Stages of Emotion:
Shakespeare, Performance, and Affect in Modern Anglo-American Film and Theatre

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Abstract

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This dissertation makes a case for the Shakespearean stage in the modern Anglo-American tradition as a distinctive laboratory for producing and navigating theories of emotion. The dissertation brings together Shakespeare performance studies and the newer fields of the history of emotions and cultural emotion studies, arguing that Shakespeare’s enduring status as the playwright of human emotion makes the plays in performance critical sites of discourse about human emotion. More specifically, the dissertation charts how, since the late nineteenth century, Shakespeare performance has been implicated in an effort to understand emotion as it defines and relates to the “human” subject. The advent of scientific materialism and Darwinism involved a dethroning of emotion and its expression as a specially endowed human faculty, best evidenced by Charles Darwin’s 1871 The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals. Shakespeare’s poetic, formal expression of the passions was seen as proof of this faculty, and nowhere better exemplified than in the tragedies and in the passionate displays of the great tragic heroes. The controversy surrounding the tragic roles of the famous Victorian actor-manager Henry Irving illustrates how the embodied, human medium of the Shakespearean stage served as valuable leverage in contemporary debates about emotion. The dissertation then considers major Shakespearean figures of the twentieth century, including Harley Granville Barker, Orson Welles, Laurence Olivier, and Peter Brook, whose “stages” similarly galvanize and reflect contestation and change in what William Reddy has called “emotional regimes” or Barbara Rosenwein “emotional communities.” For each of these figures, a specific emotional paradigm is at stake in staging Shakespeare and particularly Shakespearean tragedy. I engage with a range of
sources, from performance reviews to popular psychology, to locate these canonical moments in Shakespearean performance history as flashpoints in a cultural history of emotion.
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Introduction
Shakespearean Performances, “Emotional Practices”

I must have passions that must move the soule,
Make the heart heave, and throb within the bosome,
Extorting tears out of the strickest eyes,
To racke a thought and straine it to his forme,
Until I rap the sences from their course,
This is my office.

— Induction, A Warning for Faire Women

In the induction to the anonymously authored 1599 English play A Warning for Faire Women, the character of Tragedy distinguishes herself from History and Comedy through her claim on the spectator’s passions. Her very “office” is to “have,” or perform, “passions” so that she can “move” them in audiences (49, 44). Studies of the early modern passions and their importance to the period’s drama of all genres mark some of the earliest contributions to the now burgeoning fields of affect studies, the history of emotions, and cultural emotion studies. From Gail Kern Paster’s Humoring the Body (2004) to Richard Meek and Erin Sullivan’s The Renaissance of Emotion (2015), scholars have explored the ways in which the early modern theatre was shaped by and helped to produce early modern understandings of emotion. They effectively adopt what the historical and cultural anthropologist Monique Scheer terms a “practice theory approach” to the history of emotions, which “emphasize[s] the use of rituals (in

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1 R.S. White offers a useful overview of this literature, as of 2015, in the opening chapter of Shakespeare and Emotions: Inheritances, Enactments, Legacies. Gail Kern Paster and Michael C. Schoenfeldt’s studies are the forebears here, revealing the embodied, material nature of the early modern passions represented in the period’s drama. Building on this work, subsequent studies have addressed how early modern drama, performance, and literature were understood to move and affect readers and audiences, including Katherine Craik and Tanya Pollard’s Reading Sensations in Early Modern England and Alison P. Hopgood’s Passionate Playgoing in Early Modern England. Reacting to the focus on embodiment and physiology in these accounts, there has been a concerted effort to understand how affects were conceived more broadly, as in Paster, Rowe, and Wilson’s Reading the Early Modern Passions, Richard Meek and Erin Sullivan’s The Renaissance of Emotions, White’s Shakespeare and Emotions, and Bridget Escolme’s Emotional Excess on the Shakespearean Stage. The latter two are unique for addressing contemporary performances of early modern emotion.
the broadest sense) as a means of achieving, training, articulating, and modulating emotions for personal as well as social purposes” (210). Tragedy practically defines herself as an “emotional practice” according to Scheer’s definition of “habits, rituals, and everyday pastimes” that “evoke feelings where there are none,” “focus different arousals and give them an intelligible shape,” or “change and remove emotions already there” (209). Indeed, much of the terminology that has been developed in emotion studies can seem axiomatic to the study of theatre in general and early modern tragedy in particular.  

At the same time, the continued performance of early modern drama in subsequent historical periods would seem to make it a fascinatingly hybrid emotional practice. The Chamberlain’s Men premiered *Hamlet* shortly after *A Warning for Faire Women*, and unlike the rarely produced earlier play, it has become an “emotional practice” “for all time”—or at least for each new context, each new time, in which it is produced. It is somewhat curious, then, that the “affective turn” in Shakespeare studies has not extended very far into Shakespearean performance studies and the history of Shakespeare in performance after the early modern period. Bridget Escolme is one of the few scholars to draw attention to the emotion work of contemporary Shakespeare production. As she writes in *Emotional Excess on the Shakespearean Stage*, “because of the social and political significance of the passions in early modern drama … they [the plays] are a particularly rich site for discussions of how our own society conceives of, celebrates and regulates emotion” (xvi). While Escolme limits her study to early modern theatrical practice and to productions that took place in Great Britain within several years of the

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2 The terms have proliferated since Peter and Carol Stearns developed “emotionology” and “emotional style” in the 1980s to refer to the “range of a society’s available forms of expression” (Boddice 60). In addition to “emotional practices” other terms that I will be touching on include William Reddy’s “emotional regimes” and Barbara Rosenwein’s “emotional communities.” The precise ways in which theatre participates in defining the emotional standards and values of a particular society have perhaps not received serious attention from emotion theorists, or even theorists of the theater (again, after the early modern period), because theatre is so obviously about emotion, or because its performance of emotion seems to operate outside of culture.
book’s publication (2015), she seeks to “provoke further thought about how emotion has been expressed, judged, disapproved or valorized, recently or historically” in Shakespeare production (220).

Taking up that call, this project examines a series of Shakespeare productions in Great Britain and the United States from the late nineteenth century through the late twentieth century that, I contend, intervene in discourse about the very nature, function, and value of human emotion during the periods in which they are performed. Each chapter focuses on a cluster of Shakespearean activity that participates in moments of what Scheer calls “contestation” or “conflict over emotional practices” in the larger culture (218). That “activity” includes stage and film productions of the plays (primarily the tragedies) as well as related sources that contribute to understanding the productions’ particular use of Shakespeare as an emotional practice. Most of the productions that I discuss are canonical from the perspective of Shakespeare performance studies, appearing in the “performance” sections of introductions to different editions of the plays. Yet as W.B. Worthen has shown, Shakespeare performance criticism tends to be limited by an interest in performance as a measure of the “original,” authoritative text. Viewing these productions through the relatively new lens of the history of emotions instead treats them as sites of innovative cultural work.3

Of course, the particular “genius” of Shakespeare in the Western, Anglo-American tradition has to some extent always been associated with emotion, the dramatist’s astonishing ability to put words to human feeling. As a recent feature in Bride Magazine proclaims: “Wedding readings don’t get any more romantic than Shakespeare: so here are 10 of the best

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3 In his most recent book, Shakespeare Performance Studies, Worthen asks how Shakespeare Performance Studies can facilitate a “more productive study of performance” beyond how it “reproduces Shakespeare” (3). I suggest that another productive line of study, given what we might call Shakespeare’s emotional baggage, is the work of Shakespeare performance in a cultural history of emotions.
tear-jerking Shakespeare love quotes” (“10 wedding”). Neil Rhodes stresses how Shakespeare’s canonization in the eighteenth century was founded on his depiction of the passions, a “more precise and informative rendering of the much vaguer designation of Shakespeare as the ‘poet of nature’” (25). Rhodes cites, for instance, Alexander Pope’s preface to his 1723 edition of the Complete Works, which claims that the “Power over the Passions was never possess’d in a more eminent degree, or display’d in so many different instances” (25). In other words, and as this project demonstrates, Shakespeare’s “cultural capital” is in many ways emotional capital.4 Indeed, implicit to a “hierarchy of cultural forms,” as Erin Hurley notes in Theatre & Feeling, is a hierarchy of affects, in which “affects such as disgust or sexual excitement are signs of our animal nature, whereas social emotions such as shame or love that involve judgement or discernment are evidence of our more advanced and complete humanity”(17). The position of Shakespearean tragedy at the pinnacle of a cultural hierarchy is largely determined by its representation of “higher” emotions, or, by its ability to raise affects and feelings to the level of higher emotions through poetic form. Given its embodied, human medium, performance has the potential to challenge or support these hierarchies, rendering an “emotion” a bodily affect or vice versa.

The notion of Shakespeare’s emotional “genius” also tends to assume a continuity and universality of human emotional experience. That is, if Shakespeare’s writing about love from the sixteenth century still resonates today, that must mean something fundamental about the experience of love is the same. Cognitive approaches to the study of emotions, as undertaken most notably by Paul Ekman and Antonio Damasio, have helped to popularize the belief that

4 I use the term “cultural capital,” obviously originated by Pierre Bourdieu, to refer to the perceived cultural and economic value of Shakespeare across a range of media and industries that has generated, and is represented by, a/the “Shakespeare Industry.” Dominic Shellard and Siobhan’s Shakespeare’s Cultural Capital (2016) explores this phenomenon.
emotions and their expression are universal and can thus be studied scientifically. Ekman’s Facial Action Coding System supports a “pan-cultural element in facial displays of emotion” (Ekman). While these approaches have permeated the humanities, they have also been subject to critique for their lack of attention to sociocultural factors. Approaches from the perspective of the history of emotions and cultural emotion studies thus act as a corrective to cognitive theory. In these fields “emotion” is generally used to refer to feelings or affects that have been encoded with meaning through a given context. In Erin Hurley’s useful formulation, “emotion names our sensate, bodily experiences [affects] in a way that at once organises it and makes it legible to ourselves and consonant with others’ experiences or emotional lives” (23).

This project is substantively aligned with the latter approach, premised on the “cultural constructedness and the historicity of concepts of affect” (Hillman 141). The first part of my title, “Stages of Emotion,” suggests that the “stages” of these performances are also stages where a specific emotional paradigm is being tested, worked out, and performed. Returning to Monique Scheer’s idea of emotional practices, I am interested in Shakespearean performance, particularly of Shakespearean tragedy, as a tool for shaping what Barbara Rosenwein has called “emotional communities” or William Reddy “emotional regimes,” both essentially terms that refer to the emotional standards of a given community. For Rosenwein, an emotional community is defined by “the emotions that they value, devalue, or ignore; the nature of the affective bonds between people that they recognize; and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage,

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5 In Shakespeare Studies, works in the cognitive vein include Mary Thomas Crane’s _Shakespeare’s Brain_ (2010), Amy Cook’s _Shakespearean Neuroplay_ (2010), and L. Gallagher and S. Raman’s _Knowing Shakespeare_ (2010), while Bruce McConachie has approached theatre more generally from a cognitive angle, most recently in _Evolution, Cognition, Performance_. Daniel M. Gross has been the most openly critical of Damasio and Ekman and works such as these that depend on their assumptions, see his recent _Uncomfortable Situations: Emotion Between Science and the Humanities_ (2017).

6 The sense of the Shakespearean text as a “tool” or “instrument” is also inspired by W.B.Worthen, particularly as articulated in his 2006 article in _Shakespeare: “Texts, Tools, and Technologies of Performance.”_
tolerate, and deplore” (11). For Reddy, an emotional regime is characterized by similar strictures and regulations to a political regime, causing “emotional suffering” to occur for transgressors and the need for “emotional refuges.” My understanding of an “emotional paradigm” is similar in that it connotes a broad framework or basic apparatus for understanding emotion that is shared by a general public. Perhaps the clearest example of what I mean by a paradigm is that of psychoanalysis in the 1930s and 1940s, taken up in the third chapter, which, of course, posited a realm of emotion subconscious to the subject. Yet inherent to any such paradigm, community, or regime is some degree of uncertainty, tension, or conflict – what Scheer, again, calls “contestation” or “conflict over emotional practices” (218). Shakespearean performance often operates in these grey areas, either to expose or attempt to resolve conflict.

The “stages” of my title is also meant to suggest a point or step in a process. While each of the chapters could function as a stand-alone case study, they do move chronologically for a reason, one that corresponds with the use of the term “modern” in the title. Henry Irving, the Victorian actor-manager and tragedian who is the main subject of my first chapter, rose to popularity in the early 1870s, at precisely the same time that scholars date the beginning of “modern scientific psychology” (Rose 3). This new psychology implicated the concept of “emotion” in physiological and evolutionary accounts of the human mind. In From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category, Thomas Dixon explains what was at stake in this redefinition, including in works such as Charles Darwin’s bestselling The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals:

The emotions – especially those feelings and instincts that were still understood by many as moral, religious and aesthetic “affectations” or “sentiments” were, along with reason, hallmarks of what was especially dignified, superior, and noble about the human mind. Physiological and evolutionary accounts of emotions were, therefore, particularly powerful weapons in wider science-religion debates. If man’s very emotions could be reduced to mere physiological reflexes, or to inherited animal survival mechanisms, then
he truly would have been removed from his unique position as the pinnacle of creation. (136)

These new accounts of emotion meant that aesthetic examples from art and literature could no longer offer unquestionable evidence of what was “natural.” Critics of Darwin’s *Expression* lament the dearth of examples from Shakespeare, whose “power over the passions” was nothing less than the *truth* of human passion. The shift from “passions” to “emotions” is to some extent the instigating moment of this project. By challenging the humanist Shakespeare project, to which emotion was central, it created a need for new ways to leverage, or reclaim, Shakespeare and his mastery of feeling in service of the “human.” My project tracks Shakespearean activity that has been more or less overtly invested in this effort.

I do not mean to imply, however, that concepts of emotion were static prior to Darwin. Certainly, one could write a history of emotion in the Western tradition through the lens of major theories of the theatre and styles of drama and performance. Beginning with Aristotle, theorists have defined theatre in terms of its affective labor. Theatre is always an emotional practice that reflects something about the emotional culture at large. It is often an “emotional refuge,” as in the “illegitimate” venues of the Romantic theatre or the Shakespearean burlesques of the Victorian theatre. The Shakespearean stage, as I have already suggested, is a particularly rich site for writing a history of emotion. The tragic stage, where emotions are at their highest pitch, the greatest intensity, is perhaps even more so. Again, Shakespeare’s canonization endowed him

7 As Neil Rhodes notes, Shakespeare, was, or perhaps still is, the “principle location of traditional humanist values” (23). That is, by the “humanist Shakespeare project,” I refer to the ways in which Shakespeare, since the eighteenth century, has been central to an understanding of what makes humans human, and that the play’s articulation of emotional experience is crucial to that process. There is even a whiff of essentialist humanism, a la Harold Bloom, in David Hillman’s entry on affect in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespearean Tragedy*, published in 2016, as he writes, employing a universal “us,” that the “tragic heroes’ lack of restraint in embracing their passions is precisely what these tragedies offer us as admirable, as pictures of the greatness of the human spirit” (138).
with authority in regard to human emotion specifically, more or less cementing Shakespeare as a fixture in most emotional regimes in the Anglo-American tradition, or, to return to Erin Hurley’s terms, at the top tier of an affective hierarchy. An actor’s emotional utterances may uphold, upstage, or supersede Shakespeare’s through the embodied medium of performance. Thus the ways in which actors perform tragic emotion and how audiences and critics respond to those performances is valuable evidence of an emotional regime or community. The success and popularity of a Sarah Siddons, Charles Macklin, or David Garrick depends in part on their ability to engage with ideals of emotional expression possessed by the larger populace, including by pushing forward new ideals.

My interest in the period of time beginning in the 1870s has to with the introduction of a new level of uncertainty about emotion and its relationship to the human subject. To reiterate what is perhaps a somewhat obvious point, Darwinism and scientific materialism more generally widened the chasm between emotions as understand in “nature” and emotions as understood in artistic representation. Jerome Kagan notes that Darwin’s “ideas were a watershed in European discussions of emotion” (13). I am interested both in the implications of this shift for Shakespeare performance and how Shakespeare performance was leveraged to navigate it, given his special affiliation with the pre-Darwinian passions. Never before, in other words, had there existed such a disparity between Shakespeare’s emotional language and human emotional language. Of course, one clear consequence is the more naturalistic and physically realistic acting of performers like Henry Irving. But responses to Henry Irving’s performances in Shakespearean tragedy, as I will show, registers points of contestation and conflict in the new paradigm of what we might call Darwinian emotion.
Each chapter centers on a canonical Shakespearean figure, or figures, that recognizes, either implicitly or explicitly, the Shakespearean stage as a platform to comment on emotion. It is a testing ground, a laboratory, for theories of emotion. In the first two chapters, broadly speaking, what is at stake is the human, bodily medium of emotional expression. Should Shakespeare endorse the animalistic, physiological, individualized dimensions of human emotional expression (as in Irving’s performances) or remain a bastion of idealized, aestheticized emotion? In the third chapter, what is at stake are the implications of the subconscious for a cohesive, autonomous human subject. In the fourth chapter, Shakespeare becomes a site to interrogate the communicative function of emotion, its social aspects. In each case, Shakespeare’s culture-emotional capital and the formal, poetic nature of the emotional expression in the plays fuels Shakespeare’s position at the crosshairs of different strands of emotional discourse. In other words, despite moving from the late Victorian period to the 1970s, this project finds that the Shakespearean stage remains a privileged, distinctive space for making, or unmaking emotion in an era of “modern scientific psychology.”

Originally, “Shakespearean tragedy” “theatre” and “affect” were the keywords of this project. As I began research on the Henry Irving chapter, “affect” quickly morphed into “emotion” because of how contested of a term it was during the period and of how frequently it came up in regard to Irving specifically, as an actor said to engage audiences intellectually but not emotionally in his tragic performances, for instance. While “affect” is almost exclusively a scholarly term, “emotion” is a term that has been in popular usage since the end of the nineteenth and one that changes meaning depending on the context. In many respects, Shakespeare is a vehicle for converting “affects” into “emotion,” giving value and definition to human feelings and sensations. My first chapter provided a test case, a template, for this process, revealing the
dense entanglement of “Shakespeare” and “emotion.” Following the trail of these keywords into the modernist period led me to Harley Granville Barker, known for his productions of Shakespearean romance and comedy. That is, Barker recognized these plays – rather than the tragedies – as having the greatest potential to exalt a pseudo-spiritual or mystical emotionalism akin to Greek tragedy. Similarly, as I began to consider the correlation between Shakespeare, emotion, and psychoanalysis, film presented itself at the same time that tragedy loomed back into focus. That is, the objects of study were determined by their relevance to the overarching terms “Shakespeare,” “performance” and “emotion.” The final chapter perhaps goes farthest afield from these terms by considering plays loosely based on Shakespeare’s *King Lear* rather than only “straight” productions. The same rationale underscores these objects, though, as I see these plays as kind of meta-commentary on Shakespeare’s emotional capital.

The first chapter argues that the intense controversy that arose from Henry Irving’s performances as Shakespeare’s “tragic heroes” is directly related to the new physiological and evolutionary accounts of emotion cited by Dixon. That Irving’s expressions appeared strange, idiosyncratic, and not totally within the actor’s control differentiated him from his forbears and from the “dignified, superior, noble” presentation of emotion in Shakespearean tragedy. Rather, they seemed to align him with the emotional subjects in Darwin’s *Expression*, whose expressions could be explained on the same principles that led to expressions in animals. At exactly the same time, the eminent Victorian intellectual, psychological theorist, and theatre critic George Henry Lewes deploys the figure of the Shakespearean tragic actor to articulate a non-Darwinian theory of emotion. Moreover, as Nikolas Rose has stressed, the new psychology was also a “psychology of the individual,” interested in abnormal or pathological behavior and its social consequences.
rather than the “general laws of functioning of the human psyche” (5). Irving’s resolute, distinct individuality in characters associated with a universal “human nature” then also caused concern.

The second chapter focuses on the modernist theatre director and theorist Harley Granville Barker. Barker’s connection to Gilbert Murry and Jane Harrison, members of the so-called Cambridge Ritualists, makes his Shakespearean activity of interest from the perspective of the history of emotions. Ritual theory at the turn of the twentieth century studied the connections between Greek tragedy and the collective emotional experiences of ancient religious rituals, as well as the practices of ancient, primitive societies more generally. This chapter argues that Barker’s approach to Shakespeare, including his 1912 to 1914 productions of The Winter’s Tale, Twelfth Night, and A Midsummer Night’s Dream as well as his critical prefaces, are deeply influenced by ritual theory. Like many modernists, Barker shared an ambivalence about the “human medium” of the theatre, in large part because of actors such as Henry Irving who made theatre a vehicle for individual, self-expression. The Cambridge Ritualists themselves emerged in response to Darwinism and the “positivist milieu” (Pokhrel). Particularly with the popularization of William James’s What is an Emotion?, it seemed increasingly evident that no human faculty existed apart from “bodily activity” (Dixon 204). Barker sought to realize in Shakespeare an emotional language that transcended the “human medium,” a language more like music in its formal, impersonal channeling of intense emotion.

The third chapter turns to stage and film productions of Shakespearean tragedy by Orson Welles and Laurence Olivier, viewing them as practices that articulated emotion as defined within psychoanalysis, which reached its peak of popularity in the late 1940s. I argue that Welles’s and Olivier’s strategies for representing the unconscious emotion or “drives” of Macbeth and Hamlet, respectively, each reflect different ways of understanding the role of the
unconscious in the human psyche. Particularly through the medium of film, Welles and Olivier effectively diagnose the characters within a psychoanalytic framework, suggesting how unconscious emotion can be mediated and contained.

The final “stage” in this study is a cluster of activity around King Lear, arguably the most emotional of Shakespeare’s tragedies, in the 1960s and 1970s. In contrast to conventional interpretations of Lear, Peter Brook’s stage and film productions in 1962 and 1971, respectively, present a cold, bleak vision of human suffering. “Nothing matters,” was Pauline Kael’s summation of what she saw as an emotionally void production of the play (Kael). Under Brook’s direction, characters utter lines with flat affect and behave either indifferently or cruelly. Brook, then, diminishes the social emotional quality of King Lear, the ways in which characters respond to and are affected by the suffering of others. It was precisely this quality that had been valued in King Lear productions subsequent to Brook’s, as a response to the horrors of World War II. The chapter then treats Edward Bond’s Lear (1971) and Ronald Harwood’s The Dresser (1980) as plays that, in very different ways, refocus attention on the importance of social emotions in King Lear in the wake of Brook’s highly influential interpretation. As Susan Lanzoni has shown recently, empathy, as the ability to put yourself in “someone else’s shoes,” became a keyword throughout a range of industries and in popular culture in the decades after World War II. Its popularity signified a demand for “new possibilities for connection, identification, and understanding that might improve social relations of all kinds” (Lanzoni). And in fact, while Brook stressed the lack of connection within the world of the play itself, he was interested in finding new ways for the audience to connect to King Lear in a post-Auschwitz, post-nuclear world. When Kenneth Tynan wrote at the end of his review of Brook’s stage production that he “not only know[s] him [King Lear] but can place him in his harsh and unforgiving world,” this is
perhaps a version of empathy. Brook’s productions and Bond’s and Harwood’s plays are to some extent all using *King Lear* as a touchstone in a larger, variegated discourse about emotional connection. The chapter concludes with a coda for the larger project.

At each of these stages, the “office” of tragedy is differently implicated as an emotional practice. In one of the few contributions to *Emotions: A Cultural Studies Reader* from the discipline of theatre studies, R. Darren Gobert notes that “‘real life’ performances of emotions are not different in kind but deeply interrelated with ‘staged’ performances of emotions” (331). While this might seem like an obvious claim, it is not one that seems to have permeated Shakespeare performance studies or the history of Shakespeare in performance. Interpreting “real life” performances to mean the ways that emotions are understood and valued in the larger culture, this project tests that claim’s validity in the context of Shakespearean performance, exploring how the two kinds of performance are interrelated — and what is at stake in that relationship.
Chapter 1: Henry Irving’s Tragic Body and the “Emotional Language of the Future”

In Bram Stoker’s memoirs of his relationship with Henry Irving, Stoker recalls discovering casts of the actor’s hands in the workshop of Onslow Ford, the sculptor responsible for a life-size statue of the actor as Hamlet. Irving had been dead for over a year, and Stoker, Irving’s former business manager, was so taken with the hands that Ford later sent him a bronze cast of one of them. Stoker claims that Irving possessed the “finest and most expressive hands I have ever seen” (151). “It would be hard to mistake them for those of any other man. With them he could speak” (282). In Ford’s extant sculpture, Irving’s hands are large and imposing. The left droops down off the actor’s thigh as if unable to withstand its own weight. The right clenches the arm of a chair, the wrist upright and tense. Both forefingers assume a slightly different pose than the other fingers. As the theorist Arthur Symons wrote of Irving, his “hands act almost by themselves, as if every finger were a separate actor” (55).

Irving’s distinctive, “speaking” hands were at the heart of the public controversy that raged around the actor as his popularity grew following his first performances at the Lyceum Theater in the 1870s. Henry James, reporting on the London theatre in 1877, found “London society” “divided, on the subject of his merits, into two fiercely hostile camps; that he has sown dissension in families, and made old friends cease to ‘speak’” (102). Known as “Irvingites” and “anti-Irvingites,” the different camps took their stands in pamphlets, periodicals, “at dinner tables

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8 Stoker’s fascination with Irving also inspired the character of Dracula, possessed of singular hands as well, as in the passage, quoted in Auerbach in *Private Theatricals*, “I could not mistake the hands which I had had so many opportunities of studying” (79). While Dracula is explicitly monstrous and terrifying, “What manner of man is this, or what manner of creature is it in the semblance of man?” there are certainly hints of this creature confusion in responses to Irving’s Shakespeare.

9 Scholars including Nina Auerbach, Jane Goodall, and Tiffany Watt-Smith have discussed the importance of the actor and of Irving in particular in Victorian discourses about the emotions, though their accounts do not address how and why his performances in Shakespearean tragedy should be especially subject to scrutiny.
and elsewhere” (102). One of the central points of contention was whether Irving deserved the title of “tragedian” in the poetic drama. That is, could he perform Shakespeare’s tragic heroes or was he only suited for comedy and melodrama?

To evaluate “Mr. Irving as a Tragedian,” to quote the title of one particularly scathing anti-Irvingite criticism in *The National Review*, is bound up with questions about new physiological and evolutionary accounts of human emotional expression circulating in the same period and in the same venues (Brooksbank). Victorian England was a generalist intellectual culture in which neither theatre criticism nor the emergent discipline of psychology was specialized or professionalized. If Irving’s hands, like the rest of his distinctive body parts in performance, such as his long, spindly legs, heavy brow, or even his jaw, were expressive, it was not always clear what he was expressing or if it matched the emotion expressed by his language. His performances were characterized by vocal tics and physical mannerisms, including a slight dragging of his leg, before he worked to “overcome” them later in his career. What Irving termed “by-play,” the physical illustration of the “workings of the mind,” made his performance of the tortured burgomaster in the melodrama *The Bells* a sensation in 1871. But as the anonymously authored pamphlet *The Fashionable Tragedian* remarked in 1877 (later revealed to be the work of William Archer), while “he might have been unsurpassed in certain lines of comedy and melodrama … it is questionable whether he could ever have made much of tragedy” (23).

“Irving-phobia” was at its most intense when it came to Shakespeare’s tragic parts because of the close ties between Shakespeare’s poetic representation of the passions and human

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10 In their edited anthology of Victorian psychological writings, *Embodied Selves*, Jenny Bourne-Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth note that the “issues” they “debated” “formed a crucial aspect of the cultural landscape” in Victorian England, “permeating the work of contemporary novelists, poets, and cultural critics” (xv). Rick Rylance’s *Victorian Psychology and British Culture 1860-1880* examines the inter-disciplinary nature of psychology during this period including a chapter on George Henry Lewes.
emotional expression. Published in 1872 and an immediate bestseller, Charles Darwin’s *Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals* insisted that human expression did not come into existence as a means of communicating feeling and attributed the same causes to animal and human expressions. Critics of both Darwin’s work and Irving’s performances in Shakespearean point to their debasement of human emotion. Indeed, the writings of the popular Victorian theater critic and psychological theorist George Henry Lewes reveal how the Shakespearean tragic stage remained a crucial space to define, or rather, defend, the rules of human emotional expression at the same time that Irving was flouting those rules with his tragic body.

1.1 Bell, Darwin, and the “Art” of Expression

Prior to Darwin’s *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals*, the leading authority on expression was Charles Bell’s *The Anatomy and Philosophy of Expression*, first published in 1806. Darwin framed his treatise as a response to Bell, and critics of Darwin tended to compare the two works. Bell’s *Anatomy* reveals how physical expression was understood as a shared rhetorical language in its own right, a uniquely human capacity designed to represent and communicate inward feeling. For Bell, the tragic actor’s purposeful coordination of expression and emotion provides an ideal metaphor for the (ideal) emotional body. Despite his unprecedented examination of the physiology of expression, Bell is insistent that “the capacity of

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1) Shakespeare provided “real” evidence of human emotional expression, showing the extent to which eighteenth century, pre-scientific modes of emotional knowledge are still at play. As mentioned in the introduction, Neil Rhodes’s essay *The Science of the Heart* stresses how Shakespeare’s representation of the passions was at the heart of the eighteenth century invention of Shakespeare as the poet of human nature, while Jean Marsden has studied the importance of Shakespeare to eighteenth century theories of sympathy, building on David Marshall’s *The Figure of Theatre*. And as Adela Pinch notes, “eighteenth century discussions of feelings, and of sympathy in particular, move with unconcern between examples of ‘real people’ and examples of representations of people” (39) and “feelings from the world of representation and feelings from real people are equally illustrative” (30). Shakespeare clearly supplied many of these representations.

2) As such, Bell participates in the tradition of physiognomy, which was invested in how the outward expressions of the body provided a clear register for interior mental states. See Lucy Hartley’s *Physiognomy and the Meaning of Expression in Nineteenth-Century Culture* and her discussion of Bell.
expression is bestowed as a boon, a mark of superior intelligence, and a source of enjoyment; and that its very nature is to excite sympathy; that it radiates, and is understood by all; that it is the bond of the human family” (145-6). The title of another popular treatise of Bell’s, *The Hand and its Mechanisms as evincing design*, highlights his allegiance to natural theology. Originally framed as a guide for fine artists, the *Anatomy’s* conflation of aesthetic and natural forms for expression is critical to “evince design” and particularly God’s superior human design. Bell’s conviction that “man had been created with certain muscles specially adapted for the expression of his feelings,” which enables his use of the tragic actor, is precisely what Darwin takes issue with in his volume (Darwin 19).

Bell draws on actors at a potentially controversial, or even “humiliating,” moment in the *Anatomy*, when he addresses expressions “which cannot be explained on the idea of a direct influence of the mind upon the features.” One of the epigraphs for this essay is a quote from *The Winter’s Tale*, “I do believe thee; / I saw his heart in his face.” He uses actors in Shakespearean tragedy as “real life” examples of expressive behavior that is outside of the mind’s control. First, he cites Clarence’s line in *Richard III* to his murderers: “Your eyes do menace me / Why look you pale?” to illustrate how a villain’s expressions will “betray that he suffers” and belie his feigned “contempt of all softer passions” (89). That the murderer’s body betrays him is far from “humiliating” here, as it communicates the presence of “softer passions.” The actor should enhance this effect in performance. “The just feelings of mankind demand respect; men will not have the violence of grief obtruded on them. The actor, to preserve the dignity of his character, must permit only those uncontrollable signs of inward suffering to escape, betraying how much he feels, and how much he restrains” (23). Somewhat paradoxically, then, the actor very much has control over the character’s “uncontrollable” expressions, a control dictated by his awareness
of the spectator and the context of the scene, play, and theatrical event. Bell assumes his reader’s familiarity with the play and with the use of a fictional example as scientific testimony. Perhaps by way of consolation or preparation for discussion of the nerves and respiratory system that follows, Bell suggests that the human subject’s body can be similarly calibrated, or at least have benevolent effects.

Bell’s second example is Sarah Siddons, the famous “tragic muse” whose performances were hailed as a “school for oratory” (Buchanan 414). Citing a moment from her famous performance as Queen Katherine in Shakespeare’s Henry VIII, Bell elaborates on the social function of even the smallest, uncontrollable bodily expressions:

Even while asleep, these interior organs of feeling will prevail, and disclose the source of expression. Has my reader seen Mrs. Siddons in Queen Katherine during that solemn scene where the sad note was played which named her knell? Who taught the crowd sitting at a play, an audience differing in age, habits, and education, to believe those quivering motions, and that gentle smile, and those slight convulsive twitchings to be true to nature? To see every one hushed to the softest breathing of sympathy with the silent expression of the actress, exhibits all mankind held together by one universal feeling: and that feeling, excited by expression, so deeply laid in our nature, as to have influence, without being obvious to reason. (83)

The rhetorician Henry Siddons’ 1807 acting manual, Practical Illustrations of Rhetorical Gesture and Action, clarifies that the “slight convulsion” at the moment of her death was “apparent only at the ends of her fingers” and that it was one of her most “natural and affecting traits” as an actor (15). In the twitching of Siddons’ fingers, what Bell describes as the “perfection” of the human hand in his treatise on the hand and the “capacity for expression” converge (2). Like the paleness of the murderer’s face in Richard III, it is natural and affecting in part because it is “universally” legible as an index of emotion hidden even from the character herself. Although a “silent expression,” it is still highly determined by the play, including the numerous poetic speeches of Queen Katherine lamenting her wretchedness. That is, it provides a
physical corollary to Shakespeare’s language and can only be interpreted as emotion in the context of the play. Thus, expressive behavior becomes emotional language.

In an 1867 letter, Darwin wrote of his desire “to upset Sir C. Bell’s view … that certain muscles have been given to man solely that he may reveal to other men his feelings” (Ekman, “Introduction” 8). It is not that Darwin denies the importance of expression in human relations in his work; it is that he focuses, unapologetically, on a myriad of other reasons why expressions manifest in the way that they do, not only in different species but also in different human individuals. Countering Bell, Darwin argues that “distinct uses, independently of expression, can indeed by assigned with much probability for almost all the facial muscles” (17). His three “general principles of expression” and the eclectic medley of examples he uses throughout the volume create the impression that expression cannot be trusted as a reliable index of mental or emotional states. The “twitchings” of a subject’s fingers could stem from a “serviceable habit” originally associated with a state of mind (e.g. grief, loss) being now only “feebly” “induced”; the principle of “antithesis” whereby an opposite state of mind can produce an opposite associated habit; or from the “direct action of the nervous system,” which can lead to “effects … which we recognize as expressive” (34). Darwin shatters the illusion of control and purpose that Bell labors to maintain, in part by invoking the figure of the tragedian.

For Darwin, the figure of the tragedian as Bell uses it becomes irrelevant. At the same time, as Tiffany Watt-Smith has shown, “theatrical imagery” permeates the *Expression*. Darwin draws on the theatre for a reason almost opposite to Bell’s: as a model of the inscrutability of the emotional body. In his concluding remarks, Darwin excerpts Hamlet’s speech about the “monstrous” ability of the player to martial his expression at will, and “all for nothing.” Watt-Smith observes that “in both Shakespeare’s play and Darwin’s scientific tract, theatricality
operates as the leading metaphor through which discontinuities and misalignments between the insides and outsides of our emotional selves are explored” (60). Whereas Sarah Siddons’s expressions allow the spectator to be in “sympathy” with her interior emotional state, for Darwin, bodily expressions harbor dramatic interest because of the challenge of detecting their source. A different scene from Henry VIII, Norfolk’s description of Cardinal Wolsey’s “strange postures” as evidence of “some strange commotion / in his brain,” proves Darwin’s point that “undirected overflow of nerve-force” can result in “movements of our bodies.” Ignoring the larger dramatic context allows Darwin to read the “commotion” exclusively in physiological, rather than emotional, terms. In his section on “Low Spirits, Anxiety, Grief, Dejection, Despair,” Darwin’s description of the facial expressions of a woman he observed on a train car becomes an opportunity to show “how easily one might be deceived” by the face’s slight movements (193). It is not until her eyes “became suffused with tears almost to overflowing” that Darwin is confirmed in assuming that she was experiencing “low spirits” (192). Darwin guesses that the woman could have been remembering “a long-lost child,” but why she is crying is somewhat beside the point — of much less interest than the idiosyncratic, bodily ways in which emotion manifests.

For Darwin’s critics, the Expression amounted to an attack on emotion itself, so entangled was emotion with the human faculty to express it in “natural and affecting” forms. As written language, Shakespeare’s poetic, rhetorical representation of the passions could still provide a model of this faculty.13 A lengthy critique in The Edinburgh Review, “Had he taken

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13 In 1873, the New Shakspere Society was founded with the goal of establishing the correct order of Shakespeare’s plays through scientific examination of the language. Then, “higher tests” would be used, such as “self-restraint in expression” “weight of thought,” and “depth of purpose,” to discover the “progress and meaning of Shakespeare’s mind” (Furnivall 6). While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss these parallel developments in academic criticism of Shakespeare, I believe they reflect a similar desire to appropriate Shakespeare in the name of human evolutionary advancement, and certainly also help to set the terms of Irving’s reception.
anything like an adequate view of the higher ranges of expression, the illustrative quotations from Shakespeare alone might have been multiplied ten-fold” (“Charles Darwin” 265). It is not clear from this statement whether the “higher ranges of expression” consist in descriptions of expression within the plays or constitute them. Yet it is clear that the author finds aesthetic representations the most viable evidence of human expression and therefore much prefers Bell, “a man of taste and of literary and philosophical culture” who demonstrates “admirably coordinated scientific and literary power” (266). What was at stake in analogizing human emotional language to Shakespeare, and not the “dwarfed, diseased, and arrested shapes” included in the Expression, was the fabric of civilized society:

The language of expression is … in relation to the emotions and desires, a more distinctive and effective vehicle of communication than articulate speech. In this respect it reflects the superior force and directness of feeling as compared with thought. As the combination of letters and words in language expresses thought, so the rapid combination of living curves and lines, of varying lights and shadows, and quickly changing hues in the human countenance express feeling. It is, moreover, not only the more rapid and direct, but the truest and most authentic index of emotion – more delicate, diversified, and instantaneous than any other. In a larger view of use and service expression is thus to a rational being a prime necessity of existence, the very breath of social and progressive life. … In other words, he [Darwin] has not included amongst his fundamental principles the human intelligence and emotion, without which it is forever impossible to explain human expression. (272)

Challenges to the “use and service” of human expression from Darwin and others elicited a wariness of and discomfort with physical expression all together. An 1873 article in the Saturday Review entitled “The Emotional Language of the Future” notes a “growing perception of the vulgar aspects of uncontrolled emotional display” (530). With evolutionary advances, physical manifestations of strong emotion, such as the “ugly signs of rage,” were disappearing (530). On the other hand, civilized society depended on a “lively interchange of sentiments with others” and thus the ability to read another’s emotions (530). The author observes that a “compromise” might be attained through spoken language, through which “we may convey most minutely and
accurately the fact of a feeling and define its nature, without bringing it forward as a vivid and
naked reality.” Or at least, language prevents other “emotional signs” and “evidences of feeling”
from seeming “unmeaning, if not actually offensive.” In this context, the Siddons-esque tragic
Shakespearean actor would seem to embody this compromise, as her body and Shakespeare’s
language work in tandem to communicate powerful emotion.

1.2 “Reading Shakespeare by the Light of The Bells”

There has probably never been an actor of equal prominence whose talent, nay, whose mere
competence, has been so much contested.

—William Archer, Henry Irving, Actor and Manager, a Critical Study

In the early 1870s, when Henry Irving first appeared on the London stage, the position of
a tragedian in the tradition of a Garrick, Siddons, Macready or Phelps was effectively vacant.
The poetic drama had been replaced by “cheap melodrama, milk-and-water comedies, and inane
burlesques,” and theater-going was out of fashion with the “better-class patrons of the
playhouse” (Scott 118). Even Henry Irving’s detractors had to admit that the actor restored
theatre, and Shakespeare, to public prominence and respectability in the 1870s; the Lyceum
Theater under his management became a place to see and be seen. He was the first actor to
receive a knighthood and gave university lectures and wrote articles on Shakespeare, the art of
acting, and the role of the stage in public life. As the theater critic and vehement anti-Irvingite
William Archer notes, it is curious how such a well-respected figure, a “cultural hero” in the
words of Jeffrey Richards, could also be so vilified (7). That his “competence” and “talent”
should be “so much contested” speaks to, in the words of the author of the “Emotional Language
of the Future,” “how curiously complex are the conditions of the problem” (531). Irving
endowed characters with physical behavior that resonated with the less stable, involuntary
emotional body posed by evolutionary and physiological accounts of emotion such as Darwin’s.
In Shakespeare’s tragic parts especially, this behavior could be applauded as astonishingly naturalistic or derided as a debasement of human emotional expression. Given the unprecedented number of people who flocked to Irving’s performances, it was even possible that the public was forming “its conception of graceful locomotion and classical English upon the examples afforded by him” (Archer, *Critical Study* 70). That is, what was at stake in Irving’s performances was the “emotional language of the future.”

It is important to understanding Irving’s reputation as a tragedian that he first made his name not in Shakespearean tragedy but in *The Bells*. His iconic success in the role of the guilt-ridden Mathias in 1871 informed the reception of his subsequent parts. Again, what Irvingites and anti-Irvingites alike could agree upon was that Irving was well-suited for melodrama, and particularly the new genre of melodrama represented by *The Bells*. Where they disagreed was whether these qualifications for melodrama, and for what Archer called “character parts” (including villains such as Iago), disqualified him for “heroic parts” in the poetic drama.

As David Mayer notes, *The Bells* was one of the first examples of a new vein of melodrama emerging in the 1870s that center on a “divided hero-villain” and “are fueled by a growing scientific and lay-interest in human psychology and awareness that there are deep fissures between outward behavior and inner lives” (“Encountering” 159). Adapted from a French melodrama, *The Bells* depicts the guilt and eventual suicide of an Alsatian burgomaster after a visit to a mesmerist dregs up memories of his murder of a Polish Jew many years before. Despite the resistance of the Lyceum’s current manager, Irving advocated a translation, by Leopold Lewis, that would put more weight on the actor’s physical expressions. Both the French original and the other English adaptation that premiered, and failed, while *The Bells* was still in rehearsals, gradually reveal Mathias’s guilt over the course of the play. Lewis’s adaptation made
the character’s guilt clear to the audience in the first act through a spectacular vision of the murder as remembered by Mathias. Thus, in *The Bells* the drama hinges not on whether Mathias is actually guilty but on how the character will express it over the course of the play. Moreover, as little of the text functions to reveal the character’s feelings, the actor’s body language is tasked with dramatizing his inner turmoil.

Indeed, Irving’s stage directions in his personal prompt copy of the play reveal the construction of an elaborate emotional subtext through physical business. One of the classic examples, which became memorialized in a studio portrait, occurs as Mathias is changing his shoes, hears the word “conscience,” “looks up in fear and slowly sits upright” (see Fig. 1).

Edward Gordon Craig described the “mesmeric” effect of this scene:

> Now you might think that the act of taking off some boots could be done in one way only—but the way Irving did it had never been thought of till he did it, and has never been done since. It was, in every gesture, every half move, in the play of his shoulders, legs, head, and arms, mesmeric in the highest degree—slowly we were drawn to watch every inch of his work as we are drawn to read and linger on every syllable of a strangely fine writer. (56)

Like the woman on the train car in the *Expression*, Irving’s body offers up its own strange drama. Even if it is difficult to decode the meaning of the expression (i.e., fear), there is fascination in the process of observing and decoding. With Irving, it seems that it would have been interesting to simply watch him stand still, although stillness was apparently not his forte. By many accounts, it was hard to take one’s eyes off of him. He was very tall with long, thin legs delighted in by caricaturists. When he walked, he thrust his head and shoulders down and
Figure 1: Irving as Mathias in *The Bells*. The top left-hand image captures the moment that Craig describes. Source: Irving, Laurence. *Henry Irving: The Actor and his World*, Macmillan, 1952.
forward and dragged one leg slightly behind. Each feature of his angular face was distinctive, including his heavy brow, thin lips, and mobile jaw. Then, of course, there were his large, expressive hands and fingers. Each part of his body could “speak” in its own right, and perhaps even contrary to each other. As Alan Hughes notes, “Even the friendly eye of the artist seldom found him graceful, while the rare photographs show that his attitudes were more frequently calculated to focus attention upon hands or face than to create a unified composition of balanced contrasts” (12). His vocal mannerisms were also notable, including unusual pronunciations of certain words and the tendency to insert short pauses and “cross-rhythms” (12). As Craig suggests, Irving’s expressions constituted a language, but it was not necessarily a language that legibly, or attractively, communicated emotion.

Again, *The Bells* depended on Irving’s speaking body as its primary source of interest. It downplays the importance of verbal emotional language and prioritizes a physicalized emotional language that humans were increasingly understood to share with animals. “A common superstition among young aspirants to social rank seems to be that lofty breeding is best seen in a uniformly passionless and vacuous arrangement of the facial muscles,” writes the author of “Emotional Language of the Future” (530). Yet Irving’s facial muscles were the drama in *The Bells*. David Mayer suggests that there was something almost illicit about Irving’s acting. Based primarily on contemporary impressions of Irving as Mathias, the terms he uses to describe the actor resonate with the concerns raised about emotional expression more broadly. He observes, for instance, how “acting loosened the daemonic in him, that Irving’s face and eyes, his voice, and at times his body expressed raw feeling uncensored by intellect or constrictions of dialogue” (14). Each of the “drawn-out moments” of stage business, such as the scene with the boots, included the “abruptly terrifying lifting of a mental barrier to expose a depth of authentic panic
or horror or revulsion beyond the capacity of actors to express” (14). He “pleasurably shocked and titillated audiences who only moments before had felt confident of their understanding of the character on stage before them” (14).

While for some The Bells had established Irving as a tragic actor, he had yet to prove himself in tragedy proper, the realm of poetic drama. It was not until 1874 that he assumed his first tragic Shakespearean role at the Lyceum, playing Hamlet for a record 200 performances. In 1878, the year he assumed management of the Lyceum, he played Hamlet again, this time with Ellen Terry as Ophelia, in her debut role at the theatre. Along with Mathias, Hamlet was considered his “best representation” (Brooksbank 683). In the character’s infamous mental distress, Hamlet is perhaps the Shakespearean tragic hero most like Mathias. Irving’s interpretation of the play also lent itself to his particular performance style. Irving located the source of the character’s conflict in his family and domestic life.14 Hamlet was not mad, but rather prone to fits of hysteria that “arose from the conflict of loyalties occasioned by the betrayals of love and trust” (Hughes 52). As with Mathias, outward signs would be needed to hint at the conflict within. The enthusiastic Irvingite Edward Russell authored a pamphlet on the actor’s performance, noting, “we ought to be very grateful to any actor who brings it [the play] from the gloomy grandeur of a conventional atmosphere within the range of domestic feeling and strongly marked character” (“Irving as Hamlet” 14). Placing Hamlet firmly within a domestic space, again like Mathias, invited the presentation of “domestic feelings,” rather than ones tailored for public presentation. He appeared more like a “real person” and thus Russell saw no reason “why Hamlet should not have had these peculiarities,” referring to the peculiarities that

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14 Zachary Lesser’s reading of Irving’s Hamlet is excellent and suggests that the main reason “why Irving’s contemporaries perceived his acting as naturalistic,” was the actor’s “insistently domestic design” (36). I am interested in a similar question, but attempt to understand it through what Gesa Stedman terms the “Victorian discourses of the emotions.”
also plagued Irving the actor. If they gave him a “stamp of individuality,” it was the stamp of Irving himself (4).

The behavior of Irving’s Hamlet could thus be explained by reference to the emotional subjects one witnessed in everyday life. Reflecting on Irving’s burst of hysteria after the first encounter with the ghost, Russell explains:

Hamlet is evidently one of those who, though capable of any amount of acting and reticence in company, finds in solitude a license and a cue for excitement, and who, when alone and under the influence of strong feelings, will abandon themselves to their fancies. Such men – though sane enough in society – will pace rooms like wild animals, will gaze into looking-glasses until they are frightened at the expression of their own eyes, will talk aloud, will write and tear into fragments many pages, will do almost anything to find vent for emotions which their imagination is powerful enough to kindle, but not fertile or methodical enough to satisfy. (30)

While Hamlet finds this “license” in “solitude,” Irving is of course performing for a large public, a public for whom, as the “Emotional Language of the Future” author suggests, there is a “growing perception of the vulgar aspects of uncontrolled emotional display” (530). Moreover, he is doing it not in the melodrama — which leaves space for a variety of other emotional languages aside from the dramatic text — but in Shakespearean tragedy, whose poetic form contains and structures strong feelings.

When critics of the anti-Irvingite camp call his Hamlet the Hamlet of melodrama, they imply the over-involvement of his body in the expression of emotion, particularly those of fear, terror, and “frenzy.” His physical behavior either conflicts with the meaning of the text, is impossible to interpret, or, is simply “vulgar.” The first scene with the ghost, which Russell exalts, was a common target. The critic from the Examiner complained, “One cannot bring oneself to believe that Mr. Irving rightly interprets the situation when he advances crouching, as if drawn onwards in terror and against his will by a mesmeric spell, at a moment when, according to Shakespeare, each petty artery in his body is as hardy as the Neman’s lion’s nerve”
B. Brooksbank, author of the scathing, “Irving as Tragedian” describes the actor’s “uncouth noises and violent spasmodic movements” while the ghost speaks (683). The Fashionable Tragedian comments that after the ghost’s exit, “we feel the dire necessity of his requesting his sinews to ‘grow not instant old, but bear him stiffly up’ for the uninitiated spectator, who does not know that this is one of the beauties of Mr. Irving’s ‘style,’ must feel anxious lest some important part of his internal economy should have given way all together” (10). What Russell interprets as Irving’s controlled, purposeful presentation of uncontrolled emotional expression, others read as the actor’s lack of control over his own body, his flailing members failing to conform to the emotional behavior dictated by the text. (In one of the more memorable anti-Irvingite quotations, The Fashionable Tragedian suggests that’s Irving is as “picturesque” as the “writhings of the octopus in the Brighton Aquarium” (14)). His body is too much present, too distracting, too peculiar.

Irving’s own commentary on acting suggests that there is a method behind what the majority of critical opinion determined to be (expressive) madness. (As most of his criticism was published later in his career, it is also possible to speculate that Irving developed theories that could respond to his opponents). First, Irving believed that it was necessary to “pass a character through your own mind,” a relatively new idea in acting theory (qtd. in Voskuil 190). For Irving, as Lynn Voskuil describes, the “player’s own identity is the core theatrical element, an element that is durably, idiosyncratically present even in the final staged embodiment of character” (190). That is, it was not necessary for the actor to efface his personal peculiarities, rather they could be used to elaborate a part. Second, what Brooksbank derides as the actor’s “strange, over-powering desire to be always doing something on stage” reflects Irving’s belief in the importance of “by-play.” In his lectures at Harvard University in 1885, he calls “by-play” the “very essence of true
art” (Richards 44). He defines “by-play” by asking his listener to remark how in the scenes between Iago and Othello, “the whole interest of the situation depends on the skill with which the gradual effect of the poisonous suspicion instilled into the Moor’s mind is depicted in look and tone” (44). This definition admits a wide range of behaviors and deemphasizes the importance of words themselves. Indeed, for Irving, one of the “greatest tests” of an actor’s art is how he listens (44). As Hamlet, Irving’s listening during the dialogue between Claudius and Laertes, while slumped in his chair, became famous. It is this scene that Onslow Ford captured in the sculpture of the actor. By some accounts, he sat “motionless,” while another recalled “the tearing at the handkerchief,” “pushing back of the hair,” his “nervous, fidgety ways” and the “constant play of expression on his face” (Hughes 43). Irving’s silent “by-play” spoke before his words did, though as we have seen, and as the differing accounts of what he actually did suggest, what or, rather, why it spoke could be unclear. Irving argues that in acting, as in nature, often “the thought precedes the word” and/or the “working of the mind is seen before the tongue gives it words” (45). The actor’s “tone” should be subject to the same principle, for “words are intended to express feeling and ideas, not to bind them in rigid fetters” (43). Here, Irving seems to be directly addressing critics of his unusual pronunciations, suggesting that to insist on formal pronunciations is to “stereotype the expression of emotion” (43).

What I want to stress, however, is that central to the anti-Irvingite position was the belief that poetic tragedy does, to some extent, regulate, if not stereotype, the expression of emotion permitted the actor. Why Irving’s critics should seem so aggrieved by his hugely popular tragic performances is because the performance debased not only Shakespeare but also the superior emotional body of the “human being.” Brooksbank, reviewing Irving as a tragedian, clarifies that the “treatment” of the passion is the main difference between tragedy and melodrama:
In tragic conceptions we are in the region of poetry, and the power of poetical insight preserves the human element in a character under the most intensely tragic delineations; for in human life a miser, a murderer, a jealous lover, are still, and must always be human beings, however transformed and warped by passions, and this is recognised in tragic conceptions; but the murderer, or the miser, or the jealous lover of melodrama, might be a wild beast for all the inhumanity of his uncomplex existence. (681)

That is, “poetical insight” or “poetic treatment” (here exampled only by Shakespearean tragedy) seems to guarantee an emotional body that will not appear “transformed and warped” in grotesque, animalistic ways. In other words, poetry unburdens the body of the necessity of expressing intense emotion and thus risking the appearance of a wild beast, or, a writhing octopus.

William Archer more explicitly condemned Irving on evolutionary grounds, making clear that his inability to appear as a “normal human being” mattered most in “heroic parts.” For Archer, “normal” signifies both standard/universal and evolutionarily advanced modes of speech and movement. As if describing a scientific specimen, Archer notes that the “depression of the head and protrusion of the shoulders which accompany any rapid motion” resembles a “survival from the low stage of development exemplified by many savage races, in which butting with the skull is an habitual practice” (63). Indeed, Archer seems to read one of Irving’s signature mannerisms through the lens of Darwin’s Expression. That is, he invites the spectator to interpret the gesture not as, or not only as, a purposeful expression of emotion but as an “unchecked habit” that originally arose in a context having nothing to do with emotion. (Archer is somewhat ambiguous on whether that context is in fact a “survival” from a “low stage of development” or from the actor’s long runs in “mannered” parts coupled with a “lack of training”). Otherwise, “no assignable reason” is visible to explain it. In the following passage, Archer stresses that this “defect of motion” is more egregious in “heroic parts” than “character parts.” In the former:
We like to conceive the particular character as literally a *persona*, a mask, behind which stands the actor, a normal and fully-developed human being, master of each nerve and muscle, and using them all with deliberate calculation to produce the desired effect. We resent the intrusion of scraps of crude nature, and especially of abnormal nature, into the work of art. (66)

This statement echoes criticism of Darwin’s inclusion of “rude, undeveloped, and abnormal forms of humanity…. its dwarfed, diseased, and arrested shapes” in a study of human expression. Indeed, when it comes to emotional expression, the “desired effect” of the tragic actor and of the “normal and fully-developed human being” converge.

If Hamlet was Irving’s most successful Shakespearean “hero,” Macbeth, which he played the following year, was his most controversial. More so than Hamlet, Macbeth represented the emotional body of the “normal and fully developed human being,” or more precisely, the male emotional body. Critics anticipated that the qualities that allowed Irving to succeed as the “intellectual Hamlet” would destine him for failure “in the bolder and more simple-minded Macbeth” (*York Herald*). “It was supposed that the actor who rendered with such power the perplexed, vacillating prince, could not control his voice and movements to express the martial spirit and bearing of the warrior chief” (*Glasgow Herald*). The fervent, convoluted workings of Hamlet’s mind found a physical corollary in Irving’s (for some) infinitely expressive face and body. The Macbeth of the Victorian public imagination, on the other hand, was “nearer to the Greek type than anything else of Shakespeare’s” (*Pall Mall Gazette*). He was a noble hero up against inescapable “external influences” (*York*), forced into a “chain of circumstances” that “gradually overpower him” (*Glasgow Herald*). His crimes came from no fault of his own and thus “cannot altogether eradicate the stamp of native heroism” (qtd in Hughes 92). Not only is

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15 Paul Prescott’s *Reviewing Shakespeare* observes that “Given the largely negative critical response to his performance, it might be…accurate to say that Irving’s characterization conspicuously failed to satisfy some need of his time” and he understands that need to be one of masculine vigor and heroism (54).
Macbeth a “warrior chief,” which implies a kind of emotional stoicism, but he possesses less inner complexity and turmoil that would need to be expressed through a physical register. Thus, although Macbeth shares with Mathias the emotions of horror, guilt, and remorse, Shakespeare’s verse mitigates the necessity of physically elaborating them. Macbeth’s first aside, for instance, details precisely why and how the witches’ prophecy affects him, including the physical manifestation of his “present fears”: “If good, why do I yield to that suggestion / Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair / and make my seated heart knock at my ribs, / Against the use of nature?” Again, it is the verse that details how the character has been “transformed and warped” by passions. William Charles Macready, the most famous Macbeth of recent memory, had embodied this classic hero, making a famous farewell to the stage in the part in 1851. Somewhat unfortunately for Irving, Macready’s diaries had been published in 1875, two years after the actor’s death. Thus a review of Irving’s performance quoted Macready’s description of how he, unlike Irving, had performed his final Macbeth “with a reality, a vigour, a truth, a dignity” *(Graphic)*.

Irving took a very different approach to *Macbeth*, making the tragedy one of individual psychology rather than of a character at bay with fate. Indeed, Irving wondered how anyone could “torture out a meaning of Macbeth’s native nobility or honour” and cautioned that Shakespeare’s “main purpose” could be lost “in the misty beauty of his poetic words” (254). He scoffed at critics who told him that “Shakespeare did not intend to make Macbeth a psychological study” (Richards 254). For Irving, Shakespeare’s purpose was to render a psychological study of:

\[\text{… a nature sensitive to intellectual emotion so that one can imagine him even in his contemplation of coming crimes to weep for the pain of the destined victims; self-torturing, self-examining, playing with conscience so that action and reaction of poetic thought might send emotional waves through the brain whilst the resolution was as}\]
grimly fixed as steel and the heart as cold as ice; a poet supreme in the power of words with vivid imagination and quick sympathy of intellect; a villain cold-blooded, selfish, remorseless … a man of sentiment rather than feeling. (254)

This excerpt from Irving’s much longer lecture on the character suggests that Macbeth, almost prefiguring the modern psychopath, is incapable of genuine “feeling.” His “poetic words” perform mere “sentiment” or “intellectual emotion,” punctuated by fleeting “waves” of deeper emotion. His “heart,” his inner emotional core, is essentially corrupt. As a prime example, Irving held that Macbeth had made the decision to murder Duncan before meeting the witches. Ellen Terry, who performed Lady Macbeth in the 1888 revival, noted next to Banquo’s line, “Good sir, why do you start” in her study book, “Because he had longed for it before and here’s his secret thought revealed” (qtd in Hughes 95). Macbeth was a character full of secret thoughts only partially revealed through his language. Indeed, Irving’s “start,” not the text, expresses his thought here. Irving’s reading almost necessitates that Shakespeare’s “poetic words” become the subtext and the actor’s “by-play” the “primary” text.

One of Irving’s most controversial cuts was the second scene of the first act. With its description of Macbeth’s bravery in battle, the scene was crucial to the conception of the character’s “martial bearing” and “native heroism.” That commentators consistently referred to the absence of “Bellona’s bridegroom” testifies to the association of Macbeth with a classical war hero in particular. The scene also of course functions to introduce the protagonist before the character himself appears. Irving’s introduction as Macbeth was purely performative. As Edward Russell described it, with his “striking profile” framed against a “murky sky,” Irving “turns to the audience, and in a single gaze … fixes the character of his whole performance” (“The True Macbeth” 186). Before uttering any lines, Irving transmits the “restless, acquisitive moral nature that lives within Macbeth’s warlike exterior” (80). The audience intuits that “there is more in
him, and the overplus is high-reaching, gloomy, and mischievous” (81). Irving’s personal prompt-copy of the play suggests that this “overplus” was rendered through his “by-play.” The first comment in his hand is “Start, from this moment he is an altered man” when the witches hail him “king hereafter” (29). At “stay you imperfect speakers,” Irving notes that Macbeth is “burning in desire.” Even the more positive accounts of the performance suggest that Irving might in certain contexts downplay how “altered” he is. Russell notes: “The air of abstraction which Irving wears on the heath is maintained in all companies. His Macbeth makes but the faintest and most ineffectual attempts to bear himself like other men, even when he receives the king’s thanks, and afterwards when the robes and ceremonies of monarchy might seem to call for more conventionality of manner” (188).

This last comment highlights the extent to which Macbeth is associated with an entrenched emotionology or emotional style, one which Irving, either by virtue of his interpretation or his particular body, is in conflict with. “Emotionology,” one of the earliest keywords in the history of emotion, is defined as the “attitudes and standards that a society, or a definable group within a society, maintains toward basic emotions and their appropriate expression” (Stearns 813). As we have seen, even while suffering from strong emotion, the sufferer should, like Macbeth, “bear himself like other men” and assume a “conventionality of manner.” The level of physical expression, in other words, should be understated and coherent, subservient to language. Yet Irving, as one critic noted, “displays much too vividly the sentiments of fear, and terror, and horror” (24). During the murder scene, Irving “distracted their [the audience’s] minds by throwing himself about in staggering attitudes, seizing and swaying the curtains … revealing his strange, over-powering desire to be always doing something…” (Brooksbank 682). Another reviewer complains of the “excessive gestures and of movements
which appear to have no special interpretative value.” “The words are enough by themselves,” the latter protests, “They do not require practical illustration.”

Figure 2: Caricature of Irving as Macbeth from The Fashionable Tragedian, displaying “desperation.” “Sometimes…his legs seem too much for him, and go ‘skating away with him,’” writes Archer (11). Source: Archer, William and R.W. Lowe. The Fashionable Tragedian: A Criticism with Ten Illustrations.

Defending Irving against “anti-Irvingism” necessarily entails articulating a different emotionology, and leveraging Shakespeare in its favor. If, for anti-Irvingites, the actor failed to behave like a “normal human being,” the opposite argument had to be made: that his manner of expressing emotion was normal, or at least natural, and anticipated and thus authorized by Shakespeare. For instance, in a study of “Henry Irving, by an Irvingite,” a counter-pamphlet to Archer’s evaluation of Irving, the author claims that “In the classic tragedy the passions are grandly but rudely delineated; in Shakespeare they are anatomized; rapid transitions of feeling occur” (Marshall 65). Irving’s detailed by-play lent itself to these subtle fluctuations of human feeling. Thus, whereas previous actors regained composure on Macbeth’s line, “Why so, / Being gone I am a man again,” after the exit of Banquo’s ghost, Irving delivered it, according to Russell, “in the anxious tone of a man who ought to feel relieved, but in reality does not” (“Mr. Irving’s interpretations” (476) Irving’s reading was therefore much “truer,” as it revealed a “trace
of the previous tone of feeling.” He also notes that with this “reflective actor, it is often in another scene than that in which they occur that the words of any particular passage receive their finest illustration.” Irving permitted his by-play to become its own autonomous “language,” a language that was inspired but not dictated by Shakespeare’s language. The busyness of Irving’s body in performance could also be justified through the way emotion manifests in “sensitive natures”:

The restlessness, of which Mr. Archer complains, is common to all highly nervous organisations. Close observation of human nature has taught me that the strongest passions, though often expressed in sluggish, cold natures by one grand and awful gesture, are, in nearly all sensitive natures, expressed by rapid, frequent, and what may be almost termed fidgeting movements. (Marshall 44)

Certainly, one could not attribute “sluggish, cold natures” to Shakespeare’s tragic heroes. Through Irving, Shakespeare could be claimed for the emotional bodies glimpsed in Darwin’s *Expression*.

### 1.3 George Henry Lewes and the Poetry of Human Psychology

In 1878, the year of his death, the eminent Victorian intellectual George Henry Lewes wrote in a personal letter to Lord Lytton that “a people that can accept Irving as a fine actor must be so steeped in stupidity as regards the art of acting that one may patiently await anything from them” (*Letters* 132). While Lewes never reviewed Irving’s performances directly, a collection of fifteen of his theater criticisms under the title *On Actors and the Art of Acting* was published in 1875. The “Epistle to Anthony Trollope” that serves as preface connects the occasion of the volume to the current “chaotic state of opinion on the subject of acting” and Lewes’s desire to help the “reflective part of the public make some attempt at discriminating the sources of theatrical emotion.” The public is the most misguided when it comes to performances of the poetic or “serious” drama, here exampled consistently by Shakespearean tragedy. Two of the
essays, “Shakespeare as Actor and Critic” and “On Natural Acting,” consult Shakespeare’s own authority. The most recent essay in the volume is from 1875 and offers impressions of the Italian actor Tommaso Salvini’s touring performances of *Othello*, *Hamlet*, and the melodrama *The Gladiator*. Especially because Irving’s tragic performances were often compared to Salvini’s, it is tempting to read *On Actors* as an indirect entry in the Irving wars, pointed to a “people” enamored of the actor.

Lewes’s vision of the ideal tragic actor is not only largely antithetical to Irving but also central to his understanding of human emotion as a psychological theorist. A true Victorian polymath, Lewes brought out *On Actors* during the same period he was at work on his sprawling, five-volume contribution to psychology, *The Problems of Life and Mind*, which would remain unfinished at his death. Rob Boddice credits Lewes in his *History of Emotions* for offering “one of the clearest and most profound generalist statements on the importance of the emotions for understanding the human condition” (21). The tragic stage was a platform for Lewes to develop that statement, and, as for more explicit critics of Irving’s, mediate between different kinds of emotional languages.16

The fundamental terms of Lewes’ psychology are nearly inseparable from his criteria for judging works of art. Indeed, Lewes turned to scientific subjects fairly late in his career, having worked as a critic of literature, theater, and philosophy; a literary biographer; and a playwright, adaptor, and actor. He was also known as the longtime partner of George Eliot. *Problems of Life and Mind* insists on two, interconnected strata of experience: the “logic of feelings” and the

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16 In *The Player’s Passion*, Joseph Roach’s offers an extending reading of how “Lewes the drama critic championed the interpretation of nature advanced by Lewes the biologist.” (188). For Roach, Lewes’s acting theory, in keeping with the focus of the book, shows how a “transformed concept of the body had again revolutionized standards of theatrical truth” (188). Again, I am interested in revealing the implied importance of Shakespearean tragedy and the tragic actor to his theories, and how those theories shaped the reception of Irving’s performances.
“logic of signs.” As a mass of immediate, pre-processed feelings and sensations, the former seems characterized by a lack of logic. The “logic of signs” processes this raw “data of feeling.” As Lewes defines it, it is the “registration of feelings generalized and constructed in symbols” (108). While animals and humans share the “logic of feeling,” only humans translate it into higher order or “ideal constructions.” Thus for Lewes the “animal world” is a “continuum of smells, sights, touches, tastes, pains, and pleasures; it has no objects, no laws, no distinguishable abstractions …” (123). The human capacity for the “logic of signs” makes possible nothing less than “Religion, Art, Philosophy, Science, the symbolical representations of a world far removed from the world of sense” (108). The role of the critic is to evaluate the degree to which a work of art achieves a symbolic register founded in the real. Lewes’ well-known essay “Principles of Success in Literature” anticipates Problems of Life and Mind when it defines “successful idealism” as the “marvelous presentation of reality as seen by a poetic mind.” That is, for Lewes, what is highest or most advanced in human nature is also what is highest or most advanced in a work of art. The “poetic mind” epitomizes the functioning of the human mind.

By guiding his reader to a greater appreciation of the art of acting in the poetic drama, Lewes could also help him towards a better understanding of the human psyche. Shakespearean tragedy in performance held out the potential to demonstrate his theory of the “logic of signs” on multiple levels. That this drama showed signs of reviving after a long absence (whether through the performances of Salvini or Irving is unclear) gave Lewes reason to believe his essays could be of use for a public not accustomed to seeing it. First, it excels at giving symbolic rather than real expression to emotion. “Strip Hamlet and Macbeth of their poetry and psychology,” Lewes argues, “and you have a fine melodramatic residuum” (24). For Lewes, it seems that there is no psychology without poetry. The form that poetry gives to human affects has an analogy in
Lewes’s definition of emotion: a more complex and dynamic feeling than sensation. “Emotion is sensation on a more powerful scale, greater in energy and wider in range” (385). He notes that it is “one of the peculiarities of Emotion that every wave is widely diffusive; it irradiates its impulse through the organism, thereby calling up other trains of feelings” (211). Moreover, language itself, as perhaps the most explicit example of the “logic of signs,” was of course key for Lewes. Through language, “personal relations are raised into impersonal conceptions” and “experiences are registered, generalized, compared, and condensed in formulas which serve for intellectual money” (139). (Not surprisingly, it was language that led to Lewes’s central disagreement with Darwin, who in fact admired Lewes). Consequently, melodrama, with its “concentration of effects,” as Lewes described it earlier criticism, and lack of poetry and language did not appeal to the emotions but to the “lower faculties” or the “animal world” of sense (Dramatic Essays 188). What is at issue in melodrama is less the “real expression of emotion” than its unideal expression or expression of lower affects belonging to the “logic of the feeling” rather than the “logic of signs.” Tragedy, on the other hand, “acts through the emotions and not through the eye” (148). In fact, Shakespearean tragedy is so supreme in this respect that it can be almost “impossible” for the actor to fail, standing as he does “in the suffused light of emotion kindled by the author.”

For Lewes, the actor is both the most unstable and important element in the performance of the tragic drama. Like the tragic poet, and as a condition of performing in the tragic drama, the actor must “express his feelings in symbols universally intelligible and affecting” (27) and use “idealized expressions which shall, to the spectator, be symbols of real emotion.” Yet his task is rendered more difficult and complex by the necessary medium of his own body. Extrapolating his tenets from Hamlet’s advice to the players on “temperance” and “suiting the action to the
word,” Lewes’s actor is the “perfect master of effects” (95) and a “master of himself” (100). This mastery is necessary to prevent the intrusion of “insignificant details” and ensure that his “external symbols,” while reflective of “internal workings,” maintain “grace and proportion to affect us aesthetically.” How the actor arrives at these symbols is an extraordinary exercise of the human faculty for interpreting the “logic of feeling”:

It is only by … familiarizing oneself with the nature of the various emotions, that one can properly interpret them. But even that is not enough. They must be watched in others, the interpreting key being given in our own consciousness. Having something like an intellectual appreciation of the sequences of feeling and their modes of manifestation, the actor has next to select out of these such as his own physical qualifications enable him to reproduce effectively, and such as will be universally intelligible. (103)

In the tragic actor, the “interpreting key” that defines human consciousness is perfected. Whereas Irving’s body was accused of distracting from the emotional content of the language or scene, Lewes’s actor subordinates his body to it. This ideal actor is in complete control of his body.

The actor, in martialing his body and intellect to perform the emotions of tragedy, also models the concept of organicism that was central to both Lewes and George Eliot’s work. Organicism was a safe middle ground between the materialist position, which insisted all mental phenomena could be attributed to the body, and the spiritualist position, which defended the mind’s autonomy from the body. As Lewes wrote, “organic phenomena grouped under the terms Life and Mind are activities not of any single element, in and out of the organism, but activities of the whole organism in correspondence with a physical and social medium.” This notion of wholeness also appears throughout On Actors. In “Shakespeare as actor and critic,” he notes, for instance, that an actor “must … select from out the variety of passionate expressions only those that can be harmoniously subordinated to a general whole” (94-95, my emphasis). Relatedly, another key phase for Lewes, which appears in Problems of Life and Mind and in his literary criticism, is the “complexity of the organism,” referring to the interdependence of parts that
contribute to the whole. George Eliot, in an 1868 essay on which Lewes collaborated, comments that “forms of art can be called higher or lower only on the same principle as that on which we apply these words to organisms; viz. in proportion to the complexity of the parts bound up into an indissoluble whole” (358). The “consensus or constant interchange of effects among its parts” in the human organism makes it “higher” than others (358). The actor is the ultimate organicist being to the extent that, ideally, his performance cannot be attributed to or reduced to any one element, whether a single body part or the power of his intellect.

Lewes’s emphasis on what he calls the “expression of subsiding emotion” in On Actors makes further sense in the context of his and Eliot’s organicism. Introduced in the first essay on Edmund Kean, who was uniquely capable of performing this “truth of passion,” “subsiding emotion” refers to the way in which “a strong emotion, after discharging itself in one massive current, continues for a time expressing itself in feeble currents” (8). This principle encapsulates what is true for Lewes more generally about emotion, as different from sensation, which is that it has greater energy, range, and influence “throughout the organism.” Lewes expects actors to sustain an emotion, show its gradations. He commends the “quivering muscles and altered tones” of Kean’s Othello, which conveyed the “ground-swell troubling the deeps” after the initial “storm” of emotion (9). Based on this account, Irving could also be said to also possess the skill. As we saw, Irving’s tendency to allow emotion from previous lines to linger through his expressions, or “by-play, even when contradicted by the line,” struck one critic as “truer.” He could perform with his very fingers, each its own actor. Yet in the final essay on Salvini, Lewes elaborates on the principles of “subsiding emotion,” clarifying that the actor’s expressions should be scaled to the verse and register in the whole body. As Othello, Salvini effected an “intense and finely graduated culmination of passion in the outburst, ‘Villain be sure you prove …’”
The spectator witnessed “fury visibly growing with every word, his whole being vibrating” (268, my italics). He faults the actor in the fifth act for lacking “the guidance of consistent emotion” and “trying to replace a massive effect by a multiplicity of varied effects.”

Indeed, the Salvini essay establishes stauncher guidelines for emotional expression more generally that make clear to Lewes’s reader where he would stand in the Irving debates (if not indirectly pointed to Irving himself). The first quality in the actor Lewes praises, as evidenced from his performance of Othello, was that he “had vocal and facial expression” (267). Lewes notes that this “primary requisite” for the profession is often overlooked, perhaps anticipating Archer’s anonymous pamphlet on Irving a few years later, which chides the actor for lacking a similar “primary requisite” of “walking and talking like a normal human being.” (In another essay he notes that the quality of “stillness” is undervalued.) course, that the actor has vocal and facial expression is self-evident; what Lewes means to imply is that his manner of expression is typical, rather than, as in Irving’s case, peculiar or even abnormal. Second, Lewes highlights how Salvini’s expressions work as part of an organic whole with Shakespeare’s language. Lewes compliments one gesture in particular in the “temptation” scene with Iago:

He gave a novel and felicitous interpretation to the passage, ‘Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul but I do love thee, and when I love thee not’ — here a momentary pause was followed by a gesture that explained the words ‘chaos is come again,’ the world vanishing into chaos at such a monstrous state of feeling.

The gesture precedes the word, but it also reflects the word, and both are symbolic representations of feeling. Their meanings are complementary, a seamless merging that makes Othello’s emotional state intelligible and affecting for the audience. This alignment between physical expression and Shakespeare’s language is so fundamental to Lewes’s understanding of the tragic actor that it is scarcely worth mentioning as a precept.
What matters to Lewes, then, is the nature of the relationship between the actor’s expression and the emotion conveyed in the language. In keeping with his psychological theory, his utmost priority is that the expression be symbolic of the emotion, as in the above example. To fail at this task is to risk imitating tendencies that belong to “early stages of evolution,” such as Salvini’s overly literal and thus redundant gestures (Lewes seems to include “tones and looks” in his definition of an actor’s “gestures”):

In his gestures there is always an excess in this direction … but I cannot think it consistent with fine art, being as it is a remnant of early stages of evolution, wherein gesture is descriptive, and not, as in the higher stages, symbolical: it bears the same relation to the expressive gestures of cultivated minds, that picture-writing bears to the alphabet. (274)

Here Lewes explicitly acknowledges the evolutionary criteria that inform his standards of acting and “fine art.” Here again is the confusion because what is “real” and “ideal.” That is, symbolic gesture does not only belong to “fine art” such as poetic drama but to “cultivated minds.” The “truth of passion” of the tragic stage is also the “truth of passion” in the most advanced stages of evolution.

The importance of “symbolical” gestures is also that they are “general” and “impersonal” and thus communicable to many, whereas Irving’s were idiosyncratic, particular to him. As Lewes insists, “the tragic passion identifies its suffering with the suffering of mankind,” rather than that of a single individual. He complains of Salvini’s final act of Othello that “there are no tears in his voice; instead of that he is unpleasantly tearful—which is a totally different thing” (272). The latter resides at the level of language, the former with the body.

Even in daily life you may observe that sympathy with grief is apt to be somewhat checked when the sufferer is greatly preoccupied with the calamity as his … Grief, however intense, however wild in its expression, when born with a sense of its being part of our general heritage, excites the deepest sympathy; we feel most keenly for the sufferer in feeling with him. (272)
An anti-Irvingite would surely say that it would be impossible for Irving to bear an emotion in this way, as “part of our general heritage.” The “force of animal passion” that Lewes prizes in Salvini and other actors contributes to the sense of a “general heritage.” Moreover, it is balanced and contained through other aspects of the performance (“the gentleman masters the animal” he writes of one moment in Othello). When Irving is compared to an animal, it is more of a curious, rare specimen.

At the outset of his essay on Salvini, Lewes states that his objective is “less to consider his [Salvini’s] insight into Shakespeare than his art as actor,” for only the latter can “be reduced to definite and intelligible principles” (265). Those principles are not specific to acting Shakespearean tragedy; they are the same principles that govern human emotional behavior. The tragic actor becomes the ideal emotional subject as he strives to translate the personal and specific to the universal and general. The interdependence of faculties necessary for a successful performance, and the way that emotion diffuses and vibrates through the whole body, also showcases the sophistication of the human organism. Shakespearean tragedy is uniquely suited to activate the actor in this way because the drama traffics in an ideal sphere of human emotion. Lewes is working in the same tradition as Charles Bell’s Anatomy, which, again, would still have held sway at the time of Lewes’s writing. That is, like Bell, he uses Shakespearean tragedy and the tragic Shakespearean actor to convey not only what is “finest” on stage but also in human emotional expression. Yet Lewes is also writing in the face of new evolutionary and physiological accounts of the emotions like Darwin’s, which the viability of using aesthetic examples to understand human emotion. His own thinking was more conservative; he could not accept that the “body was a machine” (Rylance). He also placed enormous importance on feeling in his understanding of human consciousness. Publishing On Actors in 1875 allowed Lewes to
export his theories to a broader audience through the figure of the tragic actor. Ultimately, Lewes suggests that the spectator should “discriminate” the “source” of her “theatrical emotion” using the same criteria for discriminating the source of her emotion to the “sufferer” in “daily life.”

As a prominent intellectual figure in Victorian England, Lewes is also essential to understanding why Irving’s tragic impersonations specifically were greeted with so much controversy. Lewes’s tragic actor is contrary to Irving’s in many respects. Lewes’s actor communicates in symbols “universally affecting” that match the symbolic register of emotion in the text and also the symbolic register of human feeling, the “logic of signs.” Befitting the strong, gradated emotions depicted in the text, the actor shows emotion fluctuating and vibrating through the “organism.” Irving, on the other hand, communicates emotion through subtle gestures of his little finger and spasmodic, frenzied movements that, on the surface, can seem to have less to do with the emotional context dictated by the text than with his particular body and personality. (It is worth noting that William Archer, the author of not one but two anti-Irving pamphlets, would later call Lewes the “most highly trained thinker who ever applied himself to the study of theatrical art in England” and credit him with introducing the word “psychology” into dramatic criticism (qtd in Roach 181)). A final example from Lewes’s *Problems of Life and Mind* indirectly points back to the problem of Irving’s hands. In the final volume, *Principles of Psychology*, Lewes makes a distinction between the terms “function” and “faculty,” noting that their meanings are generally understood as synonymous. Lewes proposes instead that function stands for the “native endowment of an organ” and faculty “for its acquired variation of activity,” “limiting it to the action or class of actions into which a function may be diversified by the education of experience” (27). Later in the same volume, that distinction is crucial to his fundamental disagreement with Darwin’s thesis in the *Descent of Man* that man and animals
have equivalent mental faculties. Lewes clarifies that “although there is no fundamental
difference in the functions of the two, there is a manifest and fundamental difference in the
evolved faculties.” To initially illustrate the distinction, he gives the example of a hand, endowed
across species with the “function of Prehension” but only in higher organisms with the faculty of
“intelligent direction and the combination of other organs” (27). The human hand was of special
interest to Bell precisely for the reason that it was so central to human emotional expression, and
seemed to provide evidence of “design.”

Irving’s critics might say that the actor’s over-active, fidgety hands, especially in
Shakespearean tragedy, lack the appearance of “intelligent direction and the combination of
other organs.” They act of their own accord, and they say nothing at all. There is no evidence of
the “interpreting key” responsible for coordinating each aspect of the actor’s body in a unified,
ideal presentation of the passion portrayed in Shakespeare’s poetry. At the same time, the
immense popularity and fascination with Irving’s hands suggests the Victorian public’s desire to
see new emotional languages modeled on stage, not just in melodrama but in the cherished roles
of Shakespearean tragedy, forgoing the clearly legible points of his predecessors in favor of
much less clearly discernible by-play and vivid physical expressiveness. In a sense, the
unapologetic distinctiveness of Irving’s particular body, movements, and voice even in
Shakespearean tragedy legitimates or authorizes the emotional body posited by scientific
discourses, one that diverged dramatically from the tragedian as traditionally understood.

Irving occupies a curious place in theatre history as a transitional figure between “old
school” and “new school,” Romantic and Victorian, Victorian and modern, modern and
modernist. 17 George Bernard Shaw, for example, agreed that Irving was incapable of performing

17 Jim Davis has suggested that “the theatre of Irving, far from being a contained and unified segment of theatre
history, should be viewed as a transitional force with a certain degree of seepage into the theatrical thinking that
tragedy, but believed he was naturally suited for the modern, naturalistic drama (and was appalled by his rejection of that drama, including his own, at the Lyceum Theatre). For Shaw, Shakespeare, particularly in the tragedies, was less like actual speech and more like music. “Now it is only in music, verbal or other, that feeling which plunges thought into confusion can be artistically expressed” (14). The “right way to declaim Shakespear is the sing-song way” (14). In this realm, Irving could not compete. As the American theatre critic Henry Clapp, writing in 1902, said of Irving, “I have never seen a performer that aspired to the name of tragedian who was so deficient as he in the higher emotional force and in sustained passionate power. … he is an extraordinarily light actor in so far as he appeals to the feelings” (221). Yet it was precisely because Irving did aspire to the name of tragedian, seeing himself as part of a long tradition of actor-managers elevating the public through Shakespeare, that made his tragic body a contested site in a discourse about emotional languages. Irving helped to expose an inherent tension between Shakespeare’s expression of emotion and human emotional expression conceived scientifically. It is telling that, chronologically, Irving is the last actor treated in Bloomsbury’s “Great Shakespeareans” series until the edition on John Gielgud, Laurence Olivier, Peggy Ashcroft, and Judi Dench. The next edition focuses on early twentieth-directors and theorists, foregrounding how modernism problematized the phenomenon of the “star actor” as embodied by Irving. The next chapter addresses one of these figures in Harley Granville Barker, who borrowed from Shaw the understanding of Shakespeare as “word music” and made it central to his vision of theatrical and emotional reform.

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ingformed the modernist movement” (28). On the one hand, Irving points to the way to emotional realism and naturalistic acting. On the other, Edward Gordon Craig saw Irving as his ideal marionette actor. Jeffrey Brown’s dissertation project To Stage a Reading: The Actor in British Modernism shows how Irving was a central figure in modernist aesthetics. My understanding of Irving’s connection to modernist Shakespeare, as addressed in the next chapter, is as a point of resistance leading to efforts to reclaim Shakespeare, and emotion, against positivism.
Chapter 2: Body Music: Harley Granville Barker, Greek Tragedy, and Ritualistic Shakespeare

…I have been reading *The Rise of the Greek Epic* for, I think, the third time; and by Jove, it would be such an education for me to do anything with you, that you must not let the book on the Drama go right out of your mind. You really must not. I want to do it.

– Eric Salmon, *Granville Barker and his Correspondence*

In a 1911 letter to the classics scholar Gilbert Murray, Harley Granville Barker writes of his desire to collaborate on a book “on the Drama,” attributing it to his admiration for Murray’s study of the Greek epic. Murray was a prominent member of the so-called Cambridge Ritualists, a group of scholars and anthropologists interested in the ritual practices of ancient, “primitive” cultures. Given the influence of ritual and concepts of the primitive on all forms of modernist art, Barker’s letter to Murray is perhaps not particularly surprising. Barker also directed five of Murray’s translations of Euripides between 1904 and 1915, including two for a United States tour performed at Ivy League football stadiums, while Murray’s close colleague and fellow ritualist Jane Harrison consulted on their production of *Hippolytus* in 1907. What is surprising is that Barker is best known as a Shakespearean, whose influential productions and critical prefaces helped to ignite what J.L. Styan called a “Shakespeare revolution.” Gone were the butchered texts, elaborate scenic illusions, and star actors of the nineteenth-century stage. Barker instead made *Shakespeare* “reappear centre-stage.” His “stage-centred criticism” respected the play as an organic whole that could only come fully alive in the theatre. Although the letter points to Murray’s broader influence on Barker’s work and theories of “the Drama,” Barker’s approach to Shakespeare remains to be fully understood in the context of this relationship to Greek tragedy and the Cambridge Ritualists. 18

18 Critics tend to focus on either Barker the Shakespearean (Styan, Dymkowski, Mazer) or Barker’s involvement in revivals of Greek tragedy during the Edwardian period (Foley, Hall, Slater, Peters, McIntosh). Dennis Kennedy’s
This chapter argues that Barker sought to realize for Shakespeare the virtues of Greek tragedy and ritual as theorized by Murray and others: namely, the virtue of collective, impersonal emotion. As Rochelle Rives notes, “critical writings of numerous modernisms sought to disarticulate emotion, both aesthetically and generally, from individual psychology” (Rives). Barker directed *The Winter’s Tale*, the first of three Shakespeare plays at the Savoy Theater in London between 1912 and 1914, a few months after his production of Murray’s translation of *Iphigenia in Tauris*. *Iphigenia* was revived for the U.S. tour in 1915, along with a new production of Murray’s translation of *The Trojan Women*. The productions shared the same design team, leading actress, and movement coach. Studying *The Winter’s Tale* and *Iphigenia in Tauris* together, rather than as examples of two different movements, reveals how they respond to a similar set of concerns about modern theories of emotion and their implications for the theatre’s “human medium.” 19

William James’s *What is an Emotion?* had famously posited that physiological changes precede an emotion, going so far as to say that a “purely disembodied human emotion is a nonentity” (qtd in Pamler 176). In the first part of the twentieth century, psychological laboratories specializing in the measurement of emotions became widespread. As Jan Plampler observes, these scientific studies “went to minimize the subjective and linguistic aspects of emotion. Feelings were de facto demystified” (184). Barker’s 1922 book *The Exemplary Theater*...
refers to the activities of psychology laboratories as “spiritual vivisection” (and to “laboratories” as a “dread word”) (49). Greek tragedy, like the primitive rituals from which it sprang, emphasized the identity of a collective body over the individual and rhythm, music, song, and dance over more naturalistic, literal forms of expression. In 1912, Gilbert Murray contributed his “Excursus on the Ritual Forms Preserved in Greek Tragedy” to Jane Harrison’s *Themis*, which stressed that tragedy was “in origin a Ritual Dance” and specifically the dance in celebration of Dionysus, “who represents the cyclic death and rebirth of the world” (341). Throughout *Themis*, Harrison defines these ancient ritual dances through the experience of collective emotion and the “sinking” of the individual. That Barker did not produce Shakespearean tragedy, with its focus on a single tragic hero and thus the body and personality of an individual actor, enabled him to better leverage Shakespeare as part of a larger effort to reclaim emotion from “spiritual vivisection,” to re-mystify it. Moreover, the plays he did produce, following *The Winter’s Tale* with *Twelfth Night* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, are all interested to some degree in community rituals and celebrations. 20 The latter two are centerpieces of C.L. Barber’s seminal study, *Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and Its Relation to Social Custom*, which traces the movement from “release to clarification” in the play, where “clarification” amounts to a kind of containment or restraint of celebratory emotional release. Stephen Greenblatt suggests that Barber does not address *The Winter’s Tale*, Shakespeare’s “most sustained and self-conscious representation of a festive ritual,” because it is “too self-conscious to count as an authentic representation of the popular spirit” (xiv). It is the self-consciousness and formality of

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20 Gordon McMullen is one of the few critics to acknowledge the importance of the specific plays that Barker chose to produce. Of the *Winter’s Tale*, he writes that it “consciously adopts a modernist aesthetic, and … marks the appropriability of the later plays to a modernist vision in which the plays are seen as difficult, fragmented engagements with ritual and the cycle of the seasons which look forward to modern forms of art as much as they look back to primitive expression – in other words, as modernist texts” (255). It is also interesting to note that Barker apparently planned to produce *Macbeth*, but it never came to fruition. Of all of the tragedies, *Macbeth* arguably has the most to do with ritual.
ritual in that play that aligns it with *Iphigenia in Tauris* in particular and suggests their shared emotional stakes.

### 2.1 Barker’s *Exemplary Theatre* and the “Human Medium”

Published in 1922, *The Exemplary Theatre* is Barker’s most substantial theoretical statement about the theatre. While its premise is the theatre’s role in education and social reform, it is also preoccupied with the theatre’s dependence on the “human medium.” For Barker, that dependence is both the theatre’s greatest strength and the cause of its debasement. Thus, a paradox lies at the heart of Barker’s vision of theatrical reform. On the one hand, the “virtue of the human medium … drama’s distinctive possession” makes the theatre an eminently social, communal art (232). The theatre “seizes upon anyone who is not steeled against its influence,” and unlike a novel, which you may easily discard halfway through, “under no obligations to its inanimation, play-going is a social act, and makes demands upon you that are direct and incidental, both” (60, 62). On the other hand, the “human medium” lends itself to an “egotism that must dislocate any artistic form” (232). This ambivalence manifests at a rhetorical level in the range of terms Barker uses to describe the theatre’s “chief circumstance” or “means of expression”: from the “ever-fresh vitality of the purely human medium” (219) and “veritable human medium” (46) to the “haphazard gifts of physical personality” (105) and the “exploiting of the human personality” (6). Of course, it is on the actor that he lays the most blame. Too often, acting simply translates to the art of “self-expression,” which is simply a “catchword” for the “development of individuality” (38).

Whether or not *The Exemplary Theatre* was the book “on the Drama” Barker had hoped to write with Murray, its core values are indebted to the classicist and to ritual theory more generally. Implicit in his understanding of the theatre as an “older, directer art” is a reference to
its origins in ritual and in epic poetry (60). In the most explicit example of Murray’s influence, Barker footnotes *The Rise of the Greek Epic* while laying out a crucial part of his argument, the “educational basis” of theatre, and namely its advantages over other arts. The theatre, he notes, “retains as much in its developed complexity it may of art’s primitive strength in the direct impact of human personalities that is involved. The bard chanting his Homer in a Dorian hall was a degree, though but a degree, directer in his appeal” (67, my italics). While the *Rise of the Greek Epic* focuses on poetry, it nods to drama as an outgrowth of the epic, calling it the “second great chapter of Greek literature” (281). Barker’s motivation for aligning the theatre with the “bard chanting his Homer” makes further sense in light of Murray’s characterization of the irrelevance of the performer’s individual personality. He contrasts the “glad and nameless offerings” of the ancient bard with the artist “under modern conditions,” whose work “must bear his personal name and be marked by his personal experience or character” in order for him to “feel or imagine intensely” (255).

In theorizing his exemplary theatre according to the fundamental principle that the “expression of the single self is inadequate” (46), Barker effaces the individual using terms such as “corporate spirit” (66), “collective consciousness,” “orchestration of humanity” and “fellowship.” He describes actors “yielding themselves utterly, body and spirit, as instruments to the harmony of the play’s purpose” (233). It was Jane Harrison who had done the most to draw attention to these qualities in the ancient rituals and rites that developed into tragedy. In *Ancient Art and Ritual*, a synthesis of her work for a wider audience of the Oxford Home Library, Harrison anticipates Barker almost verbatim in her complaint that, “When an artist claims that expression is the aim of art he is too apt to mean self-expression only—utterance of individual emotion” (241-2). By contrast, “it is in the common act, the common or collective emotion, that
ritual starts. This must never be forgotten” (126). In her 1912 *Themis*, she describes how participants in ancient initiation rites “sink their own personalities and by the wearing of masks and disguises, by dancing to a common rhythm, above all by the common excitement, they become emotionally one, a true congregation, not a collection of individuals” (45). Barker conceives of his theater in similarly religious terms, calling it a “meeting-house” or a “church” or “chapel” of art, as if in recognition of the sacred, mysterious process that bonds together actor and character, actors and audience, and audience with playwright (32).

*The Exemplary Theatre* opens with a dialogue between an imagined “Minister of Theater” and “Minister of Education” that reveals the civilizing impetus of Barker’s theatre, with regard to emotions specifically. One of the appeals of ancient ritual and the notion of collective emotion was that it structured and channeled the release of emotion. In *The Rise of the Greek Epic*, Murray makes a certain level of restraint one of the distinguishing qualities of the Hellenistic Greek, as opposed to the Pagan. The Greeks valued “*sophrosyne*,” which Murray roughly translates as the principle of “*Nothing too much.*” He describes it as something like Temperance, Gentleness, Mercy; sometimes Innocence, never mere Caution: *a tempering of dominant emotions by gentler thoughts*” (26, my italics). In Barker’s dialogue, the Minister of Education believes that unlike more “impersonal, abstract” arts, the theater leaves a “little of the primitive social mud for men to relax themselves in” (8). (In *The Rise of the Greek Epic*, Murray uses similar terms, including “swamp,” “primitive slough” and “mud,” to refer to the Pagan.) Therefore he takes little heed of the Minister of Theatre’s claims that the current theatre is “emotionally degraded” (8) with “uncultured emotions played upon night after night,” assuming that this is precisely its role (14). The Minister of Theater, the figure through whom
Barker speaks and a self-titled “expert in emotionalism,” articulates a different function for the theatre:

M. of E: … It [the drama] has its place, and a very worthy one, as recreation. But if you ask me in its name to substitute emotion for thought and pleasure for hard work, and as a part of education … to let loose that spirit in a child which would then find itself very loose indeed in the man, I must find something very severe to say. … The world has never got on by cultivating its emotions, and it never will.

M. of T.: It may ill become an expert in emotionalism to tell you that he detects a confusion of thought, but I think I do. In the same breath … you spoke of letting loose emotions and cultivating them, as if you equally condemned both proceedings. But surely it’s only dangerous to let loose an emotion when you haven’t cultivated it? (13)

Somewhat paradoxically, the “emotionalism” of “primitive” art and ritual could be considered more “cultivated” or “cultured” than that of other art forms. The shared potential of ritual and theatre was that they could “let loose emotions” and also “cultivate” them, in part because both forms ideally deemphasize individual emotional expression, which was the central risk of the theatre’s human medium.

The kind of drama that was needed for the exemplary theatre was thus one that could help achieve this goal of simultaneously “letting loose” and “cultivating” emotion. In other words, it needed to respond to the particular “problem” of the theater, which Barker equates (later in the volume) to the question of “how to attain enough definition of form and unity of intent for the staged play to rank as a homogeneous work of art and yet preserve that freedom of action which the virtue of the human medium demands” (226, my italics). This kind of drama was not that of Ibsen and Shaw, although Barker had been intimately involved in producing and advocating for the modern, naturalistic drama at the Court Theatre early in his career. 21 In 1914,

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21 This chapter does not dwell on Barker’s own plays, which themselves chronicle an ambivalent relationship to naturalism. Indeed, John Palmer, in The Future of the Theatre, writes that Barker “is an excellent peg for our discourse upon the future direction of English drama” (175) because his better work points away from the “naturalist mold of Ibsen” and toward the “Romantic mould of Shakespeare.” In Barker’s play The Marrying of Ann Leete,
Barker publicly distanced himself from that work, which he called the “quietist school,” telling

*The New York Times:*

It was good work, I think, and worth having done. But it was not complete expression. Gilbert Murray put the case best when he said: “The work here lacks two important elements. It lacks blood and it lacks fervor.” And it seems to me that the way to bring in these things lies, in a sense, through Shakespeare, and in the help we shall have from a school of actors trained by habit and understanding in the delivery both of the rhetoric and of the word music of his plays. We have precious few such actors, and we must have them if there is to be lyric fervor in the drama to be produced at our National Theatre—when it comes.

Why Shakespeare should be the best way to bring in these things is tied to the “problem” or paradox of the theatre’s human medium: the need to balance “form” and “freedom of action.” The “fervor” of Shakespeare is, crucially, “lyric fervor,” his words “word music,” his expression “complete expression.” Each of these phrases contains two terms that balance each other, echoing Barber’s process of “release to clarification.” Put differently, each phrase suggests a way of elevating the “human medium,” whether channeling fervor through lyric, words through music, expression as “complete expression.” Barker’s rhetoric echoes common refrains in criticism of the modern, naturalistic drama during this period. In a 1913 pamphlet, for instance, the theatre critic Huntley Carter calls for the recovery of a “wideness of expression” (28) and the “lyrical element” (9). For Carter, the problem has as much to do with the modern drama’s narrowness of form (i.e., “purely literary”) as with content, its “conception of man as a self-contained machine impelled by appetites common to all animals” (32). Examining Barker’s production of *A Winter’s Tale* in the context of *Iphigenia in Tauris* shows that the tools he used

Palmer sees the former, in a protagonist “presented romantically where illusion is built up of creatures who embody not the particular ache of this generation or that, but the common burden of all men and women” (176).

22 “Was Barker reading Nietzsche?” was a question I received at the colloquium on this chapter and I do realize that what this sounds like is the “counterpoising” of the Dionysian and the Apollonian, or the “forces of extreme affect and the powers of containment,” which also explains, I think, Barker’s interest in these particular plays. (Hillman 149).
to bring “lyric fervor” and “complete expression,” as well as a more exalted “conception of man,” to Shakespeare are derived from Greek tragedy and ritual theory. Shakespeare was a higher stakes platform to establish and champion a new emotional language, given its cultural status and the ways in which it had become, through actors like Henry Irving, a venue for self-expression.

2.2 Iphigenia in Tauris

Of the five productions of Murray’s translations of Greek tragedy that Barker directed, Iphigenia in Tauris most explicitly responds to the concerns Barker lays out in The Exemplary Theatre. As Edith Hall notes, the play offers a “perfect example of the mantra of the Cambridge Ritualists” (241). It is, “more than any other ancient Greek tragedy, essentially about ritual and especially about human sacrifice” (236). With four iterations between 1912 and 1915, Iphigenia also had the longest life of the any of the revivals. Following the initial series of eight matinees at London’s Kingsway Theatre in 1912, the actor-manager Herbert Beerbohm Tree invited the production to perform at the Shakespeare Festival at the significantly larger His Majesty’s Theatre. Lillah McCarthy, who played the title role, claimed of the latter performance that it was the first time a “Greek tragedy created a great sensation in London” (303). That summer, Iphigenia became the first professional production to appear in the Greek-style outdoor theatre at Bradfield College outside London. In 1915, Barker and McCarthy selected Iphigenia in Tauris and The Trojan Women for a tour of college stadia on the east coast of the United States, where McCarthy estimates that 30,000 people attended the performances.

Murray’s translation of Iphigenia in Tauris is heavily invested in distinctions between “civilized” and “savage” communities and forms of ritual. Iphigenia is a Hellenistic Greek held captive by the Taurians, whom Murray refers to in the preface of the translation as a “savage
people” with “cruel gods,” on par with the “Pagans” he describes in *The Rise of the Greek Epic* (xi). The Taurians have tasked her with presiding over the human sacrifice of foreign visitors to the island. In *The Rise of the Greek Epic*, Murray names human sacrifice as one of the “barbarities which Hellenism successfully overcame” (16). (Murray might have been thinking of *Iphigenia* specifically when he notes that in Euripides especially, “such acts are generally connected with a study of the worst possibilities of a savage mob, or of scheming kings led by malignant and half-insane priests” (12). The play opens on a “great and barbaric temple” with “spoils of slain men hanging from the roof” (3). Yet Iphigenia and her maidens, who are, according to Murray’s sympathetic description in the preface, “all exiles, all away from their heart’s home,” still insist on performing the more humane rites of their homeland. As they chant and give drink offerings for Iphigenia’s dead brother Orestes, they learn of the arrival of two “Hellenes,”: “young, good slaughter for the altar stone” (13). The prospect of having to preside over the sacrifice of her own is made more unbearable upon the discovery that one of the victims is Orestes. By staging a fake ritual in honor of Artemis, Iphigenia tricks their captors and leads the Greeks off the island. As the Tauri leader King Thoas rages in vain, the goddess Athena calls for a temple to be built in Athens where worshippers will commemorate Orestes’s “death undone.” For Murray, both the play’s “tragic atmosphere” and a “happy end” unique to Greek tragedy depend upon the clear cultural division between the Greeks and the Tauri, a division that mirrors the distinction between Greeks and Pagans in *The Rise of the Greek Epic*.

With music, singing, dancing, and bold, abstract sets and costumes, in performance *Iphigenia in Tauris* obviously realized a more “complete” form of expression than the drama Barker had directed at the Court. In keeping with the focus of Murray’s translation, it also
established very different expressive styles for the Tauri and the Greeks. As Barker explained the design choices for the “Tauri” to the *Daily Princetonian*:

…. when... Euripides furnishes me with such characters as the Tauri, people whom every line describes as fierce savages, offering human sacrifice in a grim and austere temple, I see no reason why the doors of that temple should not open upon a blood-red interior. The King of that land must obviously have been the apotheosis of everything they [the Greeks] stood for. Why should not I make him so, primitive and rudely gorgeous in dress and weapons? (qtd. in Slater 172)

The “barbarian king” wore a “flaming red square-cut beard and pagoda-like headdress with birds perched on its upper tier” (*Outlook*) and carried an ornate “ornithological sceptre” (*Times*). His soldiers wore “terra-cotta kilts and black and white geometric patterned leggings” (*Outlook*) that looked to be “adorned with whisk brooms of the hue of tomato bisque” (*New York Times*). These bizarre, lavish costumes were accompanied by a rough, boisterous performance style. One reviewer found the “Herdsman” who delivers the news of the Greeks’ capture to Iphigenia, “a little too barbaric, too crouching and aboriginal” (*The Nation*). He and his followers “gibber like so many angry apes” (qtd. in Kennedy). In London, Thoas’s “discomfiture,” and “prodigious shouting voice” elicited laughter. He made a “rapid and tumultuous entrance” into the stalls of the theater, while his soldiers “madly and excitedly galloped down the side aisle” (qtd. in Hall 243).

In contrast, the chorus of Greek maidens appeared as a harmonious, dignified collective. Indeed, *Iphigenia in Tauris* thematizes what Harrison calls “common or collective emotion,” or Barker a “corporate spirit” or “collective consciousness.” Murray’s translation stresses their kinship as women and Greeks. After the recognition scene with Orestes, Iphigenia invites the chorus to “share our peril” and promises to “aid thee also home.” The stage directions describe how she “goes to one after another, and … kneels embracing the knees of the Leader” (63). In the production, the chorus wore “orange and blue and green and black” robes that gave the
impression of the “swaying of green-leaved wands” (*Outlook*). Another critics described the dancing as “wavy, sinuous, and prettily intertwined” (*Nation*). Margaret Morris, whose system of dance training was founded on the poses featured on ancient Greek sculpture, choreographed the dances, which blended seamlessly with the “slight and charming accompaniment” (qtd. in McIntosh 349).23 In a note in the program for the U.S. productions, Barker notes that the music composed for the chorus is “mostly melody, slow and chant-like through which the lines may be declaimed with greater emotional intensity and effect than would be possible if merely spoken” (qtd. in The *New York Tribune*). Music that is “mostly melody” implies music that is highly rhythmical. For Harrison, the collective nature of the ritual event is what makes possible its “emotional intensity” as well as its rhythm (*Ancient Art* 87). The production clearly celebrates the more artful collective emotion of the Greeks by juxtaposing it with the chaos of the Tauri.

As Iphigenia, Lilah McCarthy appeared “stark against the barbaric background and full of tragedy.” She embodied a different emotional ideal of the classical world, one associated with ancient Greek statuary (qtd. in McCarthy 308). As the costume designer Charles Rickets observed, she “really looked like a Greek statue” (30). Critics praised the “nearly motionless dignity of her entrance and early speeches, her calm and distinct recitation of her lyrics of lament” as she made the “innocent offerings of her own country—the milk, the wine, and honey ordained for buried spirits” (*Nation*). McCarthy gravitated towards parts in which she could assume a statuesque, regal composure. When she produced Murray’s translation of *The Bacchae* in 1908, for which she played Dionysus, she modeled her appearance on the ancient Greek sculptures in the British Museum, in keeping with her vision of the character as “strong and calm

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23 Speculating that the “Greeks got the positions from the Egyptians,” Morris also admits to mining Egyptian painting as well as Indian and Cambodian sculpture for their stylized rendering of natural movements.
and magnetic” (294). For one interviewer, the actor’s “grand manner” reminded her of Sarah Siddons, herself an actor associated with classical statuary. Whether it was “the cause or the effect of her having been so much connected to the Greek drama,” the interviewer likened being in McCarthy’s presence to standing on the “same pedestal with a cast of the Discobulus or Antinous” (Lady’s Realm). That the writer should associate McCarthy, even off stage, with these ideal male bodies—the former captured in an elegant athletic stance, the latter a figure of cult worship renowned for his beauty—suggests how completely McCarthy had succeeded in effacing her own personality and physicality.

McCarthy’s approach to acting in general seems premised on the performance of Greek tragedy, which was an approach endorsed by both Murray and Barker. McCarthy writes in her memoirs that she learned early on the importance of the “control of bodily movements and of bodily repose” and that “one restless movement of the body may ruin the effect of a whole speech.” This lesson is particularly relevant to Murray’s translations, which sought to convey the “formal dignity of the language and action” of the original texts and performances (qtd. in Morwood xii). Murray, whom McCarthy considered the “greatest of authorities on the Greek drama,” gave her notes on her performance of Jocasta in Max Reinhart’s production of his translation of Oedipus Rex. Noting that the “feeling of stately beauty” is “the essential quality of a Greek tragedy,” he observes that she adopts “perhaps in general too many movements, detracting from the value of the big movements” (296). (Murray also cautions her not to succumb to Reinhardt’s “nervous, frivolous, jumpy” vision of Jocasta and to instead embrace the “stronger, calmer woman” of his translation (McCarthy 296).) Barker had also coached

24 McCarthy learned this lesson from William Archer’s wife, who had herself “learned the art of bodily control from Annie Payson Coll, the author of ‘Power in Repose’” (68). First published in 1891, the book samples the huge body of literature interested in “bodily reform” and also reads as a lesson in how to avoid the perils of Irving’s performances.
McCarthy extensively on this part. She reported to Murray that he worked with her “three hours every day … and knocked out all my superfluous gestures …” (qtd. in Purdom 132). Barker’s extensive notes to McCarthy suggest his own interest in “bodily repose.” Addressing the scene in which Jocasta joins the debate between Creon and Oedipus, he instructs:

Keep your voice low, calm, clear, and steady on the first words, having in mind the sorrow. Make no gestures as you stand speaking; “be majestic and beautiful”; “Stand still and erect”; “Don’t lift your hand to your face until the end”; “Don’t make gestures to Oedipus on ‘For God’s Sake’….”; “Don’t act or shout or bounce ‘Be sure of this he told the story …’”; “Stand upright, not one foot on step, but both feet together.” (qtd. in Purdom 131)

Here, the language clearly restrains and controls the human medium of the actor.

_Iphigenia in Tauris_ was in many ways the ideal vehicle to showcase the benefits of Greek tragedy for the “emotionally degraded” modern theatre. First, it exalted the choreographed collective emotion of ancient ritual by contrasting the Greek maidens with the “savage mob” of the Tauri. What might appear to modern readers as artificial and stilted in Murray’s translations (such as the frequent rhyming couplets) contribute to this formality, or “stately beauty” of emotional expression in performance. Second, McCarthy as Iphigenia demonstrated impersonal yet emotionally intense acting at the level of an individual tragic protagonist. These different strands or vocabularies of emotional behavior map onto the production’s distinction between “savage” and “civilized.” Murray’s concept of _sophrosyne_, a “tempering of dominant emotions by gentler thought,” is relevant only to the “Hellenes.” Finally, the production facilitated a ritualistic experience for audiences. Describing the outdoor performance at Bradfield, McCarthy recalls how, “In that serene air, the exquisite lines seemed to fall like benedictions on the aspirations of mankind. The beauty of the play, which I felt so deeply, was deeply felt by others also” (308). Closer in spirit to the theatres of Ancient Greece, the huge outdoor stadia in the United States could intensify that effect. In a comment that would surely have delighted Murray,
an audience member wrote to McCarthy that the value of the production lay “behind the subtle
scenes, beyond your voice” in the “glimpse of the great Greek age” it offered (312).

Figure 3 (left): Lilah McCarthy as Iphigenia. Source: McCarthy, Lilah. Myself and My Friends.
Figure 4 (right): King Thoas from Iphigenia in Tauris. Source: Niall W. Slater. “Touring the Ivies.”

Figure 5: Bradfield Production of Iphigenia in Tauris. Source: “From the World’s Scrap-Book.” The Illustrated
London News, 6 July 1912.
2.3 The Winter’s Tale

Murray’s preface to Iphigenia in Tauris and Barker’s preface to The Winter’s Tale both foreground the unusual genre of the plays. Murray begins his preface by explaining that the play is “not in the modern sense a tragedy; it is a romantic play, beginning in tragic atmosphere and moving through perils and escapes to a happy end” (v). Barker’s preface labels The Winter’s Tale a “tragi-comedy” and focuses on the devices Shakespeare uses to avoid the “finality of tragedy” and the “true tragic mood” and keep the “tragedy a little less than tragic.” Most obviously, in the figures of Orestes and Hermione, the plays share the motif of a character who, in Murray’s words, comes to the “verge of death but just does not die.”

Indeed, Richard Paul Knowles, in his study of Shakespeare’s “extensive use of divine intervention” in the late plays, uses a term popularized by Gilbert Murray in his “Excursis on the Ritual Forms Preserved in Greek Tragedy: theophany (269). A theophany, according to Murray, originates in the “peripeteia,” or “reversal,” in the ritual dance that gave birth to tragedy. It was a “change from sorrow to joy, from darkness and sights of inexplicable terror to light and the discovery of the reborn god” (342). That Euripides was the “clearest and most definite in his ritual forms” is exemplified by theophanies of a “markedly formal and ritual character” (353). They “almost always bring comfort,” he writes, “and thus conserve an element of the old Peripeteia from grief to joy” (347). In her memoirs, Lillah McCarthy charts the audience’s response to one of her final performances of Iphigenia for the English Verse Speaking Association, at which Gilbert Murray gave the opening speech. After wondering tensely what will happen to “thwart the hand of fate which lies so heavy on the lost children of this stricken house,” the audience experiences a sense of relief to see Euripides bringing the gods “down to
earth to remedy the evil they have wrought” and then, finally, a “happy smile when at last it is quite sure that O and I are free again: are free at last” (314).

Implicit, perhaps, in Murray’s claim that Iphigenia’s “happy end” disqualifies it as tragedy “in a modern sense” is a criticism of the modern sense of tragedy. Theatrical reformers including Barker took issue with the pessimism of modern drama. Barker’s Minister of Education faults its “belittling instead of exalting, of [the human personality’s] every theme.” For Huntly Carter, it was precisely the modern playwright’s emphasis on man’s free will, rather than on “destiny or fate as master of man,” that led to modern drama’s depiction of only “unbalanced and diseased types” (34). In the Future of the Theatre (1913), the theatre critic John Palmer makes a plea for drama that presents life as “a succession of wonderful things unclassified, unexpected, irreducible to reason” (182). Gilbert Cannan’s manifesto The Joy of the Theatre (1913) defines the “joy” of the title as leaving the theatre with “courage renewed,” having shared “in a vision of beauty,” a “communal confirmation of the instinctive knowledge of truth that lies deep in the heart of every human being” (15-16). To achieve this “joy-of-life spirit,” he adds, “we want the tragic-comedian in drama” (15).

Among the “dominant emotions” that Murray considers in his definition of sophrosyne in The Rise of the Greek Epic are a “feeling for the value and wonder of life” and a “spirit of intense enjoyment” (26). Yet with this “appreciation of good things” also comes a “power to refuse them” and a “tempering wisdom” (i.e., the “milder thoughts” that “temper” the dominant emotions”). For Murray, sophrosyne, the essential quality of the Greek as opposed to the Pagan, has strong moral implications (as his “gentleness” and “mercy” also suggest.) Another letter that Barker sent Murray in 1911 is eager to connect Aristotle’s definition of tragedy to Murray’s characterization of Greek values. The British “orientalist” D.S. Margoliouth had published a
translation of Aristotle’s *Poetics* that year, and Barker reports to Murray that he “has made out that Aristotle did really define Tragedy as ‘a representation of Felicity.’ By felicity—not a satisfactory translation—he means High Life, the sort of life one desires or considers good.” Barker seems to be interpreting, rather than simply quoting, the translation, to make it more relevant to the *Rise of the Greek Epic*.26

Indeed, *Iphigenia in Tauris* and *The Winter’s Tale* both endorse and realize a kind of moral “high life.” In the preface to *The Winter’s Tale*, Barker understands Leontes as Shakespeare’s attempt to “retrieve that magnificent error, if error it was” in *Othello*, of portraying “jealousy as a noble passion” (v). If Othello’s jealousy appears “a strength, even a seeming strength” (iv), in Leontes it is rendered “perverse, ignoble, pitiable” (v). His jealousy makes him a “tyrant” and a “very drunkard of passion.” Moreover, the absence of an Iago figure means that there is not even a “shadow of an excuse for his suspicion” or for his “wanton malice,” both of which here exist only in Leontes’s “own heart” (vi). If Leontes represents one end of the play’s moral spectrum, Hermione represents the other. Barker presents her, much as Murray presents Iphigenia, as a pillar of virtue in the face of egregious wrong. As an “exquisitely sensitive woman, high-minded, witty too, and tactful,” Hermione shares qualities with the “whole magnificent file of heroines in Greek tragedy” Murray cites as an example of Hellenistic progressivism in the *Rise of the Greek Epic* (19). “All of them are free women,” Murray claims there, “free in thought and spirit, treated with as much respect as any of the male characters, and

25 It is perhaps no surprise, then, that Murray should feel the need to justify Iphigenia’s “heavy lying” to Thoas, the one stain on her otherwise impeccable character (ix). “Which of us would not expect at least as much from his own sister, if it lay with her to save him from the altars of Benin or Ashanti?” he writes (ix). Here, Murray compares the ancient savage to contemporary Africans, an impression that the design of the production reinforced.

26 What Margoliouth says is that “A tragedy is, then, the portrayal of an imaginary chapter of heroic life” (qtd. in Murray “Margoliouth” 391). Barker thus seems to be moving from “heroic life” to “felicity” and then “high life.”
with far greater minuteness and sympathy” (19). Barker’s description of Hermione brings to mind impressions of Lilah McCarthy as Iphigenia:

She had been under no illusions about Leontes, had questioned herself carefully before marrying him; since then had made his court a gracious, happy place, and to do that could have been no easy matter. One can tell that she knows the danger of the man, but when the outrageous blow has fallen, even in her utter helplessness, she has perfect courage. Against all the trouble facing her she stands serene; only the cruel side-blow of her son’s death fells her. Even then she falls silently, proudly still. (viii)

Barker reads the events of the first act as part of a narrative pre-existing the play, in which Hermione arrives a foreigner in Leontes’s court and attempts to civilize it. Leontes’s jealousy is not an isolated event but a manifestation of the “dangerous,” volatile nature that Hermione has thus far succeeded in suppressing.27 By the same token, Hermione’s courage and emotional control testifies to her civilizing influence.

Barker’s distinction between the two characters is thus essentially premised on the ability to “temper” one’s emotions. That distinction manifests in what could be seen as different types of ritual activity.’ 28 With the child laid down before him by Paulina, as if at an altar, Leontes commands that she be “instantly consumed with fire,” promising to “dash out” “the bastard brains” himself if Antigonus does not do it (II.ii.132, 138). It is only when Antigonus offers to “pawn the little blood which I have left / to save the innocent,” itself a kind of sacrificial offer, that Leontes relents (II.iii.164-5, my emphasis). Antigonus hints at Leontes’s own “savageness” when he remarks that even “wolves and bears,” “casting their savageness aside,” have been known to nurse children not their own (II.iii.185-186). This near altar of human sacrifice is

27 Here it also worth noting Murray’s characterization of the Pagan, who at best leads a “simple and instinctive” life; at worst, he is “all beset with terror and blind cruelty and helplessness” (9).
28 John Pitcher’s introduction to the Arden Shakespeare foregrounds the importance of ritual and ceremony. Reviewing the production history, he also observes how Barker “came at the play through his earlier productions of Greek tragedy. Euripides in particular, and for him Shakespeare’s theatre wasn’t a temple of psychology but a place of myth, ritual, and ceremonial undoing” (113).
juxtaposed immediately with the practices of Apollo’s temple as described by Cleon and Diomedes. As Cleon reports, “For most it caught me, the celestial habits — / … and the reverence / Of the grave wearers. O, the sacrifice, / How ceremonious, solemn and unearthly / It was i’th’ offering!” (III.i.4-8). Both their awed respect and Hermione’s enduring faith in “powers divine” contrasts with Leontes’s flagrant disregard for the oracle. Indeed, the “courage” and “serenity” that Barker admires in Hermione are partly enabled by her faith in the power and humanity of ritual. Ultimately, of course, Leontes is absolved and the play achieves its “happy end” in a scene that could be described, like the rites of Apollo’s temple, as “ceremonious, solemn, and unearthly.”

The view of Leontes as a “drunkard of passion” marked one of the production’s most notable departures from tradition. Critics were clearly accustomed to a “noble” version of the character. As one publication noted, “As a rule Leontes is played so as to make the man seem as dignified as possible. The character is treated to some extent as a companion picture to Othello…” (Westminster Gazette). In performance, the “drunkard of passion” of Barker’s preface became a “vivid picture of a kind of savage in a frenzy” (Scotsman). Indeed, Leontes’s costume echoed the “primitive and rudely gorgeous” King Thoas from Iphigenia. A portrait of Ainley as Leontes (Fig. 6) shows a “crown of curious design” and sharp streaks of black hair on his head and face. One of the effects of the “simple and perfectly plain white and gold hall” (Referee, Kennedy) that made up the background was that the “barbaric hue” (Times) and “barbaric richness” of the costumes stood out (qtd. in Bartholomeusz 146). Leontes was “the disturbing element” (Graphic).

The style of Leontes’ acting, apparently the most physically realistic in performance, also seems to have contributed to this impression. The Times singled out the actor’s “infinite variety
of … ‘business’ and gestures and poses, his crouches upon crouches and groveling in corners.”

Ainley is “slightly offensive even in his remorse” quibbled another critic, who founds his “displays of physical frenzy” to be “fascinatingly ugly: the passion is so much on him that one is even astonished at the King’s moderation. The effect is powerful, rather horrible, very real” (Westminster Gazette). For others he was a “neurasthenic” (Sunday Times), a “modern neurotic, speaking in gasps” (Standard), and a “neurotic descendent of the Herodian variety” doing “neurotic antics” (New York Tribune). This kind of acting both echoes the behavior of the Tauri in Iphigenia in Tauris and seems appropriate to the naturalistic drama. Here, it is being deployed to condemn Leontes within the world of the play.

Figure 6: Henry Ainley as Leontes and Lilah McCarthy as Hermione. Source: “The Winter’s Tale,” Sketch, 2 October 1912.

In the trial of Hermione, the set was entirely transformed through red light and shadows. The formal nature of the proceedings in the play lent themselves here to the atmosphere of sinister ritual. (The dominant color of red was also central in the design scheme for the temple of human sacrifice in Iphigenia). A “great brazier”—a kind of fire pit used in religious
ceremonies—was “lighted in the middle” (Observer). Leontes was flanked by “squads of supers” making “symmetrical, automaton movements” (Times). One review suggests the Leontes wore a different, more elaborate crown, “like a Christmas cracker.” A photograph shows him crouching menacingly over Hermione’s crumpled body, a “snarling, skulking wolf of a jealous king” (Observer, qtd in Kennedy 132). Hermione’s prison robes, meanwhile, established her as an “innocent.” “The robe in which Hermione stands her trial is purely lovely,” noted one reviewer (Observer). Another called it the “one supremely effective costume in the play” because “unlike all the others, which were fantastic and baroque, it was simply perfect and dignified” (The Academy and Literature).

Indeed, if McCarthy as Iphigenia looked like a statue come to life, Hermione gave the actor the opportunity to perform a statue come to life (see Fig. 7). Hermione “poses as the tinted statue in a manner calculated to trick Leontes into thinking that he beholds mere marble” (Daily Mail). The stillness and repose of a statue accentuated her performance in the first part of the play as well, almost to a fault. The “queenly dignity” of “tearless grief” in response to Leontes’s accusation lacked “sufficient surprise” (Daily Mail), while the “rich quiet” of her acting in the trial scene bordered on “excessive restraint” (qtd. in Bartholomeusz 155). A New York reviewer found Hermione “cold as ice and passionless as marble,” who “with studied gesticulation declaims her lines” (New York Tribune). Falling “silently, proudly still,” in Barker words, she “avoided the traditional cry of despair on hearing of her son’s death,” a clear physical clue to the character’s emotions (qtd. in Bartholomeusz 154).

In the scenes in Bohemia, the production embraced the kind of exuberant emotional dancing that was of central interest to ritual theory. For the ritualists, communal dancing enacted

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29 The set of The Trojan Women also featured a brazier.
during an important event in a community or tribe’s life cycle lay at the very root of drama. Dances allowed for the “discharge of pent-up emotion into action” (Harrison 43). *The Winter’s Tale* of course dramatizes the performative, festival activity surrounding the season of sheep-shearing. In Barker’s words, it was a “celebration of English country life,” in which Shakespeare’s “rustics” have their “full fling.” Lillah McCarthy recalls that the dancing was the most controversial aspect of the production. “I have one criticism to make of your *Winter’s Tale,*” she quotes a friend as saying, “which has been made to me by several people: the hoydenish, noisy and not very pretty dances lasts far too long” (159). For another, it was “pandemonium … turned loose on the stage” (*New York Tribune*). In keeping with the notion of the dance as a community ritual activity, a fluid boundary existed between the onstage dancers and audience. Of the Satyr dance, once critic complained, “they should not so much intersperse among the villagers as pass through them—which is quite a different thing…” (*Academy and Literature*). The *Times* wrote that they are “a riot of jollity: none of your ‘poetry of motion,’ but uncouth, rustic bumping and jerking” (158). The *Referee* commended the satyrs for depicting the “gallimaufry of gambols” referred to in the text while wondering whether there was “something too much of this perhaps” (qtd. in Bartholomeusz 158). For the *Daily News* critic, the dance was simply “unrestrained” (qtd. in Bartholomeusz 159). Jane Harrison believed in a “modern prejudice” towards dancing that expresses a “sheer joie de vivre” and these reviews seem to support her contention (*Ancient Art* 30).

To help establish this festive, raucous, “unrestrained” atmosphere, Barker restored the character of Time, traditionally cut in productions, and made him appear a Bacchus-like figure in the mold of Murray’s translation of *The Bacchae.* In *The Bacchae*, he comes to “Hellas—having taught / All the world else my dances and my rite / of Mysteries.” He is described as
having a “fair shape for a woman’s eye” with “long curls,” “white skin” (27), a “wine-red check” (26), wearing “green and clustered vines” (8). In the preface to the play, Murray associates Bacchus with the bestowal of “a mystic Joy, surpassing in intensity that of man, the joy of a god or a free wild animal.” In *The Winter’s Tale*, Time’s declaration of the “power” to “overthrow” “law” and “custom” and his claim to pre-exist known civilization, or the “ancient order,” resonates with Bacchus, as does his introduction of “Fair Bohemia” with its celebratory dancing.

A sketch of Time from the acting edition of *The Winter’s Tale* (Fig. 7) shows him to be effeminate, with dark lips, bare feet exposing painted toes, and long fingers with long painted nails. His make-up—bright white with darkly accented eyes, cheeks and lips—“in part resembled a mask” (Dunbar 51). Garlands of cloth leaves drape his robes and “stiffened, twisted strands of hair” adorn his head (Dunbar 51). The riotous, joyful quality of the dancing might also have been inspired by the Bacchic spirit of “mystic joy.”
That the scenes in Bohemia authorized a different kind of emotional behavior than the scenes at the court also came across in Catherine Nesbitt’s performance as Perdita. During a one-month break from rehearsals, Barker arranged for Nesbitt to do personal movement coaching with Margaret Morris, the choreographer for *Iphigenia in Tauris.* In her memoirs, Nesbitt recalls Barker’s reasoning: “You realize you must dance ‘like a wave of the sea.’” For Barker, this line, spoken by Florizel to Perdita, signaled the absence of “any coyness or courtly graces” (64). Nesbitt, however, had envisioned Perdita as a “Botticelli figure with long slender legs.” Her costume, a tunic that “split right up one side, away up above the knee” horrified her (64) (Fig. 8). Nesbitt attributes her initial understanding of the character to being a “prim little prude” at the time, whereas ultimately she came to see Perdita a “country girl” whose only knowledge of “breeding and impregnation” comes from animals (64). Yet critics were not entirely convinced. They noted an incongruity between Nesbitt’s performance and Polixenes’s comment that there is something about her “too noble for this place.” In sharing the “over-strenuous mirth” of her “rustic companions,” Nesbitt broke with traditional conceptions of the character (*Daily Mail*).

Yet what all of these conceptions share is a belief that Shakespeare’s poetry determines a particular kind of emotional behavior. Another critic quoted Florizel’s line to Perdita in full as an example of the exquisite poetry of the fourth act that “evaporates” in the production, presumably because it connoted, for him, as it did for Nesbitt at first, a more “noble,” classical style of acting (*Spectator*).

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30 Fiona McIntosh explores the “various maenadic incarnations of the Edwardian period—those ‘aestheticized’ objects who were felt to have danced off vases, head thrown back with their long hair tossed and tussled wildly behind” (*Ancient Dancer* 190). Morris believed that “movement is the most primitive of arts” (53) and that the instinct to move one’s body in rhythm with music is innate. Rejecting the artificiality of classical ballet, her system of physical training and choreography focused on bringing the body in harmony with the natural world and accentuating and strengthening its natural inclinations and poses. The value of “early Greek vase painting” is that they represent “positions used in Hellenic gymnastics and dance” rather than “purely artistic conventions” (17).

31 The tunic was similar to Morris’s standard uniform for her students and dancers, designed for “showing all the body movements.”
It is not only the content of Florizel’s line, the description of Perdita’s dancing as a “wave of the sea,” that seemed to determine Barker’s conception of the character. It also the sound, rhythm, and music of the verse. Barker would also warn Nesbitt when she was “being too poetical,” and would frequently remind the whole cast to “be swift … be not poetical.” For Barker, “poetical” seems to imply acting that is at once too literal and too formal. Poetry is a very different thing than “poetical.” When Ainley voiced a concern about how quickly Barker wanted him to deliver one of his early speeches—“I can’t say anything as quickly as that and give any meaning to the words”—Barker replied that the audience members “don’t have to understand with their ears … just with their guts.” It was only important that Ainley “accelerate and accelerate, just sounding the words” before coming to a “roar, a howl” (Nesbitt 64-65). The “swiftness” of the verse-speaking that characterized Barker’s Shakespeare was less about fidelity to Shakespeare than connecting to a kind of primal, universal emotional rhythm.32

Barker conceived of The Winter’s Tale in three parts, reflected in the structure of the acting edition. The first part encompasses the scenes at the court of Leontes and Hermione, the second the scenes in Bohemia, and the third the return to court that makes up Act V. This structure sharpens the distinction between settings. So far, I have attempted to show the different emotional aesthetics that dominated the first and second parts, respectively. That is, the first part highlighted the sinister, “savage frenzy” of Leontes and its manifestation in bloody ritual. The second provides release from this near-tragedy in the joyful dances of Bohemia. Both parts suggest Barker’s interest in the forms of emotional expression explored in the ritual theory of Murray and Harrison. In the words of Barker’s Minister of Education, in The Exemplary Theatre,

32 According to Huntly Carter, in 1913, “Europe was under a rhythmic spell,” evidence that “people are beginning to realise the immense importance of rhythm in life” (qtd. in Macintosh, Choral Mediations 339). “In the theatre,” Macintosh notes, “the meaning of the play was no longer deemed to reside exclusively in the word but in a ‘rhythm’ that encompassed word, body, set and score” (339).
the production up until the return to court has in a sense functioned to “let loose emotion.” Both
the production and Barker’s preface has also suggested that this emotion could stand to be
“cultivated,” not unlike that of King Thoas and the Tauri in *Iphigenia in Tauris*. In that
production, the more humane, dignified rites—or “collective emotion”—of Iphigenia and the
Greek maidens ultimately prevail, on both a literal and figurative level, to discipline the “savage”
Tauri.

Similarly, the third part of *The Winter’s Tale*, with its ritualistic “theophany” in the
revelation of the statue, exists on a different emotional plane. Here is Murray’s sophrosyne,
Harrison’s collective emotion, and the wonder and mystery of an ancient rite. Barker’s preface
highlights how carefully the final act prepares the audience to experience the statue. The long
speech of Paulina’s steward brings the audience “almost to the pitch of revelation, saving just so
much surprise, and leaving so little, that when they see the statue they may think themselves
more in doubt than they really are whether it is Hermione herself or no” (vii). Then, the
“fantastic prose and fun” of the scene between Autolycus, the Shepard, and the Clown, carry-
overs from the “Punch and Judy,” “Stratford Fair world of Bohemia,” serves as “preparation” for
and “heightens” the scene’s “poetry.” Barker’s description of the scene admires what he might
call its “complete expression.” As he writes, “from the moment the statue is disclosed, every
device of changing colour and time, every minor contrast of voice and mood that can give the
scene modeling and beauty of form, is brought into easy use” (vii). Even Paulina’s betrothal to
Camillo, which “may seem queer to us dramatic realists,” contributes to the scene’s “symmetry,”
which “was as natural to an Elizabethan dramatist as was the rhetorical final speech without
which he would have no more ended his play than would a classical musician now finish a
symphony without a full close” (vii-viii).
The scene took fullest advantage of Barker’s decision to extend the apron over the orchestra pit, which he had been done for the first time for the London production of *Iphigenia* a few months prior. The revelation of the statue upstage could thus take place downstage of the proscenium, in front of the curtain, “a few feet from the spectator’s seats.” The account book records that the house lights nearest to the stage were on “full” (Kennedy 127). Hermione appears on a tall, ornamented pedestal that stresses her position as an object of ceremonial worship. More so than at any other point of the production, it invited the audience to partake of a ritual depicted onstage. The trial scene with the glowing brazier, the rustic sheep-shearing dances of Bohemia, these had the potential to alienate. Here, the audience is encouraged to share in the celebration of death undone and the triumph of virtue, or more specifically, the triumph of emotional restraint over unhinged jealous rage. Paulina, presiding over the revelation in dark hooded robes, names the emotions expected of both those onstage and in the audience: marvel, joy, exultation. “Strike all that look upon with marvel,” she commands. Do not “trouble your joys with like relation,” she says to Hermione.” And then, to all: “Go together / You precious winners all; your exultation / Partake to every one.” The whole community partakes in this response to the revelation of rebirth from death.

2.4 Shakespearean Word Music

An actor in *The Winter’s Tale* contributed an anonymous article to *The New Age* in 1913 that claimed he was “nothing more than a gramophone record made during rehearsals by Mr. Barker himself” (qtd. in Mazer 7). It describes the director as “whisking up into his motion the human material within reach and reducing it to a pulp.” Beyond further testimony of Barker’s ambivalence about the theatre’s “human medium,” these comments are suggestive of the musical analogies that appear frequently in his Shakespeare criticism—including the comparison between
the last scene of *The Winter’s Tale* and the close of a classical symphony—and his theories of the theatre more generally. Indeed, conceiving of theatre as music is another way of negotiating the theatre’s “human material” because music shares with ritual the emphasis on impersonal emotion, or what Rochelle Rives describes as emotion “extending beyond the individual to a much larger, impersonal human consciousness.” Jane Harrison describes music in *Ancient Art and Ritual* as the only modern art form that “could express abstract, unlocalized, unpersonified feeling” (233). She quotes the critic D.S. MacColl’s description of music as a kind of anti-theatre: “In tone and rhythm music has a notation for every kind and degree of action and passion, presenting abstract moulds of its excitement, fluctuation, suspense, crisis, appeasement; and all this *anonymously*, without place, actors, circumstances, named or described, without a word spoken” (232). For Barker, theatre achieves its highest form when it is like music, creating an overall aesthetic effect that cannot be attributed or reduced to any tangible, specific element. As he writes in *The Exemplary Theatre*, “*For as with music* – when melody and harmony have been accounted for and praised, through these we have been spoken to of supernal things— so it is, too, with great drama finely showed us” (233, my italics). Moreover, it is the collective effort of a “company” of actors that gives the drama “some of the *virtue of fine music*” (233, my italics).

That Shakespearean drama was always already musical thus made it of crucial importance to Barker’s exemplary theatre. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, the play he uses as case-study for the production of a play in *The Exemplary Theatre*, was “less a play…than a musical symphony” (211) or a “poetical symphony” (219). The program note for Barker’s 1914 production at the Savoy refers to its “screeds of word music,” where “word music” means something similar to “lyric fervor,” the term Barker used in association with Shakespeare in the
New York Times article the same year. That is, both terms suggest the channeling of emotional energy through “abstract moulds.” Of the first scene between Titania and Oberon he writes, “They are instinct with that excitement, that spontaneity, that sense of emotional overflow which is drama.” But they are also “as carefully constructed for effective speaking as a messenger’s speech in a Greek drama” (More Prefaces 37, my italics). Barker’s understanding of the “drama” here certainly seems indebted to its origins in collective, emotionally intense dancing, such as before or after a hunt, a “discharge of pent-up emotion into action” (Harrison 43). It was the increasingly formalization of those dances that lead to ritual and then drama. Shakespeare’s “careful construction” of “emotional overflow,” through his “word-music,” crystallizes the development of the drama. It does not sacrifice or diminish the emotional intensity, but gives it an impersonal, effective form.

Shakespeare’s word-music also had the potential to reconnect an audience with the less civilized form of emotionality implied by “emotional overflow.” As Barker writes in The Exemplary Theatre, “if Shakespeare wrote rhetorically, he wove his effects out of strands of unrepressed individual emotion” (87). Once again, there is kind of dichotomy at work here, between Shakespeare’s rhetorical weaving (akin to his “careful construction”) and “unrepressed individual emotion” (similar to “emotional overflow”). In a later preface to A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Barker has a long tangent on music’s special affiliation with the “emotional self”:

Music, truly, is of its time; and there is something innate in it, something of the spirit and behavior of its time, which could never perhaps find equal expression in words. Words are for thoughts, and emotion must be framed in terms of thought before words will convey it. But music may express something, now as simple as set movements of the body, now as subtle as those moods of the mind and the measures to which emotion learns to beat. By reasoning about it we may make it more strange than it ever need be if we simply listen. For the emotional self is apter at shifting ground than the intellectual, apter to explode unknown ground.*
At the end of this passage Barker provides a footnote: “And if there is such a thing as racial memory, music, one would say, could be counted on to call it life.” By “unrepressed individual emotion” and “emotional self,” Barker does not mean personal emotion, rather he means, again, the shared emotional identity of a larger culture. In the 1914 preface to A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Barker cites the sounds of contemporary society, including the “chatter of a smart society gathering” and the shouts drifting from an elementary school, as evidence of how completely it has neglected the “value of song and dance, tune and rhythm” (36). He implies that A Midsummer Night’s Dream, and specifically in his incarnation, can contribute to “awakening” this value, and in turn, the return of “a standard of beauty in the English language” (36). If or Harrison, music speaks to “a century too stagnant and listless to act out its own emotions, too reflective to be frankly sensuous,” by offering “a shadowy pageant of sense and emotion, that serves as a katharsis or purgation” (234). Barker implies that Shakespeare belonged to a culture that was more in touch with its emotions; in the words of Murray, they had “blood and fervor.” As Barker stated in a 1912 interview, “The men of the Elizabethan period were big-hearted, full-blooded, bit-sounding, rushing, hurrying men, full of color and full of the rush and hurry of life and doing big things … who knew there was a God above them” (New York Tribune).

Barker’s sense of the musicality of Shakespearean drama also helps to explain the visual aesthetic of the productions at the Savoy, which contemporary critics often described as “post-impressionist.” The term was popularized in the controversial London exhibition of 1910, “Manet and the Post-Impressionists.” As Marianna Torgovnick points out, the exhibition

33 “Poetry quickens to new life. The seed of this new life of the sensations lies dormant in us all. Only poetry can awaken it,” writes Lillah McCarthy in her memoirs (178). Even when the poet’s “words are vague,” she adds, “something of the meaning steals like music into the hearer’s mind,” explaining the appeal of her verse-speaking “pilgrimages” to audiences as diverse as “miners in Whales” and “weavers in Lancashire” (178).
represents the “English debut of the primitive in high culture,” with “three of the most famous artists … Gauguin, Matisse, and Picasso … heavily invested in primitivism as a mode of modern art” (85). Barker’s use of abstract patterns and “exotic” costumes made reference to cultures considered more primitive and whose “emotional selves” naturally embraced the value of “song and dance, music and rhythm.” Appropriate to the play that Barker likened most frequently to music, the fairies in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* are most explicitly engaged with a primitivist vocabulary. Coated in gold flake, with golden robes, and hair that looked like gold shavings, Barker’s fairies were “nightmare-devils” (*Academy*) that critics saw as “oriental,” “Eastern,” and in keeping with the “russo-Jewish orientalism of the Tsar’s ballet” (*English Review*).

The *Times* asked whether it was Titania’s “Indian Boy that has given Mr. Barker his notion of orientalising Shakespeare’s fairies … they look like Cambodian idols and posture like Nijinsky.” “I enjoyed the fairies, every one of them” remarked another critic, “their golden faces, their Egyptian posturing, their Bacchic playfulness, their mortal dancing, their ‘exhibitionism.’”
In her seminal book on the Ballets Russes, which, as the reviews above suggest, seemed to inspire *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in particular, Lynn Garafola points out how little the primitivist vein in modern art had to do with the specific cultures that ostensibly inspired it. For instance, cubism’s debt to African sculpture did not “derive from Africa per se, but from the perception of differentness: the extent to which such art refuted the values and forms associated with ‘civilization.’ In this sense, primitivism reflected a state of mind; defining a psychological rather than physical fact, it posited a mysterious impenetrable other” (73). The “state of mind” that Barker sought to evoke was an emotional one, an impersonal, rhythmic emotional consciousness.34

At the same time, and as implied by the comments of the disgruntled actor in *The Winter’s Tale*, conceiving of Shakespeare as music demands vigilant regulation and planning on the part of the director. Barker analogizes the “shaping” of a production to the work of a conductor: “By shaping we are to understand … not only the physical action of the scenes, but their mental and emotional action as well, everything, indeed, that could be regulated, were our play an orchestral symphony, by time signatures, metronome markings, sforzandi, rallentandi, and the rest” (*Exemplary Theatre* 218, my italics). In the later preface to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Barker analyzes the first scene based on its on “tones” and “antiphonies” and suggests that one cast the play by considering the “musical range of voices wanted,” so “vital is this

34 Between the productions of *Twelfth Night* in 1912 and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in 1914, Barker visited Jacque-Dalcroze’s Rhythmic Gymnastic Institute. He wrote enthusiastically of the experience to Gilbert Murray that the “Eurythmics would be the path” to the creation of a Greek play company in Germany (qtd. in Purdom 144). Dalcroze’s system of Eurhythmics essentially taught musical principles through movement and developed a musical-like notation system for movement. Two of its central principles are evident in Barker’s writing about music. First, Dalcroze believed that his system was “capable of awakening dormant or moribund temperament” and “undreamt-of sources of creative and artistic vitality” (147). Second, by “temperament,” he implies a cultural temperament, and that “music, in the Greek sense of the word, is the art in which temperament is most concretely manifested” (xiii).
question of right relation between voices” (111). To assign “basso for Theseus” and “soprano for Titania” helps to “detach the actor from himself.” It is a technique, he believed, that helps to achieve the “impersonal clarity” boy actors must have brought to their roles in the Elizabethan theatre (1914 preface, 35).

Music fulfills the Minister of Theatre’s claim that emotion can be “let loose” and also be cultivated. A similar emotional calibration or balance characterizes the Hellenistic Greek described in The Rise of the Greek Epic, Iphigenia in Tauris, and ancient ritual. The plays of Shakespeare that Barker felt were best suited to bringing much-needed “lyric fervor” and “complete expression” to the modern theatre depict forms of emotional release and expression that counteract the community’s dominant emotional mode (e.g., Leontes’s “drunkard of passion,” his “perverse, ignoble” jealousy). At the end of the plays, it is the larger community that “partakes” of “exultation,” “marvel,” and “joy.” The “word music” of the verse further enhanced the plays’ potential to model the kind of life-affirming, celebratory and impersonal emotion that the theatre, as a reflection of the “positivist milieu,” with its laboratories of “spiritual vivisection,” was sorely lacking. These are plays that even the most egotistical actor would be hard pressed to turn into a vehicle for self-expression, thus exposing the perils of the human medium and his human material.

The actor Henry Irving hovers in the background of this chapter and particularly in Barker’s critiques of the actor who impersonates only himself. He is the ultimate example of a “tragedian self-centred in the limelight” (226-7), or of the actor who “exercises” his “personal charm” “as often as not directly upon the audience rather than primarily upon the play” (209). In a 1907 interview, one year after Irving’s death, Barker said in interview that the actor, “gloried in

35 Orsino in Twelfth Night was portrayed very similarly to Leontes.
bad plays, and his success in *The Bells* presented a singular contrast to his conception of *King Lear* (Stage). That is, “bad” plays such as *The Bells* indulge this kind of actor, leaving plenty of space for his personality to seep through, whereas “good” plays such as *King Lear* mandate the “gestation” of a “new being” or “individual” entirely, that is “not the actor’s consistent self” nor “the character worn as a disguise,” but a “relative being only” (217-18).

Like the Victorian theatre critic and psychologist theorist George Henry Lewes, Barker associated Shakespeare with a special category of emotional experience. For Lewes, it was Shakespearean tragedy and the individual tragic actor that could model the ideal expression of intense emotion. It is not the tradition of a star actor that he takes issue with, but whether that actor’s expression of emotion is “symbolic” or “ideal” and thus, like Shakespearean tragedy, representative of the faculty of human emotion in its highest form. For Barker, the issue has deeper roots, in the “human medium” itself. If only the theatre could embrace the vitality and directness of that form without risking the intrusion of the individual, personal emotional self. The “lyric fervor” of Shakespeare’s word-music, like music itself, could be made to “awaken” the kind of collective, impersonal, and life-affirming emotion that characterized the theatre’s earliest forms.
Chapter 3: The Ego and its Discontents: Performing the Subconscious in Shakespearean Tragedy on Stage and Film

Orson Welles’s *Macbeth* and Laurence Olivier’s *Hamlet*, the first major English-language film adaptations of Shakespearean tragedy, were released within weeks of each other in 1948.36 Both Welles and Olivier had histories with these plays in the theater early in their careers. Welles had directed the *Voodoo Macbeth* at the Lafayette Theater in Harlem in 1936, and Olivier had starred in *Hamlet*, directed by Tyrone Guthrie, at the Old Vic in London and at Elsinore Castle in Denmark in 1937. By the 1940s, Olivier and Welles had become two of the most famous stage and film personalities of their time. It was inevitable that the films would be compared, mainly to Welles’s detriment. *Life* magazine ran its review of *Macbeth* one week after dedicating its third reverential feature that year to Olivier’s *Hamlet*. Of *Macbeth*, the magazine punned, “Murder! Orson Welles doth foully slaughter Shakespeare” (qtd. in Andregg 76). As a sign of the intensifying rivalry between the two actor-directors, Welles withdrew the film from competition at that year’s Venice Film Festival once he learned that the grand international prize would go to *Hamlet*. Despite their receptions in the popular press, the films, both shot in black and white, have much in common. Gloomy, expressionistic sets, ominous orchestral soundtracks, and multiple silent film versions of Shakespearean tragedy in the early twentieth-century, as well as several television versions for the BBC by George O’Ferrall, including a full-length *Hamlet* in 1947. The first talking, feature-length Shakespeare film was the Mary Pickford/Douglas Fairbanks *The Taming of the Shrew* in 1935. Max Reinhardt’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* was released the same year, followed by Irving Thalberg and George Cukor’s *Romeo and Juliet*, starring John Barrymore as Mercutio, in 1936. This big-budget yet un inventive *Romeo and Juliet* (1936) “encouraged Hollywood’s moratorium on major Shakespeare films for nearly two decades” (42). Welles’s *Macbeth* was something of an outlier, according to Rowell, it “being a special low budget ‘poverty row’ aberration” (27). Although Welles’s *Macbeth* and Olivier’s *Hamlet* were not strictly Hollywood films, they were certainly received as mainstream films. Olivier received the Academy Award for best actor, building on the success of his patriotic *Henry V* in 1945.

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36 *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* both had their U.S. debuts in Boston on September 29 and October 7, respectively, while the London opening for *Hamlet* was a few weeks prior. There had been multiple silent film versions of Shakespearean tragedy in the early twentieth-century, as well as several television versions for the BBC by George O’Ferrall, including a full-length *Hamlet* in 1947. The first talking, feature-length Shakespeare film was the Mary Pickford/Douglas Fairbanks *The Taming of the Shrew* in 1935. Max Reinhardt’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* was released the same year, followed by Irving Thalberg and George Cukor’s *Romeo and Juliet*, starring John Barrymore as Mercutio, in 1936. This big-budget yet un inventive *Romeo and Juliet* (1936) “encouraged Hollywood’s moratorium on major Shakespeare films for nearly two decades” (42). Welles’s *Macbeth* was something of an outlier, according to Rowell, it “being a special low budget ‘poverty row’ aberration” (27). Although Welles’s *Macbeth* and Olivier’s *Hamlet* were not strictly Hollywood films, they were certainly received as mainstream films. Olivier received the Academy Award for best actor, building on the success of his patriotic *Henry V* in 1945.
frequent close-ups, and soliloquies performed in voice-over seek clearly seek to convey a sense of the protagonists’ inner lives.

Indeed, Welles’s and Olivier’s roughly parallel stage and film productions of *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, respectively, capitalize on public interest in the human unconscious, or subconscious, as it was more popularly referred to, in the 1930s and ’40s. As the American psychoanalyst William C. Menninger declared in a 1947 *New York Times* profile, “Never before has psychoanalysis been so much a matter of general discussion,” defining the science as an “investigative procedure” into what he refers to variously as a patient’s “unconscious,” “repressed material,” “inner conflicts,” “inner self,” “unseen threatening enemies,” and “unknown forces in himself.” In 1948, conditions were particularly ripe for the film industry to tackle the “neurotic, tragic psyches” of Shakespearean tragedy (Brown 24). First, psychoanalytic literary criticism of Shakespeare, with a special focus on the tragedies, was well established, with analyses of Shakespeare’s characters providing fodder for psychoanalytic journals. Second, film had proved an ideal medium for psychoanalytic themes and the representation of the unconscious. Orson Welles himself called his *Citizen Kane* (1941) “dollar-book Freud,” as subjects like Charles Kane filled the “case books of psychiatrists” (Mulvey). Third, Olivier’s

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37 That Freud and Ernest Jones influenced Olivier’s *Hamlets* is common knowledge. Beginning with Peter Donaldson in 1987, critics have attempted “to specify how the film uses psychological ideas, and what it achieves in doing so,” mainly from perspectives of Olivier’s autobiography (Donaldson), formalist film studies, and the study of Shakespeare-on-film (Davies, Crowl, Anderegg) (22). Robert Shaughnessy provides the most sustained study of the psychoanalytic influence of the theatrical production. The connection of Welles’s *Voodoo Macbeth* and the film to psychoanalysis is less self-evident and is less studied. Richard Halpern and Marguerite Rippy locate *Voodoo Macbeth* within discourses of modernist primitivism, which was intimately connected to psychoanalysis. My interest is in how moving these plays from the theatre to film works within a framework of contemporary understandings of psychoanalysis and subconscious emotion.

38 Both Philip Armstrong and Carolyn Brown offer useful overviews of the co-development of Shakespeare and psychoanalysis. As Brown notes, 22 of the essays included in the first anthology devoted exclusively to psychoanalytic readings of Shakespeare, *The Design Within* (1970), focused on the tragedies, reflecting the “overwhelming interest in the tragedies as Shakespeare’s most penetrating exploration of neurotic, tragic psyches” as well as the fact that in in the first half of the twentieth century, psychoanalytic criticism was becoming a reputable approach to Shakespeare” (24).
patriotic *Henry V* in 1945 had proved that Shakespeare could make good box office. And finally, World War II, as Menninger also points out, had “extended the public’s acquaintance” with psychoanalysis because of its use as a treatment for “battle neuroses,” allowing “shell-shocked” soldiers to uncover the buried traumas of war experience.

This chapter treats Welles and Olivier’s productions as explorations of what it means to possess a subconscious emotional self. It shows how they “diagnose” the protagonists and their tragedies — and then stage them — within a psychoanalytic framework. For both directors, film is a means to foreground the role of the subconscious in ways that the theatre seemingly could not. The films thus bring into focus the different strands of contemporary psychoanalytic thought that animate Welles’s and Olivier’s interpretations. By the late 1940s, the field of psychoanalysis consisted of two main camps, each associated with a pioneering female psychoanalyst: the object relations of Melanie Klein and the ego psychology of Anna Freud. Very broadly speaking, object relations was concerned with the contents of the unconscious, particularly in infants and young children, while ego psychology focused on how the ego could control and defend itself against it. In the 1949 volume *What is Psychoanalysis?*, Ernest Jones, Freud’s leading disciple in Great Britain and the United States, notes how Klein and her followers “laid great stress on the savagery of the infant’s early impulses,” bringing to light “fantasies of tearing, devouring, and so on that remind one of the wilder Walt Disney films” (110). Ego psychology, on the other hand, as the historian Eli Zaretsky notes, stressed “reason, maturity, and the ego’s capacities to organize the inner and outer worlds” (306). The rivalry between the two schools was so intense that in 1945 a conference, known as the “Controversial Discussions,” was held in London to debate their merits. Klein’s supporters accused the Anna Freudians of positing a “basic fallacy: a rigid divorce between the id and ego” (Rose 142).
The Kleinian position maps onto Welles’s approach to *Macbeth* because of the productions’ emphasis on the consuming nature of forces that are at once interior and exterior to the subject. If for Welles’s *Macbeth* the mature ego almost never had a chance, Olivier’s *Hamlet* witnesses the successful recuperation of the mature ego as the neurotic subject explores and comes to terms with his subconscious emotions. Ego psychology was extremely popular in the United States, which perhaps helps to explain the success of the *Hamlet* film, and the failure of *Macbeth*, with American audiences.\(^39\)

What the different schools of psychoanalysis seemed to agree upon, however, particularly after World War II, was the importance of nurture for the young child. Through nurture, especially from the mother, the violent, aggressive instincts lurking in a child’s subconscious could be prevented from developing. Indeed, Olivier’s and Welles’s films figure the protagonists at various points as vulnerable children and draw attention to the presence, or absence, of nurturing relationships. (Ernest Jones, in his 1949 book on Hamlet and Oedipus, refers to the adult unconscious as the “still living infantile mind” (74).) Thus, they both use Shakespearean tragedy to suggest ways in which the power of the subconscious could be limited and contained.

### 3.1 Hamlet vs. Hamlet: Performing *Hamlet* in the Theatre

In a 1936 letter, Tyrone Guthrie wrote of his upcoming production of *Hamlet* at the Old Vic, starring Laurence Olivier: “I’m terribly excited about it; much the most stimulating & interesting of the books on the subject I’m finding is an essay by Dr Ernest Jones—a leading psycho-analyst—*fascinating*” (95). Guthrie refers to Jones’s essay, “A Psycho-analytic Study of

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\(^{39}\) As scholars such as Zaretsky, Hale, and Samuel have shown, the emphasis on “mechanisms of control” and “controlling instinctual drives” that could “sublimate (or at least postpone) aggressive behavior” resonated with the “national temperament” (Samuel 7-8).
Hamlet,” included in his 1923 book, Essays in Applied Psychoanalysis. That Guthrie should make such casual mention of reading of a book of psychoanalytic theory suggests how thoroughly it had entered the mainstream since the essay’s first appearance, in 1910, in an academic journal, The American Journal of Psychology. By 1949, the essay would be expanded into a book-length study for a popular publisher, under the simpler title, Hamlet and Oedipus. Jones, Freud’s official biographer, played a major role in the thread of psychoanalysis in Great Britain and the United States. He helped to bring both Anna Freud and Melanie Klein to Great Britain and continued to support their respective endeavors even as their rivalry intensified.

On Guthrie’s recommendation, Laurence Olivier took Jones’s essay on a vacation before the start of rehearsals. Jones, Guthrie, and Peggy Ashcroft, who played Gertrude, also visited Jones’s office in London, where, in the words of Olivier, they “talked and talked” about the doctor’s conviction that Hamlet was a “prime sufferer of the Oedipus complex” (On Acting 78).

The essay’s original title perhaps better suggests its appeal to Guthrie and the actors: “The Oedipus-Complex as an Explanation of Hamlet’s Mystery: A Study in Motive.” In the essay, Jones attributes the failure of other accounts of the character’s mystery—his infamous inaction—to their “ignorance of the actual workings of the human mind” (27) and adherence, instead, to “conventional standards of the causes of deep emotion” (39, my emphasis). Of course, psychoanalysis believed that “deep emotion” springs from the deepest recesses of the self, hidden even from the subject. Claudius’s actions have triggered an “internal conflict” in Hamlet between his unconscious, Oedipal desires and the “repressing forces” of his ego (54). Killing Claudius would mean confronting “the deepest and most buried part of his [Hamlet’s] own personality” (57). If the “conventional standards” understand emotion to “come from without,” psychoanalysis states that it “comes from within” (93).
By 1937, psychoanalysis had shifted directions in ways that bolstered Jones’s reading, by further stressing the role of the ego. Freud’s *The Ego and the Id* (1923) put forth a structural model of the personality, dividing it into the ego, super-ego, and id, which replaced the original topographical model of the “conscious” and “unconscious.” “Within a few years” of that work, notes a psychoanalyst reviewing the field in 1948, “analysts were to become less concerned with what happens to the libido and very much concerned with the ways in which the ego defends itself” (Thompson 63). Jones assisted in the English translation of Anna Freud’s *Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense*, published in 1937. In this work, the younger Freud reveals the ego as a manipulative, dynamic agent whose most “efficacious” and “dangerous” mechanism of defense was repression, “capable of mastering powerful instinctual impulses.” Repression shuts down “whole tracts of instinctual and affective life” (50). Thus a kind of battlefield is created in the human psyche, most vivid as she describes the moment when “instinctual impulses” “make hostile incursions into the ego, in the hope of overthrowing it by a surprise-attack” so that the “ego on its side becomes suspicious; it proceeds to counter-attack and to invade the territory of the id.”

Not only does this flurry of psychic activity take place “with in,” but all the while the subject remains largely unconscious of it. How then should the actor playing Hamlet in the theatre *perform*, or rather indicate, the “real” source of his distress? An offhand comment in his memoirs about working with Jones the following year on his performance of Iago (also under Guthrie’s direction) suggests that this question concerned Olivier throughout his career. As he wrote in *On Acting*, “I must say I have never yet discovered any means of divulging something that is definitely subconscious to any audience, no matter how discerning they may be.” That most accounts of the 1937 *Hamlet* failed to acknowledge Jones’s reading makes it likely that it
contributed to Olivier’s frustration. One critic notes that he went to the production having heard it would be “an Ernest Jones Hamlet” but concludes that it “did not emerge in performance” (Bystander). Rather, what did emerge was physical, almost manic energy. Olivier had a reputation as an actor of “pronounced physical leanings” and critics thought that he made Hamlet suit his “natural disposition” (Cottrel 119). He was “athletic” and “agile” (Observer), “vivid, virile, and lively” (Daily Telegraph), full of “pulsating vitality and excitement,” “spry … and sinewy” and “capable of kangaroo-like leaps” (Bystander). James Agate observed that Olivier “acts literally all over the stage” after the play scene, leaping from the elevated throne and “down to the footlights in an access of high hysteria.” Ultimately, he complained:

There should be more “to” Hamlet than this, even at the outset. We ought to feel that even if there were no Ghost and no murder, Hamlet is still an invincible neurasthenic. We feel that the present Hamlet has not in him anything “which passeth show,” that in him everything, as it should be in the case of healthy young men of his age, even though they are mourning a father, is on the surface.

Considering that the production’s interpretation was founded on the depths and disorder of Hamlet’s psyche, this review is a case in point of the challenge of psychoanalytic emotion for the performance of Shakespearean emotion.

Both Anna Freud and Ernest Jones comment on the tremendous “energy” (Freud) and “effort” (Jones) required to repress subconscious emotion, which perhaps helps to explain Olivier’s highly physical Hamlet. That is, by focusing on what he calls the “cover-up” (i.e., the defense mechanisms) of his “subconscious guilt,” he covers it up for the audience as well (On Acting 78). One of Olivier’s biographers describes how the actor, after lifting his sword over the praying Claudius, “dropped [his arm] as if dragged down by some unseen leaden force, and throughout the whole of the rest of the speech—with its merest shell of excuse for his own inaction—he paced the stage with a restless and uncomprehending exasperation” (Cottrell 120).
The biographer implies that this restless pacing, and even the speech itself, participates in and communicates the act of repressing the “real” excuse for his inaction. This “unseen force” could also be read as Hamlet’s own ego (unseen to the character as well), “silently and invisibly,” in Anna Freud’s terms, preventing his “instinctual impulses” from staging an attack.

Jones might have further confused matters when it came to the implications of his reading for performance. According to Olivier, Jones had advised him not to make “it [the Oedipus complex] overt, as long as you know about it. That’s the important point” (On Acting 17). (The “you” here presumably refers to Olivier the actor, not the character, as Jones was “anxious to stress” that Hamlet suffered “quite unconsciously” (qtd in Shaughnessy 101).) Then, in a letter to Guthrie after he saw the performance, Jones complained that Olivier “gets away from the idea of a man internally tortured,” in that “everything is converted into external fussiness and all trace of dignity in the noble prince is lost” (qtd in Shaughnessy 104). On the one hand, Jones advises Olivier not to make the cause of Hamlet’s suffering too “obvert” or external (such as by “hanging on your mother’s tits”); on the other hand, he clearly does expect an external register of Hamlet’s internal suffering (On Acting 79). He seems to want the impossible: a Hamlet whose behavior can be explained in terms of psychoanalysis but who still adheres to the “conventional standards” of performing emotion in Shakespearean tragedy, implicit in his reference to Hamlet’s “dignity” and “nobility.”

Psychoanalysis, particularly in its emphasis on ego mechanisms, also had implications for the relationship between performer and audience. When Jones, in his essay on Hamlet, describes

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40 Philip Armstrong has argued that Jones’s reading of Hamlet is representative of how psychoanalysis “constitutes a sustained and radical attack on humanism” for “Hamlet demonstrates not the omnipotence of the rational mind celebrated by Enlightenment humanism, but rather the enslavement of human agency to forces which remain obscure and illegible, in short to the unconscious” (27). Certainly in Jones’s comment on Olivier’s performance, and in Olivier’s film, a kind of humanism does seem to be sustained, which I will address in closing this chapter.
the analyst as a “trained observer” alert to the “external expression” of “mental trends hidden from the subject himself,” he effectively describes the role of the spectator observing an actor. (Jones really did seem to see Hamlet as his patient; when he acknowledges to Guthrie that given how well he knows Hamlet, it would be hard for any actor to succeed in the part, he is only somewhat joking.) In a sense, the wily, defensive ego made the analyst’s job harder: she had to wage her own battle with its defenses in order to discover their source. As Anna Freud states, it was her role to “rectify displacements and … bring that which has been isolated back into its true context.” Olivier’s advice to actors in On Acting is highly, almost sadistically, attuned to the spectator-as-analyst. The two are engaged in a power play in which the actor strategically divulges and withholds clues to keep the audience on its toes. “Remember, do not show them [the audience] the complete iceberg,” he advises, for instance, invoking Sigmund Freud’s well-known analogy of the mind as an iceberg of which only the tip represents conscious thought (159). “Never giving too much; always making them want more… Controlling every eye in the house, making your thoughts theirs” (370). It was through the medium of film that Oliver could best meet Jones’s demands and fulfill this fantasy of controlling an audience’s access to the inner life of a character.

3.2 “This is I!”: Hamlet on Film

Olivier’s introduction to Hamlet: the Film and the Play, a “behind the scenes” look at the making of the film, describes the camera’s penetrating gaze as one of film’s most significant differences from theatre. “Bear in mind, all the time, that the cinema is even more insistent on the visual aspect of art than the theatre, that the camera can, and must, nose into corners and magnify details that escape notice or pass muster on the stage” (Dent). If Olivier’s Hamlet film is, as he referred to it here, a “legitimate experiment,” it is in large part an experiment in whether
film can “divulge” Hamlet’s subconscious emotional self more successfully than the theatre. In the same book, the film’s set and costume designer Roger Furse states that Olivier “wanted a dream-like, cavernous space as the setting for a drama which is centred in the shadowy regions of the hero’s mind.” The “details” that Olivier hoped to “magnify” concern the “shadowy regions” of Hamlet’s mind that failed to register in the stage production, all that lies beneath the “surface.” Olivier’s performance in the film suggests that there is more at stake in the experiment: portraying inner conflict without sacrificing an impression of the character’s dignity and nobility.

Orson Welles’s Citizen Kane, released in 1941, set a precedent for bringing the repressed emotion of a neurotic psyche to film. In his memoirs, Olivier calls Welles a “marvelous film man” and the editing of Citizen Kane “demonic” and “rule breaking” (On Acting 302). And in unpublished notes, Melanie Klein herself made a diagnosis of Kane that refers to his “manic mechanisms,” which are essentially analogous to “mechanisms of defense.” In the film, this reading contributes to the sense of the spectator as analyst, a topic Laura Mulvey explores in her seminal essay on the film. From its opening shot of a “No Trespassing” sign, Citizen Kane invites the viewer to “interpret clues and symptoms on the screen as might a detective or psychoanalyst” (33). The “pleasure of looking” becomes “the pleasure of decoding” (33). Crucially, film allows the physical or scenic environment, or what Olivier refers to as the “visual aspect,” to be read as evidence. In other words, the “external expressions” of the subconscious that are of such importance to the analyst appear not only though the medium of the subject. As

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41 Klein says that Kane’s “depressive feelings [are] overlaid and kept at bay by manic mechanisms” (251). That is, the “depressive position” was a developmental milestone that allowed an infant to recognize objects, most importantly the mother, as separate, outside of himself. “Manic mechanisms” go into effect in order to defend against the feelings, such as guilt and jealousy, attendant upon this recognition.
Mulvey observes of *Citizen Kane*, “things loom up and occupy a privileged space on the screen and in the story” (Mulvey 33). These “things” illuminate the character’s hidden motivations and desires, the “something definitely subconscious.” In a statement to the press responding to the film’s supposed depiction of William Randolph Hearst, Welles states that it was his goal to “examine his [Charles Foster Kane’s] private life” the “backstairs aspect of it” (qtd. in Mulvey 95-96, my italics). In seeking to “lead the thoughts of my audience closer and closer to the solution of the enigma of the dying words,” Welles aligns the audience with the analyst, who desires to understand the “true context,” or source, of certain behaviors (96).

The solution in *Citizen Kane* is also of course similar to the solution of Hamlet’s “enigma” as conceived by Olivier, via Jones: Hamlet’s “inner involvement with his mother” (*On Acting* 78). “From the point of view of the psychologist,” Welles explains, “my character had never made what is known as ‘transference’ from his mother” (97). Although Kane has no consciousness of it during his “waking hours,” he continually seeks to recreate this original bond with his mother, traumatically severed at a young age. The absurdly opulent Xanadu is a futile attempt to recreate the “womb” (97). “Rosebud” looms large in his subconscious as a symbol of his “mother’s love, which Kane never lost” (96). For Melanie Klein, “Kane’s dying word refers to the breast, hence his trouble with wives” (251). Klein’s work helped to fuel what Philip Zaretsky calls the “emphasis on rupture from, and reconnection with, the mother” that “came to dominate analytic theory,” particularly after World War II (251). Occurring between Olivier’s stage and film productions, both this development in psychoanalysis and Welles’s *Citizen Kane* perhaps informed Olivier’s decision to return to *Hamlet*. While the Old Vic production had advertised a full-text *Hamlet*, the film edited the text to foreground the domestic sphere, including removing Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Fortinbras entirely.
Olivier’s *Hamlet* opens on a castle slowly coming into view through swirling mists. The shot only teases the possibility of entry. As the first stage directions in the published screenplay read, “After about fifteen seconds a cloud settles in front of the camera, shutting out the castle from view” (Dent). Like Welles’s “No Trespassing” sign outside Xanadu, almost everything about the film’s extended prologue suggests the need for investigation into Hamlet’s impenetrable psyche. The lines of text, from act 1, scene 4, superimposed on the cloud positions Hamlet’s criticism of Claudius’s raucous revels as an almost perfect articulation of the components of “inner conflict.” There is the “vicious mole of nature” of the subconscious, the “pales and forts of reason” of the ego, the “form of plausible manners” of society, and the “o’ergrowth of some complexion” or “habit grown too much” that indicates repression of the subconscious. Olivier’s voiceover addition, that “this is the tragedy of a man who could not make up his mind,” further alludes to the “troubled human mind” at the root of psychoanalysis’s “investigative procedures” (Menninger). Indeed, it is precisely on the word “mind” that the mists clear and the scene shifts to Hamlet’s dead body held aloft, and lying prostrate like the patient in analysis, on a funeral bier. Beginning with the death of the subject, as in *Citizen Kane*, works to create anticipation in the viewer, signaling that the film will work backwards through the events that lead to this moment. Of course, in the case of *Hamlet*, the viewer is familiar with the plot, so the device instead signals a psychological narrative or accounting: the events of Hamlet’s “mind.”

That narrative, then, reveals the recuperation of a highly repressed character through the process of psychoanalysis. If *Henry V*, Olivier’s first Shakespeare film, embraced patriotic post-war sentiment, *Hamlet* is a kind of advertisement for psychoanalysis, which as Menninger notes, was enjoying greater popularity in part because of its success with traumatized war veterans.
Like the patient in analysis, confronting and shedding light on the “dark, threatening enemies” of his subconscious leads to the restoration of a mature ego. By the end of the film, Hamlet’s mind is in fact “made up.”

To begin, if Elsinore represents the “shadowy regions of the hero’s mind,” it reflects a highly stratified mind, one primed for psychoanalytic probing. Indeed, the “inner-self” was often likened to a physical space, as in the phrase “the ego is not master in its own house” (Menninger). Menninger takes this metaphor to an extreme, describing the patient as a “fearful, struggling person who has come into an unfamiliar and totally darkened room crowded with furniture.” That room is his subconscious. Only when “light” comes into the room through the “interpretations made by the analyst,” can the patient put “his house in order as he wishes.” That is, Hamlet’s “room,” or house, is not so much crowded as sparse. The scenic designer Roger Furse noted Elsinore’s “niggardly furnishing” and “scarcity of furniture” (Dent). It has already been “put in order” for the viewer, filtered through the gaze or “interpretation” of the analyst. After leaving Hamlet on the funeral bier, the camera travels slowing through the narrow staircases and halls of the castle, pausing on “things” that speak to the patient’s “unconscious wishes and fears,” most obviously, an enormous bed, glimpsed as if through a keyhole (Menninger). Discussing the differences between Ophelia and Gertrude’s chambers, Furse observes, “These women have their special significance to Hamlet, and their surroundings should reflect it.” Because the furnishings are so spare, anything that is there cries out as a clue to Hamlet’s “mind.”

While Olivier tried to convey Hamlet’s repression in the theatrical production through physical activity, in the film Olivier is remarkably still. Draped in a chair for the entirety of his first scene, Olivier’s performance recalls Anna Freud’s suggestion that repression can lead to the
“withdrawal of consciousness from whole tracts of instinctual and affective life” (50). The little text Hamlet has in the scene is cut further, including the puns that gesture to self-awareness: a “little more than kin” and “I am too much in the sun.” When Gertrude embraces and kisses him, the camera catches a look of confusion cross his face. Finally alone, Hamlet’s soliloquy, ostensibly an exercise in the revelation of feeling, further testifies to its repression. As the stage directions state, “with the exception of a few phrases” the soliloquy “is thought, not spoken” (Dent). Of course, in the film, what is “thought” is spoken too, by Olivier in voice-over; that the script does not specify this suggests that the intended effect is one of subconscious thought. Hamlet moves during the soliloquy, but it is movement expressly related to that thought, “between the thrones at the head of the table and his own chair,” chairs that figured prominently in the camera’s initial journey through the castle. The “phrases” that are spoken by Olivier—“nay, not so much, not two”, “and yet within a month” “a little month!” “O God!”—barely register the more complete sentiments at the level of “thought.”

Of course, it is not only the physical surroundings that the film filters through the interpretations of an analysis, or rather, through their “special significance to Hamlet,” but the other characters as well. Ophelia’s blond ringlets, rosy cheeks, the floral motif of her wallpaper, in a room absent any bed, exist in stark contrast to the rest of Elsinore. Her “little room,” as Furse explains, was meant to have “an effect of prettiness—almost of sentiment.” She stands for the pure, virginal innocence that Hamlet’s “inner involvement with his mother” must corrupt. That idealization extends to her family, with the scene between Ophelia, Laertes, and Polonious taking place outside the castle in a setting of airy, bounteous nature that seems to exist only for them. It is a portrait of a more nurturing, intimate family life that has been denied to Hamlet and makes sense given the concern of psychoanalysis with the life of the family.
Hamlet’s recovery from this repressed state begins with the first encounter with the ghost, which knocks him to the ground in a reclining position. He utters, “King, father” in the voice of a small, scared boy. Psychoanalysis made out the child’s inner world as nightmarish and terrifying, which the ghost seems to represent. He is a hooded, faceless specter with a static, mechanical voice—although it was Olivier himself who provided the voice, hinting that the ghost of the father is a “dark, threatening” figure within Hamlet’s own mind. In a series of disjointed cuts that defy any attempts to map a “real” physical progression, Hamlet follows the ghost up a staircase swallowed in mist. Hamlet’s queries—“Wither wilt thou lead me” “speak, I’ll go no further”—read as the “fearful, struggling person” in analysis, resistant to discovering the truth. Before the ghost begins his story, the camera pans to the back of Hamlet’s head, reflective of its preoccupation with Olivier’s head throughout the film as well as the psychoanalytic parlance of “head shrink” or “having your head examined.” In the enactment of the ghost’s story, the misty borders of the frame obscure Claudius’s head and thus leave open the possibility that Hamlet is imagining himself committing the murder. The scene ends with Hamlet appearing to awake or come to as if from a dream, again lying on his back, sweat soaking his brow.

Framed as a taxing analytic session, this experience leads to more purposeful, self-aware encounters with the “diseased material” of his troubled mind (Menninger). Olivier’s decision to have Hamlet overhear Polonius’s plan means that Hamlet is conscious of acting cruelly towards Ophelia. He kisses her hair regretfully at the end of the scene and we seem to share Hamlet’s perspective as the camera slowly pulls away from her slumped figure on the stairs. The camera then trails up a series of stairs to a tower overlooking the sea for the “To be or not to be” soliloquy. Moving this soliloquy after the nunnery scene makes it more explicitly a vehicle for self-examination. Indeed, the camera pierces the back of his head before moving out onto the
waves, their roiling and crashing a metaphor for the contents of his mind. Here, it is not only the viewer who is given privileged access. Hamlet is seeing into his own mind: when he drops his dagger into the sea, the stage directions indicate that he “stands looking down” at it (Dent). Implicit in this scene and stage direction in particular is a division between the subject and his subconscious self; that is, the subconscious exists as a separate entity or space that he is able to view as an outsider. Meanwhile, the body of the actor, as in the image below, is free to assume a state of repose.

Figure 10: Olivier as Hamlet performing “To be or not to be.” Source: Hamlet, directed by Laurence Olivier (1948; The Criterion Collection, 2000), DVD.

The film also figures the players as an acting out of subconscious “wishes and desires.” The troupe of actors includes a single boy to whom Hamlet gives special attention, including costuming him in the wig he will wear as the queen in the dumb show. Olivier looks down at the
boy skeptically, perhaps regretfully, as he does so. Is Hamlet seeing himself as a small boy, the wig a symbol of his attachment to his mother? The dumb show thus becomes the second time in the film that the murder is reenacted with the murderer’s identity tied obliquely to Hamlet. The staging of the dumb show incorporates both circumstantial evidence—proving Claudius’s guilt—and self-incriminating evidence.

By now, climbing up winding stairs signals that Hamlet is about to travel deeper into the space of the subconscious, which he does once again as he proceeds to Gertrude’s chambers, drawing out the words “Mother, Mother, Mother.” Indeed, this will be the penultimate therapeutic encounter. In the 1937 stage production, Hamlet’s desire for his mother, to the extent that it was visible, appeared one-sided. In the closet scene, “he smothered his mother in an utterly lascivious kiss, which she wiped away with horror” (Cottrell). In the film, their relationship is reciprocal, and as familial as it is romantic. The effect of casting Eileen Herlie—an actress over a decade younger than Olivier—works as much to emphasize Hamlet’s desire to sleep with his mother as it does his desire to be a child again, to go back to the “womb.” After all, the bed, with its folds of sensual drapery, is at once the place of birth and consummation. At the end of the scene, Hamlet embraces Gertrude and then rests his head in her lap—sitting on the bed—while she strokes his hair as if he were a small child. They reach this place, however, only after exorcising the “rank … dark spots” of their relationship: her complicity in the King’s death, her unnatural lust, the element of sexual attraction, and the figure of the father.

Practically from this scene onwards, Hamlet no longer appears a fearful, struggling patient but rather a princely figure unburdened by hidden, painful emotions. In the following scene with Claudius, the close-up on the clenching of Olivier’s hands as he ruminates, “My mother: father and mother is man and wife,” is one of the final symptoms of an inner conflict.
Hamlet’s last soliloquy, and the only one that takes place after the scene with Gertrude, is cut. The character next appears in the film’s enactment of the sea voyage narrated in Hamlet’s letter to Horatio. In combination with the scene itself, the stage directions suggest that the decision to represent this scene stemmed from the opportunity to portray Hamlet as the dashing, noble figure he had yet to be: “The men of the pirate ship surge on the deck of the ship bearing Hamlet, who is seen to slip across the main stream of men on to the deck of the pirate ship, Hamlet moving left to right” (Dent). He is both physically able and socially astute: “The Pirate Captain … seems pleased to see him, patting him on the shoulder and taking him by the hand.” The directions add that, “beyond this foreground action can be seen the ship which had been bearing Hamlet going further and further away.” The shot is symbolic of the physical and emotional ties with Elsinore that Hamlet has cut.

From his costume to his manner, the Hamlet that reappears in Denmark is visibly more comfortable, at ease. Denmark is itself different, with birds chirping and a natural outdoor setting that contrast with the gloomy confines of the castle. That it is the shadow of Hamlet’s head that first appears onscreen in this scene, overlapping exactly with the skull of Yorick, indicates that his “mind” is better made up. One of the main publicity images for the film featured Olivier’s head next to the skull he holds up in his hands, so the conflation of the two in this moment suggests a kind of reconciliation. Moreover, that the skull belongs to a beloved childhood figure, leading Olivier to effectively cuddle with the skull as he holds it, highlights that it is partly by recovering some of the normalcy and security of his childhood (including the motherly embraces of Gertrude) that Hamlet is now able to better function. The proud proclamation of his name and position when he confronts Laertes— “This is I, Hamlet the Dane!”—speaks to this newfound wholeness. Hamlet’s sudden subscription to ideas of providence, which scholars have perceived
as inconsistent, comes across here as the successful outcome of the character’s earlier struggles. Significantly, Hamlet’s speech to Laertes, admitting that “what I have done” was “madness,” is retained in full.

That Hamlet’s recuperation comes at the expense of Gertrude’s suffering is something the film seems to take for granted. In the mother-focused domain of late 1940s psychoanalysis, it is perhaps appropriate that the mother should feel the consequences of the realization of her failed nurturing, whereas the child could be finally free. In Hamlet, Gertrude drinks knowingly, and resolutely, from the poisoned chalice after a long close-up of her face. They have one last mother-son moment, perhaps the most loving and well-adjusted of the film, as he kneels below her, drawing her face close to his own, while she wipes his face. Clearly, his forgiveness is not enough. After the “crucial interview with Hamlet,” Roger Furse notes, “the Queen expresses her more subdued attitude of mind in a single-toned garment of dark velvet, with less decoration than before. Her hair is dressed more severely and is no longer set off by a flamboyant head-dress.” When Claudius caresses her breasts following this “crucial interview,” she clutches them with a pained expression on her face, as if recalling their motherly purpose and ashamed of their sexual connotations.

To return, however, to Menninger’s analogy, the final scene shows the extent to which Hamlet’s house has been put in order. Especially compared to the experimental camera effects earlier in the film, it is strikingly old-fashioned, and the most like filmed theatre, particularly at Hamlet’s death. The scene occurs center-stage, while “in semi-circle in the background are mourning people” (Dent). They flank Hamlet reverentially. No lines remain that could affect the film’s recuperative narrative — such as “what a wounded name, / Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!” Even Horatio’s “Now cracks a noble heart!” is cut, as if too
reminiscent of the distress that Hamlet is meant to have overcome. Horatio pronounces the play’s closing lines, which are consistent with its narrative: “For he was likely, had he been put on, / To have proved most royally.” Of Hamlet’s lines, only “O, I could tell you …” and “tell my story” remain, as they highlight the act of unburdening that has proved curative for this Hamlet.

Indeed, the film reminds the viewer of the psychoanalytic process that has made possible the recovered dignity and mental health of the “sweet prince” and “soldier.” The camera revisits the significant spots of the castle as it winds its way up to the funeral procession with which the film began, pausing the longest on Gertrude’s bed. The camera’s first tour of Elsinore endowed these spaces with a degree of mystery; revisiting them now that they have been placed in their “true context” is another measure of order restored. The shadowy regions of Hamlet’s mind have been made less shadowy: light has been brought into them through the penetration of the camera and Hamlet’s own confrontations with the enemies within. The film, then, manages to depict both the ego’s powers of repression and the effects of an ego that has been relieved of intrusions of the subconscious.

Reviews of the film at the time tended to focus on the impression of depth and interiority, the level of insight into Hamlet’s character, offered by the film and the medium of film itself. They registered Olivier’s attempt to use film to counteract the perceived superficiality and manic quality of Olivier’s stage Hamlet. *Hamlet* proved that film can do more than simply show “character in action” (*Sunday Times*) and the “merely picturesque” (*Tatler and Bystander*). It shows “character in conflict with itself; the tragedy of the human heart” (*Sunday Times*) and the “illumination…of mind and heart.” The *Tatler and Bystander* makes a direct comparison between theatre and film, noting the camera’s:
powers of penetration not only into Elsinore with its roof off, as it were, but into the
movements of the mind which are the chief concern of the film—as of the play … [the]
camera reveals character at a lower depth than the footlights […] Olivier’s whole
performance, as an actor, like his whole conception as the film’s producer and director, is
keyed to this mysterious capacity of the camera for getting under the skin or at least
behind the make-up.

The “capacity of the camera” also creates a distinction between surface and depth, in that
Hamlet’s physical body registers only the “tip of the iceberg,” while what Olivier refers to as the
“visual aspect” illustrates the roiling conflict beneath. It is significant, then, that the final scene
puts the least weight on the “visual aspect,” or rather, relegates it to mere background for the
actor. The reduced role of the “scenic aspect,” the film’s primary language for Hamlet’s
subconscious, suggests, again, the triumph of Hamlet’s rational, mature ego.

3.3 “The tropics have got him”: Orson Welles and Voodoo Macbeth

In What is Psychoanalysis? Ernest Jones likens the mental states of “savages” to that of
“neurotics and children” (82). Governed by “the primary instincts and the primitive modes of
thought,” they share a “merely disguised and not an unaltered unconscious” (82). At the time of
Orson Welles’s Voodoo Macbeth, in 1936, Haiti was a popular symbol for “notions of
primitivism and savagery” because of the United States’ recent, nearly two-decade occupation of
the country (Renda 124). As Mary C. Renda has shown, accounts of white U.S. Marines
stationed in the country helped to produce an image of Haiti as a “preserve of human
primitivism” (248) and a “representation of the Freudian unconscious” (249). Welles’s Voodoo

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42 Welles voiced the eponymous character in the radio show The Shadow in the late 1930s, which often used Haitian
tropes such as drumbeats and Voodoo-practicing villains to represent the “evil” in the famous tagline: “Who knows
what evil lurks in the hearts of men.” In addition, as Rippy discusses, one of his first film projects, never produced,
was an adaption of The Heart of Darkness, “one of the most famous stories using the paradigm of the white
consciousness lured into and destroyed by primitive regression,” that proposed to make the viewer one with the
protagonist (90).
Macbeth, set in Haiti and featuring an all-black cast, capitalized on this discourse to draw attention to the weakness and vulnerability of the mature, rational ego.43

Macbeth was chosen as the first “classical work” to be performed in New York’s Negro Theater Unit, a program of the Works Project Administration’s Federal Theater Project. John Houseman, the white producer who had recently been appointed head of the Unit, established that one of its goals would be to produce “classical works of which our actors would be interpreters without concession or reference to color” (Callow 221). He tapped Welles to direct and to select the repertoire, though it was Welles’s wife Virginia that came up with the idea of a “Voodoo” Macbeth. As one of the Voodoo Macbeth actors recalls, white audiences were resistant to seeing people of color in “classical work.” “If it was a maid’s role, go ahead, but if it was something from the classics, no” (qtd in Schwartz 23). In an interview with The New York Times, Welles implies that to make an all-black production of Shakespeare appealing to a white audience, some concession or reference to color would have to be made:

We were very anxious to do one of Shakespeare’s dramas in the Negro Theatre … and Macbeth seemed, in all respects, the most adaptable. The stormy career of Christophe, who became the “Negro King of Haiti” and ended by killing himself when his cruelty led to a revolt, forms a striking parallel to the history of Macbeth. The costumes and the settings of the productions are therefore in the period of Haiti’s grimmest turbulence.” (Crowther)

The “adaptability” of Macbeth in particular is inseparable from the role of Haiti and its famous revolutionary king in the public imagination. In the “countless images of black kings and

43 Reading Voodoo Macbeth in context of the place of Haiti in the public imagination underscores the extent to which the production was informed by and endorsed blatant racism as part of its modernist primitivist project. As Rena Fraden points out, “Whatever the FTP bureaucrats said about creating a theatre of and for Negroes and not for downtown whites… Houseman and… Orson Welles had no intention of forgetting about downtown audiences; indeed, they geared and produced with an eye toward downtown audiences” (153). The accounts of Welles and Houseman of their experience working on the production (and of Welles’s most contemporary biographer, Simon Callow) are saturated with the same kind of sentiments white reviewers expressed. I am trying to understand the psychological/emotional paradigm that the production activates through this confluence of Shakespeare and discourses about Haiti.
emperors” that “populated U.S. American culture in the 1920s and 1930s,” Christophe was the most popular, from a “proud, dignified figure” to a “savage” and the “greatest monster in all of history” (Renda 216-217). He could thus be seen to embody similar contradictions in Macbeth. Moreover, the moniker Welles uses for him, “Negro King of Haiti,” underscores the ways in which Christophe’s image and reputation were conflated with Haiti’s and with his blackness. For Welles, that conflation reflected the dichotomy between interior and exterior, self and environment, in Macbeth.

Once the basic concept of the “witches as Voodoo priestesses” had been determined, Welles, Virginia, and the production’s set and costume designer Nat Karson “began to amass research on Directoire modes, Napoleonic uniforms and tropic vegetation” (Houseman 185). They sought to bring Haiti to life in Harlem’s Lafayette Theater, framing the production, in the words of Richard Halpern, as “an anthropological field trip” for white audiences (37). The set consisted of a backdrop of palm fronds and a single set piece modeled on Saint Souci, the Citadel of Christophe. Houseman and Welles hired a troupe of African (not Haitian) drummers, which included an “authentic” Voodoo witch doctor, to perform on stage throughout the production. Karson’s sketch of the priest (a character invented for the production), shows the exaggerated features common to the portraits of Haitians featured in the accounts of white travelers (Fig. 11). Reviewers found themselves transported to the “rank and fever-stricken jungles” of Haiti (New York Times), “riotous with color, pulsating with voodoo, dank with the jungle … reverberant with thunder and drums, and shrill with the squeak and gibber of the … papaloys and mamaloys” [Creole terms for Haitian priests and priestesses] (Hartford Courant).
These elements of the environment — the jungle, the heat, the Voodoo, the drumming — were also associated with severe psychological effects suffered by “civilized “visitors to the country. Author of two bestselling books based on his experience in Haiti, the former Marine John Houston Craige describes the “mysterious, terrible psychological disorder” (83) brought on by the “strange degenerating magic of the tropical sun” (90). One man, Craige recounts, was enjoying his tenure in the country until “the environment began to get on his nerves” (89). The sound of drums became inescapable, throbbing constantly in his mind. Craige describes his own emotional state under the influence of a Voodoo curse, including “strange currents of horror and foreboding” in which his “intellect” was “tossed about like a boat at sea.” “Gazing wide-eyed into the lewd, green jaws of insanity,” he “wrestled” for his “soul through the mad, red dreams of delirium” (271). In “lucid moments” he was able “stand aside and analyze myself,” including consulting books by “Freud, Jung, Adler, Kraff-Ebing,” though they offered him no diagnosis (271).
At the same time, of course, the danger and the pleasure of Haiti, according to these accounts, was its ability to stir emotions that already existed within the sufferer, so deeply rooted and so primal that no amount of analysis could help. The author of *The Magic Island*, another popular travel book about Haiti, recalls how “Something inside myself awoke and responded to it” while watching a Voodoo ceremony, “emotional reactions, perhaps deplorable in a civilized person” (Seabrook 42). Elsewhere, he acknowledges the “terrors aroused by elemental nightmares in my own soul” while watching a Voodoo sacrifice (37). A similar ambiguity characterizes the role of the supernatural in *Macbeth*, while its effects on the Macbeths, from sleeplessness and delirium to “thick-coming” fancies, echo the symptoms described in Haitian travel accounts. As Mary Floyd-Wilson writes, “Macbeth imagines that his existence is identical with the walking shadows, spirits, and ghosts he has witnessed: insubstantial, unreliable, and indistinguishable from environmental noise” (226). The play refuses to answer whether the tragedy lies with the infectious air and weird women or “a mind diseased.”

Through *Macbeth*, then, Welles could animate the different threads of this narrative about a civilized outsider succumbing to the tropics of Haiti. (The “tropics have got him” was a common phrase for the “psychological disorder” of marines, according to Craige.) Macbeth, played by Jack Carter, and the male members of the court, wore “full Napoleonic regalia,” the dress of Haiti’s imperial colonizers (Houseman 196). On his first entrance, according to the prompt book, Macbeth pushes his way through “leaves and tall grass” (France). While he and Banquo might look different from the crowds of Voodoo celebrants who have been singing and dancing on stage since the curtain, it is clear that they are accustomed to them. It is only when the witches, wearing “gnarled and hairy” hides, hail him a second time as “Thane of Cawdor” that Macbeth stops (Houseman 190). He addresses his second line— “How far is’t called to
Forres”—to Hecate, apparently unaffected by the character’s appearance, which included a “12-foot-bullwhip” (Houseman 190). John Houston Craige describes the “astounding blend of savagery and civilization” that characterized Haiti, especially the capital of Port a Prince, where the “impossible and the incredible walked bodily abroad in the full light of day” and “Cosmopolitan and cannibal rubbed shoulders” (CC 17). The production made clear that the palace, Birnam Wood, and the witches’ heath were all part of the same jungle. A classical waltz played during the banquet scene, but only moments before and after the Voodoo drumming and chanting.

According to Houseman, Carter, who played Macbeth, could “pass for white,” but his face was darkened for performances so that he could not “pass” in the role (194). The production clearly wanted to signal Macbeth’s “natural” affinity with the jungle and the Voodoo elements. Welles expanded the role of Hecate, played by one of the few professional actors in the cast, into a kind of surrogate Macbeth figure. The promptbook shows that he speaks Macbeth’s lines at the end of the second act, after the banquet—“No boasting like a fool! Seize upon Macduff”—as a direction to Macbeth. Macbeth also takes on aspects of Hecate, such as when he utters an “invocation,” as the stage directions call his plea for the witches to “answer” him. On this command, the gates of the palace open and Hecate appears within, in a “strange light” (76). The production also included a “band of cripples,” which appeared on two occasions and recognized a leader in Macbeth:

A figure appears in the crack of light where the gate stands ajar, with another behind him. They push the gates slowly, almost furtively open. They drag themselves into the courtyard. A dozen or so follow. They are the cripples. Macbeth watches them, fascinated as they limp over to him, a grotesque, silent little army. Suddenly, they all stop moving and fall to their knees at his feet. He stiffens in the throne. From far off comes the chant, “All hail, Macbeth! Hail, King of Scotland!” Then, from above, come the hoarse voices of the three Witches…” (62)
These expanded and invented characters reveal Macbeth himself to be an agent of Voodoo magic. If he “fascinated” by the cripples, it is because this “grotesque, silent little army,” like Hecate, is an extension of himself. To the extent that blackness and Haitian voodoo were symbolic of the primitive unconscious, or in Jones’s words, an unconscious that has been “disguised” but not “altered,” the production asserts that Macbeth ultimately suffers because of that unconscious. Significantly, the promptbook also notes that Macbeth “stares” when he sees the “jungle growing” and “still rising leaves” in the final scene, where the stage is “filled with leaves that the army is bearing” (94, 96). That is, in the context of narratives about Haiti, the jungle and Voodoo drums are both “environmental noise” and symbolic of forces within the self.

Indeed, the tendency of critics to compare Voodoo Macbeth to Eugene O’Neill’s Emperor Jones (1920) foregrounds Welles’s appropriation of Macbeth within a psychoanalytic framework. If O’Neill was the “playwright who epitomizes the Freudian period,” as David Sievers would note in 1955, in Freud on Broadway, Emperor Jones was more explicitly expressionistic than Voodoo Macbeth in its use of Haiti and race to represent the “regression to the primitive—to the racial unconscious” (Sievers 97). As Marguerite Rippy observes, “Expressionism used romantic racial symbolism to evoke the internal emotions moved on to the external skin—thus the tragedy of race in dramas like … The Emperor Jones, in which the beating tom-toms and the jungle are tangible performance metaphors for Brutus Jones’s own interior struggle of conscience and guilt” (72). That Carter’s Macbeth was referred to as a “sort of Brutus Jones Macbeth” suggests that elements of the setting were being read similarly (qtd. in Rippy 75).

However, as we have seen, in part because of the need to employ as many actors as possible, Welles’s vision of Haiti was much more spectacular, illusionistic, and on a larger scale
(whereas *Emperor Jones* featured a single drumbeat, *Voodoo Macbeth* employed a six-person troupe). This made *Voodoo Macbeth* different on two accounts. First, Haitian travel narratives by white Americans did claim that a “return to civilization” or a “change of environment” could cure the psychological disorder brought on by a stay in Haiti. As Craige declared, “White men think strange thoughts and do strange deeds in the tropics” (268). More so than *Emperor Jones*, and by channeling the ambiguity of *Macbeth*, *Voodoo Macbeth* testifies to the power of the external, primitive environment to disturb one’s emotional state. Second, *Voodoo Macbeth* created an opportunity for its audience to take an “anthropological field trip,” to have something “inside themselves” awaken. The Federal Theater Project defended the production in these terms, as “pure theatre—Negro Theatre—that kind that is instinctive and inspired” (qtd. in Fraden 154). *Vogue* magazine called the production a “gift of the Negro to a more tired, complicated, and self-conscious race,” allowing audiences to “recapture briefly what once we were, or like to think we were before ‘civilization’” (qtd. in Fraden 154).

### 3.4. Birthing *Macbeth* on film

The opening sequence of Orson Welles’s film of *Macbeth*, over a decade later, shows the witches’ hands pulling and tearing at a mass of clay that emerges from their boiling cauldron. A shot of the finished product, a rudimentary clay figure of what looks to be a baby, appears on the screen at the exact moment the witches pronounce the character’s name, is “there to meet with Macbeth” (Fig. 12). The witches’ hands mold the doll and pull the slippery figure out of the cauldron in a scene that is evocative of a birth. One of the most distinct features of the doll are its eyebrows, pointed downward in an expression of anger, even devilishness. Throughout the film, key developments happen to the doll before the “human” Macbeth, played by Welles. The doll is crowned, for instance, before the witches announce the prophecy to Macbeth and Banquo on the
heath, and before Macbeth crowns himself in front of a mirror at the castle after the murder. During the dagger speech, the camera switches away from Macbeth’s face to a blurred image of the doll, momentarily standing in for the dagger. Finally, when Macbeth is beheaded, it is the doll whose head the viewer sees removed.

This mud baby, reminiscent of a Voodoo doll, is perhaps the film’s clearest link to the stage production. Here, the doll is not so much under their spell as their creation. Unlike in Voodoo Macbeth, there is little ambiguity surrounding the question of where the environment begins and his self ends, as Macbeth is quite literally made out of the earth. The film’s focus on this doll, then, is freighted with psychoanalytic significance. In particular, it resonates strikingly with Kleinian object relations theory, the darker tones of Anna Freud’s theories of child development, and Ernest Jones’s analogy of the unconscious as the “still living infantile mind.”

Indeed, as Anna Freud wrote, based on her experience working in war nurseries, “Children have to be safeguarded against the primitive horrors of the war not because horrors and atrocities are so strange to them, but because we want them at this decisive stage of their development to overcome and estrange themselves from the primitive atrocious wishes of their own infantile nature” (qtd in War Inside).

Still, as her emphasis on stages of development suggests, Anna Freud believed in a “lawful continuity” from the “primitive psychical makeup of an infant” through to the “elaborate organization of an adult personality” (Rose). The Kleinians, however, were less convinced that the subject could ever “overcome” and “estrange” herself from these “primitive atrocious wishes.” As Stephan Frosh observes, Kleinians “portray the terrors of existence with most verve:

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44 And also perhaps by Welles’s own experiences … As a young child, Welles was put in the care of an “eminent German psychologist who specialized in unusual children (Leaming 17.) The professor “liked to exhibit Orson before psychology students who questioned him about his dreams” (17). Welles would apparently search for case studies of particularly “lurid” dreams in the professor’s library in order to entertain the class.
Figure 12: Macbeth being formed from the witches’ muck. Source: *Macbeth*, directed by Orson Welles (1948; Olive Signature, 2016), DVD.
having its origins within each one of us, destructiveness runs riot if the environment is not built to contain and modify it” (52). Thus they were concerned with the “potential destructiveness of the external environment and the damage this can do to the possibilities of nurture and of support for the infant’s incipient selfhood” (52).

In Welles’s Macbeth, not only does this doll visually lurk behind (or within) the adult Macbeth, but the film depicts an “environment” that seems designed to foster and rear its destructive impulses. (Most obviously, the witches are figured as its mothers through the birth-like sequence). In the courtyard of the castle, a chorus of greased, bare-chested men pound drums while a series of heads on stakes can be seen trailing into the distance. The spears carried by Duncan’s men feature a Celtic design that resembles the witches’ staffs as well as the twisted tree branches of the heath. Water drips down the walls of spaces that are supposedly indoors, including the cave-like space in which the banquet takes place. Voodoo Macbeth invented a priest character to shepherd the sinister beggars; here that part is expanded and made more dubious. Particularly without the prologue that would be added to the re-edited version of the film in 1950 it is difficult to tell that the priest is meant to be a figure of the “cross” and of the “Christian law and order” “newly arrived here.”45 The film seems much more interested in the rival forces, the “agents of chaos, priests of hell and magic; sorcerers and witches” that populate “ancient Scotland, half lost in the mist which hangs between recorded history and the time of legends.”

The doll also seems to set the tone for Welles’s performance. For Beverle Houston, the doll is an iteration of the Wellesian “power baby,” the “eating, sucking, foetus-like creature” that

45 Adding a prologue was one of several changes pressed upon Welles to make the film more favorable with critics, and thus more like Olivier’s Hamlet.
appears throughout the films (3). Robert Kolker associates it with the Wellesian theme of the
“malformed ego” (188). Indeed, Welles is a belligerent, hapless Macbeth, accentuated by his
decision for the character to start drinking, and become increasingly drunk, after he is crowned.
He drips with sweat and tends to wander aimlessly through the halls of the castle; he seems more
to stumble upon the banquet by chance than arrive there on purpose. In one scene, he sits on an
everous throne, looking down at a practically empty court, and appears to be an overgrown
child playing at being king. Reviewers called Welles’s Macbeth a “dead-end kid on the make”
(Time) with a penchant for the “dumb suffering and fear undergone by the murderer” (LA Times).
Life magazine’s impression of the film as a “jumble of gallopings and sweaty close-ups and fog
and bubbling cauldrons” is notable for the way it reads the many close-ups of Welles’s face as
part the general scenic effect of darkness and chaos. Like the baby, he is barely distinguished
from the crude background. In his drunken clumsiness, Welles’s Macbeth would seem to channel
Menninger’s “fearful, struggling patient,” who “bumps into a chair and it falls over; he sidesteps
and hits a lamp, which crashes.” Indeed, European critics in particular interpreted the scenery as
the character’s subconscious; for Claude Beylie, for instance, it was “essentially the pathetic
reflection of the conscious, or the rather the unconscious of the hero” (qtd in Davies 3). Yet
Macbeth remains in a kind of psychoanalytic purgatory; no light ever comes into the space.

Beginning with the birth scene, the film identifies a crisis of mothering at the heart of its
nightmarish world. Freud interpreted Macbeth as a tragedy of childlessness, in which the
“internal frustration” of the Macbeths with their lack of an heir is aggravated through the death
of Duncan (Hillman). Whether or not Welles was familiar with this reading, the film defines
Lady Macbeth, played by Jeannette Nolan, largely in terms of her relationship to motherhood
and children. In a tight-knit bodice, she first appears writhing on a bed of furs as her soliloquy
plays in voiceover. Cutting the lines between “yet do I fear thy nature” and “Come, you spirits” excises much of the material about Macbeth and stresses instead the erotic pleasure she receives from visions of cruelty and the removal of her mother’s milk. The film also makes her a mother figure to Macbeth. Nolan was four years older than Welles, and appears visibly older. As the two plan the murders, she is consistently placed on a higher level than he, while he looks up at her with expressions of fear. Nolan shrieks the line “Why did you bring these daggers!” — the first word hitting such a shrill register that the viewer cannot tell whether it is meant to be terrifying or comedic.

By expanding the role of Lady Macduff and staging two scenes in which the two female characters appear together, the film both further chastens Lady Macbeth and leaves room for her redemption. Like Ophelia in Olivier’s *Hamlet*, Lady Macduff appears almost as a visitor from another world, with rosy cheeks and a halo of blond ringlets. She is also always present, seeming to reside with her children in the castle. After the murders, it is Lady Macbeth who cries out Ross’s line, “Who knows who did this more than bloody deed?” Her innocent questioning, of course, contrasts with Lady Macbeth’s own role in the deeds. In their first scene together, it is Lady Macbeth, not Ross, who tells Lady Macduff that her husband has left. As if expecting more from a female confidante, the camera lingers on Lady Macduff’s confused reaction after Lady Macbeth exits abruptly, cold to the mother’s cries “to leave his wife, to leave his babes.” In the second, Lady Macbeth participates in the scene between Lady Macduff and her son (who was played by Orson Welles’s daughter). A nurse and a babbling baby also appear in the scene. Lady Macduff’s lines are divided between the two actresses. The child addresses the question about his father — “was he a traitor?” —to Lady Macbeth, who answers him while framed against one of the castle’s spiky, prison-like windows: “All traitors must be hanged.” Here it becomes clearer
that Lady Macbeth feels her childlessness acutely (a state that is hinted at earlier when Nolan chokes slightly but audibly on the word “childhood” as she chides Macbeth that it is “the eye of childhood / that fears a painted devil.”) She is positioned exactly in between mother and son as they engage in their tender exchange, and the camera dwells long enough on her face to show regret.

The murders of Lady Macduff and her children thus occur in the castle, presided over by Macbeth himself, contributing to one critic’s complaint that any “moments of tenderness, remorse and honor disappear entirely” (New Republic). Lady Macbeth is shown lingering outside the room, listening to their cries. Her glimmers of remorse and awareness are juxtaposed with the lack of any faculties of reflection in Macbeth. Indeed, Macbeth’s presence at the murders seems to proceed more logically from the “primitive atrocious wishes” of the creature created out of the witches’ muck at the beginning of the film. It is the nightmarish inner life of an infant or child brought to life. His problem is thus the opposite of Olivier’s Hamlet, not the repression of his subconscious, but its unfiltered expression.

Welles once told an interviewer that he “hate[d]” psychoanalysis. “I think if you’re guilty of something you should live with it. Get rid of it—how can you get rid of a real guilt?” (Leaming 33). Both iterations of Welles’s Macbeth suggest, in a way, that you can’t—not guilt specifically, but subconscious feelings, instincts, and desires more broadly. Voodoo Macbeth leveraged associations between the subconscious, Haiti, and blackness to show how Macbeth is overwhelmed by forces both inside and outside himself. Carter’s regal costume, his stately palace, and the elegance of the court illustrate his “civilized ego.” In the film, however, no such division between “civilized” and “primitive” exists: Macbeth is a blunt instrument of the witches and their “primordial women’s muck” (Huston). Welles filmed Macbeth in three weeks and with
a very small budget, under the auspices of the “B movie” studio Republic Pictures. Sets and costumes were recycled from previous Republic productions. According to the film’s co-producer, Welles “had for years wanted to do a Shakespeare film and had tried to sell the idea to anyone who would listen” (Wilson). It may be, then, that Welles recognized a way to turn necessity into concept. One of the earliest ways that critics theorized the difference between film and theater was that whereas theater “relegates the background to the background” in the cinema “man and background are of the same stuff” (Bela Balazs, qtd. in Davies 9). Welles’s Macbeth, with its makeshift set and costumes, examines the implications of a self forged out of crude materials.

For Olivier, however, the value in filming Hamlet was that the camera could be used to “divulge something definitely subconscious” to the viewer—or rather, create a clear division between the character and his subconscious that was impossible on the stage. Much like the progress and process of psychoanalysis that Menninger puts forward in his article, a highly repressed, despondent Hamlet regains a healthy, mature ego through a series of encounters with the agents of his subconscious. The film animates “background” selectively and strategically as it relates to the illumination of the “shadowy recesses” of Hamlet’s mind.

Unconscious emotion, one’s “unknown forces” or “inner self,” was, in the era of Welles and Olivier, a new iteration of the problem of the “human medium” that Harley Granville Barker confronted in the productions discussed in the previous chapter. Barker saw his ritualistic Shakespeare productions as an antidote to what he saw as the debasement of human emotion in the Shakespearean performances of idiosyncratic actors like Henry Irving. That is, for Barker, as it was for George Henry Lewes, Shakespearean drama embodied human emotion in its most ideal form. In their respective productions, Welles and Olivier were not only interested in the
aesthetic question of how to perform the subconscious, they were also interested in Shakespearean character as a site to understand and define it. Indeed, analyses of Shakespeare’s tragic character had been instrumental in the development of psychoanalysis; their subconscious emotions were treated as case-studies of the ways in which subconscious emotion in the human psyche operates. The films’ concern with family relationships offers perhaps the clearest evidence for their immersion in post-war psychoanalysis, as well as Welles’s and Olivier’s desire to put these characters “on the couch” and diagnose them.

Indeed, as Alan Sinfield notes, “Freudian criticism, such as Ernest Jones and others applied to Hamlet, purported to revise drastically the terms of modern understanding, but may be placed a more elaborate kind of character criticism” in which “the individual is envisaged as the source of coherence, meaning, and truth” (Sinfield 25). The same might be said of the Freudian performances of Welles and Olivier. If not the “conventional standards of the causes of deep emotion,” both actor-directors recognize performance as a means to reveal the inner, hidden causes of deep emotion. Moreover, they assume Shakespeare’s tragic characters to be ideal subjects of this investigation, as individuals who harbor and express the deepest emotion. In fact, particularly with Olivier, filmed Shakespeare performance is a site to reconcile character criticism and psychoanalysis, with its purported demolishment, in the words of Ernest Jones, of an “anthropomorphic and anthropocentric outlook on life.” Film helps to maintain an impression of Hamlet and Macbeth as coherent characters/individuals, whose behavior can be rationalized and explained.46

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46 I wonder if there is something to be made here of Matt Ffytche’s argument in The Foundation of the Unconscious that psychoanalysis had at stake a “much larger moral and existential task: the problem of how to become a ‘self,’ or how to reveal a ‘truer’ or more autonomous layers of the self…” (228); that it is invested in questions of autonomy and independence.
Chapter 4: Reclaiming Social Emotions through *King Lear*

In *King Lear*, emotions are excessive and unwieldy. Try as he might, King Lear cannot command his “climbing sorrow” or “hot tears” to stay down. Lear is arguably the only protagonist in Shakespearean tragedy to die as a result of emotional suffering alone. Playing the part is often likened to climbing a mountain, while for audiences, the intensity of the play’s emotions makes it notoriously and almost unbearably affecting. As Alexander Leggatt notes, “throughout the production history of *King Lear* the main test has been… whether the audience can be made to cry” (9). The assumption that the play’s emotions occur within a social and moral framework, that they have important effects, is obviously key to this test. Characters around Lear respond to his suffering, and through that suffering, Lear experiences emotional growth that enables him to feel for others. Viewed through this lens, the play celebrates what psychologists and neuroscientists now refer to as “social emotions,” among them empathy and compassion, emotions that, broadly defined, “result from observing, imagining, or anticipating emotional states of others” (Ugazio, Ruff).47

Indeed, prior to Peter Brook’s landmark production of the play in 1962, this narrative of redemption through suffering was central to the British tradition of performing *King Lear*, while productions during and after World War II put greater value on the play’s relationships.48 As one

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47 Of course, social emotions are central to phenomenological and cognitive approaches in theatre studies, following the popularization of the discovery of mirror neurons in the early twentieth century, Terms have proliferated to describe the cognitive processes that facilitate audience response, among them “mirror mechanisms” “kinesthetic empathy” and “emotional contagion.” I realize that my use of “social emotions” is underdeveloped here, and casts too wide a net, as I try to understand them through a cultural history of emotions lens, rather than the cognitive one that has dominated theatre studies.

48 R.A. Foakes offers a thorough account of how King Lear “changed its nature almost overnight” circa 1960, from a play “concerned about Lear’s pilgrimage to redemption” to “Shakespeare’s bleakest and most despairing of suffering” (3-4). Both Foakes and Maynard Mack suggest that the change concerns political events, for, in the words of Mack, “After two world wars and Auschwitz, our sensibility is significantly more in touch than our grandparents was with the play’s jagged violence, its sadism, madness, and processional of deaths…” (57).
of the most popular wartime Lears, the actor Donald Wolfit stressed the character’s concern for Poor Tom, the beggars, and the Fool. He was a Lear, according to one reviewer, “brimming with tender humanity” (qtd in Raw 61). The reunion with Cordelia was ceremonial in importance. According to Laurence Raw, “He [Lear] understood that the best way to resist tyranny was to hold Cordelia’s hand and vow to remain with her – even in death” while the overall message of the production was that “alternative ways of living could be possible, so long as people made the effort to communicate” (60). John Gielgud also played Lear during wartime, and recalls audiences telling him, “there’s a kind of catharsis, and when we come out of the theatre we are uplifted… It shows us that with all the appalling things going on, there is some glory, and something that is worth everything” (Croall 25). In this tradition, King Lear is leveraged as an emotional practice that celebrates the expression of intense emotion and its importance in social bonds. David Hillman’s observation that “tragic heroes’ lack of restraint in embracing their passions is precisely what these tragedies offer us as admirable, as pictures of the greatness of the human spirit” employs a universal “us,” but for the audiences of Wolfit and Gielgud, the character’s emotionalism had significance in light of “all the appalling things going on” (138).

Speaking of the influence of Brook’s production of King Lear, Laurence Olivier noted that “the image of King Lear has had its expression slightly changed” (Croall 47). My first aim in this chapter is to show how the play had its expression changed as an emotional practice. Both for the RSC production in 1962 and the film in 1971, Brook downplays the social, interpersonal function of emotion in the play. As a prime example, he cut what is perhaps the play’s most explicit instance of a character being moved by another character’s emotion, Edmund’s response to Edgar’s description of their father’s “burst” heart: “This speech of yours hath moved me, / And shall perchance do good” (V.iii.200-201). “You might feel dead inside while you watch,”
warns Pauline Kael in her scathing review of Brook’s film, reacting to the “dead” eyes and “frozen” expressions of the actors. Brook was famously inspired by Jan Kott’s essay “King Lear or Endgame,” which argues that King Lear shares Beckett’s absurdist, nihilistic world view. While for many critics filtering King Lear through a Beckettian lens seemed counter-intuitive (“I can’t see what is gained by going against the emotional climaxes of the play,” commented Susan Sontag of the theatre production, for instance), for Brook it was precisely the point (Hunt 50). That is, negating emotions in the most emotional of Shakespeare’s tragedies could make the most extreme, powerful statement of the emotional realities of a post-war, post-nuclear world.

My second aim in this chapter is to show how Edward Bond’s Lear, which premiered the same year as Brook’s film, and Ronald Harwood 1980 play The Dresser work to reassert social aspects of emotion in King Lear. The actor Donald Wolfit was a significant influence for both playwrights; Bond credits Wolfit’s wartime performance as Macbeth as his greatest education as a child and Harwood served as Wolfit’s dresser and biographer, providing the inspiration for the character of Sir in The Dresser. In very different ways, the “tender humanity” that Wolfit brought out in Lear, and Macbeth, is a touchstone for both plays.

At the same time that Bond’s and Harwood’s plays can be seen as a corrective to Brook’s use of King Lear, all of these approaches claim King Lear as a site for investigating social emotion. In her study of the history of empathy, Susan Lanzoni notes that its meaning of “to grasp another’s emotion” was only developed in the late 1940s but quickly became a keyword in popular culture and in a range of industries, signifying a demand for “new possibilities for connection, identification, and understanding that might improve social relations of all kinds.” And as Eli Zaretsky notes, by the 1960s, the popularity of psychoanalysis was waning, at least as a psychology of the individual. Instead, the “great post-Freudian texts of the
sixties preached the relative insignificance of the individual” and adopted an “other-directed paradigm” focused on the “social and political dimensions of personal life” (337).

4.1 Peter Brook’s King Lear in “Zombieland”

My initial reaction to the production was that it was more cerebral than moving; more brilliant as a set of choices than persuasive as an unfolding action. But I now suspect that the removal of sympathy and identification is the price we must pay for epic objectivity; that in, in forfeiting our conventional empathy for the poor old geezer tossed out on a stormy night by two cruel daughters, we prepares ourselves for the profounder emotionalism which comes from understanding the merciless logic of the play’s totality; the realization that the tragedy is not Lear’s but ours. (Marowitz 119)

This excerpt from Charles Marowitz’s “Lear Log,” his published record of serving as Brook’s assistant director on the 1962 production of King Lear, highlights how it was conceived as a reworking of an audience’s “conventional” emotional connection to the play and to Lear specifically. In a 1965 article entitled “Endgame as King Lear: or how to stop worrying and love Beckett,” Brook describes Beckett in terms that help to understand his approach to King Lear:

Beckett shows us man living in the mud and does not qualify this. Most other writers would feel forced to make out that mud has a dark fascination, that the man in the mud is martyred, misunderstood, that his misfortunes have made him special—or else that we are in the mud together, so it must be a friendly sort of mud, pulsing with heart. (9-10)

Both the term “qualify” and the idea of a community bonded in their suffering are relevant here. Kael, reviewing the film, claims that Shakespeare’s “words” “ring with all the meanings and emotions this production denies.” What this production “denies” is that Shakespeare’s words do social emotional work; they do not effectively communicate emotion with the aim of fostering connection. In other words, the language – rife as it is with descriptions of powerful, destructive emotions - is not “qualified” within a framework that acknowledges its communicative value.

Rather, Brook sought to depict what emotions historians term an “emotional regime” or an “emotional community” that values indifference and cruelty. For William Reddy, an “emotional regime” is a “necessary underpinning of any political regime” (qtd in Boddice 70).
It refers to the “set of normative emotions and the official rituals, practices and emotives that express it.” Marowitz describes the overall atmosphere of the production in emotional as well as visual terms: “an isolated and forbidding landscape, a lack of empathy, a slow continuum of action, or non-action, focusing on futility, exhaustion, cruelty.” Significantly, Brook came to the production of *King Lear* at the RSC after having spent nearly a year directing a film adaptation of *Lord of the Flies*, in which, when left to their own devices even “wanton boys” take to killing as a sport. That lament of Gloucester’s as he wanders blinded and bleeding on the heath (“As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods; / They kill us for sport”) had traditionally been cut in productions. That Brook restored this line is indicative of his, and Jan Kott’s, overall approach to the play. As Kott puts it bluntly in his essay, “*King Lear or Endgame,*” “the theme of *King Lear* is the decay and fall of the world” (152). The play makes a “tragic mockery of all eschatologies” and “established values disintegrate” (147). In performance, that thesis registered largely in terms of a breakdown or absence of values governing human interactions and relationships.

The visual elements of both theatrical and film productions communicated coldness and inhospitality. At the RSC, the dominant color was white or grey – white walls, white backcloth, metal thunder sheets, metal props, and consistently “bright, blinding white” lighting (Reeves 48). Six years later, Brook went to great lengths to find, quite literally, the coldest, whitest environment for filming the play: the frozen tundra of northern Denmark. For one critic, it was “forever winter; frozen, bleak, inimical to man” (qtd in Davies 149). In his memoirs *Threads of Times*, one of Brook’s only anecdotes about making the film is watching a pony sink into the earth so that only the top half of its body “showed above the surface of the bare grey Jutland landscape, as lonely as the moon” (153). Here, Brook himself correlates the visual setting with an emotional state of loneliness and isolation.
Paul Scofield’s white-bearded Lear was clearly figured as the leader of this political-emotional regime. At the RSC, reviewer referred to him as a “malignant old man with a black canker in his heart” (Leggatt), “unsentimental” (Croall 44), a “gruff, grizzled, north-country Lear (Reeves 49), and “a little bit too iron…a little bit implacable” (Croall 47). Leggatt notes that, ‘Where Gielgud used a variety of tones in reacting to his setbacks in the first scene, Scofield ground crisply on, seemingly as tough as ever” (49). In the film, Scofield’s Lear was even less prone to become emotional. Kael noted that Scofield is a “freezing actor,” an actor “who keeps us at a distance,” and threatens to “reduce Shakespeare’s lines to words that no longer communicate.’ This lack of affect applied to the other actors as well, “drained of emotional force” with “dead eyes” and “dry and rigidly mannered” that resembled “ensemble acting carried to Zombieland.”

Karen Raber’s recent reading of King Lear in Shakespeare and Posthumanism suggests that “in the final analysis, the land, the earth, the elements that both chafe and feed it, exist without reference to Lear, without consideration of the human at all” (50). Indeed, implicit to Kott’s reading of the play and Brook’s interpretation of it is, in Kott’s words, “the absurdity of the human situation.” The resistance to this reading stem from the conviction, certainly held by Kael, that the characters’ ability to feel, to suffer, to communicate is precisely what makes them human, and not zombies. One of Kott’s initial claims in “King Lear or Endgame” is that “the exposition of King Lear seems preposterous if one is to look for psychological verisimilitude in it” (129). “Regarded as a person, a character, Lear is ridiculous, naïve and stupid” (13). Marowitz recalls Brook’s response when he proposed “an elementary psychology explanation” for Lear’s decision to divide up his kingdom and resign the throne: “you can’t apply psychoanalysis to a character like Lear” (106). Brook, according to Marowitz, “has a terror of pat
psychological interpretation.” To treat Lear as a “person, a character” in performance, so that the actor, for instance, seems to deeply feel the emotion carried on the line, is to risk the “conventional” types of interpersonal emotional connection an audience expects and craves.

For critics, one of the dimensions missing from Scofield’s performance was “Lear the father.” As Marowitz acknowledged, “Lear the ruler is there, as is Lear the madman; but Lear the father and Lear in those supreme final moments, where the play transcends itself, is only sketched out” (45). “Lear the father” is the social emotional Lear, the Lear who is best able to feel and respond to the emotions of others. “Lear the father” is also the most visible in the “final moments” and thus a gauge of the narrative of the character’s growth and change. This narrative was still present in Brook’s productions, but it was much more understated than in previous productions, if not rendered meaningless in the larger scheme of the production. (Another storm rumbles in the distance at the end of the stage production as Edgar drags off the dead body of his brother, or as in the film, Lear falls slowly out of the frame.) Gielgud was “critical” of the “decision for Lear not to look at Cordelia during the awakening scene, which he felt destroyed any chance of pathos” (Croall 46). Gielgud had been praised specifically for the “pathos” of the scenes with Cordelia; his acting “gives us much of the terror of the play, and still more the pity of it” said one critic (Croall 24). In Brook’s production, critics found the lines between Cordelia and Lear “drained” and “bleakly formal” (qt. in Leggatt 49). What is considered “supreme” about the play’s final moments is the regeneration of social and familial bonds, and that the “weight of this sad time” is shared, the “mud” in which they all exist is “pulsing with heart.” Thus, in Brook’s production, for one reviewer, the fact that “all the characters” were “locked into their own existential isolation from the beginning…affected the power and emotion of the drama’s close” (qtd. in Leggatt 48).
In general, Brook’s most controversial cuts demonstrate moments of social emotion at work, including Edmund’s attempt to undo his order on Cordelia’s life and the response of Cornwall’s servants to Gloucester’s blinding. In the latter scene, these lines affirm and model for the audience/reader the appropriate response to the character’s suffering (outrage, a desire to help, a plan of action) and provide comfort by suggesting that it is an isolated act of cruelty, not the status quo. In Kinesthetic Spectatorship in the Theatre, Stanton B. Garner cites the blinding of Gloucester in King Lear as an example of “empathic dissonance.” He speculates that he closes his eyes during this scene during performances of the play not, or not only, out of identification with Gloucester but out of identification with Cornwall, the perpetrator, partly because of that character’s more dynamic language and motion. In addition to cutting the servants’ lines, which contribute to the scene’s more explicit “empathic claims,” Brook gave Cornwall a “pair of golden spurs” to “carry the threat [“Upon these eyes of thine, I set my foot”] into literal effect” (Tynan). Coupled with the absence of the servants, this striking detail arguably enhances the “empathic claim” of Cornwall and compounds the overall “empathic dissonance” of the scene. Gloucester then groped around the stage as the (silent) servants clear furniture, pushing him aside as they do so. The houselights came up for intermission with Gloucester still on stage. The scene simultaneously makes Gloucester more pitiable and disturbs the audience’s ability to process the character’s suffering in “conventional” ways, as the servants do. Edmund’s speech, as I observed earlier, makes an explicit connection between virtuous behavior (his attempt to do “good”) and the affective power of emotional display (Edgar’s speech). And as with the servants, this interaction hints that “all” is not perhaps, in the words of Kent, “cheerless, dark, and deadly.”
In 1964, the year that *King Lear* toured Eastern Europe and the United States, Brook and Marowitz conducted an experimental workshop at the RSC entitled the Theater of Cruelty in which, as Brook writes in *The Empty Space*, “part of our experiment was the audience” (129). “Today, the question of the audience,” he also notes in that book, published in 1968, “seems to be the most important and difficult one to face” (131). Of course, like many other theatre-makers, Brook was interested in shocking audiences out of a polite complacency cultivated by a theater of “bourgeois values” (50). In that theater, “You cry, you have a bath of sentiment. You come out saying you’ve had a lovely time” (Reeves). “One look at the average audience gives us an irresistible urge to assault it – to shoot first and ask questions later” (*Empty Space* 55).

*King Lear* lent itself to an experiment in how intense emotions could be expressed and described onstage without facilitating an “an emotional steam bath” for the audience (*Empty Space*) Indeed, Shakespeare, who provides a model for much of Brook’s theatrical theory, insisted that we “identify emotionally, subjectively, and the same time…evaluate politically, objectively, in relation to society” (*Shifting Point* 57). The metaphor of the bath is one of comfort and ease, whereas Brook sought, with *Lear*, for the audience to feel viscerally the emotional discomfort the play describes, feeling gutted out, assaulted by feeling. Rather than empathize in the “conventional” sense with a single character, an interpersonal connection, the productions invite the audience to identify as subjects of an “emotional regime.” 49 Kenneth Tynan’s original review of the stage production perhaps best articulates this response. “Writing about this incomparable production,” he says, “I cannot pretend to the tranquility in which emotion should be properly recalled.” The review proceeds as a series of impressions, each trailing off in

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49 To that end, on the Eastern European tour, the more favorable response was facilitated (according to Brook) by audiences’ familiarity with this kind of political/emotional regime. “They were moved ‘not by the sentimental image of a poor old father howling, but by Lear as the ‘figure of old Europe, tired, and feeling, as almost every country in Europe, that after the events of the last 50s years people have born enough” (Leggatt 51).
ellipses. He concludes the review by saying, “this production brings me closer to Lear than I have ever been; from now on, I not only know him but can place him in his harsh and unforgiving world.” That is, the emotions that he experiences do not facilitate intrapersonal connection with Lear but an understanding of a “world” which is – as the adjectives “harsh” and “unforgiving” suggest – devoid of social emotional connections.

4.2 Children Will Listen: Edward Bond and Lear’s Emotional (Re)-Education

Our human emotions and intellects are not things that stand apart from the long development of evolution; it is as animals we make our highest demands, and in responding to them as men we create our deepest human experience.

— Edward Bond, Preface to Lear

Normally we accept the series: emotion – motive – act
We have to accept the series: motive – emotion – act
That is, we have to ask why does the character have that emotion?
The motive for it is political – it comes from the individual’s political situation

— Edward Bond, Notebooks 2

As James C. Bulman has noted, in King Lear, Shakespeare is “too Beckettian for Bond’s liking” because the play implies that “individuals cannot ever hope to understand or to control the course of events” (67). And according to Jan Kott himself, Brook had helped to “discover Beckett in Shakespeare” (365). While Bond places the Lear of his play in a “harsh and unforgiving world” that makes that of Brook’s productions pale in comparison, Lear is also one of the playwright’s most explicit,
self-conscious dramatizations of his theory that emotions, as distinct from feelings, are at once socially produced and crucial to a humane society. Bond suggests in Lear that individuals can understand and control the course of events precisely because of the human capacity for emotional learning, specifically those emotions that allow us to recognize and respond to the needs of others. Bond’s Lear, after all, learns in the play’s final moments: “we have only one thing to keep us sane: pity, and the man without pity is mad” (98).

If Lear is a “thesis play,” as a reviewer of the first American production, in 1973, complained, its thesis is one that appears throughout Bond’s theoretical writings, that human emotions are culturally produced (Gussow). For Bond, emotions, as opposed to other affects, “only exist in context” (Letters I 4). “There isn’t an innate, existential, feeling, emoting self: the self is created by intellectualizations” (Letters I 4). As he explains in his preface to The War Plays in 1991:

We have to distinguish between feelings and emotions. Feelings are genetically formed, emotions are learned. We learn them through experience and interpretation. Emotions mediate between feelings and ideas; this is the way we become what we are. Pain is a feeling, sadism and masochism are the cause of emotion. (250)

What converts “feeling” to “ideas” is society, broadly speaking: “…the physical, institutional, legal, domestic environment – in a word the social environment – affect our emotions” (Activist Papers 89). In contrast to psychoanalysis’s focus on the inherently aggressive nature of the infant, whose impulses live on in the adult unconscious, Bond believes that all children are born into a “state of radical innocence.” While he would develop that term later in his career, a

50 The volume Edward Bond and the Dramatic Child focuses on his extensive involvement with children’s theatre in the later part of his career but foregrounds how the “fate of children…has been at the heart of Bond’s ‘project’ well before…” (Davis 11).
51 Indeed, Bond further distinguishes his position from psychoanalysis when he writes: Our unconscious is not more animal than our conscious, it is often more human. The unconscious sees through us and our social corruptions and sends us messages of our humanity, ingeniously and persistently trying to reconcile the divisive tensions in our lives. Our unconscious makes us sane… (War Plays 250)
concern with the inherent innocence of the human child figures prominently in the preface to *Lear*. An infant’s only innate impulses are to be loved and cared for, but it is born into an “absolute alien enemy world” that it learns it must fight (11). Thus, “human beings become vicious, wild, dangerous and all the rest of it” (11). Bond’s experience of growing up during the war shaped these views. He was born in London but evacuated to the countryside after the outbreak of the war, without his family. “Being put into a strange environment created a division between feeling and the experience of things,” he said of that time. “If there is any one reason, I dare say it’s because of that I became a writer” (TQ 4). That is, his own childhood made him aware of the process by which experience shapes feelings, often in coercive, destructive ways.

Bond attributes theatre with the responsibility of laying bare this process. The role of the stage is not to “reproduce psychology” but to “show how psychology is produced” (*Plays* 6 302). It can also play an important role in the development of what he calls the “socio-psyche” or “politico-psyche” of the audience. Indeed, if emotions can be learned, they can also be unlearned, or re-learned. “Radical innocence” persists into adulthood. “If we were not vulnerable children for so much of our lives…we would not understand a work of art,” Bond states (*Letters I* 101). He analogizes the theatre to a child’s “learning-and-forming game” (*Notebooks* 2 198). Theatre is “forming work” and part of that work is to denaturalize the emotions, to lay bare their causality. “Emotions must always be treated as if they were a foreign language: we have no right to understand them without further explanation” (*Letters I* 10).

Bond was drawn to *King Lear* because he recognized in Lear the ability to “learn and form” his emotions in advanced age. In a 1970 interview, given as he was working on Lear and during which he dwells at length on his views of the mistreatment of children in modern society,
he calls *King Lear* “my kind of play” and claims that he has “learnt more from it than any other play” (“Discussion” 24). He explains:

For me the fascinating thing is, I’m sorry if it goes back to this child thing again, in fact he’s rather like a child growing up and learning to live, but the astonishing thing and the disturbing thing is that you see him do it as an old man. The astonishing thing about the play is that you see an old man behaving like a child, asking the childish questions, asking for the security of a child and not finding it…. Lear in fact is protected in his court cradle until he’s an old man and suddenly he’s born. (25)

In *Lear*, Bond accelerates Lear’s fall from power in order to focus on and draw out his emotional growth. In *King Lear*, Regan’s refusal to accept any of Lear’s retinue at the end of Act II is arguably the final thrust from his “court cradle.” In Bond’s play, Lear’s daughters overthrow the father in the first scene. Devoid of poetry and issuing from a murderous dictator, Lear’s retaliatory outburst seem almost a parody of Shakespeare’s Lear: “There will be no more children. Your husbands are impotent. … I am ashamed of my tears! You have done this to me.”

The play disentitles Lear to these sentiments and renders him a petulant child. Further, the scene explicitly associates Lear’s emotional immaturity with a misunderstanding of “pity,” as the word first appears as part of Lear’s insult: “I pity the men who share your beds.”

There is almost a dark humor to be found in Lear’s skewed emotional logic, how flagrantly the humanity of his subjects is disregarded, let alone the emotion of pity. What registers as “cruel” to Lear, for instance, is making a worker wait for his death by firing squad, not the punishment itself. He expresses concern for the condition of the workers’ huts only to clarify that men treated like “cattle” will not be efficient workers. Again, like Brook’s “harsh and unforgiving world,” the regime that Lear has established is defined as an emotional regime.

Lear’s statement that he is “not free to be kind and merciful” reflects Bond’s theory of the emotional self in a capitalist or fascist society (5):
If the social environment isn’t one that helps us to live humanely (socialism) but helps in our exploitation (capitalism) or makes us beasts or machines (fascism) then our emotions tend to deteriorate into fear, tension and racial and religious paranoia which lead to aggression, vandalism, child battering and other forms of violence. (Activist Papers 89)

The wall that is being erected in the opening scene is thus a “wall within and without” (Letters 2 182). It is the ultimate symbol of Lear’s emotional regime, of the barrier between self and other and between self and society. In the preface to Lear, Bond describes how the “small, infinitely vulnerable child” comes into the world craving “not only food but emotional reassurance” (viii). When its innate “need to love, create, protect and enjoy” is not met, it becomes defensive, i.e. putting up a barrier (xiv). “Faces…set in patterns of alarm, coldness or threat” in adults are symptoms of this emotional deprivation (xi).

“Listen and learn,” Lear says to one of his daughters, Boddice, in the first scene. Bond refigures the relationship between Lear and the daughters to show how their “psychology” has been “produced.” “What I wanted Lear to do was recognize that they were his daughters—that they had been formed by his activity, they were children of his state, and he was totally responsible for them” (TQ 8). Their names point to this process. Fontanelle, or “soft spot,” is the term used for the small gap in an infant’s skull that allows its brain to grow rapidly. Soft to the touch and harmful if pressed, it is the vulnerable child as biological fact. Boddice, more obviously, refers to the undergarment that restricts and tightens the female body. Although Bodice and Fontanelle are guilty of the most sadistic, masochistic behavior in the play, Bond points to its source in emotions they have been taught and the “emotional reassurance” they have been denied. As Fontanelle cries when Lear is lead out at the end of the first scene, “Happiness at last! I was always terrified of him” (9). In rehearsals for the first production the director stressed this line for the actor because “it’s very important to what we see later of her” (TQ 30). What we see almost immediately is the daughters’ gruesome torture of Warrington, the Gloucester-figure.
Fontantelle calls out for Lear as she delights in his pain: “Oh, yes, tears and blood. I wish my father was here. I wish he could see him” (17). Bodice then sets loose the maimed man to “Let people know what happens when you try to help my father,” echoing Lear’s own rationale for brutality in the first scene (18). Bond shows that they have listened and learned in spades.

Unlike Brook’s productions, however, “Lear the father” figures prominently in Bond’s Lear, forcing the character’s recognition of how the children have been “formed” by him and his state. When the character is visited in prison by the ghosts of Bodice and Fontanelle as children (played by the same adult actors), he glimpses an imagined scene of what their life was like as children, surrounded by death. He also plays the father he never was, sitting them on his lap and comforting them as they cry. In a direct echo of Lear and Cordelia’s final scene in King Lear, Lear tells them, “I know it will end. Everything passes, even the waste. The fools will be silent” (46). “You’re such a little girl,” he states twice about Fontanelle, coming to the realization of “radical innocence” that takes full effect when her dead body is autopsied in front of him. In the play’s most grueling scene, a doctor holds up her different organs for Lear to see. Lear asks, “But where is the… She was cruel and angry and hard…” (68). The implication is that he is looking for her heart, or absence of it, assuming that there is a biological reason for her cruelty and hardness. Instead, what he sees is “beautiful.” “Her body was made by the hand of a child, so sure and nothing unclean…If I had known this beauty and patience and care, how I would have loved her. … Did I make this and destroy it? (69). Dipping his hands into her body, covering them with “organs and viscera,” he declares:

Look! I killed her! Her blood is on my hands! Destroyer! Murderer! And now I must begin again. I must walk through my life, step after step, I must walk in weariness and bitterness, I must become a child, hungry and stripped and shivering in blood, I must open my eyes and see! (70)
Bond might argue that Shakespeare (and perhaps Brook too) leaves the character here, in a kind of Theatre of Absurd limbo. His daughters are dead (Bodice is killed shortly after this), his kingdom lost, he has suffered. He recognizes the human condition and is resigned to endure it. Yet as we have seen, for Bond “radical innocence,” is a gateway for new emotional education. Indeed, the horrific blinding of Lear that concludes this scene mocks any comfort an audience might derive from his revelation. “Blindness is a dramatic metaphor for insight,” Bond points out in the preface, “Lear is blind till they take his eyes away…” (xv). Bond’s blinding of Lear is could thus be read an implicit critique of the limited insight afforded to Shakespeare’s Lear. Indeed, during rehearsals at the Royal Court, Bond pointed out that after the blinding is when Lear “begins to understand he has to learn again how to act as a man and a politician.”

Crucial to that education is pity, or compassion, which Bond seems to understand similarly. As he explained to the actor playing Lear at the Royal Court about the character’s final speech and its embrace of “pity”: “Somewhere in the universe there will be a crack of light. Finally, you cannot make people inhuman. People like Lear or Tolstoy become symbols. The rest of the speech explains what is to be human. Lear has compassion - if you lose that compassion, you become mad” (27). The characters that are the most sinister in the play are those inhibit or limit the reach of these social emotions. Bond notably left out Cordelia as the “good” daughter for Lear and gives that name (the only other name retained from Shakespeare’s play) to the leader of the opposition against Lear who, also a well-trained child of his state, continues to build the wall and wage war with brutal tactics. Bond felt that Shakespeare’s Cordelia was “an absolute menace,” a “very dangerous type of person” (TQ 8). The character lets Lear off the hook and halts his education. Bond distributed the function of that character as he saw it in King Lear onto “the ghost of the Gravedigger’s Boy” and Cordelia’s husband. He is a constant
companion for Lear and Bond makes it tempting to read their relationship as a gauge of Lear’s redemption, likening it to Lear and Cordelia’s. Lear consoles him: “Cry while I sleep, and I’ll cry and watch while you sleep…. The sound of the human voice will comfort us” (49). In rehearsals at the Royal Court, Bond told the actor playing the part that he should be less “sympathetic,” as “ghosts are always nasty and corrupt” (27). Indeed, the ghost ultimately encourage and endorses a nihilistic vision of the human condition that resonates with Brook and Kott’s reading of King Lear. When Lear converts personal emotion to political action, for instance, proposing to write to Cordelia because she “doesn’t know what she’s doing!” the ghost cries out, ““no! no! no! they never listen” (77). Of course, Bond’s view of the theatre and of human psychology depends on the idea that they do listen. The ghost, however, advises Lear to simply “learn to live” in a pitiless, compassionless “world” in which people are “hungry and no one feeds them, so they call for help and no one comes….Ÿ” (93-94).

Each of the play’s three acts mark a different, more sophisticated stage in Lear’s understanding of pity and compassion. In the first act, even in exile, Lear remains a subject or prisoner of his emotional regime, where pity is a commodity or means only self-pity. “I know you have no pity to sell,” he says upon his first encounter with the Gravedigger’s Boy, “there’s always a shortage of that in wartime, but you could sell me some bread” (21). He pities himself, crying, “I’m too old to look after myself. I can’t live in ditches and barns and beg for scraps and hire myself to peasants!” (32). He is incapable of reading signs of Cordelia’s distress, made visible to the audience through her constant crying. He berates her: “You go! It’s you who’re destroying this place!” (32). In the second act, a new orientation to pity is revealed as Lear looks at himself in a mirror and sees an animal: “Oh, God, there’s no pity in this world. … Look! Look! Have pity. Look at its claws trying to open the cage. It’s dragging its broken body over the
floor. You are cruel! Cruel!” (41). Here, pity is extended outward, as he recognizes in his own image, and in his daughter’s autopsied body, symbols of the universal human condition.

Finally, the third act shows Lear’s application of pity, compassion, and empathy with regard to actual others. Returning to the setting and circumstances of the first act – the house of the Gravedigger Boy’s, whose new occupants have also taken Lear in – is obviously intended to highlight the dramatic shift in Lear’s character. He tells a deserter seeking shelter: “I wasn’t turned away, and I won’t turn anyone away” (86). He criticizes the new regime in terms that exactly describe his own: “Whatever’s trite and vulgar and hard and shallow and cruel, with no mercy or sympathy – that’s what you think and you’re proud of it!” (91). His interest in other people’s lives models empathy. “I thought I’d die but they saved me,” Lear tells the deserter, “But tell me about your life. I’d like to know how you’ve lived and what you’ve done” (81). He questions Cordelia as might a therapist: “You’ve been to the house? Did it upset you?” (96). Of course, it is ironic that Cordelia’s response to Lear’s penultimate speech about pity is to accuse him of misconstruing “pity” as “self-pity,” for Bond suggests that Lear finally does understand, and practice, pity. The gesture of knocking down the wall extends pity to unseen, unknown others, the suffering world at large. If the wall is a wall “within and without,” the gesture also represents a blow to the “social morality” Bond discusses in the preface, as distinct from an uncorrupted, innate, human morality, or “radical innocence.” Indeed, for Bond, pity and compassion are central to morality. The director of the Royal Court production stressed this point in rehearsals: “Finally he [Lear] becomes a man with great pity, which makes him a great man” (29). What Kenneth Tynan described as the “cool…moral scrutiny” of Brook’s approach to *King Lear* is thus somewhat anathema to Bond’s theatre and certainly his own approach to *King Lear*. 
Bond observes of his “version” of *King Lear* that it “turns out to go back more faithfully to the original source, though I wasn’t consciously aware of that when I was writing” (TQ 8-9). Where *Lear* is most engaged with the “original source” is the concept of an old man learning to live again, a concept that resonates with Bond’s theory of emotional learning. Bond’s sense of theatre as “forming work” is aligned with Monique Scheer’s definition of an “emotional practice,” in that Bond sees his theatre as a practice with the potential to shape an audience’s emotional values. By setting Lear on a course of education in pity and compassion, Bond clearly intends for the audience to have one as well. Bond has described his desire to use theatre to “flush away” the “emotional excesses that cling to people” and to make “emotional pretense” “fall like rotten hoardings” (*Notes 1* 16-17). He has also described theatre as a venue for quite literally practicing the kinds of the social emotions needed in a humane society. Describing the role of empathy in the theatre, he observes: “Empathy is the identification of the emotional self with the emotions that are symbolized in the actors’ faces and gestures, and the play’s plot and staging.; it is therefore an articulation of the emotional self, it confirms and strengthens the emotional self” (*Notes 1* 16). By the “emotional self,” Bond implies the social-emotional self, the self that is able, as he notes in the preface to *Lear*, excerpted above, to respond to the emotions of others with empathy, compassion, and pity.

That Bond should use *King Lear* to make, as I have suggested, his most explicit statement about emotional education can be traced to the playwright’s experience of seeing Donald Wolfit perform Shakespearean tragedy when he was a child. Both Wolfit and Shakespeare uphold “certain standards” regarding the “value of a human being,” as he described in the 1971 interview:

> My education really consisted of one evening, which was organized by the school. We saw Donald Wolfit in *Macbeth*, and for the very first time in my life… I met somebody
who was actually talking about my problems, about the life I’ve been living, the political society around me. … And also out of the play I got a feeling of resolution – that there were certain standards…I knew that if one could maintain these standards they could work in social situations and produce certain results….And also what came across from Wolfit’s performance – and that play suited him very well – was a sense of dignity about people. Now it’s not true that God is concerned every time a sparrow falls to the ground, because he couldn’t bear it, but it is true that Shakespeare cared. Of that I have absolutely no doubt – even about this man Macbeth, who perhaps was like Hitler. And so I got from that play a sense of human dignity – of the value of the human being… Also a certain feeling, afterwards, of real surprise – that other people had seen this, so how was it that their lives could just go on in the same way. (“Discussion” 5-6).

Here, it is the sense that Shakespeare “cared” about the character, reflected in Wolfit’s performance, that leads to Bond’s impression of the “value of the human being” and “human dignity.” Bond expresses a similar sentiment in the preface to Lear, which, again, notes that it is through responding to the needs of other human beings (including for “emotional reassurance”) that we become most human.

4.3 King Lear’s emotional capital: Ronald Hardwood’s The Dresser

Her Ladyship: … He’s not himself. He can’t work. Will the world stop turning? Will the Nazis overrun England? One Lear more or less in the world won’t make any difference.

Norman: Sir always believes it will.

— The Dresser

The Dresser may depend more than it has any right to on such outbursts as Lear’s celebrated “howl, howl, howl”…

— Matt Wolf, Variety

The Dresser might seem an unlikely point of comparison for either Brook or Bond’s “versions” of King Lear. The play, however, is something of a love-letter to both the tradition of actor-manager Shakespeare and to Wolfit’s wartime King Lear, characterized by Lear’s “tender humanity” and the strength of his emotional bonds. Indeed, what distinguished Wolfit as an actor and manger was, as Hardwood notes in his 1971 biography, “a sense of service to the community” (134). He worked to bring Shakespeare to as many people as possible, believing in
its power to instill patriotism and boost morale. Harwood also stresses that Wolfit’s approach to Shakespeare was antithetical to high-concept, director’s Shakespeare, clearly affiliated at the time with Peter Brook. That Harwood, who has publicly voiced his opposition to gender-blind casting, including of Glenda Jackson in *King Lear*, perhaps articulates his own view as well when he writes in the forward to the biography:

His interpretative gift was for what he instinctively judged to be the heart of the play. He could not act according to an intellectual, scholarly theory; he could not suit his performance to a director’s private conception of the play…. To Wolfit, a play called *Hamlet* was *about* Hamlet – if not, then Shakespeare would have called it something else – and being about Hamlet, he saw his actor’s duty as fleshing out the role with all the gifts and insights he could demand.

King Lear was Wolfit’s most famous role, and it is *King Lear* that is set to be performed on the evening that Sir, as Harwood names the character based on Wolfit, has experienced a mental collapse. Set in the dingy dressing room of a provincial English theater during the Blitz, the play depicts the cast and crew’s efforts to make the show go on. Sir finally performs, triumphantly, and dies “backstage” moments after dying “onstage” as Lear. Harwood depends on an audience’s ability to “flesh out” Sir and his dresser, Norman, through the figures of Lear and the Fool in *King Lear*. As a critic of the 2005 West End revival noted, in the same review quoted above, the “essence” of the play is the “give and take between Sir and Norman, as it echoes and also revises the tenderness and tears felt between Lear and his Fool” (Wolf). This review demonstrates what I mean by the play’s use of *King Lear* as “emotional capital.” It suggests that the relationship between Sir and Norman is affecting *because* the relationship between Lear and the Fool is affecting, or rather, because it animates associations of the “tenderness and tears” that defines the relationship.

In the biography, Harwood strives to convey a vivid sense of Wolfit’s performance as Lear, praised by John Agate of the *Sunday Times* as the “greatest piece of Shakespearean acting I
have seen,” for the reader. He suggests that it was both the actor’s identification with Lear and
the “tenderness” of the scenes with the Fool that made it such a “momentous performance.”

Describing Lear and the Fool in Act I, scene 4, he writes:

His temper is unpredictable; the whip dangles by his side, twitching dangerously from
time to time. His tongue lashes round, ‘No lad, teach me’; “Dost call me fool, boy” is
puzzled, but not without venom; the relationship between King and Fool is founded on
love and compassion, which deepens as the scene proceeds, as if the King, sensing his
alienation, admits the wise clown to Cordelia’s place in his heart. (161)

Harwood also explains that the first time the actor performed Lear, in 1942, it was not a critical
success. As Wolfit acknowledged, “Physically I was exhausted, but not mentally or spiritually”
(157). He “worked at it” for two years before attempting the role again. It is this performance
that Harwood recounts in the biography with a degree of awe. Wolfit arrived at the theatre with a
“strange, unaccustomed remoteness” (165). Rather than “hissing last-minute instructions” he
“stood perfectly still” and spoke to “no one” (160). He cast a glance at “nearby bomb damage”
“as if he understood some symbolic message contained in the ruins” (159). He merely “nodded”
with “an expression of infinite weariness” to his fellow actors, and looked at his wife, “with a
look that seemed to want to make sure she understood the weight of all the world was on his
shoulders” (160). Laurence Raw claims similarly that, “Wolfit invested more of his own
personality in Lear than in any other Shakespearean role” (Theatre 87).

The Dresser sets both Sir and Norman on a collision course with their King Lear
counterparts, as if seeking to capture something of the effect of such a fully “fleshed out” vision
of Shakespeare’s tragedy. Although The Dresser does not make immediately clear that King
Lear is the play scheduled to be performed that night, everything we learn about Sir up until his
entrance makes it inevitable. In contrast to Scofield’s “freezing” Lear, the first thing we learn
about Sir, in the first line of the play, is that he “cannot stop crying.” The banter between
Norman, the dresser, and “Her Ladyship,” Sir’s common-life wife, as they discuss what to do about Sir is witty and irreverent but also clearly marked by “love and compassion.” Norman “fights tears” as he declares, “I want to sit with him and be with him and try to give him comfort. I can usually make him smile” (20). In the recent film version starring Anthony Hopkins as Sir and Ian McKellen as Norman, Norman and Her Ladyship, played by Emily Watson, inserted grave pauses and loaded glances on lines such as her Ladyship’s “He said, I have to make an exit?” as if the line signified a death wish rather than a case of theatrics. The explicit parallels between Sir and Lear, such as Norman’s recounting of Sir tearing off his clothes or throwing up his hands “as he does to convey sterility into Goneril’s womb”- prepare the audience to pick up on more subtle parallels (15). Like Lear, Sir is facing the end of his “reign,” because of the war (viscerally experienced in the production through the sounds of bombs), his age, and changing theatrical styles. And like Lear, to be stripped of his profession is to lose his sense of “self.” The play is creating a kind of composite character, insisting that we read Sir through Lear and Lear through Sir.52

Once Sir makes his highly anticipated entrance, the play indicates a further cause of his unstable mental condition: the task of performing Lear again and again. For Sir, the emotions of Lear have become the “real thing.” As Sir explains:

I can face the division of my kingdom. I can cope with Fool. I can bear the reduction of my retinue. I can stomach the curses I have to utter. I can even face being whipped by the storm. But I dread the final entrance. To carry on Cordelia dead, to cry like the wind, howl, howl, howl. To lay her gently on the ground. To die. Have I the strength.”

52 Anthony Hopkins would go on to play Lear in the Amazon Prime film in 2018 (having last played it in 1986) with Richard Eyre as the director, who also directed the film of The Dresser. Ian McKellen has his own long history with the play, playing Lear in a 2007 RSC production and then in 2017 for the National Theatre that was streamed in as a film through National Theatre Live. The play and its productions also depend on these associations.
As in Norman’s earlier description Sir’s Lear-like antics, these lines could be construed as melodramatic indulgence. But is also possible to have the actor perform them more seriously, as if he really cannot bear it. This was the approach of the 2015 film, which underscored the speech with somber music. Sir’s own account of his collapse is interspersed with lines that seem to confuse his own experience with Lear’s, such as “I refused to take shelter. I’m accustomed to the blasted heath”; “Wherever I went I seemed to hear a woman crying,” and, “I decide when I’m ready for the scrap-yard. Not you. I and no one else. I” (24-25). Performing King Lear for the Public Theater’s 2015 production, John Lithgow found that he could not rehearse the role “dispassionately”; “the emotions run away with me.” *The Dresser* suggests that is the situation for Sir, putting a kind of tragic twist on Harwood’s account of Wolfit’s offstage identification with the King Lear. Indeed, Sir’s analogy between the marketplace during an air raid and the “blasted heath,” evokes the moment when Wolfit, walking into the theatre on that legendary opening night, seemed to glimpse nearby bomb damage as if through the eyes of Lear. By taking Sir’s struggle with Lear seriously, the play enforces and reminds an audience of the affectivity of the character’s emotional suffering. That is, to feel for Sir is also to feel for the image of King Lear that the play activates.

According to Harwood, Wolfit’s main piece of advice to actors playing Lear was “watch your fool.” Laurence Raw states that in Wolfit’s production he was an “insignificant figure dressed in white” (59). *The Dresser* gives Norman a backstory and explores the implications of being that insignificant figure in “real life,” showing that there is more at stake in Norman’s identification with his King Lear counterpart than there is for Sir. Thus, in addition to foregrounding the “tenderness and tears” of Lear and the Fool’s relationship, the play presents two Lear-like figures, two figures suffering from their immersion in the world of the play-within-
the-play. In both the first and second acts, the actor playing the Fool in the “offstage” *King Lear* visits the dressing room. Like the explicit parallels between Sir and King Lear that underscore the more subtle connections, these scenes suggest how Norman can be read through the Fool.

The actor is playing the role for the first time, so Sir gives him a series of instructions, including “no crying in the part… *I* have the tears in the play,” “at all costs remain still when I speak,” “feel it, my boy, feel it, that’s the only way,” and “but do not let too much take you. Remain within the bounds” (45). These lines articulate how little, ultimately, the Fool/Norman matters to Lear/Sir as well as the problem that plagues both Sir and Norman, of feeling it too much, being too full of the real thing, not remaining in the bounds. Norman mainly adheres to this advice until the second act, when he becomes increasingly drunk and defensive of Sir. “I have to know all that occurs. I have to know all he does,” Norman cries to the young actress who claims Sir’s affections, even striking her (79). When the actor returns the dressing room after the performance, he is full of thoughts about the role: “Fool is a curious role. You give your all for almost an hour and a half, then vanish into thin air for the rest of the play. The next one hears of me is you saying I’m hanged. But why? By whom? It seems awfully unfair”” (87). Of course, the actor only plays the Fool; he is able to comment objectively, critically, on the character. Norman, however, inhabits that curious role, lives with the unfairness of washing Sir’s “undies” night after night, feeding him lines, drying his tears, and receiving little acknowledgement for it. Sir, it turns out, has failed to include his dresser in the long list of acknowledgements that constitute the entirety of his memoirs-in-process.

If Wolfit “saw the actor’s duty as fleshing out the role with all the gifts and insights he could demand,” the play-within-the play in the second act of *The Dresser* suggests the effects of this approach in performance. Or, as a review of the actor’s performance of Lear stated, “More
than any other on the British stage today, Wolfit knows the value …of a direct, emphatic appeal to the emotions of an ordinary man, woman, and child” (qtd in Raw 87). The Lear that assumes the stage in *The Dresser* has already been “fleshed out” in the context of Sir, which strengthens the emotional appeal of speeches such as “Reason not the need” and “Howl, howl, howl.” (Other excerpts include Kent’s “seeking” of the king in the storm and Edmund’s speech “some good I mean to do,” which model the social emotions in *King Lear* itself, including those felt towards Lear.) At least, Sir’s performance resonates with the people watching his performance within the play, seeming to model how *The Dresser*’s audience should receive it too. Norman declares that he has never seen Sir “so full of the real thing” (65) while Madge, the company manager, admits that “he’s performing a little less mechanically than usual” (74). Norman concludes that there has “never been an interval like it,” returning from a visit to the stalls with the story of one man who was particularly moved:

You should hear what they think out there. I’ve never known an interval like it. Michelangelo, William Blake, God knows who else you reminded them of. One poor boy, an airman, head bandaged, was weeping in the stalls bar, comforted by an older man, once blond, now grey, parchment skin and dainty hands, who kept on saying, “There, there, Evelyn, it’s only a play,” which seemed to me no comfort at all because if it wasn’t a play “There—there—Evelyn’ wouldn’t be so upset. (71)

Harwood is obviously bringing some of Wolfit’s biography to bear here, as he worked to bring *King Lear* to active duty soldiers, who were apparently some of the most responsive audiences. The comment cultivates a new appreciation for the Sir/Lear performance the audience of *The Dresser* is witnessing simultaneously. Norman also reminds the audience that it is not only a play for Sir either, and that it is the depth of his feeling that leads to the audience member’s. The 2015 film showed the reactions of the audience and of the backstage company members to Sir’s performance, with studied awe and tears in their eyes, more explicitly pointing the audience’s response.
Indeed, that Sir’s death occurs shortly after he dies onstage as Lear suggests how the performance has completed the identification with the part set in motion from the play’s first line. Returning to the dressing room for the interval, he reveals that for the first time he had the experience of watching his own performance from a distance: “I saw an old man and the old man was me.” As he describes:

I thought tonight I caught sight of him. Or saw myself as he sees me. Speaking ‘Reason not the need,’ I was suddenly detached from myself. My thoughts flew. And I was observing from a great height. Go on, you bastard, I seemed to be saying or hearing. Go on, you’ve more to give, don’t hold back more, more, more. And I was watching Lear. Each word he spoke was fresh invented. I had no knowledge of what came next, what fate awaited him. The agony was in the moment of acting created. I saw an old man and the old man was me. And I knew there was more to come. But what? Bliss, partial recovery, more pain and death. All this I knew I had yet to see. Outside myself, do you understand? Outside myself. (70).

From an audience’s perspective, “catching sight” of Lear, experiencing his agony, the prospect of more pain and death, exists in the “moment of acting.” As the play suggests again and again, for Sir it is lived. Ultimately he is not, like the audience, watching from a distance; he is the old man. When Sir comes offstage after completing the performance, the histrionics that characterized the character earlier are absent. The play makes clear that he is physically, mentally, and spiritually exhausted. Yet in the little he speaks, he shows concern for both the actor playing the Fool and Norman. To Norman, he says: “What will happen to you?” “I worry about you, my boy” (86).

In the first act, Norman had assisted the actor playing the Fool with his song, “He that has a tiny little wit…” The play ends with Norman singing that same song, “staring into space,” his performance perhaps a recognition that he “is” the Fool, in parallel to Sir’s recognition that he is the old man. As Norman laments in the moment after Lear’s death, “I’m nowhere out of my element,” which could be read as an articulation of the position of a Fool without a Lear (94).
While the Fool in *King Lear* famously disappears, Harwood creates in Sir a figure who does not stand still next to Lear, who also has tears. The full significance of those tears, of his emotions, depend on the frame of reference to the Fool in *King Lear*.

The popularity of *The Dresser* since its premiere in 1980, including two film versions and multiple revivals, can be attributed in part to its rehabilitation of a pre-Kott, pre-Brook “expression” of *King Lear*. That image is one in which the outsized emotions in the play are inherently social, functioning to make an audience feel for and identify with King Lear. The role of the Fool is central to that image. Lear’s compassion for the character is a clear register of Lear’s growth and change, while the Fool’s concern for Lear alleviates the cruelty depicted elsewhere and models how the audience might respond to Lear’s suffering. What seems to have drawn Harwood to Wolfit as a biographical subject and as an actor was precisely his respect for these elements of the play and for the belief that the theatre and Shakespeare more generally thrived on the intrapersonal, social emotional connection between the audience and a “fleshed out” character. For Wolfit, *King Lear*’s emphasis on the redemptive power of emotional connections made it imperative to perform during wartime. (Edith Sitwell wrote to Wolfit that the performance left her “unable to speak” in its “stupendous revelation of the redemption of the soul” (qtd in Raw 87).) The ways in which *The Dresser* deploys *King Lear* reach back to and to some extent honor that tradition, a tradition that Kenneth Tynan happily lays to rest in his review of Brook’s production, “that royal Lear with whom generations of star actors have made us reverently familiar” and who is “automatically entitled to our sympathy because he is a king who suffers.”

Edward Bond was inspired by Wolfit and Shakespeare for similar reasons. Again, what Bond understands as their insistence on “human dignity,” the “value of a human being,” and
“certain standards” for living in society also seems premised on social emotion. That is, Shakespeare “cared” about Macbeth and gives the character “human dignity” through his range of emotional expression. The ways in which Wolfit animated Macbeth’s emotions enhanced an audience’s ability to “care.” In Bond’s view of King Lear, the character begins to learn again as an old man, that possibility is itself a demonstration of the “value of the human being.” In Lear, Bond explicitly grounds that education in pity and compassion, which Shakespeare’s Lear learns but does not take far enough. Given the violence, cruelty, and sadism featured in Bond’s play, it might seem odd to put it in the same category of The Dresser. Yet that dominant emotional regime exists in order to highlight the urgency of what Bond calls “the emotional self,” an emotional self that partly comes into being through the theatre.

Very broadly speaking, then, both Harwood and Bond deploy King Lear as a touchstone for emotion’s communicative value, its role in forging social bonds. As such, they respond indirectly to the “use” of the play by Peter Brook, which had deprived Shakespeare’s emotional language of the ability to communicate and showed the characters “locked into their own existential isolation.” Yet it was precisely the emotional content of that language as well as prevailing assumptions about the purpose of that language, articulated most forcefully by Pauline Kael, that allowed Brook to achieve his intended effects and use the play as a study in the absurdity of the human condition, the power of nothingness. For Bond, crucially, “the human condition isn’t absurd; it’s only our society which is absurd” (Companion 54). Lear, in keeping with Bond’s theoretical writing, suggests more or less explicitly that the human capacity for “responding” to other people’s emotions provides the grounds that allow him to say this.
4.4 Coda

Unbeknownst to me until fairly recently, the period of time that I have been working on this project coincides with the establishment of the “history of emotions” as a stand-alone field of academic study. As I suggested in the introduction, it is a new if somewhat obvious lens through which to think about theatre and especially Shakespeare, whose canonization in the Western tradition is practically inseparable from the plays’ representation of human emotion. (A comment of my father’s from my college theatre days has frequently come to mind, “Is there any emotion Shakespeare doesn’t represent?”) And indeed, over twenty years after Alexander Leggatt observed the “tear test” in effect for productions of King Lear, it still seems to hold true. Of the most recent revival starring Glenda Jackson on Broadway, the critic for Variety noted that Jackson “fails to wring tears,” although the audience “may find itself emotionally wiped out” (Stasio). The New York Magazine critic complained that Jackson’s Lear “seems cut off from her emotional center,” or, at least, “I can’t feel it” (Holdren). A through-line of all the case studies in this project – case studies in Shakespeare performance as a kind of emotional practice – is the assumption that the Shakespearean stage is a venue for a privileged form of emotional experience.

What I have tried to understand in this project are the shifting stakes, the cultural value and capital, of that experience. Again, my first chapter documents an instigating moment for the entire project, which is essentially a destabilizing moment in the history of emotion. I am intrigued by the title that the Shakespeare scholar Erin Sullivan uses for an eventual book project, “Shakespeare and the making of emotion,” as “Shakespeare and the making of modern emotion” might serve as a more assertive title for this project. That is, my underlying hypothesis is that Shakespeare performance has contributed to “making” some of the major emotional
paradigms of the twentieth century even as, or perhaps because, of the divergences between Shakespeare’s “ideal” emotional expression and “real” human expression. My chapters are experiments in whether the Shakespearean stage can be a productive site for doing emotions history, and to what extent it actually “makes,” rather than merely records, emotional communities, regimes, and practices.

From the beginning of this project, I have struggled with narrowing its focus and scope. What after all, is emotion? What isn’t emotion? “Emotion” overlaps with so many other categories of “culture” and human experience. Honing in on “emotion” from “affect” was crucial, as was my discovery of the proliferating terms and keywords related to the study of emotion. I recognize, however, that the belated application of these keywords to the dissertation’s theoretical framework is in evidence here. My sense of a particular performance’s precise work as an emotional practice tends to lapse into description of how it reflects a general cultural or psychological zeitgeist. What I have achieved, I hope, is a template for how and why one might seek out connections and moments of interchange between Shakespearean performance and other kinds of emotional practices.
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