

“Unsuitable for theatrical presentation”:

Mechanisms of censorship in the late Victorian
and Edwardian London theatre

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The present paper explores several aspects of censorship in the London theatre of the 1890s and 1900s. Although the Lord Chamberlain banned a number of plays which later gained canonical status (Wilde's *Salomé*, Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession*), it will be argued that indirect censorship by actor-managers and theatre critics as well as self-censorship by playwrights was more significant in the last decade of the 19th century. It appears that the majority of agents in the theatrical field subscribed to prevailing Victorian moral and ideological paradigms. While some dramatists, e.g. Arthur Wing Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones, probed the limits of the universally acceptable in the commercial theatre, the autocratic actor-managers, dreading interventions of the Lord Chamberlain as well as financial losses, hesitated to produce advanced plays and also forced the authors to revise potentially offensive passages. A gradually strengthening opposing force was also at work, the theatre societies, which, essentially, undermined the authority of the Lord Chamberlain. Contrary to the general antagonism, a case study shows the bizarre collaboration between the alternative theatre and the Examiner of Plays prior to the staging of *Alan's Wife*. In the first decade of the twentieth century major playwrights were involved in a continuing struggle against censorship. Two case studies, that of the banning of Harley Granville Barker's *Waste* and that of Edward Garnett's *The Breaking Point* in 1907, shed light on two different aspects of the censorship debate. While major

critics fully supported the ban on *Waste*, on the grounds of protecting the average playgoer, it is exactly this latter notion which is deconstructed in Garnett's response to the Examiner of Plays. In the final section of the paper some of the major arguments in the censorship campaign, which eventually resulted in the establishment of a parliamentary committee in 1909, are delineated and evaluated.

Key-words: theatre censorship, fin-de-siècle London, actor-managers, theatre societies, aesthetic versus moral rationale.

1 Introduction

1.1 The institution

In the first volume of his excellent study of *The Censorship of British Drama 1900-1968* Steve Nicholson succinctly defines the objective of censorship as follows: 'Preventing the unacceptable from being written or even imagined is probably the ultimate goal of censorship.' (2) The institutions and their maneuvers to achieve this goal in London at the turn from the 19th to the 20th century will be at the centre of the following considerations. Theatre censorship in Britain was institutionalized in 1737 by the passing of the Stage Licensing Act, which was slightly amended in 1843 by the Theatres Act. This system of censorship was in operation, largely unchanged, until 1968. Stage censorship was carried out by the Lord Chamberlain, assisted by the Examiner of Plays, who in fact did most of the work. The licensing procedure was roughly the following: not the author but the manager of the theatre which intended to stage a play submitted the text to the Lord Chamberlain's Office, the Examiner of Plays would read it and either recommend it for receiving a license, demand certain emendations, or advise to ban it. The Theatres Act of 1843 provided the Lord Chamberlain with the following guidelines for the exercise of his office: it was the censor's duty to forbid any performance of a play or other work 'whenever he shall be of opinion that it is fitting for the Preservation of good Manners, Decorum, or of the public Peace so to do' (section 14, qtd in Thomas, 62).

1.2 Ibsen and attitude

Before the practice of the Lord Chamberlain and its impact on the writing and producing of drama in the late Victorian period will be exemplified, the

general attitude the censorship authorities took in the so-called Ibsen controversy is delineated, as it is representative of the general perspective on serious advanced drama. In the late 1880s and early 1890s Ibsen’s plays were first introduced to the London stage. Two legendary productions, that of *A Doll’s House* by Janet Achurch in 1889 and, even more so, the private staging of *Ghosts* by the Independent Theatre Society in 1891 caused a furor as well as a veritable outrage in London. In polemical attacks the majority of established critics denounced Ibsen’s plays as ‘loathsome, monstrous and unnatural.’ (Adams qtd in Woodfield, 45). Edward F. Smyth Pigott, who was Examiner of Plays from 1874 to 1895, took a similar position; this is what he has to say about the characters in the plays of Henrik Ibsen:

I have studied Ibsen’s plays pretty carefully, and all the characters in Ibsen’s plays appear to me morally deranged. All the heroines are dissatisfied spinsters who look on marriage as a monopoly, or dissatisfied married women in a chronic state of rebellion against not only the conditions which nature has imposed on their sex, but against all the duties and obligations of mothers and wives; and as for the men they are all rascals or imbeciles. (Quoted in Woodfield, 113)

While the number of plays which were banned in the 1890s is comparatively small the indirect effect of stage censorship on the writing of plays, on the shape of plays, and on the production of plays was enormous. Among the banned plays are two which have become classics of the international repertoire, Oscar Wilde’s *Salome* (1892) and George Bernard Shaw’s *Mrs. Warren’s Profession* (1894). The ban on these dramas does not come as a surprise. Wilde puts biblical figures on the stage and has Salome rapturously kiss the severed head of Jochanaan, while Shaw thermalizes the social causes of prostitution and places the manageress of a chain of brothels at the centre of his play.

2. The actor-manager: Censorship by proxy

Next to the Lord Chamberlain the autocratic actor-manager was the most powerful force which ruled the commercial theatre in London. He was the first approving authority as well as the intermediary between dramatist and censor. The playwright first submitted his script to the actor-manager for

approval. Once the latter accepted a play for production the text was submitted to the Lord Chamberlain's Office. As an experienced agent in the theatrical world the actor-manager was familiar with the taste of the audience as well their limits of acceptance as to unconventional themes. In the same way, he was well aware of the standards of the Lord Chamberlain. Actor-managers in the commercial theatre hardly ever took any risks in exceeding tolerable limits in order to forestall financial losses. A few examples illustrate the impact of this system on the writing of advanced plays in the late Victorian period. A case in point is the first production of *The Profligate* by Arthur Wing Pinero. When the dramatist submitted the play to John Hare, the actor-manager of the Garrick Theatre, the latter demanded a revision of the ending. It appears that Hare thought that the production of a serious play with an unconventional theme was challenge enough for censor and audience; an onstage suicide at the end would overstep the mark. In contrast to the current fashion of dramatizing the fate of a woman with a past, in this early problem play Pinero explores the repercussions of the immoral past of a man. At the end of the play the secret of his earlier life is revealed, which results in the separation of the couple. In his despair the protagonist takes poison and dies in the arms of his forgiving wife. Hare did not want to overtax his audience and asked the dramatist for a happy ending. Pinero complied and ended the play with a reconciliation of the marriage partners. This version was then performed in 1889. However, the dramatist restored the original ending in the printed version (1891). When, a few years later, Pinero wrote another serious play for Hare's company, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, the cautious actor-manager refused to produce it, as he regarded it as immoral. This is what the author himself has to say about the problems he had to face before the first staging of this ground-breaking play in 1893:

As I progressed with my work, Hare invited me to read the first act to him, and after he had heard it he made a grimace, and said, "We shall have to cut a lot of that out." Having seen the whole play, he declined it flatly, declaring that he considered it not only bad art but commercially hopeless. ... I then took the play to Alexander, whose verdict was "Sorry; I daren't do it." As I was leaving his room, rather disconsolately, an idea struck me. I turned to him and said, "Look here, will you do the thing at a *matinée* for nothing?" "Oh, that

puts another complexion on the affair, said he, and promptly agreed to my proposal.”

However, as the play that was running at the St. James’ Theatre at the time was not successful, Alexander needed a new play very quickly, which, after all, made an evening production of Pinero’s new play possible. *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* was the first play in which a fallen woman, a woman with a past, is presented with great understanding and sympathy while, at the same time, the double standard of morality is severely criticized and the conduct of men is repeatedly condemned. This audacious problem play, which marks a turning point in the progress of English drama, certainly probes the bounds of tolerance. In his book on censorship, John Russell Stephens speculates about the censor’s non-intervention: ‘If the Examiner of Plays ever had any misgivings about licensing [*Tanqueray*], there is no evidence of them in the official records. ... [C]learly Pinero’s already not inconsiderable reputation as a dramatist must have played its part in molding the attitude of the authorities.’ (145)

Another telling example is the controversy between playwright Henry Arthur Jones and the actor-manager Charles Wyndham, for whom Jones wrote three plays, *The Case of Rebellious Susan* (1894), *The Liars* (1897), and *Mrs. Dane’s Defense* (1900). Wyndham’s criticism of Henry Arthur Jones’s comedy *The Case of Rebellious Susan* focused on a dialogue passage in which the eponymous heroine appears to allude to an extramarital affair. Although the line is phrased in fairly vague terms, Wyndham preferred to understand it as an explicit reference to an illicit relationship. This is the incriminated dialogue passage:

LADY SUSAN: You’re sure nobody suspected?

LUCIEN: How could they?

LADY SUSAN: Oh, I should kill myself if anyone knew! You have never spoken of me – boasted to any of your men friends – ? (129)

In a letter to Jones, Wyndham, who appears to have been appalled at what his dramatist expected the audience to countenance, severely criticized the ostensible outspokenness of Lady Susan’s last speech as well as the

dramatist's acceptance of what the actor-manager regards as highly unethical conduct: 'I stand as bewildered today as ever at finding an author, a clean-living, clear-minded man, hoping to extract laughter from an audience on the score of a woman's impurity' (quoted in Jones, Doris 164). While this line of criticism could be attributed to Wyndham's genuine moral indignation, the argumentation very soon takes a different direction and concentrates on the fears of the actor-manager to irritate or even offend his audience, with detrimental effects on the box-office returns. One may argue that purely commercial considerations are at the bottom of Wyndham's moralistic allegations, and perhaps an underlying unease about possible objections of the Lord Chamberlain:

I am astonished at a practical long-experienced dramatic author believing that he will induce married men to bring their wives to a theatre to learn the lesson that their wives can descend to such nastiness, as giving themselves up for an evening of adulterous pleasure and then return safely to their husband's arms provided they are clever enough, low enough, and dishonest enough to avoid being found out? (quoted in Jones, Doris 164-5)

A crucial remark in this letter not only indicates the representative function of the actor-manager and his knowledge of the sensibilities of his spectators, but also sounds very much like a quotation from the *raisonneur's* speech in one of Jones's comedies: 'I am not speaking as a moralist, I am simply voicing the public instinct' (quoted in Jones, Doris 166). Essentially, this is also the typical stance of the censorship authorities.

The conflict between dramatist and actor-manager was finally resolved by cutting the parts of Lady Susan's speech which, in Wyndham's view, clearly referred to a relationship that went beyond flirtation. However, Jones later restored the original dialogue in the printed version of the text, also adding a satirical dedication "To Mrs Grundy", the unseen but ever present guardian of morals (Jones, *Plays* 105-7), in which he expresses his irritation with the prudery of his audiences and, significantly, of the actor-managers.

Clearly, in these cases the actor-managers acted as unofficial representatives of the Lord Chamberlain, on the one hand, affecting to protect the public from the immorality of dramatic authors, on the other hand, in actual fact, reducing their own financial risks.

3 Tricking the system

The story of the first production of *Alan's Wife: a dramatic study, in three scenes*, by Florence Bell and Elizabeth Robins sheds light on an entirely different practice to avoid interference by the Lord Chamberlain when staging a provocative play. In *Alan's Wife* a young, recently widowed mother smothers her physically disabled child and is sentenced to death for infanticide. Instead of repenting she refuses to consider her deed as a crime. She argues that she killed her child out of love to spare him a life of suffering. This short play, whose authoresses, significantly, remained anonymous until thirty years later, would never have received a licence. However, J. T. Grein, the founder and director of the Independent Theatre Society, was acquainted with Edward Pigott, the Examiner of Plays, whom he approached privately to receive a license for the play. Katherine E. Kelly delineates the procedure in the following way:

[...] the play was submitted to the Lord Chamberlain's Office for approval, but in this case, it was submitted after omitting (in possible collusion with Pigott) its controversial scene. Purged of the infanticide scene, the Examiner of Plays passed *Alan's Wife*, permitting two performances of a drama written in part to defy his authority. (551)

The play was then first performed at Terry's Theatre on 28 April 1893.

This peculiar licensing process calls into question standard notions of the censorship system in late Victorian London. The assumed, and in other sources well documented, opposition of dramatist/producer, on the one hand, and the Lord Chamberlain's office, on the other hand, appears to have given way to a bizarre collaboration between representatives of the alternative theatre and the Examiner of Plays. Moreover, one of the strategies to stage an unlicensed play was to have it produced by a theatre society, as their performances were classified as private, the audience consisting only of the members of the society. This was one of the strategies to sidestep state control. Theatre societies also performed plays which had been banned by the Lord Chamberlain. However, as the societies had to rent a theatre for a couple of performances, the owners or lessees of theatres moved into the focus of the

Lord Chamberlain. As theatre managers were afraid of losing the license for their theatre, many of them were reluctant to provide a venue for the performance of an unlicensed play. A case in point is the first staging of Henrik Ibsen's highly controversial *Ghosts*. J. T. Grein had great difficulties in finding a theatre. After many refusals Kate Santley, the proprietress of the Royalty, offered her theatre for a single performance on 13 March 1891. James Woodfield provides the following account of Miss Santley's concerns:

A vehement article in the *Daily Telegraph*, which urged the Lord Chamberlain to prevent the performance, disturbed her sufficiently to make her visit his Controller for reassurance on her legal position: finding that there was no law broken provided it was a strictly private affair not open to the general public, she stood by her offer. (44)

4 Crucial bans: towards the censorship campaign

4.1 Barker's *Waste* and the critic as censor

In the final part of this paper peculiarities of the licensing system and of the censorship debate in the first decade of the twentieth century are focused on. The Edwardian era was a period of transition, with the Victorian value system still intact but progressively questioned and undermined. In the theatre major efforts were undertaken to raise the quality of drama as well as of production. Moreover, after the turn of the century dramatists offered more resistance to and leveled harsher criticism at institutionalized censorship and its representatives. As the commercial theatre was hardly conducive to a renaissance of British drama, an alternative theatre scene established itself. There were several attempts to introduce a repertory system, one of the major initiators being the actor, manager, director and playwright Harley Granville Barker. After three seasons at the Court Theatre, from 1904 to 1907, he moved to a bigger venue, the Savoy Theatre. One of his own plays was meant to be the major attraction of the first season. However, all hopes were destroyed by the banning of *Waste*. Steve Nicholson briefly points out the primary issues addressed in the play:

Waste famously depicts an independent politician who is about to join the Tory Cabinet and steer a Bill through Parliament to dis-establish the Church of England. After making a married woman pregnant in a brief affair, he refuses

to procure an abortion, and she dies in a back-street operation. The politician then commits suicide when the Prime Minister decides it is now too risky to include him in the Cabinet. (30)

When the play was banned Barker refused to comply with the censor’s demands to tone down the explicit references to sexual relations and remove ‘all reference to a criminal operation’. (qtd in Nicholson, 31) It is interesting to note that *Votes for Women!*, a play by Elizabeth Robins which Barker had produced at the Court Theatre in the same year, had received a license although an abortion is quite openly referred to. This has given rise to speculations as to the true motive of the censor for banning *Waste*. For example, Dennis Kennedy argues that the play was most probably banned for political reasons: ‘Its convincing analysis of the machinery of Edwardian government could embarrass party leaders on both sides by its exposé of the cynical inner world of parliamentary power.’ (17) The Stage Society’s production of the unlicensed play in November 1907 met with very ambivalent critical response, which reveals the peculiar attitude of even advanced critics to censorship as a mechanism to protect the general public. While the critic for *Era* does not argue his evaluation and simply states that ‘*Waste* is undoubtedly a work of genius, but it is quite unfit to be presented to an average theatrical audience,’ (30 November 1907) A. B. Walkley, critic for the *Times*, who also regards *Waste* ‘as a work of extraordinary power’ and praises its ‘strength and unity and veracity and total impressiveness’, argues his full support for the banning of the play as follows:

For our part we have no hesitation in approving the Censor’s decision. The subject-matter of *Waste*, together with the sincere realism with which it is treated, makes it in our judgment, wholly unfit for performance under ordinary conditions before a miscellaneous public of various ages, moods, and standards of intelligence. (27 November 1907)

While Walkley does not even mention the problematic subject-matter at issue, he implies that the abortion as well as the political intrigues at the thematic centre of *Waste* are too disturbing and unsettling for an average audience. The critic for *The Stage*, also in favour of the ban, is far less restrained in his review. He disapproves of the play on account of various

aesthetic flaws; most importantly, the ‘unsavoury drame d’adultère’ kept the critic in the theatre for an uncomfortably long time. In his review, he also discredits the members of the Stage Society by insinuating that most of them attended the performance of *Waste* in order to be titillated by a banned play: ‘The attractions offered by a "Prohibited Play" seem to be very great, especially to women of the Advanced type [...]’ Clearly, the main target of the conservative, morally orthodox and patriarchal critic are women, most particularly those who stand up for their rights: ‘[...] *Waste* is certainly not a play for the ordinary paying audience – or, indeed, for any unmarried women, except those belonging to the "shrieking sisterhood".’ (28 November 1907) The critical reception of the banned *Waste* highlights the crucial role of the conservative theatre critic, the third agent in the theatrical field (together with the Lord Chamberlain and the actor-manager) in curtailing the freedom of the playwright and, ultimately, in inhibiting the emergence of a critical, advanced, and innovative drama.

4.2. *The Breaking Point* and Garnett’s censure of the censor

In the same year as *Waste*, Edward Garnett’s play *The Breaking Point* was banned. In this play a young woman who becomes pregnant from a married man drowns herself. The details of the licensing process in this case are particularly interesting because they reveal a common practice of the Lord Chamberlain’s Office which was meant to keep down the number of stage works which were refused a licence while simultaneously preventing a public production of these plays. When Frederick Harrison, manager of the Haymarket Theatre, wanted to produce *The Breaking Point* George Redford, the Examiner of Plays, privately advised Harrison not to submit the text to the Lord Chamberlain’s Office. However, when Garnett insisted and the play was officially refused a licence, he demanded an explanation. Redford’s letter so enraged Garnett that he responded with a fierce criticism of the censorship system. (Woodfield 121) Soon afterwards Garnett published the play, together with an introduction in which he included his own as well as Redford’s letter. In his letter to Redford Garnett addresses an essential peculiarity of the British censorship system, that the Examiner or the Lord Chamberlain exclusively deals with theatre managers, not with dramatic authors. Garnett responds to Redford’s remark on this issue – ‘The Licensor

has no official cognisance of authors as such’ – in the following manner: ‘That is to say, you claim the right to ignore my existence while destroying my property – for a play debarred the Stage is practically destroyed.’ (Garnett 4) Garnett also raises another issue in the censorship debate, that of the injustice of the system, which gives all the power into the hands of one official who is not responsible to any democratic body, who need not defend his ruling, while, on the other hand, the dramatist is not even a player in the unfair game. Moreover, the case of the theatre (for the dramatist) is not heard, neither is there the possibility of appealing against a decision. Edward Garnett, very pointedly, defines the position of the author in this situation of grave imbalance, which, essentially, is much more disadvantageous than that of a common criminal:

The prisoner indicted for felony has a right to be heard in his own defence. The judge does not say to him, "I sentence you to be hanged, but you must not ask me my reasons, for I have no official cognisance of your existence." Dramatic authorship is not, as far as I know, in itself a crime; yet I am denied the elementary fair play allowed to the accused. Judge and jury in one, you fine me the whole value [...] value of a work to which I have devoted months of thought; and when I want to know wherein lies my misdemeanour – Yours not to reason why,/Yours not to make reply! (4)¹

Redford’s attempt to shed his responsibility for refusing a licence, while at the same time claiming to have done a favour to the theatre manager, incensed Garnett the most. The letter of the Examiner of Plays in response to Garnett’s was marked ‘private’:

I trust you will absolve me from any discourtesy if I point out that my official relations are only concerned with the Managers of Theatres. It is always painful to me to decline to recommend a licence, and in this case I hoped to avoid any possible appearance of censure on any one by suggesting privately to Mr. Harrison the desirability of withdrawing this piece. (quoted in Garnett, 4)

¹ If Redford was such an uneducated man as the authors present him to be, he would not have understood Garnett’s ironical adaptation of lines from Alfred Lord Tennyson’s poem ‘The Charge of the Light Brigade.’

Garnett addresses the perfidiousness and cowardliness of such an undercover strategy, pointing out that this entails the abandoning of responsibility on the part of the censor: 'Will you think it very ungrateful of me if I look a little deeper into your motives, and suggest that all this tenderness for Mr. Harrison's feelings and mine was merely another device for evading responsibility' (4). Moreover, Garnett regards this as an attempt 'to ensure silent acquiescence in [his] verdict' (4). Ultimately, this devious policy can be read as a call upon authors and theatre managers to practise self-censorship.

4.3 The censor's rationale: aesthetic, not moral?

Garnett's systematic attack serves as an appropriate point of departure to consider the authors' primary arguments in challenging the institutionalised censorship in the early years of the twentieth century. First of all, he seriously questions the censor's rationale and his interpretation of his office, on the one hand, and the actual licensing practices, on the other hand. The quintessential justification of the existence as well as the implementation of state control over the theatre was the protection of the public from gross indecencies and immoral attitudes. It is exactly this moral vindication of the office which Garnett, and other writers, dispute with reference to the licensing of a considerable number of frivolous plays: 'It is not a question of morals. [...] Mr. Redford, the Censor, [...] has licensed many silly, inane, semi-indecent plays, both original and versions of French farces [...].' (Garnett, Preface 1) In a letter to the editor of *The Times*, of 29 October 1907, prior to a meeting with the Prime Minister, the signatories expressed a similar idea.² They lodged 'a formal protest against the office, which was instituted for political, and not for the so-called moral ends to which it is perverted.' Garnett maintains that it is not the indecency of a play that provokes the ban of the censor but the seriousness with which an unsavoury subject is treated; such dramatic works are suppressed 'because of their power as works of art.' (Garnett 2) According to Garnett, this is also the main reason why so very few plays are staged that 'seriously try to analyse modern life.'

² Among the most prominent signatories were Harley Granville Barker, John Galsworthy, George Bernard Shaw, Joseph Conrad and Henry James.

(2) As to the banning of his own play Garnett is convinced that Redford’s refusal of a licence must be attributed to the Examiner’s lack of judgment: ‘I contend that the Censor has here shown that he cannot discriminate between an immoral work and a work of fine art, and that in fact he has suppressed it because it is a work of tragic intensity [...]’ (2) Among a list of axioms Garnett includes the point of non-interference of the censor with aesthetically and ethically advanced plays: ‘It is not the Censor’s business to suppress intellectual plays that criticise contemporary life, or plays [...] that introduce new moral teaching,’ (2) because most works of art are inherently revolutionary, as it is the essence of art to challenge current tastes and prejudices. W. L. Courtney, whose adaptation of *Oedipus Rex* was refused a licence, voices a similar opinion as to the Lord Chamberlain’s agenda:

The average play that was passed by the Censor is one that corresponds to the average instincts of the ordinary man. He likes a certain level of moral maxim to which he is accustomed. He does not, as a rule, like any serious study or anything like a serious examination of moral or social points with which he is unfamiliar ... he will always fall back on the conventional, and refuse the original work. (quoted in Nicholson 51)

This view of the censor’s concern for the aesthetic and moral sensibilities of the average playgoer as his standard of the stage ability of a play is certainly perceptive, yet, it appears, the dramatists protesting against the institution of censorship never attempted to fathom the ulterior motives of the authorities in support of the control of the theatres. Essentially, the ruling classes were only interested in the sensibilities of the wider public in terms of their predictability and reliability, as they had no interest in allowing them to become aware of alternative, let alone innovative paradigms of social, political and moral conduct. While the governing classes professed to protect the mass of playgoers from unconventional or even unsettling new ideas in order to safeguard their emotional and moral health, they were actually driven by the sole interest of preventing unrest of any sort among the population, thus safeguarding their own position of power.

Nevertheless, the moral sensibility of the wider theatre-going public was the key issue for both the censorship authorities as well as the dramatic authors. Although the playwrights’ criticism of the censor’s stance is all too

justified, their patronising attitude towards the common spectator casts a shadow over the position of the dramatists. The authors critical of censorship keep referring to the lack of taste and the lack of education of the ordinary playgoer, occasionally also locating him among the middle-class, like, for example, Edward Garnett: '[Our] Censor, who is not a literary man, claims the right of suppressings artists, great or small, who do not give our middle-class public pleasure!' (2) One could argue that this elitist stance, inspired by class-consciousness, does not become a group of artists who are fighting for the abolition of an undemocratic institution. In another paragraph, Garnett speaks of the 'prejudices and limitations of the crowd' (2), which, in his view, constitute the critical yardstick of the censor. Garnett even stipulates that a work of art, by definition, does 'not flatter the tastes, the feelings, or prejudices of the great public', summing up his grievances focusing on the 'half-educated public' as follows:

It is monstrous to say that [advanced plays] corrupt or debauch the public mind. They may pain or shock the general public that does not understand them, or that cannot judge of them, but there is no more necessity for the general public to go to the theatre which stages these works than for me to go to the theatre that stages the last Gaiety farce, which shocks my moral and mental tastes and artistic conceptions. (3)

In his evidence to the Select Committee, John Galsworthy, in a less condescending manner, explains why it is entirely unnecessary to protect the average playgoer from being confronted with unsavoury plays, arguing in terms of the parameters of the theatre-going culture:

The First Night audience at a play is always a picked and hardened audience. The general Public is at once informed by the Press of the nature of the play. People do not go to plays without either reading or hearing what sort of play it is [...] (quoted in Marrot 219).

It appears that the banning of *Waste* and of *The Breaking Point* triggered the campaign for the abolition of censorship of the theatres, which eventually led to the setting up of a Joint Select Committee in 1909 to debate the question of censorship in a Parliamentary context. Eventually, after a

long discussion process, the only concession of the state amounted to the inauguration of an Advisory Board whose members should be addressed to consider controversial cases. However, even this board remained under the control of the Lord Chamberlain. (Nicholson 69) Moreover, the appointment of Charles Brookfield as Examiner of Plays in 1911 was regarded as a provocation by serious dramatists and the champions of the abolition of theatre censorship. Brookfield was an actor, journalist and playwright who had written a number of frivolous stage entertainments and was well known as a declared enemy of Ibsen and the intellectual drama. The reaction of Harley Granville Barker, the spiritus rector of the renaissance of English drama and theatre at the beginning of the twentieth century, marks an appropriate ending to this overview of the mechanisms of censorship:

In view of Mr. Brookfield's recently published opinions on the Modern Drama this action of the Lord Chamberlain's is but further proof, if further proof were needed, that he is hopelessly out of touch with the theatre over which he exercises despotic control and that the continuance of his legalised tyranny is inimical to the Drama's welfare and its good name. (quoted in Shellard 65)

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