THEATRE AND THE MOB:
DRAMA AND CULTURE, 1880-1914

by

Kristen Leaver

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Department of English, in the University of Toronto

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis argues that debates about drama in the years between 1880 and 1914 are indicative of a change in the way that cultural categories were conceptualized. During this period, the drama became the focus of critical scrutiny as a genre associated with high cultural value and British identity. Specifically, its advocates hoped that a reinvigorated contemporary British drama could counteract the effects of commercialism and the predominantly economic focus of the growing entertainment industry. This critical enterprise was conflicted, both because critics did not share a common vision of what elements defined a high cultural drama, and because emerging mass culture appropriated elements of traditional high culture.

The opening chapters of this thesis provide background for the debates, contextualizing developments in the nineteenth-
tradition of Idealism. Subsequent chapters focus on discourse about the drama, including critics' on-going concerns to define an ideal audience among the middle class and with the effects of growing populism on criticism. The final chapter considers how debates impacted on attempts to found a national theatre. Throughout, this project focuses on the relationship between changing cultural categories and critics' interests in idealizing the middle class. By studying one cultural manifestation of the shift from an older cultural model divided between "high" and "low," to one that included a modern mass culture, this project connects middle-class identity with the emergence of modern mass culture.
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Chapter Three
Middle-Class Audiences and the Democratization of Critical Discourse ................. 147
For much of the second half of the nineteenth century, appraisals of Victorian drama consistently emphasized the gap that separated "the cultivated classes and the stage" (Knight 3). Throughout this period, critics claimed, entertainment value took precedence over questions of artistic merit and so alienated audiences disposed to encourage the growth of high culture.1 While critics invested their hopes for a reformed British drama in the "cultivated" classes, by which they meant to indicate the large respectable middle-class audience that had largely absented itself from the theatre in the early years of Victoria's reign, little changed in the theatre until the years after 1880. Thus, in spite of the efforts of such major literary authors as Coleridge, Shelley, Byron, Browning, and Tennyson to produce works for the stage, the hoped-for transformation of the drama took a long time to materialize and, as Joseph Knight suggests in his contemporary history of the period, critics regarded "the sleep of the drama" as "long and all but unbroken" (11).

1 In addition to Knight, see Filon, and Archer's The Old Drama and the New: An Essay in Re-valuation.
Although much early nineteenth-century drama criticism was pessimistic in its evaluations of the stage, that produced in the years between 1880 and 1914 optimistically proclaimed a second "renascence"\(^2\) of the drama. In part, this optimism was fuelled by the growth of widespread public interest in and enthusiasm for the theatre. Not only did the longed-for return of the "cultivated" middle class occur, bringing with it a boom in the theatre trade, but new cultural developments and influences combined to produce an upsurge of public interest in the contemporary drama. While evaluations of the stage written in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries equate the artistic awakening that took place in the years after 1880 with the return of fashionable audiences to the theatres, they generally obscure the fact that this period was fraught with conflicts about who constituted the "cultivated" classes and what forms of "legitimate" high culture they should patronize.

This thesis examines different forms of discourse about the late nineteenth-century drama in light of such conflicts, paying particular attention to concerns about the

\(^2\) The first of such proclamations appeared in the Saturday Review survey of the 1887/8 season (see Nicoll 160). The phrase was adopted again by David Christie Murray in 1891, and then again in 1895, when Henry Arthur Jones published a collection of essays and addresses entitled The Renascence of the English Drama. By the end of the century, belief in the "dramatic renascence" was widespread—see Knight (176-
relationship between critics' constructions of audiences and forms of cultural categorization. My major focus is on the general critical debate about theatre and the drama, although I also consider how conflicts about class and cultural classification were manifest in interviews, memoirs, contemporary histories and political debate. Throughout the century, questions about theatrical audiences played a central role both in critical evaluations of the drama and--since the theatres were regarded as microcosms of society as a whole--in wider discussions about the role culture should play in ameliorating increasingly antagonistic relations between the classes. While schemes for reforming the drama dwelt on the need for leadership from the "cultivated" classes, by the time the self-proclaimed "renascence" was underway in the years following 1880 the notion of "cultivation" was already an increasingly problematic and imprecise term.4

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178) and Archer (Old and New 280) as well as Holbrook Jackson's broad view of the movement (205-211).
3 The idea that the social composition of theatrical audiences reflected society as a whole had particular currency in the nineteenth century. See Hadley (45).
4 This thesis charts the evolution of a number of terms related to class and culture whose meanings change radically over time. I argue that such shifts are symptomatic of changes in the formation of cultural categories at the time. However, as Kidd and Nicholls argue in their introduction to The Making of the British Middle Class?, the notion of class is, itself, fluid (xxv). My thinking on this problem has been informed by Lamont's discussion of the relationship between cultural, moral and socioeconomic boundaries in the
Although the major focus of this thesis is on this debate about the drama, the issues this conflict raise speak to a more generalized concern about the relationship between the growth of mass markets and their effect on high culture evident in the period. When I consider why late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century critics were troubled by concerns about "cultivation," then, I also examine how critics attempted to re-formulate existing cultural categories in light of the growing influence of mass culture. I argue that such attempts were coloured by conflicting ideas about democratization that inform much late Victorian criticism and call the traditional opposition of high and low culture into question. The broad relationship between high and mass forms of culture is therefore central to my discussion, as is the changing relationship between categories of culture and class. Specifically, I contend that in discourse about the drama we can see how the historically stable relationship between high culture and its upper class consumers steadily eroded throughout the nineteenth century, to be replaced by the more conflicted and ambiguous relationship between high culture and mass culture evident in the twentieth century.

constitution of subgroups within classes (4-5), and by Davidoff and Hall's study of the British middle class; however, my greatest intellectual debt is to the work of Raymond Williams.
Concerns about the effects of mass culture and democratization represent a major current in criticism of almost all of the arts during the Victorian period. For instance, both J.B. Atkinson (the art-critic for *Blackwood’s Magazine* through the 1880s) and Edmund Gosse authored articles during the period I discuss that raised conservative alarms against the effects of mass audiences and mass production on existing forms of high culture.\(^5\)

While nearly every form of traditional or accepted high art was profoundly affected by the growth of mass culture during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, I have chosen the drama as my specific area of inquiry because it represents what I see as an unusual "borderline" form of art that was simultaneously recognized as an important genre within the existing high cultural hierarchy and denigrated as an early adapter to the demands of mass culture. Because it was simultaneously associated with both "high" and "mass" influences, the drama became the subject of debates that highlighted problems that arose as cultural categories were redefined. While my argument is grounded in broader concerns that included nearly all forms of culture in the last half of the Victorian period, it takes up the large

\(^5\) See articles by Atkinson and Gosse (1891). Many excellent studies demonstrate the changing relationship between the art and publishing industries and their patrons in the age
theoretical questions about the relationship between classes of audiences and methods of cultural classification within the comparatively narrow framework of criticism about the drama.

Throughout, my major argument is that the historically stable relationship between high culture and its upper class patrons was compromised by the growth of a powerful mass audience of middle-class consumers by the last third of the nineteenth century. Although music, painting, literature, and drama were regarded as high cultural aesthetic forms, they had long been subject to appropriation and reformulation to suit the needs of the growing middle class. Among the arts, the eighteenth-century novel has perhaps been the most frequently explored example of how traditional literary forms were adapted to suit the tastes of the emerging middle class in the eighteenth century. However, since the seventeenth century the drama has had a conflicted association with the middle class which resulted both in the appearance of distinct comic subgenres during the Renaissance period and in the Puritan suppression of the

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of emerging mass culture. See, for example, Altick, Keating, Meisel's Realizations and Altholz.

6 Since the novel's middle-class origins were influentially explored by Watt, they have become a major theme in literary criticism.
theatres during the reign of the Cromwellian government. For the Victorian middle class, this legacy was significant since it helped support stereotypes of themselves as "narrow," "puritanical" and materialistic cultural consumers. Not only were middle-class Victorians eager to revisit what they saw as the drama's associations with an Elizabethan golden age, they were also anxious to shed their negative associations with a close-minded and uncultivated Puritan tradition and identify themselves as a "unified" national audience for art.

In what follows, I contend that the historically stable relationship between high culture and upper class consumers steadily eroded throughout the nineteenth century, and that this process of erosion came to a point of crisis by the end of the Victorian period. With this crisis came the need to reconsider assumptions about the relationship between class and patterns of cultural consumption. Not only did practitioners of mass culture target the large and diverse body of middle-class consumers as their preferred audience, they often appropriated aspects of high culture to lend their work legitimacy with this group. The result, as Shaw

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7 For background on the middle class in Renaissance drama see studies by Nolte and Leggatt.
8 This association also helped distance the middle class from its historical identification as a compendium of social non-descripts, substituting instead a unified "national"
suggested of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*--a play that caused a great sensation in the early 1890s--was a form of art designed to conquer "the public by the exquisite flattery of giving them plays they really liked, whilst persuading them that such appreciation was only possible from persons of great culture and intellectual acuteness" (*Our Theatres* I:60). The problems raised by this strategy were considerable, I argue, since the authority to legislate the difference between the "authentic" forms of high culture and the "inauthentic" forms of mass culture was not linked to a distinct, fixed class-based audience, but rather to competing factions within the middle class.

Theatre High or Mass? The Middle-Class and Mass Culture

In an 1883 essay entitled "The Theatre and the Mob," playwright and critic Henry Arthur Jones identified the relationship between social class and taste as one of the most crucial issues confronting the English theatre in his age. To address this crisis, Jones claimed, it was necessary to reform those persons among the "habitual playgoers" for whom the appeal of dramatic literature on the stage was still alive; by re-educating audiences' tastes for art, he argued, it would be possible to counteract the character. For a useful historical survey of the early middle class see Mayer (411-17).
class-based prejudices and preferences that encouraged the production of "less worthy" works on the stage.

For Jones, as for many of the drama critics and theorists who preceded him, the prospects of restoring the drama to "the dignity of a great national, self-respecting art" were contingent on the kinds of audiences it could attract (Renascence 2). In the first half of his discussion, Jones focused on the relationship between "authentic" and "inauthentic" cultural forms. "Among the many hopeful signs of a real and permanent dramatic revival in England," he suggested, there are also many assurances that, while on the whole playgoers may be said to desire literature and poetry, the great body of them also much more desire many much less worthy things--sensation, realism, noise, tricks of surprise, huge scenic effects, tawdry dresses, foolish songs--anything but the quiet, steady, faithful portraiture of character in natural, fitting language. (1)

In this passage, Jones described the influence of emerging mass culture, contrasting its appeal with that of an authentic culture linked to "literature and poetry." Jones's vocabulary and use of contrasting descriptions implied an opposition between high and mass orientations towards cultural objects. High culture--"natural," "quiet," "steady" and "faithful"--was contrasted with the negative
products of a "tawdry" and "foolish" emerging mass culture that used "sensation," "noise" and "tricks" to capture its audiences.

Jones identified three distinct classes of audience--or "mobs"--each of which demonstrated characteristic tastes: the middle classes have chiefly chosen plays that confirm and flatter them in their own self-content and genial, ignorant self-worship; and the upper classes have chiefly chosen plays that studiously reject everything heroic, and studiously insist on mean and commonplace details about aristocratic persons . . . ; and the lower classes have chiefly chosen plays that, like the rank raw spirit they drink, have no nourishment, but give a rousing hot sensation while they are being swallowed. (12)

Although he referred to each class separately, Jones focused most insistently on the influence which middle- and upper-class audiences exerted over the drama, and mentioned the lower class only to generate an uncomfortable point of comparison. Lower-class audiences might prefer works that bear "the same relation to dramatic art as an engraving in the Police News bears to an etching by Rembrandt," Jones suggested, but their counterparts among the dominant classes should be capable of greater things (9); far from viewing the theatre as a "popular amusement," he argued, these
audiences should encourage a drama that reflects "all the sources of our national character and national greatness" (8).

As Jones sensed, mass culture posed a threat to traditional high culture because it blurred boundaries and appropriated other forms to maximize its appeal. Perhaps most significantly, it appealed to audiences from across a range of classes, and so eroded traditional social barriers associated with taste. Jones's appeal to discrete "mobs" within the existing class structure represented an attempt to arrest this leveling influence by reinstating traditional social boundaries and equating them with taste.

The idea of categorizing audiences was not new at the end of the nineteenth century; in fact, concerns about the relationship between ruling class and "masses"--and the attendant fear that rule by the masses would result in the degradation of existing cultural and social values--had a lengthy history by the early nineteenth century.9 In the years preceding Jones's publication of "Theatre and the Mob," however, the notion of what constituted a "mob" changed radically. Where "mob" had historically referred to a lower class that threatened to engulf or destroy existing

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9 Patrick Brantlinger documents this history from the classical period to the present; for a shorter account that focuses on seventeenth-century England see Hill (chapter 8).
"civilization," it now applied to any class whose "debased" tastes had a destructive effect on cultural traditions. Jones's argument reflected this change in emphasis, identifying segments of the dominant classes as a threat to existing cultural values, even as it also privileged the middle class by ultimately identifying it with the interests of high culture. By placing the middle class as the hope for cultural leadership in England, Jones vested it with an authority that was traditionally the preserve of the upper class. While it contributed to the larger cultural and social project of legitimizing the middle-class, however, "Theatre and the Mob" also introduced (though it never really resolved) the problem of this class's relationship to high and mass forms of culture.

Among twentieth-century theorists, mass culture is a concept that has been used to describe a commodified, technologized, and infinitely reproducible system of cultural production that shapes and rationalizes consumers' tastes across existing social lines. This idea of mass culture has played a significant role in the theory and

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10 Both Hayes and McClelland discuss this development from political and sociological perspectives. The application of their insights to a cultural framework is my own.

11 This definition is my own, but it has been informed by such works as Adorno and Horkheimer's discussion of the culture industry in Dialectic of Enlightenment; also important is Raymond Williams's historicized account of the evolution of the term "mass" in Keywords (192-7).
criticism of culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, where Andreas Huyssen suggests it is often evoked as the demonic other of "legitimate" high culture (vi-vii). While this dichotomy allows us to draw clear historical distinctions between kinds of art, however, such perspectives are determined largely through hindsight.12 In nineteenth-century theatre criticism, I argue, mass culture was neither fully visible nor fully distinct from older notions of high and popular culture. As a result, it created difficulties for critics who attempted to explain a new development using older conceptual models and terms.

In theatre criticism the distinction between high and mass culture was characteristically described as a schism between "art" and "amusement" which was linked in critics' minds to the problems posed by the "uncultivated" thinking characteristic of the kind of broadly-conceived "mobs" identified by Jones.13 Substituting a merit- and education-based hierarchy for traditional distinctions based on class, critics distinguished "mobs" at all class levels from "cultivated" patrons. Their classificatory schemes produced

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12 Although this reading is my own, my thinking about the relationship between class and culture has been influenced by Pierre Bourdieu's Distinction and John Frow's Cultural Studies and Cultural Value.
highly conflicted characterizations of the middle class as cultural consumers.

I have chosen Jones's characterization of class-based "mobs" as the starting point of this introduction because it dramatizes a major shift in the ways people thought about and conceptualized theatre audiences--particularly middle class audiences--in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Jones's interest in the negative aspects of middle-class taste exemplified the approach many critics adopted at this time, as did his emphasis on the need to transform fragmented class-based "mobs" into a unified "national" audience. Jones and others wanted to enshrine the middle class as cultural legislator by proposing, as an alternative to any class-based "mob," an educated national cultural audience free from the narrow prejudices of class. Towards this end, Jones envisioned an audience drawn from "all classes" and comprising "the best elements of society, all that is soundest and most characteristic and of national importance" (Renascence 23). In reality, however, Jones's "people"--"educated" but not fashionable, and expressing "all that is vital and preservative and honourable in English life" (23)--referred to increasingly narrow and conflicted critical constructions of middle-class audiences.

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13 Jones evokes the distinction between art and amusement often in his criticism of the drama; see, for example, essays included in The Renascence of the Drama.
Jones was not the first critic to appeal to an idealized "classless" audience of cultural interpreters as a counterpoint to the destructive force of "the mob"; in fact, his approach to the subject was indebted to Matthew Arnold, as Jones himself acknowledged, and through Arnold to Coleridge and Schiller. Unlike these earlier theorists, however, Jones explored the cultural problems posed by the drama and its audiences from the perspective of a working theorist and playwright; in doing so, he raised a number of important questions about the relationship between culture and its audiences. Specifically, Jones's use of the term "mob" evokes an older set of associations with the lower classes as an unruly or ungovernable group but then applies them to the upper and middle classes in ways that anticipate twentieth-century concerns about the leveling effects of middle-brow culture\(^\text{14}\)--a conceptual shift that suggests crucial changes in the organization of cultural categories underway at the time.

Drama, Class and the Problem of Cultural Categorization

In this thesis I argue that the answers to the questions raised by Jones's article are related both to the

\(^{14}\) Among twentieth-century cultural theorists and intellectuals there has been a pervasive tendency to view the middle--rather than the lower--classes as a degrading
consolidation of a distinct middle-class identity founded on and authenticated by the sphere of high culture, and to the rise of a distinct mass culture in the twentieth-century that calls into question the separate character of this sphere. In general terms neither of these propositions is unique; both Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton have argued convincingly that middle-class identity is tied to the legitimizing discourse of "high culture" and the emergence of aesthetics as an autonomous sphere,\(^{15}\) while such theorists of mass culture as Andreas Huyssen have effectively challenged the notion that "high" and "mass" are opposed, rather than interpenetrating, cultural categories. Their insights have informed my own alternative focus on the ways that the relationships between cultural categorization and class were redefined in a context which localizes the effects of this large theoretical concern. In the case of late nineteenth-century drama and drama criticism, I suggest, the implications of these broad arguments about culture converged in new and provocative ways.

In large part this is the case because drama was associated with both "high" and "mass" culture throughout

\(^{15}\) See Williams, *Culture and Society* xiii-xx. For the middle classes' consolidation of aesthetics as specialized field see Eagleton, chapter one.
the period I discuss. Throughout the nineteenth century, drama was venerated as one of the highest forms of expression in a received hierarchy of genre and, on a national level, identified through its association with Shakespeare as the consummate expression of a British affinity for the drama. As a result of these associations, the drama had significant symbolic power for the middle class since it was a cultural form that identified the highest stage of national development with a "popular" renaissance. At the same time, the theatre was associated with the negative influences of commercialism and technology and so widely regarded as a symptom of cultural debasement caused by the nascent entertainment industry's willingness to cater to audiences' lowest impulses. In this regard, the theatre also mirrored negative stereotypes of the middle classes as materialistic philistines whose influence was antithetical to the interests of culture. Because it was caught between these conflicting ideas and implicit ideological associations, late nineteenth and early twentieth-century discourse about the drama enacted in microcosm many of the broader cultural contradictions that arose with the consolidation of mass culture. Specifically, critical concerns about the drama highlight the problems involved in sustaining a traditional ideal of "high" culture as a fixed, universal category in the face of changes to the
organization of cultural audiences under the conditions of mass culture.

Contemporary drama critics responded to the problem posed by emerging mass culture by taking up a somewhat contradictory, "populist" position on ways of determining artistic value. Although he did not frame his argument in terms of a distinction between "high" and "mass" cultures, Jones was sensitive to the overriding importance of material conditions of production—including audiences' tastes—on the drama. Unlike such "private" forms of literature as poetry, drama was an undeniably public form of art that required substantial audiences to be economically viable. As Jones pointed out:

A poem may be written for the few, a picture may be painted for the few, and the poet and painter may wait with contemptuous patience for the verdict of the centuries. But a play must be successful at once; it must catch the crowd on its first week, or the manager cannot afford to keep it on his bills, and it is withdrawn with the stigma of failure fixed to it for ever. (Renascence 4)

Jones's view of the drama as an economically determined cultural form acknowledged the integral relationship between art and its conditions of production and reception. As he suggests, "we find that this condition under which every
play is produced of immediately striking the fancy and satisfying the appetite of the populace, has tended to lower the standard of dramatic work" (10). He continues by noting:

The drama is an art, but it is also a competitor of music-halls, circuses, Madame Tussaud's, the Westminster Aquarium, and the Argyll Rooms. It is a hybrid, an unwieldy Siamese Twin, with two bodies, two heads, two minds, two dispositions, all of them, for the present, vitally connected. (11)

This description, which noted the negative effects of mass culture even as it suggested the necessary interdependence of art and economics in the theatre, was significant insofar as it recognized that the drama's need for a substantial, immediate audience distinguished it from arts such as literature. For Jones and his contemporaries, this requirement coloured appeals for a "serious," non-commercial theatre and, ultimately, changed the way that critics thought about high culture in relation to the drama.

Similar characterizations of the drama's vital relationship to its audience appeared in theatre criticism through the later years of the nineteenth century. At the same time, however, Jones and many of his contemporaries remained indebted to the quintessentially Romantic notion that an autonomous high cultural sphere could counteract the
negative influence of taste and so restore a sense of social cohesion to an increasingly fragmented class system. This mode of thought led a number of late nineteenth-century critics including Jones, William Archer, and Granville Barker among others, to endorse the idea of a state-sponsored theatre that could function as an autonomous and "legitimate" venue for high culture. Such critics sought to overcome the exigencies of dramatic production by eliminating economic necessity as a factor. At the same time, they somewhat paradoxically insisted that a national drama must maintain its character as a "popular" art, a mandate that simultaneously reflected the general tendency to idealize Shakespeare's Elizabethan public as a truly "classless," national audience even as it reintroduced the idea that theatrical production must "prove" itself by drawing paying audiences. In making this uneasy and nostalgic historical link between popularity and legitimate art, these critics were not able to see how emergent mass culture changed the existing configuration of high and low cultures. To address the difficulties posed by a drama problematically divided between the claims of "art" and "amusement," critics like Jones suggested the need to

16 This idea was central both to Schiller (33) and Schlegel (Course 27).
nurture a high culture that would reverse the negative
effects of economics on art. What these critics did not
recognize was the extent to which the models of unified,
collective high culture they evoked were implicated in the
emerging mass culture whose influence they were attempting
to counteract.

Drama and the Problem of Culture
The relationship between high culture, emerging mass culture
and middle-class audiences in the late nineteenth- and early
twentieth-century British theatre is a subject that has
received little direct attention from literary critics and
theatre historians, most of whom have tended to divide their
accounts between descriptive histories of the popular stage
and influence-based studies of playwrights. One result of
this divided focus is that while excellent studies of the
contemporary theatre exist they are often organized as
descriptive histories rather than as cohesive arguments
about the drama, theatre and audiences in relation to larger
cultural effects.17 Alternatively, accounts of the late
nineteenth-century drama are interpreted in light of
twentieth-century developments that are read back on
previous eras to give a meaningful sense of progression

17 This category includes the pioneering work of Booth and
Rowell among others.
towards important authors or works. While they help us to understand continuities between Victorian and Modern forms of the drama, such histories lend a sense of progress, coherence and stability to late Victorian theatrical taste that obscures the often contradictory enthusiasms audiences demonstrated for what were essentially popular forms of drama, as well as their uncertainties about what work would have lasting value. As a result, influence-based approaches to late nineteenth-century theatre history tend not to consider the conflicted cultural status of works or practices within the tradition for contemporary audiences, who accorded high-cultural status to plays we would now categorize as "mass," or vice versa. Rather than revisit these already well charted territories, this thesis examines how high and emerging mass cultures converged in theatre and the drama in the years between 1880 and 1914.

Previous studies of the problems raised by cultural categorization in criticism of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century drama are nonexistent. Although many sourcebooks of original reviews and limited studies of individual commentators exist, no scholar has yet considered the discourse of criticism as a primary focus of research. More helpful, for the purposes of this study, have been

18 This genealogy is standard for the period. See, for example, Nicoll; Rowell's The Victorian Theatre, 1792-1914,
works such as John Stokes's *Resistible Theatres: Enterprise and Experiment in the Late Nineteenth Century* and Loren Kruger's *The National Stage: Theatre and Cultural Legitimation in England, France and America*, both of which document specific moments in the British theatre. While this thesis takes a different focus than either of these works--both of which consider a number of historical movements in context--its interest in the relationship between class, taste, and the concern to define "legitimate" culture is related to Kruger's discussion of the campaign for a British National theatre. Kruger's study takes as its explicit focus the relationship between the function of legitimate culture and the universalization of the values and tastes of the dominant class. Central to her work is the relationship between the ruling class and the lower class, whose tastes were marginalized in the struggle to replace the popular theatre with a legitimate national one.

By contrast with Kruger--who places primary emphasis on the dominant class's conflicted attitude towards the lower class--this study looks at a corresponding dynamic within the middle class. While Kruger and I take up the same problem, then, we do so from distinct but complementary perspectives. Like Kruger, I begin by discussing Matthew Arnold's "The French Play in London," a seminal contribution to chapters 3 and 4; Woodfield; and Innes, chapter one.
to late nineteenth-century discussions about the drama in England. While Kruger uses Arnold as a point of departure for considering the connection between the middle class and the campaign for a national theatre, however, I argue that Arnold's highly influential idealization of the middle class as a homogeneous cultural influence fostered a critical misconception which subsequently created dissonance within discourse about the drama. I argue that, far from functioning as a unified influence, this group was highly unstable in the period between 1880 and 1914. In fact, I suggest, the sense of fragmentation between dominant and subordinate classes which the middle class was evoked to resolve was reproduced within the middle class as the tension between "legitimate" and "illegitimate" responses to culture.

Where Kruger focuses exclusively on the implicitly classed nature of the campaign for a national theatre, then, this project places more emphasis on the relationship between class and culture in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century discourse about the drama. One of my specific historical arguments is that later nineteenth-century theatres and their audiences have been read too much in light of trends and critical concerns that emerged much earlier in the century. In particular, I want to discuss how key assumptions about the homogeneity and dominance of
middle-class audiences in the later nineteenth-century theatre have obscured the tensions between high and mass forms of culture that influenced ideas about the drama at this time.

The years between 1865 and 1914 are commonly regarded as what George Rowell has influentially described as the "era of Society drama:" a designation which captures both the thematic concerns of the contemporary drama and its primary audience base. In its basic contours this perspective is accurate; however, our assumptions about its contemporary influence exclude many of the broad cultural concerns that troubled critics at the time. In fact, while the dominant critical narrative that has guided our understanding of late nineteenth-century theatre history assumes an uncomplicated, unified middle class of "Society" viewers who patronized theatres in a consistent manner, this conclusion is not borne out by the critical debates about class-based audiences that erupted in the early 1880s and continued through the first decade of the twentieth century. My contention in this study is that the "era of society drama" is best understood as a period in which questions about cultural categorization were raised by a middle class that was increasingly fragmented from within. Under these conditions, "cultivated," "respectable," and "fashionable"
were not neutral descriptive terms, but rather highly contested markers of class and classlessness.

Late nineteenth and early twentieth century British drama is well-suited to such a study. The nineteenth-century critical preoccupation with classifying audiences was rooted in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century cultural theories which saw the theatre as a forum for collective education because its emphasis on affect fostered sympathy between individuals.19 In England, this line of thought influenced playwrights, critics and theorists from Joanna Baillie to Matthew Arnold, and helped foster the belief that the "better classes" could elevate the sensibilities of audiences generally. Whereas earlier writers like Baillie could allude to a reasonably uncomplicated notion of the "better classes" which corresponded to the shared attributes of the aristocracy and upper bourgeoisie, however, Arnold had to work with more complex and entrenched class distinctions to shape his discussion of audiences and cultural consumption. For Arnold, the need for the middle class to assume a position of cultural leadership was inseparable from discussions about cultural reform and, ultimately, from attempts to

19 This perspective was characteristically Romantic; see, for example, excerpts from Schlegel and Lessing included in Draper.
define cultural categories that were changing radically at this time.

When Arnold's ideas were adopted by subsequent critics they led to conflict about who constituted the "cultivated" class as well as to debates about processes of cultural classification. The roots of this discord in nineteenth-century cultural criticism are the focus of my first chapter, which provides a context for debates about the drama in the years between 1880 and 1914. This chapter introduces the nineteenth-century theatre generally, but it is primarily organized around a discussion of Matthew Arnold's highly influential commentary on the future of British drama in an 1879 review entitled "The French Play in London." Arnold's piece is central to this study because it introduces key terms of reference for the critical debates that are the focus of my central chapters: including questions about competing constructions of middle-class audiences, about changing cultural categories and their relation to dramatic subgenres, and about how theatres could best be organized to address the problem of cultural unity. Arnold's argument underpinned much of the drama criticism and theory that followed and in this chapter I contextualize Arnold's argument and consider how it shaped later conflicts about high and mass cultures and their audiences.
The theoretical issues I examine in Chapter One introduce concerns related to later debates. In subsequent chapters I focus on particular critical issues raised by changing modes of classification and concerns about audience, relating contemporary debate about the drama to larger concerns about the role that high culture should play as a meliorative influence on British society. In Chapter Two, I provide an overview of the drama in the years between 1880 and 1914. Although many diverse forms of drama developed during this period— from a lucrative commercial theatre trade to experimental "art" theatres designed to resist the influence of commerce—I argue that fundamental overlaps between these forms of theatre blurred the traditional distinction between art and economics that structured the distinction between high and low forms of culture. Chapter Three traces the rise of critical concerns about the impact of middle-class audiences on the theatre in the years between 1880 and 1914, placing particular emphasis on the ways that competing constructions of this audience reflected changes in the traditional understanding of high culture. In Chapter Four I consider how increasingly democratic and populist constructions of audience impacted on the process of cultural categorization following early developments in the 1880s. While Chapters Three and Four focus on critical debate about the drama and its audiences,
the final chapter examines the role that critical constructions of audience and cultural classification in the theatre played in campaigns to create a national theatre.

The overarching interest of this study is to consider how assumptions about high culture changed in discourse about the drama between 1880 and 1914, and how the conceptual overlap between "high" and "mass" forms allowed critics to appropriate and redefine the category of high culture in different ways. Throughout this study, I am also concerned to document how changes in the organization and classification of cultural forms were shaped by critical constructions of theatrical audiences in the years between 1880 and 1914. Any attempt to generalize about historical theatrical audiences is, as Michael Booth astutely points out, "risky business" for the modern critic because the composition of theatrical audiences varied from theatre to theatre at different times and was shaped by such factors as ticket price, geographical location, and architectural layout (Victorian Age 10). For late Victorian critics, however, the tendency to generalize about audiences was widespread and often explicitly linked to existing social and class distinctions. Without accepting the notion that these generalizations corresponded to specific or actual audiences, I try to ask why such critical constructions of audience were evoked at this time, and reflect on what
purpose they served in broad debates about the remedial role culture should play in shaping modern society.

A Note on Sources

This research is largely based on primary documents. Where possible I have used the original sources—most often contemporary periodicals. When this has not been possible I have relied on contemporary and modern collections of primary sources to obtain material. Contemporary collections of primary materials such as Henry Arthur Jones’s Renascence of the Drama and William Archer’s About the Theatre are cited by the title of the collection rather than article by article. Later twentieth-century collections of original material—including Nagler’s Source Book in Theatrical History, Hayden’s Romantic Bards and British Reviewers, Rowell’s Victorian Dramatic Criticism and Russell Jackson’s Victorian Theatre: The Theatre in its Time, among others—are identified by author in the text, but are parenthetically cited to the collection in which they appear (i.e. “in Jackson 123”).
Chapter One
Nineteenth-Century Drama and Cultural Theory

From the early years of the nineteenth century, the drama was regarded as a source of national shame and tangible proof that British culture was in decline. In the past, Walter Scott claimed, Shakespeare's audiences "crowded, not to feast their eyes upon the show and scenery, but to see and hear the literary production of the evening" (201); by contrast, he argued, nineteenth-century audiences do not come to "listen, and to admire" but rather to partake of the latest spectacle (203). The opposition of a past golden age to a debased present was a notable feature of much nineteenth-century drama criticism, and such comparisons invariably turned on the conviction that theatres and audiences "make" each other, for good or evil. Given this relationship, complaints were levied both at the stage--which was increasingly denigrated for its commercialism--and at the audiences who "are well satisfied with garbage" (Baillie viii). Together, these factors contributed to a general climate of despair about the possibility of reforming the British drama. As one early reviewer of Coleridge's Remorse concluded, "no important revolution can be effected in the present degraded state of the stage" (in Hayden 136).

Such early characterizations of the nineteenth-century theatre retained a powerful hold over subsequent generations
of critics, many of whom betrayed what theatre historian Jonas Barish has described as an "antitheatrical prejudice" that manifest itself in the tendency to privilege the dramatic text over theatrical performance. Even among critics who continued to support the idea that the drama should be performed, however, the tone was unremittingly pessimistic. Between 1865 and 1867, for instance, George Henry Lewes repeatedly remarked on the "many theatres nightly crowded by an eager but uncritical public" in reviews which despaired "that the stage is no longer the amusement of the cultured few, but the amusement of the uncultured and miscultured masses, and has to provide larger and lower appetites with food" (Forster and Lewes 178, 213). By the late 1870's, however, the idea that mass audiences of--presumably--lower class viewers blocked the prospects of a "serious" contemporary drama in England changed radically as the longed-for return of the "cultivated" classes to the theatres began to alter the conditions under which plays were produced.

This chapter examines the context in which this demographic shift took place, focusing both on the role that the British middle classes played in the theatre industry and on the ways that this audience was conceptualized by drama critics in the years before 1880. In the first half I provide an overview of the conditions that prevailed in the

1 For characteristic expressions of this position see Otten, Richardson, and Webb.
nineteenth-century theatre, paying particular attention to the ways that changes in the organization of theatres impacted on middle-class audiences' patterns of consumption. Subsequently, I consider how critics' perceptions of these audiences changed over time. Although early nineteenth-century critics insisted that the influence of the cultivated classes was necessary to reinstate a serious British drama, the actual return of the middle class to the theatres seemed to have the opposite effect—encouraging a boom in popular entertainment that we would now equate with the rise of mass culture.

If much early and mid-century criticism bore marks of anxiety, pessimism, and protectionism in matters related to class privileges, Matthew Arnold's "The French Play in London" rejected the pessimistic outlook on theatres and their audiences that was conventional at the time. This piece, which comprises the focus of the later part of this chapter, explicitly and influentially identified the drama as an important cultural form tied to national identity. Unlike most of his contemporaries, Arnold saw the growing interest of middle-class audiences in the theatre as an encouraging sign that the state might be moved to provide greater support for culture, and as an authoritative cultural figure he lent the drama renewed status and cultural prestige. From a practical perspective, however, Arnold's view of the drama as a high cultural form was problematic, both because it assumed that the middle class
functioned as a unified group of consumers and because it lacked insight into the actual exigencies of theatrical production. As a result of the latter limitation, Arnold proposed a number of solutions to the "problem" of the British drama that were subsequently developed in often conflicting ways by people involved in the theatre industry. Most centrally, Arnold and the drama critics who later adopted his ideas did not grasp the ways that opposing factions within the middle class struggled to define their cultural authority against other groups from within their class.

I. Middle-Class Audiences in the Nineteenth-Century Theatre

Early Nineteenth-Century Developments: The Divorce of Theatre and Drama

Prior to the nineteenth century, the London theatre scene—which was representative of "British theatre" as a whole—was governed by a small, relatively homogeneous audience drawn mostly from among the wealthier classes, whose cultural tastes were determined by education and whose expectations about cultural forms were shaped by received traditions (Booth Victorian Age 6). Similarly, theatres

2 Until the later years of the nineteenth century, London theatres and companies set the tone for England as a whole. Not only did London house an organized theatre industry, but this industry carried plays to the provinces through organized tours.

3 My overview of the nineteenth-century theatre draws on many primary and secondary sources. I am particularly indebted to the modern work of Booth and Rowell, to
were generally organized to reflect and reinforce the existing social hierarchy, with the upper classes occupying a prominent position in the boxes while the middling ranks filled the stalls and the lower class the galleries (Hadley 40). In the early years of the nineteenth century, however, London's population expanded rapidly and with this population came a new metropolitan audience drawn from among the middle and lower classes. With this demographic shift, critical discourse about the theatre began to focus on the competing interests of high and popular forms of culture. While critics of the Romantic era largely supported a conservative view of the theatre as a form of high culture, the existing system of theatrical organization—in which only two theatres were licensed by Royal Patent to perform dramas—was increasingly pressured to serve popular interests as non-regulated theatres appeared, providing alternative forms of entertainment for this new urban population. This shift and the anxieties it raised among Romantic dramatists and critics testified to a new set of

contemporary historians such as Mowbray Morris and Augustin Filon, as well as to memoirs such as Clement Scott's The Drama of Yesterday and To-day (1899). For the sake of brevity I have generally confined parenthetical references in this section to specific facts.

4 For characteristic British views see the reviews compiled by Hayden, as well as the reviews by Lamb and Hazlitt included in The Life, Letters and Writing of Charles Lamb and On Theatre.

5 Non-regulated theatres initially developed in taverns and saloons; most sidestepped restrictions against dramatic performance by incorporating musical interludes—an early form of melodrama.
influences at work in the theatres, as well as a growing sense of confusion about whose tastes should predominate and whose interests "important" cultural forms should serve. Concerns expressed by critics were further amplified by changes in the organization and orientation of the two "legitimate" theatres, which became increasingly large in size and diverse in repertoire in the early years of the century as they struggled to compete in the new market for entertainment.⁶

The growth of urban populations demanding accessible entertainment from the London theatres fuelled an emergent leisure industry; with increases in the size of theatres and increased competition by "illegitimate" forms of drama, productions became more reliant on the economic benefits of popular acclaim. As a result, even prestigious London theatres began to promote novelty acts (such as child or animal performers), to place more emphasis on star actors, and to embrace popular forms such as melodrama⁷—all of which appealed to broad segments of the population and so offered the most opportunity to realize profits (Rowell 11). With this influx of entertainment choices, came a sense of

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⁶ Around the turn of the century, theatre architecture changed radically in response to increased demand for leisure activities. For particularly helpful accounts of this change see Glasstone's discussion of changing architectural styles (7-15) and Rowell's description of the changing relationship between theatres and audiences in The Victorian Theatre, 1792-1914 (1-18).

⁷ For an account of the growth of this genre see Rahill (103-35).
confusion about the differences between high and popular forms, and a corresponding need to re-establish clear boundaries between them. The growth of new genres such as melodrama, and the expansion of older spectacular genres such as pantomime were contrasted with the decline of more "significant," established genres such as tragedy. Increasingly, the serious genre "drama" was distinguished from "theatrical" forms intended only for amusement.8

As the early nineteenth-century theatre became more democratic in its appeal to popular taste, its status as a high cultural form paradoxically began to assume greater theoretical importance.9 Among Romantic cultural theorists and critics, drama was venerated as the highest form of expression in a received hierarchy of genre and lauded for its potential to impart social unity to its audiences by exciting a sense of sympathy among them.10 This idea, derived from German Idealists such as Hegel,11 proved to be

8 This schism between textual and theatrical concerns is placed in historical context in Carlisle.
9 This narrative is my own, although it draws extensively on primary material and incorporates some critical commonplaces which are informed by my reading in secondary material about the Romantic drama. Specific debts are acknowledged in notes and parenthetic references.
10 The ability to excite sympathy was a central characteristic of tragedy for Hegel, Lessing, and Schlegel. For a brief reference see excerpts included in Draper.
11 For the Idealists the drama was the highest genre because it was "the most perfect totality of content and form," bringing together the concrete focus of epic and the abstract interest in the ideal characteristic of poetry. See Hegel (II:1158).
highly influential in England where it combined with the existing beliefs about sensibility to create a view of the drama as a form of culture that was an ideal vehicle for educating audiences in manners and morals. For Shelley, writing in the "Defense of Poetry," the ability to produce superior drama demonstrated a high level of social development; "the connection of poetry and social good is more observable in the drama than in whatever other form" he remarked:

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\text{it is indisputable that the highest perfection of human society has ever corresponded with the highest dramatic excellence; and that the corruption or the extinction of the drama in a nation where it has once flourished, is a mark of a corruption of manners, and an extinction of the energies which sustain the soul of social life. (492)} \]

The idea that excellence in drama was a mark of "the highest perfection of human society" was a powerful one at the time, reflected both in the growing tendency to idealize Shakespeare's England as a cultural and social golden age and in the growing philosophical interest in hierarchies of genre. While Shelley's ideas about the drama's social importance reflected accepted beliefs about genre, however,

\[12\text{ See, for example, Baillie's introduction to Dramas and Hazlitt's "On Actors and Acting."} \]

\[13\text{ This idea parallels Hegel's insistence that "Drama is the product of a completely developed and organized national life" (II:1159).} \]
his insistence elsewhere on the particularly literary, or poetic, character of the drama represented a definitive shift in the definition of the drama as a high cultural form that was unique to British commentators. Like Shelley, many other poets and critics of the Romantic period viewed the drama as literature first, downplaying questions about its theatrical realization; for some, the idea that the drama should address assembled audiences was even rejected outright in favour of "closet" dramas that were intended to be "staged" only in the imagination of the individual reader.

The influence of Romantic criticism in England meant that the drama retained its traditional high cultural prestige even as it came to be viewed as distinct from the theatre, which—according to its detractors—corrupted or degraded the author's intention by interposing the economic and technological demands of production between author and audience. This distinction was so influential that much

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14 Hegel, for example, insisted that performance was a crucial component of the genre: "it should not be maintained that a drama cannot be satisfying poetically on the score of its inner value alone, but this inner dramatic value is only to be provided by a treatment which makes drama excellent on the stage" (II:1183).

15 This perspective has strongly influenced twentieth-century appraisals of the nineteenth-century drama. See, for example, Mathur and Webb. Otten, Cox and Richardson have tried to place Romanticism's strategies of interiority in context, while more recent literary critics have begun to argue that the Romantics were not as anti-theatrical as their isolated statements on the subject would suggest. See, for example, Carlson, Burroughs, and Kucich.
nineteenth-century criticism was dedicated to rejoining the interests of drama and theatre, an enterprise that required that critics account for the negative relationship between the contemporary drama and its audience that had resulted in commercialization. As a result of this concern, discussions about the relationship between drama and theatre were persistently troubled by questions about audience.

For critics who hoped to reconnect drama and theatre into a single high cultural entity, the problem of actual audiences was addressed by theorizing an ideal audience distinguished from the "masses" by its highly developed cultural sensibilities. This emerging distinction between ideal and existing audiences was compounded by changes in the public's perception of the theatre, which had lost much of its currency as a fashionable pastime by the middle years of the century—the result of a democratized theatre industry that came to be viewed as a low form of amusement defined by the interests of the lower classes. By the time the patent restrictions were lifted in 1843, in fact, the staid middle classes had already largely absented themselves from the theatres—which were widely condemned as

16 The problem is noted in many contexts. For representative examples of mid-century discussion see Forster and Lewes, Purcell, and Aytoun.

17 There is tendency among mid-century critics to view the theatre as a quaint pursuit associated with the lower classes. See Mayhew (20-21) and Dickens (32-39).
immoral\textsuperscript{18}--while the "opulent" upper and affluent middle classes turned their backs on popular entertainment in favour of the opera (Rahill 181; Nicoll 9). Such developments were in fact evident much earlier; as an aristocratic visitor to England noted in 1826,

The most striking thing to a foreigner in the English theatres is the unheard-of coarseness and brutality of the audiences. The consequence of this is that the higher and more civilized classes go only to the Italian Opera, and very rarely visit their national theatre. (in Nagler 476)

\textbf{Mid-Century Theatre and the Idealization of the Middle Class}

Because they did not represent a large presence in the theatres through the middle years of the century, I would suggest, the middle classes were often identified with the idealized audience of elite viewers that critics claimed was necessary to reform the drama. In part, this identification hinged on the earlier conviction that the "better classes" were a necessary influence, central to the theatre's ability to educate. As Joanna Baillie suggested, if the refined and well-informed stay away, there is nothing . . . to be taken into account but how to please such auditors as commonly fill the pit and galleries, and the boxes will very soon be occupied by company.

\textsuperscript{18} Literature on the immorality of the stage in the nineteenth century is extensive; see discussions in Barish and Bain.
somewhat richer, indeed, but not more scrupulous or intelligent than the others. (viii)

By the time commentators began to identify the absent “better” classes as necessary for the revival of the drama, the middle class was emerging as a group both “refined” and “well-informed,” in contradistinction to segments of the aristocracy who still attended the theatre—most of whom were perceived to have failed in their duty to lead society by example. The idea that such factors as “worth” or “refinement” were more important than more traditional markers of distinction such as wealth subsequently distinguished between groups which bore the marks of their class (upper or lower) and those who seemed to transcend their class by demonstrating their cultivation.

By mid-century, it was a critical commonplace to appeal to the "better classes" of viewers in the hope of promoting the interests of high culture in the theatres and improving social ties between increasingly fragmented class-based audiences. Attract the middle classes back to the theatres, critics reasoned, and their influence would elevate tastes across class lines. This type of thinking found practical backing in the smaller and more serious theatres that the

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19 Hadley notes the growing perception among theatre audiences that the upper classes had abdicated their responsibility to lead, following the redesign of the patent theatres (45-46).
20 The evolution of the term “cultivation” is noteworthy in this context; see Williams’s discussion in Keywords (92).
middle classes continued to patronize through the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s--such as Madame Vestris's management at the Olympic, which presented light comedies and Shakespearean productions in an intimate, well-appointed theatre that catered to the sensibilities of more refined patrons (Rowell Victorian Theatre 9-20). The success of Vestris and others seemed to lend credence to critical claims that the middle classes were more interested in serious high culture than the lower classes, who largely patronized melodrama. By the 1860s and 1870s, however, the notion that the middle class represented a practical incarnation of the ideal audience was increasingly called into question as the theatre began to regain its status as a fashionable pastime and the middle classes returned to the theatres, precipitating a boom in the growing entertainment industry.

To a large extent, the classificatory distinction between "legitimate" and "illegitimate" forms continued to shape the categorization of the drama through the 1840s and 1850s. As a result, older plays associated with an existing high cultural tradition--particularly those by Shakespeare--retained (and even gained) prestige21 while newer, more lucrative, forms of entertainment such as melodrama and

21 As may now be clear, Shakespeare was central to nineteenth-century arguments about the importance of the drama; ironically, the tendency to idolize Shakespeare came at a time when he was also subject to significant "revision" in performance--as plays were bowdlerized and endings changed to make them compatible with contemporary expectations. See Felperin, and Foulkes's Shakespeare and the Victorian Stage.
spectacle were associated with the lower classes and so accorded little respect by critics. In the 1860s, this distinction between high and popular forms of drama became more complex as contemporary playwrights began to produce plays that incorporated aspects of popular genres such as melodrama in works targeted specifically for middle- and upper-class audiences. This growing tendency to hybridize the drama challenged traditional assumptions about the relationship between cultural classification and social class by packaging popular forms associated with the lower classes for upper- and middle-class audiences. From a modern critical perspective, the most influential example of this trend was the collaboration of manager Marie Bancroft (née Wilton) and playwright Tom Robertson at the Prince of Wales Theatre in the 1860s: an artistic partnership that has been widely regarded as the progenitor of the late Victorian theatre by twentieth-century scholars.

The Prince of Wales Theatre and the Return of the Middle-Class Audience

Bancroft, who began her career as a popular burlesque actress, initiated her artistic partnership with Robertson shortly after she acquired the lease on the Queens Theatre: a small 22 run-down venue outside the more prestigious West End theatre district which had long been a haunt for lower-

22 Seating capacity in the theatre was 800; see Booth, Theatre in the Victorian Age (52-53).
class audiences. Bancroft immediately renamed, redesigned and redecorated the theatre, aiming for a more genteel atmosphere. Its new interior in particular caused a sensation among patrons, providing comfortable chintz-upholstered chairs and settees in a drawing-room type setting that fostered a sense of comfort, luxury, and intimacy for its audiences. On stage, too, Bancroft insisted that the costumes, props and furnishings used be "real"; accordingly, ladies' dresses were acquired from the most fashionable designers and shops, while furniture, china, and props used were also genuine and high quality articles (Bancroft 82).

The design elements Bancroft introduced at the Prince of Wales proved to be highly influential, initiating trends towards increasingly opulent theatres and increased "realism" in detail in the London theatres (Archer English Dramatists 22; Clement Scott Yesterday I:561; Nicoll 51). On the whole, Bancroft's theatre was designed to suggest

23 The account of the Prince of Wales Theatre that follows is drawn largely from the Bancroft's memoirs. See Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft On and Off the Stage.
24 An 1870 Times review noted that at the Prince of Wales audiences "sit, as in a drawing-room, to hear drawing-room pleasantries, interchanged by drawing-room personages" (10).
25 "Realism" in detail--including the trend toward using "real" household and other articles on stage--is distinct from the later artistic movement influenced by developments in continental drama and in the novel which incorporated serious social themes and experimented with producing "slices of life" on stage. Where I use the term I try where possible to distinguish these conflicting meanings in context.
exclusivity and its expensive appointments and productions were used to justify higher ticket prices which deliberately excluded many of the theatre's previous patrons (Bancroft 52). Moreover, Bancroft's repertoire included light comedies and the highly influential "society" plays popularized by Robertson, both of which allowed the theatre to mirror the experiences and tastes of the affluent classes it sought as patrons. Such developments were especially attractive to upwardly mobile middle-class audiences, I would suggest, because they simultaneously provided guidance in matters of taste related to fashionable and affluent members of high society, and fostered a sense of belonging to their exclusive world.

Marie Bancroft's creative alliance with playwright Tom Robertson began in 1865 and, while cut short by Robertson's death in 1871, it exerted a major influence over subsequent developments in the British theatre. Although now widely regarded as the first "modern" English dramatist (Rowell 75), I would argue that Robertson's most notable contribution to the Victorian theatre was his ability to consolidate existing trends and package diverse strains of popular theatre for a middle-class audience. Robertson's plays took their pattern from such older works as Bulwer-Lytton's *Money* (1840) and Dion Boucicault's *London Assurance* (1841), both of which incorporated melodramatic conventions associated with lower class forms in plays that focused on characters drawn from affluent society. Unlike his
predecessors, however, Robertson enjoyed more favourable social conditions as a playwright. Not only were moral strictures beginning to relax, but the increasingly affluent middle class was also beginning to seek new leisure pursuits, and a rapidly expanding public transportation system was opening new suburban markets to the London entertainment industry (Booth Victorian Age 14-16; Nicoll 6-9). While he was not the first nineteenth-century playwright to incorporate melodrama in plays for and about the middle classes, then, Robertson found a highly receptive audience in the 1860s and so helped launch the genre of "society drama" that would dominate British theatre until the beginning of World War One.

In large part, Robertson's method was effective because he drew on extensive background knowledge of the Victorian drama and its conventions. The son of an actor, Robertson grew up on the provincial circuit where he worked as an actor, a scene painter and a stage manager before trying his hand as a playwright.26 In spite of these qualifications, Robertson's climb to success was a hard one and he was on the brink of ruin when Marie Bancroft decided to produce Society in 1865, a turn of events that marked an end to Robertson's financial misfortune and established him as the foremost British playwright of his generation. The play was

26 Information about Robertson included here is adapted from biographical material included in Booth's introduction to Six Plays.
perfectly suited to Bancroft's ambitions since it depicted life among the affluent classes but tempered light social satire with affirmation of the existing social order, bringing together the formal structure of the French well-made play27 with a sentimental focus derived from melodrama. The latter, in particular, allowed Robertson to relate the story of a struggling journalist's romance with the ward of a rich, Society figure by framing social tensions as matters related to love and domesticity. In the hero's melodramatic triumph over the adversity of "society's" expectations, Robertson was able to reduce questions about the vertical organization of class to concerns about the horizontal distinctions that informed differences within fashionable Society. At the same time, I would argue, by evoking the oppositional values central to melodrama he was also able to treat this class as if its concerns were universal.

Robertson's appeal to individual aptitude or sensibility was important because it reinforced the middle class's contemporaneous interest in establishing an alternative to distinctions based on wealth and position, the traditional indicators of rank. If social position and wealth were regarded as accidents of birth by the Victorian middle class, such internal qualities as talent reflected an

27 The well-made play was a highly formulaic method of construction for social comedies pioneered in France by Eugène Scribe and Victorien Sardou in the mid-nineteenth century. The well-made play format was embraced by popular British playwrights because it allowed them to produce a predictably successful product.
individual's worthiness to transcend class associations. In the case of Society, this focus allowed Robertson to evoke the clash between new money and an existing gentry as the background for a melodramatic story that privileged the inward qualities associated with love and talent over the surface qualifications of wealth and position. In the world of Society, the motives both of the nouveau riche Chodds and the pretentious gentry stood in sharp contrast to the deeper internal qualifications of individual sentiment and talent which allowed the hero and heroine to succeed. At the same time, Robertson's treatment of "society" conflated the general meaning of the term (all of society) with the more specific concerns of "Society" audiences. However, while the final tableau of the play visually expressed the reconciliation of society as a whole—bringing together the individual story of triumphant love with the harmonious social outcome of a successful election—neither the play nor the theatre in which it was staged admitted the radical step of including all levels of society in political elections or entertainment venues.

If Robertson's success in the 1860s hinged both on his timing and on his ability to express and mediate the concerns of an upscale and an upwardly mobile clientele, it was also indebted to the timely coincidence of his interests with those of Bancroft. As a manager, Bancroft was able to package Robertson's plays in a way that resonated for new audiences—simultaneously supporting both their vanity as a
rising class and their putatively “democratic” interests. Interestingly, the relationship between Robertson’s plays and Bancroft’s theatre was a highly contradictory one—offering plays that appealed to democratic principles in a theatre organized to exclude patrons without the economic means to buy a ticket. The result was that the real reconciliation which these productions effected was a very narrow, ideologically coded one between the “fashionable” upper and upper middle class and the “respectable” middle, rather than the broad socially inclusive grouping suggested in the final scene of the Society. That the Robertson/Bancroft partnership worked so well at this historical juncture suggests a parallel between the contradictions of this theatrical experience and those internal to a liberal middle class audience that supported democracy even as it sought to limit the upward mobility of the lower classes. Not only did changing social and economic conditions combine to make the theatre a more attractive form of entertainment than it had previously been, it also nurtured a strong ideological fit between the emerging Society drama and its audiences.

In the five years between 1865 and 1870, Tom Robertson’s name became synonymous with the Prince of Wales Theatre, and in many respects Society set the pattern for the genre of “society drama” that followed it—depicting the tensions between a newly moneyed class and an established gentry in a context where love invariably triumphed over
social prejudice and differences were harmoniously resolved.28 In material terms, Robertson and Bancroft's decision to package theatre for the "respectable" classes was a major success, sparking trends in theatre and set design, theatrical organization, and repertoire that continued through the first decade of the twentieth century. Although her own company was not organized around major star performers, Bancroft's system of organization helped lay the groundwork for the later dominance of the actor-manager system of theatrical organization—in which theatres were administered and run by stars who used the drawing power of their names to consolidate large audiences, and who planned their theatres' repertoires to guarantee audiences a specific standard of entertainment. While the Bancroft management at the Prince of Wales theatre instituted a new set of practices in the theatre and revived public interest in British plays, its greatest achievement was in creating and marketing a form of theatre that was attractive to middle-class audiences. Following the Bancrofts' successes at the Prince of Wales, managements increasingly focused on attracting affluent middle and upper class patrons. In critical terms, the success of their alliance initially contributed to a sense of optimism about the future of the stage. While the Bancrofts deliberately created a small,

28 By the 1880s these themes would be consolidated in such "genteel" society comedies as Pinero's Sweet Lavender and Jones's sentimental melodrama The Silver King.
intimate, and exclusive theatre, however, subsequent managers adapted their approach for a broad, mass audience in much larger theatres.

**Criticism and Conflict: The 1870s**

Although the Bancrofts' innovations at the Prince of Wales seemed to signal the dawn of a new artistic era in the British theatre, the return of the middle class to the theatre did not bring about the kinds of changes that critics had predicted through much of the century. In fact, I would argue, far from realizing critics' expectations of a reformed high cultural drama, the influx of middle-class audiences appeared to precipitate further decline. Rather than promote the interests of "high" culture in the theatre, middle-class audiences seemed instead to encourage the growth of such new forms of popular drama as adaptations of French farce and "respectable" society melodrama, and to popularize spectacular productions that elevated questions about costume and set design over the play itself. Because the effect of actual middle-class audiences on theatrical practices seemed to replicate--and even amplify--effects previously attributed to lower class audiences, critics soon returned to pessimistic appraisals of the British theatre. Now, however, they targeted the affluent classes as the primary source of decline, alternately castigating the drawbacks of "fashionable" taste and the influence of a "philistine" middle class on the contemporary drama.
If Society audiences became the focus of negative criticism by the 1870s, perceptions of who comprised this audience varied considerably, and critics satirized both the members of fashionable society, dubbed "Stall Swells," and the bourgeois families and "old maids" that made up "Dress Circle Gentility" (in R. Jackson *Victorian Theatre* 55-59). In such cases, satiric accounts of manners and dress were linked to "fashionable" and "respectable" audiences' lack of critical acumen and their tendency to function as blind followers of fashion, devoid of "aesthetic lights" (56). Together, both respectable and affluent sectors of the middle and upper classes--once the hope for rejuvenation of the drama as a high cultural form--came to be viewed as a direct threat to the interests of high culture in the theatre. In 1871, for example, Thomas Purcell lamented that it was no longer "the most intellectual and scholarly people" who frequented the theatres, but rather "country people, bored aristocrats, and a large number of green grocers and other shop keepers, who have received orders for displaying play-bills in their windows" (14). These labels suggested a convergence of negative influences from across the upper and middle classes, from naïve and uncultivated "country people" to "bored" aristocrats who had abandoned their duty to lead by example and a self-interested, economically-driven middle class.

Purcell's perception of contemporary audiences exemplified critical attitudes towards London theatre
audiences at this time; however, it also highlighted the emerging problem of how to define a common cultural identity for this diverse group of spectators. Purcell simply lumped stereotypes of middle and upper-class viewers together, making them the basis for a negative comparison with an idealized past audience unified socially by its shared intellectual leanings. For subsequent generations of critics, however, the specific interests represented by "bored aristocrats" and "shopkeepers" complicated attempts to try and define common cultural ground for Victorian theatre audiences. By the last years of the 1870s, in fact, a clear division had begun to emerge between "respectable" and "fashionable" factions of theatre audiences as each group struggled to displace negative associations onto the other and to identify its own tastes with the ideal of a universal high culture. At this point, the entrenched idea that high culture helped develop unified tastes and audiences became a point of conflict--particularly within the middle class, which lacked the traditional power of the aristocracy and was still sensitive about its "shopkeeping" roots. If the "culture" central to Idealist discourse represented an idealized, classless sphere, the affectation of "cultchah"--as Raymond Williams suggests--connoted the negative, class-based tendency to put on airs (Keywords 92).

Along with these divergent critical views about middle-class audiences, conflict also arose about what constituted legitimate high culture. By the late 1870s, the tendency to
dwell on the negative effects of middle-class theatre audiences translated into concerns about the leveling effects of cultural democratization. As Henry James noted in an 1879 review of the London theatre scene, The English stage has probably never been so bad as it is at present, and at the same time there probably has never been so much care about it. It sometimes seems to an observer of English customs that this interest in histrionic matters almost reaches the proportions of mania. It pervades society--it breaks down barriers.

(Scenic Art 119)

James's comment not only drew attention to the state of contemporary English drama, it also spoke to the lack of critical discernment among English audiences more concerned with the claims of fashion than the quality of culture. In the context of this review and elsewhere James linked these developments to the effects of what we would now recognize as mass culture: audiences' interests in actors and fashionable "events" rather than aesthetic achievement, and the overweening desire for social visibility behind these interests. "Members of the dramatic profession are 'received' without restriction," James complained. "They are received in society, and the people of society appear on the stage; it is as if the great gate which formerly divided the theatre from the world had been lifted off its hinges" (119-20). For James, the breakdown of traditional social barriers and distinctions was directly linked to the
disintegration of taste and, by extension, of art itself. He contended that the theatre's status as a fashionable pastime made a mockery of existing cultural distinctions and so reduced the claims of art to faddism: "the world is being steadily democratized," he complained, "and literature and art give their testimony to the fact" (Scenic Art 120).

By the late 1870s, as James intimated, the growing interest in entertainment had begun to erode distinctions related to class and cultural categorization that had previously seemed fixed. In this context, longstanding assumptions about the relationship between class, patterns of consumption, and cultural legitimacy were redefined. Whereas in earlier eras people unquestioningly accepted forms consumed by the upper classes as examples of high culture, they now began to question the social basis of cultural authority and to focus instead on cultivation as a distinguishing factor that transcended questions of class affiliation. As a result, competing notions of high culture proliferated as did arguments about what faction of the middle class should maintain guardianship over cultural values. Most critics continued to assert the authority of the middle- and upper- classes to legislate high culture; however, they now referred to distinct factions when they posited an ideal audience. The early clash between these opposing groups in debates about the British theatre focused a significant tension associated with the emergence of mass culture. At the same time, it also raised questions about
the changing relationship between cultural categorization and middle-class identity.

**Class and Cultural Categorization: The Problem of the Middle Class**

From the early years of the nineteenth century onwards, the socially volatile British middle class was fearful of being identified as a part of the masses. This anxiety partially reflected the fact that the middle class's claims to social power were reliant on political democratization—which carried negative associations with "mob rule" from the classical period onward, and which gained particular poignancy as the middle class tried to separate itself from the working class following the Reform Act of 1832.29 In response to such influences, Peter Hayes notes, the British middle class formulated an alternative--positive--notion of collective action that identified its interests with those of "the people," or society generally (9). This alternative collective was distinguished from the "debased" mob by its proclaimed interest in acting on behalf of society as a whole through the exercise of its democratic function. Where the lower class "mob" was traditionally viewed as emotional and ungovernable, then, the middle-class collective emphasized "intellectual" powers to build a case for reasoned collective leadership.

29 Brantlinger traces the history of antipathy to democratization. In a more focused context, Leaver connects the changing relationship between the middle and lower classes to developments in melodrama.
While Hayes focuses specifically on the mob as a political entity, his insights are equally applicable to questions about culture in the nineteenth century, since to advance the middle class’s claims to democratic participation its advocates emphasized the centrality of such factors as education and cultivation. These interlocking influences suggested both the capacity of the middle class to lead politically and its ability to participate in the broader realm of culture. Through the middle years of the century, such attainments were only available to the economically privileged middle and upper classes; accordingly, to indicate superior status one merely had to “have” an education or access to cultural objects. As subsidized education and cultural resources such as public libraries, museums and galleries became more widely accessible to the lower classes, however, less importance was placed on one’s access to education or culture. In its place, the ability to demonstrate “cultivation” through the exercise of taste became an increasingly important indicator of one’s perceived ability to lead.

30 Ideas that “talent” and “education” were crucial to the democratic process were central to middle-class arguments against extending the vote to the masses; see for example, Carlyle’s “Shooting Niagara” and Ruskin’s “Traffic.”

31 This idea was central to the cultural theory of Matthew Arnold, which showed how increased importance was placed on “culture” as democracy was extended. Arnold’s ideas are discussed in depth later in this chapter.
Both politically and culturally, Terry Eagleton points out, the positive notion of collective action associated with the intellectual tradition of Idealism exerted tremendous ideological influence throughout the nineteenth century, enabling the consolidation of middle-class power (3). Within the context described in different ways by Hayes and Eagleton, high culture played a pivotal role. Not only did it help define a "universal" aesthetic sphere autonomous from social, political, and economic interests, it also legitimized the political and social power of the middle classes by reinforcing the idea that "cultivated" members of society had a duty to lead and improve others. Because of these associations, the notion of high culture helped underwrite the middle class's rise to political and social power and, simultaneously, naturalized its claims to lead by identifying its values with "universal" standards of taste.

With the growth of middle-class political power, demonstrated conversance with the objects of high culture therefore became an increasingly important indicator both of one's place within the social hierarchy and of one's freedom from "vulgar" economic values. Traditionally associated with the tastes of the aristocracy, the ability to judge high culture began to function as a signifier of "classlessness"—as Jon Klancher suggests in his study of early nineteenth-century reading audiences (51). Klancher's very perceptive analysis of the shift from coterie audiences
to mass reading publics suggests how the emerging mass publishing industry both created and nurtured the broad desire to transcend class association in periodicals of general culture in order to capture new, and lucrative, audiences of middle-class readers. In his chapter on the middle class, for example, Klancher considers how such periodicals of general culture as Blackwood's and Fraser's identified familiarity with "culture" as an indicator of "classlessness."

Klancher's insights may be usefully extended beyond the scope of Romantic periodicals; in fact, I would suggest that both the distinctly middle-class desire to transcend class and the cultural dynamic this desire set in motion were also central to the philosophical discourse of Idealism, which figured prominently in the periodicals mentioned above, and through this discourse to broad Victorian concerns about culture and cultivation. Generally, the idea that one could transcend class association by demonstrating conversance with culture helped create a distinct position for the middle class, distinguishing it both from an aristocracy whose social power was determined by birth and from a lower class which generally lacked the economic ability to acquire "cultivation." By contrast with aristocratic privilege, "cultivation" required that people distinguish themselves actively and on an individual basis; it therefore opened up the prospect that anyone with talent could rise socially by transcending his or her class through cultural attainments.
Even as it offered the radical possibility of advancement, however, the Idealist notion of culture also helped reinforce the barrier between middle and lower classes since "cultivation" was generally accessible only to those with the economic power to acquire it. In contradistinction to the upper and lower classes--who were firmly entrenched as classes--the middle class therefore adopted an ideal of "classlessness" which placed it as a privileged group outside of the existing hierarchy.

In the case of the middle class in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, I would suggest, the relationship between culture and perceived classlessness exerted a powerful influence. Not only did it help reinforce existing vertical divisions--effectively curtailing the more radical effects of democratization--it also helped draw important horizontal distinctions within the middle class. This group, which was extremely heterogeneous both in its socio-economic composition and in its interests, included a range of constituents: from an upper-middle class sustained by investments, to independent shopkeepers, professionals and lower-middle class clerks. Socially differentiated by its way of earning money or amassing wealth, this group as a whole was still plagued by stereotypes that generally associated it with materialism and vulgarity. Culture and cultivation offered a way to escape such associations, effectively placing concerns about money aside altogether in favour of a focus on "higher"
matters. In the theatrical profession, it is significant that most critics active in the years between 1870 and 1914 came from within the middle class, and most were trained for positions in business or the civil service.\textsuperscript{32} For this group, then, enthusiasm for the drama translated to an activity through which one escaped an explicitly classed position.\textsuperscript{33}

If the Idealist notion of a distinct high cultural sphere helped create a unique position for the middle class, it also relativized existing cultural distinctions. Where the traditional distinction between "high" and "low" culture was reproduced in the social split between types of cultural consumers, the rise of a distinct middle-class cultural audience which defined itself by imaginatively transcending class meant that the existing cultural model was inadequate to describe the emerging one. As a result of this shift, judgments about class and culture became increasingly difficult to make. Although the notion that the upper classes were inherently fit to rule in matters of politics and taste was revised to reflect the need to demonstrate aptitude in cultural matters, how one demonstrated

\textsuperscript{32} Nearly all the major critics and reviewers—including Archer, Clement Scott, and A.B. Walkley, among others—came from the affluent middle class and were originally trained for careers in commerce or the civil service.

\textsuperscript{33} Perceptions about the "classless" position of the critic extend the earlier political and critical focus on "disinterest" as a prerequisite for good judgement. For a useful discussion of "disinterest" see Poovey (40).
"aptitude" could vary—including anything from educated
critical expertise to patterns of cultural consumption. As
a result of this adjustment between old and emergent models
of culture, the notion of "cultivation" that subsequently
developed was a flexible and somewhat ephemeral designation
that could signify a range of meanings, from "socially
respectable" to "authoritative in cultural matters."
Subsequently, the designation of high culture was thrown
open to interpretation in light of one's understanding of
whom, exactly, the "cultivated" classes were.

In the case of drama criticism, the impact of the
emerging schism within the affluent classes was pronounced,
the theatre having long been identified as an institution in
which an idealized collective culture could work to produce
a positive effect on society as a whole and in which
existing social distinctions were firmly (and symbolically)
entrenched. Through the middle years of the century, the
idea of the theatre as a disinterested cultural sphere and
potential source of social unity had continuously gained
ground; however, this idea was not easily reconciled with
the parallel growth of elitism fostered by the rise of a
genteel theatre from the 1860s onwards. The theoretical
problems raised by the conflict between an idealized
autonomous cultural sphere and an actual theatrical system
that emphasized social prestige were reflected in critics’
protests about audiences, but no change occurred until 1879.
In this year, Matthew Arnold published a highly influential
critical piece that described the theatre as a unifying influence and powerfully proposed the middle class as an appropriate source of cultural leadership.

For Arnold, the solution to the "problem" of the contemporary British drama and its audiences was a state-sponsored national theatre that could disseminate an authoritative high culture, unify existing social audiences, and stimulate the production of serious contemporary plays. In its theoretical focus, Arnold's piece redefined the traditional idea of high culture as the province of the upper class, substituting instead a more democratic vision. Significantly, Arnold preserved the idea of culture as a "universal" sphere but he linked the ability to recognize this quality to a British national identity embodied by the middle class—whose influence, he argued was necessary for more general social progress.34 Arnold's contribution to discourse about the drama was highly influential, shaping the arguments of such advocates of a "serious" drama as Henry Arthur Jones and William Archer. Among this group Arnold's cultural theory did not immediately raise the kinds of conflict his more general writing about culture, politics and religion did—in large part because these thinkers were already inclined to embrace the Idealist notion that cultural matters ought to be central to national life.

34 Here, as elsewhere, Arnold's idealization of democracy did not take the radical step of including society as a whole in the decision-making process.
While Arnold's argument exerted a powerful influence over subsequent thinking and writing about the drama, however, attempts to realize a "serious" contemporary British drama and an authoritative high cultural theatre based on his thinking were complicated both by the emerging rift within the middle class and by the struggle to define high culture that it produced.

**British Drama and Cultural Theory: Matthew Arnold and the Idealist Context**

For critics concerned about the state of British drama and the negative effects of fashionable theatre audiences on high culture, 1879 was a landmark year. Both issues came to the forefront of public attention with the visit of the Comédie Française to London, an event that prompted a wave of media attention and a slew of critical pieces denouncing British audiences. While in England, the acclaimed French theatre company performed a selection of plays at the Gaiety Theatre before capacity audiences of London's most glittering society. At the time the most accomplished ensemble in Europe and guardian of France's theatrical tradition, the Comédie Française had long been a practical reminder to British critics of the possibilities for a national drama performed to advantage by a highly trained company of actors that included, among others, Sarah Bernhardt. To the dismay of many London reviewers, however, the audiences that crowded to see the London performances of
the Comédie Française seemed less interested in the plays than the glamour of celebrity that surrounded the actors. Writing disdainfully of the spectacle of London society "exhibiting itself to the Théâtre Française," Henry James bemoaned the triumph of Bernhardt's "advertising genius" over the claims of art (Scenic Art 127, 129). James was not alone in his assessment of London audiences and many critics took this episode as yet another indication that society audiences drawn from the middle and upper classes were a threat to high culture, noting these audience's enthusiasm for "foreign" culture in addition to the economic and social focus of their cultural consumption.

In the context of the critical storm against London's fashionable theatre audiences, there was one notable dissenting voice. Matthew Arnold, by this time England's most influential spokesman for high culture as a way to promote social unity, took up the problem of the British drama. Much of Arnold's previous social criticism had focused on such institutions as politics, education and religion, and he had no background as a drama or theatre critic. By the 1870s, however, Arnold was revisiting many of the concerns of Culture and Anarchy--particularly the role of the middle class as social and cultural leaders--and this contemporary dispute about the drama offered him an ideal opportunity to develop his theory. While much of Arnold's writing at this time focused on the middle class in
a political context,35 "The French Play in London" took up the issue from a cultural perspective. In spite of the apparent differences between social and cultural issues, Arnold saw the theatre as a form whose influence paralleled and supported existing state-identified institutions. In fact, much of his cultural project aimed to bring together cultural and social concerns. Arnold therefore took the opportunity provided by the French troupe's visit to examine the social and cultural benefits offered by a strong contemporary British drama and to advocate for a state-sponsored national theatre. In doing so, he not only linked his longstanding interest in the relationship between high culture, social improvement and national identity to an issue that was highly topical, he also offered a positive analysis of the middle class as patrons.

Arnold published his piece in the Nineteenth Century, a publication whose position as a journal of general culture not only lent prestige to debate about the current state of British drama, but also brought the issues it raised before a wide audience of "serious" middle-class readers who had previously regarded the contemporary theatre as a subject unworthy of attention.36 Arnold chose to regard the

35 "Democracy" took up this focus; see Murray (288-290). My brief comments on Arnold's interests in the late 1870s are generally indebted to Murray's A Life of Matthew Arnold.
36 Prior to the appearance of Arnold's article in the Nineteenth Century, debate about the drama had largely been limited to specialized trade journals and newspapers. After 1879, however, drama critics were able to build on the
public's response to the visit of the Comédie Française as a hopeful sign: "I am not going to join the cynics, and to find fault with the *engouement*, the infatuation, shown by the English public in its passion for the French plays and players. A passion of this kind may be salutary if we will learn the lessons for us with which it is charged" (229). The "lesson," from Arnold's perspective, was that British audiences were ready to embrace a significant national drama. Arnold's plan for reforming the British drama took the French troupe as its pattern, and his major recommendation was that the State--"the nation in its collective and corporate character"--establish a national theatre and acting school dedicated to nurturing, producing and venerating the British drama (243). By doing so, Arnold argued, "you will restore the English theatre, and then a modern drama of your own will also, probably, spring up amongst you" (243).

Neither Arnold's diagnosis of the state of British drama nor his plan to reform it were wholly revolutionary in 1879: the idea of a national theatre had, in fact, been advanced much earlier by philanthropist Effingham Wilson (1848). In the timing of his prognosis, however, Arnold struck a responsive chord and the article had the immediate consequence of offering a different--positive--perspective.

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37 Wilson's early attempt to establish a national theatre is discussed in Kruger (87-9).
to critics whose hopes for the revival of the British drama had all but vanished with the death of Tom Robertson. His approach would subsequently exert considerable influence in debates about the drama; while never carried out in the terms he envisioned, Arnold's plan to reform the theatre set the tone and focused the issues central to discussions and debates about the British theatre over the succeeding thirty years.

The Social Role of Culture: Arnold's Idealist Roots

In its general contours "The French Play in London" outlined the cultural benefits to be derived from a national theatre and appealed to the tradition of viewing the drama as a distinctly "British" art associated with the genius of Shakespeare. Arnold began by assessing the relative historic merits of French and British drama, comparing Shakespeare's legacy with that of Molière, Corneille and Racine. Generally Arnold found Shakespeare's legacy to be superior, but he deplored the influence of British audiences, and linked the decline of the theatre to the "great middle class of this nation" which entered "the prison of Puritanism, and had the key turned upon its spirit there for two hundred years" (239). Arnold's stated concern was the return of this audience to the theatre and its subsequent implications for the British drama; behind this explicit interest, however, his article explored the reciprocal relationship between cultural tastes and social
conditions that had led to the decline of the drama as a high cultural form in England.

From Arnold's perspective, the strength of the British theatre—which he unproblematically equated with the work of Shakespeare—had traditionally been rooted in its ability to evoke universal cultural values. Unlike the French drama, which produced plays that expressed the views of "the average sensual man, whose country is France, and whose city is Paris, and whose ideal life is the free, gay, pleasurable life of Paris," British theatre of the Elizabethan period "had its cause in an ardent zest for life and living, a bold and large curiosity, a desire for a fuller, richer existence" (238-9). Because it embraced this focus, Arnold argued, the French drama was "natural enough in the life of Paris" but not a true national drama (239). In England, by comparison, there was a strong tradition but "no modern drama at all," a state of affairs which Arnold attributed to the conditions of modern British life: "Our vast society is not homogeneous enough, not sufficiently united, even any large portion of it, in a common view of life, a common ideal, capable of serving as basis for a modern English drama" (238). In making this diagnosis, Arnold evoked the ideas about class that he had explored extensively in *Culture and Anarchy* and applied them to the drama, which he saw as a microcosm of society as a whole. For Arnold, social fragmentation was the result of class differences which entrenched competing self-interests among different
groups. In the case of the drama, he suggested, the effects of class difference had ultimately curtailed the vibrant, authentic, and genuinely popular culture expressed in Shakespeare's works in favour of a degraded mass culture. In spite of his negative assessment of the drama as an expression of British character, however, Arnold's analysis of its contemporary possibilities was positive. The answer to the current impasse, according to Arnold, was to enable audiences of all classes reconnect to a universal high culture by supporting a national theatre that could help them discover a "common view of life."

Insofar as he highlighted the social need for a national high culture that fostered social unity, Arnold's vision of the drama was rooted in the intellectual tradition of Idealism. Arnold's views of the State as "best self" were influenced by such works as Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*--a work whose explicit purpose was to address problems caused in modern society by the "rigorous separation of ranks and occupations" which severed "the inner being of human nature" (33). Like Schiller--who insisted that if "man is ever to solve the problem of politics in practice he will have to approach it through the problem of the aesthetic" (9)--Arnold argued that culture had a definitive political and social role to play in redressing the fragmented character of modern life. Similarly, Arnold's thinking embraced the Schillerian maxim that culture "unites society, because it relates to that
which is common to all" (215). Even as he accepted many key concepts from Idealism, however, Arnold also extended this tradition to address a distinctly late nineteenth-century context shaped by concerns about the interaction between classes—a concern that emerged clearly in *Culture and Anarchy*, and was reformulated in a more practical context in "The French Play in London." Specifically, Arnold retailed Idealist thought (which saw culture as a way to preserve a traditional aristocratic hierarchy) for the middle class by making explicit the democratic implications of a universal cultural sphere. This process of redefinition allowed him to make use of a traditional cultural vocabulary to outline a project in which the middle class were central to the institution of an ideally popular high culture.

**High Culture and the Middle Classes: The Implications of Arnold's Idealism**

Arnold's analysis of theatre audiences in "The French Play in London" focused on the impact of the middle classes on the British theatre. Noting changes he himself had observed in the British theatre over the past twenty years, Arnold suggested that "an increased liking in the upper class and in the working class for the theatre" was "not enough to account for the change" (240). Rather, for Arnold the contemporary "attraction of the theatre" was the result of a revived interest in high culture among the middle classes.
This shift was central, he argued, because it indicated that a definitive turning point had come. "We have in England everything to make us dissatisfied with the chaotic and ineffective condition into which our theatre has fallen," he declared. "We have the remembrance of better things in the past, and the elements for better things in the future" (242). However, audiences' interests in the theatre were not enough to bring about a second Shakespearian era. For that, he suggested, the better classes of audience would have to be prepared by the state to take up a position of leadership. To begin this process of education, the state needed to sponsor a national theatre that could unify and elevate existing elements of the industry since, from Arnold's perspective, the problem with the contemporary drama was not the lack of dramas or of actors but rather the lack of "organisation" that had resulted from fears about the "mischief of State interference" (242). Could this individualistic prejudice against intervention be addressed, he argued, the State could begin to act on behalf of the "best self." The result of such an intervention, from Arnold's perspective, would be a revived contemporary national drama that spoke to the interests of the nation as a whole.

In many respects Arnold's argument about the controversy raised by the visit of the Comédie Française rearticulated and extended the broad concerns developed in his great polemic *Culture and Anarchy*, which was published
in collected form in 1869. In its basic contours "The French Play in London," like Culture and Anarchy, responded to the generally pessimistic attitudes of modern critics by advocating on behalf of the crucial work that high culture performed. In Culture and Anarchy Arnold attempted to refute contemporary arguments that dismissed culture as "simple pedantry" devoid of social purpose (55) by outlining a broad project for reforming British society through the ministrations of high culture--which he defined as "a study of perfection" linked to "the moral and social passion for doing good" (59). The social emphasis of this work was strongly reflected in its title, which emphasized that "culture" was a force that promoted the collective best interest and so was opposed to the fragmentary conditions of "anarchy." Throughout this work, Arnold defined culture as "perfection," emphasizing the sense of wholeness and harmony it embodied. Unlike the anarchic effects of individualism--or "doing as one likes"--Arnold argued that "culture" unified society into a collective identity, the "State," which may shape "individual wills in the name of an interest wider than that of individuals" (83). Culture, in these terms, allowed individuals to transcend their class, "mak[ing] their distinguishing characteristic not their Barbarianism or their Philistinism, but their humanity" (110).

Arnold's predisposition to see culture as a force that transcended individual bias and addressed society's
collective best interest lent shape to his foray into popular controversy about the drama in 1879. As a form of cultural expression, the drama was historically celebrated as an explicitly social art and in this regard it was theoretically well suited to act as an instrument for the dissemination of a universal high culture that "seeks to do away with the classes" (Culture and Anarchy 79)—although Arnold ignored the practical problem posed by the traditionally classed organization of seating that still predominated in the London theatres. In many respects, then, Arnold's interest in the drama mirrored the earlier recognition by the German Idealists that the theatre could exert a positive unifying influence over society. As Loren Kruger points out, Schiller—himself a highly respected dramatist—had argued that a national theatre would foster a sense of social harmony by providing disparate people with a common experience (85-6). Similarly, in "The French Play in London" Arnold identified the theatre as an important cultural form because it was "an influence so important to national life and manners" that it could—if superintended by the state—foster the highest tendencies among audiences, elevate the nation as a whole, and so overcome class bias and antagonism (243).

In taking up the cause of the drama as a way to heal rifts between the classes, Arnold extended many of the basic concerns of Culture and Anarchy. Most notably, he emphasized the role that the middle class should play in
fostering a legitimate high culture. Describing his own experience as a playgoer in a provincial town, Arnold suggested that the heterogeneous character of theatre audiences was symptomatic of attitudes towards art which compromised the ability to sustain important high cultural forms:

Scattered at very distant intervals through the boxes were some half-dozen chance-comers like myself; there were some soldiers and their friends in the pit, and a good many riff-raff in the upper gallery. The real townspeople, the people who carried forward the business and life of Shrewsbury, and who filled its churches and chapels on Sundays, were entirely absent.

(239)

For Arnold, this "scene of desolation" not only indicated "the complete estrangement of the British middle class from the theatre," it was also a sign of artistic decline that resulted when heterogeneous tastes—rather than the sensibilities of the "real townspeople"—were allowed to shape the market for artistic forms (239). By aligning this idealized group of potential viewers with the interests of culture, Arnold effectively lent them authority as exemplars of a universal culture. At the same time, Arnold's plea for an endowed national theatre was conceived to combat this state of affairs by releasing the drama from economic dependence on the box-office and providing an authoritative
forum for defining and disseminating legitimate high
culture.

In support of this position, Arnold noted the growing
enthusiasm for the theatre among the middle class, whose
interest he viewed as recognition that the "human spirit has
a vital need, as we say, for conduct and religion" as well
as for "expansion, for intellect and knowledge, for beauty,
for social life and manners" (240). In making this
assessment, I would contend, he explicitly aligned the
interests of the middle class with a British corporate
identity manifest in the state, a rhetorical strategy that
positioned the middle class as a unified source of
collective identity and authority and emphasized its status
as a representative group that could establish a pattern of
cultural consumption for the nation as a whole. "When your
institute in the west of London has become a success,"
Arnold argued, "plant a second of like kind in the east.
The people will have the theatre; then make it a good one"
(243).

Arnold's tendency to privilege middle class norms by
equating them with the interests of an ideal, universal high
culture had the effect—as Loren Kruger suggests in her
analysis of the interclass relations mapped in "The French
Play London"—of naturalizing this class's claims to
authority (94). It is significant, in this regard, that in
his description of the needs of the "human spirit" generally
Arnold identified the middle class as a representative
population that could help the British people as a whole to recognize their "common humanity" and so transcend the limitations of self interest linked both to individualism and to class identity. Kruger's argument emphasizes that this apparently "universal" focus theoretically included all of the classes in an idealized cultural sphere, but effectively excluded them on a practical level since, by legitimating a certain kind of representation as "fine art" and rejecting others as "mere entertainment," "amateurism," or simple vulgarity, he excludes the working class even as he hopes to persuade them that all, irrespective of class divisions, are capable of appreciating beauty transcending such divisions and thus, in accepting this consolation in culture, may reconcile themselves to social, political, and economic discrimination. (94)

Kruger's argument, that to participate in "culture" in the terms described in "The French Play in London" meant that one had to accept middle-class norms, emphasizes the ways that Arnold's scheme for promoting unity between the classes foreclosed on alternative perspectives, particularly among lower classes audiences. While Kruger makes an excellent and valuable point, however, her analysis does not take up the corollary question of how Arnold's characterization of the relations between classes is grounded in a problematic vision of the middle class as a homogeneous group.
In the abstract, Arnold's Idealist vision of the middle class is crucial both to his broad vision of cultural and to his scheme for a national theatre. In practice, however, Arnold's idea that the middle class shared homogeneous tastes, attitudes and values was complicated by the existence of conflicting factions within this group. Although he claimed to speak on behalf of the "mass of the British middle class," Arnold in fact conflated such diverse groups as fashionable "Society" audiences, the respectable bourgeois business classes, and even the "intellectual" readers of such journals of general culture as the *Nineteenth Century*. While subsequent critics would embrace Arnold's ideas about culture and the middle classes, then, their appraisals of who, exactly, constituted this group were open to widely varying interpretations. This problem with audience was further complicated by Arnold's vision of a national theatre, which—like his vision of audience—remained largely abstract and so posed problems for theatre practitioners who attempted to institute schemes influenced by "The French Play in London."

**Audience and Authoritative Culture: Arnold's Plan for a National Theatre**

In the concluding paragraphs of "The French Play in London" Arnold sketched out a vision of a national theatre that could bring members of all classes together through a common concern for high culture. Beginning with the notion that a
state-sponsored theatre could be a force of significant importance in shaping "national life and manners" (243), Arnold envisioned a movement spreading out from London's existing theatre district to outposts across the country. In addition to theatres within London he suggested, "Let your two or three chief provincial towns institute, with municipal subsidy and co-operation, theatres such as you institute in the metropolis with State subsidy and co-operation" (243). Arnold's vision of a movement beginning in the metropolis assumed that if a national theatre were established in London, the effects of the movement would radiate outward. Such thinking equated London with the more cultured elements in society, both identifying it as exemplary of a national identity and placing it as an example for the nation as a whole to follow. This approach, which treated London as if it were "England" as a whole, paralleled his similar assumption that Shakespeare represented "British drama" and that the idealized middle class was synonymous with a "national" audience. All equations treated parts as if they stood for an idealized whole and also held them up as privileged examples that ought to be followed.

Arnold's use of synecdoche in mapping the relationship between leadership, society and culture represented a significant departure from the traditional metaphor of society as a body in which each part fulfilled a function—
with the aristocracy as "head." In effect, Arnold's substitution of the middle class added a populist dimension to the traditional argument, substituting a constantly changing democratic "authority" for one fixed by birth, with a corresponding change in the organizing metaphor. In this respect, while Arnold's proposed national theatre carried forward received ideas about the theatre it also redefined the existing model of high culture shaped by a social elite, adapting it for a middle-class audience committed to the idea of an authority designated by a popular democratic process to define taste from above. Arnold's assertion that since "the people will have the theatre" the state should endeavor to "make it a good one" was critical in this regard because it merged the impulse to impose a vision of culture from above with the corresponding tendency to idealize popular support for this enterprise from below.

While he conflated an authoritative state culture with popular sanction from below in "The French Play in London," Arnold did not address the problem an existing popular theatre represented for the proposed national theatre. Simply institute such a theatre, Arnold seemed to suggest, and the people would patronize it. However, what Arnold did not envision was that in instituting a government sponsored, middle-class institution based on a traditionally upper-class model of culture, difficulties would arise. Most

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38 This metaphor is central to Hill's discussion of the masses as a "many-headed monster" (chapter 8).
centrally, Arnold's unproblematically democratic, "classless" cultural sphere failed to adequately account for the problem of competition--both as an explicit economic factor and as an implicit influence over the definition of what constituted legitimate culture in a context governed by popular consensus. Because Arnold's theory was constructed around a fixed idea of high culture which he imagined corresponded to the interests of a popular audience, his argument was very straightforward. From a practical perspective, however, not only would a British national theatre have to attract audiences conditioned by an existing entertainment industry, it would also have to mediate competing visions of high culture. What these practical problems posed by a popular mandate meant, finally, was that the idea of a government-sanctioned high culture would have to be redefined to reflect the opinion of the majority.

The idea that the state had merely to step in and sponsor a national theatre in order to elevate the British drama to its previous level of development seemed to suggest that once audiences had access to a "good" theatre they would no longer be drawn to "bad" works. In reality, however, Arnold's proposed British national theatre--like the Comédie Française on which it was modeled--had to compete for audiences by providing a form of entertainment that owed as much to principles of mass culture as to traditional high culture. Arnold effectively avoided such concerns when he sketched out a set of working principles
for the proposed national theatre, glossing over the conflict between his ideal and the actual exigencies of production:

Form a company out of the materials ready to your hand in your many good actors or actors of promise. Give them Drury Lane Theatre. Let them have a grant from your Science and Art Department; let some intelligent and accomplished man . . . be joined to them as Commissioner from the Department, to see that the conditions of the grant are observed. (243)

The swift movement in this passage from forming a company to finding a commissioner to oversee the project de-emphasized not only the material difficulties of such an endeavor but also the ideological struggles it would set in motion. In his discussion of a repertory for the proposed national theatre, however, the problems associated with actually achieving popular consensus were foreshadowed.

The question of what plays the national theatre ought to endorse was central to the project as a whole, since the drama was the cultural substance that the theatre was designed to showcase. In this phase of his plan, Arnold’s tendency to discuss Shakespeare as if he represented the British drama as a whole created difficulties. Arnold suggested that plays "taken out of the works of Shakespeare and out of the volumes of the Modern British Drama" be mounted each season (243). While Shakespeare was an obvious candidate because he combined high cultural prestige with
popular acclaim and a focus on a distinct British identity, however, modern works were more difficult to prescribe. Not only was there little consensus about which modern works were significant, but, because production in the theatre would lend immediate cultural value to any newer works staged, it was imperative that works be chosen which expressed a distinct British national identity. Significantly, Arnold did not designate any playwrights other than Shakespeare, sidestepping questions about new works by suggesting that the company "use its discretion" (243). By refusing to delve into the practical aspects of selecting a tradition, I would suggest, Arnold maintained a visionary tone; however, by leaving open the problem of how to define a serious modern British drama, he also evaded the practical difficulties posed by an institution governed by specialists but designed for popular audiences accustomed to existing forms of entertainment.

Because he maintained a visionary tone throughout the article, Arnold did not need to engage with the practical questions raised by state-funding, the need to find audiences for high culture, or the project of selecting a repertory. Nonetheless, these problems were already apparent in the model of a national theatre sketched out in "The French Play in London." For subsequent critics, these concerns would become the loci of significant debate which culminated in the publication of a concrete proposal for a National Theatre in 1907. Most centrally, Arnold's decision
to identify the middle class as the proper group to
determine cultural value implicitly validated the notion
that consensus was an appropriate index of worth. This
development had a significant impact on later attempts to
define a high cultural drama. Arnold himself assumed a
fixed standard of high culture grounded in a tradition where
aristocratic tastes prevailed when he envisioned a
revitalized British drama. For critics and dramatists
attempting to inaugurate this change, however, the overlap
between high and mass forms posed a major difficulty which
was amplified by the Arnoldian belief that the middle class
should function as the collective guardians of culture.
These problems might not have been visible had the middle
class been as homogeneous as Arnold's characterization
assumed. However, in England internal struggles within the
very heterogeneous middle class led to conflict about
cultural categorization linked to audience, genre, and--
ultimately--the project of a national theatre.

Conclusion: Drama Criticism and Arnold's Legacy
As a response to the widespread critical tendency to lay
blame for the state of the drama at the feet of the middle
classes, Arnold's endorsement of the theatre as a potential
site of cultural reform was highly influential, particularly
insofar as subsequent critics adopted his vocabulary and
terms of reference. In the years between 1879 and 1914,
critics appealed to different visions of class-identified
audiences with increased intensity, placing particular emphasis on the problem of how to realize the ideal of a unified audience of the British "people" which was at once representative of broad qualities of character and of focused middle class values. Even when they did not embrace his belief in the middle class as the great hope for cultural and social reform, commentators on the theatre adopted a similar focus on the relationship between class and cultural development.39

Arnold’s ideas may have been appealing to later nineteenth-century drama critics because they provided a broad cultural context for ideas about the drama that were already deeply entrenched. Assumptions about the drama as an index of a society’s development were commonplace by the 1880s—uniting the on-going work of more progressive critics such as William Archer with more obscure or occasional pieces on theatre and the drama.40 Similarly, the Idealist notion that the drama was valuable because it acted as a form of education was equally widespread. When Henry Arthur Jones outlined the relationship between drama and education in order to garner support for a national theatre in 1893,41 for example, he appealed to an existing current of thought.

39 See, for example, Quilter (554).
40 This assumption is central to much of Archer’s work. See, for example, the essays collected in About the Theatre. See also, Lytton’s “The Stage in Relation to Literature” (12), and Theodore Martin “The English Stage” (188).
41 See Renascence of the Drama (chapter 15).
As an outsider to the theatrical world, Arnold synthesized and lent authority to these kinds of ideas, connecting Idealism to the broader concerns of liberalism. However, such definitions as Arnold offered were deceptively simple, as later critics who tried to extend his discussion soon discovered. Chief among the many difficulties posed by an Arnoldian critical vocabulary were questions about "who" within the middle class epitomized "the British people" that would form the basis for a unified national audience. This question was mooted in many different contexts, from discussions about classes of theatrical consumers, to quarrels about the proper understanding of "popular" consensus in determining cultural value. Ironically, Arnold's vision of a unified culture was ultimately used to pit preferred audiences within the middle class against competing factions.

In the years following the publication of "The French Play in London" the idea of a redemptive high culture was mobilized by a range of groups within the middle class for a range of purposes in support of a variety of views of art, from highly "moral" agendas to more purely formal or aesthetic concerns. Far from conclusively establishing the claims of an exclusive group, however, Arnold's idea of collective culture--like the mass culture it was evoked to oppose--generated more anxieties about the process of classification then it answered. In large part this occurred because high culture itself functioned as a
designation that conferred status and, as a result, was valuable to anyone producing art or entertainment. Subsequently, as high cultural associations were used to market works, concerns about audiences' abilities to distinguish "authentic" and "inauthentic" cultural forms became more pronounced.
Chapter Two
The Appeal of an Elite: Theatrical Organization, 1880-1914

In 1879 Matthew Arnold called for a "common ideal capable of serving as a basis for a modern English drama" and vested his hopes for cultural unity in the leadership of the middle classes ("French Play" 238). Circumstances were auspicious for such a change in the three decades that followed as Arnold's target audience steadily grew larger and the movement to promote a "serious" British drama flowered into the self-proclaimed "renascence" of the 1890s. While the middle classes exercised a dominant influence over the theatre in the years between 1880 and 1914, however, no true "common ideal" emerged. On the contrary, British drama of this period was extremely heterogeneous. Genteel melodrama, spectacle, and adaptations of French farce continued to be the dominant forms of popular drama, while Shakespeare remained the most important British dramatist. Over these years there were also significant new developments in both popular and high cultural forms of drama. By the end of the nineteenth century the popular musical comedy had become a major subgenre while the New Drama, a self-consciously "serious" form of theatre influenced by continental realism,

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1 Baldick makes a complementary point about the instability of literary canons in the years between 1888 and 1918 (54).
had introduced a range of religious, intellectual and social
to the British stage.

I would contend that such heterogeneous offerings added
interest in--and growing contentiousness
about--the drama as a cultural form. As William Archer
noted in 1891, "We are talking, and perhaps even thinking,
about the drama with unexampled fervour and pertinacity"
("Free Stage" 663). Throughout this period, discussions
about the theatre began to move out of specialized trade
journals and newspapers and into such prestigious journals
of general culture as the Nineteenth Century, the
Fortnightly Review, the New Review and the Contemporary
Review as the state of British drama became an issue of
interest to a broader public. Drama critics such as Archer
applauded this change as a sign that the theatre was
becoming a subject worthy of serious attention, and saw in
it hope that the drama would become a cultural force rather
than a fashionable pastime. Yet with the growth of public
discussion about and interest in the drama came
agreements about the form it should take. Some critics
argued in favour of new influences such as continental
realism, others issued claims on behalf of more "wholesome"
genteel melodrama, while others still looked back to
Shakespeare and the Elizabethans for their ideal.
This chapter examines how the London theatres evolved in the years between 1880 and 1914 to address the perceived need for a more "serious" drama. Ironically, perhaps, in a period when consumers were becoming more democratic in their social outlooks, the most prominent feature of London's West End theatre was its appeal as an elite form of entertainment. Not only were West End plays attended by the fashionable, famous, and politically important leaders of society at this time, attendance also came to represent a subsidiary form of participation in this exclusive world for members of the lower-middle and lower classes. An effect of this elite association was that average people went to the theatre to feel as if they were part of a world whose gates were usually closed to them, while members of the fashionable upper classes went to affirm their position amongst themselves. Theatre managers of the period worked hard to create and foster these elite associations, drawing on and extending the kinds of strategies introduced by the Bancroft management at the Prince of Wales Theatre in the 1860s. In doing so, they were able to expand their audiences by attracting more members of the middle classes, many of whom enjoyed a period of prosperity and upward mobility through the last years of the nineteenth century.

The link between this process of expansion and the elite feelings it fostered was central to the development of
the West End theatres, which, ironically, invoked the cachet of high culture in order to attract mass audiences. Just as critics of the 1870s worried about the effects of fashionable audiences on the drama, later critics deplored both the effects of "Society" and "the intellectual." By the 1880s, however, the theatre's critics were faced with a situation in which the distinction between "high" and "mass" culture had become increasingly hard to draw. While drama critics were unanimous about the need for a "serious" contemporary drama, they differed radically in their views of what issues this drama should address and how it should be produced. Critics who supported a "serious" British drama argued that the actor-manager system--then the dominant form of theatrical organization--impeded the development of new works because it produced plays that appealed to the tastes of popular audiences. 2 By contrast, their more conservative counterparts claimed that the unprecedented financial rewards offered to successful dramatists by the actor-manager system supported the growth of a contemporary British drama. 3 Disputes about different kinds of plays therefore often placed significant emphasis on the types of theatres in which works were produced and

2 Debate prompted by the actor manager system is discussed in depth in chapter 4.
the types of managers that produced them—although, as I will suggest in the final section of this chapter, enterprising managers were quick to capitalize on the scandalous appeal of realism where possible, staging plays with self-consciously high-cultural appeal when audience demand warranted.

I. The Dominant Paradigm: West End Theatres, 1880-1914

For mainstream London theatres, the years between 1880 and 1914 represented a period of tremendous growth and unprecedented prosperity. Through the 1880s and 1890s there had been a boom in theatre building, and older theatres had been renovated and redesigned to accommodate growing audiences (Glasstone 98). Also in response to the growing wealth and size of audiences, forms and places of entertainment came to be increasingly targeted for specific populations—a trend that was supported by the parallel growth of music halls associated with both lower-class audiences and aristocratic libertines. Among existing West

3 See, for example, David Christie Murray.
4 Although the history of the music hall is an area of great interest, it is a topic outside the immediate scope of this thesis. Briefly, the rapid evolution of music halls from lower-class drinking establishments to a more heterogeneous form of variety entertainment—ranging from East End to large, luxurious "palaces" during the last third of the nineteenth century—are believed to be responsible for the diversion of "unsavoury" lower class and libertine audiences
End theatres, this development meant that managements could build on the existing enthusiasm for the theatre among the fashionable classes. Thus, while including and accommodating other segments of the theatre-going population, large theatres continued to adopt and universalize middle-class norms in matters of repertoire, production and design. Large mainstream theatres also placed increased emphasis on "moral" or "respectable" forms of entertainment that would appeal to the large middle class audiences who filled the stalls. Notable successes in the 1880s included sentimental, genteel melodramas such as Henry Arthur Jones's **The Silver King** (1882) and Arthur Wing Pinero's **Sweet Lavender** (1888), both of which enjoyed long runs and critical acclaim. In fact, no less a figure than Matthew Arnold praised **The Silver King** for conveying "sobriety and propriety" through its "diction and sentiments" (quoted in Archer *Old Drama* 282). The success of such plays at this time contributed to the growing sense of optimism about the theatre, and even those critics who had larger visions for the British stage recognized the merits of these works: both were by contemporary British dramatists and their success among popular audiences seemed

from the mainstream theatres. See Glasstone (45), Rowell (*Age* chapter 6) and Booth (*Victorian Age* 12-13); for an excellent historical account of working class culture and its relationship to the music hall see Stedman Jones,
to signal an important step towards a more culturally significant British drama.

The Middle Class in the Theatre, 1880-1914

As the British theatre flourished it also emerged as a solidly respectable institution fashioned to meet the needs of affluent and status-conscious audiences. With the growing acceptance of acting as a profession, members of the middle class began to pursue careers in the theatre without fear of losing caste. Even the Anglican Church, which traditionally objected to the theatre on moral grounds, began to speak out in support of certain kinds of drama. Such developments were indicators of how successful West End managements had been in attracting the "better" classes back to the theatres by packaging the drama as a respectable, cultivated form of entertainment. A significant step in this process was the trend towards staging self-consciously cultured plays that satisfied audiences' desires for entertainment even as they seemed to lend them the aura of cultivation. Beyond attracting and maintaining large


5 A major focus in Baker is the way that the acting profession adopted middle-class norms in order to consolidate a social position.

6 There was a vogue for Christian drama in the 1890s and 1900s--including works such as Barrett's The Sign of the
audiences, however, the widespread success of these theatres also helped to shape a new approach to the idea of high cultural legitimacy based on popular consensus. Whereas previous generations largely accepted the notion that the authority to determine "legitimate" forms came from society's upper echelons, by the late nineteenth century middle-class audiences were receptive to the suggestion that they could determine these matters for themselves. This perspective was reinforced in the theatre since upper middle-class social behaviours, values and attitudes were treated as the norm.

In the West-End theatres, managers who were eager to build and maintain followings among the middle class appealed to these audiences' growing sense of prestige and social power. Curtain rise was pushed back to accommodate the dinner hour and the evening's entertainment ended before the last trains to the suburbs. Normative codes of behaviour also became increasingly important at this time. In 1880, for example, talking, eating, and drinking during performances were still considered to be acceptable behaviours. By the first decade of the twentieth century,

Cross (1897) and Jerome's Passing of the Third Floor Back (1908), both of which were praised by the church. I have drawn on a number of sources for this overview of practices in the theatre, including Macqueen-Pope's memoirs and histories of specific theatres, Courtney's The Passing Hour, as well as Glasstone.
by contrast, loud or unruly behaviour was frowned upon and audiences were expected to behave—as Macqueen-Pope suggests in his memoir of the period—"with stately decorum and good manners" (8). Full evening dress was mandatory for patrons of the higher-priced stalls, boxes and dress-circle frequented by the middle and upper classes, and this convention helped foster the sense of exclusivity that theatres aimed to achieve.

On stage, producers favoured dramas that focused on middle or upper-class subjects. In addition to such lighthearted blockbusters as the 1897 adaptation of Anthony Hope's *The Prisoner of Zenda*—in which an upper middle-class Briton stands in for the king of a small European country during a time of crisis—playwrights such as Wilde, Shaw, James Barrie, John Galsworthy and Granville Barker all focused on the affluent classes in their plays. Even when evoked to satirical ends—as in the case of Shaw and Wilde—or to raise questions about accepted ways of life—as with Barrie, Galsworthy and Barker—this focus promoted the idea that the middle and upper classes ought to be the natural

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8 For a brief note on changing standards of audience behaviour in England see Booth's *Theatre in the Victorian Age* (12). Levine contains a fascinating and more in-depth discussion of parallel changes in America (195–200).
9 Although West End theatre patrons came from a range of classes, the increasingly high price of seats meant that only affluent middle and upper class spectators had the
focus of interest. For contemporary observer Mario Borsa, the "entire organization of the theatre reflect[ed] that special and aristocratic conception of its status which is the point of view of its patrons" (279). Borsa's phrasing highlighted the fact that while audiences were not always "aristocratic," their evolving sense of status was flattered by the theatre's upscale packaging, which was designed to make them feel like an elite. Borsa also insightfully noted the paradox implicit in this attitude towards the theatre, suggesting that the wealthier classes went "in calm expectation of a reception befitting the guests of a peer's drawing room, rather than the patrons of a place of public entertainment" (279).

Borsa's appraisal of the paradox implicit in fashionable audiences' perceptions of the theatre as a cultural institution is suggestive of the broad tension between exclusivity and inclusivity that managers had to negotiate in the years between 1880 and 1914 to support the growth of a mass entertainment industry. In many respects, I would argue, the identification of theatres with the norms of the upper-middle and upper classes contributed to their sense of social prestige. Yet, as Borsa's comment emphasized, the theatre's exclusivity was at least partially illusory. Although managers cultivated the feeling of an

resources to habitually attend expensive productions; see
exclusive private drawing room, their theatres were explicitly public spaces. One might find oneself in illustrious company in a West End London theatre—particularly on an opening night—but inclusion was secured by one's ability to pay (and dress) for seats that reflected a particular social station. The economic basis of this cultural exchange was further underscored by the general composition of audiences, which, despite the theatre's attempts to package itself for the "better" classes, remained socially heterogeneous and inclusive. This tension was particularly apparent to middle class viewers, who not only comprised the most heterogeneous and socially volatile consumer group but were also eager to define themselves as appropriate arbiters of taste by demonstrating their classlessness in relation to each other. While the theatres were still organized according to a traditional hierarchy that organized viewers vertically by ability to pay, then, emerging differences within the classes suggested the difficulties raised by an inclusive form of culture marketed for its apparent "exclusivity."

For the range of viewers who comprised middle-class audiences, I would suggest, the theatre's problematic exclusivity replicated their own anxieties about a social
position that was explicitly defined by such abstract concepts as "talent" and "worthiness." Such qualities, while seemingly classless, were implicitly sustained by the economic power that allowed audiences to demonstrate their cultivation by attending significant cultural events. In light of this anxiety, the West End theatre's self-conscious attempts to foster an "aristocratic" atmosphere for Society audiences evoked a conflicted response from the middle class, which was anxious to be counted among society's elite but, at the same time, had historically secured its identity by positioning itself against an upper class defined by wealth and birth rather than individual distinction. Managers of West End theatres catered to these dualistic impulses, offering audiences the benefits of luxury and social exclusivity as a background to plays that were self-consciously "cultivated" (and therefore, by extension, "classless"). The latter brand of cachet was intellectual, rather than material, and was generated both by formal criticism and word of mouth that emphasized a production's cultural profile when discussing such factors as acting, staging and design. Audiences therefore enjoyed the benefits of aristocratic luxury while being given the message that their own interests differed significantly from those of a "superficial" aristocracy. The result, finally,

10 Rowell makes a related point about the composition of
was that the self-consciously cultivated West End theatres worked to accommodate the conflicting impulses central to middle-class identity, housing the ideally classless sphere of culture in an explicitly classed context.

The Age of the Actor-Manager: Henry Irving and the Lyceum Theatre

In the years between 1880 and 1914 theatrical management became a form of financial speculation that could yield impressive fortunes. In 1871, Henry Irving became a star overnight when he appeared in The Bells—a success that subsequently enabled him to assume management of the Lyceum Theatre in 1878. Over the following twenty years, Irving would establish the definitive formula for successful West End theatre management, bringing together a combination of star performers, identifiable tone and style, lavish production value and expensively-appointed surroundings to create a new industry standard. His celebrated adaptation of Marlowe's Dr. Faustus, first staged in 1885, took five years to plan and cost over £15,000 to stage but earned more than £110,000 in its first two London seasons (Rowell Age 26). Most significantly, while Irving's productions were

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audiences in Victorian Theatre (104).

11 My account of Henry Irving's career at the Lyceum is indebted to Stoker's Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving
unabashed spectacle, his highly successful, elaborately staged productions of British plays by authors such as Shakespeare, Goldsmith, and Tennyson were credited with restoring the dignity of the stage; under his management, as William Archer pointed out in 1897, the Lyceum became widely recognized as England's unofficial "national" theatre ("Blight" 30-1). Through the 1880s, the Lyceum was an object of national pride and its success was widely noted as an indication that the prospects of the British theatre were improving. In 1895, Irving consolidated the new social position accorded to members of the theatrical profession when he became the first actor to be knighted.12

Irving's approach to theatrical management at the Lyceum built on many aspects of production and organization popularized by the Bancrofts in the 1860s. He emphasized the spectator's sense of importance and comfort in the layout and design of the theatre, and its sumptuous scarlet and gold appointments subsequently influenced the lavish decorating schemes dominant in Edwardian theatres.13 While

and to Laurence Irving's *Henry Irving: The Actor and His World.*

12 For an extensive discussion of the significance of Irving's knighthood see Baker's excellent study, which details the self-conscious struggle of nineteenth-century actors to professionalize their work and define a respectable place for themselves in society.

13 See Clarke (chapter one) for discussions of Edwardian excess in decorating. Macqueen Pope's histories/memoirs of
the Bancroft management at the Prince of Wales theatre fostered an atmosphere of exclusivity and intimacy by keeping seat prices high and numbers of patrons low, however, Irving's management at the Lyceum emphasized the grand, even monumental, character of the large theatrical space. Accordingly, where the Bancrofts' theatre had been small, intimate, and elitist, Irving's theatre redefined the notion of exclusivity as something that reflected a distinct--and comparatively broad--national culture. Because he included patrons from all classes, I would suggest, Irving emphasized the cultural--rather than class-based--exclusivity of the Lyceum, self-consciously defining his theatre as a place where "national" culture was disseminated. Although his repertoire included a wide variety of plays--including The Bells, which was a translation of a French play--Irving was recognized for consistently staging expensive, high-profile British works that were associated with the Elizabethan tradition. Such works, which included Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice and Marlowe's Dr. Faustus, became Irving's signature productions.

Irving's style influenced almost every contemporary management in London: even the Bancrofts relinquished their management at the Prince of Wales in 1880 in order to
relocate to the significantly larger Haymarket. Most significantly, Irving's success at the Lyceum paved the way for the new generation of actor managers who would dominate the London theatre scene through the first decade of the twentieth century; some of the most influential, including Herbert Beerbohm Tree and George Alexander, were trained in Irving's company before establishing managements of their own. This new wave of managers continued the trend towards grandiosity in matters of staging and reaped major social and economic rewards. In 1895, for example, Tree made his fortune on a single production of *Trilby*, the proceeds from which financed the construction of Her Majesty's Theatre—a grand venue that opened in 1897 and cost £60,000 to build (Glasstone 103). George Alexander's success at the St. James's Theatre was similarly influential; not only did it represent one of the most lengthy and successful actor-managements of the era, lasting from the late 1880s until the outbreak of World War One, it was also responsible for bringing such contemporary British plays as *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1893) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) before late nineteenth-century audiences.

Irving, Tree and Alexander all used similar tactics to consolidate audiences for significantly different forms and styles of drama. Irving, for example, focused on older background.
works by established British playwrights or more recent melodramas that allowed him to showcase his talent for playing highly emotional or mannered roles. Following Irving, Tree produced a number of spectacular—if critically unpopular—versions of Shakespeare's plays, while Alexander consolidated his reputation by mounting tastefully appointed and costumed contemporary social comedies or dramas. While different in repertoire or style, however, each of these managers succeeded with his audience because patrons of all social stations knew what they could expect when they spent an evening at his theatre. When these expectations were frustrated—as they famously were in 1895 when Alexander staged a disastrous production of Henry James's Guy Domville—patrons exercised their economic power by staying away until a new play appeared.14

Opposition to the Actor-Manager System

Although the rationalization of West End modes of theatrical production helped managements establish and maintain large audiences and large revenues, many critics, authors and playwrights protested against the rigid codes used to

14 When audiences failed to respond, Alexander swiftly withdrew Guy Domville in favour of a new play by Wilde—then at the height of popularity with London audiences. The Importance of Being Earnest was an immediate success and would most likely have enjoyed a long run had Wilde's trial not occurred.
determine a theatre's repertoire and standards of production. Sumptuous productions and theatres not only cost fortunes to design, build and maintain, they also represented significant financial risks for managers. In matters of staging and costuming in particular, audiences' expectations about quality and novelty meant that costs were continuously rising, and while a hit could secure a fortune, staggering losses were the more likely outcome if a play failed to attract a significant audience. George Rowell notes, for instance, that the first production of *Hamlet* in which Henry Irving appeared cost £100 to mount since stock scenery and costumes were used (*Age* 12); by contrast, his own production of the same play in 1878 cost £1,100 while by the mid-1880s the spectacularly successful production of *Faustus* mentioned above cost £15,400 to stage (26). With such major outlays required to mount grand West End productions, managers had to take calculated risks in the hope of achieving major box office success.

For its opponents, the actor manager system of production emphasized economic matters at the expense of all other considerations, particularly those related to the growth of the drama as an art. As Frederick Wedmore protested in 1880:

* A disproportionate outlay on scenic decoration and furniture for the performances of modern comedy--nay,
even on the playhouse itself—is at the root of the question. It began, no doubt, with genuinely artistic intentions, and has never been disassociated from good taste. But what was an adroit and justifiable bait to begin with ends by being hardly an attraction at all, and only a tyranny. Luxury has no limits. Its novelty ceases, but not the need it creates. (in Jackson 62).

In this passage, negatively charged words such as "bait" and "novelty," intimated how the growing economic concern to capture audiences had overshadowed "artistic intentions" in the theatre. Wedmore's major point, that "novelty" creates a "need" which is then "hardly an attraction" suggested the immediate consequence of systematizing production in the context of a mass culture where the desire for bigger, better, and newer attractions overcomes all other considerations. Wedmore acknowledged the tendency towards excess associated with this development when he pointed out that "[t]he blue china and the old English furniture that were the material setting of one comedy must be capped by the porcelain of Sèvres and the finest marqueterie of Louis Quinze as the setting of another" (63). For critics of the popular theatre, this mania for "realism" in detail threatened the art of the drama since it displaced the substance of the play in favour of pictorial effect. As Henry James's fictional playgoer "Dorriforth" suggested in a
dialogue about the theatre entitled "After the Play," the logical culmination of this trend would reduce the theatre to "a landscape without figures" in which the arts of acting and playwriting were overwhelmed by concerns with creating grand scenes (Scenic Art 233).

The overarching concern that standards and modes of staging had simply become part of commercial audiences' expectations of the theatrical experience was central to much critical discourse about West End theatres at this time, as was the parallel concern that the aims of a genuine "art" could not be served in such a context. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, drama critics of all tempers--from the arch conservative Clement Scott to the progressive William Archer--consistently bemoaned the fact that new plays by younger or unestablished playwrights were practically prohibited from the stage because of costs related to production. Thus, for instance, Scott regretted the fact that

in this great country, there is not one theatre in which artistic aims can be placed higher on the shelf than money-bags, and in which the manager, being guaranteed against a loss, can turn his attention to the higher development of the art which appeals to the whole world. (in R. Jackson Victorian Theatre 54)
Nearly all critical camps opposed this influence, which they associated with the actor-manager system's tendency to pander to the taste for amusement among fashionable audiences. As William Archer noted in his 1882 introduction to *English Dramatists of To-Day*:

A theatre supported mainly by people who have no taste or thought whatever, and partly by people who have taste and thought for everything except the drama, cannot be expected to take a serious hold of life. Pleasure, and that of the least elevating sort, is all that the public expects or will accept at even our best theatres. People talk of the theatre as an instrument of culture, but they take very good care that it shall be nothing of the sort. (9)

Unlike Jones, who contemporaneously equated audiences' tastes for amusement with their respective class positions, Archer viewed pleasure-seeking audiences as a single uncultivated group--some with "no taste or thought whatever" and some "who have taste and thought for everything except the drama." Like Jones, however, Archer emphasized the problems created by pleasure-seeking middle-class and Society audiences who paid lip service to the theatre "as an instrument of culture" but then failed to patronize serious plays. As a result of this influence, he argued, "the coming dramatist" could not hope for a decent reception in
the London theatres, since he would want to address intellectual, moral or political "problems" which were deemed unpopular. "Were he to make his appearance to- morrow," Archer submitted, "[the coming dramatist] would find no public to applaud him, no critics to appreciate him, and consequently no manager to put his pieces on the stage" (16). This kind of appraisal was voiced repeatedly through the end of the nineteenth century. In 1894, for instance, popular novelist and playwright Hall Caine lamented the fact that the theatre was enslaved both to "the upholsterer and the milliner," suggesting that even Shakespeare would find the contemporary stage closed to discussions of "the great questions of life" (133). Not all of Archer's fellow critics agreed that audiences' desires for "pleasure" in the theatre were necessarily undesirable; however, most concurred that some pleasures--particularly those associated with Society tastes in plays and productions--should be discouraged.

As the most outspoken exponent of the need for a "serious" British drama, Archer opposed the limitations enforced by the existing actor-manager system of production and, by implication, the identification of West End excess as a central component of British culture; however, as a drama critic familiar with the existing state of the theatre, he also recognized that to succeed in broadening
audiences' ideas about culture a contemporary play would first have to overcome the existing attitudes towards the theatre. "A frivolous public calls for frivolous plays," he claimed, "and frivolous plays breed a frivolous public" (17). To break this cycle, Archer advocated a scheme of progressive education to be supported, in Arnoldian fashion, by more advanced theatre enthusiasts who could gradually influence general audiences by providing them with a positive example. For Archer, drama critics were central to such a scheme, since they could "labour to improve the conditions, material and intellectual, under which 'the coming dramatist' will have to work" (16). Archer also saw the possible realization of this goal in the "great Perhaps" of an endowed theatre "raised above the necessity of being always and immediately a remunerative speculation" (17).

While Archer himself saw the critic as a central instrument of change, however, it was his notion of an endowed theatre that proved to be most influential in the evolution of the British Theatre. In fact, as interest in alternatives to the existing theatrical context grew in the last years of the 1880s, Archer's "great Perhaps" seemed imminent as other alternatives for expressing a distinct British culture in the theatre emerged.
II. New Alternatives: Independent Theatre Societies and "Artistic" Theatres

Opposition to the actor-manager system of production grew through the 1880s and as large theatres became increasingly prosperous, concerns about the state of the drama escalated. For Archer and other progressive critics who advocated on behalf of a "serious" contemporary British drama, the empty splendour of London's West End theatres was a particular source of shame when compared to the continental theatres that had evolved to support the naturalist movement in Europe. By the late 1880's even new developments in genteel comedy and melodrama made the contemporary British drama seem antiquated when compared with the work being done in Scandinavia and France. In England, interest in naturalism was minimal until the last years of the 1880s. Early enthusiasm for Ibsen's plays voiced by critics such as Archer or Gosse made little impact on the broad theatrical context, and a weak adaptation of *A Doll's House* by Henry Arthur Jones and Henry Herman staged in 1884 did little to raise public interest. In 1889, however, Ibsen became the subject of heated debate when actors Janet Achurch and Charles Charrington produced *A Doll's House* at the Novelty Theatre. This production caused an uproar in the press when conservative critics issued condemnatory reviews, and on the strength of its notoriety its initial run of seven
performances was expanded to twenty four (Woodfield 37; Rowell 153). In the wake of this production, public interest in Ibsen rose and by 1891 a number of Ibsen's plays—including *Rosmersholm*, *Hedda Gabler*, *The Lady from the Sea* and, most infamously, *Ghosts*—had been mounted in London (Dickinson 139).

The timing of the Charrington/Achurch production of *A Doll's House* was fortuitous since it fell in the same year as another major theatrical "event," the London tour of the French Théâtre Libre. This troupe, founded by gas-works clerk Georges Antoine in 1887 and run on a minimal budget, was closely aligned with the naturalist movement in France and produced works by Zola, Ibsen and Strindberg, among others (Stokes 117). Stylistically, Antoine attempted to translate naturalist principles for the stage: both the acting methods and sets used by the company were designed to place emphasis on the ideas and experiences represented rather than on the material elements of production. For London audiences accustomed to highly embellished staging and genteel subject-matter, the Théâtre Libre was a new—and, for many, an unwelcome—departure. However, to its supporters Antoine's shoestring experiment represented the triumph of artistic principles over economic concerns. Henry James's fictional "Dorriforth" argued that the Théâtre Libre offered spectators a new way of seeing performances
because it eliminated the staging apparatus central to large productions. "When the appointments are meagre and sketchy," he argued, "the responsibility that rests upon the actors becomes a still more serious thing, and the spectator's observation of the way they rise to it a pleasure more intense" (Scenic Art 230). Such tactics helped to counter what both James and his fictional persona saw as the "corrosive principle in the large command of machinery and decorations--a germ for perversion and corruption" and so placed greater emphasis on the art--rather than the artifice--of the drama (230).

The Théâtre Libre's performances in London helped focus issues related to drama as an "art" and so contributed to the growing sense that the British theatre should achieve a level of cultural significance commensurate with its importance as a social institution. While advocates of the New Drama appealed to the widespread desire for a culturally significant British theatre, however, they did not take up Antoine's formal concern with the techniques of "naturalism." Instead, as John Stokes suggests, Antoine's naturalist project came to be associated with the thematic concerns of "Ibsenism" (125). As a result, subject-matter, not style, remained the primary issue for British critics, managers and playwrights dedicated to advancing the cause of serious drama--in part because the British theatre operated
under the often insidious influence of the state-sponsored Censor.15 Theoretical discussions prompted by interest in naturalism did raise broad questions about what constituted legitimate "culture," that will be taken up in Chapter Three. More immediately, though, these 1889 productions of naturalist plays helped focus public attention on the relationship between management and cultural legitimacy, and so generated increased discussion about the actor-manager system of production. At the same time, I would argue, critics' often violent reactions to early naturalist plays provided an important impetus for innovation by generating public curiosity which, in turn, provided a window of opportunity for an alternative theatre to develop in England.

England's Théâtre Libre: The Independent Theatre

When J.T. Grein and C.W. Jarvis launched the British Independent Theatre Society in 1891, it seemed that an alternative to the actor-manager system of production in

15 The Examiner of Plays played an important regulatory role in the British theatre. While initially implemented to control possibly seditious political themes, by the Victorian period the office a lengthy history of policing the "moral" content of plays. For an historical survey of the official censor's function in the British theatre see Bain.
London was finally a reality.\textsuperscript{16} Grein, the moving force behind the project, was a Dutch-born theatre enthusiast who had come to London in 1885 to work in a trading firm. In England, Grein established a reputation as a theatre critic, first through reviews published in Dutch papers and later in English periodicals (Woodfield 39). Grein was passionate about the drama as an art, and in 1889 he and Jarvis founded The Weekly Comedy, a journal of theatre criticism and reviews. Here, they also published a proposal for a British theatre to be modeled on the French Théâtre Libre. The Independent Theatre was conceived in opposition to existing mainstream practices of dramatic construction and production. According to the plan outlined by Grein and Jarvis in 1889, a British Théâtre Libre would provide an alternative venue to the mainstream theatres whose managers cling to the traditional, well-worn dramatic formula, which sends the public home in a satisfied mood; a formula in which reality, likelihood and possibility are thrown overboard in order to reach the happy ending, without which no play can hope—so they say—for financial prosperity. (175)

\textsuperscript{16} My narrative of the Independent Theatre is largely adapted from longer accounts by Woodfield and Stokes; analysis of Grein's proposal is my own.
By founding a theatre "free from the shackles of the censor, free from the fetters of convention, unhampered by financial considerations," Grein and Jarvis hoped to nurture plays by younger authors, whose aim, in the first place, is not money, but art; whose ideals soar above the commonplace; whose notion of play-writing is not that it should merely cause tears to flow, or laughter to roar, but that real human emotion should be aroused by the presentment of real human life. (175-6)

Their stance deliberately pitted "art" against economic concerns, suggesting a disinterested alternative to the existing theatres.

The published plan for an Independent Theatre addressed complaints common among drama critics in the 1880s, focusing particular attention on the need both for a theatre free from the taint of economic determinism and for a serious contemporary British drama. Following suggestions by Archer that a privately endowed theatre could provide such a context, Grein and Jarvis sought

A moderate capital (say £2,000) derived partly from honorary contributors, partly from earnest subscribers who have the leisure and feel inclined to devote their evenings to the performances, which ought not to exceed two a month, and lastly from the small fees to be
levied on every play sent in, in order to check a too copious influx of manuscripts. (176)

Because economic backing was to come from a group of disinterested, "earnest" patrons devoted to improving the cultural conditions of the British theatre, commercial concerns could be displaced in favour of artistic principles of management. Towards this end, Grein and Jarvis downplayed the economic dimension of their project, emphasizing that cultural and intellectual patronage was most crucial to the success of their venture (177). In addition to the press, the proposal enlisted the help of established novelists and playwrights, including Meredith, Hardy, Jones and Pinero, to complement the cultured ranks of the middle classes—"old playgoers," "wealthy and disinterested friends of the drama," "artists, historians, and specialists of all kinds"—who would lend the movement intellectual support (177).

To make the proposed Independent Theatre attractive to this diverse patron base, I would suggest, Grein and Jarvis downplayed the avant garde associations of the Théâtre Libre in their proposal. Thus, even as they invoked it as a model, they also distanced their project from the broad objections that had been levied both at Antoine's company and at productions of Ibsen's plays. Centrally, they insisted that the British Independent Theatre would eschew
both "play-writing of a merely didactic kind" and "subjects of an immoral, or even unwholesomely realistic nature" in favour of "realism of a healthy kind" depicting "human beings bearing human characters, speaking human language, and torn by human passions" (176). This appeal to the current of Arnoldian Idealism operative at all levels of British criticism focused attention on a broad concern with artistic excellence and cultural improvement, and so deflected more contentious issues associated with naturalism. While Grein and Jarvis promoted the cause of a "national" drama in their proposal, however, the British Independent Theatre, once established, appealed in fact to a much narrower audience of "intellectual" patrons interested in continental influences and works.

Grein's decision to present Ibsen's *Ghosts* as the Independent Theatre's first production in 1891 set the tone for its subsequent career. At the time public interest in—and controversy about—Ibsen was widespread in England, and *Ghosts* was among his most controversial plays. In contradistinction to the reassurances of the 1889 proposal, Grein proclaimed that the "moral" element of *Ghosts* was immaterial; instead, he justified his choice of play by appealing to the opposition between commercial and artistic demands, suggesting that it was the purpose of the Independent Theatre to break the grip of convention in the
British theatre (Stokes 138). The biggest obstacle Grein faced was the Examiner of Plays, E.F.S. Pigott, who had declared he would never license *Ghosts* for production (Woodfield 43). To circumvent the powers of the censor, the Independent Theatre was organized as a Society whose members attended private performances for which no tickets were sold—a tactic that followed the example of the Shelley Society, which had successfully staged *The Cenci* in 1888.\(^{17}\) In spite of this loophole, Grein still had to find a venue for his production—a major difficulty since managements that co-operated with such perceived attacks on the censor had been warned that their licenses would be jeopardized (Woodfield 44). After extensive negotiations, however, Grein secured the Royalty Theatre for a single performance that was, predictably, greeted with a storm of critical protest and extensive public attention.

The choice of *Ghosts* as the first Independent Theatre Society production was, as John Stokes points out, a calculated one (138). Not only did it generate a wave of publicity as conservative critics denounced it with almost hysterical passion,\(^{18}\) it also identified the Independent

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\(^{17}\) This was one of several ways to circumvent the censor; the other was to organize a private "reading" in which the play was recited by actors but not performed.

\(^{18}\) Rowell notes that Clement Scott, violently opposed to Ibsen from the outset, famously savaged *Ghosts* as "an open
Theatre as part of a larger avant garde movement associated with continental interests (a situation exacerbated by Grein's status as a "foreigner"). This association remained fixed throughout the subsequent career of the Independent Theatre, and became further emphasized by the fact that works by Ibsen, Zola and other European playwrights dominated its repertoire. The Independent Theatre's association with European authors also overshadowed the primary mandate of the 1889 proposal: to stimulate and nurture plays by British authors. In fact, contemporary native authors submitted few plays in the years between 1891 and 1898 and even fewer were performed. Among those staged, only two were significant theatrical events. George Moore's The Strike at Arlingford and G.B. Shaw's Widowers' Houses (both produced in 1893) stimulated interest among intellectual audiences, although neither play generated as much attention as productions of Ibsen's plays. While the Independent Theatre's later claim to fame was its early support for Shaw, however, Grein declined to stage both Mrs. Warren's Profession and The Philanderer when Shaw offered them (Stokes 148). Other plays by British authors--such Alan's Wife, a play about infanticide--tended to focus on dark themes associated with continental realism and, on the whole, failed with audiences.

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drain" and "a dirty act done publicly" in reviews for the
**Influence of the Independent Theatre**

When Grein resigned in 1895, the Independent Theatre effectively ceased to exist: it produced only a handful of revivals between 1896 and 1898 and financially folded in 1898. Its position as England’s major alternative theatre was subsequently filled by a series of significant, if less publicized, artistic alliances including the New Century Theatre (established in 1897) and the Stage Society (1899). Both organizations continued the tradition of producing "non-commercial" plays, and both attempted to address problems that had plagued the Independent. The New Century explicitly distanced its programming from the "foreign" influence of naturalism prevalent in the Independent Theatre and, although devoted to producing "serious" drama, it did not position itself in opposition to the existing popular theatre. Instead, its directors, including William Archer, American actress Elizabeth Robbins, and playwright Alfred Sutro, forged active links with the popular theatre by soliciting the help of major managers (Woodfield 57). However, because it embraced a conciliatory position between the existing West End theatres and the more scandalous Independent, the New Century had a far shorter and quieter career than its predecessor. While it lasted, it produced

*Daily Telegraph* (Victorian Theatre 129).
only a handful of plays and failed to realize its founders' hopes for a permanent artistic theatre.

Following the New Century was the Stage Society, a dramatic club dedicated to producing a set number of non-commercial works each year. Like the Independent and New Century Theatres, the Stage Society stimulated the production of new or different works of "serious" drama by lesser-known playwrights and promoted different approaches to staging. Because it was a private dramatic club patronized by a set number of members who broadly supported the cause of "intellectual" theatre, the Stage Society was also able to mount controversial productions that could only be staged as "private" performances—such as Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* in 1902 and Granville Barker's *Waste* in 1907; however, its status as a dramatic club that reflected the tastes of a small group also meant that the Stage Society remained a marginal influence. While the Stage Society remained active until the 1920s, its primary contribution to the British theatre was to provide early venues for such major figures as Shaw, John Galsworthy, John Masefield, and Somerset Maugham, all of whom went on to achieve success in the commercial London theatres in the years before the war (Trewin *Theatre* 62-6).

From an organizational perspective I would suggest that all three enterprises shared similar challenges to their
artistic programs. Battles with the censor over the production of plays such as *Ghosts, Mrs. Warren's Profession* and *Waste* enforced artistic restrictions directly, by banning public performances, and indirectly, by intimidating the managers who lent or sub-leased their theatres for private events. This problem was exacerbated by the fact that none of these organizations had permanent homes, and so were reliant on existing popular theatres to stage their productions. Because they lacked solid economic backing, performances by these groups also had to be organized around the schedules of actors simultaneously engaged in more lucrative work in the popular theatres. Perhaps because of these restrictions, none of these organizations managed to make money in the long run. Charrington and Achurch's early production of *A Doll's House*—considered a success because it lost "only" £70 (Shaw *Letters* 215)—set the pattern for subsequent attempts to produce alternative forms of theatre.

Together, the Independent Theatre Society, the New Century Theatre and the Stage Society helped both to foster awareness of alternative forms of theatre in England and to provide exposure for new playwrights. However, none of these organizations succeeded in their larger goals of attracting significant audiences for these plays from among an idealized class of dedicated and cultured consumers or of establishing a permanent home for the artistic drama in
England. Membership in the Independent Theatre Society never exceeded 175 members, while the Stage Society capped its membership at 300 and never actively sought supporters beyond the existing body of "intellectual" theatre advocates already active in London (Woodfield 49, 58). As a result, as W.L. George pointed out in 1914, the intellectual theatre "carried coals to Newcastle, taught the initiated" (4). Because their appeal never extended beyond small coterie groups of intellectuals--many of whom were already attached to the mainstream theatre as critics, actors, or playwrights--these organizations could not compete successfully with the existing popular theatre or promote significant changes in the organization of the actor-manager system. In fact, all three ultimately came to see themselves as supplementary to the existing theatrical system, rather than engaging in open competition with it. The Independent Theatre posed by far the most radical challenge to existing managements; however, because of its avant garde associations and combative stance it remained identified with "foreign" influences. By contrast, the New Century Theatre and the Stage Society both emphasized a distinctly British focus but remained subordinate to the existing London theatre scene.

Commercial Alternatives: The Court Theatre
Because the theatrical societies relied on spaces provided by popular mainstream theatres to stage their works, the question of profitability was not a problem. Productions were usually run on shoe-string budgets so losses were manageable, but such operating strategies also meant that these organizations were economically unstable and without permanent venues. Many critics who favoured the cause of alternative theatres continued to advocate on behalf of an endowed theatre; as Archer suggested in 1896, endowment would be required "during the experimental stage, to start the enterprise, to establish it, and to give it time to create its public and form its tradition" ("Blight" 32). For prospective managements, however, a modified theatre based on the existing system of theatrical organization seemed increasingly attractive by the early years of the twentieth century. By this time--due, in large part, to the activities and subsequent influences of the theatre societies--"realism" had lost some of its threatening character and there was hope that an audience could be cultivated for such plays since critics interested in stimulating a "serious" British drama had kept the issue before the public. As a result, by the Edwardian era there seemed a good prospect of packaging artistic theatre in ways that would be attractive for London audiences.
The most notable attempt to reconcile artistic and economic aims was the Royal Court Theatre which operated in the years between 1904 to 1907 under the management of Harley Granville Barker and John Vedrenne. Barker, an actor, director, and playwright had an extensive background in the theatre, while Vedrenne, his collaborator, was a concert agent and theatre manager with a strong background in commerce (Woodfield 75-7). The two came together in 1904 when Barker--active in the Stage Society since 1900--was invited to direct and act in Two Gentlemen of Verona at the Court. Barker accepted on the condition that he could simultaneously produce matinée performances of Shaw's Candida. Both productions were successful and the Court's owner, John Leigh, decided to allow Barker and Vedrenne (then manager of the Court) to mount a series of matinées including a translation of Hippolytus and John Bull's Other Island by Shaw. These productions were well received by the press, and encouraged by their early success Barker and Vedrenne formalized their partnership in 1905 with Barker as artistic director and Vedrenne as business manager. The aim of this management was to produce a diverse range of artistically significant plays on a short-run basis, thereby avoiding the long-run system of organization that dominated the popular mainstream theatre. Court productions were staged frugally--without lavish sets or star performers--and
the small size and location of the theatre outside London's expensive West End district meant that overhead expenses could be kept to a minimum. In spite of cost-cutting measures, however, the bare expense of running a theatre required that the productions garner some success and encourage a stable audience.

In the years between 1905 and 1907, the Court's significance was widely recognized by critics.\(^{19}\) As a result, the theatre managed to attract small but glittering audiences for some of its performances--including politicians and, ultimately, royalty\(^{20}\)--in addition to the small "intellectual" audience that also patronized the theatre societies. Success at the Court not only helped consolidate Shaw's artistic and commercial position in the contemporary theatre,\(^{21}\) it also introduced new plays by contemporary British authors including Barker, John Galsworthy, and St. John Hankin as well as by the American actress Elizabeth Robbins. In large part it was able to do

\(^{19}\) Contemporary accounts of the British drama are unanimous in proclaiming the central cultural position of the Court and its major dramatists, including Barker, Galsworthy, and Shaw. See MacCarthy, as well as chapters on the Court in Borsa, Pearson, and Cunliffe.

\(^{20}\) A command performance of John Bull's Other Island was played for King Edward in 1906 (Trewin Theatre 58).

\(^{21}\) Over 2/3 of performances at the Court were plays by Shaw, including 31 of Candida, 149 of You Never Can Tell, 176 of Man and Superman, 121 of John Bull's Other Island, 52 of
this because, unlike the theatre societies, the Court ensured a strong public showing for each of the works it produced. Barker's productions were meticulously well-cast and acted, and great attention was paid to imaginative details of production and staging. In 1907, encouraged by the artistic success of the Court, Barker and Vedrenne moved their management to the Savoy Theatre in the hope that the "serious" theatre could compete with West End productions. The move proved disastrous, however, and by 1908 the partnership went bankrupt after losing money on simultaneous productions at the Savoy and the Haymarket.

Together, Barker and Vedrenne had attempted to balance artistic and commercial aims at the Court Theatre, achieving tremendous artistic, and tenuous financial, success. As Shaw subsequently pointed out, the Court "paid its way and made a living wage for its workers" but "produced an effect on dramatic art and public taste which is out of all proportion to the mere physical and financial bulk of its achievements" (Drama Observed III:1148). Although it was widely acclaimed, however, the critical success of the Court did not ultimately satisfy either Vedrenne's desire to expand the commercial potential of the intellectual theatre or Barker's ambitions to convince a larger audience of the social importance of serious drama. As the partnership's

Major Barbara, 50 of The Doctor's Dilemma, and 89 of Captain
manager, Vedrenne was frustrated that successful productions were not kept on for long runs to capitalize on public interest. By contrast, Barker chafed at the artistic restrictions related to censorship and commercial management and so began to play a more active role as a critic and advocate for a national theatre. The result of their conflict, as Loren Kruger suggests, was an "institutional compromise" that was ultimately too unstable to be sustained (103).

In many respects, I would suggest, Barker and Vedrenne's attempts to strike an "institutional" compromise between the existing "intellectual" and commercial theatres enacted in microcosm the problems associated with the intellectual theatre movement in England generally. Unlike parallel European movements, which maintained a self-consciously oppositional or avant garde focus, advocates of "serious" drama in England upheld an Arnoldian faith in the drama as a cultural vehicle for promoting social unity. In the case of British naturalism, this meant that concerns with subject matter--particularly with social themes--largely eclipsed questions about staging or acting styles. This broadly social focus was part of a general orientation towards audiences that was characteristic of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century British drama, but it was also

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Brassbound's Conversion; see Woodfield (78).
responsible for its often contradictory practices. Thus, for example, Barker insisted on maintaining an artistic vision and refused to let "intellectual" plays achieve the popular success associated with long runs; at the same time, the Court remained financially reliant on fashionable audiences drawn from the existing mainstream theatre to maintain its status as an alternative theatre. These contradictions meant that although the intellectual theatre succeeded in introducing new artistic practices and (for the time) radical ideas to the stage, it did not challenge its surrounding social context. While Barker hoped that the theatre could command attention on its own terms, then, he also accepted without question the fact that it was necessary to cater to the tastes and norms of fashionable audiences.

III. Blurring the Boundaries: The Rise of Mainstream "Artistic" Drama

To some extent, alternative theatres of the 1890s and 1900s remained marginal to, but reliant on, the existing system of theatrical organization because they were obliged to share its resources. Most centrally, as W.L. George pointed out

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22 By 1907, plays by Shaw had the potential to achieve significant popular success, but were seldom given long runs since both Barker and Shaw disapproved of the practice.
in 1910, these theatres never successfully competed for, or influenced, the mainstream audiences they hoped to reform into a new kind of popular viewership. "Not a single play of ideas has, during the last ten years, enjoyed as good a run as a Garrick failure," he pointed out (4). While George contrasted the large popular audience which "prefers simpler fare" to the "small section, known as the elect" (5), however, he and others ignored the fact that a popular version of "intellectual" drama had evolved to address the perceived need for "culture" within the mainstream theatres. In fact, popular theatres' capacities to absorb and repackage intellectual ideas for existing audiences were so effective that they obscured the traditional line between "artistic" and "economic" ends. This development was enhanced by intellectual theatres' attempts to encourage popular audiences, which meant that they shared many of the concerns of their mainstream counterparts. The culmination of this development was directly evident by the turn of the century, when works by "intellectual" playwrights such as Shaw began to succeed with popular audiences without significantly changing their cultural perspective.23

When Shaw did consent to a long run for Fanny's First Play it played for 624 performances; see Woodfield (90). 23 Shaw gained status as a popular playwright "overnight" in 1906, when King Edward VII broke his chair laughing at the command performance of John Bull's Other Island (Trewin Theatre Since 1900 58).
Indirectly, however, the influence of alternative theatres was evident as early as 1893, when George Alexander's production of Pinero's *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* at the St. James's Theatre drew large Society audiences, considerable critical praise, and even more considerable profits, and was credited with launching the "renascence" of the British drama.24

**The Second Mrs. Tanqueray and the Popularization of Intellectual Drama**

When it first appeared in 1893, Pinero's play was considered daring both in its subject matter— which criticized the double sexual standard Society applied to women—and its unhappy resolution, in which the heroine, Paula Tanqueray, commits suicide. For its condemnation of Society's hypocrisies, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* was compared to *A Doll's House* and Pinero, already a successful and well-known West End playwright, was widely heralded as the British Ibsen (Archer *Old Drama* 310). At the same time, however, the play was conservative enough for the West End's fashionable and middle-class audiences. The play was a "Society" drama and stylistically it adhered to conventional

24 Pinero earned over £30,000 from the first run of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (Rowell *Victorian Theatre* 165).
principles of construction. Although he flouted the West-End assumption that plays should have happy endings, Pinero replaced this convention with another (borrowed from the Victorian novel) by having Paula kill herself, thereby eliminating the possibility of more radical solutions to the perennial problem of the "Woman with a Past." Alexander's production of the play also softened the impact of subject matter considerably by retaining the expected trappings of West End theatre, using lavish sets and costumes to represent high Society, as well as star performers—Alexander himself appeared in the role of Aubrey Tanqueray. Pinero, who had been forced to re-write the ending of The Profligate in 1889 to eliminate the suicide of the title character, enjoyed enormous success with The Second Mrs. Tanqueray. In broader terms, the play's popularity also represented a watershed moment in the Victorian theatre. Following the success of The Second Mrs. Tanqueray, established playwrights had much more latitude in dealing with serious themes when writing for West-End managements, and both Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones began to pursue in earnest the social issues they had begun to introduce to the drama in the late 1880s.

25 For a description of this production see Macqueen-Pope's St. James's: Theatre of Distinction (chapter 15). See also Kaplan's "Pineroticism and the Problem Play."
For Society audiences, I would argue, The Second Mrs. Tanqueray was the perfect compromise between old and new forms of drama, since it introduced "serious" themes without abandoning British mores and theatrical conventions altogether. The result was a fashionably "important" British play without the radical edge of European naturalism. One consequence of this play's appeal was that a vogue for "serious" drama began which established Pinero and Jones as the West End theatre's leading dramatists. In the years between 1893 and 1895, "serious" dramas by contemporary British playwrights enjoyed popularity and critical success. In spite of this apparent upswing in the fortunes of the British theatre, however, many critics regarded the success of this work as an obstacle to more significant reform. In 1893, Shaw scornfully suggested that The Second Mrs. Tanqueray was a hoodwink designed to "conquer the public by the exquisite flattery of giving them plays that they really liked, whilst persuading them that such appreciation was only possible from persons of great culture and intellectual acuteness" (Our Theatre in the Nineties I:60). Shaw and others who supported more radical changes to the existing theatre felt that the popular success of plays such as The Second Mrs. Tanqueray posed a threat to the movement for a serious drama in England, but
at the time Shaw's analysis was overshadowed by the optimism prevalent among fellow drama critics.26

Ironically, I would point out, Shaw's analysis was supported by Clement Scott, arch-nemesis of the progressive drama, who saw the success of such plays as "the outcome of an age that allows Society to rule the stage and not the people" (Drama II:396). Both critics focused on the negative effects of Society audiences whose tastes dominated the West End theatre; while their perceptions of the problem were nearly identical, however, they argued from opposing perspectives. Shaw supported the growth of a more intellectual drama and felt that Pinero's play did not go far enough. By contrast, Scott resisted the idea of problem plays altogether and supported both the existing commercial system of theatrical organization and the genteel melodrama that was its mainstay. I will take up the implications of critics' attempts to define audiences in Chapter Three. For the purposes of the present chapter, however, it is significant that critics who represented oppositional positions agreed in seeing the growth of popular "problem" dramas as evidence of Society audiences' desires to be perceived as "cultured," rather than an affirmation that

26 William Archer, among others, was very enthusiastic about the play when it was first produced; later in his career, however, he had a more restrained perspective. See The Old Drama and the New (310).
high culture was gaining ground in the popular theatre. Most significantly, the conflict between "intellectual" and "conservative" critics about a compromised form of high culture suggested how difficult it had become to assign stable definitions of cultural terms. Both Shaw, Scott and others argued for a particular vision of high culture; in an era marked by institutional compromise, however, both the notion of high culture and the authority to designate its appropriate forms were increasingly contested.

Compromise and the Crisis of Definition

To more moderate critics, including Archer, for whom the success of Pinero's play was a milestone, Scott's objections to the play were expected, while Shaw's rumblings could be dismissed as typical of a flamboyant critical persona. However, Archer's subsequent analysis of the "blight" that seemed to have fallen on the "serious" drama in 1896 indicated that the problem identified by extreme progressives and conservatives in 1893 was a real one. In a review of the 1896 season published early in 1897, Archer noted that a "regrettable depression in serious drama" seemed to have occurred after a period of intense promise in the years between 1891 and 1895. Centrally, Archer noted that romances such as Trilby and The Prisoner of Zenda, as well as a host of musical comedies, had eclipsed efforts by
such successful intellectual playwrights as Pinero and Jones ("Blight 23). "Our dramatists of proved intelligence and skill are silent or find no hearers," Archer wrote, our younger writers knock in vain at the managers' doors; the stage (a few revivals and adaptations apart) is entirely devoted to trivial and ephemeral, if not brutal and degrading, spectacles; our two dozen theatres, in the course of a twelvemonth, produce one new play which may, at a pinch, be held to touch the confines of literature. (23)

Archer's complaints--that new playwrights could not find audiences and that spectacle dominated the popular stage--reiterated old arguments against the actor-manager system; however, to this list he also added the problem of theatrical "fashions" earlier identified by Shaw and Scott. From Archer's perspective, the public's higher instincts needed to be encouraged so that serious work would not be subject to audiences' whims. "Owing to a combination of pure chance with managerial superstition," he claimed, "no effective attempt has been made during the period under review to attract the public in the direction of serious drama" (31). As a result, he suggested, while the vogue for musicals and romances could be replaced by "a rush of realism" should "another set of chances come into play," such developments would be fads, not real steps forward (31--
2). Under such conditions, even "serious" drama could make no lasting impression since, as Henry James suggested in a response to Archer's piece, the public was simply not interested in the artistic connections between works, authors, or actors (Scenic Art 293). In "The Blight on the Drama" Archer only tentatively explored the ramifications of his fears that audiences' susceptibilities to fashion would derail attempts to cultivate a stable "serious" drama in England; ultimately, he concluded that the negative results of the past seasons were only temporary. For critics who promoted the interests of high culture, however, the leveling effect that Archer described in 1896 had a significant corollary in the growth of arguments advocating on behalf of the public's right to determine cultural worth by popular appeal.

"Popular" Culture: West End Appropriations of High Culture

Critical appraisals of the highly volatile British theatre scene in the 1890s consistently reiterated a concern that had shaped the West End system of management since the Bancrofts' tenure at the Prince of Wales in the 1860s. Specifically, managers had to attract and maintain middle-class and Society audiences who wanted to see themselves as cultured, but who--as Shaw suggested--also wanted plays "they really liked." In 1889, George Moore argued that the
devotion of middle-class "philistines" to pseudo-cultural works was a far greater threat to public taste than lower-class entertainments. According to Moore, the state of the contemporary theatre indicated the "powerlessness of modern audiences to distinguish between what is common and what is rare" ("Our Dramatists" 627). The problem, he suggested, was that the contemporary stage "corrupts our intelligence by easy satisfactions instead of stimulating the imagination, which should create all from the words of the poet" (630). Henry James made similar claims in his 1889 critical dialogue "After the Play," in which the cultivated playgoer "Dorriforth" suggested that the public "has rather a preference for amusements that it believes to be 'improving,' other things being equal": "It has an idea that fine scenery is an appeal to its nobler part and that it shows a nice critical sense in preferring it to poor. That's a real intellectual flight, for the public" (Scenic Art 232). Both critics castigated the public; yet, beneath their aggressive criticism was the lurking fear that a majority "powerless" to distinguish authentic and inauthentic forms of culture could choose to redefine the category of high culture by consensus. For both Moore and James, managers' attempts to cultivate this predilection among audiences were insidious because they drained "real"
culture of its meaning and opened the door for a widespread redefinition of culture by the majority.

The fear that the category of high culture was called into question by the rise of an economically successful theatre with claims to artistic status lay behind critics' tendencies to denounce West End managements with artistic pretensions in the years after 1880. Irving—who saw the Lyceum as "a temple of the arts" (Rowell *Victorian* 95), devoted significant resources to "risk" plays by Tennyson and others, and was widely recognized for promoting the interests of high culture in the British theatre—was nevertheless a major target for critics' complaints about the actor-manager system. By contrast, less assuming managers who quietly cultivated musical comedy were denounced as a group but otherwise left alone. Opposition to Irving's "artistic" pretensions began when Archer and R.W. Lowe published *The Fashionable Tragedian* in 1877, a work that questioned the vogue for Shakespearian tragedy popularized by Irving and deplored the negative influence of "fashion" on the art of the drama. Archer subsequently resumed his assault on Irving in *About the Theatre* (published in 1886) this time emphasizing that—far from representing advances for the British theatre as their supporters claimed—popular appropriations of high culture (including Irvingite spectacular tragedy and Elizabethan—
inspired verse drama) reflected the dismal and corrosive state of audiences' tastes. For Archer, Irving's productions of Shakespeare were not evidence of "an understanding discriminating popularity" but rather of "a temporary, unreasoning vogue" founded on the appeal of elaborate scenic effect; he therefore concluded that the success of recent Lyceum productions suggested "that the public has not sufficient appreciation of Shakespeare to be disturbed by misrepresentations of his work" (About 241-2).

In a parallel criticism, Moore accused Irving of capitalizing on the public demand for pseudo culture:

> Mr. Irving understood better than anyone the baseness of modern taste, and he has appealed to it more flagrantly than any other manager. He was, of course, well within his right in appraising and selling his goods in the largest market, but I am acting well within my right when I attempt some criticism of the value of his supposed contributions to the development of artistic taste. ("Our Dramatists" 630).

Moore's choice of words in this passage emphasized the economic dimension of Irving's enterprise, recalling Jones's earlier characterization of managers as "cheesemongers" who sell the public anything it wants--however damaging--in order to realize a profit. While characterizations of Irving as a self-seeking capitalist were grounded in the
older opposition between art and economics, however, they also generated conflicts that testified to a deeper crisis in the definition of high culture that emerged forcefully in the early years of the 1890s.

Attacks on Irving became more frequent in the years between 1877 and 1890, particularly among progressive critics who had a stake in the success of the intellectual drama. Throughout this period, however, Irving's success with audiences grew, and he quietly tolerated resistance to his brand of culture. With the burst of activity associated with the perceived dramatic "renascence" in 1890, however, Irving's followers mounted a counter-campaign, openly advocating on behalf of the right and authority of the public to define cultural worth. The moment was opportune for such a move. Established theatre critics had been divided by debates about Ibsen, which not only questioned what constituted "legitimate" drama but also what ought to be considered high culture. In response to this schism, critics such as Archer and Jones who had advocated an Arnoldian view of high culture began (however tentatively) to align themselves with the "foreign" influence of naturalism by taking up the cause of the New Drama. In response, popular advocates of "high" culture could emphasize the minority appeal and the foreign character of such developments, and so gain the sympathy of the large
West End audiences who had a stake in more palatable forms of "high" culture.

In response to widespread condemnation of the actor-manager system in the early 1890s, Irving's business manager, Bram Stoker, published a defence of existing theatrical organization in the Nineteenth Century. Central to Stoker's arguments was the somewhat radical claim that the public had reached a stage of development in which popular success should be judged the true index of cultural value. Whereas upper class elites had long limited the art of the drama through the controls of patronage and the legal stricture of patent laws, Stoker argued, the open market economy of the actor-manager system offered dramatic art the opportunity to develop a truly collective "national" character (1047). Stoker's positive appeal to economics and the vox populi--both of which were traditionally associated with negative cultural outcomes--represented a significant revision of existing cultural vocabularies. In the context of his discussion, economics was treated as an indicator of cultural worth, while the "popular" voice was implicitly identified with the democratic middle class, rather than the "masses." Stoker, in this instance the voice of emergent mass culture, therefore simultaneously appropriated aspects of traditional high culture and reformulated them to defend
the tastes of what he saw as the legitimate audience for the British drama.

Although Stoker represented only one voice, his comments epitomized a general trend in discourse about the drama which was evident even among critics who were otherwise hostile to his defence of the commercial theatre. Not only was there a growing tendency to idealize the popular audience at this time, there was also a corresponding consensus that economic concerns could go hand in hand with artistic ones. This development in discourse about the drama suggested how the overlap between commercial and intellectual forms of theatre was also manifest in broader cultural criticism which focused on the relationship between audiences and processes of cultural categorization. The causes and effects of this tendency towards cultural democratization are the subject of chapters three and four, which consider how the breakdown between the conceptual opposition of artistic and economic spheres shaped discussion about the drama.

IV: Conclusion

The growing overlap between commercial and artistic forms of theatre in the years between 1890 and 1914 significantly complicated the tendency to describe the theatre in terms of an opposition between art and economics. As a result, while
these terms continued to be evoked in critical discourse, there was also a growing sense of confusion about the practical separation of "high" and "low" cultural categories. This confusion was compounded by the fact that, for most theatre critics of this time, successful reform of the drama required that a balance be found between practical and artistic success. Writing in 1886, for example, Archer noted that the "absence of a middle way between sensational success and total failure" was "one of the most serious evils to which the English stage is at present subject" ("Plea" 828). Because Archer's idea of a "middle way" between the aims of art and economics resonated during this period, it had significant practical value for reformers who had to work with the resources available, it challenged the traditional conceptions of an elite high culture which underpinned existing critical vocabularies. Not only was this kind of approach anathema to supporters of traditional high cultural values, particularly to literary figures and cultural critics working outside the theatre, it also complicated the terms of debate for drama critics and raised questions about which classes of audiences should have the power to determine which forms of culture were "legitimate."
Chapter Three:  
Middle-Class Audiences and the Democratization of Critical Discourse

In spite of the fact that fashionable audiences were the dominant influence in London's West End theatres through the first decade of the twentieth century, critics did not universally share managers' enthusiasm to cater to this group's needs. Many--like Shaw--resented the fact that play length was dictated to suit the habits of Society audiences (Drama Observed II:27). Others complained that managers' preferences for plays that appealed to fashionable audiences restricted the subject matter of contemporary British drama.\(^1\) In opposition to this influence, such drama critics as Clement Scott and William Archer among others, proposed an alternative in the "cultivated" middle class. If this alternative offered a conceptual counterpoint to the perceived excesses of the fashionable audience, however, it also posed some practical problems. In fact, in the context of an entertainment industry in which it was possible to argue--as Bram Stoker did--that taste had advanced to the point that popular consensus was the best indicator of cultural value, critical focus on the middle class meant

\(^{1}\) This was a major complaint throughout the period I discuss; see, for example, essays included in Jones's Renascence of the Drama, as well as Archer's "Plea for the Playwright" and Crawfurd's "The London Stage."
that the whole idea of a "better" viewer came to be highly contested.

In large part, critical divergences about the idea of "cultivation" developed concurrently with the rise of the New Drama which had fostered the growth of a self-consciously cultivated intellectual audience. Earlier critical characterizations had labeled middle-class audiences as "shopkeepers" or "swells" and contrasted them with idealized "cultivated" viewers who were distinguished by their ability to appreciate culture rather than by their economic or social standing. With the rise of a self-consciously "intellectual" audience, however, a version of this ideal audience assumed a real, if contested, presence in the theatres. For supporters of the New Drama, "intellectual" was a positive term synonymous with the idealized audience central to traditional critical discourse. For its detractors, by contrast, "intellectual" was a negative term for audiences whose intellectual elitism was equated with "superfine" attitudes and "immoral" tastes that distanced them from true British values.

In late nineteenth and early twentieth-century drama criticism, the new categories of spectator that emerged along with new forms of drama fuelled critics' ongoing

^2 See chapter one.
interests in the middle class audience. In addition to their new focus on different types of drama, critics' attempts to distinguish audiences based on their tastes were also complicated by the growing confusions between traditional ranks. With the return of the middle class to the theatres, came a diverse group of new spectators whose interests and affiliations challenged existing class boundaries. Thus, for example, wealthy and "fashionable" middle-class spectators' interests were more closely aligned with those of upper-class Society audiences, rather than with those of the lower-middle class spectators beneath them. This chapter focuses specifically on how critics attempts to categorize audiences in the years after 1880 reflected a deeper crisis of definition within the middle class. In the first half, I introduce general trends in critical discourse, describing both how the middle class replaced fashionable audiences as the cultivated ideal and how the idea of the "intelligent" middle class was appropriated to support arguments for "old" and "new" forms of drama. In the second half, I examine how this ideal was invoked in the work of Clement Scott and William Archer, whose fierce debates about the merits of New Drama shaped the criticism of the 1890s and 1900s.
I. Redefining the "Better Class": Criticism, Democratization and the Middle Class Audience

Although London's West End theatres had successfully attracted patrons from the middle class by the last third of the century, the years between 1880 and 1914 were marked by increasingly bitter critical conflicts about this audience's tastes and its effects on the British drama. In many respects, critics who expressed doubt about theatrical audiences at this time were merely reproducing the same kind of complaint that had been levied by critics in the 1860s and 1870s--focusing on the ways in which concerns about fashion and production value overshadowed interest in cultural matters. Whereas critics of the 1870s largely concurred that fashionable and middle-class audiences exerted a negative influence, later critics differentiated positive and negative influences within the middle class, effectively mapping the traditional association of "high" and "low" class and culture onto factions within the middle. One result of this change was that critical attention was increasingly focused on the middle class itself rather than on influences from the upper or lower classes. Another was that criticism became much more conflicted, as competing groups argued about what kinds of drama constituted "high" and "low" forms of culture.
But while debate about audiences became increasingly heated and critics focused on defining audiences for specific kinds of drama, their constructions also abstracted from actual audiences—which were far more heterogeneous in their tastes and interests than the fixed entities critics described. At the same time, although criticism tended to treat preferences for "Old" and "New" drama as if they were completely distinct, their viewerships were shared to some degree, both because their viewerships came from similar social backgrounds and because they shared heterogeneous tastes. In fact, Ian Clarke observes that by the Edwardian period "the Court's audience derived from an identical socio-economic grouping to that of the major commercial theatres" (20). Although Clarke focuses specifically on the twentieth-century context, such convergences were apparent even among early audiences for the experimental continental drama. In Henry James's "After the Play" (1889), for example, a critical piece intended to demonstrate "typical" British attitudes towards the theatre, also skillfully portrayed a reality which more abstract critical constructions of theatre audiences obscured: that "intellectual" and "fashionable" audiences were socially indistinguishable, and that the two groups' interests overlapped to a significant degree.
"After the Play" was presented as a critical dialogue between four fashionable observers of the 1889 Théâtre Libre tour in London. James's four "speakers"—none of whom were professional drama critics—each represented a distinct approach to the drama, from the sophisticated intellectual perspective espoused by Dorriforth to the more superficial, entertainment-oriented interest evidenced by Amicia. While each speaker introduced a specific view of the drama, however, interactions between characters did not suggest the kind of rigid opposition of "Society" to "intellectual" interests evident in more conventional criticism. Instead, James's piece indicated both the common social status of the four characters—who were grouped in the private, ritualized social setting of the tea-table to discuss the play—and their shared interests in the drama. In spite of the fact that Dorriforth and Amicia advocated on behalf of the drama as art and amusement respectively, both characters demonstrated familiarity with "old" and "new" forms of drama and their associated staging practices. While James's sympathies seemed to lie with Dorriforth, who guided the conversation, Amicia's occasional membership in an "intellectual" audience suggested that, in spite of her stated resistance to realism, she supported it as a consumer. In fact, by demonstrating both Dorriforth's and Amicia's conversance with commercial and avant garde forms.
of drama, James indicated the permeable nature of audience groupings and the oversimplification of critical constructions which treated "intellectual" and "fashionable" theatre-goers as if they were completely distinct.

The sense of overlap between the two "opposing" categories of art and entertainment was further enhanced by Florentia and Auberon, the remaining characters who fell between the more sharply differentiated perspectives of Dorriforth and Amicia. Their more moderate views indicated a middle way between positions that often seemed completely opposed in critical discourse; moreover, their attempts to reconcile aspects of popular and intellectual theatre to fit with their individual views of art suggested both how individual consumers adapted existing discourse to suit their specific views and how economics and aesthetics intersected in a post-patronage society. If James's brief critical experiment was intended to dramatize the kinds of attitudes towards art characteristic of Society audiences at the time, it also highlighted the problems involved in characterizing individuals by broad critical stereotypes.

Although the segment of audiences who most concerned critics generally shared a common socio-economic background, critical constructions of opposing middle-class audiences whose positions were fixed not by income but by taste became increasingly powerful and central to discourse about the
drama in the years between 1880 and 1914. The centrality of these constructions reflected critics' desires to describe a new context in traditional terms, as well as the eagerness of the middle class and Society "intellectuals" to distance themselves from the existing elite. For individual members of the middle class in particular, there was a desire to distinguish oneself from one's own class, which was increasingly constructed as a mass in both its political and consumer practices.

The New Power of the Middle: Changing Perceptions of the Upper Class
Perhaps the most striking change that took place in the years between 1880 and 1914 was in the way that critics defined a "better" class of viewer. Prior to 1880, critics who evoked the descriptor "better" when defining audiences placed a strong emphasis on social position, assuming that education and cultivation were qualities naturally associated with the middle and upper classes. By the first decade of the twentieth century, however, the concept of "better" audiences no longer assumed that participation in a particular class automatically meant that one was cultivated. In fact, as critics began to condemn the fashionable classes as a negative cultural influence, wealth was often associated with a viewer's "philistine" nature,
and "better" viewers redefined as a middle-class group notable for their cultural abilities, national character and disinterested capacity to lead.

Indeed, the very audiences of fashionable elites sought by managers were singled out by critics as a negative force against which an "authentic" British public could be defined. In an 1887 article entitled "The Decline of the Drama," for example, journalist Harry Quilter linked the dearth of significant British plays to the dominance of "aristocratic" Society audiences whose tastes for French drama reflected "that decadence in national spirit and taste, which has made us of late years think that all artistic products emanating from France must of necessity be superior to those of our own country" (552). Quilter's interest in the inverse relationship between decadent fashionable audiences and the traditional interests of a British drama "founded upon a genuine human sympathy" played the narrow self-interest of this social group against a broad "human one" associated with the British character (551). This kind of approach was common in criticism at the time; in fact, I would suggest, the belief that Society audiences were responsible for the state of the contemporary British drama formed perhaps the only unifying current in a critical discourse that was otherwise fraught with controversy.
Thus, after enjoying a brief period of cultural prominence in the 1860s, fashionable viewers were denigrated both for their elitism and for their divergence from a "true" British character. Like Quilter, many of this audience's detractors contended that it was responsible for the scarcity of high-quality contemporary British plays and playwrights. As well, they linked this audience to the decline of "serious" audiences in the theatres, describing the bad manners and affectation of fashionable audiences in terms usually associated with the lower classes. As numerous contributors to the Theatre complained throughout the late 1870s and early 1880s, Society audiences were distinguished from "true playgoers" by a lack of interest in the drama as anything but an "agreeable accompaniment to conversation" (Broughton 36; Faithfull 76). Similarly, critics noted this audience's tendency to place the demands of fashion--including vision-obscuring hats and loudly rustling silks--over the demands of an art which commanded respect both for performers and fellow audience members (Scott 140; Faithfull 76).

Such discussions echoed earlier critical disquisitions about the behaviour of the lower classes who frequented the gallery,3 effectively aligning the fashionable class with

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3 See, for example, Charles Dickens's accounts of the lower class in the theatre included in The Uncommercial Traveller
the "masses" in order to highlight the middle class's cultural and moral superiority and so position it as the cultivated alternative. The middle class was therefore presented as a distinct and contrasting group, characterized by the "respectability" and "sobriety" of its behaviour, by its "British" character, and by its native instinct for recognizing "true" art. This group was positioned to lead in matters of culture, but it was not presented as an elite in the same terms as Society audiences; instead, it was distinguished in moral and nationalist terms. Critics identified this new ideal audience as "the people"--by which they meant to indicate the broad middle class, praising it for its "authentic" and commonsense grasp of a culture that was distinctly British because it took "genuine" humanity as its focus. By making this kind of argument, critics significantly revised the traditional view of culture as the territory of an elite, installing the middle class in place of an effete aristocracy. Far from achieving the kind of "homogeneous" consensus envisioned by Arnold, however, this shift helped stimulate intense conflict among critics who differentiated factions within the middle class based on their preferences for specific kinds of drama.

as well as "Theatres For Audiences" in Jackson's The
The Roots of Populism: Critics and the Pit

The idea that the "common" viewer ought to represent the ideal developed steadily in England as critics' animosity towards Society audiences grew. One early attack on a successful management not only focused the tendency to oppose artistic to economic concerns, it also indicated the change in attitude towards Society audiences that had taken place among critics in the years between 1860 and 1880. In 1880, the Bancrofts decided to relocate their highly successful management from the Prince of Wales Theatre to the much larger Haymarket which was located centrally in the West End theatre district. At the Haymarket they put into effect many of the same kinds of changes they had instituted at the Prince of Wales in the 1860s, redecorating, raising prices and eliminating some of the pit seats in order to expand the dress circle and stalls. While these changes had provoked some response when instituted at the Prince of Wales, the support of critics and affluent patrons had far outweighed the protest of displaced audiences. At the Haymarket, however, the Bancrofts met with significant protests over their treatment of the pit, both from the plebian classes who resented losing "their" place in the Victorian Theatre.
theatre, and from critics who saw the reallocation of seats as an attack on cultivated theatregoers by moneyed elites.\(^5\) In a commentary published in the *Academy*, for example, Frederick Wedmore suggested that the growth of luxury in the theatre was resulting in "almost the extinction of the older and more critical class of playgoer" since "playgoing, instead of being a general amusement and a method of cultivation, may be but a costly indulgence for those who have richly dined" (in R. Jackson, *Victorian Theatre* 63). Critics' eagerness to ally themselves with displaced lower-class patrons in this controversy was indicative of the larger conceptual shift in their vision of an "ideal" audience. Not only did their position signal the estrangement of their interests from those of elite Society audiences, it also suggested their growing desire to align their authority with that of a popular "democracy," broadly conceived.

Critics' reactions against the Bancroft management were part of a larger context of debate, underway since the 1870s. With their growing conviction that Society audiences degraded the British drama, critics had adopted a related

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\(^4\) My account of the Haymarket controversy is adapted from excerpts of contemporary criticism included in Jackson's *Victorian Theatre: The Theatre in its Time.*

\(^5\) This event sparked numerous responses, both in trade journals such as the *Theatre*, which published a symposium on
belief that the "people" represented a corrective influence to aristocratic debasement. To make their case against the Bancrofts' and other managers' perceived attacks on the pit, critics focused on the class distinctions traditionally associated with different seating areas in the theatre--the boxes with the upper classes, the stalls and dress circle with affluent middle-class audiences, and the gallery with the lower classes.6 Within this socially and economically determined hierarchy, the pit occupied a unique position since it was a "cheap" viewing area like the gallery, but was also located in a preferred position immediately in front of the stage. Because it offered access to the stage and was moderately priced, the pit was regarded as a place where audiences drawn from across the classes--including artisans and clerks as well as middle-class critics and younger middle-class men--could co-mingle.7 For its middle-class supporters, the pit audience was therefore defined not by its social or economic status, but rather by its love of art.8

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6 This division was widely acknowledged; see Booth, Theatre in the Victorian Age (2).
7 For a brief discussion of the composition of the pit, see Booth Theatre in the Victorian Age (64).
8 In Actresses as Working Women, Davis notes that this position also offered the largely male audience of the pit a good vantage point for admiring actress' legs (150).
Because they saw it as an audience unified by a common interest in the drama, critics emphasized the "classless" character of the pit as a kind of idealized cultural sphere in which social differences could be put aside. Such arguments treated lower- and middle-class members of the pit audience as a common group--although in doing so these critics had to ignore the actual behaviour of their lower class compatriots, who were often boisterous. In an early defence of the pit published in 1875, for example, Clement Scott underplayed the "pleasant chaff and quaint humour" characteristic of the pit audience, portraying it in terms compatible with middle-class norms (in R. Jackson Victorian Theatre 51). "There is no more orthodox and courteous assemblage than the pit of an English theatre," Scott claimed. "It is possible to meet there men of the highest dramatic intelligence and keenest artistic feeling" (51). By characterizing the pit audience as "the true playgoers," Scott and his fellow critics attempted to strike a blow against the encroachment of the "ten shilling stalls" (52). They claimed that unlike patrons of the dress circle and stalls--who came to the theatre to see and be seen--the pit advantage was not noted in critical discourse that idealized the pit audience for its ability to appreciate art.
deserved a place apart that reflected its preoccupation with higher matters.9

By invoking the pit's traditional association with a classless appreciation of art, critics in the early 1880s capitalized on the situation at the Haymarket to make a much larger point about the damaging influence of Society audiences on British tradition and values. Unlike earlier protests, which had largely been carried on within the theatres by disgruntled patrons,10 the Haymarket controversy was carried on in the newspapers as well, where middle-class readers were encouraged to see the theatre's preference for fashionable audiences as an assault on the "traditional" prerogative of the British theatre-going public. For Scott, the Bancrofts' attempts to cater to what he characterized as the fashionable "toothpick patrons of the play" was indicative of a much larger problem: the erosion of national character which led to the deterioration of art ("Postscript" 139). To make his point, Scott contrasted the

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9 See Jackson, Victorian Theatre (51-2).

10 There is a long and colourful history of protest in the English theatre--the most famous incidence being the Old Price Riots early in the nineteenth century (see Baer, and Hadley, chapter one). Generally speaking, through much of the nineteenth century crowds protested by hissing or making other diversions designed to interrupt performances within the theatre. This practice continued through the Society era, although it came to be associated with the gallery and was not an accepted mode for indicating displeasure among "respectable" patrons--as Shaw made clear in his review of
pit audience--which he characterized using such terms as "worthy," "sympathetic" and "honest"--with a decadent elite, "delicate nerved" and "weary" (140-1). Such characterizations of the elite were, in turn, applied to its effects on the drama. "In proportion as applause has diminished," he suggested, "the art has become flabbier and flabbier" (141). Such degenerate analogues for the minds and habits of elite audiences reminded middle-class readers of their contrasting status as an exemplary national audience.

In subsequent iterations of this debate, critics not only contrasted the pit audience with the explicitly classed groups located elsewhere in the house--noting that it sheltered the "real, serious, reflective, critical playgoers whose views are worth more than those of the playgoers either in the gallery or the more costly seats"--they also placed the pit audience in a leadership role, suggesting that it represented "a happy medium between the stalls and the ‘gods’" (in R. Jackson Victorian Theatre 67). By focusing on the pit as a mixed, "reflective," art-oriented audience, critics evoked both the cultivated classless viewershhip central to Idealist discourse and the educated democracy central to the middle-class worldview. In it, they implied, viewers found a public sphere in which they

the first night performance of Guy Domville; see "The
transcended their social identities and exchanged ideas on a universal cultural plane. By making this distinction, critics not only located the "classless" audience central to Idealist thought in a real area of the theatre, but they also placed themselves as a legitimate, disinterested and popular source of cultural authority aligned with the general public.

Insofar as critics emphasized the "popular" and "traditional" dimension of this group, controversies about the pit dovetailed with their larger interest in promoting a distinctly middle-class notion of cultural authority derived from the consensus of a preferred viewership that was distinct from the existing upper-class elite. In the context of the Haymarket controversy, critics emphasized the fact that a major British theatre was being changed to reflect the interests of a social elite by a management interested only in profits. Unlike the Prince of Wales—a small theatre outside the West End that had previously been frequented mainly by lower class audiences—the Haymarket was geographically and historically central to the West End theatre scene.11 At the same time, the Haymarket also had longstanding associations as a "serious" theatre frequented

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11 For background on this theatre see Macqueen-Pope's *Haymarket: Theatre of Perfection.*
by the middle class$^{12}$ and, as a result, it became a symbolic locus for critical agitation to preserve British culture for its "true" inheritors.

Bound up with arguments against Society audiences were overt challenges to the fashionable middle and upper classes' prerogative to legislate taste. These challenges were most often framed as appeals to a classless idea of culture by middle-class critics who idealized and assimilated popular audiences in order to contrast them with Society audiences. Unlike Society audiences, whose opinions, they contended, were shaped by advertisements and tea-table chit-chat, the pit expressed its critical judgments spontaneously by cheering or hissing and so--for its supporters--reflected a disinterested and "universal" perspective. At the same time, the pit represented an idealized sphere for the democratic exchange of ideas because critics saw its audience as a group which seemed to confirm the middle-class notion that education, not position, was the appropriate source of authority.

Although significant controversies about the pit did not persist, larger concerns about audiences and the

$^{12}$ Note Booth's comment that even earlier in the century Drury Lane, Covent Garden and the Haymarket were theatres in which the working class were never a dominant part of the audience; see Theatre in the Victorian Age (9).
relationship between art and commerce did. In fact, I would contend that as the middle class replaced the upper class as the legislator of cultivated values, there was a corresponding shift towards the democratic view that culture, like society, was best defined by an educated majority of middle-class viewers who identified themselves as "common" people against the interests of a social elite. While this development seemed to herald the advent of an Arnoldian cultural sphere in which the middle class assumed a position of leadership, however, the idea that this group might represent an homogeneous influence was dashed almost immediately. In fact, far from demonstrating the middle class's common values, the outcome of this shift was conflict about what subgroup within the middle class should lead. In critical circles, debates raged as factions of the middle class were defined in terms derived from earlier cultural distinctions between upper- and lower-class audiences that no longer adequately described existing audiences. Ironically--given their originator's hopes for culture as a source of social unity--Arnoldian ideas were

13 By the first decade of the twentieth century, more sophisticated audiences understood that the layout of the pit was subject to change, given the demand for more lucrative stall seats; at this point, theatrical geography became less important than one's ability to perceive the economic basis of organization. See contemporary remarks in Jackson (Victorian Theatre 70)
appropriated and used to define these increasingly fragmented middle-class audiences.

From Theory to Practice: Criticism and the Middle-Class Spectator

Although the tendency to idealize the middle-class audience did not originate with Matthew Arnold, he was unquestionably its most influential exponent during the last third of the nineteenth century. Critics who embraced Arnold's idea that the middle class was central to the development of a high cultural theatre were obliged to account not only for the Puritanism and materialism associated with the designation "philistine" but also for the longstanding perception that this class passively followed the aristocracy in matters of taste.14 Those who promoted the middle class therefore had to address existing stereotypes and negative perceptions, which they usually did by designating positive and negative groups corresponding to the opposition between economic "interest" and cultural "disinterest." In doing so, they superimposed qualities traditionally associated with "high" and "low" class and culture on groups distinguished not by

14 Even through the 1890s this attitude was still evident in some criticism; see, for example, Quilter.
social differences but rather by their divergent tastes in
drama. Thus, for example, audiences for adaptations of
French farce could be dismissed as part of a debased elite
interested only in entertainment, while exponents of
"serious" drama were hailed for their cultural acumen.

In the context of the middle class, this oppositional
way of thinking about culture had potentially radical
implications that the older, vertically aligned model of
culture did not. Not only did the shift from class-based to
taste-based concepts of audience mean that the composition
of groups was potentially changeable, it also opened up
judgments about cultural value to conflicting
interpretations since "taste" meant different things to
different people. If the idea of a fixed, "universal"
standard of culture remained central to critics' arguments
about value, the standard itself came to be highly contested
as different interests embraced competing definitions.

While the opposition between art and economics seemed
unproblematic, then, it was actually quite contentious. If
French farce had few supporters, many critics did champion
cultural forms such as genteel melodrama--which supporters
of an intellectual drama dismissed as hopelessly commercial.
For advocates of "old" and "new" forms of drama,
respectively, the opposition between art and economics
therefore produced completely different kinds of judgments
since conservatives such as Clement Scott could denigrate the character of a foreign-influenced "serious" drama, even as progressives rejected the artistic claims of sentimental plays. Insofar as it retained the central terms of an Idealist model of culture, this new development seemed to be reassuringly rooted in tradition, and critics invoked it to lend weight to their arguments. However, the older cultural vocabulary proved to be an uncomfortable fit for critics attempting to differentiate new categories of spectator on the basis of taste rather than class. If this new approach did not break with the Idealist view of culture advocated by critics such as Arnold, it did carry it forward in entirely new ways.

Concurrently with the growth of conflict about different categories of middle-class spectator came disputes about these groups' claims to represent the interests of an authentic "culture." With the growth of the New Drama in particular, bitter controversies began to develop between critics who defended the "old" sentimental drama and those who advocated on behalf of a "serious" drama influenced by realism. Although most debate centred on questions about genre--or what kind of play people should be watching--critical discourse almost always evoked characterizations of the drama's audiences to make a case for one form of drama over another, since the kinds of plays that became popular
were regarded as symptomatic of the state of taste. As in the past, critics invoked an idealized "better" class to buttress the claims of their preferred forms of drama; by the 1890s, however, definitions of this class varied widely. While nearly every critic claimed to represent an "educated" or "cultivated" viewership, most commentators vigorously rejected others' characterizations of, and claims to represent, this audience.

Among drama critics such controversies began in the early 1880s with the feud between Clement Scott and William Archer. In the Scott/Archer conflict, problems caused by the idea of a "better" class of viewer were clear since both critics used similar cultural vocabularies to argue opposing perspectives on the drama and its spectators. Each critic attempted to discredit the other by characterizing his rival's preferred form of drama as an effect of the Society influence while simultaneously positing a corrective influence in a democratic construction of "the people," with whom he aligned himself. While both men were broadly consistent with Arnoldian principles, Scott and Archer's arguments ironically worked to undermine the notion of fixed cultural value central to Idealist thought. As a result, their corrective populism unwittingly contributed to the process of cultural democratization evident in the growth of the entertainment industry against which both struggled.
Although both critics attempted to redefine the traditional opposition between art and economics to better reflect the interests of middle-class spectators, they ended by unwittingly demonstrating that the Idealist model of culture both embraced was compatible with emerging mass culture.

III. The Reaction Against Society Audiences and the Growth of a Popular Ideal: Clement Scott and William Archer

In critical circles Clement Scott and William Archer were powerful figures whose names were synonymous with the deep opposition between sentimental Victorian drama and continental realism. Both were also part of the new wave of young, university-educated, middle-class drama critics who were hired, initially by the newspapers, to address a growing public demand for information and criticism about the drama in the 1870s. By the 1880s Scott, who was theatre critic for the Daily Telegraph and also edited a trade journal, the Theatre, was advocating on behalf of the "old" drama popularized by Robertson, a tradition which he characterized as evincing "a deep vein of tenderness and humanity" that was quintessentially British (Yesterday 396). Archer, a strong advocate of the New Drama and Scott's major opponent, published widely in support of the realistic drama, which he valued because it promoted thought about the ideas or "moral problems" central to modern life (English
Dramatists 4-5). Through his advocacy of a "serious" drama, Archer not only advanced the cause of the British theatre among the audiences for journals of general culture, he also came to be recognized as a figurehead for the interests of progressive theatre. Although both published widely through the 1870s and 1880s, Scott and Archer are best known now for their bitter controversy about Ibsen's plays, and their responses to realism have formed the basis for twentieth-century appraisals of the late Victorian drama and its audiences. As Allardyce Nicoll has suggested, Clement Scott and William Archer embodied, respectively, the "great mass of stolid, respectable, middle-class opinion" and the "tastes of the younger intellectuals" who looked upon the theatre as "a place where high aspirations and daring thought might find scope" (22).

As a representative twentieth-century perspective, Nicoll's characterization correctly suggests that questions about taste formed the basis of conflict between Scott and Archer. Scott's overpowering interest in the drama as an instrument of moral instruction and Archer's more forward-thinking perspective identified the opposing tastes that continued to influence criticism through the first decade of the twentieth century. Like most twentieth century critics who view Archer as a pioneer and Scott as a philistine,15
however, Nicol1 does not look beyond conflicts about realism to the significant overlaps in their respective positions. These overlaps included shared cultural terminologies and ideological points of reference that significantly complicated subsequent discussions about the British drama because they were defined in radically different terms. Most significantly, while Archer and Scott espoused antithetical approaches to the drama they also claimed a common ideal audience in the "intelligent" and "cultivated" middle class, and appealed to this class by emphasizing the "moral"--or improving--quality of the drama as a distinctly British art. Similarly, both critics shared a common conviction that Society audiences were responsible both for the decline of the drama and for the predominantly economic motivation of the managers who had helped entrench this narrow influence. Precisely because of their shared perspectives, the struggle between Scott and Archer suggests how confused traditional cultural vocabularies had become by the last years of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, I suggest, it shows how different factions within the middle class developed in response to the pressures of a mass culture which not only created an entertainment industry but

15 For contemporary reflections on the Scott/Archer rivalry, see Filon (200) and Courtney's The Passing Hour (215).
also legitimized it by confusing the terms of traditional high culture.

Re-visioning Idealism: The Early Criticism of William Archer

From the early years of his career onward, Archer was critical of popular West End audiences, in which he included both "the most Philistine section of the middle class" and "the worse than Philistine, the utterly frivolous section of the upper class" (English Dramatists 8-9). According to Archer, Society audiences interested only in amusement created a situation in which "People of intellect and culture go at long intervals to one or two theatres, and are perfectly in the dark as to what is really good and bad" (9). As a result, he suggested, commercial interests held sway in the theatrical economy and a cycle of negative influence was created in which the theatre and its audiences reinforced each other's worst impulses since the "public degrades the managers, the managers the authors, the authors the actors, the actors the critics, and the critics the public again" (English Dramatists 17). To address this problem, Archer claimed that it was necessary to attract "educated" and "thoughtful" viewers by nurturing an alternative to the existing West End theatres. For Archer, such viewers represented a "serious" or "intellectual"
influence which was distanced from the middle and upper classes (its social origins) by its grasp of culture.

Insofar as it emphasized "culture" as a separate sphere, Archer's view of the drama was indebted to the cultural theory of Matthew Arnold, whose support for the drama he acknowledged in the introductions to both English Dramatists of Today (1882) and About the Theatre (1886). Following Arnold, Archer advocated on behalf of an educated minority who could help shape a public for a true high cultural drama. While he did not believe, as Arnold seemed to, that all of society could be harmonized by a meaningful high culture, he did believe that the efforts of a small public of "educated" viewers could positively affect society as a whole. In About the Theatre, for example, Archer suggested that because contemporary society was "heterogeneous" by comparison with earlier generations it would probably never be possible to gather a "whole theatrical public as of old" (255). He did not believe that a nostalgic Elizabethan past could be revisited, but did envision that it would be possible to nurture a "special" public for the high cultural drama (255), and further projected that such an example "would quickly educate its public, and that no scanty one" (256).

The idea that a significant public, implicitly drawn from among the "better" classes, might be found for the
drama was central to Archer's critical project. In his early writing he used Arnold's idea of a publicly funded national theatre as a point of departure for imagining the "great perhaps" of an endowed theatre. Unlike Arnold, however, Archer proposed a theatre supported by a "smaller confraternity of wealthy art-lovers" who might gain disinterested "pleasure" from such an enterprise while enjoying "a moderate profit" (About 256). Such a theatre would be free of the economic exigencies that governed the existing commercial theatre, yet would also be popular enough to command "moderate" remuneration for its backers by attracting significant audiences. The backers themselves would fulfil a dual role as cultural leaders, enabling the growth of culture while independently providing the funding which Arnold felt should come from the state. Because it provided for independent backing, Archer's plan by-passed the problem of middle-class resistance to state "interference." At the same time by yoking together wealth and cultivation, he also addressed his middle-class readers as a significant part of the process, offering them the same kind of status as the backers. In doing so, Archer implicitly suggested that a materialistic perspective could be positive so long as it was accompanied by the proper disposition towards culture. In the terms Archer adopted, then, the middle class played a leadership role both in
educating taste and in ensuring that wealth be used to combat a "frivolous" popular culture.

Through much of his critical writing Archer adopted a practical tone, even when describing visionary directions the theatre might take. The possibility that one might find a way to balance artistic and economic concerns while advancing the cause of a cultivated drama fit with this practical approach and represented an important adjustment of the Idealist model of culture he espoused. Unlike many of his predecessors who separated culture and economic exigency in more absolute terms, Archer acknowledged that "art" and "mammon" were "bound together" for good or evil (About 271). By taking this mediating position, Archer acknowledged patrons' desires to be entertained even as he reminded them that more deserving forms merited their attention. While he advocated on behalf of a realistic drama modeled on continental realism, then, he admitted popular forms into the pantheon of British drama. "Preference should, of course, be given to serious dramatic studies of modern life," he suggested in a discussion of a possible endowed theatre, "but healthy farce, graceful light-comedy, powerful melodrama, should by no means be excluded from consideration. Nothing human should be held alien" (279). Insofar as he identified practicality as an issue in discussions about art, Archer universalized the
appeal of the serious theatre for middle-class spectators by describing it in terms that fit with their existing preferences.

Archer continued to develop the same line of argument in "A Plea for the Playwright" (1886), where he suggested that the "absence of a middle way between sensational success and total failure" meant that the British drama could not develop as an art (828). He advocated for a "middle way" by aligning the interests of the New Drama with a compromise between "sensational success" and "total failure." Like critics who saw an idealized pit audience as a middle way between upper and lower class interests and influences, Archer described the New Drama as a form that mediated between the demands of popular success and artistic expression. He also emphasized the need for managers to "recognise the promise of inexperienced writers and to afford them the opportunity of acquiring experience" (826). Archer maintained that managers must put aside the preconception that the public would not accept plays that deviated from established models; instead, he suggested, managers should count on the support of "at least an intelligent minority of the public" (826)--a suggestion that not only publicly reminded managers that their audiences were not stupid but also invited the drama's patrons to place themselves among the "better" class of viewer by
embracing more challenging plays. By adopting a rhetorical position that emphasized balance, Archer not only presented the New Drama as a palatable blend of cultivation and popular appeal, he also identified its interests with those of a middle class that regarded itself as a mid-point between the extremes represented by the upper and lower classes. At the same time, while he did not adopt populism wholesale, his appeal to a moderate position preemptively defended the intellectual drama from charges of elitism.

If Archer's appeal to a "middle way" suggested a congruence between the New Drama and the middle class, his discussions of culture also conflated an Idealist model of culture with middle-class values in a way that equated "cultivation" with an implicitly classed worldview. In "A Plea for the Playwright," for example, Archer emphasized that the business of managers was to "present to the English public a series of healthy and worthy English plays" (817). By repeatedly using words such as "healthy," "wholesome" or "worthy" in his critical discourse, Archer evoked a specifically ideological understanding of art within an Idealist cultural framework. Not only did this strategy seem to validate a middle-class world view, the implied link between these values and "British" character placed the middle-class audience as representative of a broad, national perspective. The result was a critical position
rhetorically designed to appeal to middle-class audiences because it placed their beliefs within a venerated and "universal" model of culture that was also distinctly British. In doing so, Archer injected popular appeal into a critical agenda that—to his opponents—often seemed intent on serving the interests of an intellectual elite.

Archer's use of an ideologically charged vocabulary not only aligned the New Drama with a middle-class world view, it also implicitly answered its critics by placing the drama in an explicitly moral context. While his opponents claimed that "moral" plays provided a wholesome example for audiences, Archer maintained that problems should be introduced and explored in the drama so that they might be addressed and corrected in society. At the same time, he redefined the idea of morality to fit with his vision for the drama. Such a focus had the benefit of allowing him to distance what he saw as truly "moral" art from the twin threats of narrow aestheticism (with which the New Drama was sometimes identified by its critics) and sentimentalism. Unlike the sentimental drama, which he found to be "fantastic, quite out of touch with the realities of life" (About 99), Archer argued that truly "moral" or didactic art instructed "as life itself teaches, exhibiting the fact and leaving the observer to trace and formulate the underlying law" ("Ibsen" 31). To further underline his conviction that
the New Drama ought to reflect the moral and social experience of its viewers, Archer explicitly linked it to "British" character: "We want to see English ideals celebrated, English problems discussed, English manners depicted and criticised by English men and women" ("Plea" 817). This kind of statement countered his detractors' xenophobic claims that continental plays and influences undermined British culture even as it attempted to attract middle-class readers to the New Drama by promoting its claims to function as an expression of national culture.

**Archer's 'Other': Clement Scott and the Power of Populism**

When Archer aligned the New Drama with the aims of a distinctly "moral" and "British" culture, he was responding primarily to the criticism of Scott, England's leading advocate of the old, or sentimental, drama. For Archer, the "old" drama—including genteel melodrama and the early Society drama popularized by Robertson—promoted an unreal, or sanitized, view of life. For Scott, by contrast, the old drama represented the values most characteristic of a distinctly British character: "humanity," "health" and "wholesome, manly sentiment" (Yesterday II:396-7). Because he believed that it aimed to displace forms such as genteel melodrama in favour of a more realistic drama, Scott reacted violently against Archer's campaign, claiming that it was
immoral and damaging to society as a whole. In spite of
their antagonism, however, Scott and Archer appealed to
similar class-coded terms such as "wholesomeness" and
"health" in their criticism—although they applied them to
nearly antithetical ends. Whereas Archer redefined the
moral drama as a form of didactic art that instructed its
spectators by challenging them intellectually, Scott felt
that the drama best expressed morality by evoking an
affective response about how life ought to be among
audiences. The fact that Scott and Archer shared key
descriptive terms and a key conviction that art should be
moral may seem surprising given their divergent views of how
morality should function in art. While they differed
significantly in their understanding of morality, their
common appeal to a vocabulary that was meaningful to
"educated" middle-class audiences suggested an important
convergence between their views.

Like Archer, Scott saw his audience as "the intelligent
and cultivated middle classes of England" (Yesterday
II:420). While Archer's "educated" middle class was largely
associated with the journals of general culture, however
Scott's audience was the mass audience for the newspaper and
trade journal for which he wrote, both of which were
explicitly popular in tone. Similarly, where Archer envisioned a "special" public for the drama--implying an elite--Scott disparaged the tendency to dismiss "the 'common people,' as they are stupidly called" (II:433). As editor of the Theatre, for example, Scott included many "memoirs" of pit viewers that ran counter to Archer's preference for professionalized critical discourse. Although his intention in evoking the "common people" was to designate a genuinely popular audience in opposition to social and critical elites, however, Scott implicitly aligned this audience with the broad middle class by granting representative status to his own values. Unlike Archer, who followed Arnold in agitating on behalf of a middle class who had not yet returned to the theatre in force, Scott believed in the capabilities of existing popular audiences. Writing about the state of the drama in 1878, Scott suggested that the presence of "thoughtful men and women" in the theatres proved "that there is a public, and a large one, ready to

16 Unlike Archer, who produced many theoretical statements about the drama over the course of his career, Scott generally preferred to express his philosophy in evaluations of particular plays or issues. Given the specificity of many of his comments, I have drawn extensively on his longer published memoir of the later nineteenth-century drama, The Drama of Yesterday and To-Day, to characterize Scott's philosophy, augmenting it where possible with his other published statements about the drama.

17 See Archer, "The Duties of Dramatic Critics."
appreciate the highest and most ambitious effort which the theatrical manager can make" ("Our Stage" 6). While he supported popular audiences, however, he felt strongly that the Society element had undermined the British drama by leading managers to elevate one segment of the population's concerns over the best interests of society as a whole. Accordingly, Scott regretted the "chatting, the whispered conversation, the flirtation, and the veiled comments of the fashionable stalls, whose occupants had come for digestion after dinner rather than pleasure" (II:423).

Although Scott and Archer agreed that the Society audience represented a damaging influence on the drama, they disagreed about who constituted this group. Archer saw the "educated" middle class as a largely absent influence, and so identified the "philistine" middle class as hangers-on of the Society audience. By contrast, Scott equated the social elitism of fashionable audiences with what he saw as the intellectual elitism of the New Drama, conflating these two groups into a single negative influence. He therefore regretted the success of such works as The Second Mrs. Tanqueray, which he described as "the outcome of an age that allows Society to rule the stage and not the people," and advocated on behalf of works that "find the poets and the Philistines on a common platform" (II:396, 390). This tendency to validate art according to its ability to convey
common sense was central to Scott's vision of the drama. Not only did it allow him to condemn both the affected "intelligence" and "culture" of fashionable audiences, it also allowed him to appropriate a "universal" view of art on behalf of the audiences who were dismissed as "philistines" by his intellectual opponents. By treating social and intellectual elites as a single group, in effect, Scott conjured up the specter of a debased, foreign-influenced elite in opposition to a nationally-defined popular audience.

Scott's interest in a popularized, "commonsense" approach to art was central to his appeal to his own readership. Rather than evoking such cultural authorities as Arnold, Scott framed his appeal to culture in terms that placed the ordinary person as the best authority to judge art. This approach emphasized the social dimension of art, identifying quality as a spontaneously recognizable element of a work. For Scott, art could not achieve the end of "cultivating" audiences--by which he meant to indicate a process of "humanization" rather than elevation to an elite--if its value was not immediately apparent to consumers. By taking this position, Scott did not mean to indicate that there was no place for drama criticism (II:432); instead, he re-emphasized that the merits of the best work must be recognizable by both the "poet" and the "philistine" in
order to further his claim that art must serve a social, moral purpose validated by "common" sense. Scott himself did not regard his position as Idealist in any strict sense; rather, he saw himself as the defender of an art of "ideals." In some respects, however, his critical position coincided with the Idealist notion popularized by his opponents that culture should be a classless, democratic sphere. In this regard, where Scott's discourse evoked broadly Idealist principles it opened up the opportunity for his supporters to identify themselves as an idealized audience of "common" viewers.

This coincidence with Idealist thought is not generally noted by Scott's detractors, who have tended to see his interest in morality only as evidence of his middle-class provincialism. Writing about Scott's appeal for his viewers in his memoir of the period, for example, W.L. Courtney suggested that unabashed philistinism was at the heart of his critical project. "The average playgoer accepted Scott's attitude without question and read his criticisms" Courtney argued, "because they appealed to the great middle-class and upheld the dogma that you might flirt with indecency, that you might listen to and enjoy risky episodes on the music hall stage, but that a serious attempt to deal with social problems must be avoided at all hazards" (Passing Hour 215). For Courtney, this position resonated
with Scott's middle-class readers because it recognized them as the final judge of art, vesting them with an aesthetic authority not apparent among other social groups. According to Courtney, Scott succeeded because he successfully conveyed that "the man in the street is the really competent judge of drama, because his limited vision and his fixed opinions, right or wrong, are the ultimate test of art and of morality" (215-6).

While it successfully conveyed Scott's longstanding sense of himself as one of "the people" for whom he wrote, Courtney's emphasis on stereotypes of the middle class did not accommodate this group's view of itself as artistically inclined or interested. However disproven by the judgments of history, this self-perception played an important role in contemporary debates about audiences, since the problem was that opposing groups saw themselves in similar cultural terms. Unlike Arnold's puritans, who evoked religion to control art, Scott saw himself defending the aims of art itself. Although Scott's popularity among contemporary audiences was undoubtedly linked to his success in positioning himself as one of the "people" for whom he wrote, his position was powerful because it evoked a traditional Idealist vocabulary familiar to his readers as part of an authoritative discourse. In fact, Scott's appeal to art as a force for moral instruction, his interest in art
as a way to express ideals, and his sentimentalism were all consonant with the broad tenets of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Idealism insofar as he emphasized that the drama's most powerful function was to change people's attitudes by evoking a universal sympathy that allowed them to transcend their individual interests.

That Scott was able to utilize critical discourse that invoked Idealism at a time when traditional sources of authority were losing currency suggests a deeper basis for his popularity as a critic. Although he was undoubtedly conservative in his views and thus appealed to conservative readers, Scott was a significant voice because he aligned traditional views about art with the age's growing interest in democratization. At the same time, because Scott's own discourse coincided with that of his detractors, it confused the issues and arguments related to morality and art—and ultimately let readers adopt the position that most accorded with their own views. Thus, for instance, while Scott would seem to have been a model for the narrow puritanical philistinism that Arnold rejected, Arnold's limited critical statements about the drama are compatible with Scott's--both in the kind of drama he praised and in the kinds of terms he used to praise it. When Arnold suggested that Henry Arthur Jones's melodrama The Silver King represented a positive step in the evolution of British drama because it conveyed
"sobriety and propriety" in its "diction and sentiments" (quoted in Archer *Old Drama* 282), he was making the kind of statement Scott would have approved.18

Because his views were compatible with Idealism, Scott's criticism appealed to a middle class that wanted to see itself as cultivated without submitting to the kinds of challenges posed by Archer. Where Archer worked to emphasize the popular and moral appeal of the drama in his criticism in order to counter claims of elitism, Scott's populism was less narrow. In fact, although his resistance to the growth of New Drama has generally been evoked to support characterizations of Scott as a philistine, his conviction that the theatre should support the values of "the people" coincided with Arnold's view that a drama of "the town" was too narrow and so must give way to a national drama mediated by the middle class. By making this kind of appeal, Scott not only countered condemnations of the value of the sentimental drama, he also drew on the popular--or democratic--elements of Idealism. While he embraced the idea that a society must re-confirm its values from within, however, Scott opposed the effects of mass culture and

18 Arnold's somewhat contradictory grasp of philistinism is similarly noted by Elsom and Tomalin, who point to Arnold's suggestion that the highly conservative E.S. Pigott--then the Examiner of Plays and outspoken opponent of Ibsen's work--might make a good state commissioner for a national drama (17).
commercialism on the drama. Throughout his career, he advocated diligently against the excesses of the emerging mass entertainment industry—including its focus on excessive "realism" in props and scenery as well as its privileging of star performers—in favour of a nostalgic and idealized model of a popular theatre in which managers emphasized craft over economic gain.

In his self-adopted role as the voice of the respectable mainstream classes, Scott was committed to the idea that the "people" should set both the moral and the aesthetic standards for dramatic production in England. Because he embraced a drama that was already popular, Scott's perspective was attractive to his readers, who liked to have their preferences reinforced by an authority. Where Archer emphasized the need for an endowed alternative to the existing theatre, orchestrated and financed by "better" viewers, Scott believed that "better" audiences were the broad middle class, whose spontaneous response to art represented the most accurate judgement of cultural worth.

"At a dull entertainment, nay, at one that is showy and pretentious" he suggested in a discussion of the art of actress Ada Rehan, "[the intelligent middle class] will sit solemn and as torpid as judges. But when the art interpreter comes along they will rise to her as to a sudden
and unexpected revelation" (II:420). For Scott, then, the theatre was valuable not because it could provide an artistic experience calculated to raise a response, but rather because it provided a venue in which art-lovers could come together to reaffirm existing values. Reflecting on the state of the drama at the end of the century, Scott argued that neither "fashion" nor "the sudden access to the stage of men and women of higher intelligence" could explain the success of the drama; rather, he suggested that a system of "Free Trade" governed by popular appeal—not the exercise of laws and parliamentary prerogatives—had produced "strong public patronage" (Yesterday II:432). The result of this system, he claimed, was a late nineteenth-century drama that was "elevated" in "artistic tone" and "purified" as popular amusement (II:433).

The Common Thread: Scott, Archer and the "Better" Class of Viewer

Although they differed considerably in their judgments of what kind of drama should predominate, Archer and Scott shared several key beliefs that were subsequently central to British theatre criticism. Both Scott and Archer regarded the drama as a primarily popular art that exercised a positive influence over social life because it had the power to reflect and shape broad national concerns. For Scott, an
avowed populist, the drama's capacity to bring large audiences together to reaffirm collectively held values was its primary strength. However, even Archer, who acknowledged that the serious drama might never find more than a specialized audience, insisted that the drama must draw the largest possible viewership. As he suggested in a commentary on the free stage published in 1891, it would be unwise to place the Independent Theatre "on the basis of a club." The drama "is essentially a social art," he claimed, and therefore must be open to criticism and exchange (668). While both critics insisted that the drama must be popular, they also limited the potentially radical effects of democratization on art--Archer by explicitly specifying a "special" public and Scott by implicitly normalizing middle-class values. For each critic, this meant that the "educated" middle class came to be identified with the idealized "better" class of viewer.

Archer and Scott's interest in the drama as a social form of art was linked to their common conviction that the "educated" middle-class audience should lead in matters of taste. While they described this audience in nearly identical terms, however, these critics divided the middle class between them, mapping their concern with "old" and "new" forms of drama onto corresponding audiences. If Scott's "old" drama appealed to the broad middle class while
Archer's "new" drama was aimed at the younger, intellectual viewer, however, each critic saw his own audience as the authentic representative of "universal" values and identified the other's audience as the source of cultural decline, aligned with a debased elite. That a model of culture founded on principles of unity would lead to such intense conflict suggests the difficulty the ideal presented: that groups evoked for their "representative" values could only constitute a cultural identity by designating an antithetical "other," in this case within their own class. As a result of its internal contradictions, this view of audience helped create embattled factions within the middle class and eventually called into question the very values and larger project it was invoked to support.

In the specific example of the Archer/Scott conflict, reliance on a common critical vocabulary to serve opposing ends created a situation in which traditional meanings were open to appropriation by any group that wanted to lend its arguments cultural legitimacy. While founded on a scheme of absolute values--on the Idealist vision of a high culture grounded in permanent, universal truths--this vocabulary was actually highly class-coded. Thus, for example, the notion of morality central to Idealist discourse was presented in terms such as "wholesomeness" and "health" that linked it to
middle-class ideas about what was best for society as a whole. This conflation of cultural and social concerns at the level of critical description helped support the perception that the middle class embodied "universal" values. At the same time, however, the lack of consensus among these and subsequent critics about what these terms meant created a situation in which the terms themselves became highly mutable. If the notion of "universal" values became increasingly central to discussions of art in the period between 1890 and 1914, the sense that any actual authority was attached to specific articulations of these values eroded. Archer and Scott's competing views of what "morality" in art meant and how it functioned not only tended to fragment the middle class, it also indicated the problem of relativism raised by the reliance on overlapping terms. In the context of late nineteenth-century conflicts about morality in the drama, this confusion of terms meant that audiences were increasingly free to choose the meaning that suited their own views best.

What is interesting about the underlying convergences in the criticism of Clement Scott and William Archer, finally, is that they suggest both the emergence of a new ideal of the cultivated viewer and the contradictions this viewer raised. That each critic identified his audience as the "educated" or "cultivated" middle class is not
surprising, given the fact that this audience had been central to critical discourse through much of the century. What is surprising, however, is that both critics defined this audience in popular and democratic terms that displaced a traditional class-based elite as the proper source of cultural authority. This parallel development in two critics with opposing views about the drama hints at the major paradigm shift away from an elite model of cultural authority that was underway through the last years of the nineteenth century.

After Archer and Scott: The Fate of the "Better" Viewer
The distinction that Scott and Archer carved out between the broad middle class and "younger intellectuals" was extremely influential among their contemporaries, establishing two competing schools which dominated the London reviewing scene through the first decade of the twentieth century. Although Scott and Archer's reviewing careers lasted through the 1890s, however, the context of their critical conflict changed significantly after the Ibsen controversies and founding of the Independent Theatre. As Nicoll points out, criticism became "more bitter and much more personal," an indication of the conviction apparent on each side of the controversy (22). The effects of this increasingly "personalized" criticism were considerable: not only did
attacks take on a personal tone, as Nicoll suggests, they were also reflective of individual perspectives. The effect, ironically, was that as the opposition between conservative and intellectual defenders of the old drama and the new became more pronounced, actual differences between critics became more difficult to define. Scott and Archer's overlapping use of key terms and common perspectives thus carried forward among other critics. As a result, subsequent critics who espoused antithetical positions ended by agreeing with each other on some issues. In spite of the fact that criticism remained polarized around conservative and intellectual positions, then, it was actually quite issue-driven, with critics making provisional alliances of the most unlikely kind—often pointing to the convergences as evidence of the "universal" nature of the commonly-held belief. Such developments, which followed Scott's suggestion that true art finds the "poet" and the "philistine" on the same platform, became increasingly common through the 1890s. As a result of the combined influence of the democratization of critical discourse and the appeal to a "universal" ideal of viewership, intellectual critics began to identify with the interests of the "common" people, whom they felt were able to recognize "authentic" culture where Society audiences could not.
Through the end of the nineteenth century, commentators as otherwise antagonistic to each other's interests as George Moore and Herbert Beerbohm Tree were able to agree that Society audiences (then the dominant influence) were damaging to the interests of a British cultural identity because they assumed that their preferred forms of entertainment were examples of high culture. In an article published in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1890, Tree, an actor-manager who would later become infamous for his overblown and spectacular productions of Shakespeare's plays, spoke out against the predominance of Society tastes in the contemporary theatre. Early in his commentary Tree made an unexpected acknowledgement of common ground between himself and Moore, an avowed intellectual whose animosity towards actors and the stage was outspoken. In the context of a contemporary critical scene defined by the hostility between advocates of "old" and "new" forms of drama, such a concurrence was not only surprising, it represented an almost unprecedented meeting of minds between embittered opposites.

Tree's major contention was that "the theatre should be regarded as a benefactor of the community at large rather than as a pastime for that narrower Society which is sometimes described as 'Cultschah'" (923). By writing the words phonetically to indicate snobbish intonation, Tree
differentiated an implied "authentic" culture that expressed the values of society as a whole from representations that appealed to the interests of a narrow clique. This appeal identified Tree with a democratic, vaguely Idealist, understanding of culture. Further, in making the link between himself and Moore, Tree rhetorically placed himself in a position so disinterested as to unite commentators whose interests were otherwise antagonistic. In this case, the kind of charges both critics leveled at Society viewers went beyond earlier condemnations of audiences who supported entertainment at the expense of art; in fact, both accepted the public's right to be entertained, and focused instead on the problems that occurred when entertainment masqueraded as serious drama. Both critics also responded to the perceived threat posed by Society audiences by appealing to broad popular audiences as a counterpoint.

Moore's suggestion that cultural quality ought to be apparent both to popular lower-class audiences and "cultivated" viewers was an indicator of the shift had occurred among critics in the years since the 1860s and 1870s. While his perspective was reiterated by a diverse group of fellow critics, however, it was evoked for widely differing ends. Thus, a critique of the intellectual drama published by journalist Norman Hapgood in the Contemporary Review in 1898 attempted to explain the kinship between the
"civilised man" and the lower-class "gods" who inhabited the galleries by focusing on the elements common to both. For Hapgood, as for Tree and Moore, the "public" was immune to the charms of "the pseudo-intellectual drama" because it was incapable of appreciating its subtleties, but it would respond to good art because it was true to "large human demands" (715). "The people are loyal to some of the deepest rules of art," he suggested, "because those principles were founded on a knowledge of human nature, but although they maintain the rights of flesh and blood, their blood and their flesh are as coarse as they are vigorous" (715). Like the public, he argued, the "civilised man enjoys the primitive instincts of mankind and dislikes the pretences of half-education" (717). While he clearly differentiated the public's "low" taste from that of "civilised" viewers, Hapgood also suggested that these diverse audiences shared a common ability to recognize culture that was lacking in the fashionable audience "that buys literature for the chromos which go with it, and goes to the theatre to see cartloads of scenery and acres of heather, and real horses" (717).

The outgrowth of a democratized criticism was a cultural field in which it was increasingly difficult to make "absolute" critical judgments. While many critics were quite certain about what kinds of plays were not art, their
anxieties that such plays might succeed in hoodwinking others escalated, suggesting the underlying fear that the "real" majority might not coincide with the idealized "better" viewership. As Archer suggested in an overview of the 1897 London theatre season, "Nothing is entirely to be deplored except the success of sheer blatant stupidity. The Sign of the Cross is, to me, a far more depressing portent than My Girl or Monte Carlo" ("Blight" 26). Archer's suggestion that an affected high culture was more damaging than forthright examples of mass culture such as the musical comedy registered an important shift in the traditional balance of high and low. Related to this fear about the effects of cultural democratization was the corresponding fear that "true" culture might be overwhelmed by a commercialized pseudo culture that was unrecognizable as such to its consumers.
Chapter Four
The Drama as Literature:
Criticism, Audiences and the Effects of Populism

Although critics who supported Archer's interest in continental playwrights regarded the emergence of the New Drama as a "renascence," others followed Scott in resisting the movement. By the early 1890s, the intensity of critics' responses to and defenses of realism resulted in debates about the proper subject matter for drama. Ironically, perhaps, hysterical denunciations of realism through the early 1890s only fuelled public interest in the New Drama. The immediate result of this conflict was that the press helped stimulate a mass market for "daring" British plays such as Pinero's *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* among fashionable and middle-class audiences interested in sampling realism. Another, broader, effect was that interest in critical writing about the drama developed among the British public, particularly the "serious" middle-class consumers of the journals of general culture. As a result, more articles about the contemporary drama began to appear in such periodicals as the *New Review*, the *Fortnightly Review* and the *Nineteenth Century* among others.

The growth of a public consensus that the drama was a topic worthy of serious attention represented a major triumph for theatre critics who had laboured through the 1880s to raise the cultural profile of the theatre and to
defend the drama's claims to status as an important art form. At the same time, however, widespread interest in the drama drew commentators from outside the immediate field and so challenged existing assumptions within discourse about the drama. Between the late 1880s and the first decade of the twentieth century, critics and journalists with no background in the theatre began to publish on the subject and as a result of their input the terms of discussion about the drama changed. Not only did these new commentators join in existing discussions about the effects of commercialism in the theatre, re-emphasizing the prevailing cultural perception that art and economics represented opposing concerns, they also queried the relative merits of literary versus dramatic writing. The effect of this new influence on discourse about the drama was considerable. Not only were existing high cultural terms subject to redefinition by theatre critics who, in spite of their differences of opinion, shared some similar perceptions of the theatre, these redefined terms were now called into question by authors and journalists more interested in defending the prestige of literary forms than in promoting the claims of the drama.1

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1 Although it is outside the immediate concerns of this thesis, there is an interesting parallel between the struggle to establish the drama as an important high cultural form and attempts to defend the novel's cultural
The widespread entry of non-theatrical voices into the debate highlighted the contentious character of high culture in discourse about the drama through the last years of the century. Although critics interested in fostering a serious drama, including William Archer and George Moore among others, had long advocated that literary authors take up the New Drama as a cause, the drama's status as literature had never really been called into question. Instead, the terms "literature" and "literary" were invoked in discussions about the drama because they highlighted its kinship with a "serious" and respected art whose claims to high cultural status were more secure, while the theatre was dismissed as a debased form of mass culture. As literary figures and general journalists began to write about theatre and the drama, however, the established relationship between drama and literature became a focal point for debate. In large part, as John Stokes points out, this description of "literary" was contentious because it was unstable—"sometimes used to elevate the status of the text, and sometimes, in a wider context, merely as a term of status. As my discussion here suggests in a very cursory form, defences of the novel as a mass form reinforced the distinction between art and economics, criticizing the growth of popular audiences. For contemporary discussions of the "problem" see, for example, Gosse and Lee.

2 Insistence that major literary figures should be involved with the drama was central to the campaign for an Independent Theatre; see Woodfield (40) and Stokes (116).
approbation" (116). In addition, the term "literary" had another, more longstanding, association not mentioned by Stokes: the link to poetic drama and the uses of poetic language. This association was dominant through the Romantic era but lost currency after the 1870s, due in large part to a number of critically ill-received attempts to revive verse drama using pseudo-Elizabethan forms. As a result, by the 1880s and 1890s most supporters of a "serious" theatre (including Archer and Jones) envisioned a "literary" drama informed by realism. By the first decade of the twentieth century, however, poetic drama experienced another vogue in the London theatres, and this older association was revived once again.

Where Stokes considers the "literary" drama in the context of polemic about the Independent Theatre specifically, I am interested in broader uses of, and conflicts about, the term over a longer period of time. This chapter investigates ways that conflicts about the drama as literature contributed to the tendency to idealize

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3 In the "Defence of Poetry," for example, Shelley linked the drama to poetry (491).
4 W.G. Wills, whose plays Walkley later described as "pseudo-poetic," was the major figure (Drama and Life 39). This phenomenon is also referred to in Archer's "The Stage and Literature" (222) and Filon (311).
5 One of the earliest advocates of this view in the late nineteenth century was the Earl of Lytton, whose discussions
a democratic middle-class theatre audience in discourse about the drama. Not only were commentators without significant backgrounds in the theatre eager to condemn its commercial excesses and, in some cases, to dismiss the drama's claims to significant artistic status in the years between 1880 and 1914, they also called into question the populist vision that by now united otherwise embattled drama critics--and, in general, condemned the drama as an irredeemably "popular" form in contrast to literature. As my brief discussion of Moore and Tree's unlikely coincidence of views in chapter three suggests, this influence had the effect of placing the bitterly divided advocates of "old" and "new" dramas at least provisionally on the same side of some issues.

Overall, theatre critics concurred that dramatic authors had to achieve a measurable level of economic success in order to have their plays produced. Even advocates of an endowed theatre maintained that the drama must develop popular audiences since it derived its power as an art form from its ability to address society en masse. Their arguments accordingly took the somewhat radical step of acknowledging the relationship between artistic and economic concerns to some degree. By contrast, literary figures were more accepting of the quintessentially Romantic

of the drama as literature in the early 1880s focused on
idea that plays should be read rather than performed, in large part because they were interested in preserving the opposition between art and economics that structured their own parallel struggle with the mass market. In debate about the drama this contrast heightened theatre critics' tendencies to idealize a democratic middle-class audience and, as I will suggest in this chapter, ultimately led them to privilege the "common man" as the appropriate judge of a work's cultural value.

This chapter examines how the critical tendency to praise popular audiences affected the way that commentators invoked and ultimately conceptualized "high" cultural forms. Specifically, I contend that assumptions about, and appeals to, the idea of "literary" drama changed significantly in the years between 1890 and 1914 as concerns about the debasing effects of fashionable and middle-class audiences became entrenched in critical discourse. As I suggested in chapters two and three, commentators vilified the commercial theatre because it catered to the affluent fashionable and middle classes but, at the same time, remained uncomfortably tied to these audiences. To ease this discomfort, and to distance themselves from the problematic overlap between

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6 Henry James' struggle to come to terms with the growing mass market for literature is the subject of an excellent study by Annesko.
"authentic" and "pseudo" forms of drama in the theatre that troubled attempts to categorize audiences, critics increasingly appealed to idealized "common" viewers whose interest in the drama they contrasted with the negative effects of "cultchah." While this distinction initially corresponded to an Arnoldian notion of an educated and enlightened middle class, in the years after 1890 it was broadened to include a more "national" audience. At the same time, assumptions about the positive effects of "cultivation" changed--simultaneously producing a more democratized view of audiences and more uncertainty about cultural value.

I. The Drama and Literature

Because the epithet "literary" had a variety of applications it was often disputed by critics--particularly after the 1890s, when it was widely cited by critics and journalists in debates about the immediate prospects of the British drama. The appeal for a "literary" drama often focused on comparisons between contemporary French and British dramas. William Archer among others had long dwelt on the fact that French theatregoers had access to printed copies of modern

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7 Critics who evoked this term in the 1890s included Archer and Jones, as well as George Moore, H.D. Traill and Oswald Crawfurd; other commentators who used it included Henry
plays, a factor that he felt was crucial to the development of thoughtful and cultivated audiences. Throughout the 1880s Archer argued that attempts to reform the stage should focus on restoring "literary merit" to the drama, by which he envisioned "a body of playwrights, however small, whose works are not only acted, but printed and read" (English Dramatists 4). Other supporters of a high cultural drama, which privileged the text and the author over its theatrical realization, reiterated this kind of argument. In Henry James's "After the Play" (1889), for example, Dorriforth (the character most associated with James) pointedly argued that "A play isn't fully produced until it is in a form in which you can refer to it" (Scenic Art 237). In spite of critics' insistences that the drama must be read as literature to be fully appreciated, however, the practice of publishing plays did not become widespread in England until after copyright law changed in 1891, since dramatists who had their work published before that time effectively forfeited their economic rights. At about the same time, the idea of the drama as "literature" was taken up in another quadrant as the Independent Theatre advertised its

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Irving, Stoker, Wyndham, and Tree. Their debates are discussed in depth in this chapter.  
8 Subsequently, Shaw embraced this position. See the Preface to Plays Unpleasant (19-25)
intention to bring a "literary" theatre before the British public. Unlike Archer and James, Grein and his supporters used the term "literary" to indicate a drama which dealt with the kinds of realistic themes then current among the most respected novelists and which exhibited the kind of artistic prose characteristic of the best contemporary literature.10

Although these two early uses of the designation "literary" shared a common concern with highly developed forms of written expression, they differed somewhat in their focus. While Archer supported a drama that dealt with serious themes, he did not explicitly identify "literary" drama with "realism." Instead, he invoked the descriptor "literary" to indicate the level of serious study he hoped that audiences would undertake in order to appreciate the drama. By contrast, Grein and Jarvis did equate "literary" drama with a specific kind of content designed to provoke an intellectual response from viewers. As a result of this overlap between their respective usages—which was heightened by Archer's public identification with realism through the Ibsen controversy—the term became very

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9 For a thorough account of changes in dramatic copyright see Stephens.
10 See, for example, Grein and Jarvis's proposal for an Independent Theatre as well as George Moore's "Our Dramatists and Their Literature." Both are discussed in chapter 2.
conflicted, signifying both a traditional understanding of aesthetic forms and a newer connection to realistic content.

In the years after 1890, I would suggest, critical dispute about the literary drama increasingly focused on issues related to judgments about cultural worth. As introduced in different threads of debate about the drama, the term "literary" subsequently came to carry considerable weight since it focused differences of opinion about the drama's claims as a cultural form.

**Literary Authors and the Stage**

The most direct appeal for a "literary" drama came during the campaign for an Independent Theatre. Both Grein and George Moore, one of the project's most ardent supporters, insisted that the theatre's chances for success were linked to the "literary" quality of the plays it produced and both identified British novelists associated with realism as the best candidates for this enterprise. Among the authors that Grein and Jarvis subsequently singled out as valuable sources of "advice" in their proposal for a British Independent Theatre were Meredith and Hardy ("British Théâtre Libre" 177). For Grein and Jarvis, the influence of respected literary figures was necessary to stimulate a drama that was distanced from the concerns of the existing theatre. Not only would works by major authors address
contemporary social problems through the study of character, they reasoned, they would also introduce a level of prose-writing that was lacking in existing plays.

While Moore and Grein appealed to major literary figures during the campaign for an Independent Theatre, none lent significant support beyond signatures on petitions. In fact, none of the authors singled out pursued playwriting on any serious level through the 1890s. For many successful novelists, the commercialism of the contemporary British drama was simply too restrictive and some, like Hardy, found the prospective rewards of the theatre generally too slight to consider making the transition. When commenting on the drama in an 1892 symposium published in the Pall Mall Gazette, for instance, Hardy expressed reservations about the actor manager system that paralleled Grein and Jarvis's complaints, noting that "parts have to be moulded to actors, not actors to parts," that "managers will not risk a truly original play," and that "scenes have to be arranged in a constrained and arbitrary fashion to suit the exigencies of scene-building" (Personal Writings 139). As a result of these demands, Hardy suggested, "the presentation of human passions is subordinated to the presentation of mountains, cities, clothes, furniture, plate, jewels, and other real and sham appurtenances, to the neglect of the principle that the material stage should be a conventional or figurative
arena" (139). Beyond his public statements about the stage, however, Hardy may also have been discouraged from aligning himself closely with the Independent Theatre since, once established, it became aggressively realist (and controversial) in its choice of plays.11

Although the Independent Theatre failed to attract significant work by contemporary literary figures, other major authors did produce plays in the years between 1880 and 1914. Henry James (still an American, but by then deeply associated with the British literary and critical scene) experimented with playwriting for the commercial theatre, as did Tennyson—several of whose plays were staged by Henry Irving. James's efforts inspired only one very limited success, an adaptation of The American produced by George Compton in 1891.12 His decision to devote his time exclusively to playwriting ended with George Alexander's ill-fated production of Guy Domville in 1895: after being hissed on the first night James's play was quickly withdrawn. Even critics who were disposed to support

11 In spite of the fact that it downplayed associations with realism at the proposal stage, Grein and Jarvis's decision to stage Ghosts as its first production in 1891 was intended to set the tone of the enterprise as a whole; see Stokes (138). Wilson notes Hardy's "very qualified interest in contemporary realist drama" (19). Hardy did eventually become involved with the theatre, but not until much later in his life; see Wilson.
James's enterprise suggested that the work conveyed levels of subtlety and delicacy in its language and character development that were lost on most contemporary viewers. Following this incident, James took what he saw as a personal attack to heart and returned to novel writing.

As a dramatist, Tennyson fared only slightly better than James. Although his works achieved a satisfactory level of economic success at the Lyceum, critics generally found his plays to be out of step with the demands of the contemporary theatre. While his plays (like Guy Domville) were praised for the "poetic" quality of their language, Tennyson's dramas were regarded as fundamentally "undramatic" by critics. By contrast, such popular (and relatively lightweight) authors as Robert Buchanan and Brander Matthews moved effortlessly between novel and play writing, producing works that achieved long runs and

12 My account of James's involvement with the theatre is indebted to Edel's *Henry James: The Dramatic Years*.
13 For examples of this response see reviews by Shaw, Wells, and Bennett included in Edel's edition of the play.
14 Tennyson's major involvement with the theatre came in the years between 1876 and 1882, during which time Irving staged a number of his works including The Falcon, The Cup and The Promise of May.
15 While works such as Queen Mary were praised when published, Tennyson's dramas in performance were generally unenthusiastically received by critics—although The Cup had a lengthy run at the Lyceum; see Martin (512-3, 524-5); by 1902, Gosse could dismiss Tennyson entirely ("Revival" 163). See also Walkley's *Drama and Life* (38-9).
handsome returns. The early effects of this state of affairs were the subject of George Moore's quite cynical piece, "Our Dramatists and Their Literature," in which he contended that most current playwrights were "second-rate" and that their success indicated "the intellectual sloth and horrible mediocrity into which we have drifted" (632).

Given the failure of most respected literary figures to make successful transitions to the stage, many general observers concluded that the contemporary theatre was unsuited to serious, highly crafted works. Among literary figures, the perceived split between the relative demands of art and economics on the playwright reinforced the longstanding perception that a schism existed between the dramatic text and the theatre in which it was staged. This perception was subsequently embraced by the journalists of general culture who entered the debate about the drama, many of whom expressed the same kinds of reservations noted by Hardy, citing the excesses of the actor-manager system of production as evidence of the theatre's debasement.

Unlike drama critics, who criticized the organization of the stage in order to change it, most non-drama critics who

16 In the years between 1880 and 1898, for example, Buchanan had 43 plays produced.
17 This view is exemplified by such journalists as Oswald Crawfurd and H.D. Traill, whose arguments are discussed in
entered public discussion about the state of the drama
generally reiterated older prejudices against the stage in
order to draw a contrast with literature. Of these, many
suggested that the elements that traditionally distinguished
the drama as an art had naturally evolved into other
forms.\footnote{18 In addition to Caine, cited below, see Hardy's
introduction to The Dynasts; James's later "dramatic"
method, outlined in the Prefaces to his post-1895 works,
also follows this pattern.}

In 1894, for example, popular novelist Hall Caine
published an article entitled "The Novelist in Shakespeare,"
in which he argued that were Shakespeare to appear in the
nineteenth century he would have been obliged to write
novels to express his views. To support his case, Caine
cited both the predominance of economic forces in the
theatre and the restrictions on subject matter that
discouraged major literary talents from writing plays.
"Shakespeare would, of course, be a dramatist," he
concluded, "but it is hardly conceivable that he would not
be a novelist also. He would want his say on the great
questions of life, and he would find that these are not
usually discussed on the stage in our day" (133). When
discussing the relationship between drama and the novel,
however, Caine blurred the line between kinds of texts. At
its best, he claimed, the novel "is now a drama written out full length, with scenery, and scene-shifting, and music, and the actors' dresses, and the actors' voices, all reproduced in words" (122). Caine's description of the novel in dramatic terms served two ends. First, it defined the best parts of the dramatic genre as "novelistic" and, by extension, allowed him to associate the most important figure in the British dramatic tradition with literature rather than the theatre. Second, it translated material aspects of the theatre to the symbolic register of language, thereby "purifying" them of their theatrical taint through a Romantic appeal to the imagination as the most desirable "stage" for realization.

In his discussion, Caine was careful to distance himself from any association with realism. He pointedly noted that his advocacy of "great questions" did not suggest a desire "to see the theatre turned into a dissecting-room," but was rather a statement in favour of "great passions" on the stage (133). Other commentators with a literary orientation adopted similar tactics, skirting questions associated with realism in favour of aesthetic discussions about the relationship between literary and dramatic effects.19 Against this argument, such commentators as

19 The exception to this "literary" position was Brander Matthews, who followed most theatrical commentators in
Henry Arthur Jones defended the art of the dramatist—a vocation he pointedly distinguished from that of the "popular playwright" ("Science" 86). For Jones, the playwright's art was more demanding than that of the literary author because it required that one simultaneously attract the public and change it. Describing the dramatist's "perpetual dilemma" Jones asked,

How shall I, while writing a play which shall be sufficiently popular to bring in seven hundred pounds a week at least to cover my manager's expenses—that is, which shall attract to some extent all these persons of different tastes—how shall I yet preserve that removed attitude which stands quite apart from all their passions and prejudices, and contemplates them as something external and objective? (86)

Jones's insistence that artistic and economic concerns ought to be balanced was not only typical among commentators on the drama throughout the 1890s and 1900s, it also set this group's interests apart from those of more conventional "literary" types.

The result of these conflicting views in debate about the drama was a general division between non-drama critics maintaining that drama and literature were distinct. Most centrally, Matthews claimed that the great distinction was "the possession of sufficient stagecraft to make the performance of their plays profitable" ("Relation of the Drama to Literature" 639).
who privileged the text, and drama critics who argued strongly in favour of the drama as a popular form that expressed a collective national character. To some extent, this division polarized the two groups. While the growing tendency among drama critics was to idealize the "common" viewer, literary commentators invoked a tradition that idealized and privileged the individual reader.\textsuperscript{20} In broad terms, this split emphasized the contradictory organization of middle-class experience in England, highlighting the perception that this class's worldview was simultaneously democratic (or collective) and individualistic. Because this contradiction was at the heart of appeals to high culture as a way to legitimize social position, it also raised questions about other related oppositions—including the distinction between art and economics which featured prominently in two sets of debates carried out in the New Review, the Fortnightly, and the Nineteenth Century in 1890 and 1891. These debates extended the questions raised in various ways by Arnold, Clement Scott and Archer in the 1870s and 1880s, focusing on the organization of the theatre and the quality of contemporary plays. While earlier disputes occurred between competing schools of drama

\textsuperscript{20} This "literary" perspective subsequently became central to the foundation of English studies, in which Shakespeare was invoked as the central, quintessentially "British,"
criticism, however, debates in the 1890s brought together a range of voices that included drama critics, playwrights, and actor-managers as well as novelists and "literary" intellectuals.

Theatrical Organization and Mass Culture: New Defenses of the Drama

Although it was a popular topic with drama critics through the 1880s, the issue of theatrical organization came to the forefront of public attention in 1890 when Oswald Crawfurd published an article in the *Fortnightly Review* in which he generally surveyed the London theatre scene and condemned the actor-manager system as the chief obstacle to the development of a modern English drama. While Crawfurd, a diplomat and littérateur, made no really original charges against actor-managers, his remarks elicited a strong response from the theatrical community. Generally, Crawfurd argued that the British drama had become debased because actor managers cultivated the lowest common denominator in the audience rather than "thinking, cultivated Great Britain" (500-03). While he despaired of

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21 Crawfurd's remarks are, in many respects, a restatement of charges that had been levied by such critics as Arnold, Archer, Moore, and even Clement Scott in the 1870s and 1880s. See chapters two and three.
contemporary audiences, then, Crawfurd regarded the actor-manager system as the chief cause for the "deterioration" of the drama since it directed the tastes of most viewers (504). Specifically, Crawfurd argued that this system of organization hindered contemporary dramatists by accepting plays "less with regard to their intrinsic merits. . . than to the fact of whether or no they contain parts in which he, the autocrat player, can make a conspicuous figure" (505). In addition to the demands of the star system, Crawfurd denounced "all the costly mechanical toys of the theatre that delight the unthinking crowd and distract intelligent people from the true business of the stage" (505).

Generally, Crawfurd's objections to the actor-manager system focused on its effects as a form of mass culture. He insisted that this type of organization "debase[d] public taste, and excite[d] a desire for more and more of such frippery, while it force[d] rival houses to follow suit" (505). To remedy the situation, Crawfurd suggested a plan that closely mirrored Archer's plea for an endowed theatre. Like Archer, Crawfurd believed that "There is not the slightest chance of the State endowing any English theatre" (510). However, he did suggest that

the State might very reasonably be asked to recognise a theatre conducted on art methods rather than on commercial methods, and which should conform to a more
ideal standard and endeavour to satisfy the higher requirements of the public rather than the requirements of the lessee's till. (510)

For Crawfurd, such a theatre would function as a "joint stock company" in which shareholders committed to fostering the British drama would underwrite a theatre "which should eschew long runs, should avoid extravagance in mounting, and cultivate variety of entertainment after excellence" (511). Such an influence would mitigate the problem posed by "bad" literature on the stage, Crawfurd insisted, since playwrights provided audiences with the level of art they demanded. He reasoned that if the negative influence of the actor-manager system were removed, the desire for mass cultural products could be eliminated. Like Archer's various proposals for an endowed theatre, Crawfurd's vision of a theatre devoted to artistic ends presumed a large, broadly based "well-judging and self-asserting public" that could reform public taste by offering an alternative to the mass-produced fare characteristic of the actor-managed theatre (511). Similarly, both critics evoked an economic analogy (of a "joint-stock company") to try and reconcile the material demands of staging with the ideal of high culture--placing "economic" necessity under the control of an enlightened audience whose interest in artistic matters
would help to overcome the seemingly oppositional demands placed on the theatre.

While neither Crawfurd's complaints about the actor-manager system nor his proposed solution to the cultural problem it posed added much to the list of existing complaints against the contemporary stage, his article did prompt a strong reaction from the theatrical community, which responded by defending the economic basis of the theatre. Within two months of its appearance in April 1890, West End managers Henry Irving, Bram Stoker (Irving's business manager at the Lyceum), Charles Wyndham, and Herbert Beerbohm Tree had all published refutations, as had Henry Arthur Jones. In large part, managers' defenses of the existing mode of theatrical organization were prompted by the growing wave of support for various schemes to promote non-commercial alternatives to actor-managed drama. While the concern to place the merits of a commercial system of theatrical production before the public predominated in these discussions, however, defenses of the actor-manager system also addressed related questions about the drama as an art. Thus, for instance, Stoker's, Irving's, and Wyndham's responses (published as a cluster in the Nineteenth Century) all discussed the evolution of the existing system of theatrical organization in relation to the needs of the British theatregoer. With this perspective
came an explicit defence of the democratic exercise of popular taste by cultural consumers. As Stoker suggested:

The public has its own discrimination; and its judgment, being the resultant of varied needs and interests and wishes, is sure to be in the main correct—vox populi vox Dei has a basis of truth which wise statesmen and students of men do well to consider.

Public favour, when bestowed on a producer of work of any kind, is a valuable commodity; and to a player it is especially valuable, since his work is purely personal and cannot be reproduced or multiplied, like literature or music or work in the plastic arts. (1044)

In this passage, Stoker's argument that economic and artistic ends were not merely compatible but mutually reinforcing reformulated the assumption that art and commerce were antithetical. Working against traditional complaints about the economic basis of the theatre in comparison with other forms, Stoker proposed that the actor's art was special because it could not be mass reproduced. In doing so, he explicitly contrasted the theatrical arts with such established cultural forms as literature, music and painting, all of which were subject to mass reproduction for economic ends—effectively suggesting the drama's capacity for authenticity in an age increasingly characterized by commercialism. This tactic, which reversed
the usual tendency to condemn all matters theatrical as hopelessly debased, allowed him to appropriate claims usually reserved for the dramatic text, effectively reversing the received hierarchy of drama and theatre.

Although Stoker's argument challenged the longstanding tendency to denigrate the theatre as a form of "low" culture, he did not end his argument by reaffirming the opposition of the art/economics pairing. Instead, Stoker indicated the complementary relationship between art and economics by identifying public inclination towards his art as a "commodity" of the successful manager. To complete his argument, Stoker addressed claims that the actor-manager system was responsible for the perceived dearth of contemporary plays. Far from stifling the dramatist, he suggested, successful managements lent the credibility and capital of an established reputation. "Too often," he suggested,

the seeker after dramatic honours is not content to avail himself of the means of testing his work open to all. He wants to secure the services of the best artists and to have all done under the most favourable conditions; and he would pick a theatre whose record is such that the public will accept the work of its manager blindfold--partly, indeed, because that manager does not produce anything which is not good. (1049)
In this passage, Stoker answered playwrights' claims that the existing system of organization undermined the production of creative works by pointing out that the burden of finance lay with the manager, whose capital included not only the economic costs associated with production but also the reputation for producing reliably "good" works. Far from hampering the playwright, Stoker suggested, the actor manager employed his combined judgment about artistic value and economic risk to protect his capital by ensuring that plays were produced which had a chance of succeeding with the public. Managers openly admitted their dual orientation, Stoker implied, while the playwright—who "wishe[d] to share, without any risk or equivalent whatever, a part of the fortune or distinction which other men have won for themselves"—hypocritically complained about managers' attempts to stifle art (1049).

Stoker highlighted the problems associated with the received opposition of art and economics, invoking the overlaps between high and mass forms of culture to his advantage. By demonstrating how the playwright who claimed privileged artistic status as a work's originator profited from the economic organization enabled by managers, he united aspects of theatrical organization that had traditionally been treated as separate, even antithetical, entities. Unlike commentators who deplored that the theatre
did not fit with accepted ideas about culture, Stoker dismissed traditional assumptions about culture that did not fit with the contemporary organization of the theatre industry. His claims for the merits of the actor-manager system were reiterated by his fellow disputants. In a caveat to Stoker's article, for example, Irving focused on the artistic claims of actors, suggesting that "there are sometimes other and higher aims than the mere accumulation of money" (1053). For his part, Wyndham followed Stoker in emphasizing the manager's duty to protect his capital---including his investments but most especially his "influence with the public," which "may be by far the most valuable" (1055). Wyndham's approach emphasized the economic focus solely and to support his position he adopted a shopkeeping metaphor, suggesting that the public had little cause to complain since it could "either approve of the manner in which the actor-manager casts himself, and go to his theatre, or disapprove and stay away" (1056).

Neither Stoker, Irving nor Wyndham prompted a reply from Crawfurd; nonetheless, the positive economic focus of their arguments indicated how attitudes towards the perceived split between art and economics were changing. By contrast, Herbert Beerbohm Tree's vigorous challenge, which focused on the distinct merits of the drama as a cultural form rather than on the merits of the actor-manager system,
did prompt a series of replies. Tree addressed Crawfurd's claims in an article published in the June 1890 issue of the *Fortnightly Review* that also included a rebuttal by Crawfurd. Like Stoker, Tree used the opportunity provided by the actor-manager debate to make a more general case for the merits of public taste. "If good plays are wanting," he ventured, it is "not entirely the fault of the public... since we look in vain for the really worthy work worthily treated which has met with failure" ("I: Reply" 922). Tree assigned playwrights a share of the blame for the state of British drama, suggesting that while there "can be no doubt that many stupid plays succeed, it is equally demonstrable that good plays do not meet with failure" (922). Where Stoker challenged the received organization of culture outright--defending the public's ability to decide what constituted art for itself--Tree appealed to popularity as an indicator of culture's "universal" character. To Crawfurd's charges against public taste, Tree pointed out that "railing against the public taste has been from time immemorial the lament of the superfine," he further suggested that Crawfurd lacked "sympathy with that wider influence of the theatre which is beyond the mere pedantry of literature" (922-3).

By staking his argument on the difference between "the theatre" and "the mere pedantry of literature," Tree, like
Stoker, reversed the hierarchy that placed "drama" (as literature) ahead of theatrical realization. In his discussion, the theatre assumed privileged status as an area remarkable for free cultural exchange, while "the pedantry of literature" was aligned with programmatic, predictable, and inauthentic responses of the pseudo cultivated. Where Stoker made a characteristically middle-class defence of "capital," however, Tree invoked the idea that high culture ought to be spontaneously recognizable, arguing that it was the public--not "superfine" or "second-rate critics"--who instinctively understood the art of the drama. Such charges marginalized as snobs and pedants the critics (like Crawfurd) who positioned themselves as members of a self-proclaimed intellectual elite. "In the fight against conventionality," Tree averred, "it is the public who are on the side of progress" (924). This argument drew on the existing current of populism in drama criticism, suggesting that there was a strong link between the public's spontaneous judgments and those of "genius." The problem, Tree suggested, was the affectation of the audience in between who controlled the drama and who enforced the "red-tape respectability into which a clique-ridden art is apt to drift" (925).

The positive relationship between broad audiences and the expression of a "true" culture was at the heart of
Tree's argument against Crawfurd, and he advanced his case for the validity of popularity as a mark of cultural worth by emphasizing that drama was a form of art distinguished from literature by its broad appeal. In doing so, he highlighted a quality that had long been associated with the drama's power to influence society as a whole by high cultural theorists. For Tree, Crawfurd's claim that actor managers stifled the development of contemporary drama was faulty because it attempted to impose the demands of one art (literature) on another. To make his case, Tree produced a lengthy list of "actor-managers" who had positively influenced the British stage since the Elizabethan period, including Shakespeare and Sheridan, concluding that "from Shakespeare downwards the best work has been produced by the actors" rather than by "literary" figures who seldom possessed "the faculty of dramatic writing" (926-8). "Those who write for the stage must learn to breathe its atmosphere" he asserted, "must make themselves acquainted with its conditions, its limitations and its possibilities" (928).

Tree's suggestion that popularity--as indicated by economic success--distinguished drama from other forms of literature was the focus of Crawfurd's rebuttal, which aimed both to deny the claims of popularity in classically high cultural terms and to re-draw the boundary between
entertainment and art. In his response to Tree, Crawfurd opposed the notion that popularity should serve as an indicator of cultural worth. "The 'gods' are very well wooed in the political world" he suggested, "but in art, though 'heads' count, it is not exactly numerically" (933). His argument not only suggested that quality and quantity were two different things, it also implicitly re-introduced the distinction between a "disinterested" culture and the "interested" spheres of politics and economics. At this point, too, Crawfurd reframed his position in explicitly "literary" terms, rejecting Tree's argument that drama was a distinct art. "We have no dearth of good writers," he asserted, "but literature is divorced from the theatre in England, because a great author will not condescend to write down to the order of a monopolist who does not ask for his best work" (934).

By placing the actor manager as a "monopolist" Crawfurd restated the argument previously put forward by most opponents of the theatre: that the conditions of the British stage precluded the production of good art because they focused on economic factors. By contrast, he suggested, most major French poets and novelists of the nineteenth century had been successful playwrights because the Comédie Française was "the greatest patron of literature" (934). Crawfurd's claim that in England "a playwright must be a
craftsman, not a great artist in ideas and words. Reintroduced ideas central to the classic distinction between the dramatic text and the theatre. Not only did it emphasize the text and the quality of language used to express ideas and emotions in comparison with such mechanical factors as plot and staging, his argument also distinguished between the learned "trade" of the British playwright and the quintessentially Romantic, transcendent view of the artist as a disinterested creator (934). Thus, for Crawfurd the drama was a primarily linguistic and cerebral art founded on an appeal to "ideas" and to the beauties of language rather than to realization. While he addressed the broad claim against his quarrel with the British theatre, however, Crawfurd did not speak to Tree's historical point about actor managers—an omission which subsequently became the focus of Tree's response, which was published as a "Stage Reply" in the July 1890 issue of the Fortnightly Review.

Although brief, Tree's reply focused on broader questions about the relationship between drama and literature than had previously been addressed. To Crawfurd's charge that the divorce of literature from the theatre was a direct result of the actor-manager system, Tree responded by generating another list, this time of twelve major nineteenth-century British writers, including
Byron, Shelley and Coleridge as well as Tennyson and Dickens, whose lack of ability as playwrights, he claimed, was a "matter of history" ("II--A Stage Reply" 18). These authors' inability to produce good plays were, for Tree, evidence that the drama was "at once something less and something more than literature" (18). By taking this focus, Tree hit the Achilles heel of critics who contended that actor managers were responsible for the shortage of good contemporary drama, since no amount of native talent in the field of literature had yet proven adequate to attract nineteenth-century theatrical audiences.

Tree's conviction that because the drama was significantly different it must be judged apart from other forms of literature was shared by playwright Henry Arthur Jones, another respondent in the debate. While Tree concurred with Stoker's idea that theatrical realization was the truest form of dramatic expression because it generated popular response, however, Jones insisted on the centrality of the dramatic text and he expressed reservations about contemporary audiences. For Jones, the current debate reflected the problem posed by the notion of "literary" drama. "The greatest confusion and delusion exist in the public mind as to what constitutes literature on the stage," he suggested, since the "average playgoer" had a "vague idea of the relative value of Elizabethan and modern blank verse"
and so placed "Shakespeare and Bulwer Lytton, Goethe and Sheridan Knowles" into "tolerably equal niches in his curious stucco Pantheon of the 'Legitimate'" ("Actor-Manager" 2).

Jones's point—that the public was unable to distinguish authentic from inauthentic (imitative or derivative) forms of art—expressed the underlying anxiety that had continued to grow among more "serious" commentators on the drama as endorsements of popularity as the best indicator of cultural value became more widespread. Unlike the actor managers, who argued that civilization had advanced to the point that the majority opinion of respectable middle-class patrons should define cultural worth, commentators like Jones admitted reservations about this group. To express the problem Jones invoked his class-coded description of the "curious stucco Pantheon of the Legitimate"—which suggested both the tendency of the middle class to construct debased ("stucco") imitations of cultural forms, and their fundamental inability to differentiate the simulation from its authentic form. If Jones's description foregrounded the difficulties posed by an audience unable to distinguish between real and inauthentic forms of culture, however, he was unable to develop a useful way to define cultural acumen—in large part because he accepted that
popularity and economic success were crucial features of the drama.

The problem posed by popularity as a central feature of the drama was evident in Jones's response to Crawfurd. As a dramatist, Jones defended the drama's differences as an art form, rejecting Crawfurd's claim that "the English in certain modern plays is not as good as that habitually employed by Mr. Thomas Hardy or Mr. Louis Stevenson" (3). For Jones, the problem was the basis of the comparison between novels on the one hand and plays on the other. "Mr. Crawfurd does not realise how much more vivid and intense a power of imagination it needs to be a character than to describe it" he suggested,

Nor does he realise how widely different, how transcendentally greater, a literary heat and force it needs to make modern Englishmen and Englishwomen speak literature in plays, than to write an agreeable essay in a good English style, deploring the decadence of the modern theatre. (3)

From a playwright's perspective, Jones suggested, differences in characterization were tied to the central restriction of the form against description. Character and plot had to be revealed through dialogue alone and, as he pointed out, contemporary audiences expected stage dialogue to be realistic since "The least departure from ordinary
modern conversation can be immediately detected by every person in the audience" (3). In spite of his reservations about contemporary audiences' abilities to distinguish good from bad art, then, Jones still identified the audience's expectation as the central authority that the playwright must satisfy.

Ultimately, Jones's argument was directed by his own broader agenda: promoting a serious, contemporary, national drama. His conception of "literary" drama finally focused not on language, but rather on the play's ability to elicit an intellectual response from its viewers. He therefore concluded that "intellectual and literary quality is the thing that we should all agree is of the first necessity for our English drama," and he subsequently assigned the playwright a primary position in the struggle to improve the drama (8). To achieve this end, Jones (not surprisingly) argued that the author must assume a more prominent position in the theatre. Under present conditions, he claimed, the manager "attains a renown equal to that of the proprietor of Horniman's tea, or Beecham's pills, and the author scarcely counts" (12). The references to commercial products were not accidental. Following Stoker, Tree and Wyndham's insistences that reputations were "commodities," Jones countered by appealing to the author's traditional prerogative as the artistic and authentic side of the
equation. While he highlighted differences between the "serious" playwright and the actor manager by highlighting the distinction between art and economics, however, Jones also affirmed the necessary partnership between dramatist and theatre. More importantly, Jones accepted without argument the claim that the drama's main requirement was to find and satisfy a significantly large audience to generate profits (14).

Like Jones, most respondents to Crawfurd's argument came to conclusions informed by their positions within the theatrical economy. Most also yoked together art and economics with varying degrees of comfort. Jones and Crawfurd accepted the fact that artistic and economic factors were interdependent in the theatre, but also employed metaphors that reinforced the traditional opposition and suggested their underlying anxieties about the effects of populism. By contrast, Stoker, Irving and Wyndham all spoke as managers, and as managers they supported a vision of culture informed by emergent mass culture--arguing that their respectable middle-class patrons' tastes ought to represent the current standard of cultural value. If they advocated against traditional ways of determining cultural value, however, the actor managers did make use of traditional assumptions about culture to lend their arguments authority.
Backlash Against the Literary Drama: Literary and Theatrical Reactions

If the debate provoked by Crawfurd resolved few questions about the drama, it did crystallize a pro-theatrical position, demonstrating that common assumptions united otherwise antagonistic commentators on the drama. At the same time, it also conveyed some sense of how issues other than realism--such as concerns about the difference between high and mass forms of culture--informed discourse about the drama. If the tendency to idealize the common viewer to various degrees was a shared concern, however, responses to Crawfurd also suggested how earlier attempts to construct an educated, middle-class audience had changed by the early 1890s. Where Archer and Scott claimed broad audiences which they identified as both "cultivated" and "national" in the 1880s, later commentators expanded and redefined this construction--placing decreased emphasis on "cultivation" as appeals to representative national status grew. Behind this impulse was a concern to defend the drama as a form that addressed society as a whole--in contradistinction to enterprises such as the Independent Theatre, which were focused on the interests of a cultivated minority. In response to the pressures of this new type of theatrical organization, contributors to the Crawfurd controversy--
Crawfurd included--emphasized the need to nurture a form of drama that would fulfill a larger social mission, but differed about how this should be achieved.

With reaction against the influence of minority art on the drama came a corresponding interest in distinguishing it from other literary forms. Where earlier commentators such as Archer and Moore believed "literary" quality and influence was necessary to aid the growth of a serious drama, critics writing at the time of the perceived "renascence" were quick to point out the drama's unique characteristics and, increasingly, to conflate high and popular ends in an attempt to preserve and celebrate the drama's popular character. As this position became increasingly widespread, there was a backlash against attempts to nurture a "literary" drama, both from general literary commentators and from people within the theatrical world. A subsequent exchange between H.D. Traill, Archer and Jones published the following year, suggested both the growing power of the idealized common viewer in discourse about the drama and a corresponding backlash against "cultivation."

H.D. Traill's polemical piece "The Literary Drama," which appeared in the New Review in 1891, was an acid condemnation of the drama's claims to high cultural status as literature. The occasion that prompted Traill's
commentary was the simultaneous publication and first staging of Pinero's play, The Times, a Society farce about the efforts of a nouveau riche tradesman to launch his family into the world of fashion. The first-night production of The Times at Terry's Theatre assumed a self-consciously high cultural tone. Not only was Pinero considered to be England's leading "serious" dramatist—a fact that lent the first night special status as a cultural event—but the audience was also presented with published copies of the play to mark the evening's importance and, implicitly, to answer critics' claims that contemporary British drama was not worth reading. While not the first contemporary play to be published under the terms of the new copyright law which protected published plays,22 The Times was the first work for which production and publication coincided—a coincidence which was timed to promote the claims of the contemporary British drama as a branch of literature.23

In his response to the publication of The Times, Traill began by considering the effectiveness of the text in "providing us, or... proving to us that we are already

22 This honour belonged to Jones's Saints and Sinners; see Stephens (132-3).

23 This intention was clearly explained in Pinero's introduction to the play (viii), and formed the focus for Traill's response.
provided, with a 'literary drama'" (502). Traill first suggested that "no member of his profession could more fittingly take the initiative in such a matter than Mr. Pinero," and he went on to praise Pinero's mastery of theatrical technique (502). In appraising the play's literary merits, however, Traill concluded "one cannot honestly say that The Times in the study is good literature" since it does not produce "its intended artistic effect through its selected vehicle of printed paper" (503). Citing such "literary" characteristics as the "reality" of the story, the presentation of characters that are "true to life," and the "naturalness" of dialogue conveyed "through the eye instead of the ear," Traill argued that The Times was "the wrong sort of handling for the study, where the picture is close to the eye," but noted that it was "the right sort for the theatre where we sit from three or four to ten or a dozen yards from the object with a row of blazing footlights between" (503). The difference was crucial, Traill maintained, since it necessitated two distinct, and opposing, approaches to art. This incompatibility was central to Traill's argument, which claimed that the current preoccupation with "literary" drama represented "a radiant vision of the wedding of two incompatibles, a 'revival' of something which never at any time existed" (504).
To defend his position, Traill focused on Shakespeare, whose work he believed exemplified the divorce of "drama" from "literature." Even "in the most popular and effective of the acting plays," he suggested, "the positive incongruity of the great 'literature' which they embalm, is painfully conspicuous" (507). In support of his position Traill questioned the place in the theatre of such "literary" passages as Macbeth's famous apostrophe to sleep, since it detracted from the advancement of action in the play as well as from the "illusion of the scene" (508). Centrally, Traill suggested that the character's language was incompatible with the realistic demands of character ("a barbarous Scotch chieftain") and plot ("in a state of terrible agitation over a newly perpetrated murder") (508). "It is not Macbeth speaking, but Shakespeare," Traill complained, "and with a disregard of propriety as sublime as the poetry which he pours forth" (508).

Traill's claim that "drama" and "literature" were distinct forms of art that co-existed uncomfortably through the "superposition of one upon the other" was founded on the conviction that the effects of "literary" language are

24 I am less interested in the validity of Traill's argument than in the kind of response it provoked; however odd it may seem as an argument now, his position was clearly informed by Romantic anti-theatricalism--paralleling Lamb's and Coleridge's contentions that Shakespeare was meant to be read rather than acted.
distinct from the effects of character and plot (504). Though some plays "may, and do, contain great literature," he argued, "they are to the extent to which they are literary undramatic, and to the extent to which they are dramatic unliterary" (505). Whereas actor managers similarly asserted that drama was different from literature in its construction and aims, however, Traill contended that drama was inferior to other literary works. "Literature," for Traill, involved the use of poetic language to create subtle psychological effect, while "drama" was the representation of a mechanically constructed plot through characters.

Traill's argument was interesting because in some ways it supported theatrical commentators' beliefs that that drama was a branch of art distinct from literature. Where drama critics would have insisted that the drama be regarded as a unique high cultural form, however, Traill suggested that the drama was not an art but merely a type of mass entertainment. Both William Archer and Jones responded to Traill's article, focusing on his claim that effects of language and structure corresponded to distinct genres. In doing so, both were required to take a different approach than was characteristic of much discourse about the drama at the time--focusing on correspondences between plays and literature in order to defend the drama's claims to high cultural status. Archer approached the problem by pointing
out Shakespeare's lasting success and power on the stage; subsequently, he went on to address questions about the modern drama, where "convention is, so far as possible, eschewed" because the playwright wants to "affect his audience with the illusion of reality" ("The Stage and Literature" 229). Similarly, Jones's "The Literary Drama" defended Shakespeare, and then--like Archer--moved on to consider the modern prose drama from an artistic perspective. In each case, Shakespeare was central to the defense of the drama, and both authors quite easily pointed out the fallacy of Traill's claim that most of his plays were "unactable."

As established voices of high culture in the theatre and staunch defenders of the "literary" drama, Archer and Jones responded to Traill because his piece had prompted assent from other sources. In his response, for example, Jones noted especially Comyns Carr's contention that there was "something almost 'suburban' in this feverish desire of our playwrights to be literary" (94). Jones took exception to Carr's use of the word "suburban," which, like his own reference to the "curious stucco Pantheon," insinuated a derivative and ultimately middle-class attempt to ape other forms of culture. Also like Jones's earlier comment, the slur denigrated the affectation behind the impulse. In this respect, Carr echoed Traill's suggestion that "the fortune-
makers . . . enjoy the profits of the lower art, but nothing will satisfy them but to share the honours of the higher art as well" (513). Carr and Traill's common point seemed, finally, to be that the drama did not deserve a place among the other arts—a powerful blow to the cultural project of promoting a serious drama. Unlike Traill, a journalist of general culture who had no background in the theatre, Carr had experience in both the theatre and in other, more established, arts: having worked both as an art critic and curator of the New Gallery, and, on the theatrical side, as a set designer for Henry Irving, a translator of dramas from the French and as a manager the Comedy Theatre. In his response to Carr's and Traill's common complaint, then, Jones was forced to garner support for the "literary" drama in the wake of attacks that challenged the basic assumptions of the movement.

Although outside commentators did not universally accept the drama's claims to high cultural status, resistance from figures outside the theatre ultimately helped consolidate theatre critics' convictions that the drama was a unique form with distinct attributes. Most significantly, negative commentaries undermined attempts to

25 Although it lies outside the immediate focus of this discussion, I would like to note that Carr's resistance to the "literary" drama as a fusion of two kinds of art is interesting given his involvement with the Pre-Raphaelites.
consolidate links between the arts by promoting a "literary" drama. In his response to Traill and Carr, Jones (whose efforts to promote the drama as a national institution were tireless at this time26) was left to reiterate a version of Arnoldian cultural theory that dwelt on the popular aspects of the drama as its most positive attribute. In his concluding remarks Jones returned, once again, to the opposition between artistic and economic concerns, contrasting the existing theatre—which he associated in negative terms with the upper and lower classes—with a "universal" drama which was implicitly linked with the middle-class audience (96). Crucial to Jones's distinction was the ability to discern the difference between "mechanical tricks" and "the infinitely subtle workings of the human heart;" his consolation, he suggested, was that "a larger and larger section of the public is beginning to find out this truth" (96). Where Traill and Carr were critical of playwrights' attempts to align themselves with more authentic "artists," then, Jones was forced to align his profession with the tastes of the audience in order to defend it.

26 Jones wrote exhaustively on the subject of the serious drama in the years between 1890 and 1895. A sampling of his writings on the subject were collected in The Renascence of the Drama, published in 1895.
The fact that Jones and Archer both stepped forward to defend the literary drama in 1891 was significant—as was the ultimate relationship between their responses in discourse about the drama. Jones began by espousing the drama's claims to traditional high cultural status but ended by affirming a popular perspective. For his part, Archer focused exclusively on formal aspects of the drama, avoiding questions about audience altogether in this context. Through the late 1880s and early 1890s, both Jones and Archer walked a fine line between a traditional view of culture and a vision of the drama that accepted the importance of popular success as an indicator of value. Ultimately, however, both had to choose between increasingly divided views of culture, and both finally chose to endorse the drama as a popular art. Not only did their responses to Traill define the aims of the "serious" drama, then, they also suggested why conceptual attempts to align the drama with literature ultimately failed at this historical juncture. I would argue that this short-term failure was important because it galvanized the tendency to privilege a "popular" approach to culture in discourse about the drama. Unlike commentators who focused on arts such as painting or novel-writing, which responded to the pressures of growing mass culture by forming small reactionary or elite groups,27

27 These kinds of artists tended to break with concerns
commentators who focused on the drama affirmed the social purpose of art. In doing so, they consolidated a trend that would have little place for elitist visions of a "literary" drama.

Impact of the Literary Drama

If the "literary" drama was intended to contribute to the theatre's cultural prestige, it ultimately had somewhat contradictory effects. As a term evoked both in the campaign for an Independent Theatre and in West End productions of plays from the New Drama, the epithet "literary" was associated with an elevated, more "serious" theatre. However, the various examples of "literary" drama associated with realism often had little in common. By the early 1890s Ibsen was published in England, but productions and play texts of social satires like The Times bore little resemblance to such works as Ghosts: the former supported the conventions and practices of popular West End theatre while the latter did not move beyond coterie success until well into the twentieth century. Even within the range of works produced as commercialized "serious" drama,

about the social function of art and with existing institutions that defined artistic worth; this was the case with aestheticism, as well as with movements such as impressionism. The growth of oppositional movements helped entrench the idea of a "great divide" that has exerted such a powerful influence in the twentieth century. See Huyssen, chapter one.
discrepancies existed, as Norman Hapgood pointed out in an 1898 critique of "The Drama of Ideas" (713).

I would argue that this disjunction reflected the uneven development of the movement for a New Drama in England. While the Independent Theatre had been founded to help nurture British playwrights and to attract literary figures to the stage, it ultimately failed to stimulate and direct much development in this area. Instead, the real impetus for the New Drama came, oddly, from the commercial West End theatres, which consistently produced the work of established playwrights such as Pinero and Jones. As a result, while the "literary" drama continued to be broadly associated with realism through the 1890s, it was also linked to the "fashionable" audiences who were vilified in most criticism of the time. This convergence contributed to the (by now) widespread perception that "elites" represented a negative influence on culture.

Interestingly, as the "serious" drama became a more widespread and diffuse influence in the West End theatres, association with the "literary" drama became a liability, since the term by now carried associations both with realism and with elitism. By the first decade of the twentieth century, realist plays were dismissed as "foreign to life, unsympathetic, artificial"—all charges that stemmed from the prevailing assumption that the expectations of broad
audiences should define accepted dramatic conventions (George 8). Such descriptions not only carried negative associations, they also linked the concerns of realism with effete, "artificial," and pseudo cultivated audiences. This group, which W.L. George sarcastically described as "the elect," was denigrated for its arrogant self-aggrandizement, which its critics regarded as proof of its lack of "humanity" (5). By the first decade of the twentieth century, both commercial and alternative productions of plays with serious themes avoided associations such as "literary" and "realist" altogether. In fact, rather than defending plays' claims to "literary" status, playwrights and critics highlighted their appeal to "universal" ideas and feelings, linking their work with the legacy of Shakespeare rather than of Ibsen.28 Although many new "realist" playwrights emerged to produce plays through the 1900s, then, most quietly avoided the descriptor, opting

28 This was true of both Galsworthy and Granville Barker, both of whom defended "realism" and "naturalism" by placing them on a "universal" footing. Barker even attempted to redefine the "intellectual" drama as the "normal" drama (103). See "Some Platitudes Concerning the Drama" and "The Theatre: The Next Phase." The obvious exception was Shaw, who--while not stylistically associated with the principles of naturalism--had made the term his own in the 1890s. See "A Dramatic Realist to his Critics."
instead to defend the need for plays to find broad popular audiences.  

While associations with realism were increasingly underplayed to avoid charges of elitism, the term "literary" was increasingly invoked to defend popular taste by the end of the 1890s. "Euripides and Calderon and Corneille did not retire into an ivory tower," Brander Matthews suggested in his 1898 article "The Relation of Drama to Literature," rather, "they brought out plays to please the broad public" (638). Such arguments aligned public taste with the reputations of prestigious historical literary figures in order to identify the common person as the best judge of lasting value. In making this kind of argument, playwrights and drama critics enshrined the public as an authority on the drama--thereby consolidating and extending a trend that had begun with attempts to focus on the "cultivated" middle-class audience in the 1880s.

By the first decade of the twentieth century, the middle class audience's identification with a "universal" cultural ideal was assumed by most commentators, who indicated the preferred audience's classlessness by denigrating its overtly classed "others" among fashionable

29 In addition to Granville Barker and Galsworthy, cited above, see Hapgood's and George's more critical discussions of realism, as well as Courtney's "Modern Social Drama as Influenced by the Novel."
and philistine viewships. As this broad audience came to be regarded as the idealized embodiment of a distinct national character, however, critics' constructions of this group became more difficult to reconcile. Economically focused arguments contributed to this tendency, since they defended both the historical prerogative of the popular audience and the claims of modern audiences to decide matters for themselves. Similarly, established high cultural critics contributed to this trend by incorporating economic arguments that the theatre must be a paying enterprise into broader appeals to a traditional model of culture. As a result of these combined influences, I would suggest, the enterprise of criticism was itself called into question as an "elite" pursuit; critics writing in the first decade of the twentieth century were therefore forced to defend their role within a discourse that had become increasingly relativistic.

II. The Problem of Critical Distinction: Literary Drama and the Popular Ideal

As playwrights working in a "serious" or "realist" vein began to underplay their association with this subgenre, the term "literary" came to be related less to content than to poetic uses of language. This trend was supported by the idea that popular feeling should inform judgments about the
value of cultural forms and by a corresponding growth of mistrust in the enterprise of criticism. Writing in the Nineteenth Century in 1901, for example, Oswald Crawfurd expressed the (by now) commonplace idea that it was not the public, but rather critics who posed a significant threat to the progress of the British drama. Crawfurd noted that the "bad critic fosters bad plays and hurts good ones," while the good critic "kills all plays indiscriminately" and the "over-lenient critic panders to our lowest tastes" ("Drama of the Future" 979). Better by far, he suggested, were eras in which "the public... were the ultimate and only judges" as in "Shakespeare's, in Molière's, and even more or less in Sheridan's time" (980). While historically inaccurate in its representation of past golden ages, Crawfurd's idea about the public's capacity to function as a critical authority indicated how literary tradition had come to be almost completely identified with an idealized historical public that bore little resemblance to actual audiences for the drama but which nonetheless exercised a powerful influence in discourse about the drama.

Through the first decade of the twentieth century concerns about the enterprise of criticism began to be

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30 This historical misperception was widespread; see, for example, William Archer's discussion of Shakespeare's audience in About the Theatre (239-55) as well as "The English Stage" (188-89).
voiced in discourse about the drama--both by commentators such as Crawfurd, who unproblematically idealized public taste, and by others who attempted to describe the phenomenon from a more critical perspective. Concerns about criticism were not entirely new at this time. Broad appeals to the journals of general culture as well as more pointed attempts to define the professional role of the drama critic had been central to William Archer project through the 1880s. Subsequent commentators focused on defining the practice of criticism to counter perceptions of perceived abuses within the profession. Where earlier discussions of criticism had largely been concerned with questions of professional standards, however, later concerns reflected the growing sense of awkwardness within the institution of criticism.

Critics and Their Audiences: The Triumph of the Middle Reservations about critics' capacities to speak on behalf of a collective audience, or to make appropriate decisions regarding works of drama, were increasingly apparent through the first decade of the twentieth century--particularly among critics who condemned "minority" forms of culture. In

31 This was a strong theme in Archer's work; see especially "The Duties of Dramatic Critics" (1885).
W.L. George's "Drama and the Common Man," published in the English Review in 1910, a later incarnation of Clement Scott's populist position was reworked to reflect the critical preoccupations of the Edwardian age. George, a journalist and theatre critic, directed his polemic against the intellectual drama, which he criticized as an elitist form that ignored the demands of the "common" audience. "By common man," he wrote, "I wish to indicate in an unambiguous manner the class of person whom Mr. Granville Barker most unfortunately calls the 'mean' man" (34). Here Barker--the great spokesman for Edwardian intellectual theatre--was positioned as the opposition, against whose interests George defined those of "common" men. In contradistinction to the claims of "elitist" critics who condemned audiences for the state of the drama, George argued that the failure of intellectual drama was due to "the inferiority of the plays," not "the stupidity of the public" (34-5). Like Scott, George aligned himself with the common viewer, assuming a collective pronoun "to outline the demands which we, the common men, make upon stage plays" (36 emphasis mine).

In his attempt to determine what "we" want, George accepted the long-standing theoretical assumption that the drama had a privileged role to play, both in the

32 See, for example, Buchanan, and Grein's "The Grave
dissemination of culture and in the education of cultural consumers. "The proposition that the common man should not be offered plays of ideas is egregious," he wrote; "if the drama is a social force we are no more entitled to refuse it to all the people than we are entitled to refuse them elementary education" (36). While drawing on the Idealist notion of culture as a force for general improvement, however, he did not admit that "common men" must shape their tastes and preferences in deference to their cultural superiors. On the contrary, he asserted that "with many other common men, I want plays of ideas, and I want them in an acceptable form" (36). George's reasoning here produced a paradox that, in some regards, represented a culmination of the critical tendency to place an ideal audience at the centre of discourse about the drama. Although audiences deserved access to the theatre because it was a form of education, he reasoned, their existing tastes ought to prevail in determining "acceptable form."

For George, the notion of "acceptable form" was linked to the belief that a middling level of popularity was the best index of a play's merit, since "first-class work seldom fails completely or scores heavily" (45). Such thinking accommodated the widespread conviction that audiences' instincts about "universal" qualities were generally to be

Responsibilities of Dramatic Criticism" (1897).
trusted, but did not go as far as a full-scale acceptance of the notion that the public's taste for mass entertainment ought to represent legitimate culture. By taking a compromise position, George (like much of the preceding critical tradition) attempted to find a middle road between the intellectual theatre and the commercial theatre. Subsequently, he described the kinds of plays the "common man" desires: plays distinct from the dictates of "realism" but which supply "reality in ideas, reality in situations, reality in persons" (47); plays which touch the emotions (48); and plays that offer a "light touch" and "bold comic relief" (49). Such qualities, which echoed Clement Scott's vision of a significant cultural drama, were evoked to suggest timeless, "universal" characteristics of art recognizable to "common" viewers. In the process of describing these qualities, however, George seamlessly shifted pronouns from "we" to "they"--and so moved from speaking as one of the "common men" to speaking on their behalf.

Interestingly, this shift in pronoun usage occurred as George began to link his definition of "common" to an Arnoldian cross-section of viewers from within the cultivated middle class who were "anxious to be educated, stimulated": 
That class is made up of many elements—'serious' clergymen, emancipated girls incited by the example of Vivie and Nora to 'live their own lives,' middle-aged men and women who look upon novels as frivolous and think to rise in the mental scale by reading biography and memoirs, daughters of the bourgeoisie pining for novelty, young men fresh from the Universities and Training Colleges, etc. (43)

George's decision to identify this group as the "common" audience made explicit the critical tendency to regard the middle class as representative of universal values. In his discussion, George openly aligned himself with the interests of "a very large number of persons whose minds and souls are in states of development varying between that of the devotees of Shakespeare (the most facile of worships) and that of the audiences who attend and laugh at the lighter efforts of Mr. Bernard Shaw" (42). Even as he explicitly identified himself with this group, however, George's descriptions seemed oddly contradictory—at once laudatory of the desire to elevate himself and patronizing of the interests of a middle class whose development he placed between "facile worship" for an established figure and interest in the "lighter" efforts of a major contemporary playwright. This dissonance was also evident in his characterization of "common" audiences, where, for instance,
the decision to place descriptive words and phrases in quotation marks seemed to suggest groups' self-conscious efforts to appear cultivated. Similarly, his appeal to gender was oddly dismissive--placing women in the diminutive as "girls" or "daughters of the bourgeoisie pining for novelty." Such strategies not only undermined the serious interests of the group to which it was directly applied, but also those of all the groups included on the list--whose desires to be "educated and stimulated" came to seem pretentious and uninformed.

Although at first glance George's move to speak "for" his audience may have seemed a natural expression of his role as a critic, I would argue that his patronizing tone towards the "common" audience was a mark of his underlying sense of uneasiness about this role. George's sense of discomfort was not only evident in his description, but also in the pronoun shift, which not only distanced him from the group in which he claimed membership, but also implicitly revealed his uncertainty about the place of criticism. If, on the one hand, his attempt to re-establish power by aggressively transcending the limitations of the "common" audience seemed consonant with his position as a critic, then, on the other hand it also suggested the larger problem of what role he ought to play in a context where audiences were assumed to be the best authority. Understood in these...
terms, George's piece reflected his anxiety about the enterprise of criticism when the critic's primary role was merely to validate the public's instincts. If George began by proclaiming his place within the "common" audience, then, he ended by reminding his readers of that audience's social and cultural limitations.

George's ultimate discomfort with the problem of the "common" audience suggested in broader terms the consequences of placing an idealized construction of the middle class at the centre of critical discourse. Like Arnold and Archer before him, George assumed that the "serious" middle class ought to represent society as a whole in cultural matters. While Archer had followed Arnold--placing his faith in an idealized middle-class audience that had not yet returned to the theatre--George was forced to validate an element that already existed within the existing mass audience. The problem, as my reading of "Drama for the Common Man" suggests, was that the critic's role within this ideal audience had become unclear. What was evident, as Charles McEvoy pointed out in a contemporary critique, was that George's claims to represent the "common" viewer were disingenuous:

Mr. George as a self-tormenting aesthete has no more relation to the ordinary man than have a pair of Siamese twins, and one is at first inclined to regard
his criticism as, after all, coming from the pen of one of the legitimate audience of the new drama--one who goes so far as to assert that the intellectuals are the ordinary men. But his article bears too many of those unpleasant jibes at the movement to be mistaken.

(rebuttal quoted in George 29)

McEvoy's analysis pointed to the discrepancy between the critic and his reader, indicating a rift that seemed almost to align George with the movement he was engaged in criticizing. The problem, as McEvoy astutely pointed out, was not with the drama or its actual audiences but rather with George's decision to write with reference to an idealized construction of the "common" audience. "Mr. George has accepted as law the principle that an appeal to the ordinary public of to-day is the criterion of dramatic worth," he argued, "and has forgotten the audiences for whom these authors have written" (28). McEvoy's point was an excellent one, emphasizing that the idealized audiences central to critical discourse often bore little relationship to actual audiences for the drama. His recognition aside, however, the construction was entrenched and the problem of the critic's relationship to his audience persisted.

The Popular Ideal and the End of the Critic?
Perhaps the most interesting perspective on the problematic relationship between critics and their audiences was produced by A.B. Walkley, drama critic for the Times through the first decade of the twentieth century, in a piece entitled "The Drama Critic as Pariah" published in the collection Playhouse Impressions in 1906. Unlike "Drama for the Common Man," which unwittingly called into question the place of the critic, Walkley's piece took as its pointedly satiric subject the "isolation" of the drama critic and his relation to theatre audiences. "His fellow playgoers regard him as a wet blanket," he suggested: "These 'know what they like,' and therefore look askance at the man whose function it is to convince them that they do not know what they ought to like" (2). Similarly, he averred, "the serious intellects" resented the critic: "They openly prefer an unidea'd theatre and recognize the drama only as a frivolous pastime" (2). Between these two groups—which corresponded, respectively, to the fashionable classes and the "serious" middle class idealized by Arnold and Archer—Walkley placed the critic: a "literary Ishmael" or "pariah" forced to advocate on behalf of high culture without support from any quarter.

Although it was comic in tone, Walkley's piece suggested the real disparity between critical constructions and actual audiences. In this regard, it represented a
corrective to Arnold's idealization of the middle class. Where Arnold insisted that the participation of "serious" middle-class audiences was all that was necessary to elevate the British drama, Walkley surveyed its actual influence on the stage. Far from nurturing an improved drama, he suggested, the "serious" audience encouraged the same frivolous drama popularized by Society audiences. From Walkley's perspective, the drama continued to be plagued by associations of frivolity because "high-class music, high-class plays, high-class novels are produced mainly for people of moderate or medium intelligence; people whose brains and bodies are systematically underworked" (1-2). For "serious intellects," by contrast, the theatre offered only the respite of pure entertainment. "Serious intellects" are "only serious in the study," he pointed out; in the theatre "they want a Gaiety burlesque" and regard the critic "as lightly as they would the ingenious gentleman at the Alhambra who spins plates on the end of his nose" (2-3). In intent, Walkley's analysis paralleled Jones's discussion of upper- and middle-class mobs in the early 1880s--introducing a negative description in order to provoke a positive effect. While Jones adopted a serious tone that assumed audiences would shirk at the comparison, however, Walkley seemed to wearily concede the critic's powerlessness to effect change.
Although Walkley made his point to explain why the "serious" drama (and, by extension, its critics) had trouble finding a general audience, the implications of his observation were related to the problem of the drama's status raised by Traill. Among the "serious" population, the drama would remain a "mere" distraction so long as drama critics embraced popularity as an indicator of cultural value. Walkley himself spoke as a drama critic caught between audiences who disregarded him and "serious intellects" who "treat[ed] him with good-humoured contempt" (1). In doing so, he registered the problem posed by cultural democratization: that audiences as a whole had increasing power to make cultural choices without particular concern for critics' judgments. Just as philistine audiences "look askance at the man whose function it is to convince them that they do not know what they ought to like" (1), Walkley suggested, so, too, did the "serious intellect" find drama criticism misplaced. Ironically, however, Walkley backhandedly endorsed the contemporary state of affairs, conceding that "high-class" forms are for "people whose brains and bodies are systematically underworked" (1-2). Such an admission highlighted the effete and narrow interests of the group at whom "art" was traditionally aimed. "Men who have done a good day's toil with head or
hands don't care for Faust," Walkley admitted, "they want a Gaiety burlesque" (2).

Overall, Walkley's discussion highlighted the way that different strands of critical discourse converged in the first decade of the twentieth century. Not only did he consider the end result of privileging audiences' instincts, he also explored how this tendency culminated in a lack of interest in the drama as a cultural form outside criticism itself. Above all, his comments demonstrated how critics' attempts to consolidate positions as Arnoldian cultural leaders ended with their estrangement from the audiences they wished to influence. Following Arnold, drama critics had looked to increasingly specialized segments of the absent middle-class audience to renew the drama, and when this audience returned to the theatres without significantly changing them, a new, more specialized group became the focus of critical discourse. The central difficulty, as Walkley's observations demonstrated, was not with the audience but rather with the ideal itself.

One significant result of the tendency to idealize and empower the popular middle-class audience was that the interests of this very heterogeneous group made it difficult to define high culture in meaningful terms. Walkley's discussion clearly pointed out that the idea of high culture was ultimately very relativistic and his unexpected
endorsement of "men who have done a good day's toil" seemed to suggest that perhaps the popular perspective was the correct one, at least where culture was valued as an expression of "British" character. Walkley's discussion further suggested that critics' concerns about differentiating "authentic" and "pseudo cultural" forms were increasingly meaningless. If the drama was "merely" entertainment, then authentic cultural expression was beside the point; similarly, if high culture was defined by the "serious" middle class, then their consensus ought to be sufficient. In either case, the consolidation of cultural authority within the middle class meant that works which met the needs of the majority would predominate.

This kind of response left criticism in a state of uncertainty through the first decade of the twentieth century, and while critics continued their work more or less as usual, there was a heightened sense of anxiety in their judgments. Many critics feared that they would be perceived as part of an intellectual or social elite whose interests opposed those of middle-class society at large. As a further complicating factor, if audiences made choices based on their desires to be entertained, then the "lasting" value of their judgments was open to question—in contrast to critics' judgments, which were still expected to be consistent over time. I would suggest that critics'
perceptions about the instability of criticism throughout this period reflect this anxiety.

**Literary Drama and the Problem of Pseudo-Culture: The Case of Stephen Phillips**

If interest in promoting a "literary" drama faded as the idea came to be associated with intellectual and social elitism, the idea did not disappear entirely. In fact, as playwrights working in the realist tradition attempted to align their work with "universal" values associated with Shakespeare, a corresponding interest developed in promoting a nostalgic kind of drama and a more traditional understanding of "literary" as a descriptor that brought together high cultural drama and popular audiences. In the West End theatres of the Edwardian period, this interest was manifest in a resurgent interest in poetic drama. Central to this development were the works of playwright Stephen Phillips, whose poetic dramas on historical themes created a sensation among critics and audiences when they were staged in major West End venues in the years between 1900 and 1902. Initially hailed as an important dramatist, Phillips quickly faded into obscurity by the end of the decade.

Although he was not ultimately a major figure, Phillips' career suggests the difficulties commentators on the drama encountered in the early years of the twentieth
century. Not only were critics of this time eager to find and recognize important British dramatists whose work captured the essence of "national" character, they were also working in a relativistic context where cultural judgments had become increasingly difficult to make. In the years between 1880 and 1900, most serious minded critics worried about the problem of pseudo art--fearing both that the democratization of culture would allow inauthentic works to stand as examples of authentic high culture and that audiences would be unable to recognize the difference. What most did not initially understand was that criticism itself would be implicated in this process. With changes in critical discourse about audiences, however, there was a corresponding relativization of ideas about culture. In critics' early responses to Phillips' work and subsequent re-evaluations, I suggest, the problem of cultural categorization came to the forefront.

Phillips' success came at a time when most serious contemporary playwrights were still producing idea-based prose dramas,33 and the critical and commercial success of Herod (1900), Ulysses (1902) and Paolo and Francesca (1902)

33 Jones and Pinero continued producing the kind of serious dramas begun in the 1890s, while Galsworthy and Barker emerged as major new contributors to this tradition. Similarly, younger playwrights such as Maugham and Barrie embraced a prose-based drama, which focused on the
represented a nostalgic trend in the London theatres. Compared with Milton, Dante and Sophocles at the outset of his career (Gosse "Revival" 166; Archer Old Drama 51), Phillips seemed to embody the great hope for a revived native "literary" drama in the most classic sense of the word, combining the "beauty" and "ennobling" qualities of Arnoldian high culture with commercial appeal. If initially praised, however, Phillips' work quickly lost currency among fashionable audiences: his later endeavors failed to garner much response and his work was rapidly dismissed as passé by London critics. In 1908 his last play was produced, an iteration of Faust staged in lavish style by Tree. While Phillips himself failed to make a lasting impression on British drama, however, the vogue for his plays highlighted the more general problem of how to make critical judgments that would last. The problem, as John Todhunter astutely noted in a 1902 review of Phillips' career, was that "criticism in England is still in a rather chaotic condition, a thing of temperament, without well-considered canons--often without sympathetic intelligence" (716).

In many respects, Phillips was the playwright that supporters of a serious drama had been waiting for. An actor trained in Frank Benson's Shakespeare company, he seemed to have the proper pedigree to balance the
countervailing artistic and economic demands of the West End theatre. Phillips' alliance with Benson did much to shape early responses to his work. As an actor, Benson had apprenticed with Irving and had subsequently formed his own company in 1883, which was devoted to producing the works of Shakespeare. From the outset, Benson's company was the kind of old-fashioned traveling "stock" theatre praised by Clement Scott.34 Rather than take a theatre in the West End, Benson elected to divide his time between provincial tours, a spring season at the Stratford-upon-Avon festival, and occasional short runs in London.35 Furthermore, Benson's approach to his company was self-consciously nostalgic and national; "we go up and down the length and breadth of the land" he proclaimed, "that the country may never go without the opportunity of seeing Shakespeare played in a company dedicated to his service" (quoted in Trewin 19).36 Because Benson's company performed a stock repertory without regard for long runs or elaborate scenery and because it worked outside the London theatre scene to some extent, it came to be regarded as an alternative to

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34 See The Drama of Yesterday and Today, chapter 13.
35 My account of Benson's company is largely drawn from Trewin's reminiscences in The Theatre Since 1900.
36 Trewin offers no source and his account is largely memoir; I have included the Benson quote second-hand because
commercial West End theatre that was also distinct from the intellectual theatre. Unlike the Stage Society, Benson did not look to realism for his material but rather to a celebrated national past. At a time when the culture central to London seemed "foreign" in its influence, then, Benson offered a return to England's golden age.

Although initially lampooned by critics, Benson slowly developed a reputation as an "authentic" and tireless supporter of high cultural aims in the theatre (Trewin 18). By the early twentieth century, Phillips' association with Benson seemed to suggest a training informed by genuinely "disinterested" principles and a romantic kinship with the acting and methods of Shakespeare. For commentators interested in "literary" plays, Phillips was therefore an interesting subject since he seemed to bring together many of the interests central to contemporary discourse about the drama without the accompanying taint of realism or commercialism. Some commentators, like Gosse, noted Phillips' background as an actor--an association that implicitly linked him to Shakespeare. "The literary success of Mr. Stephen Phillips is bound up in a remarkable degree with practical knowledge of stage requirements," Gosse declared. "The poet is himself an actor, . . . and he has all that acquaintance with the necessities and impossibilities
of stage movement which greater poets than he have utterly failed for the want of" ("Revival" 165). Others were willing to overlook Tree's elaborate staging of the plays in favour of their "literary" claims. For example, Todhunter remarked on Tree's and Alexander's respective productions but ended by suggesting that the poetic drama needed little more than "conventional scenery which shall suggest rather than realise the place and period indicated" (725).

While Phillips' early reviews may have been influenced by his rather attractive associations, his real accomplishment--as both Gosse and Todhunter concurred--was his ability to attract popular audiences to the poetic drama (157/716). Most notably, Phillips' work seemed to provide a real example of how popular audiences might response to "authentic" cultural works. This feat was viewed as evidence not just of Phillips' talent, but--in Gosse's case--as a possible indication that audiences were becoming more sophisticated in their tastes (156). While his early successes seemed to confirm the Idealist notion that society might respond to an "elevated" drama, however, the vogue for Phillips' work quickly passed. With this eclipse, Phillips received only brief mention in subsequent discussions of significant drama of the period, where he figured as a fad rather than a legitimate cultural influence.

interested in him as a background figure to this discussion.
Conclusion: Defining a Culture for the Middle Class

Although his career ultimately had little impact either on the development of the drama or on discourse about the drama, Stephen Phillips is a figure worth considering—if only for the questions he allows us to raise about the ways cultural judgments are made. I would argue that the enthusiasm with which critics embraced his early works—some even hailing him as a new Shakespeare—suggests how important it was to the enterprise of criticism to find a playwright who validated widespread perceptions about the relationship between high and popular forms of culture. If most early twentieth-century accounts of contemporary playwrights featured short, laudatory descriptions of people whose names we no longer recognize, there was a subsequent sense of embarrassment about the tenor of early responses to Phillips.  

37 Beyond the discomfort expressed in George's and Walkley's discussions of the relationship between critic and audience, however, changing responses to Phillips suggest a deeper sense of mortification at having been duped by pseudo culture. If subsequent critics distanced themselves from their overpraising counterparts, I would argue, it may be a reflection of their lingering uncertainties about how to

37See Archer's Old Drama and the New and Courtney's The Passing Hour.
make cultural judgments in a context where popular choice was privileged.
Although the idea of a government-endowed national theatre was central to Matthew Arnold's vision for the British drama, the idea did not gain widespread currency in the 1880s and 1890s. Many critics and other commentators—including William Archer, Mowbray Morris, Henry Arthur Jones, Beerbohm Tree and Henry Irving—supported the idea, but most also conceded that there was little hope of gaining government support for such a venture. Because there was general consensus that no public support would be forthcoming, some aspects of the project were pursued privately. Thus, while supporters of an intellectual drama worked to establish theatres or societies dedicated to promoting a "serious" drama, actor managers focused on the idea of developing a training school for actors. One result of this schism was that the perceived opposition between commercial and intellectual forms of theatre became further entrenched. Rather than promoting the idea that the drama could reconcile rifts within society as a whole, these projects reinforced existing differences within the theatre industry.
By the first decade of the twentieth century, however, the mood had begun to change. Although the repertory and commercial theatres of the 1900s were still separated by organizational and philosophical differences, these differences were less glaring than they had been during the 1890s. In large part this was the case because later advocates of both commercial and intellectual forms of theatre experienced crises of cultural legitimation which the idea of a national theatre seemed to redress. The commercial theatres were financially successful but did not command respect as cultural institutions. In spite of their considerable efforts to use the existing system of organization to support "artistic" ventures, such leaders of the commercial theatre as Beerbohm Tree and George Alexander did not gain widespread acceptance as cultural figures. By contrast, the intellectual theatres were critically acclaimed, but could not attract the audiences necessary to demonstrate a popular base of support for

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1 Both Tree and Alexander made efforts to support "artistic" experiments in a commercial context. Alexander was a long-time supporter of the New Drama, and had made noteworthy efforts to stage works by contemporary British dramatists, including Pinero, Jones, and Wilde in the 1890s. On an even grander scale, Tree promoted afternoon matinees of "artistic" works (including plays by Ibsen) as well as a yearly festival of Shakespeare's works, lavishly staged. In spite of these efforts, however, both managers were regarded as "commercial" figures.
their work. While organizations such as the Independent Theatre, the New Century Theatre and the Stage Society all played important roles in fostering the growth of "serious" drama, the failure of these enterprises to secure audiences beyond the existing coterie of intellectual theatre-supporters in London meant both that the broad goal of reforming popular audiences was unrealized and that the movement itself remained marginal. Because both sides agreed that a broad base of audience support and a clear source of cultural authority were necessary to secure the status of the drama as an art form, they came to embrace the idea of a national theatre that would bridge the gap between the two existing alternatives.

This chapter focuses on the evolution of a campaign for a national theatre in the years between 1900 and 1914. Throughout this period, support for the idea of a national theatre grew, both among critics and segments of the "cultivated" populace. From early critical support for the project in the journals of general culture at the turn of the century, the movement culminated in a Parliamentary debate in 1913. In between, the campaign gained momentum through its association with a parallel project: a national monument to Shakespeare in London. Although the campaign finally failed in its goal of founding a national theatre
in time for Shakespeare's tercentenary in 1916, it did succeed in garnering a base of support for a lengthy post-war movement that finally culminated when a national theatre company was established under the direction of Laurence Olivier in 1963.² In the context of this thesis, however, I am less interested in the outcome of the campaign than I am in exploring how the pre-war movement for a national theatre tested issues that had been central to discourse about the drama in the years after 1880.

The Edwardian campaign for a national theatre was not only deeply informed by Arnold's 1879 proposal, it came about--oddly enough--at a time when discourse about the drama had assumed a populist tone that seemed to indicate a break with the Idealist notion of culture that underpinned Arnold's plan. The campaign for a national theatre not only demonstrated how powerful Arnoldian Idealism still was, it also provided critics with a project that clearly affirmed the worth of a national high culture at a point when populism in discourse about the drama called this precept into question. From a position of hindsight, I believe, the movement is therefore an interesting test case

² A building for this company was not raised until 1973. A very brief account of the immediate post-war movement is included in the conclusion to this thesis.
for considering how an Idealist scheme for cultural reform ultimately polarized conflicts within the middle class.

I argue that one of the most interesting aspects of the campaign for a national theatre was the way it brought critical discourse about culture into contact with the explicitly social discourse of politics. Although there had been much talk about the drama as a social force in nineteenth-century criticism, discussions about audiences and the relationship between art and economics had remained largely theoretical rather than practical. Furthermore, concerns about society at large had gradually been obscured in discourse about the drama after 1880, both because constructions of audiences were largely theoretical and because critics generally assumed that the norms of middle-class audiences were representative of "universal" values. As a result of this focus, debate about how to unify society as a whole often ended by focusing on how to bring together fragmented groups within the middle class. Moreover, because the middle class was so consistently polarized in critical debate in terms of its preference for either commercial or intellectual drama, discussions about how to unify "society" focused almost exclusively on the relationship between these two types of theatre.
In discussion about the possibility of a national theatre, this contradiction emerged in concert with a related idea that such an institution ought to reflect the aims central to the kind of Idealism that had evolved in discourse about the drama--simultaneously serving the interests of the general population by providing "healthy" forms of popular entertainment even as it defined and sheltered "high" culture from economic influences. In Arnold's formulation these ends were generally treated as if they were compatible and interrelated; in practical terms, however, they represented competing models, one popular, the other elitist. Such an approach was strongly evident in planning for a national theatre, but it was criticized by people outside the culture industries who did not accept the Arnoldian view that educating the middle class could elevate the rest of society. In fact, in the 1913 parliamentary debate about the drama as a cultural institution discussed in this chapter, we can see very clearly how political and cultural forms of democratization clashed. Not only did opponents of the movement question the kinds of audiences a national theatre would attract, they also insisted that its real value would lie in its ability to educate the lower classes, rather than in its appeal for the existing audiences of cultivated viewers.
Because the terms of debate adopted within discourse about the drama focused almost exclusively on the middle class, detractors of the movement were able to construct it as elitist. For commentators speaking from within the existing theatre scene (both as critics and as participants), the idea of a national theatre was related to a parallel interest in promoting drama for a "common" viewer who was implicitly middle class. Not only would it allow them to fulfill their obligation to lead in matters of culture, a national theatre also seemed to provide a way to bring together audiences whose conflicting interests were at the centre of debates about competing schools of drama. While this agenda seemed both pressing and important to commentators who supported the theatre (and the arts generally), it was less convincing to elected officials who did not embrace the idea that the government ought to support an Arnoldian cultural plan designed to promote social unity by focusing the needs of the affluent classes. In fact, in the broader arena of politics the proposed institution seemed only to promote the interests of a cultivated minority—which, in the case of the campaign for a national theatre, somewhat ironically brought together in equal partnership the "cultivated" intellectuals who crafted the plan and the "Society"
patrons of the arts who helped raise funds to support it. Since its supporters focused on reconciling the schism within the British drama rather than on addressing the needs of the lower classes, then, it was relatively easy to dismiss them as advocates of a marginal "cultchach" rather than as authentic spokespeople for a national culture.

A Climate of Compromise: Critical Support for a National Theatre

Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, various critics stepped forward to advocate that an endowed National theatre be established--particularly in the years immediately following the publication of "The French Play in London." Not only did Archer endorse the idea in both English Dramatists of Today (1882) and About the Theatre (1886), meetings were held and a national theatre committee was struck by Irving in 1882 (Morris 188). If interest was high, though, no significant practical results were achieved at this time. In the 1880s private training schools for actors appeared, but no "national" training institution was available until Beerbohm Tree founded the Academy of Dramatic Art in 1904.3 Similarly, while Archer

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3 This institution subsequently became the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in 1920, by charter (Elsom 52).
continued to advocate for a privately endowed theatre through the early 1890s, the Independent and its successors were not conceived as vehicles for a "national" movement, but rather as venues for "alternative" forms of drama associated with the continental avant garde.

By the first decade of the twentieth century, however, public and critical dispositions had changed somewhat. Not only was there less distance between commercial and intellectual forms of theatre, but another alternative had emerged in "grassroots" movements whose goal it was to promote frequent and accurate productions of classic Elizabethan drama. Perhaps the best example of this trend was Frank Benson's provincial company, founded in 1883, which was recognized for its productions of works by Shakespeare. This troupe not only had a lengthy history by 1900, its association with the existing Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford made it a focus for public interest in a national drama. Groups with similar interests were also established through the 1880s and 1890s, including both Ben Greet's Woodland Players (1886) and the Elizabethan Stage Society, under William Poel (1894). Although quite different in their organization, these groups shared a common interest in staging significant "national" drama of the past and all operated
under similar financial constraints which differentiated their productions from those of West End managements. They therefore represented the prospect that a truly "British" theatre could succeed in a repertory free both from the excesses of the actor-manager system and the "elite" focus characteristic of the intellectual drama. In the early years of the twentieth century, then, interest in Shakespeare seemed to offer a way to bring together a cultural community that had remained conceptually--if not actually--divided by contemporary intellectual and commercial approaches to the drama.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Benson's, Poel's and Greet's companies was their common ability to bring together a populist focus with artistic concerns and thus achieve a sense of authenticity in their work that seemed lacking in other forms of theatre. Insofar as they focused on classic works of British drama, these companies were not subject to charges of foreign influence by conservatives. Similarly, because they operated on very limited budgets and had no permanent theatre space, they could not approximate the excesses of West End theatres (either in London or on tour) and so were widely regarded as more "authentic." In fact, the adverse conditions under which these companies worked helped nurture the perception
that they performed not to amass fortunes but rather because they believed that great art ought to be accessible to the general populace. At the same time I would suggest, these groups were lauded both for their dedication to high artistic principles and for the "popular" quality of their work. At a time when Shakespeare's plays were often subject to substantial reworking by actor managers in order to make them fit with contemporary theatrical conventions, these groups insisted on the sanctity of the text—a focus which George Rowell suggests ultimately influenced the later Edwardian trend in artistic theatre towards very spare production design and a return to original textual arrangement in the plays (Victorian Theatre 140).

4 This was true both of Greet and Benson. The philosophy of the former, George Rowell notes, was rooted in "his belief that Shakespeare's plays provided spiritual comfort for all kinds and conditions of men" (Old Vic 98). Similarly, Benson emphasized the "common" focus such art ought to take. On the subject, he wrote: "'I like Macbeth,' I heard a Northern country artisan say--'I felt I could do a better week's work after seeing it'" ("National Theatre" 772).

5 Not only were Shakespeare's plays bowdlerized to eliminate problematic "moral" content, they were also reworked (cut or augmented) by managers to better serve concerns about play length and capitalizing on a star's stage persona; see Rowell (Victorian Theatre 140). This tendency was widely condemned by critics; see, for example, Shaw's "Preface" to Plays Unpleasant (20).
The respect these kinds of experiments ultimately commanded was consonant with the growing critical interest in "universal" themes and "common" viewships, offering concrete examples of how these ideas might work. In fact, by the early years of the 1900s, the idea of a national theatre seemed to offer a cause in which intellectuals and conservatives could transcend their differences by finding common cultural and national ground. Such interests had always been central to the idea of a national drama. Through the 1880s and 1890s, however, they had been taken up in arguments that debated the relative influence of "foreign" art with the influx of realism. By the 1900s, however, both intellectual and conservative critics could agree that a national theatre might fill gaps in the existing organization by elevating the masses' taste in commercial drama, and allowing the existing art theatres to appeal to more specialized audiences. This idea was supported by such serious critics and playwrights as Shaw, Walkley, Pinero, Barrie and Barker, as well as by more properly commercial—if also self-consciously "artistic"—figures such as Tree, Hare, and Johnston Forbes-Robertson.

Although these groups had clashed in the past, they were now able to unite on the very issues about which they were now able to unite in a spirit of public improvement.
and cultural leadership. As the intellectual Granville Barker suggested in 1910, the "great bulk of theatre-goers (and week by week they number millions)" needed a theatre "of good report, clean, wholesome, making for righteousness" ("Next Phase" 162). Such characterizations conflated vocabularies associated with the middle class (such as "wholesome") with descriptive terms like "millions" which evoked the lower class--effectively placing the concerned middle and upper-middle classes in the quasi-political position of intervening in cultural matters to serve the public good. In fact, Barker's argument appealed directly to the middle class's sense of civic responsibility. If there could not be free theatres as there were free libraries and galleries, he suggested, large cities "should at least put [the municipal theatre] on a level with the Swimming Baths, build[ing] and equip[ping] it at the public expense, looking for the running expense to be met by the people who use it" (162). By identifying culture as a matter of public health, Barker appropriated the theatre's traditional association with education, placing it as a matter to be regulated by the state.

The idea that a national theatre ought to serve the interests of the country at large was central to early
appeals for a national theatre, which self-consciously invoked national and public spirit. In 1901, for example, Benson published a piece supporting the idea of a national theatre in the Nineteenth Century. Benson followed Archer's earlier approach, focusing on ideas and concepts, rather than concrete plans, for a national theatre. Like Archer, Benson also explicitly linked the need for a theatre to the contemporary national context, lamenting the decline of interest in art in a materialistic modern world. "For luxury and toys we have bartered too many of the necessaries of national life," he claimed--"What is there for the man in the street to observe?"

We pull down most of the buildings that are beautiful, we banish Nature from our cities, we grub up the trees and grass, silence the birds, and give him little in exchange but stucco and mud and ill-dressed people hurrying past a background of flaunting advertisements to an accompaniment of steam whistles and hooters.

(772)

Like Jones and other advocates of "serious" culture before him, Benson's analysis of the ills of modern society focused on the effects of mass culture--the "advertisements" which formed a "flaunting" background to a debased national audience, "ill-dressed" and surrounded by
the "stucco and mud" of suburbia. Such characterizations pointed directly to the broad middle class, its classic spirit of yeomanry debased by the commercial hodge-podge of modern life. Benson further suggested that the effects of materialism went far beyond surroundings, influencing man's spiritual capacity. "We cannot collectively mourn or rejoice in a manner becoming to the mighty people we know ourselves to be," he claimed: "Once we could do little work that was ugly, now we can produce little that is beautiful" (772).

Against this depressing picture of modern existence, Benson drew a comparison with the "fair and merry England" of the past. This appeal evoked the remnants of an earlier spirit, and it was anchored by his description of an outside perspective which reminded his readers how England was presently regarded by others. "Neighbouring States have got into the way of talking of us as played out, as effete, sunk in the materialism of our prosperity," he maintained--in an appeal to appearances designed to shake middle-class complacency and smugness (773). If he began with harsh criticism, however, Benson subsequently connected what he saw as the national spirit evident in the Boer crisis with the revival of interest in matters of the "spirit," such as beauty and art, at home (773). "In the
same spirit of duty and unselfishness which we have shown in many a recent crisis," he proclaimed, "shall we win back some of the beauty that has faded from our midst--shall we have the right to speak once again of fair and merry England" (773).

Following his nationalistic appeal to an implicitly middle-class England (exemplified by the readership of the Nineteenth Century), Benson went on to suggest the role a national theatre might play as "the chief art or recreation except the public-house for many thousands of toilers; one of the few means of bringing change and brightness to their lives, of lifting them out of themselves beyond this ignorant present" (773). In doing so, he shifted his emphasis away from materialism, suggesting instead how the British middle class might act in a spirit of public service to remedy the problem of national decline. Where his opening remarks focused on middle-class materialism, then, he quickly highlighted the need for this class to act "unselfishly" to better society for others, particularly lower class "toilers" (773). By making this shift, Benson suggested both that cultural leadership and elevation ought to come from the middle class, and that by exerting leadership, the middle class could release itself from the influence and surrounding context of materialism.
While the opening segments of Benson's piece highlighted the social and cultural need for a national theatre, his actual suggestions about the enterprise linked problems with the existing stage to this larger context. He rejected the highly commercialized actor-manager system of organization, proposing that the best way to overcome the twin problems of materialism in modern life and materialism in the theatre would be to return to a simpler form of organization. Towards this end, he advocated that a national theatre be organized along the lines of a traditional stock company much like his own, suggesting that such a structure not only nurtured better actors, but also helped foster an interest in culture among audiences (776-9). While he highlighted issues related to acting and theatrical organization, however, Benson also linked these concerns to a broader interest in the audience. This focus was necessary, he suggested, because managers needed to understand that the public "nearly always in the end prefers the good to the bad when given any choice in the matter" (774). He further argued that a national theatre could both "help to elevate and keep before the public a high standard of taste" and, at the same time, "be a guide to theatres more directly dependent on their receipts... as to what the public did desire" (775).
In their substance, Benson's remarks were not very radical. As he himself acknowledged, many other critics had made similar endorsements of a simplified form of organization (779). Also like many of his predecessors, Benson did not go so far as to envision a publicly funded institution. Instead, he hoped for an enterprise "subventioned if needs be by a syndicate or an individual" (779). Insofar it focused on a national theatre, however, Benson's argument introduced a third term in the existing theatrical context, using contemporary national sentiment to reinvigorate an essentially Arnoldian appeal to the middle class. This kind of appeal was not only timely—evoking national sentiment at a time when concern about maintaining the prestige of Empire was high—it also shifted attention away from the material dimension of England's relationship with its colonies, emphasizing instead its role as cultural leader. While it took a characteristically Arnoldian tone, then, Benson's argument also placed the middle class in a position of cultural leadership that had double impact. If, in the past, the middle class had been called upon to unite fragmented classes, it was now also needed to knit together the relationship between England and its colonies.
If Benson's argument had particular poignancy for its intended audience in 1901, it also used the broad sweep of national events and anxieties to focus on a fairly narrow question about theatrical organization. Similar appeals to large national questions in discussions of a possible national theatre became increasingly common in the years that followed. Like Benson, commentators often formulated such concerns in terms of a debate about competing forms of theatrical organization. This was certainly true of journalist Hamilton Fyfe, whose article "Towards a National Theatre" also appeared in 1901. Overall, Fyfe took a different approach to the problem of the British drama from Benson, emphasizing the need to promote contemporary plays. Yet, like Benson, Fyfe linked the drama to the spirit of the age. "Drama has flourished," he suggested, "always in periods of action, at times when nations draw together in the pursuit of some great aim. Have we not drawn together in the determination to set the Empire upon a firm basis of unity?" (915). Like Benson's, Fyfe's evocation of England as the centre and source of unity in the Empire equated the ideological project of unifying the colonies with similar cultural activities on the home front. Just as a diverse empire could be unified through the efforts of the leading nation, he seemed to suggest, so, too, could divergent
class and social interests be reconciled through a common cultural cause. To achieve this end, Fyfe advocated for a privately endowed theatre distinct from existing commercial and intellectual practices, which could help constitute a representative "British" audience. According to Fyfe, such a theatre would balance economic and artistic concerns equally: "all plays accepted for production would be expected to pay their way," he noted, "and a fine catholicity of taste shown in choosing them" (917).

Taken together, Benson and Fyfe's arguments about a national theatre suggest how the idea was beginning to have new currency among critics in a context where national sentiment was high and concerns about Empire central. At the same time that supporters of a national theatre evoked broad social issues to underpin their arguments, however, they also tended to focus on fairly narrow concerns about organization. As a result, while the idea gained impetus from quite traditional (Arnoldian) claims about the need for the middle class to step forward and assume a position of leadership in order to elevate the other classes, its exponents were finally less interested in the actual problem of how to make a national theatre accessible to the lower classes than they were in solving existing problems within the discourse about drama. In its broad contours,
this kind of argument was reproduced in other calls for a national theatre through the first decade of the twentieth century--most of which affirmed the social importance of the theatre as a public institution even as they focused on the need to reform existing modes of organization. Like Arnold before them, Edwardian advocates of a national theatre assumed that once the institution was put in place, audiences would naturally (and unproblematically) follow.

"Something Must Be Done!": The National Theatre Becomes a Project

Through the early years of the twentieth century, support for a national theatre grew quickly, particularly among the "cultivated" classes, which agreed both that culture was crucial to social development and that a national theatre could play a unifying role in the Empire. At this time, there was a wave of general interest in the drama from a variety of critical, political and social figures pleading the cause of a national theatre. In 1904, for example, a

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6 See, for example, Barker's "The Theatre: The Next Phase" which outlines the need for an endowed national theatre in addition to more specialized theatres for intellectual plays.

7 Elsom and Tomalin note that in the years between 1907-8 discussions about a national theatre appeared numerous times in the Daily Chronicle, the Times, and the Daily
letter to the *Times* by actor-manager John Hare, by that time one of the grand old men of the conservative theatre, drew significant responses from a number of readers including a bishop, leading actor managers and playwrights, as well as a number of other cultural and social figures (Jones "Recognition" 449). Taken as a group, Henry Arthur Jones suggested, they were "a very weighty and representative assembly, furnishing abundant evidence that amongst all classes of cultivated Englishmen a benevolent, if vague, conviction [was] spreading that 'something must be done!'" (449).

While the interest of leading social and cultural figures indicated that there was great enthusiasm for the idea of a national theatre in the early years of the twentieth century, most published commentaries did little to move beyond the kind of broad appeal mounted by Arnold and Archer twenty years earlier. The problem with this lack of focus, as Jones pointed out in response to Hare's letter, was that although public support was in favour of

News, all of which printed numerous letters on the subject by such figures as Archer, Walkley, Pinero, and Shaw (40). Peter Lewis notes that public figures such as Winston Churchill also took up the cause at this time (11).

8 Hare began his career with the Bancrofts at the Prince of Wales and subsequently went on to his own highly successful "genteel" managements at the Royal Court and the Garrick. He was knighted in 1907.
the drama there was no clear plan in place to bring the project to life ("Recognition" 449). Jones worried particularly that "the wrong thing" might be done so that "the whole business is henceforth maimed and disjointed, and falls to the ground" (449). Ironically--given his argument on the matter--Jones did not step forward with a plan. Instead in an article published in the Nineteenth Century in March of that year, he outlined the difficulties a successful national theatre would have to surmount. Although he focused explicitly on questions about organization, Jones also addressed another issue that was central to the project's success: the problem of how to overcome the existing rift within the middle class between advocates of an Arnoldian high culture and "Puritans" who were motivated by moral and economic concerns to oppose the drama. This issue, which had long been implicit in discourse about the drama, was also a major factor in discussion about a national theatre, since any movement towards unifying British society or the British Empire was linked to the idea that the middle class should step forward to lead, culturally, ideologically and economically.

In many respects, "The Recognition of the Drama by the State" reiterated many concerns central to Jones's ongoing
critical project—including the divorce of the drama from
the theatre and the crucial role the dramatist ought to
play in any proposed national theatre. In addition,
however, Jones also touched on the practical conditions
required to make a national theatre successful. Among the
items listed, he highlighted issues related to staging--
including the need for a strong company of actors and "the
right" manager, "a man of good social standing, and also
possessing the necessary literary, theatrical, and business
knowledge and qualifications" (460). Jones further
insisted that the repertory chosen must include
contemporary works, and that the process of selection
should emphasize the "national" scope of the project so
that "all fads, schisms, cliques, and little notoriety-
seekers were kept in due subordination" (460). Most
importantly, however, Jones insisted that audiences must
have ownership over the enterprise. He therefore rejected
private forms of endowment, either by subscription or
"good-natured millionaires," proposing instead that a
national theatre should be "built and endowed by the
Government of England, with the approval of the majority of
English citizens" (461-2).

The idea of a national theatre supported exclusively
by government funding was still very radical at the time;
Arnold had made a similar argument, but subsequent critics had dismissed this aspect of his vision as an "impossibility," focusing instead on the possibility of finding private sponsors. In making the suggestion that the government underwrite the enterprise, Jones recognized that his position would be unpopular—particularly among what he identified as the "Puritan" middle class which traditionally resisted both the idea that the theatre was an art and the notion of government interference. To address the objections of this class, Jones sought both to defend the drama's claims as an art form and to emphasize the ways that it could exert a positive influence over the nation as a whole. Drama was not only a symbol and index of civilization" he suggested, but "also a source and agent of civilisation and good manners; a harmoniser; a humaniser; an enlightener; in the best sense an educator" (466). This approach emphasized the drama's capacity not only to knit a nation together but also to reproduce and disseminate the middle-class world view encapsulated in appeals to "manners" and "civilisation." "I make a very strong appeal to [this class] on all grounds," he pointed out, "and more

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9 This was Archer's perspective from 1882 onwards—see my discussion in chapter three. Subsequent critics, including Oswald Crawfurd, reiterated this position (see my discussion in chapter four).
especially on the ground of the influence for good in national affairs of those Puritan principles in which I, in common with them, was nurtured" (465). By noting the common ground between the "Puritans" and himself, Jones urged a unified perspective within the middle class which was embodied in Idealist cultural concerns with "harmonization," "humanisation" and "enlightenment." In doing so, he implied the ideological benefits to the nation as a whole of overcoming petty differences even as he invoked Shakespeare as an overtly nationalistic figure who could unify the middle class. "With all your hatred for the theatre," he suggested, "you have yet a great love and reverence for our great dramatic poet, and many of you class him next to the Bible as the greatest power in our literature, and the greatest moulder of our national character" (465).

In his discussion of the merits of the drama as a way to promote social unity, Jones invoked an Arnoldian view of culture as an "instinct" among the people (465). At the same time, he also made more practical proposals about funding calculated to appeal to the middle-class interest in the bottom line. Jones noted both that the sum he proposed (£10,000) was comparatively small and that the theatre was eventually expected to "render sufficient
profit to secure its financial stability on its own merits" (461). This approach allowed for the initial cost of raising a national institution, even as it addressed the longstanding (essentially middle-class) conviction that as a "popular" form the drama ought to find paying audiences. If this view accommodated the entrenched populist view of the drama, however, Jones also insisted on the older view of the theatre as a source of public education in morals and manners. When addressing questions about funding, then, he noted the relative economy of a national theatre as a source of public education that would "everywhere set a standard of good taste and good manners, and would raise the character of theatrical performances all over the Empire" (465).

Although Jones's piece was intended to help rouse the middle class to endorse a state-funded national theatre through which it would lend unity both to England and the Empire, it ultimately had more to say about rifts within the middle-class audience for West End entertainment. Not only did he focus on the perceived opposition between art and economics, Jones directed his comments at a group whose centrality was assumed, but whose interests were ultimately very narrow. This kind of approach suggested how the concerns of London's middle class had come to be regarded
as universal in discourse about the drama. Jones, like almost all of his contemporaries, continued to assume that London was the centre and source of culture and cultivation in the Empire, and addressed practical concerns about organization as if the existing West End theatre scene was representative of all audiences everywhere.

A National Theatre: A Blueprint for Compromise

While Jones in 1904 was writing about the problem of "what was to be done," a document was already circulating that not only addressed similar concerns about cultural coherence but would also become the focal point for a full-scale public campaign for a national theatre. Where Jones insisted on complete state funding, however, William Archer and Harley Granville Barker's A National Theatre: Schemes and Estimates was more conservative--bringing together the emerging current of civil spirit with the kind of appeal to private endowment that had long been central to Archer's vision. Authored in 1904 by Archer and Granville Barker and privately circulated in the years between 1904 and 1906, Schemes and Estimates was a concrete and practical plan for building, financing, and running a national theatre in London. At the same time, this document also articulated the ideological assumptions about an
institution that was conceived in an Arnoldian spirit, addressing questions about the kind of drama such a theatre ought to produce and proposing ways of making it accessible to viewers. Most crucially, though, Schemes and Estimates was designed to reconcile the differences between "serious" and commercial forms of drama, even as it also appealed to potential donors, both public and private. By the time it was published in 1907, Archer and Barker's plan had already gained a following—even among actor managers such as Bancroft and Hare who were inclined to regard such an enterprise as competition. More importantly, this document subsequently became the focal point for a broader campaign for a national theatre which brought together such cultural figures as Israel Gollancz (Professor of English Literature at King's College, London), Edmund Gosse and Sidney Lee, as well as aristocratic and affluent patrons of the arts, including the Earl of Lytton and Mrs. Alfred Lyttelton.

Like many of the appeals that were published in the early years of the twentieth century, Schemes and Estimates regarded the drama as a way to disseminate culture within the Empire. Archer and Barker proposed "a Central Theatre, to be situated in London, . . .worthy of the metropolis of the Empire" (xvii). Such a theatre would not only enhance London's status as the hub of national culture, they
imagined, but also supply "an incentive and model to similar enterprises in provincial cities, in the colonies and in America," since "the acted drama ought to be, and indeed is, one of the great bonds of union between all the Anglo-Saxon peoples" (xvii). In these terms, a national theatre would not only help to consolidate a stable British cultural identity by functioning as a symbolic centre of the empire, but also facilitate the reproduction of national culture by providing a blueprint for organizing similar theatres outside of London. While they appealed to sentiments of nationalism and claimed that they sought to constitute a broad audience, however, Archer and Barker remained firmly focused on problems that had long plagued the London theatre scene and they implicitly privileged an affluent, cultured viewer. Even as they spoke of a theatre that might unify the Empire, then, they devoted significant space and attention to reconciling the interests of the commercial and repertory theatres.

From the outset, Schemes and Estimates attempted to strike a middle path between existing critical factions. Archer and Barker began by reiterating longstanding complaints about the problem of promoting a serious drama in a commercial context, emphasizing "that it is impossible worthily to present a worthy repertory at a playhouse held
on the onerous terms which now prevail" (2). At the same time, they also insisted that the drama was a popular form of art and so ought to generate sufficient audiences to be self supporting:

we believe. . . that if a theatre, freed from the burden of rent, &c, cannot at least clear its working expenses season by season, the probable deduction is that the management must either be culpably extravagant or conducted on some mistaken principle. A theatre which appeals to no public, or to a very narrow one, cannot be a National Theatre in any true sense of the word. (2)

By upholding the widespread belief that good drama ought to attract patronage and have a broad appeal, Archer and Barker ensured that their plan would be conceived as "universal" in its interests, rather than as an attempt to promote the minority drama with which both were associated. They further distanced their prospectus from the intellectual drama in the Preface, where they explicitly rejected the idea that the national theatre might support the avant garde drama:

There must be no possibility of mistaking it for one of those pioneer theatres which have been so numerous of late years, here and elsewhere, and have in their
way done valuable work. It must not even have the air of appealing to a specially literary and cultured class. It must be visibly and unmistakably a popular institution, making a large appeal to the whole community. (xviii)

Even as they insisted that the proposed national theatre must be a popular institution, Archer and Barker carefully established that the new theatre would not compete with existing forms of theatre but rather complement them. Accordingly, they emphasized the need for a national theatre to function independently of both forms of organization. While they admitted that advances in the drama owed much "to the actor-manager and the long run" (xvi), they also maintained that the predominance of such influences had exerted a negative impact on the drama as a whole: "In the interests both of authorship and of acting," they suggested," a fair proportion of Repertory Theatres ought to co-exist with the actor-managed and long-run theatres" (xvi-xvii). Such definitions of the national theatre as a supplement to existing forms of theatre provided a basis for reconciling intellectual and populist theatre patrons into a cohesive audience without disturbing the existing structure of organization prevalent in both forms of theatre.
Attempts to distinguish the proposed national theatre from the existing forms of theatre then available in London placed it as an alternative that was emphatically popular, "making a large appeal to the whole community." At the same time that they distanced it from the interests of a "specially literary and cultured class," however, Archer and Barker also implicitly set it apart from the taint and influence of mass culture. Thus, for instance, they emphasized that "the National Theatre must be its own advertisement"—"must impose itself on public notice, not by posters and column advertisements in the newspapers, but by the very fact of its ample, dignified, and liberal existence. It must bulk large in the social and intellectual life of London" (xviii). These terms of reference focused on the popular--and universal--character of the proposed national theatre, which they felt ought to gain its cultural position not through advertisement or "fad" but rather through spontaneous public acknowledgement of "its ample, dignified and liberal existence." The idea of an autonomous institution that needed no advertisement but rather which generated audiences through popular acclaim not only emphasized the dignity of this theatre as a national institution, it also placed it as a leader in matters of culture which could contribute to the existing
theatre scene by elevating the tastes of popular audiences. While Archer and Barker advocated this kind of theatre (and the model of culture it implied) because they believed it would help educate the "people," however, they—like Arnold before them—did not address the problem of how to capture audiences who were not already disposed to support "serious" art.

If the "cultivated," middle-class orientation of Schemes and Estimates short-circuited questions about how to attract the kinds of audiences a national theatre might be expected to benefit, Archer and Barker's proposed organization also implicitly restricted its both its viewership and the role it might conceivably play in reconciling class-based social differences. While they emphasized the national and popular character of the theatre as an institution, they also rejected the idea that the theatre ought to be funded by the state, instead proposing a funding scheme in which the site would be publicly funded while the building was raised by a single private donor and the guarantees from other private contributors (4). This three-tiered model effectively reproduced the existing social hierarchy—placing a single donor at the head of the enterprise with the public at the bottom of the pyramid—even as it symbolically elevated the
individual who brought together wealth and cultivation to the level of aristocracy by suggesting that the major donor be designated a box opposite the one reserved for royalty (7 note 1). If the theatre was intended to be "the property of the nation," Schemes and Estimates nevertheless made it clear that some members of the nation were to be placed above others (xviii). By making such distinctions within a "popular" institution, Archer and Barker made explicit the mutually supportive relationship between the existing social order and an Idealist model of culture that was supposed to be classless.

This restriction was particularly evident in sections of the document dealing with the physical organization of the theatre and with its repertory, which implicitly equated "national" interests with those of the middle class. Because Archer and Barker identified the seemingly classless ideal of collective culture with norms that governed the existing social and theatrical hierarchies, their proposal treated differences between commercial and intellectual audiences as if they were extensions of existing rifts between different social classes. Thus, while plans for the national theatre were organized on apparently democratic principles--so that "no one seat in any given portion of the house [was] notably preferable to
any other seat" (3)--deference to the existing social hierarchy was preserved both through the organization of seats (which retained their traditional names and class associations) and through seating prices which reflected the economic differences among patrons (82-3). Such organizational principles did not suggest the need for radical social leveling, or for reorganizing the existing hierarchy of classes; rather, they reinforced the existing social order by ensuring that the national theatre's patrons could all enjoy "equal" access to the drama within a theatre that was arranged by classes of viewers. While they defined the proposed institution as "national, representative, and popular," then, Archer and Barker's view of "popular" culture implicitly reflected the tastes and habits of the middle-class consumer (37).

Although Archer and Barker advocated on behalf of the needs of the nation as a whole, I would argue that their target audience was the existing middle and upper-middle class West End theatre viewership10—a focus that subsequently shaped their model for choosing a repertory for the proposed theatre. On the question of a repertory,

10 Kruger makes a related point in her discussion of Schemes and Estimates, where she suggests that because the proposal privileged the tastes and norms of elites, the mass audience was effectively excluded (98-99).
Schemes and Estimates clearly sought to bridge differences between the "serious" middle class and "fashionable" Society. Specifically, Archer and Barker's choices highlighted the difficulty of assembling a national canon, since their criteria for selecting plays produced a list of uncontroversial works compatible with mainstream tastes, rather than representative "great" works which were autonomous from outside considerations. When discussing the proposed repertory, Archer and Barker dissociated themselves from "intellectual" and "commercial" practices, choosing instead to argue on behalf of works that exemplified "universal" values. Shakespeare's plays took a central place as examples of "genius" and established a basis for defining a popular national tradition (38-9); however, they had a more difficult time choosing contemporary works which were not yet part of a recognized "national" cultural tradition.

In selecting works from the early and mid-Victorian period, Archer and Barker emphasized the need to assemble a "representative" tradition that illustrated the shift from "old rhetorical" to "new realistic" methods (41). To illustrate this shift in theatrical practice they proposed that Bulwer Lytton's *Money* and Robertson's *Caste* be included, along with Pinero's later historical account of
the period--Trelawney of the Wells--which was a "history of the transition between the two" (41). Describing their choice of plays, Archer and Barker maintained that a national theatre ought to function as a sociological museum of drama in addition to its primary role as guardian of British cultural values; accordingly, they maintained that these plays should "be dressed, and so far as possible acted, after the manner of the early Victorian period" (41). While such choices allowed them to negotiate the delicate question of a nineteenth-century tradition that was contested by critics, they also introduced a distinction between works that fit into an "important" national tradition and those which were to be preserved only for their "sociological" and "historical" value. In these terms, insofar as it was represented at all, the "popular" theatre of the Victorian period was differentiated from a more authentic "popular" tradition that ended in the eighteenth century.

The uneasy shift from a culture simultaneously "universal" and "popular" to a drama "representative" of its given time period was even more pronounced in Archer and Barker's selection of contemporary plays by living authors. Here, unlike their selections from earlier eras, they did not have historical criteria with which to defend
their judgements. Of their choices they therefore suggested, somewhat defensively:

> It is unnecessary to go at length into the reasons which prompted our selection of recent plays. Of most of these pieces, we may say, as we said of the actors in the company, that they are to be taken as types rather than as individuals. All of them are subject to stage-right, and in some cases permission to revive them might not be obtainable. But if this one or that one failed us, there would be no lack of others to fall back upon. (41)

This explanation served the obvious purpose of diffusing possible complaints from excluded playwrights; yet, Archer and Barker's acknowledgement that the contemporary plays selected were virtually interchangeable "types" also complicated their attempt to promote a vision of culture based on the autonomous value of distinguished works. In the Preface, they sidestepped this problem by suggesting that viewers' individual likes and dislikes must be subordinated to the higher good of establishing a collective tradition. "The repertory includes more than one play for which we ourselves cherish no personal enthusiasm," they pointed out, further noting that "Helpful criticism . . will confine itself to the discussion of our
principles of selection, and will regard the particular plays set down merely as the representatives of their respective classes of dramatic literature" (xx).

While focusing on the need for "representative" classes of plays, however, their actual selections—including Pinero's The Benefit of the Doubt, Jones's The Liars, Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest, Yeats's The Countess Cathleen, Charles Haddon Chambers's The Tyranny of Tears and R.C. Carton's Lady Huntsworth's Experiment—represented a range of dramas so unlike that it undercut the notion that the national theatre was committed to creating an identifiable ("representative") tradition within the contemporary drama. In fact, the plays included in the proposed repertory were "representative" only insofar as they had all achieved at least middling levels of success among London audiences and were, for the most part, strongly allied with the existing theatrical modes and tastes popular among the middle classes, including farce, society drama, and less risqué examples of the New Drama. By 1904, the Wilde play was a less controversial selection than it would have been in the previous decade—and Wilde's death in 1900 had softened his social stigma to
some extent. Among the plays chosen to represent the contemporary period only one, The Countess Cathleen, was included for reasons other than popularity: "because of its rare beauty" and because "the representative character of the repertory demanded that the new Irish drama should hold an honourable place" (43).

When Archer and Barker circulated the first version of Schemes and Estimates in 1904, their list of modern plays was deliberately chosen, as they later admitted in their 1907 Preface, to reflect their "disinterestedness" in the struggle to establish a theatre that was "representative" rather than "revolutionary" (xi). Notable exceptions to the proposed repertory for the National Theatre included work by Ibsen and Shaw, both of whom were still strongly associated with Barker and Archer's own campaigns in support of the intellectual theatre. Through subsequent revisions, they retained this accommodating posture—although they did leave open the possibility that works could be added to the repertory at a later date. In their design of a repertory, they hoped that by keeping

11 Wilde's plays were withdrawn from the stage when he was arrested in 1895. George Alexander subsequently mounted two revivals of The Importance of Being Earnest: the first in 1901 as part of a provincial tour and the second in London at the St. James's in 1909. When Schemes and
contemporary selections fairly uncontroversial, their proposal might succeed and so "recruit and foster an intelligent, not necessarily an 'advanced' public" (37). Such a public, they recognized, would be receptive to the effects of high culture (and the cachet it conveyed) but would also demand the satisfaction (and confirmation) of being "entertained" by any theatre it supported.

Material Issues: Endowment and the Cultivated Audience

For the fashionable Society and middle-class audiences that already comprised London's theatre scene, Schemes and Estimates offered a palatable solution to the "problem" of viewships divided between intellectual and commercial forms of theatre. Presented in terms that drew on surrounding critical discourse about the need for a drama that was both "universal" and "popular," Archer and Barker's plan worked to nurture a conciliatory spirit among existing factions of London theatre audiences. Like broader discourse about the drama at this time, this proposal for a national theatre emphasized the "universal" nature of art, even as it supported the general tendency to privilege middle-class norms. In theory, at least, it

Estimates was prepared, however, the play had not yet become the assured success that it was after 1909.
therefore seemed to address broad concerns about the need to educate the "masses" by working to create a context in which a privileged middle-class could provide leadership by example.

For the drama's cultivated supporters as well as for wealthy patrons of the arts, Archer and Barker's approach proved to be appropriately diplomatic and appealing: in 1908 *Schemes and Estimates* was adopted by the newly established Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre (S.M.N.T.) committee as the centerpiece of a campaign to raise funds for a national theatre.12 This committee merged two parallel interests—the longstanding desire for a national theatre and an existing campaign to raise a memorial to Shakespeare in London. The former cause had remained largely theoretical—having prompted a string of endorsements and plans, but no action—while the idea of raising a memorial to Shakespeare had assumed more concrete, if contested, form. By 1907, a fundraising campaign initiated four years earlier by Richard Badger, a wealthy brewer, had generated numerous bequests, but the committee had experienced significant difficulties finding

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12 My account of the activities of the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre committee is informed by Elsom and Tomalin's narrative, although the conclusions I draw are my own (37-48).
an appropriate project to endow. When a plan to raise a monument proved unpopular, support for a national theatre galvanized into a more formal movement and the Shakespeare Memorial Committee agreed to merge its interests with those of the new movement. The idea of national theatre seemed to offer a way to simultaneously raise a "living" monument to Shakespeare and to capitalize on existing enthusiasm for promoting a national drama, resolving both groups' difficulties.

In the new organization, Barker and Archer took places along with such diverse social and cultural figures as the Earl of Lytton, J.M. Barrie, John Masefield, Sir Edward Elgar, Comyns Carr, Beerbohm Tree and Princess Louise, among many others (Elson 44). To their voices were also added those of Henry Arthur Jones and George Bernard Shaw, who rallied support for the movement in the journals of general culture, while the Committee itself engaged in various fundraising activities to meet the estimated funding need for £500,000 by the proposed opening date of April, 1916, the tercentenary of Shakespeare's death.

Considered as a group, the project's supporters represented a cross-section of London's fashionable and intellectual circles--an integration in practical terms of two groups
that had long been theoretically opposed in discourse about
the drama.

In large part, this coincidence occurred because
wealthy patrons of the arts were needed to fund the
project. Mrs. Alfred Lyttleton took up the cause
enthusiastically, and in 1908 the project found its first
major patron when Carl Meyer anonymously donated £70,000 to
the cause. By 1909 the national theatre project had become
a fashionable craze, and numerous Society fundraising
efforts followed, including a Shakespeare pageant featuring
Ellen Terry and a Shakespeare Ball, organized by Mrs.
Cornwallis-West under royal patronage. Such activities had
the somewhat ironic effect of raising funds for a theatre
that was to be "dignified" without advertisement, by
generating a wave of interest in Shakespeare prompted by
social, rather than cultural, enthusiasm. Various forms of
mass-produced Shakespeare memorabilia followed, thereby
allowing the middle class to participate at arm's length in
the "exclusive" activities and interests of fashionable
London.

In spite of the fact that the campaign for a national
theatre became a fashionable cause and prompted a fad for
Shakespeare among members of London Society, it did not
raise sufficient funds to proceed with the project in the
years between 1909 and 1912. While Society events raised public interest, the revenues they generated were not significant, and Meyer's donation represented even with interest only about one fifth of the estimated funds needed. As no other major donors emerged, the S.M.N.T. committee decided to appeal to the government for financial backing in the hope that they could still open the theatre in time to commemorate Shakespeare's death. Under this deadline, the focus of the project shifted from soliciting private endorsements for an autonomous, national culture to framing arguments about the general benefits such a theatre might confer on the populace in order to attract political support. Whereas previous arguments on behalf of a national theatre had in various ways emphasized the need for the affluent classes to step forward and exert leadership in matters of cultural taste, more practical questions about capital now came to the forefront of discussion. With this change in focus, questions about the relationship between existing audiences were displaced in favour of more properly "national" concerns about the place of culture in the empire.
Parliamentary Debate: Culture and Empire

In Schemes and Estimates, Barker and Archer had suggested that "private liberality" must provide a National Theatre since asking the government would be a "waste of time" (Schemes xix). In taking this position, they emphasized the need for private patrons to provide cultural leadership for the nation both by funding the institution and by exerting the beneficial influence of their taste. As a group, Archer and Barker argued, the major donors and guarantors would represent a large voluntary movement which would affirm the importance Britons placed on cultural enrichment and the dissemination of culture. When this movement failed to materialize, however, the S.M.N.T. committee secured the support of H.J. Mackinder, a Member of Parliament sympathetic to the cause, who agreed to introduce a Private Member's Bill in the House of Commons asking the government to endow funds for a National Theatre. Because it was a private bill, there was no assured party support, and to pass it Mackinder needed to generate a more than two-thirds majority. In making the appeal, Mackinder faced a number of difficulties: he needed to demonstrate that there was such a significant base of public support for the project, that government
interference was indicated, and that the project had a role to play in the life both of the nation and the empire.

I would argue that by 1913 Mackinder's appeal was largely theoretical. By altering its funding scheme from private to a combination of private and public support, the S.M.N.T. committee had implicitly conceded that individual liberality--long the great hope of the drama's "serious" advocates--was not sufficient to underwrite the proposed theatre. Such a realization also raised an underlying question about the extent of broad public support for such a project, since smaller subscriptions had also failed to materialize. Also important was the fact that--interest in cultivation as an indicator of genteel status aside--the majority of the middle class still regarded the theatre as a source of entertainment, rather than as a cultural institution. Finally, although plans or calls for a national theatre had long insisted on the public good such an institution might accomplish for the "masses," there was little concrete evidence that this group had any inclination to patronize the "serious" drama: not only had earlier experimental forms of drama failed to gain broad audiences, but commercialized "serious" theatre had remained a largely middle-class or fashionable pastime. In fact, in the years leading up to the parliamentary debate,
the S.M.N.T. committee's fundraising results seemed to indicate that actual support for a national theatre was confined to a minority of existing cultured and fashionable London audiences.

In addition to questions about the patron base for the proposed national theatre, advocates of this institution who insisted on its value as a way to disseminate a centralized form of high culture also had to answer questions posed by the growth of successful alternatives in Ireland and the provinces. In the years that followed the publication of *Schemes and Estimates* in 1907, Archer and Barker's focus on the competing demands of intellectual and commercial London theatre audiences was overshadowed by developments outside London. Of particular importance were the rise of important repertory theatres which challenged one of the major assumptions of the proposed National Theatre scheme: that London was the repository and source of British cultural values and that it ought to exert leadership over the provinces and colonies in matters of taste. Between 1904 and 1907, the previously unquestioned idea that London was the centre of British culture as a whole was thrown in doubt as theatres with their own national or regional identities began to appear and flourish. In addition to the efforts of the Irish National
Theatre Society at the Abbey Theatre, a similar enterprise was founded in Glasgow in 1909 and, while never as successful as the Irish drama, the Scottish theatre took as its mandate the need to "make Scotland independent of London for its theatrical supplies" (quoted in Trewin Theatre 73).

By the time Schemes and Estimates was published in 1907, I would suggest, Archer and Barker already recognized the potentially fragmenting effects of competing "national" theatres. Their decision to include a play by Yeats not only ensured "colonial" representation, it also appropriated to a British tradition an existing force that threatened to undercut the claims of their project. As they developed, the success of alternative national theatres ultimately challenged the idea that national identity was conferred from London and lent a greater sense of urgency to concerns about Britain's cultural coherence. Similarly, the provinces began to compete with London as cultural centres. In 1907 a repertory theatre, the Gaiety, was established in Manchester to support intellectual and "improving" forms of drama. Both the Abbey and the Gaiety theatres were supported in the early stages of their development by Annie Horniman, heiress to the Horniman's Tea fortune, which had often been invoked by Jones as an
emblem of the mercantile values antithetical to the interests of "true" culture. Both theatres were central to the growth of important drama outside London: the Abbey supported the early work of Yeats and Synge, among others, while the Gaiety helped encourage local playwrights and contributed to the rise of the "Lancashire School" of dramatists who included Harold Brighouse, Allan Monkhouse and Stanley Houghton. The movement quickly gained momentum, and similar theatres were established in Liverpool in 1911 and Birmingham in 1913.

Taken together, these provincial and national theatres quickly became major forces in the British contemporary drama, introducing unconventional new playwrights to the playgoing public and providing concrete evidence that the West End of London was not the sole guardian and repository of British tastes and cultural values. By the time the S.M.N.T. committee sought government funding for their proposed theatre in 1913, then, these enterprises raised significant doubt about the representative status of London, and about the comparative commitment of the British public to the cause of a national theatre. Rather than leading the way in matters of culture as its advocates hoped, a national theatre would now be necessary to compete with the provinces, the colonies and the rest of the world.
To address these difficulties, Mackinder's appeal to the House of Commons on April 23, 1913 drew extensively on existing critical discourse about the drama's role in promoting cultural unity. Like Archer and Barker, Mackinder gave pride of place to Shakespeare in his proposal to establish in London a National Theatre "for the performance of the plays of Shakespeare and other dramas of recognised merit" (Hansard 454). In the opening section of his speech, Mackinder described the need for a monument to Shakespeare as a figure indicative of England's general fitness to lead in matters both cultural and social. Citing examples of Shakespeare's popularity in other countries, Mackinder emphasized the unifying potential of art and noted that the tercentenary festival "may be utilized for the purposes of peace in the world" (454). Mackinder then addressed questions about government interference, suggesting that the appropriate role of the State was "not to initiate but to crown the efforts of a movement privately initiated" (455).

Overall, Mackinder's argument focused on issues that were central to ongoing discourse about the drama, highlighting the unifying role that a national theatre could play both in the life of the nation and in the Empire as a whole. Following Arnold's argument that the theatre
was "irresistible," Mackinder pointed to the "enormous and increasing part which stage entertainment is playing in the life of our people" (458 emphasis mine). In England, he maintained, it was necessary to provide healthy entertainment for the great mass of viewers who frequented the theatres. At a time when the working class and the "higher grades" of viewers both had increased leisure time and increasingly monotonous work, he noted that it was necessary for people to "look for intellectual interest outside" (459-60). Towards this end, suggested that the government might help support a broad scheme of public education that would help counter the effects of modern mass culture:

Provided the leisure is well used, I am not at all sure that it is not in the long run a matter making for higher civilisation that we should be able to earn the necessary living by less consumption of the higher powers of the mind, and that we should enable to be devoted to the higher things which we have had handed down to us from the Greeks, an increased portion of the time not only of the few but of the great mass.

(460)

By emphasizing the possibility that mass culture could be turned to the benefit of the nation, Mackinder put a
positive construction on England's mercantile and industrial organization, rather than adopting the more usual understanding of these influences as evidence of debasement. At the same time, however, he followed detractors of mass culture in insisting that government support for culture amounted to a question of public health.

Mackinder subsequently went on to use cultural arguments to provide answers to long-term social problems and anxieties, emphasizing the educational benefits of the drama. "What we want is education through our Shakespeare," he argued, "and what we are seeking in our National Theatre is to teach literature, and not merely for amusement as a spectacle" (461). Although it was to be pointedly educational, however, the National Theatre was not to be didactic but rather to function in the Idealist tradition, providing a basis for common, collective cultural ties. "I venture to say," Mackinder suggested, that a nation is held together by the fact that you can appeal to the members of it with a common history, if you will to a common religion, and to a common literature, and for that reason, I want as an Imperialist that our British race, coming to this London, visiting it either as Rhodes scholars or as
Statesmen responsible for the Dominions, that when any one of them come here on a pilgrimage, it may be once or twice or thrice in their lifetime, that he should have the opportunity of seeing the great national dramas presented, not a chance of one or two of them in the course of a long time, but a series of them, so that a serious study may be made of them, and that a term may be kept of national literature just as you keep a term at the university. (461-62)

Such suggestions emphasized the central position of London as the hub of the Empire and proper repository of national history and culture--and adroitly sidestepped mention of closer (more contentious) parts of the Empire, such as Ireland and Scotland, in favour of more distant holdings in Australia, South Africa and America (462). At the same time, however, Mackinder also shifted the focus of the proposed theatre somewhat. Rather than addressing questions about how existing London audiences with increased leisure time might be attracted to theatres that proposed to undertake "serious" work (when they had clearly failed to patronize them in the past), Mackinder evoked an idealized audience of the colonial middle class that would help to affirm the value of British culture in fraternity with an existing social elite.
This rhetorical shift exemplified the process of refocusing and redefinition that had long been central to discourse about the drama—in which critics had traditionally replaced "real" audiences who failed to make appropriate cultural choices with other (abstract) groups from within the middle class who they claimed would be different. In the passage cited above, Mackinder likened the proposed national theatre to a course of self-study at a university, effectively targeting the educated middle- and upper classes who might come to the capital as "Rhodes scholars" and "Statesmen." At the same time, he also lent London (and the national theatre) additional aura as a quasi-sacred sphere by suggesting that visitors seeking to affirm a "common religion" and a "common culture" would be undertake visits as "pilgrimages." By focusing on the cross-empire kinship of those who would visit the proposed national theatre, Mackinder not only salvaged the middle and upper-middle classes as an ideal audience, he also implicitly suggested that this group exemplified British values.

Mackinder's focus on unifying the cultivated classes across the British Empire emerged with even greater clarity when he began to elaborate on the positive influence a National Theatre might exert in maintaining common ties
within the middle class. Among the other tangible benefits Mackinder listed was the preservation of the English language which, he feared, was "in danger of breaking into dialects" both because of the great distances that separated England and its colonies and because technological innovations, such as the telegraph, introduced "a divergence of standards of language in those different countries" (462). By establishing an authoritative standard and communicating it through immediate contact with audiences, he argued, the theatre would provide a high cultural antidote to such influences. He further claimed that,

the way in which you are to maintain that standard is by having it heard pronounced by those who have studied it, and to have heard it you must have it heard as expressing its literature in some such central position as a National and Imperial theatre would have in London. (462)

In this regard, the national theatre would fulfill its traditional role as educator by modeling social conduct and dialect, both on stage and within the theatre itself, where cultivated spectators from across the Empire could come together to affirm their common patrimony.
Among the groups who could benefit from this linguistic standard, Mackinder included "the vast mass of Americans or provincials" as well as "men from the Dominions who visit this country" (462). Such suggestions drew on the traditional view that the theatre could consolidate common "human" interests and nurture a cultivated national identity among audiences. Experiences like this were important, he suggested, because they opposed the tendencies of modern technology, which displaced people from immediate human, and humanizing, contact and, by extension, from a common unified language. For Mackinder, as for many critics before him, theatres were valuable because they supplemented the positive social influence of institutions such as churches by showing people how to live (459). Yet, even as he emphasized the need for "intellectual interest outside of work," Mackinder insistently emphasized the ties between classes located across diverse locations rather than between classes in the same location.

13Shaw's remarks in the 1898 Preface to Plays Pleasant were indicative of this conviction; "The theatre is growing in importance as a social organ," he wrote. "Bad theatres are as mischievous as bad schools or bad churches; for modern civilization is rapidly multiplying the class to which the theatre is both school and church" (11).
In making an argument for London as a central hub of the Empire which could preserve bonds between the dispersed "cultivated" classes at home and abroad, Mackinder implicitly abandoned the problem posed by the divergence of tastes between the "cultivated" theatre patron and the masses in England. Crucially, he did not extend his discussion of linguistic fragmentation to the great mass of Londoners, an irony that was underscored one year later when Tree's production of Shaw's *Pygmalion* became a huge hit with London audiences. While he purported to ask that the State "crown the efforts of a movement privately initiated," however, he did not address how such an institution would reflect a truly "popular" consensus. Instead, following Archer and Barker, Mackinder distanced the National Theatre project from association with "the esoteric drama" by emphasizing that it be "popular and educational"--and, by extension, "universal" (464).

In spite of his attempts to differentiate the national theatre from existing forms of theatre and emphasize its collective benefits, Mackinder's opponents quickly objected to the notion that such an institution reflected "popular" tastes. As Ellis Griffith pointed out:

> It has been said that if you had this national theatre there would be a revival of the most characteristic
English drama that cannot possibly be produced profitably now because the people do not want it. That is why the movement has such popular support in the country! As I understand it, the national theatre is to produce plays to which, if they were produced by private enterprise, no one would go. (482).

In setting up his objections to the "popular" base of the proposed national theatre, Griffith aligned himself with the critical rhetoric of the "common man" by suggesting that although he had "no right to speak in the literary tone of the Gentlemen who have hitherto addressed the House" he might perhaps be "more easily understood" (481). Certainly his objections to the notion that the government should fund such an institution were practical insofar as he insisted that "national" culture should demonstrate its popular mandate by functioning on the same paying basis as private enterprise--nearly every advocate of an endowed theatre, from Arnold to Archer and Barker, had admitted as much. By taking this position, Griffith in fact evoked the distinction between "cultivated" and "popular" audiences that had long troubled critical discourse about the drama. Griffith subsequently revised Mackinder's characterization of the audience for such a theatre as "popular": "you cannot in private enterprise produce only for people of
"culture" he maintained, for "they are in a minority" (482). To even consider backing a movement of this kind, he emphasized, the government must first be certain that it reflected the legitimate interest of the majority. While he insisted on the need to be certain of "popular opinion" however, even Griffith implicitly aligned this interest with the middle class, who were representative of "an interested, educated, and enthusiastic popular opinion" (483 emphasis mine).

Such challenges to the idea of a National Theatre cited the historical resistance of the British middle class to government intervention in matters of private commerce and in fact circled back to the kinds of objections Matthew Arnold attempted to counter in "The French Play in London." If the drama were truly popular, reasoned the national theatre's detractors, then it would be commercially viable and no state subsidy would be necessary. While susceptible to older concerns about the relationship between art and economics, however, Mackinder's proposal was also subject to question on the grounds of its claims to further the interests of "national" culture. "We ought to understand what is meant by a National Theatre," an objecting Member (Booth) insisted:
Some hon. Members are strong advocates of Scottish Home Rule, and the hon. Member for Clare. I am not aware whether he was supporting or opposing this motion—did not throw the light which one would naturally expect from an Irish Member, as to whether the Irish Parliament would be content to join in a State subsidy for a theatre in London after they had got Home Rule. I presume that under Scottish Home Rule they would require a National Theatre in Edinburgh, and under Irish Home Rule they would require a National Theatre in Dublin, but we have no idea whether the money is to come from English funds or not. (492)

By introducing Ireland and Scotland back into the discussion, the whole question of a "national" culture shifted from a simple matter of collective education to the more politically contested ground of whose interests a national culture ought to express. "It seems to me," Booth continued, "that the National Theatre conjures up the important question of the different views which different nationalities may take of the drama" and "national plays and the right kind of dramatist to encourage would be entirely different in the various parts of the Kingdom" (493).
This somewhat deconstructive view of "national" culture as a force subject to widely differing interpretations challenged Mackinder's central claims for the unifying potential of the theatre as a social institution, even as it also called into question the notion that a centrally-imposed culture would be desirable. The objection also supported from a different perspective the point introduced by Griffith: that the real force behind the movement for a National Theatre was not popular support but rather a narrow "cultivated" minority. "Whom do you wish to attract to this National Theatre?" he queried,

Is it the poor? I have heard no suggestion that the money is to be used to bring the priceless gems of literature within the reach of the poor. As far as I can make out, the idea is rather to pamper the intellectuals who can well afford to pay for their own theatre. (493)

This kind of criticism directly expressed one of the central difficulties that the S.M.N.T. committee faced in promoting a national theatre: that the real audience was not the poor, who were to be educated by such an institution, but rather the middle and affluent classes, who were to safeguard a national cultural inheritance. For
a middle class more inclined to see itself as a benefactor of the less privileged classes than as an Arnoldian clerisy, I would argue, such arguments were not sufficient to remove "cultchah's" negative associations. At the same time, the idea of state interference was not consonant with the middle-class's sense of itself as genteel patrons of the arts. Against widespread attempts to promote the idea that a national theatre would be "universal" and "popular," then, critics mobilized the negative associations that were already entrenched in discourse about the drama and so challenged the idea that a "cultivated" minority ought to represent the interests of the nation--or the Empire--as a whole.

Conclusion: Culture and the Changing Face of Idealism

In spite of the serious reservations expressed by the scheme's critics, Mackinder received a broad base of support for his motion in the House of Commons, with 96 M.P.'s voting in favour and only 32 voting against (Hansard 496). This vote confirmed that a significant shift in attitude had occurred among the middle and upper classes, who seemed almost ready to set aside traditional fears about government interference in the name of establishing a national theatre. What had seemed an "impossibility" to
William Archer in the 1880s was thus nearly a fait accompli in 1913, and cultural supporters took heart. While the votes in favour of the motion were not sufficient to pass it by the required two thirds majority, the S.M.N.T. committee regarded the outcome as a promising sign of things to come. Accordingly, they decided to proceed with plans for a national theatre, content that they would be able to renew their request to the government once matters had progressed further. In the fall of 1913, the committee purchased a site and drawings of a building were prepared--both actions suggesting the strong sense of optimism that surrounded the venture. Before the committee could proceed further, however, war was declared. In 1914, the S.M.N.T. committee was temporarily dissolved, and while its supporters were hopeful that the 1916 deadline might still be met if the war ended quickly, this expectation that was clearly frustrated. Shakespeare's tercentenary finally arrived, but the end of the war was still not in sight. When the S.M.N.T. committee did convene again in 1918, it had to articulate the role of a national theatre in a world that was considerably less optimistic than the one that had passed away.

Given the widespread effects of World War One, it is impossible to say what might have happened if the campaign
for a national theatre had proceeded unimpaired. The campaign did ultimately continue and after subsequent debate, considerable struggle, and a second disruption with the onslaught of the Second World War, a company was established in 1961 and a building was raised in 1973. If the final product was shaped by earlier efforts, however, the ultimate result was much different than Matthew Arnold, William Archer, or Granville Barker imagined during the earliest stages of the project. Where their theories and plans had emphasized that the purpose of a national theatre ought to be to harness the positive social potential of the drama, the national theatre that was finally established was firmly dedicated to providing support for an autonomous art, and virtually uninterested in fulfilling a broad agenda of social improvement.\footnote{For accounts of this struggle and its outcome, see Elsom and Tomalin (chapters 5-8) and Lewis (1-6).} If nineteenth-century cultural advocates had believed that the idea of an aesthetic state was possible and desirable, then, twentieth-century theorists were more inclined see art as a refuge from the effects of mass culture.\footnote{T.S. Eliot, A.C. Bradley and Leavis, among others, were influential exponents of the kind of position that was}
Arnoldian Idealism, but in the twentieth century there was clearly less interest either in reforming the "masses" or in nurturing common bonds between classes. Instead, art and culture came to be regarded as the domain of gifted individuals whose role it was to safeguard an imperiled cultural inheritance.

With the changing understanding of an Idealist cultural model in the years after World War One came parallel changes in the understanding of what role the drama might play in the life of the nation, changes that were informed by the more individualistic and private concerns that developed with the growth of Modernism. While the drama in general and Shakespeare in particular continued to occupy a place in discussions about culture, then, the conviction that drama ought to be realized in the theatre waned. Where nineteenth-century theorists had emphasized the theatre's capacity to unify people by bringing them together in one place to share a common experience, twentieth-century Idealists regarded the drama as text first, and as performance only as an afterthought. One result of this shift was that the Arnoldian cultural project that had underpinned early plans for a National

identified both with High Modernism and with the growth of "literature" as a field of study.
Theatre in the late nineteenth century subsequently became central to attempts to establish literature as the cornerstone of national identity.

As ideas about the relationship between culture and society were taken up in discourse about literature, they were significantly revised to privilege the text, the private reading experience and the centrality of the critic. Such enterprises as the growth of English literature as a discipline were informed by the same kind of Idealist cultural project that had underpinned interest in the drama—and, as Terence Hawkes points out in a discussion of the growth of English as a discipline, documents such as the Newboldt Report of 1919 highlighted inter-related concerns with promoting "social cohesion in the face of potential disintegration and disaffection" and "nationalism, the encouragement of pride in English national culture on a broader front" (111). While these aims were markedly similar to those of the proposed national theatre, however, the social focus central to the latter was redefined. As had earlier been argued of the drama, literature was regarded as important because it "humanized" society; unlike the drama, however, literature
achieved this end by addressing the individual rather than society as a collective.\textsuperscript{16}

Although symptomatic of a larger shift in thinking that underpinned the growth of Modernism, the shift in interest from theatre to dramatic text was enabled by developments within the theatre. One difficulty the campaign for a national theatre encountered in the years after the war was that many of the movement's central figures had withdrawn from the stage. Among these were included actor managers such as Beerbohm Tree, as well as such Edwardian dramatists as Somerset Maugham, who gave up a successful career as a "Society" dramatist to pursue more philosophically informed work as a novelist. Perhaps the most notable figure in this respect was Granville Barker, who left the stage and devoted much of his later life to textual criticism of the drama, including highly influential work on Shakespeare.\textsuperscript{17} Barker's scholarly work, which was largely "literary" in focus, mirrored a larger change that significantly impacted on perceptions of

\textsuperscript{16} In a recent review of the \textit{Cambridge History of Literary Criticism} (volume 8) published in the TLS, Stephan Collini makes a related point, as does Carey (chapter one).

\textsuperscript{17} Barker did not abandon the campaign for a national theatre entirely—in 1930, he revised \textit{Schemes and Estimates}. 
the drama as a social form intimately related to performance in the theatre—a development that has had a significant impact on the way that theatre and drama have been studied for much of the twentieth century.18

Oddly, this shift in emphasis from theatre to dramatic text had no real impact on the theatre itself: the commercial theatre continued to extend and rationalize its practices while the "serious" theatre continued its struggle to realize "significant" culture. Ideologically, however, this shift significantly revised the terms that had been central to discourse about the drama, effectively splitting the commercial and "serious" theatres off from each other in debate. This split effectively reintroduced and reinforced the distinction between high and mass forms of culture that had eroded in the years between 1880 and 1914. While this reconceptualization stabilized thinking about culture, however, it also had the effect of lowering the drama's status among general supporters of culture. In the years before World War One, the drama had been an issue of pressing social and cultural importance, both because it was regarded as a distinctly British genre, and because its

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18 For a very cursory overview of the effects of textual focus on theatre scholarship see Thomas Postlewait's contribution to *Interpreting the Theatrical Past.*
supporters firmly believed that it could have a positive impact on a fragmented modern society. Such beliefs not only galvanized support for the drama as a significant cultural form, they also prompted widespread interest in protecting it from the threat of emerging mass culture. By the end of World War One, these issues did not hold interest for general readers. As a form of mass culture, the commercial theatre had been surpassed by other—larger and more pervasive—forms such as the cinema. Comparatively speaking, critics of mass culture now had little to say about the drama, which, commercialized or not, now seemed somewhat quaint and traditional by comparison.
Conclusion
Mass Culture and the Middle Class in
the Twentieth Century

With changing views of Idealism came corresponding shifts in discussions about audience. While the middle class as a whole was idealized as a cultural audience by nineteenth-century theorists, the split between "intellectual" and conservative viewerships that complicated discourse about the drama in the years between 1880 and 1914 subsequently became more pronounced and more powerful in theories of culture generally. As a result of this change, the trend towards populism identified in this thesis was reversed in the years after World War One as "intellectuals" lost their broad social focus and came instead to function as an intelligentsia committed to critiquing mainstream mass culture rather than to elevating it by example. By the middle years of the twentieth century, the interests of the two groups whose uneasy relationship I described in chapters three and four were polarized, and mass culture was firmly associated with the negative leveling interest of a middle class characterized by its devotion to mediocrity.1

1 In addition to the American tradition represented by Macdonald and Fiedler, European critics such as Hannah Arendt deplored both the middle class and the mass culture with which it was identified. For an overview of twentieth-century perspectives see the essays included in Rosenberg.
Twentieth-century theorists have overwhelmingly associated mass culture with the middle class in ways that amplify the kinds of concerns I have noted in discourse about the drama. As Dwight Macdonald cautioned in the middle years of the twentieth century, the middle class is particularly threatening because it commands the social power and numbers to significantly influence taste and has access to an established cultural tradition on which it preys like "a parasitic, a cancerous growth" (59). Such perspectives were not only evident in drama critics' concerns about Society audiences and the proliferation of pseudo culture, they also reflected parallel concerns about the effects of mass culture in places as disparate as America, France and Germany\(^2\). While broadly negative appraisals of the middle class are historically widespread, I am interested what specific iterations of this position have to show us. In an Arnoldian cultural model that was optimistic about the cultural influence of the middle class, I would suggest, the split that emerged in critical discourse between elite and mass audiences indicated the difficulty of realizing a homogeneous cultural ideal, particularly during a time of transition between two distinct forms of cultural organization.

\(^2\) See the essay included in Mass Culture Revisited.
In many respects, the emergence of two distinct cultural groups within the middle class in the period I discuss represented the culmination of the shift from a model of culture that was defined by fairly rigid class-associated distinctions to a paradigm in which differences were more impressionistically defined by taste. From a twentieth-century perspective, what has united these two forms of organization—and even obscured the fact that a shift occurred—has been the idea of a "great divide" which separates the opposing interests of high and mass forms of culture. If this conceptual separation has been heuristic, insofar as it has allowed us to define cultural forms and movements within a period, it has also come to obscure differences that have something to tell us about the historical specificity of such forms and movements. Cross-pollination between high and low forms of culture has always occurred, as Stallybrass and White remind us, but in periods such as the nineteenth century the line between high and mass was itself called into question as critics struggled to reconcile their seemingly opposing aims.

The idea that high culture could also be popular was perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of discourse about the drama in the years between 1880 and 1914, and this convergence is what sets this specific development apart from other cultural movements that more clearly anticipated
the belief that an impassable rift separated "culture" and "society" in the twentieth century. While the efforts of commentators and theorists to nurture a "serious" drama that could unify British audiences was an indicator of the sense of optimism that permeated the period, however, the fate of this attempt to create an ideal "common" culture also suggests the impossibility of realizing an Idealist scheme in the terms Arnold and his predecessors imagined. Specifically, nineteenth-century commentators struggled with the same problem of defining culture that we face today. Like them, we idealize culture both as a stable, transcendent entity that can confer meaning and social unity, and as an autonomous form that "does" nothing. As a specific test-case for considering how we have come to think about the relationship between high and mass forms of culture in the twentieth century, I believe that discourse about the drama provides valuable insights both into the ways cultural models develop and change over time and into the conceptual problems raised by such periods of transition. By recognizing the historical continuities and dissonances between different forms of cultural discourse, I would suggest, we may be better able to better understand the inflections that guide our own judgments.

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3 See the early chapters of Huyssen for an overview of convergences in nineteenth and twentieth-century thinking.
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