floor are "a big show of lamps," saddlery, trunks and portmanteaux, "modern brass goods" and "kitchen requisites." He concludes, confusing a language often used for the actor-managers, "The whole of this spacious floor is under the management of Mr. Smart, and he is to be congratulated on having produced a show that, being almost unique in his class of business, deserves to be fully patronized by all who visit his employer's new premises."⁸⁴ Coincidentally, shop rhetoric was applied to the actor-managers' theaters forming a significant discursive exchange. Macqueen-Pope writes:

Like those exclusive West End shops which eschewed window display because they knew the customers who were on their books, so he too knew his own power of attraction. [The actor-manager] had built it up. He had made his home a place where you got good quality, the best quality, of the line he supplied, in its right atmosphere, where you were treated as someone he was glad to see, and for whom he had a regard.⁸⁵

Notably, the 1884 description pre-dates the Edwardian reconstruction of the store into a luxurious shopping palace and describes the store when it was a mere fraction of its eventual size. The Edwardian remodeling saw not only the growth of Harrod's into an island site in the hundreds of thousands of square feet, but also its interior redecoration in the grand style. Each department was transformed into a unique and exotic *mise-en-scène*: from the tiled bakery, vegetables, and meat courts

⁸³Dale, 14.

⁸⁴Dale, 15.

⁸⁵Macqueen-Pope, 30.



Figure 22. A Harrod's advertisement

with ceramic representations of bread, produce and meat; the Egyptian-styled satinwood woodwork, upholstered chairs and Indian carpets of the "Ladies' Club" hairdressing salon; to the more stately, Georgian-style carved Mahogany of the Gentleman's Department. No longer explicitly catering to all classes as the Victorian Harrods had, Edwardian Harrods marketed to an upperly mobile clientele almost exclusively adding opulence, luxury and comfort to the ever-increasing abundance on display.⁸⁶ The addition of several restaurants throughout the store meant that practically the entire body's needs and pleasures could be addressed while visiting the store. During this period, department stores were being conceived not just as places to conveniently buy life's necessities and occasional wants, but as social centers where the public could meet, relax and entertain themselves without the obligation to buy. Other department stores as well added tea rooms, public lavatories, writing rooms and post offices for the convenience of shoppers.⁸⁷

The 1895 catalog boasts of 75 separate departments within the store from the more typical Millinery, Women's Dress, Children's Clothes, and Home Furnishing Departments, to those departments historically with Harrod's from the beginning (the Grocery, Meat, Poultry and Vegetable Departments) to the more exotic departments: Perfumes, Drugs and Chemicals, Feather and Artificial Flowers.⁸⁸ In the Oriental

⁸⁶According to Alison Adburgham the upper most classes scorned the department stores, preferring their exclusive, more discreet, Bond Street stores. Adburgham, 175. Thus the department stores, like the theaters provided only the spectacle of the upper class for those who wished to place themselves in their midst.

⁸⁷Adburgham, 168.

⁸⁸Alison Adburgham, ed. Victorian Shopping: Harrod's Catalogue 1895 (New York: St. Martin's P, 1972).

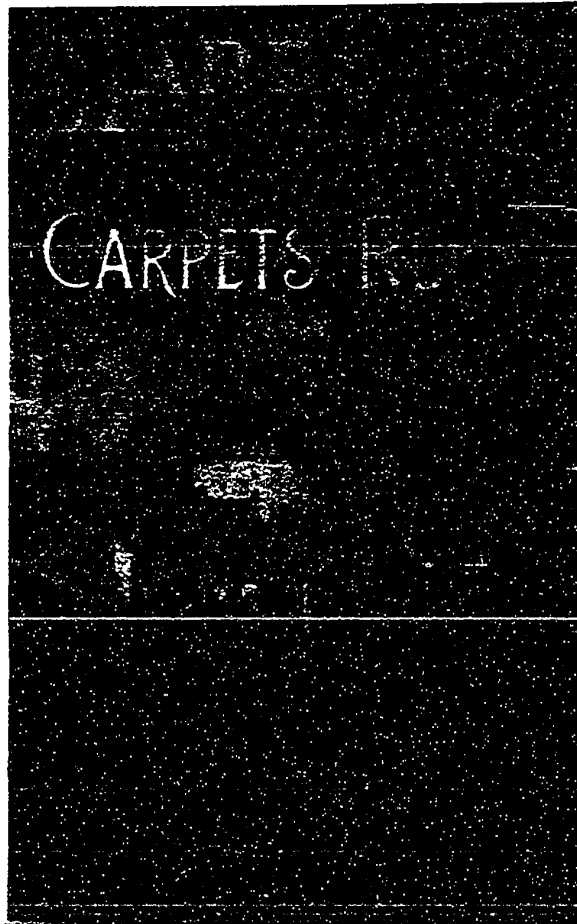


Figure 23. Selling the mise-en-scene

Department one could buy all sorts of furniture and objet d'art from the near and far easts. A Harrod's customer could literally be furnished from cradle to grave (the store had an extensive Mourning Department which provided not only the furnishings of mourning but also grave sites and funeral services) while also providing for surviving family through the Harrod's Insurance department. One could buy theatre tickets at Harrod's at its ticket library run by Messrs. Keith, Prowse & Co. or could hire private entertainments for children's parties, fêtes, garden or evening parties and festivals. Harrods offered a variety of musicians—a lady or gentleman pianist, small orchestras and ensembles, even a military band or a banjo quartet. For approximately £5 one could hire the Meier Family to perform "charming yodells of Tyrol and Switzerland, interspersed with characteristic Part Songs and Glees." Performing in the "picturesque style of the Zillerthal" this Alpine family could also perform original dances—"including the famous Tyrolean Shoeplattler"—or more traditional native peasant dances. Fortune tellers, Eastern Palmists, Hand-bell choirs, performing dogs, birds, cats and mice, "Negro Comedians," Musical clowns, and jugglers, conjurers and ventriloquists, Punch and Judy, and Mr. Harry Hayward's Royal Marionette Fantoccini were offered for hire in the catalogue. In short, an entire carnival was available at Harrod's.

By 1909 Harrod's was a city within a city. A conglomeration of interior spaces resembling street markets, dry goods stores, fashionable drawing rooms and opulent private clubs—with details of the Empire's exotic locales worked into the decor—Harrod's presented a "virtually real" environment of the city-as-market-place where every object becomes available for consumption and the Empire digested for the middle-class household. The labyrinthine ground plan even mimicked the haphazard

urban landscape of London. Spectacular representation was introduced as a new marketing strategy. Bodies moving through its space were caught up in the free-floating desire but also projected their own desire onto the objects to be consumed. The architecture of the department stores and the representation introduced both united diverse commodities within a single *mise-en-scène*, an urban subject. They mapped the space as they moved through it even as they were mapped by the space. Within the building desire may have floated free, but it was contained by the department store's topography.

A Landmark Theater: The Eiffel Tower

One more topography needs to be explored before this chapter enters H Majesty's theater. Landmarks are important elements within any urban topography. As recognizeable points along the pathway they aid navigation, functioning as guides pointing the way or in their series even define the way as subjects move from landmark to landmark. Significantly, then, in the process of aiding navigation through an urban space, landmarks write the space semiotically providing the means through which any space appears as a distinct topography. As signs guiding the subject's movement as well as what the subject sees, landmarks frequently becomes the very sign of the topography itself. Understanding the semiotic function of landmarks demonstrates the very construction of topographies.

According to Roland Barthes, the Eiffel Tower has a profound effect on the city of Paris. A centralizing node, as well as the city's dominant landmark, the Tower marks

Paris's center and, consequently, polarizes the urban sprawl. Even more significantly, for Barthes, the tower actually constitutes Paris as both the universal sign of the city (thus, "Eiffel Tower" becomes synonymous with "Paris") and the principle means through which the city can be viewed, or "deciphered" as Barthes terms it, by the tourist. In other words, to see Paris, one must view it from the Eiffel Tower. When presented with the view of Paris from the tower, the tourist "reads" the city as a text, thus "every visitor to the Tower makes structuralism without knowing it":

[I]n Paris spread out beneath him, he spontaneously distinguishes separate—because known—points and yet does not stop linking them, perceiving them within a great functional space; in short, he separates and groups; Paris offers itself to him as an object virtually *prepared*, exposed to the intelligence, but which he must himself construct by a final activity of the mind: nothing less passive than the *overall view* the Tower gives to Paris.⁸⁹

The image presented to the tourist by the tower is automatically broken up into recognizable points, districts, interconnections, and pathways and thus subjected to the process of decipherment. Conversely, though, that image, cut up, is reconstructed into the single view of the tourist, a montage—"Paris"—that then can be linked together into other pre-existing codes, contextualizing the view and making it understandable, even perceivable. For Barthes that code draws from the naturalism of landscape paintings.

Barthes states:

... by its very position of a visited outlook, the Tower makes the city into a kind of nature; it constitutes the swarming of men into a landscape, it adds to the frequently grim urban myth a romantic dimension, a harmony, a mitigation; by it, starting from it, the city joins up with the great natural themes which are

⁸⁹Roland Barthes, "The Eiffel Tower," The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), 9-10.

offered to the curiosity of men: the ocean, the storm, the mountains, the snow, the rivers.⁹⁰

The tower, as a landmark, turns experience into a view. The swarming crowds in the urban sprawl become a topography overlaid, in this case, with sublime romanticism.

Without a similar tower, London must be experienced at ground level. Its structuralism is therefore more elusive, less open to decipherment, almost escaping a single totalizing view. As any visitor to London knows, its winding streets and narrow passageways make getting lost a constant and frequent danger. Without a map, the explorer of London's urban terrain is subjected to almost constant disorientation. Perhaps because of this, descriptions of the city adopt the language of jungle exploration, like Steevens' account that began this chapter. In addition, because London eludes a single discernable structure, the construction of a London topography becomes more contestable. Topologies like Steevens', like the shoppers', like the audience members' abound, but their reification into a crystalized topography undergoes frequent revision.

Barthes argues that landmarks, like the Eiffel Tower, write topographies. In Paris The Eiffel Tower dominates as the singularly most important landmark, hence it operates as the universal sign of the city. London's elusion of a dominant topography results not only from its amorphous system of pathways, but because it lacks a comparable, universalizing landmark. Instead, various landmarks compete with each other to write the topography. The image of London that partially accomplishes the function of the Eiffel Tower in Paris is the view of the city from the south bank of the

⁹⁰Barthes, "The Eiffel Tower," 8.

Thames. Yet this view, in actuality a mere facade, only demonstrates the competition between landmarks as it sprawls from the Houses of Parliament to the Tower Bridge.

Not surprisingly, as viewing becomes more important to the establishment and maintainance of subjectivities—from consuming by looking to watching political pomp represented—theaters often become dominant urban landmarks. Barthes' analysis of the Tower, even, with its emphasis on the views it offers of Paris, is remarkably theatrical. And certainly H Majesty's with its imposing facade offered itself as a monumental landmark to Edwardian London. H Majesty's Theatre, then, by entering into this competition attempts to write a London topography. And, like other landmarks, it writes itself into the city text even as it attempts to re-write it. Like a renter in a new apartment, it makes the city "habitable" for itself by refashioning the environment as it adapts to the place in which it is found.

In order to accomplish this operation, the subject must enter into the space: to *inhabit* it. According to Barthes, the exploration of the city necessarily includes an exploration of its inner spaces, particularly its landmarks. The tourist's goal is to pry open the city, to penetrate the facade of the street life, and glimpse its heart. According to Barthes:

Ordinarily, for the tourist, every object is first of all an *inside*, for there is no visit without the exploration of an enclosed space: to visit a church, a museum, a palace is first of all to shut oneself up, to "make the rounds" of an interior, a little in the manner of an owner: every exploration is an appropriation; this tour of the *inside* corresponds, moreover, to the question raised by the *outside*: the monument is a riddle, to enter it is to solve, to possess it. . . .⁹¹

⁹¹Barthes, "The Eiffel Tower," 14.

For Barthes, Eiffel's tower, an open structure constructed with beams, rivets and metal frames, has no definite inside. Entering the tower means to enter the view. Thus the view, the tour of Paris, becomes the tour of the landmark's inside and hence the riddle the Tower poses and solves. The Tower's open structure leads to not only its self-demystification—its habitability—but the demystification of landmarks generally, hence its exploration at present. As the visitor climbs it:

. . . there is the enlarged spectacle of all the details, plates, beams, bolts, which *make* the Tower, the surprise of seeing how this rectilinear form, which is consumed in every corner of Paris as a pure line, is composed of countless segments, interlinked, crossed, divergent: an operation of reducing an appearance (the straight line) to its contrary reality (a lacework of broken substances), a kind of demystification provided by simple enlargement of the level of perception⁹²

Thus the Tower, which makes Paris into a readable, inhabitable structure—which deciphers its space into an analysable, critical text—is itself an analyzable structure. The Tower, the unifying sign of the city, the "pure line" visible from almost anywhere in Paris running through its smallest nooks and corners tying the city together as a discourse, becomes a sign of its own constructed-ness and hence its deconstruction. The Tower, in Barthes' analysis, is a constructed and constructing fetish.

H Majesty's Theater

Sometime in 1896, Tree wrote to a prospective partner:

I have just had the offer of perhaps one of the very best sites in London, and as my lease at the Haymarket falls out very shortly and as the house is not capable of enlargement, which is very necessary from a financial point of view, I have

⁹²Barthes, "The Eiffel Tower," 15.

conceived the idea of building a really first-class theatre with every modern improvement.⁹³

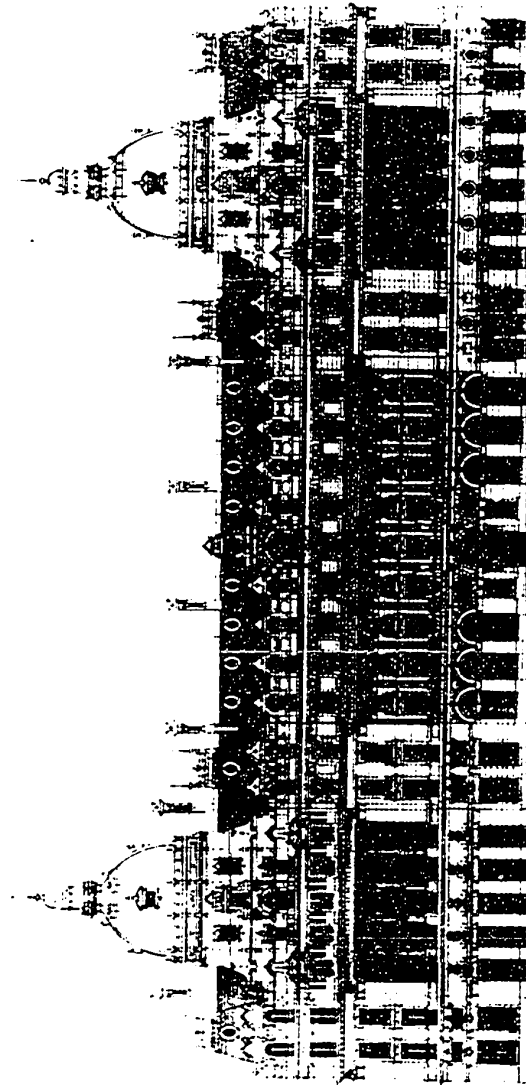
The site, located directly across the street from the Haymarket Theater at the corner of Haymarket and King Charles II street—approximately halfway between Piccadilly Circus and Trafalgar Square—was as the Survey of London points out, "in continuous use for theatrical entertainment for longer than any other place in London."⁹⁴ Early in the century the Royal Haymarket Opera House stood on the entire block from Charles street to Pall Mall. Destroyed by a fire in the 1860s, it was rebuilt as a Victorian theatre and Opera House known as "Her Majesty's" only to be demolished in the early 1890s after falling into disuse. Crown property, the site inspired several rebuilding schemes including a theater and hotel, an opera house and restaurant and shops, and hotel and shops.⁹⁵ In February 1896 after a scheme to build an Imperial Opera House failed to raise significant capital, the principal lessees entered into a contractual agreement with Tree to erect a new theater on one-third of the site, the remaining portion to be a hotel.⁹⁶ Architect C. J. Phipps was commissioned to design both structures as a single unit, retaining the Royal Opera Arcade in the back linking Charles Street with the Pall Mall and the one remaining structure from the original Royal Opera House. By April 1897, Tree was performing in his new theatre. The adjoining hotel, The Carlton, was completed in 1899.

⁹³Letter in Tree's handwriting [no signature, n.d.], University of Bristol Theater Collection, The Beerbohm Tree Collection.

⁹⁴London County Council, The Survey of London, ed. F.H.W. Sheppard, Vol. 29 & 30 (London: Athlone P, 1960), 223.

⁹⁵Survey of London, 245.

⁹⁶The Era, 1 May 1897.



"HIS MAJESTY'S" THEATRE, LONDON. EAST ELEVATION of BLOCK.

Figure 24. H Majesty's Theater and the Carlton Hotel

According to Macqueen-Pope:

Simply to go to His Majesty's was a thrill. As soon as you entered it, you sensed the atmosphere. It did not matter what part of the house, you felt that this was an important place, where things happened. Its main entrance can be seen to-day, but in Tree's time, it was graced by footmen in powdered wigs and liveries. Paintings hung on the walls, of Tree himself, and other great ones, good pictures by celebrated artists. Everything was in tone, nothing cheap, nothing vulgar.⁹⁷

The overall style of the theater is generally described as "French Renaissance," referencing the period of Louis XIV, the great French King of Versailles. The theater, built at the apex of British spectacular Imperialism—Victoria's Diamond Jubilee of 1897—is itself a palace of impressive consumerism. Built of Portland Stone and graced by elaborate architectural details such as balustrades, corinthian capitals, intricate and eclectic details over the many windows, and capped by an imposing copula, the theater sits fortress-like on the busy street-corner, a French country chateau in the heart of London. The interior of the theater, designed by H. Romaine Walker, carried the French Renaissance theme inside, epitomized by the design of the act curtain, a copy of the Gobelin Tapestry made for the brother of Louis XIV depicting "Dido Receiving Aeneas." Walker and his team of designers travelled to Paris for materials and special inspiration. In addition, they spent time in the British Museum among the antiquities inspiring themselves with the "true Classical feeling."⁹⁸ In spite of the fact that these workmen were building a theater he would claim as his own, Tree left the supervision of the construction to his wife Maud, and took his company on tour in America fulfilling

⁹⁷Macqueen-Pope, 35.

⁹⁸Romaine Walker to Maud Tree, 4 February 1897, letter, ms., University of Bristol Theatre Collection, The Beerbohm Tree Collection.

Veblen's formula where the wife accomplishes the actual work of expenditure the husband enables. Maud, whose tastes tended toward the aristocratic, threw herself into the project with zeal. She writes of a frantic, last minute disaster narrowly averted:

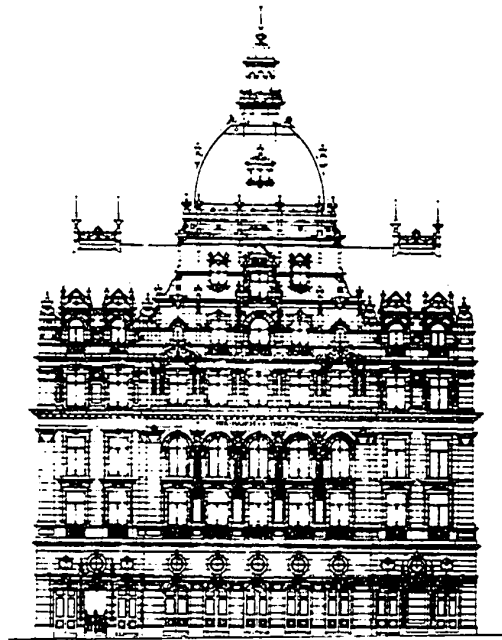
Well do I remember looking in as late as six o'clock, and finding to our horror and dismay that some kind of firm of pottery-makers had sent in hundreds of huge vessels, crude, shiny, in shades of yellow, peacock blue and crushed strawberry—the very worst products of an ugly age. By dint of frantic endeavor, these abominations were removed in time to prevent their marring the beautiful symmetry and simplicity of Mr. Phipps' and Romaine Walker's design, but they had given us a terrible shock, and had nearly driven from my head the Poet Laureate's inaugural address which it was my privilege to speak.⁹⁹

In most theaters "the auditorium itself" writes Marvin Carlson, "is a particularly rich source of political, social and economic signification."¹⁰⁰ Especially, he continues, is the significance of the spatial organization a "complex, social stratification [which] has traditionally been found in the audience support spaces, with different bars and foyers for various social ranks."¹⁰¹ With a potential capacity of over 1,600, H Majesty's Theatre was designed to maintain the audience within five distinct classes, carefully separated between the ground floor and two tiers. Each class, divided into the Stalls (for the upper class patrons on the main auditorium floor), the Pit (directly behind the stalls for the lower to middle class), the Dress Circle (directly above the pit for the upper to middle class), The Upper Circle (above the dress circle for the lower middle class), and the Gallery (directly behind the upper circle for the lowest class), was separated not

⁹⁹Maud Tree, "Herbert and I," *Herbert Beerbohm Tree: Some Memories of His Art* ed. Max Beerbohm (London: Hutchinson and Company, [n.d.]), 103.

¹⁰⁰Carlson, 45.

¹⁰¹Carlson, 44.



Vorder-Ansicht FRONT ELEVATION Facade Principale



Figure 25. H Majesty's Theater's facades, front and side.

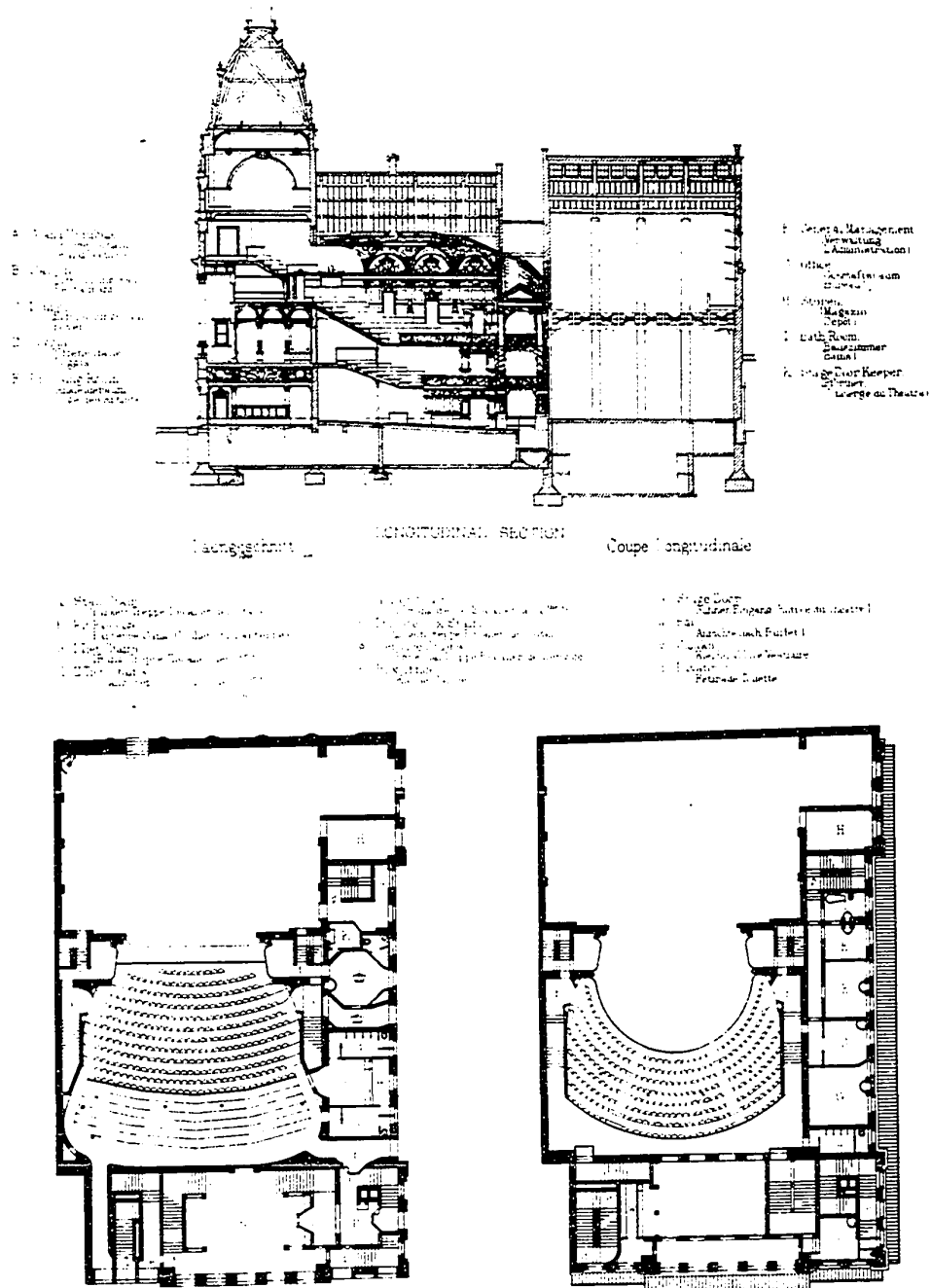


Figure 26. The floorplan of H Majesty's Theater

only by their seating but by practically everything else including cloakrooms, bars, and entrances and exits. The classes were assured not to mingle by the very architecture of the interior space, another feature designed for comfort. Nevertheless, all classes were united by one box office situated so that all parts of the house entered through its administration, a sort of centralized office organizing the house.

The Pit, Gallery and Upper Circle patrons entered and exited through doors at the corner or to the side, like servants, going directly into the theater or a staircase without a public gathering place. In contrast, Dress Circle and Stalls patrons entered from the Haymarket through the front, center doors into a vestibule and then passed through a plush foyer before taking their seats. A separate Royal Entrance opened onto Charles Street so that visiting royalty could enter directly into a private retiring salon directly adjacent to the royal box. Bars were similarly segregated. The saloon bar behind the dress circle was the largest of the five bars in the theater. It opened onto the front of the theater and was met by the loggia and colonnade on the Haymarket exterior facade. Patrons could view the street traffic below and, potentially, be seen from the street. The Stalls bar was underneath the theater, on the way to the Stalls, the Pit bar off to the side, and the Gallery and Upper Circle bar crammed into the small spaces directly behind each of these sections.

"The spatial prominence and central location of the royal box may provide its most obvious and direct architectural statement," writes Carlson referring to the typical Renaissance auditorium stratification, "but the canopies, crowns, cupids, and coats of arms that surround it contribute in no small way to its impact."¹⁰² Thus the decor of H

¹⁰²Carlson, 47.

Majesty's Theater influenced the socialization that occurred in the building as much as the carefully partitioned public spaces.

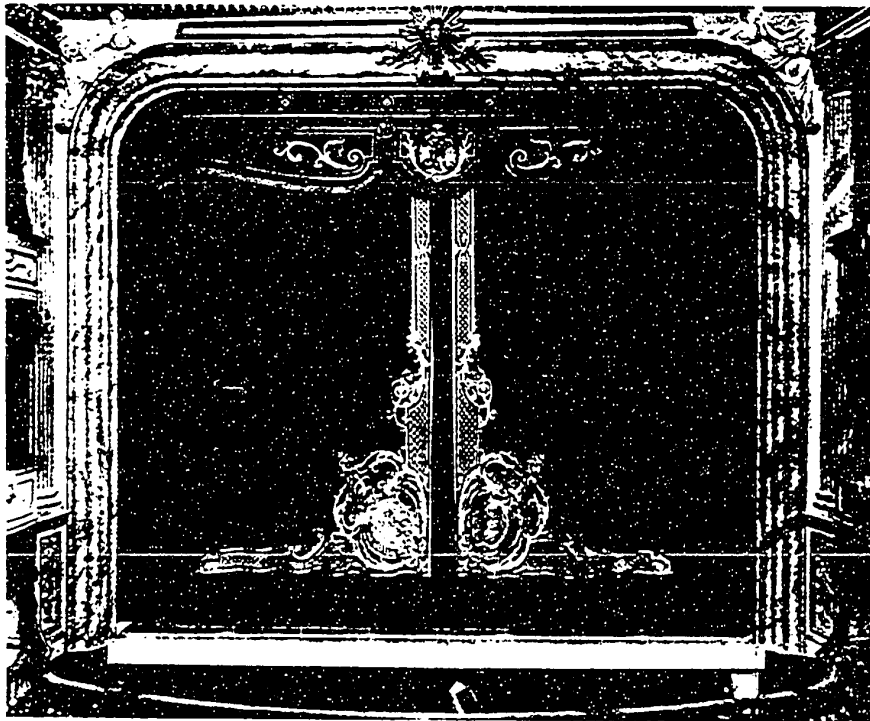
The interior of the auditorium was designed for the plush comfort of audiences and to dazzle them with its modern technology and gilded sensuality. The dominant colors throughout the auditorium were red and gold though the carpeting was blue, effecting the color scheme of a gilded Union Jack. With arm-chair seats in the Stalls and Dress Circles covered in a short-pile red velvet that matched the tableau curtains, an act drop tapestry, gilded details throughout the decor off-setting classical-style frescoes and bas-reliefs, ormolu light fixtures, and a cut-glass and ormolu chandelier, patrons entered a palatial treasure house of art and—by most accounts—refined taste. The effect was not unlike entering a grand hall in one of the stately homes on the National Registry. Further, on the six boxes, three to each side of the stage, were hangings made of cerise-colored embroidered silk that matched the wallpaper of the entire auditorium. The tiers of boxes were flanked by marble corinthian columns which separated them from the rest of the auditorium while supporting the proscenium arch. The sunken orchestra, partly underneath the stage, was separated from the auditorium by a gilded balustrade. In contrast, the pit and gallery patrons who sat on benches, though the pit benches had arm-rests, could only gaze on this space of opulence as well as the opulence of the patrons in it.¹⁰³

¹⁰³For a description of the interior of the building as it was when it first opened, see The Daily Chronicle, [April] 1897; The Era, 1 May 1897; The Times, 26 April 1897; and The British Architect, 1 May 1897. The British Architect includes three renderings of the interior spaces: the entrance hall and box office, the Dress Circle Foyer, and the view of the proscenium and the interior of the auditorium from the Dress Circle. The Daily Chronicle includes a view of the auditorium from the a "flown" position just inside the proscenium arch.



"HER MAJESTY'S" THEATRE, LONDON. VIEW OF PROSCENIUM.

Figure 27. H Majesty's Theater auditorium



HER MAJESTY'S' THEATRE, LONDON.

Figure 28. H Majesty's Theater proscenium

All patrons could gaze on the overt sensuality literally crammed into the available nooks and corners and lit by the new technology of electricity. Above the Stalls, an electric chandelier (or electrolier) made of cut glass in Louis Quatorze style hung from a central dome-shaped ceiling whose mural depicted the hours of the day as semi-clad or nude female figures in languid repose. The story of Psyche is illustrated in the spandrels of the arches over the doors on either side of the upper circle, further infusing the space with female sensuality, but more specifically with desire as the paintings illustrate the goddess longing for her absent Cupid. The murals, according to one critic of the space, added "considerably to the beauty and effectiveness of the scheme of decoration."¹⁰⁴

The auditorium was entirely lit by electricity—one of the first theaters in London to incorporate the new technology so completely—with wall fixtures in imitation of Fontainebleau candle brackets. For Rosalind Williams, electricity played a crucial role in transforming consumption practices, dazzling consumers with brightness while distracting them from the material substance of the object. At the turn of the century electric lighting made even the cities seem at night like fairyland environments.¹⁰⁵ But

¹⁰⁴Arthur Fish, "Decorations at Her Majesty's Theatre," The Magazine of Art, 22 (1898): 110-111.

¹⁰⁵Rosalind Williams illustrates by citing the annual Salon de l'Automobile where 200,000 electrical lights transformed the Grand Palais exhibition hall in Paris, an imposing Imperialist structure of concrete, steel and glass, into a glittering jewelbox. The practice was carried over into Paris. "Instead of correcting its mistakes, the city buries them under another level of technology. In this respect the whole city is assuming the character of an environment of mass consumption. In the day as at night, the illusions of these environments divert attention to merchandise of all kinds and away from other things, like colonialism, class structure, and visual disasters." Williams, 89. Tree would often draw on electricity to enhance his stage illusions and with at least one production, A Midsummer Night's Dream, created a fairyland with small electrical lights studded into the scenery.

the technique was still new and according to The Era, "The *coup d'oeil* from the dress circle is dazzling—almost too much so—and Mr. Tree will probably find it advisable to soften the too-intense radiance of the electric candles around the front of the tiers."¹⁰⁶

The proscenium space was separated from the rest of the auditorium by the archway formed by the corinthian columns on either side of the box tiers and the curved ceiling that connected them, suggesting the archway over the renaissance forestages even though in this theater no such forestage exists. The patterned design of the arched ceiling over the proscenium further suggests a classical renaissance arch with its rows of inward-molded rectangles in imitation of the Roman arches used for triumphant imperial street pageants. A similar decorative molding was used on the ceiling of the box-office foyer, where the stalls and dress circle patrons passed through on their way to the auditorium. In the center of the proscenium arch directly over the stage opening, a gilded head dominates with rays emanating outward, suggestively signalling the sun-king whose style inspired the interior decorations. Placed directly over the brown-speckled marble arch that makes up the picture-framed stage opening, the image is flanked by sculpted figures of women representing comedy and tragedy resting sensually on the corners of the arch wearing classical costumes draped to emphasize the curves of their bodies. The Sun-King—head only—and his classical concubines are topped by the royal coat-of-arms of the English monarchy, ultimately dominating the

¹⁰⁶The Era, 1 May 1897. Apparently the new technology was unstable. Though equipped with its own generators the electricity still faltered opening night. When the Prince of Wales entered, noted Maud Tree, the heir-apparent was submerged in an unroyal darkness. Maud Tree, 104.

entire proscenium as the core essence of the space, thus giving the theater its name—His Majesty's.

The importance of this symbol of English royalty is emphasized by its placement in a half-oval space between the corniced entablature and the larger arch that encases the entire proscenium and its additional framing by sculpted drapery sconced to the top of the arch on either side of the royal insignia. The background of this space is further decorated with a molded pattern of crossing diagonal lines flanked in the corner by decorative scroll-work moldings, adding another frame. In all, the proscenium at His Majesty's consists of three frames, one inside the other: the archway that includes the royal box tiers, the space that includes the royal coat of arms, and the actual stage opening itself topped with the image of the sun-king.

The cumulative effect of the architectural and decorative features gave the space the feel of a palatial classical temple, essentially—since it emulated the French renaissance style—an imitation of an imitation. In particular the entablatures, the molded work over the proscenium, the "mythological" figures, and the domed ceiling with panelled mural carried the effect. Further, bas-relief portrait medallions of great European dramatists over the doors of the Upper Circle "classicalized" Western literature as they gave the temple its pantheon. However, with the separated tiers of seating, the modified horse-shoe shape of the balconies and pit and the box tiers to either side of the stage, the auditorium still remained traditionally Victorian. According to Macqueen-Pope:

From that 2s. upper circle, from every seat in the house, at His Majesty's, from the gallery to the boxes, you could see the whole of the stage and hear every word spoken. Its dark red, its cream and gold were the right decorations for a

theatre. There was nothing tawdry, nothing metriculous anywhere, front or back. It was, indeed, a Temple of the Drama.¹⁰⁷

Bernard Shaw, for one, tacitly acknowledged the Temple semiotic when he wrote in the Saturday Review,

[Mr. Tree] has the good sense—a very rare quality in England where artistic matters are in question—to see that a theatre which is panelled and mirrored, and mantlepieced like the first-class saloon of a Peninsular and Oriental liner or a Pullman drawing-room car, is no place for "Julius Caesar," or indeed for anything except tailor-made drama and farcical comedy. When you enter it you do not feel that you have walked into a Tottenham Court Road shop window, or smirk with a secret sense of looking as if you kept a carriage and belonged to a smart club; you feel that you are in a place where high scenes are to be enacted and dignified things to be done.¹⁰⁸

Not only a Temple of Art, Her Majesty's was a Temple of consumption, not so subtly underscored through its stylistic references to Louis XIV, which at least one historian has called the "Consumer King."¹⁰⁹ Playgoers entering the auditorium were enticed to enjoy personal comfort in the sensual plushness that surrounded them. Their bodies were cushioned by the seats, the carpets and the draperies. But they also could gaze and subsequently identify with the sensual—though respectably classical—women

¹⁰⁷Macqueen-Pope, 35.

¹⁰⁸The Saturday Review, 1 May 1897. Shaw, however, was not pleased with the plush-velvet armchairs. In the theater, he wrote "I would abolish all upholstery in the nature of plush and velvet. Its contact with the sitter is so clingingly intimate that it stops the circulation in the smaller vessels near the skin, so that the playgoer at last finds himself afflicted with 'pins and needles' from the small of his back to his calves." He concludes, "At Her Majesty's the three rows of stalls next to the pit, which are to be had for six shillings, are not plushy; so that the man who sits down sensitively and knows the realities of things from conventions, they are better upholstered than the half-guinea seats covered in velvet." The Saturday Review, 1 May 1897.

¹⁰⁹See Williams, 26-28. "The sumptuous style of life at Versailles provided little personal pleasure either for the king or his courtiers. That was not its purpose. The ceremonies of consumption, the feasts and *fêtes*, the balls and parties, were all part of a calculated system that had as its aim not individual gratification but enhancement of political authority. Louis XIV transformed consumption into a method of rule." Williams, 28.

painted and fitted into the very nooks and corners who seemed to similarly enjoy the space's plushness while also adding to it. Patrons could either imagine themselves as those women relaxing their bodies to enjoy the spectacle or could fantasize themselves engaging the women's fleshy bodies even as their real bodies engaged the space of the auditorium. Thus, with the aid of these classical semi-nudes and other ocular treats the space afforded, the patrons filled the entire auditorium of H Majesty's with their bodies, resting their materiality on the seats but projecting their fantasies throughout.

Once projected, however, the subjectivities of the patrons were met on various levels and to varying degrees (it was, afterall, still divided by class) by the subject who built the theater and whose subjectivity was already dispersed throughout the space, thus represented in the nooks and corners: Herbert Beerbohm Tree playing the role of the grand consumer/host. The image of the Sun-King dominating the proscenium arch reminded the spectator that the true god of this temple was in fact the consumer though in deference to the English Royalty. Tree as the producer of this theater functioned in one sense as its priest, but also as the stand-in for the god represented and by implication the British Royalty. The "H Majesty's" could refer simultaneously, then, to Tree or the current monarch. Tree may have overstepped himself in his decor at least according to his competitor, the Prince of Wales, who took exception to the livery of the theater staff, dressed as royal footmen. According to the Prince, they were too close an imitation to the liveries of the footmen at Buckingham palace and thus objectionable. But Albert, later to be Edward VII, was a pompous stickler for details.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰Hesketh Pearson, Beerbohm Tree: His Life and Laughter (1956; London: Columbia Press, 1988), 102.

Haunting the Corridors of H Majesty's Theatre

According to Macqueen-Pope:

[H Majesty's] became great at once, because of the greatness of its creator. His own terrific personality and power, his high ideals, his insistence on beauty and perfection, stamped itself at once on the playhouse. The others—even Garrick—only added their greatness to theatres already famous. They made them more illustrious, it is true, and sometimes they changed the luck of an unfortunate theatre. But Tree achieved it all in a new theatre as soon as he opened it. His own force and command, his own sweeping power, made this a great theatre overnight. It was a thing almost without parallel.¹¹¹

According to this description an almost mystical essence of Tree's personality enfused the space. The process, however, may have worked in the reverse—the theater established and buttressed Tree as a great personality. In other words, the dispersal of Tree throughout the space was more practically achieved by the placement of his image along the passageways and in the various public spaces. Not relying on the audience's awareness that H Majesty's was his theater, Tree emphasised his ownership of the space by placing in almost every conceivable space outside the auditorium oil paintings, water colours, or crayon sketches of scenes from previous productions, actors in character for those productions, or principally of himself in his more famous roles. By 1917, walking through the theater would be like walking through the past twenty years of Tree's career.¹¹² Thus, while the Harrod's customer walked through the British Empire, the

¹¹¹Macqueen-Pope, 32.

¹¹²The following tour of the pictures hanging in H Majesty's Theater is based on the inventory and valuation of the paintings done during the early 1920s, presumably when the theater was redecorated following Tree's death. Marler and Marler Auctioneers and Valuers,

audience member at His Majesty's moved through a Temple of Art dedicated to the personality of the actor-manager who built it, the discriminating yet amassing consumer who opened, for a fee, his great house to the public.

Stalls patrons, after entering the box office vestibule, descended a flight of stairs into the theater's basement and then proceeded along one of two corridors—to the left or right—before entering the auditorium and taking their seats. They passed through the catacombs, as it were, before entering the temple. Along the way they were met by Tree at every turn. As they descended the stairs the patron passed by a series of oil paintings by Charles Buchel of The Tempest, produced by Tree in 1904. Four paintings show famous scenes ("Prospero's Cave," "A Wood," "The Yellow Sands," and "The Shipwreck"); others depict actors as the characters (Tree's daughter Viola as Ariel, Basil Gill as Ferdinand, Julian L'Estrange as Sebastian, William Haveland as Prospero, and Tree as Caliban). Buchel, in fact, functioned in practice as the theater's publicity artist, illustrating most of Tree's souvenir programs and providing artwork for posters and paintings for its corridors. By far, his work was seen more than any other artist. Some of the work that hung in the theater were no doubt the originals for his reproduced art, thus still heavy in what Benjamin calls "aura" since reproduceability arguably increases the aura of the original.¹¹³ In addition to The Tempest paintings, the Stalls patron passed by six oil portraits of characters from Stephen Philips' Ulysses produced by Tree

"List of Pictures in and upon the Premises known at His Majesty's Theater, Haymarket S.W.," April 1921, ts., University of Bristol Theater Collection, The Beerbohm Tree Collection.

¹¹³See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Illuminations ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 217-264.



'HER MAJESTY'S' THEATRE, LONDON.

Figure 29. H Majesty's Theater vestibule and box office

in 1902 (Lional Brough as Eumaeus, Nancy Price as Calypso, Harry Kemble as Ctesippus, Oscar Asche as Antonius, Gerald Lawrence as Telemachus, and Courtice Pounds as Phemius) and an oil portrait of Tree as D'Artagnon from the 1898 production of The Musketeers by the prolific and popular Sydney Grundy.

In the Stalls corridor underneath the Pit, patrons passing through found seven water colors of scenes from The Darling of the Gods, Tree's 1903 production of the David Belasco and John Luther Long spectacle set in historical Japan (including "The Old Sword Room in the Palace," "Geisha Dance," and "The Feast of a Thousand Welcomes"), color types of Tree as Svengali from Trilby--the show whose profits helped finance construction of the theater and whose frequent revivals bolstered its share of sagging seasons--and six scenes from Twelfth Night, in which Tree played his most successful Shakespearean role, Malvolio. Also in the corridor were three oil portraits by Charles Buchel of the leads from the 1910 Henry VIII, Tree's largest and most profitable Shakespearean spectacle: Violet Vanburgh as Queen Catherine, Arthur Bouchier as Henry VIII and Tree as Cardinal Wolsey. The Stalls patrons on the way to their seats also encountered five crayon sketches by Buchel from the 1905 production of Oliver Twist (Frank Stanmore as the Artful Dodger, Tree as Fagin, Lynn Harding as Bill Sykes, Constance Collier as Nancy and Nellie Bowman as Oliver Twist). The Stalls bar was more modest. It boasted the original poster of Pygmalion, the original poster of Macbeth and a black and white drawing of Tree in The Darling of the Gods. Thus Stalls patrons passed through a panorama of Tree crossing various class gulfs: as the upstart Malvolio somewhere in the middle, the power-grabbing Cardinal Wolsey close to the top, or the money-grubbing anti-semitic portrayals of Svengali and Fagin at the bottom.

Those few patrons who sat in boxes to the prompt side of the proscenium were greeted by an oil painting of Tree as Malvolio, and character portraits in oil from Ulysses (two of Tree as Ulysses—one from Act III, scene ii (in rags) and one from Act I, scene iii (the soldier on the isle of Calypso)—as well as Lily Hanbury as Penelope, Ulysses' patient wife, and Constance Collier as Pallas Athene, Ulysses' goddess/mistress). The prompt side boxes were the only ones open to the public, since the opposite prompt side consisted of the royal box, and the two manager's boxes above.

Patrons who booked seats in the Dress Circle, like the Stalls patrons, entered the vestibule from the Haymarket, but unlike them, they ascended a flight of stairs opposite those leading down and directly behind the box office. As they moved upward they passed by six oil portraits of characters from Twelfth Night (Robert Tabor as Orsino, Lily Brayton as Viola, Herbert Tree as Malvolio, Courtice Pounds as the Clown, and Lionel Brough as Sir Toby Belch), three oils of famous scenes from the play ("The Kitchen," "The Terrace," and the most famous, "Olivia's Garden"), and then three more character portraits (Norman Forbes as Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Maude Jeffries as The Countess Olivia, and Zeffie Tilbury as Maria). Also in this staircase, perhaps as moral lesson, Dress Circle patrons encountered Buchel's black and white oil painting of Tree as the dying Count D'Orsay from the 1901 Clyde Fitch melodrama The Last of the Dandies about the profligate Count who died in poverty. But no doubt the most spectacular of all the paintings on the way into the Dress Circle foyer were three oil paintings by Fuseli. Each of gallery quality and in carved gilt frames, one depicted Macbeth and the witches from the 1911 production, another was of Tree as Macbeth, another of Tree as

Gregoire from The Ballad Monger, produced in 1887, one of Tree's earliest roles as an actor-manager, and another of Tree as King John from the 1899 production.

In the foyer, the elegantly appointed gathering space just outside the Dress Circle entrance with the loggia overlooking the Haymarket, patrons found three more oil portraits in gilded frames, each highlighting important milestones in Tree's career as a producer (Tree as Svengali, his most famous and lucrative role; Tree in the Seats of the Mighty, the inaugural production for H Majesty's Theatre; and Tree in The Red Lamp, Tree's first production as an actor-manager). In general the artwork was more discreet in this space, less crammed than other passageways through which upper-class patrons passed. The only other paintings were over the foyer bar where the Dress Circle patron found three paintings depicting scenes from the patriotic English seafaring melodrama, Drake, produced in 1912 and one of Tree's last successful large-scale spectacles (the paintings were titled "Drake's ship", "Ship at Sea" and "England is Watching"). The placement of the large portraits depicting milestones in Tree's career, suggests that this space, more than the other public spaces in the theater, was its public drawing room: the place to receive guests on equal terms.

Of the lower class audiences, only patrons in the Upper Circle and the Pit encountered artwork and only then in limited quantity and of lesser quality media. "The gods" in the gallery saw no artwork whatsoever. While the Dress Circle and Stalls patrons were treated with a panorama of Tree's career on the way to their seats, the Upper Circle patrons saw, at the back of the Upper Circle, character portraits from the 1906 production of Nero sketched in crayon by Buchel (Basil Gill as Otho, Phyllis Embury and Esme Percy as Octavia and Britannicus, Dorothea Baird as Acte, three

sketches of Tree as Nero, Maud Tree as Agrippina, and Constance Collier as Poppaea). Presenting the lower middle class patrons of the Upper Circle with Tree as characters from their own class (in effect, as one of them), in the Upper Circle bar were large wash drawings of Tree in the two roles he played from his 1914 adaptation of David Copperfield (one of Tree as Peggotty and another as Micawber). Well below the Upper Circle, in the tiny Pit bar hung a black and white drawing from Ulysses and the original pen and ink drawing that was published in the Lady's Pictorial from Henry Arthur Jones' 1899 Imperial melodrama set in India, Carnac Sahib.

In all, the inventory lists over 90 pieces of art hanging throughout the public spaces of the theater. Of them, over 22 (one-quarter of all the art in the theater) depicted Tree by himself as various characters, 17 (almost one-fifth of all the art) were of scenes from his productions, with the remaining one-half of all the art being a collection of various actors in the characters they played with Tree. Of these actors, only a few appear more than once. Constance Collier, one of the more regular performers at H Majesty's (and for a time Tree's mistress) merited three paintings in various spots, the most of any actor: as Pallas Athene on the way to the prompt side boxes, as Nancy from Oliver Twist in the Stalls Corridor, and as Poppaea, sketched in Crayon and hung at the back of the Upper Circle. Maud Tree, Tree's wife, appeared only once: as the vengeful mother Agrippina from Nero, hung away from the fashionable society she courted in the Upper Circle.

Aside from the obvious narcissistic implications of hanging so many representations of himself, the portraits and pictures created a feeling that the theater was in effect a gallery of art. But this gallery was differentiated according to the various

classes of its patrons. Thus the oil portraits in gilt frames hung for the Dress Circle patrons or the crayon sketches and pen and ink drawings in the Upper Circle and Pit bars classified the patrons as much as the structural architecture which kept them physically separated. The decor catered to every class yet reinforced class distinctions, matching quality of art to the social quality of the patrons. But not only the media, but the location of the hangings (that is, which spaces were deemed appropriate for artwork) indicated class bias and effected class control as the artwork literally privileged some passageways over others. Notably, the staircases in and out of the Upper Circle and Gallery were bare of artwork—thus discouraging unnecessary lingering—while the passageways from the vestibule into the Stalls boasted of over 42.

Not only do they represent an abundance of material art at Tree's disposal, but also the many paintings reminded patrons of the abundance of theatrical capital Tree had collected throughout his career. The paintings also testified to the theater as a storehouse for an abundant repertory of productions, even though the principle production practice was the single long run and only a handful of the productions were revived regularly. With the paintings of the scenes, however, past performances could run in perpetuity, if only in illustrations, but creating a sense of a repertoire nevertheless. Similarly, the large collection of other actors in their roles displayed as if members of a single company, swelled the ranks of those actors that Tree employed to perform with him. This had the effect of increasing his status as an actor-manager and as an employer, even displaying other actor managers—Oscar Asche and Arthur Bourchier—in supporting positions. For Tree's reputation, the variety of characters through which he could be found in the artwork emphasized his versatility as an actor, reinforcing this

popular conception just before audiences saw him in yet another role. This had the additional benefit of continually out-performing any guest manager who happened to be leasing the building for special performances. In addition, when a guest manager did perform in H Majesty's, audiences were reminded repeatedly of whose theater they are attending, regardless of the star performer.

The cumulative effect of the 22 paintings of Tree dispersed throughout H Majesty's, therefore, marked the theater as Tree's, permeating the interior space with his presence. The space distributed his image into practically all available public spaces--and even into the "private" spaces of dressing rooms, administrative offices, and the corridors that connected them. Interspersed were scenes he created as a producer and the actors he hired to support him. The cumulative effect, then, created another constellation of the actor-manager as represented subject, similar to the dispersal of the subject in the fetishized *mise-en-scène*. The entire space of the theater bore his image, figuratively and literally. Even if the patron only casually noticed the paintings themselves, or flaneur-like selected a few to consume on the way into the auditorium, the effect would be the same. In actuality it did not matter if they were even closely examined. The paintings themselves, particularly the larger portraits hung in small spaces, would have been unavoidable even to the casual observer. Tree's presence was in the background--a known, accepted, and unavoidable presence. Thus Tree's roles, the scenes from his productions, and the actors who played in them through the illustrations literally formed a spatial context for everything that occurred in the theater. Like in the *mise-en-scène* where spaces were repeatedly and deliberately opened for Tree as celebrity to move as an agent independent of the representation, the distribution

of artwork throughout the architecture of H Majesty's opened spaces from which the various representations of Tree could emerge. In effect, Tree, the common denominator to all of them, moved from artwork to artwork as an agent in the architecture itself engaging the patrons who passed by, consuming them as they consumed the representation. The distribution of the artwork according to class demarcations within the space hierarchized these encounters, thus administering also by class the relation in which each audience member found themselves to the host.

The most remarkable portrait, however, was seen only by a select few. In the stairway from the gallery leading up to the Dome, Tree's private chambers where he entertained invited guests, hung Carlo Niepen's oil portrait of the actor in an overcoat—as the unmediated gentleman—on a large canvas measuring approximately 7' by 6'. Visitors who saw this portrait were entering another type of space in the theater, the private world of Sir Herbert. Though he seemed uncostumed, the large oil portrait actually portrayed the actor-manager in his greatest role.

The Dome

Fashioned out of two rooms on the topmost floor of the theater in the space made by the large capitol copula on the Haymarket side of the building, Tree's dome apartment was mostly used as a banqueting hall for the private dinners Tree hosted on special and not-so-special occasions, and as the private sleeping quarters for Tree who was anxious to leave an unsatisfying domestic life behind him. With the dome, Tree's private domain, H Majesty's theater functioned like the nearby social clubs for men a

few streets away in Pall Mall (except in this case Tree was the only member) as well as a private home from which Tree could host guests in manorial style. More significantly, with Tree living in the pinnacle of the building, the space through which the actor-manager had dispersed himself in images was capped. Spatially and figuratively the theater was his home, interpellating all who entered as his guests. More than any other space in the theater, Tree's dome apartment encouraged the fetishization of the theater as the private domain of the actor-manager. Infused with the urban gentleman persona of the actor-manager as host, it inserted its spatial configuration not only in the space of the theater it topped, but into the city of London it phallicly penetrated. The rooms of The Dome apartments included a library, the central dining hall, and a small kitchen. Reached through stairs leading up from the gallery level, the apartments were entered through two massive wooden doors—almost fortress-like—opening into the dining hall directly underneath the pinnacle of the theater with the high ceiling and rafters to prove it. The library—where Tree kept his hide-away bed—was on the other side of the dining hall and separated from it by a sliding partition.¹¹⁴ In the decor, Tree enhanced his role as "Lord of the Manor" by creating in his private apartments a setting more suggestive of banqueting chambers in the older country estates than a modern London theater. Underneath his theater's dome, he entertained England's cultural elite: poets, artists, composers, politicians, and society patrons. Maud Tree referred sarcastically to these parties as "Herbert at Dome."¹¹⁵ According to Constance Collier, "Everybody who made

¹¹⁴A recent visit to the theater in February of 1993 and its dome revealed the complete disarray of this once, highly significant space. Only the massive doors, placed to the side, remain. Current plans include its renovation into a studio rehearsal space.

¹¹⁵Pearson, 142.

history and laughter and music gave thought and imagination to the world would be gathered under that dome, and had something to say about—and offer to—the theater.¹¹⁶

Aside from the many books Tree kept in his library—many relating to research for his productions—the room was filled with various gifts and objets d'art from his friends and admirers.¹¹⁷ The walls were decorated with eight panel paintings by Charles Buchel and a hanging mirror in a carved frame. The principal furniture consisted of two oak armchairs stuffed and covered in satin damask, a high-back open armchair covered in tapestry and plush pile velvet, a five-and-a-half foot carved table and eight leather-covered dining chairs (for smaller entertainments), and a five-foot brass bound and studded mahogany coffer. In addition Tree kept a safe and a roll-top secretary's desk. A plaster bust of Alexander Dumas, another of Moliere (in keeping with the overall "French-ness" of the theater), a bronze male figure, a mounted figure in armour, and a marble bust of an unidentified female were also located in various spots throughout the room in addition to a mounted bear's skin. Three electric table lamps supplemented the wood-carved electoleer that lit the room. The most expensive piece in the room, however, was the gilded bracket clock with inlaid tortoiseshell surmounted by a winged figure.

¹¹⁶Constance Collier, *Harlequinade: The Story of My Life* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1929), 134-135. For Collier, the dome held a haunting mystery: "It was eerie up in the dome at night, and I never liked to be left alone there." Further, "His theater was his home. I used to imagine him opening the little window and welcoming those restless spirits. They must have been around him, for he was never lonely there. It was his haven." She concludes, fondly, "I always like to think of him in the dome. They say he haunts it still. I shouldn't wonder!" Collier, 135.

¹¹⁷Marler and Marler Auctioneers and Valuers, "Inventory and Valuation of Certain Furniture, Jewelry, Silver Plate & Effects at His Majesty's Theater, Haymarket S. W." April 1918, ts., University of Bristol Theater Collection, The Beerbohm Tree Collection.

On the walls of the dining hall, the more public of the two rooms, Tree hung the mounted head and antlers of an ibex, a leopard's head, a stag's head and antlers, and a pair of antlers (without a head) providing the most pronounced signs of Tree's lordly status, fresh from the hunt, and its strongest phallic signifiers. The collection of both local animal trophies (the stag) with the more exotic (ibex and leopard) also suggested that Tree's figurative hunting ground extended over the both England and its colonies, thus configuring Tree as an Imperial subject. A pair of antique tapestry curtains on which were depicted several figures on horse-back carried further the old country chateau theme. A Japanese screen, a studio easel (perhaps to remind those entering the space was after all an artist's loft apartment), an antique iron box and lock and an oak stool were the smaller pieces of furniture in the space. Most prominent, however, were the polished oak dining tables with seating for approximately thirty-two guests and as many oak frame dining chairs, with seats and backs covered in leather, leaving little doubt about the function of the space. In addition to the animal heads, twelve panel paintings by Charles Buchel hung on the walls of the dining hall. Four circular electric fittings containing fourteen lights each hung by iron chains, again in the manorial style, lit the room.

Of the many smaller items—mostly gifts and presentations made to Tree—several were quite opulent. Silver items abounded including cigar and cigarette cases, bowls, ceremonial trowels, and cups. Many of these items were gifts from fellow actors including Violet Vanbrugh, Arthur Bouchier and the Kendals, Madge and William. In addition Tree kept in the Dome several jewels, including a gold scarf pin mounted in diamonds and rubies—a gift from Edward VII—a jade and pearl knob pin, a star sapphire

with a diamond surround, and a star sapphire with four diamonds. Other gifts were topical to various productions, including a silver dagger in commemoration of Macbeth in 1911, a horn snuff box carved with the arms of Sir Francis Drake, from Drake, and a small shaped casket with a piece of stone from the pavement of Nero's house at Olympia, a gift from Cyril Maude in honor of Nero (1906). Thus the Dome, while in the general style of a French country estate, displayed the eclecticism and kitsch predominant at the turn of the century.

Only a small percentage of the audiences who visited H Majesty's Theatre were private guests of Tree in his Dome apartment, although a greater portion—those who read the society columns—were aware that Tree entertained and occasionally lived there. Those who were intimately aware of the existence of the penthouse apartments—whose bodies entered the space—were likely to be among the relatively small group of regular theatre-goers: the opening night crowds of civic leaders, upper middle class and aristocratic patrons, and fellow artists, celebrities and authors—in other words, the wealthy and famous that lived in the expensive townhouses of the West End and for whom H Majesty's was a neighborhood theater. But for the vast majority of Londoners, those who required more than a short cab-ride to the theater and who were, instead, more likely to take a bus or one of the new underground trains plus a transfer to a train to one of the suburbs, for these H Majesty's was more a tourist attraction than a neighborhood theater. For them, attending one of the theaters in the West End was a privileged and infrequent event and the rhetoric of audience members received as "guests" into an actor-manager's "home" nothing more than a pleasant, misleading fiction. These audience members had an entire city to cross before attending the theater

and were more likely to combine visiting the theater with such other urban outings as shopping, sight-seeing, or the daily commute to work.

But, then, even those people with a lengthy commute were part of the privileged group that entered the building. Another, larger portion of the population of London, never crossed the threshold. And yet the theater had an impact on them as well. "The articulation of space and the selection and arrangement of decorative elements," concludes Carlson, "may thus express a wide range of information about not only a society's view of the theatre itself, but also about all manner of social, political and economic concerns." But, he continues, the project is only partially completed since "these two areas of potential semiotic analysis . . . only involve a certain, rather limited section of the public—that portion of the population which actually attends the theatre."¹¹⁸ And yet, one does not necessarily need to enter the building in order to be affected by its message. The other portion of the population could still be influenced by the theatre's exterior as it encountered the structure when passing by on the street. Carlson applies the tools of urban semiotics to interpret the theater's meaning. Urban semiotics, according to Carlson, "views the city as a 'text' created by human beings in space, spoken by and speaking to those who inhabit it, move through it, and observe it, and of the roles of individual units, such as theatres, within such a text."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸Carlson, 47.

¹¹⁹Carlson, 47.

Conclusion: The Proper Place of H Majesty's in London

Barthes' essay on the Eiffel Tower examines both the place of the landmark in the city text and its inner workings as a structuring device. Thus the Tower accomplishes the semiotic operation attributed to theaters: it both attracts an audience and reenforces its function with its structure. H Majesty's as a landmark differs significantly from the Eiffel Tower even as it practices a similar operation. H Majesty's lacks the prominence of the Tower; its influence is less totalizing on the city text. In addition, the theater presents for the most part a closed facade. Despite the many windows along its two street fronts, penetration of the massive building was administratively controlled through the box office and only then with the proper price. The administration continued inside as the audience was rigidly segregated by class. Further, the representation of a closed facade continued as visitors were first led through closed corridors, then mystified by the carefully constructed illusionistic realism of the stage *mise-en-scène*. Where visitors to the Tower encountered iron beams, rivets and cross braces, visitors to H Majesty's met plush velvet, gilded decor, and semi-nude women painted and molded into the space. Yet both the Tower and H Majesty's provided its visitors with a panoramic vista. The *mise-en-scène* presented through the massive proscenium led audience members from their comfortably upholstered plush-velvet seats on a tour through a British landscape decipherable as representational units: Shakespearean England, Dickens' London, Imperial Rome, and Society drawing-rooms.

Inhabiting London, H Majesty's Theatre is a habitable space. In fact, unlike the Tower, it enticed audiences to enter by its habitability. It also functioned, like the Tower, as its own little world. According to Barthes:

... by affording its visitor a whole polyphony of pleasures, from technological wonder to haute cuisine, including the panorama, the Tower ultimately reunites with the essential function of all major human sites: autarchy; the Tower can live on itself: one can dream there, eat there, observe there, understand there, marvel there, shop there; as on an ocean liner (another mythic object that sets children dreaming), one can feel oneself cut off from the world and yet the owner of a world.¹²⁰

A world to itself constructed for the purpose of inducing its inhabitants to dream, H Majesty's Theatre, like the Eiffel Tower, is a signifying monument. An apparatus for representation, it mystifies its operations, however, through not only its fortress-like architecture, but the fortified construction of the persona of its star overlaid onto its ground-plan. And, like the Tower, as one both figuratively and actually rises up in the building, one becomes closer to the owner of the space, the purveyor of the world it encompasses. The ultimate habitable space of H Majesty's Theatre, the dome, was Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree's private apartment.

But, as de Certeau's walker in the city realizes, the names of landmarks often become types of landmarks themselves. Like the physical structures that make locations recognizable, their proper names--and the names of streets, parks and neighborhoods--structure the readability of the city. For de Certeau, to be "proper" means to have a stable position in a static order, to be in place: "the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence."¹²¹ *Langue*, in

¹²⁰Barthes, "The Eiffel Tower," 17.

¹²¹De Certeau, 117.

semiotic terms, is a "proper" order of signs, a rule-governed system, as opposed to the practiced activity of *parole*, operational and vectorily driven, the spoken exchange of signs. Proper names, according to de Certeau who is describing street names, names of city squares, parks, etc., are frequently detached from their original function providing only the veneer of totalization. "In the spaces brutally lit by an alien reason," he writes, "proper names carve out pockets of hidden and familiar meanings. . . . These names create a nowhere in places; they change them into passages."¹²² Further:

[T]hese names make themselves available to the diverse meanings given them by passers-by; they detach themselves from the places they were supposed to define and serve as imaginary meeting-points on itineraries which, as metaphors, they determine for reasons that are foreign to their original value but may be recognized or not by passers-by. . . . These constellations of names provide traffic patterns: they are stars directing itineraries.¹²³

Thus the proper name, like the Eiffel Tower, functions as a hollow sign: one-dimensional when viewed from a distance, but filled with meaning—with a view—when entered. The proper name is also a fetishized sign. Detachable, superficially over-valued, and misrepresented as indivisible, it is alluringly available for use (consumption) by others eager to adapt it for their own purposes. But the proper name's adaptability is its trap. The veneer of the proper name makes the sign habitable even as it firmly roots that habitability into place.¹²⁴

¹²²De Certeau, 104.

¹²³De Certeau, 104.

¹²⁴Other fetishes, commodities for instance or even stage properties within a *mise-en-scène*, may be similarly entrapping.

Theaters, as signifying monuments whose signifying practice changes with the change of the marquee, continually empty themselves partially of one meaning, one representation, and fill themselves with another. Through the hole of the proscenium, in fact, little remains constant. Thus the space surrounding the proscenium, the shell that encrusts the stage, functions like the proper name as posited by de Certeau: stable, ordered and discursively static but also continually filled with a diversity of meaning. Theaters are passageways of meaning:

Linking acts and footsteps, opening meanings and directions, these words operate in the name of an emptying-out and wearing-away of their primary role. They become liberated spaces that can be occupied. A rich indetermination gives them, by means of an semantic rarefaction, the function of articulating a second, poetic geography on top of the geography of the literal, forbidden or permitted meaning. They insinuate other routes into the functionalist and historical order of movement.¹²⁵

The structure encrusting the stage of H Majesty's Theatre (a more proper and yet more non-specific, "hollow," name is difficult to imagine) was continually overlaid by the various topographies of consumerism, patriarchy, or their combination within a celebrity persona. Tree's topography, the most dominant, mapped both the public spaces of the theater and the *mise-en-scène* on stage though was "filled" by whatever topographical codes audiences carried with them. However, the theater also served as a passageway for audiences to be overlaid with the poetic geography of the *mise-en-scène*, to imaginatively travel to different scenic or historic locales, and also to enter into the spatialized subjectivity of its host—to take part in his communal body. But the operation worked in yet another way. H Majesty's Theatre, as a landmark passageway

¹²⁵De Certeau, 105.

in the city, became a means for Tree to enter into the metropolitan topography, to "make a name for himself" in London as the London topography mapped the theater. The merging of the two proper names—"H Majesty's Theatre" and "Herbert Beerbohm Tree"—architecturally placed Tree's celebrity in the London metropolis. As a landmark home, H Majesty's sited Tree: it functioned both as the site of his personality, his "home", and the citation of his authority in the urban text. Tree's status in London society was grounded by the building that defined him as an actor-manager. H Majesty's fetishized Tree within the urban text.¹²⁶

¹²⁶Apparently Tree was the chief fetishizer. According to Hesketh Pearson with oedipal undertones, "With the completion of the building Tree was excited as a child over a new toy. He would seize a friend or acquaintance or even a stranger and walk up towards Coventry Street to display the theater from the north, and down towards Pall Mall to exhibit it from the south, and along Charles Street to show the side view, and back again to the pavement opposite the entrance to admire it from the front. One day, after lunching at the Garrick Club, he eagerly invited [the elder actor-manager] Squire Bancroft to come and gaze at his wonderful creation. Presently they were standing in the colonade of the Haymarket Theatre, and Bancroft was surveying Her Majesty's through his monocle. 'Well?' asked Tree at last. Still looking upwards, Bancroft said in his hollow, impressive voice: 'A great many windows to clean.'" Pearson, 102.



Figure 30. Gentlemen performers

CHAPTER 4

NATIONALIZING IDENTITIES: THE SHAKESPEARE FESTIVALS, 1905-1913

In October 1904, The Daily Telegraph announced actor-manager Herbert Beerbohm Tree's new project. The article began, "It has long been a standing reproach that while London has shown a certain eagerness to honour the memories of some of her more famous citizens, she has revealed a curious tardiness in responding to any appeal made on behalf of the greatest of all," that is, William Shakespeare.¹ The writer continues, "In this respect Stratford-on-Avon has set a notable example, but, although the intentions of her townspeople are of the best, the means at their disposal are, clearly, extremely limited." Now, the writer reported, that reproach will be removed by Tree. Citing the examples of Charles Kean, Samuel Phelps and Henry Irving for notable Shakespeare revivals, the Telegraph states:

[N]ow the mantle which rested upon the capable shoulders of these actor-managers has fallen upon those of Mr. Tree, who has offered the best possible proof that at His Majesty's, at any rate, Shakespeare spells not bankruptcy but prosperity. Mr. Tree's intention is, then, to institute next year a "Shakespeare Festival Week," which will, of course, include April 23 [the anniversary of Shakespeare's birth]. And during that week he proposes that a series of performances of the highest interest shall be given, either at His Majesty's or, if good cause can be shown, at some other West-end theatre.²

The Shakespeare Festivals, annual occurrences at His Majesty's from 1905 through 1913, provide one final example of the conspicuously consuming theater of Herbert Beerbohm Tree. Constellations of mises-en-scène, the festivals broadened the space of Tree's expenditure beyond the stage, beyond the theater, beyond the city and into the

¹The Daily Telegraph, 1 October 1904.

²The Daily Telegraph, 1 October 1904.

field of Anglo culture and the empire this culture purported to animate. With the festivals, Tree positioned himself as the leading actor-manager of his generation of managers, argued for H Majesty's theater as the metropolitan home of Shakespeare, and put in place the structure for its institutionalization as England's national theater. He also took his production style, based on a rhetoric of abundance and loss, to new levels of expenditure. According to Ralph Berry, "Beerbohm Tree's Shakespeare Festivals have always been recognized as a step toward the National Theatre. They were annual, glittering and—at least until the last two—highly successful ventures."³

From their conception, the festivals represented an ambitious project which they would approximate only in their later years. In 1904 most of those goals were clearly laid out in this early announcement, written with little doubt in close contact with the theater's press agents. The article articulates several themes, including perhaps its most significant: the festival's immediate configuration against the already existing Shakespeare festival in Stratford on Avon. For historian George Rowell, in fact, "Tree's Festival was clearly intended to be the capital's answer to Stratford-on-Avon."⁴ The rivalry of the two festivals, in fact, one urban the other rural—both working for national prominence, not only significantly shaped the festivals themselves but placed them in the national debate over England's very representation as agrarian or metropolitan, and hence its national identity. The Daily Telegraph, at least, in this case sided with the city festival. The writer diminishes the Stratford festival in order to boost Tree's, contrasting

³Ralph Berry, "The Aesthetics of Beerbohm Tree's Shakespeare Festivals," Nineteenth Century Theater Research, 9.1 (1981): 23.

⁴George Rowell, "Tree's Shakespeare Festivals (1905-1913), Theatre Notebook, 29 (1975): 74.

the limited resources of Stratford's quaint "townspeople" against Tree's implied abundance, a comparison drawn from Tree's production style as much as his financial accounts in addition to his metropolitanism and the abundance of the city it signified.

The festivals, however, were also rituals of status. As cited above, Tree succeeded to the position of leading actor-manager by claiming the Shakespearean "mantle" passed on from Kean, Phelps and Irving. Shakespeare, after all, was capital that secured a position within the theatrical hierarchy of London. But Tree also secured his position through means defined by a conspicuously consuming bourgeoisie: he turned his Shakespearean capital into performances of abundance. In addition, the festivals provided Tree with yet another opportunity to play "host," a role that in consuming culture was deeply imbued with status. From the beginning, the festival plan called for the appearance of guest artists who would, rather than detract from Tree's "bounty," by sharing in it, increase it. In other words, they would invest their capital in Tree's venture increasing the collective capital of all involved thus forming a plutocratic theatrical corporation under Tree's leadership. The Telegraph assures its readers that while Tree is capable of producing the festival on his own, other managers "of the highest rank" and their companies will add to its largess, providing the material for Tree's "spacious" imagination:

Mr. Tree has himself a large répertoire upon which to draw, but his ideas are much more spacious than a simple catalogue of the Shakespearian plays produced at His Majesty's would imply. An essential and vital part of the scheme is that other artists of the highest rank shall be asked to share in its development, and that in this way representations by the most celebrated Shakespearian actors and actresses shall be rendered as well.

With so many high-ranking managers the festivals, like most everything else in London's West End (at least according to the West End press), would inevitably be national in scope. The outlying countryside would converge on London. The writer not so subtly commands the rural community into the metropolis:

Nor is it too much to hope that the provinces will in this instance join hands with London. Considering the enthusiasm displayed in the case of musical festivals, it surely follows that a large contingent of country playgoers would gladly avail themselves of any facilities for visiting the metropolis which the various railway companies may be expected to place at their disposal.

Finally, according to the article in The Daily Telegraph, the Shakespeare Festivals at His Majesty demonstrate Tree's willing ability to sacrifice financial gain. Before the first festival either incurred a cost or realized income, the keynotes of loss and expenditure are struck, suggesting their importance to the festival scheme:

To suggest that he himself should bear the cost of the festival week would manifestly be unreasonable; the sacrifices he will have to make in relation to it are, indeed, sufficiently obvious. Not the least among these will be the suspending of the run of whatever piece, however successful, he may have in the bill at the time, and everyone knows how dangerous a measure it is to interrupt the career of a play in the height of its popularity.

In addition, Tree, the article announced, will give a portion of the proceeds to the Shakespeare Memorial Fund, further increasing the anticipated loss.

But the financial sacrifice anticipated a gain in status. The interruption of the usual commercial venture of H Majesty's signalled that Tree as an artist was above his own commodification. Thus the "danger" of interrupting a popular play is more than offset by the gain of these sacrifices to Tree's celebrity-artist figure leisurely outside the vulgar material cycle of theatrical production/consumption. The history of the festivals, however, suggest that Tree may have not been entirely above commercial interests. At

first the losses were minimal. In fact, the early festivals actually profited the theater mostly through limited costs incurred for scenery, costumes and properties since they came from the theater's storage. The bulk of new expenditures, then, went to salaries of technicians, actors, and supers. Yet by 1912 the festivals sustained significant losses draining the theater's annual profits.⁵ After 1913, another year of significant loss, the festivals were ended suggesting that willingness to lose in the name of providing an urban home for a Shakespeare festival may have been a public relations face afterall.⁶

Financial concerns, however, were for the most part secondary to Tree's real interest: the social recognition of his status as leading actor-manager. The capstone to the Daily Telegraph article is a challenge to other managers masked in Tree's willingness to be self-effaced:

Let it be added that if it can be shown that the plan may be carried out with a greater prospect of success at any other theatre or by any other manager, Mr. Tree will cheerfully stand aside, merely stipulating that he shall be allowed to contribute his services and his co-operation in any way that may be deemed useful.

Apparently no other manager stepped forward and in April 1905 Tree began his first Shakespeare Week, secure in his status and setting about accumulating more.

⁵See Rowell, who delves into these financial concerns to uncover aspects of the festivals.

⁶According to Rowell, "It could be argued that his reputation as the last exponent of 'picture-book' Shakespeare was as much due to changing economic conditions as to the public's rejection of his ideas." Rowell, 80. Rowell refers to the constraining finances of the years spanning World War I during which other actor-managers could not afford to produce theater as Tree had. It could also be argued, however, that the changing economic conditions included a change in attitudes toward the spectacularized commodity. Thus the erosion of bourgeois culture since the Edwardian era would include an erosion of the popularity of their commodity-based aesthetic. The decline in popularity for Tree's festivals may indicate growing disfavor for Tree's particular version of this aesthetic, namely its gilded imperialism.

Previous chapters have demonstrated constructive projects that define and place the actor-manager within commodity-laden, material worlds. The constitution of the subject through fetishized objects occurred on stage within the *mise-en-scène*, within the theater space and within the urban *mise-en-scène* that contained them both. For reasons both due to scale and blatant enthusiasm, Tree has proven a prime example of this project. One might also add the obvious intent on the part of the actor-manager to increase his social status (ie, subject position) through his stage representations and professional management of, at the time, London's most lavish and modern theater building makes Tree the ideal study for this social and theoretical analysis.

The implementation of the Shakespeare festivals represents another project of status aggrandizement, though in this case the emphasis is more "corporate" (as in a conglomeration of companies) than architectural or object-based. Tree's Shakespeare festivals involved the participation of several theatrical companies other than his own, though under the auspices of Tree's festival they appeared more like subsidiaries than independent operations. The goal of this growing Shakespeare corporation included, among other things, restructuring the corporate representation of England. Tree's Shakespeare Festivals at H Majesty's Theatre were part of a larger project, one that included the Stratford Festivals, to revise the English national identity at a time when the Empire was showing signs of dissolution and civil unrest was emerging in Great Britain. The establishment of a national theater was the tangible goal of this project, but the competing plans for the national theater revealed not only competing theatrical

styles, egos and aesthetic philosophies but also competing ideologies defining the ideal England.⁷ The corporate body proved as disparate and unruly as England itself.

Both the Stratford festivals and Tree's festivals were "invented traditions" in the sense defined by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. Both festivals attempted to revive a sense of the historic past in order to justify or change present conditions.

According to Hobsbawm,

"Invented tradition" is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.⁸

The traditions associated with the British monarchy, for example, though they rely on the ancient reverence, are in fact as Hobsbawm points out recent revivals dating only to the late nineteenth century and Edward VII's interest in representing authority through pomp and circumstance. In fact, the invention of tradition according to Hobsbawm is a product of the modern age:

[I]nsofar as there is such reference to a historic past, the peculiarity of 'invented' traditions is that the continuity is largely factitious. In short, they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition. It is the contrast between the constant change and innovation of the modern world and the attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within it as unchanging and invariant, that makes the 'invention of tradition' so interesting for historians of the past two centuries.⁹

⁷For the various schemes for the National Theatre see James Woodfield, The English Theatre in Transition 1881-1914 (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1984), 94-107.

⁸Eric J. Hobsbawm, "Inventing Traditions," The Invention of Tradition ed. Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1983), 1.

⁹Hobsbawm, "Inventing," 2.

Thus the increased ceremonialism attached to British royalty resulted partly from the erosion of their real political authority (a novel situation) during the last years of Victoria's reign and partly from the increased political upheaval from dissident movements both within and outside of Parliament (a constant threat of change).

According to Hobsbawm the invented traditions since the industrial revolution fall into three, overlapping categories. Invented traditions symbolically establish social cohesion, they legitimize institutions, status or authority, or they socialize through the inculcation of beliefs, value systems or behavioral conventions.¹⁰ In other words, invented traditions are social apparatus: productive, useful and transformative.

One operation of certain social apparatus included the reshaping of English cultural identity, "Englishness," in the face of competing, alternative voices—also English though not part of the dominant commercial middle-class hegemony. According to Philip Dodd adapting Said's formula of Orientalism:

a great deal of the power of the dominant version of Englishness during the last years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century lay in its ability to represent both itself to others and those others to themselves. Such representation worked by process of inclusion, exclusion and transformation of elements of cultural life of these islands. What constituted knowledge, the control and dissemination of that knowledge to different groups, the legitimate spheres and identity of those groups, their repertoire of appropriate actions, idioms and convictions—all were subject, *within the framework of the national culture and its needs*, of scrutiny, license and control.¹¹

Thus the reshaping of English cultural identity involves not only constructing a national persona, but also was a very real attempt to socially organize through representation the

¹⁰Hobsbawm, "Inventing," 9.

¹¹Phillip Dodd, "Englishness and National Culture," Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920 ed. Robert Colls and Phillip Dodd (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 2.

English from the non-English including the relegation of its own members, when necessary, to the excluded categories. According to Dodd:

Englishness was appropriated by and became the responsibility of certain narrowly defined groups and their institutions, and yet the meaning and function were (con)ceded to subordinated groups and institutions. But the places offered to the subordinated groups were, it is clear, no simple gift. For instance, the acknowledgement that women had their own "culture," their own sphere of activity became, as is clear in the history of the suffragette movement, a demand that they know their place.¹²

The last years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth, as both authors point out, experienced the intensification of the desire for a stable, English cultural identity in the face of significant contestations of that identity from both within and without. As a result, cultural apparati were implemented— including, for instance, Shakespearean festivals—to bring about its establishment. Whether a truly stable identity formed, however, is doubtful. Nevertheless, in the process of forging a national identity, various factions contesting the nature of that identity, would draw from various cultural material, bringing into play those materials most akin to their means and reshaping the nature of the construction. In the theater industry of the period, ownership of Shakespeare's authority proved the prize most frequently sought in almost any cultural debate. Claiming Shakespeare was akin to authenticating a temple with the placement of a divine icon in sanctum (or, investing a venture with enough capital). The debate over the most appropriate production style for Shakespeare, then, and the most appropriate setting, urban or rural, was more than an aesthetic argument among theatrical dilettantes but a debate that went to the heart of English culture as

¹²Dodd, 21.

represented through the theater. Claiming Shakespeare was claiming cultural power. Both Shakespeare festivals, then, competed with each others to place Shakespeare within their version of the English national identity.

The competition between the Stratford Festivals and Tree's Shakespeare Festivals, then, involved more than acquiring audiences, and dividing a limited box office revenue, but rather played out a competition between variant versions of Englishness as defined by Shakespeare. Stratford's Shakespeare was different than Tree's: rural, artisanal, endowed and nostalgic compared to urban, commodity-based, and overtly market-driven. Stratford also worked harder to establish continuity to the past in its pilgrim-based historical pageantry, while Tree brought Shakespeare to modern, urban audiences—making Shakespeare contemporary rather than making contemporaries Shakespearean. At stake with both was institutionalization as the National Theater. Yet remarkably, though competing, the two proved interdependent. Ironically both proved in some ways the genesis for what would become the two English national theaters: The Royal Shakespeare Company (directly resulting from the Stratford festivals) and the National Theater, more indirectly derived from Tree through his association with the committee to form a National Theater in London.¹³

This chapter examines Tree's Shakespeare festivals against the background of this debate over the English national identity. The competition with the festival at Stratford on Avon reveals how the Edwardian theater variously attempted to construct

¹³Notably the present National Theater is placed in one of the only places in London with a view of the city, the south bank of the river Thames. Thus the National Theater is more a "landmark" than H Majesty's could ever have been. See Chapter 3.

a national identity even as it also demonstrates that identity's very contestability, notably at the point of construction. In both cases, the products of the festivals—including not only the performances, but the programs, press coverage, and marketing publications—will be read to determine the nature of the competing identities under construction. Finally, this chapter examines Tree's festivals as his participation in the movement to establish the English National Theater. Notably, because Tree may have been more concerned with his personal status than a "culture war," his participation in the construction of the national identity existed alongside his project of constructing his own identity. Thus his Shakespeare festivals may be seen as an attempt to nationalize himself. In other words, overlaying a Shakespearean topography onto the topography of the English national identity, the cultural terrain was remapped. Maneuvering in this topography, Tree worked to make the space his own. Thus with his Shakespeare Festivals Tree attempted to nationalize himself as an English cultural institution.

A Country Excursion: the Shakespeare Festivals at Stratford

With the Stratford festivals, Shakespeare serviced the project of chauvenistic nationalism in direct contrast to urban cosmopolitanism. All aspects of the festival worked to represent a pre-industrial England on one hand isolated from the rest of the world, on the other hand the center of culture. The Stratford festivals "purified" English culture by representing its origins as steeped in Tudor ruralism increasingly the representational parameters for "Shakespearean." According to Alun Howkins:

for all groups, in different ways, the land, 'peasant proprietorship,' even country life itself, were coming to represent order, stability and naturalness. In contrast

to the towns, and London in particular, the country and country people were seen as the essence of England, uncontaminated by racial degeneration and the false values of cosmopolitan life.¹⁴

Rural England, more specifically the southern portion, according to Howkins, was an ideologically charged representation. Further, "this 'south country'" he writes, "was the product of an urban world, and an urban world at a particular point in time—the late 1870s through to the early 1900s."¹⁵ As the economy of England shifted from the industrial north to the commercial south, the importance of financial London as the core of England increased. In addition, the greater role of imperialism played in both the country's economy and culture consolidated this shift. "From the crowning of the Queen Empress in 1876 imperialism became an increasingly important factor in English life, and London, commercially, politically and culturally, was the heart of that Empire."¹⁶ Anxieties arising from the new emphases on commercialism and imperialism could be attributed to the metropolis. According to Howkins, Edwardians applied Gibbon's lesson on the fall of Rome to their own situation: an over-extended, hugely wealthy empire that relied on colonized natives for that wealth would decay at the center.¹⁷ In order for that center to survive, it would require an antidote. Thus the representation of rurality rejuvenated the city.

¹⁴Alun Howkins, "The Discovery of Rural England," Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920, 69.

¹⁵Howkins, 64.

¹⁶Howkins, 65.

¹⁷Howkins, 65.

The Stratford Festivals of the late Victorians participated in this project that represented England by its southern rurality, established at the time Howkins argues the rural representation began to dominate. In fact, as both imperialism and commercialism grew, so did the popularity of the Stratford festivals and with it the popularity of the company of Frank Benson whose annual visit to Stratford on Avon constituted the festival. Thus the significance of the Stratford Festivals increased with the growing significance of metropolitanism. The introduction of Tree's festivals in the imperial and commercial center of the England, the West End, consolidated this dialectic relationship with an actual metropolitan rival. Thus the period beginning with the 1902 appearance of Ellen Terry at the Stratford Festival through 1913 and 1914 were halcyon days for the rural celebrations and directly coincided with Tree's Festival in London. It is, therefore, doubtful whether either Festival would have gained the cultural significance or public interest they garnered without the presence of the other and subsequently developing an identity of not being characteristically the other.

In a similar way as, according to Edward Said, the Orient existed as a cultural entity primarily for the benefit of Western identity construction, rural "Merry Olde England" existed primarily for the urban subjective experience.¹⁸ The rural Stratford celebrations were significant primarily in that they were not urban, hence their very structure deliberately encompassed and semiotically reinforced the non-metropolitan

¹⁸According to Said, "In an important sense, we are dealing with the formation of cultural identities understood not as essentializations (although part of their enduring appeal is that they seem and are considered to be like essentializations) but as contrapuntal ensembles of opposites, negatives, oppositions: Greeks always require barbarians, and Europeans Africans, Orientals, etc." Edward Said, Culture and Imperialism (New York: Vintage, 1994), 52.

features of Stratford. Yet, set against urbanism, they were in many ways determined by the urban experience itself, signifying a referent through its negative representation. Perhaps it was inevitable, then, that another Festival developed almost out of the very things that Stratford expelled. Thus like the interdependence of the Orient and Occident as mutual signifiers of the other, a dialectical constellation of Festival and anti-Festival developed. Not surprisingly, then, the metropolitanism of Tree's festival was its chief rhetorical statement. London, proponents contended, needed a Shakespeare festival. At the very least, once Tree's festivals were in place the Stratford Festival's cultural function changed significantly, becoming embroiled in a competition and debate over the representation of England, by the turn of the century a metropolitan nation.

A 1907 article in The Era describes in some detail the events in Stratford during the festival. Occurring close to the time of Easter, the festival—a celebration of and by the whole town—in the writer's prose quickly takes on religious dimensions. April 23, the anniversary of Shakespeare's birth, was marked by a procession from the house where he was born to Holy Trinity Church, where he is buried. For this occasion, the town transformed its streets, costuming them in tudor garb. According to the correspondent for The Era, "the ancient town's time-worn, half-timbered gables have never been so bedecked with flowers and flags, not even in the tercentary year".¹⁹ Banners along the festival route published Shakespearean mottos—iambic bytes—or depicted characters from the plays. Shields bearing the arms of the local families, the

¹⁹The Era, 27 April 1907.

Stratford aristocracy, were displayed in one street, while craft guild arms were "emblazoned" on the Market Hall. Festoons and garlands dominated High Street and outside Town Hall were cartoons depicting the "Seven Ages of Man." The history of the home in which Shakespeare died was illustrated with "heraldic devices" and embroidered portraits. According to The Era, "a novel feature in the Old Town was a long line of Venetian masts, from which hung the flags of all the countries where Shakespeare is read in the native tongue."²⁰

The Era describes the procession as a pilgrimage, noting the important symbolism of the flowers bourn sacrificially:

On Tuesday the Mayor (Mr. J. A. Priest) and the members of the Shakespeare Club mustered outside the Birthplace, and they were joined by over a hundred visitors, four abreast. Each carried some floral tribute—an elaborate wreath or a simple posy, a bouquet of orchids or a single daffodil. All kinds of spring flowers were carried, but the favorite buttonhole was the English rose, which symbolised the association of the Shakespeare celebration with St. George's Day, the national-poet with the national saint.²¹

The group began the walk to the church through the decorated streets of the country town, augmented by those who had lined the route. The head master and the boys of Shakespeare's school joined as the procession passed them by, taking their position at the head. The Festival celebrants soon reached their destination:

As the procession neared the Parish Church the sky, which had threatened rain, began to clear, and from that time the weather was delightful. The grand old fane soon filled, and some pilgrims were kept outside when the doors were closed. The service opened with a welcome innovation. Miss Marie Brema sang with dramatic effect, "Through the grave and gate of death" (Bach), then gave an expressive rendering of Schubert's solemn Litany, and finally made the church echo with the glad strains of an Elizabethan Easter song. The Rev. G. Arbuthnot

²⁰The Era, 27 April 1907.

²¹The Era, 27 April 1907.

(vicar) recited the ancient bidding prayer, in which he included the names of St. George and William Shakespeare, and then delivered the customary address.²²

At the conclusion of the service, the pilgrims placed their floral tributes on the chancelry underneath Shakespeare's memorial. "The fragrant carpet almost covered the chancel floor, and the stream of votaries seemed unending."²³ Among those paying homage were Mr. and Mrs. Benson and Miss Genevieve Ward, who was appearing with the Bensonians. That evening the Festival performances opened at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre.

This single procession reveals several cultural elements woven together during the festival. Most immediately striking is the quaint nostalgia for a rural Tudor past. Festoons, banners and heraldic emblems enhancing the carefully preserved timber-framed structures theatricalize the town as it works to represent a past procession that never took place. The streets are designed with a bricolage of newly-fashioned relics as if to say the town itself is a relic preserved from history. The reporter for The Era is caught in this trap, referring frequently to Stratford as "ancient" and "old." The abundance of flowers in the street decorations, carried by the participants and piled in the church emphasize the rurality of the event while also suggesting rejuvenation. The festival, then, takes on the quality of a rite-of-spring.

Yet the flowers offered in tribute, as sacrifices of nature (more specifically, as sacrifices of the sex organs of plants), to the dead dramatist function similarly as fetishes given over to an abiding spirit. The use of the flowers demonstrates not only their own

²²The Era, 27 April 1907.

²³The Era, 27 April 1907.

use as individual fetish objects, but through their signification, the fetishization of nature and the English country-side, thus rurality itself. This fetishization was repeated through the Victorian and Edwardian craze for the "cottage garden" transplanted to suburbia. The use of flowers and their signification of nature for the festival organizers was partly strategic. Sacrificing to Shakespeare as if he were a god of spring, invests the poet with a rurality that Stratford, rather than London, can more ably reproduce. Ironically, though, the spectacular abundance of flowers demonstrates a rather Edwardian metropolitan proclivity, displaying an accumulation of objects as a sign of wealth, though in this context the wealth signified is a wealth of nature. The flowers, supposedly purer since naturally produced (though to have roses in April artificial measures must have been invoked—importation or hothouses), are merely substituted for the artificial commodities produced and distributed in urban contexts. The abundance of cut flowers emulates a type of wasteful expenditure rivaling similar metropolitan expenditures.

According to Alun Howkins, the choice to represent English rurality as Tudor fit well within imperialist representation:

The Tudor construction was an extraordinarily powerful one. Unlike the medievalist construction it encouraged expansion and worldliness. Its heroes were adventurers rather than knights, its physical setting was idyllic without the harshness of monasticism. Above all it was English. Froude's picture of the degenerate French and Spanish fitted well with a society which blamed the corruption of France for Oscar Wilde and the nameless "greenery-yallery" sins he imported for English youth. Against Wilde the Tudor set Drake, against the inside world of darkened velvet rooms it set the outside horizons of sea and Empire, against the Lily it set the Rose.²⁴

²⁴Howkins, 71.

Thus the dominate aspects of its representation, the abundance of cut flowers and the quaint tudorism of Stratford specifically chosen to contrast to the contemporary metropolitan scene, were still intricately mired in the space of urban representation. The flowers signified the wasteful expenditure of commercialism, and the tudorism represented virile imperialism. Notably, however, floral tudorism filtered out the decadent aspects of London commercial imperialism: the non-productive dandified consumer.

Perhaps even more significant than the tudor nostalgia and flower fetishes brought in operation during the festival procession was the conflation of Shakespeare with the English chivalric hero St. George and with the Christian Easter rites. Not only was this operation overt, but it was clearly sanctioned by the local church, and firmly underscored by the press as The Era's narrative demonstrates. Infused with the rural setting, Shakespeare is placed at the very core of English religious and secular culture. Shakespeare becomes the saviour of Englishness whose resurrection brings the nation into a new era.

The chauvenism of this new era is revealed in a curious little book published in 1911 for the Stratford festival committee, presumably to market the festival. The Shakespeare Revival by Reginald R. Buckley featured the more ambitious ideals of the festival organizers. Frank Benson, the actor-manager whose company annually performed at the festival, provided a foreword. Through this propagandistic book the ideological backbone to the festivals stands forth clearly. In particular, what stands forth is the festival's firm linkage to a British patriotism and an imperial and racial

manifest destiny, demonstrating the complicity of even "innocuous" cultural performances within hegemonic political discourse.

The book, a collection of essays by three authors, including a preface by the actor-manager Frank Benson, expresses sentiments of chauvenism and English cultural hegemony. Reginald Buckley, in the largest portion of the book uses a quasi-scholarly argument to position Shakespeare as the culmination of Western drama, drawing on an essentializing understanding of Greek drama, nostalgia for Medieval performance, promotion of English choral celebrations, and an affinity for Wagner's teutonic mix of sexual passion and nationalist/racial pride. Using the Stratford Festivals for the aggrandizement of Anglo people configured as a race, he states bluntly, "the entire significance of the Stratford Movement lies in the race question."²⁵ His ideal festival would include alternating productions of Shakespeare, Wagner, Greek drama and, choral groups and Morris dancers. The result would salve contemporary evils. He states:

And now, when there are undoubted signs that all is not well, when plutocracy, and to a great extent alien wealth, has to a large degree supplanted our aristocracy, while democracy had not yet learned its enormous responsibility, faith and tradition must speak in the authentic voice of an England that was great, and must sound their clarion call to the ends of the earth, wherever the language of Shakespeare and the bonds of race are ready to respond.²⁶

The formula for this English nationalism is distinctly anti-urban. In fact, the "cosmopolitanism" of metropolitan London with its commercial oligarchy, "plutocracy,"

²⁵Reginald R. Buckley, "The Nature of Drama," The Shakespeare Revival and the Stratford-upon-Avon Movement ed. Reginald Buckley (London: George Allen and Sons, 1911), 108.

²⁶Buckley, 115.

and "alien wealth" threatens to shift English culture from its core traditional values perceived as rural, folk-driven and embodying a virile artisanship. According to Buckley, in fact, "the habitual amusement of our deformed and defiled cities no longer is pleasurable to normal people; nor would it have found favour in any robust or intellectual age."²⁷ Another contributor, Mary Neal, explicitly condemns urban existence claiming, "all over the world and in all nations the cosmopolitan ideal is being realised as false except for purposes of trade, commerce, and for certain material conveniences."²⁸ Neal, writing on the folk art revival, less polemically repeats the argument for the mythic agrarian English nationalism and race-consciousness through Shakespeare. She revives the socialist nostalgia for pre-industrial labour:

There are everywhere signs that the ugliness of cities has reached its limit, that the power conferred by mere money has failed, that commercialism cannot satisfy, and once more men and women are returning to the deeper and abiding rhythm of life long ago broken by the rush and whirr of machinery. We are relearning the lesson to-day that the forces which make for evil are apt to be increased both by opposition and by cowardly acquiescence, and that they can be redeemed only by the transmuting power of beauty and of art into willing servants of the best and highest interests of the nation.²⁹

The writers work together to recoup Shakespeare's rural roots. For Neal, Shakespeare's plays fit better in a rural landscape:

And there is not the jar between the play inside its walls and the surroundings in which one can walk between the acts and after the play is over, all is so different from the crowded city street into which so many theatres open in other places.

²⁷Buckley, 181.

²⁸Mary Neal, "Folk-Art," The Shakespeare Revival and the Stratford-upon-Avon Movement, 204.

²⁹Neal, 208.

Here all is peaceful and idyllic, and helpful to the best understanding of our national drama.³⁰

According to Benson, the theater and its dream is "linked to the Warwickshire soil by creeping plants and twining flowers."³¹ Buckley is broader. To him, Shakespeare was "like Nature herself, full of the impulse of Spring, the prodigality of generous Summer, the deeper tints of Autumn. An early death prevented the cold of Winter from chilling his blood or frosting the ripe fruit of his genius."³²

Benson's preface, more than the other writers, represents the ideological space of the festivals. His narrative creates a *mise-en-scène* from which emerges an anti-urban, artisanal folk-spirit that is hegemonically nationalistic. Benson begins by painting an innocent country scene. Benson's dreamer lies on a lawn in the river-side garden attached to the theater. The imaginative scene, the dreamer's field of vision, carefully constructs the backdrop. Gazing at his surroundings he sees not only the country but the progress of history. The scene on which he gazes has been traversed by a historical parade of English folk laboring to make the staff of life, overseen by a Christian god on whose gaze Benson's dreamer gazes. "To the right," Benson writes, "through a frame of rush and willow, yew and cedar and elm, the spire of the church looks down on the mill where Celt, Roman, Saxon and Dane, Norman and Englishman for centuries have ground their harvest."³³ On the other side of the river he sees the playing fields,

³⁰Neal, 192.

³¹Benson, forward, The Shakespeare Revival and the Stratford-upon-Avon Movement, xii.

³²Buckley, 86.

³³Benson, xii.

"secured to the towns-folk for ever by wise burgesses." The change of seasons is marked not by nature, but sport: "The playing-fields are deserted to-day, save for a few youths enjoying the last kick of the season at a football, or their first renewal of the controversy between cricket bat and ball."³⁴ The field that Benson's dreamer configures through a simple panoramic gaze is quaintly naturalized, stretches through to the origins of British culture and is finally marked off by the manly pursuits of athletic sport and its implied British chivalry. Significantly the author identifies himself through the reverie of fantasy with not only the Christian god of the church steeple, but the "wise burgesses" who figuratively inhabit the playing fields.

As the time for the festivals approach, Nature itself implicitly takes notice: "the jackdaws and the starlings notify the rooks that another sun has reached its zenith; but the rooks, busy giving their offspring a final lesson in aviation, merely caw back composedly, 'It is so, all is well.'"³⁵ Soon Benson's dreamer is joined by the townspeople gathering for the festival in the celebration that combines primitive rites with medieval civic ceremony. "But hark! I hear the minstrels play, and after them I know the rout is coming. . . . On to the green of the Bancroft dance the singing children of Stratford and neighboring villages."³⁶ The ceremony begins:

The Mayor in his chain of office, supported by the notables of the district, makes a cheery little speech. He hands a bouquet to the Queen of May, a fair little maiden seated on a throne of flowers in the midst of her court. The rough spear, entwined with ivy pointing upwards, connects the eternal homage paid by age to youth with the primitive worship from our ancestors to the earth and sun.

³⁴Benson, xii.

³⁵Benson, xii-xiii.

³⁶Benson, xiii.

Then the Folk-songs of our forefathers ring out blithely on the spring air, and the twinkling feet of the little dancers on the grass catch something of the rhythm of Shakespeare's verse and the music of the spheres.³⁷

The spatial configuration of this quaint *mise-en-scène* aggrandizes the author. The participating agents are consistently little—the mayor's "cheerly little speech," a "fair little maiden" presides as the queen of the festival, and the "twinkling feet" of "little dancers" celebrate the moment. Thus the writer, identified with the local bourgeois patriarchs and the Christian god, looms large as he gazes on the festival. The local festival participants are tiny, innocent puppets who "catch something of the rhythm" of a much larger, universal significance which the author constructs.

Benson's dream, then, nostalgic as it is for an ancient English folk history, has a broader scope. On one level, the festival is global in its proportions. In the crowd are foreign guests: "blood brothers of the race, fellow subjects from distant parts of our Empire, friends from foreign countries all the world over . . ."³⁸ The ceremony taps into a universal folk-spirit that even those Benson relegates to second class are able to appreciate. "The Spaniard, the Bohemian, the African, the Asiatic," he writes, "recognise in many of the dances some primitive ceremony still in vogue among their own folk to this day."³⁹ Holding some common, originary and universalist folk spirit, the Stratford festival rejuvenates these foreign cultures. The festival has the potential to colonise these more foreign people, most notably the Indian noble who misrecognizes the

³⁷Benson, xiii-xiv.

³⁸Benson, xiv.

³⁹Benson, xiv.

occasion as religious, (though in consideration of the description from The Era quoted above that combined the festival with an Easter celebration, that misrecognition was encouraged):

The Indian Prince, guest of honour on this occasion, expresses his pleasure at being present with words full of meaning, "I will take back to my country the story of your song and your dance and your Shakespeare Festival, that my people may have more joy in their lives, and that your folk and my folk may better understand each other's religion."⁴⁰

The festival in its trappings may focus on England for the English but clearly the implication is that English culture redefines world culture.

In Benson's scheme, the festival would celebrate not only Shakespeare's plays, but the life and times of the Elizabethan culture as seen through their local industry. After the celebration on the commons, the celebrants disperse to either visit the memorial library or picture gallery, or the carefully preserved historic sites in Stratford. They attend lessons in Folk-dancing, lectures on Folk-lore or a lecture on "Shakespeare's Girls and their Flowers." There are exhibitions of arms and armour, household gear and furniture from the "days when handicraft and skilled workmanship were the cherished possessions of every artisan."⁴¹ Further, the festival celebrates its artisanal spirit by parading through the streets workers enmeshed in a mise-en-scène of their own making. The image presents a fantasy of artisan subjects fetishized by the surrounding object-identifications like the actor-manager on stage:

He catches sight of a country waggon drawn by a gaily-decked horse half-hidden with tapestry, embroideries, and woven webs, whence look out the

⁴⁰Benson, xv.

⁴¹Benson, xvi.

wistful faces of some workers from the neighbouring school of needlework, not strong enough to join in the dances except with their deft hands and hearts.⁴²

By representing the contextual space of Shakespeare's plays as quaintly artisanal, Benson infuses a folkloric work-spirit into a post-industrial England. In Benson's formula Shakespeare maps the history of the English at the level of the everyday, explaining in addition to the route taken to the present, the route to take in the future:

Some, had he questioned them, would have told him that their poet had shown them in the Playhouse how "we English became what we are and how we can keep it so." He would have reverently recognised that power of growth in the great Master's work that makes him eternally modern, so that the people of a thousand years hence will still have their lesson to learn to apply properly the wisdom of the Anglo-Celtic seer to the practical details of their everyday life.⁴³

The heart of the festival, however, amidst all this activity remains the performance of the plays. For Benson, not surprisingly, the plays lie at the festival's spiritual core. He describes what his "Anglo-Celtic" seer might witness amongst those in attendance utterly simple in their appreciation:

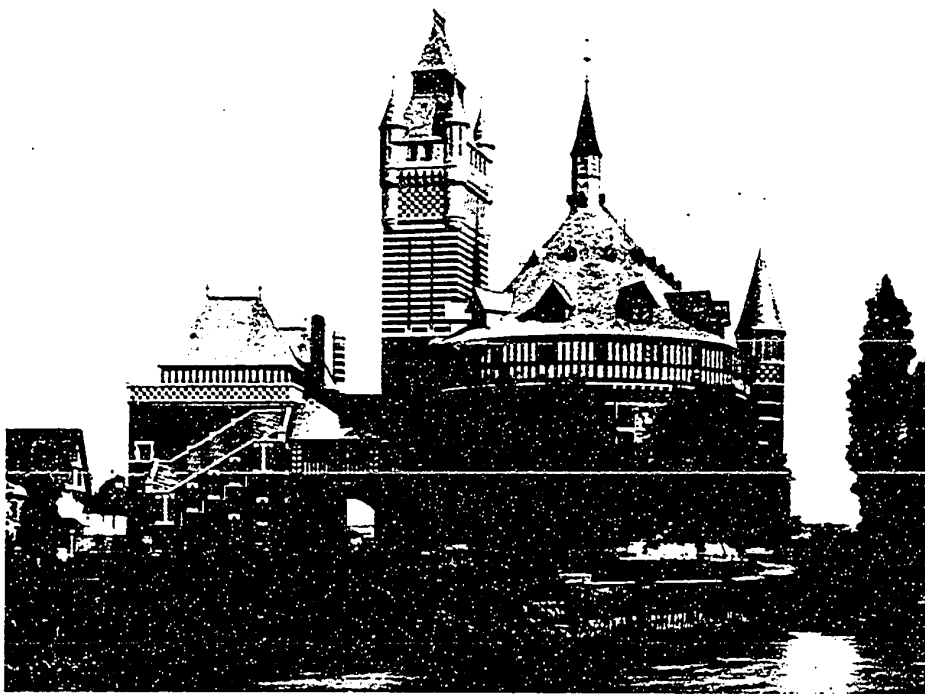
It may be that he will see some pilgrim from the country-side, visiting the theatre for the first time in her life, drop on her knees and pray, vaguely realising that this Festival of Drama may have something to do with the relation of man to God. He may hear in the theatre such remarks as "He is a clever one that wrote yon." Or the simple conclusion, breathlessly uttered at the end of *Macbeth*, "Aye, but that chap was a waster." Then he will watch the audience disperse to rest, and he will know the pilgrims have gained something of strength and knowledge, "Aye, man, it helps one to do a better week's work."⁴⁴

Though Benson's fantasy scheme for the festival displays quaintly nostalgic simplicity it masks the more insidious project he maps as the festival's cultural potential.

⁴²Benson, xvi.

⁴³Benson, xvii.

⁴⁴Benson, xvii.



SHAKESPEARE MEMORIAL THEATRE, STRATFORD-ON-AVON.

Figure 31. Shakespeare Memorial Theater, Stratford-on-Avon

Benson's reverie displays an unabashed patriotic fantasy that has frightening similarities to German propaganda from World War II. The rhetoric demonstrates how innocent imagery can quickly service fantasies of domination, how in "the waters of the Avon [that] reflect the music of the myriad of young-eyed cherubim," can rise "with added courts and upper storeys a temple dedicated to the genius of the Anglo-Celtic race." Benson's Shakespearean temple represents the culmination of an entire (Aryan) world culture:

Around are shrines to the Greek and Indian Sage, to Aeschylus, to Phidias, to Plato, to Michael Angelo and Beethoven, where the service of the song is perpetually celebrated by priests and pilgrims. Side by side with the Morality, the Mystery, and the Miracle play are performed Sakuntala and the Drama of the East. The Orphic hymn in its early and latest development mixes with the bardic drama of the Ivernian minnesingers.

According to Benson, the Stratford Festival could form the cultural center-piece of a greater confederation of culture, an Olympic-scale festival and unashamedly hegemonic domination of English-speaking culture originating in Stratford:

Under its roof, books, pictures, statues help to express and formulate the work of this college of humanity. Stratford, Warwickshire, the British Empire, and America join in an informal conference of the Anglo-Celtic confederation. With their differences adjusted in a world of art, music and literature their common race possession, they will realise, as they join hands with the subtle strength of India, the triumph of the Aryan Empire, which seems on this night of May to be drawing nearer with the dawn, for the pilgrims who have realised Shakespeare's message of strong and strenuous self-control.⁴⁵

Benson blithely concludes:

The gazer in the stream can, in fancy, hear the prayer of agony, the praise of joy, the lyric of love, the paeon of the battle, the call of the blood, the anthem of a new awakened and a larger faith, mingled with the thousand voices of our mother Earth, as the Master Singer unrolls his written scroll. Above these variant notes, dominant, insistent, in the great peace of the night sounds the call

⁴⁵Benson, xix.

of the Higher Humanity, throbs the note of nature that makes the whole world kin. "If it be not now, yet it will come"; let be—the workers round the temple can wait.⁴⁶

The ideals presented in this curious book are certainly extreme. Yet even among the less polemic, Shakespeare was a source of national pride, central to the British concept of itself as a culture and part of the nostalgia for a simpler, less complex period in direct reaction to the disasters promised by commercialism and imperialism: decadence and native revolution. Radical as it now seems, the rhetoric in The Shakespeare Revival demonstrates how the quaint, provincial Stratford Festival can quickly be called into service for a cultural ideology that is reactionary, chauvenistic and, quite frankly, fascist. What is significant for the present discussion of Tree's London Festivals is the proximity of Shakespeare to the nationalist and racist argument (and how closely racism and nationalism are linked); the rhetoric that places Shakespeare and the English ideal within a "natural" rural landscape; and the nostalgia for a pre-industrial, non-commercial medieval commune characterized by healthy, non-alienated artisans in an Anglo-Celtic brotherhood celebrated by Morris dancing. This was the representational space against which Tree's festivals were set.

The proselytizers for the Stratford movement were positioning themselves and their festival for the honor of becoming the National Theater. In doing so, they purposely distinguished themselves from those in London who were championing the presence of the National Theatre in the capital metropolis, hoping to capitalize on the Edwardian anxiety about urbanization and liberal guilt over the commercial industrial

⁴⁶Benson, xx.

productivity that impoverishes workers. Because in many ways the relationship was deliberately dialectic, however, one should not assume that all aspects of the Stratford Festival deliberately contradicted Tree's London Festivals and that Tree's Festivals were therefore ideologically pure of the racism, chauvenism, and nationalism so blatant in the promotional book. In the high point of both Festivals, between 1908 and 1911, the two were more complementary and interdependent than contradictory and often interchanged performances, productions and stars—Tree played Hamlet to Benson's company while the Bensonians appeared during Tree's Festival on several occasions. Though highly competitive, the two had much in common and could be assumed to be two linked celebrations of the English for their national poet. In a liberal society like the English, even cultural nationalism had to be presented in the form of a debate.

In Celebration of the Author(s): the 1905 and 1906 Shakespeare Weeks at H Majesty's

That Tree's festivals contained less overt English chauvenism may be due to the personality of the actor-manager. Benson, who had a reputation for his athleticism and great love for sports (Benson's company could be as easily found on the cricket field as on the stage), also specialized in staging outdoor pageants celebrating patriotic moments in English history. In short, Benson seemed prone to manly British patriotism. Though the London festivals at H Majesty's were less overtly concerned with "Englishness" does not dismiss its efforts in the similar cultural project. In fact, though lacking the external Tudor context of Stratford and its overt revivalism of an ideal English past, Tree's festivals nevertheless contained their own rhetorical representation

of Englishness. In one way, the London festivals relied on the collective force of play selection. Thus the perennial revivals The Merry Wives of Windsor and Julius Caesar communicated both the quaintness of "Merry Olde England" in combination with imperial politics respectively.

Tree's festivals, however, like most everything Tree did as an actor-manager, built him up as the consummate urbane English gentleman. Thus representing himself in the festival's *mises-en-scène*, the national identity represented by the festivals was defined by the fetishized persona on stage. With his Shakespeare Festivals Tree took part in the cultural project that was constructing the English national identity; he merely made the project synonymous with the establishment of the bourgeois gentleman. If the national identity resided in the work of William Shakespeare, then by placing Shakespeare within the domain of the gentleman of leisure (in the heart of the West End with its department stores, restaurants and clubs) the cultural identity of England was within not only their control but the very context of their identities. With his Shakespeare Festivals, Tree moved to make that identity his own.

Tree's festivals, then, were less concerned with the origins of English culture than they were with the celebration of Tree's status, ie., his subject position. The festivals were charged with the objective to celebrate Shakespeare as England's greatest dramatist and with Tree's ability, as the leading actor-manager, to produce his plays spectacularly. To a large extent, Tree was "showing off" his ability not only to produce Shakespeare more lavishly than others but to argue, of the commercial actor-managers in London, he had produced more of the Shakespearean repertory thus was invested

with more Shakespearean capital. As with most of Tree's productions, the keynote of the festivals was expenditure tempered by the ideology of hosting.

The first two festivals, in 1905 and 1906, center more exclusively around the personality of Tree than later festivals and illustrate how play selection can be manipulated for rhetorical purposes. The first festival opened April 24th, Easter Monday 1905, with a revival of Richard II (Tree as Richard). This was followed on Tuesday with Merry Wives of Windsor (Tree as Falstaff), a Wednesday matinee of Monday's Richard II, and Twelfth Night (Tree as Malvolio), on Wednesday evening. Hamlet was performed Thursday evening with a gimmick experiment: without scenery. Much Ado About Nothing (Tree as Benedick) was performed Friday evening, and the Festival concluded with a Saturday matinee of Hamlet (with scenery) for school children and a public performance of Julius Caesar (Tree as Marc Antony) in the evening. All of the plays, with the exception of Hamlet, were successes for Tree during their first production, and while Tree acknowledged that the festival would not have been possible except by the fact that the plays were already in his theatre's repertory it should not be assumed that Tree was merely randomly dusting off some old pieces from his closet. Rather, the week-long "season" displays a range that crosses the spectrum of Shakespearean drama from chronicle to tragedy, farce to romantic comedy. In the process, Tree displayed his versatility playing rapacious buffoons, ineffectual but introspective monarchs, a charismatic orator, an overweening servant and love-struck soldier/wit.

The range of Shakespearean characters, in fact, forms a type of progressive narrative through which Tree moved as a star actor. In the course of appearing in this

constellation of spectacular Shakespeare, Tree first played a poetic and deposed monarch (Richard), a lusty but eventually humiliated knight (Falstaff), then a prudish puritanical but vain and humiliated steward (Malvolio). With Hamlet the process of humiliation turned around when the tragic prince dies but in death achieves nobility. Tree next appeared as the romantic wit and soldier Benedick eventually fulfilled in love, and finally as the Roman Marc Antony who, after the death of Julius Caesar, sways the crowd and defeats his rivals to become a successor to Imperial power. In this way, the festival formed a single performance for the actor-manager moving progressiving down in status (king, knight, steward) through various humiliating defeats, then progressively enobling from politically disenfranchised prince to the Imperial triumverate. Even if audience members were not in attendance for the entire festival (although it is reasonable to believe that some were during this first festival for the novelty) they could read about each of Tree's performances (and his progress) since each was reviewed by the press, adding another benefit to the rapid turn over of productions: increased media coverage.

Tree, rather than Shakespeare, was the star of the festival. The Era questions the choice of Richard II as the opening production of the "most momentous festival ever held in London" as too obscure for the modern theater-goer, but admits being seduced by the spectacle of Tree's production. The play, the writer admits:

is so suggestive of the halcyon days of knightly chivalry—so magnificent in its wealth of detail, that one willingly listens to the eloquent artificiality of its speeches, and bears the burden of lengthy orations for the sake of witnessing the supreme triumph of stage-management to be noted in the remarkable tableau of Bolingbroke's entry into London. . . . Every opportunity for picturesque display is seized, and rich appointments, a musical score worthy of a more romantic theme, and a superb entourage, harmonise entirely with the tastes of a public

accustomed to the modern traditions of the mounting of the plays of Shakespeare.⁴⁷

Not surprisingly, the first festival began with a spectacular expenditure—in fact, one of Tree's best. According to the reviewer, Tree has outdone Shakespeare.

Tree, as argued in preceding chapters, performed through the spectacle as much as the character. His productions during this first festival, including Richard II, demonstrate how Tree navigated through his character's loss of status. With the lavish spectacle of Bolingbroke's triumph—signalling Tree's character, Richard's, defeat—Tree countered humiliation with a triumph of stage management signalling status for the producer and leaving the character behind. Tree, through the spectacle, transcended character loss. The same strategy was used during The Merry Wives, which followed Richard II, and in Twelfth Night which followed The Merry Wives. The scene at Herne's Oak, where Falstaff is humiliated by the bourgeoisie of Windsor, was the most spectacular of the production; while Twelfth Night's most lavish scene, Olivia's Garden, provided the setting for Malvolio to be both snared by Sir Toby and his cohorts and later to enter wearing the yellow, cross-gartered stockings that satirize his foolish vanity.

Malvolio was, by most accounts, Tree's best Shakespearean role perhaps because of the thinly veiled self-parody. The Daily Telegraph gives the actor strange praise ending the passage by a vague reference to "the man" who could be Tree or Malvolio:

Mr. Tree's Malvolio ranks with the very best of his Shakespearean studies; it is one of those unforgettable portraits of which every detail, every line is filled in with masterly precision. The airy self-satisfaction of the man, his over-weening conceit, superb arrogance, and unconscious humour are brought into the finest

⁴⁷The Era, 29 April 1905.

relief; the personality of the actor is, in short, completely merged in that of the character.⁴⁸

Hamlet without scenery proved a curiosity at best. Perhaps Tree was attempting to demonstrate his own power as an actor independent of scenic effects since by 1905 his spectacular style when applied to Shakespeare caused as much controversy as praise. His acting however, rarely achieved the level of his spectacle. The Era reported coolly though politely that "the absence of scenery served to emphasise the artistic features contained in Mr. Tree's impersonation."⁴⁹ Tree, who lacked the personal charisma of Irving, no doubt gave an accomplished, if not remarkable, performance though few went out of their way to praise it. What the performance without scenery most likely accomplished, however, was to set in even greater relief the spectacle of the usual H Majesty's fare while providing another version of the performance of loss. The festival week concluded with a Friday performance of Much Ado About Nothing and Saturday matinee and evening performance of Julius Caesar.

The souvenir program from this first Festival week demonstrates its dual purpose: to commemorate Shakespeare's birth and display Beerbohm Tree to the greatest advantage in Shakespeares' plays.⁵⁰ Through its publication, in fact, Tree was able to bolster the cumulative effect of each performance and condense the constellation into a single subject, in this case commodified and distributed as a "souvenir." The

⁴⁸The Daily Telegraph, 29 April 1905.

⁴⁹The Era, 29 April 1905.

⁵⁰"Shakespeare Birth-Week Festival 1905," Souvenir Program, University of Bristol Theater Collection, The Beerbohm Tree Collection.

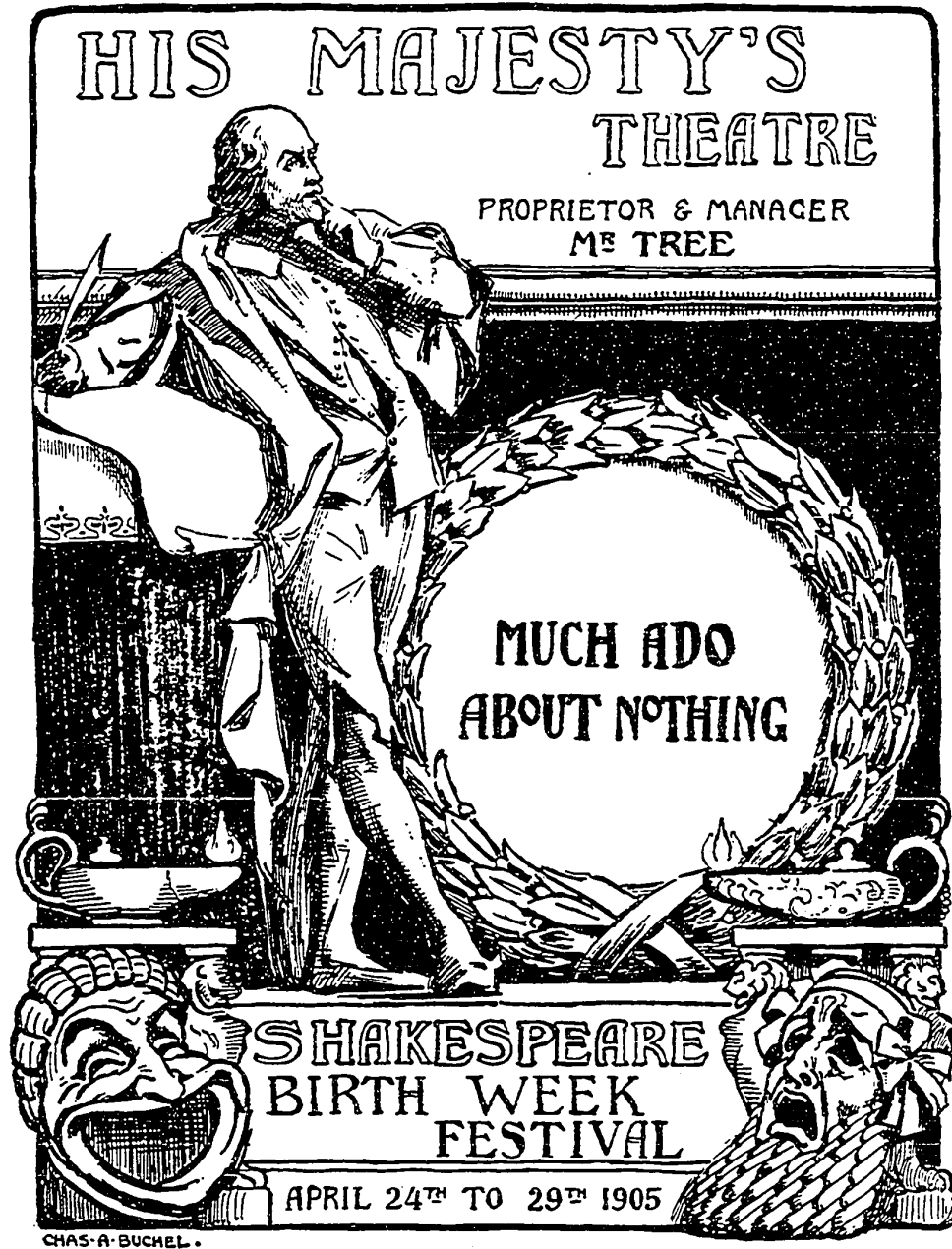


Figure 32. H Majesty's Theater Shakespeare Festival Program, 1905

cover, designed and drawn by Charles Buchel, features Shakespeare posed with pen to paper and staring off with a finger at his mouth, obviously deep in thought. "His Majesty's Theatre, Proprietor & Manager, Mr. Tree" shares the same upper third of the cover page as Shakespeare's head while the title of the play, encircled by a large wreath, is on the same level as the poet's waste, loin and thighs. On the lower third of the page, framing "Shakespeare Birth Week Festival" and its dates, are two pedestals in each corner on which are set a lighted lamp, appearing ancient and in the style often associated with a genie. The pedestals are formed by what appears to be male lions (they have manes) and standing back to back with chests protruding outward. The effect of the pedestals suggests rather an ancient temple than an English stage. In front of the pedestals are the masks of comedy and tragedy, with decidedly romanesque countenances. The mask of comedy is large and round with an enormous mouth opened in a grotesquely large laughing smile that takes up approximately half of the entire face. The mask of tragedy, to the right, is bearded, gaunt with a mouth open more carelessly suggesting a weak groan, almost, it seems, taking a breath. Together, in addition to their traditional signalling of dramatic genres the two seem to be suggesting both abundance and loss.

Inside the ten-page program, is featured pictures of Tree in each of the roles he played during the festival. The first three pictures, one per page just inside of the cover, show Tree in full royal regalia as Richard II, reclining with tankard as Falstaff, and as Malvolio preening through an eyeglass and posing fop-like with a long, narrow walking stick. The last three pages sport pictures of Tree as Hamlet in black and holding the skull at his waist but not looking at it, Benedick in braggadocio pose with hands to the

waist and groin thrust forward, and a contemplative Marc Antony standing erect over the perpindicular body of the slain Ceasar and wrapped in a toga and cloak that extends outside of the photo. These photos frame the program itself at the centerfold of the large booklet.

The festival played to full houses and Tree, in his curtain speech after Saturday's performance, claimed that over twelve thousand had come to the theater that week.

The Era cited the speech in the third person. In his "last word" Tree reveals his rhetorical navigation driving Shakespeare through the commercial decay of the drama. Like a park in the city, Shakespeare flourishes:

During the evening, in the intervals snatched from his Roman oration and other cares, he had been reading once again about the decadence of the drama. In the spring the world need not be surprised to hear the note of the frivolous cuckoo, and in the same season they of the stage were not unfamiliar with the croak of the raven. But they were not dismayed. Shakespeare week had shown them that there, at all events, they had not fallen on decadence. Shakespeare was as vital as ever. Such had been their success, that he had decided to have another Shakespeare Festival next year, and it would be on a larger scale than the festival which had so happily concluded that evening.⁵¹

The 1906 Festival resembled its predecessor in both format and choice of plays. Tree, though, again opened with a direct challenge to the growing number of critics taking him to task for over-elaborating Shakespeare. Tree opened his festival with a revival of the production that partially sparked this controversy, The Tempest. When first produced the play caused a minor controversy over the amount of interpolated spectacle—including a ship that sank on stage, a disappearing banquet, and an elaborate masque more out of the Christmas pantomines than Elizabethan drama. Tree was also

⁵¹The Era, 6 May 1905.

criticized for including elements not specified in the original text such as the final tableau of Caliban (Tree) alone on stage watching the departure of Prospero and the rest, claiming the magical island for himself. Unperturbed and confident in his style, it opened the festival: a clear signal to critics. The schedule for 1906 ran with The Tempest on Monday, April 23, King Henry IV, Part I (Tree as Falstaff) playing on Tuesday evening and Wednesday matinee, Twelfth Night on Wednesday evening, Hamlet Thursday evening, The Merry Wives of Windsor on Friday with Ellen Terry repeating her 1902 performance as Mistress Page, Hamlet on Saturday matinee, and Julius Caesar again closing the festival.

The 1906 souvenir program demonstrates a different emphasis than the 1905 Festival program that featured Tree so prominently.⁵² Specifically, through the program, Tree made pointed references to the Stratford Festivals, their emphasis on the plays rather than the performance and their inherent rurality. Specifically, the 1906 program gives greater emphasis to the textuality of Shakespeare's plays and features images and photographs from his Stratford birthplace. The cover consists of a sketched representation of the bust over his tomb in Stratford—Shakespeare from the waist up with a pen in one hand and paper in the other. This image, made to look like a woodcut print, is centered at the top of the page and encircled by a wreath and then framed by garlands—also apparently woodcut that reach to the corner then drop two-thirds down the cover on either side framing the title "Shakespeare Birth Week Festival" which is positioned in the center. Underneath the title are similar comedy and tragedy masks

⁵²"Shakespeare Birth-Week Festival 1906," Souvenir Program, University of Bristol Theater Collection, The Beerbohm Tree Collection.

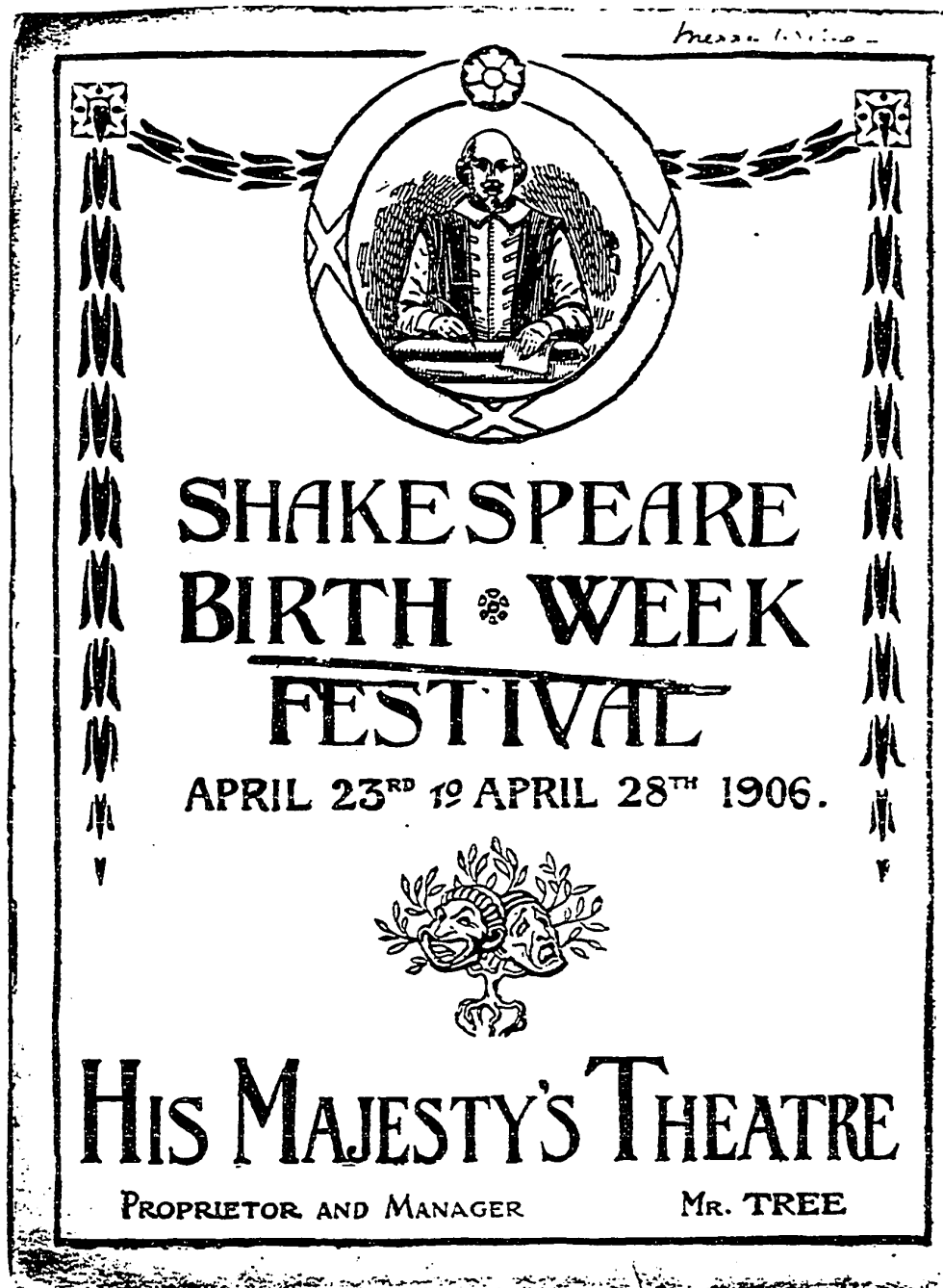


Figure 33 H Majesty's Theater Shakespeare Festival Program, 1906

from the 1905 program. They hang on a small tree—a pun pointing to the actor-manager—with roots exposed. "His Majesty's Theatre" anchors the cover, extending across the entire width of the page.

Just inside the program is a reproduction of the portrait of William Shakespeare used for one of the early publications of his plays. A caption reads that this image, itself a reproduction, was in fact reproduced from the biography of Shakespeare by Sidney Lee, prominent Shakespeare scholar and one of Tree's staunchest critics. The following page reproduces the title page to the First Quarto of Hamlet, also a reproduction from Lee's biography. Small portraits of the company are featured on the next page, arranged around the larger portrait of Ellen Terry and framed by floral art nouveau designs. The actual program occupies the center fold and is followed by another set of portraits, arranged identically to the previous one, but featuring Tree in the larger, central position. The symmetrical arrangement of portraits, then, creates the impression that Ellen Terry is in fact the leading lady and symbolically Tree's managerial "wife" for the festival rather than Maud Tree who, in the arrangement of portraits is on the same page as Terry and is, in fact, looking up to her almost in supplication. Following the company portraits is a photograph of the room in which Shakespeare was born containing another bust of the poet in the photo, then, on the last inside page is picture of the outside of the birthplace house in Stratford. The inside back cover lists the plays for the week including the cast list, the titles of the plays appearing in faux old English type script.

The change in program design and format from 1905 to 1906 is remarkable in that it demonstrates a shift of emphasis in the rhetorical effect the festival was meant to

have. Tree seemed to have adapted to his critics, showing a reverence for the textuality of the plays—most notably signified in the image of the title page, but also through referring to the body of scholarship about Shakespeare by reproducing images from the famous biography written by the loudest critic of Tree's style, Sidney Lee. Tree's program refers not only to Shakespeare as writer, but to Professor Lee who in effect is cited as an authority for the Festival and thus made to service a style of performance he stridently criticized. The images from Stratford refer to the popular rural festival with its locale not far from the birthplace itself—thus proximate to the mythic origin of the Shakespeare cult. The portraits also suggest that the festival celebrates ensemble performances, like the Benson company performing at Stratford. In addition, the images of the birthplace—including the photo of the very birth room with its bust as a type of omphalos—cite the authority of Stratford for the London festival, in a sense making the mythic origin proximate through technology to audiences at His Majesty's. The floral designs around the portraits create a sense of the rurality of the Stratford Festival—that fetishized flowers in its pageants and celebrations—even as the art nouveau style seems to suggest the ironmongery that popularized it as a style among urban decorative arts and architecture.

More significantly, however, by re-configuring the representation of his festivals in the souvenir programs, he re-decorates the overall *mise-en-scène* of the festivals themselves. The programs functioned, like the *mises-en-scène* on stage, as representational spaces containing their own object-identifications whose cumulative effect constructs and territorializes an identity, a subject of discourse. In the case of the programs those "objects" are the photographs, text and font, and the decorative graphics

that make them up. The 1905 festival program used photographs of Tree's characters as its dominant signs. The identity constructed was clearly based on the celebrity persona of the festival's star and producer. But with the following year's program, Tree placed in this festival identifiable signs of the Stratford Festival. In other words Tree re-configured his London Festivals with fetishized representations of the fetishized birthplace. Tree moved the Stratford Festival into H Majesty's, within the means of his commodifying production notably for distribution among his patrons.

Institutionalizing Status: H Majesty's Festivals and the National Theatre

Subsequent festivals repeated with some variation the same formula of the first two: a week of revivals in revolving repertory, usually those which had proved famous successes for Tree in the past: Tempest (famous for the scenery), Twelfth Night (Tree's performance as Malvolio), Hamlet (Victorian tradition demanded it), Julius Caesar (the political and military defeat of rivals), Merry Wives of Windsor (the quaint, bourgeois nostalgia for "Merry Olde England"). As the festivals continued there occurred a shift in emphasis from Tree himself to a more broader subject, the establishment of the national theater, a project Tree could not accomplish alone (it is unlikely he was ever motivated to do so) though he could place himself to accept its leadership role should it ever materialise.

In fact, Tree positioned himself from the start suggesting the establishment of the festivals were meant to inspire the institutionalization of H Majesty's Theater as the

National Theater. Strategically, though, H Majesty's must first be established as the home of Shakespeare. In the program for the 1905 festival, Tree wrote:

The thoughts of many men are turning just now to find some fitting and permanent memorial to the memory of Shakespeare. It must be that such a scheme, awakening to freshened admiration the thoughts of many minds in many lands where our English tongue is spoken, will need time for its due fulfillment. But meanwhile it is in the power of those who have already devoted some labour to his service, to let no year go by without offering some tribute, within their means, in honour of the greatest dramatist of our land. And it is with this thought that I have decided to devote Shakespeare's birthday week to the presentation of some of the most famous of his plays. It would not be possible, in view of the requirements of our modern stage, to attempt such an enterprise unless these plays had already been presented at His Majesty's Theatre; but I venture to hope that this fact will not be held to diminish the interest with which the present series of revivals will be received.⁵³

Both associating himself with the Shakespeare Memorial and also distancing himself—namely providing a ready-made memorial festival before the Committee could come up with its own—Tree effectively argued through these comments but also through the festivals themselves for his own earned right ("those who have already devoted some labour to his service") to be in the forefront of any commemoration of Shakespeare. Like Benson's scheme, the national theater extended beyond England's shores to the "many lands where our English tongue is spoken." Though unlike Benson's vision, because the core is clearly the metropolitan H Majesty's the vision is urban rather than rural.

Hobsbawm suggests that invented traditions build social cohesiveness of a defined group, legitimize institutions, and inculcate belief systems. The Stratford festival seemed primarily invested in communicating a system of cultural values that constructed an ideal England. The festivals at H Majesty's theater, though similarly

⁵³Souvenir Program, University of Bristol Theater Collection, The Beerbohm Tree Collection.

communicating a value system, seemed more concerned with the first two categories: the social cohesiveness of gentleman actor-managers and their culturally elite patrons and legitimizing their institutionalization with a national theater. Though the ritual context surrounding Tree's festival may have been less colorful it was equally as illustrative of the festival's cultural project. General meetings, committee banquets, and resolutions and nominations in the stead of floral parades through tourist Tudorism places the Festivals at H Majesty's within bourgeois institutionalized bureaucracy dominated by urban gentlemen and some prominent women. The festivals were increasing given over to the work of a committee, a necessary strategy to secure its national status.⁵⁴

The 1907 Festival reveals this partial shift. In 1907 many of the same plays were revived in addition to The Winter's Tale which Tree had just produced with Ellen Terry, although neither Terry nor Tree appeared in the festival revival. In addition, the 1907 program was less dominated by Tree's personality. It featured the Droueshout portrait from the Quartos, the name of the Theatre, "Proprietor and Manager – Mr. Tree" in small type underneath, and "Shakespeare Birth Week Festival" with the dates (the 22nd

⁵⁴To some extent, however, the national theater movement sought to cure the evils the rurality of Stratford sought correct, namely the imperialism of decadent commercialism. According to James Woodfield, "During the latter part of the nineteenth, it became increasingly evident that any renaissance of the English drama first required the liberation of the English theatre from the bondage of commercialism, with all its inherent evils: long runs, the actor-manager and star system, the general lack of opportunity for both actors and authors, the reliance on well-tried formulas, and the reluctance—enforced, to some degree, by the Censor—to risk controversial subjects or the serious treatment of real life issues on the stage. Consequently, the establishment of a National Theater came to be perceived as an essential first step in the larger cause of revitalizing the English theater and bringing it on a par with its continental counterparts." Woodfield, 94.

through the 27th of April, 1907). Inside was a schedule for the week and playbill information on each play.

Because Tree was just returning from a tour of Berlin where he played for the Kaiser, the 1907 festival had the added resonance of a national triumph. According to

The Westminster Gazette:

Mr. Tree's "Shakespeare Week" is always a marvel of industry and energy. Merely to contemplate in the mind's eye the life of the scene-shifter during these seven days brings on an attack of exhaustion. In ordinary circumstances the thing is wonderful; when it follows immediately after a visit to Berlin it is heroic. . . . [O]ne would never have guessed that here were people [Tree's company] who but a few days ago had been facing the wild storm of German popular enthusiasm, and treating with the silent contempt which it deserves the malicious envy of those dastardly and ill-mannered German critics. . . . Those chauvinistic Germans, with their arrogant claim that Shakespeare is their own, had not had time to recognise that Shakespeare as interpreted by Mr. Tree is an Institution, quite different from Shakespeare as understood by anyone else. We have learnt to know it, to respect it for what it is; and by this time there is nothing more to be said.⁵⁵

The imperialist rivalry that characterized Europe during this period is apparent in these few lines from the review of Tree's opening production The Tempest. What is also noteworthy is what the Gazette is highlighting about the festival: the tremendous amount of scenery that must be moved during the course of the week, and how it signals English industry (a curious counter given the context of Germany's industrial boom and England's industrial decline). In addition, the reviewer acknowledged what the Festivals were in fact hoping to achieve: the institutionalization of Tree's production style and their celebration of the bourgeois consumer.

⁵⁵The Westminster Gazette, 23 April 1907.

In comparison to the previous three festivals, the 1908 Shakespeare week was smaller and without much distinction. A new spectacular production of The Merchant of Venice was already running at H Majesty's when the time of the festival approached. It continued to run during the birthday week but was interrupted for revivals of The Merry Wives, Twelfth Night, and Hamlet. In 1908, the plans for the Shakespeare Memorial were still directed towards construction of a monument. The Era credits Tree with stimulating continued interest in the playwright:

World-wide is the interest that is being taken in the proposed memorial to Shakespeare, but meanwhile no stronger testimony to his genius could be found than the marvelously increasing regard for his work which is being manifested among the populace. To Mr. Beerbohm Tree belongs in great measure the credit of having stimulated the taste for Shakespeare, and it is fitting that he should lead the way in honouring his birthday in the great metropolis.⁵⁶

Perhaps as a testimony to the pre-eminence Tree's festival was taking from the one in Stratford, The Era gave the revivals at H Majesty's the lead in its reporting of the birthday week celebrations followed by the celebrations in Stratford, reversing its previous practice from past years in leading with the birthplace festival.

Shortly after the 1908 Festival closed, the on-going debate about an English National Theater came to a head during a meeting held at the Lyceum Theater on May 19, 1908.⁵⁷ Over three thousand individuals from the elite intellectual, artistic, and social classes assembled to debate the proposition that the Shakespeare Memorial Committee, charged with commemorating Shakespeare with a statue somewhere in London, and

⁵⁶The Era, 25 April 1908.

⁵⁷For a more detailed discussion of the various meetings before and after this one see Woodfield, 102-104. See also John Elsom and Nicholas Tomalin, The History of the National Theatre (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978), particularly pages 37-52.

the National Theater Committee, charged with establishing a National Theater also in London, merge their purposes into one effort and establish the Shakespeare Memorial National Theater Committee. The resolution in a carefully orchestrated meeting passed and a committee was formed (consisting of easily over 330 of this same elite) charged with devising an appropriate scheme for this national theater that would include not only productions Shakespeares' plays but neglected classics and modern, non-commercial drama. In fact, the establishment of the National Theater seemed to be intended to rescue the theater from its own commercialism. The actor-manager John Hare argued, "Month by month, year by year, the work of the theatre is becoming more a trade and less an art, and commercial interests paralyze the aspirations and ambitions of the most artistic and conscientious of our managers . . . Why, gentleman, it is that very commercial spirit in art that we want to fight against, this hydra-headed monster that we want to scotch and kill."⁵⁸

This emphasis on non-commercialism placed Tree in a tricky position since his productions were geared to increase the box-office revenue, define and attract a market, and mired intrinsically in a commodity-aesthetic, thus commercial through and through. The circular promoting the meeting even took an indirect aim at Tree, stating "when Shakespeare revivals have sometimes been presented they have been accompanied by a scenic display quite distinct from the intrinsic value of the drama."⁵⁹

⁵⁸The Era, 23 May 1908. As argued in previous chapters the production style of Tree in its fetishization of the actor-manager in the *mise-en-scène* on stage and its subsequent fragmentation and distribution of various representations of the star, the "hydra-headed monster" may have been the actor-manager himself.

⁵⁹The Era, 23 May 1908.

Playwright Arthur Pinero rose to Tree's defense noting Tree "generously and unselfishly lent his support to the movement" citing the annual festival at H Majesty's:

Opinions may differ—I believe they do differ—as to Mr. Tree's method of presenting Shakespeare; but surely nobody, not even the gentleman who has drafted this circular, can deny that Mr. Tree supports the burden of his great theatre manfully; that he possesses a rare courage, indomitable perseverance, and a brilliant imagination; and I fancy that many of you would have been better pleased if the paragraph had been worded so as to not convey a question of disparagement to Mr. Tree's endeavors.⁶⁰

Mr T.P. O'Connor, M.P. confirmed this assessment stating bluntly, "The presence of Mr. Beerbohm Tree on this occasion is a significant proof that he is prepared to aid, by his magnificent abilities and resources, this project to a successful issue."⁶¹ Thus the counter defence to charges of commercialism was a rhetorical mask of unselfish generosity and sacrifice.

The use of this mask is demonstrated in an interview Tree gave to The Era during the fall of 1909 on the subject of the National Theater. Tree was appearing in the historical spectacle of Ancient Egypt, The False Gods, and spoke to the reporter in costume. In setting the scene the reporter draws attention to the costume's appropriateness while striking the key themes for the interview:

The stately robes of the High Priest suggest supremacy; the lined face is a symbol of the anxiety of the modern advanced actor-manager face to face with the practical difficulties of theatrical art as opposed to—or, at least, often conflicting with—theatrical business.⁶²

⁶⁰The Era, 23 May 1908.

⁶¹The Era, 23 May 1908.

⁶²The Era, 6 November 1909.

The interview in fact provides a clear example of the careful negotiations necessary to extricate Tree from commercialism and position him as the artistic leader of a national theater. Again, Tree's point is readily made by others. In a leading question the interviewer pointedly asks:

Supposing, Sir Herbert, that the National Theatre were established, what more could they do then you have done in your thirty-five years of gloriously wilful management. Revive Shakespeare? You have played him, both with and without embellishments. Produce Ibsen and Maeterlinck? You have done that. Encourage contemporary genius? What about Herod, Nero, and The Tempter?⁶³

The fact of Tree's commercialism was the one point that could arguably disqualify him from the priestly position as the artistic leader of a national theater. It was therefore necessary to respond to the issue.

The interviewer assisted with more leading questions. "Your idea is that the highest form of dramatic art cannot be attained until the manager is free from commercial influences?" Tree epigrammatically responded, "Undoubtedly—hunger spurns one on, but starvation robs one of the power to do." The reporter pressed on. "But are you not a living witness to the contrary? You have obeyed your artistic instinct; you have produced esoteric and poetical plays. You have spent large sums on mounting them. And you are still solvent!" Tree played up the role. "Ah! This the public knows;" he replied "what it does not know is the strain which such a career entails upon the individual." The interviewer supported this aesthetic malaise taking the bait, "But is not this strain inevitable in the purely artistic life? Is not the ideal artist ex-officio an ascetic? Are not fame and the practice of a beloved craft sweeter than

⁶³The Era, 6 November 1909.

peace, luxury, and a big banker's balance.?" To which Tree responded so that even his personal gain is configured as a sacrifice. He must, after all, support his family. "If it were only one's self one would not mind. But there are always others dependent on us; and they, as the vocalist said to the stingy hostess, 'cannot live upon roses.'"⁶⁴

Spinning a rhetoric of a priestly, self-sacrificing artist who only seeks commercial gain for the benefit of his dependents, Tree could extricate himself from the impurity of commercialism. Ironically, however, his successful commercial viability was an argument in his favor: he could make the National Theater pay for itself. His own commercial successes were sacrifices to the higher art he championed. He told the reporter:

It is not the fact . . . that the actor turns with delight to the cheaply popular and easy achievement. At the bottom of every actor worth his salt is the desire to excel, to do his best even if the doing is difficult. But one has to make both ends meet, and the result is a "divided duty." Now the manager of an Endowed Theatre would be as superior to those sordid considerations as the manager of the Comédie-Française. Though even those commercial considerations assert themselves, all he would have to think about would be Art. If it paid, so much the better; if not, it would not matter.⁶⁵

Thus status was not the only thing at stake with the National Theatre, but the promise of a State and privately subsidized endowment that would decrease the personal financial liability for the manager risked with each new production. Entitlement to the endowment, however, was a product of status—free from commercial concerns the manager would rid himself of the taint business placed on his position becoming a true gentleman. In a sense, as the beneficiary of rate payer's revenue while leading a

⁶⁴The Era, 6 November 1909.

⁶⁵The Era, 6 November 1909.

national institution would also place the manager, in the theatrical world at least, in a parallel position as the monarch.

In 1909 the format of the festivals changed somewhat and seemed rejuvenated with the prospect of it being the model for a national institution. Postponed until the end of June, the festival no longer coincided with the birthday week (and, consequently, the Stratford festival). Expanded to a two week schedule, the first week consisted of The Merry Wives (with Ellen Terry) playing Monday through Thursday, a Friday evening and Saturday matinee of Twelfth Night, and a Saturday evening performance of Julius Caesar. The second week began with Julius Caesar, followed by Hamlet on Tuesday, Merchant on Wednesday evening, then Hamlet again. Another new aspect of the 1909 festival were the guest performances by visiting companies, including the Bensonians in Richard III, playing the Wednesday matinee and the prime spot Friday evening. In addition, Arthur Bouchier and Violet Vanbrugh appeared with their company in Macbeth for the Saturday matinee. On Saturday Tree closed the festival with a performance of The Merchant of Venice and Act II, scene 2 from Antony and Cleopatra which featured Constance Collier as the Egyptian queen languishing for her absent Antony.

Benson's production caused a minor controversy before it was performed when a London paper listed Henry VI as a character in the play, leading some to surmise that portions of Henry VI, part 3 might be included. The Pall Mall Gazette launched:

The production of "Richard III" at His Majesty's, will be Mr. Benson's, but in the circumstances Mr. Tree will be held artistically responsible for all that is presented in his theatre; and it is, indeed, hard to believe that he would sanction so gross a thing as the opening of one of Shakespeare's plays with a scene tacked on from another, particularly after Henry Irving had, amid the unanimous applause of all lovers of Shakespeare, banished the vandalism from our stage. It

is sufficiently surprising to hear that Mr. Benson should perpetuate an impure version; but that Mr. Tree should allow it to be presented on the boards of His Majesty's (*and at a Shakspeare Festival!*) is unthinkable.⁶⁶

Several sprang to Benson's defense. A. Hutchison of Worcester College, Oxford, accused The Pall Mall of, "seeking to heap entirely unmerited opprobrium on a man who has, conspicuously among his contemporaries, 'done the State some service'—I mean Mr. F. R. Benson, the distinguished Shakespearian actor, who has lately suffered in your columns an attack sufficiently virulent to rank as 'yellow journalism' of the most objectionable kind."⁶⁷ According to W. Langdon Brown, M.D., F.R.C.P., "Considering all that we owe to Mr. Benson for his admirable Shakspearian productions of the last quarter century, I protest emphatically against this attempt to prejudge the performance. The paragraph reads to me as inspired by ignorance or malice . . ." ⁶⁸ In actuality, as the Pall Mall recorded, Benson proposed to present as a prologue to Richard III, Act V, scene 6 from Henry VI, Part 3. The controversy demonstrates how seriously certain playgoers took their Shakespeare, and perhaps how sensitive Benson supporters were in this matter to controversy. The appearance of Benson within the proscenium of a rival in a rival festival made his friends a bit edgy. Tree, in fact, had nothing to lose. According to The Westminster Gazette, "So great are Mr. Tree's resources that I am sure he could dispense with this help if he wished to do do."⁶⁹

⁶⁶Pall Mall Gazette, 21 June 1909.

⁶⁷Pall Mall Gazette, 30 June 1909.

⁶⁸Pall Mall Gazette, 30 June 1909.

⁶⁹The Westminster Gazette, 22 June 1909.

The most remarkable event of the Festival, however, occurred during the Friday evening performance of Twelfth Night, coinciding with the announcement King's birthday honors where the public learned that Tree would be knighted. This could hardly have been a coincidence since the play, which featured Tree in his best Shakespeare role, was scheduled for Friday and Saturday only, the day of the public announcement, and that knighthood usually results after a long lobbying effort on the person's behalf. In fact, there is reason to believe that the entire Festival was postponed from April to June just so the two events could occur simultaneously. The penultimate moment arrived, rather ironically, when Tree as the status-conscious Malvolio read the lines, "Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them." The audience stopped the play with their cheers. According to The Era:

Seldom has enthusiasm so earnest and so unrestrained been expressed within the walls of a theatre as that which welcomed Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree on his appearance as Malvolio in Twelfth Night at His Majesty's Theatre on the 25th ult. The cheering was deafening and tremendous, and the extraordinary demonstration of admiration and affection quite unmanned the recipient.⁷⁰

At the end of the performance, Tree gave a humble curtain speech. The Era paraphrased:

At the close of the performance, in a voice which shook from emotion, Sir Herbert said the day had been a very touching one for him, and he could hardly say how grateful he was for the honour which had been bestowed upon his art and his profession. The great night had come at the close of a most touching day, during which messages had kept pouring in from all quarters from the loyal friends whom he still hoped to serve most loyally. He regard his Knighthood as an honour to his art and his calling; to him, not merely personally, but as representing the great Theatre at large.⁷¹

⁷⁰The Era, 3 July 1909.

⁷¹The Era, 3 July 1909.

He concludes, innocently, "The honour had come at a most appropriate time, when they were engaged in paying homage to Shakespeare, for their greatest achievement had been the placing of Shakespeare before the public."

While the 1909 Festival contained perhaps the height of Tree's career—his knighthood—the 1910 Festival represents the climax of Tree's festival project. The 1910 Festival was the largest Tree produced. Once again beginning in April and lasting over five weeks, Tree hosted several companies in addition to his own and turned over the management of the festival, nominally at least, to a committee consisting of the actor-managers attending with him as chair while also assuming the name, "London Shakespeare Festival." The program lists the members of the committee from London's leading actor-managers: F.R. Benson, Arthur Bouchier, Martin Harvey, H. B. Irving (son of Sir Henry Irving), Cyril Maude, William Poel (producer of the Elizabethan Stage Society), Otho Stuart, Fred Terry, Herbert Trench, Lewis Waller, Madge Kendal, and Ellen Terry. Tree, in effect, increased his "body" by increasing the corporate body of the festivals. In addition, Tree offered direct comparison to styles of Shakespeare production in competition to his own, more traditional approach including Poel's Elizabethan revivalism (staging the plays, mostly uncut, on a set meant to represent the Elizabethan tiring-house) and the abstraction of the "New Stagecraft" with Herbert Trench's production of King Lear as designed by Charles Ricketts inspired by the experimentation of Gordon Craig and Adolphe Appia with symbolic light and form. In effect, the Festival became a Music Hall variety consisting, as The Times calls, "a series of 'turns.'"⁷²

⁷²The Times, 21 April 1910.



His Majesty's Theatre

Proprietor and Manager

SIR HERBERT BEERBOHM TREE

LONDON SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

(SIXTH YEAR)

28th March to 30th April, 1910.

Committee for 1910.

F. R. BENSON.
ARTHUR BOURCHIER.
MARTIN HARVEY.
H. B. IRVING.
CYRIL MAUDE.

WILLIAM POEL.
OTHO STUART.
FRED TERRY.
HERBERT TRENCH
LEWIS WALLER.

Mrs. KENDAL.
Miss ELLEN TERRY.
HERBERT BEERBOHM TREE
(Chairman)

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE.

Figure 34. H Majesty's Theater Shakespeare Festival Program, 1910

Tree had little to lose, at least according to the press. The Era is blunt regarding the Elizabethan Stage Society's production of Two Gentlemen of Verona, stating "this representation of one of Shakespeare's weakest comedies was curious rather than satisfactory."⁷³ The Pall Mall Gazette, though, adopted a more patronizing tone, describing the society as "that association of admirable enthusiasts . . . under the direction of the master-enthusiast of them all."⁷⁴ The critic concludes succumbing to the comparison implicit throughout the review as well as sealing the characterization of Poel's company as dilettante amateurs, "On the whole . . . we can thank the Society and Mr. Poel for a very interesting and pleasant evening if not for an entirely satisfying picture of a performance under the greatest of all actor-managers."⁷⁵

Benson, who again appeared with his company during the Festival, did not escape being diminished by Tree's largess. The Era interpreted the Bensonian's presence as a favor bestowed, almost a pat on the head. "It is a worthy tribute to Mr. Benson's efforts in the cause of Shakespeare that a travelling company bearing his name should be selected to figure in the celebrations at His Majesty's, and the enthusiasm of the audience showed that the choice was amply justified."⁷⁶ In contrast, when Tree appeared that same week in the Statford festival, playing Hamlet against his own

⁷³The Era, 23 April 1910.

⁷⁴The Pall Mall Gazette, 21 April 1910.

⁷⁵Pall Mall Gazette, 21 April 1910.

⁷⁶The Era, 23 April 1910.

tapestry scenery designed for the 1906 festival and supported by Benson's company the performance was given "the place of honor."⁷⁷

In fact, the 1910 festivals at Stratford and London were for both the most interdependent. According to The Times:

The co-operation of practically all the leading English actors and actresses in the two Shakespearean festivals—that at His Majesty's Theatre in London and that at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford-on-Avon—is becoming little by little an established custom; and both Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree and the memorial governors, represented by Mr. F. R. Benson, are following, as all must admit, a good course in making each festival as far as possible a national celebration, and making, indeed, the two to some extent the two parts of one whole.⁷⁸

There remained an important distinction. According to the same article,

While the increasing scope and importance of the London Shakespeare Festival remains an example of what can be done by private enterprise, the memorial governors at Stratford-on-Avon have always rightly regarded themselves as practically, if not expressly, fulfilling a national trust.⁷⁹

That "national trust" however included development of the festival an Olympic style celebration of an "Anglo-Celtic Confederation" as articulated in The Shakespeare Revival published within the year. The Times article, however, suggests the ideological interdependence of the two festivals. The Stratford Festivals produced the nationalistic representation of England and centralized Anglo Culture within its rural, tudor space. The London Festivals, an exemplar of private enterprise, took the ideological commodity Stratford produced as a national trust and distributed within the

⁷⁷The Era, 30 April 1910.

⁷⁸The Times, 14 March 1910.

⁷⁹The Times, 14 March 1910.

metropolitan space. Tree's London Festivals marketed the nationalism produced by Stratford. Representing two distinct identities—one rural and nationalistic, the other commercially entrepreneurial—they worked together to define the space of Englishness that was somehow both. Their mutual rivalry tempered the ability of both to dominate.

The 1910 Festival was the closest Tree came to actually realising the model for a National Theater if not in fact actually establishing the organization. In a meeting held at Kent House in fashionable Knightsbridge, in the neighborhood of Harrod's Department store, Tree addressed a group of upperclass patrons on the subject of the National Theater. Presumably the meeting was a fundraiser for the Endowment Fund meant to subsidize its operation. Tree was hardly shy, just coming short of arguing for his own theater. He stated, carefully positioning himself:

I suppose of recent years no one in London has been more associated with the productions of Shakespeare's works than I have been myself, and it is therefore a satisfaction to me to feel that our National Theatre, when it is realised, will devote a large part of its energies to the presentation of the poet's works.⁸⁰

Even more to the point, promoting his Shakespeare Festival as the model for the National Theatre while arguing indirectly for his own proven ability to lead it:

I am at this moment engaged in organising with the enthusiastic co-operation of my brother managers who are interested in the Shakespeare movement, what will prove to be a cycle of the master's works. In years to come the National Shakespeare Theatre will, I presume, carry on throughout the twelve months of the year works of the nature that we are now endeavoring to do during the period of the forthcoming five weeks.⁸¹

⁸⁰The Era, 26 March 1910.

⁸¹The Era, 23 March 1910.

Tree in fact could afford to show a certain amount of modesty because others, like Pinero in 1908, were willing to make the point for him. Addressing the same meeting in writing Arthur Bouchier, one of Tree's brother actor-managers, stated directly:

Might I suggest that here [the Shakespeare Festival at H Majesty's] is as national a movement as can be desired, starting from within, which, so far as can be seen, will pay its own way, the promoters being the those the majority of whom have spent their lives in the theare, and who are thus eager to contribute towards a movement not only as a celebration of the moment, but because it marks a step towards that ideal of a national theatre to which so many of us are looking? Might it not be well in the interests of all concerned that the promoters of the theoretical should at once join forces with the promoters of the practical, and so, from modest beginnings, show the public that there is something to put into a new building, if such were required, rather than by asking a large sum of money to build a theatre with nothing worth with which to fill it? With this hope, and with the additional reminder that it was from a still smaller beginning that the National Theatre of France sprang.⁸²

The 1910 Festival, however, was the closest Tree came to firmly institutionalizing his model for the national theater. After 1910, in fact, though the debate was still hotly waged, interest in the national theater faltered. The death of Edward VII perhaps contributed to a change in public sentiment; somehow in the face of a new monarch like George V, less inclined to play at high culture and society like his father, the National Theater seemed less important. More directly, however, two years into significant fundraising efforts, the Shakespeare Memorial National Theater endowment was barely growing.

The 1911 festival repeated the success of 1910, though not quite with the same magnitude. The 1911 Festival began the end of May and lasted through the middle of July. Guest artists were featured, though only Arthur Bouchier, Oscar Asche and F. R.

⁸²The Era, 23 March 1910.

Benson returned. Instead, it coincided with the coronation gala hosted by Tree at H Majesty's theater as the centerpiece of the festival, June 27, and the tremendous success of Henry VIII, not only Tree's most spectacularly produced Shakespeare play, but the most profitable of all his productions. Henry VIII eclipsed the revolving repertory running for three weeks and framing the coronation gala.

Staging a coronation gala at H Majesty's was another master-stroke of status recognition on Tree's part. Yet it proved difficult to repeat. After 1911 the Shakespeare festivals began a rapid decline. The next two festivals, in 1912 and 1913 were, practically speaking, flops. Media interest evaporated and the festivals lost cohesiveness. Increasing the run of each play during the festival (in 1913 Tree revived a production a week) diluted the theatrical force of a revolving repertory, while less taxing on the theatre's labor force, lost an important festival nature. The festivals also began losing money. 1912 and 1913 were absent of guest appearances and became, therefore, revivals of productions now several years old and no doubt appearing to London audiences as "stale." Moving the festivals to the end of the season, May through June, decreased their timeliness since they no longer coincided with the Stratford celebrations or the birthweek. The advantages of joint marketing and historical memorialism were lost. Ultimately, however, the festivals themselves relied heavily on novelty and occasion and Tree evidently became hard-pressed to find new gimmicks. More significantly, Tree's production style was finally being eclipsed by the new modernist aesthetics and the productions themselves most likely appeared to be hopelessly dated in old traditions. 1913, a half-hearted attempt, proved the last Shakespeare festival for Tree.

AFTERWORD

This study has worked to show the various means through which the production style of Herbert Beerbohm Tree embodied the mechanisms of conspicuous consumption. It examined the *mise-en-scène* of one spectacular production, Nero by Stephen Phillips produced in 1906, as a means of illustrating those mechanisms in operation on stage. The *mise-en-scène* was shown to be a montage of fetishized objects given over not only to represent the Roman locale and its Emperor, but also the celebrity persona of Tree and the urban gentleman that celebrity represented. In addition, this study demonstrated how the anxieties of Edwardian bourgeois patriarchy were subsequently dramatized in the melodrama of Ancient Rome. Urbanization, colonial unrest, and above all revolutionary New Women threatened the subject under construction. After examining the *mise-en-scène* on stage as a *mise-en-scène* of consumption, this study then explored the consuming spaces in which it was found as well as other spaces of spectacular consumption: the architecture of H Majesty's Theater, the Edwardian audience, Harrod's Department Store and Edwardian metropolitan London. A topography of subject representation through consuming practices was sketched in each of these spaces. Finally, this study examined Tree's Shakespeare Festivals along with the rival festivals in Stratford-on-Avon as projects constructing the English national identity and the attempts to institutionalize them as the National Theater. At each stage and through each representation, the study has worked to represent the various facets of Tree.

In 1910, W. R. Titterton sketched a mildly satiric portrait of "Beerbohm the Magnificent" in the pages of the Penny Illustrated Paper. Titterton wrote:

I have sought him in his characters, and I have not found him. I have sought him in his gorgeous stagings—and he was there—these glowing colors, this profligate pouring forth of riches, this splendid barbaric realism of an Oriental furniture dealer who was once a King, these best express the man, and in the midst I see a sort of wild-eyed Malvolio-Svengali producing all these enchantments with mystic passes in the air to the sound of triumphal music played by a decorous orchestra.¹

Further, "it was the time of the aesthetic dandy," Titterton wrote of the 1890s though it is equally applicable for the first decade of the present century, "and Mr. Tree capped the mode."² In many ways, Titterton's brief critical sketch caps the mode of this study and its critical sketch of Herbert Beerbohm Tree.

This study has tried to demonstrate how Tree's celebrity, the object of Titterton's jests, was found not in the characters he played, but in the spectacular stage representations he produced. This study has sought Tree in the "gorgeous stagings" and found him there. Commodity spectacle, not drama, it was argued was the principal means through which Tree expressed himself. In *Nero*, busts of the Emperor on stage perform the character as much as the actor. In *H Majesty's Theater*, works of art spread the celebrity persona throughout the nooks and corners of Tree's theatrical home, grounding the entire space as an architectural spectacle of the actor-manager.

Moreover, this study demonstrated how the spectacle produced was presented to entice audience members into its representation, how they were seduced by Tree's "profligate pouring forth of riches," as much a social statement, according to Veblen, as an economic one. Tree's representations of himself, on stage, in the theater, in the city,

¹W. R. Titterton, "Beerbohm the Magnificent," Penny Illustrated Paper, 17 December 1910.

²Penny Illustrated Paper, 17 December 1910.

were presented for consumption by other bourgeois subjects who subsequently acknowledged the superiority of their host. Like the Oriental furniture dealer with regal aspirations Titterton invokes, Tree sold his spectacles, in effect the exotic spectacle of himself, to a British public in the habit of consuming the world through their Empire and its commodity distributors: the Department Stores.

Tree's spectacles were firmly grounded in the cultural-economic practice of consumption. Yet through it all, the "wild-eyed Malvolio-Svengali"—the status-conscious hypnotist—mystified the commodity-laden construction of himself with theatrical illusions. This study has meant to do the opposite: to work against the mystification of Tree's spectacular feasts to show the project of their construction, from the basic unit, the prop, to their largest realization as Shakespeare Festivals vying for national institutionalization.

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APPENDIX A
Ulysses (Feb 1 to May 31 1902) Expenses and Revenue

To Cash	£	s.	d.			
Stage Salaries, Supers, etc.	8896	6	5			
Stage Staff	922	7	10			
Salaries Front of House	1925	17	3			
Band & Music	1234	9	-			
Carpenters, Propterymen &						
Electrician	1908	14	10			
Gas & Fuel	[4]06	9	5			
Electric Light	572	1	1			
Supervision	11	14	5			
Limelight	587	7	11			
Advertising	1360	1	7			
Billposting	766	14	11			
Printing & Stationary	179	14	4			
Petty Disbursements	165	8	9			
Hire of Furniture	521	16	-			
Fees & Percentages	6359	3	7			
Repairs & Renewals	306	10	10			
Miscellaneous	108	12	11			
	3	6	8			
Subscriptions & Donations	130	4	-			
Rents	3226	8	3			
Rates & Taxes inc. Water	601	17	1			
Licenses	8	6	5			
Insurances	210	5	5			
Accountancy	100	-	-			
Law Charges	13	6	8			
Telephone	10	10	-			
Exchange Tel Co.	20	7	6			
Souvenirs	293	1	8			
Balance Profit	2752	7	3			
				£ 33,303	11	-
Production	576	14	4			
Profit & Loss Acct	2175	12	11			
By Cash etc. Receipts from 132 perfces						
Cash at doors	15,556	19	6			
Bookings in Advance	9,160	12	-			
Libraries	8,342	1	6			
				33,059	13	-
Rent of Refreshment bars				175	-	-
Opera Glass Co., etc				68	18	-
				£ 33,303	11	-
By Balance Profit in tradg	£2,752	7	3			

APPENDIX B
Nero (1906) "Production and Preliminary" Expenses

	£	s.	d.
Scenery	2,005	17	3
Properties	779	13	2
Costumes	2,053	5	4
Electrical	133	11	3
Music	148	9	10
Musical Instruments	26	16	8
Fees for Services	439	-	-
Retainer Mrs (Mr.?) Tree	125	-	-
Advertising	178	9	-
Sundries	122	4	8
Rehearsal Expenses	783	19	8
Cartage	22	1	4
	<hr/>		
	£ 6,818	8	8

APPENDIX C
Nero (1906) Expenses and Revenue

July 1906

	£	s.	d.		£	s.	d.
To Prod & Prel Expenses	6,818	8	8				
Deduct Portion chargeable to Playhouse Ltd.	5,304	17	6		1,513	11	2
Treasury Account							
Artistes Salaries					7,532	11	7
Supers					878	16	3
Orchestra					1,589	1	6
Carpenter's Wages					1,053	3	11
Electrian's "					438	10	10
Propertymen's "					509	4	1
Stage Salaries and Expenses					1,733	4	3
					60	16	11
Management & Clerical					1,116	17	11
Front of House					918	15	10
Advertising & Billposting					2,023	-	7
Lighting					1,430	7	3
Authors Fees					1,858	8	9
Miscellaneous Exes	145	15	-				
	52	7	3		198	2	3
Repairs & Renewals					129	10	10
Fuel					47	6	7
Printing					348	8	6
Programmes					314	15	3
Souvenir Acct					88	1	6
Profit & Loss Acct					8,148	1	11
					<hr/>		
					£31,931	-	8
By Final House Returns	£37,168	15	6				
Deduct Playhouse Ltd Portion payable to them	5,304	17	6		31,863	18	-
Comn Opera Glass					67	2	8
					31,931	-	8

APPENDIX D
Shakespeare Festival Expense and Revenue
1905

	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
To Preliminary Expenses				461	2	1
Artistes Salaries				501	-	10
Supers				41	9	6
Orchestra				131	13	-
Carpenter's Wages				130	11	8
Electrician's "				25	8	10
Propertymen "				38	13	-
Stage Salaries & Expenses	71	8	11			
	1	18	3	73	7	2
Management & Clerical				61	8	6
Front of House				58	11	4
Advertising & Billposting				202	18	6
Lighting (1,337 13 10)				74	9	9
Miscellaneous Expenses				8	3	7
Printing				39	1	6
Profit & Loss Account				429	19	5
				<hr/>		
				£2,277	18	8
By Final House Returns				2,225	11	-
Comm Opera Glass				2	6	7
Souvenir Account				50	1	1
				<hr/>		
				£2,277	18	8

1906

	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
To Preliminary & Production Expenses				178	5	4
Treasury Account						
Artistes Salaries				707	6	2
Supers				37	10	-
Orchestra				151	9	3
Carpenter's Wages				146	14	4
Electrician's "				29	16	3
Propertmen's "				51	19	1
Stage Salaries & Expenses	93	16	5			
	-	-	-	93	16	5
Management & Clerical				64	12	6
Front of House				56	6	10
Advertising & Billposting				273	15	6
Lighting				93	-	10
Author's Fees				-	-	-
Miscellaneous Expenses	12	-	-			
	-	-	-	12	-	-
Repairs & Renewals				-	-	-
Fuel				3	-	-
Printing				26	8	-
Programmes				-	-	-
Profit & Loss Account				394	-	11
				<hr/>		
				£2,320	1	8
 By Final House Returns				2,256	2	7
Comm Opera Glass				3	1	-
Souvenir Acct				60	18	1
				<hr/>		
				£2,320	1	8

1907

	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
To Prel & Prod				385	-	11
Treasury Account						
Artistes Salaries				561	10	5
Supers				24	17	6
Orchestra				158	14	8
Carpenter's Wages				109	12	5
Electrician's "				29	6	6
Propertymen's "				44	6	-
Stage Salaries & Expenses	73	10	7			
	2	16	3	76	6	10
Management & Clerical				81	7	-
Front of House				60	15	10
Advertising & Billposting				144	16	2
Lighting				80	3	11
Author's Fees				-	-	-
Miscellaneous Expenses	6	5	5			
	3	1	-	9	6	5
Repairs & Renewals				-	-	-
Fuel				4	-	-
Printing				41	15	-
Programmes				52	5	5
Profit & Loss Account				614	15	6
				<hr/>		
				£2,482	-	6
 By Final House Returns				2,478	12	6
Comn Opera Glass				3	8	-
				<hr/>		
				£2,482	-	6

1908

	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
To Prel & Prod				56	6	2
Treasury Account						
Artistes Salaries				260	5	10
Supers				1	16	6
Orchestra				58	16	6
Carpenter's Wages				72	15	6
Electricians "				10	13	2
Propertymen's "				16	2	4
Stage Salaries & Expenses	28	2	8			
	-	5	3	28	7	11
Management & Clerical				32	7	6
Front of House				28	15	11
Advertising & Billposting				103	6	7
Lighting				41	19	6
Author's Fees				-	-	-
Miscellaneous	2	18	11			
	-	-	-	2	18	11
Repairs & Renewals				-	-	-
Printing				5	12	-
Profit & Loss Account				410	18	3
				<hr/>		
				£1,131	2	7
 By Final House Returns				1,099	19	10
Programmes				28	12	9
Comn Opera Glass				2	10	-
				<hr/>		
				£1,131	2	7

						334
	1909					
	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
To Prel & Prod				248	17	5
Treasury Account						
Artistes Salaries				929	7	3
Supers & Children				59	12	3
Orchestra				243	9	-
Carpenter's Wages				220	5	10
Electrician's "				29	5	9
Propertymen's "				56	17	7
Stage Salaries & Expenses	139	15	3			
	1	5	9	141	1	-
Management & Clerical Salaries				127	13	-
Front of House				95	10	-
Advertising & Billposting				284	8	8
Lighting				149	4	5
Author's Fees				-	-	-
Miscellaneous Expenses	23	6	1			
	-	-	-	23	6	1
Repairs & Renewals				-	-	-
Fuel				-	-	-
Printing				34	4	-
Programmes				13	5	8
Balance Brought down				786	7	11
				<u>£3,442</u>	15	10
Trading expenses account	739	-	-			
Profit & Loss account	47	7	11			
	<u>£786</u>	7	11			
By Final House Returns	3,677	1	11			
Less share paid to Messrs						
Benson & Bouchier	368	12	6	3,308	9	5
Bars, Programmes, etc.				131	5	-
Opera Glass Commission				3	1	5
				<u>£3,442</u>	15	10
Balance brought down	£786	7	11			

						335
	1910					
	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
To Prel & Prod				324	5	-
Treasury Account						
Artistes Salaries				2,611	1	1
Supers & Children				163	4	3
Orchestra				621	16	8
Carpenter's Wages				372	10	-
Electrician's "				75	6	3
Property men's "				142	17	6
Stage Salaries & Expenses	343	8	8			
Gratuities	91	10	-			
	3	3	7	438	2	3
Management & Clerical				283	19	2
Front of House				244	12	8
Advertising & Billposting				668	9	5
Lighting				429	15	11
Author's Fees				-	-	-
Miscellaneous Expenses	45	12	-			
	9	4	4	54	16	7
Repairs & Renewals				-	-	-
Fuel				9	7	4
Printing				111	2	-
Programmes				3	11	-
Bouchier, A. & Maude, C. Payments made to them in respect of special bill in which their comp's took part				133	5	3
Balance carried down				3,739	9	6
				<hr/>		
				£10,424	11	10
Trading Expenses Account (to) Profit & Loss account	1,974	13	7			
	1,764	15	11			
	<hr/>					
	£3,739	9	6			
By Final House Returns deduct portion paid as shares to visiting companies	11,004	12	6			
	970	10	4	10,034	1	9
Bars, Programmes, etc.				376	15	-
Comm Opera Glass				16	15	1
				<hr/>		
				£10,424	11	10
Balance Brought down				3,739	9	6

1911

	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
To Prel & Prod				1,489	16	-
Treasury Account						
Artistes Salaries				4,397	7	7
Supers				333	9	-
Orchestra				889	13	9
Carpenter's Wages				638	11	4
Electrician's "				129	13	1
Propertymen's "				184	2	2
Stage Salaries & Expenses	583	4	7			
	9	18	3	593	2	4
Management & Clerical				364	8	4
Front of House				357	-	1
Advertising & Billposting				1,246	4	6
Lighting				634	2	1
Miscellaneous Expenses	45	12	3			
	16	4	1	61	16	4
Repairs & Renewals				-	-	-
Fuel				-	-	-
Printing				182	13	10
				<hr/>		
				£11,502	0	11
Balance Brought down				502	12	9
Trading Expenses Account				2,670	18	8
				<hr/>		
				£3,173	11	5
 By Final House Returns				10,434	4	5
Bars, Programmes, etc.				542	10	9
Comm Opera Glass				22	13	9
Balance Carried down				502	12	9
				<hr/>		
				£11,502	0	11
(Trad) Profit & Loss Account				£3,173	11	5

[The 1911 season included the productiong of Henry VIII with a profit of £19,282/6/1; making the net profit for the season £17,613/5/6]

						337
	1912					
	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
To Prel & Prod				328	14	9
Treasury Account						
Artistes Salaries				1,636	19	3
Supers				123	6	6
Orchestra				356	18	3
Carpenter's Wages				403	7	5
Electrician's "				59	16	1
Property men's "				131	3	-
Stage Salaries & Expenses	247	13	3			
	6	19	6	254	12	9
Management & Clerical				179	14	3
Front of House				143	17	9
Advertising & Billposting				630	16	1
Lighting				262	8	2
Miscellaneous Expenses	24	2	8			
	5	0	10	29	3	6
Repairs & Renewals				-	-	-
Fuel				-	-	-
Printing				91	3	6
Programmes				2	13	6
				<hr/>		
				£4,634	14	9
Trading Expenses Account				1,167	-	3
				<hr/>		
				£5,801	15	-
By Final House Returns				4,738	15	8
Comn Opera Glass				8	6	-
Bars, Programmes, etc.				214	7	6
Souvenir Account, sale of books				3	5	5
From Profit & Loss Account				837	-	5
				<hr/>		
				£5,801	15	-

[The total capital loss for 1912 season £11,218/2/4; the only profitable run was the Trilby revival]

1913

	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
To Prel. & Prod.				329	3	1
Treasury Account						
Artistes Salaries				1,891	8	3
Supers				130	16	-
Orchestra				459	-	6
Carpenter's Wages				334	19	11
Electrician's "				78	17	5
Property men's "				105	19	3
Stage Salaries & Expenses	316	10	-	316	10	-
Management & Clerical				266	10	-
Front of House				191	4	5
Advertising				693	9	6
Lighting				271	16	6
Miscellaneous Expenses	29	6	7			
	6	19	1	36	5	8
Repairs & Renewals				-	-	-
Fuel				-	-	-
Printing				56	12	6
Programmes				3	14	-
				<hr/>		
				£5,166	7	0
Trading Expenses Account				1,576	-	-
				<hr/>		
				£6,742	7	-
By Final House Returns				4,159	7	-
(Deduct Portion payable to Playhouse Ltd.)			-	-	-	-
Bars Programmes				280	-	-
Opera Glass Comm				11	13	1
Profit & Loss Account				2,291	6	11
				<hr/>		
				£6,742	7	-

APPENDIX E
Profits and Losses, H Majesty's Theater

1905

Profits

<u>The Tempest</u>	16,393	11	-
<u>A Man's Shadow</u>	888	17	-
Shakespeare Festival	429	19	5
<u>Julius Caesar & 12th Night</u>	162	15	6
Special Performances	36	6	4

Loss

<u>Much Ado About Nothing</u>	(453	-	10)
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£18,108 5 6

1906

Profits

<u>Oliver Twist</u>	10,246	4	3
Revivals	350	10	5
Shakespeare Festival	394	-	11
<u>Nero</u>	8,148	1	11
<u>Col. Newcome</u>	234	14	11
Special Performances	18	7	7

£19,395 - -

1907

Profits

<u>The Winter's Tale</u>	2,433	17	8
<u>Col. Newcome</u>	388	7	7
<u>Antony & Cleopatra</u>	2,672	9	3
<u>Red Lamp</u>	1,419	6	9
Festival	614	15	6
<u>J. Caesar & Trilby</u>	26	15	2
<u>Woman of No Importance</u>	1,656	3	5
<u>Hamlet Matinee</u>	48	19	11

Loss

<u>Richard II</u>	(113	0	10)
Last Night of Season	(63	0	5)

£9,084 14 -

1908

Profits

<u>Asche Brayton Season</u>	5,442	12	8
<u>The Beloved Vagabond</u>	2,737	9	10
<u>The Merchant of Venice</u>	2,072	1	3
<u>The Merry Wives Revival</u>	896	17	10
Shakespeare Festival	410	18	3
Coquelin Season	735	7	5

Loss

<u>Mystery of E. Drood</u>	(390	4	2)
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£11,905 3 1

1909

Profits

<u>Faust</u>	3,237	10	3
<u>Pinkie & the Fairies</u>	5,233	6	6
<u>School for Scandal</u>	5,313	8	3
Shakespeare Festival	47	7	11
<u>Wreckers (?) Command Perf</u>	29	16	9

Loss

<u>Dancing Girl</u>	(3,143	6	8)
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£10,658 9 6

1910

Profits

<u>Trilby Revival</u>	952	1	3
<u>Pinkie & Fairies</u>	232	-	10
Shakespeare Festival	1,764	15	11

Losses

<u>False Gods</u>	(2,854	6	4)
<u>Beethoven</u>	(2,809	1	10)
<u>O'Flynn</u>	(4,070	7	3)

(£ 6,784 17 5)

1911

Profits

<u>Henry VIII</u>	19,282	6	1
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Losses

Shakespeare Festival	(3,173	11	5)
<u>Midsummer Night's Dream</u>	(1,204	-	7)

£14,901 14 1

1912

Profit

<u>Trilby Revival</u>	2,720	12	10
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Losses

<u>Macbeth</u>	(1,802	10	10)
<u>War God</u>	(603	4	2)
<u>Orpheus in the Underground</u>	(7,612	12	6)
<u>Oliver Twist</u>	(1,052	17	5)
<u>Othello</u>	(3,746	18	9)
Shakespeare Festival	(837	-	5)

(£12,934	11	3)
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1913

Profit

<u>Drake</u>	13,353	17	7
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Losses

<u>School for Scandal</u>	(664	13	5)
<u>Happy Island</u>	(5,528	4	8)
Shakespeare Festival	(2,291	6	11)
<u>Ariadne in Naxos</u>	(1,494	19	3)

£3,574	13	4
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1914

Profit

<u>Joseph & His Brethren</u>	576	13	2
<u>Pygmalion</u>	9,086	3	6

Loss

<u>Darling of the Gods</u>	(223	1	11)
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£9,739	14	9
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APPENDIX F
Property Plot for Ulysses

Act I,—Prologue

Large sceptre, C.
Thunderbolt, C.
Trident, L.C.
2 sceptres
Wand for HERMES
Lyre, R.
Bunch of wheat
Sledge hammer
Bow and quiver, R.
Glass drinking cup, L.C.
Large shield and spear discovered, L.

Scene 1.

2 long bronze lion seats R. & L.
2 small stools, L.
2 tripod jars on platform of steps, R.
Skins and rugs
3 squats
Large casket, R.
Grape vine trailing over house, L.
Tambourine, 2 pairs of cymbals
2 large wine jars, R.U.E.
Instrument, strap-key, baskets of fruit and flowers off L.U.E.
Branches of fruit and flowers off L.U.E. Resin box off L.U.E.
Distaff off L.
Lyre off R. (Repeat PROLOGUE)
Platters of fruit off L.
Drinking cups discovered

Scene 2.

Bank set on grass matting R.
Padding under cloth on rake, C., striped drapery on top
Loom and stool covered with drapery, R.U.E.
Small basket of wool and shuttle
Drinking goblet off R., particular, containing half a pint of wine. Violet garlands for LADIES
Ship set on rake to run down at cue—3 paddles in ship, mast and sail practicable
Spear for ATHENE
Tripod with charcoal and sandal wood discovered up R. lighted
Fruit on borders

ACT II, Scene 1.

3 black rocks, 1 each side of steps, one C. on steps
Black velvet on platform C. of opening

Wind barrel off R. Thunder in flies

scene 2.

CHARON'S barge and pole on platform L. to work

Trolley to work O.P. to P.S. of 2nd platform at cue

Vulture to hang from flies and work at cue

Lime for steam C.

Apple branches on border—Grass matting on platform at back

Rolling stone at back

2 Furies to work from flies

Change rock piece on steps at 1st change

Rain box—Eagle on set rock-piece C.—Spear for ULYSSES

Ball thunder at cues and sheet thunder

ACT III., Scene 1.

Musical pipe for ATHENE. Sand down R.C.

Thatched roof to hut, form rustic seat R., crock R.

Pig mash, C.

Wet sawdust, acorns in bowl R., straw

Noise of smacking pigs off R.

Stick in pig mash, wooden pail, discovered

Pointed stick and mug off R. in hut

Stool, etc. off R. for dressing room for ATHENE'S change

Platter for food. Spear to throw on stage from L.

Scene 2.

3 shields and swords R. against flat

2 columns R. & L.

Large bow and quiver on column R.

All skins, rugs and squats

4 long tables set on platform at back R. & L., and down P.S. on stage level. 4 rude beds and mattresses L. and on platform

4 lamps

Tables set out with dishes of food. Goblets with drink

Fruit—Property bread, discovered

4 small seats R. & L.

Trick arrows

Hearth and ashes C. Arm-chair by hearth

Small stool covered with white skin R. of hearth—Lyre by stool

Fruit on tables—Real buns and apples in plenty

Trick arrow off C. door, to hand on by man at cue of shooting of arrow by Ulysses

VITA

DAVID V. SCHULZ

Advanced Degrees

Ph.D., 1995, University of Washington: Seattle, Washington.
M.A., 1989, The Ohio State University: Columbus, Ohio.
B.A., Summa Cum Laude, 1988, Wabash College: Crawfordsville, Indiana.

Publications

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