Advancing Theatre: Theatrical Experiments, Networks, Communities, and the Independent Theatre Society

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Abstract

The 1890s were marked by intense dramatic debate, activity, and innovation. Accounts of this important period in British drama largely focus on increasing psychological and social realism onstage as well as theatre's grappling with 'the woman question'. This thesis seeks to challenge this dominant conception of 'avant-garde' theatrical culture by offering a fuller account of 1890s dramatic experimentation across a variety of British theatrical communities and genres. It uses the Independent Theatre Society, the non-commercial subscription theatre organisation, as a methodological node to achieve this aim.

The first substantive chapter of this thesis focuses on mapping and characterising the various inter-relations and interactions between Independent Theatre Society members and associates. It argues for a recognition of the more fluid dynamic between so-called 'mainstream' theatre and the 'avant-garde' and an appreciation of the period's complex continuum of theatre making. Building upon these observations, subsequent chapters examine the types of multifaceted and critically under-considered dramatic innovations that permeated through 1890s British theatrical culture. Each chapter is organised around a central issue or impulse that was filtering through contemporary theatrical networks. The aim of each chapter is to illustrate the various types of underappreciated innovations and debates that had entered theatrical discourse and analyse how such experiments not only influenced each other but also intersected and interacted with the financial and cultural considerations of a range of theatre and performance environments.

As a whole, this thesis seeks to challenge established narratives about British theatrical culture in the 1890s and by extension the birth of modern theatre. By foregrounding the fluidity and heterogeneity of experimental theatrical culture, this thesis seeks to offer a more contemporary vision of late-nineteenth-century theatre – one in which, as we see in today, experimental or artistic productions are often deeply intertwined in more 'mainstream' media ecology.

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Introduction

In June 1893, the theatrical magazine *The Era* remarked upon the large number of noteworthy dramatic productions that had been staged in London during the previous week:

> First there was an Italian actress in two plays; then *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* – an evening at very high pressure; then came three Ibsen afternoons, with those pretty little kickshaws, *Hedda Gabler*, *Rosmersholm*, *The Master Builder*, and a scrap of *Brand*; then there was another night of Duse, in drama and old comedy; then there was an "advanced" evening with the Dutch Independents; and the week also contained a comic opera afternoon and a "private" matinée of the Society of British Dramatic Art.[1]

The Era deploys this whistle-stop survey of theatrical activity as a tongue-in-cheek lament for the struggles of the overworked dramatic critic. Yet, what is even more remarkable than the sheer volume of productions listed above is their diversity and heterogeneity. Arthur Wing Pinero's *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* (1893), "the unprecedented critical and commercial success" of the late-nineteenth century stage, is placed alongside a series of subscription Ibsen afternoons which barely turned £60 profit.[2] Internationally acclaimed actress Eleanor Duse, with her sold-out repertoire of famous French boulevard dramas, is mentioned in the same breath as a one-off performance of *Leida* (c.1893), a play by virtually unknown Dutch playwright Josine Holland. Cutting across genres, forms, spaces, nations, genders and theatrical traditions, this summary offers an inclusive and expansive vision of late-nineteenth-century theatrical innovation. Not privileging one particular dramatic impulse or singular community of theatre makers over another, *The Era* sees valuable theatrical activity occurring in multiple different sites and directions simultaneously.

This thesis seeks to explore and demonstrate the type of fluid and decentralised experimental theatrical culture captured above. It uses communities and networks that congregated in and around the Independent Theatre Society (ITS), the non-commercial theatre organisation which operated between 1891 and 1898, as a methodological node to achieve this aim. The ITS is a well-known institution in theatre history. Famed for its inaugural 1891 production of Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts* (1881), it has been the subject of extended analysis by scholars such as John Stokes, James Woodfield, and Tracy Davis.[3] These accounts focus on the various productions mounted by the society, with a particular emphasis on its performances of Ibsen. My thesis, by contrast, seeks to

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[1] *Era* (3 June 1893), 8.

[2] Sos Eltis, *Acts of Desire: Women and Sex on Stage 1800-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 128; Accounts for Robins's 1893 Ibsen Season. Box 204, Folder 2, Elizabeth Robins Papers, Fales Library, New York University, New York.

[3] John Stokes, *Resistible Theatres: Enterprise and Experiment in the Late Nineteenth Century* (London: Elek, 1972); James Woodfield, *English Theatre in Transition, 1881-1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1984); Tracy C. Davis, 'The Independent Theatre Society's Revolutionary Scheme for an Uncommercial Theater', *Theatre Journal*, 42:4 (1990), 447-454.

take a more expansive approach to the activities of the society, asking not so much what graced its stage but rather what wider impulses, innovations, and communities did it create and reflect.

The overarching aim of my thesis is to deepen and enrich understandings of this period of theatre history, moving away from overly teleological or rigid narratives of theatrical development and towards the kind of fluid and decentralised model conveyed above. In doing so, my research illuminates the role of the 1890s theatrical communities as a seeding ground for many of the innovations and networks typically foregrounded in histories of early modernist drama. Consequently, it advocates for a greater appreciation of the significance and influence of more marginal writers and theatrical communities from the period. My thesis offers a more contemporary vision of late-nineteenth-century theatre – one in which, as we see in today, experimental and artistic productions are often deeply intertwined in more 'mainstream' media ecology. This scholarship seeks to contribute not only to ongoing debates and enquires within the field of late-nineteenth-century literary scholarship but also to the growing calls to adopt more "rhizome[atic]" or "polyphonic" models of theatre history more broadly.[4]

The Theatre of the 1890s: Traditional Narratives and Approaches

The 1890s are often considered a decade of great theatrical innovation and experimentation. Critical overviews of the development of modern drama frequently begin in or around 1890.[5] Positioned as the "watershed moment between traditionalist and modern perspectives", the period is seen as having revolutionised the British theatrical scene.[6] Such narratives reflect, and indeed frequently draw upon, contemporary accounts of rapid theatrical change. In 1891, *The Era* reported "people talking and thinking about the drama as they have not talked or thought about it for years".[7] By the early twentieth century, commentators claimed to have experienced a period of exceptionally swift and sustained theatrical development. Pinero, for instance, declared that "From the nineties to the War [drama's] advance was uninterrupted. No other branch of art […] can be credited with such strides during that period".[8]

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[4] Claire Cochrane and Jo Robinson, 'Introduction', in *The Methuen Drama Handbook of Theatre History and Historiography*, eds. by Claire Cochrane and Jo Robinson (London: Methuen Drama/Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2020), 1-20, 13. Tracy C. Davis and Peter W. Marx, 'Introduction: On critical media history', in *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance Historiography*, eds. by Tracy C. Davis and Peter W. Marx (London: Routledge, 2020), 1-40, 5.
[5] See for instance: Christopher Innes, *Modern British Drama 1890-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Jean Chothia, *English Drama of the Early Modern Period, 1890-1940* (London: Longman, 1996); Mary Luckhurst (ed.), *A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama, 1880-2005* (Malden, MA; Blackwell Pub., 2006).
[6] Ibid. (Innes), 5. Innes notably selects 1890 as the date to commence his study on the basis that Shaw's 'Quintessence of Ibsenism' lecture was the start of this watershed. This logic is also echoed by Chothia (ibid.), 8.
[7] *Era* (2 May 1891), 10.
[8] Arthur Wing Pinero, 'The Theatre in Transition', in *Fifty Years, Memories and Contrasts: A Composite Picture of the Period 1882-1932*, ed. by George Macaulay Trevelyan (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1932), 70-6, 73.

This sharp increase in theatrical activity is traditionally attributed to the influence of Henrik Ibsen and the associated rise of theatrical realism. Erupting onto the London theatre scene in the "so called Ibsen year" of 1891, Ibsen's dramas revolutionised the British dramatic repertoire – which had long been characterised as stagnant, clichéd, and hackneyed.[9] Henry Arthur Jones analogised Ibsen's dramas to "an emetic or liver pill" for British theatre, purging conventional narratives from the dramatic repertoire and ushering in an era of increased psychological and social realism on stage.[10] Ibsen is widely credited as a "major force and influence" in teleological narratives of late-Victorian drama in which "nineteenth-century entertainment – popular, romantic, sentimental, and quintessentially melodramatic – gives way to twentieth-century drama in the modernist mode, predominantly realistic".[11] This movement from melodrama to realism and then eventually early modernism fits neatly into "evolutionary and adversarial" models of theatre histography which emphasise progress and linear development.[12]

Part of the strong emphasis on the influence of Ibsen-inspired realism is due to the particular biases and agendas of the individuals who produced much of the early criticism and theatre history of the period.[13] The mutually reinforcing influence of figures like George Bernard Shaw and William Archer, prominent theatrical critics who were also heavily involved in writing, translating, and the staging of new dramatic works, cannot be underestimated. In the *Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891), or as several scholars have pejoratively termed it "the Quintessence of Shavianism", Shaw "focused on the iconoclastic aspect of Ibsen's themes: his attack on life-denying idealism, and his constructive employment of internal contradictions".[14] Shaw consequently shaped Ibsen's, as well as his own, place in theatre history around a socialist conception of drama's development and purpose – a fact that both Shaw's contemporaries as well as theatre historians have repeatedly

[9] Tracy C. Davis, *Critical and popular reaction to Ibsen in England, 1872-1906* (PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 1984), (n.p.). Ibsen had already begun to circulate and be performed in Britain prior during the 1880s. However, 1891 was marked by numerous productions, publications, parodies, and reviews of the playwright's work. For discussion of the ways in which both contemporary commentators and modern scholars have characterised mid-Victorian drama as a period of cultural stagnation see Jacky Bratton, *The Making of the West End Stage: Marriage, Management and the Mapping of Gender in London, 1830-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Nina Auerbach, 'Before the Curtain', in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*, ed. by Kerry Powell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3–14.
[10] Jones quoted in *Era* (2 May 1891), 10.
[11] Thomas Postlewait, 'From Melodrama to Realism: The Suspect History of American Drama', in *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Genre*, eds. by Michael Gays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996), 39-60, 45; 39.
[12] Ibid., 44.
[13] Postlewait notes the danger of theatre historians' "tendency to take the 'primary' evidence on its own terms, as if the initiating agents who produced the documents were objective observers and participants, without any self-serving or self-limiting motives, ideas or purposes". Ibid., 40.
[14] Michael Meyer, *Ibsen* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), 478; Innes, *Modern British Drama*, 15.

pointed out.[15] Archer did not share Shaw's political leanings. He once declared that if he could eliminate "every trace of doctrine or tendency" from Ibsen's work "its value, in my eyes, would scarcely be diminished".[16] However, Archer's preference for naturalistic forms of theatre, something which informed both his translations of Ibsen as well as his theatrical criticism, implicitly complemented, and indeed amplified, Shaw's attention to social problems.[17] It is important not to oversimplify this complex period of theatre history. Thomas Postlewait has stressed Archer's often overlooked appreciation of the symbolist and poetic elements of Ibsen's dramas.[18] Similarly, Joan Templeton argues against the critical tendency to assume that Shaw "regarded Ibsen as a reformer rather than an artist".[19] Nonetheless, this pervasive dominance of a few leading voices, combined with the later modernist tendency to declare the "years 1837 to 1900/ […] abysmal inexcusable middle-class", has strongly influenced scholarly understanding of late-nineteenth-century theatre history.[20]

As a result, theatre historiography tends to repeatedly emphasise a relatively small number of performances from this period. Much attention has been paid to the first stagings of Ibsen's dramas as well as productions of Shaw's early work. The Shavian play of ideas, "critical-realist drama in which ideals and conventions were criticized, tested, examined, ridiculed, and proposed", is often credited as a highly important and influential step in the development of late-nineteenth-century British drama.[21] Critical focus then generally turns towards the response of prominent commercial playwrights to the arrival of Ibsen, particularly the emergence of sexual problem drama: "issues of feminism and the iconography of the New Woman" having uniquely dominated the discourse on Ibsen in England. [22] A strain of society dramas, which "echo[ed] Ibsen in their posing of moral questions" yet sufficiently neutralised the Norwegian's radicalness by tending towards more morally conservative forms of conclusion, are considered to be British drama's response to Ibsen's works.[23] A select number of plays associated with this form of drama, namely Pinero's *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* and *The Notorious Mrs Ebbsmith* (1895) alongside several of Henry

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[15] Some representative critiques of Shaw's distortion of Ibsen include Maurice Valency, *The Flower and the Castle: An Introduction to Modern Drama* (New York: Macmillan, 1963); Robert F. Whitman, *Shaw and the Play of Ideas* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977); Meyer (Ibid.).

[16] Archer quoted in George Bernard Shaw, *Shaw and Ibsen: Bernard Shaw's The Quintessence of Ibsenism, and Related Writings*, ed. by J. L. Wisenthal (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 240.

[17] For a discussion of Archer's initial resistance to the more symbolic elements of Ibsen, see Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr, *Ibsen and Early Modernist Theatre, 1890-1900* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1997).

[18] Thomas Postlewait, *Prophet of the New Drama: William Archer and the Ibsen Campaign* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood, 1985), see esp. 10-19.

[19] Joan Templeton, *Shaw's Ibsen: A Reappraisal* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), viii.

[20] Wyndham Lewis (ed.), *Blast 1,* foreword by Bradford Morrow (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1981), 18.

[21] Martin Meisel, *Shaw and the Nineteenth-Century Theater* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 66.

[22] Shepherd-Barr, *Early Modernist Theatre,* 29.

[23] Chothia, *English Drama*, 29.

Arthur Jones's society comedies, such as *The Liars* (1897) and *The Case of Rebellious Susan* (1894), are repeatedly used by scholars to explore issues of theatrical realism, sexual mores, women's rights, and Ibsenism on the British stage. The social comedies of Oscar Wilde – which are credited for "satirizing and subverting the orthodox values on which Victorian society was based" – are also often included in these accounts.[24] It is this handful of plays and playwrights that influential accounts of 1890s dramas, by scholars such as Jean Chothia, Anthony Jenkins, and Christopher Innes, shape their narratives around.[25]

Prominent actor-managers, such as Charles Wyndham, George Alexander, and Herbert Beerbohm Tree, are frequently credited for their part in bringing the works of these select playwrights to the stage. Moreover, these actor-managers' efforts to create an elevated form of "socially fashionable" national drama, particularly through their productions of Shakespeare, has also led to these managements becoming a site of scholarly interest and credit.[26] As will be discussed later in this chapter, there is an increasing critical push to diversify the scope of Victorian theatre studies. Nonetheless, scholarly attention is still disproportionately focused on the outputs of a handful of highly successful West End theatre managements and, by extension, the activities of the middle-class white men who were best placed to negotiate the social, economic, and cultural barriers that controlled access to such spaces.[27]

Smaller experimental endeavours, namely matinées or special seasons by figures such as Elizabeth Robins or Florence Farr, as well as the programmes of the larger non-commercial theatres, are generally credited for their early staging of Shaw's and Ibsen's works. Yet, there is a tendency to treat these activities as largely distinct from the commercial mainstream. These endeavours are either siloed into their own distinct theatrical category – discussed predominantly in terms of their relationship to other similar intuitions, as Woodfield does in *English Theatre in Transition, 1881-1914* (1984). Alternatively, the interconnectedness of the so-called avant-garde and commercial mainstream is acknowledged in terms of a process of gradual permutation, whereby larger commercial managements "tended eventually to absorb the method, ideas and even, often, the plays of the avant-garde".[28] Yet, this transition is generally conceived of as a distanced and remote process, one based on shifting cultural norms, rather than a direct, immediate, multi-

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[24] Sos Eltis, *Revising Wilde: Society and Subversion in the Plays of Oscar Wilde* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 5.
[25] Chothia, *English Drama*; Innes, *Modern British Drama*; Anthony Jenkins, *The Making of Victorian Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
[26] Michael R. Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 54. The role of Henry Irving at the Lyceum Theatre often features prominently in these discussions as well.
[27] Kerry Powell has written of the struggles women faced when access to the playwrighting profession "was controlled through the masculine domains of theatre management, law, journalism, and men's clubs". Yet, I would argue that this observation equally applies to any individual who was part of a historically marginalised identity group. Kerry Powell, *Women and Victorian Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 82.
[28] Chothia, *English Drama*, 2.

directional relationship between the two spheres. Under these dominant narratives of theatre history, the variety, fluidity, and interconnectedness of theatrical culture witnessed in *The Era's* description of the London stage in 1893 struggles to be accommodated.

Resisting Periodisation and Categorisation: New Approaches and Methodologies

There are two main strands of literary scholarship which complicate and contest these existing historiographies. The first is the growing challenge across the discipline to periodisation.[29] Given modernism's much quoted claim to "Make it New", this has led to a re-evaluation of the traditional demarcations between realism and modernism.[30] In recent years, numerous scholars have highlighted the continuities between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth in order to critique existing "definitions of modernism that have tended to privilege exclusivity and rupture as the prime requirement for inclusion in the modernist canon".[31]

Yet reflecting the relative neglect of theatre and performance in Victorian literary studies, most of this work is focused on poetry and prose fiction. By way of illustration, the recently launched journal *CUSP: Late 19th-/Early 20th-Century Cultures*, a publication that explores the "temporal, geographic, disciplinary, and aesthetic senses of transition" which were occurring during this period, features articles on a wide range of fiction and non-fiction texts.[32] However, at the time of writing, it has yet to include a single article that extensively and predominantly focuses upon Victorian theatre.[33] In a similar vein, several otherwise wide-ranging studies of the continuities between late-Victorian and early modernist writing, such as Bénédicte Coste, Catherine Delyfer, and Christine Reynier's (eds.) *Reconnecting Aestheticism and Modernism: Continuities, Revisions, Speculations* (2016), omit any substantial examination of theatrical culture.[34] Despite drama being the most widely consumed form of literature in the late Victorian period, the influence and output of theatrical communities has been systematically downplayed.

To the extent that scholarship significantly highlights the continuities between late-Victorian and early-twentieth-century drama it is largely to emphasise Ibsen's role in modernist stylistic developments. Initially, scholars sought to highlight Ibsen's modernist credentials, through

[29] Eric Hayot, 'Against Periodization; or, On Institutional Time', *New Literary History*, 42:4 (2011), 739–756.
[30] Ezra Pound, *Make It New* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934).
[31] Laura Marcus, Michèle Mendelssohn, and Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr, 'Introduction', in *Late Victorian into Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), eds. by Laura Marcus, Michèle Mendelssohn, and Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr, 1-18, 7. See also Anne-Florence Gillard-Estrada and Anne Besnault-Levita (eds.), *Beyond the Victorian/Modernist Divide: Remapping the Turn-of-the-Century Break in Literature, Culture and the Visual Arts* (New York: Routledge, 2018).
[32] Kate Hext, Kristin Mahoney, and Alex Murray, 'Editors' Introduction', *Cusp: Late 19th-/Early 20th-Century Cultures*, 1:1 (2023), 1-8, 1.
[33] So far, only four issues of this journal have been published. There is however a significant number of articles discussing early film and magic lantern productions.
[34] Bénédicte Coste, Catherine Delyfer, and Christine Reynier (eds.), *Reconnecting Aestheticism and Modernism: Continuities, Revisions, Speculations* (London: Routledge, 2016).

emphasising the more impressionistic and metaphysical elements of the playwright's late works.[35] This reclamation of Ibsen as a proto-modernist was aided by studies of the initial reception of Ibsen's dramas, particularly the work of Kirsten Shepherd-Barr, who stresses the Norwegian's "prominence and influence among the early modernist" communities in England and France.[36] More recently, Toril Moi has sought to extend this analysis to Ibsen's middle period dramas, such as *A Doll's House* (1879), *The Wild Duck* (1884), and *The Lady from the Sea* (1888) – plays that in Britain are strongly associated with theatrical realism.[37] Moi highlights how Ibsen's "sustained metatheatrical reflections" on dramatic conventions critique "the games of concealment and theatricalization in which we inevitably engage in everyday life" and thus he is intellectually a modernist in his destruction and subversion of dramatic conventions.[38]

The re-appraisal of Ibsen's dramas has consequently led to the beginnings of a critical push to re-claim the modernist elements of late-Victorian drama. Mary Christian has recently explored how Ibsen's "metatheatrical outlook" on marriage was adopted by several late-nineteenth century playwrights, namely Pinero, Shaw, Jones, and Wilde.[39] Shaw, in particular, has been singled out for re-evaluation. Drawing upon Moi's observations about the need to recalibrate our conception of theatrical modernism, Lawrence Switzky contends that Shaw's role as a "*bricoleur* of *bricoleurs*", playing with both theatrical conventions as well as later senses of his own outdatedness, locates him within a modernist tradition.[40] This emphasis on Shaw's generic and formal hybridity is echoed by Innes. He argues that the "dominantly intellectual" nature of Shaw's plays, "both in formulation and in the thematic attack on convention", creates "a shared basis with Modernism".[41]

Scholarly conceptions of the possible interconnections between late-Victorian and early-twentieth-century drama are constantly expanding. However, there is less research in this area than one might expect – a reflection perhaps of the fact that while many scholars have charted the complex process of Ibsen's arrival in Britain, "less attention has been paid to the broader cultural circulation of Ibsenism, the afterlife of Ibsen performances and texts as they interacted with ongoing cultural change."[42] Furthermore, by predominantly examining canonical and commercially

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[35] For an example of this tendency, see John Fletcher and James McFarlane, 'Modernist Drama: Origins and Patterns', in *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930,* eds. by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 497-513. A fuller discussion of Ibsen's more impressionistic elements can be found in Chapter 2.
[36] Shepherd-Barr, *Early Modernist Theatre,* xii.
[37] Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
[38] Ibid., 2; 241.
[39] Mary Christian, *Marriage and Late Victorian Dramatists* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 1.
[40] Lawrence Switzky, 'Shaw Among the Modernists', *Shaw*, 31:1 (2011), 133-48, 143.
[41] Christopher Innes, 'Modernism', in *George Bernard Shaw in Context*, ed. by Brad Kent (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 151-9, 158.
[42] Katherine E. Kelly, 'Pandemic and Performance: Ibsen and the Outbreak of Modernism', *South Central Review,* 25:1 (2008), 12–35, 12.

successful playwrights, particularly through the lens of gender politics and social problem dramas, the limited research that does exist in this area largely replicates and adheres to traditional theatre historiography's problematically narrow focus. The "various banners under which Ibsen was hailed" in England have long been recognised – with socialists, feminists, decadents, aesthetes, free-thinkers, and homosexuals all being among the groups who were interested in the Norwegian's works.[43] Yet, the theatrical outputs of these diverse and multifaceted communities still remain critically underexplored.

In recent years decadence studies has made important steps in this direction – a product of the growing scholarly interest in the relationship between decadence and modernism.[44] Adam Alston has recently argued that decadent theatre's embrace of anti-theatrical prejudices played an important role in creating "the transformational impulses of modernism".[45] Moreover, individual author studies, on figures such as Wilde and Michael Field, have sought to highlight the "modernity, radicalism, and relevance" of the work of dramatists who are traditionally associated with the decadent and aestheticism movements.[46] However, while this scholarship valuably expands critical conceptions of the roots of early modernist theatre, the focus on only one literary movement, with its limited set of associated theatrical forms and genres, struggles to capture the full complexity of the period. Richard Le Gallienne described the 1890s as being "almost bewildering in its variety. So much was going on at once, in so many directions, with so passionate a fervour".[47] Approaches that place dramatic experimentation into discrete literary movements risk eliding the dynamic literary crosscurrents of this period and thus need to be complemented by broader, more cross-categorical, scholarship.

These issues around literary categorisation highlight the second major critical push that informs this thesis: the growing critical recognition of the fluidity and inter-connectedness of different forms of literature and art. 'New Modernist' studies, in particular, is moving away from traditional conceptions of modernism as a 'high-culture' phenomenon, found only in rarefied forms of

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[43] Shepherd-Barr, *Early Modernist Theatre,* 8.

[44] Examples of the recent push to consider the continuities between decadence and modernism include Vincent Sherry, *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Kate Hext and Alex Murray (eds.), *Decadence in the Age of Modernism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019); Martin Lockerd, *Decadent Catholicism and the Making of Modernism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

[45] Adam Alston, 'Decadence and the Antitheatrical Prejudice', in *Nineteenth-Century Literature in Transition: The 1890s*, eds. Dustin Friedman and Kristin Mahoney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 264–84, 280.

[46] Sarah Parker and Ana Parejo Vadillo, 'Introduction', in *Michael Field: Decadent Moderns*, eds. by Sarah Parker and Ana Parejo Vadillo (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2019), 15-43, 19. Petra Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetics of Transgression* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011).

[47] Richard Le Gallienne, *The Romantic '90s* (New York [State]: Doubleday, 1925), 137. See also Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Grant Richards, 1913).

literature and art, to a more inclusive consideration of where modernist impulses lie.[48] Under this new critical framework, "modernist works, even those in the high modernist canon, are inextricably linked with popular culture – vastly expanding the places one might encounter modernist ideas and aesthetics".[49]

This more comprehensive and inclusive outlook has also been reflected in studies of experimental or avant-garde theatre movements. James Harding's *The Ghosts of the Avant-Garde(s): Exorcising Experimental Theater and Performance* (2013) points to the heterogenous, multivalent, and frequently diffuse nature of avant-garde theatre-making:

> Beneath the name [avant-garde], it not only goes in many different directions, it also has multiple points of departure, none necessarily reliant on another. The avant-garde is always the avant-gardes, and while the constituting points of departure for one may borrow from another, one avant-garde is seldom directly contingent upon the precedents set by its predecessors. Vanguard traffic moves in pluralities.[50]

Emphasising "avant-garde pluralities" leads to an understanding of experimental theatre-making as something with soft rather than hard boundaries.[51] Harding's analysis problematises general cultural assumptions about the antagonism and oppositionality of avant-garde movements. It also suggests that theatre historians need to be wary of mapping incorrect conceptions of the prominent twentieth-century avant-gardes' uniqueness and iconoclasm back onto their nineteenth-century predecessors.

Indeed, within eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theatre studies, there has been a similar turn towards interrogating the assumed boundaries between 'high' and 'low' art. Jacky Bratton, Nina Auerbach, and Davis, among others, have sought to challenge the notion that "commercialised entertainment is the Other of the art of theatre".[52] They highlight the aesthetic and ideological heterogeneity as well as the value of popular nineteenth-century drama. These approaches have been complemented by increasing research on the interconnectedness of different forms of theatre and culture. Jane Moody's *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770-1840* (2000) has shown minor and patent theatres constituted "overlapping and interconnected domains", with "plots, playwrights,

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[48] Examples of this critical push include Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (eds.), *Bad Modernisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Sascha Bru (ed.), *Regarding the Popular Modernism, the Avant-Garde, and High and Low Culture* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012).

[49] Scott Ortolano, 'Introduction' in *Popular Modernism and Its Legacies: From Pop Literature to Video Games*, ed. by Scott Ortolano (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 1-18, 3.

[50] James M. Harding, *The Ghosts of the Avant-Garde(s): Exorcising Experimental Theater and Performance* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2013), 4.

[51] Ibid., 1.

[52] Jacky Bratton, *New Readings in Theatre History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 8; Auerbach, 'Before the Curtain'; Tracy C. Davis, 'The Sociable Playwright and Representative Citizen', in *Playwriting and Nineteenth-Century British Women*, eds. by Tracy C. Davis and Ellen Donkin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 15-34.

managers performers and spectators" frequently moving across the highly "permeable boundaries" between the two.[53] In a similar vein, Helen Nicholson, Nadine Holdsworth, and Jane Milling's *The Ecologies of Amateur Theatre* (2018), a wide-ranging account of the activities and contribution of amateur dramatic companies in Britain, emphasises the continual "porosity between different sectors" and stresses that "the boundaries between the professional and amateur activity are rather more loosely drawn than is often understood".[54] Research on nineteenth-century amateur theatre, by scholars such as David Coates, Judith Hawley, and Mary Isbell, all emphasises the ubiquity, influence, and importance of amateur dramatics in this period.[55]

Notably, much of this work has been done within the field of feminist theatre scholarship. The critical push to recover lost female literary contributions, as well as the prevalence of "the woman question" in the late-nineteenth-century cultural consciousness, have driven interest in female Victorian playwriting. Building upon work by feminist scholars such as Davis and Ellen Donkin, Katherine Newey's *Women's Theatre Writing in Victorian Britain* (2005) emphasised the existence of a vibrant and complex tradition of female dramatic writing across a range of theatrical forms, genres, and settings.[56] This research tends to emphasise how women moved between public and private, commercial and non-commercial spaces with far more frequency than their male counterparts who were better able to access the role and status of a professional playwright. More recent feminist-focused theatrical scholarship, particularly the work of Anna Farkas, has continued to build upon this work to similarly "eschew the binaries that have informed much of theatre history to this point particularly the distinctions between amateur and professional, public and private, high and low, and feminist and conformist".[57]

The potential for these approaches to be used to probe the current critical distinctions between avant-garde and more commercial theatre is highlighted by Newey herself. Speaking of the literary relationship between Florence Bell and Elizabeth Robins, she notes that:

> Through the working collaboration and personal friendship of Bell and Robins, we can start to make visible the connections between these two apparently separate worlds, and,

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[53] Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 8.

[54] Helen Nicholson, Nadine Holdsworth, and Jane Milling, *The Ecologies of Amateur Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 4.

[55] David Coates, 'Mapping London's Amateur Theatre Histories', in *The Methuen Drama Handbook of Theatre History and Historiography*, eds. by Claire Cochrane and Jo Robinson (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 126-138; Judith Hawley and Mary Isbell, 'Amateur Theatre in the Long Nineteenth Century', *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, 38:2 (2011), xvii-xix.

[56] Tracy C. Davis and Ellen Donkin (eds.), *Playwriting and Nineteenth-Century British Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Ellen Donkin, *Getting into the Act: Women Playwrights in London*, 1776–1829 (London: Routledge, 1995). Katherine Newey, *Women's Theatre Writing in Victorian Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

[57] Anna Farkas, *Between Orthodoxy and Rebellion: Women's Drama in England, 1890-1918* (PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 2010), ii; *Women's Playwriting and the Women's Movement, 1890-1918* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019).

> in terms of the material practices of the contemporary theatre, there is a continuum – of actors, writers, critics, and audience – from the popular to the *avant-garde*.[58]

Nonetheless, the kind of analysis that Newey calls for has largely yet to emerge. Arguments about the porousness of nineteenth-century theatrical culture are still predominantly framed through the lens of women's theatre writing and subsequently create the impression that female playwrights had uniquely diverse and fluid "portfolio careers".[59] Yet, as this thesis will show, women writers and practitioners were not alone in employing collaborative and varied working practices to challenge theatrical and aesthetic norms. This continuum of actors, writers, critics, and audiences encompassed a full range of identity characteristics and theatrical schools.

A more concerted critical effort to problematise the traditional distinctions between 'avant-garde' and commercial mainstream in late-Victorian theatre studies is beginning. Shepherd-Barr and Eltis's re-examination of the 'New Drama' movement has shown how "these binaries of 'new' and 'old', high and low, mainstream and coterie break down under a deeper exploration of the theatre of this period".[60] The fluidity and hybridity that Eltis and Shepherd-Barr observe has further been supported by large-scale quantitative analysis on the development of the British dramatic repertoire between 1890 and 1960. Matthew Franks emphasises the high degree of cross-exchange that occurred between subscription theatres and the commercial stage, highlighting how subscription societies "introduced nearly a third of the most frequently revived plays and nearly half of all new translations to the commercial repertoire" during this period.[61] Franks's scholarship indicates a porous and multifaceted relationship between so-called avant-garde and mainstream theatre which extended across decades, cities, and literary movements.

Taken as a whole, the current state and direction of theatre scholarship points towards the need for more expansive and multivalent ways of approaching theatre history in this period. There is a need to consider the multifaceted and various strands of theatrical and literary innovation that were permeating through late-nineteenth-century creative networks. However, this approach must also be complemented by a resistance to, or at least healthy scepticism of, overly determined sets of academic categories. Full-length examinations of 1890s theatrical culture which adopt this broader and more inclusive vision of dramatic experimentation and exchange, as my doctorate

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[58] Newey, *Women's Theatre Writing*, 177.
[59] Ibid., 169.
[60] Sos Eltis and Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr, 'What was the New Drama?', in *Late Victorian into Modern*, eds. by Laura Marcus, Michèle Mendelssohn, and Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 133-49, 133-4.
[61] Matthew Franks, *Subscription Theater: Democracy and Drama in Britain and Ireland, 1880-1939* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 8.

seeks to do, are consequently a vital and much needed tool to nuance and extend ongoing research in these areas.

The Independent Theatre Society

The activities of the Independent Theatre Society offer a valuable node for attempting this kind of theatre history. Founded by Dutch theatre critic J.T. Grein in 1891, the society was created to stage plays that have "literary and artistic rather than commercial value".[62] The ITS was active between March 1891 and December 1898, producing approximately 34 dramas in this time.[63] As will be outlined in the introduction to Chapter 1, the society underwent several changes in leadership as well as organisational structure throughout its lifetime. Yet it was, as Stokes argues, "the first major, and reasonably permanent", non-commercial theatre organisation in Britain.[64] It is this volume and continuity of productions that sets the organisation apart from other experimental theatrical programmes, such as Farr's 1984 season at the Avenue Theatre or Charles Charrington and Janet Achurch's 1893 repertory season at the Royalty Theatre, which tended to be smaller and time-limited in nature.

Initially, the ITS was structured as a private members club: whereby "none but *Members* or invited *Guests* [could] be admitted to the performances".[65] This subscription-based model allowed the society to produce Ibsen's *Ghosts* without applying for a licence to the Lord Chamberlain. Ibsen's play was thus given its British premiere as the ITS's inaugural production in 1891. The public outcry that followed the performance, with Clement Scott denouncing the play as "an open drain […] a loathsome sore unbandaged […] a dirty act done publicly", is one of the most infamous moments in Victorian theatre history.[66]

With the very public antagonism surrounding *Ghosts,* the ITS understandably enjoys a reputation as an oppositional entity. The first major historical account of the society, Michael Orme's (pseud. Alice Grein) *J. T. Grein: The Story of a Pioneer, 1862-1935* (1936), positioned the society as the provocative home of theatrical naturalism in Britain.[67] The text arranges its account of the first three seasons of the ITS under chapter titles of "The Story of Ghosts" and "Bernard's

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62 *Black and White* (14 March 1891), 167.

63 A list of ITS's productions can be found in Woodfield, *Theatre in Transition*, 178-80. Some scholars offer different figures for the number of plays the ITS produced. These differing figures reflect the fact that several of the ITS's plays were given in collaboration or conjunction with other organisations and therefore not all are always recognised under the ITS banner.

64 Stokes, *Resistible Theatres*, 114.

65 Promotional pamphlet for 'The Independent Theatre of London' (1891), 1r (emphasis in original). THM/368/3/11. Programmes, playbills and advertisements related to The Independent Theatre Society, Theatre and Performance Collections, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

66 *Daily Telegraph* (14 March 1891), 5.

67 Michael Orme (Alice Grein), *J. T. Grein: The Story of a Pioneer, 1862-1935* (London: J. Murray, 1936).

First Play".[68] It also contains several sections focused on the hostility the ITS received from the mainstream theatrical and political establishment, such as "J. T. Ostracised".[69] The ITS's starring role in narratives around the challenges to theatrical censorship in Britain has further compounded this emphasis on the society's political radicalism. Accounts such as Richard Findlater's *Banned!: A Review of Theatrical Censorship in Britain* (1967) foreground the ITS's role in challenging the power and purview of the censor.[70]

The ITS's relationship to Ibsen consequently dominates critical accounts of the institution. Stokes's *Resistible Theatres*: *Enterprise and Experiment in the Late Nineteenth Century* (1972), the most comprehensive work on the society to date, commences its study of the ITS by declaring the production of *Ghosts* one of the "the annunciatory events in the history of naturalism".[71] Stokes consequently focuses his discussion around the rise of naturalism in Europe, staging and responses to Ibsen, as well as ITS plays which most closely align with the genre of social problem drama, namely Shaw's *Widowers' Houses* (1892) and George Moore's *The Strike at Arlingford* (1893). Similar organising principles are observable in Woodfield's *Theatre in Transition*. Woodfield introduces the society via an account of the introduction of Ibsen into England and spends the vast majority of his time discussing the performance of *Ghosts*.

It is no surprise then that the ITS's output is largely valued by theatre historians in terms of its contribution to increasing social realism in drama. Peter Raby, for instance, declares that "Grein's program was unsuccessful, and the theatre's main achievement was in staging Ibsen and in hosting Aurélien Lugné-Poe's Théâtre de l'Oeuvre".[72] In Raby's eyes, the only original ITS drama to have been of significant literary merit was Shaw's *Widowers' Houses* .[73] Chothia displays similar thinking when she states that the ITS's main success was to give "some writers, notably Shaw and Elizabeth Robins, an opportunity to experiment before an audience".[74] All these approaches see the ITS's main contribution as staging the works of a select group of Ibsenites. In recent years, however, scholars of women's and queer theatre history, in particular, have returned to the ITS to reclaim other sites of interest: most frequently Robins and Florence Bell's *Alan's Wife* (1893) alongside Michael Field's *A Question of Memory* (1893) and Dorothy Leighton's *Thyrza Fleming* (1895).[75] This

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68 Ibid., 73; 107.
69 Ibid., 89.
70 Richard Findlater, *Banned!: A Review of Theatrical Censorship in Britain* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1967).
71 Stokes, *Resistible Theatres,* 113.
72 Peter Raby, 'Theatre of the 1890s: Breaking Down the Barriers', in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*, ed. by Kerry Powell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 183-206, 185.
73 Ibid.
74 Chothia, *English Drama*, 49.
75 Examples include Farkas, *Women's Playwriting;* Newey, *Women's Theatre Writing*; Sally Ledger, 'New Woman Drama', in *A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama, 1880-2005*, ed. by Mary Luckhurst (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub.,

renewed scholarly interest emphasises how the ITS was involved in a myriad of theatrical and social debates, not just Ibsenism, and suggests the need for alternative critical approaches to its productions and outputs in order to more fully uncover and illuminate this multiplicity and variety.

Indeed, what differentiates the ITS from other similar subscription theatre organisations that could have been chosen as the focus of this study (namely the New Century Theatre and the Stage Society) is that it grew out of relatively immature, diffuse, and diverse theatrical connections. The ITS's membership included "a dazzling array of bohemians and intellectuals", many of whom saw the society as a site of literary debate and exchange.[76] Stokes observes that most of the ITS membership possessed "only *similar* concerns and alignments".[77] They were largely dissatisfied with the current state of British theatre, yet shared no unified positive conception of what an improved national drama should resemble. As Moore wrote of his fractious relationship with Archer, a fellow early supporter of the ITS: "Our taste in dramatic literature often coincided; our admiration of Ibsen is the same, but though our eyes were set on the same goal, the ways by which we hoped to reach that goal were different ways".[78] In stark contrast, the New Century Theatre was the product of a long-established working relationship between Archer and Robins.[79] Similarly, the Stage Society brought together the long-established collaborators of Shaw, Achurch, and Charrington and was created under a high degree of Fabian Society influence.[80] The ITS, by contrast, capitalised on the renewed interest in drama from all walks of literary and political life, bringing together disparate writers and thinkers into a loosely formed community.

As will be extensively discussed in the next chapter, the ITS was actually a relatively diffuse, porous, and decentralised entity. Writers and work often moved between the society and other performance venues both smaller, more experimental or radical ventures, as well as more mainstream theatre managements. The fact that the ITS quickly abandoned its subscription model – the Lord Chamberlain having threatened to revoke the permit of any theatre that performed an unlicensed play – further added to this free-exchange and flow of material and ideas.[81] Scholars frequently term the society the "early modernist *fringe*" and claim that the ITS "produce[d] plays that other theaters did not want and in a way that other theaters did not care to attempt".[82] Yet, as

2006), 48-60; Jill R. Ehnenn, *Women's Literary Collaboration, Queerness, and Late-Victorian Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

[76] Sally Ledger, *Henrik Ibsen* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1999), 1; (A.) Grein, *Story of a Pioneer*, 96-8.

[77] Stokes, *Resistible Theatres,* 114-5 (emphasis in original).

[78] George Moore, 'Introduction' in *The Heather Field and Maeve*, by Edward Martyn (London, Duckworth & Co., 1899), vii-xxviii, xiii.

[79] For details of Archer and Robins's longstanding relationship see Joanne E. Gates, *Elizabeth Robins, 1862-1952: Actress, Novelist, Feminist* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994).

[80] Ian Britain, *Fabianism and Culture: A Study in British Socialism and the Arts, 1884-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), chap.7.

[81] The process of the ITS abandoning its subscription model is extensively discussed in the next chapter.

[82] Farkas, *Women's Playwriting,* 8 (emphasis added); Davis, 'Revolutionary Scheme', 448.

my analysis will show, the society was far more integrated in and connected to mainstream theatre networks than these descriptions imply.

It is this more open and fluid conception of the society which drives my use of the ITS as a grounding locus for tracing the development of experimental networks and writing across a range of dramatic endeavours. Phillip Ross Bullock has already utilised a similar methodology to explore the transnational networks underpinning experimental theatre-making. He uses the ITS to:

> view the contexts of British Ibsen reception around 1900 not from the point of view of their eventual outcome (either in the institutional history of British theatre, or in the story of Ibsen's eventual place in the literary canon), but as a way of rethinking the interaction between the local, national and international in literary analysis and history.[83]

Bullock's analysis adopts an expansive and comparative methodological lens to valuably emphasise the multi-centred, collaborative nature of Ibsen's entry into Britain. Extending this approach to a broader cross-section of the ITS's activities, not just its famed and well-documented productions of the Norwegian's dramas, further develops the ways in which experimental theatre-making in this period can be viewed as an iterative, collective, and multi-directional process.

Structure, Approach, and Methodology

This thesis is structured in two parts. The first part (Chapter 1) focuses on mapping and characterising the various inter-relations and interactions between ITS members and associates. Drawing upon archival materials as well as newspaper and periodical reviews, it explores the ITS's relationship to other avant-garde literary and intellectual communities as well as its more commercial theatrical counterparts. In particular, it argues for a recognition of the more fluid dynamic between so-called 'mainstream' theatre and the 'avant-garde' and a re-conception of contemporary dramatic experimentation, not as necessarily being in opposition to commercial theatre, but rather as existing along a more complex continuum.

Building upon these observations, subsequent chapters examine the types of multifaceted and critically under-considered dramatic innovations that permeated 1890s British culture. Each chapter is organised around a central issue or impulse that was filtering through contemporary theatrical networks. Chapter 2 examines the assimilation of the visionary and symbolic into a realist theatrical framework. Chapter 3 explores the depiction of sexualised violence and acts of passion in relation to the idea of a higher or more intense plane of existence. Chapter 4 analyses self-

[83] Philip Ross Bullock, 'Ibsen on the London Stage: Independent Theatre as Transnational Space', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 53:3 (2017), 360–370, 361.

conscious performance and theatricalisation as it pertains to social cynicism and critique. Chapter 5 considers plays that staged the evolution of deep-seated moral value systems in order to offer a positive conception of how defunct social and dramatic structures can be rebuilt.

The methodological shift between the two parts of this thesis — the move from an interrogation of theatre history and historiography to a greater focus on close readings and thematic discussions of texts — is a deliberate choice. By fusing 'New Theatre History' with more traditional methods of literary scholarship my thesis demonstrates how these two modes of theatrical analysis can complement and enrich each other. Detailed examination of the theatrical context and operation of dramatic networks provides the conceptual underpinning for, and shapes the parameters of, the textual enquiry. The subsequent consideration of particular plays then illuminates how the content of a piece, or the development of a specific theatrical trend, is influenced and inflected by the material and social realities of the theatrical culture. Rather than seeing a tension between the two parts of the thesis, my analysis seeks to model how these two methodological approaches may work together symbiotically.

This approach is also heavily indebted to the rise of network theory and the associated "shift away from models of literary analysis based on influence and reception, towards new approaches based on networks, material culture, literary sociology and urban geography".[84] These methodologies, which are increasingly being employed by theatre scholars, problematise the types of over-arching categories that are used to demarcate sites and types of literary production.[85] Caroline Levine observes that the issue with the "use of the nation as a shaping form" for defining literary outputs is that "it too readily merges, unifies, and blends; it fudges togetherness, imagining and imposing a sense of artificial unity while preventing us from grasping and acknowledging the intricate inter relations of its parts".[86] Although focused on models of transnational literature, Levine's argument holds equally true for any form of broad-brush-stroke literary categorisation. By focusing on shared aspects or impulses rather than siloing works – many of which are of interest precisely because of their innovative bending and blurring of theatrical traditions – into generic categories, my methodology seeks to explore the potential commonalities and connections between dramas without imposing an exaggerated sense of unification between them. These plays are brought together not as one defined category of their own but rather for assumptions and conventions they challenge and rework.

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[84] Philip Ross Bullock, Stefano Evangelista, and Gesa Stedman, 'Literary Communities in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: Space, Place and Identity – Introduction', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 53:3 (2017), 271-3, 272.

[85] Examples within the field of Victorian theatre studies include Bratton, *Making of the West End*; Bullock, 'Transnational Space'; Coates, 'Amateur Theatre Histories'.

[86] Caroline Levine, 'From Nation to Network', *Victorian Studies*, 55:4 (2013), 647-66, 659.

This approach is still, however, attentive to the dominant theatrical norms and trends. One of the major critiques of network theory is that it downplays the cultural, economic, and social forces that shape the production of literary texts. Networks, as Jürgen Osterhammel remarks, are by default democratic structures. "Unless the possibility is allowed that a network has strong centers and weak peripheries", there is an ever-present risk of "overlooking or underestimating hierarchies".[87] Narve Fulsås and Tore Rem have already cautioned against this tendency in nineteenth-century theatre scholarship. They note how Ibsen's entry into various national literatures was heavily influenced by the "different and partly competing agendas" of those who introduced his writing into new cultures.[88] The specific power structures and processes of appropriation in each location had a transformative effect on the Norwegian's work and cultural image: producing "right from the start several distinctly different 'Ibsens'".[89] In order to fully capture and acknowledge these mediating forces, each chapter starts with an overview of the prominent theatrical influences feeding into a particular strain of drama, while each individual play is introduced with a grounding in the material and social conditions of its production. This allows me to consider the underlying cultural factors shaping a literary work as well as to draw particular attention to social and economic barriers that emerging playwrights had to navigate when attempting to make a name for themselves and achieve commercial viability.

A strong grounding in the dominant theatrical trends and influences of the time is also vital for the other major methodological cornerstone of this thesis: a strong focus on inter-theatricality. Bratton and Davis stress how nineteenth-century audiences' understanding of performances were conditioned by their recollection of the collective body of previous performances which new dramas evoked through their "iteration, revision, citation and incorporation".[90] These inter-theatrical frameworks frequently add another layer of complexity and nuance to contemporary theatrical works, particularly when it comes to the representation of contentious social issues. Sos Eltis, for instance, has illustrated how the stage's inter-theatrical mode of meaning making allowed for "a greater complexity of meaning and implication for audiences" in the representation of illicit female desire onstage than has traditionally been appreciated.[91]

An understanding of inter-theatricality allows for greater attentiveness to a work's engagement with specific cultural and theatrical discourses. In Pinero's *The Notorious Mrs Ebbsmith* (1895), for

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[87] Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. by Patrick Camiller (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 710.
[88] Narve Fulsås and Tore Rem, 'Networks, Asymmetries and Appropriations: Towards A Typology', *Ibsen Studies*, 19:2 (2019), 65-87, 67.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Tracy C. Davis, 'Nineteenth-Century Repertoire', *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, 36:2 (2009), 6-28, 7; Bratton, *New Readings*.
[91] Eltis, *Acts of Desire*, 8.

instance, the titular character attempts to incinerate a copy of the Bible in a fit of passion. Yet, she immediately repents her rejection of conventional Christian norms: so "*thrust[s] her hand into the fire, [and] drags out the book*".[92] An "implicit riposte to *Hedda Gabler",* this scene inverts Ibsen's heroine's burning of Lövborg's manuscript.[93] Pinero's censure of Ibsen's depiction of transgressive femininity occurs through the re-configuring of a controversial scene from the Norwegian's work. Through tracing inter-theatrical modes of meaning making, it is possible to potentially identify both chains of dramatic influence as well as the theatrical and social debates that a work seeks to position itself in conversation with.

Project Parameters and Textual Selection

The parameters guiding my selection of texts are deliberately broad. My conception of the ITS as a diffuse and decentralised entity means that my thesis is interested in work with loose as well as strong connections to the society. As will be discussed in the next chapter, due to external circumstances (most frequently the society's financial difficulties) the fact of a play making it to the ITS stage or not becomes a somewhat arbitrary circumstance. It is therefore necessary to take a very loosely defined view of what constitutes a work that came out of the ITS's communities and networks of interest. In order to capture a broader array of theatre-making from this period, particularly from playwrights who had differing degrees of affinity to and interest in the ITS project, my analysis focuses on work by any writer who had a meaningful connection to, and engagement with, the society in any capacity.

In terms of geographic and linguistic boundaries, the focus is on English language dramas. Yet, there are no constraints on the nationality of the writer, place of production, or country of first performance. Recent scholarship on non-commercial theatre as a highly transnational space, alongside the growing emphasis on the cosmopolitan nature of literary production and artistic social identities in the British *fin de siècle*, highlights the geographic hybridity of theatre-making in this period.[94] Such cosmopolitanism is immediately observable in the history of a work like Wilde's *Salomé* (1893) – a piece which has often featured prominently in accounts of experimental or avant-garde theatre-making from this period. Written in London and Paris by an Irishman, *Salomé*

[92] Arthur Wing Pinero, *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* (London: William Heinemann, 1895), 184. Citations from primary material will on first instance be given fully in the footnotes. Subsequent citations are referenced parenthetically in text.

[93] Eltis, *Acts of Desire*, 140.

[94] Bullock, 'Independent Theatre as Transnational Space'; Zoltan Imre, 'Cultural Mobility, Networks, and Theatre: The Stagings of Ibsen's *Gengangere (Ghosts*) in Berlin, Paris, London, Moscow, New York, and Budapest between 1889 and 1908', *Nordic Theatre Studies*, 32:2 (2021), 6–25; Narve Fulsås and Tore Rem, *Ibsen, Scandinavia and the Making of a World Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). Stefano Evangelista, *Literary Cosmopolitanism in the English Fin de Siècle: Citizens of Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

received its international premiere in Paris and is most closely associated in style with the work of Belgian writer Maurice Maeterlinck.[95] Taking a consciously transnational approach to the ITS's output not only prevents the exclusion of interesting and important works from this study but also allows the international element of the ITS's networks and influences to be more sharply brought into focus.

Such flexibility also extends to the temporal boundaries of this project. Although my focus is predominantly on drama from the 1890s, the point at which ITS activities and networks were at their strongest, my analysis occasionally extends into the early-twentieth century. To borrow from Dennis Denisoff's conception of the rise of decadence, my thesis views literary movements not "as a rigid and distinct singular through line of history but as shifting threads that, starting and ending at different times, collectively wove a cultural network of interests".[96] Flexible temporal limits for this project allow the longer and divergent legacies of a theatrical movement to be more fully explored, with a particular emphasis on how certain ideas or impulses interacted with changing social and cultural contexts over time.

Furthermore, my emphasis, although on drama, is not restricted to full-scale theatrical productions or even embodied performance. Given their provocative and uncommercial nature, many of these plays often went unperformed. As Moore bitterly declared, after several failed attempts to bring Edward Martyn's *The Heather Field* (c.1896) to the London stage: "those who write plays from impulse, because they have something to say, must publish their plays in book form".[97] To focus solely on plays that managed to receive full-scale productions would reinforce the historical privileging of the outputs of a fairly limited set of theatrical managements as well as elide the networks and mechanisms of non-performance-based transmission which circulated and remediated ideas throughout the theatrical culture. Nonetheless, the "neglect of theatrical performance" is a longstanding issue in studies of modernist and proto-modernist theatrical historiography.[98] Therefore, when discussing texts that were staged, my analysis is attentive to the affordances of performance in contributing to the dynamics and impulses at play within a work as well as the specific performance contexts, particularly the underlying economic and social conditions, which inform and shape a production.

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[95] For an excellent overview of *Salomé*'s debt to Maeterlinck see Katharine Worth, *The Irish Drama of Europe from Yeats to Beckett* (London: Athlone Press, 1978), chap.4.

[96] Dennis Denisoff, *Decadent Ecology in British Literature and Art, 1860-1910: Decay, Desire, and the Pagan Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 141.

[97] Moore, 'Introduction', xi.

[98] Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr, 'Modernism and Theatrical Performance', *Modernist Cultures*, 1:1 (2005), 59–68, 65. In recent years there have been important works aimed at rethinking the place of performance in modernist historiographies, including Martin Puchner, *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality, and Drama* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Olga Taxidou, *Modernism and Performance: Jarry to Brecht* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

Given such broad parameters, it has obviously been necessary to be selective with the texts which constitute the core focus of each chapter. Some of this textual selection has been driven by my own personal sense of the richness and interest of a work. However, there is also a concerted effort to include a wide range of drama: both canonical and lesser-known plays, especially those which did not garner critical acclaim or were penned by writers from historically marginalised identity groups. Through offering a cross-section of texts within each chapter my analysis aims therefore to give a sense of the different and divergent strands of theatre-making that were occurring in this period and bringing out a sense of the commonalities, coincidences, and central concerns shared between them. Generic markers, such as modernism or decadence, are used throughout this thesis. However, in keeping with my emphasis on the porousness of literary categories, this terminology should not be taken as a categorical statement of generic allegiance. These words function as necessary and useful descriptors for particular literary traits of a work, yet they are as flexible and contested as terms such as 'mainstream' or 'avant-garde' (which are interrogated in detail below). The decision to not capitalise literary movements in this thesis (i.e., modernism rather than Modernism) reflects my use of these terms as broad and fluid concepts rather than fixed and monolithic entities.

When working with little-known texts, it is easy to overclaim the significance or novelty of a newly rediscovered work. As Claire Cochrane observes, there is a scholarly bias towards "radical and experimental" drama "which can be shown to push out the boundaries of previous performance aesthetics".[99] My analysis, however, seeks to follow an integrative and associative model of theatre history, one informed by a conception of theatrical innovation as an iterative, collaborative, and open-ended process. That is not to say that the texts discussed in this thesis are not complex, interesting, and on occasion highly innovative – worthy of study or greater study in their own right. However, it is how these dramas illuminate collective contributions to an ongoing process of theatrical change and innovation as well as the circulation of different ideas and dramatic impulses that is as much my focus as the particular significance or detail of any individual text or performance.

<u>The ITS and the Avant-Garde: Issues of Terminology</u>

A more inclusive and iterative historiographical lens informs my use, or rather avoidance, of the term 'avant-garde'. Avant-garde is a word that recurs across numerous critical accounts of the

[99] Claire Cochrane, 'The Pervasiveness of the Commonplace: The Historian and Amateur Theatre', *Theatre Research International,* 26:3 (2001), 233–242, 233. See also Alan Woods, 'Emphasizing the Avant-Garde', in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance*, eds. by Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 1989), 167-76.

ITS's activities: a reflection of its usage as a "ubiquitous label, eclectically applied to any type of art that is anti-traditional in form".[100] However, this appellation is not without its issues. Although the precise definition of the term has been subject to much contestation and debate, there is still a dominant and longstanding critical narrative that all avant-gardes are radical, unconventional, and antagonistic: "characterized by the twin tendency to make something new that was also in opposition to prevailing values".[101] Indeed, the phrase itself inherently suggests cultural division. It is difficult to "have an advanced guard without some anchored sense of what is at its rear".[102] There has been significant work to complicate and contest these assumptions, and, for a long time, the working title of this thesis was 'Locating the 1890s Theatrical Avant-Garde' in an effort to reflect that my project was part of this ongoing effort to enlarge and reconsider understandings of where avant-garde impulses may be found.[103] Yet, as my thinking developed, this terminology has become less attractive since this thesis is not fundamentally about enlarging conceptions of where unique, daring, and oppositional impulses may lie but rather advocating for an appreciation of the integration and symbiosis of an entire theatrical culture. To consider this thesis an exploration of avant-garde theatre would potentially reinforce the very binaries and schemas that it seeks to undo.

Turning away from the term avant-garde, nonetheless, still leaves issues of terminology and which critical label, if any, to apply to the work under discussion. To the extent that the ITS used a term to describe its dramatic output, "advanced theatre" was the most frequently used phrase. When Charrington become director of the ITS, for instance, the society praised his previous "attempts to establish an advanced theatre in London".[104] Yet, much like the inherent division suggested by the word avant-garde, "advanced theatre" implies a clear separation between the progressive and the backwards. Furthermore, the term was not usually used to cover the whole of the ITS's activities but specifically the naturalistic plays of writers like Ibsen and Émile Zola – a likely reflection of the fact that the term seemingly originated from its relations to "advanced" social circles and thus carries particular political and aesthetic connotations.[105] A similar problem

[100] Christopher Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre 1892-1992* (London: Routledge, 1993), 1. Examples of scholars terming the ITS avant-garde include Tracy C. Davis, *The Economics of the British Stage, 1800-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 139; Franks, *Stages of Subscription*, 28.
[101] Richard Schechner, *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), 7.
[102] James M Harding, 'From Cutting Edge to Rough Edges: On the Transnational Foundations of Avant-Garde Performance', in *Not the Other Avant-Garde: The Transnational Foundations of Avant-Garde Performance*, eds. by James M. Harding and John Rouse (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 18–40, 20.
[103] Paul Mann, *Theory-Death of the Avant-Garde* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Harding, *The Ghosts of the Avant-Garde(s);* James M. Harding and John Rouse (eds.), *Not the Other Avant-Garde: The Transnational Foundations of Avant-Garde Performance*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).
[104] Dorothy Leighton, *Short Summary of the Position and Prospects of the Independent Theatre* (London: [n.p.], [n.d.]), 7. CA F480-9-161, Dan H. Laurence Collection, McLaughlin Library, University of Guelph, Guelph. For an example of the ITS being referred to as a platform of "advanced drama" by the popular press see *Era* (1 July 1893), 8.
[105] Austin Fryers's *Beata* (1892), a melodramatic prequel to Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* (1886), was, for instance, advertised as "The advanced drama in a popular form". *Standard* (6 May 1892), 4.

emerges with the term "the New Drama".[106] Not only is New Drama more typically used to describe Edwardian theatre it is also a term that seeks to draws divisions.[107] As Eltis and Shepherd-Barr note, the "extraordinarily diverse body of plays" encapsulated by the term are generally brought together in their "distinction from 'old' drama": West End spectacles and morally conservative society dramas.[108] Established critical terminology, particularly those adopted by self-conscious theatrical experimenters themselves, tends to privilege a sense of cultural demarcation and rupture.

To combat this issue, my analysis generally avoids using terminology such as avant-garde to categorise the plays and productions under discussion but instead uses looser and less-culturally defined adjectives, such as rich, experimental, or multifaceted, to recognise particular points of interest or complexity. Moreover, my thesis is entitled "advancing drama": a phrase that in its dual adjectival and verbal meanings seeks to stress the two core characteristics of this project. Firstly, my work is interested in drama which speaks to a gradual, ongoing, and not necessarily teleological or unidirectional process of change and development. Secondly, my thesis is as much interested in the *process* of "advancing drama", the networks, communities, and organisational structures that allowed new ideas and impulses to circulate and develop, as it is in the advancing drama itself. An exploration of "advancing drama", with its simultaneous emphasis on both gradual development and the multifaceted cultural processes underpinning that ongoing change, recognises the complexity, fluidity, and interconnectedness of a heterogenous theatrical environment.

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[106] This formulation has been recently reassessed by Eltis and Shepherd-Barr and therefore could potentially offer critical label for this vein of theatrical experimentation. Eltis and Shepherd-Barr, 'New Drama'.
[107] Characteristic temporal limits for the New Drama movement can be observed in Jan McDonald, *The "New Drama" 1900-1914: Harley Granville-Barker, John Galsworthy, St. John Hankin, John Masefield* (London: Macmillan Education, 1986).
[108] Eltis and Shepherd-Barr, 'New Drama', 133.

CHAPTER 1
"No Longer Independent": ITS networks, cultures, and influences

After the ITS's first two productions, Moore wrote a lengthy letter to *The Times*. In his missive, Moore stressed the seeming impossibility of satisfying all the society's critics. He noted that the ITS was too radical for some and too conventional for others: "We were attacked for not licensing *Ghosts*, we were sneered at for licensing *Thérèse Raquin*, and the Independent Theatre was declared to be no longer independent.[1] This critique of "no longer independent" emphasises the complex reality underlying the ITS's existence. The society may have aspired to be "a theatre free from the shackles of the censor, free from the fetters of convention, unhampered by financial considerations".[2] Yet, as Moore's remarks highlight, it still needed to adapt its performance practices based on the economic, social, and legal realities of the theatrical climate. As this chapter will demonstrate, the ITS was in a fluid, multifaceted, and above all deeply symbiotic relationship with the wider theatrical environment.

The ITS was an ever-evolving institution. Before the society had even opened its doors, it underwent several organisational changes. In 1889, Grein had initially announced his plans to establish a British Théâtre Libre.[3] Then, when the organisation launched in 1891, the ITS was marketed as the Independent Theatre of London, before finally being inaugurated as the Independent Theatre Society in March of that year.[4] Such shifts would continue throughout the society's operation. In 1894, Dorothy Leighton joined the society as a co-director, shortly before the society announced its incorporation as a limited liability company.[5] In 1895, Grein would resign as director and would be replaced by Charles Charrington.[6] Another restructuring of the ITS to a joint-stock company followed shortly.[7] In 1897, Charrington would then effectively make the ITS into his personal touring company when he took *A Doll's House* and Shaw's *Candida* (c.1894) round England under the organisation's banner.[8] The society then returned to London for a final performance, a production of Eugène Brieux's *Blanchette* (1892), in 1898.

The ITS's constantly changing organisational and production structures makes writing an analysis of the society's various networks, communities, and influences challenging. Different

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[1] *Times* (13 October 1891), 5.
[2] Grein quoted in Jan McDonald, 'Continental Plays Produced by the Independent Theatre Society, 1891–8', *Theatre Research International*, 1:1 (1975), 16–28, 16.
[3] N. H. G. Schoonderwoerd, *J.T. Grein, Ambassador of the Theatre, 1862-1935: A Study in Anglo-Continental Theatrical Relations* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1963), 100.
[4] *Era* (7 March 1891), 10. The change to being a private members society was likely caused by the selection of *Ghosts* as the ITS's inaugural play.
[5] *Era* (27 October 1894), 10.
[6] Schoonderwoerd, *Ambassador of the Theatre*, 111.
[7] Leighton, *Position and Prospects,* 4.
[8] *Era* (17 July 1897), 4.

agendas and practical considerations assumed varying importance at different points in time. Nonetheless, there were a few core characteristics of the society which persisted over time and are therefore worth outlining from the outset. The first is the organisation's commitment to performing drama which had perceived artistic merit. As the society's early promotional material announced, "The object of the Independent Theatre is to give special performances of plays which have a LITERARY AND ARTISTIC rather than a commercial value".[9] The precise formulation of what made ITS plays unique varied. Grein described the ITS as a testing ground for "original, unconventional, and literary" theatre, while Archer considered the society the home of "progressive, experimental, unconventional drama".[10] Nonetheless, the consistent emphasis on the aesthetic and literary qualities of the pieces the society performed remained clear.

As previously discussed, theatre history tends to tie the ITS to the Ibsen movement. But the ITS was not beholden to any particular theatrical school. Before the curtain rose on *Ghosts*, a prologue, penned by John Gray, made clear the society's wide-ranging creative interests. Audiences were informed that "We offer you/ No promises to give you old or new" and that art should be "As free to disregard as to obey/ The latest whim, the fashion of a day".[11] Aware perhaps of elements of the popular press who were describing the ITS as "the Ibsen theatre", the society was keen to stress the diversity of its dramatic interests.[12] The ITS's repertoire of plays ranged from famous historical tragedies like John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (c.1612) to witty modern comedies set in fashionable London society, such as Arthur Benham's *Theory and Practice* (1893). These works may have all been variously ascribed the label of literary drama, but they drew from multiple different theatrical schools and communities.

A disregard of commerciality is the crucial distinction between the ITS and the traditional London managements. Not every production by these "established theatres", as the organisation's first secretary Alexander Teixeira de Mattos referred to them, was designed to maximise profit.[13] Managers often donated their theatre to charitable matinées to increase their "personal prestige, which, in turn, added to the appeal of [the] venue".[14] There are also instances of commercial managers, such as Alexander, keeping pieces running at a loss for several weeks in order to

[9] 'Independent Theatre of London' pamphlet, 1r (emphasis in the original).
[10] Grein quoted in Stokes, *Resistible Theatres*, 139; *Fortnightly Review* (1 November 1891), 665.
[11] Gray's prologue is reproduced in the ITS's 1891 Programme for *Ghosts*. THM/368/3/11. Programmes, playbills and advertisements related to The Independent Theatre Society, Theatre and Performance Collections, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
[12] *Western Daily Press* (1 December 1891), 5.
[13] Letter from Alexander Teixeira de Mattos to Michael Field (23 May 1893), Add MS 45852, 5r. Michael Field Collection, British Library, London.
[14] Lucie Sutherland, *George Alexander and the Work of the Actor-Manager* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 54.

"demonstrate the ongoing prestige of the theatre entrepreneur".[15] However, the overall aim of these managements was still nonetheless to make a profit. 'Commercial' and 'non-commercial' will be used throughout this chapter as broad umbrella terms to denote the distinction between these two different approaches to theatrical management.[16]

Prioritising the artistic over the commercial meant that another key characteristic of the society was its constant financial difficulties. The ITS started with very limited capital: £80 that Grein had received from his work facilitating the staging of British plays at the Amsterdam Theatre as well as his translation of Mrs Oscar Beringer's drama *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1888).[17] This financial position was never significantly improved upon. Grein recollected that "the roll of our members never exceeded 100 and 75, and the income was barely £400 a years [sic.] during the whole of its existence".[18] By summer 1897, Charrington was sending begging letters to various potential patrons claiming dire financial straits, and it was only thanks to a £50 donation from Shaw that the ITS was wound up solvently in 1899.[19]

Lack of capital heavily influenced the way the society financed its endeavours. It is somewhat of a critical misnomer that the ITS was predominantly supported by subscription or indeed even conventional ticket sales. Grein had always hoped to rely on a system of voluntary contributions: a conception nearer to Archer's 1889 vision of an endowed theatre funded by "the enlightened generosity" of a few donors than a pure subscription organisation.[20] When Grein first promoted his scheme for a British Théâtre Libre, he stated that only "A moderate capital […] derived partly from honorary contributors, partly from earnest subscribers […] and lastly from the small fees to be levied on each play sent in" was required.[21] The initial programmes similarly stressed that "The Independent Theatre will be maintained by Membership, and by VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS".[22] Such voluntary donations were, however, never forthcoming. Instead, much like the early days of the Théâtre Libre, which famously scheduled performances to coincide with Antoine receiving his wages from his employment at a gas company, the ITS's leaders often

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15 Lucie Sutherland, '"The Power of Attraction": The Staging of Wilde and His Contemporaries at the St James's Theatre, 1892–1895', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 31:1 (2015), 33–48, 33.
16 Non-commercial was notably a term adopted by many contemporary commentators. Archer, for instance, used this language in his 'A Plea for an Endowed Theatre', *Fortnightly Review* (1 May 1889), 610 – 626.
17 (A.) Grein, *Story of a Pioneer*, 69.
18 Grein quoted in Tracy C. Davis, 'The Show Business Economy, and Its Discontents', in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*, ed. by Kerry Powell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 36-51, 45.
19 Letter from Alys Russell to Charles Charrington (26 August 1897). Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware, Newark; Robert Speaight, *William Poel and the Elizabethan Revival* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1954), 126
20 *Fortnightly Review* (1 May 1889), 620.
21 Cited in Schoonderwoerd, *Ambassador of the Theatre*, 101.
22 'Independent Theatre of London' pamphlet, 1r (emphasis in the original).

had to personally finance performances.[23] After the first season of performances, Grein recalls that "we had only £88 in the bank, and it was due to the help of Frank Harris, Frank Danby, and a few others, that I obtained enough to give a second performance".[24] Financial support was required throughout the society's existence, with Teixeira de Mattos noting that Grein went on "year after year, throwing away money, far beyond his means".[25]

Precarious finances had a profound and persistent impact on the organisation's ability to mount productions. Five plays had initially been slated for the ITS's inaugural season.[26] But, these aspirations quickly proved unrealistic, with a lack of funds forcing the first season to conclude after only two productions.[27] This announcement of plays that the society would never actually stage became a recurrent pattern across almost every ITS season.[28] The likelihood of being financially unable to perform pieces was eventually factored into the society's arrangement with its dramatists. When the ITS planned to stage Michael Field's *William Rufus* (1885), a piece which notably never made it to the society's stage, Teixeira de Mattos made clear that announcement by no means guaranteed production:

> I am writing to you now to beg permission to announce "William Rufus" as the fifth production of our autumn season – without either yourself or Mr Grein absolutely being bound by this announcement. I put it this way because the question of expense will be an undoubted difficulty, and we would refuse to produce your play if we were not able, at the time, to afford an adequate cast and accessories.[29]

With a "financial optimism" that his wife described as "godlike", Grein repeatedly accepted plays that the society had very little chance of producing; though, this approach was arguably an effective way for the Dutchman to raise the profile of the society by advertising new works.[30]

Limited financial resources also had a pronounced effect upon the production style of ITS plays. In 1893, the Charringtons estimated that to produce a play "not sumptuously, but decently-

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[23] (A.) Grein, *Story of a Pioneer*, 69.
[24] Grein quoted in Davis, 'Show Business', 45.
[25] Letter from Alexander Teixeira de Mattos to Michael Field (15 August 1893), Add MS 45852, 12r-12v. Michael Field Collection, British Library, London.
[26] Davis, 'Revolutionary Scheme', 448.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Examples of the plays that the ITS announced but never performed include August Strindberg's *The Father* (1887) and Leo Tolstoy's *The Dominion of Darkness* (both announced in 1891) as well as Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea* and Gerhart Hauptmann's *Lonely Lives* (1891) (both announced in 1894). *Era* (28 February 1891), 10; *Wrexham Weekly Advertiser* (26 May 1894), 7.
[29] Letter from Alexander Teixeira de Mattos to Michael Field (2 May 1893), Add MS 45852, 2v-3r (emphasis in original). Michael Field Collection, British Library, London. Throughout this thesis I will use the full name of Michael Field to refer to the writer. This is because one of Edith Cooper's nicknames was 'Field', making it an unsuitable reference for both co-authors. In this decision, I am following several recent works of Michael Field scholarship such as LeeAnne M. Richardson, *The Forms of Michael Field* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2021).
[30] (A.) Grein, *Story of a Pioneer*, 78.

means an outlay of at least four hundred pounds a week".[31] ITS productions were, however, run on a fraction of this figure. Expenses for the production of Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* (1873), for instance, totalled less then £60.[32] The society could not afford many of the typical trappings of a standard West End production and the actors only received nominal salaries: "a honorarium of three or five guineas".[33] When Michael Field insisted that the ITS produce *A Question of Memory* with an orchestra, they were required to personally defray the expense.[34] The society attempted to present such simplistic staging as an artistic benefit. Before the premiere of *Ghosts*, Grein defended the minimalism of the set on the basis that Ibsen's drama was "a work of art overpowering in its extreme simplicity, and therefore useful as a lesson in the craft of playwrighting".[35] Yet, the ITS's pared-back production style was as much fuelled by financial necessity as any genuine creative preference.

Production quality was a recurrent audience complaint. As one Cambridge student wrote:

> The Independent Theatre is the worst managed concern in the world I should think. The performances generally begin 20 minutes late, after the curtain has gone up two or three times, to encourage the audience – you're never safe from the irruption of a cat in the most moving scenes, the actors aren't ready to come on at their cues, or the curtain stays up at the end of the act.[36]

Reviewers often also remarked that some of the acting at ITS performances was "very amateurish".[37] Initially, Grein had hoped to rely exclusively on unengaged professional actors to fill ITS casts. However, after the first season, it was publicly announced that "aspiring actors and actresses" would also be welcome on the ITS stage.[38] The society was a mix of professional and non-professional elements in the fashion of many amateur organisations which worked symbiotically within the West End.[39]

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[31] Janet Achurch and Charles Charrington, 'A Confession of their Crimes by Janet Achurch and Charles Charrington from the Cell of Inaction to which they were Condemned in the Latter Half of the Year of Grace, 1893', *New Review*, 10:59 (1894), 488-98, 491. This is to say nothing of the most spectacular excesses of the London stage in which running costs could easily reach several thousand pounds a week. See Michael R. Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre, 1850-1910* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).

[32] *Times* (13 October 1891), 5. It is difficult to ascertain the average budget for an ITS production. McDonald notes that Grein did not keep balance sheets until 1895, and I have been unable to locate any detailed financial records. Jan McDonald, '"Disillusioned Bards and Despised Bohemians": Michael Field's A Question of Memory at the Independent Theatre Society', *Theatre Notebook*, 31:2 (1977), 18-29, 19.

[33] Letter from Alexander Teixeira de Mattos to Michael Field (2 May 1893), Add MS 45852, 23r. Michael Field Collection, British Library, London.

[34] McDonald, 'Disillusioned Bards', 19.

[35] Grein quoted in Tracy C. Davis, *George Bernard Shaw and the Socialist Theatre* (Westport, Conn; Greenwood, 1994), 36-7.

[36] Letter from Edward Marsh to R. C. Trevelyan (c.1895), 1v- 2r. TRER/15/322. Julian Trevelyan Papers, Special Collections, Trinity College Library, Cambridge. Quoted with kind permission of the Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge.

[37] *Birmingham Daily Post* (24 February 1894), 4.

[38] Grein quoted in McDonald, '*Disillusioned Bards'*, 25.

[39] On the symbiosis of professional and amateur theatre in Victorian London see Coates, 'Amateur Theatre Histories'.

The final aspect of the ITS worth outlining is the society's leadership structures. As will be discussed later in this chapter, the ITS was a collection of loose creative ties, divergent literary interests, and constantly shifting alliances. Yet, this does not mean that the ITS lacked all artistic direction or points of cohesion and unity. Especially in the ITS's early years, Grein acted as the central directional node for the society. By the Dutchman's own admission "each play is read first by me, and then, if it appears to contain any merit which may warrant its production at the Independent Theatre, I refer it for further consideration to advisers whose competence is undisputed".[40] Grein also seemingly held a degree of "presidential fiat" which allowed him significant power over production and casting decisions.[41]

Alongside Grein's leadership, the ITS also initially operated on a committee structure. Founding committee members were Frank Harris, Julia Frankau, C. W. Jarvis, Cecil Raleigh, and Moore.[42] Among these individuals, Moore was seemingly the most active and influential. Having led calls for the establishment of a British Théâtre Libre in the late 1880s, Moore "was inclined to regard the [ITS] as his own child" and played a particularly strong role in promoting it in the press.[43] Furthermore, there were several figures who seemingly held no official ITS role but nonetheless appeared to exercise significant influence over the workings of the society. Shaw, for instance, would frequently attend rehearsals of ITS productions and have a substantial hand in drafting the society's 1895 prospectus, despite never actually being on the ITS's committee.[44] The society was highly receptive to anyone who was prepared to devote their time and energy to its activities.

The analysis that follows seeks to unpick the multifaceted ways this novel and complex institution reflected, interacted with, and indeed influenced the broader theatrical culture. The first section examines the ITS's place in the wider theatrical market and the type of plays it performed on its stage. The second section then explores the society's relationship to its various collaborators and contributors, with a particular emphasis on how the fluid nature of theatrical experimentation rendered the ITS a porous, conflicted, and continually evolving organisation. Thirdly and finally, this chapter examines the avenues and mechanisms which allowed various ideas, impulses, and resources to flow in and out of the society.

The intention of this chapter is not to write a literary history of the ITS. Though, given that all significant existing accounts of the ITS's activities are several decades old, it is hoped that my

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[40] *Era* (23 July 1892), 9.

[41] Letter from J.T. Grein to William Heinemann (6 January 1896). Little Alphabet Series, Henrik Ibsen Folder, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, Austin.

[42] (A.) Grein, *Story of a Pioneer*, 91.

[43] Joseph Hone, *The Life of George Moore* (New York: The Macmillan Company), 170.

[44] George Bernard Shaw, *Bernard Shaw, the Diaries, 1885-189*, ed. by Stanley Weintraub (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986), vol.ii, 719; George Bernard Shaw, *Bernard Shaw Collected Letters 1874 - 1897*, ed. by Dan H. Laurence (Max Reinhardt: London, 1965), vol.i, 571-2.

analysis will provide valuable information and perspectives that will help develop further research on the institution. The increasing availability of digital archives combined with growing scholarship on less canonical writers and performers has been particularly important in allowing new information to come to light. However, the primary aim of my analysis is to rethink claims that non-commercial theatre was "opposite" and "outside" the established theatrical industry.[45] This chapter traces ITS influences, networks, and communities to illuminate a fluid, symbiotic, and multifaceted theatre ecology.

Enter the ITS: characterising the late-nineteenth-century dramatic marketplace

The Theatrical World of 1891

When the ITS was first founded, leading figures within the society repeatedly emphasised the conventional and anti-intellectual nature of the British theatrical scene. In particular, the economics of the 'long run' model, which had seen a massive surge in popularity among West End theatre managers from the 1860s onwards, was blamed for having pushed managers towards more conventional practices.[46] As Shaw estimated, this move away from a repertory system required a new play to suggest "some probability of 50,000 to 75,000 people paying [a manager] an average of five shillings a piece within three months" to justify production.[47] "Irving and Tree and Wyndham and the rest simply can't afford to produce fine acting plays", Moore claimed before the ITS's production of his play *The Strike at Arlingford*.[48] The ITS's non-commercial structure was thus purported to be "the only medium for the production of more intelligent plays than those that can be handled by the ordinary theatrical manager".[49]

This characterisation, however, misrepresented the heterogeneity and diversity of commercial theatres. As Farkas observes, "the experimental matinee flourished in the 1880s and early 1890s, allowing managers to try new or potentially risky material […] with comparatively little financial risk".[50] Grein himself had also frequently utilised the matinée format before the establishment of the ITS. His play *A Man's Love* (1899), which he adapted from a Dutch original with C. W. Jarvis, was produced as a matinée at the Prince of Wales's Theatre in 1889. Moreover, nearly all the professional premieres of Ibsen in England had initially been done as matinées.[51] Prior to the

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45 Stokes, *Resistible Theatres*, 3.
46 For a detailed discussion of the rise of the long run model in London's West End see Davis, *Economics,* 212-14.
47 George Bernard Shaw, 'Preface', in *The Theatrical World of 1894,* by William Archer (London: Walter Scott, 1895), xi-xxx, xix. Shaw goes on to blame these economic conditions for the fact that no commercial manager produced *The Wild Duck* which was instead brought out by the ITS.
48 *Pall Mall Gazette* (21 February 1893), 2.
49 Ibid.
50 Farkas, *Orthodoxy and Rebellion,* 110.
51 Ibsen's dramas and the matinée format is discussed in Susan Torrey Barstow, "'Hedda Is All of Us": Late-Victorian Women at the Matinee', *Victorian Studies*, 43:3 (2001), 387-411.

foundation of the ITS, the matinée format clearly functioned as an outlet for more experimental plays to reach the public stage.

Furthermore, Grein was far from the only individual who was trying to launch a non-commercial theatre in the early 1890s. As early as 1879, prominent literary figures, such as Matthew Arnold, had been calling for "a society of good actors, with a grant from the state" to perform theatrical works of literary merit.[52] The foundation of André Antoine's Théâtre Libre in 1887, which had caused much debate around the state of British drama when it visited London in 1889, further galvanised these discussions. "Various schemes for an uncommercial theater were proposed by George Moore, Justin Huntley McCarthy, Oswald Crawfurd, B. W. Findon, and William Archer", as Tracy Davis highlights.[53] Indeed, in 1890-1 alone, McCarthy and Charles Coluaghi announced their association "in the project for establishing a Théâtre Libre London" with the intention of producing the British premiere of *Hedda Gabler* (1891), while Charles Glenney and Henry Gloster Armstrong planned a series of "subscription matinées" at the Comedy Theatre.[54] These endeavours, although not all of them came to fruition, complemented the already rich matinée culture and added to the increasing push for more experimental pieces of theatre to make their way onto the London stage.

This lively pre-existing culture of experimental theatre making is perhaps best highlighted by the multiple attempts to stage *Ghosts*, the play which is often held up as the epitome of the ITS's iconoclastic mission, prior to its 1891 premiere. In early 1899, when Mrs Oscar Beringer, the actress-manager who would notably go on to pen the ITS play *Salvé* (1895), was looking for a suitable benefit piece to showcase the talents of her daughter Vera, she initially considered a production of *Ghosts*.[55] This project was, however, abandoned in favour of a production of *The Pillars of Society* (1877): one of Ibsen's more "actable, palatable, and inoffensive" social dramas.[56] Almost a year later, the Norwegian writer H. L. Braekstad would attempt to produce the piece as a matinée "for the benefit of a proposed Ibsen fund".[57] Herbert Beerbohm Tree, the actor-manager whose matinées and other experiments arguably "came closest in spirit" to the ITS's endeavours, agreed to lend the production the Haymarket and its scenery.[58] This production fell through: not because of more established commercial managements' opposition to the play, but

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[52] *Nineteenth Century* (August 1879), 241.
[53] Davis, 'Revolutionary Scheme', 448.
[54] *Era* (February 14, 1891), 10; *Daily News* (11 November 1889), 3. Glenney and Gloster Armstrong's matinées were announced in November 1889 but planned for early 1890.
[55] Elizabeth Robins, *Both Sides of the Curtain* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1940), 198.
[56] Ibid.; Davis, *Ibsen in England,* 85.
[57]Ibid. (Robins), 257.
[58] Davis, 'Show Business', 46.

due to rather unfortunate circumstances. Tree apparently had designs on the part of Oswald.[59] But, Robins, who had been cast as Mrs Alving, offered the role to the actor Fred Terry. Tree consequently withdrew his support, leading to the financial collapse of the scheme.[60] Tree would notably be reported "to have 'Ghosts' on his list of prospective plays" for the 1891 season.[61] Far from performing drama that no one else dared to produce, the ITS's production of *Ghosts* was one of several efforts to bring Ibsen's work to the London stage.

Upon the announcement of the foundation of the ITS, many individuals lambasted Grein and Moore for disingenuously characterising the current state of English theatre. In a letter to *The Times*, an anonymous member of the society wrote that:

> In his saner moods Mr. Moore must be vastly puzzled to deny that Mr. Irving's Shakespearian revivals, Mr. Beerbohm Tree's production of Beau Austin, and even some of the works of Messrs. Pinero and Jones make – always in intention, and often in effect – for the artistic betterment of the modern theatre.[62]

These critiques were echoed in *The Manchester Courier* which noted:

> But is that anything more than a question of degree? Are there not already intellectual plays as distinguished from plays which are merely crude and sensational? Is it not in the nature of a reflection upon Mr. Irving, Mr. Beerbohm Tree. Mr. and Mrs. Kendal, Mr. Alexander, and other leading managers to say that an Independent Theatre Society is necessary in order that intellectual plays may be produced?[63]

Such comments constitute a clear acknowledgement of the multifaceted spectrum of drama which fell under the very broad umbrella label of commercial theatre. The ITS's claim to be a riposte to the pervasive anti-intellectualism of the established London stage was identified by many as a fiction.

Disingenuous characterisations of the state of culture and politics by emerging literary movements is nothing new. As Harding observes, avant-gardes rely on a recognisable

> political aesthetic formula that heralds the advent of the new by strategically defining the old and defunct, and that positions certain artists at the vanguard through a calculated, and at times biased, delineation of what constitutes the front lines of experimentation, innovation, and progress.[64]

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59 Robins, *Both Sides*, 260.
60 Ibid., 264.
61 *Queen* (31 January 1891) 184.
62 *Times* (22 October 1891), 6.
63 *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* (7 February 1893), 5.
64 Harding, *Ghosts of the avant-garde(s)*, 33.

The ITS clearly used the press to engage in a large amount of canny artistic positioning or what might be termed nowadays as 'branding'. ITS promotional material was not an accurate reflection of the society's place within the London theatrical scene. Rather it was a tool that the organisation used to create a public image of its own avant-gardism.

The need to negotiate the Censor was a further break upon the society's aspirations to radicalism. In light of the furore which erupted after the performance of *Ghosts*, as well as the Lord Chamberlain's threat to revoke Kate Santley's (the manager of the Royalty Theatre) licence, theatre owners were increasingly nervous about hosting unlicensed productions.[65] Santley mandated that all further ITS productions at her establishment be licensed – a demand seemingly echoed by all other theatres in which the society staged work.[66] The general theatrical environment also became more hostile to unlicensed productions. When trying to find a suitable venue for the ITS's intended co-production of *The Cenci* (1820) with the Shelley Society, Shaw lamented that "there is the difficulty raised by the *new covenant* in the lease of the Grand at Islington, whereby Wilmot is bound not to allow the theatre to be used for the performance of unlicensed plays".[67] Not only were individual managers becoming increasingly uneasy about collaborating with the ITS, but theatre owners were seemingly taking active steps in order to stop their lessees from doing so.

As a result, the ITS was nearly always unable to perform unlicensed work. When William Heinemann's *The First Step* (1895) was refused a licence "the Society found no theatre procurable for its representation".[68] This fate would also befall Shaw's *Mrs Warren's Profession* (c.1893); though, part of the reason that the ITS never produced the Irishman's play was undoubtedly that Grein was "horrified to the soul" by the piece.[69] Excluding revivals of *Ghosts* and one 'At Home' event in 1893, which were held in private halls, all other ITS productions were licensed.[70] Occasionally the society stretched the limits of censorial compliance. The licencing copy of Elizabeth Robins and Florence Bell's *Alan's Wife* omitted the final moments of Act Two in which Jean Creyke "*goes stealthily towards the cradle*" to suffocate her infant son.[71] Nonetheless, the ITS's inability to procure theatres for unlicensed productions thus meant that the majority of its works were within the bounds of what other theatres had licence to produce.

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[65] Davis, 'Revolutionary Scheme', 452. After the ITS's production of *Thérèse Raquin*, it was also reported in *The Saturday Review* that the Lord Chamberlain "had let it be known that, if unauthorized plays were produced in any theatre over which he had control, it was exceedingly probable that when the lessee came for renewal the licence request would not be granted". Quoted in Chothia, *English Drama*, 10.
[66] (A.) Grein, *Story of a Pioneer*, 96.
[67] Shaw, *Collected Letters*, vol.i, 334 (emphasis mine).
[68] (A.) Grein, *Story of a Pioneer*, 144.
[69] Ibid., 8.
[70] I have been unable to locate copies of the plays performed at the 1893 'At Home' event in the Lord Chamberlain's collection. It therefore seems that this performance was unlicensed.
[71] Florence Bell and Elizabeth Robins, *Alan's Wife* (London: Henry and Co., 1893), 37. The licensing copy of the play can be found at Add MS 53524D, Lord Chamberlain's Plays, British Library, London.

The need to secure licences for the majority, if not all, of the ITS's productions also had significant ramifications for the society's subscription model. The ITS quickly began to stage what *The Glasgow Herald* termed "sort of semi-private performance[s]".[72] When the ITS produced *The Duchess of Malfi* in October 1892, they "decided to admit – on slightly more than the usual theatre prices – those members of the general public who may be interested in the forthcoming production".[73] A hybrid model of ticket sales continued during the Society's 1892 and 1893 seasons. Seats for several prominent ITS productions, such as Shaw's *Widowers' Houses* and Moore's *The Strike at Arlingford*, were sold publicly.[74] Then in February 1894 newspapers announced that "The Independent Theatre Society has resolved to admit the public to their performances on payment at the door", marking a seeming end to the society's private subscription model altogether.[75] The ability to generate more revenue seemingly trumped any desire to remain a genuine private members organisation.

Much has been made of the unique cultures and community identities of subscription societies. Stokes argues that the ITS served as a meeting point for "special and elusive social groups", while Martin Puchner characterises the emergence of small independent theatres "as a deliberate retreat from a mass public into an intimate and private space".[76] Yet, in practice, the ITS was a far more open and publicly accessible organisation than these narratives suggest. The ITS was arguably more analogous to the public subscription theatres found in cities like Manchester, Glasgow, and Liverpool in the first decade of the twentieth century, which admitted "any member of the public who could pay, no referral necessary", than a coterie organisation.[77] The ITS entered a space which already contained a variety of opportunities for more experimental or provocative theatre making, and, despite its initial rhetoric, the society was largely subject to the same economic and legal conditions as the rest of the theatrical ecology.

The ITS and the Dramatic Marketplace

The ITS's existence within this wider culture of experimental theatre making meant that theatrical works tended to flow freely between the ITS and other sites of theatrical production. Many of the ITS's most successful plays were not composed with the society's stage in mind but were originally

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[72] *Glasgow Herald* (12 July 1893), 7.
[73] *Glasgow Herald* (15 October 1892), 9.
[74] *Standard* (5 December 1892), 4; *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* (18 February 1893), 1.
[75] *Edinburgh Evening News* (19 February 1894), 3.
[76] Stokes, *Resistible Theatres*, 3; Puchner, *Stage Fright,* 19 -20.
[77] Franks, *Stages of Subscription*, 48. Although Franks extensively discusses public subscription organisations, he notably places the ITS under the category of a private subscription organisation: institutions that he terms "experimental coterie clubs" (18). The ITS's mix of features from both public and private subscription organisations, however, offers an interesting illustration of the porousness and potential flexibility of these categories.

offered to other managements first. In some cases, these pieces were initially submitted to other more experimental or non-commercial managements. In August 1892, John Todhunter, for instance, offered Charrington *The Black Cat* (1893), a piece which would be later performed as part of the ITS's 1893 season.[78] In most cases, however, plays were initially sent to more traditional commercial managements – a likely reflection of the better renumeration, prestige, and security offered by these establishments. Robins and Bell, for instance, initially approached Tree at the Haymarket when hoping to stage *Alan's Wife*, only later resorting to Grein's organisation when Tree refused.[79] Similarly, Moore's letters to his lover Clara Lanza reveal that he had initially written *The Strike at Arlingford* with the Haymarket in mind.[80] Then, when Tree refused, he offered it to other prominent theatrical managers, such as Wilson Barrett.[81] These plays, although all ultimately premiering on the ITS stage, were the product of the existing experimental culture rather than a response to the ITS's creation.

Given nonetheless that these plays were rejected by other managements, it is tempting to argue that the ITS fulfilled its function as an entity that would bring out dramas that no other organisation would produce. Yet, such a characterisation would run the risk of oversimplifying the idea of non-commercial drama. As can be observed in the production history of Shaw's *Candida* (fuller details of which are available in the next chapter), the assessment of a work's commerciality was highly subjective and often changed over time. After selling the rights for a conventional American production to Richard Mansfield, Shaw was highly reluctant to give his play to the ITS as he believed that "there is no conclusive evidence that it is outside the scope of ordinary theatres".[82] He only finally let the Charringtons perform the piece under the ITS banner, after several commercial managers, including Alexander, Wyndham, and Lewis Waller had refused it.[83] There were not often intuitive or immediate distinctions between mainstream and non-mainstream theatrical productions. Instead, these boundaries had to be continuously explored and negotiated by individual playwrights, actors, and managers.

Furthermore, a play's rejection by a commercial management was often for reasons not inherent to the play itself. Shaw details how his play *The Philanderer* (1893), which he had initially envisioned

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[78] Letter from John Todhunter to Charles Charrington (15 August 1892). *Mark Samuels Lasner Collection*, University of Delaware, Newark.
[79] Powell, *Women and Victorian Theatre*, 166.
[80] Letter from George Moore to Clara Lanza (11 November 1889), 1. Box 5, Folder 6, George Moore Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, Austin.
[81] Letter from George Moore to Clara Lanza (14 February 1890), 1. Box 5, Folder 6, George Moore Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, Austin.
[82] Shaw, *Collected Letters,* vol.i, 424.
[83] Sos Eltis, 'Introduction', in *Mrs Warren's Profession, Candida and You Never Can Tell*, by George Bernard Shaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), ix – xlvi, xxxv.

for production by the ITS, had attracted the interest of Wyndham at the Criterion Theatre.[84] However, "whilst the project was under consideration, Wyndham made such a decisive success with 'Rebellious Susan' that he resolved to follow up the vein of comedy opened by Henry Arthur Jones to the end before venturing upon the Shawian quicksand".[85] Although perhaps overly optimistic about the potential commerciality of his own work, Shaw's comments nonetheless highlight how the fortune of a piece was influenced by a whole host of external factors.

The struggles that Pinero, a noted member of the ITS, initially had to stage *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* – a play which initially ran for 288 performances and achieved over £10, 000 in profit – perfectly encapsulate the fine margins that dictated the distinctions between commercial and uncommercial theatre.[86] Pinero first read the play to John Hare, who rejected the piece as he believed that it was "commercially hopeless".[87] Alexander was similarly pessimistic about *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*'s commercial prospects. He only initially agreed to perform the piece when Pinero offered for it to be done "at a matinée for nothing".[88] It was subsequently contracted that the play would be staged as a matinée and run weekly so long as receipts continued to cover expenses. However, the writer of the main piece running at the St James's objected to this arrangement on the basis that "the weekly representation of [Pinero's] play would distract the attention of the public from his own work".[89] This complaint, according to Pinero, prompted Alexander to risk placing the play in the evening bill, since he had apparently done well out of R. C. Carton's *Liberty Hall* (1892) (the work which had previously been occupying that slot).[90] One of the most successful plays of the decade only received a conventional hearing due to a lucky set of circumstances.

Arguably, it was the very factors that made *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* a runaway success, namely its "original and startling" depiction of transgressive female sexuality, that pushed it close to the boundaries of being potentially unstageable.[91] After the premiere, Hare wrote to Pinero to express his "regret that I had not the good judgement and the *courage* that Alexander has shown".[92] Hare's emphasis on courage conveys the risk-taking producing such a success required. Plays which had an element of innovation or modernity often led to the most success and acclaim. This is not to say that no play was beyond the bounds of what an established management would agree to

[84] Shaw, *Collected Letters*, vol.i, 466.
[85] Ibid.
[86] John Dawick, *Pinero: A Theatrical Life* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1993), 200. Pinero's membership is the ITS is noted in (A.) Grein, *Story of a Pioneer*, 81.
[87] Pinero, 'Theatre in Transition', 72.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] *Illustrated London News* (3 June 1893), 659.
[92] Letter from John Hare to Arthur Wing Pinero (28 May 1893), 2r. MS Thr 65. Papers concerning *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*, Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge (Mass.).

perform. Despite his relentless efforts to secure more commercial hearings for his work throughout the 1890s, Shaw was certain that *Mrs Warren's Profession*, with its frank depiction of prostitution, would not be accepted by any commercial management. Hence, Shaw repeatedly attempted to persuade the ITS to perform the piece.[93] However, in most cases, the boundary between what could achieve a successful matinée performance at a commercial theatre and what most managements would reject was slim.

The ITS's re-staging of several plays that had already been performed elsewhere reflects these permeable boundaries between these different types of theatrical productions. The ITS's 1895 performance of Grein and Jarvis's *A Man's Love* (1889), an adaptation of a Dutch play by J. C. De Vos, had originally been performed as a matinée at the Prince of Wales's Theatre in June 1889.[94] Furthermore, even when the plays hadn't been performed elsewhere, many audience members had a strong sense of the equivalence between ITS productions and commercial matinées. As *The Standard* wrote after the society's 1892 production of Willem Gerard van Nouhuys' *The Goldfish* (1892), "the one object in view is 'to produce original, unconventional, and literary plays'; but these qualities cannot be claimed for Mynheer van Nouhuys' work, which at the best can only be regarded as rather above the average of an ordinary matinée production".[95] Some scholars have sought to differentiate ITS plays from the wider matinée culture by claiming that "Grein was promoting intrinsically worthwhile plays, which few matinee plays were".[96] Yet, this characterisation asserts a clear distinction between the average ITS production and a standard matinée performance that did not in fact exist.

The ITS operated largely in the same space, and, by extension, the same market as many other managements. In around 1894, Arthur Conan Doyle wrote to Grein to inform him that he was unable to supply a play to the society since Irving had already committed to produce the piece.[97] Doyle claimed, however, that he would have been "glad to have seen it on the Independent stage first".[98] The fact that he had previously provided a one-act piece for the Charringtons' experimental season at Terry's Theatre in 1893 implies that this statement was more than just empty words.[99] The dynamics of this fluid marketplace are also observable in the journey to stage Bell's *Karin*

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[93] Having initially attempted to persuade Grein to perform the work in 1893, Shaw made another concerted effort to get Charrington to perform the piece after the intended production of *Little Eyolf.* See Shaw, Collected Letters, vol.i, 562.
[94] *Era* (23 March 1895), 8.
[95] *Standard* (9 July 1892), 3.
[96] J. P. Wearing, 'The London West End Theatre in the 1890s', *Educational Theatre Journal*, 29:3 (1977), 320–32, 329.
[97] Letter from Arthur Conan Doyle to J.T. Grein (n.d.). Box 1, Folder 72, Arthur Conan Doyle Correspondence, Special Collections, Newberry Library, Chicago. Conon Doyle's one-act play was performed by Irving in September 1894.
[98] Ibid.
[99] *Morning Post* (5 June 1893), 4.

(1892), a translation of Alfhild Agrell's Swedish play of the same name. In early January 1892, Bell offered the play to Grein and the ITS.[100] However, she also negotiated with Wyndham for "at his expense – to play it for five matinées – without my receiving a renumeration. Then if it proves a success he puts it on in the evening on more profitable terms for me".[101] Bell then abandoned this proposal in favour of an offer from Henry Irving to take it, in exchange for five percent of the receipts, though this arrangement never came to fruition.[102] *Karin* was ultimately produced by the Robins-Lea joint management at the Vaudeville Theatre for two matinée performances in May 1892.[103] Far from only performing "plays that other theaters did not want", the ITS had to compete with both established commercial managements and independent producers alike for pieces.[104]

Indeed, the very impulses and energies which led to the ITS's creation, as well as arguably the organisation's success and prominence, led to an increased number of non-commercial or experimental managements. For instance, the Society of British Dramatic Art, which was founded in 1892, followed the ITS's model of play reading by committee and commitment to discovering new British dramatic talent. The society included prominent commercial managers such as Tree and Irving as well as figures more closely aligned with the non-commercial theatre movement such as Grein and Edward Aveling. It also adopted a far less antagonist position to the theatrical mainstream.[105] At the Society of British Dramatic Art's inaugural meeting Tree, the society's first president, claimed that they wanted to avoid "clamouring for phantom reforms or tilting against imaginary windmills".[106] Nonetheless, the society was still aiming to acquire similar plays to the ITS. Aveling's *Judith Shakespeare* (1892) had initially been slated for the ITS's 1891-2 programme.[107] Yet, the play ultimately ended up premiering under the Society of British Dramatic Art's banner in January 1894 instead.[108] Furthermore, the ITS also had to compete with the managements of many of its key performers and supporters, such as Robins, Farr, and the Charringtons. Farr, for instance, explained that her 1894 experimental season at the Avenue Theatre was an attempt "to produce the kind of plays the Independent Theatre Society aimed at producing but under more perfect conditions as to mounting and rehearsal than are possible to the Independent Theatre".[109]

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[100] Letter from Florence Bell to Elizabeth Robins (10 January 1892). Box 106, Folder 1, Elizabeth Robins Papers, Fales Library, New York University, New York.
[101] Letter from Florence Bell to Elizabeth Robins (14 January 1892), 1r-v. Box 106, Folder 1, Elizabeth Robins Papers, Fales Library, New York University, New York.
[102] Farkas, *Orthodoxy and Rebellion*, 104.
[103] J. P. Wearing, *The London Stage, 1890-1899: A Calendar of Plays and Players* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1976), 216.
[104] Davis, 'Revolutionary Scheme', 448.
[105] *Era* (10 December 1892), 7.
[106] Tree quoted in Ibid.
[107] (A.) Grein, *Story of a Pioneer*, 94.
[108] *Pall Mall Gazette* (20 January 1894), 8.
[109] Farr quoted in *Pall Mall Gazette* (29 March 1894), 7.

Relying on new work by Shaw and Todhunter, two playwrights whose most recent plays had been mounted at the ITS, Farr's venture exemplifies how experimental playwrights had increasing options to mount their work as the number of non-commercial managements grew.

Competition for pieces profoundly influenced the ITS repertoire. N. H. G. Schoonderwoerd observes that "Grein's choice of plays was often eccentric, and in most cases it is hard to see by what else he was governed than by the sheer necessity of having to take what was available".[110] Robins corroborates this observation in her unpublished autobiography *Whither and How*, noting that Grein appeared to have "unblushing hopes of anybody who might bring possible grist to the independent mill".[111] This problem seems particularly acute given that shoe-string budgets meant that ITS was not usually able to offer renumeration for pieces nor the same production quality as many of their competitors. Braekstad, for instance, revoked permission for the ITS to perform his translation of Anne Edgren's *True Woman* (1883), on the grounds that "The play was popular in Sweden and he wanted it to be seen on the popular stage of London, not the pariah platform of the Independent Theatre"[112]. The society repeatedly struggled to attract both the calibre and depth of literary drama that it desired.

The ITS thus effectively functioned as a receptacle for the various strands of experimental playwriting which were occurring throughout 1890s Britain. As Davis notes, the society "was unconcerned with new scenographic theories, lacked the vision of a single strong director, and rehearsed so haphazardly and briefly that a distinct acting style or artistic process could not possibly evolve".[113] Its lack of finances, artistic vision, and (as will be explored in more depth later) frequent disputes among committee members meant that the society was more of a space into which disparate dramas flowed than a leading creator of new and distinctive works. To be clear, this is not to claim that staging plays at the ITS had no effect on the work's reception or character. Plays were undoubtedly shaped by the specific qualities and location of their production – a mechanism which likely facilitated the flow of pieces between different types of managements outlined above. Part of the success of *Hedda Gabler* was that Robins made her depiction of the eponymous heroine "a very melodramatic, highly effective creation, ingeniously calculated to interest, even to appeal to the sympathies of London audiences".[114] Similarly, when *Little Eyolf* moved from being performed as a series of matinées at the Haymarket to the evening bill at the Avenue Theatre, Shaw observed how "an artistic forlorn hope" had been transformed into "a full blown fashionable

[110] Schoonderwoerd, *Ambassador of the Theatre,* 118.

[111] Elizabeth Robins, *Whither and How,* Chap. 7, 4. Box 194, Folder 5, Elizabeth Robins Papers, Fales Library, New York University, New York.

[112] (A.) Grein*, Story of a Pioneer*, 95.

[113] Davis, 'Revolutionary Scheme', 448.

[114] *Gentleman's Magazine* (June 1891), 638.

theatrical speculation".[115] The promotion of Mrs Patrick Campbell, the actress who had achieved great acclaim in the leading role of *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*, to the part of Rita Almers had "succeeded wonderfully in eliminating all unpleasantness from the play".[116] As these remarks illustrate, the reception of plays was heavily influenced by their performance context. The ITS's emphasis on the literary qualities of a drama combined with their minimalistic production style undoubtedly gave a certain flavour to their performances. However, it would be disingenuous to claim that the society originated a significant new vein or style of drama.

Evolving Commercial Tastes and Repertories

The level of cross-exchange outlined above highlights the fluid dynamic which existed between the ITS and its more established counterparts. Yet, it must be stressed that this process of exchange was by no means one-directional. Sydney Herberte-Basing who had played Camille in the Society's performance of *Thérèse Raquin* was "so impressed with the play that after the performance he secured its rights and placed *Thérèse Raquin* with its original company in the regular bill of the Royalty".[117] Herberte-Basing also apparently faced some fierce competition for rights to the work since Moore claimed that "soon after the curtain went up on the fourth act [of *Thérèse Raquin*] I was called out of my box and a London manager begged me to assign him the London rights of the play, and on the following day an offer came for the provincial rights".[118] Indeed, it was not just those who had been directly involved in productions who took up ITS pieces. When May Fortescue visited Birmingham in October 1892, she performed Archer's translation of Edvard Brandes' *A Visit* (1882), a piece the papers touted as having "created a very decided impression when produced here by the Independent Theatre Society two or three months ago".[119] As previously discussed, Franks has shown that most plays which premiered at subscription theatres would eventually transfer onto the commercial stage. Yet, as these almost immediate transfers evidence, this shifting of the theatrical repertoire was often not a lengthy or gradual process but a swift and rapid one.

The number of plays that immediately transferred is, however, small. Yet, it is clear that a commercial transfer was nonetheless often the aim of many productions. Alice Grein notes that after the premiere of Shaw's *Widowers' Houses* at the ITS, it was apparently hoped that the play

[115] George Bernard Shaw, *The Drama Observed*, ed. by Bernard F. Dukore (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), vol.ii, 717.
[116] Ibid., 718.
[117] (A.) Grein, *Story of a Pioneer*, 99.
[118] *Times* (13 October 1891), 5.
[119] *Birmingham Daily Post* (21 July 1892), 5.

"might be taken up by a commercially-minded manager and given a run".[120] Similarly, after the ITS production of Todhunter's *The Black Cat*, the work attracted the interest of several commercial managers, who "want[ed] to see the play, and ask[ed] why I had not shown it to them before" .[121] ITS plays were undoubtedly seen as, and indeed sometimes became, a potential source of new material for the commercial stage.

This prospect of commercial transfers had a noticeable impact on how the ITS set-up its productions. In 1891, *The Pall Mall Gazette* reported that when the ITS staged Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* the translators applied for a licence "since they thought that their work was of financial value and did not wish to run the risk of being unable to use it the ordinary way".[122] As Moore's comments at the beginning of this chapter indicate, this decision was sneered at in some quarters. However, it saliently highlights how the desire to produce a more literary form of drama did not necessarily equate to a conscious desire to eschew West End venues and the control of commercial managers. Indeed, from around 1893, the ITS stipulated in their contracts that "when a new play is produced by us, and afterwards taken up at one of the established theatres for a 'run' the author agrees to hand over a certain percentage of his royalties to the funds of the Independent Theatre Society, until a certain maximum sum is reached".[123] The ITS clearly not only envisaged the transfer of their plays onto the commercial stage as a likely prospect but were also prepared to utilise this occurrence as a useful means to rescue their ailing finances. Rather than steadfastly turning away from the prospect of moneymaking, the society, and its writers alike, actively leant into the potential for ITS plays to become commercial successes.

This prospect for commercial transfers was also accompanied by a significant shift in the society's messaging. Quickly Grein adopted a more conciliatory approach towards commercial managements. In 1892, he claimed that the ITS was "the best friend of the theatrical managers; for, if a play has been successfully tried on the independent stage, every effort is made to transfer the rights of that play to any manager who may wish to produce it at his theatre".[124] This emphasis on collegiality meant that the transfer of ITS plays often occurred before the plays had even been produced at the ITS. The society surrendered the rights to Maeterlinck's *L'Intruse* (1890) and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's *A Gauntlet* (1883), after expressions of interest from the managements of the Haymarket and the Royalty, respectively.[125] This allowed Grein to stress his aspiration to aid

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[120] (A.) Grein, *Story of a Pioneer*, 166.
[121] John Todhunter, *The Black Cat* (London: Henry & Co., 1895), vii.
[122] *Pall Mall Gazette* (13 October 1891), 1. This piece was a translation of Zola's own 1873 adaptation of his 1868 novel of the same name.
[123] Teixeira de Mattos to Field (23 May 1893), 5r-v.
[124] *Era* (23 July 1892), 9.
[125] (A.) Grein, *Story of a Pioneer*, 101; 127.

established theatres "by bringing out plays and promising artists" into the wider theatrical market.[126] It was undoubtedly also a reputational win for the ITS too, showing that they were able to inform theatrical trends, minus the cost of actually mounting a production. Indeed, the society's emphasis on this facilitating function continued to develop throughout its lifetime. Shortly after Grein resigned, Leighton wrote that:

> If the London managers were wise, they would be amongst the most ardent supporters of the Independent Theatre, through which they could feel the pulse of the public from time to time as to new departures in dramatic art and authorship much more easily, cheaply, and irresponsibly than by formal productions under their own management.[127]

Leighton's comments display a growing awareness of how the society operated as a barometer, and of course influencer, of public tastes.

The society had a significant influence in late-nineteenth-century theatrical culture through its role in shifting audiences' tastes and expectations. From the outset, the ITS expressed its desire to serve an educative function. Moore pronounced that "every good play produced makes converts to the new art" and teaches "people to look for something higher than indecent burlesque and illiterate melodrama".[128] The relationship between commercial and non-commercial audiences was relatively porous. Catherine Hindson notes that audiences could visit the Haymarket, the Gaiety, and the ITS in the same weekend "and considered all to be part of their conception of entertainment and the theatrical".[129] Giving audiences a taste for more artistic forms of drama thus had significant implications for the rest of the theatrical market. As Shaw observed in 1895, "a modern manager need not produce The Wild Duck; but he must be very careful not to produce a play which will seem insipid and old-fashioned to playgoers who have seen The Wild Duck, even though they may have hissed it".[130]

This ability for these small-scale productions to influence theatrical taste and trends is best illustrated by the increasing popularity, and consequent commerciality, of Ibsen's dramas across the 1890s. Ibsen commenced the decade as a familiar but not particularly fashionable dramatist. He was mainly revered by a select group of intellectuals and social activists: the "sad vegetarians […] men in mackintoshes and women in knitted shawls of red wool", derided by Wilde on his attendance at Robins's production of *Hedda Gabler*.[131] Yet, Ibsen's fame among the average

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[126] Ibid., 101.
[127] Leighton, *Position and Prospects,* 8.
[128] *Times* (13 October 1891), 5.
[129] Catherine Hindson, *Female Performance Practice on the Fin-de-Siècle Popular Stages of London and Paris: Experiment and Advertisement* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 24.
[130] George Bernard Shaw, *Our Theatres in the Nineties* (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1932), vol.i, 165.
[131] Oscar Wilde, *More Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Rupert Hart-Davis (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1985), 96.

fashionable theatregoer quickly grew and competition to produce his plays commensurately increased. As Charrington and Achurch lamented in 1893, "We had made Ibsen a marketable article in London, and so had, as it turned out, forfeited our power of producing his new plays".[132] This is not to suggest that Ibsen had become entirely 'mainstream' by the mid-1890s. However, producing his works was clearly profitable and provided a degree of prestige or at least a highly marketable form of infamy.

Such increasing commerciality had a significant impact on the ITS's ability to produce Ibsen's work. When Heinemann secured the performance rights to *Little Eyolf*, Grein wrote to the publisher to ask whether it could "be arranged that this play is brought out by the I.T." and subsequently entered into extensive negotiations with the German in an attempt to stage the piece.[133] Moreover, when the ITS did finally secure the rights to perform *Little Eyolf* the terms of the agreement with Heinemann reflected Ibsen's status as a valuable theatrical commodity. The society was obligated to secure "a first class west end theatre" for the production and commit to at least fourteen performances.[134] The activities of the ITS, along with the other earlier producers of Ibsen in Britain, had clearly shifted the cultural position of the Norwegian dramatist to the point that they could no longer easily secure a production of his plays.

On the other hand, this increasing marketability also had significant ramifications for the ITS's productions of plays to which they did have the rights. When the society staged *The Wild Duck* in 1894, *The Birmingham Daily Post* noted "that the production shall be upon an unusually elaborate scale".[135] Such confidence was borne out, and after the performance it was observed "that the announcement of a play by Ibsen served to attract a large audience".[136] The production was also praised for not having "a single weak spot in the cast".[137] The profitability of Ibsen seemingly allowed the society to produce his plays at a larger, more well-equipped theatre and with a far higher production quality than most of their other works.

Productions of Ibsen's dramas consequently financially cross-subsidised the society's other ventures. In 1893, the ITS revived its production of *Ghosts* – a measure which undoubtedly was calculated to help remedy the society's precarious finances. Indeed, the financial impetus behind staging Ibsen's work was made clear when the society next performed *Ghosts* in 1897. Leighton

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[132] Achurch and Charrington, 'Confession', 495.
[133] Letter from J.T. Grein to William Heinemann (27 November 1894). Little Alphabet Series, Henrik Ibsen Folder, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, Austin. A letter dated 8 January 1895, repeating this request, can be found in the same folder.
[134] 'Memorandum of Agreement with the Independent Theatre' (1896), 1r. George Bernard Shaw Collection, Series V, Box 70, Folder 5. Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, Austin.
[135] *Birmingham Daily Post* (14 Feb 1894), 5.
[136] *Morning Post* (5 May 1894), 6.
[137] *Era* (12 May 1894), 11.

and Charrington wrote that "we are anxious to strengthen the resources of the Independent Theatre for the continuance of our work during the ensuing season" and offered tickets to *Ghosts* in exchange for "Donations of 5 [shillings] upwards to the funds of the company".[138] Charrington, notably, had form in using productions of Ibsen as a consistent money-maker. After his first production of the piece at the Novelty Theatre in 1899, *A Doll's House* would form a staple of Charrington's repertoire. The drama was produced on almost a weekly basis (totalling more than 150 performances), during the Charringtons' 1889-92 world tour.[139] It would later feature as part of the pair's 1892 and 1893 seasons at the Avenue Theatre as well as their brief 1893 stint at the Royalty.[140]

This pattern continued when Charrington took charge of the ITS. Alongside the aforementioned private performance of *Ghosts*, the ITS also announced in early 1897 that it would perform *The Lady from the Sea*, *The Wild Duck*, and, as Shaw somewhat cynically put it, "the inevitable Doll's House".[141] The production of *The Lady from the Sea* never materialised, although, *A Doll's House* and *The Wild Duck* were staged at the Globe Theatre in May 1897. *A Doll's House* would also then be nationally toured alongside Shaw's *Candida* under the ITS banner later in the year. In this way, the ITS appears to have utilised performances of Ibsen's drama in a very similar fashion to how later non-commercial theatre organisations relied upon Shaw's dramas in the early twentieth century. As Shaw himself explained, the Vedrenne-Barker management at the Royal Court Theatre depended upon the guaranteed fame and profitability of his work to allow them "to give matinées of good plays which give the theatre its standing as the artistic and intellectual London theatre".[142] Likewise, Grein noted that whenever a work by Shaw appeared on the Stage Society's programme "up went membership, interest, and prestige".[143] As Franks observes, experimental or non-commercial theatre is an evolving concept: "quickly avant-garde turned old-guard and […] frequently artistic risk returned commercial reward".[144] The ITS's repeated staging of Ibsen evidences a similar ability for dramatic experiments to both develop theatrical tastes and expectations, while also improving the commerciality of their own repertoire.

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138 Circular for the Independent Theatre's 1897 performance of *Ghosts* (London: Chiswick Press, 1897). *Mark Samuels Lasner Collection*, University of Delaware, Newark.

139 Bernard Ince 'An Early Pioneer of the New Drama: Charles Charrington, Actor-manager and Fabian Socialist', *Theatre Notebook*, 64:3 (2010), 130-159, 134.

140 Ibid., 151.

141 Shaw, *Drama Observed*, vol ii, 821.

142 Shaw, *Collected Letters*, vol ii, 550. For further discussion of Shaw's relationship with the Vedrenne-Barker management see Sos Eltis, 'The Court Theatre', in *George Bernard Shaw in Context*, ed. by Brad Kent (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 68–75.

143 J.T. Grein, *The World of the Theatre: Impressions and Memoirs, March 1920-1921* (London: William Heinemann, 1921), 52.

144 Franks, *Stages of Subscription*, 43.

The ITS as an Institution: collaboration, career making, and conflict

Collaboration

The diverse and multifaceted theatrical landscape outlined in the previous section also had radical implications for how the ITS functioned as an institution. The fluid nature of experimental theatre-making in this period meant that different managements often joined forces. In some cases, this took the form of formal collaborations, such as the ITS's hosting of the Théâtre de l'Œuvre at the Opéra Comique Theatre in 1895. Lugné-Poe's company performed a series of pieces by Ibsen and Maeterlinck to ITS subscribers to much acclaim. Reviewers noted that this production had "several elements of importance and interest about it", and Raby notably credits this performance as being Grein's main achievement, alongside premiering Ibsen and Shaw's *Widowers' Houses*.[145] The strong reception this collaboration received conveys how co-operation was a vital mechanism by which the ITS was able to bring prestigious and unusual work to its stage.

The Théâtre de l'Œuvre's visit was the ITS's only major formal co-production with an established management. Yet, this was not for want of trying. In January 1892, it was announced that a "joint committee of the Shelley Society and the Independent Theatre Society" had been formed to give a private performance of *The Cenci*.[146] The Shelley Society's 1886 performance of *The Cenci*, which had generated almost as much press coverage as *Ghosts*, had been the first use of a private subscription performance to allow an unlicensed theatrical work onto the London stage. This production never materialised under the ITS banner (it was eventually performed in August 1892 under the sole auspices of the Shelley Society) – the aforementioned difficulties of securing a theatre as well as casting disputes having caused significant delay to the process.[147] However, such an endeavour demonstrates the society's desire to join forces with other similar organisations: a move which likely gave them significant prestige and greater reach, while also reducing the financial outlay of mounting a performance for both parties. Indeed, shortly after the end of the ITS's first season, it was proposed "that the Independent Theatre should link up with the society that McCarthy and Colnaghi wished to form for the purpose of staging performances on Sundays".[148] The hope was that the combined finances of the two organisations would have allowed them to acquire a shared permanent venue.[149] The ITS was clearly open to collaborating with other similar managements in order to improve its own financial viability as well as help support the development of non-commercial theatre.

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[145] *Liverpool Mercury* (27 March 1895), 5; Raby, 'Theatre of the 1890s', 185.
[146] *Era* (2 January 1892), 10.
[147] *Pall Mall Gazette* (8 July 1892), 4.
[148] (A.) Grein, *Story of a Pioneer*, 93.
[149] Ibid.

The foundation of a Manchester committee of the ITS in February 1893 exemplifies this tendency for different groups of non-commercial theatre makers to formally come together to share resources. As *The Manchester Courier* announced, "Several Manchester gentlemen have made arrangements to *co-operate* with [the ITS] for the purpose of bringing similar performances before the Manchester public".[150] This language of co-operation is important as it stresses the equality of the relationship between the Manchester committee and its London counterpart. The Manchester ITS grew out of the rich existing tradition of non-commercial theatrical activity already in Manchester. The President of the Manchester Branch, Charles Hughes, had been a founding member of the ITS and was a long-time proponent of Manchester-based theatre.[151] Members of Hughes's committee were also similarly involved in promoting theatre and literature in the city.[152] Charles Rowley, for instance, had established the Ancoats Brotherhood in 1889, a society aimed at bringing art, music, drama, and literature to working-class audiences in Manchester, and was another original ITS member.[153]

The Manchester ITS's production record reflects this status as an autonomous centre of theatrical debate and innovation rather than a mere extension of its London counterpart. Some of the performances at Manchester were the direct product of the London stage. The Manchester society's inaugural production was Moore's *The Strike at Arlingford* which was given on the 24th of February 1893 and was performed three days after the London performance with almost exactly the same cast.[154] However, many of the society's subsequent performances such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Clavigo* (1774), as well as a large number of Shakespearian dramas (*Love's Labour's Lost* (c.1595), *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (c.1590), and *Richard II* (c.1595)), were never given by the ITS's London establishment.[155] Most of these original productions were under the direction of Louis Calvert, a Manchester-born actor-manager who had made his name both in London and internationally performing Shakespeare.[156] Furthermore, even when the Manchester society performed new works which had been staged in London, they often used their own original cast and direction. In 1893, for instance, they staged *Rosmersholm*, with Calvert playing Rosmer, while May Harvey, another local actress, performed Rebecca West.[157] Drawing on its own local

[150] *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* (7 February 1893), 5.
[151] *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* (7 March 1893), 5.
[152] The founding committee members were Charles Hughes, Charles Rowley, E. A. Parry, Abel Heywood junior and Alfred Darbyshire. *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* (4 February 1893), 1.
[153] *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* (7 March 1893), 5. Details of Rowley's activities in Ancoats are given in Charles Rowley, *Fifty Years of Work without Wages* (London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1911).
[154] Schoonderwoerd, *Ambassador of the Theatre*, 113
[155] A full list of the Manchester ITS's productions are given in Schoonderwoerd, *Ambassador of the Theatre*, 113-4.
[156] Calvert's Shakespeare productions are discussed in Richard Foulkes, 'Louis Calvert: a Shakespearian in the Nineties', in *British Theatre in the 1890s: Essays on Drama and the Stage*., ed. by Richard Foulkes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 165-83.
[157] *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* (7 October 1893), 1.

talent more than London exportations, the Manchester ITS largely operated in a distinct and autonomous fashion.

On occasion, the Manchester ITS even led the London ITS's activities. The two ITS productions of Robert Browning's *A Blot on the 'Scutcheon* (1843) were both led by the Manchester ITS. Organised by Hughes (and relying on familiar talents from the Manchester ITS's acting pool), the production premiered at the Opéra Comique in June 1893.[158] Several months later, the play was then performed at Manchester's Gentlemen's Concert Hall in October 1893 with an almost identical cast.[159] Similar patterns of collaboration are also present in the ITS's 1897 series of Ibsen-Shakespeare performances. In early 1897, Achurch and Calvert had staged an "immensely popular" production of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (c.1606) at the Queen's Theatre in Manchester.[160] It was then announced that there would be a series of Ibsen matinées followed by *Antony and Cleopatra* in London, held under the joint auspices of both the London and Manchester ITS.[161] Owing much of its conception to Calvert, who had previously given combined productions of Ibsen's and Shakespeare's dramas under the banner of the Manchester ITS, this scheme reflects the mutually beneficially sharing of resources, talents, and ideas which occurred between the two organisations.[162] The Manchester ITS and its London counterpart had their own distinct identities as theatrical communities but could gain much from collaboration and cooperation with each other.

The potential for a mutually beneficial merging of different experimental theatrical communities explains the number of informal collaborations the ITS entered. Productions also often received support from the society without being officially located under the ITS banner. In May 1893 there was an "Ibsen season" performed at the Opéra Comique – the venue which the ITS had utilised for nearly all of its performances during its 1893 to 1894 season.[163] Renditions of *The Master Builder*, which Robins had premiered only three months earlier at the Trafalgar Square Theatre, were given alongside representations of *Hedda Gabler*, *Rosmersholm*, and the fourth act of *Brand* (1865).[164] This programme was advertised as being "under the direction of Miss Elizabeth Robins", while Grein was named as "managing secretary".[165] Although not officially part of the ITS's 1893 season, many ITS members conceived of it as falling under the society's umbrella.

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[158] *Morning Post* (16 June 1893), 3; *Globe* (16 June 1893), 3.
[159] *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* (23 October 1893), 8.
[160] *Era* (20 March 1987), 20.
[161] Schoonderwoerd, *Ambassador of the Theatre,* 112
[162] *Liverpool Mercury* (24 October 1894), 6. The ITS seems to have used productions of Shakespeare in a similar fashion to its staging of Ibsen's dramas, relying on the playwright's fame to act as a guaranteed money maker.
[163] *Glasgow Herald* (12 June 1893), 4.
[164] *Standard* (5 June 1893), 4.
[165] *Times* (17 May 1893), 12.

Henry James wrote to Robins to apologise that he was "little likely to be present at what you are doing for the 'Independent'", while also pressing Bell for more details about "the Independent thing".[166] It was often difficult to delineate between an individual who was acting on behalf of the ITS versus when they were acting in a personal capacity. The flexible and multifaceted nature of Grein's and others' engagements with a range of theatrical enterprises created informal partnerships and alliances between many different dramatic endeavours.

Fluid ad-hoc merging of different actors or managements was not uncommon practice, especially for performers of Ibsen. The year prior to the Opéra Comique Ibsen performances, Robins had joined forces with the Charringtons to produce a series of Ibsen dramas in Brighton. This "curious Achurch Robins amalgam", as James termed it, consisted of *A Doll's House*, in which Robins reprised her 1891 role as Mrs Linden, alongside *Hedda Gabler*.[167] Robins received both a salary from the Charringtons from playing in the pieces as well as commission for her having supplied the rights to *Hedda Gabler*.[168] A series of matinées at Crystal Palace were also arranged on the same terms.[169] Furthermore, when Robins was taken ill during the run at Opéra Comique, Farr began to prepare to come on to take her place.[170] Despite never becoming necessary, this contingency plan further underscores how leading actors and producers of Ibsen were frequently prepared to support each other's ventures. Such arrangements likely helped cement individual actors' statuses as leading performers of the Norwegian's dramas as well as provide them with commercially viable roles.

Theatre history tends to focus disproportionately on the premieres of Ibsen's work and the particularities of the managements which produced them. Yet, it is clear from the afterlives of many of these performances and their managements that there was also a constant merging and reforming of different groups. Such dynamics are evident in the aborted ITS production of *Little Eyolf*, which had intended to unite the Charringtons, Robins, and Farr under the society's banner. As Robins observed, part of the reason that Shaw was so keen to secure her participation was that it would allow the ITS to position the performance as a "grand consolidation" of all the different Ibsenite groups.[171] Indeed, the society announced their production of the play as a most admirable instance of "the continuity and organisation of the Independent Theatre [being] reinforced by the

166 James quoted in Schoonderwoerd, *Ambassador of the Theatre,* 117.
167 James quoted in Elizabeth Robins, *Theatre and Friendship*: *Some Henry James letters with commentary by Elizabeth Robins* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1932),72.
168 Letter from Harrington Bailey to Elizabeth Robins (21 October 1892). Box 204, Folder 1, Elizabeth Robins Collection, Fales Library, Ney York University, New York.
169 Ibid.
170 Shaw, *The Diaries*, vol.ii, 939.
171 Robins quoted in Joanne E. Gates, 'The Theatrical Politics of Elizabeth Robins and Bernard Shaw', *Shaw*, 14:1 (1994), 43–53, 47.

most conspicuous artistic ability of its friendly competitors".[172] The society had to contend with, and was indeed acutely aware of, its role as just one of the many spaces in which producers of more literary or experimental styles of drama could collaborate and come together.

The porousness of the ITS as an institution is further apparent in its interaction with other subscription societies. As discussed, Robins was initially prepared to enter into a quasi-co-production with the ITS to bring *Little Eyolf* to the stage. Furthermore, even when this arrangement broke down there was still a high degree of collaboration between the two managements. The ITS announced that their shareholders "will have allotted to them gratis, the same number and class of Seats as they would have received had the play been produced as originally intended by the Independent Theatre".[173] The ITS "guaranteed part of the booking at the Avenue" and hence helped Robins find the financial backing to ensure that the play could be staged.[174] This sense of the ITS working in natural collaboration with Robins's theatre, rather than being replaced or subsumed by it, epitomises the fluidity of experimental theatrical groupings.

There was undeniably still friction between the two societies. Promotional material for Robins's new 1896 management explicitly positioned it as an improvement on the ITS's performance practices:

> An energetic & in many ways praiseworthy effort in somewhat the same direction – the Independent Theatre --- was only partially successful. Its projectors seemed to have erred in overestimating the amount of material at their command, & consequently promising more than they could perform, without seriously lowering literary standards.[175]

This description rankled the ITS leadership. When Leighton heard that Robins had termed her management 'The New Independent Theatre', she wrote frantically to Charrington to see whether they should announce their own forthcoming productions in response.[176] However, despite these tensions, the two managements were often able to overlook their differences. Financial necessity combined with a genuine desire to promote new forms of drama in Britain seemingly provided sufficient motive for collaboration.

The desire to support, or at least be seen to support, the development of British drama even occasionally provided enough incentive for established commercial managers to assist ITS

[172] Leighton, *Position and Prospects*, 7.
[173] Letter from Charles Charrington and Dorothy Leighton to ITS shareholders (31 October 1896). Box 204, Folder 7, Elizabeth Robins Papers, Fales Library, New York University, New York.
[174] Shaw, *Drama Observed*, vol.ii, 722.
[175] 'Draft Manifesto for a New Theatrical Management' (n.d.), 2. Box 204, Folder 11, Elizabeth Robins Collection, Fales Library, New York University, New York. This manifesto announces performances of *Little Eyolf* and *Marianna*, hence indicating that it was written for Robins's 1896 management ventures.
[176] Letter from Dorothy Leighton to Charles Charrington (n.d.). *Mark Samuels Lasner Collection,* University of Delaware, Newark.

endeavours. Initially, managers were somewhat hostile towards the society. They refused to let their casts perform in ITS productions or indeed other experimental matinées. In January 1891, Shaw wrote a piece in *The Pall Mall Gazette* explaining how no suitable male actor would be released to play the lead in Farr's production of *Rosmersholm* and decrying the London managers for their role in "the exclusion from the stage of the best modern dramatic literature".[177] Attitudes, however, quickly shifted. By 1892, Grein trumpeted that: "I have received support from such leading managers as Mr. Henry Irving, Sir Augustus Harris, and Mr. Beerbohm Tree, who have kindly allowed artists engaged by them to take part in the performances of the Independent Theatre".[178] Moreover, playbills for ITS productions began to name the managements from which the actors had been released.[179] This public announcement of the association shows how managers likely realised that having their actors perform at the ITS could become a good form of advertising for their productions.

On occasion, prominent London managers even provided more direct kinds of financial and material support. In 1892, when the ITS produced *The Duchess of Malfi*, Irving offered "some of the treasures of the Lyceum wardrobe" to the performers.[180] Furthermore, when the ITS performed Browning's *A Blot on the 'Scutcheon* in London and Manchester in 1893, it was announced that the production "boasts the patronage for this occasion of the Right Hon. A. J. Balfour, Mr Henry Irving, and Mr Algernon C. Swinburne".[181] For understandable reasons, Irving did not attach his name to the ITS's more controversial performances, such as pieces by Ibsen or Zola. Yet, when it came to renowned historical verse dramas, something which fitted the rarefied literary image that Irving sought to cultivate, the actor-manager was prepared to financially support the society's endeavours. Having been lambasted by Grein in 1890 for having "done next to nothing for new original plays", Irving's collaboration with the society allowed him to publicly demonstrate his commitment to the development of literary drama in Britain.[182] He was thanked prominently for his contribution to the ITS's production of *The Duchess of Malfi* on the playbill and his association was mentioned in several of the newspapers.[183] Rather than being in constant

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[177] *Pall Mall Gazette* (9 January 1891), 2.
[178] Grein quoted in *Era* (23 July 1892), 9.
[179] See, for instance, the ITS playbill for *A Question of Memory* and *Le Pater* (1893). Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware, Newark.
[180] *Glasgow Herald* (8 October 1892), 9.
[181] *Era* (10 June 1893), 10.
[182] Schoonderwoerd, *Ambassador of the Theatre*, 67.
[183] Playbill for the Independent Theatre Society's production of *The Duchess of Malfi* (1892), 2. Box 1, Folder 11, Collection of Theater Letters, Philbrick Library of Dramatic Arts and Theatre History, The Claremont Colleges Digital Library. For an example of Irving's contribution being commented upon by the press, see *Pall Mall Gazette* (18 October 1892), 1.

opposition to the ITS's activities, a mutually beneficial sharing of resources and cultural cachet sporadically arose between the society and established managers of the West End.

Career Making

The ITS's potential to help build individuals' association with, and reputation in, the realm of literary drama also explains why actors and playwrights were incentivised to donate their services to the society. As Robins recounts, "Marion Lea and I had seen how materially an actor's prospects might be affected by playing at occasional matinées" and therefore endeavoured to do matinées even while working at established theatres.[184] The ITS was aware of the attraction they held for actors in this regard. "We have discovered new histrionic genius", Moore pronounced with characteristic humility after only the ITS's second ever production.[185] The effect performing in *Ghosts* had on Mrs Theodore Wright's reputation as an actress is perhaps the best example of the ITS's ability to launch performers' careers. Mrs Theodore Wright had worked as an amateur actress throughout the 1880s.[186] However, after her turn as Mrs Aveling, she achieved significant public recognition as an "admirable and sympathetic" actress.[187] Mrs Theodore Wright went on to perform for multiple major theatrical managements, for instance, starring in Sydney Grundy's *An Old Jew* (1894) at the Garrick Theatre in 1894, and she would also star in several other roles for the ITS.[188]

The alternative means of an actor showcasing their talents was a trial matinée, which "favored those fortunate few performers who were wealthy or had monied connections, because such a presentation often cost as much as £100".[189] Performing at the ITS by contrast was free and, as will be discussed later in this chapter, came with almost guaranteed press coverage. These conditions made the society a very attractive prospect for actors attempting to make their name. For instance, when the ITS mounted Leighton's *Thyrza Fleming* in 1895, the titular role was played by Esther Palliser, an actress who had yet to make her theatrical debut but was a much-respected operatic performer. For aspiring actors or actresses who were hoping to make their name as an actor of literary drama, the ITS was clearly a desirable location to make a debut.

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[184] Robins, *Theatre and Friendship*, 32.
[185] *Times* (13 October 1891), 5.
[186] Davis notes that prior to her performance at the ITS, Mrs Theodore Wright "had acted for the New Shakespeare Society, she played at Sadler's Wells, and was popular at the Hall of Science as a reader and reciter". Davis, *Ibsen in England*, 140.
[187] Era (16 May 1891), 10. For a review explicitly noting that *Ghosts* had seemingly made Mrs Theodore Wright's reputation, see *Pall Mall Gazette* (13 December 1892), 1.
[188] Mrs Theodore Wright performed in the ITS's productions of *Thérèse Raquin, A Question of Memory*, and *Salvé*.
[189] Gay Gibson Cima, 'Elizabeth Robins: The Genesis of an Independent Manageress', *Theatre Survey,* 21:2 (1980), 145–163, 146.

It was not just the performance structures which made the ITS attractive but also the type of drama the society had at its disposal. As Robins remarked, "Actors were coming to realize that 'Ibsen made reputations'".[190] Much of the casting furore around the ITS's production of *Little Eyolf* was because the performance had the ability to launch careers. Grein wrote to Heinemann of his sincere "hope that Miss Hackett [their desired choice for the part of Rita] will find in 'Little Eyolf' the opportunity to make a hit".[191] He lamented that "so clever an artist" had such "difficulties to find a hearing" and that the opportunities normally afforded to her were scarce and often poorly paid.[192] Moreover, even to an established actress, the part still held significant appeal. As Robins put it to Achurch, who was ultimately cast as Rita in the ITS production of *Little Eyolf*: "I see you had affixed to act the part for love + glory at the I.T.".[193] A combination of career prestige and genuine enjoyment of the acting challenge appears to have been the underlying motivation for actors to perform Ibsen at the ITS.

Indeed, the naturalistic style of many of the ITS's works as well as these pieces' diminished reliance on stock characters offered interesting and attractive parts to already successful actors. Jan McDonald observes that many performers used ITS performances "to break out of the mould into which the commercial theatre had cast them".[194] W. L. Abingdon, who was best known for performing melodramatic villains, for example, received significant plaudits for his roles in *Thérèse Raquin*, *The Goldfish*, and *The Wild Duck*.[195] McDonald argues that actresses, in particular, found ITS roles "more stimulating and therefore more rewarding than those they played elsewhere".[196] She notes that Olga Brandon was lauded as having given the best performance of her career after her turn as Florizel in *The Visit*, while Maud Milton was said to have surprised audiences with her starring role in *The Goldfish*.[197] Prominent actor-managers tended to select plays which showcased their talents. Robins, for example, had initially solicited interest from Tree to star in Jones's *Judah* (1890).[198] However, when Tree realised that the piece "had more interesting acting possibilities for the female lead than it did for him, he abandoned it".[199] The ITS, contrastingly, was not designed to showcase the talents of any particular actor. Freedom from the actor-manager system allowed

[190] Robins, *Theatre and Friendship*, 34.
[191] Grein to Heinemann (6 January 1896).
[192] Ibid.
[193] Letter from Elizabeth Robins to Janet Achurch (5 September [no year]). Marks Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware, Newark.
[194] McDonald, 'Continental Plays', 25.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Gibson Cima, 'Independent Manageress', 146.
[199] Ibid., 147.

for a more diverse and varied set of productions to be mounted under its proverbial roof, appealing to both male and female acting talents.

Like its acting talent, ITS playwrights often worked with both the ITS and more mainstream commercial managements simultaneously. Both Robins and Bell, for instance, were concurrently working with more commercially minded managements elsewhere – the former re-drafting *Mrs Lessingham* (1894) with Constance Fletcher and John Hare at the Garrick Theatre and the latter producing comedies for a variety of mainstream theatres – while *Alan's Wife* was being written and produced.[200] Likewise, H. M. Paull, who penned the ITS's 1893 drama *At a Health Resort* (1893), would also have several comedies running at commercial managements shortly after his piece graced the ITS stage.[201] Furthermore, Mrs Oscar Beringer, who penned the ITS drama *Salvé*, had written multiple dramas for conventional theatres, such as well-received adaptations of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1888) and *The Prince and the Pauper* (1890), and was a successful and well-regarded actress-manager in her own right.[202]

Newey notes that many nineteenth-century female dramatists developed "'portfolio' careers", working across a range of media, genres, and theatrical spaces in order to maximise their earning potential.[203] Although perhaps particularly true of women writers, this dynamic clearly extended to other types of playwrights more broadly. *The Era* highlighted this practice when it cheekily suggested that an author who desired both financial stability and literary acclaim "could be made to compromise by sending his melodrama to a West-end manager, and his intellectual play to the Independent Theatre Society".[204] This configuration of the ITS as a hub for the more literary output of commercial dramatists emphasises the overlap between the society and more established theatrical managements. Rather than being occupied by a distinct subset of avant-garde playwrights, the ITS largely drew its works from playwrights who were already integrated into the wider theatrical environment.

This desire to simultaneously work across several different theatrical spheres did not apply to all playwrights involved in the ITS. As already touched upon, several highly established West End playwrights would never offer a play to the society. However, these playwrights were often

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[200] Gates, *Elizabeth Robins*, 72. A comedietta by Bell called *The Masterpiece* (1893) was performed at the Royalty in April 1893, while a piece called *Nicholson's Niece* (1892) was performed as a matinée at Terry's Theatre in May 1892. *Morning Post* (17 April 1893), 2; *Morning Post* (31 May 1892), 5.
[201] In 1894, Paull had two one-act comedies performed *The Gentleman Whip* (1894) and *Hal the Highwayman* (1894). *Hastings and St. Leonards Observer* (21 July 1894), 3; *Standard* (7 December 1894), 6.
[202] The most comprehensive current summary of the Mrs Oscar Beringer's life and work can be found in Katherine Newey, 'Feminist Historiography and Ethics: A Case Study from Victorian Britain', in *Theatre History and Historiography: Ethics, Evidence and Truth*, eds. by Claire Cochrane and Jo Robinson (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2016), 85–102. As Newey noted, Beringer is a "remarkably elusive" (93) figure in the historical record. She appears to have been a playwright, social hostess, actress and manager, who was popular both with London Bohemia as well as the industry elite.
[203] Newey, *Women's Theatre Writing*, 169.
[204] *Era* (26 January 1895), 17.

members of the society and prepared to offer other forms of support.[205] Jones, for instance, would lecture on "The Drama" as part of the ITS's Sunday Night Debates.[206] Similarly, George Sims refused Grein's invitation to pen a drama for the ITS.[207] However, he did offer £100 to anyone who could produce a play "that by public acclaim was regarded as unconventional" and subsequently donated that sum to the society after its production of *The Strike at Arlingford*.[208] As Alice Grein explains, Sims was "a prosperous playwright and in receipt of handsome returns from his many melodramas".[209] It therefore made little sense for Sims to both forego considerable income as well as potentially damage his reputation as a dramatist by a poor attempt at an innovative piece. However, either out of a genuine desire to reform British theatre or, if regarded a bit more cynically, some element of wanting the cultural cachet associated with the mission to advance British drama, these playwrights still meaningfully contributed to ITS endeavours. Mirroring the approach of prominent commercial managers, established and commercially successful writers often associated themselves with the society without fully aligning themselves with the organisation's activities.

Conflict and Schism

As has been outlined above, the ITS was a hotbed of ever shifting social, political, and artistic alliances as different managers, playwrights, and actors moved in and out of the society. However, such fluidity and mutability were not without their downsides. Tensions frequently arose within the society as different groups or individuals attempted to negotiate their way through the competing interests, agendas, and theatrical tastes. Many of these disagreements were fairly low level, largely involving the selection of plays or performers. Alice Grein, for instance, records that a group of ITS supporters, led by Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling, fervently protested against her husband's choice to cast Mrs Theodore Wright as Mrs Alving in *Ghosts*.[210] Marx, an aspiring actress, had seemingly envisaged the role of Mrs Alving for herself.[211] Yet, after "the critics were all eulogistic in their remarks about [Mrs Theodore Wright's] performance", these tensions subsided, and Grein was lauded for his good judgement.[212]

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[205] Chothia highlights how Jones's and Pinero's membership of the ITS constitutes an example "of the interesting crossings in the 1890s between mainstream and emergent alternative theatre". Jean Chothia, 'The New Drama', in *George Bernard Shaw in Context*, ed. by Brad Kent (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 109-16, 115.

[206] *Birmingham Daily Post* (6 February 1894), 5. The exact relationship between the ITS and this Sunday night debate series is difficult to pin down. Although not officially termed ITS debates, they were orchestrated by Grein, used the *Opéra* Comique Theatre, and seemingly took used part of the profits to form a reserve fund for the ITS.

[207] (A.) Grein, *Story of a Pioneer*, 123.

[208] Ibid., 109.

[209] Ibid., 123.

[210] Ibid., 83.

[211] Davis, *Ibsen in England*, 139-40.

[212] (A.) Grein, *Story of a Pioneer*, 84.

Sometimes, however, these clashes over productions went beyond mere indecision or protestation. In 1892, when the ITS submitted Archer's translation of *A Visit* for licensing, the play was returned with several deleted passages.[213] Archer raged that "the Lord Chamberlain by his elimination had impaired the effect of the drama, and had, moreover, defeated his own ends by thus preventing the work from being credible and moral".[214] It would, however, later transpire that it was in fact Moore who had made the emendations before the play was submitted for licence.[215] Although united in their broad vision of improving British drama, leading ITS figures were frequently at odds with each other. Notably, the ITS's agreement with Heinemann for the rights to *Little Eyolf* in 1896 included a dispute mechanism. The agreement read that "Heinemann shall be consulted with regard to the particulars of the performances, and that, in the event of differences arising, he shall be empowered to submit them for arbitration to […] William Archer, whose decision thereupon shall be regarded as final".[216] History had led them to expect difficulties and thus required a formalised way to resolve these disputes.

The ITS experienced several splits and schisms over the years. As touched upon previously, Moore was an early and active ITS committee member. However, his involvement with the society ceased in around 1895. The justification Moore would later give in 1899 for his abandonment of the society was "there were not 1500 people in London who cared sufficiently for dramatic art to pay one guinea a year to save dramatic writing from the grave into which it was slipping".[217] He also alluded to tensions and artistic differences with prominent members of the society.[218] Moore would later throw his energies into the Irish Literary Theatre instead (an institution which its founders notably initially considered naming the Irish Independent Theatre Society).[219] However, in seemingly characteristic fashion, the Irishman would have a major falling out with W. B. Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory in 1902 and hence cease all substantial involvement in their various theatrical endeavours.[220] In comparison to traditional commercial managements, which were usually run by one family or individual, this new style of literary theatre, with its multiple committee members or leaders, was seemingly particularly prone to conflict and clashing egos.

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[213] Ibid., 104.
[214] Ibid., 104-5.
[215] Ibid., 105. It is possible that Moore was pre-empting potential objections from the censor. Alternatively, McDonald argues that the Irishman was potentially "trying to make the play *more* daring by emphasising the point that what a man could do with full knowledge before marriage, a woman could also do in similar circumstances, and expect her husband to understand her conduct". McDonald, 'Continental Plays', 18-9 (emphasis in original).
[216] 'Memorandum of Agreement', 1v.
[217] Moore, 'Introduction', viii.
[218] Ibid., xii-iii.
[219] Adrian Woods Frazier, *George Moore, 1852-1933* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000), 265.
[220] Ibid., chap.10-11.

In the worst case, ITS infighting could even cause a whole production to collapse. As previously discussed, the ITS went to great efforts to secure the rights to perform *Little Eyolf* in conjunction with Robins. However, as the production was being readied, the relationship between Robins and the ITS broke down, forcing the American to produce the piece under her own independent management. The exact reason for the collapse of the ITS scheme is unclear. However, a large cause of difficulties appears to have been the machinations of Shaw. Robins wrote in February 1896 that "I think there's no doubt [Janet Achurch] and the Independent Theatre have lost Little Eyolf after all. If so they've Shaw to thank".[221] Furthermore, Shaw would write to Heinemann in 1896 to offer his "unreserved apology for my outrageous conduct about 'Little Eyolf'".[222] One individual's personal politicking could cause even the most long-awaited and hard-fought of ITS endeavours to collapse.

Robins's production would notably also run into further difficulties when Achurch, who was playing the lead role of Rita, attempted to break her agreement with Robins and negotiate directly with the theatrical syndicate that was funding *Little Eyolf*'s commercial transfer.[223] This move was apparently instigated by Charrington who was known for his underhand financial practices and had spent much of the initial *Little Eyolf* run complaining that "'My wife' was not properly featured on the bill".[224] Achurch and Charrington's attempt to gain more money for themselves, a manoeuvre which Robins termed an "act of suicidal grasping and unfaith", ultimately failed.[225] Mrs Patrick Campbell replaced Achurch as Rita, while Farr took Patrick Campbell's original role as the Rat Wife. Achurch's betrayal, followed by her subsequent ejection from the cast, highlights how precarious these types of arrangements were. It is evident that personal earnings and prestige could often outweigh any lofty goals or aspirations about collectively improving the state of British drama.

Even Grein ultimately fell out with the organisation he had founded. After his resignation as director in 1895, the Dutchman had retained a position as Honorary President of the organisation.[226] Grein continued financially supporting the society and, as his correspondences indicate, still played an active role in attempting to mount productions for the organisation.[227] However, in March 1897, he informed Leighton that in light of the "unfriendly treatment which I

[221] Robins quoted in Gates, 'Theatrical Politics', 47.
[222] Letter from George Bernard Shaw to William Heinemann (26 November 1896) tipped into a copy of *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*. PT 8895.S5. Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware, Newark.
[223] Gates, *Elizabeth Robins*, 96.
[224] Robins quoted in ibid.
[225] Robins quoted in ibid.
[226] Leighton, *Position and Prospects*, 7.
[227] Letter from J.T. Grein to Dorothy Leighton (8 March 1897). Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware, Newark; Grein to Heinemann (6 January 1896).

received at the last meeting at the hands of Charrington, I cannot take any further part in the discussions concerning the Independent Theatre's management".[228] Grein would not altogether break with the society. In 1898, the ITS would mount a performance of *Blanchette* using a translation by Grein and Martia Leonard. Yet, the Dutchman did not seemingly play a role in the society's management past 1897, instead devoting his energies to several other new theatrical endeavours.[229]

In a way, it is remarkable that Charrington, who was busy touring Australia when the ITS was founded, had managed to take control of the organisation by the end of its existence.[230] Charrington's introduction to the society was a product of the fluid relationship between different theatrical innovators and experimental networks. When he was announced as an ITS director, it was trumpeted that Charrington's "three attempts to establish an advanced theatre in London have left him with much valuable experience".[231] It was Charrington's experience not at the ITS specifically but rather in the general experimental theatrical space that was seen as a valuable asset for the society. He also significantly benefitted from his close friendship with Shaw, a fellow Fabian, who advocated for him during the discussion over who should replace Grein.[232] However, Charrington, with his longstanding "talent for converting other people's investments into thin air" and abrasive personality, quickly alienated many of the ITS's staunchest supporters.[233] These individuals, such as Grein and Robins, simply took their energy, ideas, and connections elsewhere. The very fluidity which had facilitated his entry to the organisation's leadership also led to the ITS's collapse.

ITS Networks: print cultures, transnational communities, and political and literary sociability

Print Culture

This chapter has so far argued that the ITS was a highly fluid and dynamic institution which was deeply integrated into other literary communities and networks. It is therefore useful to explore in more detail the channels that enabled resources, ideas, and plays to be exchanged between the ITS and the wider theatrical environment. One important way that the ITS both received and disseminated ideas and theatrical impulses was nineteenth-century Britain's rapidly growing print

[228] Ibid., (Grein to Leighton).
[229] Grein's theatrical activities in the years immediately post-1897 include establishing a German theatre in London, serving on the initial 'Reading and Advising Committee' of the Stage Society, and editing the *Stars of the Stage* series. Schoonderwoerd, *Ambassador of the Theatre*, chap.5.
[230] Charrington left England in 1889 and did not return until 1892.
[231] Leighton, *Position and Prospects*, 7.
[232] Shaw, *Collected Letters*, vol.i, 562.
[233] Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw: the one-volume definitive edition* (New York: Random House, 1997), 147.

culture. As Daniel Barrett notes, the number of dramas published for a reading audience had slowed "to a mere trickle" by 1820 and instead the century saw a proliferation of acting editions – cheap copies largely suited to the needs of provincial or amateur theatre companies.[234] The 1886 Berne Convention, which introduced dramatic copyright into Europe, however led to more continental European authors producing translations of their work for a reading market. This change in international copyright explains the large number of Ibsen's dramas which were circulating in Britain in the early 1890s.[235] Furthermore, the 1891 Chace Act, which introduced international dramatic copyright to America, immediately transformed the incentives for British dramatists to produce English language reading copies of their plays. The forfeiture of American stage rights, as Jones observed, had previously been "a very serious pecuniary loss" and one unlikely to be compensated by sales from a reading text.[236] Mere months after the passage of the act, Jones published a reading version of his play *Saints and Sinners* (1884), while Pinero sold a printed version of his play *The Times* (1891) to audience members at the piece's premiere.[237]

The ITS thus came into existence just as playwrights with literary aspirations were becoming interested in publishing reading versions of their texts. Grein published several ITS plays in print form via Henry & Co., a publishing venture in which he was a partner.[238] As the Dutchman wrote in his preface to *Widowers' Houses*, the first published ITS play:

> The works produced by the Independent Theatre are not merely plays to be seen: they are plays to be read. They belong to Literature as well as to Drama; and I should consider the work of the Independent Theatre only half done if it did not succeed in making its repertory known throughout the country to those who are out of reach of its performances.[239]

The reach of this ITS series of plays was relatively small. Shaw complained that Henry & Co.'s edition of *Widowers' Houses* was "never advertised […] even once; and the sale was 150 copies!".[240] Yet, the society's commitment to disseminating plays in print, despite knowing that this endeavour

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[234] Daniel Barrett, 'Play Publication, Readers, and the 'Decline' of Victorian Drama', *Book History*, 2:1 (1999), 173–87, 175.
[235] Norway did not actually join the Berne conventional until 1896. However, this issue, as Heinemann realised, could be circumvented by publishing the work first in its original language in a nation which was a signee. Fulsås and Rem, *World Drama,* chap.7.
[236] Henry Arthur Jones, *Saints and Sinners* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1891), v.
[237] These ventures are outlined in detail in Barrett, 'Play Publication'.
[238] Grein's exact role in the press, and indeed the management structure of Henry and Co. more broadly, is somewhat unclear. Grein did however publish multiple works and periodicals with the company. For more details on Henry & Co., see Koenraad Claes, 'Henry & Co. (1889–1897)', *Y90s Biographies*: *Yellow Nineties 2.0*, ed. by Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, Ryerson University Centre for Digital Humanities, 2019 [Accessed: 23 June 2024] https://1890s.ca/henryco_bio/.
[239] J. T. Grein, 'The Editors Preface to the Independent Theatre Series', in *Widowers' Houses*, by George Bernard Shaw (London: Henry and Co., 1893), v – vii, v.
[240] Shaw, *Collected Letters*, vol.i, 424.

would likely run at a loss, underlines the importance of text-based drama to their overall mission.[241] Many plays that appeared on the ITS stage also later appeared in privately printed editions, such as G. H. R. Dabbs and Edward Righton's *Dante* (1893), André Raffalovich's *Roses of Shadow* (1893), Benham's *Theory and Practice*, and Michael Field's *A Question of Memory*. As Jones declared in his 1891 preface to *Saints and Sinners*, failure to publish a work was "an open confession his work is a thing of the theatre merely, needing its garish artificial light and surroundings" (vi). The high number of ITS dramatists publishing their work post-performance suggests that they bought into this conception of literary drama.

Print publication was also particularly valuable for playwrights who were unable to secure a performance of their work. Print was one way to circumvent issues of theatrical censorship. Shaw published *Mrs Warren's Profession* because he knew it would not be sanctioned by the Lord Chamberlain. Similarly, after Heinemann's *The First Step* was refused a licence, he arranged for Lane to publish the piece. Playwrights also turned to print after their plays were rejected by multiple managements. Both Martyn's *The Heather Field* and Michael Field's *Attila, My Attila* (1896), the production histories of which are detailed extensively in later chapters, were published after the writers' repeated attempts to stage their plays failed. This method of publishing was not particularly lucrative. Shaw was initially highly sceptical of the economic viability of publishing his dramas, and it was largely thanks to his commitment to ensure that the 1898 publication of *Plays Pleasant* (1898) and *Plays Unpleasant* (1898) mimicked "the material look and poetic weight of fiction and poetry" that he was able to ensure strong sales.[242] However, especially when other options were exhausted, print publication was a valuable means of disseminating playwrights' works to wider audiences and building their reputations as theatrical writers.

Some writers even preferred print publication over an ITS performance. In 1895, Grant Allen sent his first play to Robins. But, despite having used Grein as an intermediary to facilitate contact with the American actress, Allen was clear that he would not offer the play to the ITS.[243] He intended the piece to be performed "on the regular stage, if possible, and if not, most probably to print it."[244] A "prosperous man of letters" who had penned several successful novels, Allen was perhaps in an atypically strong position to publish his drama.[245] Nonetheless, his attitude reflects

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[241] A letter from Henry & Co. to Shaw explaining that they never expected sales "to recoup us for our outlay" is quoted in Dan H. Laurence, *Bernard Shaw: A Bibliography*, vol.i (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 23.
[242] Katherine E. Kelly, 'Imprinting the Stage: Shaw and the Publishing Trade, 1883-1903', in *The Cambridge Companion to George Bernard Shaw*, ed. by Christopher Innes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 25–54, 25.
[243] Letter from Grant Allan to Elizabeth Robins (January 1895), 1v. Box 19, Folder 3a, Elizabeth Robins Papers, Fales Library, New York University, New York.
[244] Ibid.
[245] Peter Morton, *The Busiest Man in England: Grant Allen and the Writing Trade, 1875-1900* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2005), 124.

the increasing viability of the print market as one of the many options available to writers as they attempted to secure the best outlet for their work.

Increasing interest in publishing literary drama for a reading audience was complemented by the nation's rapidly growing periodical culture – the number of magazines published in Britain having increased from 643 in 1875 to 2,081 in 1895.[246] Small-scale radical periodicals aimed at minority political and aesthetic countercultures provided further platforms to disseminate and debate new forms of drama.[247] The socialist publication *To-Day*, for instance, was first to serialise *Ghosts* in English in an 1885 translation by Henrietta Frances Lord.[248] High-art literary publications also printed a significant amount of drama. The first issue of *The Yellow Book*, for instance, included 'The Fool's Hour' (1894), the first act of a comedic play co-authored by Moore and Pearl Craigie. Likewise, the inaugural issue of *Pageant*, run by ITS member Charles Shannon and printed by Grein's Henry & Co., included the first English translation of Maeterlinck's *The Death of Tintagiles* (1894) as well as Michael Field's verse drama *Equal Love* (1896).

Radical periodicals provided valuable platforms for experimental dramatic communities to disseminate and discuss work. Yet, the wider popular print culture was also a vital, if often underappreciated, means by which ITS productions and initiatives were critiqued and developed. The ITS benefitted from the press's interest in contemporary dramatic movements and experiments. As Davis notes, "unlike amateur clubs [… the ITS] commanded full publicity and a call on critics' attention equal to that of the powerful West End managements".[249] Significant media attention helped grow interest in the ITS as an institution. The critical furore surrounding the premiere of *Ghosts* "called attention to the Independent Theatre […] and eventually brought us a good many subscribers", Moore remarked.[250] Extensive media coverage also created an opportunity for the press to form intellectual groupings around the ITS. Renata Kobetts Miller observes that established publications such as *The Westminster Review*, "embraced these new paths of the Independent Theatre […] in order to claim for itself the role of standard-bearer for art".[251] On top of the output of prominent critics associated with the ITS, like Shaw and Archer, the society benefitted from support from the wider discourses and cultural interest around theatre.

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[246] Peter Keating, *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel, 1875-1914* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1989), 34.

[247] For detailed discussion of the emergence of the radical periodical press in this period see Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, *Slow Print: Literary Radicalism and Late Victorian Print Culture* (California: Stanford University Press, 2013).

[248] Davis, *Ibsen in England*, 40.

[249] Davis, 'Revolutionary Scheme', 448.

[250] *Times* (13 October 1891), 5.

[251] Renata Kobetts Miller, 'The Cultural Work of Drama Criticism in the Early 1890s', "1893: The Independent Theatre and the Cultural Work of Drama Criticism." *BRANCH: Britain, Representation, and Nineteenth-Century History* (2013). [Accessed: 27 March 2023], https://branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=renata-kobetts-miller-the-cultural-work-of-drama-criticism-in-the-early-1890s.

Print culture was instrumental not just in providing a platform to disseminate new forms of drama but create intellectual communities and an ongoing cultural discourse about new forms of theatre and performance.

Transnational Impulses and Endeavours

The rapid increase in printed drama and general print culture and communication also enhanced the transnational element of British theatrical culture. Just under half the plays performed at the ITS were adaptations or translations of foreign works.[252] The greater accessibility of foreign drama from a range of European nations provided a valuable source of new and different dramatic material for the ITS stage. Exposure to the broader literary and intellectual culture of continental Europe also provided inspiration for new theatrical work. *Alan's Wife*, for instance, was based on 'Befraid' (c.1891), a short story by Elin Ameen, which had originally appeared in a Swedish magazine.[253] The increasing ease with which literary movements and ideas were able to spread throughout Europe had a significant influence on British drama.

The ITS's aims and organisational structures were also, as several scholars have observed, "inspired by examples from the continent".[254] Originally envisaged as the British Théâtre Libre, the idea for the ITS was clearly indebted to Antoine's organisation. Several other models of non-commercial theatre organisations, such as the Freie Volksbühne of Berlin, also existed in Europe and were indeed frequently mentioned in connection with the ITS.[255] Many ITS works had been initially or previously performed at continental independent theatres, particularly the Théâtre Libre. *Thérèse Raquin*, *Blanchette*, and Théodore de Banville's *Le Baiser* (1887) all internationally premiered at the Théâtre Libre, and several other ITS dramas, such as *Ghosts* and *A Visit*, were performed by Antoine's company before they graced the ITS stage.[256]

The ITS's debt to the Théâtre Libre reflects the multiple points of connection and contact between French and British theatre makers. "The French Invasion" of British theatre, as British author Edward Morton provocatively termed it in 1897, has long been recognised by both contemporary commentators and theatre historians.[257] Numerous adaptations of French dramas

[252] At least 17 of the ITS's plays were based on foreign originals.
[253] Katherine E. Kelly, 'Alan's Wife: Mother Love and Theatrical Sociability in London of the 1890s', *Modernism/modernity*, 11:3 (2004), 539-560, 542.
[254] Stokes, *Resistible Theatres*, 4.
[255] *Glasgow Herald* (14 October 1891), 6.
[256] McDonald, 'Continental Plays', 17.
[257] 'The French Invasion' is the title of an article by Morton on French drama in Britain published in *Theatre* (1 July 1897), 27 – 29. For discussions of French influences on British theatrical culture see George Rowell, 'Sardou on the English Stage', *Theatre Research International*, 2:1 (1976), 33-44; John Stokes, *The French Actress and Her English Audience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Ignacio Ramos-Gay, 'Introduction: Performing, Translating, and Adapting from the French in Victorian Britain', *Cahiers Victoriens et Édouardiens* 86:1 (2017), 1-14.

alongside the frequent visits of French companies to England forged strong links between the two theatrical cultures. Close connections also existed between the avant-garde theatrical communities of the two countries: a reflection of Paris's "synchronous and symbiotic relationship with London Bohemia".[258] Antoine's company had visited London in 1889 and several leading figures in the ITS's early years, like Moore and Arthur Symons, travelled to Paris to watch the French premiere of *Ghosts* in 1890.[259] Importantly, these Anglo-French crossovers were often multi-national in character. A case in point is the ITS's 1895 hosting of the Théâtre de l'Œuvre for a programme of Maeterlinck and Ibsen's dramas: Belgian and Norwegian plays being performed in French on a British stage. As Bullock argues, the ITS reflected not just the importation of one theatrical culture into another but "a whole series of transnational literary engagements and networks across the continent".[260]

Yet, such analysis often downplays the mutuality of this process of transnational exchange. Although the major point of exchange was foreign theatrical works flowing into Britain, many different British theatrical works were also produced on the continental stage. As the Marx-Avelings observed, this successful exportation of British drama was "thanks chiefly to the indefatigable Mr. Jack Grein", who acted as a quasi-theatrical rights agent.[261] Grein facilitated the production of numerous British dramas across the continent, including, for instance, a Dutch performance of Jerome K. Jerome's *New Lamps for Old* (1890) and a staging of Malcolm Watson's *The Pharisee* (1890) in Hamburg.[262] He also arranged productions of several works by Jones and Pinero across multiple different countries.[263] These plays, which were nearly all penned by ITS members, constituted a vein of British drama which was beginning to permeate international, and especially European, theatrical cultures. Such activities were complemented by various ITS members' endeavours in theatrical touring: one of the most important, yet "under-researched of the various manifestations of transnational, even global, theatre" at the end of the nineteenth century. [264] The Charringtons brought *A Doll's House* to audiences in the Antipodes, while Robins performed *Hedda Gabler* in New York.[265] Exciting and innovative pieces and productions, though not perhaps in the same quantity as was imported into Britain, did nonetheless flow out onto the international stage.

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[258] James Gatheral, *The Bohemian Republic: Transnational Literary Networks in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 16.
[259] Stokes, *Resistible Theatres*, 134-5.
[260] Bullock, 'Transnational Space', 365.
[261] *Time* (January 1891), 85.
[262] Schoonderwoerd, *Ambassador of the Theatre, 137.*
[263] Ibid. See also (A.) Grein, *Story of a Pioneer*, chap.3.
[264] Christopher B. Balme, 'The Bandmann Circuit: Theatrical Networks in the First Age of Globalization', *Theatre Research International*, 40:1 (2015), 19–36, 19.
[265] Ince, 'Early Pioneer'; Gates, *Elizabeth Robins*, 103-4.

It is consequently no surprise that ITS productions also were involved in this impulse to export experimental British drama to the continent. The Scandinavian rights to Dorothy Leighton's *Thyrza Fleming* were sold shortly after the ITS produced the piece.[266] Similarly, after the ITS premiere of *The Strike at Arlingford*, it was announced that the play would be "seen by a Parisian audience, possibly in the programme of a regular theatre but, failing this, in the next season of Antoine".[267] Although this proposed French production never actually occurred, the fact that such a transfer was seen as possible conveys the high-level of mutual cross-exchange which occurred between the literary theatres of London and their continental counterparts. As a producer as well as a receiver of experimental plays, the ITS was deeply enmeshed in a transnational theatrical export market.

Theatrical Sociability

The operation of the transnational networks outlined above underlines the importance of personal relationships and connections to the ITS. Focusing on the society's production of *Alan's Wife*, Katherine Kelly argues that "subtle and complex modes of sociability" underpinned the avant-garde theatrical scene.[268] Indeed, similar patterns can be observed across the society's production history. The ITS's production of *The Minister's Call* (1892) was, for instance, advertised as the first dramatic effort of Arthur Symons. Yet, Moore seemingly also had an authorial hand in Symons's piece, writing to fellow ITS committee member Frank Harris "asking for permission to turn the Modern Idyll [a short story of Harris's] into a play".[269] Likewise, André Rafflovich's *Roses of Shadow* graced the ITS stage after his partner John Gray produced a translation of Théodore de Banville's *Le Baiser* entitled *The Kiss* (1892) for the ITS, alongside penning an opening monologue for the inaugural performance of the society. The ITS frequently secured work through the personal relationships and connections of its members.

It was not just plays that arrived at the ITS through personal and professional networks but performers as well. Mrs Theodore Wright is often credited as being an unknown actress who was miraculously "discovered", as Moore put it, by the ITS.[270] However, Mrs Theodore Wright had been well-known in socialist circles since the foundation of the International – a prominent London-based socialist organisation.[271] She had also been a member of the Dogberry Club, an amateur theatrical club which had been frequented by prominent socialists such as Eleanor

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[266] *Birmingham Daily Post* (4 February 1895), 3.
[267] *Era* (11 March 1893), 10.
[268] Kelly, 'Alan's Wife', 547.
[269] Frank Harris, *My Life and Loves* (Paris: [n.p.], 1922), vol.iv, 1.
[270] *Times* (13 October 1891), 5.
[271] Davis, Ibsen in England, 139. The International was founded in 1864.

Marx.[272] Although not a famous actress, Mrs Theodore Wright's social connections were instrumental in bringing her into the ITS's orbit. These social contacts also brought more established performers to the society. The lead role in *Thyrza Fleming* was taken by Esther Palliser, a "well-known opera and concert singer", who, as the papers noted, was a friend of Leighton's.[273] Leighton was arguably also doing her friend a favour by allowing Palliser to make her theatrical debut in a production which was guaranteed a large amount of press coverage. However, the fact that Leighton secured such a well-respected performer to star in her piece was clearly mutually beneficial and unlikely to have occurred without the pre-existing social connection between the two women.

Personal and professional connections frequently forged links between successful and established theatrical figures and the ITS. The previously discussed instances of Irving lending his support to the society are all likely attributable to his personal relationships with various ITS members. The ITS's performance of *The Duchess of Malfi* was led by William Poel. Poel had directed costumed performances of plays for the Shakespeare Reading Society, an organisation of which Irving was president.[274] Similarly, the performance of *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon* was overseen by the Manchester ITS which included Alfred Darbyshire as a committee member. Darbyshire had been responsible for the 1878 redevelopment of the Lyceum and had maintained a lifelong friendship with Irving after they had met in the 1860s when Irving was a young actor in Manchester.[275] There is no definitive evidence on how Irving's collaborations with the ITS came about. However, the fact that the manager only collaborated with the society when the productions were being led by close connections of his indicates the importance of personal relationships in securing the collaboration and contribution of figures from across the theatrical spectrum.

The multi-disciplinary careers of many of the society's leading members were consequently vital to the successful functioning of the ITS. To take Grein as a particularly prolific example, the Dutchman fulfilled an extraordinary number of functions within the theatrical community. First, Grein was a playwright. In the 1890s, his playwriting endeavours included *Reparation* (1892) at the Vaudeville Theatre, followed by *The Compromising Coat* (1892) at the Globe Theatre, both of which were co-authored with C. W. Jarvis. Grein also worked as a translator and adaptor of foreign theatrical works, producing *Spring Leaves* (1891), *Make-beliefs* (1892) and *Dr. Klaus* (1897) from various different continental originals.[276] Grein's sizable dramatic output was complemented by

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[272] Rachel Holmes, *Eleanor Marx: A Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 132.
[273] *Glasgow Herald* (15 November 1894), 7.
[274] The details of this relationship are more extensively outlined in Chapter 3.
[275] Alfred Darbyshire, *The Art of the Victorian Stage: Notes and Recollections* (London: Sherratt & Hughes, 1907), chap.6.
[276] For further details of these works (many of which were done with collaborators), see Schoonderwoerd, *Ambassador of the Theatre*, chap.3.

his work as a dramatic critic. He wrote prolifically for both the British press and continental publications and started several of his own periodicals and newspapers, including *Dramatic Opinion*, *The Weekly Comedy*, and *Tomorrow*.[277] Grein was able to launch so many new periodicals because he also founded his own press, Henry & Co. This venture allowed Grein to create the ITS series of plays as well as print his own dramatic writing – most notably *In the Garden of Citrons* (1892), a poetic "idyll" that purported to be Grein's translation of a work by Emilio Montanaro but was later revealed to be the Dutchman's own original creation.[278] On top of these activities, Grein was additionally involved in several projects aimed at developing, debating, and disseminating British drama. As previously mentioned, Grein acted as a quasi-rights agent for British dramatists looking to sell their work on the continent, and he was also the Secretary and subsequently the President of the Playgoers' Club during the late 1880s and early 1890s.[279] All of these endeavours were alongside his most prominent role in theatre history: founder, managing director, and indeed major financial backer of the ITS.[280]

These wide-ranging and multifaceted literary interests secured work and support for the ITS. Alice Grein observed that her husband's work promoting British drama abroad "laid the foundation-stone on which the Independent Theatre was subsequently built".[281] The Dutchman's longstanding relationship with several major Dutch theatres seemingly secured many works for the ITS. *Leida*, *The Goldfish*, *A Man's Love*, and Eline van Goethem's *The Cradle* (c.1893) all originated from Flemish originals. Moreover, as previously discussed, several of the British writers for which he had acted as a continental rights agent, such as Mrs Oscar Beringer and Jones, subsequently made contributions to the society. New social networks continued to flourish and evolve throughout the ITS's existence. During late 1892 and early 1893, for instance, Grein was in regular communication with Robins about the possibility of producing *Alan's Wife* at the ITS. In March 1893, he wrote to let her know that Hughes (the President of the Manchester ITS branch) was keen to make her acquittance as he would like "to have a chat with you about a possible production of the Masterbuilder in Manchester".[282] Grein's facilitation of this contact between Hughes and Robins proved successful. The Manchester ITS would perform both *The Master Builder* and *Hedda Gabler* in November 1894, with Robins reprising her famous roles.[283] Working across a

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277 Ibid.
278 (A.) Grein, *Story of a Pioneer*, 63.
279 Benjamin William Findon, *The Playgoers' Club, 1884 to 1905* (London: [n.p.], 1905), 25; 29.
280 Although Grein was perhaps atypically active, his multi-disciplinary approach was by no means unusual. Figures like Moore, Teixeira de Mattos, Shaw, and Archer all worked in multiple different theatrical capacities.
281 (A.) Grein, *Story of a Pioneer*, 65.
282 Letter from J.T. Grein to Elizabeth Robins (11 March 1893). Box: 27, Folder 76, Elizabeth Robins Papers, Fales Library, New York University, New York.
283 *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* (23 November 1894), 1.

wide range of ventures, and building valuable social connections, allowed theatre makers to constantly form new relationships and alliances with each other.

Apart from simply using their networks and connections, the creative talents of core ITS members were also frequently relied upon to supply work for the society. Several original ITS plays, such as Shaw's *Widower's Houses*, Moore's *The Strike at Arlingford*, and Leighton's *Thyrza Fleming*, were penned by individuals who had organisational roles in the society. They were also reports that it would stage a piece by Julia Frankau, an ITS committee member, in 1893.[284] Furthermore, nearly all of the ITS's productions of foreign dramas relied upon the committee's skills as translators. Texeria de Mattos translated *The Goldfish* and *Leida* as well as Zola's *The Heirs of Rabourdin* (1894) and *Thérèse Raquin* for the society, the latter of which was touted as being "specially revised for the Independent Theatre by George Moore".[285] Archer's translation of *Ghosts* and *A Visit* both featured on the ITS stage, while his wife Frances was the translator behind the society's production of *The Wild Duck*. Grein's adaptation of de Vos's *A Man's Love* as well as his translation of *Blanchette* were also produced by the society. The ITS was frequently dependent upon the creative expertise and ability of its committee members to sustain its output. Multifaceted careers and talents were integral to the society's successful functioning.

Parallel Societies and Communities

The ITS's reliance on social and professional networks highlights the importance of the many literary and political societies which operated alongside the institution. Some of these societies were theatrical in nature, for instance, the Playgoers' Club, a subscription membership society for prominent theatrical figures. The Playgoers' Club offered an opportunity for a diverse group of theatrical figures to discuss and debate different forms of drama and theatre making.[286] Grein gave a paper to the Playgoers' Club in November 1889 on the potential for establishing a British Théâtre Libre.[287] Furthermore, Aveling read sections of *Ghosts* to the club's members in February 1891, leading to a series of heated and well publicised debates.[288] This controversial debate series "made grand advertisement for the Independent Theatre", which was preparing to perform *Ghosts*.[289] It also led to a "rapid increase of [the Playgoers' Club's] list of members".[290] The activities of one society shaped and influenced the reception of the other. This symbiotic effect was undoubtedly

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[284] *Birmingham Daily Post* (13 February 1893), 5.
[285] *Daily News* (28 September 1891), 4.
[286] The society had a wide range of members and speakers, from individuals heavily involved in the ITS, like Grein and Shaw, to prominent actor-managers, such as Tree and Irving. See Findon, *Playgoers' Club*.
[287] Stokes, *Resistible Theatres*, 134.
[288] Davis, *Ibsen in England*, 108-9.
[289] Findon, *Playgoers' Club,* 28-9.
[290] Ibid., 29.

enhanced by the significant overlap between the two societies' membership and leadership. Grein became the Playgoers' Club's secretary during the late 1890s and subsequently served a term as president of the organisation between 1891-2.[291] During this time, Grein also seemingly used the Playgoers' Club's rooms at the Mona Hotel as an ITS rehearsal space.[292] The multi-disciplinary and wide-ranging activities of ITS members allowed the society to form synergies with other prominent theatrical communities.

Alongside the Playgoers' Club, the 1880s had also seen an "unprecedented flourishing of literary societies".[293] These literary societies played an instrumental role in shaping theatrical networks and culture. As Elizabeth Carolyn Miller notes, many of the individuals involved with the ITS "initially coalesced" around the Shelley Society's 1886 effort to privately stage *The Cenci*.[294] Figures like Shaw and Archer played key roles in bringing the piece to the stage, while prominent members of the theatrical community, such as Jones, joined the society to attend the performance.[295] The performance of *The Cenci* is perhaps the most prominent example of different theatre makers congregating around a literary society. However, there were a myriad of other similar endeavours. Stokes locates the ITS experiment as a culmination of various attempts to establish alternative theatrical organisations in the 1880s: including E. W. Godwin's Pastoral Players and Professor Hubert von Herkomer's musical plays at Bayreuth.[296] Timothy Anderson has, for instance, shown how Alma Murray and Alfred Forman's experimentations with verse drama, and particularly the work of Wagner, "influenced and advanced the activities of fellow bourgeois radicals".[297] Ibsen reading groups and lectures, especially those connected with socialist communities, have also received significant credit for developing early British interest in Scandinavian theatre.[298] A rich and multifaceted theatrical culture, replete with various societies and coteries, was part and parcel the ITS's intellectual, cultural, and social environment.

Some individuals even arranged their other literary and social groups, while at ITS performances. In 1892, poet Ernest Dowson wrote to his friend Victor Plarr to inform him that: "I searched for you at the Independent Theatre the other night, but you were not. Meeting there,

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291 Ibid., 25; 29. Grein would also serve a second term as president between 1899 – 1900.

292 In 1890, the Playgoers' Club secured a room "at the Mona Hotel, Maiden Lane, with the right to use a large room on the floor above on state occasions". Findon, *Playgoers' Club,* 26. Shaw's diaries record multiple instances of the Mona Hotel being used as an ITS rehearsal space. Shaw, *The Diaries*, vol.ii, 719; 872.

293 Angela Dunstan, 'The Shelley Society, Literary Lectures, and the Global Circulation of English Literature and Scholarly Practice', *Modern Language Quarterly,* 75:2 (2014), 279-96, 280.

294 Miller, *Slow Print,* 126.

295 Lee Michael-Berger, 'The Chaste Parricide: Murder, Femininity and the Subversion of Authority in the Reception of the First Performance of Shelley's The Cenci, 1886', *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, 44:2 (2017), 192–211, 198.

296 Stokes, *Resistible Theatres*.

297 Timothy Anderson, 'There's Something about Murray: Victorian Literary Societies and Alfred Forman's Translation of Richard Wagner's Der Ring Des Nibelungen', *Modern Language Quarterly,* 82:3 (2021), 281–313, 286.

298 For an overview of these activities, see Davis, *Socialist Theatre*, chap.1-2.

along with many other persons, the poet Green [sic.], I undertook to send out notices for Rhymers' meeting au Cheshire on Friday next".[299] Including figures such as Wilde, Yeats, Todhunter, Le Gallienne and Lionel Johnson, the Rhymers' Club was a dining club for young male poets. Dowson's letter reveals how different intersecting groups moved fluidly across different social and literary organisations, forming cliques and sub-cultures within wider communities. In a world where writers and intellectuals were members of multiple literary clubs and societies – Shaw's diaries, for instance, attest to the dazzling array of clubs and societies he frequented on almost a daily basis – the ITS was just one of many sites of debate, exchange, and social networking.[300] It is difficult to draw hard and fast distinctions between the ITS and any other societies or formalised groupings since individuals moved so fluidly and frequently between them.

Coteries and communities operating in the same social and intellectual space as the ITS also extended beyond the purely literary. The growing British socialist movement has long been recognised as playing a "complex and manifold" role in facilitating Ibsen's arrival into Britain.[301] Reading groups run by Eleanor Marx gave some of the first ever embodied performances of Ibsen's works in Britain.[302] Shaw's *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* originated as a paper he gave to the Fabian Society as part of a series of after-dinner lectures.[303] Shaw also reported to Robins having seen her Hedda "In company with a large and intelligent contingent of Fabians".[304] The social connections and aligned political interests of the socialists created a space independent from the established theatre managements where new theatrical impulses and ideas could emerge.

Women's groups and other proto-feminist organisations, many of which were intimately related to socialist networks, were another influential community which fed into experimental theatre movements.[305] As Tore Rem observes, "Ibsen's links to female emancipation became his foremost and most enduring political association in Britain" and many of the early supporters of Ibsen in Britain were heavily involved in the women's movement.[306] Women's social clubs had a high overlap with writers and actresses who came to the ITS. Several ITS actresses were members of

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[299] Dowson quoted in Mark Longaker, *Ernest Dowson* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1945), 103.
[300] Shaw, *The Diaries*, vol.i-ii.
[301] Ian Britain, 'A Transplanted Doll's House: Ibsenism, Feminism and Socialism in Late-Victorian and Edwardian England', in *Transformations in Modern European Drama*, ed. by Ian Donaldson (London: Macmillan, 1983), 14-45, 17. See also Davis, *Socialist Theatre*.
[302] Davis, *Ibsen in England*, 38-9.
[303] Miller, *Slow Print*, 128.
[304] Shaw, *Collected Letters*, vol.i, 291.
[305] For an overview of the intersections between socialism and the women's movement, especially as it pertains to early supporters of Ibsen see Britain, 'Transplanted Doll's House'.
[306] Tore Rem, 'British Reception', in *Ibsen in Context*, eds. by Narve Fulsås and Tore Rem (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 175-83, 177.

the Somerville Club, an all-women's organisation with strong links to Fabian circles.[307] For many individuals it was not possible to disaggregate their literary interests from their social interests. Political communities formed a vital means of transmitting new theatrical ideas. The ITS and the communities that formed around it were intimately bound up with the operation and activities of a myriad of different other literary and social movements.

Conclusion

In his 1906 obituary for Ibsen, Shaw reflected upon the Norwegian playwright's entry into the British theatrical scene. After reciting a now familiar list of individuals, such as Robins, Farr, and the Charringtons, whom he commends for their role in developing British theatrical art, Shaw concludes by acknowledging the role of "Mr J.T. Grein's forlorn hope called The Independent Theatre. That forlorn hope, now that the lapse of time has thrown it into its true perspective, is seen to have been the most important theatrical enterprise of its time".[308] Shaw's remarks both reflected and indeed contributed to a type of theatre history which seeks to isolate and laud a group of avant-garde experimenters. Far from stressing the continuities and cross-exchanges between different elements of theatrical culture, Shaw paints the ITS as a maligned, marginalised, and, above all, unique bastion of theatrical progress. This chapter, however, has sought to move away from such hierarchical, segregated, and overly categorised conceptions of late nineteenth-century theatre making. Instead, my analysis has foregrounded the continuity between the society and other pre-existing sites of theatrical debate and production, highlighting the symbiotic structures which allowed drama to advance and develop in this period.

An understanding of this rich, multifaceted interplay which existed between different kinds of theatre and sites of theatrical production conceptually underpins the rest of this thesis. The subsequent chapters will all speak to different aspects of this multifaceted theatrical culture in contrasting and varied ways. The plays examined in Chapter 4, for instance, will particularly strongly evidence the considerable overlap between the concerns, methods, and tropes running between major commercial hits and smaller non-commercial endeavours and indeed the arbitrariness of such categorisations. The analysis in the subsequent chapter exemplifies how earlier feminist and queer communities assimilated, adapted, and innovated trends in contemporary drama to further their own socio-political ends and demonstrates the reach and

[307] Both Mrs Theodore Wright and Charlotte Morland, the latter of whom performed in the ITS's 1893 production of François Coppée's *Le Pater* (1889), frequented the club and performed in several of its productions. Laura Monrós-Gaspar, 'A 'Distinctive' Map of London: Women, Theatre and the Classics in 1893', *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, 47:1 (2020), 26–42.
[308] Shaw, *Shaw and Ibsen*, 240.

longevity of the ITS transnational influences via analysis of Israel Zangwill's *The Melting Pot* (1908). Through providing wide-ranging and detailed illustration of the ways that the networks and impulses outlined above operated, this thesis endeavours to develop and enrich understandings of how and why this fluid and heterogenous theatrical culture functioned.

CHAPTER 2
Master Builders and Jerry Builders: assimilating the visionary into 1890s realist drama

In 1893, Florence Bell's one-act drama *Jerry-Builder, Solness* (1893) was performed as part of an ITS "At Home" event at St George's Hall.[1] As the title suggests, Bell's work parodied Ibsen's *The Master Builder*, reconfiguring the eponymous figure of Halvard Solness as "a builder of suburban houses, whose father and mother have perished in the ruins of one of his 'jerry-built' erections".[2] The text of Bell's drama is no longer extant.[3] However, the humour of the piece seemingly lay in its lampooning of the incongruity between the play's emphatically banal suburban setting and its enigmatic depiction of Solness's hypnotic powers. This burlesque of what *The Morning Post* termed "the peculiar dramatic methods of Ibsen" was claimed by Grein to be in the spirit of "the sincerest flattery".[4] Nonetheless, by inflating the commonplace underpinnings of Ibsen's drama to parodic proportions, *Jerry-builder, Solness* exposes the inherent tensions of a dramatic form in which mundane realism and mysticised symbolism sit side by side.

It is no surprise that *The Master Builder* was the site of much contemporary contestation. Having had his work "mediated through Archer's preference for the well-made play", Ibsen largely made his name in Britain as a pioneer of realist social problem drama.[5] Although there had always been a complex non-naturalistic undercurrent to Ibsen's dramas – evident, for instance, in the mystical "white horses" of *Rosmersholm* or the recurrent imagery of "vine leaves" in *Hedda Gabler* – these more symbolic elements were repeatedly downplayed.[6] Archer's 1891 introduction to *Rosmersholm*, for example, focuses exclusively on the text's "political circumstances", neglecting any explicit acknowledgement of the play's much remarked upon "atmosphere of supernatural suggestion".[7]

However, as the 1890s progressed, Ibsen's writing underwent "a distinct shift […]: from the social to the visionary, from the naturalistic to the symbolic, from the problematical to the psychological, from the demonstrative to the evocative".[8] With its elliptical discussion of "castles

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[1] *Morning Post* (12 July 1893), 7.
[2] *Lyttelton Times* (6 October 1893), 2.
[3] To my knowledge, a copy of the play has not been located. As Davis notes, "It was not submitted for licensing and consequently is not among the Lord Chamberlain's Plays". Davis, *Ibsen in England*, 326.
[4] *Morning Post* (12 July 1893), 7.
[5] Katherine Newey, 'Ibsen in the English Theatre in the Fin De Siècle', in *A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama 1880–2005,* ed. by Mary Luckhurst (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 35-47, 40.
[6] Henrik Ibsen, *Rosmersholm*, trans. by Charles Archer (London: Walter Scott, 1891), 5; Henrik Ibsen, *Hedda Gabler*, trans. by Edmund Gosse (London: William Heinemann, 1890), 142. See Shepherd-Barr, *Early Modernist Theatre* for a detailed discussion of the British avant-garde's response to the more non-naturalistic elements of Ibsen.
[7] William Archer, 'Prefatory Note', in *Rosmersholm* (1891), iii; *Sunday Times* (1 March 1891), 7. It would not be until 1907 in his revised and expanded edition of Ibsen's drama that Archer would extensively address the "pure poetry" of the play. William Archer (ed.), *The Collected Works of Henrik Ibsen: Rosmersholm; The Lady from the Sea,* vol. ix (London: William Heinemann, 1907), xvii.
[8] James McFarlane, 'Introduction', in *Four Major Plays*, by Henrik Ibsen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), vii – xiv, viii.

in the air" and invisible "helpers and the servers", *The Master Builder,* alongside works like *Little Eyolf* and *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896), pushed purely naturalistic readings of the Norwegian's dramas to their limits.[9] As *The Saturday Review* perceptively remarked in December 1896, depiction of "higher psychology" combined with shades of "symbolism", "ha[d] become parts of the bones and marrow of Ibsen".[10] No longer just considered exercises in social realism, Ibsen's dramas were increasingly recognised for their exploration of the "mysterious truths of life".[11]

Ibsen's experimentation with this more impressionistic and evocative style of theatre was part of a wider European impulse towards more metaphysical modes of dramaturgy. In particular, the French symbolist movement was similarly driven by a desire to capture the inexpressible: "The finer sense of things unseen, the deeper meaning of things evident", as Arthur Symons put it in his famous essay on the subject, which also notably includes analysis of Ibsen's "personal kind" of symbolism and impressionism.[12] As scholars such as Frantisek Deak and Shepherd-Barr have shown, the French symbolists' co-option of the Norwegian's works highlights the affinities between Ibsen's drama and this new literary movement.[13] Before the French premiere of *The Master Builder,* the Théâtre de l'Œuvre touted the play as a "masterpiece of symbolism".[14] Furthermore, leading symbolist dramatist Maurice Maeterlinck commended Hilde and Solness as "the first dramatic heroes who feel for an instant that they are living in the atmosphere of the soul".[15] He would later also praise Ibsen's use of what he termed "dialogue of the second degree": "those words that are spoken by the side of the rigid, apparent truth".[16] As these remarks illustrate, Ibsen's plays resonated with the symbolists' desire to create characters who could seemingly access the essence of experience as well as achieve a dramatic form which could reflect and simulate such complex interiority.

Given these commonalities, it is no surprise that "several of [Ibsen's] most astute followers in England […] bec[a]me interested in the French symbolist movement", with prominent examples including Symons, A. B. Walkley, and Henry James.[17] Such interest is reflected in the ITS's repeated attempts to stage works associated with the European symbolists, particularly Maeterlinck. The ITS would have produced Maeterlinck's *L'Intruse* in 1892 but surrendered the rights to Tree at The

[9] Henrik Ibsen, *The Master Builder*, trans. by William Archer and Edmund Gosse (London: William Heinemann, 1893), 191; 139.
[10] *Saturday Review* (19 December 1896), 654-5, 654.
[11] *Daily Chronicle* (24 November 1896), 8.
[12] Arthur Symons, 'The Decadent Movement in Literature', *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (1893), 858-67, 859; 866.
[13] Shepherd-Barr, *Early Modernist Theatre,* esp. 60-3 and 117-28; Frantisek Deak, *Symbolist Theater: The Formation of an Avant-Garde* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), chap.6.
[14] Quoted in Deak (Ibid.), 186.
[15] Maeterlinck quoted in Ibid., 204.
[16] Maurice Maeterlinck, *The Treasures of the Humble*, trans. by Alfred Sutro with introduction by A. B. Walkley (London: George Allen, 1897), 115; 112.
[17] Shepherd-Barr, *Early Modernist Theatre,* xv.

Haymarket Theatre.[18] In 1893, they considered a marionette-based performance of Maeterlinck's *La Princesse Maleine* (1889) with "the lines being spoken at the wings by well-known actors and actresses".[19] Though, as with several putative ITS productions, the society's constant financial difficulties seemingly scuppered this endeavour. Maeterlinck did, however, finally grace the ITS stage in 1895, when the society hosted the Théâtre de l'Œuvre at the Opéra Comique Theatre. For the inaugural production, *Rosmersholm* and Maeterlinck's *L'Intruse* were performed together, followed by later performances of Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1893) and then *Solness, le Constructeur.*[20] Maeterlinck himself was also reportedly in attendance.[21] Performed behind a gauze scrim and with dialogue delivered in plainchant style, these productions reflect the ITS's role within a complex transnational network of experimental theatre makers who were interested in exploring the more metaphysical elements of both Ibsen's and Maeterlinck's works.[22]

Increasing appreciation of these more metaphysical impulses has led to a growing critical emphasis upon Maeterlinck and Ibsen's combined role in the birth of modern European drama. Deak argues that Ibsen's and Maeterlinck's joint "synthesis of realistic dramatic form (verisimilitude of situation, conflict, and character) with metaphysical concepts" provided the vital underpinnings for placing symbolism at the heart of modern drama.[23] A similar trajectory is drawn by John Fletcher and James McFarlane. They argue that Ibsen's "discovery of new potential in dramatic language" to capture the articulatable poetry of existence provided the "origin and impetus" for an intimate, elusive, and evocative form of theatre which finds expression in the work of Maeterlinck, Anton Chekhov and August Strindberg, among others.[24] Moving beyond earlier scholarly appraisals which sought to separate Ibsen's and Maeterlinck's use of symbolism, these critical narratives highlight a dialectical process of multifaceted metaphysical experimentation which was permeating throughout the 1890s theatrical avant-garde culture.[25]

However, these arguments tend to downplay the differences in dramatic texture between Maeterlinck's and Ibsen's work. Many of Maeterlinck's plays, such as *Pelléas et Mélisande*, a story of two doomed lovers set in the medieval kingdom of "Allemonde", utilise mythical or epic

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[18] (A.) Grein, *Story of a Pioneer*, 127.
[19] *Glasgow Herald* (5 June 1893), 9.
[20] William Archer, *The Theatrical 'World' of 1895* (London: Walter Scott, 1896), 104.
[21] *Morning Post* (11 March 1895), 3.
[22] Archer details that the performances of Maeterlinck's work were done with a "film of gauze interposed […] between the audience and the stage", with the dialogue being "intoned" by the actors. It is unclear, however, if this also applied to the performances of Ibsen. Archer, '*World' of 1895*, 109; 110.
[23] Deak, *Symbolist Theater,* 207.
[24] Fletcher and McFarlane, 'Modernist Drama', 499; 503. See also MacFarlane's 'Intimate Theatre: Maeterlinck to Strindberg', 514-26, which appears in the same volume.
[25] For a typical example of the earlier distinctions drawn between Maeterlinck and Ibsen see Katharine Worth, *The Irish drama of Europe from Yeats to Beckett* (London: Athlone Press, 1978). Worth credits Ibsen with inspiring Maeterlinck yet distinguishes Ibsen's naturalistic symbols from Maeterlinck's more mystical and psychological approach.

backdrops, whereas even in those dramas that are grounded in more mundane domestic situations, such as *L'Intruse* and *Intérieur* (1895), "there is a deliberate 'vaguening' or paring down even of these experiments in dramatic minimalism. Characters rarely have names, there is no mention of anything more than the most basic locality (a room, a roadside, a garden), and they have no temporal or geographic specificity".[26] Performed in the distinctive Maeterlinckian style, which was characterised by "an eradication of character psychology" through the use of plainchant and hieratic gesture, characters' realisation of an otherworldly presence lacks all social specificity and is therefore easier to assimilate into a more abstract symbolic mode.[27]

By contrast, all of Ibsen's characters exist within a highly realised social framework. Audiences learn of Hedda's vision of Ejlert Lövborg dancing with "vine leaves in his hair" (142) or Halvard Solness's pledge to create "castles in the air" (191) at the same time that they experience the plays' realistically rendered Norwegian society. Characters' desire to achieve a form of transcendence is inextricably linked to their particularised domestic context and by extension their personal foibles and insecurities. As Olivia Noble Gunn argues, "while *The Intruder* affirms (a longing for access to) the existence of another reality – supposedly beyond human reason yet partially accessible to those with heightened awareness – *The Master Builder* depicts delusions built on the desire for mastery and preservation".[28] The argument that Ibsen's work showed how "the material aspects of everyday life are compatible with symbolism, when they are derived from metaphysical principles", runs into potential difficulty, when the deliberate ambiguity of Ibsen's more metaphysical elements is considered.[29] Driven by egotism and self-interest, Solness may possess transcendent powers and insight, but this possibility is never straightforwardly confirmed.

Indeed, as the ITS's production of *Jerry-Builder, Solness* emphatically highlights, the place of visionary or metaphysical enquiry in realist domestic drama was a constant point of friction in the contemporary critical British reception of Ibsen's work. At the same time that figures like Henry James were lauding the "mingled reality and symbolism" of Ibsen's dramas, anti-Ibsenite reviewers were explicitly questioning the sanity of Ibsen's more visionary characters.[30] Assertions that "Hedda Gabler is manifestly a lunatic of the epileptic class" or "Solness is not to be taken seriously – he is a madman under the microscope" typify the most vitriolic responses.[31] Yet, even among more tempered assessments, the ambiguity and ambivalence of these characterisations was still

[26] Maurice Maeterlinck, *Pélléas et Mélisande* (Bruxelles: P. Lacomblez, 1892), 8; Patrick McGuinness, *Maurice Maeterlinck and the Making of Modern Theatre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 227.
[27] Olivia Noble Gunn, 'The Master Builder's Tragic Quotidian', *Ibsen Studies*, 15 (2015), 40-65, 63.
[28] Ibid., 41.
[29] Deak, *Symbolist Theater,* 207.
[30] *Pall Mall Gazette* (17 February 1893), 1. See Davis, *Ibsen in England*, for a detailed account of this anti-Ibsenite reaction.
[31] *Times* (21 April 1891), 10; *Evening News and Post* (21 February 1893), 1.

repeatedly commented upon. As *The Daily Telegraph* observed before the premiere of *The Master Builder*, "there was a curiosity to see what degree of mental stability, or the reverse, Mr. Waring would suggest in the case of Halvard Solness".[32]

Moreover, it was not simply the characters in Ibsen's work who were the subject of criticism, the wider practice of employing allegorical or symbolist frameworks to his dramas was also critiqued. As the *Spectator* wrote:

> Ibsen's plays, they say, are more or less symbolical, his plots, his characters, with all their horrible incidents and occasionally grotesque absurdities – which to the ignorant and uninitiated seem but the nonsensical dreams of a madman are symbols of eternal truth. Of what are his plays symbolical, and who shall read their hidden meaning. Why, the same might be said of a nursery rhyme, 'Ride a cock-horse to Banbury Cross' might be called a symbolical poem, and a hundred deeply interesting meanings attached to it by many different interpreters.[33]

Whether Ibsen's dramas contained "symbols of eternal truth", or whether the "nonsensical dreams of a madman" were being over-interpreted and allegorised by a self-absorbed section of the theatrical avant-garde, was a hotly debated topic. Multiple reviewers stated, or at least heavily implied, that great symbolic depth was only being found in Ibsen's dramas because admiration for the Norwegian was the current intellectual "vogue".[34]

This question of how the visionary aspects of Ibsen's work should be interpreted was also repeatedly picked up on in contemporary parodies – a key site of contestation and commentary on the Norwegian's work.[35] In F. Anstey's 'Pill-Doctor Herdal' (1893), for example, a prose satire which depicts Hilde Wangel's return to Dr Herdal's household, Hilde exhorts the doctor to add poison to his pills. When Dr Herdal expresses concern that such actions "may perhaps be misunderstood—by the narrow-minded and conventional", Hilde dismisses these anxieties as "so foolish—so irrelevant! As if the whole thing wasn't intended as an allegory!"[36] This implicit parallel between the grandiose visions of Ibsen's characters and the rhetoric of the proponents of his dramas in England teasingly highlights the intellectual delusions of the Ibsen movement. Moving

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[32] *Daily Telegraph* (21 February 1893), 3.
[33] *Spectator* (4 March 1893), 285-6, 286.
[34] W. M., *Hawk* (28 February 1893), 12-13. Reprinted in Michael Egan, *Ibsen: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 283-7, 287.
[35] For detailed discussion of the cultural importance of parodic responses to Ibsen's work see Tracy Davis, 'Spoofing 'The Master': Parodies and Burlesques of Ibsen on the English Stage and in the Popular Press', *Nineteenth Century Theatre Research*, 13 (1985), 87–102; Tore Rem, "Cheerfully dark': Punchian parodies of Ibsen in the early-1890s', in *Anglo-Scandinavian Cross-currents*, eds. by Inga-Stina Ewbank, Olav Lausund and Bjørn Tysdahl (Norwich: Norvik Press, 1999), 215–230.
[36] F. Anstey, *Mr. Punch's Pocket Ibsen; a Collection of Some of the Master's Best-known Dramas Condensed, Revised, and Slightly Rearranged for the Benefit of the Earnest Student* (London: William Heinemann, 1893), 192; 193. F. Anstey was the literary pseudonym of Thomas Anstey Guthrie.

beyond simple critique of Ibsen's dramas, parody thus also engaged with the broader discursive push towards a more metaphysical conception of drama itself.

Yet, these inter-textual commentaries were not exclusively satiric. Ibsen's later plays were also frequently received as self-reflective commentary on his own dramatic method. *The Wild Duck* was considered in some quarters to be the Norwegian playwright "indulg[ing] a little in the salutary pastime of laughing at himself".[37] Similarly, in a critical trope which has persisted to this day, Solness's move from building churches to domestic houses in *The Master Builder* was said to "symbolize Ibsen's abandonment of poetic drama in favour of social plays", with the image of the architect's pursuit of "castles in the air" coming, by extension, to represent his shift towards a more metaphysical mode of drama.[38] Moreover, as *The Times* highlighted, there was "one merry moment" in Robins's 1893 performance of *The Master Builder*: when Hilde interrupts Solness's rambling discussion of the crack in the chimney flu to ask him "what is all this nonsense you are talking", "a burst of laughter suggested that the spectators also desired to be informed on this point".[39] Such anecdotes illustrate how Ibsen's own plays stage moments of doubt and contestation, which meta-theatrically resonate with audiences' own uncertainty and unease as inherent parts of their depiction of the search for higher insight. In ways which extend beyond simple parody, Ibsen's plays illustrate the potential of this new dramatic mode to meta-theatrically discourse upon itself. However, although significant critical attention has been paid to burlesques of Ibsen, the presence of meta-theatrical debates on the place of the visionary in non-satiric British dramas has received almost no scholarly examination.

The rest of this chapter examines depictions of the search for higher insight in realist prose dramas penned by ITS members and associates, with a particular focus on works which feature a contestation surrounding, or inter-theatrical commentary on, such depictions. In doing so, it argues these plays often implicitly ridiculed the Ibsenite figure of the "alienated artist", and by extension a more poetic style of prose drama, only to later undercut this impression by reasserting a more violent, evocative, symbolist mode in their writing.[40] Thus, this chapter seeks to show how the ITS and its associates not only pushed back against the critiques of Ibsen's more visionary characters, but simultaneously exploited such debates to expand the formal possibilities of what highly realised social dramas could entail.

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[37] *Saturday Review* (28 February 1891), 247.

[38] James MacFarlane, 'Introduction', in *The Oxford Ibsen*, vol.vii (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 1-24, 24. For an example of the self-reflexive nature of *The Master Builder*'s architectural imagery being discussed in the contemporary British press see *Times* (21 February 1893), 12.

[39] Ibid. (*Times*).

[40] Inga-stina Ewbank, 'The Last Plays', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*, ed. by James McFarlane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 126-54, 127.

Before commencing this analysis, however, it is necessary to make a comment on terminology. It is tempting to try to align these plays with one of the various recognised historical artistic traditions. However, the issues that modern scholarship has had ascribing generic labels to the more non-naturalistic elements of figures like Ibsen, and his plays' stubborn "resistance to categorical interpretation", saliently illustrates the difficulty of such endeavours.[41] Indeed, Symons's retitling of his famous essay on decadence to *The Symbolist Movement in Literature,* when he published it in expanded monograph form, highlights how even contemporary writers grappled with fully articulating the artistic impulses of which they were a part.[42] Consequently, this chapter purposefully avoids attempting to ascribe generic categories to the plays under discussion. Instead, its analysis seeks to challenge distinctions between poetic and naturalistic drama, symbolism and the problem play, metaphysical drama and social realism – and indeed show how dramas staged meta-theatrical debates and encounters with this very question of the relation between them.

John Todhunter's *The Black Cat* (1893)

One of the first London-based dramatists to engage extensively with the symbolist aspects of Ibsen's dramas was Dublin-born playwright, poet, and literary scholar, Dr John Todhunter. A rather neglected figure in late-nineteenth-century literary studies, the only full-scale examination of Todhunter's work is James Moriarty's 970-page unpublished doctoral thesis *John Todhunter: Child of The Coming Century* (1979).[43] This work positions Todhunter as an undervalued participant in late-nineteenth-century experimental literary networks, emphasising his relationship with a broad range of prominent Romantic as well as proto-modernist thinkers and writers in both Britain and Ireland.[44] The only other critical examinations of Todhunter's work are brief analyses in articles or chapters concerning Irish drama of the period, which predominantly explore the writer's relation to the Irish literary revival and Yeats, an early family friend of the Todhunters'.[45]

Todhunter's first theatrical experiments took the form of poetic dramas. Having received much acclaim for his drama *Helena in Troas* (1886), the standout success of the 1880s experimental Greek play series, Todhunter wrote and produced several short plays for audiences mainly comprised of

[41] Elizabeth Wright, 'Re-Interpreting the Master Builder: A Response to J. S. Hurst', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 46:3 (2010), 297-309, 297.
[42] Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (London: William Heinemann, 1899).
[43] David Moriarty, *John Todhunter: Child of the Coming Century* (PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin – Madison, 1979).
[44] The distinction between romantics and proto-modernists is Moriarty's own. The argument of my thesis seeks somewhat to question rather than reinforce this dichotomy and therefore I am wary to rely on such categorisations.
[45] Other critical discussions of Todhunter's work include Christina Hunt Mahony, 'The Shadowy Waters as Drama and John Todhunter's Isolt of Ireland', *Yeats: An Annual of Critical and Textual Studies*, 10:1 (1992), 296-316; Susan Harris Cannon, *Irish Drama and the Other Revolutions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

his Bohemian friends.[46] In 1889, his one-act drama *A Sicilian Idyll* (1889) was performed, largely by amateur actors, in the Bedford Park Clubhouse. The play was later re-staged at the Vaudeville Theatre in conjunction with the premiere of Todhunter's *The Poison Flower* (1891) in 1891, with Farr, a fellow member of the Golden Dawn occult group, taking the lead role in both productions. These plays, both written in blank verse, were marked by a blending of poetry, music, and dance.[47] Todhunter encountered many members of the growing Ibsen movement through this interest in poetic drama. In 1891, he stage-managed Farr's production of *Rosmersholm* at the Vaudeville Theatre.[48] He then also worked on the attempted ITS/ Shelley Society co-production of *The Cenci* which brought him into close contact with Grein.[49]

Todhunter's increasing involvement in Ibsenite circles is reflected in his first modern prose drama *The Black Cat*, which was staged at the Opéra Comique Theatre as part of the ITS's 1893 season. The play centres upon the relationship between Bohemian painter Arthur Denham and his much put-upon wife Constance. Arthur commences a flirtation with Constance's childhood friend and serial divorcée Blanche Tremaine, whom he is employing as a sitter. Once Constance discovers the dalliance, she contemplates leaving. However, rather than abandon her marriage, she poisons herself in Arthur's studio, and the play concludes with Arthur and Blanche discovering her body.

Current criticism largely focuses on *The Black Cat*'s relationship to Ibsen. As *The Athenaeum* wrote, "a piece more strongly imbued with the spirit of Ibsen it would be difficult to indicate."[50] This debt to Ibsen can partially be construed as the play's realist aesthetic and focus on transgressive female sexuality. Todhunter's preface to the published play highlights how many of his critics objected to "Ibsenism, Dodoism, Sarah-Grandism, Keynotism, rampant on the English stage!" (viii). However, there is also another, if less acknowledged, set of Ibsenite influences which were discernible to a contemporary audience. *The Theatre*, for instance, declared:

> this is just the story of Beata, Rebecca West, and Rosmer of "Rosmersholm," adapted, modernised […] "The Black Cat" jumps with the "White Horses" of Rosmersholm, and when the tragic end arrives we find ourselves groping in a similar mist of bewilderment.[51]

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[46] See W.B. Yeats's review of the performance for detailed description of "the artistic and literary people" he observed at Todhunter's *A Sicilian Idyll.* W. B. Yeats, 'A Sicilian Idyll — Dr. Todhunter's New Play — a New Departure in Dramatic Representation' (1899), in *Letters to the New Island: A New Edition,* eds. by George Bornstein and Hugh Witemeyer (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), 98-101, 98.
[47] Moriarty, *Coming Century*, chap.9.
[48] Ibid., 491-2.
[49] Ibid., 600. Todhunter was the President of the Shelley Society and had been heavily involved in the society's first private performance of *The Cenci* in 1886.
[50] *Athenaeum* (16 December 893), 857.
[51] *Theatre* (1 January 1894), 51-53, 51.

By emphasising *The Black Cat*'s parallels to *Rosmersholm*, specifically Ibsen's "white horses" and general obscurity, the link most strongly being forged to Ibsen is not in *The Black Cat*'s staging of social problems but rather in its vague and bewildering symbolist undercurrents. A strong thread of social realism interlaced with a complex poetic element was also seemingly an integral part of the play's borrowing from Ibsen.

However, rather than simply straightforwardly adopting this hybrid dramatic mode, Todhunter's play repeatedly foregrounds the incongruous nature of romantic symbolism in realist drama. In *The Black Cat*'s opening scene, the Denhams' daughter, Undine, "make[s] a libation to Demeter" (3), playfully copying some of the Hellenist images she has observed in her father's studio. Wrapped in a piece of discarded embroidery, she "take[s] some of father's painting water—though it's rather black-and-whity" (3) to toast the Greek deity. As *The Atheneum* commented, "a kind of resemblance between Todhunter and Ibsen extends to the introduction of a little neo-paganism; and the 'vine leaves in the hair' of Hedda may be set against the libation to Demeter spilt by the childish hands of Undine".[52] Yet, far from being a straightforward parallel, the low comedic mode in which Undine evokes these neo-classical elements challenges their dramatic veneration much in the manner of a contemporary burlesque – J. M. Barrie's *Ibsen's Ghosts* (1981), for instance, made light work of Hedda's fascination with "vine leaves in your hair".[53] From the outset, the world of *The Black Cat* abounds with romantic and classical symbols, yet any simplistic belief in their non-mimetic function and meaning is immediately put under stress.

These tensions are then furthered by the introduction of Constance, who frequently undercuts her husband's artistic musings with blunt pragmatism:

> **Denham:** There are only three possible women in the world, the Divine Mistress —
> **Mrs. Denham**: And the "Divine Matron"—I have heard this sickening cant before.
> **Denham:** Cant? Philosophy! (19)

Constance's constant complaint that her husband's witty or literary pronouncements are nothing but "Phrases, phrases, always phrases!" (11) raises the thorny issue of whether Denham's more abstract mode of seeing the world simply consists of spouting meaningless literary clichés. An artistic man being constrained by his unimaginative and materialistic wife was a familiar contemporary trope: see for instance, the depiction of "unpractical artist" Edwin Reardon and his avaricious wife Amy in George Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891).[54] However, in a very similar vein

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[52] *Athenaeum* (16 December 893), 857.
[53] J. M. Barrie, *Ibsen's Ghosts or, Toole Up-to-Date* (1891). Reprinted in *The Broadview Anthology of Nineteenth-century British Performance*, ed. by Tracy C. Davis (London: Broadview, 2012), 557-76, 572.
[54] George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, ed. by Katherine Mullin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 8.

to Ibsen's use of "Gina's practicality and simplicity to deflate the posturing of Hjalmar and Gregers" in *The Wild Duck*, Todhunter appears to be utilising this trope to suggest that Denham's artistic viewpoint is highly divorced from reality.[55]

Indeed, as underscored by the striking similarity of the plays' titles, Todhunter creates an extended inter-theatrical parallel to *The Wild Duck* in order to further problematise *The Black Cat*'s depiction of the visionary artist. Not merely content with replicating the self-absorbed artistic husband, pragmatic wife, and young daughter which constitute Ibsen's Edkal family trio, Todhunter also gives the Denhams a mysterious family pet: the eponymous black cat. Constance wishes to dispose of the creature, which, in the first act, results in a conversation about the cat's future:

> **Mrs. Tremaine**: But surely you're not going to kill a black cat? It is awfully unlucky.
> […]
> **Denham**: Constance is not superstitious. It is her worst fault. A little superstition gives colour to life. (42)

The explicit emphasis of the superstitious element of the black cat, and hence its function of an ill-omen or portent, clashes with its representation as a simple domestic animal. Much like how the wild duck becomes "the vehicle for the ridiculous duck-symbolism of Gregers, for whom all surface reality is a system of transcendental referents", Denham imbues this animal with great symbolic weight.[56] However, unlike Ibsen's wild duck, which is at least given a somewhat unusual and significant backstory through its involvement in a hunting incident, there is something rather hackneyed about finding portentous significance in a black cat. Stuck in the realm of clichés, the credibility of Denham's critiques of Constance, and by extension the markedly Ibsenite form of symbolism he adopts, becomes strained.

Todhunter further ties this clash of perspectives to contemporary theatrical and literary debates through the character of Cyril Vane. Vane, a minor poet and aesthete, prides himself on producing work which is unintelligible: "Meaning? It is a piece of *mu*-sic, in which I have skilfully e-*lu*-ded all *meaning*" ([emphasis in original], 29). This doctrine of incomprehensibility he then applies to Denham's painting:

> Will you never learn to be an *artist*, Denham? The modern picture should be a painted quatrain, with colours for words—words which say nothing, because everything has been said, but which *suggest* all that has been felt and dreamed. Art is the initiation into a mood, a mystery—

[55] Joan Templeton, 'Sense and Sensibility: Women and Men in *Vildanden*', *Scandinavian Studies*, 63:4 (1991), 415-31, 420.
[56] Errol Durbach, *Ibsen the Romantic: Analogues of Paradise in the Later Plays* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 93.

> a sphinx whose riddle every one [sic.] can answer, yet no one understand. ([emphasis in original], 31).

Modern art's definition as mystery, mood, and suggestion, an obvious allusion to the "revolt from ready-made impressions and conclusions" associated with the symbolist school, offers a new vision of the artistic future – one that is significantly more abstract and impressionistic than Denham's current work.[57]

Vane is a figure of gentle ridicule. His extreme literary precocity and exaggerated dandiness has led several critics to identify him as a caricature of Wilde.[58] Nonetheless, Vane's artistic opinions are still perceived as valuable. Heeding the poet's words, Denham "*makes a long cut across"* (32) his latest portrait and declares instead his intention to produce a new modern masterpiece. It, however, remains unclear whether such transcendent artistry is achievable or whether Denham is simply moving from one conceited artistic fad to another.

The extent of Denham's self-absorbed artistic pretensions become more apparent in the play's second act, when he starts painting Mrs Tremaine for his new portrait. His positioning of Mrs Tremaine on a "throne" in his studio while he reads her love poetry conveys his extreme idealisation of her as a romantic figure. Furthermore, his use of conspicuously meta-theatrical language, "I wonder, if you and I were put on the stage, what they would say of us" (57), draws attention to the fact that he is theatricalising his own existence.

The superficiality of Denham's romantic declarations is quickly exposed when Mrs Tremaine suddenly reciprocates the artist's affections. In response, Denham immediately adopts the role of a star-crossed lover: "Oh, it is the eternal tragedy! We must renounce" (65). The speed with which Denham switches between passionate pleas to woeful renunciation undercuts the authenticity of his earlier actions. Denham possesses all the theatrical signs of passion but nothing of what it actually signifies, seemingly liking the grandeur of being a passionate, suffering artist more than the thing itself. As Mrs Tremaine emphasises through her highly-metatheatrical last words of this scene, "Excuse me, but our little comedy is played out. I am out of the story. (*Exit.*)", she has merely been a theatrical part in Denham's egotistical self-staging – a "toy of your husband's imagination" (68) as she tells Constance. Much like Hjalmar Ekdal who "embodies a narcissistic

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[57] Symons, 'Decadent Movement', 859.

[58] Moriarty, *Coming Century*, 69; Laurence Senelick, 'The Homosexual as Villain and Victim in Fin-De-Siècle Drama', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 4:2 (1993), 201-29, 221. Clement Scott notably described Vane as a figure drawn from "the effeminate wearers of the blue-green button-hole", an obvious allusion to the Wilde and his green carnation wearing circles of aesthetes. *Daily Telegraph* (9 December 1893), 3. The name also echoes that of Sybil Vane in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890).

and self-pitying theatricality", Denham is shown to be not a visionary artist but rather a self-glorifying egotist who seeks to make melodramatic struggles out of the mundanities of life.[59]

However, as audiences familiar with *The Wild Duck* would have been aware, there is still the potential for Denham to genuinely experience tragedy. This possibility is raised, when Undine, in an act that clearly parallels Hedvig Ekdal's death, attempts suicide, after witnessing her family's discord. The Denhams learn that "the mite was looking for the Thames, to drown herself" (83) but this crisis was adverted by the intervention of family friend Mr Fitzgerald.[60] Fitzgerald recounts how Undine fled: "with a little white scared face, and no hat on her—and her curls flying behind her—an'—an'—'pon my word, I could hardly stop her But we met a little girl with a goat, an' we stroked the goat—eh, stroked the goat—an' that comforted her a bit" (84). In one breath, Fitzgerald offers an image of a terrible tragic fate, but then comically undercuts it with the mundane reality of Undine's childish interest in animals. Having been led to expect a child tragically taking their own life, audiences are confronted with a far more banal situation.

This episode consequently appears designed to ridicule audiences' expectation of an Ibsenite tragedy. Denham declares the whole event "was rather a ghastly bit of tragi-comedy" (84), a term which was frequently applied to *The Wild Duck* – Shaw, for instance, pronounced the play "a tragi-comic slaughtering of sham Ibsenism"– subtly highlighting how the precedent established by Ibsen's work has seemingly been repudiated.[61] This parallel is further inter-theatrically reinforced by Arthur's affectionate pronouncement of Undine as a "Poor little ugly duck!" (88), as she rests from her exertions. Thus, halfway through the final act, the play rejects the symbolistic and tragic mode, moving seemingly towards a more naturalistic resolution. However, here it is not just "sham Ibsenism" that has been rejected, but rather the entire concept of a more expansive mode of realist drama that is being mocked and deflated.

Nonetheless, the play still concludes tragically with Mrs Denham's suicide. Preceded by a lengthy soliloquy, a device that Archer notably advised Todhunter to "eschew" in any further dramatic writing, the act is highly stylised: "Undine's little handkerchief, still wet with her tears—the last human thing on the brink of the abyss […] (*Kisses it, and thrusts it into her bosom*)" (92).[62] Furthermore, Constance's references to the Black Cat, "The Black Cat had a friend; I am not so fortunate" (92), now give portentous significance to the symbols that the audience has previously been encouraged to dismiss as frauds. As Todhunter's close friend T.W. Rolleston noted, the play

[59] Toril Moi, '"It was as if he meant something different from what he said: all the time": Language, Metaphysics, and the Everyday in "the Wild Duck"', *New Literary History*, 33:4 (2002), 655-86, 664.
[60] Fitzgerald's Christian name is never mentioned in the text.
[61] George Bernard Shaw, *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (London: Walter Scott, 1891), 96.
[62] Archer, *Theatrical World (1893),* 287.

"is distinctly an Ibsenite piece […] in its irony, its symbolism, in the bitter quality of its tragic end and in the way in which the tragedy is gradually developed through acts and conversations of the most everyday character".[63] A noticeable aesthetic departure from the rest of the play, the concluding scene suddenly turns towards a more impressionistic dramatic style.

This sense of a new artistic form finally being achieved is ironically crystalised in the play's final moments. After Constance imbibes the poison, she "*Staggers behind the screen, and throws herself on the couch, where she is hidden from the audience*" (93). Her body is then discovered by Arthur and Mrs Tremaine, when the former declares that he "seem[s] to feel her presence here" (96) and "*looks behind the screen, then thrusts it aside, showing Mrs. Denham lying dead on the couch*" (96). A striking parallel to Tesman pulling back the curtains to find his own wife lying dead by suicide, this moment possesses much of the "chic morbidity" and perverse staginess which had characterised the scene in Robins's production of *Hedda Gabler*.[64] Revealed by an artist in the midst of an artist's studio, Constance's body is framed as a piece of beautiful yet grotesque art. With no small amount of irony, Constance's body becomes the modern artistic masterpiece – "the right kind of ugliness" (24) – that her husband could never quite achieve.

This conclusion left critics bewildered. Yet, defending the denouement, Todhunter declared that "the heroine, […] might have been allowed to live, if that last symbolic pageantry had not had its dramatic fitness" (vi). By framing Constance's death as a piece of grotesque art, Todhunter offers a violent and uncomfortable demonstration of what the "symbolic pageantry" of modern art truly entails. Indeed, Denham's self-pitying exclamation that "Constance! I meant to have kept you from all the thorns of life! It was fate! It was fate!" (97), a striking parallel to Hjalmar's curses at the end of *The Wild Duck*, "(*[…] cries, upwards*.) O thou above – ! If thou be indeed! Why hast thou done this thing to me!", encapsulates that he still cannot grasp the true forces of the universe at play.[65] Through a complex inter-theatrical commentary on Ibsen's mode of drama, Todhunter has shown that there is a form of transcendent modern artistry, but this form of higher expression cannot be accessed by egotists and conventional artists like Denham. Thus, he pushes back against the claims of delusionality which had been levied against the Ibsen movement, while simultaneously assimilating more non-naturalistic undercurrents into his drama.

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[63] T. W. Rolleston, 'Introduction', in *From the Land of Dreams*, by John Todhunter (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1918), xi-xxii, xx.

[64] Joel H. Kaplan and Sheila Stowell, *Theatre and Fashion: Oscar Wilde to the Suffragettes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 48; Kirsten Shepherd-Barr, 'Against Interpretation?: Hedda and the Performing Self', in *Ibsen's Hedda Gabler: Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. by Kristin Gjesdal (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 174-93.

[65] Henrik Ibsen, *The Wild Duck*, trans. by Frances Archer, ed. by William Archer (London: Walter Scott, 1905), 250.

Some modern critics paint *The Black Cat* as a failure.[66] However, contemporary accounts suggest that it was well-received. Grein's wife stresses that despite the play's flaws it was widely acknowledged that there was "a brilliance in the writing", while Archer similarly declared that "Dr Todhunter's play is unquestionably very able and even brilliant".[67] Fellow ITS dramatists Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper even requested a copy of the script to study in order to help improve their own playwriting.[68] Indeed, in the preface to the printed play, Todhunter terms *The Black Cat* "a certain *succès d'estime"* (v) and recounts how his play apparently attracted the interest of several commercial managers, who "want[ed] to see the play, and ask[ed] why I had not shown it to them before" (vii). Surviving letters from prominent commercial managers, such as Wyndham, asking "to read 'The Black Cat' itself" illustrate how this claim was more than mere promotional puffery.[69]

One facet of this relative success to note, though, is that *The Black Cat*, in many respects, resembles a contemporary social comedy. *The Theatre* described the drama as "very brightly, at points brilliantly, written – in the manner of Mr. Oscar Wilde – the earlier acts are clever and amusing in the extreme".[70] The primary focus for criticism of the play was its tragic final act and abandonment of the comedic mode. Alice Grein, for instance, terms the ending "the great fault of the play", noting that it was disliked for introducing "extremes in his situations" and no longer "mov[ing] the characters simply and naturally along the course of the story".[71] If anything, in some quarters, the play's positive reception seems to have been in spite of its more symbolist elements and metaphysical approach, not because of them. In the early 1890s, plays which offered a more symbolistic or metaphysical conception of the dramatic form could only seemingly succeed if these elements were mixed with a heavy dose of humour and social comedy.

George Bernard Shaw's *Candida* (c.1894)

This issue of expanding the possibilities of the dramatic form, while also retaining comprehensibility, and by extension commercial viability, was also of particular concern to Shaw – a playwright whom Moriarty argues that Todhunter was attempting to emulate in *The Black Cat*.[72] Shaw's early relationship with the ITS, as well as the 1890s theatrical avant-garde more broadly, is

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[66] Josephine Johnson, *Florence Farr: Bernard Shaw's New Woman* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1975), 60.
[67] (A.) Grein, *Story of a Pioneer,* 136; William Archer, *The Theatrical 'World' for 1893* (London: Walter Scott, 1894), 285.
[68] Bradley and Cooper record having received the script from Todhunter, presumably at their own behest. Michael Field, 'Works and Days' (1894), Add MS 46782, 14v. Michael Field Collection, British Library, London.
[69] Letter from Charles Wyndham to John Todhunter (13 December 1893). MS 202/1/563-564. John Todhunter Collection, Special Collections, University of Reading, Reading.
[70] *Theatre* (1 January 1894), 51-53, 52.
[71] (A.) Grein, *Story of a Pioneer*, 136.
[72] Moriarty, *Coming Century*, 540.

well documented.[73] Shaw's first play *Widowers' Houses* premiered at the Royalty Theatre as part of the ITS's 1892 season. Critics often see this production as the ITS's only significant contribution to the development of native drama. Raby, for instance, pronounces that "apart from serving to galvanize Shaw into completing *Widowers' Houses*, Grein's program was unsuccessful".[74] In no small part thanks to Shaw's own aggressive self-promotion and previously discussed role in shaping the theatre history of this period, the Irishman's particular brand of realist social drama is seen largely to epitomise the early 1890s new drama movement.

However, as highlighted by *Arms and the Man* (1894) replacing Todhunter's *A Comedy of Sighs* on the bill at the Avenue Theatre, Shaw's work did not possess the same level of audience alienating obscurity as many other theatrical experiments. *Arms and the Man* was played alongside Yeats's *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894) at the Avenue. Farr recollects that Yeats's play "succeeded very well at first, but it ceased to be understood as soon as Mr. Bernard Shaw's extravaganza, 'Arms and the Man,' which filled up the rest of the bill, began to draw the ordinary kind of fashionable audience".[75] Although not actually commercially successful – *Arms and the Man* lost approximately £2000 pounds – Shaw was clearly beginning to attract a larger audience than many of his fellow ITS or Avenue experimenters by the mid-1890s.[76]

This potential for commercial success and widespread public acclaim is integral to understanding the production history of *Candida.* The play is one of Shaw's most successful works. In an often-quoted remark, the success of Arnold Daly's American production of the play led to "an outbreak of Candidamania" in New York in 1904.[77] The play was also performed multiple times in Britain in the early 1900s by the Stage Society and the Vedrenne-Barker management at the Royal Court Theatre, among others.[78] However, *Candida* was far from an instantaneous success. Shaw wrote the work in 1894 and it initially struggled to find a place in the mainstream commercial market. He read the play to multiple prominent West End managers including Alexander, Waller, and Wyndham, the latter of whom declared "that it would be twenty-five years before the London stage was ready for such a play".[79]

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[73] For a detailed overview of Shaw's early dramatic career, see Maurice Valency, *The Cart and the Trumpet: The Plays of George Bernard Shaw* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).
[74] Raby, 'Theatre of the 1890s', 185.
[75] *Freeman's Journal* (4 April 1899), 5.
[76] William Archer, *The Old Drama and the New: an Essay in Re-Valuation* (Massachusetts: Small, Maynard and company, 1923), 338-339.
[77] Shaw, *Collected Letters, vol.i,* 424.
[78] The Stage Society performed *Candida* in July 1901. The Royal Court gave the first public performance of the play in April 1904. The Vedrenne–Barker management would frequently revive the play between 1904-7.
[79] Valency, *Cart and the Trumpet*, 118.

Shaw, however, was convinced that the work was not "outside the scope of ordinary theatres".[80] He refused to let the ITS stage the work unless they mounted it with a production budget of £1000, a sum far beyond the means of the society.[81] His hope was that the ITS would instead produce *Mrs Warren's Profession*, a play which never could have achieved commercial success due to its frank depiction of prostitution. Shaw therefore offered *Candida* to Richard Mansfield, for production in America, and he suggested that the actor engage Janet Achurch for the title role, having written the part with her in mind.[82] The production, however, was never fully mounted and failed to provide Mansfield with the American hit he desired.

Ultimately, when it became apparent that *Candida* would not be taken up by a commercial management, Shaw relented and allowed the Charringtons the rights to the work. Under the banner of "The Independent Theatre Company", the pair premiered the play at the Her Majesty's Theatre in Aberdeen in 1897, followed by a provincial tour in which *Candida* was played alongside *A Doll's House*.[83] *Candida* is not however typically included in the overviews of ITS productions since many theatre historians consider the cessation of London-based activities to have effectively constituted the society's conclusion.[84]

Current criticism largely focuses on the play's gender politics.[85] Shaw's often quoted remark that the play was written as "a counterblast to Ibsen's Doll's House, showing that in the real typical doll's house, it is the man who is the doll" dominates recent readings of the play, which seek to explore it from a feminist perspective.[86] It is, however, worth noting that Shaw made this pronouncement several decades after the play's conception, and is therefore potentially significantly distanced from his intentions at the time. By contrast, criticism from the mid-twentieth century tends to offer a wider assessment of the possible Ibsen-esque influences observable in *Candida*, particularly its more symbolist elements. James Huneker suggests that Shaw's work is a re-fashioning of the final act of Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea* (1888), whereas Jacob Adler has argued that *The Wild Duck* is the play that "most closely parallels *Candida* in its realist-

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[80] Shaw, *Collected Letters*, vol.i, 613.
[81] Eltis, 'Introduction', xxxvi.
[82] Valency, *Cart and the Trumpet*, 118.
[83] *Evening Telegraph* (6 August 1897), 1. This was not the first English performance of the play. A copyright performance had been held in received its copyrighting performance at the South Shields Theater Royal in March 1895. Ibid., 119.
[84] For a characteristic omission see Woodfield, *Theatre in Transition, 180.*
[85] See, for instance, Mary Christian, '"Not a Play": Redefining Theater and Reforming Marriage in Candida', *SHAW: The Journal of Bernard Shaw Studies*, 35:2 (2015), 238-253; Naghmeh Varghaiyan, 'To Leave, Or Not to Leave: That is the Problem in A Doll's House and Candida', *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 6:3 (2015), 118-122. A notable exception to this trend is Eltis, 'Introduction'.
[86] Shaw quoted in Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson, *Theatrical Companion to Shaw; a Pictorial Record of the First Performances of the Plays of George Bernard Shaw* (London: Rockliff, 1955), 43.

idealist-Philistine relationships".[87] In particular, much of this early criticism notes *The Master Builder* as a possible parallel for *Candida*. Louis Crompton suggests that Ibsen's play revealed to Shaw how he "might combine mundane surface verisimilitude with a subtle and elaborate poetic symbolism".[88] Maurice Valency echoes these observations. He contends that the drama's "mystical aura […] with its ambiguities, its secrets, and its vague suggestions" gives *Candida* arguable claim to being "the first symbolist play in England".[89] On the level of both form and content, there is clearly a strong non-naturalistic undercurrent to the drama.

Much like *The Black Cat*, *Candida* depicts male figures who view the world through a highly conventionalised poetic lens. In the play's opening scene, Christian socialist preacher James Morell rhapsodises about his marriage with quasi-religious fervour: "a foretaste of what will be best in the Kingdom of Heaven we are trying to establish on earth".[90] Shaw, however, immediately highlights the unrealistic element of these descriptions through the character of Proserpine (Prossy) Garnett, Morell's secretary. Prossy frequently draws attention to how Morell's rhetoric constructs an overly idealised image of Candida: "a perfectly commonplace woman raved about in that absurd manner merely because she's got good hair, and a tolerable figure" (86). Prossy's comments highlight how the rhetoric surrounding Candida imbues her with a divine quality which is not actually inherent to her character. This sentiment is even more apparent in deleted lines from Shaw's first full draft of the play, "One would think she was the Queen of Heaven herself. He is thinking of her half the time when he imagines that he is meditating on the virtues of Our Blessed Lady".[91] Prossy herself declares "I have no feeling against [Candida]. She's very nice, very good-hearted: I'm very fond of her and *can appreciate her real qualities* far better than any man can" ([emphasis mine], 86). Rather than being a tool of higher understanding, Prossy suggests that rhetoric obscures rather than aids judgement.

This issue is then exacerbated when the young poet Eugene Marchbanks arrives. In the opening act, Morrell praises the visionary potential of Marchbanks's poetry:

> "You will be one of the makers of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth; and—who knows?—you may be a pioneer and *master builder* where I am only a humble journeyman; for don't think, my boy, that I cannot see in you, young as you are, promise of higher powers than I can ever pretend to. I well know that it is in the poet that the holy spirit of man—the god within him—is most godlike." ([emphasis mine] 104)

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[87] James Huneker*, Iconoclasts: A Book of Dramatists* (New York: Scribners, 1905), 246; Jacob H. Adler, 'Ibsen, Shaw, and "Candida"', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 59:1 (1960), 50-58, 50.
[88] Louis Crompton, *Shaw the Dramatist* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), 30.
[89] Valency, *Cart and the Trumpet,* 132.
[90] George Bernard Shaw, *Plays: pleasant and unpleasant*, vol.ii (London: Constable, 1898), 85.
[91] Quoted in George Bernard Shaw, *Mrs Warren's Profession, Candida, and You Never Can Tell*, ed. by Sos Eltis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 305.

Ostensibly, his words exalt the poet's power and perceptiveness. Yet, as underlined by the subtle inter-textual reference to *The Master Builder,* with its attendant connotations of egotism and delusion, there is a latent sense that all this rhetoric is mere aggrandisement. Aside from this being Morell's attempt to dissuade another man from affections towards his wife, this commendation is incongruous with the seemingly young and naïve figure of Marchbanks, who is comically reported to have rendered himself almost destitute because he did not know he was able to advance "a seven day bill for £55" (96). A conspicuously oratorical speech, replete with heavy religious imagery and delivered "*with great artistic beauty*" (103), these words appear more a performance piece for Morell, than any particular expression of great insight.

In response, Marchbanks lambasts the preacher's rhetoric for its detachment from reality:

> **MARCHBANKS**: […] A woman, with a great soul, craving for reality, truth, freedom, and being fed on metaphors, sermons, stale perorations, mere rhetoric. Do you think a woman's soul can live on your talent for preaching?
> **MORELL**: (*Stung*). Marchbanks: you make it hard for me to control myself. My talent is like yours insofar as it has any real worth at all. It is the gift of finding words for divine truth.
> **MARCHBANKS**: It's the gift of the gab, nothing more and nothing less. What has your knack of fine talking to do with the truth, any more than playing the organ has? (105)

Here, Marchbanks explicitly raises the issue of conventionalised rhetoric being little more than empty signifiers. Morrell's claim to have "the gift of finding words for divine truth" (105) appears overblown and self-aggrandising.

It is not, however, just the preacher's rhetoric that Shaw depicts as stale and clichéd: Marchbanks's own identity as a poet is also highly conventionalised. As A. B. Walkley remarked*,* "[w]e know the poet, with some traits borrowed from Shelley and others from DeQuincey".[92] Shaw notably admitted that he "had in mind DeQuincey's account of his adolescence in his Confessions" when initially outlining the play.[93] Furthermore, as one reviewer noted of the 1898 ITS production in Manchester, the actor playing Marchbanks was "Got up to look like Shelley".[94] Marchbanks's poetic rhetoric is similarly strongly stereotyped. His desire that Candida should be given "not a scrubbing brush, but a boat—a tiny shallop to sail away in, far from the world" (118) is, for instance, highly conventionalised. Crompton, pronounces the image Pre-Raphaelite-esque, noting particular similarities with "the romantic escapism of Morris's The Earthly Paradise", whereas one contemporary reviewer likened it to an "old-fashioned description of an Alma-

[92] A. B. Walkley, *Drama and Life* (London: Methuen & Co., 1907), 216.
[93] Shaw quoted in Arthur Nethercot, 'Who Was Eugene Marchbanks?', *The Shaw Review*, 15:1 (1972), 2–20, 8.
[94] *Manchester Guardian* (15 March 1898), 8.

Tadema".[95] Presented as a pastiche of various poetic tropes, Shaw depicts Marchbanks, much like Morell, as a character stuck in a form of constant emulation.

Reliance on an outmoded poetic identity serves to obscure Marchbanks's true character. As a perceptive reviewer of *Plays Unpleasant* remarked, Marchbanks's "poetical phraseology" leaves audiences highly unsure of his authentic self.[96] Indeed, it is notable that when the young poet attempts to profess his love to Candida, she agrees only so long: "as it is your real self that speaks, and not a mere attitude—a gallant attitude, or a wicked attitude, or even a poetic attitude." (133). Candida's insistence on Marchbanks's rejection of stylised attitudes – the poet currently being positioned in a conventional melodramatic gesture of supplication, "*on his knees, with his hands clasped and his arms on her lap*" (133), a pose which is conspicuously at odds with the more naturalistic acting style of early Shavian realism – emphasises how he is a man trapped in outdated theatrical and literary modes. Here, in her vast domestic wisdom, Candida knows that expression through traditional literary formulations only leads to inauthenticity rather than true insight. The fact that when Morell bursts in at the end of this scene, he cannot make head or tail of what has happened because Marchbanks is just talking in poetic clichés, claiming that Candida "became an angel; and there was a flaming sword that turned every way" (135), further comedically underscores how such rhetoric serves to obfuscate rather than illuminate.

The metaphorical blindness caused by conventional poetic thinking is exposed when Candida chooses between the two suitors. In a gesture highly reminiscent of Torvald and Nora's discussion scene in *A Doll's House* and the play's turn away from the theatricalised conventions of melodrama, Candida invites Morell and Marchbanks to "sit and talk comfortably over it like three friends" (148).[97] Like Nora, she deflates rhetoric and performance by pointing out the material realities which underlie her husband's idealised view of his domestic life: "I build a castle of comfort and indulgence and love for him, and stand sentinel always to keep little vulgar cares out" (149). Blindness rather than vision ironically underlies Morell's rhetorical prowess. As with Todhunter's play, the pretensions of poets and those attached to grand figures of speech are gently mocked and deflated by reality.

However, although Candida's assessment of the true nature of her domestic life with Morell seemingly strips the action back to a more realist mode, the play still nonetheless ends on a rather more ambiguous and uncertain poetic note. Throughout the final act, Marchbanks displays signs of growing maturation and insight. He is, for instance, far quicker than Morell to grasp the meaning

[95] Crompton, *Shaw*, 38; *Academy* (7 May 1898), 491.
[96] Ibid. (*Academy*).
[97] This parallel has been noted by multiple scholars. See, for instance, Christian, *Marriage*, 144.

behind Candida's declaration that "I suppose it is quite settled that I must belong to one or the other" (147). This sudden maturation climaxes when Marchbanks abruptly declares "(*with the ring of a man's voice—no longer a boy's—in the words*) I know the hour when it strikes. I am impatient to do what must be done" (150). As Shaw put in a letter to Archer, Marchbanks:

> jumps to the position from which the Masterbuilder saw that it was all over with the building of happy homes for human beings. He looks at the comfort and sweetness and happiness that has just been placed before him at its best, and turns away from it, exclaiming with absolute conviction, 'Life is nobler than that'. [98]

Disabused of his previous conventionalised poetic notions, yet still possessing a poet's sensibility, Marchbanks achieves a level of insight that is ""*higher* but vaguer and timider" ([emphasis mine], viii) than before. Indeed, *The Manchester Guardian* notably described Marchbanks's character as "the *final* judge and searcher of hearts of his fellow puppets", emphasising how his character seemingly achieves a higher level of insight than even Candida herself.[99] The stripping back of poetic artifice creates a moment of revelation that eclipses even the clarity of perspective that Candida, as the embodiment of the anti-poetic perspective, can access.

Furthermore, it is not just the content of the play which ends in this more symbolist vein but its form as well. The repeated use of the phrase "night", which is peppered throughout the closing dialogue, "Out, then, into the *night* with me! […] Let me go now. The *night* outside grows impatient" (150-1), creates a symbolist-esque atmosphere of mystery and extra-perceptual significance. This imagery also evokes, in Shaw's own words, resonances of "Tristian's holy night".[100] Shaw's subtle echo of Tristian highlights how Marchbanks's earlier clichéd use of Wagnerian imagery – his claim that "If I were a hero of old, I should have laid my drawn sword between us" (132) is an allusion to the forest scene in *Tristan and Isolde* (1859) – has developed into the true Wagnerian epic mode. Additionally, the mystery behind what Shaw means by "*the secret in the poet's heart*" (151) – a group of schoolboys at Rugby notably wrote to Shaw in 1920 suggesting all possibilities from "The poet Marchbanks was going to seek an end to his miserable existence, finding that the woman he loved most could not live with him" to "The poet was after another lady whose heart he would try to win"– combined with Morell's concern that the young man may do something "rash" (150) creates a sense of vague yet impending calamity.[101]

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[98] Shaw, *Collected Letters*, vol.ii, 33.
[99] *Manchester Guardian* (15 March 1898), 8 (emphasis mine).
[100] Shaw quoted in Nethercot, 'Eugene Marchbanks', 644.
[101] Quoted in *Spectator* (17 November 1950), 10.

Marchbanks's realisation of his higher purpose in life is therefore intimately tied to this more non-naturalistic way of speaking and being. However, unlike his earlier poetic fantasies, there is less of a stereotypical pre-Raphaelite poetic quality about his new rhetoric. Marchbanks's clichéd poetic vision has been transformed into something far more innovative and experimental. Like Todhunter's play, although with a noticeably happier comedic ending, the drama concludes with a reassertion of a more symbolist and poetic mode that the rest of the action of the play has seemingly dispelled. As Shaw detailed in the preface to *Plays Pleasant*, he has shown pre-Raphaelitism "in the first broken, nervous, stumbling attempts to formulate its own revolt against itself as it develops into something higher" (vii).

In comparison to *The Black Cat*, though, Shaw's inclusion of these more symbolist aspects is extremely subtle. Many of these more explicitly poetic elements are only found in the stage directions. Walkley noted of the 1904 production that "the actors can, and do, embrace; but they have no possible means of telling the spectator, by their actions, whether they do or do not know the secret in the poet's heart".[102] Additionally, it is only in the printed preface where the explicit parallel to Ibsen's *The Master Builder* is made. Reviews of the first performances are largely devoid of comments on the play's more symbolist elements, largely focusing instead on the play's "restatement of the independence of women's souls" and Shaw's skilful blending of probing psychological and social examination with a comedic domestic realism.[103] Although perhaps part of a deliberately impressionistic effect – Shaw's preface likens the visionary elements in *The Master Builder* to a fleeting "vision in the magic glass of his artwork" (viii) – there appears a reticence to make the complex metaphysical elements of his play too prominent.

Eltis observes that "like all avant-garde artists, Shaw had first to cultivate his audience".[104] In the early 1890s, his intellectual ambition and excoriating social critiques were too provocative for mainstream commercial theatre. It is notable that many of his later plays offer a far stronger expression of this new form and purpose of theatre than is observable in *Candida*. Father Peter Keegan in *John Bull's Other Island* (1904), who ends the play speaking of his visions of "a godhead in which all life is human and all humanity divine: three in one and one in three", for instance, can be seen as a more prominent version of Marchbanks's realisation of his visionary potential.[105] Furthermore, *Man and Superman* (1903), with its extended dream sequence and sweeping philosophical and evolutionary debates, models the metaphysical possibilities of a drama that is no longer tied to strictly naturalistic frameworks and structures. *Candida*, although more strongly

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[102] Walkley, *Drama and Life*, 218.
[103] *Bookman* (May 1898), 44.
[104] Eltis, 'Introduction', xlvi.
[105] George Bernard Shaw, *John Bull's Other Island, and Major Barbara* (New York [State]: Brentano's, 1907), 125.

resembling a traditional domestic comedy, implicitly advocates for this new and visionary potential of the dramatic form.

Edward Martyn's *The Heather Field* (c.1895)

So far, this chapter has examined plays that mix their more symbolist or metaphysical aspects with strong elements of humour and social satire. However, there was also a vein of theatrical writing that attempted to adopt a mode far closer to Ibsen's late-stage dramas. A more classically Ibsenite exploration of these issues can be observed in the work of Edward Martyn. Many of Martyn's plays have been noted for their prominent debts to Ibsen. *An Enchanted Sea* (1904), for instance, resembles a combination of *The Lady from the Sea*, *Rosmersholm,* and *Little Eyolf*, while his later work *Grangecolman* (1912) blends *Rosmersholm* and *Hedda Gabler*.[106] As these examples illustrate, Martyn was drawn to Ibsen's more poetic elements. He believed that the Norwegian's "master genius soared to its highest point in *The Master Builder*", praising the play in particular for its "subtle mental poetry [that] finds expression in the most direct realism of speech".[107]

Martyn's first full-length play *The Heather Field* premiered in 1899 as part of the Irish Literary Theatre's debut programme, an endeavour for which he notably provided significant financial backing.[108] Owing to the timing and location of its premiere, *The Heather Field* is often considered alongside other early 1900s Irish dramatic experiments.[109] Yet the play was written significantly earlier. Patricia McFate claims that "*The Heather Field* was completed before 1894", while Yeats's autobiography suggests that Martyn finished the play during the summer of 1896.[110] Martyn's process of redrafting and revision likely accounts for these discrepancies. Either way, the play was completed several years before its premiere, most probably when Martyn was living and writing in London – a period when he was highly immersed in experimental British theatrical culture.[111]

In particular, Moore – Martyn's cousin, closest friend, and long-term literary collaborator – functions as the key link between Martyn's work and the ITS. Moore was a strong proponent of *The Heather Field.* He wrote a preface to the 1899 printed edition of the play and may have also written and/or revised parts of the actual text.[112] Moore definitely collaborated with Martyn to

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[106] Irina Ruppo Malone, *Ibsen and the Irish Revival* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 89.
[107] Martyn quoted in Denis Gwynn, *Edward Martyn and the Irish Revival* (London: J. Cape, 1930), 142.
[108] Marie-Thérese Courtney, *Edward Martyn and The Irish Theatre* (Dublin: Vantage Press, 1956), 77.
[109] Una Ellis-Fermor, *The Irish Dramatic Movement* (London: Methuen, 1939); Jan Setterquist*, Ibsen and the Beginnings of Anglo-Irish Drama: Edward Martyn* (Uppsala: Lundquist, 1960); Ruppo Malone, *Irish Revival.*
[110] Patricia McFate, 'The Bending of the Bough and The Heather Field', in *Éire-Ireland*, 8:1 (1973), 52-61, 57; W. B. Yeats, *Dramatis Personae, 1896-1902: Estrangement, The Death of Synge, The Bounty of Sweden* (London: Macmillan, 1936), 6.
[111] Martyn had a particularly strong connection with George Moore, Yeats, Symons, the three dedicatees of *The Heather Field*, all of whom were living in London at the time.
[112] Paul Newlin, 'The Artful Failure of George Moore's Plays', in *Éire-Ireland*, 8:1 (1973), 62-84.

produce *The Bending of the Bough* (1900), a rewrite of Martyn's play *The Tale of a Town* (1897).[113] Like Martyn, Moore was also deeply interested in developments in European art in the early 1890s. In 1891, he published *Impressions and Opinions* (1891) – an extensive collection of essays and reviews on the French impressionist movement.

During the mid-1890s, Moore appears to have convinced Alexander to produce *The Heather Field* as a morning matinée performance.[114] However, the offer was rescinded due to the intervention of Archer, who seemingly believed that the play was not sufficiently concerned with social issues.[115] Moore noted that Archer particularly disdained the play's symbolist elements: "he seemed still involved in the traditional comprehension of Ibsen which discerns a social reformer in the greatest dramatic poet and thinker since Shakespeare, or maybe it was a man who paints from life, straight away, without troubling himself about symbolism" (xxii).[116] As these remarks illustrate, Moore and Martyn represented a vocal, yet somewhat underappreciated, segment of ITS dramatists who felt constrained by what they saw as Archer's narrow prosaic conception of Ibsen's work.

This interest in exploring a more symbolist side of realist drama is evident from *The Heather Field*'s subject matter. Much like Todhunter's and Shaw's dramas, the play centres upon an ambitious but over-reaching male figure. The protagonist, Carden Tyrell, is an idealistic landowner in the West of Ireland. Stifled by an oppressive marriage, he becomes obsessed with cultivating the "very wild and untamable" (9) heather field which exists on his land.[117] Yet, this endeavour comes at great financial cost, and Carden is repeatedly warned that the project will be his undoing. Such counsel is, however, to no avail. At the end of the play, the heather field returns to its wild ways and Carden, financially ruined, seemingly descends into insanity.

In Moore's words, Carden is a character "whose dreams are in conflict with reality" (xxiv). However, unlike Todhunter's Denham or Shaw's Morell, Carden is not overly enamoured by his own artistic pretences. Rather, as a youth, Carden was initially a "beautiful child who saw nothing real in the world outside his own fairy dreams" (7) and held a deep appreciation for Irish mythology. As reflected by his extended reminiscences of the "bright happy days" (19) spent

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[113] See McFate, 'The Bending of the Bough', for an account of these revisions.
[114] Moore, 'Introduction', xi.
[115] Jerry Nolan, 'Edward Martyn's Struggle for an Irish National Theater, 1899-1920', *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua,* 7:2 (2003), 88-105, 89.
[116] Moore, 'Introduction', xxii.
[117] Edward, Martyn, *The Heather Field and Maeve: with an introduction by George Moore* (London, Duckworth & Co., 1899), 9.

travelling down the Rhine, he also has a strong interest in European art and spiritual movements – an appreciation which Martyn himself notably shared.[118]

Carden's unusually sensitive and poetic nature is key to understanding the symbolism underlying his relationship with the heather field. In the first act, Barry Ussher, a learned philosopher and Carden's closest friend, recounts how after Carden's marriage, "The old, wild nature had to break out again when the novelty was over […] There are some dispositions too eerie, too ethereal, too untamable for good, steady, domestic cultivation, and if so domesticated they avenge themselves in after time" (8). Much like a male Hedda Gabler striving for a higher aesthetic purpose in response to the dullness of married life, Barry presents Carden as an "ethereal" man trapped by the banalities of a conventional domestic existence. Barry perceives that Carden's "latent, untamable nature was not to be subdued. Its first sign of revolt against suppression was when he began this vast work in the heather field" (8). Here, Barry directly links the heather field to Carden's thwarted nature. Such a connection is further reinforced when shortly afterwards Barry declares that heather fields are "very wild and untamable[…] If heather lands are brought into cultivation for domestic use, they must be watched, they must have generous and loving treatment, else their old wild nature may avenge itself" (9). Through this evocative linguistic patterning, Martyn positions the heather field as a natural mirror of Carden's soul.

The supernatural expression of a stifled inner sensibility was a recurrent theme in the work of other writers of the Irish literary revival. Yeats's *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894), for instance, depicts Maire Bruin being seduced from her domestic life by "a faery child" to join the eponymous Land of Heart's Desire.[119] Michael McAteer argues that the work reflects the influence of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* namely in "the theme of a young woman who rebels against the restrictions imposed on her through marriage".[120] Hence, he argues that "magic became, in Yeats's play, the expression of Nora Helmer's revolt against bourgeois values in *A Doll's House*".[121] In a similar vein, *Maeve* (1899), Martyn's second drama which he published alongside *The Heather Field*, depicts an unusually sensitive young woman's unwilling betrothal to an English aristocrat. However, she is rescued by her mythical namesake Queen Maeve and transported to the legendary "land of joy" (121) Tirnanogue, before the marriage can occur. Subtitled "a psychological drama" (85), a term which

[118] Martyn was particularly fond of Palestrina's music, founding the Dublin Palestrina choir through a £1000 endowment. Jerry Nolan, 'Edward Martyn and the Founding of Dublin's Palestrina Choir', *New Hibernian Review*, 4:1 (2000), 89-102.
[119] W. B. Yeats, *The Land of Heart's Desire* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1894), 8.
[120] Michael McAteer, *Yeats and European Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 18.
[121] Ibid., 19.

was notably also applied to Ibsen's later work, *Maeve* presents the supernatural as the means of accessing a higher plane of spiritual and mental existence.[122]

Comparing *Maeve* and *The Heather Field*, Moore wrote that "both plays are but different expressions of the same thought […] The idea of both plays is that silvery beauty which survives in the human heart, which we see shimmering to the horizon, leading our longings beyond the world".[123] Carden's affiliation with the heather field is a manifestation of this inner beauty of his soul. However, although *The Heather Field* quivers with ethereal possibility – Carden's description of the "magic in those mountain breezes" (48) imbues the field with a supernatural quality, while the fact that the space is never depicted (only stared at from a drawing room window) gives it an almost otherworldly nature – Martyn's drama offers no definitively supernatural or transcendent elements. As such, it is not clear if the heather field is really a quasi-supernatural expression of Carden's interiority or merely the subject of his boredom and egotistical fixations.

In a similar vein to Denham and Constance's relationship in *The Black Cat*, these more egotistical aspects of Carden's personality are reinforced through his interaction with his wife Grace. In her first scene, Grace interrupts Carden's rhapsody on medieval architecture with forceful pragmatism:

> **TYR:** […] what a genius these medieval architects had for soothing with picturesque ideality the restless suffering spirit of their time. To gaze on their work makes one forget oneself and everything else –
> **GRACE:** (*who the whole time has been looking about her with an impatient and wearied expression*). Goodness me, what a litter the room is in with all these books and papers. (23)

Grace's words emphasise the banal domestic reality surrounding her husband's lofty aspirations. Furthermore, she explicitly challenges Carden's claims to an unfathomable level of higher insight: "you think yourself the great incomprehensible, ha, ha. well, you are quite mistaken. Everyone understands you. So do I, absolutely. For in spite of all your efforts to be singular, you are a very ordinary person, in whom there is nothing particular to understand" (26). This rebuke strongly echoes the previously discussed anti-Ibsenite complaint that proponents of Ibsen's drama were claiming to perceive great symbolic depth in plays which were fundamentally devoid of any actual hidden meaning. Moreover, Carden's response that "this simple barren prose of your mind" (27) is infuriating him evokes the divisions between 'prose' and 'poetry' that seemed to function as a contemporary critical shorthand for the divisions between conventional contemporary prose drama and the more impressionist, metaphysical impulses associated with figures like Maeterlinck

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122 In his 1907 introduction to *Rosmersholm*, Archer, for instance, delineates between Ibsen's "social series" and his "psychological series". Archer, *Rosmersholm* (1907), xvi.
123 Moore, 'Introduction', xxvi.

and Ibsen.[124] On the meta-theatrical level, therefore, the dynamic between Carden and Grace comes to represent a clash on this more expansive and visionary mode of drama.

This meta-theatrical commentary on contemporary debates around the nature of Ibsen's later mode of drama culminates when Grace attempts to get Carden certified as insane by two doctors to protect the family from financial ruin. In a moment which has clear resonances with Hilde and Solness's discussion of "harps in the air" (64), Carden's declaration that in the mountain breeze he hears "choristers singing of youth in an eternal sunrise" (49) is initially taken as a sign of his mental infirmity.[125] However, this approach is challenged by Barry. Barry argues that "a highly-gifted man like Carden Tyrrell is not to be judged by your everyday rules" (52) since "it is only common-place and unimaginative people who consider the poetic and original temperament to be a mark of madness" (54). Echoing debates over the "crazy performance of *The Master Builder*", Barry's words suggest that critics of a more evocative and poetic mode of expression simply possess unrefined intellectual sensibilities.[126]

In the end, one doctor is prepared to certify Carden insane, while the other ultimately declares that "I think – for the present – that is to say – perhaps […] I am afraid I cannot make up my mind about the patient as yet" (56). Couched in extremely hesitant language, a diagnosis of insanity cannot conclusively be made. Martyn's dramatisation of contemporary debates surrounding the place of the visionary in realist social problem dramas consequently reaches no easy conclusion. The possibility that Carden is not mad, but is instead accessing a higher plane of understanding, cannot be completely excluded.

In the final act, however, Martyn seemingly decides against Ibsenite drama. Set several months later, Carden's increasingly reckless obsession with the heather field has finally brought financial ruin to the family. Moreover, the extremity of this fixation greatly accentuates the unpleasant and unreasonable aspects of Carden's personality: "this vulture cannot touch the heather field! […] that mountain is a great green field worth more than all they can seize, (*with a strange intensity*) and it is mine – all mine" (74). Rather than displaying a poetic sensibility, Carden is simply consumed by delusion and egotism. Thus, the play appears to be turning towards a conclusion that exposes a more visionary mentality as one concerned with mastery and domination rather than the expression of any greater sensitivity and insight.

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124 For various contemporary references to the 'poetry' of Ibsen's prose dramas see *Sunday Times* (1 March 1891), 7; *Sunday Times* (1 February 1903), 6; William Archer, *Fortnightly Review* (1 March 1905), 428-41: partially reproduced in Egan, *Critical Heritage*, 421-8.

125 Andrew Parkin has also suggested that "the voices Carden hears from his past" has parallels to *The Master Builder*. Andrew Parkin, 'Ibsen in Dublin: A Nordic Contribution to Irish Modernity', in *Ibsen and the Modern Self*, eds. by Kwok-kan Tam, Terry Siu-han Yip, Frode Helland and Knut Brynhildsvoll (Oslo: Unipub AS, 2010), 265-78, 275.

126 *Times* (21 February 1893), 12.

However, as with *The Black Cat* and *Candida*, though to an even more pronounced extent, the final scene of the play problematises this rejection of a more symbolist framework. After Grace abandons Carden, his young son Kit arrives, announcing that "buds of heather" (78) are "growing all over the heather field" (78). From this moment, Carden suddenly loses all recollection of the last ten years and is instead seemingly transported to the day after Barry "advised [him] not to marry Grace Desmond" (80). His past life he describes as a "dreadful dream" (81) where he was condemned to "wander through common luxurious life – seeing now and then in glimpses, that beauty--but so far away!" (81) – straining, striving, searching for a more refined reality that only he can see. The soft poeticism of Carden's last lines, as he wanders with his son Kit towards the heather field, "See, the rain across a saffron sun trembles like gold harp strings, through the purple Irish Spring!" (82), show how just as the eponymous field has broken out of domestication, Carden too has reached a wilder and more ethereal plane of existence.

The final line of the play is Barry's explanation to Grace of what has occurred: "The wild heath has broken out again in the heather field" (83). This utterance gives Carden's insanity a highly poetic quality as his entire social identity has finally been conflated with this symbol of unruly natural Ireland. The heather field's return to its wild ways upon the loss of Carden's sanity, seemingly validates Carden's conception of it as a quasi-supernatural space. The play consequently concludes with the seeming artistic triumph of the poetic over the prosaic, even though, much like the depiction of Solness's fall at the end of *The Master Builder*, the play's reassertion of this more poetic mode is one that is dangerous, destructive, and perhaps not entirely of this world.

Owing to the prominence of realist social problem drama on the late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century English stage, for almost a century a prominent critical argument has been that "it was thus left to the Irish Dramatic Movement to bring back to the English theatre the poetry it had missed in Ibsen".[127] Consequently, most of the discussion of symbolism in *The Heather Field* has been placed in a wider teleological narrative about the development of modernist theatre in Ireland. Irina Ruppo Malone and Katharine Worth both include discussion of Martyn's work in their analyses of Ibsen's influence in Ireland, positioning the writer as a minor steppingstone to the later symbolist experiments of the early twentieth century.[128] Worth, for instance, writes that:

> The central symbol of his play, the heather field, represents an obscure psychological process which might have received more 'inward' treatment. But instead it is fitted into a pattern of

[127] Una Ellis-Fermor, *The Irish Dramatic Movement* (London: Methuen, 1939), 7.
[128] Ruppo Malone, *Irish Revival*; Katharine Worth, 'Ibsen and the Irish Theatre', *Theatre Research International*, 15:1 (1990), 18-28.

> social activities in something like the way of the prosaically functional but symbolic orphanage in *Ghosts*.[129]

The assumption underlying Worth's critique is that Martyn's exploration of Carden's interiority is weak and un-innovative because it is too grounded in a highly realised social framework.

Yet, when viewed on its own terms, and not as an insubstantial precursor to leading modernist dramatists like Yeats, *The Heather Field* is not simply a superficial emulation of Ibsen's mode of symbolism but a complex contestation of the place of the visionary within contemporary realist drama. Stripped of much of the contemporary cynicism, domestic comedy, and discussion of gender and socio-economic debates which characterise, and indeed obfuscate, the more metaphysical elements of *The Black Cat* and *Candida*, *The Heather Field* strongly engages with the ongoing contemporary debates about expanding the possibility of dramatic forms. Martyn is not merely interested in using Ibsen's "intensely Norwegian plays" as a means of developing his own "emerging cultural nationalism" — the predominant critical explanation for Martyn's interest in Ibsen's work.[130] Rather, *The Heather Field* shows that Martyn also experimented with Ibsen-esque symbolism to capture and convey a more metaphysical form of experience.

Recalling his conversations with George Alexander, Moore claimed he was explicit about *The Heather Field*'s lack of commercial appeal: "there is not a penny of money in the play. It is merely a good part" (xi). He also declares that "those who write plays from impulse, because they have something to say, must publish their plays in book form" (xi). Although somewhat self-justifying, this remark nonetheless highlights how at the edges of the experimental theatre scene there were writers who were unable to get their work staged because they were interested in introducing newer, more inwardly psychological expressions of realism in theatrical form. Moore and Martyn would have to wait for the establishment of the Irish literary theatre at the turn of the century before they found an audience for their new conception of drama.

Harley Granville-Barker's *Agnes Colander* (c. 1901)

Conflict and contestation about the place of a more visionary mode of perception and artistic expression was clearly a prominent feature of many late-nineteenth-century dramas. Yet, as the 1890s progressed, there emerged a greater emphasis on the *process* of achieving a new form of artistic insight as opposed to questioning whether such insight could exist. This increasing emphasis on the search for a more developed form of perception is encapsulated in the early work

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[129] Ibid., 18. This perception of Martyn's symbolism both reflects Worth's previously discussed distinctions between Ibsen's and Maeterlinck's mode of symbolism (see n.25).

[130] Nolan, 'Edward Martyn's Struggle', 88. See also Parkin, 'Ibsen in Dublin', 275-6.

of Harley Granville Barker. A generation younger than most of the other playwrights in this thesis, Barker was not one of the early experimenters who congregated around the ITS. In a 1902 letter to Jones, Shaw sardonically stated that "Barker feels towards us as we feel towards Sheridan Knowles".[131] Nonetheless, Barker's earliest theatrical experiences were still rooted in the experimental theatrical circles of the early 1890s. Barker was an understudy for Farr's 1894 season at the Avenue, witnessing dramas by Yeats, Todhunter, and Shaw.[132] In 1899, as part of Mrs Patrick Campbell's company, he would perform in Gilbert Murray's *Carlyon Sahib* (1893) , a play which almost premiered at the ITS in 1895.[133] Furthermore, Winifred Fraser – Barker's "early love" who would later star as the eponymous heroine of his breakthrough drama *The Marrying of Ann Leete* (1902) – played both Hedwig in the ITS's production of *The Wild Duck* as well as Mary in the Avenue's premiere of *The Land of Heart's Desire.*[134] Although not seemingly a member of the ITS, Barker cut his theatrical teeth on the creative endeavours of the society's broader networks and communities.

Barker was, however, deeply involved with the Stage Society, the subscription organisation often termed the "true successor" to the ITS.[135] The Stage Society's opening season provided Barker with his first directing job, a triple bill of poetic plays: Fiona Macleod's *The House of Usna* (1900) alongside Maeterlinck's *L'Intruse* and *La Mort de Tintagiles.*[136] Noting the poetic nature of these work, Dennis Kennedy argues that "Barker's directing debut aligned him with Lugné-Poe and the Symbolists", in stark contrast to the social realism of many of the other plays performed as part of the Stage Society's first season.[137] Barker like many of his fellow Stage Society members was a committed Fabian.[138] Yet, he also had a deep interest in the poetic and formal possibilities of drama.

Barker's plays are known for a "characteristic blending of naturalism and symbolism", following the work of Ibsen and Maeterlinck.[139] In particular, Barker's use of allusive and elliptical dialogue is seen as his main borrowing from these dramatists. As Anne Cnudde-Knowland notes, "There

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[131] Shaw quoted in Doris Arthur Jones, *The Life and Letters of Henry Arthur Jones* (London: V. Gollancz Ltd., 1930), 211.
[132] Margery Morgan and Frederick May, 'The Early Plays of Harley Granville Barker', *The Modern Language Review*, 51:3 (1956), 324–38, 326.
[133] In early 1895, Charrington and Murray entered negotiations about the possibility of staging *Carlyon Sahib* at the ITS. Letter from Gilbert Murray to Charles Charrington (6 February 1895). Mark Samuels Lasner Collection: University of Delaware.
[134] Margery Morgan, *A Drama of Political Man: A Study in the Plays of Harley Granville Barker* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1961), 15.
[135] Woodfield, *Theatre in Transition*, 172.
[136] Fiona Macleod was the pseudonym of William Sharp.
[137] Dennis Kennedy, *Granville Barker and the Dream of Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 9-10.
[138] Barker officially joined the Fabian Society in 1901. C. B. Purdom, *Harley Granville Barker: Man of the Theatre, Dramatist and Scholar* (London: Rockliff, 1955), 14.
[139] Morgan, *Political Man*, 8. Barker's debt to Maeterlinck is also highlighted in ibid., 10.

appears to be a broad correspondence between Barker's label 'the revealing phrase' and Maeterlinck's 'dialogue du second degré': both denote statements by the characters which, while often ostensibly unrelated to strict plot requirements, contain the deeper meaning of the play".[140] Cnudde-Knowland argues that Barker's "mode of drama […] was in many ways much more conventional than what Maeterlinck had achieved", lacking the supernatural or mythical elements which defined the Belgian's work.[141] With their middle-class Edwardian settings and focus on contemporary social issues, Barker's dramas were marked by a strong sense of formal hybridity.

The issue of finding new artistic forms to express inner sensibilities is directly explored in Barker's *Agnes Colander* (c.1901). The play focuses upon the artistic aspirations of the eponymous Agnes Colander. At the start of the piece, Agnes is working as a painter, having deserted her husband three years prior in order to fulfil her creative ambitions. Struggling to realise the latent artistic potential within her, she is considering returning to her marriage. Otho Kjoge, a Danish painter whom Agnes admires, instead persuades her to run away with him to "a little place in Normandy".[142] Agnes, however, encounters the same artistic struggles in France as she does in England. Otho grows jealous at the arrival of Alexander (Alec) Flint – a young friend of Agnes with whom she once had a flirtation. He therefore kisses their neighbour Emmeline Majoribanks, leading him and Agnes to quarrel. Here, Agnes realises that she must not seek emotional fulfilment through dependent relationships with men as that stifles her spiritual sensibilities. At the play's conclusion, Agnes decides that she must live completely on her own terms and consequently heads back to England with Alec.

One of Barker's earliest theatrical efforts, *Agnes Colander* was written around the turn of the century.[143] Kennedy observes that at this time Barker's writing was beginning to assume a more impressionistic quality: "glancing dialogue, indirect progression, incomplete statements, unexplained behaviour".[144] This shift, Kennedy argues, marks Barker's move away from the narrative and formal cohesion of the well-made play "to the twentieth-century world of uncertain knowledge, indeterminate action, unconscious desire".[145] These plays' obscurity and obliqueness

[140] Anne Cnudde-Knowland, *Maurice Maeterlinck and English and Anglo-Irish Literature: A Study of Parallels and Influences* (PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 1984), 160-1.
[141] Ibid., 11.
[142] Harley Granville Barker, *Agnes Colander*, (I, 17). Harley Granville Barker Collection, British Library: London. Due to the ongoing outage of the British Library's manuscript catalogue, it is currently not possible to provide a manuscript reference for this item.
[143] The typescript of *Agnes Colander* is dated 10 January 1901.
[144] Kennedy, *Dream of Theatre*, 6. Kennedy identifies Our Visitor to 'Work-a-Day', penned c.1898-89, as the turning point in Barker's dramatic style. A similar observation is made by Eric Salmon, *Granville Barker: a Secret Life* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983), 27.
[145] Ibid. (Kennedy).

meant that they struggled to find a hearing.[146] Archer recalls how Barker submitted several of his early works to him. Yet, despite finding "a queer sort of originality" in the young playwright's dramas, he was "wholly unable to make head or tail of them".[147] *Agnes Colander* was never staged in Barker's lifetime and remains largely unknown among his oeuvre.[148]

Margery Morgan observes that *Agnes Colander* has strong resonances with "the type of social drama which the period associated with Ibsen".[149] The play comes off the back of several works by Barker which explored questions of female agency and independence. Barker's *The Weather Hen* (1898), for instance, depicts Eve Prior almost leaving her loveless marriage for an idealistic younger man. However, after being forced to realise that "loneliness is the only test of strength" and that she cannot simply drift from one man to another, Eve resolves to chart her own independent path and returns to her earlier profession as an actress.[150] *Agnes Colander* continues this theme. A woman deserting her marital home in order to achieve self-actualisation has clear debts to Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Barker's numerous inter-theatrical allusions to the Norwegian's drama in the first act subtly positions Agnes as a version of Ibsen's heroine. Agnes's assertion that she always had "a healthy objection to duty" (I, 7) echoes Nora's claim that her highest duty is to herself, while her claim that she was a metaphorical "child" (I, 7) when she wed also recalls Nora's famously childlike characterisation. As *The Guardian* wrote of Richard Nelson's 2018 version of the play, "perhaps we are supposed to see Agnes as a version of Ibsen's Nora after the door has been slammed and she has gone off to find a better version of herself".[151]

Agnes's journey is, however, not straightforwardly one of social and sexual exploration. It is also tied to a particular form of self-realisation through art. The handwritten subtitles on the British Library's typescript copy of the play are 'An Attempt at Life' and 'An Experiment'.[152] Conflating the language of portraiture and the language of self-expression, they emphasise that Agnes's journey is a fusion of emotional and artistic experimentation. After proverbially slamming the door on her married life, Agnes has retreated into an artist's studio (the setting of Act One) to develop her skills. As Agnes tells Otho, "I look ahead and – I could do something, Otho. I'm not a great

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[146] Barker's *The Weather Hen* was performed as a special matinée at Terry's Theatre in June 1899. However, none of his other early works made it to the stage.
[147] Archer, *The Old Drama*, 357.
[148] The play was performed in a revised version by Richard Nelson at the Theatre Royal Bath's Ustinov Studio in 2018. The script was also later published: Harley Granville-Barker, *Agnes Colander: An Attempt at Life*, revised by Richard Nelson (London: Methuen Drama, 2019). This has further helped to raise the profile of the work in recent years.
[149] Morgan, *Political Man,* 45.
[150] Harley Granville Barker, *The Weather Hen*, MS 00089, (IV, 3). Harley Granville Barker Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto, Toronto.
[151] Lyn Gardner, 'Agnes Colander review – flawed portrait of a woman confronting her desires' (25 March 2018), *Guardian* online. [Accessed: 7 February 2021], https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2018/mar/25/agnes-colander-review-ustinov-bath-trevor-nunn-harley-granville-barker .
[152] The third potential subtitle is 'A blind alley and blue sky'.

genius, but there's a tang of – well, I could afford to have patience" (I, 11). With her fragmentary utterances and vague allusions to her inner being, Agnes is straining towards a type of spiritual development which can bring out the true artist within her. Unlike the other plays in this chapter, the issue of *Agnes Colander* is not so much whether the artistic or visionary sensibilities are genuine. Agnes is aware that such a higher form of insight exists: the challenge is whether she can reach it.

Otho represents the type of artistic vision to which Agnes aspires. His Scandinavian origins have been noted by several scholars and critics as a potential nod to Ibsen.[153] Otho's worldview is notably impressionistic. He describes Alec pressing "his face against [Agnes's] front door" (I, 2) as "a dash of sunshine on a dirty sea" (I, 2). Furthermore, his description of how he would envisage painting Emmeline, "Spirituous [sic.] Emmeline - I will paint your portrait as I see you now - your profile rising from the shade - one black line for the eye, a dip-in for the mouth" (II, 11), with its emphasis on long expressive brush strokes and abstract features, points towards an artistic style which is a highly abstracted. A far cry from the highly conventional symbolism of Agnes's own artistic creations, who recounts trying "to sketch for an Allegory: 'The Ship of English Youth'. Ignorance, a young girl, was at the prow, and Vice, a schoolboy at the helm" (II, 6), Otho has mastered a more developed form of artistic expression.

Agnes's flight to France with Otho is her attempt to realise her latent artistic potential through sexual intimacy. Speaking of herself as "a dead thing" (I, 14) with "no soul of my own" (I, 10), Agnes hopes that a romantic relationship will bring about an awakening of her inner life. However, this endeavour yields little success. The crux of the issue is that Agnes and Otho do not achieve a genuine spiritual connection:

> **OTHO:** Hasn't your painting got better?
> **AGNES:** Has it?
> **OTHO:** (*A little too positively*) Yes.
> **AGNES:** Either you're lying, or speaking to me as one of the dear Public that you so want me to deceive – with prettiness. In either case, you're not seeing down into the meaning – which is in me. (III, 4)

Agnes's insistence that Otho is "not seeing down into the meaning – which is in me", and is instead deceiving her with empty platitudes, emphasises how he is unable to truly perceive her core self. As with the other plays explored in this chapter, there is a sense of false artistic or creative

[153] Morgan, *Political Man,* 45; Mark Lawson, 'Harley Granville Barker's 116-year-old Agnes Colander is finally brought to life' (19 January 2016), *Guardian* online [Accessed: 18 February 2024], https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/jan/19/harley-granville-barker-agnes-colander-national-theatre-stage-reading.

aggrandisement. Yet, here Agnes is not deluding herself. Rather, she is aware that male self-servingness is inhibiting her from achieving true freedom of soul and mind.

Agnes's realisation that her relationship with Otho is another constraint on her artistic flourishing feeds into the play's wider feminist critique. From the beginning of the play, Agnes is aware that social conventions inhibit her spiritual, and by extension artistic, growth. Returning to her husband would "crush in me every development, every bit of good that I have earned" (I, 20), she asserts. These sentiments strengthen while Agnes is in Normandy. When she breaks off her relationship with Otho, she declares that "I should have known long ago, when my life had broken that I was nothing but a worker, belonging to my work – only – body was in the way – Because – I suppose for generations we have been nourished to give you men pleasure" (III, 3). The socialisation of women to be subordinates to men inhibits Agnes from truly connecting with her soul and mind. As Morgan observes, what the female protagonists of all of Barker's early dramas enact is "fundamentally the rebellion of offended Nature, or some neglected truth of life, against the stultifying artificiality of civilisation".[154] Here, Agnes is learning that it is societal expectations and norms which prevent her from ascertaining authentic social and artistic development.

Agnes's growing awareness of how her gender constrains her development as an artist leads to a sudden epiphany, much like the abrupt maturation of Shaw's Marchbanks. Barker notably acted in the Stage Society's 1900 production of *Candida* at approximately the same time that he was penning *Agnes Colander*.[155] When discussing her intention to leave Otho, Alec proclaims to Agnes that she has "started on a man-like course already" (III, 16). Agnes then declares "(*Suddenly and with triumphant inspiration*) Women should be man-like in this thing" (III, 16). Although not spelled out in explicit detail – a product of both Barker's elliptical prose style as well as most likely the need not to offend the censor – being manlike implicitly equates to an unbridled following of instinct and in particular sexual impulse. "Think of the man's triumph who keeps straight not because he must" (III, 16), Agnes declares. Displaying shades of free-union rhetoric (the influence of which will be extensively explored in Chapter 5), Agnes realises that she must only enter sexual relationships which are based on free, mutual choice rather than gender obligations and social expectations.

This epiphany leads to Agnes and Alec agreeing to return to England together in what is heavily suggested to be a sexual relationship. When ending her relationship with Otho, Agnes had expressed her belief that a more developed form of relations between the sexes was possible: "Though mine was a failure – and this fails. But a true marriage is a miracle and I believe in God

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154 Morgan, *Political Man*, 41.

155 Barker played Marchbanks at the Stage Society's production of Candida at the Strand Theatre which opened on the first of July 1900.

too when I see one – I have known three good marriages – no – only two" (III, 4). Agnes's decision to leave with Alec is an attempt to try and see if this true form of union can exist – the "miracles of miracles" hinted at in the conclusion of *A Doll's House*.[156] As Agnes declares to Alec, "We should have all been taught more of life and less good manners. Fancy having to experiment at this time of day" (III, 18). With its conflation of the language of social and artistic exploration, Agnes has potentially found a new way forward on both a personal and artistic level. A world free from social conventions, and in particular those which pertain to sexual mores, is depicted as the state needed to achieve true creative vision.

A salient point of comparison here is *The Marrying of Ann Leete* (1898) – a play Barker penned at approximately the same time as *Agnes Colander*.[157] Ann Leete's decision to marry her family's gardener and abandon her aristocratic world of social decorum and party politics is her attempt to reconnect with her authentic self. "[W]e've all been in too great a hurry getting civilised. False dawn. I mean to go back", Ann states.[158] As Christopher Wixson argues, the final scene of the play in which Ann retreats to the gardener's cottage represents a "leap of faith away from the fallen world into a more authentic mode of being, aligned with Nature and alive with Edenic promise".[159] Developing many of the undercurrents in *Agnes Colander*, *The Marrying of Ann Leete* stages a clear break with the spiritually constraining forces of modern civilisation.

Agnes, unlike Ann, does not find a definitive way to revert to a more natural and unconstrained state of being by the end of *Agnes Colander*. The play ends with Agnes announcing her departure to Otho:

AGNES: Otho!
OTHO: Well?
AGNES: I'm going. (*There is a pause – he stares at her without a word*)
AGNES: In about an hour. I'll order some lunch first. Will you eat it with me?
OTHO: (*Severely*) You are very cruel and unwomanly.
AGNES: Am I? (*He turns to his painting. She gathers up her pile and goes out*). (III, 20)

Agnes's second exit from the Doll's House, so to speak, is one of true liberation, instead of false enlightenment. Her questioning of what it means to be "cruel and unwomanly" underscores how she has finally broken free from the mores and dictates of conventional society. With her art materials under her arm, Agnes is following a hopeful path towards spiritual growth and enlightenment.

[156] Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House,* trans. by William Archer (London: T. Fisher Unwin), 122.
[157] *The Marrying of Ann Leete* was performed in 1902, having been written in 1898. Morgan, *Political Man*, 17.
[158] Harley Granville-Barker, *The Marrying of Ann Leete: A Comedy in Four Acts* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1909), 79.
[159] Christopher Wixson, 'Doing the Usual Things: Gender, Race, and Inwardness in Harley Granville Barker's *The Marrying of Ann Leete* and *The Secret Life*', *Comparative Drama*, 43:4 (2009), 497-519, 400.

When Agnes speaks of her artistic aspirations, she talks of the need to create a new and distinctively British form of visionary art: "I want my work to feel English and understood only in England – it's about time we stopped borrowing" (II, 20). In *Agnes Colander*, Barker is moving towards this new form of English theatre. Combining the thematic concerns of British social problem drama with Maeterlinck's allusive dialogue and pre-occupation with inwardness, Barker's play marries together two different theatrical forms. Unlike the dramas discussed earlier in this chapter, these two modes are not explicitly in conflict – a reflection of how these more symbolist impulses had begun to assimilate into the British theatrical consciousness. Yet, there was still significant contestation over how such a higher form of spiritual insight can be achieved.

Conclusion

Approximately fifteen years after Barker penned *Agnes Colander*, another talented young man with literary aspirations would write a drama which similarly married the Edwardian social problem play with the symbolist impulses of Maeterlinck and Ibsen. James Joyce's *Exiles* (1918), the Irishman's first and only dramatic effort, is a reworking of 'The Dead' (1914). "[A] pastiche of Victorian and Symbolist drama", the play focuses on a man's passion for his friend's common-law wife.[160] This conventional narrative is however shot through with more impressionist or unworldly elements: gusts of winds blow and lamps flicker as characters vaguely speak of "the darkness and warmth and flood of passion".[161] *Exiles* is a point of critical irritation in Joyce studies. Several scholars have seen it as a poor imitation of Ibsen's dramas, whereas others more charitably view the piece as an innovative mixing of different theatrical forms.[162] John MacNicholas claims that "Joyce was struggling towards a new kind of theatre".[163] Eltis and Shepherd-Barr term it "one of the most striking examples of th[e] transitional quality" of late-Victorian drama.[164] Emphasising the unusual mix of genres in the play, these comments position the play as a seemingly unique experiment by one of the greatest literary minds of the twentieth century.

Yet, viewed in a different light, *Exiles* can also be seen as a development of one of several late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century dramas which mixed these different modes of theatre together. As this chapter has shown, numerous dramatists, and indeed particularly writers involved with the Irish revival, incorporated more symbolist or impressionistic elements into the

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[160] Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr, 'Reconsidering Joyce's *Exiles* in Its Theatrical Context', *Theatre Research International*, 28:2 (2003), 169–80, 169.
[161] James Joyce, *Exiles* (New York [State]: B.W. Huebsch, 1918), 116.
[162] For a summary of the unfavourable comparisons to Ibsen, see John MacNicholas, 'Joyce's 'Exiles': The Argument for Doubt', *James Joyce Quarterly*, 11:1 (1973), 33–40, 39.
[163] John MacNicholas, 'The Stage History of "Exiles"', *James Joyce Quarterly*, 19:1 (1981), 9–26, 22.
[164] Eltis and Shepherd-Barr, 'New Drama', 142. A similar point is also made in Shepherd-Barr, 'Reconsidering Joyce's *Exiles*'.

structure of social problem drama or domestic comedies. These playwrights not only experimented with different theatrical forms but actively used the tensions between these different modes to debate and probe the possibilities, limitations, and controversies of a new form of theatre. This rich undercurrent of drama both built towards the type of theatre encapsulated by Joyce's *Exiles*, but also created a complex tradition of plays of which Joyce's work can be considered a part. Appreciating this longstanding interest in exploring the theatrical potential and limitations of the visionary offers a framework for rethinking the commonalities and connections underpinning many late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century dramatic works.

CHAPTER 3
"Enter with me into the dark zone of the human soul": perverted passions and spectacular excess

In 1984, William Sharp published *Vistas* – a collection of short dramatic works designed to represent "vistas into the inner life of the human soul".[1] Many of the pieces contained a highly unsettling mix of horror, beauty, violence, and extreme passion which are explicitly tied to a spiritual or supernatural aspect. 'The Black Madonna' (1892), for instance, depicts a pagan African society which worships a bloodthirsty and all-powerful goddess: the eponymous Black Madonna.[2] One day, the Black Madonna appears to the warrior chief Bihr in the form of a beautiful woman. Bihr "*is wrought to madness by her/Beauty, and lusteth after her*" (111). At the drama's climax, Bihr attempts to claim the Black Madonna as his bride and embraces her in a fit of frenzied passion. The pair slink off into darkness together, only for Bihr's naked body to remerge in the morning "*crucified against [a] smooth white slope*" (115). Exploiting the overlap between sexual passion and religious ecstasy, Sharp's drama offers a highly disconcerting and perverse exploration of human desire. "Enter with me into the dark zone of the human soul" (2), a quotation from Spanish novelist Emilia Pardo Bazàn, is Sharp's justification for the strange, sexualised horror his work portrays.

Locating the origins of this vein of highly sexualised, morally confronting, and strangely mystical drama is a complex endeavour. An obvious place to start is the decadent and allied symbolist movements. In his 1894 translation of *La Princesse Maleine*, Richard Hovey credited *Vistas* (along with Wilde's *Salomé*) as being the strongest emulation of the French symbolists by an Anglophone writer.[3] Decadent drama is not a well-established literary genre: "only a tiny handful of plays are widely identified as decadent".[4] These dramas, namely *Salomé* as well as Maeterlinck's *La Princesse Maleine* and *Pelléas et Mélisande*, combine heightened depictions of lust, violence, and monstrosity with stylised and intricate poetic forms. With its elaborate stage directions, gruesome conclusion, and depiction of extreme sexual passion, 'The Black Madonna' has a clear affinity with this tradition.[5] Yet, as Alston and Jane Desmarais write in their recent anthology *Decadent Plays:*

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[1] William Sharp, *Vistas* (Illinois: Stone & Kimball, 1894), 2.

[2] This piece was originally published in the first and only issue of Sharpe's 1892 periodical *The Pagan Review*. This publication had a similar focus on spiritualism. Sharp, who wrote the entire thing himself under various pseudonyms, declared that the purpose of his periodical was "to give artistic expression to the artistic 'inwardness' of the new paganism". William Sharp, *The Pagan Review*, 1:1 (1892), 3.

[3] Richard Hovey, 'Introduction', in *Princess Maleine,* by Maurice Maeterlinck (New York: Dodd Mead and Company, 1894), 3-11, 8.

[4] Sos Eltis, 'Decadent Theater: New Women and "The Eye of the Beholder"', in *The Oxford Handbook of Decadence*, eds. by Jane Desmarais and David Weir (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 318-34, 318.

[5] Denisoff, the only critic to significantly discuss 'The Black Madonna', argues that "the lush excess of what are impossible stage instructions places the piece squarely within the murky terrain of decadence". Denisoff, *Decadent Ecology*, 174.

1890 – 1930 (2024), "decadence is ultimately a vehicle for creative experimentation and moral provocation, and fails to coalesce into one coherent genre".[6] The plays they collect under the label of decadence "encourage readers to re-appraise taxonomies that neatly compartmentalise a work" rather than reinforce or construct a singular dramatic category.[7]

Indeed, decadence is a large and amorphous concept: one which tends to suggest more of a mood or impulse than demarcate a precise set of characteristics. Critical scholarship has long noted that decadence became a general term of abuse or "a banal synonym for sex, luxury and excess" in the *fin de siècle*.[8] Many contemporary commentators also highlighted the term's lack of specificity. In 1894, Hubert Crackanthorpe complained that critics identified decadent elements in "Ibsen, Degas and the New English Art Club, Zola, Oscar Wilde, and *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*".[9] Six years later *Poet-Lore* echoed this view, expressing disbelief "in the exactitude of the word 'decadent' as an index of an author's special quality, when such diverse writers as Maeterlinck, Zola, Hauptmann, Hardy, Ibsen, and Stephen Phillips have all been called decadent".[10] Decadence suggests degrees of commonality rather than generic cohesion between many different theatrical works.

A more detailed unpicking of the various literary and theatrical threads woven into this dark display of sexualised, passionate excess often placed under the label of decadence is therefore necessary. One place to start is the highly sexualised and passionate dramas which emerged on the French stage in the 1880s. Multiple scholars have noted that *Salomé* bears a strong relation to the dramas associated with Sarah Bernhardt – the French actress who was scheduled to play the eponymous princess in the aborted 1892 London production of Wilde's work.[11] Achieving extraordinary acclaim in plays such as Victorien Sardou's *Fédora* (1882) and *Théodora* (1884), Bernhardt had developed a reputation for playing histrionic, sexualised, transgressive women. With lavish staging and exotic settings, these dramas tended to offer an outpouring of eroticised sexual yearning before containing the transgressive passions of Bernhardt's characters in a spectacle of slow, drawn-out death and suffering.

Bernhardt's spectacles of extreme passion and pronounced female suffering offered a glimpse into the passionate excesses inherent within the melodramatic mode and its "desire to express

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[6] Adam Alston and Jane Desmarais (eds.), *Decadent Plays: 1890 to 1925* (London: Methuen Drama, 2024), 5.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Alex Murray, 'Decadent Histories', in *Decadence: A Literary History*, ed. by Alex Murray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1-17, 2. See also David Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995).
[9] Hubert Crackenthorpe, 'Reticence in Literature', *The Yellow Book*, 1:2 (1894), 259-69, 266.
[10] *Poet-Lore* (1 January 1900), 135.
[11] See Z. Raafat, 'Wilde's Salomé and Sardou's Théodora', *Revue De Littérature Comparée*, 40:3 (1966), 453-66; Kerry Powell, *Oscar Wilde and the Theatre of the 1890s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), chap.3; Stokes, *The French Actress*, chap. 7; Sharon Marcus, 'Salomé!! Sarah Bernhardt, Oscar Wilde, and the Drama of Celebrity, *PMLA,* 126:4 (2011), 999 -1021.

all".[12] Indeed, Eltis argues that "the generic overlap between melodrama and the excess of Decadent literature" became clear when Wilson Barrett premiered his wildly successful play *The Sign of the Cross* (1895).[13] Combining sumptuous staging with depictions of "slaughter, attempted seduction, political intrigue, orgiastic dancing, combat and torture" in the declining Roman Empire, *The Sign of the Cross*, along with its many imitators, formed a vein of toga dramas which "pushed their sensational subject matter far enough to strain the limits of the genre".[14] These plays offered an excess of sensual pleasures, sexual temptation, and extreme suffering, but tended to avoid the label of decadent by invariably concluding with the "new infusion of Christian values and morality" into the corrupt and decaying Empire.[15] These toga dramas highlighted how melodrama's tendency towards extreme physical and emotional conflicts are somewhat decadent in flavour, especially when combined with theatrical splendour, exotic settings, and sexualised spectacle.

Splendour and spectacle were the defining aesthetics of many of the most established London theatres, especially Irving's Lyceum. In 1894, Bernhardt claimed that Irving's theatre was her biggest inspiration for the sumptuous aesthetics of her own management.[16] Furthermore, the fashion for opulent toga dramas is often considered to have originated with Irving's lavish production of Lord Alfred Tennyson's *The Cup* (1884).[17] The Lyceum aspired to create "a Temple of Art" in which the talents of leading artists and scene painters were used to create a distinct brand of extravagant pictorialism.[18] The Lyceum's sumptuous staging and subtly sexualised costuming often hovered "on the edges of a decadent sensibility".[19] Yet, by emphasising this staging's historical accuracy and educational value these productions veered towards the classical and refined rather than the transgressive or provocative.[20]

A more troubling and subversive form of Irving's picturesque medievalism would however emerge. As Worth notes, several of Maeterlinck's plays contain a "lush, old-fashioned

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[12] Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 4.
[13] Eltis, 'Theatre and Decadence', 208.
[14] David Mayer, 'Toga Plays', in *British Theatre in the 1890s: Essays on Drama and the Stage*, ed. by Richard Foulkes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 71- 92, 73; Ibid.
[15] Ibid. (Meyer), 73.
[16] *Sketch* (27 June 1894), 458.
[17] David Mayer, *Playing out the Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 20. There was also significant thematic overlap between *The Cup* and many later toga dramas. See Jeffrey Richards, *The Ancient World on the Victorian and Edwardian Stage* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 155.
[18] Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 402. Meisel's work offers a detailed account of Irving's stagecraft and aesthetics.
[19] Veronica Isaac, 'Ellen Terry, Shopping in Byzantium: Decadent costumes fit for a "Temple of Art"' (16 August 2022). [Accessed: 7 January 2024], https://www.stagingdecadence.com/blog/shopping-in-byzantium.
[20] Irving's emphasis on accurate and educationally valuable scenery is highlighted in Jeffery Richards, 'Irving and his Scenic Artists' *Henry Irving: A Re-Evaluation of the Pre-Eminent Victorian Actor-Manager*, ed. by Richard Foulkes (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 99-116.

romanticism" which has been "transformed and transcended".[21] This style had particular affinity with the work of the Pre-Raphaelites, with their eroticised medievalism and beautiful yet moody settings. Maeterlinck himself had been significantly influenced by the work of the Pre-Raphaelites, particularly the paintings of Edward Burne-Jones.[22] Upon seeing the Théâtre de L'Œuvre's special season at the ITS, one audience member recorded his impression that "in the mixture of great simplicity with an entire rejection of realism it seems to me to go back to Burne-Jones – Morris kind of thing".[23] Several contemporary commentators would describe Maeterlinck's work "as faded Burne-Jones-esque".[24] The Lyceum's historical verse dramas, which had frequently used Burne-Jones and other Pre-Raphaelite artists as scene painters, have a strong thematic and aesthetic connection with Maeterlinck's troubling romanticism.[25]

This overlap would become more apparent when Mrs Patrick Campbell and Johnston Forbes-Robertson produced *Pelléas et Mélisande* at the Prince of Wales's Theatre in 1898. With exquisite costumes designed by Burne-Jones and music "specially composed" by renowned French composer Gabriel Fauré, this production was a full-blown romantic spectacle.[26] As one commentator remarked, this "scenic splendour" made the play's "weird, elusive beauty […] shrivel up", bringing instead to the fore the more conventional aspects of Maeterlinck's plot: forbidden love, sexual jealousy, and violent punishment.[27] Declared by *The Era* to be "in every way superior" to the performance given at the ITS in 1895, which had only used "cloths painted to represent old tapestry" for scenery, this production had all the aesthetic elements of a picturesque Lyceum tragedy.[28] Indeed, when Mrs Patrick Campbell revived *Pelléas et Mélisande* in 1900 at the Royalty Theatre, she used old Burne-Jones sets from the Lyceum's 1895 production of Joseph Comyns Carr's *King Arthur* (1895).[29]

What delineates the passionate excesses of a more decadent strain of drama from conventional melodrama, boulevard drama, or tragic historical spectacle, however, is the strong sense of moral and social perversion. Decadence is frequently characterised not just by excess but also degeneration and distortion: "salacious desires at odds with the delimitation of 'appropriate' and

[21] Worth, *Irish Drama*, 74.
[22] Katharine Worth, *Maeterlinck's Plays in Performance* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1985), 28.
[23] Marsh to Trevelyan (1895), 1r-v.
[24] *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* (7 December 1891), 6. Comment on Maeterlinck's affinity to the Pre-Raphaelites can also be found in Hovey, 'Introduction', 8.
[25] Meisel, *Realizations*, 19.
[26] *Era* (25 June 1898), 13.
[27] Virginia Crawford, *Studies in Foreign Literature* (Massachusetts: L. C. Page, 1899), 166.
[28] *Era* (25 June 1898), 13; *Era* (30 March 1895), 11. The ITS's shabby staging perplexed critics. The same article in *The Era* expressed its disbelief that Maeterlinck's work could be sent "across the Channel clothed in such dimmed and dowdy attire".
[29] Worth, *Maeterlinck's Plays*, 30.

'healthy'".[30] Female desire becomes unsettling in these plays because these passions appear abnormal or misplaced. Maeterlinck's Princess Maleine is determined to marry a man that she has never met but insists that she loves. The young virgin Salomé is unnaturally infatuated with Jokanaan. Her triumphant crooning over his severed head, "*J'ai baisé ta bouche, Iokanaan, j'ai baisé ta bouche*" (I kissed your mouth, Jokanaan, I kissed your mouth), is a horrific and repulsive conclusion to a passion which seemingly defies all logic.[31]

In Bernhardt's Sardou repertoire, desire was often transgressive or forbidden. Bernhardt's character always fell "in love with a man whom she must either sacrifice or destroy".[32] However, as Gerda Taranow notes, this doomed, illicit love "remained pure, thus assuring sympathetic response from the audience".[33] By contrast, in Maeterlinck's dramas and Wilde's *Salomé* there are no clear moral imperatives and notions of familial or social duty fail to serve as religious or moral guides. In an unsettling instance of filial obligations meshing with bloodthirsty desire, Herodias is, for example, delighted with Salomé's demand for Jokanaan's head. Critical responses to Wilde's and Maeterlinck's dramas indicate their troubling resistance to traditional moral frameworks. *Salomé* was described as "morbid, bizarre, repulsive, and very offensive", while Maeterlinck's work was frequently labelled as "weird" and "strange".[34] The elements of sex, power, death, violence, and beauty which in Bernhardt's dramas and plays like *The Sign of the Cross* combined to create crowd pleasing and highly consumable spectacles are instead reconfigured to obfuscate recognisable moral systems and perturb audiences.

Notably, these monstrous manifestations of female lust arise when individual female desire is constrained, denied, or weaponised by surrounding society or male power. Salomé's destructive passion arises as she is "gasping for respite from the world of the lecherous stepfather".[35] Princess Maleine's strange refusal to renounce Prince Hjalmar comes after a violent conflict between two royal families over her marriage and threatening stories of a young noblewoman being imprisoned because "she loved a prince they would not let her love".[36] Mélisande's marriage to Golaud "awakens no love--only fear" and it is in this constant state of threat that her desire for her brother-

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[30] Alston and Desmarais, *Decadent Plays*, 2.
[31] Oscar Wilde, *Salomé: drame en un acte* (London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane, 1893), 84.
[32] John Stokes, 'Sarah Bernhardt', in *Bernhardt, Terry, Duse: The actress in her time*, eds. by John Stokes, Michael R. Booth, and Susan Bassnett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 13-64, 36.
[33] Gerda Taranow, *Sarah Bernhardt: The Art within the Legend* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 206.
[34] *Times* (23 February 1893), 8. For reviews commenting on the strangeness of Maeterlinck's dramas see: *Pall Mall Gazette* (17 September 1891), 3; *Era* (19 December 1891); *Era* (26 December 1891), 10.
[35] Worth, *Irish Drama*, 101.
[36] Maurice Maeterlinck, *Princess Maleine*, trans.by Richard Hovey (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company Publishers, 1894), 24.

in-law Pelléas arises.[37] Desire in these plays is depicted as an essential part of selfhood which when being denied or constrained manifests itself in strange and destructive ways.

Perverse manifestations of frustrated desires form a subtle, yet important, thematic overlap with elements of Ibsen's writing. Archer's often quoted description of Salomé as "an oriental Hedda Gabler" underscores the commonality between Wilde's monstrous creation and Ibsen's heroine.[38] Core supporters of the Ibsen movement in England frequently used decadent images of artifice, perversion, and exaggeration to describe Hedda's character: she is an "ill-educated, ill-trained, over-civilised daughter of our super-civilisation" McCarthy pronounced.[39] Figures like Hilde, with her dangerous desire to have Solness build "a tremendously high tower" (189), or John Gabriel Borkman and his fantasies of an industrial empire which stretches "all the wide world over", display similarly potent combinations of excessive ambition, constrained will, and consequent desire for the aberrant or destructive.[40]

The recurrent theme of constrained inner passions highlights the wider interest in the spiritual or the metaphysical which unites Ibsen, Maeterlinck, and many of the writers commonly categorised as decadent. In *Decadent Plays*, Alston and Desmarais anthologise several dramas under the heading "Oblivion and the Occult": "playwrights seek[ing] to pierce the veil of the visible, probing deeper into a mysterious and unfathomable world of possibilities, often with profoundly morbid and unsettling results.[41] As Stokes observes, "the quivering intensity, indefinite shapes, untranslatable moods, and exotic locations that Bernhardt conveyed on a grand commercial scale" all lend themselves to a symbolist sensibility.[42] The existence of works like Sharp's *Vistas* show how contemporary playwrights were highly aware of this potentiality as well.[43] Spectacular displays of transgressive passions and excessive desire were used not just to repulse or horrify but also to capture some strange, dark, inexpressible facet of the human existence.

This chapter analyses dramas which combine displays of perverse passion, sumptuous spectacle, horrific violence, and spiritual vision. It traces this impulse across a particularly wide range of theatrical forms and genres from historical verse drama, occult ritual, revenge tragedy, Pre-Raphaelite poetry, and melodrama. In doing so, my analysis seeks to show how the very forms and genres which fed into decadent drama subsequently drew elements of this new dramatic

[37] Mrs. Patrick Campbell, *My Life and Some Letters* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1922), 127.
[38] *Black and White* (11 May 1893), 290.
[39] *Black and White* (25 April 1891), 382.
[40] Henrik Ibsen, *John Gabriel Borkman*, trans. by William Archer (London: William Heinemann, 1897), 80.
[41] Alston and Desmarais, *Decadent Plays,* 2.
[42] Stokes, 'Sarah Bernhardt', 15.
[43] Notably, Sharp is best known for writing mystical Celtic dramas under the name Fiona Macleod from 1895 onwards. Sharp's association with the writers of the Celtic Revival is an interesting indication of the common spiritual and metaphysical threads running between writers and work commonly categorised as decadent and those aligned with the Yeatsian mode of symbolist drama.

tradition back into the wider theatrical culture. These strange, excessive depictions of extreme desire allowed playwrights and performers to create a strain of drama which both troubled and challenged sexual and moral norms, while simultaneously probing the deeper, darker elements of human experience.

Michael Field's *Attila, My Attila!* (1896)

One interesting example of Bernhardt-esque spectacle being made into an unsettling exploration of constrained female desire can be found in the dramatic writing of Michael Field. Michael Field is the literary pseudonym of Katherine Bradley and her niece, lover, and literary collaborator Edith Cooper. Although better remembered today for their poetry, particularly their collection of Sappho-inspired lyric poems *Long Ago* (1889), Bradley and Cooper were also prolific dramatists, publishing twenty-eight plays (mostly verse dramas) together.[44] As Algernon Charles Swinburne declared, most of Michael Field's early verse dramas follow "the great English tradition of poetic and historic drama".[45] They take the form of either Elizabethan-style dramas or classical tragedies and are generally characterised by large casts, elaborate verse, and epic or mythological elements.

A noticeable shift, however, occurred in the early 1890s, when Bradley and Cooper entered what Symons termed, "their second dramatic period […] when they came to a certain extent into contact with the so-called Decadent Movement".[46] The pair's friendships with many of the leading figures associated with British decadence, such as Wilde and Symons, introduced them to many of the ideas and impulses of the movement. This shift in dramatic style is reflected in their verse drama *Stephania* which was published by Elkin Mathews at the Bodley Head in 1892. Considered by Moriarty as "one of the first examples of a *genuine* symbolist drama produced in England", the play depicts the seduction and murder of Holy Roman Emperor Otho III by the widow of the king he overthrew, the eponymous Stephania.[47] Prized away from the wise counsel of Pope Sylvester II by Stephania's sexual wiles, Otho's religious devotion and strong sense of duty are replaced by an all-consuming lust. The drama's conclusion, in which a dying Otho begs "To kiss [Stephania] with one kiss till I am mad" despite knowing that she has poisoned him, encapsulates the play's perturbing depiction of the subversive and destructive power of sexual desire.[48]

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[44] Marion Thain, *'Michael Field': Poetry, Aestheticism and the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 7.

[45] Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Uncollected Letters of Algernon Charles Swinburne*, ed. by Terry Meyers, (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005), vol.ii, 436.

[46] Arthur Symons, 'Michael Field', *Forum*, 69:1 (1923), 1584-1592, 1588.

[47] Moriarty, 'Michael Field', 125 (emphasis in original).

[48] Michael Field, *Stephania: A Trialogue* (London: Elkin Mathews & John Lane, 1892), 99.

As Bradley and Cooper's close friend Bernard Berenson recognised, the "method is French" and "Stephania is a figure for the great Sarah".[49] This shift towards the murky world of Byzantine sexual intrigue and fervid, almost fantastical, sexual desire was not well received. Mathews only agreed to publish *Stephania* on the condition that he was first able to publish *Sight and Song* (1892) – the pair's collection of lyric poems inspired by famous pieces of European art.[50] Poor sales and negative reviews vindicated Mathews's caution. Stephania was condemned as "a perverse and well-nigh frantic figure" and multiple reviewers ridiculed Michael Field's elaborate and archaic turns of phrase.[51] Michael Field's depiction of "strange personalities" and "perverted moralities" struck a discordant note with their once appreciative critics.[52]

Around the same time as writing *Stephania*, Bradley and Cooper refocused their aspirations "In direction of the stage".[53] After receiving a negative response towards their verse drama *The Tragic Mary* (1890), the "first failure" of their dramatic career, Bradley and Cooper began to consider experimental matinée productions as a possible outlet for their dramatic ambitions.[54] "Mr. Tree talks about special plays to be given on Monday nights. Could William Rufus be rearranged, I wonder? Could any of Michael Field's plays be given a sufficiently determinate shape?", Bradley wrote in the August of 1890.[55] The pair would send Tree a comedy, most likely *A Christian Name* (c. 1888), at the end of the year.[56] However, as they had correctly anticipated, the actor-manager rejected the piece.[57]

The foundation of the ITS offered another outlet for Michael Field to attempt to stage their work. In November 1891, Bradley recorded her musings as to whether *Ferencz Renyi*, the play which would become *A Question of Memory*, could be suitable for the ITS.[58] The pair would first attend an ITS performance in April 1892 to watch their friend Symons's *The Minister's Call* and would later attend most of the 1892 and 1893 seasons, including the 1893 re-run of *Ghosts* to which they responded with great enthusiasm.[59] At the same time, the pair's friendship with Symons led

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[49] Michael Field, 'Works and Days,' (1893), Add MS 46780, 129r. Michael Field Collection, British Library, London.
[50] Michael Field, 'Works and Days' (1891), Add MS 46779, 146v. Michael Field Collection, British Library, London.
[51] *Academy* (22 April 1893), 342.
[52] Ibid.
[53]Michael Field, 'Work and Days' (1890), Add. MS. 46778, 104v. Michael Field Collection, British Library, London.
[54] Charles Ricketts, *Michael Field*, ed. by J. G. Paul Delaney (Edinburgh: Tragara Press, 1976), 3.
[55] Field, 'Work and Days' (1890), 105r.
[56] Ibid., 126r. *A Christian Name*, a farcical comedy of mistaken identity, is dated by Ivor Treby to around 1888. The fact that it exists in a fair copy (somewhat of a rarity among Michael Field's extant unpublished dramatic works) further strengthens the likelihood of *A Christian Name* being the play sent to Tree. Ivor C. Treby, *The Michael Field Catalogue: A Book of Lists* ([S.l]: De Blackland Press, 1998), 114.
[57] Michael Field, *One Soul We Divided: A Critical Edition of the Diary of Michael Field*, ed. by Carolyn Dever (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024), 63.
[58] Field, 'Works and Days' (1891), 140r. The pair also record that they read both *Ghosts* and *Thérèse Raquin* (the ITS first two performances) in 1891. Field, 'Work and Days' (1891), 144r; 163r.
[59] The pair wrote a lengthy and laudatory review of *Ghosts* in Field, 'Work and Day' (1893), 7r-10v.

to an acquaintance with Moore, who was living with Symons in Fountain Court. Moore, who had named Michael Field as one of the most promising British dramatists in his famous essay on an English Théâtre Libre, admired the pair's "strength and ease of style", and was keen to integrate Michael Field into the ITS.[60]

Moore's efforts led to the ITS offering to produce Michael Field's verse drama *William Rufus* – a piece that the Irishman had already proposed to the Théâtre Libre a few years prior.[61] *William Rufus* never made it onto the ITS stage. The "enormous amount of male talent" the play required was beyond the capacity of the society's acting pool.[62] Instead, Grein was offered, and subsequently accepted, Michael Field's drama *A Question of Memory*. Loosely based on a true story, the play dramatises the heroic exploits of Hungarian peasant farmer Ferencz Renyi, during the revolution of 1848. The ITS staged *A Question of Memory* in October 1893 at the Opéra Comique Theatre. However, the play was met with an unenthusiastic response. "[E]very morning paper against us", Cooper recorded the day after the performance.[63] Apart from the perennial complaint that the actors were "unequal to their task", most of the objections were to the play's convoluted dialogue and lack of a tight dramatic structure.[64] "The dialogue is always flying off at unexpected tangents, and trying to obtain subtlety by means of incoherence", Archer complained in his review of the piece. [65]

A Question of Memory was the only play that Michael Field ever managed to stage. Some critics therefore suggest that Bradley and Cooper abandoned their theatrical aspirations after the disastrous performance.[66] Yet, as Joseph Bristow has shown, the disappointment of *A Question of Memory* only fuelled their theatrical ambitions.[67] The pair, as they wrote in a draft letter to Archer, attempted to learn "much from frequent attendance at the theatres".[68] They watched a wide range of plays by leading contemporary dramatists, from Pinero's *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* to Wilde's *An*

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[60] George Moore, *Impressions and Opinions* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), 23-48; Field, 'Work and Days' (1891), 31r (emphasis in original).
[61] Field, 'Work and Days' (1890), 94r.
[62] Cutting from *The Daily Chronicle* (23 August 1893) pasted into Michael Field, 'Works and Days' (1893), Add MS 46781, 54v. Michael Field Collection, British Library, London.
[63] Field, 'Works and Days' (1893), 86v.
[64] *Theatre* (1 December 1893), 342. *The Theatre* notably also remarked that Bernhardt, Irving, and Forbes Robertson would be able to make the shooting scene "pass the limit of human endurance, and I for one should be loath to witness it" (341).
[65] Archer, *Theatrical World* (1893), 253. Alice Grein makes a similar observation about the dialogue's impressionistic quality: (A.) Grein, *Story of a Pioneer*, 135-36.
[66] Ibid. (Grein) 136; Moriarty, 'Michael Field', 127.
[67] Joseph Bristow, 'Michael Field's "Unwomanly Audacities": Attila, My Attila!, Sexual Modernity and the London Stage', in *Michael Field: Decadent Moderns*, eds. by Sarah Parker and Parejo Vadillo (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2019), 123–50.
[68] A draft of this letter is found in Field, 'Works and Days' (1893), 98v.

Ideal Husband.[69] They also set out to "analyse modern plays", reading extensively through Ibsen's oeuvre as well as plays by their fellow ITS playwrights, such as Todhunter's *The Black Cat*.[70] Embracing modern drama did not, however, lead to a complete abandonment of Cooper and Bradley's previous interest in historical verse drama. Shortly after the ITS's production of *A Question of Memory*, Michael Field began work on *Equal Love* – a verse drama about the life of Empress Theodora, a subject that Bernhardt's performance in Sardou's *Théodora* had popularised.[71] The interest in sexualised, histrionic displays of female passion combined with potent symbolism and historical, orientalised settings which the pair had shown in *Stephania* was clearly still strong.

Attila, My Attila! lies at the heart of this nexus between Bradley and Cooper's interest in modern drama, female sexual passion, and historical verse drama. Inspired by an episode in Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-88), the play, which was published in 1896, focuses upon the life of Roman princess Justa Grata Honoria.[72] At sixteen, Honoria falls in love with and is subsequently impregnated by her chamberlain Eugenius. Upon learning of her pregnancy, Honoria's mother, Galla Placida, has her placed into a religious order and arranges for the baby to be killed at birth. During her fourteen-year imprisonment, Honoria develops an infatuation with Attila the Hun and proposes marriage to him via a secret envoy. Attila consequently lays waste to Rome in order to "claim his bride".[73] Honoria's family, shocked by her "mad folly" (106), force her into marriage with Eugenius so that she may be put beyond Atilla's reach. However, just after the rite is performed, news arrives that Atilla is dead: murdered by Burgundian princess Ildico, whom he was trying to force into marriage. With the threat of Attila past, Honoria is dispatched to perpetual imprisonment.[74]

In many ways, *Attila, My Attila!* resembles the pair's previous Byzantine verse dramas. As with *Stephania*, the pair noted that Honoria "was conceived with Sarah Bernhardt before us all the while" and even recorded their intention to send the work to the French actress once they had secured the dramatic rights.[75] However, Honoria is a stranger creature than the heroines of Michael Field's previous Byzantine plays. From the start of *Attila, My Attila!*, Honoria is presented as having expansive and unsettling desires. In the opening act, she recounts the nightly dreams she has of

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[69] Field, 'Works and Days' (1893), 93r; Michael Field, 'Work and Days' (1895), Add MS 46783, 4r. Michael Field Collection, British Library London.
[70] Ibid. (1893), 13r; (1894), 14v.
[71] *Equal Love* was published in 1896. However, there is evidence of the pair working on the drama in late 1893. Field, 'Work and Days' (1893), 104v.
[72] Michael Field's drama has debts to George Meredith's 'The Nuptials of Attila' (1879). The phrase "Attila, My Attila" is a quotation from Meredith's poem. Bristow, 'Unwomanly Audacities', 124.
[73] Michael Field, *Attila, My Attila!* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1896), 65.
[74] For a more extended plot summary see: Bristow, 'Unwomanly Audacities', 124-7.
[75] Michael Field quoted in Johanna Kirby, *Heroines, Anti-Heroines and New Women: The Early Drama of Michael Field, 1884-1895* (PhD thesis, University of Westminster, 2017), 26. Field, 'Works and Days', (1895), 25v.

steering a boat in a storm-tossed sea in which she relishes the "delicious" (10) peril of being able to chart her own course. Asked what her greatest ambition is, she responds "to have my will" (16). Yet, when asked what her will is, she "cannot say,/It stretches out so far" (16). Bradley and Cooper described Wilde's Salomé as "a pale, exacting virgin-thirsting for tragedy": a character type which seemingly functions as the model for Honoria.[76]

Honoria's vast and expansive desires crucially carry a highly sexualised element. Sexual freedom is one of her core fantasies: "I want to be a captive and have lovers, /Two at a time, and freely choose at last/ The great, barbaric fellow as you chose" (11-12), she tells her mother. The Princess is affectionate and expressive in her gestures, often giving or begging a kiss from the other characters, while also displaying a slightly cruel or coquettish element to her behaviour. Honoria's "eyes sparkle" (28) when Eugenius details the litany of male attendants she has sexually teased and tormented. Echoing the provocative "combination of naivety, knowingness, virginal purity, and active desire", which characterise *Pelléas et Mélisande* or *Salomé*, Honoria displays a disconcerting mix of sexual maturity and innocence.[77]

The crowning of Honoria as Augusta accentuates the more unsettling elements of her sexuality. To protect her son's status as Emperor, Placidia gives her daughter this Imperial position to ensure that she is "always inaccessible/To any suitor--general, count, or king" (19). This political manipulation of a young virgin's sexuality, a recurrent theme across many of the works mentioned in this chapter, ensures that Honoria's sexual instincts are now constrained. Placidia's advisor Satyrus warns against the potentially disastrous consequences of this constriction. He cautions that "our little princess is as fresh and hearty/ As [her father]" (14) and "if we cut her off/From every pleasure, we shall lose her too" (14). Honoria's barbarian father is seemingly a key feature in explaining and emphasising the untameability of the Princess's instincts. Michael Field makes clear that denying Honoria access to her desires, including her sexuality, goes against all natural laws.

Upon learning her fate, the Princess's sexualised behaviour immediately heightens. Honoria suddenly craves to know "What is it I am missing" (23) regarding the relationship between man and wife and demands kisses from her maidservant Marsa. Her claims to desire individualism and freedom also become more pronounced:

> […] all life is simple and we want
> No masters in it, if we will but live.
> Only the courage seems impiety
> For just a girl to dare to be herself. (26)

[76] Michael Field quoted in Moriarty, 'Michael Field', 140 (n.27). Moriarty notes that "The parallels between Honoria and Salomé are somewhat obvious".
[77] Eltis, 'Decadent Theatre', 318.

This speech, which occurs just before Honoria summons Eugenius to her, positions the Princess's transgressive attraction to her servant as the product of having her inner nature constrained.

Desire's unnatural containment, and its consequent perversion, is crucial to understanding the most transgressive passion in this drama: Honoria's desire for Attila. After she learns that she will be made Augusta, Honoria has a momentary fantasy of Attila as her means of deliverance:

> Unless, indeed, some mighty conqueror
> Should take me captive. Ah, how glorious
> If such a thing could be! If Attila
> Could lay siege to Ravenna! (23)

Expressed in "*a frenzied voice*" (23), one of the few stage directions in the drama, this hysterical yearning for Attila is shown to be closely linked to sexual repression. After becoming Augusta, Honoria's obsession with Attila continues. She declares "How I love to hear/ Of the black hordes […] They bellow like wild beasts, their countless drums/ Keep echo ringing" (36). In a similar vein to Maeterlinck's *La Princesse Maleine*, a work that the pair read in September 1891, Michael Field presents a young princess whose desires once thwarted now manifests itself as the determined and forceful pursuit of an inappropriate lover.[78]

This sense of Honoria's inner nature being changed by her strange situation is stressed in the play's preface. Michael Field justify Honoria's actions by claiming that "the importunate desire to be herself was fair and natural, its perversion was revenged by the blight with which nature curses" (n.p.). "[T]o be urged by nature, and yet outrage her through very obedience is a tragedy of tragedies" (n.p.), they declare. Bristow suggests that there is a contradiction or confusion in having nature which outrages nature.[79] Yet, as Michael Field hints with their reference to the perversion of desire, the tragedy seems to be that Honoria's fundamental instincts have been warped. Honoria, the pair proclaim, "sought to give freedom to her womanhood by unwomanly audacities" (n.p.). Following natural sexual instincts by pursuing an unnatural and monstrous object of desire is the paradox at the heart of the play.

Indeed, the turning point in Honoria's attraction for Attila comes in Act Three: after Honoria's baby has been killed and Honoria condemned to live a cloistered, joyless life in a religious order. The princess experiences a "revelation" (62), in which she sees herself as Attila's bride and instructs Satyrus to propose marriage to him. This passion for Attila, which Honoria presents as a grand attraction of her soul, is driven by the lure of the Hun's terrible greatness:

[78] Field, 'Work and Days' (1891), 103r.
[79] Bristow, 'Unwomanly Audacities', 136.

> Say that I feel within
> A greatness to wed greatness. Something answers
> Deep in my nature to that energy
> That makes a waste place of an obstacle. (69)

In the play's preface, Michael Field describe Honoria as "the *New Woman* of the fifth century" ([emphasis in original], n.p.) and explicitly reference Hedda fighting against her own motherhood as an analogue for Honoria's predicament. Such pronouncements underscore how, much like Ibsen's heroine, Honoria's boredom and containment have created a spiritual attraction to the horrific and destructive.

The terms that Honoria uses to declare her passion for Attila are more an expression of her own sense of constriction than love:

> I am desperate:
> I cannot of myself fulfil my passion,
> I cannot reach the freedom I desire,
> I cannot carry suffering to its end … (67)

Exploiting the full possibility of the verse form, Michael Field uses Honoria's suggestive, rhythmic, reaching language to encapsulate her desperate desire to transcend her current situation: a desire which is seemingly beyond the ability of words or rational thought to properly convey. The metaphysical, almost supernatural, element of this perverse desire indeed gets stronger as Honoria's passions grow more extreme. Just before the play's climax, Honoria begins to speak of Attila as a supernatural demon or quasi-avenging God: "I am with the storms/ Nature's own incantations, devilry/ To overthrow you" (100). She even expresses her conviction that both she and Attila can affect the universe by "sheer willing" (65) – an interesting potential echo of Solness's belief that "special, chosen people" (139) can affect the universe by strength of will alone. Displaying a similar mix of egotism and sexual frustration to Ibsen's master builder, Honoria's constrained passions move ambiguously to the realm of the mystical or transcendent.

As the fantastical and egotistical elements of Honoria's fantasies grow, so too do the ironic and potentially satiric undertones of Michael Field's piece. Moriarty argues that Honoria is "so caught up in her own self-absorption and self-indulgence, and unable to effect her own liberation, that she represents the modern character in the throes of the contemporary dilemma, paralyzed by self-pity".[80] This sense of irony culminates when the news of Atilla's death arrives, revealing that Honoria's so-called liberator and all-powerful hero was a common mortal rapist. Much like Ibsen's most self-absorbed characters, Honoria has visions of grandeur, supernatural powers, and her

[80] Moriarty, 'Michael Field', 129.

tragic predicament but is oblivious to the realities around her. One review of *Attila, My Attila!* made this exact comparison, acknowledging that some critics believe that "Ibsen himself is irony, and that he is laughing all the while at Ibsenism".[81] Mirroring the ambiguous tonality of some of the Norwegian's dramas, Michael Field undercuts Honoria's claims to grandeur, greatness, and visionary insight.

Attila, My Attila!'s preface concludes by declaring "this play presents Irony" (n.p.). The few complimentary reviewers of the play picked up upon this ironic element. *The Athenaeum* praised the drama as "an historical ironical tragedy of much power" and suggested that it was a piece "on which the Independent Theatre might cast its eyes".[82] The repeated claim that the play contains irony has, however, puzzled both contemporary critics and modern scholars alike.[83] Bristow writes that "this description proves hard to construe, since it remains unclear whether *Attila, My Attila!* is supposed to undercut the tragic form that places Honoria's sexuality in opposition to the harsh political forces that entrammel her".[84]

However, a critique of the patriarchal forces constraining Honoria and an ironic depiction of her subsequent self-indulgent egotistical desires are not necessarily mutually exclusive entities. *Attila, My Attila!* was designed to be a play which "would once and for all place [Michael Field] among a rising generation of playwrights whose daring dramas were transforming the London stage".[85] The drama reflects Bradley and Cooper's incessant reading and study of the most widely acclaimed avant-garde dramatists. Like Wilde's *Salomé*, Bradley and Cooper took a Bernhardt-esque tale of unorthodox female desire and made this desire strange and aberrant. Yet, they laced it even more strongly with the ironic, egotistical, and metaphysical elements which permeated many of Ibsen's works. The play shows the tragic effects of constricting female agency and sexual desire. Yet, this constriction creates a modern monster rather than a sympathetic victim.

Florence Farr's *The Beloved of Hathor* (1901)

In *Attila, My Attila!* the connection between Honoria's thwarted desires and some form of transcendent or metaphysical aspect is relatively subtle and implicit. However, this relationship between the spiritual plane and the violent, erotic, sensuous passion associated with decadent writing can be seen in a more explicit form in the occult dramas of Florence Farr. Farr is often

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[81] *Daily Chronicle* (20 November 1895). Quoted in Bristow, 'Unwomanly Audacities', 141.
[82] *Athenaeum* (11 April 1896), 487.
[83] For an example of the contemporary press being puzzled by the irony statement, see *Pall Mall Gazette* (6 January 1896), 4.
[84] Bristow, 'Unwomanly Audacities', 136.
[85] Ibid, 124.

mentioned in critical discussions of Shaw's or Yeats's dramatic writing.[86] Yet, as a theatrical figure in her own right, Farr's place in theatre history is predominantly tied to her role as an actor and producer of Ibsen. Her 1891 production of *Rosmersholm* at the Vaudeville Theatre, in which she played the role of Rebecca West, established her "considerable power" as an actress and positioned her as a significant theatrical experimenter in the public consciousness.[87] Her later role as the Rat Wife in Robins's production of *Little Eyolf* further cemented her association with the Ibsen movement.[88]

Although Farr is best remembered for her performance in *Rosmersholm*, this production was not her first foray into non-commercial theatre. Following the breakdown of her marriage in 1888, Farr took up residence with her sister Henrietta and her husband, the artist Henry Marriott Paget, in the bohemian community of Bedford Park. Here, Farr, who had worked as an actress throughout the 1880s, began to star in Todhunter's productions at the Bedford Park Clubhouse alongside her sister and brother-in-law.[89] Performing in front of "artistic and literary people from all parts of London", such as Selwyn Image, Alma Murray, and Yeats, Farr began to integrate herself into experimental theatrical circles.[90]

It was through these Bedford Park connections, as much as her reputation for producing Ibsen, that Farr became involved in the ITS. In 1892, she played Blanche Sartorius in the ITS's production of *Widowers' Houses*: Shaw and Farr having been intimate friends and most likely lovers during the early 1890s.[91] She also took the starring role of Beatrice Cenci in the Shelley Society's (led by Todhunter) 1892 production of *The Cenci,* which had initially been organised as an ITS co-production. She would then rely upon Todhunter, Shaw, and Yeats (all of whom had been involved in the Bedford Park community) to write plays for her 1894 season at the Avenue Theatre, an endeavour which, as discussed previously, was designed to emulate the ITS. Farr's reputation as a producer and performer of experimental drama was such that when Grein resigned from the ITS, and a co-director was being searched for, her name was put forward as a potential replacement director.[92] This suggestion was actively endorsed by Grein; though Shaw suspected that the Dutchman's support was in order "to keep the I. T. dependent on him personally".[93]

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86 Research specifically focused on Farr's relationships to these men includes Johnson, *Florence Farr*; Josephine Johnson, "The Music of Speech: Florence Farr and W. B. Yeats', *Literature in Performance*, 2:1 (1981), 56-65; Joseph M. Hassett, *W. B. Yeats and the Muses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
87 *Morning Post* (24 February 1891), 3.
88 This part had initially been played by Mrs Patrick Campbell. However, after Achurch dropped out of the performance and Mrs Patrick Campbell was consequently promoted to the role of Rita, Farr took over this role.
89 Johnson, *Florence Farr*, 38.
90 Yeats, *New Island*, 98; ibid., 39.
91 For an example of a scholar who believes that Farr and Shaw's relationship was sexual see Johnson, *Florence Farr*.
92 Shaw, *Collected Letters*, vol.i, 563.
93 Ibid.

A notable strand which runs throughout Farr's dramatic career is her prowess as a poetic actress. Shortly after seeing her perform for the first time, Yeats commented that "I have never heard verse better spoken […] she is an almost perfect poetic actress".[94] Farr's attraction to *Rosmersholm* was in part likely driven by the play's distinct and unconventional lyricism: its "symbolism and […] stale odour of spilt poetry".[95] Indeed, it is interesting to note that Murray – a member of the Bedford Park community who was famed for playing Beatrice in the first performance of *The Cenci* – had also been keen to produce the British premiere of the play, until Shaw dissuaded her.[96] Farr's interest in elaborate, sensual verse dramas continued throughout her dramatic career. She produced the English premiere of *Salomé* at the Bijou Theatre in 1905 and also acted in the Court Theatre's 1904 production of Maeterlinck's *Aglavaine et Sélysette* (1896).

Many of Farr's experiments with poetic drama were focused round the activities of the Irish Revival. Farr starred as the bard Aleel in the Irish Literary Theatre's 1899 inaugural performance of Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen* (1892) – a production that Farr also initially stage-managed.[97] She also played an active role in Yeats's attempts to establish a 'Theatre of Beauty': a London-based equivalent of the Irish Literary Theatre which aimed to have "little dealing with the problem plays" and instead "try to bring back beauty and beautiful speech".[98] A shared interest in mysticism and the occult underpinned this strong professional and personal relationship between Yeats and Farr. Having joined the Golden Dawn in July 1890, Farr was a deeply committed member of the society, rising to the rank of "Chief Adept in Anglia" by 1897.[99] She penned numerous studies of occult practices, such as *Egyptian Magic* (1896) and *The Way of Wisdom* (1900), and made frequent contributions to prominent spiritualist periodicals.[100]

This combined interest in theatre and the occult finds expression in Farr's one-act drama *The Beloved of Hathor* (1901). Co-authored with Olivia Shakespear, a novelist and fellow Golden Dawn member who was also a close friend and former lover of Yeats's, the piece premiered in 1901 at the Victoria Hall. It was produced to mark the establishment of the London Egyptian Society, an

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[94] Yeats reproduced in Clifford Bax (ed.), *Florence Farr, Bernard Shaw, and W. B. Yeats: Letters* (Dublin: Cuala, 1941), 33.
[95] W. B. Yeats, *Autobiographies* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), 372.
[96] Shaw, *Collected Letters*, vol.1, 272. Murray was renowned for her ability to recite verse: see Anderson, 'Something about Murray'.
[97] Johnson, *Florence Farr*, 102. Moore would ultimately oust Farr as stage manager.
[98] Yeats quoted in Ronald Schuchard, 'W. B. Yeats and the London Theatre Societies, 1901-1904', *The Review of English Studies*, 29:116 (1978), 415-46, 433. As part of Yeats's endeavours to educate audiences on his new philosophy as well as train amateur actors capable of performing in this ritualistic style, Farr gave numerous verse and chanting recitals.
[99] Mary K. Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn: Rebels and Priestesses* (Rochester, Vermont: Park Street Press, 1995), xviii. After a major schism within the society, Farr would however break with the Golden Dawn in 1902 and instead join the Theosophical Society.
[100] Muriel Pécastaing-Boissière, '"Wisdom Is a Gift given to the Wise": Florence Farr (1860–1917): New Woman, Actress and Pagan Priestess', *Cahiers victoriens & édouardiens*, 80:1 (2014), para.12.

organisation led by another Golden Dawn member Marcus Worsley Blackden.[101] The play was then performed a few months later at the same venue alongside another one-act piece inspired by the rituals and customs of Ancient Egypt, *The Shrine of the Golden Eagle* (1902), which was also nominally co-authored with Shakespear.[102] As Yeats remarked, these productions were "very amateurish".[103] The cast was largely made up of Farr's family and the audience was heavily populated by her friends and fellow Golden Dawn associates.[104]

As Denisoff notes, the Golden Dawn had a keen appreciation of "the role of theatre in helping one enter into a higher level of spirituality".[105] *The Beloved of Hathor* hovers indeterminately between a theatrical production and the embodied performance of occult practice. Described by Yeats as less a play "than fragments of a ritual", the piece is replete with instances of magical rites being performed.[106] From an elaborate scrying ritual to a ceremonial libation involving "*a crown bound with Urcari snakes*", "Miss Farr's intention seems to be to illustrate, in a sort of object lesson as it were, the manners and customs, and above all the religious beliefs, of ancient Egypt", as *The Westminster Review* observed.[107] All instances of spell-casting in *The Beloved of Hathor* are also accompanied by chanting and stylised movement, replicating the quasi-theatrical way that the Golden Dawn performed ritual magic.[108]

In terms of plot, *The Beloved of Hathor* focuses on the struggle between human passion and spiritual enlightenment. The play's hero Aahmes, the "warrior chief of the Red Race" (A3r), is leading the Egyptian army against the Hyksos. Ranoutet (played by Farr), the Goddess Hathor's chief priestess, promises him immortality if he is victorious. Just before the great battle, Aahmes is however corrupted by a young Egyptian noblewoman called Nouferou. Seeking glory for herself, she enchants him to fall madly in love with her. Ranoutet attempts to break the enchantment through her own magical powers. Yet, just at the point that victory has been achieved, Nouferou corrupts the ritual, ensuring that Aahmes's soul "no longer reflect[s] the divine image" (D4v).

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[101] Ibid., para.17.

[102] Both plays are attributed to Shakespeare. However, Greer argues that Farr's journals suggest that these works are almost entirely her own. Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, 266.

[103] Y. B. Yeats, *The Collected Letters of Y. B. Yeats*, eds. by John Kelly and Ronald Schuchard (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), vol.iii, 121.

[104] Johnson, *Florence Farr*, 90-1.

[105] Dennis Denisoff, 'Performing the Spirit: Theatre, the Occult, and the Ceremony of Isis', *Cahiers victoriens & édouardiens* [online], 80:1 (2014), para.8. As Denisoff highlights, many of the Golden Dawn's members were heavily involved in theatrical ventures.

[106] Y. B. Yeats, *Later Articles and Reviews: Uncollected Articles, Reviews, and Radio Broadcasts Written after 1900*, ed. by Colton Johnson (New York: Scribner, 2000).

[107] Florence Farr and Olivia Shakespear, *The Beloved of Hathor, and The Shrine of the Golden Hawk* (Croydon: Farncombe & Son, [n.d.]), B2r. *Westminster Review* (January 1902), 109.

[108] As Ellic Howe details, the Golden Dawn's ritual ceremonies bore some resemblance to "complicated theatrical performances". Ellic Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn: A Documentary History of a Magical Order, 1887-1923* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1972), 67.

Consequently, Egypt is saved but Aahmes is denied his promised immortality: "the doors of Hathor's sanctuary open to [him] no more" (E1r).

The centre of destructive desire in the play is Nouferou. A highly sexualised oriental noblewoman with grand and perverse passions: Nouferou's character displays a clear generic allegiance to figures like Honoria and Salomé. Nouferou feels cloistered by society's patriarchal strictures. "I burn for knowledge, for the freedom of a bird upon the wing. I am weary of the speech of the wise, who have not wisdom; who would tell me that Egyptian women must always be discreet and secret" (B4v), she proclaims. Denisoff notes the atypicality of a femme fatale figure displaying shades of "feminist" rhetoric.[109] He suggests that Farr is using Nouferou's character to explore "the struggle between the independence and self-agency encouraged by New Woman feminism, on the one hand, and the Order of the Golden Dawn's ideal of a de-individuated universal will".[110]

An alternative, though by no means mutually exclusive, explanation is that Farr is using this language of intellectual and physical constriction to explain Nouferou's troubling behaviour. Forbidden to leave the palace and with a father who "punishes like the gods" (B4r), Nourferou is being constrained by a controlling male power. Moreover, in an interesting parallel to Honoria's barbarian father, the audience learns that Nouferou's mother was a "*wandering woman*" (A3v) and, as the stage directions make clear, the daughter has inherited her mother's "*wild instincts*" (A3v). Farr positions Nouferou's dangerous and destructive behaviour as the result of her instinctual desire for freedom and adventure being denied.

Termed by *The Westminster Review* "a rather Ibsenish young lady", Nouferou indeed has much in common with the destructive and self-aggrandising yearnings of Hilde or Hedda.[111] Nouferou's rebellion against Egyptian society is not fuelled by a desire for social emancipation. Instead, she exhibits a troubling attraction to glory, grandeur, and violence: a "long[ing] to see the soldiers and hear the clash of arms, and hear the war chant" (B4v). She considers death merely a way to achieve magnificence. "I do not desire old age and ugliness in Egypt, nor the great wisdom of the gods in heaven. To be always beautiful and young is enough" (B4v), the Egyptian noblewoman proclaims. Echoing Hedda's destructive desire to "do it beautifully" (54), Nouferou's feeling of restriction has led to her desire to achieve a form of highly aestheticised destruction.

Nouferou's seduction of Aahmes is fuelled by this perverse desire for glory and domination. Her attraction to the great warrior appears after she witnesses him being venerated as the beloved

[109] Denisoff, *Decadent Ecology*, 171.
[110] Ibid, 172.
[111] *Westminster Review* (January 1902), 109.

of Hathor. This dynamic becomes more apparent when she revels in having become a godlike figure to Aahmes:

> **AAHMES**: What is the dawn to me? My life is here.
> **RANOUTET**: Egypt is crying to her son!
> **AAHMES:** Egypt is here.
> (*Ranoutet wrings her hands.*)
> **NOUFEROU:** I am the dawn, and am Egypt! Beyond the circle of my arms lies the night. I am the dawn, and I am Egypt! When I speak with my beloved the voices of all the world are hushed, and he hears me only. (D1r)

"Egypt" in the piece symbolises not just the nation but also a state of spiritual alignment with Hathor and her wishes: "my heart is Egypt's! My heart longs for Egypt!" (C1v), Aahmes earlier proclaims. Nouferou's declaration that she is now "Egypt" underscores how she has usurped the all-consuming place of the divine in Aahmes's soul.

In Judeo-Christian theology, "there is a certain symbolic or analogical alignment of sexual desire and desire for God".[112] 'The Black Madonna', with Bhir's hysterical sexual passion for the goddess he worships, is a clear example of how this element of religious passion can be taken to transgressive and troubling territory. Likewise, Gerrard Carter observes that Wilde's Salomé is "a Judean princess taken from the same geographical *cadre* of the *Song of Songs*" but Wilde transformed the Shulamite's love of God into a monstrous sexual passion.[113] Nouferou's enchantment of Aahmes's soul exposes the similar space that sexual lust and spiritual devotion occupy by perverting that religious sentiment. The play rests on "a conflict between earthly love and divine wisdom" since Aahmes is told that only if he can resist earthly temptation will he receive immortality.[114] Farr's use of the trope of the oriental princess with perverse desires thus serves as a way for her to explore and accentuate this spiritual conflict.

This connection between sex, death, the divine, and dramatic spectacle reaches its crescendo during the battle with the Hyksos. Having learned that Aahmes has been compromised, Ranoutet leads a mass ritual to save his soul, having threatened Nouferou with immediate execution if she does not assist. A frenzy of sounds, rhythms, and images ensues: "*The priests chant. Maut! Maut!. Nouferou and Ouny dance and clash cymbals. Drums, sistrums, and cries of victory rising to a great clamour without*" (D4r). The access to the divine is shown to be given by the outpouring of emotion and spectacle which carries a slightly sexualised and hysterical edge. At the climax of Farr's second

112 Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay "on the Trinity"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 295.
113 Gerrard Carter, 'The Shulamite of Sodom: Wilde's Subversion of the *Song of Songs* and the Birth of the Monstrous-Feminine', *Miranda* [Online], 19:1 (2019), para.32.
114 Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, 266.

Egyptian play *The Shrine of the Golden Eagle*, the protagonist does an ecstatic dance "in triumph to the music of the worlds beyond space" (G1r) when she is possessed by the spirit of the divine Ka in a similar expression of this dynamic. A great spectacle of performance and excess of emotion is the key mode of both experiencing and accessing the inexpressible.

This moment of spiritual transcendence is, however, only temporary. Just when the day has seemingly been saved, Nouferou seizes the statue of Aahmes and shatters it on the ground, with a cry of "then let Aahmes die" (D4r). This shocking violent act means that the purity of Aahmes's soul has been destroyed, even though his physical body remains intact. Like Hedda's suicide or Solness's fall at the end of *The Master Builder*, the climax of the play thus becomes an abrupt moment of horrific destruction but one which is nonetheless tied to the kind of terrible beauty and grandeur these characters wish to achieve. The horrific desires caused by Nouferou's distorted and constrained nature have found their shocking conclusion. From here, the piece's ending is swift and muted. Nouferou quickly slinks away and returns to her father – with only his scowl suggesting any possible further discontent. Aahmes, having successfully defended Egypt, receives control of the kingdom. However, as Ranoutet says, "such a blossom is arid, and holds no promise of Immortal fruit" (E1r). The exuberant, ritualistic, multi-modal theatrical spectacle, with its promise of access to the divine, is replaced with a mundane, quiet end.

The Beloved of Hathor perplexed the theatrical press. One reviewer apparently claimed that "nothing as bizarre in dramatic art had ever been performed before".[115] Yet, Farr's associates were keen to stress the beautiful spiritual qualities of the play. Yeats's review of *The Beloved of Hathor* and *The Shrine of the Golden Eagle* indicated that "he saw these Egyptian plays as models for a 'new' way forward towards a theatre of 'ritual'". [116] He praised their refusal to "grossen the imagination with realism" and commended the production's use of symbolic scenery.[117] The handful of scholars who have discussed *The Beloved of Hathor* draw similar critical lineages. The piece is largely either considered in terms of its relationship to late-nineteenth-century esotericism and occultism or as a precursor to the Yeatsian vein of modernist theatre.[118]

These genealogies, however, tend to obscure how *The Beloved of Hathor*'s spiritual dynamics both grow out of and are enhanced by its relation to decadent depictions of perverse desire. It is interesting to note that the war chant Farr uses for the battle scene, "the battle breaks,/ The weary

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[115] Johnson, *Florence Farr,* 91.
[116] Andrew Houwen, 'The "Egyptian Faces" of W. B. Yeats's *At the Hawk's Well', Essays and Studies in British and American Literature*, 69:1 (2023), 20-9, 24.
[117] Yeats, *Later Articles*, 62.
[118] See Houwen, 'Egyptian Faces'; Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*; 'Pécastaing-Boissière, 'Wisdom is a Gift'. One significant exception to this trend is the work of Denisoff, who explicitly explores the piece through the lens of "decadent feminism", Denisoff, *Decadent Ecology*, 140.

waiting days are over/Let each man rush to battle as a lover" (D1r), is directly taken from 'The Coming of War' (1889) by Lionel Johnson – a well-known decadent poet of the period.[119] With their unsettling conflation of desire and violence, these lines encapsulate the decadent literary tradition that much of the play's aesthetic and narrative conventions depend upon. Recognising how the eruption of perverse passion in dramas like *Salomé* speaks to wider questions of the human soul, Farr has moved this trope to a more explicitly mystical and spiritual context.

William Poel's 1892 production of *The Duchess of Malfi* (c.1613)

Attila, My Attila! and *The Beloved of Hathor* are both plays which share an affinity with what can loosely be termed as the *Salomé* school of decadent drama: a sexualised oriental princess with perverse desires. Yet, there was also a vein of drama which more closely resembled the strange and unsettling medieval world of Maeterlinck's plays. An interesting example of this impulse was the ITS's 1892 production of Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, "re-arranged for the modern stage by William Poel".[120] Poel is best remembered today for founding the Elizabethan Stage Society in 1894 and promoting a 'bare-boards' approach to Shakespearian staging in British theatre. A leading proponent of Elizabethan drama throughout the 1870s and 1880s, he founded 'The Elizabethans' in 1879, a group of self-described "Shakespearian Students" who gave performances of the playwright's work in rooms and small halls across the country.[121] He also joined Frederick J. Furnivall's New Shakespeare Society in 1881, having produced a bare-stage production of *Hamlet* (c.1599) at St. George's Hall under the auspices of the society earlier that year.[122] Poel would soon become a committee member of the New Shakespeare Society, a fact which is displayed prominently on the playbill for the ITS's production of *The Duchess of Malfi*.[123] Furthermore, from 1887 onwards, Poel became an instructor for the Shakespearian Reading Society, directing the society's annual rehearsed reading of a Shakespeare play.[124]

As Marion O'Connor observes, Poel's work with these Shakespearian organisations gave him many influential connections and admirers.[125] Shaw, for instance, read a paper on Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* (c.1602) to the New Shakespeare Society in 1884 and was an early proponent of Poel's work.[126] Poel publicly participated in many of the key theatrical debates and discourses

[119] Ibid. (Denisoff), 171.
[120] *Malfi* Playbill, 1.
[121] Speaight, *William Poel*, 46.
[122] Marion O'Connor, 'William Poel', in *Poel, Granville Barker, Guthrie, Wanamaker*, ed. by Cary Mazer (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 7-54, 14.
[123] *Malfi* Playbill, 1.
[124] O'Connor, 'William Poel', 19.
[125] Ibid., 16.
[126] Ibid., 16-7.

of the day. In 1886, Poel would chair a debate opened by Archer on whether "a State Theatre (or an Endowed Theatre) [was] possible or desirable in England".[127] However, it was not just members of experimental theatrical circles whom Poel encountered through his interest in Elizabethan drama, it also placed him right in the heart of the London theatre establishment. Several Lyceum performers typically took part in the Shakespearian Reading Society's annual productions and Irving himself became president of the organisation in 1877.[128] As discussed in Chapter 1, this connection allowed Poel to borrow several pieces from the Lyceum's wardrobe for the ITS's production of *The Duchess of Malfi*. Though, Poel's request for use of the Lyceum itself was denied.[129] Samuel May and Willy Clarkson, a leading costumer and perruquier respectively, also supplied their services to the ITS for the production, having worked with Poel on the Shakespearian Reading Society's performance of *Henry V* (c.1599) the previous year.[130] The dual nature of Shakespeare in this period, at once both big budget West End spectacle and object of literary veneration, secured Poel support from across the theatrical spectrum.

The ITS's choice to perform a historical work rather than a contemporary drama proved controversial. *The Pall Mall Gazette* declared that the play "seems quite out of the society's scheme, since the production certainly does nothing to improve modern drama".[131] Similarly, *The Derby Daily Telegraph* considered it "a curious, but eloquent, indication of the barrenness of the younger generation in the playwright's art that the Independent Theatre is still on the hunt for a good drama by an unknown man".[132] This sense that reviving historic dramas was somehow inferior to premiering new plays is also reflected in modern theatre scholarship. Excluding a few pieces that are interested in the afterlife of Jacobean drama in England, theatre historians largely ignore the production in favour of focusing on the ITS's new writing.[133]

The tragic story of a woman who secretly marries beneath her station and is then murdered by her controlling and vengeful brothers, *The Duchess of Malfi* contains many of the themes relevant to this chapter: transgressive sexual passion, violence, and women under containment and threat. Indeed, Patrick McGuinness observes how *La Princesse Maleine* to an extent resembles "a revenge tragedy relocated in a post- (or sub) Wagnerian world, 'enveloped' in the modish vagueness of

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[127] Ibid., 16.
[128] *Pall Mall Gazette* (27 February 1890), 6; ibid., 19.
[129] Ibid. (O'Connor), 24.
[130] *Malfi* Playbill, 2; ibid., 26.
[131] *Pall Mall Gazette* (22 October 1892), 2.
[132] *Derby Daily Telegraph* (15 July 1892), 2.
[133] Scholarly discussions of the ITS's production of *The Duchess of Malfi* include Jeremy C. Bloomfield, *"I am Duchess of Malfi still": the Framing of Webster's The Duchess of Malfi* (PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 2011); John F. Buckingham, *The Dangerous Edge of Things: John Webster's Bosola in Context & Performance* (PhD thesis, Royal Holloway [University of London], 2011); Christina Luckyj, *The Duchess of Malfi : A Critical Guide* (London: Continuum, 2011).

Symbolist 'suggestion'".[134] This similarity was noted by many early proponents of Maeterlinck in England, with Archer describing the Belgian as "A Webster who has read Alfred de Musset".[135] Maeterlinck's knowledge of and interest in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama was indeed substantial. He produced a French adaption of John Ford's *Tis Pity She's a Whore* (c.1630), entitled *Annabella* (1894), in 1894. McGuinness argues that much of the play's attraction to Maeterlinck lay in its unsettling depiction of "fused opposites": violent, cruel, and often frenzied moments of transgressive passion unsettlingly combined with stiller, gentler, moments of beauty, tender love, and yearning.[136] Describing the moment when Giovanni rips out Annabella's heart, Maeterlinck claimed that "I do not think there exists in literature a scene more beautiful, more gentle, more cruel and more despondent".[137] The potential of revenge tragedy to contain bloody violent expressions of the worst of human nature while also seemingly offering access to "the dark undercurrents that lie beneath the surface" appeared a core attraction of the genre.[138]

Poel's production of *The Duchess of Malfi* accentuated the perturbing darkness of Webster's drama in a way which combined both the weirdness of Maeterlinckian symbolism with sumptuous and picturesque Pre-Raphaelite spectacle. As many reviewers noted, the ITS's production leant into the play's "abnormal ghastliness" and its troubling encapsulation of "the extravagant and the horrifying".[139] The scene most frequently referenced in giving spectators this impression was 'The Dance of Death' – one of Poel's most significant additions to Webster's drama. Drawing its inspiration from the Hans Holbein paintings of the same name, 'The Dance of Death' occurred in place of the madmen's dance and "consisted of a troupe of women-dancers who, when they turned their backs to the spectators, were found to resemble animated skeletons".[140] Lauded by *The Era* as "the one unquestioned success of the production", this "weird dance", as Poel described it in his promptbook, brought a sense of the uncanny to the performance.[141] Reviewers praised it variously as: "very weirdly effective", "very unearthly", "very weird, and will not soon be forgotten by those who saw it", and "an ingenious but a needless addition to the cumulative terrors of the fourth act".[142]

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[134] McGuinness, *Maurice Maeterlinck,* 79.
[135] Archer quoted in *Pall Mall Gazette* (3 September 1891), 3.
[136] McGuinness, *Maurice Maeterlinck,* 43.
[137] Maeterlinck quoted in ibid., 44.
[138] Ibid.
[139] *Times* (22 October 1892), 6.
[140] *Nottingham Evening Post* (20 October 1892), 4; *Graphic* (29 October 1892), 522.
[141] *Era* (29 October 1892), 10. Microfiche copy of William Poel's promptbook for *The Duchess of* Malfi. *Prompt Books and Actor's Copies: Theatre Museum, V&A, London* (London, Ormonde Publishing Limited, 1983), III. It was unfortunately only possible to view this promptbook via a highly faded microfiche copy. No page or folio numbers were visible. I have therefore used act divisions to provide references for direct quotations.
[142] *Pall Mall Gazette* (22 October 1892), 2; *Era* (29 October 1892), 9; *Liverpool Mercury* (25 October 1892), 5; *Graphic* (29 October 1892), 522.

The disconcerting strangeness of 'The Dance of Death' seemingly emanated from its highly artificial and spectacular rendering of the horror of dancing skeletons. The dancers were visually arresting: "four pretty girls in Spanish costume, two in yellow, two in red, with bolero jackets and little black velvet caps".[143] "*[A] muffled drum softly beaten off stage*" (III) also accompanied the whole interlude – an effect that was repeatedly compared to "the slow tom-tom of […] melodramatic music" and indeed engendered a critical debate about "what kind of art this production represented: high national drama or low melodrama".[144] This recurrent comparison to melodrama stresses how the production sought to achieve an unsettling sense of terror through multi-modal spectacle. As *The Birmingham Daily Post* pronounced, the play relied on "the power of *outward sensation* to move the inward emotions of the soul".[145]

'The Dance of Death' was not however all excessive, elaborate spectacle. According to *The Times*, the prison scenes were "Slowly and deliberately performed on what, for the most part, is a darkened stage".[146] Furthermore, 'The Dance of Death' itself was staged "through the transparent drapery of silken gauze of the finest texture, admirably represent[ing] the indistinct images seen in the troubled dream".[147] These staging devices have a striking affinity with the production style of the Théâtre d'Art: Paul Fort's experimental theatre company which had given its first season (including the French premieres of Maeterlinck's *L'Intruse* and *Les Aveugles*) in Paris the previous year. As Deak notes, the Théâtre d'Art mounted "the first distinctly symbolist production[s] in regard to […] mise-en-scene and design".[148] These performances used a gauze scrim, dimmed lighting, and slow, deliberate gesture to create a "distant and dream-like" quality.[149] Poel's use of similar techniques to create the impression of a "troubled dream" suggests a shared aesthetic vision. Moments of stillness and obfuscation, combined with heightened violence and excess, appear designed to push the work into the vaguer, more unearthly symbolist style.

Despite these debts to the French symbolists, the overall aesthetic of the piece was far closer to the pictorial romanticism of the London stage. Much like Mrs Patrick Campbell's *Pelléas and Mélisande,* the ITS accentuated the unsettling eroticism of *The Duchess of Malfi* by using lavish, sensual costumes and picturesque Lyceum sets.[150] *The Cornishman* reported that the dresses were "marvels of artistic beauty", with the Duchess's gold dress making her look like "she had walked

[143] *Nottingham Evening Post* (20 October 1892), 4.
[144] *Liverpool Mercury* (25 October 1892), 5; Bloomfield, *Malfi Still*, 152.
[145] *Birmingham Daily Post* (11 November 1892), 3 (emphasis added).
[146] *Times* (22 October 1892), 6.
[147] *Birmingham Daily Post* (11 November 1892), 3.
[148] Frantisek Deak, 'Symbolist Staging at the Théâtre d'Art', *The Drama Review,* 20:3 (1976), 117–22, 117.
[149] Ibid.
[150] O'Connor, 'William Poel', 24.

out of a Titian picture".[151] The production seemingly treated elements of the Renaissance in the Pre-Raphaelite style but used the violence and bloodiness of Jacobean tragedy to push the spectacular, transgressive dynamics to an even grander level. The ITS's programme for the production included comment by Swinburne, who was gifted a box for the performance by his long-time friend Poel, applauding the piece's "impression of terrible effect, the fancy of bidding a live woman array herself in the raiment of the grave".[152] This endorsement of the play by one of the leading Pre-Raphaelites highlights the type of visual aesthetic and literary tradition that Poel was seeking to associate his production with.

Sumptuous staging allowed Poel to disconcertingly counterpoint the play's heightened depictions of terror and suffering with highly erotic moments of extravagant or unsettling beauty. At the very end of the first act, just after Antonio and the Duchess have wed, the pair retire to the Duchess's bedchamber to consummate their union, and the Duchess's gentlewoman Cariola speaks of the "fearful madness" (I) that her mistress's behaviour betrays. Cariola then closes the curtain to the bedchamber that the Duchess and Antonio are behind and "*advances to the Priedieu & kneeling prays; as the curtain descends slowly Canzoni a Ballo is heard in the distance*" (I). Handwritten notes in the prompt script add further emphasis that this act drop was to be a "*very slow curtain*" (I). This drawn-out moment of languishing horror quivers with a barely concealed eroticism. From here on, the sound of the *Canzoni a Bello*, a piece of medieval Italian music, functions as a Wagnerian leitmotif throughout the rest of the play. At moments of extreme sexual tension or eroticised violence it returns. When, for instance, the "*Duchess walks slowly up to the coffin*" (IV) that her captors have placed in front of her and "*gazes steadily into it*" (IV), the *Canzoni a Bello* is heard again. Slow moments of erotic terror, complemented by strange excessive aural accompaniments, are woven throughout the piece.

The production ends on one of these moments of beautiful and slowly drawn-out supernatural horror. One of Poel's major additions to the final act is the repeated use of the echo device. He significantly extended Webster's original echo scene, in which the voices of Antonio and Delio uncannily bounce off ancient ruins, to several pages of back-and-forth dialogue all accompanied by the weird echo. Webster's original stage directions state that the echo comes from "*from the Duchessese Graue*".[153] Poel, however, makes this supernatural element more explicit by "concealing Miss Rorke behind the scenes" so that the echo "assume[s] the exact tones of the murdered

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[151] *Cornishman* (27 October 1892), 6. Mrs Patrick Campbell would notably also wear an "exquisite gold dress" in her performances as Mélisande. Worth, *Maeterlinck's Plays*, 28.
[152] *Malfi* Playbill, 4; Bloomfield, *Malfi Still*, 152.
[153] John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. by Leah S. Marcus (London, Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2009), 323.

Duchess".[154] Furthermore, when Antonio laments that "My Duchess is asleep now/ I hope sweetly: O Heaven/ Shall I never see her more", the words "never see her more" are echoed and the "*shadow of the duchess* [is] *thrown across the stage*" (IV). The Duchess becomes a literal haunting presence for the rest of the action of the play.

The echo, and its unearthly implications, return at the conclusion of the drama. Having cut several scenes from Webster's final act, Poel concludes the piece with Bosola being arrested for Ferdinand's murder. Delio's final speech of the play is truncated so that it ends on him pledging to "join all our force" (V) to establish the Duchess's young son "In his mother's right" (V). The words "in his mother's right" are then repeated by the unearthly echo. This sound causes Bosola to give "*a slight shudder*" (V) and make "*the sign of the cross*" (V) in seeming recognition of the terrible events the sound reflects. He then exits the scene, revealing the final stage picture: "*the figure of the Duchess […] between the Cyprus Trees at the back. She is looking sadly towards her son. Music of the Canzoni a Ballo is heard in the distance as the curtain falls*" (V). Accompanied by the haunting music of the *Canzoni a Ballo,* this lingering image of the ghost of a beautiful woman is a picturesque yet tragic reminder of the play's various unnatural horrors. The strange mix of violence, beauty, and entrapped female sexuality which had characterised Poel's production becomes its concluding note.

The ITS would never attempt such an elaborate historical spectacle again. The issue of resources was likely at play here. It was only through Poel's connections that adequate costuming and staging for the piece could be secured. Furthermore, the general consensus was that "only a first-class company, thoroughly trained" could adequately convey the tragedy and terror of the piece.[155] The Duchess's part, in particular, was considered to require "the advent of an actress endowed with genuine tragic force and intensity", something it was felt that Rorke lacked.[156] The ITS's production of *The Duchess of Malfi* nonetheless indicates the society's awareness of, and interest in, the unsettling and horrific potential of revenge tragedy. The form had the ability to be taken to strange and disconcerting places as the French symbolists had done, yet it also combined well with the excessive eroticism of the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic. The production is testament to the type of beautiful, weird, disconcerting spectacle of horrific passion that the society was interested in creating, given the resources.

Elizabeth Robins's *Benvenuto Cellini* (c.1900)

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[154] *Graphic* (29 October 1892), 522.
[155] *Pall Mall Gazette* (22 October 1892), 2.
[156] *Graphic* (29 October 1892), 522. Michael Field were not impressed by Rorke's performance. They recorded their impression that "the actress was not great enough for her part". Field, 'Work and Days' (1892), 140r.

In the ITS production of *The Duchess of Malfi,* Poel used strange, spectacular staging to accentuate the spiritual darkness of a play which was already weird and horrifying. Yet, as can be seen in the work of Elizabeth Robins, this unsettling, eroticised medievalism could be provocatively combined with more conventional theatrical forms, particularly historical melodrama. In theatre history, Robins is best remembered for her role in bringing the works of Ibsen to the Anglophone stage. Having achieved critical acclaim for playing the lead role in the British premiere of *Hedda Gabler* at the Vaudeville Theatre in 1891, she quickly became "the most enthusiastic of all the Ibsen actresses".[157] During the 1890s, Robins produced the British premieres of *Hedda Gabler*, *The Master Builder*, *Brand* (Act IV), *Little Eyolf*, and *John Gabriel Borkman*. She also acted in performances of *The Pillars of Society* and *A Doll's House*, produced by the Charringtons and Mrs Oscar Beringer respectively.

Alongside her staging of Ibsen's dramas, Robins wrote several plays which reflect this growing contemporary interest in theatrical realism, social problems, and particularly female autonomy. Her and Bell's 1893 play *Alan's Wife*, which stages a young woman's murder of her new-born child, "sparked a debate in the pages of *The Speaker* about the boundaries of stage realism and decency".[158] She would also tackle the tricky issue of abortion and non-marital sex in her later play *Votes for Women!* (1907). Realistically rendered depictions of female desire, social transgression, and constrained autonomy were also recurrent themes in the pieces that Robins produced under her own management. Her 1892 production of Agrell's *Karin*, a play "about a woman who fights for the security of her family while her husband squanders his money on mistresses and ultimately kills their child through neglect", was widely regarded as being "of real value".[159] She also produced *Mariana* (1892) by José Echegaray, a Spanish writer known for dramatising characters "in sharp conflict with a conventional society that would swallow up the individual".[160]

As discussed in Chapter 1, this strong interest in Ibsen and provocative social problem drama led to many of Robins's theatrical endeavours being closely intertwined with the ITS. *Alan's Wife* premiered at the society and her production of *Little Eyolf* received significant support from the ITS management. However, it is important to stress that Robins's theatrical interests were not exclusively limited to modern prose dramas. In 1891, just after the success of *Hedda Gabler*, Archer produced a heavily revised version of Tennyson's verse drama *Queen Mary* (1862) to be performed

[157] Shaw, *Shaw and Ibsen,* 240.
[158] Catherine Wiley, 'Staging Infanticide: The Refusal of Representation in Elizabeth Robins's "Alan's Wife"', *Theatre Journal*, 42:4 (1990), 432–46, 442.
[159] S. E. Wilmer, *Theatre, Society, and the Nation: Staging American Identities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 157; *Graphic* (31 December 1892), 13.
[160] Ruth Lee Kennedy, 'The Indebtedness of Echegaray to Ibsen', *The Sewanee Review*, 34: 4 (1926), 402–15, 415.

by the Lea-Robins joint management.[161] *Queen Mary* never made it to the stage; though, Robins's interest in poetic drama continued throughout the decade. In September 1893, she wrote to Michael Field to convey her "intense interest" in their play *A Question of Memory* and offer her "sincere regret that I cannot consider so attractive a proposal" due to prior engagements at the Garrick.[162] Furthermore, in early 1896, Shaw reported to Leighton that Robins had previously been interested in staging William Morris's *Love is Enough or the Freeing of the Pharamond* (1873) – a verse drama in the style of a medieval morality play.[163]

Robins took a concrete step forward in her mission to produce a poetic drama in late 1895 when she entered into collaboration with Burne-Jones, a figure whose name notably appears upon the list of subscribers to Robins's 1893 Ibsen season.[164] Unsure of what exactly to produce, Robins was advised by Bell to go "to the fountain head. If you want Swinburne, go to Swinburne".[165] Bell also recommended the plays of Robert Bridges who was best known for his verse tragedies set in the ancient world such as *Nero* (1885), as an alternative option.[166] Keen to find both "a womans [sic.] play" as well as one which had poeticism, Robins was searching for a play which offered the ability to express female passion in a heightened and beautiful form.[167]

Eventually, Robins settled on a project: a performance of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's dramatic poem 'Sister Helen' (1852). The piece is a duologue between a young boy and his sister Helen, a young noblewoman who has been betrayed by her faithless lover. Consumed with anguish, Helen melts a "waxen man" (1) in his image, thus sacrificing her soul to witchcraft but exacting revenge on her beloved who dies an agonising death.[168] Exploring "the terrible Love turned to Hate, perhaps the deadliest of all passion-woven complexities", the poem brims with unorthodox female desires, sexual transgressions, and extreme, all-consuming, emotion.[169] Much like the critical response which had greeted the ITS's *Malfi*, reviewers emphasised the unsettling, almost unearthly nature of the poem's excessive passions. *Fraser's Magazine* praised the "fierce and relentless irony

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161 A partial typescript of *Queen Mary* replete with heavy emendations by Archer is contained with the Elizabeth Robins collection at the Fales Library. Box 206, Folder 14, Elizabeth Robins Papers, Fales Library, New York University, New York.
162 Letter from Elizabeth Robins to Michael Field (September 1893), Add MS 45852, 18v; 19r. Michael Field Collections, British Library, London.
163 Shaw, *Collected Letters*, vol.i, 600.
164 List of Subscribers for Robins's Ibsen Plays, 1. Box 204, Folder 3, Elizabeth Robins Papers, Fales Library, New York University, New York.
165 Letter from Florence Bell to Elizabeth Robins (19 January 1896), 1v. Box 122, Folder 7, Elizabeth Robins Papers, Fales Library, New York University, New York.
166 Ibid.
167 Ibid., 2r.
168 Dante Gabriel Rosetti, 'Sister Helen', in *Poems* (London: Ellis & White, 1881), 10-25, 10. 'Sister Helen' underwent several revisions during Rosetti's lifetime. Robins's various references to a "waxen man" imply that she was using the 1881 edition of the poem.
169 Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Collected Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. by William M Rosetti (London: Ellis and Scrutton, 1886), 486.

[that] pervades the piece, intensified by the weird refrain, the echo repeated from earth and heaven, as it were, of consuming hate and hopeless despair".[170]

It is this 'weirdness' that Robins sought to accentuate in her staging of the piece. Robins initially envisaged that every verse would conclude with "a refrain chanted by an unseen choir".[171] Resembling "an ecclesiastical chant out of liturgy", the first line of the refrain would be "sung in union" with the other lines "swell[ing] into harmony".[172] Like the ITS's production of *The Duchess of Malfi*, which similarly had an unseen choir "*singing litany in a distant part of the palace*" (V) throughout its final act, the desired effect was to bring a heightened intensity to the performance. "The choir has no personality", Robins explained: "it embodies both by effect and from association, a faraway spiritual intensification of the mood of the listener".[173] Robins also hoped that the music for the piece would be produced by Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg.[174] Grieg's music had been used by the ITS for their production of *Ghosts* and his mournful wedding march *Norwegischer Brautzug* was apparently Robins's "inspiration in the MasterBuilder".[175] The disembodied effect of the choral music was designed to complement and accentuate "the weird fantastic effect of Scandinavian music" – an interesting fusion of the more unsettling elements of modern Ibsen productions with the disconcerting possibilities of the medieval form.[176]

Grieg was never persuaded to do the music for 'Sister Helen'. However, with the aid of up-and-coming Scottish composer William Wallace, Robins devised an instrumentation that would be "quite 'formless'.[177] It would "drop in when there's no dialogue & die away when the speakers deliver their lines, & be simply an indefinable vague sound coming from the direction of the stage, invisible and very intense".[178] Excessive, yet vague and undefined, spiritual intensity appears to be the predominant aural effect that Robins wanted to create for her production of 'Sister Helen', a seeming attempt to bring out the strange and weird inner passions that so many reviewers had identified in the piece.

The proposed staging of the piece was similarly intended to create a sense of strange excess. Through collaboration with Burne-Jones, Robins hoped to produce a grand medieval set. The pair envisaged "a medieval Hall" with a large fireplace, imposing gallery, and "great window [that] looks

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[170] *Fraser's Magazine* (May 1870), 620.
[171] Elizabeth Robins, 'Typed sketch of ideas for 'Sister Helen'', 1r. Box 110, Folder 7. Elizabeth Robins Papers, Fales Library, New York University, New York.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Elizabeth Robins, 'Handwritten Sketch of ideas for 'Sister Helen'', 1r. Box 122, Folder 7, Elizabeth Robins Papers, Fales Library, New York University, New York.
[175] ITS Programme for *Ghosts* (1891), 2r; Bell to Robins (19 January 1896), 2r.
[176] Robins, 'Typed Sketch', 1r.
[177] Robins quoted in Michael Allis, 'Reshaping the Ballad: William Wallace's Musical Re-figuring of Rossetti's 'Sister Helen', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 27:2 (2022), 252–275, 259.
[178] Ibid.

out on the night".[179] There would also be "an orchestra of little choristers, small children in medieval gowns playing on archaic instruments", while "the actual music is produced by players out of sight".[180] Like the ITS production of *The Duchess of Malfi*, Robins was using this picturesque Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic to create a beautiful yet unsettling experience for the audience – a reflection of the heightened passion and strange supernatural element the piece contained.

Robins's production of 'Sister Helen' never materialised. The piece had initially been promised to the People's Concert Society.[181] But difficulties in negotiating with the society and conflicts with Robins's schedule caused that scheme to collapse.[182] Robins then envisaged performing 'Sister Helen' under the auspices of her own management. The piece was promised in Robins's 1896 manifesto for her attempted creation of an endowed theatre, and she would return to the idea again when launching the New Century Theatre in 1898.[183] However, the death of Burne-Jones in June 1898 seemingly put paid to these plans since the piece was never performed. It is interesting to note, though, that Mrs Patrick Campbell would not only use old Burne-Jones sets in her second run of performances of *Pelléas et Mélisande* in 1900 but also specially commission music by Wallace, having unsuccessfully approached Grieg first, for the production.[184] The similarities between the two actress-managers aesthetic vision indicates how the strange yet sumptuous medieval aesthetic that Robins had envisaged for her production was beginning to increasingly infiltrate the commercial stage.

Robins's return to the world of beauty, sexual passion, and transgressive desire in her later drama *Benvenuto Cellini* (c.1900) reflects this changing theatrical landscape. Drawn from Alexandre Dumas's *L'Orfèvre du roi, ou Ascanio* (1843) and its various stage adaptations, the play focuses on the exploits of the eponymous sixteenth-century Italian craftsman Benvenuto Cellini. The play opens with a romance blossoming between Cellini's apprentice Ascanio and Gervaise D'Estourville, a beautiful gentlewoman. The pair's courtship, however, faces significant complications. The King's mistress, the Duchess D'Etampes, is determined to seduce Ascanio. Furthermore, Cellini has also fallen in love Gervaise. Having been promised "anything he asks" if he completes a bronze statue of Hebe for the King, Cellini intends to use this arrangement to gain

[179] Robins, 'Handwritten Sketch', 1r.
[180] Robins, 'Typed Sketch', 2r; 3r.
[181] Letter from William Wallace to Ottilie McLaren (20 October 1897), MS.21513, 8v. William Wallace Correspondence, Manuscript Collections, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.
[182] Ibid.
[183] 'Draft Manifesto', 5; Gates, *Elizabeth Robins*, 102.
[184] Letter from William Wallace to Ottilie McLaren (n.d.), MS.21513, 8r-v. William Wallace Correspondence, Manuscript Collections, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.

Gervaise's hand in marriage.[185] Yet after the Duchess scuppers his plans by causing his furnaces to cake, Cellini is required to smelt all his priceless creations to finish the sculpture. Upon the statue's successful completion, Cellini, having learned of Ascanio and Gervaise's affection for each other, uses his one wish from the King to secure their marriage.

Benvenuto Cellini was chiefly written by Robins in 1899, with emendations and edits by Archer; though, the Scot was insistent that Robins "say nothing of [his] share" in the piece.[186] The play is highly melodramatic in style. It is full of large expressive gestures and sumptuous Renaissance settings, with each scene structured around a set of elaborate tableaus. In 1900, the play was accepted for production by Tree, with an agreed production budget of £6000 at His Majesty's Theatre.[187] The drama, which is seldom discussed critically, is considered somewhat of an aberration in Robins's theatrical oeuvre. Joanne Gates writes that this "actor-manager's play" was "the polar opposite of Ibsen's drama" and "recalls the kind of drama that Robins had spent a decade repudiating".[188] In a similar vein, Angela John declares that this "very different" drama is the product of Robins's "romantic imagination".[189] Both scholars seemingly view the romance, excess, spectacle, and historical setting of the play as antithetical to Robins's previous theatrical work.

Such readings, however, overlook the provocative undercurrents of extreme sexual passion and desire which underpin and inter-animate the play's more conventional romance elements. From the outset of the play, it is clear that Ascanio and Gervaise's characters are drawn from melodramatic stock-types. Unaware of the Duchess's status as a courtesan, Gervaise is presented as an innocent "shrinking beauty" (I, 6). Her pronounced cries of distress and exaggerated gestures of supplication, "Oh, I have suffered to the utmost verge of what a young maid's heart may bear. Help me help me! (*Sinks on her knees*)" (I, 12), encapsulate her strong generic allegiances to the persecuted heroines of melodrama. Similarly, Ascanio's comic obliviousness to the Duchess's repeated sexual advances and extreme devotion to Gervaise – he likens himself to a knight "sent forth to do battle for his lady" (II.ii, 7) – establish him as the honourable melodramatic hero. The young lovers completely embody a theatrical mode which seems out of keeping with the sexual intrigue and court politicking of the rest of the play.

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185 Elizabeth Robins*, Benvenuto Cellini* (c.1900), 'Private Copy. Her Majesty's Version', (IV, 10). Box 123, Folder 11, Elizabeth Robins Papers, Fales Library, New York University, New York. There are multiple different surviving versions and drafts of the play. However, I have chosen to focus on the one which Robins sent to Tree.

186 Archer quoted in Angela V. John, *Elizabeth Robins: Staging a Life* (Stroud: Tempus, 2007), 84.

187 Letter from Elizabeth Robins to Florence Bell (28 February 1900), 1. Box 125, Folder 24, Elizabeth Robins Papers, Fales Library, New York University, New York.

188 Gates, *Elizabeth Robins,* 113. Gates similarly claims that *Benvenuto* Cellini was written "as if [Robins] had never been introduced to Ibsen" in 'Theatrical Politics', 49.

189 John, *Staging a Life*, 106.

This sense of artificiality is accentuated by the darker, more violent, set of passions that Ascanio and Gervaise's world of sweetness and purity is set against. Although a somewhat sanitised version of his historical counterpart, Robins's Cellini functions as a stark counterpoint to the lovers' naivety and gentleness.[190] Cellini's reputation for "volcanic" (I, 8) anger, exile from Italy, and his lack of deference to the King immediately mark the Italian out as a volatile and potentially dangerous force. In stark contrast to Ascanio, whose face makes his kindness immediately evident to Gervaise, the young noblewoman tells Cellini that his face only conveys "that which makes me glad you are not my enemy" (II, 6). Melodrama's clear moral binaries and immediate moral legibility of character are subtly broken down. Ascanio repeatedly assures Gervaise that his master should be trusted "to light the darkness with that great double torch he bears of Goodness and of Genius" (II.ii, 5). Nonetheless, the sense that Cellini possesses a dangerous and destructive temperament remains.

The raw passion which underlies Cellini's artistic genius becomes apparent when he falls in love with Gervaise. Unlike classical artists' distanced appreciation of their muse, Cellini is insistent that the consummation of his passion is an integral part of his artistic creation: "I am a man of hot blood, and I work in grosser stuff in gold and stone and bronze. Dante needed only to dream, I have need to see. You divine his creations, you touch mine. His inspiration looked down from the clouds; mine must lie upon my breast" (III, 5). The imagery of fire and burning which had formed a notable undercurrent throughout the work now becomes an explicit expression of the sensual core of Cellini's soul – the driver of both his artistic genius and strong sexual instincts. Indeed, a development in Cellini's sexual passion is tied to an improvement in his art. Cellini reveals how since seeing Gervaise:

> I have worked in these miraculous days like 50 Cellinis. A new force was born within me and struggled to be free. A score of gleaming statues posed and passed glorious through my mind – beautiful women, heroes, immortals, I say again, her beauty and my strength will breed a mighty race between them. (III, 5)

Provocatively intertwining the imagery of artistic creation and pro-creation, Cellini positions sexual and artistic growth as the deeply interlinked twin development of the soul. This symbiotic relationship explains why and how he is so determined to make the young noblewoman his bride. "There is no human power that can withstand the onset of my will. She shall be mine if I have to overturn a kingdom" (III, 4), he impassionedly declares.

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[190] Robins's work makes no explicit reference to the craftsman's well-documented history of battery and sexual assault. However, Cellini's biography may have been known by some audience members, potentially accentuating this sense of the craftsman's latent danger and violence.

Cellini's extravagant, fiery passions are notably mirrored in the figure of the Duchess D'Etampes. Like Cellini, the Duchess pursues her lust with single-minded intensity: "I am not one who has the art of accepting defeat […] If another woman loves the man I love … so much the worse for the other woman" (II.ii, 10). A merciless femme fatale figure, the Duchess also habitually assassinates her lovers once she has tired of them. Implicitly paralleled to Cellini through their shared imagery of heat and fire – Ascanio, for instance, describes how he has been warned that she is "false as fire" (II.ii, 3) – the Duchess fully embodies the dangerous and destructive elements of sexual passion.

The parallels between the pair's temperaments come to a head at the end of Act Two, when Cellini vows to protect Ascanio from the Duchess's machinations:

> Do you think I would shrink from the duel? She would have on her side all the evil passions, I the noble ones. She would attack me with her intrigues, I would defend myself with my masterpieces. She may be seductive and adroit – I am fertile and indefatigable. And who knows, Madame, whether the artist might not prove stronger than the lover, in Francis. (II.ii, 15).

Unlike traditional melodrama, in which "virtue and vice coexist in pure whiteness and pure blackness", the distinctions between hero and villain in Robins's drama are blurred.[191] Depicted as two sides of the same coin, Cellini and the Duchess possess the same inner sensibility. The expected melodramatic confrontation between good and evil is reconfigured here as a battle between art and sex: with art being the nobler expression of the same passionate impulse that creates unrestrained sexual desire.

This battle between art and sex culminates in Cellini's attempt to finish his statue of Hebe. Act IV of the play opens in Cellini's workshop, with an elaborate working furnace centre of the stage (IV, 1).[192] Since the Duchess has scuppered his furnaces, Cellini must smelt all the treasures in his workshop in order to fuel the fires. "*Things in precious metal rain down*" (IV, 15) as apprentices frenziedly pass items to Cellini to smelt. Cellini is distraught at the "sacrilege" (IV, 15) of destroying his masterpieces. Stage directions indicate that the destruction of the pieces should be performed via "*dumbshow to indicate that it goes to his heart to sacrifice these things*" (IV, 15). A wordless theatricalised expression of Cellini's anguish, this momentary shift in acting style places the focus on Cellini's grand and tumultuous inner conflict.

The scene reaches a crescendo when Cellini realises that he must finally sacrifice his great silver salt cellar: "his matchless work" (IV, 15). After much agonising he casts the masterpiece into the

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[191] Michael R. Booth, *English Melodrama* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1965), 14.
[192] It is noted on the typescript that these designs for the furnace were produced by Bell's husband Hugh.

cauldron and then collapses: "(*With uplifted arms, contre*) Thank God, the day is saved. (*He reels and falls heavily in the midst of his MEN*) (IV, 15). Cellini emerges as a victor, having used the inner fire that allows him to experience the great passions, determination, and insight of an artist. This scene has all the elements of a climactic sensation scene: elaborate stage effects, a heroic feat, suspense, and jeopardy.[193] Yet, it is conspicuously without physical conflict. Instead, the tension and spectacle come from, and indeed reflect, the passion of Cellini's soul.

Although the Duchess's threat has been neutralised, Cellini's victory does not however bring the play back to the world of purity and innocence. In the final act, when the statue has been complete, Cellini declares to the Duchess:

> Each loves in his own way. My way was to suffer – yours to persecute. You fought for Ascanio as for a crown. I laboured for Gervaise as the artist labours for his ideal. In love we have failed, Madame, but let it not shame our courage. You have ambition to console you. We will leave these children their innocent loves, and darken no more their heaven with our stricken faces. (V, 5)

Cellini's sympathy with the Duchess continues the uneasy sense of equivalence between them. Distancing himself from the childlike innocence of Gervaise and Ascanio, Cellini acknowledges that he and the Duchess know the true world of passion, frustrated desires, and sexual skulduggery. By the end of the play, Cellini may emerge as "valorous, noble of purpose, even willing to sacrifice romance when he realizes that his own passion is unfair to the young lovers", as Gates argues.[194] Yet, the darker, more erotic territory that the raw, unadulterated passion and expression of the melodramatic mode has been brought into remains**.**

The play's conclusion strengthens this impression. Defying the conventions of the melodramatic "world of justice", the Duchess is not punished for her sexual transgressions and deadly scheming.[195] She still retains her place at the King's side, continuing as a latent threat. Furthermore, Cellini announces that he will depart the French Court immediately. *Benvenuto Cellini* thus ends with Gervaise's unanswered question: "you will come back to us?" (V, 11). Utilising the type of open-ended conclusion popularised by Ibsen, Robins leaves Cellini and his artistic passions ambiguously outcast. As Bratton argues, "melodrama is heteroglot".[196] The ostensibly just, pure, and moral narrative structure of the melodramatic genre often contains discordant impulses which

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[193] For more details on the typical elements of a climactic sensation scenes, see Joanna Hofer-Robinson and Beth Palmer, 'Introduction', in *Sensation Drama, 1860-1880: An Anthology*, eds. by Joanna Hofer-Robinson and Beth Palmer (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), xi – xxxvii.
[194] Gates, *Elizabeth Robins*, 113.
[195] Booth, *English Melodrama*, 14.
[196] Jacky Bratton, 'The Contending Discourses of Melodrama', in *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen*, eds. by Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook and Christine Gledhill (BFI Publishing: London, 1994), 38-49, 39.

reveal "a more pragmatic tacit understanding of the world".[197] In *Benvenuto Cellini*, Robins pushes this element of the melodramatic form to its limit. The play exposes an inner world of dark passions, violence, and sexual longing only to contain these rawer, darker aspects of human nature very superficially and unconvincingly through the conclusion of a conventional romance.

Ultimately, Tree, for reasons that are somewhat unclear, decided not to perform the play, replacing the piece with a production of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (c. 1599) instead.[198] The official reason given was that the revelation of Robins's authorship violated the terms of the contract and might jeopardise the success of the performance.[199] However, as *The Pall Mall Gazette* sceptically pointed out, it seemed unlikely that audiences would struggle to "credibly discuss a romantic drama by Miss Robins in the light of her achievements in Ibsen's plays".[200] The more likely explanation perhaps is that Tree was unsure whether to take the financial risk on the highly expensive production. Robins read the piece to several other London managers, including Waller and Alexander.[201] She also attempted to sell a French version of the play to French actor-manager Benoît-Constant Coquelin.[202] Yet, since none of these ventures came to fruition, *Benvenuto Cellini* went unperformed.

It is notable, though, that shortly after the His Majesty's production collapsed both Tree and Robins found significant success with the works of Stephen Phillips – "the literary shooting star of the Edwardian age".[203] Less than six months after the intended production of *Benvenuto Cellini*, Tree staged Phillips's *Herod* (1900) to great acclaim and he would follow it up with two more original pieces by Phillips: *Ulysses* (1902) and *Nero* (1906). Robins too was attracted to Phillips's writing. In her last professional acting role, she played Lucrezia in Alexander's 1902 production of Phillips's *Paolo and Francesca* (1900). Phillips's plays which all "deal with obsessive, destructive love" were characterised by spectacular plots, sumptuous staging, and beautiful verse.[204] Archer lauded Phillips as "the elder Dumas […] speaking with the voice of Milton", while numerous reviewers heralded the playwright as the true successor to Jacobean writers like Marlowe and Webster.[205] This extravagant staging of both the horror and the beauty of all-consuming passion echoes the

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[197] Ibid, 44.
[198] *Glasgow Herald* (6 July 1900), 7.
[199] Gates, *Elizabeth Robins*, 113.
[200] *Pall Mall Gazette* (30 June 1900), 1.
[201] Gates, *Elizabeth Robins*, 132; Letter from Elizabeth Robins to Florence Bell (14 February 1900), 2. Box 100, Folder 9, Elizabeth Robins Papers, Fales Library, New York University, New York.
[202] Letter from Elizabeth Robins to Florence Bell ([n.d.]), 2. Box 100, Folder 9, Elizabeth Robins Papers, Fales Library, New York University, New York. Various French copies of the play can also be found in the same archive (Box 125).
[203] Richards, *Ancient World*, 183.
[204] Ibid, 184.
[205] Archer quoted in ibid., 186. A selection of reviews comparing Phillips to various Jacobean dramatists are reprinted in Stephen Phillips, *Paolo and Francesca* (London: William Clowes & Sons, 1902).

kind of effect Tree and Robins envisaged for *Benvenuto Cellini*. The success of Phillips's works demonstrates how this more unsettling brand of sexualised spectacle and destructive passion was beginning to establish itself more strongly on the commercial stage.

Conclusion

In 1904, Bernhardt and Mrs Patrick Campbell joined forces for a French production of *Pelléas et Mélisande* at London's Vaudeville Theatre. Bernhardt's career had shifted in the middle of the 1890s. Performing in plays such as Edmond Rostand's *La Princesse Lointaine* (1895), the French actress had "aligned herself with the Symbolist theatre" and sought "to capitalize on the fashions for mysticism and religiosity".[206] The alliance with Mrs Patrick Campbell, an actress who had reached a similar stage of renown in her career, appears a continuation of this theme. With its luxurious staging and all-star cast, the production was considered "an artistic triumph". [207] It was followed by a highly successful tour of Ireland and the provinces when Bernhardt returned to England the next year.[208] A play which had premiered in Britain as a "rather odd" experiment at the ITS had now become a sumptuous performance vehicle for two of the most famous actresses of their generation.[209]

The plays and productions analysed in this chapter speak to this extended and wide-ranging interest in unsettling spectacles of sexual passion. Mirroring the widely recognised way in which Wilde and Maeterlinck had taken elements of established theatrical genres and made them perverse and weird, writers and managers began to assimilate these disconcerting depictions of all-consuming desire back into established theatrical models. It is well acknowledged that the late-nineteenth century saw in a proliferation of "plays centring on sexual questions and judgements": dramas focused on transgressive desire's recognition, punishment, expulsion, and labelling.[210] Yet, running alongside this theatrical tradition was a complex strain of drama which repeatedly frustrated these frameworks. The source of transgressive desire in many of these plays is often barely identifiable yet alone expellable, and the line between the healthy and unhealthy passion frequently blurs. Appealing to female playwrights and actresses in particular, these dramas offered a vehicle to perform sexual feeling in a way which transformed and transcended normative moral categories and explore the strange and troubling depths of human emotion and experience.

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206 Stokes, 'Sarah Bernhardt', 23.
207 *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* (2 July 1904), 4.
208 Campbell, *Life and Letters*, 139.
209 *Era* (30 March 1895), 11.
210 Eltis, *Acts of Desire*, 114.

CHAPTER 4
All the World's a Stage: performing authenticity and the theatrical self

In 1893, Marc-André Raffalovich penned a comedic one-act duologue to accompany the ITS's second run of performances of *Ghosts*. In Raffalovich's play, *Roses of Shadow*, Severin Campion declares that "when I go to the play I like to sit in the stage box, [...], and to feel that I am known and talked of on each side of the foot-lights".[1] A dandy and aesthete, who "not being gifted with peculiar advantages, personal, pecuniary or intellectual, has made a practice of attracting attention by affectation alone", Severin's approach to life elides all distinction between social and literal performance.[2] The play concludes with Severin resolving to wed his equally cynical friend and interlocuter Blanche Darien. As *The Morning Post* disapprovingly remarked, "after much railing at 'Society', the young people eventually agree to marry, and to accept the ordinary conditions of life as thousands of others do without making any special merit of it".[3] However, such disparagement overlooks the radical implications of adopting marriage as just another form of convenient performance. Upon proposing to Blanche, Severin declares "You are unconventional. I am unconventional. Separate, we are at the world's mercy; together we are perfect strength [...] We can shut the door and be happy with silence and music and beauty and friendship" (13). Far from being trapped by convention, Severin envisages himself reauthoring the social codes that circumscribe him. As subtly underlined by Raffalovich's inversion of the image of a "*door closing*" (123) which famously ended *A Doll's House*, self-consciously performing expected social roles is potentially just as theatrically subversive as rejecting them.

The ITS is not known for its comedic output. *Ghosts* was frequently criticised for being excessively "melancholy and malodorous", while many of the ITS's original English dramas, especially in its earliest years, were also tragedies.[4] After the ITS's 1893 season, which featured multiple plays that concluded with suicides, such as *Alan's Wife* and *The Black Cat*, audiences complained that the ITS had "entered into a suicide pact with its dramatists".[5] Furthermore, even when the ITS did produce non-tragic plays, its best remembered comedic works are more in the vein of social problem dramas.[6] Shaw's *Widowers' Houses* ends comedically with the re-engagement of Blanche Sartorius and Harry Trench. The play's opening act, which initially depicts Harry and Blanche's courtship as an "idle ceremonial trifle", bears a superficial generic resemblance to a witty

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[1] Marc-André Raffalovich, *Roses of Shadow* ([n.p.]: [n.p.], 1894), 10.
[2] *Era* (28 January 1893), 9.
[3] *Morning Post* (27 January 1893), 5.
[4] *Daily Telegraph* (14 March 1891), 3. For further discussion of the charges of dullness and drabness characteristically made by anti-Ibsenites, see Davis *Ibsen in England*, chap.5.
[5] (A.) Grein, *Story of a Pioneer,* 137.
[6] Ibid., 138.

comedy of manners.[7] However, through Shaw's focus on "the ruthless exploitation of the destitute and homeless by the mercantile and upper classes" and psychologically complex exploration of villainy and moral compromise, this playful surface is gradually stripped back to reveal a deeply troubling moral core.[8] Contrastingly, in Raffalovich's play, the witty, irreverent, comically exaggerated depiction of aristocratic society persists, never reaching the morally confrontational bleakness of Shaw's work. Nonetheless, as Raffalovich's aforementioned subversion of the conventional comedic ending illustrates, *Roses of Shadow*, which was notably "cordial[ly] applaud[ed]" by the select audiences which had congregated to watch *Ghosts*, was still deeply concerned with provocative dramatic debates.[9]

In modern theatre scholarship, this vein of society playwriting is predominantly associated with Oscar Wilde. As Scott observed, Wilde excelled at writing "witty, paradoxical, cynical set[s] of scenes on modern society", centring on the foibles of the aristocratic classes.[10] Raffalovich, a minor decadent poet and homosexual, moved in the same social circles as Wilde, who he seemingly lampoons in *Roses of Shadow* via the character of Ivor, a dandy-type figure who having expended his stock of epigrams "had to wait in his seclusion until he had some more sent from Paris" (5). This inter-text both wryly acknowledges where Raffalovich was drawing his style of playwriting from and facilitates a multi-layered engagement with contemporary theatrical counterculture. Ivor remarks upon Severin's "faded carnation" (4), using it to highlight how their world is all about surface appearances, "so artificial, wired, faded and so fragrant" (5). Severin then symbolically abandons his carnation when he commits to marry Blanche, disavowing the "world of appearances, […] the world of vanity […] the 'Roses of Shadow'" (18). Wilde and his circle of young male aesthetes frequently attended ITS performances wearing a variety of ostentatious flower badges, particularly "carnation[s] dyed a green colour".[11] Severin's abandonment of his carnation hence not just serves as a droll meta-theatrical comment on some of the audience members but in a play where the proposed marriage is configured in highly platonic terms, promising "silence and music and beauty and friendship" (13) rather than love or passion, also highlights a possible homosexual reading of the couple's marriage of convenience. In this light, *Roses of Shadow* is not just an emulation of Wilde's mode of drama, but, for select audiences, a deeper engagement with a subset of avant-garde culture and their concerns.

[7] George Bernard Shaw, *Widowers' Houses* (London: Henry & Co., 1893), 43.
[8] Frederick J. Marker, 'Shaw's Early Plays', in *The Cambridge Companion to George Bernard Shaw*, ed. by Christopher Innes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 103-23, 104.
[9] *Morning Post* (27 January 1893), 5.
[10] *Daily Telegraph* (22 February 1892), 3.
[11] (A.) Grein, *Story of a Pioneer*, 97.

Kerry Powell's *Acting Wilde* (2009) constitutes the most extensive current examination of the theatricality underlying Wilde's life and work. Building upon earlier re-examinations of the more subversive elements of Wilde's dramas, Powell argues that Wilde "was among the first to discern that life is a continuum of performance" and that his theatrical works reflect "the power of the actor […] to shape reality through performance".[12] This sense of characters putting forward a "decorous pretence" is not in and of itself radically new in the comedy of manners tradition.[13] However, earlier comedies of manners, like Richard Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* (1777) and their nineteenth-century successors, such as W. S. Gilbert's *Engaged* (1877), characteristically foregrounded "the gap between appearance and reality", revealing characters' intrigues and duplicities to offer a degree of exposure and censure of society's self-serving hypocrisies.[14] By contrast, in Wilde's dramas there is far less of a distinction between what is artifice and what is authenticity and there exists no typical exposure and correction scene. The essence of what Powell identifies as innovative in Wilde's work is seemingly a refusal to separate performance from authenticity.

Powell conceptualises Wilde as the sole Victorian "forerunner of late-twentieth-century drama and cultural theory".[15] However, the subversive theatricality and deep engagement with contemporary avant-garde dramatic culture evident in *Roses of Shadow* problematises this assessment. The social world of Raffalovich's play is replete with examples of canny role-playing, from a young actress who "to keep up her prestige as a heartless flirt, had to appear in public every evening for a fortnight with a fresh and handsome bore" (9) to a "poor, ugly skinned wife of a fool" (15) who consistently feigns ignorance of her husband's transgressions. In this light, Powell's argument that Wilde was unique in his focus on presenting social life as a form of acting appears unsustainable.

The influence of Ibsen's dramas offers a potential insight into the broader presence of self-conscious performance in 1890s society dramas. Developing earlier readings of the instances of highly self-aware staging in Ibsen's work, Moi observes that the playwright critiqued "the games of concealment and theatricalization in which we inevitably engage in everyday life".[16] Moi argues that this sense of theatricality as being a core component of existence constituted the "centre of

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[12] Kerry Powell, *Acting Wilde: Victorian Sexuality, Theatre, and Oscar Wilde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1. For important discussions of Wilde's melodramas' social subversiveness, see Powell, *Oscar Wilde and the Theatre of the 1890s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Eltis, *Revising Wilde.*

[13] 'Comedy of Manners', *Oxford Reference.* [Accessed: 7 February. 2021], https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095626536.

[14] David L. Hirst, *Comedy of Manners* (London: Methuen, 1979), 10.

[15] Powell, *Acting Wilde*, 172-3.

[16] Moi, *Birth of Modernism,* 241. For detailed discussions of instances of self-staging in Ibsen's work, see also Gay Gibson Cima, *Performing Women: Female Characters, Male Playwrights, and the Modern Stage* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), chap.1; Shepherd-Barr, 'Against Interpretation'.

Ibsen's modernism".[17] Indeed, Christian's recent work *Marriage and Late-Victorian Dramatists* (2020) observes that Ibsen's influence led to what she terms the "leaders in Britain's New Drama movement" emphasising "elements of scripting, staging, performance, and spectatorship" in their depiction of romantic relationships.[18] However, she still constructs Wilde's society dramas as somewhat of an outlier among late-Victorian dramatists, owing to his embrace of role playing rather than an insistence that marriage should be "separate from performance of any kind".[19] The wider existence of continuous self-fashioning in provocative society comedies, the type of which is witnessed in Raffalovich's play, has yet to be extensively explored.

This chapter examines society dramas produced by the ITS and its associated networks. It focuses upon dramas which were noted to be exceptionally cynical, paying particular attention to dramatists' use of pronounced theatricality and the cleavages between character, conventionalised social role, and theatrical performance. In doing so, it seeks to move beyond Powell's conception of Wilde as a lone experimenter and build a picture of a broader strain of drama which challenged theatrical moral codes by highlighting how traditional melodramatic markers of character are little more than empty signifiers, to be appropriated and performed at will.

Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892) and *An Ideal Husband* (1895)

Despite being best remembered for the glitz and glamour of the West End stage, Wilde was involved with the ITS from its very inception. In 1890, Teixeira de Mattos wrote to Wilde seeking his support for the society and attempting to secure Wilde's agreement to produce a play for them.[20] Wilde never gave the society a piece – though, his brother Willie was listed as one of the writers who had promised to produce work for the ITS's 1891 season.[21] Like Pinero and Jones, Wilde was seemingly reluctant to offer a work to the society when acclaim and success could be found elsewhere. The Irishman was however in attendance during the society's inaugural private production of *Ghosts*, indicating that he held membership of the society. Wilde frequently attended the society as part of a coterie of young men, all conspicuously sporting carnations. This fact would be highlighted at his 1895 sodomy trial since one witness claimed that Wilde had attempted to initiate sexual relations, after accompanying him to an ITS performance.[22] Wilde may not have

[17] Ibid. (Moi), 240.
[18] Christian, *Marriage*, 2.
[19] Ibid., 10.
[20] Letter from Alexander Teixeira de Matos to Oscar Wilde (19 July 1890). *Mark Samuels Lasner Collection*, University of Delaware, Newark.
[21] 'Independent Theatre of London' pamphlet, 1r.
[22] Joseph Bristow, *Oscar Wilde on Trial: The Criminal Proceedings, from Arrest to Imprisonment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023), 185.

written a play for the ITS, but his artistic and social circles were still very much intertwined with the society's activities.

The tension between performance and authenticity is evident in Wilde's first society comedy *Lady Windermere's Fan*, which premiered at St James's Theatre in 1892. The story of a young woman whose mother returns to society having abandoned her husband and young daughter twenty years ago, Wilde's play has been recognised as being subtly in dialogue with Ibsen's *A Doll's House*.[23] Christian notes that when Lord Darlington urges Lady Windermere to elope with him, he configures her current marital union as a series of sham performances:

> Echoing Ibsen, he urges her, "Be yourself!" implying that by exiting her marriage performance (and eventually forming a union with himself), she might enter a pure, performance-free existence of authentic selfhood; he urges her, like Nora, to assert her primary identity not as a wife or mother, but as a human being.[24]

Mrs Erlynne's account of the life of a social outcast, however, is one which is utterly reliant on strategic social performances, fearing "every moment lest the mask should be stripped from one's face".[25] Mrs Erlynne, Wilde's version of Nora, "rejects the concept of a 'real self' separable from performed identities, and she has found empowerment in that rejection, learning to adopt many roles and play them well".[26]

By depicting identity as a sustained performance, Wilde ideologically challenged established systems of theatrical representation. As Eltis argues, *Lady Windermere's Fan* repeatedly undermines the traditional theatrical delineations between the character of the morally debased fallen woman and her innocent female counterpart, particularly through its appropriation of "the plots and conventions of numerous popular contemporary dramas, reshaping and subverting their material to criticise the social principles on which they were founded".[27] The provocative moral implications of this subversion are highlighted through the discussion of Mrs Erlynne's pre-fallen self:

> Lord Windermere scornfully points to Mrs Erlynne's girlish self, as represented by a miniature his wife innocently covets, as the true self which the mature woman's false appearance and fallen sexuality have betrayed: 'It's the miniature of a young innocent-looking girl with beautiful dark hair.' [… Mrs Erlynne] deconstructs the miniature as merely another performance for social consumption: 'It was done before I was married. Dark hair and an innocent expression were the fashion then, Windermere!' […]. Morality

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[23] See, for instance, Powell, *Theatre of the 1890s*, 28; Christian, *Marriage*, chap.3.
[24] Ibid., (Christian), 59.
[25] Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest and Other Plays*, ed. by Peter Raby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 39.
[26] Christian, *Marriage*, 60.
[27] Eltis, *Revising Wilde*, 55.

> is reduced to a series of melodramatic roles, discarded as claustrophobic and lacking in style. [28]

The melodramatic mode relies heavily upon the "democratization of morality and its signs", a character's ethical signifiers and their substance are expected to perfectly align.[29] Melodramas therefore relied upon a highly recognisable set of costume conventions and acting styles to immediately signal a character's role and moral substance: "The very appearance of a villain or hero, comic servant or evil henchman was enough to identify them".[30] Yet, what is provocative about Mrs Erlynne's pronouncements is not just that moral signifiers have become meaningless, as Eltis observes, but also the subtle implication that they can be tactically performed to one's own advantage.

Morality, especially the negation of idealism, is a central concern of *Lady Windermere's Fan*. Current scholarship on the play's critique of idealism largely focuses upon Lady Windermere's softening of her harsh moral standards, "alter[ing] from a purity ideologue into a woman who demands perfection from no one and calls into question settled definitions of 'good' and 'bad'".[31] However, as Moi notes in her discussion of Ibsen's relation to idealism as a philosophical discipline, idealism was not simply individuals being "too unworldly [or] high-minded for comfort" but a moral framework "in which ethics and aesthetics are one".[32] Idealism as a theoretical and aesthetic school believes that beauty, goodness, and truth can and should align.

Lady Windermere treats the aforementioned miniature of her mother as a quasi-religious icon: "she kisses [it] every night before she prays" (53). Lady Windermere notably has very little evidential basis for her belief in her mother's pure character. She recounts that her father "begged me never to mention her name to him again" (56). Lacking any actual information, Lady Windermere has imputed a set of moral values onto the literal image of her mother. This thinking epitomises not only "The characteristic idealist conflation of truth and beauty" but also the kind of immediate moral judgements audiences were trained to make in melodrama.[33] When Lady Windermere declares that her mother is the foundation of her "ideals in life" (55), she is espousing a system of morality that depends upon the alignment of ethical substance with its traditional representation.

By not divulging her true identity, Mrs Erlynne chooses not to shatter her daughter's idealism. Nonetheless, the play fundamentally unsettles the relationship between morality's representation

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[28] Eltis, *Acts of Desire*, 142-3.
[29] Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, 44.
[30] George Taylor, *Players and Performances in the Victorian Theatre* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 121.
[31] Powell, *Acting Wilde*, 57.
[32] Moi, *Birth of Modernism*, 71; 68.
[33] Ibid., 74.

and its actuality. This occurs not just because Mrs Erlynne resists many of the typical tropes of the fallen woman, as Eltis has shown, but also because the play repeatedly insists that one sign can have multiple signifieds. The most prominent literal example of this dynamic is Lady Windermere's fan that Mrs Erlynne claims to be hers when she is found in Lord Darlington's room, "I am afraid I took your wife's fan in mistake for my own, when I was leaving your house tonight" (47). Subverting the conventions of the well-made play, where the true significance of hidden objects and concealed items are always exposed at the play's denouement, Mrs Erlynne simply assimilates material reality into her performance. The generic assumption that one material sign can have a fixed and stable meaning and consequently lead to one definitive narrative conclusion (in this case the unmasking of Lady Windermere's impulsive flight) is completely undercut. In a play where both lead actresses were playing against type – Walkley noted how Marion Terry "generally plays parts like that of the guileless Lady Windermere", while also terming Lily Hanbury "a little too Juno-like, physically and mentally, for the part of the young wife" – there is a strong sense that the distinction between a fallen women and a good woman is a matter of performance.[34]

The play's conclusion emphasises this sense of mutability. Upon hearing Lord Augustus announce his engagement to Mrs Erlynne, Lord Windermere declares "well, you are certainly marrying a very clever woman!" (59), while Lady Windermere comments "Ah, you're marrying a very good woman!" (59). These conflicting declarations not only again highlight how one figure can embody multiple conflicting interpretations but also, especially since they follow a nuptial announcement, subtly raise the question of whether in fact in fashionable modern society cleverness and goodness are actually one and the same. As Eltis notes, "Wilde subverted theatrical conventions by rewarding his fallen woman with the ultimate prize of a husband".[35] Marriage, the greatest theatrical affirmation of female virtue, goes to the woman who can perform the best. An ability to appropriate the theatrical signs of virtue leads to virtue's reward.

This relationship between social performance, idealist iconography, and theatrical systems of moral reward is even more pronounced in Wilde's later play *An Ideal Husband* (1895), which premiered at the Haymarket Theatre. When Sir Robert complains of his wife's idealising tendency, he repeatedly employs the language of religious visual iconography. He laments that women "place us on monstrous pedestals" (211), despite men's "feet of clay" (211), finally admitting to Lady Chiltern that "you made your false idol of me, and I had not the courage to come down, show you my wounds" (211). Sir Robert's fundamental complaint is that his wife, like Lady Windermere and her idealisation of her mother's miniature, mistook the traditional representation of moral virtue

[34] *Speaker* (27 February 1892), 258.
[35] Eltis, *Revising Wilde*, 79.

for the thing itself. He is publicly profiting by severing sign from signified, allowing his personal and political life to "have different laws, and move on different lines" (186). Yet, his wife's entire moral system depends upon the notion of a singular, unified, and authentic human being.

Throughout the play, Wilde, however, repeatedly challenges the iconographic system that Lady Chiltern's idealist belief in her husband's virtue depends upon. At the close of Act One, Lady Chiltern professes her surety in Sir Robert's moral character, "I will love you always, because you will always be worthy of love" (188). At the act drop, audiences would typically expect a closing tableau which functioned to create "a legible symbolic configuration that crystallizes a stage of the narrative as a situation".[36] However, both Sir Robert and Lady Chiltern exit and instead audiences are left with a different form of pictorial representation: "*The only light there is comes from the great chandelier that hangs over the staircase and illumines the tapestry of the Triumph of Love*" (189). The moral position that Lady Chiltern embodies is now subtly rendered as a literal symbol, nothing more than an outwards social expression. By substituting one form of moral representation for another, especially one which is notably highly antiquated and overly idealised in nature, Wilde playfully denaturalises the authenticity of the moral signifiers of Lady Chiltern's ideological purity.[37]

This sense of conventional morality being little more than a series of detachable poses is further underlined by the character of Mabel, Sir Robert's younger sister. In her first scene, she laments that the pearls Lady Chiltern forces her to wear "make one look so plain, so good and so intellectual" (184). A witty, modern cynic, Mabel recognises how the traditional visual melodramatic signifiers of character can be appropriated without substance. As Eltis notes, Mabel "stands conventional behaviour and morality on its head – literally so when she performs in a tableau in aid of the Undeserving".[38] Adding to Eltis's observation here, it is important to stress that the tableau Mabel is performing in, "The Triumph of something, I don't know what!" (202), is implicitly the Triumph of Love, the very same tableau for which Lady Chiltern is substituted. Wilde counterpoints Lady Chiltern's circumscription by meaningless moral symbols with her sister-in-law's canny and irreverent subversion of them. The fact that Mabel's tableau is "in aid of the Undeserving" (203) stresses how by appropriating and reconfiguring traditional signifiers of morality Mabel can completely invert the established theatrical relationship between moral desert and material reward. Concluding the play married to a wealthy bachelor of her choosing, Mabel,

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[36] *Meisel, Realizations, 45.*
[37] In performance, these dynamics are subtle and complex. Wilde's stage directions indicate that the tapestry was "*from a design by Boucher*" (165). François Boucher's *The Triumph of Venus* (1740) is a well-known oil painting in the Rococo style. There is evidence of an unsigned French painting from c.1890 called *The Triumph of Love* 'after François Boucher'. However, it is unclear if this design would have been well-known enough for audiences to recognise. Wilde added extensive stage directions to the play when it was first published by Leonard Smithers in 1899. Therefore, arguably this element of the play was primarily designed for reading audiences.
[38] Eltis, *Revising Wilde*, 143.

much like Mrs Erlynne, profits off her ability to perform, receiving the reward typically given to the good and pure melodramatic heroine.

The link between inauthentic social performance and subverted systems of material reward becomes more apparent in the play's political plotline. Sir Robert's offer of a cabinet seat clearly upends established theatrical moral schema: "a traitor and a scoundrel escapes with no worse a penalty than a fright and with one of the most coveted of human rewards" one disgruntled reviewer wrote.[39] As Powell observes, Sir Robert's situation bears striking similarities to Ibsen's *The Pillars of Society* (1877).[40] However, unlike Ibsen's work, where Consul Bernick is forced to publicly admit to his misdeeds, forcing the townspeople to realise that no one is able "to hold high the banner of the ideal", in Wilde's play "hypocrisy is perpetuated as Sir Robert succeeds precisely because of his reputation for unshakeable integrity".[41] The ironic lesson learned here is that consummate performance allows for sustained avoidance of society's expected moral consequences, even after an ostensible turn away from inauthenticity. The fragmentary, highly conventionalised language in which Sir Robert's speech to Parliament is praised, "Brilliant orator . . . Unblemished career . . . Well-known integrity of character . . . Represents what is best in English public life . . ." (231), highlights how all he has done is fit into a bunch of pre-established poses or moulds. It is Sir Robert's ability to perform the expected signifiers of morality which, with a little help from Lord Goring, allows him to prosper. On both the personal and political level, performance is the key to achieving "success in modern life" (192).

Ultimately, Lady Chiltern also learns that she must occasionally allow sign to become divorced from signified if she is to survive in modern society. At the play's denouement, Lady Chiltern initially encourages her husband to turn down the offer of his seat in cabinet. Yet, Lord Goring, the closest character the play has to a *raisonneur* figure, counsels Lady Chiltern that this act will ultimately "kill [Sir Robert's] love for you" (241). In a surprisingly brutal critique of societal hypocrisy, he tells her that "Women are not meant to judge us, but to forgive us when we need forgiveness. Pardon, not punishment, is their mission" (241). Unlike Lady Windermere, Lady Chiltern commits no transgression. Indeed, Wilde's numerous drafts of the play indicate his desire to create a woman "with a genuine, deeply felt moral code".[42] However, Lady Chiltern is forced to compromise her ethical principles in order to retain her husband's love.

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[39] *Athenaeum* (12 January 1895), 57.
[40] Powell, *Theatre of the 1890s*, 81-6.
[41] Henrik Ibsen, *The Pillars of Society,* trans. by William Archer (Boston: Walter H. Barker & Co., 1890), 42; Eltis, *Revising Wilde*, 149.
[42] Eltis, *Revising Wilde*, 146.

Lady Chiltern's encouragement of her husband's political ambitions is consequently one extended performance. She explains her change of heart to Sir Robert by repeating verbatim Lord Goring's words on the difference between the sexes: "A man's life is of more value than a woman's. It has larger issues, wider scope, greater ambitions" (242). With her completely transparent mimicry, Lady Chiltern is effectively adopting a theatrical persona. Sir Robert's subsequent claim that "you are to me the white image of all good things, and sin can never touch you" (244) thus assumes two levels of irony. Not only is Sir Robert ironically holding his wife to the idealised standard that he himself has remonstrated against, but he is also unable to recognise that Lady Chiltern has now become a consummate performer. She is successfully divorcing her personal morality from its public representation, in a way that her idealist self had previously professed was not possible.

The play's concluding moments crystalise this sense of irony. Lady Chiltern proclaims that the couple have been saved by the purity of their love, "It is love, Robert. Love, and only love" (245). Her words, accompanied by the lovers' embrace, seemingly re-enact the 'Triumph of Love' that she predicted at the end of Act One. However, rather than straightforwardly enacting Lady Children's expected affirmation of her husband's pure character, this concluding tableau has been divorced from reality. Ibsen's Nora learns that Torvald is not an 'ideal husband' – a phrase that Powell suggests Wilde likely picked up from Shaw's discussion of *A Doll's House* in *The Quintessence of Ibsen* – and therefore deserts her marriage in a refusal to perform anymore.[43] Lady Chiltern, by contrast, experiences the same realisation yet salvages her marriage by being prepared to start performing. It is of course possible to interpret this conclusion as a genuine triumph of love, as multiple scholars have done.[44] Yet, concealed underneath this "sentimental interpretation [that] allowed Society to love the playwright who mocked it", there emerges a more complex picture of strategic self-fashioning.[45]

<u>Estelle Burney and Arthur Benham's *Theory and Practice* (1893)</u>

Wilde's suggestion that stereotypical melodramatic roles can be wilfully performed, and theatrical systems of reward and punishment consequently subverted, is extremely subtle. However, work produced by writers on the theatrical fringes offer a more pronounced version of this dynamic. Performed as the curtain raiser to the ITS's 1893 production of *Alan's Wife* at Terry's Theatre, *Theory and Practice* is a comedic duologue between a married couple. On the programme, the work was attributed to Arthur Benham, a playwright of whom there is very little record since he died of

43 Powell, *Theatre of the 1890s*, 80.
44 See for instance, ibid.; Eltis, *Revising Wilde*.
45 Regenia Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1987), 106.

consumption in 1895 aged only 23.[46] Upon his death, *The Era* noted that Benham's older sister Estelle Burney, the actress who had played the female role in *Theory and Practice* and starred as the heroine in all of Benham's work, "was, though the fact was not made public, his collaborator in most, if not all, of his plays".[47] After Benham's death, Burney went on to author several full-length plays and one-act duologues which are highly similar in terms of style and subject matter to the work credited to her brother.[48]

Although her performance in and likely co-authorship of *Theory and Practice* constituted the height of Burney's direct engagement with the ITS, the actress moved in experimental theatrical circles throughout the 1890s. Having received significant plaudits for her "really splendid impersonation of Rebecca West" in Austin Fryers's *Beata* (1892), a tragic prequel to *Rosmersholm*, Burney was invited to audition in front of the ITS committee for the part of Beatrice in their intended performance of *The Cenci*.[49] Burney lost out to Farr for the role. However, she went on to act in several dramas written by ITS committee members and associates, including Alec Newton's (Edward Aveling's) *Frog* (1893) and Zangwill's *Children of the Ghetto* (1899).[50] Furthermore, as an actress-manager Burney mounted several of her own experimental productions. When discussing her rivalry with Farr for the role in *The Cenci*, *The Era* introduced her as "Miss Estelle Burney, who has been known to give matinées".[51] This highlighting of Burney's involvement with matinée productions as a way of establishing her theatrical credentials as being equal to Farr's conveys the importance of such endeavours in connecting her to innovative theatre movements.

Judging by reviews of Burney and Benham's dramas, there were several factors which made their plays provocative. Multiple reviewers noted the plays' unconventional or unclear moral schemas. The *Era* pronounced Burney and Benham's first dramatic effort, *The County* (1892):

> a very curious play – curious in motives, curious in its working-out, curious most of all in its morality. It is impossible to agree with some of the theories of domestic and social life laid down by Miss Estelle Burney and Mr Arthur Benham and equally impossible to accept their artistic views.[52]

The script was seemingly not submitted for licence. But reviews indicate that the plot of the play follows a woman who deserts her boorish squire of a husband to run off with a painter, before

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[46] *Era* (14 September 1895), 10.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Burney's sole authored works include *An Idyll of the Closing Century* (1897) and *Settled Out of Court* (1897). For a discussion of Benham's characteristic style see the below.
[49] *Era* (23 April 1892), 8; *Era* (19 March 1892), 10.
[50] *Daily News* (30 October 1893), 5; *Leeds Times* (29 July 1899), 8.
[51] *Era* (19 March 1892), 10.
[52] *Era* (4 June 1892), 9.

turning to the stage and ultimately marrying an aristocrat.[53] Commentators considered it particularly objectionable that the female protagonist is materially rewarded for her infidelity: "the authors seemed to think that the divorced lady ought to become a duchess on the strength of having eloped with an artist"[54]. Much like Mrs Erlynne in *Lady Windermere's Fan*, there appears to have been a denial of the traditional punishments of the fallen woman, which challenged established theatrical systems of moral reward.

Furthermore, like Wilde's dramas, the pair's works were rooted in a tradition of cynical social comedies and the world of "vicious, fast, fashionable, respectable society".[55] Even detractors of Burney and Benham's work acknowledged that "some of the dialogue [was] indeed of a very smart character".[56] Though, it was repeatedly emphasised that of these "many nicely pointed lines most of them [are] pessimistic […] and somewhat too cynical".[57] The recurrent emphasis on Burney and Benham's cynicism underscores how their work was populated by characters who seemingly rejected sincerity and sentimentalism.

Despite receiving some praise from contemporary reviewers, none of Burney and Benham's works were commercial successes. Most of their early dramas were given as matinées or other forms of one-off performances. The only exception to this is *The Awakening* (1892) which was initially billed for an extended run at the Garrick Theatre, which Burney had leased from Hare while his company was touring.[58] However, the play was quickly withdrawn since "although it showed considerable ability it was decidedly crude".[59] Reviewing Burney's *Settled Out of Court* (1897), a play about a woman's descent into a murderous madness after her husband discards her for another woman, Shaw declared that "as a piece of crisp, deft, vivid scenic projection of such character and situation as there is in it to project neither Mr Pinero or Mr Grundy could have done it better".[60] Via this comparison to Pinero and Grundy, Shaw locates Burney's work's aesthetics within the vein of realist English social problem dramas. However, he also noted that Burney's "hero and his mistress", two characters who express absolutely no moral qualms about extra-marital sexual liaisons, "belong to the realistic repertory of the Independent Theatre".[61] Shaw's

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[53] This play notably mirrors Burney's own unorthodox biography. The actress had abandoned her wealthy husband to go on the stage and maintained a string of high-profile lovers. Israel Zangwill's personal diaries record the scandalous details of Burney's life. See Meri-Jane Rochelson*, A Jew in the Public Arena: The Career of Israel Zangwill* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 2008), 86.
[54] *Era* (4 June 1892), 9.
[55] *Pall Mall Gazette* (3 October 1892), 3.
[56] *Glasgow Herald* (3 October 1892), 4.
[57] *Pall Mall Gazette* (3 October 1892), 3.
[58] This season was seemingly financed by a rich suitor of Burney's (see *Evening Star* [26 November 1892], 6), further highlighting how the work produced was outside of standard commercial viability.
[59] *Pall Mall Gazette* (1 Nov 1892), 1.
[60] George Bernard Shaw, *Our Theatres in the Nineties* (London: Constable and Company limited, 1932), vol.iii, 163.
[61] Ibid.

reference to the ITS is significant as it suggests that the actual content of Burney's drama, not just its realistic aesthetic, had moved to more provocative moral and conceptual ground.[62] However, as a result of this lack of commercial appeal, Burney and Benham's works have largely been forgotten in modern scholarship. *Settled out of Court* receives some brief discussion in a handful of overviews of contemporary women's writing.[63] The rest of the pair's work remains unexplored.

Theory and Practice opens with Phillip, a young gentleman, hiding a jewelled bracelet as a birthday present for his cynical wife Maud, who has been flirting with several other gentlemen. In response, Phillip pretends to have adopted a mistress and weaponises his wife's own pragmatic outlook on life against her. The piece concludes with Maud renouncing her flirtatious ways and subsequently discovering the bracelet that Phillip had hidden for her. Coinciding with the uproar caused by the "horrible circumstances" of *Alan's Wife*, *Theory and Practice* received little attention in the popular press.[64] Most commentary on the piece applauded it for its clever dialogue and strong acting. Though there was some less laudatory discussion of the play's moral schema which questioned "whether it is dramatic justice that the flirt should be thus rewarded".[65]

From the outset, the persona of the witty, modern, cynic is tied to the concept of inauthenticity. It is a role that Phillip blatantly adopts in order to outmanoeuvre his wife as is shown by his feigning of the fact that he had forgotten Maud's birthday: "Your birthday is it? Oh, yes, of course, I forgot".[66] Phillip's transparent adoption of this persona is presented as a form of social game for which marital harmony is the prize. When Maud first enters, she catches sight of Phillip tossing a coin to decide whether he will conceal the bracelet from her. She asks "Well, Phillip, that must be an exciting game – what are the stakes?" (3) to which he simply replies "you" (3).

In many other contemporary social comedies, cynical modern characters frequently pronounce life as game in order to justify their behaviours. Lord Darlington, in *Lady Windermere's Fan*, declares that in "the game of marriage—a game, by the way, that is going out of fashion—the wives hold all the honours, and invariably lose the odd trick" (23), while in *An Ideal Husband* Mrs Cheveley justifies her blackmailing behaviours by declaring "this is the game of life as we all have to play it" (18). However, in *Theory and Practice*, this metaphor is made far more explicit as it is literalised on stage through the game of chess Phillip and Maud play, while discussing their respective

[62] Shaw frequently disparaged Pinero's work for its underlying moral and narrative conventionality. See Ibid., vol.1, 44-7 for a characteristic example.
[63] See Doreen Thompson, *Propriety and Passion: images of the new woman on the London stage in the 1890s* (PhD thesis, University of Victoria, 1992); Susan Carlson, 'Conflicted Politics and Circumspect Comedy: Women's Comic Playwriting in the 1890s' in *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, eds. by Tracy C. Davis, Ellen Donkin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 256-276; Powell, *Women and Victorian Theatre*.
[64] Walkley quoted in Bell and Robins, *Alan's Wife,* xix.
[65] *Glasgow Herald* (29 April 1893), 7.
[66] Arthur Benham, *Theory and Practice* (London: Samuel French, 1893), 8.

paramours. Here, sentiment and seeming sincerity is repeatedly tied to social missteps. Phillip admonishes Maud that "You're getting sentimental; you're placing your bishops wrong" (11) and advances in the game as Maud becomes less and less disdainful about their relationship:

> **PHIL:** I shall take your knight if you don't look out.
> **MAUD:** (*dreamily*) When I saw you first I said: "That man will never love but one woman."
> **PHIL:** Check to your queen. (11)

After Phillip checks Maud, she abandons the game and, apparently distraught at her husband's infidelity, disavows her previous comments as meaningless inauthentic expressions: "I didn't mean it, dear, I was joking – one says these things so readily, they do not come from the heart" (12). Maud's cavalier demeanour has seemingly been stripped away, ironically through Phillip's more skilful adoption of a cynical persona. Thus, the play appears to stage the peeling back of artifice and seems to be resolving towards sincerity and a conventional moral ending as both parties have jettisoned their cynical personas and reverted back to their authentic selves.

However, this reading of the play is upended by the piece's final line: Maud's declaration, upon finding the bracelet, that "Phillip dear, I don't want to know her name" (12). Although the audience is aware that Phillip's mistress is imaginary, and therefore the play ostensibly retains its sentimental veneer, Maud herself is oblivious to this fact. The speed at which she switches therefore from near hysterics to calm acceptance undercuts the authenticity of her earlier actions. By oscillating from one extreme version of femininity to another, Burney and Benham denaturalise the theatrical archetype. Maud's heightened and stylised expressions of her seemingly sincere feelings for Phillip, which consist of extreme sentiment, "(*dreamily*) when I saw you first I said: 'That man will never love but one woman'" (11), and exaggerated feminine hysteria, "Philip, I don't deserve all this; what I said was so little – what I suffer so little – what I suffer is so great (*She bursts into tears at the desk*)" (12), become just another role.

Although possible to read Maud's declaration as a wifely submission to her husband's imperfections and a willingness to overlook them, in a similar vein to what is asked of the eponymous heroine of Jones's *The Case of Rebellious Susan* (as will be discussed later in this chapter), her behaviour can also be interpretated as a canny bit of social manoeuvring. At the beginning of the piece, Maud declares "I'm practical; don't you think" (6) in regard to her initial proclamation that if Phillip ever took a mistress, she would relentlessly solicit her rival's company in order to ensure that her husband quickly "grew cold at the sound of [his lover's] name" (6). For Maud being pragmatic means adopting the most convenient form of social performance. Indeed, this sense of the piece being an extended explication of the value of social performance can be discerned through the work's title, *Theory and Practice.* On the one hand, the play's title could convey how the

piece explores the disjuncture between what men and women profess of their relationships and their genuine feelings. *The Morning Post* declared that "The theory resembled that of a little piece by Alfred de Musset to the effect that a 'door must be either open or shut'. The 'practice' […] was that there is no wisdom in trifling with affection".[67] However, in an alternative light, the totality of the play can be seen as the practice of the practical approach to life which Maud initially expounds, one which involves the adoption of strategic performances to achieve her desired ends.

Indeed, in the opening section of the play, Phillip praises Tilly Vernon, a dancer who an aristocrat "ran away [with] only last month" (4), as "the only one with any brains" (4) in her husband's family. Given Tilly's profession as a performer and her advantageous social match, Phillip's remark playfully highlights how his entire social world functions on tactical social performance, much as Wilde does in his dramas with his hypocritical side characters. Thus, when *The Glasgow Herald* questioned "whether it is dramatic justice that the flirt should be thus rewarded" in *Theory and Practice*, the reviewer is fundamentally misunderstanding the moral schema on which the play is implicitly operating.[68] Maud's jewelled bracelet is received not simply as a reward for her abandoning her coquettish behaviour, in the theatrical tradition of aligning material reward and moral virtue, but rather as a prize for her skilful manoeuvring of the matrimonial game. Much like Mrs Erlynne in *Lady Windermere's Fan*, in a world where all behaviour is staged, Maud is able to achieve her desired ends through the adoption of the most convenient theatrical roles. Stripped of some of the more complex and convoluted melodramatic elements that underpin Wilde's dramas – a product likely of the ITS audiences' sympathies as well as the compressed form – *Theory and Practice* is an even bolder assertion of the power of social performance and the inauthenticity of conventional theatrical mores.

John Gray and André Raffalovich's *The Blackmailers* (1894)

So far, this chapter has examined instances of self-conscious role playing being used by characters as a means of empowerment. However, the divorce of melodramatic signifiers from their traditional moral signifieds also raises the potential for unjust condemnation and circumscription. This dynamic is explored in the collaborative work of Raffalovich and John Gray, two playwrights involved in the ITS from its early years. As previously discussed, Raffalovich's *Roses of Shadows* was employed by the ITS as a curtain raiser in 1893. Likewise, Gray's *The Kiss*, a rhyming couplet translation of Theodore de Banville's *Le Baiser*, was produced at the Royalty Theatre as the curtain raiser to the ITS's production of Symons's *The Minister's Call.* Gray also wrote the prologue to the

[67] *Morning Post* (1 May 1893), 3.
[68] *Glasgow Herald* (29 April 1893), 7.

ITS's inaugural performance of *Ghosts* as well as suppling the introductory note for Grein's faux translation of Montanaro's *In the Garden of Citrons*.[69] Both men were heavily involved in contemporary aestheticism and decadence movements: their likely point of social entry to the ITS. Gray had been part of Wilde's circle of young male aesthetes in the late 1880s and early 1890s, notably earning himself the nickname of Dorian.[70] He published several volumes of aesthetic poetry, achieving particular acclaim with *Silverpoints* (1895) in 1895. Similarly, Raffalovich, who had attempted to establish a London literary salon in the early 1890s, also produced several poetic volumes and would write a significant work on contemporary theories of homosexuality: *Uranisme et Unisexualité: étude sur différentes manifestations de l'instinct sexuel* (1896).[71]

After meeting in late 1892, the pair became life-long friends, literary collaborators, and possibly lovers.[72] Supported by Raffalovich's extensive personal fortune, together they wrote what Raffalovich's sister Sophie termed "witty, clever plays, which were acted to select audiences".[73] In 1894, for instance, they rented the Royal Albert Hall's West Theatre for a private theatrical event, which opened with Gray performing a rhymed dramatic monologue in the persona of "Etienne Rozenwaltoff", a radical European anarchist with a penchant for pyrotechnics.[74] Not content with the provocativeness of presenting the character of a blood thirsty revolutionary who "pray[s] for the day, when blood shall run in the gutters" (63) to an audience of wealthy aesthetes and bohemian intellectuals in one of London's most prestigious theatrical venues, Gray's Rozenwaltoff recounts how he had previously befriended a young gentleman who was "always wearing some sort of flower. / White carnation, I think it was, stuck in his button hole" (63). This young gentleman meets an untimely end when Rozenwaltoff decides to throw a bomb into the theatre audience he is sitting in one night. For the young carnation-wearing men in Raffalovich and Gray's own audience, this meta-theatrical provocation is made only marginally less antagonistic by Rozenwaltoff's tongue-in-cheek claim that he "rather liked him I can't deny;/ Only I felt I should like to spoil him, I don't know why" (63-4).[75] A provocative discomforting of social convention,

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69 (A.) Grein, *Story of a Pioneer*, 61-2.
70 On Gray's relationship with Wilde see Brocard Sewell, *In the Dorian Mode: A Life of John Gray, 1866-1934* (Padstow: Tabb House, 1983), 1-37.
71 Brocard Sewell, *Two Friends: John Gray & André Raffalovich* (Aylesford, Kent: Saint Albert's Press, 1963); Brocard Sewell, *Footnote to the Nineties: A Memoir of John Gray and André Raffalovich* (London: Cecil & Amelia Woolf, 1968) offer the most detailed current accounts of Raffalovich's life and work.
72 There is critical debate about whether Raffalovich's relationship with Gray was sexual. For an overview, see Jerusha Hull McCormack, *John Gray: Poet, Dandy, and Priest* (Hanover; London: University Press of New England, 1991), 39-52.
73 Mrs. William O'Brien, 'Friends for Eternity: André Raffalovich and John Gray', *The Irish Monthly,* 62 (1934), 699-706, 700.
74 John Gray, *The Poems of John Gray, 1880-1920*, ed. by Ian Fletcher (Greensboro, NC: ELT Press, 1988), 62.
75 Wilde's circle notably attended Gray's *The Kiss* all wearing green carnations. Hull McCormack, *Poet, Dandy, and Priest*, 81.

laced with additional layers of meaning for specific coterie audiences, was seemingly part and parcel of Raffalovich and Gray's work.

Receiving only a single matinée performance at the Prince of Wales Theatre in 1894, *The Blackmailers* was the pair's sole attempt at a full-length play. The pair complained that the performed work was "a mangled and mutilated version of the first four acts... scene after scene ruined by cuts, omissions, impoverishment and slipshod rehearsals".[76] Nonetheless, the play, as it was submitted in its licensing manuscript, follows the exploits of Hyacinth (Hal) Halford-Dangar, a young gentleman who is befriended by "an unconscionable villain" named Claud Price.[77] Hal becomes embroiled in the older man's scheme to extort money from Camilla Bond-Hinton, a married woman whom Claud had secretly seduced several years earlier. Hal ultimately endeavours to rescue Camilla from her predicament by attempting to persuade her husband to "shut [his] ears to any innuendo" (44) against her but he is instead denounced for his involvement in Claud's schemes. Following the revelation of his involvement in the blackmail scheme and Camilla's sexual transgressions, Hal is arraigned by his outraged family who propose to banish him to New Zealand. However, after almost imbibing a vial of poison in order to escape his punishment, Hal decides to seek refuge with Claud in Paris and simply walks out the door of his familial home.

The work's critical reception was almost unanimously negative. *The Times* declared that the play was "a sordid and repulsive picture of blackmailing practices carried on in society" and objected particularly to the fact that "the greater culprit [Claud] apparently escapes molestation of any kind".[78] Indeed, echoing the objections made to the moral schemas of Wilde's as well as Burney and Benham's dramas, *Truth* complained that the pair gave "a halo of glory to such a mean and contemptible wretch as their untamed cub of a hero" rather than punishing him roundly for his transgressions.[79] Unlike Wilde's work which managed to make somewhat sympathetic figures out of Mrs Erlynne and Sir Robert Chiltern, there was very little compassion for Raffalovich and Gray's protagonist, who was described as "the most outrageous rascal who ever appeared in dramatic print".[80]

Existing scholarship on *The Blackmailers* is scant. Having been anthologised in Laurence Senelick's *Lovesick: Modernist Plays of Same-Sex Love, 1894-1925* (1999), critical commentary on the play is predominantly limited to examining the homosexual coding of Hal and Claud's relationship.

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[76] *Theatre* (1 July 1894), 37-38. Quoted in Laurence Senelick (ed.), *Lovesick: Modernist Plays of Same-Sex Love, 1894-1925* (London: Routledge, 1999), 56.
[77] John Gray and Marc-André Raffalovich, *The Blackmailers* (1894). Reprinted in Laurence Senelick (ed.), *Lovesick: Modernist Plays of Same-Sex Love, 1894-1925* (London: Routledge, 1999), 23-53, 38.
[78] *Times* (8 June 1894), 8.
[79] *Truth* (14 June 1894), 12.
[80] *Illustrated London News* (16 June 1894), 766.

Senelick argues that blackmail was closely associated with contemporary homosexual culture and consequently the play's depiction of an older man tempting a younger man into a life of moral disrepute would have been read as a "homophilic relationship".[81] These undertones are most apparent in the hyperbolised rhetoric which surrounds the revelation of the blackmailing secret:

> **PRICE**: (…) You know what you are, Hyacinth, don't you'?
> **HAL**: What I am? What do you mean?
> **PRICE**: You know the name by which this sort of transaction usually goes… even amongst the unprejudiced?
> **HAL**: No… (*Under* PRICE*'s look he falters*) Yes.
> **PRICE**: And it is?
> **HAL**: Spare me! Spare me! Claud!
> **PRICE:** Blackmail (*HAL is silent*) What did I say?
> **HAL**: (*Tremblingly*) Blackmail.
> **PRICE**: And you are a blackmailer, my dear Hyacinth. (34)

Senelick contends that "after this hysterical crescendo, Claud Price's line 'Blackmail' is almost anticlimactic; since the coterie audience would readily have had 'sodomy' on its lips", highlighting the subversive potential of this form of layered drama for select audiences.[82]

Although Senelick's analysis is important for recovering non-heteronormative readings of the play, this current critical focus on *The Blackmailers'*s homosexual undercurrents elides the piece's dramatic complexity. For an audience steeped in nineteenth-century theatrical culture, the possible homosexual coding of certain devices cannot necessarily be separated from their wider theatrical conventions and connotations. The practice of blackmail was an established theatrical device in the *pièce bien faite* theatrical tradition. Sardou's *Dora* (1880), for instance, involves blackmail via an incriminating letter. The drama was credited by several critics as being Wilde's inspiration for the use of a similar trope in *An Ideal Husband*.[83] Furthermore, alongside Claud and Hal's misdeeds, there is a strong focus on the issue of illicit female sexuality. The play's opening act is called 'Camilla' and with its depiction of an intelligent, genteel woman haunted by a previous sexual mistake it initially bears a marked similarity to contemporary fallen woman social problem dramas – the "theatrical obsession" of the 1890s stage and site of increasing contestation of moral norms.[84] Especially given Raffalovich's and Gray's previously discussed experimentations with theatrical conventions, it is important not to neglect the possible meta-theatrical or inter-theatrical elements of their work.

[81] Senelick, *Lovesick*, 19.
[82] Ibid., 21.
[83] Eltis, *Revising Wilde*, 131.
[84] Eltis, *Acts of Desire,* 114.

Raffalovich and Gray signal the generic hybridity of *The Blackmailers* from the outset. The play opens with Claud hurriedly writing a secretive letter and covertly "*remov[ing] the photograph of MRS BOND-HINTON's little girl*" (23), a signal to arrange a clandestine meeting with Camilla. Such skulduggery immediately indicates the work's affinity to the *pièce bien faite* genre. However, once the rest of the characters enter the drawing room, audiences' expectations of a Scribean play are quickly undermined by a stream of witty sceptical banter that multiple reviewers identified as belonging to "modern life".[85] Camilla, for instance, declares that her niece Violet Bond-Hinton is "A wonderful woman. She has an ideal: cost price" (24), while Hal's mother, Mrs Dangar, observes that "our husbands don't call it deceiving when they are not found out" (27). In this environment, melodramatic and Scribean elements become noticeably antiquated. When Violet raises the possibility that a friend may fall victim to the machinations of a conniving family member, "if he is not careful that stepbrother of his will work mischief between Harry and his father" (26), Hal is utterly dismissive of the likelihood of such events:

> 'Oh! How melodramatic, Violet. This is real life, we have brothers, but no secrets, dislikes but no hates, spites but no revenge. I wonder sometimes whether people who lived in other days, in times when things happened, found life more exciting. What would you give for a secret? Only think of having to keep a watch over your face, your gestures, to be acting before one's nearest. (26)

Senelick observes that "ostensibly, [the lines about acting] relate to the victims of blackmail but can be read as the homosexual's creed, the double game constantly played to avoid detection".[86] However, it is also important to note the distinction that Hal draws between "melodrama" and "real life" before he makes this declaration. Meta-theatrically, these remarks emphasise how the Scribean blackmail plot, which the audience has already seen beginning to unfold, grates against the play's more realistic generic impulses. Indeed, when Hal later expresses moral concerns about extorting money from Camilla, Claud declares "theft is a good, an old-fashioned institution, and I won't have you more squeamish than our grandfathers" (34), comically highlighting the long-established nature of blackmail as a theatrical device.

This sense of Hal performing an outdated theatrical role is underscored by his difficulty at naturally adopting the expected demeanour of a blackmailer. When Camilla arrives to give Hal his first payment, Hal is too courteous. Camilla then starts to coach Hal through his expected words and gestures:

> **CAMILLA:** Take off your mask, Mr. Dangar, and show the face of the blackmailer.

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[85] Bright, reproduced in Senelick, *Lovesick,* 55.
[86] Senelick, *Lovesick*, 21.

> **HAL:** You said you come on business.
> **CAMILLA:** (*with horrible irony*) That's better. (34)

The irony here is that Hal, in stripping off his mask, is adopting just another theatrical persona. Furthermore, when Hal starts to more fully assume the role of a blackmailer his words undercut the conservative moral creed they uphold. He tells Camilla that she has irretrievably damaged her daughter Cissy's fortunes since "the stains a mother invites upon herself descend to her daughter *by strange laws"* ([emphasis added], 36). His emphasis on the unnaturalness of Cissy's fate, an eventuality that the success of his blackmailing attempts is nonetheless dependent upon, stresses the disconnect between his highly conventional condemnation of Camilla and his actual beliefs. The fact that Hal eventually abandons his blackmailing attempts and pledges to "use all the influence I had with Claud" (35) to help Camilla out of her predicament conveys his good moral core. Rather than his authentic self being an inherently evil blackguard, Hal is simply caught in a role that he is struggling to escape from. This conflict is reflected in the difficulty many reviewers had in ascribing a fixed personality to him in the opening acts: as Scott complained, "A good man, a weak man, or a detestable scoundrel? I could not make him out". [87]

In Act Three, the troubling implications of being forced into an outdated theatrical stereotype are explored via the figure of the fallen woman and Hal's attempts to persuade Mr Bond-Hinton to forgive his wife. Pretending to be advocating on the behalf of an unknown woman, he stresses the fundamental purity of Camilla's character: "she is not a bad woman I assure you. You would call her a good woman. [Claud] preyed on her very virtues" (44). In a similar vein to other contemporary sexual problem plays, such as Pinero's *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*, which endowed former courtesan Paula Jarman with "shades of goodness, intelligence, [and] even nobility", Raffalovich and Gray seek to challenge the simplistic form of theatrical morality which automatically designates Camilla as a bad woman.[88] This dynamic is further underlined by Mr Bond-Hinton's own soliciting of Hal to help another blackmailed woman, implicitly his own mistress. As Camilla foregrounded in the first act, her husband, despite his transgressions, has been able to maintain a veneer of respectability through her complicity in this fiction: "Edward may have been *what you call a good husband* but he has always counted on my forgiveness, on my anger, on my indifference" ([emphasis added], 27). Good and bad have become little more than meaningless labels, attached to certain forms of social roles.

However, upon observing a "*very ill and anxious*" (45) looking Camilla cautiously creep into the drawing room, and consequently realising that his wife is the errant woman on whose behalf Hal

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[87] *Illustrated London News* (16 June 1894), 766.
[88] Arthur Wing Pinero, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (London: William Heinemann, 1895), 36.

is advocating, Mr Bond-Hinton immediately changes his demeanour. He declares to Hal that "I don't know what you their accomplice deserves, but I know what she deserves" (45). Mr Bond-Hinton performs moral outrage, having mere moments earlier not only admitted to his own infidelity but sought Hal's help to placate Claud. Upon hearing his words, Camilla collapses and "*falls headlong onto the ground*" (45), ending the act prostrate upon the floor at her husband's feet. This tableau arrangement conventionally signifies a fallen woman's acknowledgement of her own sinfulness, "the remorseful woman signals her shame and regret by dropping to the ground to await masculine censure and discipline".[89] The iconographic conventions of the stage enshrine Camilla's guilt yet the audience is aware that she is no more duplicitous or transgressive than her husband who absolves himself of blame by appropriating the melodramatic signifiers of righteous patriarchal authority. Camilla's character is never seen again onstage after this act drop, her fate being relayed through malicious gossip in the final act, "he had heard Mary […] say it would be a good thing for all if Mrs. Bond-Hinton never got better" (45), emphasising how she has become trapped in a social and moral identity that she cannot escape. Additionally, for Hal, who is trapped in the equally theatrical role of the play's villain, it stresses that he will be condemned by the conventional moral associations of his role.

This sense of moral outrage as a hypocritical social performance culminates in the play's final act, where "representatives of [his] outraged family" (47) confront Hal. Throughout Hal's arraignment, Gray and Raffalovich repeatedly underscore the parallels between the gathered Halford-Dangar family, who are "*sitting down*" (46) in the drawing room onstage watching Hal be denounced for his crimes, and a theatrical audience. Hal's uncle, and chief denouncer, Sir Felbert Dangar remarks that his sister Lady Felbert, who has come to London especially, is "going to do all the theatres, I suppose" (46), while Hal observes that his aunt, who is witnessing the revelation of her nephew's scandalous misdeeds with barely supressed glee, "finds she is in for something better even than a first night at the theatre" (49). The implication is that Hal has become just another stage villain: an immoral spectacle to be condemned. Indeed, the conception that Sir Felbert has of him being redeemed through honest work and starting a family in New Zealand is notably highly theatrical in nature:

> […] we will hope that after long years of separation, your mother may be able to cross the seas and at last, bending over the cradle of an innocent child, see in that sleeping babe your innocent childhood, and as you kneel there at her feet - two good women, your mother and your wife, will meet and be kin, linked by the love of a good man. (51)

[89] Melissa Gregory, 'Melodrama and the Penitent Woman Tableau in Victorian Culture: From Tennyson to Conrad', *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*, (2012), 3. [Accessed: 15 January 2021], https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1025999ar.

His emphasis on stylised penitential gesture, "kneel there at her feet", and conventional figures of moral purity, "innocent child…two good women", configures Hal's potential rehabilitation as an idealised tableau, the kind of which one might expect to end the play if it was a sentimental melodrama. Popular temperance dramas, such as W. H. Smith's *The Drunkard* (1850) which ends with the eponymous drunkard surrounded by his domestic household and accompanied by a "flute symphony to 'Home, Sweet Home'", were particularly prone to conclude with an image of the erring hero "reclaimed and reunited with his family" in order to emphasise the redemptive power of repentance, community virtue, and hard work.[90] Just as Camilla was condemned by circumscription within traditional theatrical moral codes, Hal's entire family is unable to conceptualise him outside of these narrow melodramatic confines.

In this light, Hal's final exit, "merely walk[ing] out of the house, leaving the family council", is a rejection of not just the strictures of society but those of the stage more broadly.[91] Much like Ibsen's Nora, Hal's desertion of his familial home constitutes a refusal to perform the social and theatrical role expected of him – a parallel notably underlined by Hal's complaint, when he starts to remonstrate against his hypocritical family, that his sister only showed affection for his younger pliable self "because I amused her like a doll" (49). The fact that Hal fills a tumbler with poison and "*puts the glass to his lips*" (53) before deciding to abandon London society further underscores the rejection of theatrical and social convention and all its associated moral hypocrisies. Senelick suggests that the inclusion of a vial of poison is perhaps "'an oblique reference' to *The Black Cat*".[92] However, it should also not be overlooked that the suicide of a repentant villain or social transgressor was a stock melodramatic ending. In Pinero's *The Profligate* (1889), another play which sought to unsettle contemporary melodramatic norms, the errant Dunstan Renshaw almost commits suicide, "*takes a phial from his pocket and slowly pours some poison into a tumbler*", until he is eventually saved by the forgiveness of his wife.[93] *The Blackmailers*'s conclusion offers a similar rejection of the expected theatrical ending and, in the vein of contemporary social problem dramas, conveys a sense that conventional dramatic schemas have become defunct. Thus, like Nora, who notably also contemplates suicide only for Torvald to dismiss this as merely "play-acting" (83),

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[90] W. H. Smith, *The Drunkard, or the Fallen Saved,* (New York [State]: W. Taylor & Co., 1850), 64; John W. Frick, *Theatre, Culture and Temperance Reform in Nineteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 108.
[91] *Times* (8 June 1894), 8.
[92] Senelick, *Lovesick*, 21.
[93] Arthur Wing Pinero, *The Profligate* (London: William Heinemann, 1891), 121-2. In Pinero's original version, Renshaw dies, but Pinero was persuaded by critical and audience responses to revise the play and have the wife arrive in time to stop him.

hence foreclosing that potential narrative trajectory as a dramatic absurdity, the only option for Hal therefore is to leave and for the play to reject conventional theatrical closure.[94]

As *The Times* noted, the play concludes on the "'note of interrogation' beloved of Ibsenites".[95] Upon discovering his nephew's desertion and finding the poisoned port, another one of Hal's uncles asks "do you think it would have been better if he had taken it?" (53).[96] Much like the ambiguity that surrounds Nora's exit, which left audiences deeply uncertain as to whether she will be able to realise her individuality or be crushed by the brutal outside world, Raffalovich and Gray leave Hal's fate unclear. However, given that Hal is fleeing to Paris, a city known for a "moral corruption" and a sexually profligate bohemian culture in the nineteenth-century English imagination, to try and redeem himself, it damns the hypocrisy of the English aristocratic classes and their narrow forms of social morality.[97]

In *The Blackmailers*, Raffalovich and Gray have emulated Wilde's style of drama, presenting an assemblage of devices from "nineteenth-century melodrama, the *piece bien faite* […], and the radical new problem play" which strain against each other's generic assumptions.[98] However, taking advantage of a coterie audience and private financing, the pair are far more explicit in their denaturalising of melodramatic stereotypes and attacks on hypocritical self-serving moral performance.[99] The moral emptiness of melodramatic signifiers are exposed to reveal a troubling bleakness, in a manner which strongly resembles a social problem play. Taking the figures of the fallen woman, and implicitly the homosexual, as points of unfair social and theatrical persecution, Raffalovich and Gray pointedly problematise the issue of simple or straightforward moral delineations.

Henry Arthur Jones's *The Princess's Nose* (1902)

Up to this point, this chapter has explored works which were viewed to a greater or lesser extent as functioning against the established theatrical grain. However, the use of instances of subversive performance in cynical comedies gradually infiltrated commercial mainstream theatre as the decade progressed. On first examination, Henry Arthur Jones may appear to be an unlikely choice to be placed alongside 1890s avant-garde experiments. As a young dramatist, he rewrote *A Doll's House*,

[94] Martin Meisel, *How Plays Work: Reading and Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 113-4 discusses the meta-theatrical implications of Torvald's remarks.
[95] *Times* (8 June 1894), 8.
[96] In performance, this line was apparently changed to Mrs Halford-Dangar declaring "Oh, why didn't he kill himself" (Senelick, *Lovesick*, 18). However, the fundamental emphasis on uncertainty remains unchanged.
[97] Ramos-Gay, 'French in Victorian Britain', 8.
[98] Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr, 'Wilde About Ibsen: The Fusion of Dramatic Modes in A Woman of No Importance'. In *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Philip Smith (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2008), 126-34, 126.
[99] It was reported that Raffalovich financed the production. *Truth* (14 June 1894), 12.

along with Henry Herman, as *Breaking a Butterfly* (1884). The play, which concludes with the heroine Flora Goddard being set "free" from her blackmailing predicament by her husband and male neighbour, reconfigured the Norwegian's work within the moral constraints of English melodrama and was widely ridiculed by early English proponents of Ibsenism.[100] Zangwill and Eleanor Marx, two of the ITS's most prominent early members, in their preface to their own adaptation of Nora's story, 'A Doll's House – Repaired', explicitly ridicule Jones for "transform[ing] the 'Doll's House' past all recognition".[101]

Yet, as the years progressed, the social politics of Jones's plays became more provocative. His daughter Doris records that "my father fought hard and fearlessly for years to establish the right of English dramatists to depict life as it is, and not as an emasculated, trumpery pageant suitable only for young ladies of a past generation".[102] Although perhaps lacking sufficient distance from her subject matter, Doris Arthur Jones's remarks nonetheless stress her father's commitment to challenging the English stage's representational and moral codes. Jones's early melodrama *Saints and Sinners*, a searing attack on hypocritical religious institutions which encouraged their congregations to "cut the ground from under your neighbour's feet" (76), caused outrage in many quarters. As Jones himself noted, in his 1891 preface to the published play, it was the "very strong antagonism between the literary and theatrical elements" (vii) of the work, "literary" here implicitly being code for being outside the confines of melodrama, that engendered this uproar.

As previously discussed, Jones allied himself with innovative dramatic schemes and institutions. He was a member of the ITS, speaking in their Sunday night debates, and his plays formed part of Grein's "earliest recommendations" to non-commercial Dutch theatres.[103] Jones was also an early supporter of the Society of British Dramatic Art. He offered "£50 to the production of any new play by an untried author that may be considered worthy of production by [the] committee", an indication of his early commitment to British literary drama.[104] Though, much like his relationship with the ITS, Jones's reluctance to personally produce work for the Society of British Dramatic Art conveys the delicate balancing act that he sought to strike between mainstream commercial acclaim and dramatic innovation.[105]

As the 1890s progressed, Jones increasingly challenged the moral conventions of the stage, especially when it came to the depiction of female sexual transgression. Through society comedies

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[100] Henry Herman and Henry Arthur Jones, *Breaking a Butterfly* ([n.p.]: [n.p.] 1884), 75.
[101] Eleanor Marx Aveling and Israel Zangwill, '"A Doll's House" Repaired by Israel Zangwill and Eleanor Marx Aveling', *Time* (March 1891), 239-53, 239.
[102] (D.) Jones, *Life and Letters,* 162.
[103] (A.) Grein, *Story of a Pioneer*, 66.
[104] *Era* (4 February 1893), 8.
[105] (A.) Grein, *Story of a Pioneer*, 109.

such as *The Case of Rebellious Susan* and *The Liars*, Jones critiqued the hypocrisy of men who sought to dictate the acceptable bounds of female morality.[106] In comparison to Pinero, the dramatist to whom Jones's realist aesthetic and critique of sexual morality is most frequently compared, what is notable about these works is their treatment of social performance. Pinero's dramas are replete with "alternative forms of union—unconventional marriages, sham marriages, and non-marriages".[107] These alternative unions are then interrogated and rejected as unsustainable, often through the mechanism of female punishment and censure. In *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*, Paula's dream of assimilating into respectable society is destroyed by the return of her former lover Hugh Ardale, resulting in her eventual suicide. Similarly, in *The Notorious Mrs Ebbsmith* the eponymous Agnes Ebbsmith desires an unconventional free-union. Yet, she is unable to break with conventional social mores, famously "*thrust[ing] her hand into the fire*" (184) to retrieve a bible, after she had cast it into the flames. By contrast, in Jones's plays, sham performances persist. Unable to bear the potential social disgrace, the eponymous heroine of *The Case of Rebellious Susan* remains with her husband whom she vows to "be a good wife to", despite her possible adultery.[108] Likewise, in *The Liars*, Lady Jessica Nepean returns to her husband, maintaining the "holy pretence" of moral virtue in order to avoid the "shabby scandal and dirty business of the divorce court".[109] Rather than expunging artifice in the manner of Pinero's most successful plays, Jones depicts such role playing as a social necessity.[110] Indeed, although Wilde apparently once declared that he only had three rules of playwriting: "the first rule is not to write like Henry Arthur Jones, the second and third rules are the same!", there were even rumours that *The Liars* "had really been written by Oscar Wilde and Henry Arthur Jones had put his name to it because of the scandal attaching to Wilde".[111] As this rumour demonstrates, Jones was increasingly being aligned with more subversive comedic critique, especially that associated with transgressive or unorthodox role playing.

Such provocativeness however raised issues of commercial viability. The efforts of actor-manager Charles Wyndham to introduce greater moral clarity into Jones's plays repeatedly appealed to the playwright's implicit understanding of commercial pragmatism. When Wyndham wrote to Jones to insist that the lines indicating that the eponymous heroine in *The Case of Rebellious Susan* had actually gone through with her threat to commit adultery be omitted in performance, he expressed his disbelief that "a practical long-experienced dramatic author believ[es] that he will

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106 For more detailed discussion of these works, see Eltis, *Acts of Desire*, chap.4.
107 Christian, *Marriage*, 15.
108 Henry Arthur Jones, *The Case of Rebellious Susan* (London: Chiswick Press, 1894), 88.
109 Henry Arthur Jones, *The Liars* (London: Chiswick Press, 1897), 114.
110 Some of Pinero's lesser known and less successful plays came closer to Jones's model, for instance, *The Benefit of the Doubt* (1895).
111 (D.) Jones, *Life and Letters*, 156; 187.

induce married men to bring their wives to a theatre to learn the lesson that their wives can descend to such nastiness".[112] Wyndham's emphasis upon Jones's position as "a practical long-experienced dramatic author" highlights how the playwright was knowingly pushing the bounds of what could be tolerated within mainstream commercial theatre. As Shaw noted of *The Liars*, Jones, much like Wilde, covered his critique of social hypocrisy with "the veil of sentimental romance" but the nuances of his drama undercut the more conservative social morality it ostensibly upheld.[113]

The Princess's Nose (1902), another cynical society comedy in the style of *The Case of Rebellious Susan* and *The Liars*, is "Jones's most ruthless staging of the sexual double standard as the morality of those in command".[114] The play's central dramatic situation consists of a young woman named Norah learning that her husband, the French Prince of Chalençon, intends to take her schoolfriend Mrs Emmeline Malpas as his mistress. After discovering her husband's impending infidelity, the Princess solicits the wisdom of her uncle Sir John Langrish, who advises her to "be a sensible woman" and avoid directly challenging the Prince on his behaviour.[115] Acting upon her uncle's instructions, the Princess attempts to win back her husband through a combination of sexual seduction and feigned acceptance of his infidelity but ultimately finds herself unable to maintain the façade. Fortuitously, however, Mrs Malpas suffers a disfiguring carriage accident while traveling to her rendezvous with the Prince, allowing the Princess and her husband to reconcile.

In Shaw's words, the play's provocativeness rested in its contention that "a man's wife is simply his whore, and must compete with all the other whores if she is to retain her hold of him".[116] While attempting to divert the Prince's attention from Mrs Malpas, the Princess "*appears in a very beautiful negligée gown*" (67) and "*makes a pretty little appealing gesture"* (67) at him, despite only moments earlier having made an angry and frustrated gesture at him. Eltis, the only critic to discuss this play extensively, argues that in this scene:

> The wife must play the whore, arousing her husband's sexual passion when she feels none. Nora Helmer's famous tarantella is ambiguously part self-expression, a hysterical release of pent-up energy, part seduction, performing her husband's favourite dance to distract him from reading the incriminating letter. Jones's brutal replay of Ibsen's scenario contains no ambiguity; his Norah's performance is equally desperate and exclusively sexual.[117]

Here Eltis identifies a reconfiguration of an instance of Ibsen's use of meta-theatre into an even harsher critique of social entrapment and the need to adapt to hypocritical patriarchal social mores.

[112] Letter from Charles Wyndham to Henry Arthur Jones (23 August 1894). Reproduced in (D.) Jones, *Life and Letters*, 165.
[113] Shaw, *Our Theatres*, vol.3, 212.
[114] Eltis, *Acts of Desire*, 150.
[115] Henry Arthur Jones, *The Princess's Nose* (Chiswick Press: London, 1902), 27.
[116] Letter from G. B. Shaw to Henry Arthur Jones (22 March 1902). Reproduced in (D.) Jones, *Life and Letters*, 212.
[117] Eltis, *Acts of Desire*, 151.

Jones's revision of Ibsen's tarantella scene is, however, not the only instance of theatrical performance in the play. Like Wilde in *An Ideal Husband*, Jones underpins his depiction of the moral hypocrisy of fashionable society with a background tableau performance. Yet, in *The Princess's Nose* the connection between literal and social performance is significantly more sustained and explicit. Upon hearing his female relatives praised for their acting abilities by the tableaux master Mr Eglinton-Pyne, Sir John remarks that "I've no doubt the ladies of my family are gifted with the ordinary feminine talent for dissimulation; but as the present level is already too high for masculine penetration, I beg you won't help them further" (7). Sir John explicitly ties the concept of social and literal performance together, refuting Pyne's contention that there is a separable "truth of nature and a truth of art" (8). Sir John, who functions as the *raisonneur* of the piece, sees life as a little more than a series of recognisable stage poses.

This observation is quickly and ironically borne out by Pyne's attempts to seduce the Princess:

> **PYNE**: […] You have the good sense and the good feeling not to betray the man who is offering you the genuine ---
> **PRINCESS**: Devotion of your life, the utmost worship of your soul!
> **PYNE**: (*With a well-feigned accent of love.*) Yes, that is what I offer you (21)

Pyne, who is described as possessing a "*touch of the stage Italian or Spaniard*" ([emphasis added], 7), freely adopts the visual and verbal rhetoric of the stage into his own life. Moreover, since the Princess has already heard from two of her friends that Pyne "made love to both of them, in exactly the same words" (21) she can repeat his clichéd words back at him verbatim. In this way, Jones comically emphasises how expressions of love and emotional sincerity are constantly feigned and performed for personal advantage.

This sense of relationships being a strategic performance is then further developed in the initial depiction of the royal couple's marital life. Before the Princess attempts to seduce her husband, she kicks her slippers off in a fit of pique:

> **PRINCE** (*Kneeling*): Permit me to put this pretty slipper on the prettiest foot in the world.
> (*She submits. He puts it on her foot, rises goes away a little distance. She kicks the other slipper a little further. PRINCE again picks it up, and again kneels.*)
> **PRINCE**: Once more permit. (*She again submits, and he again puts it on.*) And now my politeness will go no further; and if those pretty slippers tumble off those pretty feet again, those pretty feet will stay outside those pretty slippers. (60-1)

A prince kneeling down to place a slipper on the foot of his beloved pictorially realises an iconic moment from traditional Cinderella narratives.[118] With its hyperbolised language and exaggerated sense of male chivalry, this scene is both literally and figuratively the picture of idealised romance. Yet, this tableau, like the empty theatrical words and gestures adopted by Pyne, is utterly detached from the reality it supposedly denotes. Far from being an ideal husband, the Prince is a heartless philanderer. The Prince's warning that "if those pretty slippers tumble off those pretty feet again, those pretty feet will stay outside those pretty slippers" stresses that his performance as a loving and attentive husband is only iterative as long as its underlying assumptions are not challenged. Unlike *Lady Windermere's Fan* or *Theory and Practice* in which clever women are able to use and appropriate melodramatic signifiers to advance their own agendas, in Jones's "conservative drama of social integration and adaptation" the loyal and virtuous Princess is forced by social and economic pressures to perform a role she cannot abide.[119]

The Princess's inability to sustain the fiction of tolerance – after her failed attempt at seduction, she angrily upbraids her husband, and he departs after Mrs Malpas – almost destroys her marriage. Mrs Malpas's carriage accident, however, offers the Princess a second opportunity to learn to perform. Multiple reviewers noted that the incident seemed "wholly farcical" and not at all what "preceding incidents had […] led one to expect".[120] In *The Liars* and *The Case of Rebellious Susan*, characters experience an underlying shift in their worldview, with both sets of husbands and wives committing to make their marriage work. The plot of *The Princess's Nose*, however, turns on a seemingly random accident. The complete arbitrariness of the plot underscores how the underlying societal values have not changed. Rather, the Princess is simply given another opportunity to conform to, rather than resist, them.

The Prince and Princess reconcile through an extended set of social performances. Pyne, angered by the Princess's rebuff of his advances, fabricates a tale of their sexual liaisons: "swaggering about the place, and more than hinting that the Princess has revenged herself on the Prince" (76). Pyne is then horsewhipped by the Prince, who has just become aware of Mrs Malpas's disfigurement. As Archer noted, "it is a plain inversion of poetic justice that the horsewhip should be in the Prince's hand and not on his back".[121] By performing the actions and gestures of the wronged husband, the Prince is able to assert his gender and economic power and bring the play to a comedic resolution without at all morally deserving it. The Princess attempts to intercede on

[118] The slipper scene from *Cinderella* had much the same cultural resonance in the nineteenth century as it has today. T.W. Robertson's highly successfully play *School* (1869), a retelling of *Cinderella,* for instance, ends with the hero stooping to place a shoe on his beloved.
[119] Eltis, *Acts of Desire*, 153.
[120] *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* (12 March 1902), 6.
[121] *World* (19 March 1902), 12.

Pyne's behalf but is advised by Sir John to "Hush, my darling! The job has got to be done" (91). Sir John, in his wisdom, knows that the Prince must be allowed to maintain this pretence unchallenged.

The Princess finally heeds her uncle's advice. After Pyne's horsewhipping, the Prince and Princess fall into what visually appears to be a conventional lovers' embrace:

> **PRINCESS**: (*Suddenly clasps him with a cry of –*) Ah, how long shall I keep you?!
> **PRINCE**: For always – while you hold me as close as you do now.
> **PRINCESS**: Are you sure? Are you sure? These hearts of ours are such vagabonds, such wanderers – Nothing binds them except love! (*He kisses her.*) (91)

Eltis observes that the comic resolution does not attempt to dispel the cynicism which preceded it: "the Prince promises fidelity only so long as 'you hold me as close as you do now' […]. The wife's position is only secure while her attractions surpass her rivals".[122] Yet, this concluding tableau is even more subversive than Eltis credits. The Princess's response to the Prince's pronouncement, "These hearts of ours are such vagabonds, such wanderers – nothing binds them except love", is a verbatim repetition of Sir John's earlier words to her about the importance of feigning toleration of the Prince's behaviour. This self-interested transplantation of text from its original context shows that the Princess, despite her profession of the all-redeeming power of love, has learned that what she must do is perform. This conclusion forms a striking parallel with *An Ideal Husband*: two women repeating the words of their *raisonneurs* as they profess the triumph of love in what to the audience is plainly a calculated act of self-preservation. However, unlike Wilde's play, there is no possible sentimental interpretation. The Princess is caught in a desperate act of social survival.

The Princess's Nose was a disaster. As *The Times* observed, "the public resented the vulgarity of feeling underlying the play".[123] Audiences refused to clap for Jones on the opening night, and, much like Benham and Burney's *The Awakening*, the play was withdrawn after only a few weeks.[124] In Jones's previous dramas there was at least some element of truth, nobility, or moral commitment. *The Liars* concludes with Sir Christopher Deering and Edward Falkner going off to "save hundreds, perhaps thousands of lives" on a diplomatic mission in Africa, while in *The Case of Rebellious Susan* the Harabins seemingly accept the social necessity of being "good faithful" (115) spouses to each other.[125] *The Princess's Nose*, however, contains no such redeeming elements. The

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[122] Eltis, *Acts of Desire*, 151.
[123] *Times* (12 March 1902), 10.
[124] Ibid.; J. P. Wearing, *The London Stage: A Calendar of Plays and Players* (Metuchen, N.J., & London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1981), 148. Wearing records that *The Princess's Nose* ran for 45 performances.
[125] Jones, *The Liars*, 83.

sense that morality and its associated melodramatic signifiers are just a set of meaningless conventions to be performed and appropriated at will, which to greater or lesser extent had been an undertone in Wilde's and Jones's previous society comedies, was now provocatively placed front and centre of the piece.

It is noteworthy though that *The Princess's Nose* received a hearing at all. The financial risks of the piece were plain to see. Upon receiving a copy of the script, Shaw had warned Jones that the work "piles moral bankruptcy on top of pecuniary bankruptcy".[126] Jones seemingly benefitted from being one of "British theatre's most recognisable and most bankable names".[127] Paradoxically, it was arguably Jones's place within the theatrical establishment that allowed him to stage such a socially provocative play. Devoid of sentimentalism and obfuscation, *The Princess's Nose* makes the overlap in concerns, methods, and tropes running between the commercial stage and the experiments of figures like Burney and Benham and Raffalovich and Gray plain to see.

Conclusion

In 1897, George Egerton penned a short story 'The Prince Obsessed' (c.1897): a thinly veiled response to Wilde's sodomy trial. In this piece, she praised her fellow countryman not only for his "telling epithets & witty epigrams" but also his ability to delight smug middleclass audiences who "were too self sufficient to see how often the laugh was directed against themselves".[128] Egerton moved in many of the same social and literary circles as Wilde. Her short story collections *Keynotes* (1893) and *Discords* (1895) were published by the Bodley Head, and she also contributed to *The Yellow Book*. Seeing beyond the comedic and sentimental veneer of his dramas, Egerton's comments illustrate how several of Wilde's contemporaries had a keen appreciation of his ability to critique and satirise the social systems that his plays ostensibly upheld.

The plays discussed in this chapter attest to this wider awareness of the provocative politics and potential for social critique found in cynical, witty societal dramas. In particular, they showcase the ability for playwrights to subvert or invert standard melodramatic narratives and associated codes of morality by reducing all of reality to an extended performance. Away from the constraints of major London theatres, writers such as Burney and Benham and Gray and Raffalovich pushed the more cynical implications of theatrical self-staging. Furthermore, as the decade progressed, prominent commercial dramatists, such as Jones, dared to strip some of the necessary sentimentality from Wilde's mode of drama. Scholars have frequently identified the work of Noël Coward and W. Somerset Maugham as the continuation and development of Wilde's witty vein of

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[126] Shaw to Jones quoted in (D.) Jones, *Life and Letters*, 213.
[127] Farkas, *Women's Playwrighting*, 31.
[128] George Egerton, 'The Prince Obsessed', reproduced in *Times Literary Supplement* (24 June 2022), 13.

playwriting.[129] Yet, as this chapter has shown, there was a rich and varied tradition of cynical society writing which spanned across the 1890s. The idea that 'All the World's a Stage' and that identity is fundamentally performative in nature has formed a long and complex undercurrent in British drama from the late-nineteenth century onwards.

[129] See, for instance, Innes, *Modern British Drama*.

CHAPTER 5
Evolutions and Revolutions: changing social structures and dramatic forms

In 1884, a young Henry Havelock Ellis composed an essay on the question of 'Women and Socialism'. At its conclusion, he turned to *A Doll's House* which he praised for its depiction of a radical shift in gender relationships: "[Ibsen] has realised that the day of mere external revolutions has passed, that the only revolution now possible IS the most fundamental of all, the revolution of the human spirit".[1] For Havelock Ellis, future editor of the 1888 Camelot Series of Ibsen's plays, the Norwegian's dramas contained a radical shift in moral ideology – one which reformed social institutions and relations not via the transformation of external structures but an inner shift in personal morality. Havelock Ellis saw in Ibsen a "new ideal of human life [that] is only possible through the union of the old Hellenic and Christian ideas" – two terms which he uses to refer to sensual passion and the spiritual connection in a relationship respectively – "with a third which is the outcome of to-day and is bound up with the attainment of equal freedom, equal independence and equal culture for men and women".[2] Writing in *To-day*: *The monthly magazine of scientific socialism*, a title which itself reflects the late-nineteenth century's rapid growth in radical intellectual movements, this essay indicates an increasing interest in using drama to explore and stimulate radical moral change.

The 1890s is often considered the decade of the 'problem drama'.[3] An expansive and somewhat loose term, both in contemporary and modern criticism, it is typically applied to plays in which a particularised social phenomenon strained against the established morality of the day. The label encompassed works which ranged from Shaw's *Mrs Warren's Profession*, with its depiction of prostitution as the necessary product of society "underpaying, undervaluing and overworking women", to Ibsen's *The Enemy of the People* (1882) in which a town's economic priorities conflict with environmental and public health concerns.[4] Often containing ambiguous or open-ended conclusions, these works tended to offer little in terms of straightforward solutions to social issues, but rather exposed the limitations of the current social order. "The problem drama is the product of a society whose morality is changing, where the old-established ideas of right and wrong no longer satisfy the conscience, and where better morality is not yet established", *The Morning Post* declared. [5]

[1] Henry Havelock Ellis, 'Women and Socialism', in *To-day: The monthly magazine of scientific socialism* (October 1884), 351-363, 363 (emphasis in original).
[2] Ibid.
[3] The term 'problem play' was apparently invented by Sydney Grundy in relation to the type of drama he and his fellow society playwrights were beginning to produce in the 1880s and 1890s. Archer, *The Old Drama*, 285.
[4] George Bernard Shaw, *The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw* (London: Paul Hamlyn Limited, 1965), 219.
[5] *Morning Post* (4 June 1896), 6.

Sexual problem dramas were especially ubiquitous: "curious amalgams of drawing room melodrama, well-made-play, and Ibsen accommodated to Mayfair sensibilities".[6] Although somewhat sympathetic to the plight of sexually transgressive female characters, sexual problem dramas tended to contain punitive and conservative moral structures. Pinero's *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*, one of the most prominent and commercially successful examples of the genre, explores whether it is possible for former courtesan Paula Jarman, with her "shades of goodness, intelligence, [and] even nobility" (36), to rehabilitate herself into respectable society. Ultimately, however, Paula realises that she has experienced an irreparable moral degeneration which has been imprinted upon every fibre of her physical and social being and as a result takes her own life. As one reviewer wrote, *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* showed the world as containing fixed moral "law to which all must adjust".[7]

Similar narrative trajectories were also present in works more sympathetic to the fallen woman's plight. In Constance Fletcher's 1894 drama *Mrs Lessingham*, Gladys Lessingham leaves her abusive husband for Walter Forbes who in turn deserts her when he tires of life as a social pariah. Gladys seemingly receives a "second chance", when Walter, at the urging of his current fiancée, agrees to marry her now that she has been widowed.[8] But, Walter's callousness towards her combined with society's contempt for their "precious cooked up job of a marriage" (65) leads to Gladys committing suicide after realising that her new union will be equally unhappy. *Mrs Lessingham* lacks Pinero's emphasis on "the inherently corrupt character" of the fallen woman.[9] Fletcher instead foregrounds the cruelty and narrowmindedness of a society which exploits Gladys and then ostracises her.[10] Nevertheless, *Mrs Lessingham* still follows an "established dramatic pattern" in which provocative challenges to the social order are "quickly reined in through ideological orthodoxy". [11]

Ibsen's plays are often placed in the problem drama category.[12] Works like *Ghosts*, with its depiction of the pernicious and inescapable stranglehold of "dead ideas, and lifeless old beliefs",

[6] Joel H. Kaplan, 'Pineroticism and the problem play: Mrs Tanqueray, Mrs Ebbsmith and Mrs Pat', in *British Theatre in the 1890s: Essays on Drama and the Stage*, ed. by Richard Foulkes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 38–58, 38. For further critical discussion of the sex problem play see Eltis, *Acts of Desire*, chap. 4; Chothia, *English Drama*, 29-38.
[7] Quoted in Eltis, *Acts of Desire*, 155.
[8] Constance Fletcher, *Mrs Lessingham*, Add MS 53546A, 44. Lord Chamberlain's Plays, British Library, London.
[9] Eltis, *Acts of Desire*, 131.
[10] The narrow mindedness of "our little parish of St James's" (37) is also an undertone in *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*. More detailed discussion of this aspect of the play can be found in Austin Quigley, *The Modern Stage and Other Worlds* (New York: Methuen, 1985), chap.5.
[11] Farkas, *Women's Playwriting*, 61.
[12] For an example of Ibsen being discussed in relation to the problem play see Bjørn Hemmer, 'Ibsen and the Realistic Problem Drama', *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*, ed. by James McFarlane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 68–88.

have affinity with elements of the genre.[13] However, as Havelock Ellis's remarks highlight, there was a vein of Ibsen's writing that appeared to suggest ways in which outdated social systems could evolve. The most obvious example is *The Lady from the Sea*, a work which, as Edmund Gosse remarked, was noticeable among Ibsen's oeuvre for concluding "in sunshine instead of in rain and tempest".[14] Ellida Wangel's decision to remain in her marriage, despite being given the option to "choose your own path in full – full freedom", creates the kind of truly equal and understanding marital union that is hinted at as the ultimate "miracle of miracles" (122) at the end of *A Doll's House*.[15] Furthermore, even when plays did not conclude with a conventionally happy ending, radical and potentially positive shifts in moral value systems can also be observed. Rebecca and Rosmer's plunge into the millrace in *Rosmersholm*, although sometimes read as the uncomfortable product of Rosmer's egotism and bullying, for instance, can on the face of it also be interpreted as the genuine "fusion of autonomous spiritual powers" – an advance upon both the dogmatism of the Church as well as the moral hypocrisy of the established freethinker movement.[16]

In all these plays the evolution of these social institutions is inextricably linked to a transformation in characters' moral values. Utilising what is commonly termed the 'discussion scene' device, all these plays contain moments when characters debate and confront their deepest held fears, beliefs, and value systems. As Archer said of Rita and Alfred Allmers in *Little Eyolf*, characters are forced to "tear away veil after veil from their souls".[17] However, unlike *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*, where a stripping away of pretence leads to the revelation of a fixed moral character, the concept of the self (and the systems of belief and judgement that characters' buy into) is revealed here to be more mutable and flexible. *The Lady from the Sea*, for instance, only reaches it resolution because Wangel, after much initial resistance, "has learned to consider [his wife] a free and equal human being".[18] Nora's exit from her marriage is precipitated by a realisation that her "duties towards myself" (147) are just as important as the obligations of her role as a wife and mother.

Recent Ibsen scholarship has paid increasing attention to how Ibsen's dramas reflect his stated belief "that ideals are capable of reproduction and evolution".[19] Moi observes that *A Doll's House* "calls for a radical transformation […], not just, or not even primarily, of laws and institutions, but

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[13] Henrik Ibsen, *Ghosts,* trans. by William Archer (London: Walter Scott, 1900), 85.
[14] Edmund Gosse, 'Critical Introduction', in *The Lady from the Sea*, Henrik Ibsen, trans. by Eleanor Marx-Aveling (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1890), 9.
[15] Henrik Ibsen, *The Lady from the Sea*, trans. by Frances E. Archer, in *The Collected Works of Henrik Ibsen: Rosmersholm; The Lady from the Sea,* ed. by William Archer, vol. ix (London: William Heinemann, 1907), 343.
[16] Errol Durbach, 'Temptation to Err: The Denouement of "Rosmersholm"', *Educational Theatre Journal*, 29:4 (1977), 477–85, 484. For a more negative reading of *Rosmersholm*'s ending see Moi, *Birth of Modernism,* chap. 9.
[17] William Archer, *The Theatrical 'World' of 1896* (London: Walter Scott, 1897), 312.
[18] Moi, *Birth of Modernism*, 309.
[19] Ibsen quoted in Ibid., 314.

of human beings and their ideas of love".[20] Her analysis has been extended by more recent scholarship. Mark Sandberg has identified "a forward-looking aspect" to many of Ibsen's dramas, in which existing social structures are either razed or renovated, leaving the tentative "possibility of rebuilding (something) on true foundations".[21] In a similar vein, Shepherd-Barr has shown how Ibsen's sustained engagement with contemporary theories of evolution positioned social institutions, and especially marriages, as "'rudiments' of our evolutionary past" which need to be progressed.[22] Ibsen's interest in the potential capacity for human spiritual growth and how it influences the plots of his dramas as well as their structure, characterisation, and methodology is increasingly being recognised by Ibsen scholars.[23]

British Ibsenites' interest in Ibsen's depiction of spiritual and social evolution is particularly apparent in their writing on the Norwegian's approach to gender relations – the topic which dominated British responses to Ibsen. In the introduction to the revised edition of her translation of *A Doll's House*, Henrietta Frances Lord stresses that the play advocates for a reform of the concept of marriage rather than a complete abolishment: "Given a man of Helmer's character and a woman of Nora's, their home must be remodelled before it can be built on a firm foundation".[24] Evoking the metaphor of structural renovation identified by Sandberg, Lord conveys an understanding of, and indeed insistence on, Ibsen's interest in spiritual growth. The Marx-Avelings, who spent most of their life in a free-union with each other, similarly emphasised Ibsen's belief that marriage required a more developed form of human relations. Writing as theatre reviewers for *Time* magazine, the pair praised Ibsen for showing "that a man and a woman have no right to live together unless they are fitted for, understand, can bear with, and get the best for the world out of, each other; unless, in Nora's words, their union is a true marriage".[25]

This emphasis on Ibsen's reconfiguration of marital unions both reflected and fed into a wider cultural push to redefine the institution of marriage. Since the 1860s, prominent British freethinkers had begun promoting "marriage as something far higher than a union 'blessed' by a minister".[26] By the 1890s, this philosophy had slowly begun to enter more mainstream discourses. Heavily influenced by free-thinking doctrines, Mona Caird's controversial essay on 'Marriage' (1888) proclaimed that "The ideal marriage then, despite all dangers and difficulties, should be *free*.

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[20] Ibid., 225.
[21] Mark B. Sandberg, *Ibsen's Houses: Architectural Metaphor and the Modern Uncanny* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 131; 58.
[22] Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr, *Theatre and Evolution from Ibsen to Beckett* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 77.
[23] Ibid., 64.
[24] Henrietta Frances Lord, 'Preface to the Second Edition', in *Nora; Or, A Doll's House* ('Revised and Expanded Edition'), by Henrik Ibsen, trans. by Henrietta Frances Lord (London: Griffith Farran & Co., 1890), v-xii, vii- viii.
[25] *Time* (March 1890), 328.
[26] Annie Besant, *The Legalisation of Female Slavery in England* (London: Besant & Bradlaugh, 1885), 8.

So long as love and trust and friendship remain, no bonds are necessary to bind".[27] Generating over 27, 000 responses, which ranged from the outraged to the supportive, Caird's essay illustrates how the possibility of re-thinking inter-personal relationships, and particularly marriage, through the framework of a freedom orientated value system was becoming a prominent point of social contestation.[28]

To the extent that these new models of human relationships were explored on the commercial stage, it was largely to deny the possibility of such spiritual transformations. In Sydney Grundy's comedy *The New Woman* (1894), Agnes Sylvester, a married woman known for moving in intellectual circles, and Gerald Cazenove, a young aristocrat, are writing a book together on "the Ethics of Marriage" from the perspective of "higher culture".[29] Their claim to "higher morality" (24), alongside declarations such as "The true alliance is the union of souls" (20), clearly position these characters as modern freethinkers. Yet, such claims to great intellectual and moral insight are really a pretext for Agnes to attempt to seduce Gerald. Despite claiming to embody a new enlightened model of femininity, she is in fact "as old as Eve" (90). The identity of the freethinking New Woman is exposed as nothing more than an intellectual costume.

In a similar vein, Pinero's *The Notorious Mrs Ebbsmith* depicts the extra-marital relationship between the titular Agnes Ebbsmith, a former radical activist, and Lucas Cleeve, a young aristocrat with promising political aspirations. Under the "banner of free union" (106), the pair, according to Agnes, will create a relationship which is based on mutual love and trust. However, at the play's climax, when Agnes is given a bible and urged to return to respectable Christian widowhood, she initially hurls the book into a fire, only to thrust her hand into the flames and drag it back out. In a moment "rooted in the melodramatic dynamics of moral disclosure", Agnes's moral instincts, despite all her talk of free love and freethinking, are revealed to be entirely conventional.[30] Agnes "creep[s] back into the shell of a narrow morality", as a disappointed Mrs Patrick Campbell (the first actress to play Agnes) observed.[31] Although *The Notorious Mrs Ebbsmith* does not unequivocally celebrate the concept of Christian marriage – on the contrary, the cruelty of Agnes's first husband who treated her "like a woman in a harem [… and] a beast of burden" (33) as well as Lucas's callous treatment of his own wife Sybil position the institution as fundamentally flawed – Pinero

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[27] Mona Caird, 'Marriage', in *Westminster Review*, 130:2 (1888), 186-201, 197. A discussion of Caird's relation to freethought debates and doctrines can be found in Laura Schwartz, *Infidel Feminism: Secularism, Religion and Women's Emancipation, England 1830-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), chap.6.

[28] In response to Caird's essay, *The Daily Telegraph* ran a series called 'Is Marriage a Failure'. They received over 27, 000 responses on the topic. Joan Perkin, *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England* (Chicago: Lyceum Books, 1989), 225.

[29] Sydney Grundy, *The New Woman* (London: Chiswick Press, 1984), 11.

[30] Eltis, *Acts of Desire*, 139.

[31] Campbell, *Life and Some Letters,* 99.

affirms marriage as the only possible path for modern society. Praised as "an unconventional homily upon the value of social conventions", the play emphatically denies the possibility of genuine philosophical and social transformation.[32]

There are several prominent plays which pushed back against these conservative social mores, largely by depicting a break with family structures and conventional social roles as the necessary conditions for achieving personal growth and autonomy. By slamming the door on her mother and tearing up her lover's letter, Vivie Warren at the conclusion of *Mrs Warren's Profession* emerges "as an autonomous figure who has refused family in the form of her biological mother and the possibilities of family offered by Frank".[33] Similarly, Janet De Mullin, in St. John Hankin's *The Last of the De Mullins* (1908), rejects her former lover's offer of marriage and likewise "refuses her father's desire to absorb her back into his patriarchal family".[34] Like Vivie, Janet knows that she has the "pluck and brains" to chart her own independent course in life.[35] These works, which feature heavily in critical accounts of radical social drama of the period, position a desertion of traditional social roles as the necessary conditions for female self-development and social progress.[36]

However, as evident in the previous discussion of *Agnes Colander*, there was another, less critically prominent, vein of drama which sought to explore the possibility for individuals to grow and develop within romantic relationships and family structures rather than outside of them. The rest of this chapter examines plays which stage a seeming evolution in characters' frameworks of morality and belief, especially in regard to the idea of true unions or marriages. It argues that these works subverted the structures of the problem play genre in order to suggest that the path forward was the desertion of dogma and the cultivation of greater understanding, charity, and sympathy between people. This approach was not just used to endorse a reformation in contemporary gender relations but also to advocate for a wider and more provocative set of social issues, including homosexuality and inter-faith unions.

Dorothy Leighton's *Thryza Fleming* (1895)

[32] *Lady's Pictorial* (23 March 1895), 392.
[33] Ann Wilson, 'Shutting out Mother: Vivie Warren as the New Woman', in *Shaw and Feminisms: On Stage and Off*, eds. by D. A. Hadfield and Jean Reynolds (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013), 56 -72, 56.
[34] Eltis, *Acts of Desire*, 179.
[35] St. John Hankin, *The Last of the De Mullins* (London: A. C. Fifield, 1909), 125.
[36] Examples of scholarship which discuss these plays include Eltis, *Acts of Desire*, chap.5; Chothia, *English Drama*.

Fairly little information is available about Ethel Ashton Jonson (née Forsyth): the woman who wrote under the pseudonym Dorothy Leighton.[37] Leighton initially appears in historical records through her involvement with various British spiritualism movements. In 1892, she was listed as the Honorary Secretary of the Esoteric Christian Union: a Theosophical organisation which described itself as "the outcome of the desires of numerous devoted students and followers at once of spiritual religion and spiritual science".[38] Theosophy, a religion which incorporated elements of Eastern mysticism to promote "a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity", was a prominent, yet critically underappreciated, discourse in the late-nineteenth century's "cauldron of radical thinking".[39] Giuliano D'Amico, for instance, attributes the emphasis on ideal marriage as being the quasi-cosmic union of "twin souls" (xi) in Lord's preface to *A Doll's House* to the her belief in Theosophy and Christian science.[40] Indeed, Elizabeth Miller notes that "spiritualism, Christian Socialism, the Labour Church, and other religious and antirationalist" organisations were significant parts of the contemporary socialist movement – a network which has long been credited by scholars as facilitating Ibsen's arrival into Britain.[41] Leighton appears to have been an active and engaged member of these radical circles.

Leighton's interest in Esoteric religions would significantly grow throughout the decade. In the mid-1890s, Leighton joined the British followers of Hindu philosopher and spiritual leader Swami Vivekananda. She facilitated numerous speaking events for Vivekananda, for instance hosting him for a lecture at the Sesame Club (an educational reform charity of which she was honorary secretary), and became "the leader for a time of Vivekananda's disciples and supporters in London after his departure" in 1897.[42] Although Leighton would eventually split with the Vedanta movement in the late 1890s, she was once praised for having had an influence "stronger than any other single persons for the cause in England".[43]

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[37] The most comprehensive current account of Leighton's biography is Renata Kobetts Miller, 'Dorothy Leighton's *Disillusion* and New Woman Experimentation', in *The Routledge Companion to Theatre-Fiction*, ed. by Graham Wolfe (New York: Routledge, 2023), 195-204.

[38] *Athenaeum* (30 July 1892), 175; Edward Maitland, *The "New Gospel of Interpretation": Being an Abstract of the Doctrine and a Statement of the Origin, Object, Basis, Method and Scope of the Esoteric Christian Union (Revised and Enlarged Edition)* (London: Lamley & Co., 1892), 78.

[39] Thomas Muse, *A Popular Introduction to Theosophy and the T. S.* (Carlisle: Fred Fenton, [n.d.]), n.p.; Giuliano D'Amico, 'Henrietta Frances Lord: Translating Ibsen for the Theosophical Movement', *Scandinavica*, 56:1 (2017), 96–122, 102. D'Amico identifies Theosophy as a prominent discourse which permeated through the intersections of feminism and socialism.

[40] Ibid. (D'Amico), 114. For additional discussion of the Theosophy movement's interest in Ibsen see also Giuliano D'Amico, '*The Fantasy of Peer Gynt*: Ibsen and Theosophy in Early Twentieth-Century Scotland', *Correspondences,* 11:2 (2023), 1-36.

[41] Miller, *Slow Print*, 222.

[42] Gwilym Beckerlegge, 'A Religion "Based Upon Principles, And Not Upon Persons": The Heart of the 'Strategic Fit' of Swami Vivekananda's Promotion of Vedānta?', *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, 27:1 (2023), 97–124, 106. *Daily Chronicle* (14 May 1896); *Morning Post* (19 May 1896), 1. Leighton's husband Charles *Ashton* Jonson was the *Sesame Club's* chairman.

[43] Baghini Nivedita, *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita,* vol.ii, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashram, 1988), 294.

Alongside this interest in spiritualism, Leighton was also heavily involved in promoting women's education and other feminist causes. In the late 1880s, she opened a technical college "to train girls and women in such subjects as enable them to take their place at the head of a household, fully equipped for the management of their domestic affairs".[44] She then served as the secretary of the Parents' National Education Union during the mid-1890s, giving lectures across the country on the subject of children's education.[45] From the early 1900s, Leighton's interest in women's issues became more politically inflected. She was a committee member of the 1899 International Congress of Women in London and produced several lectures and articles on the topic of suffrage.[46]

This belief in a more spiritualist conception of human relations alongside an interest in women's social and political issues is reflected in Leighton's work as a novelist. Her 1893 debut novel *As a Man is Able*, the story of two lovers who after several years together discover that they are not suitable life-partners, promoted the idea that "to tie up two people before they know each other […] for life, without any chance of freedom, except through the mire of the Divorce Court, is uncivilised".[47] Reflecting Leighton's theosophical leanings, "actual union" (vol.iii, 81) is instead shown to be "such a sacred thing in itself that no amount of law or religion could make it more solemn or binding" (vol.iii, 81) A similarly unorthodox viewpoint is espoused by socialist and radical playwright Mark Sergison, the protagonist of Leighton's second novel *Disillusion* (1894). *Disillusion* concludes with Mark welcoming back his adulterous former wife Celia, after they have divorced, on the basis that "the legal untying is as powerless to destroy a bond of love as the legal tie is to create it".[48] Described by *The Standard* as containing "revolutionary" views on "the English marriage laws and with English theories of marriage as these affect the relations of the sexes", Leighton's novels offered a vision of inter-personal union that rested not on social institutions but rather on deep and intimate personal connection.[49]

Given the radicalness of Leighton's writing combined with her extensive organisational experience in various progressive clubs and societies, it is no surprise that she assumed an organisational role within the ITS. In October 1894, when the ITS was registered as a limited company, Leighton, alongside Grein, was named as director.[50] However, in promotional material

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[44] *Pall Mall Gazette* (13 July 1891), 3.
[45] *Parents' Review* (May 1894), 238 – 240.
[46] *Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough* (18 January 1899), 4. Although pro-suffrage, Leighton was not, however, supportive of the Suffragette movement. See *New York Times* (18 March 1912), 10.
[47] Dorothy Leighton, *As Man is Able* (London: William Heinemann, 1893), vol.i-iii, (vol.i, 16).
[48] Dorothy Leighton, *Disillusion* (London: Henry & Co., 1894), vol.i-iii, (vol.iii, 211).
[49] *Standard* (15 October 1894), 2.
[50] *Era* (27 October 1894), 10. It is unclear for how long this arrangement had been operating before the society's incorporation.

for the society, Leighton was referred to as "Directress" of the ITS, with Grein in the role of "Managing Director", which suggests that the Dutchman was still very much in charge.[51] Then when Grein stepped down in 1895, Leighton along with Charrington became co-director of the society.[52] Though, promotional material again afforded Charrington the title of managing director. [53]

Leighton's function within the organisation appears to have been mostly administrative. Letters between Leighton and Charrington reveal her role in sending out circulars, drawing up the accounts, and providing much needed reality checks to Charrington's grand theatrical ambitions: "We cannot find subscribers to give 14 matinees" she exasperatedly wrote to her colleague seemingly in response to his overly optimistic plan for producing *Little Eyolf*.[54] Leighton also appears to have been in charge of ticketing and membership. Circulars for the 1897 revival of *Ghosts* directed applications for tickets to be sent to her, and prominent ITS members, such as former ITS secretary Teixeira de Mattos, frequently contacted her to arrange subscriptions for various individuals.[55] Furthermore, Leighton seemingly had very little input over the ITS's creative vision. Despite being nominally penned by Leighton, the ITS's 1896 circular, which articulated the new vision for the society, was largely written by Shaw.[56] Like many societies and organisations of the age, the ITS seemingly relied on educated, intelligent women from a certain leisured middle-class environment (Leighton was the daughter of a prominent British diplomat) to provide significant unpaid administrative labour.

That said, the society nonetheless provided Leighton with a valuable artistic platform to explore her interest in new and unorthodox models of human relations. Her first play *Thyrza Fleming* was produced by the ITS at Terry's Theatre in 1895, very soon after Leighton joined the society's management. The play centres upon the relationship between Hugh Rivers and his young bride Pamela. On their wedding night, Hugh receives a mysterious letter penned in a feminine hand. Pamela, growing suspicious that Hugh has been involved with another woman, departs back to her family home. Hugh goes to speak to the letter sender: his former mistress Thyrza Fleming, who then entreats Pamela to be more trusting of her husband and return to her marriage. It is further revealed that Thyrza is none other than Pamela's mother, who deserted her own family when Pamela was a baby. Despite successfully reuniting Hugh and Pamela, Thyrza deeply regrets

[51] *Era* (29 December 1894), 14.
[52] *Standard* (28 October 1895), 6.
[53] Charrington and Leighton to ITS shareholders (31 October 1896).
[54] Letter from Dorothy Leighton to Charles Charrington (8 February [no year]). Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware, Newark.
[55] Letter from Alexander Teixeira de Mattos to Dorothy Leighton (18 November 1896). Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware, Newark.
[56] Shaw, *Collected Letters*, vol.i, 571-2.

the selfishness of her past deeds and attempts suicide. Tragedy is averted, however, as Pamela, realising the truth about her parentage, prevents her mother committing the fatal act.

On the face of it, the play's plot structure resembles works such as Jones's *The Case of Rebellious Susan* in which a young woman is convinced to stay with her husband after the revelation of his sexual infidelity. Several scholars – though notably none who have considered Leighton's biography or the radical politics of her wider oeuvre – consequently identify the piece as an anti-feminist riposte to those who criticised the sexual double standards of the day.[57] Sally Ledger, by contrast, views *Thyrza Fleming* as "one of the most radical of the New Woman Plays", advocating for a fundamental change in the nature of romantic relationships.[58] This starkly divided critical opinion highlights the main tension of Leighton's work: the play contains the rhetoric of a more loving, equal, and sympathetic relationship between the sexes which, despite being treated seriously and with respect by the playwright, seemingly chafes against the conservative arc of the play's plot.

In the opening act of *Thyrza Fleming*, Leighton initially depicts Pamela as a misguided version of Nora Helmer.[59] Pamela's claims that she "won't be treated like a doll – a baby" (12) echo the famous protestations of Ibsen's heroine.[60] Yet, unlike Nora, who is genuinely infantilised by her husband, Pamela is simply acting rather petulantly. Pamela's belief that Hugh must be concealing a "dreadful secret" (17) – rhetoric that conspicuously locates her viewpoint within a melodramatic framework – is utterly at odds with her husband's patient and measured reassurances. Pamela's pronouncement, as she abandons Hugh, that "It is a woman's first duty to respect herself" (19), a clear parallel of Nora's famous declaration, consequently seems selfish and distorted. As *The Era* wrote, "the audience can have no sympathy for this silly young woman […] "an unreasonable, hysterical girl".[61]

The fundamental issue is that, unlike Ibsen's Nora, Pamela is not deserting her husband out of a desire to form her own opinions and value systems. Instead, her belief that her husband is treating her unfairly is due to the influence of her cousin Theophila Falkland, who, as Hugh complains, has "made [Pamela] take a one-sided unnatural view of life" (33). With her "*close-cropped hair, manly attire [and] divided skirt*" (42), Theophila is a "rather crude caricature of the 'new woman'".[62] As Farkas observes, Theophila resembles the New Woman characters of Grundy and Jones.[63] She propagates a highly misandrist approach to life which seems to run against all of Pamela's natural

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[57] See, for instance, Eltis, *Acts of Desire*; Farkas, *Women's Playwrighting*.
[58] Ledger, 'New Woman Drama', 56.
[59] Farkas has observed how Pamela's rhetoric echoes Nora's. She highlights how *Thyrza Fleming* "self-consciously engages both with the ideas and the contemporary reception of *A Doll's House*". Farkas, *Women's Playwriting*, 45.
[60] Dorothy Leighton, *Thyrza Fleming*, Add MS 53565F, 12. Lord Chamberlain's Plays, British Library, London.
[61] *Era* (12 January 1895), 11.
[62] *Manchester Guardian* (5 Jan 1895), 7.
[63] Farkas, *Women's Playwriting*, 45.

beliefs and inclinations. While Pamela declares that the separation has made her "so very, very miserable" (45), Theophila's woman's club is intending to give her a standing ovation. A pushback against those who adopted *A Doll's House* as a radically anti-marriage text, Leighton depicts Pamela as a victim of a false enlightenment.[64]

Thyrza, by contrast, truly embodies the spirit of Nora Helmer. She recounts how she "simply left [her husband] to be free. He had hideous ideas of woman's duty, and he thought because he owned my person he possessed my soul" (33). Unlike Pamela who merely felt infantilised, Thyrza was seemingly in a genuinely oppressive union. Yet, rather than espousing the type of misandry embodied by Theophila, Thyrza is far more accepting of imperfect moral standards, advocating for compassionate understanding between all. "Sympathy, friendship, council, comprehension" ([emphasis in original] 35) define Thyrza's approach to relationships between the sexes.

The difference between Pamela's and Thyrza's moral value systems becomes apparent when the latter seeks to persuade her daughter to return to Hugh. Thyrza initially attempts to explain her relationship with Pamela's husband:

> **PAMELA:** You were never his love?
> **THYRZA:** Never I swear it.
> **PAMELA:** Never his mistress then?
> **THYRZA:** (*hesitating a moment*) No (*pauses -and adds quickly*) not as the world knows the term.
> **PAMELA**: (*rapidly*) what do you mean? What then were you?
> **THYRZA**: A man's mistress is a woman he keeps for his own pleasure; his toy, his plaything, his caprice, is a woman who has forfeited his respect in losing her self-respect. (51)

Thyrza's carefully worded responses to Pamela's questions never actually categorically deny sexual relations with Hugh. As Sally Ledger writes, Leighton's "lexical contortions" are the product of attempting to express the sexual nature of this relationship "without offending the censor" (57).[65] A prompt script copy of the play notably cuts Pamela's further question in regard to "has he been nice to you (*in a low voice*) Hasn't he ever kissed you" (52), suggesting that even these "lexical contortions" were still frankly too on the nose.[66] Thyrza's vagueness renders it just about possible that the pair "maintained platonic relations of an obscure kind", as *The Times* put it.[67] Nonetheless, *The Pall Mall Gazette* felt confident enough to pronounce that Hugh "lived with a woman as his mistress", noting that the above passage was not a denial of sexual relations but rather an attempt

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[64] Theophila is notably a member of the Anti-Marriage League.
[65] Ledger, 'New Woman Drama', 57.
[66] Dorothy Leighton, *Thyrza Fleming* (annotated typescript), 2003MT-364, (III, 12). Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge (Mass.). These lines have "cut?" (52) by them in the LPC copy. Here they are definitively scored out.
[67] *Times* (5 January 1895), 6.

to "explain that their peculiar intimacy was entirely without 'love' on his part; that from the sentimental point of view Colonel Rivers is in no way a damaged article".[68] Although not clear if Pamela fully understands Thyrza's meaning, the older woman is advocating for a moral standard which places no weight on Hugh's sexual history.

Pamela's moral standards are, however, rigid and inflexible. Resisting the trajectory of Ibsen-esque dramas whereby discussion scenes lead to the transformation of social perspectives, Pamela's value systems remain unchanged:

> **PAMELA**: […] I daren't allow my inclinations to over-ride my conscience.
> **THYRZA**: But haven't I made you see —
> **PAMELA**: You haven't altered my standard of morality.
> **THYRZA**: Not by enlarging your point of view. *PAMELA shakes her head.* (55)

Although she seems unconvinced of the moral system she upholds, speaking of the difference between "what one would like to be right" (55) and "what one knows is right, - moral, I mean" (55), Pamela appears unable to fully reconsider her worldview. She declares that she "still love[s] the man I thought I was marrying" (55). However, in a moment that parallels Ibsen's Nora telling Torvald that he was merely in love with the idea of her – a declaration in Ibsen's drama that Moi argues "demands nothing short of a revolutionary reconsideration of the very meaning of love" – Thyrza responds to this pronouncement by telling Pamela that she "never loved the true Hugh Rivers" (56).[69] In Thyrza's view, loving only the ideal of a person, rather than having a sympathetic understanding of a complex and flawed human being, is not true love at all.

At the act drop, Thyrza concludes this conversation by declaring "be true to your heart, Pamela, a true woman's heart never leads her astray!" (57). Inverting the logic of Jones's and Grundy's *raisonneurs,* who "advocate the accommodation of the desire for personal fulfilment to the limitations imposed by society", Thyrza encourages her daughter to follow her own desires and inclinations rather than remain bound by external systems of morality and social judgement.[70] The offstage change of heart that Pamela experiences, where she decides to reconcile with Hugh, thus follows a very similar narrative trajectory to Jones's and Grundy's dramas but carries very different implications. Pamela's return to her husband becomes less a capitulation to society's sexual double standards, but rather, as Ledger argues, the affirmation of "a new kind of relation between men and women based on friendship and trust as well as sexual love".[71] As in *The Lady from the Sea* and Shaw's *Candida,* a wife is staying with her husband but not for reasons of social conformity or

[68] *Pall Mall Gazette* (5 January 1895), 3.
[69] Moi, *Birth of Modernism*, 247.
[70] Russell Jackson, 'Introduction, in *The Plays of Henry Arthur Jones* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), by Henry Arthur Jones, 2-28, 14.
[71] Ledger, 'New Woman Drama', 56.

constrained choice. In a play noted for its "dialogue with prominent genres and writers of [the] day", Leighton has taken the typical structure of dramas which uphold the sexual double standard yet subtly transformed its politics.[72]

Having repudiated misandrist forms of feminism, Leighton concludes the drama by turning to another moral value system that needs interrogating: Thyrza's radical and unaccountable form of individualism. After learning of the distress that her abandonment caused her family, Thyrza becomes distraught about the consequences of her past deeds. In the play's most explicit evocation of *A Doll's House*, she acknowledges how her own individualism harmed others: "I wanted freedom; I thought I owed I a higher duty to myself than to my child" (65).[73] Thyrza repudiates her past actions on the grounds that "the true self of a woman never can be developed at the expense of those who look to her for love and tenderness, and that self-development is generally an excuse for self-indulgence" (65). While not endorsing duty for duty's sake, the spiritual evolution of human beings, according to Thyrza, cannot be achieved without respecting and investing in personal emotional ties.

Another victim of a false enlightenment, Thyrza's failure to have found her true moral path almost has tragic consequences. Consumed by regret, Thyrza waits for Hugh and Pamela to depart, before putting a pistol to her head.[74] Following the conservative moral strictures of 1890s problem dramas, it appears that Thyrza, like many other fallen female characters, is about to take her own life. A value system that allows for her to be redeemed and rehabilitated has seemingly not been found.

Yet, at the last moment, crisis is averted. Pamela, realising both the truth about her parentage, as well as the danger that Thyrza is currently in, "*mak[es] a rapid movement towards Thyrza, flings her arms round her with a wild cry"* (67) and shouts out "mother" (67). Functioning as the last line of the play, this gesture of acceptance is highly ambiguous. However, as Leslie Anne Hill observes, "though at first Thyrza rejects family structures, it is through them that she is saved". [75] The play's final moments show that through softening her inflexible moral standards, Pamela, who desperately wants the guidance and love of a mother, is able to find the female solidarity and maternal bond that she craved, while Thyrza is able to avoid self-destruction through reuniting with the daughter she abandoned. In a riposte to the moral and social inflexibility of the problem

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[72] Carlson, 'Conflicted Politics', 271.
[73] The strong parallels between this speech and *A Doll's House* are noted by Ledger, 'New Woman Drama', 57.
[74] In the performance, Thyrza attempts to end her life by imbibing poison. *Morning Post* (5 January 1895), 3.
[75] Leslie Anne Hill, *Theatres and Friendships: The Spheres and Strategies of Elizabeth Robins* (PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 2014), 153.

drama genre (the tropes of which Leighton has emulated but then swiftly subverted), human connection, community, and compassion thus become the saving grace of all.

Given the abruptness of this ending, there was unsurprisingly much debate about the play's politics and messaging. Some reviewers placed the work within the conservative moral strictures of the problem play genre. *The Morning Post*, which notably misses the suggestion that Hugh and Thyrza had sexual relations, for instance, declared that "The moral of all this is, […], satisfactory enough, in as much as both mother and daughter acknowledge fully that they did wrong in leaving their husbands".[76] Yet, reviewers who fully understood the subtext of the piece were far from considering the play morally conventional. Pronouncing the play "repugnant to healthy moral natures", *The Liverpool Mercury* declared that "the curtain descends upon a situation the authoress must mean to be a logical solution of all difficulties. But it is a situation which cannot possibly last for 24 hours".[77]Although not entirely explicit in its objections, the shocked insistence that the situation "cannot possibly last" conveys a firm disbelief in *Thyrza Fleming*'s wide-ranging philosophy of redemption and rehabilitation. The extreme divergence of critical responses to the play highlights the complexity of Leighton's drama. It resembles conservative social problem dramas in so far that it depicts female characters who, having previously embraced modern forms of freethinking or feminism, repent their abandonment of marriage and family life. However, the radicalness of the play lay in the characters' underlying rationale rather than their actions. Instead of being cowed by social pressures and expectations, Pamela and Thyrza have managed to spiritually evolve within these existing structures to fit them to their own desires and purpose.

Ultimately, the response to the play was mixed. Several reviewers griped about Leighton's lack of dramaturgical instinct. *The Morning Post* termed the play a "workmanlike drama", while *The Pall Mall Gazette* complained that it was "intensely conventional in its manipulation".[78] Though, there was some praise for the play's "unconventional […] central conception" and, as previously mentioned, the Scandinavian rights to the play were sold soon after its premiere.[79] Theatrical explorations of these new and more equal relations between the sexes would notably only become more common as time progressed. In 1902 the Playgoers' Club's competition for the best unperformed play would be won by Netta Syrett's *The Finding of Nancy* (1902), with Leighton's second drama *The Hedonists* (1902) "practically t[aking] the second place".[80] Syrett's *The Finding of Nancy,* the story of a woman who becomes a man's mistress out of financial desperation only to

[76] *Morning Post* (5 January 1895), 3
[77] *Liverpool Mercury* (7 January 1895), 5.
[78] *Morning Post* (5 January 1895), 3; *Pall Mall Gazette* (5 January 1895), 3.
[79] Ibid. (*Pall Mall Gazette*).
[80] Quoted in Kobetts Miller, 'Dorothy Leighton's *Disillusion*', 202. Official runners up were not announced. The script of *The Hedonists* is seemingly no longer extant.

later freely and fairly choose him as her partner, similarly expounded the redemptive possibility of sympathetic, understanding, and loving relations. Nancy's relationship with Will Fielding only becomes a true union when she achieves economic independence and can therefore willingly choose a life with her former partner on equal terms, recognising him as "my friend, my child, my lover".[81] In a play where characters explicitly complain that Ibsen has "given [women] the disease of thought" (16r), leading them to "consider it less immoral to live with a man she loved than to marry one she didn't" (17r), Syrett is staging the realisation of such a philosophy. *Thyrza Fleming*, although far more implicit and subtle in its politics and messaging, can be seen as an early attempt at a play which upholds this social philosophy.

Michael Field's *Quits* (c.1894)

Thyrza Fleming is subtle and implicit when it comes to its embrace of this more sympathetic and compassionate paradigm of male-female relations. Yet, as can be seen in the work of Michael Field, this espousal of an alternative model of relationships could take a more radical and explicit form. Michael Field's interest in modern drama as well as their relationship to the ITS has been extensively detailed in Chapter 3. However, it is worth emphasising how this period of engagement with the radical contemporary stage led to an intense, if albeit short-lived, change in Michael Field's dramatic style. After the failed performance of *A Question of Memory* in 1893, they stated their desire "to start afresh" and "to be contemporary; to write a direct prose with natural sequences".[82] Conceiving themselves as undergoing a clear and deliberate "turning to modern Drama", the pair sought to move beyond historical verse drama.[83]

As part of this effort, Bradley and Cooper penned several prose plays between approximately 1893 and 1896.[84] These dramas (some of which only exist as partial drafts) strongly reflect Ibsen's influence. *William Said*, a play in which the two lead female characters are said to represent "modern hedonism" and "modern idealism", was, for instance, originally entitled *Omens* in order to highlight that the work is "Ghosts of the future".[85] The pair identified Ibsen with a strain of radical individualism. At the end of 1893, the year that the pair started their turn to "modern Drama", Cooper wrote of her certainty "that we are doing an unnatural & destructive thing if you allow the claims of others to mar the freedom of self-realisation as the central need of our lives – & the

[81] Netta Syrett, *The Finding of Nancy*, 1902/14I, 60r (emphasis in original). Lord Chamberlain's Plays, British Library, London.
[82] Field, 'Work and Days' (1893), 91r.
[83] Field, 'Work and Days' (1894), 23r.
[84] See Treby, *Michael Field Catalogue*, 114-8.
[85] Field, 'Work and Days' (1894), 15r.

condition of happiness.[86] The modern, when it came to the pair's theatrical writing, was linked as much to the development of individual agency as it was to the formal and aesthetic qualities of theatrical realism.

This question of how to prevent "the claims of others" from impeding individual freedom and happiness is explored in the pair's drama *Quits* (c.1894). Cooper described *Quits* as Michael Field's "mere first attempt in prose-drama".[87] Developed between 1893 and 1894, it was written in the immediate aftermath of the disastrous ITS performance of *A Question of Memory*. Unusually among Michael Field's oeuvre it appears to be almost exclusively written by Cooper. As Bradley recorded in 'Work and Days', "Henry […] maintains he must be left alone to develop Quits".[88] However, although the bulk of the draft material was penned by Cooper, there is a small amount of manuscript material in Bradley's hand, suggesting that this was not altogether an isolated endeavour.[89] Unlike Michael Field's earlier dramas, the play was created with performance in mind. The day after the work was completed in March 1894, the pair wrote to Olga Nethersole, a prominent London actress who had notably played the lead role in the ITS production of *A Visit*, asking "if she would like to see Quits".[90] However, such intentions were never realised. *Quits* was seemingly neither performed nor published and thus, like much of Michael Field's drama, it has languished in critical obscurity.

The play opens in the marital home of Victor and Lilitha Shalford, the apparent "model couple of the neighbourhood", who are actually deeply estranged from each other.[91] Lilitha is enamoured by the charms of radical freethinker and individualist Sergius Voronzoff, while Victor has been conducting his own clandestine affair with Emmy Curliffe, a nature loving widow with a sordid sexual past. During a weekend at the Shalfords', Emmy and Sergius meet, fall passionately in love, and announce to their respective lovers that their previous relationships are over. A heartbroken Lilitha seeks to commit suicide, while Victor resolves to murder the new lovers in a fit of jealous rage. The Shalfords, however, fortunately discover each other's intentions and in the process of dissecting their failed marriage forge a new sense of personal intimacy. The curtain thus falls on not one but two new unions. Emmy and Sergius depart together to Paris, while Lilitha and Victor

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[86] Field 'Work and Days' (1893), 104r-v.
[87] Field, 'Work and Days' (1894), 144r.
[88] Ibid., 8r. Henry is a nickname for Cooper. Bradley and Cooper frequently used male pronouns and/or pet names to refer to each other.
[89] Michael Field, 'Draft of Act III of *Quits*', MS. Eng. misc. e. 343, Special Collections, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
[90] Field, 'Work and Days' (1894), 14r.
[91] Michael Field, *Quits*, MS. Eng. misc. d. 975, (I, 2). Special Collections, Bodleian Library, Oxford. Four typescript copies of "Quits" are collected under the shelfmark d. 975/1-12, the specific set of scripts referenced by this thesis are further marked MS. Eng. misc. d. 974/1-3.

resolve to call "quits" (III, 25) on their previous marital despair and commit to a more loving and emotionally intimate partnership.

The question of what constitutes an ideal marriage dominates the play's first act. *Quits*'s opening scene commences with the Shalfords' small-minded neighbour Mrs Fisher-Owen commending Lilitha and Victor as "the model couple of the neighbourhood" (I, 2), despite the fact that they "have nothing in common" (I, 4). Mrs Fisher-Owen praises the pair for their "public relation" (I, 2) of "harmony, fidelity and so on" (I, 2), while being quite explicit that she considers the issue of their private relation, and indeed the small matter of whether they love each other or not, as completely inconsequential. It quickly becomes apparent, though, that this respectable façade conceals a deeply unhappy core. As Lilitha tells Sergius, "I didn't get to know [Victor] during our engagement, and I have never got to know him since; we are acquaintances who have to live together, that's all" (I, 13). The swift reveal of Victor's affair with Emmy, alongside Lilithia and Sergius's own ambiguously presented passionate friendship, conveys how such an approach to marriage is deeply flawed.

A radically different approach to romantic relationships is offered by Sergius. He views love as a deep spiritual connection and sympathy, as shown by his declaration that "all [his] love-affairs have been Friendships" (I, 12) – the "calm tenderness of friendship" was a longstanding trope to express the emotional intimacy of ideal marriage in British freethought discourses.[92] This philosophy is borne out when Sergius meets Emmy. His instantaneous attraction to her, both when he meets her at the Shalfords, as well as when he fleetingly passed her on the streets as a child, presents her as his soulmate. Leighton notably also employed this trope in *As Man is Able* when Vere Vandaleur is instantaneously drawn to Beatrice Armstrong when he saves her from a carriage accident in London, only then to develop a true emotional connection when they re-meet several years later. Reflecting Bradley and Cooper's own admiration of Ibsen's characters for depicting a new kind of modern individual, those who "live by ideas, sensations + actions resonant with novelty", Sergius tells Emmy that "there are men and women who are living lives from their birth to their grave – I'm one, and I believe you're another" (I, 17).[93] The pair are instantaneously united by the sheer vibrancy and vitality of their beings.

Crucially, this belief in a free intellectual and spiritual union is not a pretence to achieve non-marital sexual relations: the kind ridiculed and critiqued in *The New Woman* or *The Notorious Mrs*

[92] Mary Wollstonecraft cited in Nancy Kendrick, 'Wollstonecraft on Marriage as Virtue Friendship', in *The Social and Political Philosophy of Mary Wollstonecraft*, eds. by Sandrine Bergès and Alan M. S. J. Coffee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 34-49, 34.
[93] Field, 'Works and Days' (1893), 22r.

Ebbsmith. Sergius explicitly distances this new love for Emmy from his previous feelings for Lilitha on the grounds that this is a true meeting of kindred spirits: "[Lilitha] did not possess them by nature as you do; they were always my ideas and not hers, while with you they are motions of your being" (III, 4). When breaking off his relationship with Lilitha, Sergius expresses disappointment that she is unable to live by the free-love principles she seemingly espoused: "You're the only woman I have met who seemed willing to give and receive ideas, and yet the moment personal considerations come in, I find I was mistaken" (II, 23). Like Agnes Ebbsmith, Lilitha's commitment to the new radical philosophy she has adopted, and indeed used to justify extra-marital sexual relations, falters when put under pressure. By contrast, there is a genuine, complete, and automatic sense of sympathy and understanding that renders Sergius and Emmy's relationship the true embodiment of free-love principles. This deep connection allows the pair to achieve a quasi-spiritual union. As Sergius declares, when a man meets a woman who truly understands him "he is there and then married, though he does not wait on the law and none of the Churches to bless them" (III, 4). The play thus offers a provocative dramatisation of the type of idealised marriage which had been extensively debated and described in freethinking discourses.

This depiction of Emmy and Sergius forming a spiritual marriage is especially radical given Emmy's status as a fallen woman. In Act One, Victor's friend Colonel Harker reveals that he knows of Emmy's life before she could introduce herself "as the Judge's widow" (II, 1), a history that Victor had both been aware of and hoped to conceal. Although not made entirely explicit, the implication is that Emmy was some kind of high-class courtesan before she married George, who was protected from scandal by the fact that her late husband "had only society in Malta to reckon with – and the island is secluded" (II, 1). This revelation also makes clear that the "little soubrette" (I, 19) Sergius encountered on the street as a boy was indeed Emmy, implying that she has been sexually exploited from a young age.

The question of what to do with fallen women was a much-contested subject on the late-nineteenth-century stage. As previous discussion of *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* has shown, extra marital sex often elicited death for the erring female character. However, even in plays which did not kill their sexually transgressive female characters, it was still largely a taboo to depict such women achieving a happy ending. Jones's *Mrs Dane's Defence* (1900) stages the investigation and ultimate revelation of the titular character's connection to "a disgraceful scandal" by her fiancé's adoptive father.[94] Upon the revelation that the titular character had had an affair with a married man, the play concludes with Mrs Dane quietly breaking off her engagement and "go[ing] away for a few months" (88). Mrs Dane is not extensively and all-consumingly punished for her sexual

[94] Henry Arthur Jones, *Mrs Dane's Defence* (London: Chiswick Press, 1900), 3.

transgression, but she is emphatically not rehabilitated either; being categorically unable to pursue her engagement. The plays which did allow their fallen female characters to escape punishment, such as Wilde's dramas, often did so through oblique, implicit, and indirect means.

In *Quits*, however, the issue of Emmy's sexual past is fully and transparently overcome by Sergius's emphasis on spiritual connection and sympathy. Shortly after Emmy's secret is divulged to the audience, Sergius tells her that "You're the simplest woman I've ever come into contact with; no more to get over in knowing you than if you were a flower, you're so free" (II, 9). The possibility of ignoring a fallen woman's past had been raised on the late-nineteenth-century stage before. At the beginning of *The Second Mrs Tanqueray,* Aubrey Tanqueray burns an unread letter containing a list of all Paula's previous "adventures" (47). However, although Paula's past can be forgotten, the narrow-mindedness of St James's society means it cannot be forgiven. Consequently, when Paula's past becomes undeniable, due to the reappearance of her former lover Hugh Ardale, she must pay the price of a fallen woman. Yet, unlike Aubrey, who places so much emphasis on Paula's past that he "can't bear to hear [her] always talking about" (49) it, Sergius's indifference to Emmy's past is because he genuinely places no moral weight on the matter.

Indeed, when Emmy does confess that she and Victor have been having an affair, Sergius reveals that he has had several loves of his own. Echoing Thyrza's logic for why Pamela shouldn't consider Hugh's past romantic entanglements important, Sergius instead emphasises the unique purity and intensity of his and Emmy's love: "we love with a capital L after all our attempts at the small-letter business" (III, 5). Inverting the typical narrative trajectory of a woman being sexually corrupted by freethinking philosophies, Michael Field presents a fallen woman being offered redemption through the abandonment of traditional moral standards. In a parallel to Claude and Hal in *The Blackmailers*, Emmy and Sergius end the play going "off to Paris" (III, 24). Michael Field does not go as far as to show the conventional social mores of British society as a whole transforming. Instead, they depict how through true relationships with each other individuals can find love and respect.

The power of deep and intimate human connection to repair and transform relationships is also witnessed in the Shalfords' plotline. After realising that Emmy and Sergius are in love with each other, both Lilitha's and Victor's worlds fall apart. In a move which is highly reminiscent of Hedda shooting herself with her father's pistol in order to escape her claustrophobic and oppressive marriage, Lilitha enters Victor's study in order to commit suicide with his pistol – a device so strongly associated with Ibsen's dramas in the late 1890s that *Punch* satirically referred to the pistol as "that fatal Norwegian weapon which, in the Ibsenian drama, *never* shoots straight".[95] Here she

[95] Anstey, *Punch's Pocket Ibsen,* 149 (emphasis in original).

meets her husband who has decided to exact revenge on the new lovers by shooting them. Much like Thryza's suicide attempt in Leighton's play, audiences are expecting to witness the disastrous result of the inability of human beings to connect and sympathise with each other. The tragic failure of flawed familial and social units to evolve, a dynamic that both Sandberg and Shepherd-Barr observe recurring across Ibsen's dramas, is seemingly about to play out.[96]

However, instead of a violent climax, Victor and Lilitha begin a lengthy analysis of their marriage as "a mere outside habit, a perpetual, loveless acquaintance" (III, 22). Following the Ibsen-esque pattern of a discussion scene, the pair strip back their pretences from each other. In a similar vein to *The Lady from the Sea* – a play which Bradley and Cooper read less than a year before Cooper started drafting *Quits* – the married couple move towards a better form of union.[97] In Victor's words, this process of intense honesty and scrutiny has "cleansed us and warmed us to-wards each other; it has brought into being *new souls* in us that can be wedded" ([emphasis added] III, 22). He declares that it is "truth as clear as day that we are man and wife at last, and that we were never man and wife before" (III, 22). Such sentiments, with their emphasis on the necessary spiritual conditions to constitute a marriage are also echoed by Lilitha: "We understand each other; we have had the same experience, and we have helped each other. You are right. To-day is our true wedding-day" (III, 24). A fundamental shift in the Shalfords' souls, precipitated by their ability to empathise and sympathise with each other, has allowed them to reform and evolve their concept of marriage.

In true Ibsenite fashion, the possibility of such a new form of human relations actually being achieved is an uncertain prospect. After realising that their relationship can be salvaged, both Victor and Lilitha say an awkward and painful goodbye to their respective paramours. Lilitha "*winces*" (III, 25) when bidding farewell to Sergius, while Victor when parting with Emmy "(*lowers his eyes, then faces her and says formally*) Good-bye." (III, 25). Clearly still emotionally attached to their past loves, the Shalfords have not yet achieved a completely fulfilling and harmonious marriage. Nonetheless, in the tradition of a drama like *Lady from the Sea*, the play leaves open the possibility for such a transformation to be truly and surely achieved.

Quits's closing tableau stresses how the concept of marriage in the play has been fundamentally remade. Left alone together on the stage, the very last line of the play consists of Victor "(*clasping LILITHA's hand*)" (III, 25) and declaring "quits" (III, 25). This tableau is clearly inflected by the pair's reading of Ibsen, who concludes a remarkable number of his dramas with a once alienated couple standing hand-in-hand. *Lady from the Sea* ends with Ellida "*quickly holding out her hand to*

[96] Sandberg, *Ibsen's Houses,* Shepherd-Barr, *Theatre and Evolution*.
[97] Michael Field, 'Work and Days' (1893), 13r.

[Wangel]" (349), a gesture which is reprised by Rita "*Giving [Allmers] her hand*." at the conclusion of *Little Eyolf* as well as Rubek "*seiz[ing] [Irene's] hand*" at the end of *When We Dead Awaken* (1899).[98] Indeed, even *Rosmersholm,* in an interesting potential imitation of the exit of Adam and Eve from Paradise in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), ends with Rosmer and Rebecca "*go[ing] out, hand in hand*" (114), just before the plunge into the mill-race. This image of two people being connected together, with its subtle potential evocation of the ancient marriage ritual of handfastening or clasping, puts the conclusion's focus onto its reformed human relations. Deploying this Ibsen-esque image of the clasped hands, Michael Field not only inter-theatrically align themselves with the Ibsenite school of drama but conclude on an image of a completely remade relationship between two people.

Like Leighton's *Thryza Fleming*, Michael Field has shown that love, sympathy, and spiritual understanding have the power to herald a fundamental revolution in the concept of marriage as well as society's treatment of non-marital sexual relations. However, although the play ostensibly focuses on the popular contemporary issues of female sexual transgression and questions of gender relations, its promotion of deep and fulfilling emotional unions is expansive enough to cover a wide range of unorthodox partnerships, including queer ones. In the very opening scene, Mrs Fisher-Owens constructs Lilitha and Victor's status as a model couple in explicit opposition to the non-traditional gender roles which were beginning to emerge in the *fin de siècle*:

> My dear I'm interested in any kind of relationship between men and women so long as the men are men and the women, women; but there's such a muddle now-a-days of men-women and women-men that any correctness in their relations is impossible. Now Shalford and Lilitha are man and woman pure and simple; they've chosen to be related to each other in marriage, and they show each other off as husband and wife to perfection (I, 2)

As Ledger notes, contemporary anxieties around "men-women" and "women-men" encompassed both the deconstruction of traditional models of gender but also concerns about the increasing cultural knowledge and prevalence of homosexuality.[99] By showing 'model' heterosexual relations to be deeply flawed and by extension locating the necessary conditions for a true partnership outside the categories of 'sex' or 'gender', there is a space for queer relationships to assume legitimacy so long as they fulfil the necessary condition of being a true meeting of kindred spirits. Much like Leighton's *As Man is Able*, which lends itself to a queer interpretation on account of its provocative statement that "souls have no gender" (96) followed by its depiction of an intense and

98 Henrik Ibsen, *Little Eyolf*, trans. by William Archer (London: William Heinemann, 1895), 180; Henrik Ibsen, *When We Dead Awaken*, trans. by William Archer (Illinois: Herbert S. Stone, 1900), 156.

99 Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), chap.5.

passionate friendship between two women, Michael Field's play uses the increasingly prominent rhetoric of spiritual unions to implicitly give greater weight and legitimacy to non-heterosexual romantic bonds.

Several of Bradley and Cooper's contemporaries used the logic and rhetoric of the free-union movement to advocate for acceptance of homosexual relationships. In the late 1880s, Bradley joined the Fellowship of the New Life.[100] An early socialist organisation, the Fellowship focused on "religious thought, ethical propaganda, and social reform".[101] "[T]he main factor in revolution must be a change in moral attitude of man to man – the acceptance of a new ethical standard", as one of their early publications declared.[102] Poet and activist Edward Carpenter was one of the most prominent members of the Fellowship.[103] In his privately printed pamphlet *Homogenic Love and its Place in a Free Society (1895),* Carpenter argued that prejudice towards same-sex relations originated from a failure to "understand[…] the *inner* feeling of the homogenic attachment".[104] Carpenter uses the underlying precepts of free-unionism, namely that a true marriage is defined by the intimacy, love, and understanding that emerges between individuals, and extended the logic to validate same-sex relations.

Quits implicitly positions Sergius's philosophy in direct relation to these emerging branches of pro-homosexual thought. In the first act, Lilitha responds to Sergius's explanation of his concept of romantic relationships by stating "I suppose you ~~have~~ [^believe in] the passion of comradeship – no other kind." (I, 12). Comradeship, a term which was popularised by Walt Whitman's erotically charged depiction of "the manly love of comrades" in his Calamus poems, was used to denote an attraction that exists on the political, spiritual, and metaphysical level.[105] This concept of comradeship, with its valorisation of homosocial relationships, was naturally latched onto by *fin-de- siècle* homosexual writers and thinkers. In *Homogenic Love,* Carpenter, one of Whitman's most ardent followers in England, refers to homosexual love as "that special attachment which is

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[100] Bradley's dealings with the society are extensively detailed in Diana Maltz, 'Katharine Bradley and Ethical Socialism', in *Michael Field and Their World*, eds. by Margaret D. Stetz and Cheryl A. Wilson (High Wycombe: Rivendale Press, 2007), 191-201.

[101] William Angus Knight, *Memorials of Thomas Davidson: The Wandering Scholar* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907), 16.

[102] *Sower* (July 1889), 8.

[103] Further details of Carpenter's involvement with the Fellowship can be found in Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks, *Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis* (London: Pluto Press, 1977), part.1; Chūshichi Tsuzuki, *Edward Carpenter, 1844-1929: Prophet of Human Fellowship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).
(1977).

[104] Edward Carpenter, *Homogenic Love and its Place in a Free Society* (Manchester: The Labour Press Society, 1894), 14 (emphasis in original).

[105] Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, ed. by Jerome Loving. Reprinted with corrections (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 99.

sometimes denoted by the word Comradeship".[106] Moreover, John Addington Symonds – a friend and correspondent of Bradley and Cooper's – is famed for the increasingly pointed letters he sent Whitman asking whether "In your conception of Comradeship, do you contemplate the possible intrusion of those semi-sexual emotions and actions which no doubt do occur between men?".[107] This reference to Comradeship is therefore highly significant as it would alert select audiences to the potential homosexual implications of Sergius's philosophy.

The increasing validation and acceptance of non-traditional unions was obviously of great significance for Bradley and Cooper. The pair saw themselves as living in "wedded life" together, and indeed performed what Sharon Bickle terms "a same sex marriage ceremony" by the River Smutt in Switzerland in 1897.[108] Taking two of the most common concerns of the late-nineteenth-century stage, rehabilitating the fallen woman and loveless relations between the sexes, the pair's play offers one of the most radical and provocative endorsements of free love for all, regardless of sex, sexuality, or gender. Its new philosophy is positioned not just as the solution to common and much debated societal problems but the correct and proper basis for an entire new model of human relations and experience.

Israel Zangwill's *Children of the Ghetto* (1899) and *The Melting Pot* (1908)

Quits never made it onto the stage – its gender and sexual politics clearly being too radical for a mid-1890s audience. However, as the years progressed the potential for using the theatrical depiction of radical love, sympathy, and understanding between couples to advocate for a wider set of social issues, not just improved gender relations, was also of significant interest to many writers and thinkers. One of these individuals was Israel Zangwill. A leading Jewish cultural intellectual, Meri-Jane Rochelson argues, "in his time, and especially from 1892 until his death in 1926, Israel Zangwill was probably the most famous Jew in the English speaking world".[109] His breakthrough novel *Children of the Ghetto* (1892), a panoramic depiction of life in London's East End, led to a string of further literary texts focused on contemporary Jewish life as well as numerous editorials and speaking engagements on the subject of Anglo-Jewish relations.[110] Furthermore, as the years progressed, Zangwill became increasingly involved in Jewish political movements. A founding member of the Jewish Territorialists Organisation (ITO), the leading

[106] Carpenter, *Homogenic Love,* 3. Carpenter's relationship to Whitman is detailed in Michael Robertson, *Worshipping Walt: The Whitman Disciples* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008), chap.4.
[107] Symons quoted in Joseph Bristow, *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing after 1885* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 141.
[108] Sharon Bickle, 'Living "Willfully": The Same-Sex Marriage Ceremony of 'Michael Field' by the Smutt River', *Hecate*, 41:1 (2016), 116–128, 121; 117.
[109] Rochelson, *Public Arena,* 1.
[110] For an overview of Zangwill's various cultural activities see Rochelson, *Public Arena.*

early-twentieth-century political organisation dedicated to finding a Jewish homeland outside of the Holy Land, he is also remembered in history as one of the most prominent early Zionists.[111]

Owing to his prominent involvement in Jewish cultural issues, scholarship tends to overlook Zangwill's early interest in theatre. Throughout the 1890s, Zangwill penned several theatrical works, most of which were unconnected to Judaism. In 1892, his first play, *The Great Demonstration,* a one-act farce about an "amateur socialist", co-written with Louis Cowen*,* was performed at the Royalty Theatre.[112] The next year he would pen a comedy about a dysfunctional touring theatre company, called *Aladdin at Sea* (c.1893), which although a copy was submitted for licensing to the Lord Chamberlain was seemingly never performed, as well as have a one-act farce entitled *Threepenny Bits* performed at the Chatham Opera House.[113] This play was then followed by *Six Persons,* a one-act duologue which was produced as a curtain-raiser at the Haymarket Theatre in December 1893. By the end of 1894, *The Era*, when discussing Zangwill's theatrical criticism, would introduce him as the "writer of a not unsuccessful comedietta", illustrating how in the first half of the 1890s Zangwill's reputation mainly lay in his comedic output.[114]

This career as a playwright was also complemented by Zangwill's role as a prominent and prolific theatre critic. In 1890, he took over the editorship of the newspaper *Puck* (later renamed *Ariel, or the London Puck*) and was a frequent contributor to the paper's 'Puck at the Play' section.[115] He also produced commentary on the London theatrical scene for *The Jewish Chronicle*, under the pseudonym of Marshallik.[116] Zangwill's longstanding interest in drama meant that he was highly immersed in London theatrical culture. He was a very active member of the Playgoers' Club, becoming president of the organisation in 1904.[117] This activity meant he was also socially involved with many of the leading theatrical figures of his day. His diary for 1893, for instance, reports contact with Tree, Irving, Pinero, Shaw, Archer, and Robins alongside many others.[118]

In particular, Zangwill's friendship with Eleanor Marx, one of the first promoters and translators of Ibsen in England, placed him in the centre of the early Ibsen movement. Zangwill supported Edward Aveling at his controversial paper on *Ghosts* to the Playgoers' Club and, as previously mentioned, he and Eleanor Marx wrote 'A Doll's House – Repaired', a satiric response

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[111] Zangwill's involvement in the ITO is discussed in Joseph H. Udelson, *Dreamer of the Ghetto: The Life and Works of Israel Zangwill* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990), 178-86.
[112] *Era* (24 September 1892), 9. Cowen was not publicly credited.
[113] Israel Zangwill, *Aladdin at Sea*, Add MS 53518E. Lord Chamberlain's Plays, British Library, London.
[114] *Era* (10 November 1894), 10.
[115] Rochelson, *Public Arena*, 37.
[116] W. D. Rubinstein, Michael Jolles, and Hilary L. Rubinstein, *The Palgrave Dictionary of Anglo-Jewish History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 482.
[117] Findon, *The Playgoers' Club*, n.p.
[118] Rochelson, *Public Arena*, 18.

to Jones and Herman's complete refiguration of Nora's character in their play *Breaking a Butterfly*. Zangwill's interest in Ibsen carried on throughout the 1890s.[119] His 1898 America lecture 'The Drama as Fine Art' praised Ibsen as "the greatest living master of the drama" and Zangwill would continue to credit the Norwegian dramatist as the leading light of European theatre well into the twentieth century.[120]

Given this early interest in Ibsen's drama, it is only natural that Zangwill was one of the ITS's first supporters. His name appears on the programme for the society's first performance of *Ghosts* as one of the promised contributors for the society's inaugural season.[121] Though, as with many of the ITS's announced productions, this promised play never actually materialised. Zangwill would however continue to move within ITS circles, particularly through his Jewish connections. Grein, a fellow Jew, produced Zangwill's play *The Revolted Daughter* (1901) in 1901 at the Comedy Theatre, and was an active part of the Maccabæans – the Jewish philanthropic and cultural society that Zangwill co-founded in 1894.[122] Burney and Benham, who were both Jewish, were also close friends of Zangwill's. Zangwill wrote Benham's obituary for the *Jewish Chronicle* upon his death in 1895.[123] The ITS had no explicit religious affiliations. Yet, through the strong social networks which underpinned so many of the ITS's productions and activities, the society seemingly served as a meeting point for a literary network of Jewish theatrical writers.

Zangwill's intersecting interests in Jewish cultural issues and modern drama can be seen in his first widely successful play *Children of the Ghetto*, which premiered in America in September 1899 before opening in London's Adelphi Theatre two months later. Despite sharing a name with Zangwill's wildly successful novel, the play, Edna Nahshon notes, only shares "one story line with the novel, the cuts, rearrangements, and additions of source material resulted in a new work that, despite its similarities, is different in details, themes, and message".[124] The dramatic version of *Children of the Ghetto* focuses on the ill-fated romance between Hannah Jacobs, a young London-born woman from an ultra-orthodox Jewish family, and David Brandon, a laxer Jew from the Cape of Africa. The pair swiftly fall in love and through their bourgeoning romance begin to find a greater fulfilment in, and affinity to, their Jewish identities. However, on the night of their engagement, it is discovered that ancient Jewish laws prohibit their union as Hannah is technically a divorced woman, having once been accidentally married to a childhood friend who jokingly put

[119] Britain, 'Transplanted Doll's House', 23.
[120] Edna Nahshon, *From the Ghetto to the Melting Pot: Israel Zangwill's Jewish Plays* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2006), 40.
[121] 'The Independent Theatre of London' pamphlet, 1r.
[122] *Country Life Illustrated* (6 April 1901), 442; Nahshon, *From the Ghetto*, 17.
[123] Rubinstein, Jolles, and Rubinstein, *Anglo-Jewish History*, 71. As previously discussed, Burney took the lead role in the British copyright performance of *The Children of the Ghetto*.
[124] Nahshon, *From the Ghetto*, 62.

a wedding ring on her finger. The pair consequently plan to elope and start a new life in America. Yet, at the pivotal moment Hannah is unable to break with her family and community, leaving David to venture out alone.

As the play's prologue announces, *Children of the Ghetto* explores the issues of "a phase transitional,/ Young love at war with ancient ritual/ How dead laws living, loving hearts may fetter/ The contest of the spirit and the letter".[125] The outdatedness of traditional Jewish orthodoxy is the focus of the first act of *Children of the Ghetto*. Sam Levine's accidental marriage to Hannah, as he fools around with an engagement ring, is depicted as an unfortunate instance of ancient Jewish customs impractically intruding on modern life. Sam's complete astonishment that such practices still exist in modern Judaism, followed by Hannah's "*quiet despair*" that "anything may be true in our religion", present the modern Jewish youth as being trapped by strange laws and customs that they do not understand.[126] As Hannah later pronounces, "we are strangled by strange old laws – they are coiled about us like serpents" (134). Much like the sexual problem dramas of the 1890s, Zangwill paints a picture of a society where modern ways of life are in sympathetic conflict with an established set of moral values, in this case the religious tenets of traditional Judaism.

While Hannah and Sam's accidental marriage is swiftly remedied through Hannah's father Reb Shemuel performing a *Get* (a Jewish divorce ritual), the tragic intransigence of Jewish orthodoxy is then witnessed in David and Hannah's romance plot. The pair are initially attracted to each other's vitality. David views Hannah as "the first girl [he has met] with poetry in her" (151), while she appreciates him as "A refreshing breath of something new" (153). The love and attraction that Hannah feels for David offers her a way to reconcile with her Jewish identity and culture. Hannah's reading and repeat quotations from the Book of Solomon, "Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong" (178), indicate that she is finding a new connection to her ancient roots. Likewise, David's commitment to keep a "Jewish home" (180) and attend Passover at the synagogue on account of his love for Hannah offers an equally positive vision of a strengthened relationship to his Jewish faith and identity. At this point in the play, Zangwill is seemingly positioning love as the unifying and healing force which allows individuals to both adapt to and evolve within more traditional social structures.

However, the ancient prohibition on descendants of the tribe of Cohen marrying a woman who has received a *Get* creates an insurmountable barrier to the pair's union. This prohibition immediately ruptures the pair's newfound connection with Judaism. David complains that "The

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125 The prologue which was printed in the play's programme was reproduced in full in *Era* (16 December 1899), 15.
126 Israel Zangwill, *Children of the Ghetto* (1899). Reprinted in Edna Nahshon, *From the Ghetto to the Melting Pot: Israel Zangwill's Jewish Plays* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2006), 111-208, 132.

law cannot visit a mere bit of fun so cruelly on the innocent" (182), while Hannah ends the act "*staring hopelessly at [her father]*" (185) and exclaiming "oh, it is cruel *your* religion" ([emphasis added] 185). This utterance, which concludes the third act, with its notable use of the second person singular, rather than a more inclusive personal pronoun, creates the sense of a clear break between Hannah and what she views as the unfair and inflexible religious mores of her father.

The pair plan to elope to America, where David proposes that they find a rabbi to marry them. Hannah, however, declares that they must abandon Jewish traditions altogether. Evoking her earlier imagery of suffocation and strangulation, she proclaims that "All this ceremony – it has always coiled stiflingly around my soul – we must break away from it all" (199). The radicalness of this statement is underlined when, almost immediately after the pair make this plan, a group of "*Jewish Free-thinkers*" (199), led by Simon Wolf and Melchitzedek Pinchas, the latter being hitherto seemingly the most orthodox character of the piece, enter the stage. This group, that declares that they are "redeeming Israel from the house of bondage, from the slavery of superstition'" (201) by going against the dictates of the Rabbis, offers a new modern vision of the Jewish identity. As underscored by David identifying the group's music, the *Marseillaise*, as the tune of his and Hannah's "march to freedom" (199), the pair are about to radically break with their deep-rooted religious identity.

Yet, David and Hannah's elopement and this radical vision of secularised cultural Judaism is ultimately not achieved. Hannah's father responds to the discontent of the freethinkers with a searing sermon on the larger spiritual value of upholding ancient Jewish laws: "for sixpence a day he is to sell his faith, his joy, his dream, the dream of centuries, the brotherhood of Israel, the Messianic hope, his share in the World-to-Come" (202). David rejects this speech as "old, old cant" (203), empty words which no longer reflect any value system he believes in, but Hannah begins to falter. She remembers instead the "faith and trust" (204) she derived as a child from her Jewish identity. Feeling the congregation's music "wind itself around [her] soul" (204), though this time in embrace rather than strangulation, Hannah cannot make the necessary religious disavowal that would allow her to leave with David.

Hannah has ultimately heeded her father's advice to "Follow your heart, my little one. It is a good heart and it will not lead you wrong" (173). Yet, unlike the similar encouragement that Thyrza gives her daughter in Leighton's play, here it becomes not an invitation to break with tradition but rather an affirmation of the indelible Jewishness which is at Hannah's spiritual core. Echoing the structure of plays like *The Notorious Mrs Ebbsmith*, Hannah, at her moment of great testing, is shown to ultimately hold traditional moral and social precepts. *The Children of the Ghetto*'s teaching, as *The Athenaeum* observed, is "that the Jew remains always a Jew, and, however much he

consorts with Christians, is true to his faith, of which at stated periods he makes avowal".[127] The strict tenets of Jewish orthodoxy are depicted as a harsh but necessary social condition: "You are a sacrifice to the Law, but think, dear, how many the Law redeems" (206), as Hannah's father tells her. Much like the depiction of traditional Christian marriage in the sexual problem dramas of Pinero and Jones, individuals must accept these inflexible social and moral laws as a necessary, and ultimately inescapable, state of affairs.

Although Hannah's decision ostensibly shuts down the potential for religious evolution, the ending does not entirely foreclose the possibility of a new more modern form of Judaism emerging. In Zangwill's original novel, when Hannah is speaking to David, she tells her mother that the sounds outside are "Only some Christian rough shouting in the street".[128] Hannah's labelling of David as a "Christian rough" symbolises the complete rejection of her beloved from Judaism, something which is later confirmed in the novel when it is revealed that he has subsequently become a Christian. However, in the dramatic version of the text, this exchange is subtly altered. It is Hannah's mother who asks her whether the noise of David "*ratt[ling] the door*" (207) is "some Christian rough" (207) to which Hannah replies "no, only the wind, mother" (207). By not explicitly labelling David a Christian, Zangwill highlights how David may still potentially find a new, yet different, Jewish future. This impression is further strengthened when Shemuel, hearing the *Marseillaise* play again, declares that it is indeed actually "some Jewish rough" (208). Thus, although the play still ends with David exclaiming that "I am shut out" (208), and listening to Shemuel curse heathens, there is still nonetheless the subtle sense that he may find space for a new and different form of Judaism which can flourish within multicultural America. The play's ending cannot straightforwardly be characterised as optimistic: in the original production, David "sinks sobbing to the ground as the curtain falls".[129] Yet, in comparison to the conclusion of this plotline in the original novel (which was written almost a decade prior to the drama), Zangwill makes David's rupture with his religion slightly less absolute.

The calling card of Zangwill's play was its highly realistic yet sympathetic and dignified portrayal of orthodox Jewish identity. Most reviewers praised *Children of the Ghetto* for "offer[ing] a canvas of richly crafted details and characters that blended harmoniously into a rich tapestry of human life".[130] *The Era* noted how often the plot seemed to pause to add "local colour", while one reviewer compared the play's focus on the staging of community to Gerhardt Hauptmann's *The*

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[127] *Athenaeum* (16 December 1899), 844.
[128] Israel Zangwill, *Children of the Ghetto* (London: William Heinemann, 1892), vol.i-iii, (vol.ii, 236).
[129] *Era* (16 December 1899), 15.
[130] Nahshon, *From the Ghetto*, 85.

Weavers (1892).[131] Letters between Zangwill and the production manager George Tyler reveal that they went to considerable lengths and expense to avoid caricature, when both casting the play and creating the costumes and sets.[132] Indeed, Tyler recounts how when he arrived in London to oversee rehearsals for the British production, he was horrified by how the Jewish background characters had initially been rendered and "started pulling putty noses left and right".[133] In both narrative and performance aesthetics, the play's fundamental emphasis seems to be upon the rich and multifaceted forms a Jewish life can take. The suggestion that both Hannah and David will continue to hold some form of Jewish identity appears in keeping with this aim.

The potential of love to transform cultural and religious relations for the better, which is hinted at throughout *The Children of the Ghetto*, was however later fully realised by Zangwill's *The Melting Pot* – his 1908 drama which premiered at the Columbia Theatre in Washington. The play was "a striking success", earning plaudits from the press as well as President Theodore Roosevelt.[134] *The Melting Pot* was then staged in Chicago and New York, followed by a production at London's Court Theatre in 1914.[135] Despite this temporal, geographic, and commercial distance from many of the other works discussed in this chapter, as my analysis will demonstrate, *The Melting Pot*'s engagement with the tropes of the problem drama genre and forms of spiritual evolution has a strong affinity to the earlier experiments of the 1890s. The play thus offers an interesting example of the influence of the ITS's networks stretching across decades and the strong connection between ITS experiments and a major international hit.

The possibility for inter-faith relationships, an issue which was likely of great personal significance to Zangwill given his own marriage to a Gentile in 1903, had formed a provocative undercurrent to *Children of the Ghetto*. Pinchas disapproves of courting on the grounds that it might encourage unorthodox relationships, "Romance they call it – I call it just sinful passion. The next step will ve to marry Christian girls altogether" (146), while Hannah's father's first concern when she announces that she has a secret beloved is that he is not Jewish.[136] In *The Melting Pot*, the issue of inter-faith marriages and the extensive socio-religious shifts needed to facilitate such unions is the play's core focus.

In *The Melting Pot*, talented violinist David Quixano, a Jewish refugee from the Russian town of Kishineff, falls in love with Vera Revendel, a Russian Gentile who has also made America

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[131] *Era* (16 December 1899), 15.; ibid. (Nahshon), 85-6.
[132] Ibid. (Nahshon), 70.
[133] George Crouse Tyler, *Whatever Goes Up-- the Hazardous Fortunes of a Natural Born Gambler* (Indiana: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1934), 164-5.
[134] Nahshon, *From the Ghetto*, 243.
[135] For details of these various productions see ibid., 243-63.
[136] The script reflects that Pinchas speaks with a heavy Yiddish accent.

her home. David is a great believer in the potential multiculturalism and socio-religious tolerance of his new American homeland. Initially, such optimism promises to be fulfilled when he and Vera become engaged. However, upon learning that Vera's father was responsible for the massacre of David's family back in Russia, David breaks off the engagement. Yet, through the transformative power of music, David overcomes his horror of the past. The pair end the play embracing in front of the Statue of Liberty and wishing that all find "peace" in the great cultural melting pot of America.[137]

The Melting Pot depicts a society in which all cultures, but especially Judaism, are undergoing rapid change and evolution. As the Quixanos' Irish maid Kathleen comically remarks there are no set Jewish ways for her to run the household by since the lax David, his uncle Mendel, and his ultra-orthodox grandmother all follow different traditions. This divergence is the result of an America which is driving great assimilatory and multicultural feeling. As David joyously expounds, "America is God's Crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and re-forming!" (37).

David's relationship with Vera becomes an embodiment of the crucible like philosophy that he promotes. In a move which would have Zangwill denounced by several rabbis for "sacrificing the ancient sanctities of his people's faith on the altar of sentimental claptrap", David defends his relationship to his uncle Mendel by suggesting that all traditional socio-religious distinctions should be re-made and reformed:[138]

> **DAVID**: What immunity has our race? (*Meditatively*) The pride and the prejudice, the dreams and the sacrifices, the traditions and the superstitions, the fasts and the feasts, things noble and things sordid—they must all into the Crucible.
> **MENDEL**: (*With prophetic fury*) The Jew has been tried in a thousand fires and only tempered and annealed.
> **DAVID**: Fires of hate, not fires of love. That is what melts.
> **MENDEL**: (*Sneeringly*) So I see.
> **DAVID**: Your sneer is false. The love that melted me was not Vera's—it was the love *America* showed me—the day she gathered me to her breast. (101)

As with C*hildren of the Ghetto*, love and a fulfilling romantic relationship have the potential to bring great cultural change. Yet, as David so emphatically stresses, this transformative version of love is not erotic passion but rather a broader and deeper sense of cultural sympathy and understanding. It is this love from America that allows David to claim that he is not stuck following the Judaism of his forefathers but will through his union with Vera follow a new form of religious faith and

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[137] Israel Zangwill, *The Melting Pot* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909), 199.
[138] Quoted in Rochelson, *Public Arena*, 183.

identity: "The God of our *children*" ([emphasis added] 103) as he tells Mendel – a phrase so significant that Zangwill notably considered using it as the title of the play.[139] Moreover, the fact that Vera and David form a free-union with each other, considering themselves husband and wife despite not being able to afford to marry, shows how they have made all institutions, social or religious, their own.

The strength and veracity of this inter-faith union is however challenged by the arrival of Vera's father Baron Revendel, a vile antisemite who has come over to America to prevent his daughter's union with "those Jew-vermin" (112). Much like the return of Hugh Ardale in *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*, the arrival of the Baron represents the inevitable re-emergence of a difficult past that characters have sought to deny. When David recognises Vera's father, his rhetoric of a great cultural amalgamation falls apart:

> **DAVID**: *(In low, icy tones)* You cannot come to me. There is a river of blood between us.
> **VERA**: Were it seven seas, our love must cross them.
> **DAVID:** Easy words to you. You never saw that red flood bearing the mangled breasts of women and the spattered brains of babes and sucklings. Oh! (167)

David's complete rejection of Vera, with its subtle potential allusion to the river of blood which led Moses to lead the Jews from Egypt, creates a clear sense of deep and unerasable socio-religious divides. The string of David's violin, the symbol of pro-assimilatory feeling throughout the play, *"break[ing] with a tragic snap"* (159), symbolically underscores how the potential for positive change has likewise broken apart.

Indeed, David specifically denies the ability for love to conquer or change deep-seated cultural ills as he rejects Vera's love explicitly on account of its Christian origin:

> **DAVID**: I should feel the blood on my lips.
> **VERA**: My love shall wipe it out.
> **DAVID**: Love! Christian love! (*He unwinds her clinging arms; she sinks prostrate on the floor as he rises.*) (169-170)

The racial distinctions that he previously elided as inconsequential in the great cultural melting pot of America are now fully re-asserted. In a reprise of the kind of dramatic structures seen in *The Notorious Mrs Ebbsmith*, David underneath his claims of embodying a new and radical social philosophy is exposed as having an entirely conventional worldview. "In the supreme moment my faith was found wanting" (360), he declares. Indeed, in 1915 the Kaminsky Theatre, a Yiddish theatre based in Warsaw, would produce a version of the play, which omitted the final act, and

[139] Nahshon, *From the Ghetto*, 214.

ended with David declaring "the melting pot is broken".[140] Much like *The Children of the Ghetto*, an ingrained cultural and religious identity and the stranglehold of history appear to have won out.

However, as with both *Thyrza Fleming* and *Quits*, Zangwill employs a dramatic structure which seemingly leans towards the censure and exposure associated with the problem drama genre only to repudiate such a conclusion through a sudden moment of social evolution. At the very last minute, David genuinely undergoes an internal transformation. Seeking to atone for his role in the massacre, the Baron offers David his gun and invites him to "Shoot me" (172). However, the young Jewish man finds himself unable to perpetuate the cycle of inter-religious conflict and division:

> **DAVID:** [*Takes the pistol mechanically, looks long and pensively at it as with a sense of its irrelevance. Gradually his arm droops and lets the pistol fall on the table, and there his hand touches a string of his violin, which yields a little note. Thus reminded of it, he picks up the violin, and as his fingers draw out the broken string he murmurs*] I must get a new string. (172)

This disavowal of ingrained religious hatred and turn instead towards music represents the gentle triumph of David's original beliefs and values. Zangwill notably removes David's cold pragmatic reasoning for not killing the Baron, "Shoot you […] Why should you be luckier than I", which is found in the Lord Chamberlain's version of the play.[141] Forced to directly confront the past, both his own personal trauma as well as his people's broader history of hardship and oppression, David has shown a genuine commitment to his new American identity. The act thus concludes not on the exposure of a phony form of naive idealism but on the ultimate affirming of radical inner change.

The final act, which is set during the premiere of David's America symphony, celebrates the potential of wide-ranging transformation on both an individual and societal level. Performed on a Sabbath which falls on the Fourth of July, a date which symbolises fusions between Jewish and traditional American cultures, the symphony is shown to have reached into the very essence of the listeners' beings. Mendel proclaims that David succeeded in "melt[ing] these simple souls with your music" (175), while in a speech contained in the Lord Chamberlain's copy of the text Vera recounts how David's music left the audience "rapt, softened, illumined" (107). This imagery of melting and softening, which is encapsulated in the titular image of the melting pot, is reflected in the rapid change in outlook of all of the side characters. Kathleen, who starts the play being somewhat antisemitic, is heard speaking Yiddish, while David's ultra-orthodox grandmother accepts that the Lord can make an exception for David playing his violin on the Sabbath. Everyone

[140] Nahshon, *From the Ghetto*, 252-4.
[141] Israel Zangwill, *The Melting Pot*, 1908/17D, 96. Lord Chamberlain's Plays, British Library, London.

is shifting towards a more accepting, understanding, and cosmopolitan vision of the American community.

It is this shift in attitude and moral systems which also facilitates David and Vera's reconciliation. David is initially ashamed that he, the self-proclaimed "apostle of America, the prophet of the God of our children" (193), could not live the doctrine of cultural assimilation and forgiveness that he espoused. However, upon learning that Vera still loves him, he seeks her love with wild abandonment. Yet, Vera's response is to offer him a deeper and more profound form of affection:

> **VERA:** (*Slowly*) I will kiss you as we Russians kiss at Easter—the three kisses of peace. (*She kisses him three times on the mouth as in ritual solemnity.*)
> **DAVID:** (*Very calmly*) Easter was the date of the massacre—see! I am at peace. (193)

By giving him a kiss of peace, love here is shown not to be carnal passion but a tool of inner healing and social reparation. Indeed, in Ibsen's plays peace was a key facet of his depiction of remade unions between characters: Grein speaks of "the ray of light of peace" which emerges at the end of *Little Eyolf*, while Rebecca claims that "rest descended on [her] soul" (101) when she fell in love with Rosmer, allaying the voracious passions and rage which existed within her.[142] Inner change brings new futures by allowing characters to become at peace with their previous struggles.

Such sentiments are foregrounded in the final moments of the play in which Vera and David "*stand quietly hand in hand"* (198)*,* the same gesture which is notably found at the end of so many of Ibsen's dramas, and gaze out upon New York City. David's *"benediction"* (199) to citizens of America, "Peace, peace, to all ye unborn millions, fated to fill this giant continent—*the God of our children* give you Peace" ([emphasis added], 199), is a radical act of acceptance of the possibility of new cultures, religions, and faiths. Stage effects sentimentally underscore the wider social and national implications of this union. As Vera and David stand alone on stage, they are accompanied by "*the softened sound of voices and instruments joining in 'My Country, 'tis of Thee'"* (200) with a stereopticon (a multi-lens magic lantern) projecting the glowing image of the Statue of Liberty behind them.[143] By underlaying such an intimate and personal moment with nationalist and patriotic iconography, Zangwill shows how it is these very intimate bonds of love, acceptance, and understanding which allow for the entrenched socio-religious problems of the past to be transformed and overcome.

As reviewers noted, the play's keynote is its promotion of "wide human sympathy, charity and compassion": the very philosophies which had made aspects of Ibsen's dramas so radical in

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[142] *Sunday Times* (16 December 1894), 4.
[143] Nahshon, *From the Ghetto*, 239.

the 1890s.[144] However, rather than purely focus on personal relationships, Zangwill makes this spiritual evolution explicitly and emphatically nationalistic and patriotic. As Zangwill himself highlighted in his 1914 afterword to the revised edition of the published play: "our sluggish and sensual English stage has resisted and even burked the writer's attempt to express in terms of the theatre our European problems of war and religion".[145] Joining the ranks of experimental playwrights who had used, and indeed subverted, the structure and tropes of the 1890s problem drama in order to advocate for deep-rooted changes in societal values, Zangwill revised the structure of the social problem play to dramatise a way forward from the long-standing issue of antisemitism.

Conclusion

On many levels, *The Melting Pot* could not be further from the early British Ibsen productions of the 1890s. Not only is the piece at a significant geographic and temporal distance it is also radically different in terms of its form and genre. Many of the leading figures of the 1890s New Drama movement criticised the play's overly sentimental and melodramatic qualities. Walkley dismissed the work as "Romantic claptrap", while Archer pronounced that "as a work of art for art's sake the play does simply not exist".[146] Unlike the early Ibsen matinées which in most cases barely broke even and caused great controversy, *The Melting Pot* was a hit with both the mass public and the social establishment. The play's third week brought in over $10, 000 and *The Melting Pot*'s premiere was attended by many significant political figures, including President Roosevelt – to whom Zangwill would "cordially dedicate" (n.p.) the printed edition of the play.[147] This patriotic, romantic spectacle ostensibly has very little in common with Nora's calm, quiet desertion of her marriage.

However, as this chapter has shown, there is a meaningful connection between Zangwill's drama and Ibsen's depiction of social evolution. *The Melting Pot*, with its depiction of seemingly intractable social problems being overcome by a shift in personal value systems, is a descendant of the vein of forward-looking social problem dramas which had emerged in the early 1890s. These works leaned into narrative trajectories of the problem play only to riposte these conventions with a moment of personal evolution which led to a fundamental reform of the relationships between characters. Zangwill's underlying dramatic structures and approach to issues of personal identity and morality can thus be seen in relation to the early British responses to the Norwegian's dramas.

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[144] Augustus Thomas quoted in Israel Zangwill, *The Melting Pot* ('New and Revised Edition') (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916), 201.
[145] Ibid., 215.
[146] Quoted in Zangwill, *Melting Pot* (*revised edition*), 199; 201. Some reviewers even pronounced the play as a cynical bid to gain audiences through "claptrap patriotism". Quoted in Nahshon, 'From the Ghetto', 250.
[147] Ibid. (Nahshon), 246; 241.

The Melting Pot is consequently a fitting final play to end this thesis on since it epitomises the long, diffuse, and occasionally surprising influences of the ITS's networks and experiments.

Coda

During my academic studies, I have watched many different productions of Ibsen's dramas. Some of these performances have been big-budget spectacles, complete with the lure of a famous playwright or lead actor. The National Theatre's 2019 production of David Hare's *Peter Gynt* (2019) was an unconventional take on the Norwegian's drama. Featuring rhinestone cowgirls, a Trump-style golf course, and jokes about politicians obsessed with blue passports, the performance managed to be both "seriously bonkers", as one reviewer put it, while at the same time offering a powerful and thought-provoking satire on modern individualism, politics, and society.[1] A similar desire to modernise Ibsen was also present in the recent British premiere of Thomas Ostermeier and Florian Borchmeyer's adaptation of *An Enemy of the People* at the Duke of York's Theatre. *Doctor Who* star Matt Smith stepped into the role of Thomas Stockmann to rage against mega-corporations "turning the planet into one big Amazon warehouse" and everyone having opinions on "whoever Taylor Swift is dating".[2] Playing to sold-out audiences and receiving significant media attention, these productions represent the height of the West End theatrical machine.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, I have also enjoyed some smaller, less spectacular but nonetheless interesting and engaging productions of Ibsen's work. One highlight was the Norwegian Ibsen Company's 2022 performance of *When We Dead Awaken* at the Coronet Theatre – a management dedicated to producing lesser-known dramas in a deliberately transnational or multi-modal way.[3] Performed in a mix of English and Norwegian**,** with almost no scenery, the piece was a disconcerting and strangely intense exploration of one of Ibsen's darkest works. Ibsen is also a mainstay of the Oxford student drama scene. I vividly remember a 2018 production of *Hedda Gabler* at the Oxford Playhouse, in which the play's heroine instead of burning Lövborg's manuscript swallowed a memory stick.[4] Six years later, I am still unsure whether this change effectively communicated the bizarreness and the perversity of Hedda's actions to modern audiences or whether it pushed her vengeful and destructive desires too clearly into the realm of the insane.

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[1] Mark Shenton, 'Review - Peter Gynt starring James McArdle at the National Theatre', *London Theatre* online [Accessed: 6 September 2024], https://www.londontheatre.co.uk/reviews/review-peter-gynt-starring-james-mcardle-at-the-national-theatre.

[2] Henrik Ibsen, *An Enemy of the People*, adapt. by Thomas Ostermeier and Florian Borchmeyer (London: Nick Hern Books, 2024), 50; 51.

[3] The theatre currently advertises itself as having a "unique programme of multi-disciplinary art without borders". Coronet Theatre Website, 'Support Us' Page. [Accessed: 15 September 2024] https://www.thecoronettheatre.com/support-us/.

[4] This production was of Lucy Kirkwood's modernised version of Ibsen's drama *Hedda* (2008). The swallowing of the memory stick is contained within the original stage directions. Henrik Ibsen, *Hedda*, adapt. by Lucy Kirkwood (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 95-6.

Moving across spaces, cities, performance cultures, and indeed ticket price points, the diversity and divergence of modern productions of Ibsen epitomises the variety and fluidity of the modern theatrical scene. Plays and productions as well as theatrical impulses and ideas are not confined to one particular theatrical environment but are instead mediated and remediated across a rich and varied dramatic landscape. This thesis has sought to move nineteenth-century theatre studies towards a similar understanding of the interconnectedness of different forms of theatre and theatre making. As Baz Kershaw writes, "theatres behave as ecosystems".[5] A central contention of this thesis is that Kershaw's description is as true of the nineteenth-century theatrical environment as it is of our theatrical world today. Thinking of theatre as ecosystems fundamentally emphasises "the inseparable and reflexive interrelational and inter-dependent qualities of [theatrical] systems as systems, however their components are defined".[6] Fluidity, interconnectedness, and heterogeneity are part and parcel of theatrical cultures.

There are of course obvious and important differences between the nineteenth-century's theatre ecology and the modern theatrical environment. Davis, for instance, writes that:

> At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the West End is sometimes inseparable from the subsidized theatres, as the commercial transfers of mega-hits attest. They may also embrace elements of the fringe by running second or third stages on a smaller scale, often with unconventional repertoire, trying out ideas, developing new playwrights, and honing artists' skills in a challenging environment. But in the Victorian era, none of this existed, and reciprocity between the commercial market and any other was unthinkable.[7]

Yet, recognising the complex and multi-directional relationships which underpinned the nineteenth-century theatrical ecology is not an attempt to argue that the exact practices or cultures of the modern theatrical environment existed in the nineteenth century. Rather, my analysis has shown how similar concerns, social networks, and economic incentives to those that emerge today led to a similarly diverse and multifaceted set of performance practices and systems, which were nonetheless mediated through the unique economic, material, and social conditions of the time. By appreciating the overlap between seemingly distinct areas of theatre making, we can see different kinds of theatre as existing not necessarily as separate spheres but rather as containing many of the same intricacies, challenges, and opportunities as the theatre ecology we see today.

Growing awareness of the longstanding interconnectedness of different forms of theatre enhances the ways in which theatre historians might recognise and explore the rich and varied theatrical environment which has existed across the development of modern British culture. After

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[5] Baz Kershaw, *Theatre Ecology: Environments and Performance Events* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 16.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Davis, 'Show Business', 43.

the ITS closed its proverbial doors in 1898, its various members and associates continued to engage with a wide variety of theatrical projects. These ventures included famous non-commercial theatre organisations such as the New Century Theatre, the Stage Society, and the Court Theatre as well as a whole host of smaller, less well-known endeavours. With characteristic fervour, Grein continued to throw his energies behind multiple different projects, ranging from a German Theatre in London, a Sunday Special Matinées series, and even an attempt to establish a second Independent Theatre in 1917.[8] Farr, for instance, would mount the British premiere of *Salomé* at the Bijou Theatre for the New Stage Club in 1905, while Martyn co-founded the Irish Theatre in Dublin in 1914.[9] With the same energy, enthusiasm, and ingenuity displayed in the 1890s, different theatrical communities and cultures continued advancing drama in many different directions and areas across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Continuing to focus on networks and chains of influence not only aids the recovery of previously underexplored areas of experimental theatre making but allows examination of how different, and seemingly distinct, sites of theatrical innovation interacted with and informed each other. This thesis has endeavoured to enrich and deepen understandings of late-nineteenth-century dramatic trends and impulses. However, the aim of my analysis was not to offer new categories or genres to proliferate across theatre scholarship but rather to suggest new ways of tracing, comparing, and investigating theatrical categories. Many of the plays analysed in depth in this thesis could have been explored in other chapters. Both *Agnes Colander* and *The Blackmailers*, with their depiction of spiritual growth and the abandonment of conventional social mores, could have been placed in the discussion of moral evolutions in Chapter 5. Likewise, *Attila, My Attila!* and its grasping, egotistical protagonist would have been an interesting inclusion in the discussion of the assimilation of the visionary in Chapter 2. Moreover, there are many different ways in which the works under discussion could have been brought together. *Benvenuto Cellini* and *Agnes Colander*, for instance, indicate a strain of drama that was interested in exploring the relationship between the sexual and artistic self, while *Quits* and *The Blackmailers* are evidence of a growing sub-culture of homosexual drama. All plays and productions contain a mix of different impulses, influences, and concerns. By softening, probing, and reconfiguring established theatrical categories and genres a more iterative and fluid understanding of developing theatrical trends can emerge not just in nineteenth-century theatre scholarship but across theatre historiography as a whole.

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[8] For further details, see Schoonderwoerd, *Ambassador of the Theatre*, chap.5.

[9] *Penny Illustrated Paper* (29 April 1905), 266; Madeleine Humphreys, *The Life and Times of Edward Martyn: An Aristocratic Bohemian* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007), chap.16.

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