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978-0-521-57115-9 - The Economics of the British Stage 1800–1914

Tracy C. Davis

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THE ECONOMICS OF THE
BRITISH STAGE
1800–1914

During the nineteenth century, British theatre developed into an industry with considerable importance in the economy, diversified by whole new forms of entertainment – first music hall, then cinema – evolving alongside the dramatic stage. This is the first comprehensive study to examine the theatre's growth from an economic perspective. Tracy Davis reflects the debates of economic theorists from Adam Smith to Alfred Marshall to investigate three key areas: the state's role in protecting theatre; the factors affecting the success or failure of theatre companies; and how theatre came to be regarded as one of the 'service industries'. By grounding debates about subsidization and the economic viability of the live arts in an era predating government funding, Davis sheds new light on the history of cultural policy for the arts in Britain. Based on in-depth analysis of primary sources, both public and private, her book will interest scholars across a range of disciplines – theatre, social history, economics, gender studies, and the sociology of culture.

TRACY C. DAVIS is Professor of Theatre, English and Performance Studies at Northwestern University. She is author of *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (1991) and *George Bernard Shaw and the Socialist Theatre* (1994). She co-edited *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (1999) and is editor of the Cambridge University Press series Theatre and Performance Theory.

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*This book is dedicated to
Michael R. Booth,
who surveyed a path
and encouraged me to walk it.*

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Abbreviations

BL	British Library
GLRO	Greater London Record Office
PRO	Public Record Office
SRO	Scottish Record Office
ROHCG	Royal Opera House Covent Garden

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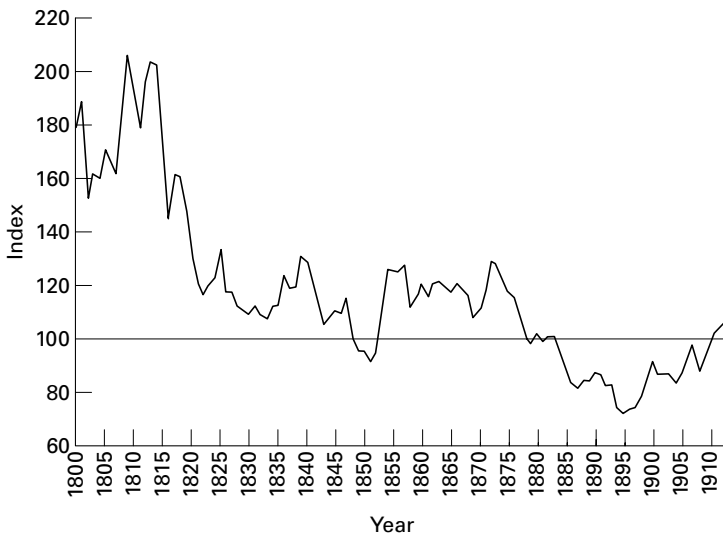
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Throughout this text, money values are quoted in the pre-decimalization style of pounds, shillings, and pence (in use until 1971). One guinea equals 21 shillings, one pound equals 20 shillings, 1 shilling equals 12 pence. Forms of citation may be £1.12.8 (one pound twelve shillings and eight pence) or, for sums less than £1, simply 12s.8d. (twelve shillings and eight pence). Monetary figures are not adjusted to a retail price index or constant for comparative purposes.

Price index of the British pound 1800–1931¹

¹ Based on P. Rousseau, *Les Mouvements de Fond de l'Economie Anglaise, 1800–1913* (Brussels and Louvain: L'edition universelles and Institut de Recherches Economique, 1938) reproduced in B. R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 722–4.

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If, however, the purchasing power of the pound is compared, whether using 1914 as a constant or as P. Rousseaux does the average of 1865 and 1885, comparable prices are evident in 1848, the early 1880s, and 1911–12. For reference purposes, the preceding graph demonstrates the price index based mainly on wholesale and import costs.

In other words, what cost £1 in 1848, 1880, or 1910 cost twice as much in 1810, or two-thirds as much in 1895.