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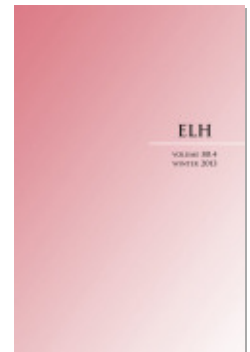
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Culture, and the Making of Social Liberalism

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# REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT: THE “PROBLEM PLAY,” QUOTIDIAN CULTURE, AND THE MAKING OF SOCIAL LIBERALISM

BY MICHAEL MEEUWIS

## I. INTRODUCTION: THINKING IN PUBLIC

In an 1895 address to the Royal Academy, Arthur Wing Pinero, the most important realist playwright of the 1880s and 1890s, reflects on theater's influence over mental life—what “dramatic art” could achieve that no other cultural form could: “[I]ts most substantial claim upon consideration rests in its power of legitimately interesting a great number of people . . . of giving back to the multitude their own thoughts and conceptions illuminated, enlarged, and, if needful, purged, perfected, transfigured.”<sup>1</sup> For the mass of the general population, the “multitude” who now turned to it, the institutional Victorian theater modeled exemplary modes of thought and action. This public arena for mental life was a defining part of the lived experience of the most important political discourse of its day, what Victorian political theorists called social liberalism.<sup>2</sup> Social liberalism held that governing institutions should furnish individuals with “their own thoughts and conceptions . . . perfected, transfigured”: with the tools needed for ideal social self-development. This essay uncovers how Victorian drama shaped this strand of post-1860 British liberalism, which made thinking itself into a public, theatrical activity.

This essay proposes—through the key concepts of *emulation* and *governability*—to describe a mode of Victorian social reproduction that encouraged individuals to admire the exemplary figures they encountered in public; to use others' behaviors as models for their own; and, most significantly, to encounter and model these behaviors volitionally. These character elements are minimized in Michel Foucault's famous formulation of “liberal governmentality.”<sup>3</sup> Twentieth-century social theorists, most notably Foucault and Louis Althusser, understood Benthamite and post-Benthamite social theory to have, in Frances Ferguson's words, consistently “subordinated the interests of the individual to those of the social and collective.”<sup>4</sup> This understanding is

precisely opposed to the nineteenth century's own view of this balance. From Jeremy Bentham to Herbert Spencer, nineteenth-century political theory sought to shape an increasingly politically-empowered society by achieving instrumental effects over minds nevertheless understood as fully volitional. Post-1850 authors working within this tradition believed that individuals would voluntarily normativize their behavior in order to reap the benefits of full social participation.

The liberal political theorist Walter Bagehot provides the most precise nineteenth-century definitions of the two interrelated processes of social norm-making that were shaped by theatrical thinking: emulation and governability.<sup>5</sup> Emulation is a practice of popular liberalism that suggests that the majority of a population should volitionally model their everyday conduct on that of an exemplary elite. Emulation has no interest in self-cultivation removed from public circulation. Instead, it defines the self as an aggregate of habits observed in others. Emulation is a term of opprobrium in the earlier educational writing of Thomas Arnold for precisely the reason that Bagehot favors it: because it encourages individuals to undertake purely pragmatic public actions intended to win "the opinion of the world."<sup>6</sup> Governability, in turn, is the cultivatable faculty that makes an individual susceptible to emulation. Emulative liberalism created the sense that there was a national suite of normal behaviors; and that individuals could be induced to follow these practices and form an orderly social body purely because they wished to do so, not because they were coerced.

Theater was the primary cultural form of emulative liberalism. Liberal theorists of the 1840s and 1850s believed that government could create concrete institutions that would direct individual mentation.<sup>7</sup> From the 1850s onward, however, the dominant strain of liberalism began to suggest that free thinking should be delegated to an elite class whose ideas would then be transmitted to the population at large.<sup>8</sup> John Stuart Mill's "On Liberty" (1859) favors mental independence for an elect, but suggests that only a small portion of the population should enjoy it. Bagehot maps Mill's recommendation that the mass public should emulate a limited society of its best members onto a process he calls "theatrical exhibition," which implies that the quotidian interplay of emulation and governability is analogous to theater's inherent structure of passive audience and empowered actors.<sup>9</sup> The institutional theater, in turn, sought to make itself compatible with this analogy, performing plays designed to model emulable behaviors. The generic form created by the theater's new ability to model social life was the so-called problem play of social representation and reform, which was supported by the

mass population's sense that what they saw in the theater represented—and so could provide insight into—their own lives.<sup>10</sup>

Understanding the social purpose of the problem play means recovering a conception of literary culture that sought to create pragmatic change in the everyday life of a mass population. By contrast, post-Victorian cultural histories have favored those texts most expressive of the reflexive retreat from everydayness, such as those addressed by Amanda Anderson under the logic of “powers of distance.”<sup>11</sup> Nicholas Dames describes Victorian theorists of the novel as favoring books that created “a purely mental geography which annulled . . . the troubling temporality of narrative reading” in order to create private mental escapes from sensual everydayness.<sup>12</sup> The high realist novel aligns with concepts of negative freedom, modeling the powers of distance, individuation, and mental freedom. The theater, in contrast, was the defining cultural form of late-Victorian social liberalism, modeling powers of normativization, immediacy, and everydayness.

The popular practice of positive liberalism that this essay tracks runs through Victorian drama, liberal political theory, and parliamentary papers relating to theater's role in public life. I consider three plays by significant playwrights, performed at established London theaters whose influence stretched across social class and throughout the empire.<sup>13</sup> My first section shows how Dion Boucicault's *The Corsican Brothers* (1851) and Walter Bagehot's *The English Constitution* (1861) assert that theaters can engineer audience perception in line with national norms, and then traces this claim through the theater industry's self-presentation before Parliament's 1866 Theatrical Select Committee. Boucicault's Corsican peasants and Bagehot's British public are each taught that private interpretations—like private vendettas—are incompatible with model citizenship. My second section, centered on the 1870s and 1880s, shows how theories of the governable human subject expressed by Bagehot's *Physics and Politics* (1872) inform the dramas of T. W. Robertson, the father of Victorian theatrical realism. My third section demonstrates how a political text marking the heyday of social liberalism, L. T. Hobhouse's *Liberalism* (1911), evolved out of ideas presented in Arthur Pinero's *Trelawny of the Wells* (1898), a biographical play about the development of Robertson's drama into a national culture. These texts demonstrate how, in theaters both figurative and actual, the Victorian population understood itself as learning to think in public.

Why was theater in particular, as opposed to other contemporary genres, understood as uniquely productive of emulation? Victorians

were concerned with specifically theatrical emulation for two primary reasons, which we can understand as figurative and social historical. First, the theatrical medium's reliance on audiences observing the surfaces of performing bodies matched how emulation figured human behavior: as a series of bodily behaviors observed and replicated socially. Secondly, as social history shows, the Victorian stage was the only contemporary medium whose demographics could produce the interpersonal connections between the members of all classes that emulation required. These two levels of theatrical understanding enjoyed a strong metaleptic connection: this concept of the theater informed the practice of theatergoing, and vice versa.

Emulation, at its most basic, requires one individual to notice another's behavior—manifest in his or her body—and replicate it. Although novels, poetry, and other contemporary media make their own complex investments in bodiliness, theater was in general the most embodied nineteenth-century medium, and so it was a natural match for emulation. Yet the affinity between emulation and theater runs far deeper than their shared bodiliness. In Richard Schechner's twentieth-century account, theater's most basic quality is that it presents “twice-behaved behavior”; that is, a “restored behavior” originating in a different context than its initial presentation.<sup>14</sup> The transmissibility of behavior is also central to emulative behavior, which is also twice-performed, constituting what Bagehot calls a series of “tendencies” observed in others and “transmitted by the body” of the emulating individual.<sup>15</sup> Emulation addresses “the most bodily part of [the] mind”; the emulating mind is primed to observe bodily actions in others and replicate them if socially useful (*P*, 56).

This understanding of behavior judged only by social success, rather than by fidelity to an interior ideology abstract from social life, coheres with what Mary Poovey has noted to be a broad trend in Victorian social theory. Poovey describes a new national standardization caused by the spread of a unitary “middle-class ideology” to the nation at large.<sup>16</sup> While this ideology was experienced differently by members of different classes, it was nevertheless performed to the same standards by all: “For some groups of people some of the time, an ideological formation of, for example, maternal nature might have seemed so accurate as to be true; for others, it probably felt less like a description than a goal or even a judgment—a description, that is, of what the individual should and has failed to be.”<sup>17</sup> The individual no longer needed to perceive his or her behavior as natural; rather, each performed a role standardized to exterior expectations. Performance may be, to use J. L. Austin's term, “felicitous” whether or not the performer fully believes

in it.<sup>18</sup> Emulation's tuning of the self to exterior expectations, rather than to interior belief, would naturally find affinities in the theatrical medium's emphasis on performance.

Bagehot's theatricality imagined an interpersonal connection between the members of all classes: this was how the "opinion of the world" could reach all social classes. Theater was the only Victorian medium capable of furnishing something like this connection in real life. As Tracy Davis writes, "[S]econd, perhaps, to the newspaper press, the theater was surely the most powerful medium of nineteenth-century Britain."<sup>19</sup> Part of this power came from the extraordinarily wide demographic that it reached. Emulation's figurative theatricality, premised on a chain of emulation in which the majority replicate exemplary behaviors dispersed "in the air" around them, both informed and found a concrete instantiation in the contemporary theater industry and its wide demographic scope (*P*, 22).

Emulation is premised on interpersonal connections between the members of all of the groups making up the nation as a whole. Theatergoing, as the embodied cultural form addressing the widest range of classes, was the contemporary media experience that corresponded best with the interpersonal connections that Bagehot calls for. The opportunity for emulative contact was part of the price of every theater ticket, whether it offered admission to a performance onboard a ship, an amateur theatrical in a middle-class home, or a performance at Henry Irving's Lyceum. The experience of traveling to the theater, purchasing tickets, interacting with the crowd, watching a play, and returning back home provided a wider range of opportunities for interpersonal contact—and for the emulation of other classes—than did any other medium. This article will describe how theaters modeled onstage a version of emulative behavior that audiences offstage also experienced through the wider experience of theatergoing.

## II. A CHICKEN AND A HANDSHAKE: *THE CORSICAN BROTHERS*, EMULATION, AND THEATRICAL AUTHORITY, 1850–1870

As Poovey demonstrates, the idea of a national "single culture" first became imaginable in Britain in the 1850s, as local traditions gave way to nationally-standardized modes of thinking and acting.<sup>20</sup> Increased social circulation meant that an unprecedented portion of the population had the opportunity to perform a normalcy based on national, rather than local, standards. Because theatrical texts are, by their performative nature, more closely linked to everyday embodied practices than any other cultural form, the drama of the 1850s shows

these tendencies more acutely than either contemporary novels or poetry. To examine the implications of national normalization for the evolution of the Victorian drama, I turn to a central text of the Victorian theatrical repertory originating from the 1850s, Boucicault's spectacular revenge melodrama *The Corsican Brothers*, and to its performance history. Boucicault's play combines elements of the spectacular melodramas of the early century and the realist problem plays came later: it presents ghosts and swordfights, yet also trains its audience to see these spectacular theatrical realities as proximate to non-theatrical life.

Boucicault bases his play on a novella by the elder Alexandre Dumas, which also describes the changes forced on traditional societies by the technologies of mass democracy. The story's Parisian narrator, Alfred, travels to Corsica, which "est un département Français; mais la Corse est encore bien loin d'être la France" (is a French department; but Corsica is still a long way from being France).<sup>21</sup> Yet metropole and province are becoming increasingly proximate. The eponymous brothers, Corsican aristocrats, have become agents of national normativization. Louis deiFranchi has moved to Paris to become a notary, while his brother, Fabien, remains in Corsica as a hereditary landlord, brokering peace among the locals. Even the story's most overtly fantastic element expresses national homogeneity: the two brothers are connected by a psychic bond, through which a strong impression made on one recurs in the other, thousands of miles away but (by implication) part of a connection between capital and province.

Adapting Dumas through a French theatrical version written by Eugene Grangé, Boucicault already registers a slight distance from his source material: his Alfred announces that he is in the "the land of adventures and this old chateau appears the head quarters of romance."<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, this exoticism, manifested in ghosts and psychic visions, takes place within standardized modern time: the first and second acts are said to occur simultaneously in Paris and Corsica, asserting the kind of geographically-dispersed temporal stability that, as Benedict Anderson demonstrates in his study of print culture, is central to the social imagination of a national community.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, this standardization sets the tone for the play's exotic elements rather than the other way around. Fabien complains that the "dwellers in cities"—not coincidentally, the play's first audiences—are deficient in perception: "[Y]ou gain in art what you lose in nature; you are more prone to believe the miracles of science which you have unveiled than to believe the wonders of that creation which a divinity has formed" (C, 38). The "nature" that the play creates, however, stages these

“wonders” as intensifying, rather than interrupting, normal reality. For example, in a famous theatrical illusion, the play calls for one actor to play the twin brothers onstage at the same time, each glimpsing the other hundreds of miles away through their telepathic bond. This psychic effect produces no supernatural estrangement. Instead, it suggests the essential continuity of the contemporary world: everywhere looks the same when viewed from anywhere else.

Despite his stated preference for the local and the rural, Fabien spends most of the play’s first act promoting the stability offered by national government, acting as an “arbiter of peace” between the two peasant families, the Orlandi and the Colonna, who are grimly carrying on a blood feud initiated by the theft of a chicken (C, 40). Stubborn localness of perception is what makes each of the peasant leaders “a true Corsican”; Fabien’s intercession involves making these peasants comply with public symbolism—in this case, a surrogate chicken and a handshake—in the interests of forging a united public consensus (C, 34).

In so doing, the play shows theater-like rituals directing the thought and action of political subjects. The ceremony takes place in the dei Franchi home, to which Fabien arranges for the peasants to bring a reparative hen. The stage chicken, of course, underscores how ultimately stupid the vendetta has been; but it also creates a symbol of standardized value. The chicken’s worth is made over into as a ceremonial token, what Fabien terms an exterior “formality of pacification,” understood by all onstage: a “formality” that, realized in one of the tableaux broadly typical of the nineteenth-century drama, equates theatrical form and the directed political will of those it arranges (C, 40). The unnamed judge who oversees the ceremony distributes “peaceful olive branch[es],” which symbolize “oblivion for the past with friendship for the future” (C, 44). The fractured chronologies of the peasant vendetta are assigned to “oblivion,” replaced with a “future” in which all swear to live by in a modernity defined by their mutual acceptance of the same values.

The sign of this future is a tableau of the two peasant leaders shaking hands: a seemingly irrelevant detail, but one to whose manufacture Boucicault and Fabien devote much effort. The peasant leaders resist assuming a place in the tableau through various bits of comic stage business that show their individual desire to continue the vendetta. Fabien must personally assemble the tableau of the reconciled peasant leaders. Taking “a hand of each,” he “forces them to shake hands, both evincing disgust and unwillingness” (C, 44). Rather than communicate an abstract idea of political philosophy on which the peasants might reflect, Fabien produces an embodied scaffolding for future action. The



handshake is not simply a one-time performance of peace. Because it is so mundane an action, it inscribes peace-making into the everyday life of this community.

How does one determine what social displays to follow, absent a local aristocrat willing to (literally) take one in hand? Boucicault, setting a paradigm for emulative liberalism, suggests that members of society's elite classes should be looked to for perceptive guidance; and, conversely, that emulable display establishes elite status. Critics have been uncertain of what to make of the play's sudden shift in tone at the end of its first act, in which Fabien sees a vision of his brother's death in a duel and puts aside settling vendettas in order to undertake one himself. Ambivalent about revenge, the play is uniformly affirmative about theater's ability to make people do things by reproducing observed behaviors. To make Fabien's private vendetta publicly comprehensible, Boucicault takes us inside Fabien's mind, making his private understanding socially visible.

At the moment when Louis is killed in France, the back wall of the deiFranchi home opens to reveal Fabien's vision of his brother's death (Figure 1). Louis has collapsed in the vision backstage; Fabien



Figure 1. The first vision scene in Kean's 1852 production of *The Corsican Brothers*. Plate 1 in *English Plays of the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 2: *Dramas 1850-1900*, reproduced by permission of Oxford University Press.

considers the vision in the foreground; and the ghostly second Louis, blood running down his shirt, gestures towards the spectacle of his own death at which his brother is already looking (Figure 2). Like the earlier peasant reconciliation, this vision places both a symbolic system and its model interpretive community onstage. Fabien's vision, which would seem to be the contents of his mind, appears in full view of the audience, whom the play subtly flatters: they perceive the world as an aristocrat does, fully aware of (and sympathetic towards) simultaneous actions in disparate countries. This aristocratic viewpoint is no longer the private property of that class; by being exposed to the theater audience, it is made universally accessible, and so compatible

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INTRODUCTION.

VIOLIN *Allegro.*

PIANO. *pp*

FORTE.

Figure 2. Title page of *The Melody from The Corsican Brothers*, 1852. Courtesy of Special Collections, Templeman Library, University of Kent, Canterbury.

with national normativization. To induct the audience into this ethical system, Boucicault places a series of audience surrogates within the scene. Louis's murderer, Montgiron, stands at the vision's center, while his seconds look away. In contrast, the dying Louis attracts the attention of his concerned seconds—and also that of his brother and mother, hundreds of miles away. Good practices attract attention, while bad practices repel it.

This ethical system operates within a three-dimensional world. The second act's last scene, which stages Louis's death, concludes when again the back wall "opens, and discovers the exact scene of the first act" (C, 62). The two-faced clock, visible in the first tableau, confirms the continuity of time between the two geographically dispersed scenes (Figure 3). This vision is, approximately, another socialization of the contents of a heroic aristocrat's mind. Yet the aristocrat in question does not seem to be the perceiving body. Louis, dying, is turned away from the audience, but also does not look at the vision. Clearly, what the audience sees is not meant to be a delegated version of his perception. The vision detaches from the perception of any onstage character. The audience sees Fabien and his mother looking at Louis; behind them is the material realization of the "fourth wall," transparent during the first act. The audience must suspend its own visual judgment—*how can we look through walls?*—to accept this theatrical presentation as "real." The audience again sees surrogate perceptive figures, most significantly the swooning Madam deiFranchi. Her reaction collapses any complexities of interpretation: as near as we can imagine her state of mind, it is unambiguous.

The concreteness of these interpreting bodies grounds the play's realism. Even the concluding swordfight between Fabien and Montgiron presents a realistic moment: Fabien's sword breaks in the middle of the fight. Reflecting the play's similar presentation of the exotic and the mundane, this detail of staging plays out the consequences of larger-than-life emotion within the concrete realm of physical norms. In this way, Boucicault anticipates the spectacular melodramas of the 1870s and 1880s, which staged the train crashes, smashed shop windows, riots, and other such events through small details of physical realism. At the end of Dumas's novella, though Fabien has successfully killed Louis's murderer in a duel, Louis remains merely a "cadavre."<sup>24</sup> In contrast, in a famous visual effect at Boucicault's conclusion, the avenged Louis appears on stage, takes his brother's hand, and announces that they will meet again. Like the chicken, Louis is returned bodily to a place in a tableau reconciling



Figure 3. The second vision scene in Kean's 1852 production of *The Corsican Brothers*. Plate 2 in *English Plays of the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 2: *Dramas 1850-1900*, reproduced by permission of Oxford University Press.

a social breach. His ghost is not specially illuminated or in any way ghostly; it is simply there. The play confirms its own logic of socially-transparent symbolic display, producing a replacement Louis whose body sutures the vendetta's ethical wound.

Did this reconciliation work for the audiences who saw the play? Recent commentators such as Carolyn Williams persuasively read the revenge plot's seeming cancelation of the first act's theme of vendetta resolution as evoking "the endless vista of revenge."<sup>25</sup> Yet the play's extremes of theatricality—its swordfights and ghostly visions—also never entirely exceed the multidimensional realism of the play's performed world. Its ghosts do not look particularly ghostly; its swords break like familiar household objects placed under exotic stresses.

Furthermore, the idea of a populace primed to take theatrically realized instructions from an elite class speaks to a set of assumptions that appeared contemporaneously in political thought. By the time of the play's first performance, Mill, among other thinkers, had started to doubt the social benefits of mass cognitive enfranchisement. In "On Liberty" Mill claims that "[i]n our times, from the highest class

of society down to the lowest, every one lives as under the eye of a hostile and dreaded censorship” caused by the social predominance of non-elite opinion.<sup>26</sup> The way for mass society to advance above “mediocrity” was to emulate a limited society of the best.<sup>27</sup> Exemplarity in the individual, what Mill calls “genius,” should permit some people to be “more individual” than others.<sup>28</sup> Mill implies, but never explicitly sets out, the existence of a practical means of expressing exemplary ideas to the public at large. Bagehot’s political criticism of the 1870s, which formally provides a transmission system for Millian exemplarity, is rooted in his cultural criticism, which also appeared in periodicals throughout the 1850s.

Like Boucicault, Bagehot suggests that cultural practices could bring populations to order. This criticism advances a conception of literary culture that is compatible with the conditions under which journalism was read; that is, with a mode of thinking integrated within the daily routine of an average citizen. An 1855 essay of Bagehot’s discusses the early-century liberal clergyman and writer Sydney Smith (1771–1845). Smith stands closer to the cloistered liberality of the eighteenth century than to the mass liberalism of the nineteenth. Nevertheless, Bagehot finds in Smith, who is “equally at home in the crude world of Yorkshire, and amid the quintessential refinements of Mayfair,” a model for the accommodationist mode of life that his later criticism recommends for the mass population.<sup>29</sup> Wherever he was in the country, Smith embodied a liberalism that understood freedom as the free emulation of practices observed in others:

More than any one else, Sydney Smith was Liberalism in life. Somebody has defined Liberalism as the sense of the world. It represents its genial enjoyment, its wise sense, its steady judgment, its preference of the near to the far, of the seen to the unseen; it represents, too, its shrinking from difficult dogma, from stern statement, from imperious superstition. What health is to the animal, Liberalism is to the polity. It is a principle of fermenting enjoyment, running over all the nerves, inspiring the frame, happy in its mind, easy in its place, glad to behold the sun.<sup>30</sup>

Enjoying life as Smith did requires tuning the individual’s perception to accord with society’s values. Like the *Corsican* vision, this perception makes equivalent the “nerves” of an individual and a community. Rather than promote a mental life distinct from the opinions of society, this “liberalism” induces subjects to freely internalize “the sense of the world”—awareness of how the rest of the world perceives and thinks—as *their own* sense of the world.<sup>31</sup>

Bagehot's subsequent political writings address national standardization not only of culture but also of the money markets and political life. The disparate social worlds that Smith straddled, Mayfair and Yorkshire, come together to form one "crowd of little men," all looking towards the same social institutions.<sup>32</sup> Like Mill, Bagehot calls for an exemplary class to lead this crowd: although "every one thinks himself competent to think," and "in some casual manner does think," the social organism as a whole "must be taught to think rightly."<sup>33</sup> Bagehot assigns the name "emulation" to the process that he proposes will guide individual thought and action.<sup>34</sup>

Bagehot describes in Smith a model for unambitious life, but also suggests that ambitious individuals should see their ambition normativized, that they should want what everyone else wants, jockeying for position within the social grid: "The opportunity of the new aspirant is the departure of his predecessor; on every vacancy some new claimant—many claimants probably—strive with eager emulation to win it and to retain it."<sup>35</sup> Innovative ideas win the ambitious individual a better spot in a stable social system. The concept of theater enters Bagehot's writings as a means of transmitting these ideas to the masses. *The English Constitution* (1861) expresses the mechanics of politics as based on the "theatrical exhibition" of the most notable political actors in public. In this work, Bagehot makes the House of Commons a theatrical center for the nation's attention, for the performance of a "speech there by an eminent statesman" is "the best means yet known for arousing, enlivening, and teaching a people."<sup>36</sup> Rather than a place for legislative debate, this Commons is a place where behaviors are modeled and transmitted to the population at large: some of the public, seeing speeches presented on this stage, will model conduct observed there to their peers, who will model it for others, until it has spread through the country.

Bagehot's concept of national politics premised on "theatrical display" reflects a contemporary discussion regarding the cultural influence of the contemporary theater industry. There was no Select Committee on the Novel, or on Poetry, yet the theaters, and the national drama, received repeated governmental inquiries. Because it necessarily assembles crowds, theater had a long history of receiving governmental inquiries, such as the 1751 Disorderly Houses Act. But it is the widespread acknowledgment of theater's influence—as a site of emulation—over the everyday life of the nation at large informs the claims made by respondents to the 1866 Parliamentary Select Committee on Theatrical Entertainments. Although none of the



committee's respondents makes so strong a claim over the direction of national mental life as Pinero would in the quotation that opens this essay, these respondents nevertheless suggest that modes of thinking modeled onstage could influence public order. William Simpson, manager of "provincial theatres" throughout England, informs the committee that "such plays as the 'Lady of Lyons,' or the 'Honey Moon,'" are a better choice for managers than "burlesques, breakdown dancers, and nigger songs": "We get more money . . . respectable people come, and it brings a 6*d.* gallery."<sup>37</sup> These plays created a respectable reality-effect: bringing peace to the Corsican Peasants onstage assembled respectable audiences offstage, even in the cheapest "gallery" seats. Audiences attended theaters to see this polite reality modeled, and then emulated it in daily life.

It was as a tool of polite social engineering that theater began to enter government's wider consideration. Although theater had long played a role in the day-to-day life of military communities, only in the 1860s does evidence of this appear in governmental reports.<sup>38</sup> An 1862 "Report . . . on the present state and on the improvement of libraries, reading rooms, and day rooms" places theatricals among the requisites for life in military communities: a respondent recommends that materials for "private theatricals" be present at all military installations, suggesting the degree to which theatrical culture had become a stock of images, sounds, and bodily arrangements accessible by the entire nation.<sup>39</sup> No previous English cultural form had allowed non-elites (from Mayfair to Yorkshire, and even in military regiments) to make such a claim for full citizenship within a cultural system. Audiences assented to a set onstage repertory of what Patrick Joyce terms "conditions of possibility": directed scenarios for social action.<sup>40</sup> In exchange, they learned to frame their own wants within these conditions, permitting visual symbolism realized in one part of the empire to make a reproducible claim over life in another part of the world.

### III. THE GOVERNABLE NATION: TOM ROBERTSON AND THE PROBLEM PLAY

The 1870s show British social theory becoming more comfortable with publicly directed modes of thinking. Bagehot again provides the most articulate account of this process; his "Physics and Politics" naturalizes emulation's "theatrical exhibition" by framing it within a scientific account of how the human organism functions. Like his contemporaries Herbert Spencer and Grant Allen, Bagehot began to promote a view of the human mind as essentially captive to a

human physiology under the sway of exterior sensation.<sup>41</sup> In primitive societies, he writes, rulers are simply the most publicly useful people: “[T]he king is the most visible part of the polity, because for momentary welfare he is the most useful” (P, 19). Emulation grants contemporary politicians a kind of mass presence through the wide replication of their traits by others: “[A] leading statesman . . . can change the tone of the community! We are most of us earnest with Mr. Gladstone; we were most of us *not so* earnest in the time of Lord Palmerston” (P, 53). Bagehot’s elites govern by inducing the population to act in a particular way. Accordingly, Bagehot is sympathetic towards non-exemplary individuals: he suggests, in fact, that national “culture” is premised on “*Most men*” simply noticing and replicating practices diffused “in the air” around them (P, 22). Nations advance when their culture teaches them to think in unison by furnishing them with a public iconography of thought.

What happens to private interiority under the dominance of emulated “custom”? (P, 19). Bagehot is occasionally imprecise with his cognitive conceptions, sometimes recommending that individuals volitionally emulate others, while at other moments suggesting that emulation is unconscious. He acknowledges that all individuals possess some “inward and intellectual part—their creed” (P, 56). Calling the space of private interiority a “creed” suggests already that private subjectivity is more a matter of participation in a shared ideology than a truly autonomous individual space. This compromised interiority is then continually, and productively, invaded by infective imitation. Mill’s 1863 *Utilitarianism* had described “habit” as “volition which has become habitual” through its repeated use: the intended outcome of Fabien deiFranchi’s manufactured handshake.<sup>42</sup> Mill cautions that this process, by removing the check of reflexive thought from actions, might potentially be pernicious, as unchecked habit is not necessarily “confined to . . . virtuous actions.”<sup>43</sup> Bagehot solves this problem by describing the community as a shared bank of pre-approved habits in which small exchanges of observed habit between elites and non-elites cumulatively create a national politics: even “national character,” Bagehot writes, “is but a name for a collection of habits more or less universal” (P, 62). Bagehot’s ideal subject cultivates and refines the general human tendency to notice, and emulate, exterior influences. Bagehot calls this innate, but cultivatable, tendency *governability*.

Governability, in Bagehot’s account, makes Britain great: the “basis of our culture” is “an amount of order, of tacit obedience, of prescriptive governability” (P, 18). This tendency makes the subject observe,



emulate, and manifest the best-available habits encountered in everyday social life. Rather than rule through inherited reserves of power or wealth, the ruling classes are those who can induce the population to emulate them:

The . . . patronage of favoured forms . . . change[s] national character. Some one attractive type catches the eye, so to speak, of the nation, as servants catch the gait of their masters, or as mobile girls come home speaking the special words and acting the little gestures of each family whom they may have been visiting. (*P*, 53)

Again, concepts like “acting,” drawn from the theater, provide explanations for how human societies function.<sup>44</sup> This sense of the world is notable for its rejection of that quality most frequently associated with mental life under earlier liberalism, the reflexive separation of thinking from immediate experience. Although he does not reduce cognition simply to stimulation and response, Bagehot nevertheless depicts a brain only interested in activities that have immediate realizations, or that involve the desire for future ones.

This new occasion for a mode of culture designed to ease subjects into a normativized *modus vivendi* helps to explain why theatrical culture—premised as it was on embodied immediacy—was beginning to become part of “the hospitalities and amenities of [the] daily life” of the country at large in the 1860s and 1870s.<sup>45</sup> Most Victorian accounts of the nineteenth-century theater suggest that T. W. Robertson’s drama marks a realist paradigm shift, premised on the theater’s assertion of its ability to assemble polite realities, onstage and off. Like many other dramatic authors of his generation, Robertson grew up in the theater: his father was, like William Simpson, a provincial actor-manager. Robertson is the first major playwright associated with the so-called problem play, whose verisimilitude was understood as contrasting with the more mannered theatricality of the melodrama.

Robertson’s problem plays contained melodramatic elements, however, so it is perhaps more productive to understand his drama as defined by an internal *claim* to realism. His *Caste* (1867), for example, includes characters who call for “real people, real mothers, real relations, real connections” to appear upon the “stage.”<sup>46</sup> This realism appears in small details of non-idealized, but respectable, life. The most successful of Robertson’s plays, *Caste* represents the “[i]nterior of a moderately respectable house” by calling for “[h]am in slices in paper” on a table in the first act, the sign (but also, in the non-theatrical world, the actual property) of a household negotiating a budget.<sup>47</sup> Bagehot’s

theorization of emulation and governability provides an explanation for how Robertson could claim national relevance for a depiction of reality that generally corresponded with the lives and manners of the upper classes: his plays portrayed exemplary conditions that his audiences might wish their own circumstances to resemble. These plays create polite spectacles onstage that address, and were designed to produce, polite spectacles—respectable, aspirational audiences—offstage.

Of all of Robertson's plays, *M.P.* (1870), a play about an election, addresses most explicitly how theater was imagined as mediating contemporary politics. Like *Caste*, *M.P.* shows the country's ruling class shifting from an inherited aristocracy to an instrumental elite who teach the general population how to act. The play's protagonist, Chudliegh Dunscombe, becomes an actor who betters his ineffectual aristocrat father by quieting an electoral riot through theatrical display.

The younger Dunscombe should, by right, inherit his father Dunscombe Dunscombe's own inherited lands, but Dunscombe senior collapses as the play opens, destroyed by the debts his name suggests. Addressed as "the bankrupt oligarch," Dunscombe clearly deserves to be replaced.<sup>48</sup> Yet, like Bagehot, Robertson promotes the outgoing aristocracy as an archive of correct cultural valuations. Dunscombe's loss of his hereditary seat leads to the crises of authority, governmental and cultural, which structure the play's plot. These dilemmas are jointly resolved, at the play's conclusion, through an onstage theatrical that reasserts the aristocracy's view of society, now blessed by public support.

In the political plot, Dunscombe's parliamentary seat is contested by two competitors. Talbot Piers, noble but bland, is challenged by the Scots Quaker industrialist Isaac Skoome, who employs the dubious political operatives Bran, Bray, and Mulhowther. The *Corsican Brothers* depicted political consensus requiring a polity to agree on the interpretation of verbal and visual signs; Skoome's operatives seek instead to sow interpretative disorder. Their democratic language euphemizes criminal intentions: a burglary becomes "English electors exercising their lawful franchise" (*M*, 350). Mulhowther, similarly, suggests that the English geographical landscape is "not so beautiful as Ireland," as it does not contain the varied national partisan perspectives that also constituted the Corsican vendetta-scape. Their *lumpen* politics influence Skoome: relatively calm at the beginning of the play, he is eventually led to repeat the operatives' signature cry of revolutionary politics: "Liberty! . . . Equality! . . . And Fraternity!" (*M*, 352).

To solve the dilemma of mob rule, the aristocracy's views of literary and political culture must be converted into a generally emulable form.

The elder Dunscombe is the play's central source of correct cultural and political opinions. He accurately calls Skoome "one of those rough brutes who pleases plebeians because he talks to them in their own bad English" (*M*, 329). In confirming this opinion by having Skoome create an actual plebeian riot, the play suggests that the aristocracy should be emulated as the interpreter of social categories, and must remain the keeper of these categories as well.

A new ruling class is required to undo the pernicious authority that Skoome might wield. This new class is founded by Chudleigh, whose parallel plot involves his courtship of Ruth Deybrooke, Skoome's ward and the subject of the latter's predatory amatory intentions. In spite of his father's suggestions, Chudleigh has decided against a traditional aristocratic career in politics, the church, or the military, deciding instead to become an actor. The younger Dunscombe has also decided, however, against Shakespeare, whom he claims has recently been "abolished" (*M*, 325). He is enthralled instead with the methods of the contemporary low stage, "entertainment crammed full of sun and singing . . . and parodies on popular songs" (*M*, 326). Theater, national politics, and everyday life are so closely interwoven that solving the problems of one means repairing the others. Chudleigh and Ruth's initiation into companionate romance occurs when Chudleigh, casting aside his anti-Shakespearean prejudice, recites Lorenzo's speech to Jessica ("Look how the floor of heaven / Is thick inlaid with patens of bright gold . . .") from *The Merchant of Venice* (5.I.58–59).<sup>49</sup> The force of a cultural work, Robertson suggests, comes from its ability to engineer a positive tactical outcome in contemporary society. Ruth, through Chudleigh's performance, is wrested away from "Skoome . . . I mean Shylock," just as Jessica is removed from Shylock in Shakespeare's play (*M*, 91).

The play's final act, which takes place in a hotel saloon over the course of the sort of election-day riot that also appears in George Eliot's *Felix Holt* (1866), demonstrates this model of tactical culture. Eliot depicts the type of culture and reflective intellectual life her novel promotes as incompatible with mass publicity: her intellectualized hero cannot control the riot.<sup>50</sup> Robertson, in contrast, shows theatrical culture as capable of any number of practical effects, including riot control. The play presents the state of the unruly population, circa 1870, as defined by a governable quiescence all but begging to be instructed by theatrical exemplarity. A carriage arrives offstage, and Skoome, from inside the saloon, urges the assembled mob to "Pitch 'em over!" (*M*, 372). In what follows, the audience, addressed as a surrogate to the assembled rioters, witnesses a struggle to control the

mob through performed charisma. Chudliegh, still offstage, alights from the carriage and quiets the rioters through what he calls “his play-acting” in front of them (M, 372). This offstage crowd assents to quiet themselves in order to watch Chudliegh’s acting; in their process of acquiescent spectatorship, they become like the actual audience now watching Robertson’s play.

#### IV. THEATER AND SOCIAL LIBERALISM

This idea of a public body brought to order by individuals’ desire to emulate theatrical performances became part of the understanding of the work of culture more generally. In an 1878 paper on the “Amusements of the People,” the liberal economist William Stanley Jevons describes the ideal audience member for a reforming entertainment as possessing a “mind enchained just so long as there is energy of thought to spare”; whose “body,” in the “meantime . . . remains in a perfect state” of passive, unreflective “repose.”<sup>51</sup> Jevons reflects contemporary political philosophy’s shift from a negative liberalism, which promoted individual mental and physical freedoms, to a social liberalism that sought to guide individuals to act according to a unified standard. To this end, Jevons suggests that theaters and other places of entertainment should intensify their promotion of audience quiescence, allowing the emulative circuit to occur with minimal interference between active elites and receptive audience members. This plan for a concrete influence over the minds of audiences resonated with the highest levels of contemporary philosophy. T. H. Green, at his death Whyte’s Professor of Moral Philosophy at Oxford, similarly recommends for the nation a Bagehot-like normativization of judgment. Although Green’s *The Principles of Political Obligation* (1882) is relentless in its promotion of the “will” of the individual, it states that this will must be directed by “some standard of right” negotiated by the community.<sup>52</sup> Green sees the nation itself as founded in the establishment of a “general law,” a set of common ethical beliefs realized in daily practice.<sup>53</sup>

In the theatrical practice of Henry Irving, the first knighted British actor and the most significant personality of the late-century stage, we observe the theater elevating itself into the seat of such a “general law”: a laboratory of ideal social practices. To this end, in 1881, Irving fully darkened the auditorium lights during a theatrical performance for the first time in England. His change of focus interrupts the normal social world of the audience in favor of the ideal social world

appearing onstage, a theatrical experience Irving expands upon in his testimony before the 1892 Theatrical Select Committee.<sup>54</sup> This committee addresses a theatrical culture that, as another respondent claimed, had become “‘one part’ of the life of everybody”: a place where the norms of quotidian “life” could be modeled.<sup>55</sup> The higher the level of the theater, the more intense and potentially transformative the emulative connection it could encourage. Darkening the Lyceum hall eliminated, or at least sharply reduced, the possibility for intra-audience communication, instead intensifying the emulative communion between actors and audience. Irving assumes audience governability as requisite for dramatic art, which “requires on the part of its management, its performers, and its audience, alike a constant fixed aim.”<sup>56</sup> The actor’s “fixity of purpose” would only be betrayed by an audience expressing any “variety of purposes,” such as strongly individuated class or cultural distinctions.<sup>57</sup>

Irving’s ideas reappear in the contemporary drama. Arthur Pinero’s *Trelawny of the “Wells”* (1898) reflects, self-consciously, on the theater industry’s norm-setting self-confidence. Pinero, knighted in 1909, typifies the class shift that late-century theater professionals underwent. Himself the son of a solicitor, the nine years that Pinero spent as a lawyer granted him the offstage respectability and manner that underwrote his onstage career, which peaked with a five-year tenure in Irving’s Lyceum company, then foremost in the country. Pinero’s *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1893), arguably the best-known problem play, describes the social catastrophe created by an upper-class woman’s past sexual relationship. This new “realism” was premised on the heavily upper-class decorum of its characters’ working out of such moral dilemmas, providing an emulable spectacle of morality and conduct to anyone who aspired to the play’s aristocratic lifestyle.

*Trelawny* is a meta-problem play, which shows the earlier Victorian stage developing the capacity to more accurately represent reality. It asserts that Robertson was the playwright who taught the problem play how to represent contemporary respectable life; and then itself models that new realism that Robertson created. The drama opens in “a sitting room on the first floor of a respectable house,” whose complex stage directions (“[o]n the right are two sash-windows, having Venetian blinds and giving a view of houses on the other side of the street”) reveal, in a sense, the play’s ending: Robertson’s theatrical reforms are what led to a theater that could put on stage such properties and developed the ability to describe so precisely one particular location within everyday life.<sup>58</sup> Within the play’s world, however, no

such theatrical system seems in sight. Although the two onstage characters, the greengrocer Ablett and the landlady Mrs. Mossop, revere the theatrical “Profession,” this theater is out of touch with contemporary reality (*T*, 6). It cannot reflect that continuity of representative dynamics between stage-world and real world that Mossop refers to in noting the “handsomely proportioned room” that Mrs. Mossop—and the *Trelawny* staging—had placed onstage (*T*, 4). This house, rented to the husband and wife actors the Telfers, fills with the members of the Barridge Wells Theatre’s company as they bid farewell to Rose Trelawny, who is departing the stage to marry the aristocratic Arthur Gower, grandson of the Vice Chancellor Sir William Trafalgar.<sup>59</sup> The stage’s low social status is reflected in the physical deterioration of these actors, most prominently the toothless low comedian Colpoys.

Working among such actors, it is no surprise that Tom Wrench, a stand-in figure for Robertson, is—when we first see him—an actor frustrated with the “damnably rotten” opportunities offered by a melodramatic stage depicted as heavily theatrical and inauthentic: there is no place for Wrench’s plays, with their short “speeches . . . and . . . ordinary words” (*T*, 20). Rather than lead Wrench to imagine a breakaway theatrical system, however, Wrench’s dismay with the stage is democratized by a fellow actor, who reminds him that “*somebody* must play the bad parts in this world, on and off the stage” (*T*, 10). The realism that Wrench proposes, accordingly, will display no interest in changing the world so much as in accurately representing it.

Bagehot’s conception of a populace looking to be governed by emulative spectacles settles, in Pinero, into a public depicted as theater-mad. Rose predicts that, even when retired from the stage, she will be “recognized by people, and pointed out—people in the pit of a theatre, in the street, no matter where; and when I can fancy they’re saying to each other, ‘Look! that was Miss Trelawny! you remember—Trelawny! Trelawny of the “Wells”!’” (*T*, 53). Pinero, somewhat anachronistically, takes as granted for Robertson’s time what Robertson’s plays did not: that the population at large was already turned towards the theater industry. Wrench premises his drama on such a continuity between stage-world and regular life. His theater will take command of “ordinary words,” and of the properties of the everyday world, through stage sets presenting “locks on the doors, *real* locks, to work” and so forth (*T*, 96). This realism is anti-idealistic, for Wrench will “fashion heroes out of actual, dull, every-day men . . . the sort . . . you see smoking cheroots in the club windows in St. James’s Street; and heroines from simple maidens in muslin frocks” (*T*, 53). This second-person address

attunes the “you” of his audience to particular experiences: London’s West End becomes a cultural Mecca, something to be visited to self-fashion in line with national norms.

The second act further refines the mode of everyday life on which Wrench will model this interpellation of public demand. Rose has gone to live in the Gowers’ house in Cavendish Square in order to learn to act like a member of the class into which she is marrying. The act opens with a portrait of “Sir William Gower in his judicial wig and robes” at stage center, with Gower himself under it, asleep after dinner (T, 55). Life in the Gowers’ house is, as this opening tableau predicts, stifling. Yet, by its conclusion, the play will suggest that the best parts of the Gowers’ lifestyle—their grace and manners—need to be put into public circulation so they may be widely emulated. Although Rose flees the Gower household, her time among the aristocracy has made her “reserved, subdued, ladylike”: emulating the Gowers, she has “developed . . . [i]nto a . . . human being,” onstage and off (T, 166). This full humanity prevents her from returning to the unreformed stage, where “[w]e are only dolls, partly human, with mechanical limbs that *will* fall into stagey postures, and heads stuffed with sayings out of rubbishy plays. It isn’t *the* world we live in, merely *a* world—such a queer little one. I was less than a month in Cavendish Square, and very few people came there; but they were *real* people—*real!*” (T, 128–29). This social panopticism convinces Rose that she has experienced “real” life, which she is in turn able to represent onstage for public emulation.

Rose’s co-mediator in this arrangement between aristocracy and public is Wrench, who, invited into the house by Rose, announces that “[*t*]his is the kind of chamber I want for the first act of my comedy” (T, 95). With this line, Wrench apostrophizes the features of the stage set in which he is standing. Retrieving elite habits from aristocratic seclusion and inserting them into public life—thereby reproducing Bagehot’s model of a practical primitive king—becomes the subject of the remainder of the play.

All classes could find in this new theater a socialized suite of values. In Wrench’s account of his performances, even the “gallery-boys,” that same class of seat-holder addressed in the 1866 Select Committee, admire uncritically the playwright who “make[s] their lives happier,” and Wrench eventually receives the patronage of Sir William Gower himself (T, 17). Despite their difference in rank, Gower and the “boys” experience theater in precisely the same way. Although sitting in “a curtained box,” Gower’s requirements for a theatrical performance are



the same as “the boys,” for Gower requests an experience defined by consumption and absorption, but not reflection; he seeks in theater the restoration of health, rather than the more intellectualized pleasures of private mental abstraction: “[W]hen I have heard and seen enough, I’ll return home . . . and to-morrow I shall be well enough to sit in Court again” (*T*, 193). The “repose” that Jevons suggested audiences would enjoy at reforming entertainments had become part of the entertainment industries’ own self-justification. Wrench’s audiences, in galleries or private boxes, lose any habits of reflexivity, dissolving—as in Irving’s darkened Lyceum—into one social organism informed and quieted by theatrical display.

The conception of a governable nation that looks to public institutions to model “normal life” for them is one of the central assumptions of L. T. Hobhouse’s defining statement of post-1900 positive liberty, his 1911 *Liberalism*. A former journalist like Bagehot, Hobhouse similarly describes mental life as a public activity. *Liberalism* has most frequently been read as an account of the policies of economic redistribution favored by the then-current Liberal administration, for which, although not a Member of Parliament, Hobhouse was as much an intellectual influence as Mill had been for earlier administrations. Hobhouse integrates the program of socialized thinking that Bagehot had initiated into his account of the sorts of behavior that government could engineer in the populace. Ultimately, *Liberalism* firmly rejects, for elites and masses alike, the mental privacies recommended by mid-century liberalism. Hobhouse suggests that mental privacy is false consciousness, a Millian ghost in what is in fact a socialized cognitive machine. Although *Liberalism* acknowledges a “sphere of what is called personal liberty,” Hobhouse suggests that this is

a sphere most difficult to define. . . . At the basis lies liberty of thought . . . the inner citadel where, if anywhere, the individual must rule. But liberty of thought is of very little avail without liberty to exchange thoughts—since thought is mainly a social product; and so with liberty of thought goes liberty of speech and liberty of writing, printing, and peaceable discussion.<sup>60</sup>

Hobhouse does not mention the theater because, in effect, he has placed all forms of cultural production—and mental life—within a socialized, standardized space. Although the contemporary subject may “not want to be standardized,” or “conceive himself as essentially an item on a census return,” an innate tendency forces him to emulate others.<sup>61</sup> Hobhouse terms this emulative tendency within



the human organism a “Liberalism . . . within.”<sup>62</sup> Like the *Corsican* vision, this innate quality forces the individual to consider the values of his community, and through them arrive at unreflexive integration within the modern state.

Hobhouse shows how common Bagehot’s conception of politics as sustained contact between an emulable elect and a governable population had become by the nineteenth century’s end. Since “[t]he masses who spend their toilsome days in mine or factory struggling for bread have not their heads for ever filled with the complex details” of political life, thinking should be done for them by an “elect.”<sup>63</sup> Hobhouse acknowledges the role of volition even in this markedly top-down exchange: the elect is responsible for “convincing the people and carrying their minds and wills,” rather than “imposing on them laws which they are concerned only to obey and enjoy.”<sup>64</sup> This emphasis on a “common” space for all activities precludes any space for the idiosyncratic “genius” that Mill envisions. The elite must simply “convince” the population, rather than accord them any space for attempting mental freedoms on their own. In stocking this national mental landscape with the social bank of “thoughts and conceptions illuminated, enlarged, and, if needful, purged, perfected, transfigured” by an elite class that Pinero had proposed before the Royal Academy, Hobhouse conceptualizes the nation thinking as its theaters, acutely aware of their hold on mental life, had taught it to do.

### *Bilkent University*

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in John Dawick, *Pinero: A Theatrical Life* (Niwot: Univ. Press of Colorado, 1993), 215.

<sup>2</sup> See L. T. Hobhouse, “Liberalism,” in *Liberalism and Other Writings*, ed. James Meadowcroft (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994). Hobhouse uses the terms “Social Liberty” and “socialized” throughout this 1911 essay.

<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, trans. Graham Burchell (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 92.

<sup>4</sup> Frances Ferguson, *Pornography, the Theory: What Utilitarianism Did to Action* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>5</sup> The strain of popular liberalism that these two terms introduce straddles the most significant shift in nineteenth-century liberalism: between the negative mental liberties emphasized by John Stuart Mill, and the positive liberties later favored by T. H. Green and L. T. Hobhouse.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Arnold’s educational writings anathematize emulation as a purely pragmatic public action undertaken to obtain an outcome by manipulating “the opinion of the world” (“Romans XII,” in *Sermons Chiefly on the Interpretation of Scripture* [London: B. Fellowes, 1845], 526).

<sup>7</sup> I am indebted, here as throughout, to Elaine Hadley's account of liberal theorists' interest in creating concrete structures to guide mentation; see *Living Liberalism: Practical Citizenship in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Uday Singh Mehta reminds us that classical liberalism extended only partial powers of thought to wide portions of the populations it governed; see *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1999). Mehta's account focuses particularly on colonial populations, but his observations are relevant to liberalism's account of non-elites as well.

<sup>9</sup> Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution*, ed. Paul Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), 71.

<sup>10</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition of the term, "a play in which a particular problem is treated or discussed," notes the first recorded usage of the term in 1894: "The phrase is new . . . the thing itself dates from twenty years, to go no further back" ("problem," n., clb.). This essay demonstrates the ways that this practice emerged out of developments in theater, and in the general understanding of how culture could achieve governmental change, in the 1850s and 1860s.

<sup>11</sup> See Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> Nicholas Dames, *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007), 47.

<sup>13</sup> *The Corsican Brothers*, *M.P.*, and *Trelawny of the "Wells"* all premiered at theaters in London's West End, at the Princess's, the Prince of Wales's, and the Court theaters, respectively. To what extent did these theaters, located in one affluent section of London, speak to all Victorian theatergoers? As Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanov explain, "London theatre audiences in the mid-nineteenth-century" and thereafter were extraordinarily "diverse": members of all classes and neighborhoods attended plays at a range of theatrical venues, of which those in the West End were the most desired and, we may assume, attended by the widest possible range of playgoers (*Reflecting the Audience: London Theatregoing, 1840–1880* [Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 2001], 226). The West End, furthermore, served as a model for theatrical producers and consumers throughout the empire, a process that was "almost wholly unidirectional" from center to periphery (Tracy C. Davis, *The Economics of the British Stage, 1800–1914* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000], 253). As such, these plays could claim influence over the wide political-theatrical sphere that this essay describes. For a further look at the "mix of classes" who attended West End theaters toward the end of the century, see David Schulz, "The Architecture of Conspicuous Consumption: Property, Class, and Display at Herbert Beerbohm Tree's Her Majesty's Theatre," *Theatre Journal* 51 (1999): 231–50 (233).

<sup>14</sup> Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 271.

<sup>15</sup> Bagehot, *Physics and Politics* (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2001), 11. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number and abbreviated *P*.

<sup>16</sup> Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988), 3.

<sup>17</sup> Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, 3.

<sup>18</sup> See J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1975), 22.

<sup>19</sup> T. Davis, 7. My own claims draw on a survey that appears in the fourth chapter of my dissertation, "Everyone's Theater: Literary Culture and Daily Life in England, 1860–1914" (PhD diss., Univ. of Chicago, 2011). My survey, which examines fifty-five

private diaries taken from twenty-five libraries in Europe and North America, confirms that theatergoing was available to—and, to a remarkable extent, widespread among—all social classes by the end of the nineteenth century. These diaries show that the theater of post-1860 England was the first “national theater” to be influenced by the entire national—and indeed imperial—population.

We can observe the spread of theatrical habituation to all nineteenth-century social classes through the humblest diary that appears in the survey, an anonymous miner’s barely legible account of theatrical attendance. The opening of a theater in a nearby community was a significant event: the miner notes, “Saturday evening a theater at Brampton first Sat night for it in Brampton,” and attends the next week. Ignoring in his description the play itself, the miner concentrates on the network of social connections that theatergoing permitted: “I at Brampton Theatere on sands in evening Lewiss Billi Brown Joseph James Park with me. I came some of the way from Brampton with Tommie Teasdale Wilson and Andrew Forest Highfell the rest of the way with George Ruddick Robert Ruddick son of Tindale Terrace. . . . I talking to miss Blackburn in Theatere” (24 August 1907, *A Miner’s Diary of 1907*, ed. Alastair Robertson [Alston: Hundy Publications, 2000], 44). Theatergoing multiplied the miner’s opportunities to form social connections with others, in the process imbricating him within the cross-class interpersonal sphere that Bagehot describes.

In fact, so demographically pervasive is theater attendance from the 1860s onward that the story of those *not* attending the theater becomes itself interesting. In the 1860s and 1870s, not attending the theater was most common among those who were women of the lower classes, from rural settings, and more-than-normally religious. Adelaide Poutney, twenty-three years old in 1864 and living with her father, the vicar of St John’s Wolverhampton, did not attend the theater; nor did Agnes Anne Kendal, a 19-year-old farmer’s daughter temporarily relocated in 1876 to a Cumbrian manor house. See Agnes Ann Kendal, *A Year at Killington Hall: The 1876 Diary of Agnes Ann Kendal*, ed. Judith Robinson (Natland: Judith M. S. Robinson, 2004); and Adelaide Pountney, *The Diary of a Victorian Lady* (Ludlow: Excellent Press, 1998). As the century progressed, non-attendance grows increasingly rare among all classes. Those moving to rural locations in Australia and South Africa experienced the absence of the theater as part of the general absence of city life. See Joseph Jenkins, *Diary of a Welsh Swagman, 1869–1894*, ed. William Evans (South Melbourne: London: Macmillan, 1975); and John Fisher Sewell, *A Victorian Pepys at Plettenberg Bay 1875–1897* (Heiderand: Ladywood, 1999). Theater was, however, a common feature among more densely organized communities abroad. So B. P. Crane notes military theatricals as a regular practice for troops stationed in Afghanistan; see *The Ninth Lancers in Afghanistan, 1879/1880 . . . Being a Diary Kept Daily by Private B. P. Crane* (London: Henry Crane, 1883). These diaries show that Victorian social scientists’ figuration of inter-class connections as theatrical was no accident. Rather, the theater truly did offer actual examples of the sorts of social exchanges that these theorists describe.

<sup>20</sup> Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830–1864* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995), 4.

<sup>21</sup> Alexandre Dumas, *Les Frères Corses* (Paris: Ancienne Maison Michel Levy Frères, 1887), 3, translation mine.

<sup>22</sup> Dion Boucicault, *The Corsican Brothers*, in *English Plays of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Michael Booth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 35. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number and abbreviated C. In his preface to this edition, Michael Booth notes that the Thomas Hailes Lacy’s Acting edition of *The Corsican Brothers*, which is

frequently taken as Dion Boucicault's version, is in fact a literal translation of Eugene Grangé's adaptation; see Booth, 30.

<sup>23</sup> See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

<sup>24</sup> Dumas, 134.

<sup>25</sup> Carolyn Williams, "Genre Matters: Response," *Victorian Studies* 48 (2005): 300.

<sup>26</sup> John Stuart Mill, "On Liberty," in *On Liberty and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), 61.

<sup>27</sup> Mill, "On Liberty," 66.

<sup>28</sup> Mill, "On Liberty," 65.

<sup>29</sup> Walter Bagehot, "The First Edinburgh Reviewers" (1855), in *Literary Studies*, ed. Richard Holt Hutton (London: Longmans, Green, 1879), 62.

<sup>30</sup> Bagehot, "First Edinburgh Reviewers," 32.

<sup>31</sup> Bagehot, "First Edinburgh Reviewers," 32.

<sup>32</sup> Bagehot, *Lombard Street: A Description of the Money Market*, ed. Hartley Withers (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1920), 9.

<sup>33</sup> Bagehot, "The First Edinburgh Reviewers," 3.

<sup>34</sup> Bagehot, "The Prince Consort" (1861), in *The Works of Walter Bagehot* (Hartford: Travelers Insurance Company, 1891), 403.

<sup>35</sup> Bagehot, "The Prince Consort," 403.

<sup>36</sup> Bagehot, *Constitution*, 14.

<sup>37</sup> George Joachim Goschen, *Index to the report from the Select Committee on Theatrical Licenses and Regulations, 1866* (373), XVI.195–99.

<sup>38</sup> For an early description of amateur theatricals during a long tour of duty in British India in the 1820s and '30s, see Robert Bakewell Cumberland, *Stray Leaves from the Diary of an Indian Officer Containing an Account of the Famous Temple of Juggurnath, Its Daily Ceremonies, . . . And a Residence in Australia* (London: Whitfield, Green, 1865). Later, some governmental organizations produced their own accounts of their theatricals: see for example, Stephen Townesend, *A Short Account of the Amateur Dramatic Club of St. Bartholomew's Hospital* (London: W. Speaight, 1888). Similarly, amateur theatricals were part of the regimen at several mental institutions; see, for example, Lunacy, *Copy of the thirty-fourth report of the Commissioners in Lunacy to the Lord Chancellor*, 1880 (321) XXIX.

<sup>39</sup> Henry Eyre, *Report . . . on the present state and on the improvement of libraries, reading rooms, and day rooms*, 1862 (2920), XXXII.626. Similarly, a 1863 commission on sanitation in the Indian army, noting barracks conditions at Malliappoorum, reports that "[t]he men have a small library, and the officer in command encourages them to amuse themselves on the skittle and cricket ground, and in private theatricals" (Edward Henry Stanley, 15th Earl of Derby, *Royal Commission on the Sanitary State of the Army of India. Vol. I. Report of the commissioners*, 1863 [3184], XIX.I.626).

<sup>40</sup> Patrick Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London: Verso, 2003), 12.

<sup>41</sup> Grant Allen's *Physiological Aesthetics* (London: Henry S. King, 1877), for example, bases its "system of Aesthetics" on "a certain portion of the organism, known as the cerebro-spinal nervous system" (29).

<sup>42</sup> Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Boston: Willard Small, 1887), 91.

<sup>43</sup> Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 91. In the context of a wider discussion of limitations of the "will," Mill notes that "many indifferent things, which men originally did from a motive of some sort, they continue to do from habit. Sometimes this is done unconsciously, the

consciousness coming only after the action: at other times from conscious volition, but volition which has become habitual, and is put in operation by the force of habit" (91).

<sup>44</sup> For a recent, and persuasive, account of concepts of acting and self-formation in mid-Victorian social theory, see Lynn M. Voskuil, *Acting Naturally: Victorian Theatricality and Authenticity* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2004).

<sup>45</sup> A. T. Davidson, "The Clergy and the Theatre," *Macmillan's Magazine* 37 (1877): 498–99.

<sup>46</sup> T. W. Robertson, *Caste* (New York: Robt. M. De Witt, 1876), 7.

<sup>47</sup> Robertson, *Caste*, 3, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Robertson, *M.P.*, (New York: Samuel French, 1890), 364. Chadwyck-Healey English Verse Drama Full-Text Database. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number and abbreviated *M.*

<sup>49</sup> William Shakespeare, *Merchant of Venice*, ed. Jay Halio (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 215.

<sup>50</sup> George Eliot's model of intellectual life and its proposed engagement with national politics is discussed, classically, in Catherine Gallagher, "The Politics of Culture and the Debate on Representation," *Representations* 1 (1984): 115–47.

<sup>51</sup> William Stanley Jevons, "Amusements of the People," in *Methods of Social Reform, and Other Papers* (London: Macmillan, 1883), 10.

<sup>52</sup> T. H. Green, *The Principles of Political Obligation* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1967), 123.

<sup>53</sup> Green, 39.

<sup>54</sup> See Basil Langton, "Shaw's Stagecraft," *Shaw: The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies* 21.1 (2001): 17.

<sup>55</sup> David Robert Plunket, *Report from the Select Committee on Theatres and Places of Entertainment, House of Commons Papers; Reports of Committees*, 1892 (240), XVIII.168.

<sup>56</sup> Plunket, 64.

<sup>57</sup> Plunket, 64.

<sup>58</sup> Arthur W. Pinero, *Trelawny of the "Wells"* (London: William Heinemann, 1897), 1. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number and abbreviated *T.*

<sup>59</sup> In his 1925 edition of the play, Pinero changes the name of the theater to Sadler's Wells, the actual theater at which Robertson was employed during this phase of his career.

<sup>60</sup> Hobhouse, 13.

<sup>61</sup> Hobhouse, 83.

<sup>62</sup> Hobhouse, 83.

<sup>63</sup> Hobhouse, 111.

<sup>64</sup> Hobhouse, 111.