Hellenism and the Independent Theatre Movement in America.

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HELLENISM AND THE INDEPENDENT THEATRE MOVEMENT IN AMERICA

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In
The Department of Theatre

By
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation considers influences of the Greek tradition on the rise of the independent theatres in America during the first quarter of the twentieth century. These influences are of two major kinds, those present in the earlier European independent theatre movement, dating back to 1877, with the creation of the Théâtre Libre in Paris, and those found in the American cultural tradition in general. The American branch of the independent theatre movement harbored from its inception a confluence of both these Hellenist strains, as seen in the work of figures such as Maurice Browne, leader of the Chicago Little Theatre, and Jig Cook, leader of the Provincetown Players.

The European Hellenist influences are traced to seminal figures in nineteenth century classical studies, such as Nietzsche, Wilamowitz-Moellendorff and Pater, and to theatrical visionaries such as Wagner, Reinhardt, Craig and Yeats. A variety of theatrical practices are considered in relation to Hellenism within the European context, including production management, directing, theatre architecture, scenic design, playwriting, and translation. The international character of the independent theatre movement, which established itself in France, Germany, England, Ireland, Russia, Sweden, and elsewhere, helped trends in classical scholarship, itself an international activity, to resonate in the experimental theatres.

The Greek tradition in the United States began in the early colonial period, when colonists were lured to the New World with promotional parallels made between North America and lost island of Atlantis. Henceforth, in every period of the nation's history, the Greek presence assumes varied, often distinctly American forms: studies of ancient Greek constitutions by the Founding Fathers; Greek curriculum in schools;
philhellenism of the early national period; Greek revival architecture; Greek letter societies; Greek-styled numismatics. These and other forms of the Greek presence in America provide an impression of the climate in which Greek-influenced work first appeared at early independent theatres in the United States.

A review of the direct and climactic Greek influences in the work of early, leading independent theatres in the America points to a pattern of Hellenist influence that has never been adequately recognized. This study provides the first, general record of that pattern.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In the winter of 1924, an American was buried in the cemetery at Delphi, his grave marked by a stone taken from the Temple of Apollo by permission of the Greek government. In the nearby stadium, Pythian games were held in honor of the man, who had spent the last two years of his life in the ancient village on the slopes of Mount Parnassus. In a paradox worthy of Delphi, this man, whom the Greeks honored in their most ancient traditions, was none other than George Cram (‘Jig’) Cook, former leader of the Provincetown Players, one of the most renowned avant-garde theatre companies in American history. But Jig Cook represents, in fact, only one of many links between ancient Greece and modern, experimental theatre in America.

Maurice Browne, leader of the Chicago Little Theatre (1912-1918), and the popularly designated “father” of the American little theatre movement, envisioned his experimental theatre as an attempt to revive Greek theatrical values. Indeed, it appears that the whole independent theatre movement in America, encompassing those theatres of the early twentieth century that were formed in imitation of European art theatres, known variously as “little,” “art,” “independent,” and “toy” theatres, was indebted to the study of ancient Greece for many of its aims and methods. Nor was it simply the American companies that had ties to ancient Hellas; the Anglo-Irish and Continental art theatres, which began to form decades prior to their American counterparts, were clearly beholden to the Greek studies that had flourished in educated circles since the late eighteenth century.

Richard Wagner, striving to recreate a religious, musical theatre based upon the ancient Greek model, developed theatre architecture and staging practices that were
instrumental in the rise of realism as it came to fruition in the first independent theatre, the Théâtre Libre under Antoine. His writings inspired Adolphe Appia and Gordon Craig, whose stage designs and design theories helped independent theatres to revolutionize modern scenography. Craig was also influenced by the teachings of English classicist Walter Pater, whose reinterpretations of Greek culture led to a widespread interest in the revival of poetic drama. Other Paterians, such as Oscar Wilde and William Butler Yeats, produced plays that were to become mainstays of independent theatre seasons. And, of course, the modern revivals of Greek tragedy, which were often staged at the independent theatres, were initiated and heavily supported by Greek scholars and enthusiasts.

At the close of the nineteenth century, the Greek tradition influenced new movements in virtually all the arts, especially in architecture, poetry, sculpture, painting and dance. In theatre, Greek revalist work found expression not only on the stages of the independent theatres, but in professional venues, college theatres, and as part of the outdoor theatre movement. Artists in all fields relied heavily on the interpretations of ancient Greece expounded by classically trained scholars and theorists, whose diverse views were conditioned by a variety of modern concerns, including political, religious, philosophical, and anthropological interests.

Because the Greek tradition bears primarily upon the artistic activity of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through the filter of contemporary classical studies, an inquiry into this field helps to disclose a vital relationship between art and the intellectual history of the period. Study of ancient Greek culture played a more central and persistent role in the intellectual trends of the period than has generally been

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Although Greek revivalism found its way into nearly all artistic forms during the time when independent theatres emerged, little attention has been directed to its role in the movement. Most studies in this area have focused on revivals or adaptations of Greek tragedy, and have come from classical studies rather than from theatre historians. Book-length studies include Hellmut Flashar’s excellent *Inszenierung der Antike: Das griechische Drama auf der Bühne der Neuzeit, 1585-1990* (1991), which concentrates on the German production tradition, J. Michael Walton’s *Living Greek Theatre* (1987) and Karelisa Hartigan’s *Greek Tragedy on the Modern Stage: Ancient Drama in the Commercial Theatre, 1882-1994* (1995). Recent essays include Peter Burian’s “Tragedy Adapted for Stages and Screens: The Renaissance to the Present” (1997) and Fiona Macintosh’s “Tragedy in Performance: Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Productions” (1997). Numerous unpublished dissertations from American theatre departments do complement the work by classicists, but give only a limited account of the role played by Greek studies in the independent theatre movement as a whole.

In short, the pattern of association between the independent theatres and the Greek tradition has not been recognized. Instead, independent theatres have been linked to anti-commercialism, progressive politics, other forms of contemporary art, such as painting, and to intellectual developments tied to the natural and social sciences. Since stage productions of Greek tragedy are usually treated apart from other forms of modern
theatrical experimentation, the greater influence of the Greek tradition on the emergence of modern theatre has been largely neglected. Yet, the full story of the independent theatres, many of whose leaders were avid Hellenists, may not be told without the understanding that classics and theatre were intermingled within the movement.

This study examines the nature and extent of the role played by the Greek tradition in the independent theatre movement in the United States. The latter branch of what was truly an international movement requires separate treatment for several reasons. The Greek tradition differs in each country and thus demands separate study. The historical context of the American independent theatres also differs significantly from its European counterpart owing to the decades that separate the former from the first independent theatres of Paris, Berlin and London. An attempt to assess the presence of the Greek tradition in the independent theatre movement on an international scale, while desirable, thus lies beyond the scope of this study, which does, nevertheless, serve as an introduction to the subject.

The chapter that follows this introduction provides background coverage of the European independent theatre movement and its connection to Hellenism. The latter is a term used throughout this study interchangeably with “the Greek tradition,” and signifies, except where otherwise qualified, the entire history of Greek culture, its influences, and its reception. Focus is placed on the earliest independent theatres in Europe, and to the state of Greek studies in each national context. Theatrical practices are considered in relation to the rivalry of viewpoints within the Greek tradition, with attention paid to various types of activity, such as theatrical management, scenic design, directing and playwriting. Despite its brevity, this review of the European background...
traces several lines of influence that were crucial to the American theatres. The practice of using amateur actors is one example of this. Another is what Americans referred to as the “new stagecraft,” which may be traced to design theorists Appia and Craig, and through them to Wagner and Pater.

Focus turns in chapter three to the American context of Hellenism and its relations to theatrical activity. The Greek tradition in America, however, is ceded a more expansive overview, with Hellenism considered in respect to political, religious, educational, social and artistic traditions. Classical programs of study are reviewed, as are more popular manifestations of the ways in which Americans perceived themselves vis-à-vis the Greek past. In this same chapter are discussed, as well, various artistic and intellectual movements related to Hellenism, including Greek Revival architecture, Isadora Duncan’s work in dance based upon Greek vase images, American idealist philosophy, such as Emerson’s platonic transcendentalism, and university productions of Greek tragedy.

Chapters four and five discuss two leading American independent theatres: Maurice Browne’s Chicago Little Theatre and Jig Cook’s Provincetown Players. The independent theatre movement as a whole, together with its legacy, is discussed in regard to the manner in which theatrical activity was changed in America as a result of the above two theatres and others like them. The spread of “little theatres” helped to lay the foundation for the development, later in the twentieth century, of a strong regional theatre in America, a vital, innovative quarter in today’s theatre. The work of the Provincetown Players and the Washington Square Players helped to revolutionize
American playwriting and scenography, and were important precursors to the off- and off-off-Broadway theatres, another lively presence in recent American theatre.

Founded in 1912, the Chicago Little Theatre undertook to bring non-commercial, poetic drama to Chicago. The Irish Players, who toured the United States in 1911, provided the principal model for the company. The work of W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory’s company, which is discussed in chapter two, thus served as a link between the European and American independent theatres. The Irish Players was also an influential model for the Provincetown Players and the Washington Square Players, making it the most important theatre to bridge the European and American traditions. The leaders of the Irish Players were themselves influenced by the independent theatres in Paris and by the aestheticism of Walter Pater, and thus harbored a confluence of Hellenism and experimental theatre germane to this study.

Englishman Maurice Browne, the director of the Chicago Little Theatre, was in his youth a distinguished student of classics. While a student at Cambridge University, he belonged to a group of self-proclaimed “aesthetes,” who referred to Oscar Wilde as the “Great Aesthete” (Browne Too Late 59). Browne’s familiarity with the aestheticism of Pater and Wilde, which clearly informs his directorship of the Chicago Little Theatre, is accordingly viewed within the context of nineteenth century English Hellenism.

Another major influence on Browne’s work was exerted by Gordon Craig, whose Art of the Theatre (1911) served as the Chicago company’s “bible” (Browne Too Late 172). In both Craig and Browne is evident a confluence of classicism and experimental theatre; Oscar Brockett and Robert Findlay state that, “a disciple of Walter Pater, Craig advocated art-for-art’s-sake and the theatre as an independent art” (119).
Essays published by Browne, in which he articulates his theatre’s ideals, are revealing of his Hellenist leanings, especially when analyzed in light of writings by Winckelmann, Pater and Craig, and the Chicago Little Theatre’s production of The Trojan Women (1913) serves to illustrate the manner in which his Hellenist ideals were put into practice. Following these considerations is an analysis of the company’s reception that emphasizes its context within the Greek tradition in America. The outbreak of the First World War is also seen to have an impact on theatrical reception of the period, as well as on Hellenist idealism.

The Chicago Little Theatre provided a model for Jig Cook, the leader of the Provincetown Players, who was active in Chicago literary circles at the time Browne and his wife, Ellen Van Volkenburg, founded their company. Cook’s Provincetown Players, founded in 1915, set out to produce new, experimental plays written by Americans, and its success, most notably with the works of Eugene O’Neill and Susan Glaspell, first brought the American independent theatre movement to a level on par with its European counterpart. Eventually, when their plays began to transfer quickly to mainstream theatres, the Provincetown artists saw their values embraced by the professional theatre and its public.

The Provincetown Players was more deeply rooted in the intellectual, political and artistic traditions of America than was the Chicago Little Theatre. The trademark collectivism of the early years of the Provincetown Players further distinguishes its aims and methods from those of Browne’s group. Robert Sarlós, in his book, Jig Cook and the Provincetown Players (1982), writes that “driven by Dionysian obsession, Cook became the originator and the undisputed leader of the earliest theatre group on record.
to have consciously operated on the principle of collectivity” (37). Collectivism has since become a regular feature of avant-garde theatre, in America and abroad, suggesting another inroad into modern theatre of ancient Greek theatre practices.

Socialist values guided Cook’s notion of a collective theater group, but, as with most of his conceptions for a new theatre, it was inextricably tied to his vision of ancient Greece. Cook’s Hellenism was more idiosyncratic and complex than Browne’s, and more closely aligned with German scholarship. For Cook, who studied philology at the University of Heidelberg, Marxism was a distant echo of Platonism, and Nietzsche remained the most constant filter of ancient Greek culture.

In the sixth and penultimate chapter, on new stagecraft, the adoption by Americans of European scenographic innovations, during the nineteen teens and twenties, is discussed in respect to the Hellenist influences in the work of leading scenic design theorists and practitioners. The three major figures in the new scenographic trends were Appia, Craig, and Reinhardt, all of whom had ties to the Greek tradition. Moreover, the simplicity and economy of the new scenic practices suggest a kinship to classical aesthetic principles, a line of inquiry supported by the work of Arthur Feinsod, whose dissertation identifies minimalist aspects of the so-called new stagecraft. Independent theatres are shown to have been instrumental in winning popular acceptance for the new scenographic values.

Chapter seven completes the study with a review of findings and a discussion of their implications.

As to research, investigating the relationship between Hellenism and the independent theatre movement has required readings in two principal fields: the history
of modern theatre and the history of the classical tradition in modern times. Gilbert
Highet’s *The Classical Tradition* (1976) offers a comprehensive and reliable review of
classical literary influences throughout the history of Western civilization, providing a
valuable basis for further research. Supplementing Highet is Hugh Lloyd-Jones’ *Blood
for the Ghosts: Classical Influences in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (1982),
which contains a narrower, more detailed treatment of the decades in question.
Especially useful are his chapters on Wagner, Nietzsche, and Murray, as well as one on
Greek studies at Oxford. In addition to these are numerous books and articles of more
specific focus, hundreds of which are listed in W. M. Calder and D. J. Kramer’s *An
Introductory Bibliography of the History of Classical Scholarship Chiefly in the

For American scholarship, Elizabeth Amanda Atwater’s dissertation, *A History
of Classical Scholarship in America* (1938) gives a useful survey of the subject, and
includes an extensive, annotated bibliography. An invaluable introduction to the
classical tradition in America, in its broadest sense, is Meyer Reinhold’s *Classica
Americana: The Greek and Roman Heritage in the United States* (1984), which includes
a review of previous work in this, until recently, largely neglected field. The classic
work on the subject remains Richard M. Gummere’s *The American Colonial Mind and
the Classical Tradition* (1963). Also helpful, for non-academic forms of the Greek
tradition, is *Ancient Greece in Modern America* (1943), by John Robertson Macarthur,
and Johannes Urzidil’s *Amerika und die Antike* (1964), although these works offer
rather general discussions and lack documentation.
Scholars have recently brought great sophistication to the study of the classical tradition in England, combining exhaustive research with social, political, and cultural readings that examine the context of classics in British society. The work of Frank M. Turner, Richard Jenkyns, and, more recently, of Christopher Stray, although centered on classical studies in Britain, has helped to illuminate the American classical tradition in new ways, suggesting numerous lines of inquiry into the topic, and demonstrating research strategies of relevance to the American context. Turner's *Contesting Cultural Authority: Essays in Victorian Intellectual Life* (1981) argues that philosophical idealism in nineteenth century Britain, Europe and America, long overlooked by historians in favor of the scientism of the period, was a far greater intellectual force, and in large measure due to period scientism, than traditionally believed. His book, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (1981), and Stray's *Classics Transformed: Schools, Universities, and Society in England, 1830-1960* (1998) offer a wealth of documentation and astute analyses of the Greek tradition in schools and in the social and political life of Victorian Britain. *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (1980), by Richard Jenkyns, brings a more politically-oriented focus to the same subject. W. B. Stanford provides complementary coverage of Ireland in *Ireland and the Classical Tradition* (1976).

The European independent theatre movement and its leading figures have been the subject of numerous studies. General works include Oscar Brockett and Robert Findlay's *A Century of Innovation: A History of European and American Theatre since the late Nineteenth Century* (1973), Anna Irene Miller’s *The Independent Theatre in Europe, 1887 to the Present* (1931), and Edward Braun’s *The Director and the Stage:*
From Naturalism to Grotowski (1982). Contemporary accounts of the independent theatre movement abound, in newspapers, periodicals, and books. Sheldon Cheney’s The New Movement in the Theatre (1914) provides an early, comprehensive treatment of the movement. Together with his other works on early twentieth century theatre, Cheney illuminates the relationship between the independent companies and other trends in the theatre, including those tied to professional, academic, and outdoor venues.

American independent theatres and American productions of Greek plays are the subjects of dozens of unpublished dissertations, and I have relied heavily on the research and analyses found in several of them. I am most indebted to Paul Edwards’ “Putting on the Greeks”: Euripidean Tragedy and the Twentieth Century American Theatre (1987); his discussion of Murray and Wilamowitz in relation to the Euripidean revival provides a rare account of relations between classics and the modern American stage. Arthur Feinsod’s The Origins of the Minimalist Mise-en-scene in the United States (1986) helped me to relate modern scenographic developments to classical aesthetics. Gordon Arnold Johnson’s The Greek Productions of Margaret Anglin (1971) brought to my attention the significant work of Anglin in the early twentieth century movement to revive Greek drama. Dorothy Chansky’s Composing Ourselves: The American Little Theatre Movement and the Construction of a New Audience, 1912-1925 (1997) presents independent theatres within the context of its audiences, and contains especially useful analyses of the role of women in the movement.

Individual American independent theatres are treated in numerous monographs, dissertations, and articles. The Chicago Little Theatre is discussed in detail by the company’s co-founder, Maurice Browne, in his autobiographical Too Late to Lament.
(1955), which forms the basis for all later studies. Browne’s account of his educational background and early years as a poet helped also to clarify his connections to English Hellenism. Bernard Dukore’s dissertation, Maurice Browne and the Chicago Little Theatre (1957), provides the most thorough record of the theatre, and includes information gathered by the author in interviews and correspondence with company members.

The Provincetown Players and its early leader, George Cram Cook, have received considerable attention in published works, including Helen Deutsch and Stella Hanau’s The Provincetown: A Story of the Theatre (1931), Susan Glaspell’s The Road to the Temple (1927), and Robert Sarlos’ Jig Cook and the Provincetown Players (1982). Glaspell’s book contains insightful journal entries from Cook, and information on his youth and education, as well as on his years in Greece; this has proven helpful in establishing the importance of Hellenism throughout Cook’s career. My reading of Cook’s position within the Greek tradition was greatly informed by two excellent studies: Arthur E. Waterman’s “From Iowa to Greece: The Achievement of George Cram Cook” (1959) and Arnold Goldman’s “The Culture of the Provincetown Players” (1978). Susan C. Kemper’s dissertation, The Novels, Plays, and Poetry of George Cram Cook, Founder of the Provincetown Players (1982) contains valuable discussions on the development of Cook’s ideas on art and society.

Scenographic developments at American independent theatres are treated in numerous contemporary works, including Kenneth Macgowan’s The Theatre of Tomorrow (1921) and his and co-author Robert Edmund Jones’ Continental Stagecraft (1922). The important scenographic work at two independent theatres in New York is
CHAPTER TWO: HELLENISM AND THE EUROPEAN INDEPENDENT THEATRE MOVEMENT

Introduction

Modern reappraisals of ancient Greece influenced in diverse ways the artists and theatre directors who established the American independent theatre movement in the first quarter of the twentieth century. But most forms of this influence had taken shape during the preceding decades in Europe, where an independent theatre movement had been continuously active since its beginnings in 1887, marked in that year by the opening of the Théâtre Libre in Paris. It is therefore necessary, in measuring the influence of contemporary Hellenism on the American independent theatres, first to consider its impact on their European predecessors. Even a brief overview of the earliest independent theatres, which begins this chapter, attests to the remarkable continuity within this multinational movement.

As this study concentrates on the American branch of the independent theatre movement, it considers only those European lines of Hellenist influences that were later evident in the work of American artists. It emphasizes Hellenist influences that are rooted in deliberative Greek studies, as these best illuminate the channels, starting from Greek sources, by which new views of the ancient world came to have an impact on stage practices. This criterion has guided the inclusion, in the second portion of this chapter, of three major figures in the cross-fertilization of Greek studies and the theatre: Richard Wagner, Walter Pater and Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff. Each of these figures represents a separate thread of Hellenism within the European independent theatre movement, initiated, respectively, in France, England, and Germany.
In the final section of this chapter, focus shifts to European artists and theorists who directly influenced the leading American independent theatres: Gilbert Murray and Harley Granville Barker; William Butler Yeats and Lady Gregory (and the Irish Players); Adolphe Appia and Gordon Craig. Here, attention is drawn to the Hellenist influences that helped to shape the work of each figure or theatre; how these informed the values and methods of the American companies is treated in subsequent chapters.

A Definition and Brief Overview of the Independent Theatre Movement

Independent theatres are broadly defined in this study as those that belong in the tradition of innovative, non-commercial theatres that began with the opening of André Antoine's Théâtre Libre in Paris in 1887. This includes companies modeled directly after Antoine’s group, such as the Freie Bühne, founded in Berlin in 1889, and the Independent Theatre, founded two years later in London, but includes as well many, sometimes remote, variations on Antoine’s example: theatres known in various times and countries as art, free, toy, little, avant-garde, off-Broadway, off-off-Broadway, fringe, experimental, black box, and so forth.

The independent theatre movement, as opposed to the entire “tradition,” refers principally to the early decades after 1887, when independent theatres were spreading from country to country, establishing a basis for the tradition of non-commercial theatre that has continued to the present day. This period of international burgeoning lasted roughly from 1887 to 1925, after which one may speak, in most Western countries, of an independent theatre tradition, and not simply of a movement. But even during this formative stage of the independent theatre tradition, when it still bore the novelty of a
movement, many theatres involved in it are found to resist easy classification. This is partly due to the eclecticism of the early theatres, which typically harbored under one roof disparate and even opposing artistic movements, such as realism and symbolism.

The Théâtre Libre had certain features that were to become standard at other independent theatres, though not as a complete set. One of these was Antoine’s innovative use of a subscription-based audience, which allowed his theatre to qualify as a private company, and thus to elude the censorship imposed on plays performed at public playhouses. This practice was widely adopted at other art theatres, especially in Germany and England. Other standard features of the emerging independent theatres, which were originally employed by Antoine, include the use of amateur actors, emphasis upon ensemble acting, and the presentation of new plays, both foreign and native. The successful imitation of Antoine’s methods was aided significantly by the tours of his company to other countries.

In 1890 Paul Fort opened the Théâtre d’Art, a Parisian independent theatre dedicated to the staging of symbolist plays. It offered an alternative to the Théâtre Libre, where staging practices were devoted to the advancement of naturalism and realism. Aurélien-Marie Lugné-Poë, who had worked as an actor for both Antoine and Fort, assumed leadership of Fort’s company in 1893, and soon transformed it into the Théâtre de l’Œuvre, where over the next four years he and associated artists developed non-illusionistic staging methods to suit the symbolist aesthetic.

J. T. Grein brought the independent theatre movement to England when he opened the Independent Theatre in London in 1891. Like the Théâtre Libre and the Freie Bühne in Berlin, Grein’s theatre produced a large number of foreign plays, and
used subscriptions to skirt censorship. It served as a model for other English groups, such as the Incorporated Stage Society, founded in 1899, and the Royal Court Theatre, founded in 1904. Between 1907 and 1913, other independent theatres were founded in Manchester, Liverpool, and Birmingham.

Unlike most early companies, the leading independent theatre in Russia was operated as a professional company. Founded in 1898 by Konstantin Stanislavski and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, the Moscow Art Theatre became one of the most innovative and influential theatres of the pioneering movement. Its methods and theories would eventually come to dominate the practice of Western acting in the twentieth century, particularly in the United States.

In Ireland, two theatres opened in 1899: the Irish Literary Theatre and the Ormond Dramatic Society. The latter became the Irish National Theatre Society in 1903, with William Butler Yeats as its first president; in 1904, it opened the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, where, under Yeats’ and Lady Gregory’s guidance, the group soon won international recognition for its experiments in scenic design, acting and playwriting. Its three tours to America between 1911 and 1914 helped to initiate, and to fashion the emerging character of, the independent theatre movement in America.

Other notable independent theatres appeared in Spain, with the founding in 1898 of the Teatro Intim in Barcelona, and in Sweden, in 1907, when August Strindberg and August Falck established the Intimate Theatre in Stockholm.

An important development that was related to the independent theatre movement began as an enterprise known as “People’s Theatre.” The first of these companies was founded by a former member of Antoine’s Théâtre Libre, Maurice Pottecher, who
created the Théâtre du Peuple in 1895, which inspired a wave of outdoor community theatre in the early decades of the twentieth century in France, Germany, England and the United States. It was frequently within this offshoot of the independent theatre movement that the most ambitious efforts at replicating ancient Greek theatrical productions took place. These efforts were especially influential on the independent theatre movement in the United States, for the two trends emerged there almost simultaneously. This helps to explain the greater role of Hellenism in the American, rather than in the European, independent theatre movement.

The spread of independent theatres, and of various types of community theatres, was tied to other, concurrent developments in the arts and sciences, and to the political and social climate of the period. The independent theatres were often anchored in artistic movements outside the theatre, in the areas of literature, music, and the fine arts, and were often aligned with sweeping social and political agendas, and with changing perspectives in philosophy, science, psychology, and religion. In sum, the independent theatre movement was steeped in the political, social, and intellectual history of its time, and its interaction with Hellenism participated in this matrix.

**Hellenism, Wagner, and the French Symbolists**

Richard Wagner's (1813-1883) influence upon the independent theatres was great, yet its true extent is hard to gauge, since it was prevalent throughout the cultural climate in which the theatres flourished. Among the major strains of his influence, the first and most important to the movement is in the work of the symbolist artists at Paul Fort's Théâtre d'Art and Aurelién-Marie Lugné-Poë's Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, where the
modem tradition of non-illusionistic staging began (Brockett 72). It also arrived, as shall be discussed later, through the mediated influence of Craig and Appia, and through directors, playwrights, and artistic directors with ties to literary symbolism.

Because of its formative role in Wagner's works and theories, Hellenism constitutes a seminal force in the modern tradition of anti-realist theatre. The conservatism popularly attributed to classical studies of the Victorian period may cause any link between classics and truly avant-garde theatre to appear strained, but this stems from a misreading of nineteenth century classicism, which actually contained competing visions of the Greek past and sharp disagreement over the methodology and purposes of its study. As a consequence, one must differentiate Wagner's engagement with Greek studies from other Hellenisms of the nineteenth century.

The study of ancient Greece provided Wagner with a means of developing his own vision of modern artistic and cultural renewal. Indeed, for Wagner, according to Wolfgang Schadewalt, who has examined the composer's life-long involvement with Hellenism, "confirmation of his own ideas by relating them to, and deriving them from, the Greeks almost becomes a way of thinking for him" (qtd. in Müller 229). Wagner was first introduced to Greek studies as a student at Dresden's Kreuzschule (circa 1822). While never attaining mastery of the Greek language, Wagner studied it with great enthusiasm, and later wrote, "it was above all the study of Greek as a language to which I felt most drawn" (qtd. in Müller 227).

As an adult, Wagner found in translations of Greek literature a repeated stimulus for his multifarious works. As Ulrich Müller has written, Hellenism may be traced through "his theoretical writings, his conception of the Bayreuth Festival, his attempts
at comedy . . . and, finally, in the music dramas themselves” (Müller 229). Among the ancient poets, Aeschylus, Homer, Sophocles, and Aristophanes held the greatest fascination for him.

Frantisek Deak identifies Wagner’s efforts as “the most significant attempt in the nineteenth century to restore theatre’s greatness, to renew its importance to society as a place wherein the fundamental myths of the population are re-enacted, as in ancient Greece during the time of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides” (Deak 94). In attempting to make theatre once more a vital institution, Wagner aimed for nothing less than the foundation of a new society, in the lives of whose members theatre would have a profound place. His long-standing commitment to social change is evidenced by his participation in the Dresden Revolution of 1849, which led to his banishment from Germany for eleven years (Deathridge 32). His ideal theatre was a populist venue where myths, viewed as the imaginative creations of a people, would be presented in musical dramas. Audiences were thus accorded a fundamentally creative function in Wagner’s understanding of a vital theatre. His insistence on the interrelationship of art and social transformation is further reflected in architectural innovations at the Bayreuth Festspielhaus, a theatre designed under Wagner’s supervision. Audiences were arranged at Bayreuth in accordance with collectivist, egalitarian principles: seating was not divided by aisles, private boxes were absent, and every seat offered a good view of the stage.

It should be noted that Wagner’s ambitions differed sharply from those of his contemporaries who aspired toward the reproduction of ancient Greek theatre through a historicist fidelity. His belief that theatre should enact for a people its own myths
already indicates Wagner’s disinterest in historical reproductions of classical theatre. Hellmut Flashar, who has researched the productions of ancient Greek plays in Germany, finds that Wagner wanted little to do with them. No Greek play was produced in conjunction with a Wagnerian opera during the composer’s lifetime. And when Wagner attended productions of Greek plays, as he did Antigone in Berlin, in 1841, and again in Mannheim, in 1872, he derided them. In his theoretical writings, Wagner expressly dismissed modern efforts to revive the ancient plays. In The Audience in Space and Time (1878), for example, he argues that Greek plays operate within a system of customs and morals that is completely foreign to modern audiences; the assumption that Greek plays may be recreated is misguided; and, that every effort at recreation leads only to the plays’ “monumentalization” (Flashar 106). Wagner conceived of ancient theatre as the manifestation of a profoundly creative and culture-specific process involving a people and its artists. His interest in this relationship between outward artistic form and its underlying causes owed much to the philosophical writings of Arthur Schopenhauer, whose ideas guided Wagner’s own philosophical thinking (Müller 287).

In The World as Will and Representation (1818), Schopenhauer contends that the external world of appearances is the expression of a single indiscernible force or will. This world view formed the basis for Schopenhauer’s elevation of music above all other art forms, for he considered music to be the sole “direct expression of the will itself” (Müller 289). Wagner was accordingly opposed to efforts to replicate the outer form of past theatre traditions, just as, on the same grounds, he opposed the realists’ efforts to recreate on stage the surface reality of life; in both he saw an art form
dislocated from the underlying, creative force of contemporary people. Instead, he sought to create a synthesis of the arts in a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or “total work of art,” which would be formed around the expressive primacy of music. Wagner’s idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* derived from his view of ancient Greek theatre, which he perceived as a unity of music, poetry and dance, one he believed had been lost in the cultural traditions of the West. This was one of the most influential ideas Wagner advanced, not only because it guided symbolist playwrights in their search for a poetic drama, but also as an early articulation of precepts that supported the modern director’s comprehensive artistic control over productions. As Brockett and Findlay point out: “above all, it is from this demand for artistic unity and its corollary – the all-powerful director – that Wagner’s enormous influence on the modern stage stems” (29).

In his contributions to the design of the Bayreuth Festspielhaus, Wagner sought to restore to contemporary audiences important social aspects of classical Greek theatre and culture. Originally planned for Munich, where Wagner enjoyed the generous patronage of Bavaria’s King Ludwig II, the theatre was located instead, after local opponents had threatened to prevent its realization, in the remote Bavarian town of Bayreuth. The final plan for the theatre emerged over several years, with contributions made by numerous designers, but “primary credit went to Otto Bruckwald as architect and to Karl Brandt as stage machinist” (Brockett and Findlay 29). Seating in the auditorium was, as previously mentioned, egalitarian and unified in its arrangement. The long rows of seats, uninterrupted by aisles, were designed to foster a shared, public response to performances, which for Wagner was another crucial aspect of Greek theatre that needed to be recuperated (Müller 230-31). Wagner also endeavored to
create the appearance of grandeur on stage, an attribute he ascribed to classical Greek performance. This was reflected architecturally at the Bayreuth Festspielhaus in a magnificently reinforced proscenium arch, from which the customary boxes were excluded, and by concealment of the orchestra in a large pit situated between the audience and the stage. All of these innovative features were frequently emulated in later architectural designs, and some have become standard at both playhouses and movie theatres. Another feature of the Festspielhaus that reintroduced into modern practice elements of ancient staging was its use of an annual festival to create a specialized context for its productions. It was, of course, at annual religious festivals that Attic tragedy rose to prominence in the fifth century B.C. Thus, it was Wagner who inaugurated the widespread use of festival productions in the modern era: “the annual festival at Bayreuth soon became famous throughout the world; it was to be the fountainhead of all those festivals that have enriched the artistic scene during the past century” (Brockett and Findlay 29).

The most forceful expression of Wagner’s Hellenism appears in Friedrich Nietzsche’s Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music (1872). Nietzsche’s training in classical languages and literature permitted him to reinforce Wagner’s theories with a general cultural theory of ancient Greek civilization. Hugh Lloyd-Jones describes Nietzsche’s reinterpretation of ancient Greek culture as a radical departure from the received view of it in the classical studies of his day: “Behind the calm and dignity praised by Winckelmann, Nietzsche saw the struggle that had been needed to achieve the balance; he saw that the Greeks had not repressed, but had used for their own purposes, terrible and irrational forces” (Lloyd-Jones 174). How much of Nietzsche’s
influential first book must be attributed to Wagner, and how much to its young author, remains unclear, especially as it was written when the mutual influences between the two men were at their height.

Theatre historian Richard Beacham contends that “One of those affected by Nietzsche was Richard Wagner” (301), and cites George Steiner’s Death of Tragedy for support: ‘spurred on by Nietzsche, Wagner confidently invoked for his own vision the precedent of antique theatre. He argued, as did Nietzsche, that tragedy had been born of music and dance’” (qtd. in Müller 301). But Ulrich Müller maintains that “the idea propounded by Nietzsche in his Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music . . . had already been developed by Wagner with reference to Greek drama both in the basic outline of his argument and in the metaphorical language which he had used to expound it” (Müller 230).

Müller relies on the findings of Dieter Borchmeyer, who has pursued the question of influences in some detail. Borchmeyer states that “it is in no respect true, as people used to assume, that Wagner owed his classical knowledge first and foremost to Nietzsche” (qtd. in Müller 330). He finds that "The Birth of Tragedy is influenced down to its details by Wagner’s theoretical works, above all by Opera and Drama (1851) and Beethoven (1870)” (qtd. in Müller 330). Borchmeyer’s case appears convincing in light of quotations he culls from earlier writings of Wagner that clearly portend Nietzsche’s major positions, including a note from Wagner’s The Artist of the Future (1849), which states “Birth from music: Aeschylus. Décadence—Euripides” (qtd. in Müller 330). This formulation of the rise of tragic drama out of music, associated with Aeschylus, and its decline soon after, associated with Euripides, is a
virtual thumbnail sketch of Nietzsche’s view of Attic tragedy, and uses key terms found in the *Birth of Tragedy*.

It is noteworthy that Wagner’s ideas on theatrical reform, developed through his theorizing of ancient Greek theatre, contributed to a book that would have a revolutionary impact on classical studies. Lloyd-Jones writes that he has “found the turning point in the modern understanding of early Greek thought to be the publication just a hundred years ago of Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*” (165). Here modern theatrical reform may be seen not only to draw on classical studies, but to effect changes in that field, even leading in this instance to a profoundly different understanding of the ancient world.

Wagner’s influence upon the symbolists came from his own theoretical writings and operas, not from *The Birth of Tragedy*. Indeed, Baudelaire’s article, “Richard Wagner and *Tannhäuser* in Paris,” published in 1861, had triggered the French symbolist movement eleven years prior to the publication of Nietzsche’s book. This is not to suggest that Nietzsche’s influence upon the independent theatre movement, while more diffuse than Wagner’s, was anything short of extraordinary, just as it has been in the Western intellectual and artistic tradition in general. But Nietzsche’s later philosophical writings, which so fascinated the generations of writers and artists involved in the independent theatres, extended well beyond Hellenism. In this study, therefore, Nietzsche’s influence is infrequently discussed, although his importance in the case of Jig Cook, founder of the Provincetown Players, provides an illuminating example of the effects of Nietzsche’s cultural presence, and is treated at some length in chapter five.
The symbolists found inspiration in Wagner’s call for the development of a theatre based upon the integration of separate art forms. Although Wagner positioned music at the center of his envisioned concourse of the arts, the symbolists accorded this place to poetic diction. In both cases, the foremost art form was understood to have a stylizing, synthesizing function. For Wagner, music offered a way to defy the hegemony of illusionistic theatre in his day. Stéphane Mallarmé, a leading theorist of the symbolist movement, believed that Wagner’s perception of music’s stylizing function might be usefully applied to actors. Frantisek Deak explains that “Mallarmé saw the ability to transform an actor into an impersonal and universal sign, thus making him part of the ideal spectacle, as one of the important benefits that music offers theater” (Deak 103-04). Due to the limitations posed by actors’ physicality, experimentation with closet drama, that is, with plays not intended for production, and with puppetry, became a recurring feature of the symbolist venture into theatre.

Symbolist productions first appeared at the Théâtre d’Art, founded by Paul Fort in Paris in 1890. The most successful of these evenings were directed by Aurélien-Marie Lugné-Poë, who continued to develop his production methods at the Théâtre de l’Œuvre, founded by him in 1893. These productions adopted Wagnerian principles through the filter of French literary symbolism, and certain symbolist departures from Wagner’s approach to theatre should be noted: the symbolists rejected the use of mythological subjects, finding them antiquarian; poetic diction, as noted, assumed the stylizing function which Wagner prescribed for music; and, symbolist productions were never intended to serve a popular or revolutionary purpose.

26

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Walter Pater and English Aestheticism

Another variation of late nineteenth century Hellenism found its way into the independent theatre movement through the work of artists associated with the English art-for-art’s-sake movement. Known as aesthetes, this group had at its center a coterie of adherents to a doctrine asserting the absolute autonomy of art. It was first cultivated primarily in France, by Theophile Gautier, Baudelaire, and others, with Gautier’s novel, Mademoiselle de Maupin (1835) providing an early, landmark contribution. English literary critic and poet Algernon Swinburne helped to introduce French aestheticism to Britain in the 1860s, but it remained for Walter Pater (1839-1894) to formulate the ideas in a truly seductive fashion. Pater’s Studies in the History of the Renaissance (1873) inspired and guided English aesthetes throughout the 1880s and early 1890s, when the movement flourished.

It was largely due to Pater’s influence that English aestheticism became linked not only to its French counterpart, parnassianism, but also to an avid Francophilism. As Christophe Campos writes, “the men in the nineties who took Pater’s word for gospel and had no time to adjust his views to the real world, gathered that only in Paris could one appreciate to the full that vague and mysterious secret, the artistic way of life” (105). This aspect of Paterian aestheticism ensured that the budding independent theatre movement in Paris would have an impact on his followers; among them, Oscar Wilde, William Butler Yeats, and John Synge kept abreast of developments in the Parisian theatre.

An insistence on the autonomy of art was the central rallying point for a host of critical positions under the rubric of aestheticism, all of which shared in what Gilbert
Highet terms “a revolt against the Victorian attitude that literature must be edifying” (445). The range of social criticism that emanated from aestheticist ideology was in fact wide-sweeping, as a summation of them by Carl Woodring reveals:

The aesthetic movement was a reaction against perceived insolence in the language of utilitarians, industrial capitalists, and scientific positivists, a rejection of respectability of morals and of democratic leveling, athleticism, imperialism, policy toward Ireland, and illusion as an aim in arts and manufacturing. (229)

Pater and other leading English aesthetes were trained classicists, whose aesthetic ideology harbored a profound philhellenism. Their admiration for France, for example, found its highest expression in comparisons to ancient Hellas (Campos 92). Moreover, German classicists of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were important forbears of the art-for-art’s-sake movement. Pater’s Studies in the History of the Renaissance, a virtual manifesto of English aestheticism (Beckson 41), contains critical readings of studies on the Greek tradition by eighteenth century German classicist and aesthetician Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768). This is also true of Pater’s other highly influential work, Marius the Epicurean (1885), a novel, which presents, according to Hayden Ward, “a more personal version of Winckelmann’s discovery of the diaphanous unity of form and religious sentiment in Greek art” (223).

Winckelmann’s studies of Greek art provided the foundation for the modern field of art history and, more broadly, for the entire German classical revival (Highet 369). His identification of the classical Greek aesthetic as one of simplicity and nobility continues to have currency, and proved through the popularizing efforts of later writers and artists, Goethe foremost among them, to have a profound influence on modern perceptions of Greek culture. For Pater and other aesthetes, Winkelmann was also an
art connoisseur of the first order, “one who could devote himself to the passionate contemplation of beauty” (Benson 14), and who demonstrated how powerful a role art may play in an individual’s personal development.

Pater stirred great controversy by arguing in the notorious “Conclusion” to his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* that Winckelmann’s type of connoisseurship should be expanded into an art of living, in which success is defined not by moral conduct but by the intensity of one’s aesthetic experience (Ward 220). So great was the disapproving reception of the “Conclusion” among Pater’s colleagues at Brasenose College, Oxford, where the author held a classical fellowship for the whole of his academic career, that in later editions the offending passage was either omitted, or, after some time, restored in a more temperate formulation. But the original was treasured by Pater’s followers; Yeats went so far as to crown it as the first example of modern English poetry (Beckson 41), and Wilde, as preeminent spokesman of the art-for-art’s-sake movement, championed its most provocative assertions.

Wilde (1856-1900) and others, including Swinburne, surpassed Pater in their use of aestheticism as a challenge to the sexual morays of their age. It was not difficult for Wilde to adapt Pater’s call for an amoral valuation of life into a stance from which to question the social standards for sexual behavior. In respect to sexual politics, as well as to art, ancient Greece served as the alternative cultural model to modern times, for, as Hight observes, “while Wilde ostensibly admired Greece as the home of beauty at its purest and passion at its most intense, we know from repeated hints in his work as well as from the ruination of his career that – like his friend Gide – he also loved Greece for the homosexuality which was practiced there” (446).
It is a measure of the prodigious cultural authority vested in ancient Greece by Victorian England that its example could be used to gain some degree of acceptance for homoeroticism, just as it was similarly engaged to assault such Victorian bedrocks of civic morality as Christianity and political democracy. As Linda Dowling states, “the prestige of Greece among the educated middle-class Victorians . . . was so massive that invocations of Hellenism could cast a veil of respectability over even a hitherto unmentionable vice or crime” (28).

The subversive sexual politics of Wilde’s aestheticism found resonance among those active in the independent theatre movement in France, where a spectrum of attacks on bourgeois sensibilities were well underway. And while most of Wilde’s plays were written for the mainstream, commercial theatres of London, Salome (1891), presents a striking exception. Generally recognized as the “only truly English symbolist play of the 1890s” (Beckson 52), Salome combines the Hellenism of Wilde’s aestheticism with the literary techniques of symbolist playwright Maurice Maeterlinck.

According to Wilde biographer Richard Ellmann, the Hellenism cultivated by Wilde in the period during which Salome was written called for the collapsing of ordinary distinctions between the noble and the ignoble: “He showed souls becoming carnal and lusts becoming spiritual. He showed the aesthetic world not isolated from experience, but infused into it. This was the new Hellenism of which he liked to speak” (361). In Wilde’s version of the biblical story of Herod’s daughter, eroticism and mutilation are conjoined and foregrounded. In one of the play’s most notorious moments, Salome, upon receiving the severed head of John the Baptist, renamed Iokanaan, proceeds sensuously to kiss it.
Written in Paris, and in French, Salome was scheduled to premiere in London with Sarah Bernhardt in the title role, when, although rehearsals had already begun, it was denied a license for public performance by Edward Pigott, examiner of plays for the Lord Chamberlain’s Office (Beckson 51). As Joel Kaplan notes, it was some time before the play reached London audiences, for it was “not staged in England until 1906 – and not publicly there until 1931” (253). After its premiere at the Théâtre de l’Oeuvre, under the direction of Lugné-Poë, the play was taken up by the independent theatres, and became “a flagship for Europe’s budget-minded little theatre movement” (Kaplan 253).

In recent years, many critics have found in Salome a veiled representation of homosexuality or at least a nod to “alternative sexuality” (Donohue 129). The reference in this and other plays by Wilde to a green flower, a contemporary French sign for homosexuality (Donohue 127), demonstrates the playwright’s use of homosexual code. The promotion of homoeroticism was doubtless the most subversive aspect of English aestheticism, and Wilde’s trial in 1895, on charges of “gross indecency,” and his subsequent imprisonment, brought the movement into such ill-repute that it effectively brought it to a close.

The English aesthetes developed one of the most subversive readings of ancient Greek culture, and are today often cited as the founders of modern homosexual identity. The social character of Greek studies during the Victorian period lent itself to this development. Greek was studied in an educational system that perpetuated a ruling elite of male citizens, and acquisition of the Greek language was virtually a prerequisite for gaining access to the country’s upper echelon of political and social authority.
Admission to Oxford and Cambridge was contingent on a knowledge of Greek well into the twentieth century (Turner 5). Moreover, histories of ancient Greece, Greek literature in translation, and elementary Greek readers offered only an expurgated version of antiquity to all but advanced students of the language.

Learning Greek thus involved a graduated exposure to an ancient past in which qualities and achievements revered in modern times were mixed with other qualities and customs that transgressed, sometimes to a shocking degree, normative Victorian notions of religion, art and sexuality. Women were generally excluded from such knowledge partly owing to the immodesty of ancient representations of sexuality. As Richard Jenkyns points out, “the classics were kept as a masculine preserve not least because they initiated young gentlemen into the mysteries discussed in the smoking room or over the port before the company joined the ladies” (280).

In English public schools of the late nineteenth century, where the education of boys centered around the study of Greek and Latin, were nurtured friendships that engendered affectionate and loving bonds between students. This invited comparisons to the celebrated companionship among males in Greek literature. As Jenkyns writes, “the public-school world struck even foreigners as Hellenic; friendships flourished there which could easily seem similar to those that Plato described” (285). It was to the memory of past school friendships, and to the reading of Plato’s dialogues, that Wilde appealed in his famous defense of male love, made by him while on trial. As Linda Dowling writes of his statement:

Charged with corrupting youth, Wilde invokes Plato’s pedagogic eros. Confronted with the sordid evidence of sodomie indecency, he appeals to a “pure” procreancy of the spirit. Condemned as effeminate and degenerate, he shows the intellectual fearlessness and commanding
flexibility of mind so celebrated in Victorian liberal Hellenism as the only vitally regenerative powers still capable of saving England. (142)

When Wilde was sentenced in 1895 to two years of hard labor on a charge of “indecent behavior with men” (Ellmann xv), the aestheticist movement suffered from the fall of its most recognizable representative, and Wilde’s incarceration is commonly cited as the immediate cause of the movement’s end. Alternatively, viewed as but an incipient phase of modernism, aestheticism may be said to have survived Wilde’s imprisonment, and his subsequent ostracism, exile and death. Karl Beckson delineates the basis for this latter appraisal of aestheticism: “the phenomenon was a significant manifestation of early Modernism in its demand for greater freedom in exploring hitherto forbidden subjects, in its insistence on the autonomy of art, and in its contention that art owed less to nature than to the imagination of the artist” (69).

Wilamowitz and Greek Play Revival

Perhaps the most obvious link between classical scholarship and the independent theatre movement lies in the revival of Greek plays on the modern stage. This practice was associated not only with the independent theatres, but also with academic and professional venues. A development related to the revival of ancient plays was the reconstruction of ancient stagecraft, which was pursued in the professional theatre by practitioners of antiquarianism. As Brockett and Findlay point out, the reconstruction of stagecraft marked “another form of antiquarianism in which the historical accuracy of architecture and dress were replaced with accuracy of past theatrical traditions” (111). But it was the appearance of new translations that most enticed directors at independent theatres to produce Greek plays, the most popular of which were those of
Euripides. Today, the staging of ancient plays and the preference for Euripidean drama are commonplace, and this has been true for most of the twentieth century. But these are both modern trends that may be traced back to the revival and advancement of Hellenic studies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, first and foremost in Germany, and then in England, the United States, and elsewhere.

The current practice of staging Greek plays dates back, though not uninterruptedly, to productions of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) at the Court Theatre in Weimar. He and Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) "brought Greek drama to center stage in the German theatre, and although initially it occupied that position only briefly, it was from then on always at hand, waiting expectantly in the wings, whenever later dramatists or producers wished to employ it" (Beacham 299). In addition to original adaptations of Greek drama by both writers, Goethe produced several ancient plays in translation, including Aristophanes’ Birds in 1780, Sophocles’ Antigone in 1809, and Oedipus Tyrannus in 1813, although these, too, were strongly modified by their translators (Flashar “Entdeckung” 58-59).

It was not until 1841, with the production in Potsdam of Antigone, that a faithful translation, “free of additions and adaptation,” (Flashar “Entdeckung” 60) found its way to the modern stage. Directed at the court theatre by Ludwig Tieck for King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia, in a new translation by Johann Jakob Christian Donner, and with music that had been specially composed for the production by Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, Antigone was so enthusiastically received that it soon transferred, with continued success, to the state theatre in Berlin, and from there proceeded triumphantly to other German cities, including Dresden, Munich, Leipzig, and Karlsruhe (Beacham 34).
It was to this production that Wagner had his adverse reaction, noted earlier.

Tieck’s landmark production of Antigone exhibited a departure from contemporary stagecraft that was decades ahead of its time. Tieck “extended the playing area out beyond the proscenium arch into the audience to approximate the ancient orchestra” (Beacham “Europe” 300) and “in place of the usual painted flats he constructed a scenic façade based on the latest evidence about the nature of the Greek skene” (Beacham “Europe” 300). Later German-language directors incorporated Tieck’s design, resulting in highly acclaimed productions of Sophocles’ plays by the Meiningen troupe in the 1860s, and at Vienna’s Burgtheater in 1886 (Beacham “Europe” 300-301).

Tieck’s success was soon followed by productions of Antigone in Paris and, in a translation by W. Bartholomew, in London and New York in 1845 (Walton 331). The London production, at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, was the British premiere of Sophocles’ play and, as a Greek tragedy, a true novelty on the London stage. Viewing the Covent Garden production as a major turning point for Greek play production in England, J. Michael Walton notes that in that country “Greek plays were still as far from the public or private stage as they had ever been and were to remain so until 1845” (331). Based on the London version, the New York production, which failed, was likewise novel, for it stands as the first known production of a Greek tragedy in the United States (Rogers 33). Both the English and American productions of Antigone used the music composed by Mendelssohn for the Potsdam premiere.
As the serial productions of *Antigone* indicates, mid-nineteenth century German audiences were more receptive than their Anglo-American contemporaries to the revival of Greek drama. The play’s successful tour to several cities was followed by German productions of other Greek tragedies, including *Medea* (1843), *Oedipus auf Kolonos* (1845), *Hippolytus* (1851), and *König Oedipus* (1852) (Flashar “Aufführungen” 308). In the United States, by contrast, the next Greek play to be produced did not appear until 1881, when *Oedipus Tyrannus* was staged in an outdoor stadium at Harvard University. The international production history of *Antigone* also correctly indicates the usual pattern by which Hellenist influences were disseminated in the nineteenth century, namely, from Germany outward. The reception of classical antiquity in nineteenth century German-speaking Europe was singularly complex and varied, and out of it emerged a range of approaches to the translation and production of Greek plays.

Donner’s translation of *Antigone*, and Tieck’s production of it, were the results of an approach marked by fidelity to both the ancient plays and to ancient stagecraft. Hellmut Flashar writes that “The production style was historicist, determined by the endeavor to approximate the ancient performance conditions, even in surface qualities” (“Aufführungen” 308). The success of Donner’s *Antigone* no doubt owed much, as Flashar suggests, to the direction of Tieck and the music of Mendelssohn, for although Donner translated all the extant tragedies of Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles, and had several of them produced, only *Antigone* was met with enthusiasm in performance (Flashar “Aufführungen” 308).
At the other end of the spectrum of fidelity were translations written with an allegiance chiefly to their theatrical effectiveness before contemporary audiences. The popular translations by Adolf Wilbrandt, which were written and produced in the 1880s, represent this other extreme; they exhibit the kind of adaptation that is even today frequently deemed necessary for making the ancient plays accessible to the public: “In the translations of Wilbrandt the ancient meter is eliminated, numerous references to legend and pre-history are deleted, and the chorus is dissolved into a ‘seemly individuality,’ that is, into single characters and into dialogue situations” (Flashar “Aufführungen”308).

Flashar places the approach of Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff somewhere between those of Donner and Wilbrandt. While in agreement with Wilbrandt that a translator should be concerned above all with the dramatic effectiveness of his work, Wilamowitz insisted on retaining the complete text, allowing only minor omissions in performance, and insisted on preserving the chorus. He also endorsed the use of music in the productions of his translations, whereas Wilbrandt did not (Flashar “Aufführungen” 309-310). Wilamowitz is a figure of supreme importance to the modern tradition of Greek play revival, and to its role in the independent theatre movement, for several reasons: he is largely responsible for establishing the favorable reputation of Euripides in modern times; his translations popularized Greek tragedy to an unprecedented degree; his Greek revivalist work was successfully extended to the Anglo-American theatrical tradition by Gilbert Murray; and, finally, the leading role of Wilamowitz in the development of modern classical scholarship, and in the emergence of the modern university system of education, helped to create the relationship between
academic classical studies and the production of Greek drama. The latter contributed significantly to Greek play revival in general, and especially in the United States, where colleges and universities took up the revivalist cause in a nation-wide trend that is discussed in chapter three.

Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1848-1931) was an extraordinary scholar and teacher who, with his innovative and voluminous work in numerous branches of classical studies, and by the remarkable achievements of his students and followers, made an enormous impact on modern philology and classical studies. His work illustrates a range of classical scholarship that, beginning in the late nineteenth century, supported the revival of Greek drama on the modern stage. His scholarly endeavors produced commentaries for Greek texts and fragments; translations; interpretive studies; studies in ancient religion, history, politics, and culture; and textual histories. All of these were executed according to, and often set, rigorous new standards of professional scholarship. They also benefited from, and contributed to, the nineteenth century advancement in knowledge of the ancient world. Wilamowitz' commentaries, for example, were "of an entirely new kind, in which the whole vast body of knowledge of antiquity built up by scholarship was brought to bear not merely upon the constitution of the text, but upon the interpretation of the author" (Lloyd-Jones "Introduction" xiv).

The international preeminence of Wilamowitz in the field of classics during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries makes his work especially relevant to the relationship between classical scholarship and the first avant-garde theatres. As Lloyd-Jones asserts: Wilamowitz' "conception of philology had enormous influence, and may
be considered representative of the period” (“Introduction” xiii). For Wilamowitz, classical philology was synonymous with a broad-sweeping, interdisciplinary Altertumswissenschaft or “science of antiquity,” a field incorporating every avenue of study that increases knowledge of the ancient world. The pursuit of Altertumswissenschaft, with its emphasis on the evidentiary basis of knowledge, came virtually to dictate the purposes and standards of classical studies in Wilamowitz’s day. Nietzsche, for example, was all but ostracized from the field of classics for the maverick approach exhibited in Birth of Tragedy, which was assailed for its factual errors and speculative theories in a scathing review by no less a personage then Wilamowitz himself.

German Altertumswissenschaft soon came to dominate the classical field in other countries, most notably in Italy and England, but also in the United States; the French declined to adopt it. The utter domination of German philology in the United States led, in the early twentieth century, to a resistance of its hegemony by a number of major American classicists. In 1913, the foremost scholar in the history of American classics, Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve, found it necessary to declare, in reference to Wilamowitz and Gilbert Murray, that “I yield to no one in my admiration of both these Hellenists; I am grateful to them both, but not to the extent of prostration” (qtd. in Kopff 565). And in 1911, in an article published in The Nation, eminent American classicist Paul Shorey “called upon American teachers and professors to liberate themselves from excessive subservience to European, especially German, models” (Kopff 570).

The debate over the methodology and character of classical studies in the United States receives fuller treatment in the following chapter, which is devoted entirely to the Greek tradition in America. The point here is simply to note the international
magnitude of German hegemony in classical studies during the decades in which Wilamowitz was the major figure in the field. Among German classicists, as among foreign scholars, opposition to the prevailing concept of philology did assert itself, although it was not until after World War I that *Altertumswissenschaft* came under widespread criticism. The main arguments against it focused on the purported lack of hierarchy in the field. As Lloyd-Jones explains, in reference to Wilamowitz, "the various disciplines linked together by his conception of *Altertumswissenschaft* are in theory on an equal footing; but in practice the rest are held together in the firm grasp of a single branch of study, history" ("Introduction" xvii).

The primacy of historical analysis in Wilamowitz' approach to classical studies was perceived by later classicists as a hindrance to meaningful investigations into numerous areas of study, including religion and philosophy. As Lloyd-Jones points out, in respect to the interpretation of Greek tragedy, "a strictly historical approach to poetry and religion incurs the danger of neglecting their aesthetic aspect" ("Introduction" xvii). On this point, the gulf between the aesthetic interests of Pater and Nietzsche, on the one side, and the historicism of Wilamowitz, on the other, may be clearly seen; a distinction corresponding to this gulf may be made between the aesthetician's interest in using ancient artistic principles in creating new art forms, and the historicist focus on reviving ancient plays.

The historicist orientation of Wilamowitz is evident in the scholar's involvement in theatrical production, which had him playing the dual role of translator and scholarly advisor for a new wave of productions of Greek tragedies. It began in 1900 with a production in Berlin of his translation of *Oedipus Rex*, which marked "the first time that
a professional production of a Greek tragedy in a modern language had taken place in Germany in over fifty years” (Edwards 23). New productions of Greek plays in modern translations soon appeared in other cities in Europe and America. This trend lasted some two decades, comprising a period called by Hellmut Flashar the “heyday of ancient drama on the stage” (Flashar Inszenierung 110). The productions were mounted at many sorts of venues, including the independent theatres. In 1902, Wilamowitz’ translation of Euripides’ Herakles was produced in Vienna at the Theater in der Josefstadt, a theatre featuring plays by Ibsen, Hauptmann, Maeterlinck, and others commonly found in the repertoire of the independent theatres (Edwards 23).

The first Berlin productions of Wilamowitz’ translations were staged by a group called the Akademischen Verein für Kunst und Litteratur or “Academic Club for Art and Literature,” comprised mostly of students from the University of Berlin, and dedicated to advancing the appreciation of Greek tragedies through lectures, discussions and productions (Flashar “Aufführungen” 310-311). Wilamowitz was engaged as principal advisor to the club by its founder and leader, Hans Oberländer. It was for the group’s first production that Oberländer directed Oedipus Rex. While Wilamowitz and Oberländer were both interested in the revival of tragedies with strong textual fidelity, neither sought in production the purely historicist goals that were evident in the productions of Antigone sixty years earlier. In fact, they were intent on bringing modern production methods to the ancient plays, and Wilamowitz vehemently opposed any attempt to recreate ancient productions in surface details (Flashar “Aufführungen” 316).
Too often overlooked by theatre historians in England and America, who have tended to concentrate on the achievements of Gilbert Murray, Harley Granville Barker and Max Reinhardt (who produced plays in London and New York), Wilamowitz was actually the first important bridge between classics and the modern revival of Greek tragedy. His *Oedipus Rex* was not only the first production of a Greek tragedy on a public stage in Berlin in over a decade and, as stated above, the first in Germany in over fifty years to receive a professional production in a modern language, it was also a tremendous success. It was performed several times, in Berlin and in other cities, and was revived in Berlin in 1905 at the Deutschen Theater (Flashar “Aufführungen” 315). Also in 1900, Wilamowitz’ translation of *Orestie* was produced in Berlin and Vienna. This was the first time that a tragedy by Aeschylus had ever been performed on a public, German-language stage (Flashar “Aufführungen” 317). This play, too, was greeted with great enthusiasm, and was sold-out for the premiere, as well as for five additional performances (Flashar “Aufführungen” 318). In 1902, the first Wilamowitz’ translation of a play by Euripides was produced, when *Herakles* was staged at the Theater in der Josefstadt in Vienna (Edwards 23). By translating and producing these plays by Aeschylus and Euripides, Wilamowitz and his collaborators departed from the nineteenth century practice of performing only certain of the ancient plays, usually Sophocles’ *Antigone*, *Oedipus Rex*, and *Oedipus at Colonus* (Flashar “Aufführungen” 316).

Director Max Reinhardt secured a lasting place for Greek tragedy on the modern stage with his production of *Oedipus Tyrannus* in 1910. Performed in Munich and Berlin, Richard Beacham calls it “one of the most successful and memorable of his
productions and the most influential staging of Greek tragedy in the twentieth century” (“Europe” 305). This production, which toured widely, prompted new ways of staging ancient drama in Europe and America, and directly influenced the independent theatre movement through its impact on the work of Murray and Barker, a topic treated separately in the following section. Reinhardt had worked with Wilamowitz ten years earlier at the Akademische Verein für Kunst und Litteratur and, in fact, had played Teiresias in the club’s first production.

Reinhardt gained considerable experience with Greek tragedy through his collaborations on several productions of Wilamowitz’ translations, and this presumably deepened his understanding of the plays’ potential in performance (Flashar “Aufführungen” 337-38), but he eventually stopped using Wilamowitz’ translations in favor of versions by Hoffmanstahl, Vollmoeller and others. Flashar attributes Reinhardt’s avoidance of Wilamowitz’ translations to a fundamental difference between the two men’s interest in the plays:

Wilamowitz sought with his translations to lead the people of his time to Greek tragedy, without having to tear them out of their conventions too much. He emphasized again and again, on the basis of his archeological realism, how tragedy, especially as a moral authority (against Goethe and Aristotle), affects people in their everyday lives.

Reinhardt wanted something quite different. In a kind of aesthetic hedonism, he wanted to raise the spectator to another level and in this way to impart theatre, not as a moral institution, but as a realm of magnificently exorbitant experiences, and as the nervous sensation of being surrounded by them. (“Aufführungen” 342)

In his career, Reinhardt thus worked within two distinct strains of Hellenism, that of the aesthetes, and that of popularized Altertumswissenschaft. And because Murray and Barker were strongly influenced by Wilamowitz and Reinhardt, the Anglo-
American tradition of Greek play revival, which they were to dominate, not surprisingly evinces this same hybrid.

Perhaps Wilamowitz' greatest contribution to the independent theatre movement lies in his successful promotion of Euripidean drama, a project that was carried into the Anglo-American theatre by Murray. The great nineteenth century scorn for Euripides dates back to the brothers Schlegel, whose views were propagated through August Wilhelm Schlegels' famous Berlin lectures of 1802-1804. These were published as Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature (1808), and in translation soon reached and influenced an international audience of scholars (Edwards 14). Schlegel's criticism of Euripides contained a variety of attacks, which were later adopted and amplified by Nietzsche, but the principal ones charged the author with dislocating and trivializing the chorus in relation to the action of the play; an ineffective deviation from received mythology; an uncertain theological position; want of a forceful conflict between fate and freedom; and an excessive reliance on prologues for preliminary exposition (Edwards 15).

Wilamowitz, who was joined in the defense of Euripidean drama by many others, including prominent historians Erwin Rohde and Eduard Meyer (Edwards 18), disputed the long-held view that Euripides' plays were misogynistic in their representations of women and argued that Euripides captured Truthfulness in his portrayals of characters. But it was above all Wilamowitz' translations of Euripides' plays, and the productions of them, that brought the ancient playwright into public favor in modern times. His translations, in modern idiomatic German, succeeded with the reading public, and generated wide interest in a playwright whose rediscovery
constituted so great a reversal as to render him a virtual newcomer to the theatre (Edwards 21).

Gilbert Murray, who was an ardent admirer of Wilamowitz, proceeded to popularize Euripides in English-speaking countries with new, accessible translations, just as Wilamowitz had done in Germany and Austria. The translations of both scholars, although enormously popular, would eventually come under harsh criticism in academic circles. Karl Hildebrandt, a member of a literary circle known as the Georgekreis, after its leader, Stephan George, published an attack on Wilamowitz’ translations in 1910, which questioned their fidelity to the original verse. While Murray’s translations retained currency with the public longer than those of his German forerunner, both men’s translations have since been superceded, and are not today highly esteemed by classicists nor are they popular with theatrical producers.

**Gilbert Murray, Harley Granville Barker and Greek Play Revival**

The modern practice of staging Greek plays was firmly established in the English speaking world through the efforts of Gilbert Murray and Harley Granville Barker. It was Murray’s enormously popular translations of the ancient plays that created a public appetite for their revival on stage. And Barker’s celebrated productions, in turn, boosted the popularity of Murray’s translations, as when, for example, over twenty-five thousand copies of them were sold in the United States within a month after Barker’s productions of *Trojan Women* and *Iphigenia at Tauris* (Rogers 62). The New York production of Barker’s 1915 tour took place in Lewisohn Stadium, and was “New York’s first outdoor and first successful professional staging of Greek tragedy” (Rogers 50).
The American reception of Barker’s productions came after years of collaboration between Barker and Murray in England. There, Greek play revival had been largely confined to school or university productions, beginning with a staging of Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* at Oxford in 1880, and with productions at Cambridge of Sophocles’ *Ajax* in 1882, and of Aristophanes’ *Birds* in 1883, all of which were delivered in Greek. Since that time, at Bradfield College, a public boarding school, and at Cambridge, ancient Greek plays have been staged approximately every three years (Walton 332-333). It was not until Gilbert Murray undertook “the first real attempt to popularize the classical drama” (Walton 335) that the general public was seen as a potential audience for the ancient plays. His translations “helped introduce a generation to the idea of Greek drama as a living form of theatre, rather than precious affectation, for the first time since the Roman republic” (Walton 335).

The extent to which Murray was successful in reaching the public is best seen in the extraordinary sales figures for his published translations of Greek plays. Within eighteen years after the first of them, *Bacchae* and *Hippolytus* (1902), were published, “the British public purchased over a quarter million copies of Murray’s translations of Euripides” (Edwards 29). In addition to Euripidean drama, to which he felt himself most drawn, Murray also published translations of Aristophanes’ *Frogs*, Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone*, and all of Aeschylus’ extant plays (Walton 335). Murray’s popularizing efforts extended to critical studies and popular lectures; he advanced the study of ancient religion, and several other areas of scholarship, and is called by Hugh Lloyd-Jones “the main propagandist for Greek studies for more than half a century” (Blood 195).
As a student at Oxford, Murray, who had been reared in Australia, was quickly recognized as one of the most promising classicists of his generation. Upon graduation and, as Lloyd-Jones notes, “at the astonishingly early age of twenty-three, Murray was appointed to succeed the famous scholar Sir Richard Jebb in the Chair of Greek at Glasgow” (Blood 199). He immediately turned to Wilamowitz, the most renowned classicist of the period, for guidance (Henderson 129).

Murray biographer Duncan Wilson states that Wilamowitz’ writings “made a deep impression on Murray and did much to liberate him from British amateurism and the narrower traditions of British classical scholarship” (54). Upon reading Wilamowitz’ commentaries on Euripides’ Herakles, Murray desired to establish a relationship with the esteemed classicist and, in 1894, wrote to him seeking advice on academic projects, whereupon “Wilamowitz became his constant correspondent and friend” (Henderson 129). The two scholars were united in their admiration for Euripidean drama, and also shared an appreciation for Ibsen. In fact, the translations of both scholars have been found by critics to evince a rather heavy-handed projection of modern dramatic sensibilities on to Euripides. Richard Jenkyns points out that it was common in late-nineteenth century England to associate Euripides with Ibsenite and Shavian drama (109), and this may be some reflection of Murray’s taste in modern literature.

It is interesting to consider the extent to which modern plays may have influenced the leading translators of ancient drama during this time, for these versions spawned the revival of Greek drama before the general public. According to Lloyd-Jones, in Wilamowitz’ commentaries on Greek tragedy, the analyses of the plays rely
on concepts and characterizations more suited to Ibsen than to Euripides (Blood 200). In his commentary on Euripides’ Hippolytus, for example, which was written in 1891, shortly after the opening of Ibsen’s Hedda Gabler, Wilamowitz ascribes to Phaedra qualities that bring to mind the nineteenth century Hedda: “she has no inner relationship to husband or children; let alone to any other object. Her life lacks the blessing of work, and she is too intelligent to be content with idleness and empty social activity” (qtd. in Blood 200). This provides another important case, in addition to the one involving Wagner and Nietzsche, in which theatre artists appear to have influenced classicists in work that is ordinarily thought to exert an influence only in the other direction.

The translations of both Wilamowitz and Murray were ardently attacked by some critics, and in each case the objections focused on the purported loss of what is distinctive in the poetry of the Greek. The sharpest attack on Murray came in an essay by T.S. Eliot, “Euripides and Professor Murray” (1918), which decried Murray’s adoption of a style associated with, but greatly inferior to, the verse of William Morris and Algernon Swinburne (Highet 489). Eliot also condemned Murray’s frequent interpolations as unwarranted and misrepresentative of the original.

Lloyd-Jones contends that “Murray’s pervading romanticism led him to distort the content in a way even more damaging to the truthfulness of his rendering than the distortion of the form resulting from the nature of his style” (Blood 206). He argues that Murray failed to appreciate the complexity and nuance of Euripidean drama and, influenced by Ibsen, Shaw, and modern political rhetoric, mistakenly reduced the tragedies to didactic vehicles for progressive moral values (Blood 207-08). It is still
popular to treat Euripides, especially in American college productions, as an advocate of progressive values, as when, for example, Trojan Women is presented as a protestation against war, and not all critics cringe at this line of interpretation (Lloyd-Jones Blood 208). To contemporaries of Wilamowitz and Murray, Euripides “seemed to have anticipated the latest fashions in drama” (Jenkyns 109), but the translators no doubt contributed to this impression. Lloyd-Jones asserts succinctly that while “his master, the great Wilamowitz, had given the world an Ibsenian Euripides; Murray’s Euripides was Shavian” (Blood 207).

Regardless of the degree to which Murray perpetrated a romantic and Shavian version of Euripides on his times, it remains noteworthy that the independent theatre movement, which was principally responsible for the promotion of Ibsen and Shaw, significantly influenced the interpretation and translation of Euripides in modern times. Thus, while the focus of this study concerns the manner in which classicists influenced the independent theatres, the currents of this influence were sometimes following a circular pattern. This was seen in the way Wagner influenced Nietzsche’s vision of ancient theatre, which later proved revolutionary in its impact on classical studies. In the case of the modern revival of Euripides, Ibsen and Shaw are seen to have shaped the reception of Euripides by Wilamowitz and Murray, two of the most eminent classicists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their translations and critical readings of Euripides’ plays helped to create a vision of the ancient world that emanated into the popular, artistic and scholarly sectors of society. This is particularly true in the case of Murray, whose translations outlasted those of Wilamowitz, and whose greater involvement in theatre and contemporary politics broadened his influence.
The modern revival of Greek plays was not confined, of course, to productions at independent theatres, but Murray’s long participation in the independent theatre movement ensured that its role in the revival’s Anglo-American context would be central. Although Murray is best known, in connection with the independent theatre movement, for his collaborations on Greek plays with Harley Granville Barker at the Royal Court Theatre between 1904 and 1907, by that time Murray had already been involved in the movement for nearly a decade. In 1895, a play Murray had just completed, Carlyon Sahib, brought the young scholar into contact with William Archer, a leading figure in the emerging independent theatre movement in England. It was also due to this play that Murray first met Barker, who acted in a production of it at the Kennington Theatre in 1899 (Thorndike 151).

A brief review of the English independent theatre movement may serve to illuminate Murray’s place within it. The first independent theatre in England was founded in 1891 by J. T. Grein, a young Dutchman. Grein had followed closely the opening of the Théâtre Libre in 1887 while working in Paris as a drama critic for an English newspaper (Orme 52). William Archer was among those who supported Grein’s efforts to establish an independent theatre in London, and it was he who dissuaded Grein from naming the English theatre the Théâtre Libre in honor of Antoine (Orme 75). An announcement for the first production of the Independent Theatre, as Grein eventually called it, stated that “the object of the Independent Theatre is to give special performances of plays which have a LITERARY and ARTISTIC, rather than a commercial value” (Orme 76).
The first play to be presented at the Independent Theatre was Ibsen’s *Ghosts*, in Archer’s translation, which was given on March 13, 1891; the second was Zola’s *Thérèse Raquin*, which premiered in October of the same year. Both of these productions prompted an outpouring of critical abuse, condemning the plays’ demoralizing subject matter. Although some of Ibsen’s plays had been presented in London prior to their production at Grein’s theatre, the publicity surrounding his new theatre, and the quality of its actors, who were drawn from professional ranks, resulted in its being primarily responsible for creating an English audience for Ibsen. As Brockett and Findlay write: “progress was slow toward winning acceptance for Ibsenesque drama until the Independent Theatre was founded” (53).

Gilbert Murray gravitated in the mid-1890s toward the excitement surrounding the controversial, new drama at Grein’s theatre. His socialist leanings soon brought him into a sympathetic bond with prominent figures in the independent theatre movement, especially with Shaw, who was an early supporter of Murray’s work on Euripides. The political orientation of the English independent theatre movement distinguishes it from its counterpart in Paris, a distinction that is echoed in later differences between the French and English traditions in theatre. The absurdist and existentialist theatre of France has not, for example, taken root to a comparable degree in Britain.

Murray’s attempts at playwriting in the 1890s, prior to turning to translating, reveals his desire to become one of the new, English playwrights then being sought by the independent theatre producers. *Carlyon Sahib* is an anti-imperialist play, having in common with the drama of Ibsen and Zola scenes designed to shock contemporary sensibilities. Although it was produced in 1899, it “was found too grim for the public

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taste and was never revived" (Thorndike 151). Murray’s only other original play, 
**Andromache**, produced by the Stage Society in 1901, was an attempt, with Archer’s 
assistance, to re-cast ancient material into a modern form. Murray later declared that 
while working on **Andromache** he thought he “was writing a boldly realistic and rather 
Ibsenite play” (Thorndike 152). When Murray eventually embarked on his theatrical 
career as a translator and advisor, he was thus already an active member of the 
independent theatre movement, and having failed to garner success with his own plays, 
it is not surprising that he should bring the movement’s interests, political and stylistic, 
to his translations.

It is revealing that the first Murray translation to be produced was done by the 
New Century Theatre, a group founded by Archer and others to “sponsor the early 
performances of Ibsen’s plays” (Thorndike 153). This production of Euripides’ 
**Hippolytus** at the Lyric Theatre in May, 1904, was enormously successful, and led to its 
revival later that year at the Court Theatre. This revival was the premiere offering at the 
Court Theatre under the Barker-Vedrenne management. John Eugene Vedrenne served 
as the theatre’s manager, and Barker as the artistic producer, in a team that became 
famous for its productions of Shaw’s plays; in fact, through them Shaw first came to 
prominence as a playwright. So great was the Shavian presence at the Court Theatre, 
that of the 946 performances under the Barker-Vedrenne management, 701 were of 
plays by Shaw (Brockett and Findlay 127).

Harley Granville Barker (1877-1946) began in the theatre as an actor, and 
performed and directed for the Stage Society prior to his co-management at the Court 
Theatre. The Stage Society was founded in 1899, two years after the closing of Grein’s
Independent Theatre, and was incorporated in 1904. Its purpose was to continue the work of Grein’s theatre, and it attracted to the project many in the London theatre, including Murray and Barker. Like its predecessor, the Stage Society was anti-commercial in orientation, and opposed to the star system and the long-running performances then in common practice at professional theatres (Miller 177).

In addition to Hippolytus, Barker directed Murray’s translations of Euripides’ Electra, in 1906, and The Trojan Women, in 1905, all of them at the Court Theatre. He also directed Murray’s translation of Medea at the Savoy Theatre in 1907. In accordance with Barker and Murray’s interest in avant-garde drama, these productions avoided any effort to recapture ancient staging practices; instead, Euripides was treated, with minor concessions, as a playwright of the modern theatre. The productions were thus quite different from the contemporary, and more historicist, productions of Greek plays done at universities and schools. Even the decisions to produce Euripides at an indoor venue, and in modern translation, were daring for the times, and some critics, including Max Beerbohm, thought them misguided (Edwards 34). Partly owing to budgetary restrictions (Brockett and Findlay 127), Barker placed greatest emphasis upon ensemble acting of the highest quality. Of course, as Dennis Kennedy points out, Greek tragedy does not lend itself to realist approaches to staging: “Greek plays can never be natural to a modern audience in the way that Ibsen is natural . . . Euripides provided Barker with his chief early opportunity to experiment outside the realistic style, with lighting, scenery, costumes, movement, music, as well as acting” (42).

Never achieving the popularity of Shaw’s new plays, on whose success the company relied, Barker’s productions of Euripides nonetheless “achieved a sizeable
matinee audience, and a persistent one” (Kennedy 50). Echoing contemporary critic A. B. Walkley, Kennedy views the real significance of Barker’s work in his success at getting modern audiences to judge the ancient plays on their dramatic merits, free from their cumbrous historical context (50). Eric Salmon, in his biography of Barker, considers the collaborations of Murray and Barker in a similar light, and underscores the fact that their approach to ancient drama was strikingly new: “both were convinced that the classical Greek dramatist-poets could be treated as modern theatre playwrights and that their plays could, and should, be presented unashamedly as pieces of entertainment. The idea was a revolutionary one at the time: the Greek plays were performed even more rarely than they are now – and never in an ordinary theatre context” (100). Walton credits the productions of Murray’s translations at the Court Theatre for making “an undoubted breakthrough for the notion that Greek tragedy had a rightful place in the canon of world drama” (336).

Despite the efforts of Barker and Murray to produce Euripides in a thoroughly modern manner, it was Max Reinhardt who gave London audiences their most stirring experience of a Greek play in modern form. His Oedipus Rex, which played at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, in 1912, created a sensation with its use of hundreds of supernumeraries and its energetic handling of the ancient play. The production was based, with minor changes by W. L. Courtney, on Murray’s translation. Barker followed Reinhardt’s work closely, having “studied the German director’s methods by sitting in on rehearsals of the Oedipus in Berlin in 1911 and again during the revival of the production in London” (Edwards 34). For the London production, Barker also “coached Lillah McCarthy in her part as Jocasta” (Styan 84).
The boldness and the directorial liberties that were evident in Reinhardt’s production generated great controversy in the London press. At the center of the critical response lay the question of authenticity, and it was Murray, in a public letter, who provided the greatest defense of Reinhardt’s choices. Pointing out that the mythological basis of Sophocles’ play dates back much earlier than the time of its writing in the fifth century B.C., Murray argued that Reinhardt had made an informed decision in accenting the pre-classical world of the play: “Professor Reinhardt was frankly pre-Hellenic, partly Cretan and Mycenaean, partly Oriental, partly – to my great admiration – merely savage. The half-naked torch-bearers with loin-clothes and long black hair made my heart leap with joy. There was real early Greece about them, not the Greece of the schoolroom or the conventional art studio” (qtd. in Styan 85).

In March of 1912, shortly after Reinhardt’s Covent Garden production of Oedipus Rex, Barker directed Murray’s translation of Euripides’ Iphigenia in Tauris at Kingsway, and again, in an outdoor theatre, at Bradfield College. As Paul Edwards notes, these productions appear to have been influenced by Reinhardt’s Oedipus (34). Following Reinhardt’s creation of an elaborate spectacle, in Barker’s Bradfield production “the chorus danced in a full orchestra and the action was opened up to fill the large theatre, which originally had been a quarry” (34). This marked a striking departure from Barker’s earlier productions at the Court Theatre, where elements of spectacle had been minimal. After the Bradfield show, Barker “resolved to never again produce a Greek tragedy indoors” (Edwards 34). And in 1915, when Barker successfully toured Iphigenia in Tauris and The Trojan Women to the United States, it
was the post-Reinhardt Barker who generated such enthusiasm with his spectacular productions at college stadia.

Barker’s new, more spectacular approach to directing ancient tragedy marks a further departure from earlier efforts in the independent theatre movement to emphasize similarities between Euripides and Ibsen. Murray’s translations, which emphasized the psychological complexity of Euripides’s characters, had been written for indoor, and relatively small, venues, which allowed subtleties in acting to be observed, and which were so effective in productions of plays by Ibsen and Shaw. Although Murray defended Reinhardt’s grand treatment of Oedipus Rex, he himself did not subscribe to it (Styan 84). The gulf between the earlier and later productions of Greek tragedy by Barker, divided by his exposure to Reinhardt, parallels the division in Germany, considered earlier, between the approaches of Wilamowitz and Reinhardt. This reveals a progression, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, from academic productions, in Greek, to Ibsenesque translations and indoor productions, and, finally, to productions that were spectacular and usually out-of-doors.

**Hellenism and the Abbey Theatre**

The threads of classical influences within the independent theatre movement had become rather complex by the time William Butler Yeats became a new leader in the movement at the turn of the century. Yeats was directly influenced, then or later, by all of the following: Antoine’s Théâtre Libre; French symbolism; Pater and the art-for-art’s-sake movement; Nietzsche’s theories on ancient tragedy; Murray and Greek revivalism; the Cambridge ritualists, and the classically-oriented poetics of Ezra Pound.
His early efforts to position himself within the various kinds of Hellenism may be seen in his overtures to Murray for collaborative work, which began in 1903 after Yeats had become impressed by Murray's translations of Greek plays for the stage. Murray, whose commitment to progressive politics never waned, rejected the various offers Yeats extended to him, and even declared offensive the poet's invitation to join in the formation of a theatre, provisionally entitled the "Theatre of Beauty," which would, as its name suggests, lean in the direction of the art-for-art's-sake tradition (Wilson 104).

Yeats' involvement in the campaign to create and sustain an independent theatre in his native Ireland played a major role in the success of the Abbey Theatre, founded in 1903, which, under his leadership, became famous for its achievements in playwriting, ensemble acting, experiments in staging, and for its influential tours abroad, especially in the United States. The extraordinary impact of the Abbey Theatre on the cultural and political life of Ireland, on regional theatre in Great Britain (Flannery 359), and on the independent theatre movement in America, has resulted in its recognition as a landmark theatrical enterprise of the twentieth century. And Greek theatre provided an important model for the company. Writing on the Abbey Theatre's legacy, theatre historian James W. Flannery contends "there has perhaps been no theatre for centuries that in theory and practice more closely approximates the ideals of that communal theatre on the slopes of the ancient Acropolis" (362).

The Abbey Theatre is most often associated with Irish nationalism and the leadership of the independent theatre movement. The collaborative union of Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory, which originated in 1897, was the vital force behind the theatre's success. Intent from the beginning on founding a theatre for the encourage-
ment of Irish playwrights, the two were joined in 1897 by Edward Martyn, who provided financial support, and the writer George Moore. Together, this group of four created the Irish Literary Theatre, which was a forerunner to the Abbey Theatre and other Dublin independent companies. They brought to their project considerable exposure to the earlier independent theatres. Martyn had witnessed first-hand the work of Antoine's Théâtre Libre, Brahms's Freie Bühne and Grein's Independent Theatre. Moore had written and directed at the latter since 1894 (Bradley 31-32). The founders also brought with them the tensions between realistic and non-realistic developments in contemporary playwriting: "for the first three years of its existence, the Irish Literary Theatre strained to accommodate both the symbolic-poetic and the realistic in the seven plays it produced" (Bradley 32). Martyn wanted to introduce Ibsen, Chekhov and Strindberg to Irish audiences, and eventually founded another group, the Irish Theatre Company, with which he fulfilled his goal. The common thread that held the first company together was a commitment to produce plays dealing with Ireland, and all seven of the plays it produced were of this kind.

In 1903, Yeats was elected to serve as the first president of the Irish National Theatre Society, which had grown out of the Ormond Dramatic Society, founded four years earlier by the brothers Fay, both prominent Dublin actors. A generous benefactor, A. E. F. Horniman, pledged enough financial support to lease a theatre for the new group, and this led to the opening of the Abbey Theatre in 1904, a venue having five hundred and sixty-two seats. Horniman provided an additional subsidy to cover the group's basic operating costs for six years (Brockett and Findlay 103). Yeats, Lady Gregory and J. M. Synge quickly assumed control over the company, which had been
founded on democratic principles, disaffecting and driving off two-thirds of the society's membership in the process. For the first decade of the Abbey Theatre, from its founding in 1904, to its last tour of the United States in 1914, the group's leaders, without Synge after his death in 1909, wrote many of the company's most notable plays, and personally guided the company's direction and activities.

The shift at the Irish National Theatre Society from democratic to oligarchic rule was found necessary by Yeats in his pursuit of a poetic, and elitist, rather than a realist-styled Irish drama. And, although Synge and Gregory did not follow Yeats in the writing of poetic plays in the symbolist manner, their support of an elitist theatre probably allowed classical literature, with which they were well versed, to exert a greater influence upon the Abbey Theatre than would otherwise have been possible. Perhaps the greatest correspondence between the Abbey Theatre and the Greek theatrical tradition lay in its leaders' efforts to establish a venue where plays written by and about local people, and having a poetic and non-commercial orientation, might engage questions of special relevance to the Irish people and culture. In pursuing this central aim the Abbey Theatre was a resounding success, and to it is attributed the beginning of a truly Irish drama and theatre; previously, the Dublin theatre, and the plays of Irish writers, had been firmly in the English tradition.

Hellenist influences may also be seen in the types of plays written for the Abbey Theatre. The widespread use of Celtic mythology and legends in the plays corresponds to the ancient practice of using mythological subjects in literature. Yeats and Synge's use of poetic diction and the tragic form are further echoes of the Greek theatre; Yeats' translation of *Oedipus Rex*, begun in 1911, was another. In stagecraft, too, one finds,
particularly in the use of Gordon Craig's screens, an employment at the Abbey Theatre of classical aesthetic values.

All of the Abbey Theatre's leaders had strong ties to the literature of Greek antiquity. Lady Gregory drew personal inspiration from Greek authors, especially Plotinos, and even kept lines of Plato in her purse (Stanford 243); W.B. Stanford finds that "to her, as to Yeats, these ancient sources of ethical idealism gave nobility and strength to outride many a contemporary storm of civil strife and national unrest" (243). Of the three directors, Synge had the strongest background in classics, having studied them at Trinity College Dublin (Stanford 96). Yeats had only a smattering of Greek and Latin in his youth. Stanford states that "attempts to teach him classics failed, and he never applied his mind effectively to their study. Later in life Yeats regretted this deficiency" (94). Despite his limited classical training, Yeats turned frequently to ancient Greek writers for stimulation in his own development as an artist. In fact, his long career reveals an evolving Hellenism of great complexity, which is the subject of a book-length study by P. Th. M. G. Liebregts entitled, *Centaurs in the Twilight: W. B. Yeats's Use of the Classical Tradition* (1993).

Liebregts identifies throughout Yeats' career an overarching purpose that relies on classical antiquity, and especially on Homer, for its abiding model. His position is that Yeats sought to promote a wide-sweeping renaissance in Ireland that would recreate the civic and cultural ideals of fifth-century Athens. Liebregts writes that "Yeats' use of the classics evolved out of his ambition in the 1880s, be it personal and/or general, to show how Ireland was on the brink of a renaissance which would turn
the country into a second classical Greece” (439). By contrast, England seemed to Yeats reminiscent of “the decadent society of classical Rome” (439).

When Yeats first met Synge, in Paris in 1896, the latter was attending a series of lectures by Jubainville on “the affinities between the Celtic heroic tales and the Homeric epics” (Stanford 96). Soon afterwards, in Yeats’ lyric poetry, “themes from Greek mythology began noticeably to supplant the Celtic emblems” (Stanford 96). Stanford thus infers that Yeats’ enthusiasm for Greek literature was increased through contact with Synge, as it would be throughout his lifetime through contact with classicists, including Pater, Wilde, Murray, Nietzsche, and others.

Early in his career, Yeats discovered modern uses for ancient Greek artistic values in concepts articulated by Pater and Wilde. Referring to one of Wilde’s essays, “The Decay of Lying,” which the author read to Yeats following a Christmas dinner in 1888, Liebregts writes that “although Yeats rejected the absolute Aesthetic doctrine that art has nothing to do with life, Wilde’s essay showed him that art could provide life with Ideal forms and images in order to help life express itself” (37). Liebregt also cites Yeats’ use of moods as a second important borrowing from English aestheticism: “in the 1890s, Yeats’ evolved Wilde and Pater’s notion of the moods or ecstatic moments by making them the instruments to give access to that eternal postulate” (40). Through moods, Yeats hoped to fill artistic moments “with the passions and beliefs of ancient times” (qtd. in Liebregt 40).

Although Yeats adopted some of its concepts for his own use, he remained wary of aestheticism’s separation of art and life, and he “instinctively rejected the aesthetes’ single-minded pursuit of Beauty for its own sake” (Flannery 14). According to Francis
Oppel, it was an intensive reading of Nietzsche's works, between 1902 and 1904, that enabled Yeats to resist the dominance of the earlier aesthetes, positing that he "escapes being engulfed in Paterian flux by leaning on Nietzsche" (14). Yeats' approach to tragedy evinces a Nietzschean influence, particularly in its focus on the tragic hero's will, and on the dialectical struggle between the Dionysian and Apollonian elements (Stanford 96). James Flannery notes Yeats' concern with the role of free will in tragedy: "Yeats justified tragic suffering as primarily an affirmation of the human will. The tragic hero chose and carried out his fateful action entirely of his own volition and not at the behest of others" (38).

While Yeats' understanding of drama was strongly colored by Nietzsche, and by English aestheticism, he also participated in the movement to revive Greek tragedy on the modern stage. To some extent, this may be attributable to Yeats' having been favorably impressed with Greek revivalist productions prior to his concentrated study of Nietzsche's works. It may also stem simply from Yeats' career-long engagement with Greek drama, his appreciation for which was not limited to formal, interpretive constructs. As Liebregts points out, "Greek drama . . . seems to be present throughout his oeuvre, ranging from his own versions of Sophocles to the many illusions and textual quotations in his many essays on theatre" (428).

Nearly all of Yeats' direct involvement at the Abbey Theatre with Greek plays, or with their thematic material, began in the mid- to late twenties, and thus has no bearing on the early independent theatres of America. However, his interest in Greek revivalism predates his company's tours to America and was, in fact, at a height when the tours were undertaken. It is pertinent, for this study, to note that Yeats had his
revivalist interests further aroused during his American tours. In an article in The New
York Times, Yeats explained that he first got the idea to stage Oedipus Rex upon
learning, while in America in 1911, that the play had been produced at the University of
Notre Dame (Dom 75). He became intent on producing the play in Ireland, since it was
at the time prohibited in England, and he believed an Irish production might exhibit a
certain independence and liberality on the part of his countrymen. That same year,
using a technical translation for guidance, Yeats drafted a new version of the play.
When, also in that year, the English prohibition against the play was dropped, and
Reinhardt mounted his celebrated production of it in Murray’s translation at Covent
Garden, Yeats lost interest in the project (Dom 75).

Yeats did not resume working on his version of Oedipus Rex until 1925, at
which time it was completed and produced on the main stage at the Abbey Theatre.
The following year Yeats also composed and produced a new version of Sophocles’
Oedipus at Colonus. And an original play, The Resurrection, which was produced in
1934 (Dom 63), was written as an extension of the ideas that had guided Yeats in his
translations of Sophocles. Karen Dorn views these three productions as the
“culmination of Yeats’ long involvement in two aspects of nonnaturalistic theatre – the
relation between stage performance and audience in the Greek theatre, and the nature of
the poetic and dramatic image produced in that type of theatre” (63).

It is noteworthy that Yeats, who was instrumental in bridging the early work of
the independent theatres with later manifestations of the movement in Europe and the
United States, had also been active in the movement to revive Greek drama. As Dorn
points out, Yeats “shared those interests with a group of actors and producers, most
notably Sybil Thorndike, Granville Barker, and Gilbert Murray, and one of the concerns of their early work, from 1900 to 1914, was a revival of Greek drama based on new archeological theories of classical Greek theatre” (63). These theories came mainly from a group of classical scholars known as the “Cambridge classicists,” who, under the leadership of Jane Ellen Harrison, popularized the notion that ritual was the incunabula of Greek tragedy. The fundamental connection between theatre and ritual provided an important basis for Yeats’ vision of his ritualistic drama.

In Yeats’ work prior to and during his touring in the United States there is evident a confluence of Hellenism and the independent theatre movement. His staging of poetic plays at the Abbey Theatre reveals the great extent to which Hellenism has been vital to the modern struggle against realism, for, although they were never as popular as the plays of Lady Gregory and Synge, they were highly influential in the modern tradition of poetic drama (Brockett and Findlay 104).

Of particular importance to the legacy of Yeats in America were the folding screens designed by Gordon Craig that had been adopted at the Abbey Theatre in 1911, the year of the company’s first tour to the United States. Craig’s screens were intended to provide poetic drama with a flexible and evocative stage setting, principally by freeing directors from the conventions of the proscenium stage (Dorn 64). Although Yeats and Craig had been friends and theatrical associates for many years, and Yeats had admired Craig’s first production design, which was for Aeneas and Dido (1901), their greatest collaborative work took place between 1909 and 1912, which further points to the currency of Craig’s influence during Yeats’ American visits. Indeed, in an
address to students at Harvard in 1911, “Yeats introduced the work of Gordon Craig to the United States” (Flannery 361).

The influence of Yeats, Lady Gregory, and the Irish Players, as their company was called, on American theatre, and in particular on the independent theatres, which were struggling to emerge at the time of the Irish company’s tours, is direct and wide-ranging. As Flannery states, referring to the company’s first American tour, “the full consequences of this Abbey Theatre tour of North America would have astounded even the visionary mind of Yeats. From it sprang a major impetus for the amateur Little Theatre Movement across the United States and Canada” (360-61). Notable artists and educators in the American theatre attended productions by the Abbey Theatre, as well as Yeats’ lectures. Even President Theodore Roosevelt was an ardent supporter of the Abbey Theatre, and an admirer of the plays of Lady Gregory (Flannery 360). Included among those who have attested to the profound influence of Yeats’ group on their work are Eugene O’Neill, Maurice Browne, Robert Edmund Jones, Herbert Blau, and Robert Brustein (Flannery 361-62). The Abbey Theatre provided a model for Americans in several areas, in the development of a national dramatic literature, in new scenic practices, in ensemble acting, in organization and management, and in the ideals that called for an innovative return to poetic theatre.

Adolphe Appia and Gordon Craig: Scenic Reform

Gordon Craig (1872-1966) and Adolphe Appia (1862-1928) are among the foremost theatrical reformers of the modern era. Their theoretical writings articulated new approaches to theatre as a discipline, and set forth principles and concepts that
were to guide generations of leading theatre artists in Europe and America. Although many of their ideas for reform were similar, the two men worked and developed these ideas independently of each other. The influence of their theoretical views, as well as of their rather limited practical work, found its way into the modern theatre in large measure through the channels of the independent theatre movement. Early implementation of their methods and artistic principles was attempted at independent theatres throughout Europe and America, including such prominent venues as the Abbey Theatre, the Moscow Art Theatre and the Chicago Little Theatre.

Craig and Appia were, along with Yeats, second-generation figures in the European independent theatre movement, and as such particularly important to the late-burgeoning American extension of the movement. Both designers reached international prominence in the years of the first stirrings of American independent theatres, and Craig's methods and ideals were carried to the United States by no less a messenger and demonstrator than Yeats, whose Abbey Theatre served as the immediate model for many of the early independent theatre companies in America.

Hellenism was integral to the reform efforts of both Craig and Appia; the latter undertook his novel approach to stagecraft in accordance to precepts set forth by Wagner, while Craig was a "disciple of Walter Pater" (Brockett and Findlay 119), with close ties to the art-for-art's-sake movement and the symbolists. Other Hellenist influences may also be delineated in the work of Craig and Appia, as well as, in both cases, a general Hellenist orientation. As J. Michael Walton writes: "Much of their inspiration was derived from what each perceived to have been the sublime
achievement of the ancient theatre, which, they were convinced, could help to provide the basis for a new aesthetic in contemporary dramatic art" (302).

Craig first gained wide recognition for his theoretical positions through his controversial contributions to several productions, starting in 1900 with his direction and set design for Dido and Aeneas for the Purcell Operatic Society, and ending with his design for a production of Hamlet, staged in 1912 at the Moscow Art Theatre. In addition, Craig exhibited his theatrical designs in major European cities during this period. The greatest attention to his ideas came, however, through his published writings, especially with the enormously influential The Art of the Theatre (1905), which was quickly translated into several languages, and followed by an expanded version, On the Art of the Theatre, in 1911. Also important was The Mask, a serial publication issued in fifteen volumes between 1906 and 1929.

Craig's theoretical writings, focusing in turn on what is now called directing, and on acting, masks, puppets, and scenic design, all revolve around Craig's strong opposition to textually-based theatre. Of the entire textual tradition in theatre, he was most vociferously opposed to contemporary realism. In lieu of relying upon textual prescriptions for a performance, Craig advocated the orchestration of non-hierarchically disposed stage elements by a single artist, thus arguing in effect for the role of the modern director. He sought to bring all production elements under the centralized control of a single artist, maintaining that masks and scenic designs should express the artistic vision of the director, and at times, and for the same reason, he advocated the replacement of actors by puppets.
Craig’s objection to textually-based theatrical production must be understood in correlation to his general theoretical and artistic orientation as a supporter of the tenets of the symbolist and art-for-art’s-sake movements. Other adherents of these or kindred tenets, who have already been considered in this study, such as Wagner, Wilde and Yeats, favored the primacy of musical or poetic values among the dramatic elements, so that Craig’s emphasis on the visual aspects of production marked a significantly new application of these tenets to theatrical art. Craig called for the stage “director” to make use of color and line in gaining stylistic control over the mise-en-scene.

Craig reveals his ties to symbolism and English aestheticism by favoring a suggestive and evocative scenic imagery that appeals to the spectators’ sense of beauty. In fact, the larger purpose of his theatrical reforms had this same function, for his ideal theatre was intended “to express absolute beauty unconcerned with everyday appearance – realism – and reveal the mysterious, interior, and secret places of being” (Brockett and Findlay 119). These ideas gained considerable currency in Europe and America through Craig’s first theoretical book, The Art of the Theatre, although it contained “little that Wagner, Appia and the French Symbolists had not said (or even done) already” (Braun 87).

Craig’s contributions to modern stagecraft, in both praxis and theory, reveal some of the same traces of Hellenism found in English aestheticism and French symbolism, as opposed to the Hellenism of the outdoor theatre movement or of those who approached Greek tragedy through the hermeneutic of modern realism, such as Murray and Wilamowitz. For realism, Craig had a particular loathing; in the “afterword” of his book of scenic designs, Towards a New Theatre (1913), he declares,
in words that echo art-for-art’s-sake sentiments: “The popularization of Ugliness, the bearing of false witness against beauty – these are the achievements of the Realistic Theatre. I wish these designs of mine to stand as my protest against the Realistic Theatre” (89).

Consistent with Craig’s symbolist and aestheticist forms of Hellenism was his contempt for antiquarianism. In A Note of Masks (1910), after decrying the antiquarianism of William Poel and the Elizabethan Stage Society, Craig writes: “There have been the revivalists of the so-called Greek theatre – a dreadful thing entirely in Greek” (Craig on Theatre 22). And in his essay, Theatrical Reform (1910), Craig specifically criticizes the naivete of outdoor theatre “enthusiasts”: “an enthusiast for the theatre has only to see one performance given in the open air with a background of trees, let us say by some ‘forest players’, to believe that the solution to the riddle of the theatre lies in taking the theatre into the open air” (Craig on Theatre 42).

The role played by Hellenism in the development of Craig’s views on theatrical reform is impossible to pinpoint. The son of celebrated English actress Ellen Terry, Craig received little formal education. He took to the stage as an actor at age twelve and entered the profession in 1889, at age seventeen. An auto-didact, Craig was indebted to a range of classical influences; Pater, Nietzsche, Yeats, and Isadora Duncan were acknowledged to be of special importance to his thinking (Craig Towards a New Theatre xi). Christopher Innes, in his book, Edward Gordon Craig (1983), offers a valuable discussion and review of Craig’s understanding of the Greek past and his purposes in studying it. In Craig’s reform efforts, Innes finds that “ancient Greece was his primary inspiration” (122). Craig’s view of Western theatre history was that of a
tradition gradually degenerating from the ancient Greeks to the present (Innes 121) and “he looked on the process of renewing the theater as a progressive stripping away of accretions to return to the earliest and most fundamental forms” (Innes 121-122).

One of Craig’s most decisive Hellenist influences came from his association with dancer and innovative choreographer Isadora Duncan, with whom he had a two-year intimate relationship, and an artistic affiliation of some twenty years. Craig embraced many of Duncan’s artistic aims as his own, and “he declared that her genius complemented his and considered her the only artist, apart from Appia, with whom he could have worked successfully” (Innes 116). It was, above all, Duncan’s insistence upon the primacy of movement, before language and music, that most stimulated Craig’s own thinking. Innes writes that “the fact that some of her dances were without accompaniment convinced him that rhythm alone could form the basis of theatrical art” (117). Innes believes that Duncan’s avid Hellenist interests played an important role in her influence on Craig: “a further influence on the way in which Craig’s ideas developed was Isadora Duncan’s fascination with Greek art” (118-19). Duncan viewed her innovations in dance to be kindred to classical Greek forms (Innes 119).

Innes underscores several features of ancient Greek theatre that were especially exemplary for Craig’s idea of a new, reformed theatrical art. The first was the dual role of the playwright-director: “the creative process of the Greek theatre, in which Aeschylus had instructed the chorus in their dances as well as the protagonists in how they should deliver their lines, and in which the dramatist and director were the same person, was precisely what Craig aimed at in defining his ideal art as completely ‘the work of one man’” (120). Other aspects of Greek theatre that were important to Craig’s
theoretical and practical work toward theatrical reform included "the principles of an architectural, multipurpose setting (as distinct from specific or two-dimensional scenes), symbolic acting, simplicity, and perhaps above all the religious value of Greek drama" (120). "In addition," Innes continues, "the origins of the theatre provided an example for the most ambitious part of his undertaking" (120), which was "to attempt the single-handed creation of a drama that his new theatre would express" (121).

Craig's visionary approach to theatrical reform, relying on an ancient Greek precedent for a sense of historical place and importance, inspired major theatre practitioners throughout Europe and the United States. Maurice Browne, a leader of the American little theatre movement, very nearly worshipped Craig (Browne Too Late 172). Craig's influence on American companies is treated more fully in subsequent chapters.

Adolphe Appia (1862-1928) advanced many of the same ideas and principles for theatrical reform that Craig developed. So great is the resemblance between the men's theories that it has often been assumed, until scholarly treatments of their careers indicated otherwise, that Appia's work had been plagiarized by Craig (Volbach 106-107). The theorists themselves did not suspect each other of having received undue recognition for any designs or writings. In fact, although they met only once, both desired to collaborate together on a scenographic project. This plan never came to fruition, but the two remained on good terms and in regular communication until Appia's death in 1928.

Appia came from a Calvinist family in Geneva, Switzerland, that was decidedly unsympathetic toward his youthful passion for the theatre; for many years, any mention
of the word ‘theatre’ was forbidden at home (Beacham Appia 8). While studying music in Leipzig and Dresden between 1882 and 1889, Appia was discretely “far more engaged in developing a comprehensive critique of contemporary stage practice” (Beacham Appia 9). He was thus prepared, upon discovering Wagner’s works in the mid-1880s, to appreciate the composer’s ideas and to apply them to his own. His efforts to develop a means of staging Wagnerian opera in accordance to new scenographic principles dominated Appia’s early career as a designer and theoretician. Appia’s proposals for a stagecraft suited to Wagner’s artistic intentions found little success in his lifetime: his staging of Wagner’s Tristan and Isolde at La Scala in 1923, as well as of the Ring Cycle in Basel in 1924-25, were not well received by audiences, and his scenic plans first appeared at Bayreuth in 1951, twenty-three years after the designer’s death.

Appia’s orientation to theatre remained grounded throughout his career in his interest in music and in Wagnerian opera and theory. Hellenist influences in his early works lie primarily in Wagner’s conception of theatrical history and reform. Beginning in 1884 in Dresden, through his close and lasting friendship with Houston Stewart Chamberlain, one of Wagner’s most devoted and distinguished followers, Appia gained an appreciation for German classicism (Volbach 33). He held Goethe in particularly high esteem, as had Wagner, and regarded him as one dedicated to ideal beauty in exemplary fashion.

The second great period in Appia’s career began in 1906, when he met and formed a lasting association with Emile Jacques Dalcroze (1865-1950), who is best known as the founder of eurythmics, a movement-based system of music appreciation
that helped to lay the foundations of modern dance. Dalcroze was to Appia, in a remarkable parallelism, what Isadora Duncan was to Craig. In 1910, at Hellerau, located near Dresden, Appia helped to design a new theatre that was financed expressly for Dalcroze’s use. Significantly, the theatre at Hellerau “was the first theatre in modern times to be built without a proscenium arch – that is, the first completely open stage” (Brockett and Findlay 116). Appia’s work with Dalcroze ended abruptly, however, when the onset of the First World War caused the Hellerau theatre to be closed. From Dalcroze, Appia had learned to identify rhythm as the essential means for bringing musical values to stage space, namely, through the movement of the actors’ bodies. Rhythm consequently assumed a central place in Appia’s most comprehensive treatise, The Work of Living Art (1921).

Perhaps due to his career-long intention of fulfilling Wagner’s vision for a new mode of theatre, Appia believed that theatre was ultimately an interpretive art form, whereas Craig, as mentioned, envisioned a non-textually based theatrical art. Appia affirmed a hierarchy of theatrical elements, in contrast to Craig, and in his designs pursued serial stage images, while Craig advanced single, mobile settings. These differences notwithstanding, Appia and Craig remain a curiosity in their kinship as revolutionaries of the modern stage.

Both Appia and Craig exerted a profound influence on the early independent theatres in America. Walther Volbach notes that Appia’s ideas were amply documented for and widely known to American artists by 1914 (197-98). Most prominent American designers professed a stronger indebtedness to Craig than to Appia, but some, such as
Lee Simonson, were ardent in giving primary credit for their development to the work of Appia (Volbach 198).
CHAPTER THREE: HELLENIST INFLUENCES IN AMERICA
PRIOR TO 1925

Introduction

This chapter considers the presence of Hellenist influences in the United States prior to and concurrent with the rise of the American independent theatres. Only a sketch capturing the outstanding features of this vast and little-researched subject has been attempted, with an exception made for the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Hellenist presence, as this phase constitutes the immediate Hellenist context in which independent theatres emerged, and here detail concerning theatrical and educational trends helps to illuminate the impressions of the Greek past held by contemporary artists and audiences. Later chapters, which treat individual theatre companies, artists, and productions, will build upon the groundwork of this overview, as well as upon the overview, provided by the preceding chapter, of Hellenist influences in the European independent theatre movement.

The principal aim of this chapter is to delineate, again, in very general terms, the peculiarly American branch of the Hellenist legacy.

Colonial Period to the Civil War

The discovery and early colonization of North America by Europeans, beginning in the late fifteenth century, was interpreted and promoted with the assistance of popular references to ancient history and literature, much of it Greek. English explorers, for example, were often referred to as "Argonauts" (Gummere 21). And in 1609, a group who were about to embark on a transatlantic voyage in order to establish an English Colony in Virginia were told in a sermon by Daniel Price, that the promise
of the enterprise lay in the prospect that “Virginia Country may in time prove to us the farm of Britain, as Sicily was to Rome, or the garden of the world, as was Thessaly” (qtd. in Gummere 29).

In his seminal study of the manifestations of classical thought in colonial America, The American Colonial Mind and the Classical Tradition, Richard M. Gummere contends that early colonizers valued classical mythology for its ability to function as a “publicity slogan” (21), serving to raise funds for, and to lure participants to, the costly and risky ventures overseas. One of the most prevalent uses of ancient mythology by colonizers was their invocation of the Greek myth of Atlantis in relation to North America. Atlantis is described in ancient literature as a vast island that had been abruptly engulfed by the sea and lost. On Atlantis was said to have been a civilization of wondrous technology and resplendent wealth. It was thought to have been located somewhere to the west of Europe. The lure of western exploration has consequently had a long history in Europe. As Johannes Urzidil writes: "In Columbus was simply renewed the ancient European yearning toward that East that lies behind the West, whose magical attraction has cast its spell on Europe for well over two thousand years" (9). He also points out that Columbus “studied the world atlas of the Alexandrian Claudius Ptolemaeus, which at that time was already thirteen hundred years old, but still modern enough” (9).

References to Atlantis in Seneca’s Medea and in Plato’s Timaeus were frequently quoted in the early days of colonization in order to suggest or even to assert that the New World was once known to the ancients. Of course, the Atlantis myth was not taken seriously by all or even by most of the early settlers, especially by New
Englanders who tended readily to dismiss pagan associations with their new homeland (Gummere 23). But the mythological stories of Atlantis and the Argonauts, as well as ancient historical accounts of Thessaly, serve to illustrate that Hellenism was present at the inception of the colonial period and also that the Hellenist tradition was not simply transplanted to the New World, but was to some extent tailored to the American experience. It was, in fact, the beginning of a uniquely American classical tradition.

Much of the evidence for a transmission of the Greek tradition into colonial America leaves open the question, on which recent scholarship has focused, of how profound was the Hellenic influence. Meyer Reinhold, paraphrasing the findings of Gummere, provides this review of the major forms of evidence (for both the Latin and Greek heritage):

Evidence abounds for an American cult of Antiquity during the eighteenth century, particularly during the second half: the ubiquitous classical quotations and tags; the common use of classical pseudonyms; the revival of classical place names; the constant adducing of classical parallels; even the frequent use of classical names for slaves in the southern states. Overshadowing all these was the tireless and purposeful reading by early Americans of the classics as a repository of timeless models for guidance in republicanism and private and civic virtue. (24)

The use of Latin language and literature greatly outweighed the colonists’ use of Greek. Nonetheless, all of the above categories of classical transmission given by Reinhold apply to the Greek legacy as well as to the Latin. Numerous minor examples of the Greek presence in the colonial period may be cited: George Washington’s order for a bust of Alexander (Gummere 15); William Byrd II’s marriage proposal in Greek to Maria Taylor (Gummere 85); the use of Greek passages in correspondences between Thomas Jefferson and John Adams (Gummere 194). Another indication of popular
interest in the classical legacy is evident in the routine publication of material from ancient history and literature in widely circulated almanacs (Gummere 5).

The place of Greek in the educational system of the colonies provides the strongest evidence for its importance to early Americans. American colleges founded in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were modeled after British institutions, which were still following the curriculum prescribed by the scholastic tradition. Elizabeth Atwater reports that “the earliest obtainable records show that the seven liberal arts were actually the foundation of higher education here, and that the study of Latin and Greek was paramount” (13).

Competency in both Latin and Greek was required for admission to American colleges of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Reinhold explains that “students were prepared for college principally through the medium of the classics” (26). Opposition to the dominance of classical subjects in the curriculum was active throughout the colonial and early national periods, but never succeeded in bringing about reforms. The opposition came from three basic directions: “At first this hostility came from the theologians, later from the advocates of utility, finally from supporters of a national education for a distinctive American culture” (Reinhold 304).

As a consequence of the classical training of the colonial period, leaders of the revolutionary period drew heavily on classical literature to advance their purposes, and drew as well, of course, on their training in rhetoric and composition. The fruitfulness of the revolutionary period in respect to the considered application of the classical tradition to modern life was recognized by Europeans and colonists alike; it is generally referred to as the “golden age” of the American classical tradition.
The classical curriculum at secondary schools and colleges ensured that a high percentage of leaders during the revolutionary period had received extensive training in the classics. The Founding Fathers made considerable use of classical allusions to support a wide range of political views. Their interest in ancient literature and history was of a more practical orientation than in Europe; Reinhold states, of the Founding Fathers, that "their reading in the classics was highly purposeful, adaptive, and selective; but their imitation was never slavish" (25). In their reading tastes, which centered on moral and historical writing (Reinhold 25), may be seen the same utilitarian impulse that spawned opposition to the domination of classics in the curriculum of schools and colleges.

The American constitution is doubtless the greatest product, in its far-reaching influence, of American efforts to bring to the modern age the benefits of classical study. It was also the first great use of ancient sources by Americans, since it was not until the nineteenth century that similar achievements were made in literature, architecture, philosophy, and other areas. As Gummere notes: "The outstanding feature of the American colonial period, in which practice always went hand in hand with theory, was its vigorous political activity" (24).

Ancient constitutions, and ancient commentaries on them, were consulted and their merits rigorously debated at the Constituional Convention in 1787, as well as "at the various state ratifying conventions, and in the pamphlet literature and political tracts spun off in great numbers to influence the structure of the new government" (Reinhold 102). Although Greek constitutional models were less important to the Americans than
Roman paradigms, the former were assiduously studied, and the ancient sources for
which were Plato, Aristotle, and Plutarch (Reinhold 100-101).

Greek political history furnished the Americans with one particularly important
alternative to the Roman model: a variety of confederations of independent states. To
the colonists, whose individual colonies differed greatly in respect to slavery, religion,
economics, and social customs, the Greek record of confederacies was of special
interest. American history has shown the tension between central and local government
to be of abiding and profound importance, in the Civil War and in the struggle over
implementation of civil rights legislation, and in the ongoing negotiation of political
control in issues such as abortion, environmental protection, and public education.
Reinhold stresses the importance of the Greek examples during the constitutional
debates: “Great attention was directed at the time of the Convention to the theoretical
and practical aspects of federalism, and in this connection the debates and polemical
literature analyzed the merits and failures of Greek leagues” (103).

Evidence of the attention paid by colonial leaders to the Greek leagues, and its
relation to the creation of the American political system, is well documented. Gilbert
Highet, citing key evidence of this kind, writes: “The Federalist essays (1787-8) by
Hamilton, Madison, and Jay, which were largely responsible for creating the present
Union out of the early and inefficient Confederation, contain a number of illustrative
parallels from Greek and Roman history, with discussions of such Greek attempts at
federative government as the Achaean League and the Amphictyonic Council” (399). It
is worth bearing in mind, as Reinhold points out, that the colonists were treading new
political ground in their time: “of all classical political models ancient federalism was
the most extensively studied because there were no precedents in the English experience or in colonial America” (103).

The Founding Fathers’ search for instructive examples in Greek political history demonstrates once again, as had the appeal of the Atlantis myth one hundred and eighty years earlier, that the American reception of the classical heritage differed from that of the mother country. The colonists’ historical and socio-political position in relation to England and Europe strongly colored their interpretation of ancient Greece. Early Americans identified, of course, with mainstream Roman and Greek civilization, which produced most of the extant literature of ancient Europe, but they also identified with city-states and colonies on the outskirts of these vast civilizations.

It seems natural that colonists of the modern age should identify with colonists of the ancient world, and in America this colonial slant predates the movement toward political independence. Gummere finds that “two ancient ideas were regarded by pre-Revolutionary Americans as fundamental” (97), one of these being “the Greek concept of a colony independent of the mother state, in everything except sentiment and loyalty” (97). This concept, “illustrated by Thucydides in his account of the controversy between Corinth and Corcyra leading to the Peloponnesian War, was a standard slogan, invoked by many leaders from John Winthrop to Samuel Adams” (Gummere 97). The social agitation brought about by the imminent and sweeping political changes of the revolutionary period induced leaders to search for ancient models to invoke in support of their political ends. When the revolution was completed, however, the “golden age” of the American classical tradition ebbed to a close. There had always been those who opposed the constant drawing of comparisons between late eighteenth century America
and ancient Greece and Rome, including such prominent figures as Franklin and
Hamilton, but only after the revolutionary furor had subsided did their viewpoint
prevail, namely, that the modern world was simply too different to stand useful
comparison to ancient times.

Once the new nation was established, opponents to the eminence of classical
learning in the schools became more ardent in their appeals for educational reform. As
Reinhold writes:

No sooner was the national life inaugurated under the Constitution in
1789 than classical learning began precipitously and conspicuously to decline in
usefulness, acceptance, and vitality. Previous sporadic and meager opposition to
the dead languages in America, largely on religious and utilitarian grounds, now
erupted into a massive campaign to dethrone the age-old sovereignty of Latin
and Greek in the grammar schools and colleges, and to banish classical learning
entirely from American intellectual life. (175)

Historians of colonial America disagree over the significance of the influence
exerted by the Greek tradition on colonial life and politics. It should be underscored,
again, that Latin was considerably more prominent throughout the period than Greek.
But the fundamental correlation between modern democratic idealism and ancient
Athens has proved to be a well-spring for recurring forms of American Hellenism. The
first appearance of this on a large scale came during the early national period, from
about 1810 to 1830 (Reinhold 215), when a multifaceted philhellenism flourished.

The causes of early American philhellenism are not entirely clear. To some
extent, it was the fruit of revolutionary era study of ancient Greek history. The
movement extended, however, to the production of a new wave of literary studies, and
to new and greatly improved translations, lexicons, and grammars. The foremost
translation of the period was William Munford's verse translation of Homer's **Iliad**.
Reinhold also notes that Sam Houston was strongly influenced by impressions of Greek heroism garnered in his youthful readings of the *Iliad*, which he came to know almost by heart (216).

Reinhold states that American philhellenism arose initially out of Americans’ travel to Greece, beginning around 1806. He claims further that the movement was not derived from contemporary German or English Hellenist movements:

This nascent American philhellenism was, as a matter of fact, not influenced by the sentimental idealization by the English poets of the eighteenth century of Ancient Greece as an idyllic Arcadia and symbol of beauty, repose and liberty, or even initially by the New Humanism in Germany, with its Hellenic renaissance in classical studies and its Greek aestheticism, associated with Winkelmann, Herder, Lessing, Schiller, Goethe, Hölderlin. No, Americans began to discover Greece by themselves – by travel. (216)

Unfortunately, Reinhold’s assertion on this point is not well substantiated. Moreover, he fails to acknowledge that this alternative approach to the Greek tradition, that is, the traveler’s, was a path already cleared by English and continental travelers prior to the 1806 visit by Philadelphian Nicholas Biddle, cited by Reinhold as one of the earliest by an American. William St. Clair, in his study of philhellenism and the Greek War of Independence, writes that travel to Greece became popular in the eighteenth century: “By the beginning of the nineteenth century the travelling gentleman, with his pocket version of the classics, became a permanent feature of the Greek scene” (14).

The New World differed from the Old not only in its identification with ancient colonists, but in its approach to the classics as a whole. Although Europeans engaged in debates that pitted the ancient world against the modern, in America that controversy took place within a context that heavily favored the side of modernity. In so many respects – geographic, demographic, economic – Americans came increasingly to view
themselves as a society unlike both past and contemporary European nations, and even unlike any nation that had ever existed.

Enthusiasts of the Greek tradition attempted, between 1810 and 1830, to make Greek studies the cornerstone of education in America. Based at Harvard, and advanced by philhellenists across the country, this was a short-lived and wholly unsuccessful movement (Reinhold 217-18). In its wake, Greek studies were progressively weakened at American schools and colleges until after the Civil War, at which time German universities, with their rigorous *Altertumswissenschaft*, began dramatically to alter the course of American education.

The American philhellenist movement was sustained by three important factors: the inspirational reports of Americans’ travels to Greece, returning American students of classics from German universities, and American involvement in the Greek War of Independence, which lasted from 1821 to 1833. The Americans, sixteen of whom are known to have participated in the Greek struggle (St. Clair 356), provided crucial shipments of foodstuffs in 1827 and 1828. They were part of an international philhellenic operation that helped Greece to win its freedom from the Ottoman Turks. The German involvement was greatest, and after the war Greece was briefly a Bavarian colony (St. Clair 348).

The Greek War of Independence, and the emergence of a modern Greek nation, which claims ancient Greece as its cultural heritage, is one of the most remarkable consequences, or largely so, of modern Greek studies. One might also point to the influence of modern democratic political theory and revolution. As Catherine Koumarianou explains: “The development of a Greek national consciousness, and the
formation of new attitudes were very much indebted to the intensive intellectual, ideological and political contacts established in the last decades of the eighteenth century with the Western world” (74). These contacts were made primarily by Greeks while studying in Western Europe, and by philhellenist travelers in search of ancient sites, who were eager to identify extant cultural traditions from ancient times among the modern Greeks. The French Revolution had a particularly forceful impact on the thinking of Greek intellectuals and students (Koumarianou 75). But it was travelers trained in the classics who most directly initiated the modern Greek identification with the cultural legacy of ancient Hellas. St. Clair explains how learned tourists kindled this new awareness of ancient culture: “These confident and successful men were amazed at the ignorance they found. They began to lecture the Greeks about their ancient history and established a regular circuit of famous sites to be visited. The Greeks picked up scraps of history and legend and repeated them back to subsequent visitors” (14).

By their involvement in the creation of a modern Greek nation, Americans helped to sow the seeds for future revitalizing waves of the Greek tradition, including the staging of ancient plays in the ancient theatres, a practice inaugurated by the Royal Theatre of Greece (which later became the National Theatre of Greece) with Thomas Economou’s production of the Oresteia in 1903. The script was a modern Greek translation of Wilamowitz’ German version of the trilogy (Bakopoulou-Halls 264-65). The foundation of a modern Greek state, and the American tradition of travel to Greece, would also prove significant to theatre artists of the independent theatre era: George Cram Cook and Susan Glaspell lived in Delphi; Isadora Duncan danced in ancient Greek auditoria and opened her first dancing school in Athens.
Despite widespread American support for the Greek struggle for independence, philhellenism brought about no significant reforms in American education, and was defunct as a movement by 1830. Perhaps its greatest influence on American culture lay in its promotion of Greek artistic values, which enhanced Americans’ reception of structural and decorative forms popularized in an architectural movement of the nineteenth century, later known in the twentieth century as Greek revival.

The Greek revival was “our first national style of architecture, gradually spreading all over the country, as the dominant form from 1820 to 1860” (Reinhold 218). It initially received considerable momentum from the American enthusiasm for the Greek War of Independence. Architectural historian Robert K. Sutton observes that “to most Americans, this interest in the Greek Revolution is a long-forgotten footnote in their history. At that time, however, the revolt was the cause célèbre among the nation’s intellectuals. Periodicals carried accounts of Turkish atrocities against the Greeks and stirred public support by equating this independence movement with the American Revolution” (43). Sutton states that “in Boston and the Northeast, the development of Greek Revival architecture coincided closely with support for the revolt and acted as a catalyst for the spread of the style” (43).

The Greek style came to America predominantly as a European import. As Sutton reports, the movement began in England and spread from there to other nations:

Greek Revival architecture first appeared in Europe in the mid-1700s, inspired by the magnificent volumes prepared by James Stuart, Nicholas Revett, and others, who illustrated the monuments of the ancient world. Stuart was the first to translate his drawings into a building with his Greek Doric Temple, built in 1758, in Hagley Garden, England. His creation and the work of his contemporaries that followed set the trends for classical architecture in the Western world. (9)
The American branch of this international movement was singularly important, for several reasons.

In America, the movement began with a period of “high style,” which saw the design and construction of prominent civic buildings, including governmental buildings, banks, and private mansions in Grecian styles. For later generations, the most impressive of these structures, and those modeled on them, were the national monuments and federal governmental buildings in Washington, D.C. The National Capitol (1835), the first phase of which took some forty years to complete, “became a national symbol that was copied in nearly every state in the union” (Sutton 32). The principal building for each of the major branches of federal government, the executive (The White House), the judiciary (The Supreme Court), and the legislative (The Capitol), is in Greek styled architecture.

The movement soon entered its popular, vernacular phase, which saw the adaptation of Greek decorative details to structures that were not otherwise Greek. Talbot Hamlin wrote, in his landmark study of the movement, *Greek Revival Architecture in America*, “the word ‘Revival’ is an unfortunate misnomer, for this style was only a revival in that its decorative vocabulary was based upon classic Greek detail. In all other aspects it was typically of America” (xvii). It is important to note that Greek revival architecture appeared in towns and cities all across the country, beginning in the first half of the nineteenth century, in houses that “either resembled classical structures or displayed Greek-like detailing” (Sutton 9).

While the Greek revival movement left to posterity such notable forms as southern plantation houses, and governmental, financial, and educational buildings, the
movement also had an impact on small communities. As Hamlin writes: "this manner called ‘Greek Revival’ penetrated almost all sections of the country. It moved westward with the advancing frontier and is seen in surprising refinement and beauty in localities which were wilderness but a few years before" (xvii). This classical Greek imagery appeared across the nation in both private usage and in association with civic, financial, cultural and religious seats of power at a time when the Greek tradition was in other fields generally neglected. Referring to its "visual symbolism of simplicity, sanctity, and eternity," Reinhold suggests that the popular success of the Greek style "was in essence a creedal statement in America’s ceaseless groping for a sense of community" (219). As such, the spread of Greek revival architecture may be seen as a forerunner to the spread of "little theatres," with their emphasis on community, early in the twentieth century.

The impact of the Greek revival upon later generations of Americans is impossible to measure. It has visually and structurally associated classical Greek values with American institutions of power for most of the country’s history. In the twentieth century, some of the most popular dramatizations of American stories have relied on Greek revival settings, as, for example, in the film Gone With the Wind and in the plays of Tennessee Williams. In the first quarter of the twentieth century, when independent theatres appeared and became a national movement, the productions of Greek plays and the use of classical values in scenic design were a prominent part of its development. Perhaps Greek revival architecture had in important ways laid the foundations for the popular growth of local theatre, itself a Greek revival of sorts.
The American variant of the Greek revival movement was also markedly different from its English and French counterparts in its impact on national architecture, for European countries had prominent, pre-existing styles of architecture that continued to represent various stages of cultural and national development. The geographical dominance of medieval cathedrals and castles throughout much of Europe offers an example of this. In America, Greek revival architecture, as the first national style, became the quintessentially American form, forever linked to the birth of the nation.

Hellenism in America: 1860 to 1920

American history from 1860 to 1920 is roughly divided by historians into three major periods: Reconstruction, the Gilded Age, and the Progressive Era. The latter, extending from 1890 to 1920, corresponds closely to the timing of the international independent theatre movement, which began in 1890 in Paris, and which established itself in America between 1910 and 1925. Many of the artists who turned to the independent theatres were part of the progressive movement, and so brought to their work the social criticism and ideas for reform central to progressive politics. This may be seen in their promotion of community involvement, anti-materialism, anti-corporate hegemony, democratic idealism and spirituality. A similar correspondence may be found between the off-off-Broadway theatrical activity of the 1960s and the social activism of that time. The “sixties” has almost eclipsed in the popular understanding of American social history the reform ferment of the Progressive Era, but many issues of social justice that were raised in the fifties and sixties had also been raised in the earlier period. And as the sixties must be understood in context of the fifties, and the social
conservatism of that decade, so the Progressive Era must be seen in context of the preceding Gilded Age, with its monopolistic capitalism and social Darwinism.

From the close of the Civil War to the end of the First World War, Hellenism appears increasingly in American public life, and is invoked throughout this time by those on every side of the political spectrum. Perhaps the most significant role of Hellenism in American life during this period lies in its centrality in the emergence of the modern American universities, an institution that has been vital to progressive politics in America (again, one thinks of the student protest movements of the sixties), as well as to the survival of theatre in the age of mass media. The rise of universities in late nineteenth century America brought with it sweeping educational reforms throughout the country.

The post-Civil War period saw momentous changes in American education, and classical studies were often at their forefront. An overview of the last quarter of the nineteenth century reveals in broadest terms a shift from the British to the German model of higher education, that is, from the collegiate to the university system. As mentioned in the earlier discussion of ante-bellum education, American students in classics had been drawn to German universities for decades, and they frequently returned from Germany as professionally trained scholars and assumed positions of leadership at America's premiere colleges. German influences were also introduced through scholarly texts and, after the failed socialist uprisings across Germany in 1848, by émigrés: "disturbances in Germany in 1848 drove many intellectuals to America, where they helped to spread German ideals of scholarship" (Atwater 33).
It was the founding, in 1876, of Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, that marked the true beginning of German dominance in higher education in America. The German ideals were pursued by the school’s first president, Daniel Coit Gilman, through the “granting of the greatest possible freedom in advanced teaching and study in an atmosphere of culture with the greatest scholars he could collect together” (Atwater 34). The first faculty appointment at the first graduate school in the United States was that of Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve, who was made head of the department of ancient languages. Gildersleeve had received his doctorate from Göttingen. Although the first Ph.D. in America had actually been awarded in 1861 at Yale to James Morris Wheton (in classics), Atwater found that “the main stream of American classical dissertations began with that of Ernst G. Sihler at Johns Hopkins in 1878” (36), and that the tradition grew thereafter: “In the 80’s Harvard, Yale and Columbia added many contributions, followed soon by those of Chicago, Michigan, Wisconsin and Princeton. At first the dissertations were rather brief, but about 1913 they seem to have arrived at an average standard size, not as thin as the German ones, nor matching the book-size French” (36).

The advanced study of classical subjects in America lead the way for the advanced study of the humanities in general, and established the workings of professional scholarship. Gildersleeve helped to found the American Philological Association, “which was the first (1869) American learned society with a disciplinary basis and which eventually divided and subdivided and regrouped to create other disciplinary organizations such as the Modern Language Association, the American Historical Society, and the Linguistic Society of America” (Kennedy 337).
Gildersleeve also "founded the American Journal of Philology in 1880 as an outlet for the scholarship of Americans, as a vehicle of communication among them, and in its reviews of monographs, texts, and journals as a link with European scholarship" (Kennedy 336). He edited no fewer than forty volumes of the journal. Other classical journals were created to accommodate the expanding scholarship in the field, including Classical Journal (1905) and Classical Weekly (1907), and additional scholarly associations were formed. Classical learning generated enough support during this period to enable American universities and colleges to found and operate schools abroad; the first was the American School for Classical Studies in Athens, founded in 1881. New or expanded classical libraries and museums of antiquities were opened during this same period, many of them on university campuses.

The universities raised the standards of classical scholarship in America for the first time to a level on par with European scholarship. At the same time, American universities, unlike their European models, had to act, as part of their institutional mission, as service providers to the local community (Cowley 38), a role of great importance to the founding of university theatres. The movement to revive Greek plays in America was initiated and supported by universities and colleges beginning in the last two decades of the nineteenth century; the first production in this development was of Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus at Harvard in 1881, an outdoor Greek-language production seen by approximately six thousand spectators (Reinhold 332). Revivalist productions of the period are treated in the following section; however, it should be noted here, in connection with the rise of American universities, that the staging of Greek plays, and the related construction of outdoor amphitheatres, received it greatest
impetus from institutions of higher education. As Peter D. Arnott states: "In the United States, as in Great Britain, the impulse for a Greek drama revival came from scholarship" (355).

While Greek studies were being greatly advanced in the new graduate schools across the United States, they lost ground among the secondary schools and colleges. In the last decades of the nineteenth century colleges began abolishing their requirement of Greek for admission; when Harvard College dropped its Greek requirements in 1886, most colleges soon followed its example, and secondary schools responded accordingly by shifting emphasis in their curriculum to other subjects (Reinhold 332-33). No longer protected by the Greek admissions requirements, and facing ever strengthening opposition to the study of Greek, which was viewed by many as irrelevant to the scientific age, classicists sought to generate interest in the field by mounting productions of ancient plays.

University theatre productions thus created an important precedent for the rise of American independent theatres in the first quarter of the twentieth century. The academic theatre was, like most of the later independent companies, non-commercially oriented, amateur, and professing to offer cultural enrichment. University productions were also staged with minimal technical support, employed non-realistic staging, and catered to an educated, elite audience; these were all characteristic of the independent theatres.

Universities and colleges between 1860 and 1920 harbored another form of highly visible, if superficial, Hellenism in their "Greek system" of fraternities and sororities. The first fraternal society in the United States was Phi Beta Kappa, founded
in 1776 at the College of William and Mary (Robson 22). Many of the subsequent societies, like the original one, derived their names from the first letters of the first words of Greek maxims, while others adopted Greek letters on other bases, such as the chronological order in which the society appeared within a state. These societies witnessed a surge in popularity in the years following the Civil War, and their exclusivity and secretiveness brought them into an uneasy relationship with the modern universities, which were ostensibly designed to serve a democratic society.

Shortly before and throughout the period when the independent theatre movement swept across America, Greek letter societies were the target of public ire over elitist aspects of public universities. In his history of college fraternities, John Robson notes that the political movement known as populism prevailed in some states at prohibiting fraternities at state universities; South Carolina adopted such a prohibition in 1897, Mississippi in 1912 (Bairds 24). The Greek language was thus drawn into the mounting tension between competing educational paradigms as the aristocratic, English college system ceded ground to the emerging democratic, Germanic universities. The latter were viewed as instruments for the greater democratization of society at a time when suffrage in America was becoming increasingly available to the general, adult population due to the abolition of slavery and the elimination of property restrictions on voting.

The new universities had a civic functionality that distinguished them from the older colleges, nearly all of which had religious affiliations. Indeed, hundreds of new colleges were established by religious organizations during the second half of the nineteenth century in an effort to counteract the secularization of education, which was
then being advanced by the university ideal as well as by the astonishing advances in scientific fields of study. The later dropping of the Greek requirements was an important part of the national shift away from an aristocratic and religious educational system (Greek language study was often in preparation for New Testament studies) toward one avowedly populist and practical. Nevertheless, the Greek tradition was strongly ingrained in both educational systems. The new universities supported democratic values and freely adopted Greek architectural elements, while Greek language requirements, until they were abolished, and Greek letter societies preserved an elitist, educational "mystery" associated with Greek study as the exclusive province of the wealthy.

Echoes of the Greek past continued to have a general presence in American public life during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Neologisms coined for technological inventions were frequently of Greek origin, including telegraph, telephone and phonograph, linking in new household words the ancient Greek language with characteristic elements of a modern lifestyle. The Greek language, and Greek symbols, continued to represent vital aspects of public life, in medicine, psychology, and the sciences. In everyday life, too, proper nouns of Greek origin were used for people, stars, trees, flowers, animals, and so forth, keeping the language active.

John Robertson Macarthur surveyed diverse Greek elements in American life in his book entitled Ancient Greece in Modern America (1943), wherein he enumerates, in addition to such obvious examples of the Greek presence given above, Greek influences in popular architectural ornamentation, including interior and exterior decorative patterns (59), and in the inscriptions of Greek authors' names on the exterior walls of
major libraries (59-60). He notes widespread use of sculptures in Greek styles, many having Greek subjects: “many of our universities, colleges, and schools, public and private, not only in their art departments, but in the decoration of buildings and grounds, are as likely as not to possess one or more pieces of Greek sculpture” (61). He also finds that Greek mythological subjects were often used in musical composition and performance, including in music written for performances of Greek plays (89-90).

One of the more interesting manifestations of the Greek tradition during the period under discussion is in numismatics. Theodore Roosevelt sought to have American coins redesigned in imitation of ancient Greek coins, which are revered by coin experts as paragons of beauty and artistry. Augustus Saint-Gaudens, the artist engaged by Roosevelt for the project, created new coins after Greek designs, although few remained in circulation for long (the twenty dollar gold coins, his most popular creations, quickly appreciated beyond their face value). Roosevelt declared: “Certain acts . . . add to the beauty of living and therefore to the joy of life. Securing a great artist, Saint-Gaudens, to give us the most beautiful coinage since the decay of Hellenistic Greece, was one such act” (qtd. in Macarthur 85). This use of ancient coins as models for modern money pieces is an example of ongoing ancient Greek authority in artistic affairs.

Another example of deliberate American study and imitation of ancient Greek works during the Progressive Era is seen in Isadora Duncan’s use of Greek vase paintings to stimulate her creation of a new form of dance. Assisted by her brother, Raymond, Duncan steeped herself in all manner of things Greek during her early career and, indeed, throughout her life. In early adulthood, Winckelmann’s “Journey to
Athens” made a deep impression on her, and led her to an extensive study of the Greek vase collection at the Louvre, and, finally, to her first sojourn in Greece, where she opened a school of dancing and singing for Greek boys. Duncan went on to revolutionize modern dance and had a decisive role in the development of Gordon Craig’s radical proposals for theatrical reform (discussed in the previous chapter). Her intention was not to recreate Greek dance as it had been practiced in ancient times, but to rediscover the natural movements and gestures upon which she believed Greek dancing had been founded (Macarthur 94).

In American literature the Greek tradition is active throughout the nineteenth century, although it is not a dominant presence. Ralph Waldo Emerson’s adoration of Plato, and his use of platonism in the articulation of New England transcendentalism is well known. Perhaps less known is that Henry David Thoreau was also an ardent admirer of Greek literature. He wrote that “two thousand summers have imparted to the movements of Grecian literature, as to her marbles, only a maturer golden and autumnal tint, for they have carried their own serene and celestial atmosphere into all lands to protect them against the corrosion of time” (qtd. in Macarthur 216-17). The most striking American use of ancient Greek literature as models for modern works is found in the poetry and criticism of those American poets, who, along with Yeats, revolutionized modern verse: T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), and others. The American independent theatre movement emerged late enough to have stirrings of this modernist revolution in the air.

One of the most important and visible Greek revival movements during the Progressive Era occurred in athletics. The revival of the Olympic games coincided with
the rise of the international independent theatre movement: the International Olympic Committee formed in 1893, just two years after the founding of Antoine’s Théâtre Libre. The two movements have much in common: both originated in Paris, and were lead by Frenchmen; both placed importance on amateurism and were generally opposed to the professionalism in their respective fields; both were internationally located organizations dedicated to the exhibition of contemporary, international fare; and both were in some measure an exercise in the revival of Greek culture.

The modern Olympic games were conceived by, and brought into being under the leadership of, Baron Pierre de Coubertin. His primary purpose was to promote international understanding and good will through the creation of an international athletic competition that would take place outside the realm of politics, sports for sport’s sake, as it were. In this, he did not entirely succeed; nationalism and international politics have intruded on the spirit and the operation of the games from the beginning. But Coubertin’s efforts to create an arena in which the athletic prowess of the human body might be celebrated and honored has met with greater success than he could have foreseen, for today’s games enjoy an extraordinary, global popularity.

The ancient Olympics were not understood by Coubertin to be only incidentally Greek, but rather an integral part of the Greek world; nor did he envision the modern games occurring without relevance to modern civilization and culture. Coubertin appreciated that athleticism for the ancient Greeks had a valued role to play in the education of young people. In fact, Coubertin’s immediate models for the development of an international Olympics were the athletic programs of English and American
schools and colleges. He was favorably impressed by collegiate sports during an extended American visit four years before inaugurating the modern Olympic games: “A visit to the United States in 1889 familiarized Coubertin with American notions of physical education and with the national mania for intercollegiate sports. He was especially impressed by the excellent facilities that the colleges and universities had made available to their students” (Guttmann 10).

The concept of amateurism which was adopted as an eligibility requirement at the outset of formal plans for the modern games derived, according to Olympic historian Allen Guttmann, from standard nineteenth century strictures governing elitist social organizations. As Guttmann writes: “The concept of amateurism as it was then understood was an invention of the Victorian middle and upper classes. Its freely acknowledged purpose was to exclude the ‘lower orders’ from the play of the leisure class” (12). In its original form, “the amateur rule specifically banned participation by those who performed any kind of manual labor” (Guttmann 12). Later, the rule was modified “so that it restricted eligibility to those who received no material benefit, directly or indirectly, from any sport” (Guttmann 12). This use of amateur rules as an exclusive class barrier in the late nineteenth century suggests that amateurism in the independent theatre movement may similarly have been linked to class divisions, particularly in America, where amateur theatrical activity was, like athletic games, associated with institutions of higher education, and thus to the upper echelon of the social strata.

Another Grecian connotation of athleticism, physical beauty, also appealed to Coubertin. In his book, The Modern Olympic Games, John Lucas writes that “The
Greeks worshipped physical beauty; so did Coubertin. Without athletics, Greek art and
the Greek conception of beauty would have been impossible. During their best days,
the ancient Greek games included rhythm, art, beauty, and balance. The French baron
hoped that these things would be intrinsic to the modern games” (79). The Olympic
movement thus reveals another manifestation of the aestheticism propagated by the
independent theatre movement, and both were tied to ancient Greek precedent. This
provides an insight into the way independent theatres were promoted and received,
especially in the United States, where the Olympic games were well established by the
time the independent theatres appeared.

The United States was among the few nations strongly represented at the early
modern games. At the first games, held in Athens, Greece, in 1896, “the American
team was clearly the strongest” (Guttmann 18) and the American spectators at these
first games acquired a bad reputation for their heavily nationalist and sophomoric
support for their athletes (Guttmann 18). In 1904, the American domination of the
games, which were held in St. Louis, was irreconcilable with the international scope
sought for them: “In all, a mere twelve nations were represented by one or more
participants. Of the 554 athletes, 432 were American” (Guttmann 25). During the first
decades of the twentieth century Americans were embracing, and even dominating, the
Olympic games. This was, it appears, another important and popular form of Greek
revivalism, parallel to, and reinforcing, the earlier spread of Greek architectural forms
throughout the country. In addition, during the same period, Americans were busy
promoting another institution, the League of Nations, that had the purpose of expanding
democratic principals of government to a global level, and in so doing, of making the world, in Woodrow Wilson’s famous phrase, “safe for democracy.”

Greek Revival in the American Theatre, 1881 to 1920

In this section are reviewed various revivals of the Greek theatre, of its literature, stagecraft, and architecture, in the American theatre prior to and during the rise of the independent theatre movement. Greek revivals took place at numerous venues and at the hands of a wide spectrum of theatre practitioners, in the academic and professional theatres, in stadia, in community theatres, and in theatres leased to foreign touring companies. They initially followed the lead of English and European revivalist stagings, but soon assumed a popularity and an independent status in their distinctive, American context.

The first known production of an ancient Greek play in the United States was that of Antigone in 1845. This was an American recreation of the London production of the same play the year before. The London version had in turn been based on the play’s German revival, also of 1844, which was tremendously successful, and is treated briefly in the preceding chapter. According to Priscilla Rogers, whose dissertation on productions of Greek tragedy in New York contains a lengthy discussion of the 1845 Antigone, the investor behind the production “attempted to copy a production of Antigone seen earlier at London’s Covent Garden Theatre, boasting in boldly printed advertisements that his play had ‘been received with most extraordinary enthusiasm in the Cities of BERLIN, PARIS AND LONDON’” (13-14). Antigone opened at Palmo’s Opera House in New York on April 7, 1845, and closed after only a few weeks, having
failed to win an audience. It would be nearly four decades before America had its next professional production of an ancient Greek play.

Classics departments were chiefly responsible for successfully establishing the modern tradition of staging Greek plays in America. The most remarkable and influential production in the academic tradition was also the first: the production at Harvard in 1881 of Oedipus Tyrannus. Performed in Greek at Sanders’ Theatre, this show created a sensation; it opened on May 17, and offered five performances, all of them playing to full houses. Tickets were in high demand: those “which originally sold at two dollars each, rose to as high as ten and fifteen dollars in the hands of speculators” (Pluggé 4).

As with the 1845 Antigone, the Harvard Oedipus was prompted by an English precedent, the successful staging of Agamemnon at Oxford in 1880, but the Harvard production was not derivative, as the Antigone had been. The production was the result of long, painstaking efforts: “Rehearsals for the play had extended over the entire college year, and every effort had been made by the sponsors to give a production that was correct in every scholarly detail” (Pluggé 4–5).

Harvard’s enormously popular Oedipus effectively launched the American tradition of Greek play revivals. Its success led directly to the first professional staging of a Greek play in the United States since the 1845 Antigone. It “aroused so great an interest that Daniel Frohman organized a professional company for the Oedipus and played it in English translation to large audiences for two weeks in New York and Boston” (Pluggé 5). Frohman’s production, which opened at Booth’s Theatre in New York on January 30, 1882, was not, however, performed entirely in English. Rogers
notes that a Mr. Riddle, who had played the title role in the Harvard production, also played it in New York, in both cases in classical Greek. The lone Greek language performer, Mr. Riddle appeared with professional actors in this curious version that failed ultimately with the critics and the public. Rogers records that, although the audience for the opening night was large, "reportedly, many spectators left after the first hour" (28).

A greater influence was felt by the Harvard production in the academic theatre where, within ten years, one or more Greek plays were produced at Notre Dame University, Beloit College, University of Pennsylvania, Smith College, Grinnell College, and Swarthmore College, all of them by Greek departments (Plugge 148), with one-third of them in the Greek language (149). Plugge provides information only on those college productions he was able personally to verify or, in most cases, to learn of through a questionnaire he circulated to schools throughout the United States in the 1930s; his figures therefore present only a tentative, and conservative, picture of the true scope of academic Greek play production in the period between 1881 and 1936, which is the time-frame of his study.

Plugge found that academic productions of Greek plays grew sharply (nearly doubling) in each decade following the Harvard Oedipus, leveling off briefly during the First World War. After the turn of the century, Speech departments began to produce Greek plays, and overtook Greek departments in productivity between 1926 and 1936, when the latter staged 62 plays to 128 staged under Speech department auspices (148). Only twenty, or about ten percent, of the total number of productions in both Speech and Greek departments were given in Greek. By contrast, prior to 1926, only 18 of 141
productions had been produced by Speech departments (Pluggé 148). Thus, during the rise of the American independent theatre Greek play production was a popular trend in academia, and was still being carried out almost exclusively within the province of Greek departments.

As indicated earlier in this chapter, classicists turned to Greek play production in part as a means of popularizing the discipline at a time when its privileged and protected status was being actively overturned. One professor of Greek, Dr. Joseph Daniels, described a production of a Greek play at Olivet College as “the best kind of advertisement for classical study” (qtd. in Rogers 16). Such efforts to popularize Greek studies were extended primarily toward the educated elite of society. This may be seen in the frequent use of the Greek language in performances, in the academic location and context of the shows, and in the use of faculty and students as the principal practitioners behind the productions.

The stylistic choices of the academic productions further evince a pedagogical orientation and scope. The manner in which educational institutions presented Greek plays tended to follow historicist fidelity as it was then understood (Pluggé 63). This was especially true of the earliest productions, in which, for example, “the scenery was more or less stereotyped in design” (Pluggé 76). The set typically had as a centerpiece a painted backdrop (Pluggé 76) “that attempted to give a faithful imitation of the scene-building of the fifth century” (Pluggé 76). Because of its commitment to historicist fidelity, academic theatre played a significant role in what is often referred to as the outdoor theatre movement, particularly in regard to the construction of amphitheatres on Greek (and Roman) models.
The outdoor theatre movement was an international phenomenon that had its first stirrings in the 1880s, and its peak in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The seminal figure in the outdoor theatre movement was an Englishman, Philip Ben Greet, who staged productions of classics, including some Greek plays, "at colleges, clubs, and private homes" (Rogers 44). Two points should be made regarding Greet's movement. First, it was partly an expression of the progressive politics of the early twentieth century. Political opposition to monopolistic capitalism translated, in the American theatre world, into opposition to the control exercised over the industry by a producing organization called the Theatrical Syndicate. Through the Syndicate, Charles Frohman had managed to consolidate and centralize professional theatre across the country. His group determined which shows would be produced and where and when they would be booked. As Rogers points out, the practitioners of the outdoor theatre movement "effectively side-stepped the monopoly altogether by originating a form of theatre which was literally 'outside' Syndicate control" (44).

The other important aspect of this movement was that it advanced some of the same scenic and aesthetic values articulated by theorists such as Appia and Craig, foremost among which were simplicity and suggestiveness. In fact, Greet was an early popularizer of minimalist décor. Rogers states that "Greet was one of the first directors to demonstrate the workability of minimal scenery. When, on a few occasions, he staged a play indoors, he used scenery sparingly, and because audiences at this time expected elaborate sets, his simple stagings created something of a sensation" (45). It may be recalled that Edward Gordon Craig lambasted the outdoor theatre enthusiasts and sought to distinguish his conceptual reforms from the practices of this group.
The revival of Greek drama benefited directly from the outdoor theatre movement. The Greek plays were championed by those in the movement as artistic works of a quality far surpassing the commercial drama of the period. Sheldon Cheney, who wrote a history of the movement, believed that it was "a very real part of the nation-wide protest against the commercialization of the regular theatre, and an indication of a desire for sounder and less artificial dramatic fare" (Open-Air 110). Of course, the ancient Greek plays take place out-of-doors, and their poetic, formal aspects made them well suited to the scenic design principles of economy and suggestion. Moreover, Greek-styled amphitheaters were among the myriad outdoor staging venues that were designed and built as part of the outdoor theatre movement.

The tradition of outdoor performance initiated by the outdoor theatre movement has remained active throughout the twentieth century. Even in its early phase, the movement included many different types of theatrical activity. In his dissertation, The Outdoor Theatre Movement in the United States From 1900 to 1920, Richard Hudson Palmer writes that "Various of its exponents saw the outdoor theatre as the salvation from commercialism, as the place for the birth of a new poetic drama, as the precursor of the university theatre, as an early form of community theatre, and as a setting for the new Art Theatre" (6-7). The early American variations of outdoor theatre are reviewed by Cheney in his book, The Open-Air Theatre (1918), in chapters on modern Greek theatres, medieval religious theatre, nature theatre and garden theatre (ix). Palmer offers this distinction between the major trends: "nature theatre which leaves the natural background essentially unadorned; the garden theatre in which the natural elements are consciously arranged and frequently supplemented by architectural and sculptural
features; and the architectural theatres, usually pseudo-Greek, which utilize a highly
developed artificial stage façade” (14).

Not all forms of performance within the movement were inspired by ancient
Greek theatre, but theatre out-of-doors had its strongest historical parallel in the Greek
precedent. The ancient theatres of Greece reflected the modern interest in natural
settings and backdrops more closely than either the Elizabethan or the medieval stage,
although these traditions were also revived as part of the outdoor theatre movement.
Some of the most successful theatres to emerge within the outdoor tradition were the
Shakespeare festivals, but by adopting a festival identity in the tradition revived by
Wagner, these, too, echo the ancient festival theatres of Greece.

Of the several outdoor amphitheaters built in the United States during the first
two decades of the twentieth century, most were located in California. Cheney wrote,
in 1918, that “In California there are four so-called Greek theatres, and others are
building. In the rest of the United States there are only two structures that approach the
type” (Open-Air 30). The first of these was built at Point Loma in 1901, with seats
overlooking the Pacific Ocean. The best-known amphitheater is the Hearst Greek
Theatre at the University of California at Berkeley, which opened in 1903 with a
production of Aristophanes’ The Birds. The theatre was constructed on a site that forms
a natural amphitheater, and which had already been used to produce Greek plays for
nearly a decade. Described by Cheney as “a curious mingling of Greek and Roman
forms” (Open-Air 31), the Hearst Theatre set an important example for colleges and
universities across America, many of which built their own amphitheaters during the
twenties and thirties, and served, as well, as a model for non-academic outdoor theatres.
It is noteworthy that modern amphitheatres were overwhelmingly an American development. While several arena-styled outdoor theatres were built or modified in Europe, Cheney states that “the only modern European theatre that follows closely the Greek tradition is that at Bradfield in England” (46).

An architectural development related to the Greek-styled theatres is that of athletic stadia. Cheney writes that “of modern structures modeled after the ancient stadium, circus and amphitheatre (or arena), there are many, such as the bull-rings of Spain and the athletic stadia throughout the world” (Open-Air 48). These are a highly visible echo of ancient times, particularly in the United States where collegiate and professional sports are played in stadia as a vital part of everyday life, and where these Greek-styled structures are a landmark feature of many cities and of most college and university campuses. The Greek precedent for modern athleticism has already been discussed; on some occasions the modern division between sports and theatre, each with ties to ancient Greece, has been bridged by the productions of Greek plays in the modern stadia. Greek plays were produced early in the twentieth century at stadia in New York City, and at Harvard and Yale (Open-Air 48).

In Jane Addams’ Hull House Theatre in Chicago, Greek plays were produced by local Greek immigrants: “At one time a colony of Greeks produced Ajax of Sophocles and later gave Electra in their effort to bring to America the beauty of their drama” (Caughey 24). The immigrants’ pride in the ancient plays reflects widespread changes brought about by the modern tradition of Greek study. With the revival of the Olympic games in Athens in 1896, and of Greek plays in Greece and throughout Europe, especially in the first decade of the twentieth century, it is clear that modern Greeks had
by this time advanced greatly in their identification with the culture of ancient times, as contrasted with the early nineteenth century, when European and American travelers to Greece had found the local population in utter ignorance of the ancient world.

The revival of Greek drama in the United States was also advanced in its early stages by foreign touring companies. In 1894, a French troupe under auspices of the Comédie Française, and featuring renowned actor Jean Mounet-Sully, produced French language versions of Antigone and Oedipus Rex. Both plays were given at the Abbey Theatre in New York and received favorable reviews in The New York Times (Rogers 30-31). The next foreign tour of a Greek play was an Italian language production of Oedipus Rex performed by a company under the direction of its principal actor, Ermete Novelli. The Italians performed at the Lyric Theatre in New York in 1907. Neither tour generated significant public interest (Rogers 31).

During this same period, prior to the rise of the independent theatres, Greek plays were also being staged by amateur and community groups. In his dissertation, The Greek Productions of Margaret Anglin, Gordon Arnold Johnson, in describing the revivalist productions at the turn of the century, states that “Many community and social organizations in New York and throughout America attempted their own Greek theatricals; public interest in outdoor and indoor presentations of Greek tragedy grew steadily” (11). The International Theosophical Society, the group that would later build the Greek theatre at Point Loma, California, produced The Eumenides at the Carnegie Lyceum in New York in 1898 (Johnson 11). A major figure in these early productions of Greek plays was Franklin H. Sargeant, who had collaborated on three seminal college productions at Harvard, in the famous 1881 staging, at Smith, and at Vassar.
Johnson reports that in 1889 Sargeant “trained his students at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in classical Greek production, and then presented public performances in English of Sophocles’ Electra in Boston and New York” (11). In 1908, Sargeant presented a student production of The Choephoroi at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York; he “also staged Greek productions for clubs and amateur theatrical organizations for a number of years” (Johnson 11). According to Johnson, the professional theatre was able successfully to produce Greek plays only after the public had been prepared for them by the academic and amateur productions: “The renascence of interest in classic Greek theatre which began in the universities and spread to amateur theatre groups became so intense that eventually a few commercial theatre managers like Miss Anglin became brave enough to produce some of the classic dramas of Greece” (9). Johnson points out that attendance at Harvard’s production of Agamemnon in 1906 “drew a total of five thousand spectators for the two afternoon performances” (10).

Margaret Anglin’s production of Antigone on June 30, 1910, at the Hearst Greek Theatre in Berkeley was only the third non-foreign professional production of a Greek play in the United States; it was the first not to be based on a previous European or academic staging (the 1845 Antigone followed an English production; the professional 1881 Oedipus was an adapted version of the Harvard production). Anglin’s production was also the first truly successful American professional production of a Greek play. Already a famous actress, Anglin was able to draw public and critical interest to her staging of Antigone. Moreover, a local audience had been primed for her work by a well-attended production of Oedipus Tyrannus in the Hearst Greek Theatre just six
weeks prior to her opening (Johnson 12). Anglin received additional support from The New York Times, which promoted her efforts by treating the production as a major theatrical event (Johnson 17-18).

Anglin, who produced many Greek plays between 1910 and 1928, managed to present them to modern audiences as worthy drama, not as academic exercises, and this was her remarkable achievement in the modern history of Greek play production in America. The Greek plays were presented by Anglin out of her passionate commitment to them as artistic works, and she personally oversaw their realization as entertaining theatre. As Johnson notes, in addition to her acclaimed performances in the plays, "she financed her own productions, planned the integration of music, supervised the set design and construction, selected and trained the acting company and directed the entire proceedings" (iv).

Greek tragedies were produced and toured at this same time by groups performing as part of the outdoor theatre movement. The first of these groups was founded in the wake of interest left by Greet's tour of the United States: "In 1904, just over a year after Greet introduced Outdoor Theatre, an American named Charles Coburn originated an acting troupe using Greet's approach. But Coburn, unlike Greet, included Greek tragedies in his repertory, namely, Electra and Alcestis" (Rogers 49). In 1910, the Coburn Players presented the American premiere of Euripides' Electra in Gilbert Murray's translation. The performance took place on November 30 at the Hudson Theatre in New York City. Euripides' Alcestis, in a translation by Blanche Wagstaff, was performed by the same group at the Hudson Theatre a few days later, on December 2 (Johnson 18). The Coburn Players also presented Electra and Iphigenia in
Tauris before academic audiences during the ensuing four years: “Despite devastating reviews, they occasionally presented Euripides’ two plays from 1910 to 1914 at such universities as Columbia, Princeton, Harvard, the University of Wisconsin and the University of Chicago” (Johnson 19). Oedipus Rex was performed in 1911 at the Irving Place Theatre and in 1913 at the Garden Theatre, both in New York City, by the J. E. Kellerd Repertory Company, an off-shoot of The Coburn Players; these productions were not better received by the press than those of the parent company. Numerous members of Coburn’s company proceeded to form their own groups or joined with others and in this way Greek tragedies came to be toured throughout the country immediately prior to and during the seminal phase of the emerging independent theatres. The tours received contempt from the press and little notice from the professional theatre, but their outdoor stagings were innovative nonetheless (Rogers 49). In fact, these companies, as well as the outdoor theatre movement as a whole, may be seen as an important adjunct of the independent theatre movement. The outdoor groups were, like the populist theatre of France, a corollary development that had much in common with the theatrical reform efforts concurrently underway at the independent theatres. This was observed by Huntly Carter, in his book, The New Spirit in Drama and Art (1913), where he “directly associated outdoor presentations with the sweeping changes in the theatre which were occurring at that time” (Rogers 87).

The outdoor theatre movement had one of its most triumphant moments when Harley Granville Barker, whose work in the independent theatre movement in England is discussed in chapter two, brought to America in 1915 English productions of Trojan Women and Iphigenia in Tauris, both in Gilbert Murray’s translations. The tour played
at universities on the east coast, opening at the Yale Bowl on May 15, and closing at Princeton on the 12th of June. Barker’s Greek productions combined elements of the outdoor theatre movement, academic theatre, professional theatre, stadium architecture, and the European independent theatre movement, and was met with unprecedented popular support and critical acclaim. On May 29, Trojan Women was performed outdoors at the dedication ceremony for Lewisohn Stadium in New York City. Rogers notes that “it was New York’s first outdoor and first successful professional staging of Greek tragedy” (50). By tour’s end, the two tragedies had been seen by approximately fifty thousand people (Rogers 50). These productions effectively combined Murray’s translations with scenographic innovations and briefly propelled Greek tragedy to the forefront of American theatre. Along with the Chicago Little Theatre’s production of Trojan Women that same year, Karelisa Hartigan, who has traced the reception of professionally produced Greek tragedy in America in her book, Greek Tragedy on the American Stage (1995), cites Barker’s productions as “the first performance of Greek tragedy to garner attention as a statement relevant to the times” (15). With the war-time context in which the productions took place, Hartigan finds they attained a landmark level of perceived relevance for Greek plays before American audiences: “the reception accorded these productions inaugurates the connection between Greek drama and contemporary society in America” (15). Barker’s tour is discussed in greater detail in relation to the Chicago Little Theatre’s tour of Trojan Women in chapter five.

In his survey of professional productions of Greek tragedies, Gordon Johnson mentions other, less-publicized productions that nonetheless reinforce the fact that ancient Greek plays were generating considerable interest during the first two decades
of the twentieth century. This interest crossed conventional divisions between the amateur and the professional theatre, and helped to create new producing organizations and venues in defiance of customary practices. Marita Leonard, for example, at Brookside Theatre, an outdoor theatre on her private estate in Mt. Kisco, New York, presented Euripides’ Electra in three performances between July and September in 1912, and once again in June 1914. The first production was reviewed by New York newspapers (Johnson 20).

Isadora Duncan arranged for a production of Oedipus Rex on February 16, 1915, at the Century Opera House in New York City. Johnson explains that Duncan “organized the production in order to give herself an opportunity to dance in a Greek play” (23). The version of the play used by Duncan was a translation by Augustin Duncan, who had formerly directed for the Coburn Players, with the choral odes in a translation by Percy Mackaye (Johnson 23). In 1916, Orestes was presented in the summer by William Faversham at the Rosemary Theatre in Huntington, Long Island, a private venue on the estate of Roland Conklin (Johnson 23). Johnson notes that “the production did not receive much press coverage even though several prominent ‘stars’ were in the company: Faversham, Julie Opp, Julia Arthur, and Nijinski who performed the Greek dances” (23).

Greek play production was thus an established alternative to mainstream theatrical fare during the first two decades of the twentieth century, both before and contemporaneous with the rise of the independent theatres. The latter were finally to bring serious reforms to the mainstream theatre, albeit with the coincident transformation of popular theatre owing to the meteoric rise in popularity of moving
pictures. The standard for Greek play production was consistently set during the crucial early period of the independent theatres by the professional stagings of Margaret Anglin. While Barker created the greatest sensation in the field, and while the Chicago Little Theatre won popular and critical approval for its 1915 production of Trojan Women, Anglin remained the outstanding force behind the Greek revival movement, from her successful Antigone at the Hearst Greek Theatre in 1910 through her last production of a Greek play, which was an outdoor staging of Sophocles' Electra, produced in June 1928 at Roger Williams Park in Provincetown, Rhode Island. Its two performances received high critical praise and drew more than eight thousand spectators (Johnson 28-29). Indeed, Anglin's Greek productions were routinely well attended and lauded by the press. Critics approved of the entire manner in which Anglin staged the tragedies, but they especially praised her acting. As Johnson states: "certainly no other actor or actress of the period who appeared in Greek tragedy obtained the superlative reviews which were generally bestowed on Margaret Anglin" (30). In sheer numbers of plays produced, and of performances given, Anglin dominated the Greek revival for nearly twenty years. While other producers staged one or two Greek tragedies, Anglin staged five, three of which were professional American premieres (Iphigenia in Aulis, Medea, and Hippolytus) (Johnson 29).

Greek plays were being revived during the Progressive Era for the first time in American history, with the exception of the Antigone of 1845. They were staged at colleges and universities, in professional theatres, at new outdoor, Greek-styled theatres, at outdoor venues on private estates, at stadia, and at Hull House in Chicago by Greek immigrants. The independent theatre movement established itself when this Greek play
revival was well underway: the Chicago Little Theatre, which popularized independent theatres on a national scale, opened in 1912, thirty years after Harvard's remarkably successful staging of Oedipus, and two years after Anglin's critically acclaimed and popular staging of Antigone at the new Hearst Greek Theatre. The Greek play revival conditioned the climate in which American theatre artists and audiences first took up the independent theatre movement, adapting it from European models and making it their own. The Greek revival, which flourished in America at both the community and professional levels well beyond its European counterpart, no doubt linked ancient Greek theatre with the new independent theatres in the minds of early practitioners and audiences to a degree higher than in any other country.

The linkage between the new independent theatres and ancient Greek culture was further reinforced by the myriad other contemporaneous American associations with ancient Hellas. Most immediately, there was the hope for a League of Nations that would bring together the countries of the world into a constitutional assemblage, and would thereby extend an originally Greek political system to a global level. There was at the same time the ostensibly non-political international association of the modern Olympics, a Greek revival that had in its early meetings a domineering American presence. The stadia on college and university campuses across the country further infused Greek design and social values into modern American life. The presence of Greek architectural elements and sculpture in towns and cities across the United States, perhaps more than any other factor, save the country's democratic political structure and attendant values, helped to condition Americans' reception of the independent theatres in a way that underscored its significance as a legacy of ancient Greece.
CHAPTER FOUR: HELLENISM AND THE CHICAGO LITTLE THEATRE

When Maurice Browne and Ellen Van Volkenburg founded the Chicago Little Theatre in 1912, it was not the first time that a theatre had been started in order to bring the independent theatre movement to the United States. Indeed, the two founders were advised against the project by one who had already tried it. In his dissertation, *Maurice Browne and the Chicago Little Theatre*, Bernard Dukore records that "Donald Robertson, who a few years earlier had attempted to found a permanent art theatre in Chicago, told Browne and his wife that there was no hope" (9). Still another Chicago theatre, the Hull House Players, preceded the Chicago Little Theatre by five years, if one dates back to the reform of that group by Laura Dainty Pelham in 1907, when Pelham's group adopted aims similar to those of Browne and his company (*Too Late* 128).

The Chicago Little Theatre may not be credited with having been the first American theatre to introduce practices associated with the reforms of the independent theatre movement. Writing of Browne's place in theatre history, Dukore points out that "he was not the first person in this country to denounce the commercial theatre for its general practice of producing plays devoid of artistic merit, nor was he the first to produce plays which had the qualities that the plays of the professional theatre lacked" (122). The so-called "new stagecraft," that is, the simplified, suggestive type of stage design and lighting, which was then being advanced in Europe by Craig and Appia, had been seen in America on several occasions prior to Browne's use of it. Nonetheless, Browne was on or near the forefront of theatrical reform in his day. Dukore finds it "likely that the Chicago Little Theatre was the first American company to make use of
Gordon Craig’s idea of screens as scenery” (124). And in his use of lighting to evoke moods Browne was without question an influential pioneer (Dukore 125).

Despite not having been categorically first in the above areas, the national prominence of the Chicago Little Theatre was unrivalled in the wave of theatrical reform that swept over America during the second decade of the twentieth century. Browne was widely recognized by his contemporaries as the “father” of the American little theatre movement (Dukore 126). In fact, Browne’s work proved seminal not only to the national movement of “little theatres,” but to experimental companies in general, to the entire range of theatrical ventures that were the American counterpart to the European independent theatre movement. As Priscilla Rogers notes:

On the heels of Browne’s effort, others started “little theatres,” “art theatres,” or “experimental theatres,” as they were sometimes called, including: Boston’s Toy Theatre, New York’s Neighborhood Playhouse, the Washington Square Players and, the most famous, Provincetown Players. Just five years after Browne opened the Chicago Little Theatre at least fifty such groups existed nationwide, cropping up so quickly that Cheney, who documented the movement, found it almost impossible to keep an accurate record (99).

Browne’s importance to the founding of non-mainstream theatres in America was recognized by scenic designer Norman Bel Geddes, who was a major figure in the promotion of the new stagecraft in America. He believed Browne to be “the founder of the Little Theatre Movement and ultimately of the Off Broadway Movement” (qtd. in Rogers 99). Thus, while not the first, Browne was arguably the most prominent and influential leader in establishing the American branch of the European independent theatre movement. Sheldon Cheney, a contemporary historian of the burgeoning reform movement, wrote of Browne’s theatre company that it “was the most significant
adventure in the field of the art theatre in America during the first twenty years of the Twentieth Century” (qtd. in Dukore 122).

Browne’s troupe stood at the forefront of the early independent theatre movement due not to its having been the first to introduce the major characteristics of the movement, but rather to its remarkable success as a company, to its influential touring, and above all to the great attention drawn to the group’s efforts through favorable press coverage. Browne also published several influential essays on his work, and a range of periodicals, with national distribution, carried reviews and essays concerning the Chicago Little Theatre, including Theatre Arts, Harper’s, The Theatre, and The Drama (Dukore 126). It was through these articles, in which Browne and others described in detail the work of the company, and explicated its ideals, that artists and producers around the country, many of them amateurs, came to regard the Chicago Little Theatre as a promising model.

Tours of the company’s productions were instrumental in promoting Browne’s work. Dukore emphasizes that they reached communities on the periphery of theatrical activity, as well as established theatrical centers: “not only did the company make annual tours to such cities as Boston, Milwaukee, St. Louis, and Kansas City, but in 1915 it brought The Trojan Women across the entire length of the United States” (126). Moreover, the toured production of The Trojan Women, which was “performed before approximately 33,000 people in cities from Baltimore to San Francisco, gave many areas of the country their first glimpse not only of Greek tragedy, but also of simplified scenery, new lighting techniques, and, in general, the achievements of a non-commercial and non-professional theatre” (126).
The influence of Hellenism on the formation of the Chicago Little Theatre had a greatly magnified influence on the general emergence of independent theatres in America due to the company's leadership role. The channels by which Hellenism entered into the work of the company, and into Browne's ideas for theatrical reform, may be traced through the production work and theories of the Europeans who were Browne's models. The American reception of the Chicago Little Theatre, and of art theatre more generally, was further colored by the American presence of the Greek tradition, as reviewed in chapter three. It is, of course, difficult to determine the precise nature of this presence and the way in which it informed the American reception of the new theatres. Certainly, the art theatre movement benefited from the production efforts at colleges and universities, and by those of the outdoor theatre movement, in all of which amateurism and Greek revivalism were active.

Like many leaders of the movement to introduce art theatre to America, Maurice Browne was a trained classicist. His ideas on art, and his lasting commitment to them, may be traced back to his formative years at Trinity College, Cambridge, which he attended from 1900 to 1903, and where he became steeped in the fresh legacy of the Oxford Hellenism of the 1890s, which flourished at the fin-de-siècle among students at both Oxford and Cambridge. Born in Reading, England, on February 12, 1881, Browne attended Cambridge at a time when Pater was for many students a revered figure. In his autobiography, Too Late to Lament, Browne recalls a Cambridge professor who "lectured on Plato to heighten your appetite for Pater" (56). When Browne arrived in 1900, aestheticism flourished at Cambridge in a student group known as the "Querists," whose members referred to Oscar Wilde as the "Great Aesthete" and his trial and
imprisonment as “his martyrdom” (59). This group of aesthetes had been formed in opposition to a group of athletes known as the “bloods,” and whose club was called “The Foxes.” Browne, who was already an aspiring poet, was delighted to become a member of the Querists shortly after his arrival at Trinity College, recalling later that with his induction “his cup of joy brimmed” (57).

While it is not possible to know the impact of Greek studies on Browne in his student years, it is evident from his autobiography that he was then in close contact with the field, and remained so throughout his life. Although in college Browne devoted himself to the study of modern British poetry, he was by then already well schooled in Greek and Latin literature and language. And college students used often to identify with ancient times, when classical studies were prominent, as reflected in the following parallel drawn by Browne: “Some chronicles, Plutarch perhaps, tells how the youths of Athens used to walk in groups along the city-streets, chanting aloud choruses from the Greek tragedian of their day. Arm in arm, two thousand years later, youths of Cambridge marched down King’s Parade, chanting Marpessa” (58).

At Cambridge Browne saw a performance of Agamemnon in Greek and “discovered with astonishment that Aeschylus was a dramatist as well as a poet” (68), but his theatrical interests lay primarily with musical comedies, such as Gilbert and Sullivan’s The Mikado, which he saw seventeen times (Too Late 68). His understanding of Greek plays, and his facility with the Greek language, was nonetheless sound enough to enable him, years later, to refer to passages in the original for clarification during rehearsals of The Trojan Women (Too Late 129).
Wilde’s influence on Browne and his youthful friends was particularly strong. Immediately following his graduation from Cambridge, Browne moved to London, where, writing and publishing poetry, he entered a literary and artistic circle comprised of persons who had known the “Great Aesthete” in his prime. The group met at a locale called the Café Royale and, amidst communal reverence for Wilde, nurtured the struggling poet. This formative period is recalled fondly in Browne’s memoirs. Describing the Café Royale, which was known for its antique mirrors, Browne wrote: “In those earlier years the ghost of Wilde lounged between the gilded mirrors; four young men, a decade older than Maurice, often spoke of him. Max Beerbohm, Bertie Christian, Robbie Ross, Reggie Turner, encouraged the lad’s dreams” (72). Browne’s involvement with aestheticist strongholds was strengthened by his homosexual relationships both during and for some years following his college years; Browne states that he turned exclusively to heterosexual relationships within a few years after leaving Trinity, and remained heterosexual for the remainder of his life.

Aestheticism appears to have been the dominant artistic influence on Browne’s early adulthood, and its values were subsequently advanced by Browne in writings and in his work as theatrical producer and director during his tenure at the Chicago Little Theatre. The latter may be seen in his emulation of Edward Gordon Craig, whose debt to Pater’s aestheticism was pronounced, and in his adoption of Yeats and Lady Gregory’s Irish Players as a model for his own theatrical enterprise.

Browne’s position within the aestheticist movement was always somewhat uneasy, for he was drawn to the progressive idea that art should have a role in promoting social change. Exposure to the Boer War, to which he had been briefly sent...
immediately prior to his enrollment at Trinity, contributed to Browne’s reservations when it came to arguments for non-political art. He recalled later that despite his “eagerness to forget the Boer War amid his new and infinitely pleasanter values the memory of it persisted, grew stronger” (Too Late 59). His pacifist tendencies brought him into conflict with other aesthetes at Cambridge. The discord extended to interpretations of Wilde’s legacy; writing of himself in the third person, as he does throughout his memoirs, Browne relates that “it seemed to him that the Great Aesthete (so the Querists called Wilde) had tried after his martyrdom (so they regarded it) to say something beyond, at variance with, indeed diametrically opposed to, all which he had heretofore preached; passionately against Salome’s partisans Maurice defended The Ballad of Reading Gaol” (59).

Struggling to reconcile his progressive political ideas with aestheticist values, Browne writes that “link by link he came to couple poverty with beauty, beauty with taste, taste with virtue, virtue with social reform; ethics had joined hands with ecstasy” (Too Late 60). A socialist sympathizer for many years, Browne concedes that he was never deeply committed to the cause. He found the niceties of life among the affluent, on whom he depended for employment as a private tutor, to be diverting and charming against his self-professed better judgment (Too Late 60). The tension Browne felt between art as a cultivation of beauty and, alternatively, as a means to promote social reform, is reflected in his work at the Chicago Little Theatre, as well as throughout his career.

In 1910, while engaged as a tutor in Florence, Italy, Browne met Ellen van Volkenburg, an American actress from Chicago. This meeting proved pivotal for both
parties, for within days they were betrothed, and in less than a year they would set about founding the Chicago Little Theatre. Browne's financial dependence on persons of wealth had accustomed him to "market" his cultivated, poetic sensibilities; this practice continued in Chicago, where he sought support from affluent Chicagoans for the fledgling theatre. Nearly penniless upon his arrival in the United States, and having financed the transatlantic passage by pawning the family silver (Too Late 107), Browne at first planned to earn money by founding a poetry society. His hopes for this were dashed after someone else founded the kind of society he had planned: "finding my potential wealth thus cut off at its source, I founded with equal haste the Progressive Arts League. Its title is sufficient commentary. There were no subscribers" (108). It may be surmised from Browne's treatment of his Chicago years that financial desperation prompted him continually to "market" interest in the arts, so that courting patronage became an integral part of his leadership of the Chicago Little Theatre. Prior to opening the theatre, Browne earned money by introducing Americans to the latest currents in British poetry, by lecturing and teaching. This was in the tradition of Oscar Wilde, who lectured profitably on aestheticism to Americans in the 1880s.

The Chicago Little Theatre was conceived as a venue for the exhibition of the latest trends in European art, and was based on the model of European art theatres. In 1913, during their summer break from the theatre, Browne and Van Volkenburg visited theatres and theatre artists in England and, during the following summer, made a similar tour of the continent, as well as a second trip to England. They visited Max Reinhardt, Gordon Craig, Harley Granville Barker, Gilbert Murray, Jacques Copeau, and other
leaders of the independent theatre movement. They also traveled to Hellerau and toured the modern theatre that had been designed with the assistance of Adolph Appia.

The Chicago Little Theatre’s connection to the independent theatres of Europe is evident also in the original aim of Browne and Van Volkenburg to present plays that were produced by those theatres: “we were both afire to see plays which the ‘commercial’ theatre – as we called it in those days – did not offer: Gilbert Murray’s translation of Euripides, the works of Ibsen, Strindberg, Shaw” (Too Late 111). Browne also planned to write “poetic drama” for the new company.

It is clear from Browne’s account of the company’s formation, and of its first choice of a play to rehearse, Euripides’ Trojan Women, that poetic drama was made a priority. The actors in the company, nearly all of whom were women, and amateur, were, according to Browne, motivated initially by the idea of reviving poetic drama: “some strange and given instinct guided us toward finding that first group of players. We did not so much choose as were chosen, they and we jointly, by our aim: the recreation of poetic drama. We never wavered in our loyalty to that aim” (Too Late 118).

The decision to focus on poetic drama was no doubt reinforced by the influence of the Irish Players on Browne and Van Volkenburg. In meetings with Lady Gregory during the Irish Players’ American tour of 1911, the torch of the European independent theatre movement was passed to Browne and his wife, who were then planning their theatre (Too Late 116). Lady Gregory used a story from Plutarch, as Browne later recalled, to communicate what should be essential to the Chicago theatre. The tale related events in the life of a famous Greek actor who had accidentally caused his son’s
death and, upon returning to the stage after a lengthy respite, henceforth would act only
the role of Theseus in Euripides’ Hippolytus, a king who causes his son’s death. Lady
Gregory concluded the story by revealing that the ancient actor “throughout the play’s
closing scene . . . held in his hands, as a chalice, the funeral urn containing the ashes of
his own son” (Too Late 116). Browne records his and his wife’s response to the story:
“Yes, yes, yes . . . that is what we mean by theatre; that is the kind of theatre we want”
(116-117). The exchange indicates how Browne associated ancient Greek theatre with
a lost sense of the sacred.

In 1913, Browne confirmed his interest in a theatre of sacred feelings, and
demonstrated that his appreciation of it was tied to his understanding of ancient Greek
theatre, in an essay published in the journal Drama under the title “The Temple of a
Living Art.” This was followed by a lengthier essay entitled “The New Rhythmic
Drama,” which was published in two parts in Drama in 1914 and 1915. In the second
part of the latter essay, Browne addressed himself to “the essentially religious nature of
all the arts, particularly drama, and to the fundamental philosophical position on which
these ideas are based” (616). The religious associations Browne invoked in his
articulation of a new theatre were an important means of perceiving independent
theatres in America. Paul Edwards notes that “what Browne envisioned was nothing
less than a religious theatre in which the practitioner participated out of a reverence for
the art” (40). John Cowper Powys, who followed Browne’s work closely and was one
of his dearest friends, went further still, stating that “for Maurice Browne the whole
world resolves itself into an act of worship” (qtd. in Edwards 49). His religiosity was at
the same time an invocation of the ancient Greek theatre as a paradigm for the new theatres.

Early in the second portion of “The New Rhythmic Drama,” Browne declared that art must always be religious: “When art ceases to have religious significance, art ceases” (146). His position is elucidated with numerous echoes of Pater’s essay on Winckelmann and, especially, of its conclusion, which was the art-for-art’s-sake “manifesto.” For example, Browne argues: “similarly, religion being opposed to dogma, art ceases when art becomes dogmatic” (146). In Pater we find the same assertion: “What we have to do is to be for ever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions, never acquiescing in a facile orthodoxy, of Comte, or of Hegel, or of our own” (189).

Browne echoes Pater again in the connection he makes between Greek theatre and religious observance: “Religion is illuminated experience, and, in its ceremonial aspects, such as Greek tragedy, which was a vital oblation to Dionysus, that state of consciousness depends on a complete understanding between ministrants and participants” (146). Later in the essay, it becomes evident that Browne’s reference to the religious drama of Greece parallels Pater’s position. We find, namely, that Browne’s conception of religiosity in art revolves around the adoration of beauty. He refers to his conception of a new artistic religion as “the religion of beauty” (155). He calls upon theatre artists to devote themselves to a faith in beauty: “In order then that life may be given to the new rhythmic drama, that is to say to a rhythmic fusion of light, movement and sound . . . there is need today for an order of men and women solemnly dedicated, for life and in death, to poverty and the service of beauty” (155). Shortly
afterwards, Browne identifies the deity whom artists are called to serve: “the God of beauty, to whom the lives of such as these are an hourly sacrifice and song of praise, is a lonely and untempled God” (156).

Pater, in his essay on Winckelmann, which was first published in 1867, writes that “Out of Greek religion, under happy conditions, arises Greek art, to minister to human culture. It was the privilege of Greek religion to be able to transform itself into an artistic ideal” (162-63). Behind this transformation lay the Greek reverence for beauty, which it was Winckelmann’s remarkable ability to discover. Pater admires Winckelmann’s seminal reconstruction of ancient sensibilities from fragmentary evidence: “So, from a few stray antiquarianisms, a few faces cast up sharply from the waves, Winckelmann, as his manner was, divines the temperament of the antique world, and that in which it had delight” (166). Drawing on the evidence Winckelmann cites in arguing that beauty was especially prized in ancient Greece, Pater reaffirms his predecessor’s point that “By no people has beauty been so highly esteemed as by the Greeks” (165).

Written when their author was the leader of the best known independent theatre in America, Browne’s essays influenced greatly the emerging Little Theatre movement. His conception of art as a religious service to beauty was, as we have seen, in the tradition of Greek studies initiated by Winckelmann and transmitted in lively fashion to the late nineteenth century by Pater and his followers. This is an important route by which Greek studies helped to shape modern theatrical reform, particularly, for this study, as it operated independently of the movement to revive Greek plays on the modern stage.
Browne makes his strongest appeal to Paterian aesthetics in his articulation of the philosophical underpinnings of the new type of theatre called for in his essay. He clears his philosophical ground with the assertion that Nietzsche has provided the definitive account in modern times of a single life-force: “there was silence for a generation, and then, in a sudden hubbub of voices, these crying that procreation and those that pleasure was the life-force, the quiet tones of a great prophet were heard proclaiming that life was actuated by ‘the will to power’ (157). Against this modern conceptual milestone Browne offers what is essentially a Paterian refinement: “the will to consciousness actuates and informs life, driving it irresistibly along the spiral of being, where universal and timeless consciousness is God” (160).

An inner voice, according to Browne, speaks to artists and “this voice tells him that consciousness is its own end, and his art, flashing consciousness into flame, confirms its truth, till consciousness itself is transformed into superconsciousness, the sign and quality of supermanhood” (160). Here, in Browne’s resounding conclusion to the essay, lies an unmistakable nod to Pater, for it was the latter, in his infamous conclusion to the Winckelmann essay, who first set forth the image of a flame-like consciousness: “to burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life” (189). Pater declares in the preceding passage: “Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life. How may we see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses? How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy?” (188).
Pater’s well-known essay offers a clear precedent to Browne’s views, and to his expression of them. Browne was not alone in his fusion of aestheticism and religiosity; the question of spirituality and its relation to English aestheticism was commonly raised by aesthetes. In her study of Gordon Craig, and specifically in her discussion of Craig’s religious beliefs, Irène Eynat-Confino points out that the “conversion to Roman Catholicism of some of the most prominent of the English Aesthetes – like Beardsley and Wilde – had been compelled by a similar urge to believe, to find answers to metaphysical questions” (127).

Craig had a more immediate influence on Browne’s views than did the writings of Pater; indeed, Craig’s The Art of the Theatre is referred to in Browne’s autobiography as the “bible” of the Chicago Little Theatre (Too Late 172). But Craig’s views were themselves largely derivative of Pater’s aesthetic philosophy. Eynat-Confino explains that Craig’s “position was not so far from that of Carlyle, Arnold, or Pater, but whereas they attempted to find in art a substitute for religious belief, Craig had a definite Belief in mind” (128). Nevertheless, true to Paterian aesthetics, it was a “Belief full of Beauty” (128) that Craig sought. According to Eynat-Confino, Craig “was never a true aesthete” (128), but did believe “that artistic excellence should be the vehicle for spiritual value” (128). Browne’s contention that for the artist “consciousness is its own end, and his art, flashing consciousness into flame, confirms its truth, till consciousness itself is transformed into superconsciousness” (160) remains a direct if unacknowledged appeal to Pater, and it brought to American readers and to Browne’s emulators throughout the United States a religious view of theatre and beauty that had its principal
authority in ancient Greek theatre as it had been interpreted in modern times by
Winckelmann and his successors in the Greek tradition.

If Browne's vision of a new theatre relied upon a Hellenic idealization of
beauty, its form was to be "rhythmic," and in this regard Craig's writings were
especially contributory. At the outset of "The New Rhythmic Drama," Browne
provides a formula that encapsulates his argument: "Fluid idea in appropriately
conventionalized form constitutes rhythm./ Rhythm is a basic principle of all the arts./
Drama is the rhythmic fusion of movement, light, and sound" (617). Pursuant to his
devotion to the revival of poetic drama, and following the symbolists' modification of
Wagner's hierarchy of dramatic elements, Browne placed poetic diction above music as
the highest, controlling element in theatrical synthesis: "conventional language, that is,
poetry, if properly uttered, produces as pleasing an audial effect as music, which is
conventionalized pure sound, and a more pleasing total effect by reason of its superior
content. The proper utterance of poetry is the first step necessary for the creation of a
drama with the qualities of folk-song" (625).

The folk-song, according to Browne, stands at the pinnacle of the literary forms
available to drama. He describes the modern folk song as "at its best the most perfect,
in fact the only perfect, thing in English art" (624). If one were to bring to modern
theatre the qualities of the folk-song, he argues, the result might be comparable to the
ancient Greek achievement: "Drama with the qualities and technique of folk-song
would be capable of rhythmic fusion with conventionalized movement in light, and had
such fusion on the ancient Greek stage" (624). In his effort to revive poetic drama,
Greek tragedy served as his chief model.
At the Chicago Little Theatre, Greek tragedy assumed an even more important function than is suggested in Browne's essays. Although the company staged an array of modern works, including realistic plays, it was *The Trojan Women* that became their best known and most staged production. It proved to be the most popular and profitable production in the group's history (Edwards 54). First staged at the Chicago Little Theatre on January 7, 1913, *The Trojan Women*, in Gilbert Murray's translation, was the third play offered by the foundling company. It was enthusiastically received by critics and audiences, and its revival in 1915 was toured extensively in the United States (Dukore 126). A second Euripides' tragedy, *Medea*, also in Murray's translation, was produced by the company in 1914. While Browne's company thus participated in the movement to revive Greek plays on the modern stage, this must not obscure the director's deeper aesthetic ties to the Greek tradition. Again, it deserves to be underscored, as throughout this study, that Greek revivalism among artists of the independent theatre movement was not limited to, nor in its most profound respects was it contingent upon, the production of ancient plays.

We have already seen how in his published essays Browne called upon artists to create a "rhythmic drama," in the synthetic hierarchy of which poetic diction is preëminent, and for which Greek tragedy provided the ideal precedent. It is not surprising, then, to find that Greek tragic drama was used by Browne as a pedagogical instrument for the cultivation of his and his company's appreciation for the type of theatre he proposed. Although not performed until two other plays had been mounted, *The Trojan Women* was the first play to be rehearsed by the new troupe. Moreover, it was in rehearsal for no less than the first eleven months of the company's history (Too
Initially, according to Browne, the play was rehearsed without any plans for its production: "We had put The Trojan Women in rehearsal with little thought of where, or indeed whether, we would play it. Performance was an ultimate possibility, no more" (119).

Euripides’ text was used for training purposes that went well beyond the application of skills required for the production of any given play. Browne and his company, most of whom, including Browne, were novices in the theatre, attempted to learn from Euripides’ play how to produce poetic drama generally, or rather, how to “recreate” it, as Browne described their goal, a term that reveals the company’s sense of reactivating a past form of theatre. Greek drama was thought to hold the secrets of this defunct artistic tradition. Stating the company’s purposes and addressing its methods, Browne wrote that their aim was “the recreation of poetic drama. We never wavered in our loyalty to that aim, though often we made wide detours in our attempt to follow so untravelled a road. Instinctively too we knew that the road-map lay concealed somewhere in the Greek chorus: a choreographic map based on the beat of verse; a map of perfectly synchronized mood, movement and speech; a ‘dance’ with words” (118-19).

Thus, in a striking example of Hellenist influence on the American independent theatre movement, the Chicago Little Theatre, the leading theatre in the movement, developed its characteristic manner of acting and producing plays by prolonged and concentrated study of Greek tragedy. Even in the company’s productions of realist plays, a poetic treatment was ever discerned by critics and spectators. In his research, Bernard Dukore confirmed the central importance of Greek tragedy to the development
of the company's signature style. Summarizing his interview with the company's co-founder and leading actress, Dukore stated that "as Ellen Van Volkenburg said, the training the actors received in the Greek plays made them sense underlying rhythmic relationships in realistic plays. It was this quality that gave a distinctive stamp to all of Maurice Browne's productions at the Chicago Little Theatre" (107).

The Trojan Women opened in January 1913, the third production in the Chicago Little Theatre's first season (a double bill of Wilfred Wilson Gibson's Womenkind and Yeats' On Baile's Strand was produced first, and Harley Granville Barker's adaptation of Schnitzler's Anatol second). Paul Edwards notes that "the critical reaction to this first Chicago Little Theatre production of a Greek play was, despite a detractor or two, generally positive, and became one of the most popular productions in the company's history" (54). Critical praise was directed toward the set design by Bror Nordfeldt, which featured "a section of the wall of Troy divided in half with a gaping hole made by the invading Greek army. The wall stood approximately eight feet tall and ran the length of the stage, with the gap located a little left of center" (Edwards 55). The use of lighting to enhance mood and the general atmosphere of the production were also widely admired (Edwards 55-56). Above all, it was the actors, and particularly those who made up the chorus, on whom the highest praise was bestowed (Edwards 57). Floyd Dell penned one of the rave reviews the production garnered, in which he declared the show to be "the best production of a Greek tragedy in a generation" (qtd. in Edwards 54). Theodore Dreiser described his treasured impressions of the production in a private letter to Browne: "aside from the artistry of the stage production which
lingers as a series of poetic pictures, dramatic and of great force, the epic pathos of that play was transferred from Ancient Greece quite adequately to me” (qtd. in Edwards 55).

True to its form as a theatre opposed to commercialism and the star system of its time, actors at the Chicago Little Theatre were listed in the production programs without reference to the characters they played. This maneuver, which frustrated critics, may be seen as further indication of how important to the company were the choral aspects of Greek drama. With the success of its early productions, the company “soon boasted a reputation which spread as far east as New England” (Edwards 57). Indeed, within weeks the company was invited by the Toy Theatre in Boston to produce *The Trojan Women*. Edwards reports that the ensuing Boston performance “garnered a great deal of praise from H. T. Parker, one of the most severe critics of the time,” (58) and that the company “also traveled to parts of the Midwest near Chicago, including Milwaukee, St. Louis, and Kansas City” (58).

The popularity of the Chicago Little Theatre’s production of *The Trojan Women* led to its revival during the company’s second season. An additional Greek tragedy, *Medea*, was also produced in the second season, and the Greek plays were performed in repertory for six weeks (Edwards 58). For the revival of *The Trojan Women*, several changes were made: “Raymond Johnson re-designed Bror Nordfeldt’s original set and the choruses were largely re-staged” (Edwards 58). In a minimalist move, the Trojan wall was eliminated and replaced by black cloth. Despite a want of critical enthusiasm for these changes, “the play remained a part of the CLT repertory and continued to be performed in Chicago and on the road” (Edwards 58).
Browne’s efforts to create a rhythmic drama were initially concentrated, as we have seen, on the staging of Greek plays, and on their choral aspects in particular. Bernard Dukore describes the results of Browne’s efforts in terms of evocative stage pictures and actors’ movements: “He composed a series of conventionalized groupings, movements, and gestures, and created a series of stage pictures which, if stopped at any moment with the actors frozen in their positions, would look beautiful and would visually convey the mood of the scene” (98).

The most advanced work by Browne toward creation of a rhythmic drama came, according to Dukore, not with the Greek revivals, but in his production of a new work by Cloyd Head, who was a member of the troupe: “although the productions of The Trojan Women and Medea, especially in the handling of the chorus, represented significant steps in the evolution of rhythmic drama, it was with the production of Cloyd Head’s Grotesques that Maurice Browne brought rhythmic drama to the most mature stage of its development” (99-102). Grotesques, which was a type of pantomime with words, premiered on November 16, 1915. Subtitled “A Decoration in Black and White,” the piece resulted from a collaborative venture between Head and Browne (Dukore 102). It also reveals yet another way in which ancient Greek theatre provided a stimulus for work at the Chicago Little Theatre, for, as Dukore writes: “the theme of this play is essentially the theme of Greek tragedy in modern treatment” (102-103).

The location of the Chicago Little Theatre had also to do with ancient Greek theatre and culture. The ninety-one seat theatre was located on the fourth floor in the fashionable Fine Arts Building, and was home to the company for its five years of
operation. It was leased to the company on highly favorable terms, without which the poorly financed group could hardly have afforded such a space. The manager of the Fine Arts Building, Charles Curtiss, offered Browne a generous lease, in part, according to theatre historian Homer N. Abegglen, because the Chicago Little Theatre was associated with the production of Greek plays. Prior to acquiring their space in the Fine Arts Building, Browne and company had been rehearsing *The Trojan Women* in an art studio belonging to one of the actresses. Abegglen relates how news of those rehearsals reached Curtiss and moved him to offer the fledgling troupe an attractive contract:

> When he heard of the project, the manager of the Fine Arts Building, Mr. Charles Curtiss, felt impelled to do his part in raising the artistic level of the Windy City. *The Trojan Women*, he reasoned, was a monument of classic Greece and therefore needed – even demanded – to be presented in a building not only erected in the classic Greek style but dedicated to the muses and located conveniently almost opposite the Fine Arts Institute on Michigan Boulevard (160).

The prominent location of the Chicago Little Theatre doubtless contributed to its success, particularly in attracting the continued financial support of its affluent patrons. For securing the space the company was clearly indebted to the wider presence of the Greek tradition in America. The long practice of adopting Greek architectural forms for prominent buildings, in this case tied also to the popular association of ancient Greece with artistic ideals, set the stage, as it were, for Browne’s theatrical productions in the Hellenist tradition.

In its ties to Chicago literary circles, Browne’s theatre kept abreast of wider Hellenist influences in the arts. The “tea room” at the Chicago Little Theatre served as a gathering place for writers and artists; lectures by local and visiting writers were offered there on a regular basis, including periodic talks given by Browne on modern poetry.
Trends in poetry of the period were actively appealing to the Greek tradition. Ezra Pound, one of the leading advocates for the study of Greek literature by modern poets, served as one of the editors of *Poetry*, an important magazine founded in Chicago in 1912 by Harriet Monroe (Tingley 131-32).

Ongoing interaction with Chicago’s avant-garde artists had also a political effect upon the Chicago Little Theatre. In his study of Chicago’s literary movements of the early twentieth century, *The Chicago Renaissance in American Letters*, Bernard Duffey states that the Chicago Little Theatre was originally understood to have a rather apolitical orientation. For both Browne’s company and the Little Room, an earlier Chicago playhouse run by Anna Morgan, writes Duffey, “a chief aim of theatrical production was ‘beauty,’ a concept deeply involved in romantic antecedents and involving an explicit detachment from everyday life to the point where it was easy to run far astray in poeticized playwriting, theatrical whimsy, and shimmering fantasy” (240). This supports the general tenor of Browne’s own account, in which, as we have seen, the art-for-art’s-sake mentality was prevalent among early members of the company.

The appreciation of beauty at the Chicago Little Theatre extended, as it did among the ancient Greeks, to the human body. As Browne plainly states: “The theatre was famous for its beautiful girls” (150). John Cowper Powys, who frequently gave lectures in the tea room at the Little Theatre, including talks on Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater (Lock 109), would often attend rehearsals, and took particular pleasure in looking at the actresses: “But think what an oasis it was in my lecturing life – and with no shred of responsibility either, for poor Maurice had to do all the worrying – when I could sit
for hours at their rehearsals in this secluded place, like a centaur drunk with berry-juice in a fairy-ring, looking, and you may believe I did not weary of these vigils, at the lithe and lissome figures of Maurice Browne’s young ladies, as they practiced the chorus of some unending play” (qtd. in Lock 110). Outside of rehearsals, writers and artists vied for the attentions of the actresses. Among the many beautiful women recalled by Browne in his autobiography, one of the more colorful figures at the theatre was Hilda Golightly, who “specialized in authors” (150). Browne writes of Golightly that “Demure, unobtrusive, indeed mouse-like, she annexed in turn Ficke, Dell, Dreiser” (150).

Browne’s experimentation in stagecraft further reinforces the apolitical characterization of the Chicago Little Theatre, for it was directed toward the development of beautiful and simplistic productions. In stage lighting Browne was especially innovative and was recognized as such by the critics. Guided by Craig’s theories, Browne’s experimental efforts fell in line with his ambition to create a rhythmic drama, as articulated in the essays already reviewed. Dukore explains how Browne came to embrace Craig’s ideals: “To Maurice Browne, the term ‘Art Theatre’ implied a distinctive technique of play production. At the outset, he began to experiment. After two seasons of experimenting, he clarified the nature of that technique and answered in his prospectus for the Chicago Little Theatre’s third season that his aim was the creation of a rhythmic drama” (91).

For Browne, a vital aspect of “rhythmic drama” was its origin in dance, and in this respect he echoed both Isadora Duncan and Jacques Dalcroze, as well as their influences on the work of Craig and Appia. Addressing the relationship of dance to
drama, Browne later wrote that “our theory was simple. Dance – ritual dance – is the
basis of drama” (Too Late 159). His specification of dance that has ritual attributes
echoes the Aristotelian sketch of the history of Attic tragedy, which the philosopher
believed to have arisen out of dithyrambic dances. In pursuit of this original source of
theatre, Browne developed his notion of rhythmic drama: “our objective, a ‘dance’ with
words, now became more clearly defined as a rhythmic fusion of movement, dancing-
place (stage and setting), light and speech” (Too Late 159). In experiments that were
similar to performances by Isadora Duncan, in which she danced without musical
accompaniment, Browne developed an evocative means of lighting. With the help of
one of his dancers, Miriam Marmein, Browne experimented with dance and lighting
together, sometimes without music: “Miriam, her pianist and we worked together,
devising light-compositions of continuously-changing colour, form and mood to
accompany each of a dozen dances; for two or three of them lighting accompaniment
alone was used, without music” (Too Late 159).

In one key respect, the Chicago Little Theatre met with only modest success in
following the example of European independent theatres and, in particular, that of Yeats
and Lady Gregory’s Abbey Theatre: few American playwrights were discovered or
cultivated by the company. In a letter to the editors of Theatre Arts Magazine,
published in 1921, Browne, in reviewing the accomplishments of the Chicago Little
Theatre, acknowledged the shortcoming: “A Great adventure. The last fight of all, a
fight which has hardly yet begun: the fight for the play. That is where the Chicago
Little Theatre failed, and where all the artist-groups in America hitherto have failed,
except perhaps the Provincetown Players” (215). The cultivation of local playwrights
was, of course, one of the features of the independent theatre movement that linked it to theatre in fifth-century Athens.

In its imitation of European independent theatres, in its adherence to theories of the European avant-garde, and in its failure to promote local playwrights, the Chicago Little Theatre remained always something of a cultural transplant, a European cultural institution supported by Chicago’s social and artistic elite as an alternative to commercial American fare. From its inception, the company aimed not so much to bring superior art to the common people, despite Browne’s occasional remarks to that effect, but to bring it to the most educated and affluent members of society. Bernard Duffey writes of the company that “their efforts were like those of the writers of the genteel protest. They were uplifters, raising the taste of the audience to a preconceived level of perfection” (240). The wider public never became part of the enterprise, though at times efforts were made to reach them with the aid of newspapers and printed reminders, which were distributed to spectators as “throwaways.” These urged spectators to enlist greater support for the theatre: “Please tell your friends that the plays given in The Little Theatre are open to the public” (qtd. in Dukore 14). As the “throwaways” suggest, the public perceived the company to be an elitist club, and was consequently not enticed to attend its productions. Dukore explains that there was the feeling that the Little Theatre was a toy of the Chicago socialites. And there was good reason for this feeling. The list of donors to the Chicago Little Theatre was virtually a list of the Chicago aristocracy, its names including those of Arthur Aldis, Mrs. J. Ogden Armour, Mrs. Chauncey Blair, and Mr. And Mrs. Julius Rosenwald. Moreover, wealthy Chicagoans formed a large part of the Little Theatre’s audience (15).
Despite enjoying such sophisticated supporters, there was only reserved enthusiasm for Browne’s productions of poetic plays. It thus became necessary for Browne to include a number of non-poetic works in his seasons: “One basic consideration that made Browne include realistic plays in the company’s repertoire was the box office. Audiences did not respond to poetic drama – or, rather, they responded by staying away. Neither the Irishman William Butler Yeats nor the Chicagoan Cloyd Head drew audiences to the Little Theatre with their poetic plays. High caliber plays of a non-poetic nature were needed to keep the theatre alive” (Dukore 46).

The limited base of support for the Chicago Little Theatre, and its insular relationship to it, was tested when the company chose to tour its production of The Trojan Women in 1914. The tour was financed primarily through Jane Addams, whose Women’s Peace Party sponsored the event, and who secured for it five thousand dollars from the Carnegie Peace Foundation (Too Late 179). During the tour by the Chicago Little Theatre, the same play was toured by Barker on the east coast. As Browne later recalled the arrangement: “Barker was about to do the play in New York. He and I carved up the U.S.A., he taking the eastern states, I the nation’s capital and all that lay west of it” (Too Late 178).

The geographical division settled upon by Browne and Barker reflected the differences in climate over the prospect of American entry into the war, which was favored in the east, and largely opposed elsewhere. As American military involvement would have certainly been in aid of British and French forces, the pacifist position became linked to support for the German war effort. Since German immigrants had settled in great numbers throughout the mid-west, while the eastern states were...
predominantly of English ancestry, the country was divided according to these
demographic differences during the first months of war: "British and French
sympathizers made little progress in the Middle West and West, and German
sympathizers made none in the East" (Seymour 149). Consequently, while Browne
toured The Trojan Women in his part of the country as an expression of pacifism,
Barker presented it without any such trappings.

The Chicago Little Theatre production was not greatly changed for the tour.
Raymond Johnson modified the set slightly, removing turrets and simplifying the gap in
the wall, and raising the height of the set so that "the thick block wall rose up and out of
the sight of the audience" (Edwards 73). The wall was designed so that its height could
be adjusted to suit the varying dimensions of the performance venues. Despite these
minor adjustments, Browne now presented the play in a sharply political light, and
labeled it "The World's Greatest Peace Play" in promotional announcements and in
programs distributed at the performances.

The play was also promoted as pacifist propaganda in brief speeches delivered
by Browne before each performance, during which "he would accuse the audience of
being equally guilty with Kaiser Wilhelm II in the spread of war" (Edwards 81).
Browne included in the programs a message from the Woman's Peace Party declaring
that "the Woman's Peace Party sends it, not as an archaic curiosity, but as a direct
message, inspiration and appeal, here and now to the men and women of America" (qtd.
in Edwards 81).

The programs also featured a quotation from the play, in which Poseidon
pronounces this curse upon the Greeks: "How are ye blind,/ Ye treader down of cities,
ye that cast/ Temples to desolation, and lay waste/ Tombs, the untrodden sanctuaries
where lie/ The ancient dead; yourselves so soon to die!” (qtd. in Edwards 80). As
Edwards points out, however, in his discussion of Browne’s promotion of The Trojan
Women, certain other passages in the play suggest that pacifism on the part of the
Trojans would have been disgraceful. Quotations from one of these other passages,
belonging to Cassandra, was discovered by Edwards to have been used in two reviews
of Barker’s production: “Would ye be wise, ye Cities, fly from war!/ Yet if war come,
there is a crown in death/ for her that striveth well and perisheth/ Unstained; to die in
evil were the stain! (qtd. in Edwards 80).

As Edwards observes, “In the context of the time, the play could just as easily
have been a propaganda piece for American intervention in the European war as a
means of protecting the oppressed Belgians” (80). This was in fact much closer to
Gilbert Murray’s view on the issue as he made clear to Browne in a series of letters
regarding the tour. Murray opposed Browne’s use of the play as a pacifist message, and
refused to waive royalties when Browne called on him to do so. Murray went so far as
to compose an insert for the program which stated his disapproval of the pacifist reading
of the play. For reasons unknown, Browne apparently did not include the statement in
the programs (Edwards 66).

The reasons behind Browne’s decision to adopt a propagandistic purpose for the
Chicago Little Theatre’s production of The Trojan Women remain unclear. Certainly,
without this added purpose, the company would have been forced to forfeit the financial
backing of Addams and her associates, and the touring opportunity would have been
lost or at any rate greatly diminished. Bernard Duffey believes that Browne and his
company became increasingly radical in their politics over the five years of the company’s existence, and perhaps this precipitated the group’s incursion into political theatre. Referring to a movement in Chicago among writers and artists known as “the Liberation,” Duffey contends that “the Chicago Little Theatre, once established, drifted almost inevitably toward the Liberation because in that force lay the real creative potency in Chicago” (243). The tour marked a turning point for Browne, who soon found himself, after the bankruptcy of the company in 1917, pursuing a career as a producer and director in the professional theatre. The tour of The Trojan Women marked the beginning of the end of his involvement in the independent theatre movement.

Browne’s association with Addams naturally brought the Chicago Little Theatre into a more politicized relationship to its audience. The theatrical productions at the Hull House Theatre in Chicago, an organization founded by Addams, had been more in line with progressive values than had Browne’s. Regarding Hull House, Bernard Duffey writes that “its work stood always as the dramatic aspect of the enlightened humanitarianism upon which Hull House itself was built. It was the voice of a social and intellectual attitude . . . rather than the center of a deep artistic commitment for its own sake” (240-41). Browne records an early encounter with Addams during which the opposing camps’ habits of thought were contrasted. Shortly after the tour’s premiere production of The Trojan Women at the Blackstone Theatre in Chicago, Addams, Browne recollects,

"gazed at me with horror: ‘You used a child!’ I was bewildered: ‘Of course.’ ‘But our party is inflexibly opposed to child-labour.’ ‘This is a play, not labour.’ ‘A principle is involved.’ ‘Of artistic integrity.’ ‘Of ethical integrity.’ ‘The play centers round the child. Our contract with
your party specifies its use.’ ‘They should have insisted on your using a
doll.’ Such was my introduction, odd but illuminating, to the world of
public affairs (Too Late 179).

For some time, in the west and mid-west, Browne benefited from the publicity
he garnered from his association with Addams and the Women’s Peace Party. In what
was surely his company’s apex of political relevance, a performance of The Trojan
Women was held on May 7, the day of the sinking of the Lusitania. On that night,
Browne abstained from his usual speech, and instead simply showed the audience a
newspaper bearing “the monstrous headline and said: ‘this is about a deed like that.’”
(Too Late 181).

Public sentiment throughout the United States shifted, as Browne’s company
was on tour, toward strongly favoring a commitment of American troops in Europe.
This was no doubt largely responsible for the bankruptcy of the touring production in
Spokane, Washington, owing to sparse bookings and meager audiences. Unable as
planned to tour their way back home, the stranded company returned to Chicago at the
expense of one of the actresses’ wealthy fathers. Once home, however, the company
continued to struggle. As Edwards notes, “many of the Chicago elite who had
supported the CLT were now involved in defense contracts” (90). The company’s foray
into political activism had exposed it to keen disfavor with its patrons and with the
public. Within two years of the tour, the Chicago Little Theatre closed its doors, unable
to pay its bills.

The company’s turn from an idealized service to “beauty” to politically-engaged
theatre, reflects a shift in tide among artists and intellectuals prior to and during the First
World War. Paterian aestheticism lost much of its appeal during the disillusioning
onset of the Great War. It seems, then, that Browne may have fared no better had he
stayed his original course in the service of “beauty.” The avant-garde’s interest in
Hellenist ideals was quickly coming to an end, as was the preëminence of classical
studies in higher education. The leadership among the American independent theatres
soon passed to the Provincetown Players, where a very different Hellenism was at play,
one based not in the tradition of Winkelman and Pater, but of Nietzsche.
CHAPTER FIVE: HELLENISM AND THE PROVINCETOWN PLAYERS

As one of the most influential and famous of the early American independent theatres, the Provincetown Players has long been celebrated as one of the outstanding theatrical groups in American theatre history. Its association with the nascent career of Eugene O'Neill has brought recognition to the group’s work quite beyond any accorded to other theatres of the period. By aiding the careers of O’Neill, Susan Glaspell and other American writers the theatre became identified as the foremost wellspring of modern American drama. Its role in the corollary development of modern American stagecraft, and its profound influence on theatrical experimentation, although less well known, further distinguish the Provincetown Players from the great number of independent theatres of the nineteen teens and twenties. The variety of ways in which the group made a lasting impact on both mainstream and alternative theatre practice in America is summarized briefly by Robert Károly Sarlós:

The Provincetown Players provided a stage and a group process for American playwrights; helped publish many of the plays they produced; started careers for actors, directors, and designers; boldly experimented with a wide range of theatrical styles and production methods; pioneered in introducing the Negro into legitimate theatre; based all activity on artistic rather than commercial considerations; enabled spectators to participate in the creative process; and reflected, as well as influenced, the current intellectual renascence in the United States. (5-6)

While the Provincetown Players contributed significantly to the emergence of modern American drama, and in this respect was the first of the American independent theatres to equal the achievements of its European counterparts and, in this same respect, to merit comparison to the classical Athenian theatre, for this study of greatest interest are the ideals and practices that characterized the company as a producing
organization. For it is the governing principles of the company that reveal its greatest
debt to and identification with the Greek tradition.

The key figure whose leadership and values did most to shape, and whose
dedication did most to sustain, the distinctive nature of the Provincetown enterprise was
Jig (George Cram) Cook. Sarlós regards the collective character of the Provincetown
Players as its most innovative feature, referring to it as “the earliest theatre group on
record to have consciously operated on the principle of collectivity” (Jig Cook 37). In
practical terms, the collective functioned as an organization whose members shared
more or less equally in the responsibilities and had variously to act in the different
capacities required for the productions. As Sarlós explains, “The Provincetown Players
was a most unusual organization in that it stood for theatre as collective creativity in
which the person temporarily functioning as playwright served as a first among equals”
(Jig Cook 5). The sharing of responsibilities was integral to the company, and hinged
on the playwright: “This group of dedicated amateurs expected and required its active
members to be by turns playwrights, actors, designers, stagehands, playreaders and
business managers; and proposed to have the member whose script was about to be
staged in charge of production” (Jig Cook 5).

The presence of the Greek tradition in the unusual goals and methods of the
Provincetown Players was introduced principally through the conduit of Cook, and may
best be understood in relation to Cook’s idiosyncratic and energetic response to the
Greek past. His seven year involvement with the Provincetown Players, from 1915 to
1922, was but one stage of his larger response to the Greek cultural heritage. The
creation of an amateur theatre company was an enterprise subsidiary to Cook’s life-
long, Greek revivalism. Both before and after his tenure as the company’s leader, Cook searched for ways to bring about a cultural renewal based on Hellenic ideals. In fact, when the Provincetown Players achieved commercial success in its seventh year, at which point “no critic or producer could ignore the tiny theatre, and plays began to move uptown after their two-week runs at the Provincetown were over,” (Waterman 48-49) Cook believed the company had lost its function as a forum for wider cultural renewal. Terminating his association with the group, he abruptly moved to Greece, where he lived until his death in 1924. Only a review of Cook’s larger career, therefore, affords an insight into the Hellenism that, through him, provided a sense of direction and purpose to the Provincetown Players.

Cook was born into a socially prominent family in Davenport, Iowa, on October 7, 1873. He entered the University of Iowa as a sophomore at age sixteen and, according to autobiographical records, discovered a passion for intellectual cultivation. In her biography of Cook, to whom she had been married, Susan Glaspell states that with his newfound love of learning Cook “determined to go to Harvard ‘at all costs’” (44), and that “he wanted to become a man of intellect, to acquire a subtle and beautiful culture, through intellectual and esthetic interests, to know great friendships” (44-45).

Although he attended for only one year (1892-93), Cook’s experiences at Harvard were of profound importance, for it was there, through his close friendship with another student and ardent philhellenist, John Alden, that Cook’s appreciation for the Greek tradition reached its apogee. Glaspell writes that “Jig entered the inner Harvard through Greece; and the Greek language gave him the first of those friendships of great hours, when words come for thoughts that had never quite emerged from
When, at the close of the school year, Alden planned to visit Greece, Cook wrote to his father that he wished to accompany him: "All this year Greek has been unfolding its beauty. The country is becoming for me, as for so many others, as a lost Fatherland. I could sail with John. Such another chance may never come" (qtd. in Glaspell 61). In the references to Greece found in Cook’s letter, and in letters he received while in Massachusetts from his mother, who addressed in them her son’s longing for Hellas, and for art and civilization, may be seen the reverence for Greek culture that lay at the heart of Cook’s intellectual passion. Understanding this, Mrs. Cook wrote to her son: "If only we could do without a kitchen, live as they did in Greece. Mostly on fruits and nuts, cultivating trees and vines rather than corn and pork, life with us might regain and surpass the beauty of Greece’’ (qtd. in Glaspell 62).

Instead of sailing with his friend to Greece, Cook returned home to Davenport, although this was presumably for financial reasons, since his longing for Hellas had not wavered; once home, he wrote: “I sit here and dream of Greece. I hear – see – the blue waves of the Aegean beating on the shore’’ (qtd. in Glaspell 63).

With the intention of preparing to become a teacher, Cook left home the following year in order to attend the University of Heidelberg, where he devoted himself to the intensive study of philosophy and philology, after one year of which he studied briefly at the University of Geneva (Kemper x). In 1895, Cook returned to Davenport and became an instructor of English at the University of Iowa. For the next six years, in addition to teaching, Cook engaged in various literary pursuits, which included writing essays on the poetry of Whitman and Kipling. He also wrote a novel, in collaboration with Charles Eugene Banks, entitled In Hampton Roads: A Dramatic
Romance (1899). Cook continued to teach and write and, for several years, to farm; his unpublished novel, “The Balm of Life” was also written during this period, as was the published novel Roderick Taliafero (1903).

In 1906, Cook became close friends with Floyd Dell, a young socialist who was working at the time as a reporter in Davenport, but who had previously worked in Chicago. Through his new friend, Cook was brought into contact with the avant-garde writers in Chicago known as the “Chicago School” (Sarlós 185). The friendship with Dell would change permanently Cook’s life, for it marked the beginning of his ongoing interaction with other artists and intellectuals, starting him on a path of social engagement that would in time lead to Chicago, Greenwich Village, and to the collaborative foundation of the Provincetown Players. Prior to meeting Dell, Cook had been mired in a prolonged depression, bearing some relation, it seems, to the failure of his second marriage. He had stopped teaching, and was instead leading an isolated existence as a writer-farmer. During this time he was immersed in the writings of Nietzsche, in whom he stayed fascinated after the depression had lifted, for Glaspell recalls that “he read ‘Ecce Homo’ just after he came from his own solitude” (171).

Cook’s emergence from isolation was accompanied by a turn to socialism. As he sought to combine his passion for Nietzsche with the cause of socialism, he developed over the ensuing years a complicated approach to art in which elitism and egalitarianism are both embraced. Yet, it is unclear how dedicated Cook was as a socialist. Glaspell believes that his socialist leanings were tempered by other philosophical interests, and relates that at the height of his socialist involvement “he startled a couple of friends in Davenport by quietly saying he was an anarchist” (173).
The development of Cook’s views on art and society during his transition from farmer to organizer and leader in the literary circles of Chicago and New York may be gleaned from several fragmentary sources: Glaspell’s biographical record, which includes selected entries from Cook’s journal, Floyd Dell’s memoirs, and Cook’s literary output from the period.

A close reading of Cook’s novels, plays, and poetry has been carried out in a dissertation by Susan C. Kemper, wherein she pays special attention to the evolution of Cook’s ideas on art and society. In her discussion of Cook’s reasons for taking up the socialist cause in Davenport, Kemper cites a combination of the following influences: the writings of Nietzsche and Haeckel, and the socialist meetings in which Cook participated.

Floyd Dell later claimed to be the one who had persuaded Cook to embrace socialism: “in our discussions he was converted from his Nietzschean-aristocratic-anarchist philosophy to Socialism, and brought by me in triumph to the local” (qtd. in Kemper 71). As Kemper points out, however, Cook retained his admiration for Nietzsche’s views long after his alleged conversion to socialism. His novel, The Chasm, written between 1907 and 1911, testifies to Cook’s continuing dual attraction to the extreme individualism of Nietzsche and the egalitarian principles of socialism. The central conflict of the novel is between two, opposing theories that correspond to the Nietzsche/Socialism split. Kemper states that the theories “which clash in the novel are the Nietzschean and the Marxian, and they are seen as deriving from the fundamental impulses of egotism and altruism” (Kemper 74). Glaspell, in a similar vein, offers this explanation of the novel’s title: “this chasm is between man and the higher race that
may follow him, as it is also between the Socialist and the Nietzschean feeling about life” (204). The camps are opposed by Cook in a way that aligns Marxist values with the democratic tradition in America:

The Nietzschean myth of the future superman to evolve from a small, privileged section of the human race argues for the special development of the few. In contrast, the socialist concern for the good of the many emphasizes the brotherhood of mankind and argues that all individuals should have equal opportunity for growth and development. This latter position obviously reflects the American ideals set forth in the Declaration of Independence; for Cook at this time, socialism represents a return to essential American values. (Kemper 74-75)

This nationalist tenor of Cook’s political views foreshadows the importance that he would later place upon supporting American playwrights at the Provincetown Players. It was, in fact, a theatre dedicated solely to American plays.

The conflicting positions in The Chasm are brought together in a synthesis that is indebted to the monist philosophy of Haeckel, in which both Cook and Dell had a strong interest. Indeed, in 1906, the two friends had founded a “monist society” in Davenport. Haeckel’s evolutionary theory of man allowed Cook, even as he affirmed socialist goals, to regard as beneficial and in conformity to socialism the biological evolution of a superior type of people. As Kemper states: “the clashing ideologies in the The Chasm are ultimately reconciled in a way that asserts the value of socialist philosophy and action for the present, while also affirming the hope of a finer race to evolve in the future” (96). The marriage of Cook’s rival theories is arranged through his appeal to a utopian future as yet unknown in its details: “in the distant future the dual impulses at the root of past and present social and political structures – the ‘lordly egoism’ manifested in capitalism and the ‘organized altruism’ represented by socialism

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may both be balanced in a harmonious way, in a form of social organization beyond our present imagining” (Kemper 100).

Cook’s struggle to forge a union between Nietzschean individualism and socialist activism, to both of which he continued to bring his idealized understanding of ancient Greek culture, endowed him with a powerful sense of purpose, for which he quickly became known. When, four years after publication of The Chasm, he initiated the founding of the Provincetown Players, Cook was fulfilling the promise of his determination, made in Davenport years earlier, when he came out of seclusion, to find some way of promoting social change through collaboration with other artists and intellectuals, without having to renounce Nietzsche.

In regard to his collaborative style, much has been written about the ability of Cook to inspire, persuade and motivate other people. Even in the days when Cook, Dell and Glaspell were in Davenport, Cook exhibited these qualities of leadership. He ran for Congress as a socialist shortly after his “conversion” by Dell. And when Dell lost his position as a reporter, Cook immediately took him in and later hired him as a farmhand. Cook also played host to the local band of socialists, holding gatherings for them at a cabin on his family’s property.

In 1911, not long after Dell had moved to Chicago, Cook joined him there. Later that year he began working for Dell as an associate editor of the Friday Literary Review of the Chicago Evening Post, of which Dell had recently been made editor. Cook reviewed new books for the paper, which was then building a reputation as one of the nation’s leading venues for literary criticism. His own literary reputation was concurrently being established by publication of The Chasm, which earned him
considerable recognition among the avant-garde, if not with a wider readership, and by poems, essays, reviews, and short stories published over the next three years. Cook moved to New York in the fall of 1912. Although he had stayed in Chicago for less than two years, Cook had come into contact with that city’s many artists and writers of note, and in their midst had continued to hone his sense of purpose as a reformer of American culture. The influence of Nietzsche appears especially to have strengthened during this time. After reading a biography on Nietzsche (Halévy’s *Life of Nietzsche*), Cook wrote: “My own mind has been enough like Nietzsche’s for him to be one of the few writers with whom I imaginatively identify myself. My artistic passion is just now excited by the idea of showing as vital, as creative a temperament as this of Nietzsche, environed by American society in 1912” (qtd. in Glaspell 224).

It was also while in Chicago that Cook witnessed important examples of the independent theatre movement. The Irish Players, during their visit to Chicago, made a strong impression on Cook. As Glaspell writes: “There were excitements in Chicago just then. The Irish Players. Quite possibly there would have been no Provincetown Players had there not been Irish Players. What he saw done for Irish life he wanted for American life – no stage convention in the way of projecting with the humility of true feeling” (218). The presence of Maurice Browne’s Chicago Little Theatre is also mentioned by Glaspell, who writes that it was “good to know Maurice Browne and the people of his Little Theatre . . . were putting on Greek plays” (218). Of course, Browne’s theatre, with its “tea room” and guest speakers on literary subjects, doubled as a meeting place for artists and writers, including those, such as Theodore Dreiser and Arthur Ficke, with whom Cook was closely associated. It seems rather clear that
Cook's familiarity with Browne's work must have been greater than Glaspell's passing reference would indicate. In fact, a striking similarity between Browne's theatre company and Cook's group is found in their respective ties to a loose network of writers, artists and intellectuals, in both cases having national prominence, and between which there was significant overlap. Moreover, this avant-garde, which initially embraced Browne's work in Chicago, was much the same group that in the mid to late nineteen teens provided crucial support for, and was in fact a constitutive part of, the Provincetown Players.

From 1912 until 1915, while living in New York, Cook continued to write for the Friday Literary Review, maintaining a weekly column, entitled "New York Letter," which kept readers abreast of the New York literati. In another way, too, Cook preserved his attachment to his mid-western past: Cook and Glaspell, whose friendship extended back to the socialist meetings in Davenport, were married within a year of Cook's arrival in New York. Residing in Greenwich Village, Cook became thoroughly immersed in the local literary and artistic avant-garde. In 1914, Dell also moved to New York. The move east by these members of the "Chicago Renaissance," coincided with a relocation of the nation's literary and artistic avant-garde from Chicago to New York. The continuity of the avant-garde "movement" is noted by Waterman: "When Greenwich Village superceded Chicago as the center for the avant-garde, Cook went to New York and shared the Village revolt in life and letters. In the artist colony at Provincetown and in the village atmosphere, his vision of an artistic flowering became a reality" (48).
Arnold Goldman, in his essay, "The Culture of the Provincetown Players," provides a detailed analysis of the social circles out of which the Provincetown company emerged. Although both the Chicago Little Theatre and the Provincetown Players were created in avant-garde centers, the slight difference in timing (some three and a half years) made a substantial difference in the political and intellectual climate of their respective social environs. The progressive-minded avant-garde that had supported Browne lost much of its momentum and social commitment as a result of American involvement in the First World War. An indication of this is the fact that Browne's theatre lost its patronage, as well as its audiences, almost overnight, once the United States' entry into the war had become imminent.

On the east coast, in New York and later in Provincetown, the avant-garde discovered a thriving new center, but soon faced fragmentation and dissolution as a result of the war. Members of the New York avant-garde first began to arrive at the sea-side town of Provincetown in 1911: "Hutchins Hapgood and his wife, Neith Boyce, are central to this group. In 1911 they began to spend the summer months away from their centre of operations in New York, at Provincetown, Massachusetts, on the tip of Cape Cod. Soon they were joined by other couples of their acquaintance and had the making of a little colony" (293). A second, and rather different, wave of avant-garde colonists arrived in 1914; these were not simply social reformers, as the earlier figures had been, but extremists: "anarchists and revolutionaries" (Goldman 293).

At first, both reformers and extremists seem to have co-existed harmoniously. But the outbreak of war in Europe had a major, disruptive impact on the colonists:

This ideal harmony was short-lived: the declaration of war in Europe changed everything. Reformers and revolutionary-anarchists were alike
plunged into depression at the news: to some it seemed that the foundations of their security in a basically stable civilized order had been removed; to others it seemed incredible that the European masses could so meekly submit to the dictates of their oppressor governments. (293)

A new, divisive atmosphere unsettled the senior members of the Provincetown colony:

"the life-style and now war-provoked despair of the radicals was dividing the reformers – tempting some to further rebellion, warning others back from the brink towards conventionality. In any case, imperiling what they had thought of as a middle ground" (Goldman 294).

A group of aesthetes, led by Mabel Dodge, was also present at Provincetown by 1914. Dodge, a patron of the arts and known for her celebrated New York salon, had "in 1914 retreated into mysticism, oriental religion and a religion of art" (Goldman 294-95). It was Robert Edmund Jones, one of Dodge’s circle, whose suggestion prompted the first theatrical production at the Provincetown colony. In the summer of 1915, while gathered at Hapgood’s house, a number of “colonists” were decrying the lack of interest in experimental plays by commercial producers, and even by the independent theatres. The example under discussion was Suppressed Desires, a one-act co-written by Cook and Glaspell. Jones “said they should stop complaining and simply do it themselves. To show what he meant, he improvised a set in the Hapgood’s living room and there the first performance of Suppressed Desires took place, with Cook and Glaspell playing their husband and wife protagonists” (298).

The beginning of theatrical activity by the persons who would eventually form the Provincetown Players was not, as discussed earlier, wholly spontaneous. Cook, Glaspell, and other charter members of the Provincetown Players had only months earlier witnessed and in some cases even participated in the establishment of the
Washington Square Players, an independent theatre in Greenwich Village. As William Vilhauer, in his dissertation on the Provincetown Players, contends, “this adventure in Provincetown was not as spontaneously achieved as these stories would indicate. It had its real beginning during the previous winters in that section of New York City known as Greenwich Village, the home of a sizeable group of the avant-garde novelists, short story writers, musicians, painters and poets” (16).

Both Cook and Glaspell had been personally involved in developing proposals for the Washington Square Players. The project was initiated by members and associates of the Liberal Club, a group which offered at its brownstone on Macdougal Street “A Meeting Place for Those Interested in New Ideas” (Vilhauer 18). Lawrence Langner and Ida Rauh, who was later an original member of, and highly-regarded actress with, the Provincetown Players, together with Albert Boni, who helped manage a bookstore affiliated with the Liberal Club, began by assembling persons who might be interested in forming a theatre. Their plan stemmed from modest theatrical productions held earlier in the year at the club’s brownstone, which were the work of Floyd Dell and others who “decided to form a dramatic group to produce modern plays in the Club Room” (Vilhauer 21).

Langner later described how upon encountering Boni one day he proposed to him that a new theatre, on the model of Browne’s Chicago Little Theatre, should be formed in New York: “‘we ought to start a theatre of our own; Maurice Browne has done it in Chicago,’ and I described the Chicago theatre to him” (qtd. in Vilhauer 22). Langner, Boni, and Rauh, after initiating discussion about establishing a small theatre, decided to include Cook and Glaspell: “they agreed to invite George Cram Cook and
Susan Glaspell and several other of their close friends who were interested in the theatre to join them in their new venture. At one of the early meetings of this group in the winter of 1914, the enterprise was officially established as the Washington Square Players” (Vilhauer 22).

Cook and Glaspell did not remain closely involved with the new theatre for long, especially after their play, Suppressed Desires, which had been considered for production by the company, was rejected. They did, however, attend the opening night of the premiere production by the Washington Square Players, which was an evening of four one-acts, held on February 19, 1915 (Vilhauer 23-24). It seems, then, that when the rejected play was produced later that year in Provincetown, it was hardly a spontaneous event, since the authors had only months before been party to the creation of a theatre that, in likeness to the Provincetown Players, featured new, American one-act plays, including many written by members of the company.

The line of influence clearly traces back, from the Provincetown Players to the Washington Square Players, and from both back to the Chicago Little Theatre. Participants in the Provincetown Players and the Washington Square Players had closely followed, and in some cases had even been part of the Chicago Little Theatre. Floyd Dell, who became a member of the Provincetown Players, and whose plays were produced by them, had, as editor of the Friday Literary Review, promoted Browne’s company in its early phase with favorable reviews of its productions, and by articulating and endorsing the theatre’s goals. Browne recalled that “Floyd Dell went out of his way to publicize our little place; he more nearly than most of his colleagues understood what we were driving at” (Too Late 129). It will also be recalled, as noted in the previous
chapter, that Dell was amorously involved with an actress at the Chicago Little Theatre named Hilda Golightly (Too Late 150). Browne wrote that Cook and Dell “used to scold me, claiming that we presented too few . . . plays by American dramatists” (Too Late 201).

The point here is that Cook and other members of the Provincetown Players had had in mind for years the type of theatre they were eventually to found. Not only was Suppressed Desires not produced spontaneously, except perhaps in a strictly superficial sense, but even the Greenwich Village origins of the Provincetown Players cited by Vilhauer were stimulated by exposure to Browne’s work in Chicago two years earlier. The Provincetown Players and the Washington Square Players were a kind of modified franchise of the Chicago Little Theatre. Nor may one account for these franchise “modifications,” in the case of the Provincetown Players, by appealing to the social milieu of the Greenwich Village and Provincetown avant-garde, as Vilhauer does, nor, even, is it sufficient to trace this milieu back to Chicago and the “tea room” of the Chicago Little Theatre. While much of the work of the Provincetown Players may be understood as a result of these influences, and while the idea of a Chicago Little Theatre that has been radicalized by a combination of socialist members (e.g., John Reed, who helped to create the organizational structure for the Provincetown Players) and the effects of the war, offers a helpful way to consider the Provincetown company, one still must account for Jig Cook’s fervor for the enterprise and for his ability to charge it with meaning; for this one must turn to Cook’s Hellenism.

While the view of the Provincetown Players as a product of avant-garde artistic circles that served as an outlet for their progressive or anarchistic political leanings and
unconventional social values reflects much of the activities that were central to the theatre, it tends to overlook the role of ancient Greek culture in favor of other, more “modern” influences, such as socialism, psychoanalysis, progressivism, women’s rights activism, and communism, which tend to be represented in the thematic material of the company’s plays. But at the core of the Provincetown Players, and largely responsible for the company’s establishment and survival, was the ardent Hellenist, George Cram Cook. In this key figure may be seen an almost religious fanaticism and faith in the undertaking, and behind Cook’s commitment, and shaping his conception of it, were modern tributes to and idealizing interpretations of the culture and theatre of ancient Greece.

Returning to earlier stages in Cook’s career, we discover that the future leader of the Provincetown Players had long dreamed of finding some way to harness the potential power of the avant-garde for bringing about cultural change. Cook was focused neither on social reforms, nor on political revolution, as other members of the avant-garde were. Instead, he envisioned a national, cultural rebirth. A letter from Cook to Glaspell written on Memorial Day, 1912, for example, reveals the author’s heightened interest in bringing about a cultural movement worthy of the “renaissance” appellation. Written almost three years before the first production at Provincetown, Cook’s letter shows that he had by then already given considerable thought to such an undertaking: “I think of Wagner burning to create a new national art for Germany, of d’Annunzio fired by the achievement of Bayreuth to labor for a like glory for the Latin soul – a third mystic life for Italy.” (qtd. in Glaspell 224-25) Cook’s vision for the revival of ancient Greek culture makes his interest in the independent theatre movement
remarkably different from that of Browne or of those principally involved in the
Washington Square Players. Earlier in the letter, Cook excitedly refers to the possibility
that a small number of persons might be capable of bringing about a "renaissance":

Nietzsche maintains that a hundred men bore the task of the Italian
Renaissance. If conditions happen to be ready a movement may be
started by the dropping of a pebble. From the cool solitude of this day of
mine I drop this page as possible pebble. An American Renaissance of
the Twentieth Century is not the task of ninety million people, but of one
hundred. Does that not stir the blood of those who know they may be of
that hundred? Does it not make them feel like reaching out to find each
other -- for strengthening of heart, for the generation of intercommunica-
ting power, the kindling of communal intellectual passion? (qtd. in
Glaspell 224)

It is evident from accounts of Cook's life by Glaspell and others, and from his
own writings, that Cook's dream of an American Renaissance had its roots in his love
for ancient Greece. Glaspell writes of him that "as a creator, he was social. He talked
of older communities. Always he talked of Greece. He talked of that possible
American Renaissance" (224). Arthur E. Waterman, in an essay on Cook's career,
maintains that "Cook's goal in life was to bring the Hellenic spirit to modern America"
(48). He relates that Cook "once said to Floyd Dell, 'Floyd, let's gather the old
Davenport crowd together, and go back there, and make it a new Athens'" (48).

Waterman furnishes a useful overview of the way in which Cook understood
ancient Greece to offer a compelling example for modern times:

Since childhood Cook had revered the classical civilization of ancient
Greece. He saw the same integrity, heroism, and democratic spirit in
Greece that he associated with pioneer life in America. He felt that
Greece had proved that man could create a unified culture where the
workaday and artistic worlds were united; where the businessmen,
artisans, and politicians supported and created the artistic climate; where
the cultural heritage, both real and legendary, formed the basis for art
and life. In Greece this way of life had led to a unity symbolized by the
theatre which reflected and gave meaning to every aspect of Greek life,
whereas in America the pioneer spirit had been replaced by a sterile culture governed by commercialism which shut out the creative voice of the artist. (47-48)

In Waterman’s summary we discover an essential quality of Cook’s Hellenist influence that is absent in the case of Maurice Browne: for Cook, following the Hellenist model was seen as a means of reforming American culture and of permitting the development of a distinctly American society. Browne had no such grand purpose, nor did he, as an Englishman, who came to America with little prior interest in or knowledge of the country, believe that his theatre might help to trigger a national renaissance.

When, in 1915, Cook set out to establish the Provincetown Players, his efforts were not Greek revivalist in any obvious sense. With few exceptions, he wrote and encouraged others to write plays that made little or no use of Greek subject matter. But his greatest contribution to the theatre, and to the American theatrical tradition, was his development of a communal theatre, and in this respect the influence of his Greek studies was decisive. His devotion to the theatre was imprinted by his passion for the creation of an art that brings into play and advances democratic principles.

At the beginning of the Provincetown Players, Cook quickly emerged as the leader and driving force of the company. Glaspell records that the first productions in Provincetown were not intended to constitute the beginning of a theatre company. When that first summer came to a close, she later wrote, “thus ended the first season of the Provincetown Players, who closed without knowing they were the Provincetown Players” (Glaspell 251). It was Cook who ensured that the group’s activities would continue. As Vilhauer states: “Cook’s enthusiasm for the idea of a new theatre became
an inspiring force behind the group’s continuing interest in the project throughout the winter. Cook assumed essentially the job of manager, if such a title can be applied to a group which was still in an unorganized state” (34).

A colorful précis of the role Cook played in the formation and continuation of the Provincetown Players is given by Floyd Dell: “over this crew of artistic ruffians, seething with jealousy, hatred and self-glorification, George ruled, with the aid of a punchbowl, like one of the Titans. He really believed in the confounded thing! And his vision it was that held this Walpurgis-night mob together in some kind of Homeric peace and amity” (266). Dell’s view of Cook is supported by Vilhauer’s discussion of the political organization and history of the Provincetown Players, in which Cook’s leadership during the early years is emphasized: “it is evident that Cook was the dominant figure in the enterprise. During the first three seasons, it is apparent that he ruled supreme” (91).

Further testimony to Cook’s dominant role in the company is provided by Eugene O’Neill, the most celebrated playwright in the company’s brief history, who stated that “Cook was the big man, the dominating and inspiring genius of the Players. Always enthusiastic, vital, impatient with everything that smacked of falsity or compromise, he represented the spirit of revolt against the worn-out traditions, the commercial theatre” (qtd. in Vilhauer 91). Deutsch and Hanau, the earliest historians of the Provincetown Players, also found that Cook’s stature in the company was unrivalled, and observed further that the theatre’s rules of operation were subject to changes following “the moods of Jig Cook, who was every season solemnly reelected president” (qtd. in Vilhauer 91).
It was Cook who managed to create and sustain a working theatre out of a pool of artists that not only contained strong and independent-minded personalities, but which, once the war had begun, was subject to the kind of dissolution and dispiritedness discussed above. We have seen how Cook’s long-standing desire to inaugurate a cultural renaissance had prepared him for the leadership position in Provincetown. His reading of Nietzsche, in particular, had convinced him that an elite group of artists could exert an enormous influence on the wider culture. And it is also clear, from his statements and journal entries, that ancient Greek culture held out for him the ideal toward which he strove.

To the various influences of classical studies on the direction given to the Provincetown Players by Cook must also be added the important work of the “Cambridge classicists,” whose interpretations of ancient theatre and culture emphasized the role of ritual in the emergence of Greek theatre, but which also addressed theatre as an important part of civic discourse. The scholarly group is identified succinctly by Shelley Arlen as follows:

The Cambridge Ritualists, also known as the Cambridge Group of Classical Anthropologists, were a turn-of-the-century intellectual movement that anticipated the rise of structuralism in social science while embracing a generally anti-positivist philosophical position. Working primarily during the period 1900 to 1915, four classical Greek scholars – Jane Ellen Harrison, Francis M. Cornford, Gilbert Murray and, to a lesser extent, Arthur Bernard Cook – developed theories concerning the relationship of myth to ritual and on the origins of religion and drama. (1)

The Cambridge ritualists pursued an anthropological approach to the study of ancient civilization that was novel. As Arlen explains: “they pioneered in applying anthropological theories to the study of ancient Greece at a time when many classicists
were primarily philologists engaged in textual criticism” (1). Their scholarship was effectively extending the Nietzschean departure from mainstream classical philology of the nineteenth century, as discussed in chapter two. As Simon Goldhill points out, in his study of the Cambridge ritualists and their influence on criticism of Greek tragedy, Jane Harrison, the leader of the group, “proclaimed herself a ‘disciple of Nietzsche’” (332). Their emphasis upon the ritual origins and nature of Greek tragedy provided theatre practitioners with a new means of bridging the Nietzschean concept of the Dionysian artistic impulse with theatre praxis.

The writings by the Cambridge ritualists in the early twentieth century influenced the European independent theatre movement during its second generation of existence. Perhaps its greatest effect was on the work of Yeats, whose poetic plays were infused with a sense of sacred ritual. As Yeats’ company, the Irish Players, was the European theatre most directly influential on the leadership of the early independent theatres in the United States, the American branch of the movement was linked from its time of bifurcation to the work of the Cambridge ritualists.

In the religious aspects of Maurice Browne’s conception of theatrical practice, and in the communal basis of the Provincetown Players, may be seen early influences of the Cambridge ritualists on the alternative theatre tradition in America. While the precise nature of the debt to the Cambridge ritualists by Browne and Cook remains unclear, it seems likely that both men were partially guided by the movement. As mentioned, both producers were strongly influenced by Yeats and the Irish Players, and this was one path by which the ritualists came to have an impact on the American theatres. In addition, Browne was personally acquainted with Gilbert Murray, who was
the chief popularizer of the ritualists’ work. As noted in the previous chapter, Browne visited with Murray in England during the summer when the Chicago Little Theatre was in recess. And Cook had first-hand experience of Browne’s theatre, and would thus have been aware of its use of the ritualists’ ideas. Cook also would have been fully acquainted with the Cambridge ritualists as a reviewer of new books on artistic and scholarly subjects for the Friday Literary Review, a position he held during the height of the ritualists’ popularity. During the time Cook and Browne were in Chicago, the Cambridge ritualists were enjoying considerable attention: “led by a remarkable woman, Jane Ellen Harrison, and reinforced by the very public and versatile Gilbert Murray, the Ritualists enjoyed great popular exposure and appeal in their active period” (Arlen 1). In the early influence of the Cambridge ritualists on the tradition of alternative theatre in the United States may be seen a foreshadowing of the important link that later developed between communal forms of theatrical practice and the Greek tradition, a link that has been obscured by the popular association of that tradition with the mere revival of Greek plays.

Cook’s pursuit of cultural renewal was guided by his interpretation of Greek theatre and culture, as informed significantly by Nietzsche, but his ambitions were always firmly conjoined to his vision for a specifically American cultural development. Cook brought to his reading of the Greek tradition an American perspective and, in particular, an affirmation of democratic government. Goldman outlines the specifically American connection to ancient theatre that appears to have prompted Cook’s insistence upon the aptness of the Greek precedent as a model for modern America:

The ancient Greek theatre had, it seemed, central spiritual and civic importance in its particular society. How different from the American
theatre of 1914. Here was a “usable” past indeed and, though foreign, not unthinkably un-American when one could argue that Athenian democracy was a source of the American democratic idea. Why should theatre not be to one what it had been to the other? (297)

Cook’s guiding vision for the Provincetown Players contained strains of an American tradition in Greek studies, most evident in his democratic, quasi-socialist, political orientation. This strain constitutes Cook’s chief departure from Nietzsche, who had great disdain for modern democratic states and their cultures. Cook’s association of modern America with ancient Greece is further displayed in his play, The Athenian Women, which was produced by the Provincetown Players in March, 1918; another production was sponsored that same year by the Women’s Peace Party of New York State at Bramhall Playhouse on April 13.

In writing The Athenian Women, which was the first full-length play to be produced by the Provincetown Players, Cook relied on two principal ancient sources: Thucydides’ The Peloponnesian War, which Cook perused during the First World War, and Aristophanes’ Lysistrata, a production of which he had seen in New York in 1913, and by which he had been profoundly moved. Kemper provides the following synopsis of Cook’s play: “The Athenian Women is in three acts, the first dealing with a plan to bring about peace, the second with the unsuccessful implementation of the plan, and the third, which takes place fourteen years later, with the failure of peace and the inevitable onset of war” (123). Cook believed that his play illuminated its historical subject, which was the Peloponessian War, better than the extant historical record of it: “As I look back to Thucydides and Plutarch, and through Aristophanes look back to the life he loved and mocked, it seems possible that the events in this play diverge more from our historical accounts than they do from the events themselves” (qtd. in Glaspell 271).
Underlying Cook’s claim was his conviction that the First World War offered an unrivalled parallel to the Peloponnesian War. This strong identification with ancient Athens is recorded in a note made by Cook in the margins of his copy of Thucydides’ famous chronicle: “We can feel this story more than any generation between yours and ours” (qtd. in Glaspell 271). His assertion of this historical parallel resurfaces almost verbatim in his preface to The Athenian Women, which was published posthumously in 1926.

Cook’s longing for Greece led finally to his departure for that country, with Susan Glaspell, on March 21, 1922, shortly after his break from the Provincetown Players. He remained in Greece, living among peasants in the countryside near Delphi, until his death, due to an undetermined illness, on January 14, 1924. During his brief stay in Greece, Cook immersed himself in the local culture and language, and sought to inform the locals of their ancient glory. In this he was acting in the tradition of American and European visitors to Greece dating back to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. He developed a reputation in Greece for having a truly passionate concern for the Greek people and their cultural traditions. When he died, and was buried at Delphi, his grave was marked by a stone taken from the Parthenon (Waterman 50).

Living among the shepherds and villagers of the Greek mainland, Cook steeped himself in rural life, much as he had in Davenport some twenty-five years earlier. Cook’s love for the Greek heritage, and by that he understood an unbroken linguistic and cultural lineage from ancient times to the modern era, was closely linked to his love for rural America. As Glaspell wrote on this connection in 1941: “It was not alone the
past of Greece he loved, he loved as well the past of the Mississippi upon which he was brought up, of his own family, entering a wilderness in their covered wagon” (xii).

The evasion of commercialism and social conventions pursued by Cook in his untiring devotion to the Provincetown Players from 1915 to 1922 was continued abroad on the mountainous Greek terrain. Perhaps, as Waterman believes, “Cook’s departure for Greece was inevitable. All his life he had been trying to create in America the Hellenic spirit and the pioneer virtues. He had left his birthplace because it refused to carry on the meaning of its ancestry; he had failed to keep alive the reascent spirit of the Provincetown. Only Greece was left. Cook hoped to find there a culture untouched by commercialism, resembling the life of antiquity” (49). Whether or not one accepts such a succinct view of Cook’s career, his contribution to modern American theatre, as an act of resistance against the commercial theatre of his day, was certainly guided by his idiosyncratic, American response to the Greek tradition.
CHAPTER SIX: HELLENISM AND THE NEW STAGECRAFT

This chapter treats the introduction of modern, European stagecraft into the American theatre during the nineteen teens and twenties. The “new stagecraft,” as the innovative methods of staging came to be called in America, were disseminated through the work of numerous theatres and artists, aided by theatre critics and essayists, and by major exhibitions of scenic designs. The major influence of the Greek tradition on these scenographic practices and theories has already been covered in the sections on Adolphe Appia and Gordon Craig in chapter two. That coverage shall be enhanced here somewhat, but the real purpose of this chapter is to consider the historical significance, within the American context, of the wide-ranging new methods and practices.

The many scenic styles and technological changes that were encompassed by the term “new stagecraft” were not regarded by Europeans as a single movement. As Robert Norvold writes: “In its earliest manifestations in Europe, the New Movement was not a single, unified force of theatrical reforms, and as it gained momentum and grew in its number of adherents, its appearance took on a number of forms and was classed under a variety of labels: Symbolism, Expressionism, Impressionism, Cubism, Dadaism, Theatricalism, and Futurism” (1).

An early effort to inform Americans about the latest trends in European scenic design was Huntly Carter’s The New Spirit in Drama and Art (1913). However, Edward E. Hale, in his review of the book, expressed confusion over the way in which the sundry practices discussed by Carter were said to represent a coherent movement: “There are productions of the new movement all over Europe, but no common aim is
obvious. I utterly disbelieve that all are aiming at Rhythm, as Mr. Huntly Carter appears to think; but what they are aiming at is by no means clear” (521).

Kenneth Macgowan, whose books, *The Theatre of Tomorrow* (1921) and *Continental Stagecraft* (1922), the latter written with Robert Edmund Jones, provided early, well-researched accounts of developments in contemporary stagecraft in Europe and America. Macgowan’s influential books expanded upon his earlier identification of three principles of the new stagecraft, which he had published in an article in *Theatre Arts* entitled “The New Path of the Theatre” (1919); these were “simplification, suggestion, and synthesis.”

Macgowan’s formula continues to serve as a useful basis for understanding the new stagecraft because it was derived from the writings of Appia and Craig, who were the foremost contemporary theorists of the new trends, and whose writings, design exhibitions, and occasional, realized production designs helped to direct experimentation in the European theatre. Macgowan shared with Appia and Craig a positive definition of modern scenographic developments, that is, he conceived of it as a movement that followed cogent aesthetic principles, but later scholars have viewed the trends as a complex spectrum of activity that may not be reduced to a common set of principles.

The radical departure entailed by the new methods from staging conventions of the late nineteenth century led many practitioners and theorists, as well as later historians, to conceive of the reform efforts as revolutionary. Norvold states that “In the second decade of the twentieth century, a revolution that had begun in the theatres of

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Europe during the final decade of the nineteenth century began to spread to America” (1).

Norvold prefers to define the developments more broadly than Macgowan, and also negatively, as a departure from realism: “‘New Stagecraft’ was a general term that was used to refer to a heterogeneous array of scenic forms and styles whose primary visual characteristic was that they differed markedly from conventional realism” (3).

He analyzes the movement in terms of three areas of experimentation:

The New Stagecraft was a result of a movement in scene design that sought to harmonize the relationship between the drama and the mise-en-scene; to create a scenic environment coordinate with the living, moving actor; to explore and expand the potentialities of the elements of the mise-en-scene; to imbue stage settings with rhythm and movement corresponding to the rhythm and movement of the actor and the drama; and to develop new techniques of stage production. (7)

Norvold’s categorization of new stagecraft activity in terms of a series of aims, complements Macgowan’s more narrowly descriptive formulation of the movement. Like Macgowan, however, Norvold offers little more than an encapsulation of the theoretical and practical output of Appia and Craig. The aims of the movement that Norvold articulates closely match those expressed, not only by Appia and Craig, but by their many followers, and in virtually identical language. A more abstract analysis, conceived with greater theoretical independence, and adopting a larger historical context, is provided by Arthur Feinsod, who analyzes the new stagecraft as one aspect of an emergent minimalist aesthetic.

In his dissertation, The Origins of the Minimalist Mise-en-scene in the United States, Feinsod argues that a minimalist aesthetic in stagecraft developed during the period of the early independent theatres in Europe and the United States, and largely
through work at these theatres, but that the significance of this trend for the entire twentieth century has been obscured by the heterogeneous concept of the new stagecraft. He states that “mixed in with minimalist traits of the New Stagecraft, such as simplification, suggestion and economy of means, scholars have also identified non-minimalist ones. Abstract decorativeness and complex syntheses of many art forms are included in what scholars have defined as the new stagecraft” (7). Feinsod’s insistence that the minimalist aesthetic deserves treatment as a category of design theory separate from the medley of new stagecraft theories has particular value to considerations of Hellenist influences on scenic design and staging practices at independent theatres. Its value lies only partially in the rejection of the term “new stagecraft,” since Macgowan and his contemporaries, relying on Craig and Appia, characterized the new developments in stagecraft, in the main, as minimalistic, and Feinsod’s alternative thus rests on a relatively minor refinement of the term. But Feinsod has succeeded in locating and underscoring an aspect of the new stagecraft that is of paramount importance to the whole of modern scenography.

Citing the work of Beckett, Pinter, Handke, Grotowski, Brook, Chaikin, and others, Feinsod states: “it is clear that theatre artists, guided by a less-is-more aesthetic vision in Europe between 1890 and 1922 and the United States between 1912 and 1922, laid the groundwork for one of the monumental pillars supporting twentieth century theatrical performance” (11). Feinsod’s distance from the period in question allows him to recognize a significant pattern of scenographic influence later in the century. Moreover, his concentration on minimalism as a unifying aesthetic underlying a range of new stagecraft experimentation supports the emphasis placed in this study on the
presence of the Greek tradition in the development of modern theatre. For the principal
sources cited by Feinsod in the emergence of minimalism, in both Europe and America,
are heavily indebted to Greek studies, foremost among which are Appia and Craig's
contributions to minimalist strains of the new stagecraft, the Hellenist influences in
which are reviewed in chapter two, and "Greek and Elizabethan revival movements
which retrieved stage simplification ideas from the past" (Feinsod 6).

In addition to re-casting the main thrust of the new stagecraft in terms that reveal
its seminal position in the history of twentieth century theatre, Feinsod sheds light on
the significance of the minimalist trend in the context of previous theatre history. As an
historical process, Feinsod contends that "Minimalist theatre comes from self-imposed
limitations and a purposeful, methodical repudiation of available possibilities" (4). He
maintains that in all of Western theatre history "only seventeenth century French Neo-
Classicism shares the distinction with minimalist theatre for reversing the historical
pattern of ever-more complex and detailed artistic expression" (6). Another feature
Feinsod cites as common to both minimalist theatre and French neo-classicism is their
"aesthetic restraints" (Feinsod 5).

It would be too great a diversion here to weigh the merits of Feinsod's far-
reaching claims, for even if one were to produce other examples of periods where the
"historical pattern" he identifies has been defied, the effect on the present study would
be negligible. More important, in connection to Hellenist aspects of the new stagecraft,
is the parallel Feinsod draws between the movement and French neo-classicism, for the
latter resulted from an effort to re-introduce classical Greek values into the art of
theatre. The parallel intimates a more general supposition regarding former periods of
classicism in the theatre, namely, that the new stagecraft and, more generally, modern
minimalist theatre, engage the same aesthetic principles that in other periods have been
defined as classical: fifth-century Athenian art, Weimar classicism, French neo-
classicism. To this list might also be added classical Japanese theatre and painting,
which had an influence on the emergence of the new stagecraft. Maurice Browne
wrote, in respect to this, that “our chief modification of Mr. Gordon Craig’s ideas has
been an attempt to introduce the principles of the Chinese and Japanese painters and
color-printers, whose work is remarkable for its simplicity and great economy of line
and color” (qtd. in Feinsod 145-46). Further, as Feinsod notes: “Japanese motifs were
used throughout the Chicago Little Theatre, especially in the tea room” (146). And
Browne had studied Japanese No theatre extensively (Feinsod 145).

In the Western tradition, of course, the classical periods were, to varying
degrees, efforts to revive the classical values of ancient Greece. By placing minimalist
theatre, which was the major aesthetic for most of the new stagecraft, in association
with classical values, the remarkable suggestion arises that the independent theatres
may have been responsible for inaugurating, if only partially, a classical period into the
American theatrical tradition.

In their adoption of the new stagecraft, American independent theatres made a
striking departure from contemporary theatrical practices; only with the revivalist
productions of Greek and Elizabethan theatre were simple and suggestive settings
otherwise found. In America of the early twentieth century, with its sprawling hustle
and bustle, and its long-standing national identity, in contrast to Europe, as a nation of
energetic and unmannered people, the appearance of controlled, stylized, and restrained
artistry must indeed have seemed a foreign direction for the theatre to take, more so than in Europe, where national classical periods had left a strong legacy. Moreover, as explained, the concentration of classical aesthetics was higher in the American new stagecraft than in its European counterpart, due to the means by which it had been transmitted to the United States. Ireland in this regard offers an interesting parallel to the American experience of the new stagecraft. The term "renaissance" was routinely applied to Ireland's modern cultural development and accurately characterized Yeats' ambitions for a national cultural renewal in a country that had had no classical period in its history.

In America, the absence of a classical period in theatre may also be seen as something of a gaping hole in the country's Greek tradition. The Greek dominance in the national architecture, and in the political identity of the United States as a democratic union, had in each case a more pronounced presence than in Europe due to the architectural and political tabula rosa, on which the young country's Greekness had been inscribed. The early American theatrical tradition, by contrast, remained predominantly imitative of the English theatre and was, until the mid-nineteenth century, almost a provincial extension of the London theatre; and the ways in which it was considered distinctively American, such as in its more energetic and effusive acting style, lay in the opposite direction of classical restraint. This means that when the new stagecraft arrived in conjunction with the independent theatre movement, it introduced classical Greek values into an activity that was a preserve of the non-classical among other areas, such as architecture, sports, and literature, where classical aesthetics were well represented or even prominent.

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At the same time, the new stagecraft in America held a higher concentration of classical aesthetic principles than its European sources for several reasons: the lateness of its arrival in the United States; the more selective, studied means by which the Americans were exposed to and adopted the new stagecraft; the comparatively limited range of artistic experimentation in the United States.

The new stagecraft had begun in earnest in the 1890s in the first European independent theatres and by the time its presence began to be felt at American theatres in the 1910s, some twenty years of development had altered its principal methods and aims. These changes significantly shaped the new stagecraft in accordance with the precepts of Appia and Craig, and in imitation of Reinhardt’s application of them.

Norvold writes that “the two most important European figures in the movement toward the creation of a more imaginative and expressive theory of scene design were Adolphe Appia and Gordon Craig” (14). The foremost position of Appia and Craig in the new stagecraft “movement” was recognized by their contemporaries and has been affirmed in later scholarship on the period. But neither figure emerged as a significant leader until well after widespread experimentation in stagecraft had begun. As Fuerst and Hume note: “Appia’s first publication dates from 1894; his first designs were published in 1895-96, and his most important book, Die Musik und die Inszenierung in 1899. Before this latter date Craig had been known only as an actor and wood-engraver; it was not until after 1900 that his activities in the new theatre commenced, and only in 1905 that he began to publish his theories” (qtd. in Norvold 15).

Prior to Appia’s first publication, Paul Fort and Aurélien-Marie Lugné-Poë had carried out experiments in Paris that involved symbolists and other avant-garde artists in
non-illusionistic styles: “Both Fort and Lugné-Poë invested their productions with non-realistic scenery that emphasized line, mass, and color rather than the illusions of locale. Lugné-Poë, in particular, commissioned many of the famous artists of the day to produce settings for him, including Toulouse-Latrec, Maurice Denis, Odilon Redon, Veillard, Bonnard, and Roussel” (Norvold 20). In America, by contrast, such experimentation was virtually unknown, save, perhaps, in Greek and Elizabethan revivalist productions. As Norvold writes: “In stage settings, illusionism was virtually universal. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the writings of Gordon Craig were only beginning to create a response . . . Appia was known, and the heterodox experiments with non-illusionistic scenery in the independent theatres in Europe were known only to a coterie of American producers, directors, and theatre patrons” (24).

When the new stagecraft finally began to appear on American stages, the movement had become largely identified with the aims and methods of Appia, Craig and Reinhardt, the latter of whom was the movement’s great popularizer with audiences, which he won over with his spectacular and innovative productions. Reinhardt’s New York production of Sumurun in 1910 was the most famous and sensational of the early examples of the new stagecraft in America. So great was the predominance of Appia, Craig and Reinhardt in the new stagecraft of Europe that the movement was sometimes referred to as coterminous with their work and influences. The Hellenist influences on the careers of all three men were strong, a review of which is provided in chapter two.
The American exposure to the new stagecraft was more narrowly a reception of the Appia-Craig-Reinhardt strain of it than was the case in Europe. This may be attributed principally to the comparative want of complexity and experimental range in the American artistic milieu and its heritage. Symbolists, expressionists, futurists and members of other movements simply did not have vital counterparts in America and were thus unable to stimulate and direct theatrical experimentation. American artists and writers routinely traveled to Europe, and especially Paris, or took up residence there, in order to experience or participate in the diversity and sophistication of the visual arts.

The Appia-Craig-Reinhardt current in scenic reform was thus somewhat distilled from its complex, international context and transplanted to an American theatre that was monopolized by illusionistic design. At its time of introduction to the United States, the scenographic innovations were thus more novel, more foreign, and in their impact more revolutionary than in Europe. Its successful appearance threatened to overthrow a theatrical tradition that was more deeply entrenched and monolithic than that of any European country. It was, moreover, introduced at a time when scenic "revolution" was in the air, as calls for reform, and scattered efforts toward it, had been made for decades, and public awareness of European stagecraft had been building.

The new stagecraft was introduced to America through several channels. The influential Reinhardt production of Sumurun in 1910 has already been mentioned. Other important demonstrations of the new stagecraft by European companies include the productions of Barker and Copeau. To these must be added the numerous but rather inconsequential, failed attempts to generate interest in scenic reforms by American
theaters. Greek and Elizabethan revivals were, of course, a more successful, but similarly sporadic activity which brought to the public deliberately non-illusionistic settings. In the professional theatres, too, Robert Edmund Jones made important inroads. But it was not until the rise of the independent theatre movement in the second decade of the twentieth century that the new stagecraft began to take hold and win acceptance among American audiences. In this way, yet another strain of Hellenism was fostered by the independent theatres of America.
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

This dissertation has attempted to establish that the independent theatre movement in America, and with it the American avant-garde tradition in theatre, is more significantly indebted to nineteenth century views of the Greek past, both in its literature and its stagecraft, than has heretofore been recognized. To this end, it has made use of recent studies of the nineteenth century Greek tradition, which for the first time enable theatre historians to examine early avant-garde theatre in the context of period Hellenism. Its review of diverse branches of classical studies may help today’s theatre practitioners, scholars, and educators to appreciate the way in which views of classical Greece are usually rooted in, or are responses to, a Greek revivalism that began in the eighteenth century. At the same time, classicists will perhaps be surprised to learn of the extent to which their discipline has influenced modern, experimental theatre.

In the European precursors to the American independent theatres, Hellenism was found to have been influential in several ways. Ancient Greek theatre was the supreme model in the call for theatrical reforms by Richard Wagner, whose theoretical writings were instrumental to the rise of French symbolism. The symbolists not only went on to inaugurate at independent theatres in Paris the modern tradition of non-illusionistic scenography, they helped to spawn the Oxford Hellenism of Pater and Wilde. Pater’s aestheticism proved of great importance to artists of the second-generation independent theatres, as evidenced in the careers of Yeats, whose company, the Irish Players, became one of the leading theatres in the international movement, and Craig, whose scenographic theories were revolutionary in their impact on modern
theatre. The other major design theorist for the modern theatre was Appia, in whose work one finds influences leading directly back to Wagner. Complicating matters further, Nietzsche's theories of ancient culture, developed in conjunction with Wagner, came in time to have an enormous impact on classical studies as a field, including its effect on the Cambridge ritualists, a group that provided direction to countless experimental theatres, including Yeats' Irish Players.

The modern revival of Greek plays, which originated as a movement in Germany, owed much to nineteenth century advances in classical scholarship, particularly in archeology. Wilamowitz, who helped to popularize Euripidean drama during the late nineteenth century, took an active role in the production of Greek plays, translating and acting as an advisor for productions of Greek tragedies in Berlin at the turn of the century. Murray acted in this same capacity in England, bridging classics and experimental theatre. Murray's collaborations with Barker at independent theatres brought Greek tragedy to new heights of popularity in the English-speaking world. In a curious twist, dramatists championed by independent theatres, such as Ibsen and Shaw, evidently colored the way Wilamowitz and Murray interpreted Euripides and, consequently, ancient society.

All of the above involvement between Hellenism and the independent theatre movement was established before the movement took hold in the United States. The American theatres thus benefited from these precedents, and even accentied the Hellenist influences from Europe in their own work due to the guidance of Yeats' Irish Players, whose tour in 1911 sparked the independent theatre movement in America. The tour came at the height of Yeats' interest in the revival of Greek drama, as well as at the
pinnacle of his association with Craig, on whose scenic theories he lectured while in America. The Cambridge ritualists were also active in the formative period of the independent theatres in America, and the Hellenist influences of Nietzsche and Pater shaped the thinking of early leaders in the movement.

As a consequence of the timing, and of the points of contact with the European theatres, the leading American independent theatres, such as the Chicago Little Theatre and the Provincetown Players, were from the beginning more infused with Hellenist influences than were most of the independent theatres in Europe. This is particularly true of Maurice Browne's company, which used Greek tragedy as its principal resource for the development of a company production style. But the communal nature of Jig Cook's company served, too, as a reminder of the relationship between the fifth-century Athenian community and its theatre.

The Hellenist values that entered the American independent theatre movement through the imitation of European theatres were not only more prominent than in most European corollaries, but the Hellenist tradition in the United States was also very different from, and more pronounced than, its European counterpart. This stemmed mainly from the American political identity with democracy. Reinforcing the Greek associations of this identity, and inscribing it on the national landscape, was the first national architectural movement known as "Greek revival." Compounding this more highly concentrated Hellenism in the United States was the extensive Greek revivalist activity in theatre prior to and during the emergence of the independent theatre movement. Numerous productions of Greek plays were offered across the country during the first quarter of the twentieth century, and Greek-styled amphitheaters and
athletic stadia, where several of these productions were held, had begun to dot the landscape.

In sum, the Greek tradition had a distinctive and far-reaching presence in America of the nineteen teens, providing a cultural climate in which the Hellenist values of the early independent theatres might be expected to resonate more profoundly, and echo more clearly, than in Europe. There is always the danger, however, when one isolates and corrals within a study one form of phenomena, such as traces of Hellenism, that it will exaggerate their importance to their times. It has not been an aim of this study to force upon the independent theatres an association with Hellenism beyond what the evidence for it seems to suggest. If the research net has been cast far, such as into the colonial period, and has been so closely woven as to catch minutiae, such as the fact that “telegraph” has Greek roots, the purpose has not been to build a grand, forensic exhibition of Hellenism, but rather to demonstrate myriad ways in which the Greek tradition has filtered into the American experience. A climatic reading of the Greek heritage in America has been sought. The point has been to kindle a sense of the Greek presence in America, and to leave open the definition of its association with the independent theatres.

In certain cases, manifestations of Hellenism at the American independent theatres have been examined in detail. The Chicago Little Theatre embraced an idealized view of beauty in terms similar to those espoused by Pater. Browne’s essays articulated a vision of theatre practice as a religious dedication to beauty. Cook, as leader of the Provincetown Players, pursued a kind of cultural renaissance that promised
to restore qualities of the Greek golden age. The new stagecraft was considered in light of correspondences between its aesthetic values and those of classical Greek art.

A pattern that has emerged in regard to the independent theatre movement on an international scale lies in the German origins of the various strains of Hellenism that were considered. Virtually all of the seminal figures in Greek studies were German: Winckelmann, Goethe, Nietzsche, and Wilamowitz. Perhaps, behind the Hellenism that has been studied, lies a Teutonism in a Greek mask. As the German intellectuals of the eighteenth century sought to liberate themselves from the hegemony of French neoclassicism, they attempted to see ancient Greece with their own eyes, and no longer through a Franco-Italian lens. The latter was itself, in fact, not so much a "renaissance" of Greek culture as a Romanesque culture in a Greek mask.

But the question becomes: why has ancient Greece been invoked so often by persons, and especially artists, seeking to fashion a new cultural identity? We have seen how Cambridge students, including Maurice Browne, were considered to be similar to ancient Athenians, and how Jig Cook thought America offered a close parallel to ancient Athens. Perhaps the vacuum created by the eradication in Europe of non-Christian cultures and beliefs prompted efforts to overthrow the Judeo-Christian tradition, and identifying with ancient Greece seemed to offer a means of doing this. But, whatever the case may be, it appears that such efforts are always intended to free one, or one’s people, from immediate constraints or feelings of degradation. If so, when the American independent theatres emerged in the nineteen teens, their rallying cry was a denunciation of commercialism in the theatre and in society. And that has become the standard means of characterizing the movement, that is, as anti-commercial, but the
many connections to Hellenism that have been considered in this study point to a desire for greater personal and social transformation than that designation implies.
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APPENDIX
QUOTATIONS TRANSLATED IN THE TEXT

Chapter Two

Der Aufführungsstil war historisierend, von dem Bestreben geleitet, den antiken
Aufführungsbedingungen auch in Äusserlichkeiten nahezukommen.

In den Übersetzungen Wilbrandts ist das antike Versmass beseitigt, sind zahlreiche
Anspielungen auf Sage und Vorzeit gestrichen, ist der Chor in eine “schickliche
Individualität”, d.h. In Einzelpersonen und in Dialogsituationen aufgelöst.

Blütezeit des antiken Dramas auf der Bühne

Wilamowitz suchte mit seinen Übersetzungen die Menschen seiner Zeit an die
griechische Tragödie heranzuführen, ohne sie aus ihren Konventionen allzusehr
herausreißen zu müssen. Er betonte ja immer wieder auf der Grundlage seines
altertumskundlichen Realismus, wie die Tragödie, auch als moralisch bildende Instanz
(gegen Goethe und Aristoteles), den Menschen in seiner Alltäglichkeit betrifft.

Reinhardt wollte etwas ganz anderes. In einer Art ästhetischem Hedonismus
wollte er den Zuhörer auf eine andere Ebene ziehen und ihm dabei Theater nicht als
moralische Anstalt, sondern als Raum festlich überhöhten (auch die nervöse Sensation
einschiessenden) Erlebnisses vermitteln.
Chapter Three

Studierte die Weltkarte des alexandrischen Claudius Ptolomaios, die damals zwar schon dreizehn Jahrhunderte alt aber immer noch modern genug war.

In Columbus erneuerte sich nur der antike europäische Drang nach jenem hinter dem Westen liegenden Osten, dessen Zauber schon zeitmehr als zwei Jahrtausend seine magische Anziehungskraft auf Europa übte.
VITA

Eric Wiley was graduated from Deerfield Academy in Deerfield, Massachusetts, in 1980. He enrolled later that year at Reed College in Portland, Oregon, where he was awarded the Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre/Literature in 1984. From 1986 until 1990, he lived in Frankfurt, West Germany, where he wrote a full length play, *Ludwig II*, on the merits of which he received a fellowship to study playwriting at the University of Texas at Austin, where he received the Master of Fine Arts degree in 1993. His translations of Euripides' *Electra* and *Medea*, and several of his original plays, were produced at the University of Texas at Austin while he was a student there.

In 1995, Wiley entered the doctoral program in Theatre at Louisiana State University, where he expects to receive the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in August 1999. He has published or has had accepted for publication numerous essays, and two of his plays have been produced at the Harold Clurman Theatre in New York. He is married to Michèle Solles Wiley, of Toulouse, France, and has a daughter, Clémentine.
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: Eric Wiley

Major Field: Theatre

Title of Dissertation: Hellenism and the Independent Theatre Movement in America

Approved:

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Dean of the Graduate School

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