Introduction

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Two decades ago, in what is still our most compact guide to the drama of the period, J. C. Trewin likened the Edwardian stage to a house, its principal rooms chambers for compartmentalizing that era's theatrical experience. In its dining room, Trewin tells us, we can sample the culinary fare of Pinero and Jones, in its study the intellectual wares of Shaw, Galsworthy, and Granville Barker. A conservatory is provided for the verse dramas of Stephen Phillips, and a playroom for the musical comedies of George Edwardes (*The Edwardian Theatre* 25–6). If, however, Trewin's structure neatly echoes the rich variety of Edwardian theatre, its subdivisions do little to suggest the interplay of forms or genres that seems, to late twentieth-century eyes, one of the most remarkable features of pre-war entertainment. To be sure, Trewin's conceit was in 1977 both a response to and corrective of an image that W. Macqueen-Pope, that 'wistful remembrancer', had used some three decades earlier. In *Carriages at Eleven: the Story of the Edwardian Theatre* (1947) Macqueen-Pope had compared Edwardian playgoing to a series of domestic visitations, hosted by that era's leading actor-managers: 'you always knew where your friend, the actor-manager, lived ... Provided you had executed that little formality at the box office or paybox, you were equally his honoured guests no matter where you sat' (9–10). Play attendance was, for Macqueen-Pope, a round of commercial at-homes, in which one called upon one's 'friends' at their respective playhouses. Yet while Trewin's house substitutes diversity for the gentility of Macqueen-Pope's houses, both participate in a view of the Edwardian stage that has come to seem increasingly untenable. In part this has been the result of a larger shift of attitudes towards the Edwardians and their world. The past quarter-century, in particular, has seen 'the old Edwardian brigade' mocked by John Osborne's Jimmy Porter, but reinforced by popular novels (and more popular

films) like *The Go-Between* and *The Shooting Party* – 'All home-made cakes and croquet, bright ideas, bright uniforms' – yield to images of mid-channel nausea meant to catch the sensibilities of an era social historian Samuel Hynes has likened to 'a narrow place made turbulent by the thrust and tumble of two powerful opposing tides' (*The Edwardian Turn of Mind* vii). Recent exhibitions such as the Barbican Art Gallery's 'The Edwardian Era' (1987–8) and the Museum of London's 'Suffragettes in London' (1992–3) have insisted upon such turbulence, registered in anxieties about gender, class, and race, and bodied forth in a series of increasingly violent street demonstrations, as emblematic of an age that had become both theatrical about its politics and political about its theatre. Viewed within this context, the Edwardian stage, one house or many, seems in need of major refurbishment.

The eleven essays that make up the present volume attempt such reconstruction. Indeed, their subject-matter alone is indicative of some of the ways in which theatre and performance studies have themselves been reshaped since Trewin's initial work. Twenty years ago it would have been unthinkable to offer a book on the Edwardian stage without substantial consideration of the dramas of Bernard Shaw, the managements of Granville Barker, or the theatre journalism of Max Beerbohm. All appear in the present volume, but obliquely as parts of a larger, more comprehensive cultural enquiry. Instead of retracing the not inconsiderable achievement of individual authors, directors, or drama critics, the present work takes as its province broader patterns of theatrical production and consumption, focussing upon the economics of Edwardian management, the creation of new audiences, the politics of playgoing, and the emergence of popular, distinctly un-literary forms of entertainment, including variety theatre, East End melodrama, musical comedy, and the cinema. In an introductory essay, Joseph Donohue stakes out the perimeters of this altered landscape, commenting upon problems of approach and access that have hitherto hindered disinterested discussion. Donohue's initial concern is one of definition. Yet in attempting to fix boundaries, and establish an appropriate degree of scholarly distance from a subject that has endured more than its share of uncritical nostalgia, he proposes 'a manageable group of qualities or attributes' helpful in distinguishing the Edwardian stage from both its late Victorian forbears and early modern descendants. Among Donohue's categories are a number of topics that assume the status of leitmotifs in the essays

that follow. The new puritanism Donohue associates with much of the period's progressive drama, for example, brings in its wake the larger question of Edwardian eroticism and its place in both coterie and popular theatre. It is a theme sounded by Peter Bailey in his enquiry into the rise of musical comedy, and J. S. Bratton in her account of male impersonators and music hall cross-dressing. The quest for new kinds of audiences, raised by Donohue in a discussion of the period's repertory movement, returns, not only where one might expect it, in Dennis Kennedy's reassessment of avant-garde spectators, but in Dave Russell's account of a newly gentrified music hall and Jim Davis's survey of East End neighbourhood playhouses. The social and moral earnestness Donohue finds in much of the era's political drama is likewise explored in Sheila Stowell's study of suffrage theatre agitation, and in Victor Emeljanow's account of the professional fraternities that helped to define the agendas of mainstream drama criticism. In each case attempts at rigorous localization are used to provide a fresh context for reassessing texts both familiar and now marginalized.

Donohue's challenge to see Edwardian entertainment as both an object in its own right and part of a larger cultural matrix is taken up by a number of contributors who bring new critical methodologies to bear upon popular forms of theatre and performance art. In the 1890s William Archer observed, not without misgivings, that the new century's 'real New Drama' would not be the theatre of Ibsen, Maeterlinck, or Shaw, but the sex-and-shopping musicals already attracting attention at George Edwardes's Gaiety Theatre. In '"Naughty but nice": musical comedy and the rhetoric of the girl', Peter Bailey seeks to account for the enormous success of this most Edwardian of genres. Drawing parallels with the Hollywood musical as that form has been reseen by post-modern film critics, Bailey shows 'how familiar and apparently unproblematical forms can reveal much of social and ideological significance'. Central to this concern, and introducing a theme that resonates through the volume, is the figure of the girl-heroine and her implications for understanding Edwardian formulations of sexuality and gender. Indeed, the celebration of woman as 'girl' in a succession of stage musicals like *A Gaiety Girl*, *The Sunshine Girl*, *The Shop Girl*, *The Girl from Kays*, and *The Girl Behind the Counter*, enables Bailey to explore in tandem the stage persona of the Gaiety heroine and the professional status of the Gaiety Girls who impersonated her. Proposing both military and industrial

models for the production-line techniques of musical comedy, Bailey invites a comparison of the regime of impresario George Edwardes – 'Svengali, martinet, snooper , and sugar daddy' – with both older paternalistic modes of authority and newer patterns of industrial production, a convergence of forces nicely caught in his reproduction of a Gaiety Girl punching a time clock. Such focus upon the Edwardian stage as a large-scale cultural industry, an emphasis echoed in Dave Russell's study of variety theatre, and Tracy C. Davis's essay on the economics of Edwardian theatre management, allows Bailey to link actual conditions of employment to the representation of work and workers on the musical stage. Here what Bailey calls the 'brokered sexuality' of Edwardes's musicals, conveyed to spectators through an acknowledged system of codified gestures and an infusion of music hall 'knowingness', takes its place within an emerging consumer culture, whose centre was the already theatricalised glamour of the purpose-built department store. In pieces like *Our Miss Gibbs*, *The Girl Behind the Counter*, and *This Way Madam*, all set in identifiable replicas of actual stores, a reactionary patriarchy on both sides of the footlights sought to define its own New Woman. What remained to be seen was whether, in the end, a female workforce would submit to such control, or oppose to it what Bailey terms 'a more independent sense of self'.

What Bailey does for musical comedy, Dave Russell and J. S. Bratton do for the equally problematic form of Edwardian music hall. In 'Varieties of life: the making of the Edwardian music hall', Russell challenges a conventional scenario which casts early twentieth-century variety theatre in the role of syndicate-controlled villain, appropriating and finally silencing earlier, more 'authentic' Victorian voices. Identifying the origins of such a tale in Edwardian debates about the 'soullessness' of mass entertainment, Russell proposes an alternative narrative in which Edwardian music hall re-emerges as a resilient response to new business practices and altered patterns of audience attendance, triggering the transformation of an institution dominated by comic song into one characterized by a rich collection of hybrid acts. Russell's emphasis falls, accordingly, on the success of Edwardian variety in constructing new constituencies, its courting of respectability in an attempt to make peace with Temperance opponents and municipal licensing boards, and its role in helping to shape the iconography of a democratic or popular monarchy, an effort that culminated in the attendance of George V at a Command Performance

at London's Palace Theatre of Varieties in 1912. Maintaining that definitive readings of individual performers or acts are, at this distance, neither possible nor desirable, Russell focusses upon the ways in which Edwardian variety functioned as a social barometer, registering economic, political, and moral disturbances, before resolving them in the interests of its increasingly genteel clientele. In 'Beating the bounds: gender play and role reversal in the Edwardian music hall', J. S. Bratton presents us with just such an instance. Taking as her starting point a collection of pin-up postcards of cross-dressed Edwardian women, Bratton asks what variety artists like Hetty King or Bessie Wentworth thought they were doing when they blacked-up, dressed as men, and delivered themselves of music hall set-pieces like 'Looking for a Coon Like Me'. Approaching such acts through a sequence of carnival tropes, and citing gender theorist Judith Butler on the relationship of cross-dressing to specific periods of cultural crisis, Bratton explores the manner in which variety transvestism (and Bailey's music hall 'knowingness') may be seen as a response to the fierce misogyny of the halls themselves. Read as burlesques of the masculine, such performances take their place as parts of a larger process in which popular entertainment contributed a space for the testing and contesting of gender. The vilification of independent women – the need, especially, to punish in stage sketches assertive suffragettes – taken together with the appeal of a figure Bratton identifies as the 'disarming androgyne' allows us to see in luminous detail some of the tensions between oppositional image-making and the policing of traditional boundaries that Russell identifies as one of the hallmarks of Edwardian variety.

The new forms of entertainment surveyed by Bailey, Russell, and Bratton have their counterparts in the new management structures and audiences examined, in turn, by Tracy C. Davis and Dennis Kennedy. For Davis, in 'Edwardian management and the structures of industrial capitalism', the shifts of sensibility recorded by Bailey and Russell are less the result of new repertoires or dramatic forms than of Edwardian innovations in industrial organization. Indeed, the centralized brokering of talent that both Bailey and Russell discuss as a feature of Edwardian popular entertainment is seen here as a concomitant of a larger push that saw theatre ownership and management pass at the century's close from limited liability partnerships to large publicly owned corporations. In seeking to understand such organizations, the financial environment in which

they flourished, and the consequences of both for women in managerial positions, Davis urges a refinement of critical vocabulary, spelling out with precision some of the differences between manager, lessee, entrepreneur, and impresario. It is an exercise that allows us to see how the emergence of integrated organizations for the large-scale production and distribution of entertainment effectively shut women out of financially significant ventures, an economic perspective that helps to explain both the 'girl' heroines of musical comedy and the suffrage grotesques of the halls. As an attempt to understand the Edwardian stage as a function of its commercial imperatives, Davis's piece is complemented by Dennis Kennedy's study of the demographics of Edwardian playgoing. In 'The New Drama and the new audience', Kennedy sets attempts by English theatre managers to reform their spectators within the wider context of European modernism. Beginning with the paradoxical role audiences played in the rise of an avant garde, he enumerates the strategies by which organizations like the Independent Theatre and Stage Society helped to lay the groundwork for the Court Theatre's management of its spectators. Attempts to regulate audience behaviour, including the reshaping of attitudes towards applause, curtain calls, and theatre dress are seen as parts of a modernist desire to control the nature of aesthetic perception. Even the Court's sustained campaign against the wearing of matinée hats is shown to have been a political act with cultural implications. The problem with such reforming agendas, Kennedy concludes, was that in the absence of any kind of state subsidy (readily available to Antoine in Paris and Brahm in Berlin) Edwardian London's progressive drama had to survive within a larger theatre community that quite patently did not want to be reformed. The result was a series of uneasy and in the end disastrous compromises – Granville Barker at the St James's, with Shaw's portrait on the programme opposite an advertisement for the International Fur Store – that helped to promote the new theatre's 'loathing' of its audience.

If Kennedy's concern is with efforts to build new constituencies for a new drama, the trio of essays by Victor Emeljanow, Sheila Stowell, and John Stokes direct attention to the appearance in the period of a new kind, or kinds, of theatre critic. In 'Towards an ideal spectator: theatregoing and the Edwardian critic', Emeljanow traces the trajectory of mainstream theatre journalism from the formation of the Society of Dramatic Critics in 1906–7 to its replacement, some half a decade later, by the more narrowly defined Critics' Circle. In

considering the shift from the 'amateur gentlemen' of the former organization – a group that included A. B. Walkley, William Archer, and J. T. Grein – to the 'professional players' of its more journalistic successor, Emeljanow is able to show how the language of theatre criticism was reshaped by a professional fraternity seeking to grapple with an irreparable breach between 'the art of the theatre' and a more commercially minded 'theatre industry'. In 'Suffrage critics and political action: a feminist agenda', Sheila Stowell argues that, for all their internal disputes and quarrels, the institutions anatomized by Emeljanow were (literally) male clubs. To their collective voices she adds those of Edwardian feminists for whom the stage was a place for political activity. Observing that prominent leaders of the suffrage cause, such as Christabel Pankhurst, Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, and Charlotte Despard, wrote theatre columns for an oppositional press that included *Votes for Women*, *The Suffragette*, *The Vote*, and *Common Cause*, Stowell seeks to identify the principles upon which individual performances were attended and reviewed, as well as those issues upon which feminist critics closed ranks against male colleagues. A concluding section reviews the militant theatre demonstrations of 1912–14, in which suffrage critics, articulating their cause, disrupted stage performances with a 'living drama' of their own. John Stokes, in sharp contrast, calls attention to the theatre writings of a single figure. In 'A woman of genius: Rebecca West at the theatre', he brings together the observations of a remarkable woman who determined to take an active role in the theatre of her time as a feminist-socialist drama critic. Using as a control the theatre journalism of West's compatriot Christina Walshe, Stokes underscores the sensitivities of an idiosyncratic personality who scorned the plays of suffrage activists, had major reservations about Shaw, neatly placed, along with Wells, Galsworthy, and Arnold Bennett, as one of the era's 'four uncles', and, above all, grasped with some prescience both the real modernity of Granville Barker ('He went thinking as other people go hunting') and the charged relationship between Edwardian performance, sex, and a newly theatricalized consumerism that set West End patrons ogling scantily clad dummies in the display windows of Regent Street shops.

The volume's concluding essays extend its frame of reference both spatially and temporally. Jim Davis's survey of London's East End cautions us against identifying Edwardian theatre exclusively with the amusements of Mayfair or the more high-minded enterprises at the Royal Court or Duke of York's. Reminding us that East London

in the pre-war years contained a twentieth part of the population of Britain, Davis traces a vigorous record of theatrical life and theatrical change, one that witnessed the disappearance of large neighbourhood playhouses like the City of London, the Grecian, and the Garrick, and saw a variety of strategies adopted by those theatres that wished to resist the seemingly inevitable transformation into music halls, or (later) cinemas. For the Whitechapel Pavilion survival meant turning to an increasingly Jewish constituency to become the home of England's Yiddish theatre, while the Standard in Shoreditch aligned itself with the 'wicked woman' melodramas of the brothers Melville, popular potboilers like *The Girl Who Lost Her Character*, *The Girl Who Took the Wrong Turning*, and *The Girl Who Wrecked His Home* that developed a 'rhetoric of the girl' as potent and influential as that Bailey describes in their Gaiety counterparts. The Standard's attempt to instruct and reform its suburban audiences, similarly, presents us with an alternative to the repertory techniques enumerated by Kennedy. While progressive managements were proclaiming that formal dress was no longer obligatory even at the fashionable St James's, East End theatres in a push towards respectability began to insist upon the wearing of collars and ties. The cinema, that together with the music hall offered the most formidable threat to the existence of such venues, is the subject of David Mayer's 'Changing horses in mid-ocean: *The Whip* in Britain and America'. Mayer, however, is less concerned with the emergence of film, by 1914, as the most significant art form of the new century, than he is with the interstices between stage and film. Using as a test case Henry Hamilton and Cecil Raleigh's 1909 Drury Lane melodrama *The Whip* and Maurice Tourneur's 1916 cinematic adaptation, Mayer considers some of the ways in which early cinematographers paused in the development of their own craft to record for posterity the legitimate drama of the period. The end products, Mayer concedes, may represent a backsliding for filmmaking as an art, but largely for this reason preserve for later viewers the stage languages of their era. Asking why sensation cinema eventually replaced Drury Lane drama, Mayer challenges the conclusions of film historians like A. N. Vardac, suggesting that it was less a matter of inadequate stage illusion than of the economic advantages of being able to print and circulate multiple copies of a single performance. According to such lights, Tourneur's war-time film, like the theatre it documents, may be said to celebrate an Edwardian penchant for the stage pose and extravagant gesture.

Taken together the essays that make up the present work offer Edwardian entertainment and the Edwardian entertainment industry as parts of a vital but troubled era whose preoccupations and paranoias anticipate those of our own age. Responding to the Edwardian stage as a social, economic, and intellectual phenomenon, the volume's contributors take up Donohue's challenge to approach their common subject as a field 'for sustained comprehensive inquiry'. Employing a variety of methodologies, they not only suggest new lines of investigation and directions for research, but show some of the insights to be gained by submitting Edwardian performance, in all its multiplicity, to broad cultural analysis and interdisciplinary debate.

CHAPTER 1

What is the Edwardian theatre?

Joseph Donohue

The image of Albert Edward, the cigar-smoking, pleasure-loving sportsman, playgoer, and first gentleman of Europe who succeeded his mother Queen Victoria as King Edward VII in 1901, looms over the decade he dominated in characteristic but problematic ways. Sixty years of age when he ascended the throne, Edward was an old man with less than ten years to live. Remarkably and unexpectedly, he conferred an energy and a sense of fresh beginnings on that brief period that endowed it with significant new life. Never all things to all men, he opened up new political vistas in Europe through his own personal diplomacy but remained at the same time neglectful of domestic problems, social unrest, and the increasing gap between rich and poor.[1] His activities at home and abroad were assiduously followed by the rapidly developing illustrated English press, so much so that his complex identity as monarch, statesman, and high liver was perhaps better defined in the popular mind than that of any previous monarch. And yet, paradoxically, during the decade itself and after, he symbolized a simple life of unhurried, unworried indolence. That symbol, reified and reinterpreted in a thousand ways then and later, typically emphasized the 'peculiar glamour' of all that was 'Edwardian'.[2] Other, more recent misperceptions include an image of a never-never land of 'high summer, the long days in the sun, slim volumes of verse, crisp linen, the smell of starch', comprising the 'brief little world' inhabited by the 'old Edwardian Brigade' vilified by the disaffected Jimmy Porter in John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*.[3] Perhaps the most persistent bias of all has been a view of the Edwardian years as innocently but ironically moving forward into the deepening shadows of the cataclysm to come, the First World War.

These and other retrospective fallacies occur, early and late, even in the very attempt to establish the term used to designate the period itself and the span of years it encompasses. The author of the unsigned