

LIVES OF SHAKESPEARIAN ACTORS

# Lives of Shakespearian Actors V

Herbert Beerbohm Tree

Edited by  
Victor Emeljanow



ROUTLEDGE  


# LIVES OF SHAKESPEARIAN ACTORS V

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LIVES OF SHAKESPEARIAN ACTORS V

HERBERT BEERBOHM TREE, HENRY IRVING  
AND ELLEN TERRY  
BY THEIR CONTEMPORARIES

VOLUME

1

HERBERT BEERBOHM TREE

EDITED BY  
VICTOR EMELJANOW



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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The volumes of 'Lives of Shakespearian Actors' follow in the footsteps of Pickering & Chatto's successful 'Great Romantics' and 'Victorian Literary Figures' series in seeking to bring to the attention of contemporary readers texts which demonstrate how the 'lives' with which we have become familiar were first created and shaped. Volumes devoted to individual figures present the reader with texts which, unhindered by the questionable advantages of hindsight, show contemporary responses to the writings and performances that were shaping the cultural life of their times. Reproduced where possible in facsimile, the texts which feature in these volumes give a taste of contemporary debates about culture, reputation and the deeply contested minutiae of representation. They show reputations in the making, and the flux of careers, the play of influence, and the evolution of writing and acting styles whose full impact might not be realized for decades. Working with a broadly new historicist approach, the volumes seek to uncover for modern readers the tensions of the moment of creativity and the multitude of circumstances which produce both that moment and, crucially, responses to it. Out of those responses are born the lives that have become familiar to us, and the critical reputations which are our starting point as modern readers and viewers.

'Lives of Shakespearian Actors' seeks to show the genesis of those reputations in both the responses that were made to the actors on whom the series focuses, and in the ways in which they themselves determined, and were innovative within, the work that they carried out. Unlike the purely literary series, this set of volumes will also seek to give a taste of the actors' work itself, for instance through pictorial records of their productions, or through brief notice of the ways in which their own approach shaped the lines they spoke and the figure they cut on stage. Clearly, unlike, say, a Victorian novelist, the work of these actors is not easily retrievable. We cannot watch and recapture the impact that their onstage presence created, so have to compensate as far as we can by the partial means available to us. We can, though, begin to appreciate the often innovative significance of the appearances of Edmund Kean, William Macready or Henry Irving, by 'hearing' the lines that they made their own and seeing the distinctive bodies that spoke those words, mediated though those bodies

necessarily are by the imagination of the visual and plastic artists whom they inspired. Coupled with the sense given in these volumes of the range and nature of the responses made at the time, we can begin to appreciate the texture of the lives and performances of which we read, and of the impact that those lives and careers had on the reputation of Shakespeare and his works.

The volumes in 'Lives of Shakespearian Actors' cover the work of actors, British, European and American, across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a period in which Shakespeare's worldwide reputation was being fostered by increasingly scholarly attention from editors, critics and biographers; by the imaginative re-workings his words inspired in writers, painters, sculptors and composers; and by performances which increasingly asserted Shakespeare's proper place as being on the stage and within a modern dramatic repertoire, rather than simply in the pages of a book. Taken as a whole, these volumes assert the centrality of the lived performance as a necessary part of Shakespeare's cultural legacy, and definitively place him within a public arena.

The volumes in this set cover the work of Herbert Beerbohm Tree, Henry Irving and Ellen Terry, three performers who were at their peak during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This was a high point for Shakespeare productions in Britain, due in no small part to the performers who are the subjects of these volumes. After a century of relative cultural contestation, this period saw the theatre function as a site of aesthetic and social ambition: the attendees at the Lyceum represented the great and good of London society, writers began to see the commercial stage as a legitimate arena for artistic expression as well as for financial gain, and the increasing availability of theatre reviews in cheaper and often more specialized papers and journals, by a breed of new and more specialist journalists, meant that the theatre was both more readily accessible and better understood as a cultural phenomenon than ever before. Perhaps because of this, the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century saw stage performers achieve unprecedented official and social recognition: 1895 saw Irving become the first theatre professional to be knighted, an achievement in which he was followed by Beerbohm Tree in 1909, and by Terry who was made a Dame of the British Empire in 1925. Irving was also the subject of a commemorative statue erected in 1910 to the north of the National Portrait Gallery in London. An adjacent street was renamed after him, and a memorial garden around the statue was opened in 1951 by Laurence Olivier.

These honours, and the popularity which prompted them, were in no small part due to the performers' work in acting, producing, editing, lecturing on and reading Shakespeare. Each had a varied career with the playwright: though best known as performers, they were also writers who commented at length on Shakespeare's works in lectures and texts, and who also, in the case of Irving, produced a series of illustrated editions of Shakespeare's plays. They were known

too through their visual appearances, on stage, but also through the media of photography, etchings and oils which were ever more available at the end of the century. The fame of Irving, Terry and Tree, and its extent, both coincided with and was enabled by technological, media and transport developments which saw them become figures of worldwide acclaim, celebrities who could achieve unprecedented status through their exposure to audiences throughout Britain and the world, for this was also the period when large-scale international touring became a necessary part of the actor's work. The spectacular performances for which the Lyceum became best known could only take place because of the company's lucrative tours to North America and Australia as well as the provinces. Indeed, as Tracy C. Davis demonstrates in *The Economics of the British Stage, 1800–1914*, Irving and Terry's Lyceum made an average loss of £5 10s on each performance, whereas on one evening on a North American tour, they made an average profit of £80.<sup>1</sup> For all their cultural prominence then, even the best-known and most successful theatres in the late Victorian period were precarious commercial ventures which represented a significant challenge for their actor-managers. Within this context, Shakespeare's plays had a rather ambivalent standing: they were enormously expensive to produce to the satisfaction of the ambitious and exacting tastes of Irving and Beerbohm Tree, but also highly popular with West End audiences, and essential to the good standing of the theatre more broadly at this time. Shakespeare was an expensive necessity in the Lyceum, the Haymarket, and Her (later His) Majesty's, the theatres of Irving and Terry, and Tree.

The names of Irving and Terry have become as indivisible for students of Victorian theatre as they were for late-Victorian audiences. Though each had significant careers before their official partnership began at the Lyceum Theatre in 1878, it was at that moment that both achieved a new level of renown and popularity, and one that was dependent precisely upon the fact of their relationship. The couple had acted together once before, in 1867 in *Catherine and Petruchio*, a version of *The Taming of the Shrew* prepared for the stage by David Garrick. Terry noted of this performance, 'I acted for the first time with Henry Irving. This ought to have been a great event in my life, but at the time it passed me by and left "no wrack behind"'.<sup>2</sup> It was as another Shakespearian couple, Hamlet and Ophelia, that they first appeared together at the Lyceum in December 1878. Irving's history with the part of Hamlet, possibly the best-known and most performed role in the Victorian period, was a telling one. He had first attempted it in the provinces in 1865, and achieved a crucial success in it under Colonel Bate-man's management at the Lyceum in 1874. It was with this part that Irving first made his mark as Britain's pre-eminent actor, and won a popular acclaim that saw him unite Britain's theatregoing classes, from Gladstone to Karl Marx and his family, who would remain fierce Irving enthusiasts throughout their lives. The play ran for two hundred nights, an unprecedented run for a Shakespeare

play, made all the more impressive given the length of the play – five and a half hours – in the lightly edited version prepared by Irving.

The production set the tone for much of Irving's career: it was a psychologically-driven interpretation that relied more heavily than was customary on Shakespeare's words, and sought to reintroduce Victorian audiences to a fuller version of the play than had previously been seen. It showcased the charisma of Irving, and the careful attention to staging and text that would become his signature at the Lyceum when the theatre came under his own management later in the decade.

As Anjna Chouhan points out in her introduction, theatre was not part of Irving's background, and indeed his choice of career set him against both his mother and later his wife. Unlike Terry, who was brought up in a theatre family and made her first stage appearance as Mamilius in *The Winter's Tale* in 1856 at the age of eight, Irving had to create his own theatrical background, which he did by opting for an apprenticeship in the provinces before coming to London. During his career, he played around seven hundred parts, yet it is the twelve Shakespearian productions that he led during the years in which he managed the Lyceum for which he is best remembered, in part because it is in those plays that his skills as a producer and designer of drama as well as an actor could shine. Irving brought relatively unpopular plays such as *Cymbeline* and *Coriolanus* back into the acting repertory and into the nation's awareness of Shakespeare.<sup>3</sup> He worked, as Chouhan shows, with the leading painters and designers of the day to produce dazzling stage sets that led the field in a period of 'spectacular' theatre. Irving is credited with darkening the auditorium in order that the actor's craft, the playwright's words, and the set could be appreciated to best advantage. He also built around him a stable group of administrators and actors who, over the years, attested to the collaborative power of the Lyceum. In many respects, the Lyceum was Britain's de facto national theatre in a period when the agitation for such a body to counter the theatrical achievements of the Conservatoire-trained Comédie Française was gathering momentum.

The Lyceum's Shakespeare productions were an essential part of the theatre's national standing, as was the partnership between Terry and Irving. Speculation as to whether their partnership extended beyond the stage was rife for many years, and still continues to intrigue critics, but most important was the persistence of their working relationship. Though both had achieved some success individually, together they proved to be a cultural and social phenomenon during the 1880s and 1890s. In Terry, Irving found not just a talented and popular actress, but someone who brought to his theatre a certain assurance born perhaps of that theatricality that the Terry children enjoyed from their childhood, and which Irving, with his Methodist upbringing in Cornwall, lacked. Identified with Shakespeare as that theatricality was by Terry and her family, it became a lucrative acquisition

for the ambitious Irving, and one which enabled him to marry his own ferocious energies to the vehicle of Terry's more assured and self-confident status.

This was demonstrated in responses to her 1875 *Portia*, which she played with the Bancroft company at the Prince of Wales's Theatre in 1875. *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* assured its readers that 'The principal success of the evening was obtained by Miss Ellen Terry, whose *Portia* will assuredly long be remembered for the grace, intelligence, and charm with which this skilful actress invested it.'<sup>4</sup> *Fun* claimed that here was a 'Portia who looks like a picture by Leighton,'<sup>5</sup> though she was in fact dressed by her former lover, the architect and designer Edward Godwin. *Punch*, in unusually earnest mode, found Terry 'such a *Portia* ... as this generation, at least, has not witnessed ... a *Portia* worthy of SHAKESPEARE.'<sup>6</sup> Terry was, as Katharine Cockin claims in her introduction, 'a touchstone of cultural capital' (Volume 3, p. xi), at home amongst the artists who worked for the Lyceum, and pre-eminently a 'painter's actress' as her friend Graham Robertson described her. Terry brought talent, charm – ever an ambivalent gift as far as she was concerned – and an enduring popularity to the Lyceum, as well as an absent-mindedness which frequently tried Irving's and his manager Bram Stoker's patience. Terry was an important link to the aesthetes and 'new' artists of the fin de siècle: Oscar Wilde wrote of her performance as *Portia* that 'No woman Veronese looked upon/ Was half so fair as thou whom I behold'. She thus ensured that the Lyceum maintained an avant-garde audience alongside the society leaders and politicians who also frequented it.

Herbert Beerbohm Tree, as Victor Emeljanow's volume makes clear, was often seen, and indeed saw himself, as both Irving's rival and his successor. At both the Haymarket and Her (later His) Majesty's theatres, Tree drew massive audiences to his popular Shakespeare productions, as well as to his other enormously varied productions. Tree was acclaimed as a great character actor who created a number of original roles, most notably Svengali in Paul Potter's adaptation of George du Maurier's best-selling novel *Trilby*. Unlike Irving, Tree was also committed to showcasing the work of new writers, and especially European playwrights, including Henrik Ibsen, the most notorious of the new writers of the fin de siècle, whose *An Enemy of the People* Tree premiered in 1893, in the same year as Tree produced Oscar Wilde's *A Woman of No Importance*. (*An Ideal Husband* also premiered at the Haymarket in 1895, but Tree did not take a role in the play.)

Tree was happily embedded in his cultural moment, and used his influence to promote the new theatre, as well as to promote new acting talent in his establishment of the Royal Academy for Dramatic Art in 1904, which still exists and is best known by its acronym, RADA. Irving, by contrast, was famously in dispute with one of the new playwrights of the 1890s, George Bernard Shaw, who was also a theatre critic, and who refused to offer the Lyceum and its head the

accolades usually given by contemporary newspapers. It is more than likely that Shaw felt rebuffed by Irving, for whom he had written a play, and resentful of Terry's loyalty to her partner, but this acrimonious relationship also betokens something of Irving's iconoclastic and independent mode: he might have been a cultural leader of his time, but when those times changed, Irving found it difficult to adapt, and ended his days touring with the same plays that had made him great twenty years earlier. Irving died in Bradford in 1905 after a performance of Tennyson's *Becket*, leaving just in excess of £20,000 in his will. Dying twelve years later, Tree left twice that amount.

Tree was innovative too in his response to modern media, becoming the first actor to perform Shakespeare on film when he was filmed in *King John* in 1899. He went on to be involved in films of *The Tempest*, *Henry VIII* and *Macbeth*. His commitment to popular media and modes went a long way to ensuring the success of his many Shakespeare productions, and ensuring too that his would be a name to rank alongside Irving's. His appearing alongside Ellen Terry in his revival of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in 1902 must have been a bitter-sweet moment for all concerned.

What distinguishes this group of actors from those already covered in earlier sets of 'Lives of Shakespearian Actors' are the conditions within which they worked. The 1880s and particularly the 1890s were decades of significant social, political and aesthetic innovation and change, which could not but impact upon the world of the theatre; indeed, theatre really came into its own at this time as one of the primary agents and fora of cultural developments. The popular outrage that greeted the introduction of Ibsen's plays onto the British stage is well known, as is the excitement of the 'Ibsenites' who relished his challenge to both dramatic and social conventions. Productions of Shakespeare were not immune to the incursions of the new theatre. The two most famous actresses on the European and world stage at that time, apart from Ellen Terry, were Sarah Bernhardt and Eleanora Duse. Both represented a new theatre aesthetic, and both of them appeared in Shakespearian roles: Bernhardt played Lady Macbeth (as had many European actresses before her) in 1884, Cleopatra (Sardou's rather than Shakespeare's) in 1892 and Hamlet in 1899; Duse appeared as Cleopatra in 1893. This role was also played by the English Janet Achurch, one of the new wave of political actresses, in 1897. In 1893, an all-female cast produced *As You Like It* at the Prince of Wales's Theatre. With the exception of Bernhardt's Hamlet, which was a popular and critical success, none of these productions really won over the main London critics, perhaps because their more traditional ideas of Shakespeare acting were being challenged. What is clear, however, is that Shakespeare, far from being ousted as representative of an outmoded theatrical practice, maintains his position within the new theatre; indeed Shakespeare comes to seem a valuable acquisition within that theatre, a persistent marker of achievement in a

new dramatic world. Within this world, the Lyceum partnership of Irving and Terry, and Tree at his theatres enjoyed larger audiences and longer runs than ever before, benefiting perhaps from the reinvigoration of interest in the theatre that Ibsen provoked, and from the newly literate and aspirational classes created by the introduction of universal primary education in 1870. These classes were now coming to maturity in a more democratic age in which cultural pursuits were increasingly open to them. Terry and Tree embraced this new age and its playwrights more enthusiastically than did Irving, but all three nonetheless conspicuously persisted, aided by Shakespeare, as emblems of cultural value well into the new century.

#### Notes

1. T. C. Davis, *The Economics of the British Stage, 1800–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 222.
2. E. Terry, *The Story of My Life* (London: Hutchinson, 1908), p. 66.
3. See Robertson Davies's article on Henry Irving for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (<http://www.oxforddnb.com>) for comments on *Cymbeline* and *Coriolanus*. For a full list of Irving's parts, see Appendix B in Laurence Irving's biography of his grandfather, *Henry Irving: The Actor and His World* (1951; London: Columbus, 1989), pp. 685–709.
4. 'The Merchant of Venice', *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* (24 April 1875), p. 8.
5. 'The "Merchant of Venice". A Tale of Tottenham Court Road', *Fun* (1 May 1875), p. 181.
6. 'At the Prince of Wales's', *Punch* (1 May 1875), p. 186.



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The journey towards the completion of this volume has been an arduous one, complicated by the sheer immensity of Beerbohm Tree's output. Unlike some of his other distinguished colleagues, Tree's journey is almost entirely documented in the newspaper interviews he gave and the critical responses within the media to his productions. This has entailed the often soul-searching task of selectivity and inevitable compromise.

My own journey has been made easier by the support and encouragement of a number of people, in particular my academic colleagues, Jim Davis at the University of Warwick and Gillian Arrighi at the University of Newcastle. They have provided assistance in times of need and critical advice that helped spur me on. Heather Romaine, the Keeper of the Theatre Archives at the University of Bristol, generously gave me the details of the large additions to the extraordinary Beerbohm Tree Collection held by the university.

I should also like to thank Gail Marshall, the General Editor of the Lives of Shakespearian Actors series, who invited me to participate and who, I hope, will be reasonably pleased with the result; and of course the editorial and production staff of Pickering & Chatto, who had to cope with delays and the unenviable task of coming to terms with often unreproducible newspaper originals.

Finally, a warm tribute to my family, who patiently allowed me the time and space needed to complete the task.



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## INTRODUCTION

Herbert Beerbohm Tree (1852–1917) was the embodiment of an enigma, a quality which informed both his professional and private lives, aspects which he assiduously kept discrete. Ambiguity and contradiction were conditions, however, in which he revelled, much to the dismay of many critics. As W. L. Courtney stated, ‘He was good when you anticipated a relative failure; poor, when you would have wagered on his success’.<sup>1</sup> He was denigrated for the ostentatious displays and spectacular interpolations that marked his Shakespeare productions, and universally acclaimed for his mastery of character transformation. He infuriated his acting colleagues with his apparent disregard for their welfare during rehearsal: Oscar Asche who worked with Tree as an actor and occasional producer describes his approach to rehearsal:

Tree never seemed to incline to work till after midnight. I know that the few days preceding production I was on His Majesty’s stage from 12 noon until 6.30 the following morning. Tree would look in just before lunch for about ten minutes. His next appearance would be about nine, after dinner. He would rehearse for two hours, and then to supper. At 1 a.m. he would turn up again, fresh and cheery and say: ‘Come, let’s do some *work*’.<sup>2</sup>

All, however, were charmed by his generosity, his wit and his capacity to elicit good performances, sometimes stellar ones, from them.

The private persona was as much of a performance as his public face on stage. He deliberately cultivated an air of vagueness and eccentricity that masked a shrewd mind and a keen understanding of contemporary movements in the theatre and in society, both nationally and internationally. He used the medium of print to vindicate and explain his aesthetic and managerial principles with a doggedness and flamboyance that eclipsed any of his predecessors. He went on record as dismissing the need for reading by an actor, yet his private rooms in the Dome of Her (His) Majesty’s was lined with books. His programme notes for his productions demonstrated an understanding of theatre history. He was quoted as denying that acting could be taught though he had worked with acting teachers like Hermann Vezin and was responsible for founding the Academy of Dramatic Art (later RADA) in 1904.

Some of these contradictions can perhaps be explained by his deliberate policy of elusiveness. He disliked being pinned down and categorized – hence his irritation at being called a ‘character actor’. His attitude toward marriage and stable relations was equally ambiguous. He had married a highly intelligent and attractive woman, Maud Holt, herself a witty social hostess and a not untalented actress. They had three daughters and all the appearances of a solid relationship. Yet as Tree said to the young Hesketh Pearson, later his biographer, ‘Love keeps you young, matrimony makes you old. Love should never be allowed to disturb the excellent economic foundation of the domestic hearth.’<sup>3</sup> That conversation took place in 1910 during the run of *Henry VIII*, by which time Tree had fathered six children with May Pinney, in a morganatic relationship that lasted from 1892 until his death in 1917. It is therefore little wonder that he created an obfuscatory persona for himself which was as cast iron as his creations on stage.

### Biography

During his lifetime biographical accounts were confined to overviews of his achievements as a performer or producer. Largely they took the form of dry statements of fact, like the account in John Parker’s *Who’s Who in the Theatre*, the first edition of which appeared in 1912. From time to time these were fleshed out into laudatory occasional articles. Probably the earliest substantial account was that of Arthur Goddard in 1891 and Austin Fryers’s in 1906.<sup>4</sup> Most of the information, however, was in the public domain, assisted by Tree’s ongoing and close relationship with journalists and editors. The only full-length monograph to appear during Tree’s lifetime was that by Mrs George (Marion) Cran in 1907.<sup>5</sup> Although essentially impressionistic and written apparently with Tree’s blessing, her account includes some early insights into Tree’s elusive personality. She introduces her volume with a consideration of ‘The Man’:

... few public men are capable of inspiring such violent and differing opinions ... To some he is the ‘pre-Raphaelite of the Drama’ ... the splendid vampire who draws beauty from the veins of history ... To others again, he is the ‘astute merchant of the Drama,’ *blagueur*, *poseur*, a whited sepulchre of Art.

She goes on to describe Tree personally as:

A man of rapt poetical demeanour, with an incandescent brain ... a man whose eyes can gloom and dream so as to make one forget the slur of the pale eye lashes ... a man of glittering courtesies rather than foreboding sympathies; a man who smiles very sweetly, but has, nevertheless, cased in the white teeth, a tongue of steel, of terror – so witty and so keen.<sup>6</sup>

Yet even here a note of controversy intrudes. She asserts that Tree was born on 17 December 1853. Later biographers place his date of birth exactly a year ear-

lier (so Hesketh Pearson in 1956) or 28 January 1852 (so Madeleine Bingham in 1978).<sup>7</sup> Thereafter Cran's account traces Tree's career from his early days, his management of the Haymarket Theatre and of Her (His) Majesty's Theatre up to 1906, to the production of *Antony and Cleopatra* and the invitation by the Kaiser for Tree to take his company to Berlin. She also gives a reasonably full account of some of the staging controversies surrounding his production of *The Tempest* and other plays.<sup>8</sup>

Tree's sudden death in 1917 sparked a brief flurry of retrospective evaluations, the most substantial of which was his half-brother Max Beerbohm's compilation, which appeared in 1920 and featured chapters by Shaw, W. L. Courtney, Desmond MacCarthy, L. N. Parker and others together with a plangent account by his widow, Maud, of their life together.<sup>9</sup> Thereafter, a full coverage of Tree's life and career would not be undertaken until that of Hesketh Pearson in 1956.<sup>10</sup> In the meantime comments about Tree were confined to memoirs by performers and others who had worked with him. Thus, for example, W. H. Leverton, for many years the box-office manager of the Haymarket, contributed an account from the perspective of a person concerned with the financial position of the theatre;<sup>11</sup> Joe Graham provided a rather jaundiced view and took issue with Tree's celebrity status:

The modern craze for publicity ... the imperative necessity of not missing a single momentous gathering of whatever nature ... leaves but a scant opportunity for the sober, earnest application to their public duties, which with former generations of actors, stood supreme.

He also disapproved of Tree's

Touch of amateurism, and there can be little doubt that a year or two with a good stock company in his early days would have imparted a breadth and finish to his later work.<sup>12</sup>

Joseph Harker, who had been Tree's main designer at the Haymarket and Her (His) Majesty's since the production of *Hypatia* in 1893, wrote a less than illuminating account of his sixteen years with Tree,<sup>13</sup> while Chance Newton, the drama critic for the *Referee*, devoted a chapter called 'Tales of Tree' in his *Cues and Curtain Calls* which set the style of fond remembrance by anecdote that largely dominated post-mortem evaluations.<sup>14</sup> Even performers who had worked with Tree were not immune to the effects of a roseate nostalgia despite their evident experience of the difficulties they had endured. Julia Neilson, for example, was part of Tree's Haymarket company from 1889, stayed with him for five years and scored her first success as Drusilla Ives in Henry Arthur Jones's *The Dancing Girl* in 1891:

From the beginning to end of my association with Tree I found him a wonderful man to work with. In every way he helped me to develop my capabilities ... He did not

merely give orders to obey, but furnished one with the material on which to work in future parts.

She was also aware of a darker side to Tree. She describes Tree's private rooms in the Dome of His Majesty's Theatre:

It was a scene, often, of lavish hospitalities but it also housed the lonely spirit of a man avid for public acclamation, forever swinging between the extremes of satisfaction and discontent; it was the shell of those aspects of himself that pride bade him conceal from his watchful public ... it was not a very happy place.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly Constance Collier, who had enjoyed great acclaim as Pallas Athena in *Ulysses*, Nancy in *Oliver Twist*, and pre-eminently Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra*, described Tree's 'fantastic and commanding personality' as well as the chaotic management of a man 'who did not believe in order or form' and whose 'sense of fun and fantasy were abnormal. He had fairies in his brain and the heart of a schoolboy. I have even known him to ring door-bells and run away'.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, she was aware of Tree's extremes in behaviour as manager and actor as well as of his deficiencies: his growing lack of interest in a role during the long run of a play, his inability to remember lines which had backstage staff scrambling to write cues on a blackboard, his love of playing heroic roles and the disadvantages of his voice and body which sometimes detracted from his performances of them. Yet both descriptions of Tree were now starting to sound similar: affectionate tolerance tempered by good-natured, remembered exasperation. Owen Nares on the other hand offered a more hard-edged view. He had been asked to play Prince Hal in Tree's 1914 revival of *1 Henry IV*: the experience 'nearly drove me insane'.<sup>17</sup>

Part of the difficulty in pursuing a greater in-depth investigation of Tree's life and career in the period up to World War 2 stemmed from the fact that his widow, Maud, was alive, as were his three daughters, together with the six children of his relationship with May Pinney. Thus biographers had to tread carefully. Maud Tree would not die until 1937 after resuming a successful career which included film and high comedy; Viola Tree continued her career as a theatre manager and performer especially in light comedies until her death in 1938; Felicity Tree left the stage early when she married Sir Geoffrey Cory-Wright in 1915 but would live until 1978, while Iris Tree, the least conventional of the sisters, died in 1968. Thus Walter Macqueen-Pope, writing in the immediate post-World War 2 environment of austerity measures and rebuilding in London, drew attention to the Edwardian period, one whose passing he mourned for its vanished glamour, wealth and sense of certainty in the centre of which he placed Tree. His evaluation of Tree is hyperbolic:

That night of 29<sup>th</sup> April 1897 [the opening of Her Majesty's Theatre] was a red letter one in British Theatre annals marking the apex of an era, the continuation of a reign which was to succeed Irving ... For on that night Herbert Beerbohm Tree threw open the doors of his own home to his guests, the public, and a period of greatness ... had begun.<sup>18</sup>

Though he had in fact seen some of Tree's productions as a young man, his panegyric does little more than scratch the surface of Tree's accomplishments. His account is really an expression of his own agenda, which sought to contrast the grey awfulness of present-day London with the polychromatic hues of a remembered past. His account was not one to which the Tree family could possibly take exception.

The first full-length biography of Tree was that by Hesketh Pearson, who had the advantages of a background of performance and employment by Tree as well as the support of Tree's family, Felicity, Iris and Viola Tree's son. The book is authoritative, if infuriatingly unreferenced, and still remains the point of departure for any study of Tree.<sup>19</sup> His biography used hitherto unavailable letters with the permission of the family and covers Tree's career with authority and the eccentricity of his personality with insight:

Some critics used to accuse Tree of being a charlatan ... The charlatanry of actors is more obvious solely on account of their profession, which is one of pretence. Tree could not help acting off the stage as well as on it. In his early days as a manager he had cultivated a vague manner, an absent mind and a dreamy form of speech, simply as a protection against importunity. This became his second nature ...<sup>20</sup>

By now the details of Tree's career as an actor and producer were well documented through the memoirs of fellow actors and co-workers, Tree's own writings and the anthologies of theatre critics like Shaw, H. M. Wallbrook, St John Ervine and Desmond MacCarthy. The public display of his personality continued to resonate through well-remembered bon mots and anecdotes. By 1978, however, biographical interest had shifted to the exploration of Tree's other and only partially clandestine life: his relationships with Constance Collier, Muriel Ridley and, pre-eminently, May Pinney. Madeleine Bingham's biography attempts to do just that with relative success.<sup>21</sup> The last of the Tree sisters, Felicity, died in 1978; Carol Reed, the most distinguished of Tree's illegitimate children, who had maintained a tight-lipped reticence about his parentage, in 1976. Bingham was thus able to have access to notebooks and diaries that revealed Tree's alternative life although she was prevented from quoting the material directly. Oliver Reed, however, writing in 1979, was disarmingly direct about his grandmother, May Pinney, and took pride in his parentage, offering a glimpse of an extraordinary woman.<sup>22</sup> Further glimpses would appear in biographies of Carol Reed and of actors like Claude Rains.<sup>23</sup> The most recent exploration of Tree's relationships with women is Isolde

Wigram's edited account of her mother Olivia Truman's love affair with Tree, which lasted from 1904 until his death in 1917. The account succeeds in knitting together some of the disparate strands of Tree's two families since Truman knew and was on friendly terms with both Maud Tree and May Pinney.

Scholarly investigations have focused largely on specific productions, Tree's Shakespeare Festivals and his theatrical experiments with playwrights like Ibsen, Maeterlinck and Brioux as well as on the battle engaged between Tree and the modernist rejections of spectacular Shakespearian staging identified with William Poel and Harley Granville-Barker. These investigations are referenced in this volume below. Certainly the overviews of Tree's work had appeared in the books of J. C. Trewin, Wilson Knight and Gordon Crosse but much of the detailed investigation is to be found in unpublished PhD theses like Douglas Berry's *Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree at His Majesty's Theatre 1897–1914: The Edwardian Theatrical Experience* (Ohio State University, 1976), David Schultz's *Spectacular Feasts: Herbert Beerbohm Tree in the Mise-en-Scene of Consumption* (University of Washington, 1995), Cary Mazer's *Shakespeare and Edwardian Scenography: The Evolution of a Theatrical Style* (Columbia University, 1980) and the monumental coverage of all Tree's Shakespeare productions in Barbara Kachur's *Herbert Beerbohm Tree: Shakespearean Actor-Manager* (Ohio State University, 1986), which offers the most wide-ranging and thorough coverage of all Tree's Shakespearian productions. Finally, modern Tree scholars have access to the extraordinary archive housed in the Beerbohm Tree Collection at the University of Bristol. This collection offers prompt books of his productions, financial ledger books, correspondence and press clippings covering Tree's career. Purchased originally in 1973, it has been augmented by a vast personal collection of letters and memorabilia from the Tree family. The letters alone number some 13,500, and though acquired from the family in 1982, the collection has not been fully catalogued.

### Tree as an Actor

Writing in response to a request to outline his views on acting in 1897, Tree stated his position. It is one of principle and practice which he would maintain throughout his career and is therefore worth quoting extensively:

It has always seemed to me that acting is not the mere reproduction of a personality, and that the higher aim of the artist is to let his personality be subservient to the part he is playing ... I for one decline to admit the opposite contention [which is that] ... the literary artist should make all his characters act and talk as he himself would act and talk. It seems to me that the actor should possess so supple a nature that he would be able to play any part for which his physique does not render him unfit. To do that he must have the courage of his convictions, for in essaying any role with which he has not already familiarised the public, he will be opposed by the advocates of the vested

rights of tradition – he will be warned that he must not enter the new domain and he will have to fight his way step by step ...

Good acting is of more necessity than beauty of person ... To present in a flash the heart of an incident is one of the most important qualifications of the actor. So far as I can judge, there is only one way to act, and that is by impersonation ... We used to have 'the heavy man,' the 'leading man,' the 'light comedian,' and the 'utility man'; the 'leading lady,' and the 'heavy lady.' And it was once a serious matter if any one of these entrenched on the province of the other. There is now a tendency to merge these departments. There is another cant expression which I should be glad to see eliminated from the dictionary of acting – that is 'character acting.' All acting is character acting, or ought to be.

The very alpha and omega of dramatic art is illusion. Everything which tends to add illusion, to stimulate the imagination of the audience is legitimate on the stage; everything that detracts illusion is illegitimate.<sup>24</sup>

Some of the values Tree expressed might appear to us as proto-Stanislavskian, particularly the disappearance of the actor into the persona of the character, fashioning it by the study of the 'given circumstances' of the play. This, however, should not be taken too far. Tree would not have been interested in the inner life of the character, although he was well aware that the behaviour of the characters he was playing demanded the selection of specific physical qualities and appropriate mannerisms. His objection to being labelled a 'character actor' (which he most certainly was) stemmed from a categorisation that appeared to perpetuate the 'lines of business' he identifies in this passage, stereotypes of performance which his own practice showed up as patently inadequate. Despite his protestations about personality, one of the ironies lay in the fact that, in life, he carefully cultivated a personality role, full of unexpected eccentricity, which would serve him well with audiences and journalists alike. Thus Tree's aim was to perfect a performance that rendered him invisible. Some critics, particularly those who knew him well, felt that he wasn't entirely successful in masking himself, but these were few compared to the vast majority who responded to his mastery of the 'otherness' of his roles.

Obviously the roles in which Tree was most comfortable were those that emphasized his transformative ability: most of these were in plays other than Shakespeare's. Had Tree confined himself to exploring new plays or even reviving the classical comedy repertoire, he would have been characterized as a showman, showing himself off in roles like Fagin, Micawber, Nero, Ulysses or Sir Peter Teazle in *The School for Scandal*. The problem came when he attempted to cross over to Shakespeare, bringing with him his non-Shakespearian expertise. In so doing, showmanship by itself was inadequate to do justice to the roles. He was also challenging the 'vested rights of tradition' in a way that threatened to expose him. He was, however, nothing if not ready for the challenge. In most cases Tree was careful to choose roles that at least enabled him to demonstrate moral ambigu-

ity or disparities between intention and achievement: King John and Richard II provided good examples. In other cases he would select roles which allowed him to transform himself physically: Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Caliban in *The Tempest* or Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*. Even then he occasionally made mistakes: the Falstaff of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is not that of *Henry IV, Part 1*. As well, he faced the inevitable comparisons with Irving. In some roles he could match his predecessor with relative ease: Mephistopheles in *Faust* or Malvolio, but when he attempted Hamlet or Othello the comparison were sometimes invidious. That said, he was capable of extending and developing characters like Shylock, transforming Irving's dignified hidalgo into a passionate Hebraic seeker after vengeance in the face of Christian condescension and antagonism. But in the final analysis, Tree would be remembered for his

disguises [which] might almost be described as important features in the theatrical world of his time. People waited for them, speculated upon them, wondered how they were done ... He seemed to be able to transpose various parts of his body

but,

Having created a part in a wider sense than may be claimed by other actors, he did not like to think of anyone else copying his creations, and his understudies scarcely ever had a chance to show what they could do.<sup>25</sup>

It would seem that Tree himself was the 'alpha and omega' of a tradition of performance on stage. His acting style was *sui generis* and there would be no emulators. At the same time his founding of the Academy of Dramatic Art in 1904 would allow would-be actors to pursue a course of training which Tree himself had egregiously lacked.

### Tree as Producer/Director

Most of the details about Tree's qualities as a producer/director appear in the discussions of his various productions contained in this volume. His position within a Shakespeare theatre tradition that stretched from the elaborate revivals of John Philip Kemble at the beginning of the nineteenth century, to those of Macready and Charles Kean, Samuel Phelps and Irving has been documented in overviews by Muriel St Clare Byrne, J. C. Trewin and Gordon Crosse among others.<sup>26</sup> However, the evidence of his productions points to a far more comprehensive repertoire. Like most actor-managers dependent almost entirely upon box office returns to sustain them, Tree had to remain sensitive to the demands and tastes of his audiences. Some actor-managers were at pains to identify themselves and their theatres with particular styles, and in this regard Tree was no

different except insofar as he was prepared to take risks, even if those risks were mitigated by a confidence in his own performance that would be persuasive and surmount the possibility of rejection.

The documents that illustrate Tree's engagement with the debates surrounding the staging of Shakespeare show that West End audiences in particular had been the subject of critical jeremiads about their apathy, their lack of imagination and the fundamental irrelevance of theatregoing in their daily lives, since the middle of the nineteenth century. This had discouraged new playwrights from treading other than a formulaic path to uncertain success.<sup>27</sup> Tree, however, would have none of that. He prefaced his chapter on 'The Living Shakespeare' as late as 1915 with the dictum 'Abuse of the public is the last ditch of the disappointed.'<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, this was a position that he had made as early as 1890, when he was in his first three years as manager of the Haymarket Theatre. In his article 'Public taste and popular plays' he distanced himself from the emerging dogma of deteriorating public taste.<sup>29</sup> He showed himself as understanding and appreciating the appeal of popular theatre forms like burlesque, melodrama and farce. People 'love [in melodrama] to see the justice which they do not always get, and the virtue they do not always practise' and agreed that the 'Gaiety burlesque is the most representative entertainment of the English stage'. At the same time he was aware that 'the public demand absolute exactitude, they delight in photographic accuracy, and are satisfied if the thing produced exactly resembles the original without stopping to think whether the original was worth the trouble of reproduction'. He recognized that this might have 'a numbing effect on the imagination' and thus he sought to balance it with what he defined as idealism 'that takes people out of themselves because they are plunged into a world which bears no resemblance to the one in which they daily move'. It was this balance that he would try to maintain throughout his career. Sometimes he misjudged his audience and sometimes his ego led his judgement astray, but even Tree's failures demonstrated an unswerving stylistic consistency. To him they served merely as an inspiration to tackle the next hurdle.

### The End of a Career: American Perspectives

Tree ended his career in America: after his return to England in 1917, he was dead before he could engage in further theatrical ventures. His three visits in 1895, 1896 and 1916 had none of the triumphalist progressions that accompanied Irving's eight American tours. By the time Tree decided on his first tour, Irving had already visited on four occasions and would tour again in September 1895 just before Tree's second visit. This placed Tree on a potential collision course. Any attempt to challenge Irving would be extremely hazardous yet Tree curiously seems to have misjudged the acumen of American theatre critics as well

as the experience of American audiences. He also seems to have misjudged the fact that actors like Edwin Booth, Richard Mansfield and James Hackett as well as producers like David Belasco had explored the same kind of repertoire that Tree brought with him and the same kind of production values. Thus reactions to Tree's visits offer a sobering evaluation that often runs counter to the sometimes uncritical and adulatory reception he enjoyed in England.

Tree completed three tours, in January to April 1895, October 1896 to January 1897 and from late 1915 to June 1916, although he would prolong his stay until April 1917. On his first visit he took a repertoire that essentially demonstrated the range of his abilities: *The Red Lamp* and *The Ballad Monger* that enabled him to show contrasting characters on the same night, the ex-bushranger Captain Swift, Philip Marchant, the corrupt financier in Grundy's *A Bunch of Violets*, and Dr Stockmann in Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*. He also took two Shakespeare plays, *Hamlet* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Tree, however, may have underestimated the speed with which new plays crossed the Atlantic. John Ranken Towse, the *New York Evening Post* critic, could compare Tree's performance of Gringoire in *The Ballad Monger* with those of Coquelin and Lawrence Barrett and decided that Tree 'lacked the humor of the one and the fire of the other', while even Tree's performance as Captain Swift had been anticipated by Maurice Barrymore whose portrayal of the romantic, he thought, was better.<sup>30</sup> While Tree's choice of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was there to show his transformative ability, *Hamlet* was a rather different proposition. Towse dismissed his performance on the grounds that his 'appeal to the heart and brain [was] utterly disregarded for the sake of superficial, conventional and melodramatic expedients'.<sup>31</sup> Such sentiments were echoed by William Winter, the long-time drama critic of the *New York Tribune*. He found Tree's performance 'devoid of poetic emotion' and concluded that 'the full effect of sublimity, terror, grief, pathos, passion and delirium cannot be produced by an actor whose face lacks mobility, whose temperament is cold, and whose voice is hollow and inflexible'.<sup>32</sup> Not all critics, however, were as dismissive, although they did comment of Tree's unfortunate choice of repertoire.<sup>33</sup> Even the non-Shakespearian roles seemed old-fashioned: *The Red Lamp*, for example, was 'like any other Russian melodrama ... Tolstoi was not read when *The Red Lamp* was written. That makes all the difference'.<sup>34</sup> American journalists, however, did respond to Tree's personality and versatility and his hugely popular reception and at least one reviewer anticipated the creative principles that Tree would elucidate in 1897: 'He does not try to sink his part, whatever it may be, in his own character. His constant effort is to be himself, for the time being, in the part he plays'.<sup>35</sup> Overall the critics were underwhelmed:

Such glowing accounts of Mr. Beerbohm Tree's powers as an actor had reached this country before he made his American debut, that only a genius of the first order could have saved us from disappointment ... When we are told that, in London, Beerbohm Tree was considered the successor of Henry Irving, we raised our hopes very high, and we were proportionally disappointed. But the injudicious puffery that had preceded the actor, and that he did not reach the standard of our expectations, should not blind us to the fact that Mr. Tree is no ordinary actor ... that each one of his performances is worked out by the brain of a man of power and that in the art of makeup he has no equal on the stage.<sup>36</sup>

Tree however, had acquired a property during his stay that would prove a goldmine: Paul Potter's adaptation of George du Maurier's *Trilby*.

When Tree returned in 1896 he brought *Trilby* with him, together with *Hamlet*, *The Dancing Girl*, *The Ballad Monger* yet again, and used the tour to trial Gilbert Parker's *The Seats of the Mighty*, with which he intended to open his new theatre, Her Majesty's in 1897. Perhaps arrangements had gone too far in this matter but he might have heeded the critical response to the play which found it undramatic. Tree's Svengali, however, found universal favour: 'it will help make Beerbohm Tree better understood by New York Playgoers ... hereafter less will be said about his supposed lack of power.'<sup>37</sup> Even Towse responded to Tree's performance: 'The swift, noiseless catlike movements, watchful eyes, and ghastly face, incessant restlessness, and the curiously skilful blend of fawning and arrogance contributed to an abnormal ... individuality which will long live in the memory.'<sup>38</sup> Alan Dale, however, with a reputation for his caustic attacks on what he perceived to be an actor's deficiencies, found when reviewing *The Dancing Girl* that 'Tree is an actor, who like olives and caviar, grow upon one's appreciation. Right here, however, I must say that he has not grown upon me. I have deliberately tried to fathom his alleged greatness, to observe something subtle, eerie, and out of the ordinary about his acting. The task has been quite impossible'. He also objected to Tree's diction: 'Mr. Tree chews off the end of his words, biting his sentences into bits, and utters his sibilants with his tongue between his teeth.'<sup>39</sup>

The third tour, which included Tree's productions of *Henry VIII*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Colonel Newcome*, coincided with the Shakespeare tercentenary in which he would also be involved.<sup>40</sup> *Henry VIII*, was respectfully received for its elaborate staging, but his most enthusiastic reactions were reserved for *The Merchant of Venice*: 'Tree does his best acting as Shylock' was the headline of the *New York Journal of Commerce's* review on 9 May 1916. 'By making Shylock strongly racist he gives the character a reality that Irving, with all his impressiveness, never achieved,' wrote Charles Darnton in the *New York Evening World* on the same day. Tree was able to give his eldest son a role as the Prince of Morocco, whom he introduced to his daughter Iris rather coyly as her cousin. Critics however sounded a note of caution: 'Sir Herbert's

stage settings and groupings recall the elaborate productions of Henry Irving. They are in the realistic manner now regarded as old-fashioned.<sup>41</sup> Most of his time on his third tour was split between rounds of speeches made on behalf of English efforts to persuade America to join the war effort and his visit to Hollywood to film *Macbeth*. There he met D. W. Griffith, whom he admired.<sup>42</sup> The film medium made a considerable impression on Tree. He was astonished at 'the pains taken to secure archaeological accuracy ... [which] goes beyond anything hitherto known to stage producers' and felt that 'history and geography will be largely taught through this fascinating medium'.<sup>43</sup>

It is tempting to hypothesize about what Tree would have done had he lived. After all, he had no intention of dying. He would perhaps have found it difficult to return to His Majesty's Theatre since Oscar Asche had installed his production of *Chu Chin Chow* there in 1916, and it would continue an astonishing five-year run until 1921. Tree had invested in the production, and his earnings as lessee of the theatre were considerable. The American press had suggested that his values of elaborate illustration were now old-fashioned. Moreover wartime austerity meant that financial backing on the scale that Tree demanded was no longer available, and there was evidence that the era of the actor-manager was coming to an end. Thus he may well have interested himself in the film medium which alone seemed to be able to perpetuate the values he had espoused all of his professional life.

The focus of this volume is on the diversity and complexity of Beerbohm Tree's huge output. Unlike Edmund Kean or Henry Irving, whose work generated a body of critical attention and analysis, responses to Tree's work are almost entirely contained in the articles, interviews and reviews of his work to be found in newspapers and journals, many of which are included in this volume. It might be argued that Tree really marked the end of the line rather than the beginning of anything new, yet his output (only part of his over ninety productions has been covered here) demonstrates a sense of adventure and excitement that has few parallels. Thus it is important to place Tree's Shakespeare productions within the context of his non-Shakespearian roles which coloured his performances in order to demonstrate the complex skein of interactions that took place throughout his career.

#### Notes

1. W. L. Courtney, 'An Open Letter to an American Friend', *Fortnightly Review* (August 1917), reprinted in M. Beerbohm (ed.), *Herbert Beerbohm Tree: Some Memories of him and his Art* (London: Hutchinson, 1920), p. 253. William Leonard Courtney (1850–1928) was a lecturer in philosophy at New College, Oxford and a journalist for thirty-eight years. He was the chief drama critic for the *Daily Telegraph* from the mid-1890s to 1925. *ODNB*.
2. O. Asche, *Oscar Asche: His Life* (London: Hurst and Blackett, [1929]), p. 98.
3. I. Hunter, *Nothing to Repent: The Life of Hesketh Pearson* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987), p. 59.

4. A. Goddard, 'Herbert Beerbohm Tree', *Players of the Period* (London: Dean and Son, 1891), pp. 185–238. A. Fryers, 'Herbert Beerbohm Tree: An Appreciation', appeared in the *English Illustrated Magazine*, 38 (May 1906), pp. 174–80.
5. (Marion) Cran (1875–1942) trained as a nurse but spent a considerable part of her life as an investigative journalist reporting on such issues as the condition of women in north-west Canada and conditions of migration within the Empire. She travelled widely and wrote extensively about gardening from the 1920s. See 'Mrs. F. S. Hurd-Wood: Marion Cran the Author', *The Times* obituary (3 September 1942), p. 7.
6. G. Cran, *Herbert Beerbohm Tree* (London: John Lane, 1907), pp. 1–3.
7. Barbara Kachur accepts the 1852 date in the authoritative entry 'Herbert Beerbohm Tree', in the *ODNB*.
8. Some of this is reproduced below under the Shakespeare Staging Debates section, pp. 175–90.
9. Beerbohm (ed.), *Herbert Beerbohm Tree*.
10. On Pearson, see 'Obituaries and Career Evaluations', pp. 357–61, below.
11. W. H. Leverton, *Through the Box Office Window* (London: Werner Laurie, 1932).
12. J. Graham, *An Old Stock-Actor's Memories* (London: John Murray, 1930), pp. 204–18, on p. 217. Graham had performed extensively outside England and in the provinces and had been responsible for negotiating some of Tree's provincial tours.
13. J. Harker, *Studio and Stage* (London: Nisbet, 1924).
14. H. Chance Newton, *Cues and Curtain Calls* (London: John Lane, 1927), pp. 113–54.
15. J. Neilson, *This for Remembrance* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1940), pp. 50 and 48 respectively. Julia Neilson (1868–1957) gained initial experience as a singer at the Royal Academy of Music. She married Fred Terry whom she had met as a fellow actor under Tree. After her five years at the Haymarket she returned to play Constance in *King John* and Oberon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for him. From 1900 she and Terry went into joint management and she became identified with the role of Lady Blakeney in the adaptation of *The Scarlet Pimpernel*.
16. C. Collier, *Harlequinade: The Story of My Life* (London: John Lane, 1929), p. 96.
17. For more details about Nares and his experiences with Tree, see 'Shakespearean Performances', p. 81 below.
18. W. Macqueen-Pope, *Carriages at Eleven; The Story of the Edwardian Theatre* (London: Hutchinson, 1947), p. 31.
19. See 'Obituaries and Career Evaluations', 357–61 below.
20. H. Pearson, *Beerbohm Tree; His Life and Laughter* (New York: Harper, 1956 [1971]), p. 111.
21. M. Bingham, *The Great Lover: The life and Art of Herbert Beerbohm Tree* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978).
22. O. Reed, *Reed All About Me* (London: W. H. Allen, 1979), p. 41–58.
23. N. Wapshott, *The Man Between: A Biography of Carol Reed* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1990) and D. J. Skall and J. Rains, *Claude Rains, An Actor's Voice* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2008). Rains had been an extra in Tree's production of *Herod*, would serve as a call-boy, and end his association with Tree as an assistant stage manager for *Henry VIII* in 1910. His unpublished autobiography has a number of scabrous and possibly apocryphal anecdotes about Tree's involvement with women.
24. J. Hammerton, 'Herbert Beerbohm Tree', *The Actor's Art* (London: George Redway, 1897), pp. 154–5.
25. Pearson, *Beerbohm Tree*, p. 196.

26. M. St Clare Byrne, 'Fifty Years of Shakespearian Production', *Shakespeare Survey*, 2 (1949) p. 1–20; J. C. Trewin, *Shakespeare on the English Stage 1900–1964* (London: Barrie and Rockcliff, 1964); G. Crosse, *Shakespearean Playgoing 1890–1952* (London: Mowbray, 1953). These have been augmented by more recent work like M. R. Booth's *Victorian Spectacular Theatre 1850–1910* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), G. Marshall and A. Poole (eds), *Victorian Shakespeare: Theatre, Drama and Performance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), and R. Foulkes, *Performing Shakespeare in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
27. Such deep-seated pessimism about audiences persisted into the Edwardian period in, for example, E. Aria's 'About Playgoers', *Nineteenth Century*, 52:305 (July 1902), pp. 76–83.
28. H. Beerbohm Tree, 'The Living Shakespeare', *Thoughts and Aferthoughts* (London: Cassell, 1915), p. 39.
29. H. Beerbohm Tree, 'Public Taste and Popular Plays', *Treasure Trove* (29 October 1890), p. 38.
30. J. R. Towse, *Sixty Years of the Theater* (New York: Funk and Wagnall, 1916), p. 440. Towse (1845–1933) served as the drama critic on the *New York Evening Post* from 1874 to 1927. See T. J. Miller, 'John Ranken Towse: Last of the Victorian Critics', *Educational Theatre Journal*, 22 (May 1970), p. 161–78.
31. Towse, *Sixty Years*, p. 444.
32. W. Winter, *Shakespeare on Stage*, 1st ser. (New York: Moffat Yard, 1911, repr. Blom, 1969), p. 386–7. William Winter (1836–1917) was the *New York Tribune* drama critic 1865–1909. Highly conservative in many ways, his views paralleled those of Clement Scott in the same period. See C. J. McGaw, 'William Winter as a Drama Critic', *Educational Theatre Journal*, 4:2 (May 1952), p. 115–21.
33. *New York Times* (3 February 1895).
34. *New York Journal* (29 January 1895).
35. C. Meltzer, 'A Study of Mr. Beerbohm Tree', *New York World* (3 February 1895).
36. M. Hall (ed.), 'Gallery of Players: Beerbohm Tree', *Illustrated American*, 5 (1895), p. 26.
37. *New York Times* (15 December 1896).
38. Towse, *Sixty Years*, pp. 446–7.
39. 'The Dancing Girl', *New York Journal* (11 December 1896). 'Alan Dale' was the nom de plume of Alfred J. Cohen (1861–1925), another Englishman like Towse, who spent most of his career as a journalist for the various Hearst newspapers. Often condemned by others as being 'unjust for the sake of appearing clever fans smart', he was nonetheless by 1904 the most popular theatre critic in America. See T. J. Miller, 'Alan Dale: The Hearst Critic', *Educational Theatre Journal*, 26:1 (March 1974), pp. 69–80.
40. L. H. Knight, 'Beerbohm Tree in America', *Theatre Survey*, vol. 8 (1967), pp. 37–52 has a useful account of Tree's visit, with a particular focus on his third tour.
41. *New York Evening Telegram*, 9 May 1916.
42. On their relationship see D. Mayer, *Stage Struck Filmmaker: D. W. Griffith and the American Theatre* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009), p. 170–2.
43. Tree, 'Impressions of America', *The Times* (8 September 1916), p. 1.

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The major repository of Beerbohm Tree resources is the Herbert Beerbohm Tree Archive located at the University of Bristol, United Kingdom. It is divided into two collections: the Herbert Beerbohm Tree Archive (RA/419 1973) which contains prompt books, photographs, designs, agreements, press cuttings, some correspondence and ledgers and account books, covering Tree's managements of the Haymarket and Her (His) Majesty's theatres; the Tree Family Archive (RA/420 1982) together with its Additions (RA/267) containing largely personal correspondence. There is a further sub-set of this: the Olivia Truman correspondence (2006/008).

The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre at the University of Texas holds a large collection of material relating to the B. J. Simmons company which provided Tree with most of his costumes (HRC-PA B. J. Simmons and Co).

Material relating to the extensive collaboration between Tree and Louis Napoleon Parker is located in the Louis Napoleon Parker Papers 1869-1943 at Columbia University, New York (MS#0973).

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## CHRONOLOGY

- 1852 Born 17 December in London, the second of four children of Julius Ewald Beerbohm and Constantia Draper.
- 1870 Joins father's corn merchant business and spends time performing with amateur theatre groups.
- 1878 Assumes name Herbert Beerbohm Tree. First success as Grimaldi in Dion Boucicault's *The Life of an Actress* at the Globe Theatre, London. Joins Bijou Comedy Company for provincial tour. Employed at Olympic Theatre under the management of Henry Neville.
- 1880 Invited by Genevieve Ward to play Prince Malcotti in a revival of Herman Merivale and F. C. Grove's *Forget-me-not* (Prince of Wales's, April).
- 1882 Marries Maud Holt (16 September).
- 1883 Creates the role of Prince Borowski in Sydney Grundy's *The Glass of Fashion*, a prototypical 'polished foreign rascal' with characteristics that would inform many of his later roles (8 September).
- 1884 Plays Rev. Robert Spalding in Charles Hawtrey's *The Private Secretary* at Prince's Theatre, Coventry Street (29 March). First major London success. Follows this by playing Paolo Macari in Hugh Conway's *Called Back* (20 May).
- 1884 First contact with Ibsen, playing Philip Dunkley in Herman and Henry Arthur Jones's version of *A Doll's House* called *Breaking a Butterfly* (3 March, Prince of Wales's). Birth of first daughter, Viola (17 July).
- 1885 Created the role of Sir Mervyn Ferrand in Comyns Carr and Hugh Conway's *Dark Days*, 'painting the heartless life of a roué...in vivid colours' (26 September).
- 1886 Joins Frank Benson's company for provincial tour. Plays Sir Peter Teazle in *School for Scandal* and Iago in *Othello* in Bournemouth. Plays Baron Harzfeld in Charles Young's *Jim the Penman* (Haymarket, 25 March).
- 1887 Assumes the management of the Comedy Theatre. Opens with Outram Tristram's *The Red Lamp* playing Demetrius, the chief of police (20 April). Becomes lessee and manager of the Haymarket Theatre (September). Creates role of Gringoire in *The Ballad Monger* (15 September) with 'his alternations of wild, half-hysterical rhapsody, passionate denunciation, and fierce contempt'.
- 1888 Produces Robert Buchanan's *Partners* with Marion Terry (5 January) and Hadron Chambers's *Captain Swift* (matinee, 20 June then transferred to evening, 1 September), the first major success at the Haymarket.

- 1889 Plays Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* for series of matinees before transferring the production to evening performances (2 January). Creates the role of Matthew Ruddock in Henry Arthur Jones's *Wealth* (27 April). Plays the dual roles of Luversan and Laroque in Robert Buchanan's *A Man's Shadow* (an adaptation of Mary and Grisier's *Roger la Honte*) (12 September). Revival of Shakespeare's *King John*, a one-off performance at the Crystal Palace (19 September), the first since 1873.
- 1890 Establishes 'Special Monday Nights' as tryouts for new plays: first performance of Maeterlinck's *The Intruder* (27 January). Plays the title role in W. E. Henley and R. L. Stevenson's *Beau Austin* (3 November as part of the Monday night experiment).
- 1891 Produces Henry Arthur Jones's *The Dancing Girl*, playing the Duke of Guisebury, with Julia Neilson as Drusilla Ives (15 January). Meets Beatrice May Pinney, aged eighteen. First child with May Pinney (Claude).
- 1892 Plays Hamlet (21 January).
- 1893 Produces Stuart Ogilvie's *Hypatia*, an adaptation of Charles Kingsley's novel with designs by Alma Tadema and music by Hubert Parry. Plays Issachar (2 January). First production by a West End manager of an Ibsen play, *An Enemy of the People*, in which he played Stockmann (14 June). First production of Oscar Wilde's *A Woman of No Importance* playing Lord Illingworth (19 April). Plays the Devil in Henry Arthur Jones's *The Tempter* (20 September).
- 1894 Produces Sydney Grundy's adaptation of Octave Feuillet's *Mountjoye, A Bunch of Violets* (25 April) and Haddon Chambers's *John-a-Dreams* with Mrs Patrick Campbell (8 November).
- 1895 Birth of second daughter, Felicity. First visit to America (28 January–13 April). Command Performance at Balmoral. Produces Herman Merivale's adaptation of Sardou's *Fedora* with Mrs Patrick Campbell and Marie Bancroft (26 May) and Paul M. Potter's version of George du Maurier's *Trilby* playing Svengali, to become one of his most celebrated roles, with Dorothea Baird as Trilby (30 October).
- 1896 Plays Falstaff for the first time in *1 Henry IV* (8 May matinee). Second American tour (October 1896–January 1897).
- 1897 Birth of third daughter, Iris (January 27). Opening of Her Majesty's Theatre (28 April) with Gilbert Parker's *The Seats of the Mighty*.
- 1898 Plays Mark Antony in *Julius Caesar* (22 January) with Lewis Waller as Brutus.
- 1899 Plays Stacey Carnac in Henry Arthur Jones's *Carnac Sahib* (12 April) and the title role in *King John* with Julia Neilson and Lewis Waller (20 September). First excursion into film: excerpts from the stage production of *King John* filmed by the British Mutoscope and Biograph Company.
- 1900 Plays Bottom in his production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (10 January). Revival of *Julius Caesar* (6 September). Plays the title role in Stephen Phillips's *Herod* (31 October).
- 1901 Plays Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* with Lily Brayton (5 February and revived 7 October). It becomes one of his most popular productions. Plays Count D'Orsay in Clyde Fitch's *The Last of the Dandies* (24 October). Meets twelve-year-old Olivia Truman with whom he would have a lasting though platonic relationship until his death.

- 1902 Establishes May Pinney at 'Daisyfield', a house in Putney, the home where she would give birth to a further five children: Robin (1903), Guy (1905), Carol (1906), Juliet (1910), Peter (1911). Changes her name to Reed. Performs the title role in Stephen Phillips's *Ulysses* (1 February). Revives *Twelfth Night* (2 June) and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* with Ellen Terry and Madge Kendal (10 June) for Coronation season.
- 1903 Plays Prince Nehludof in Henry Bataille and Michael Morton's version of Tolstoy's *Resurrection* with Lena Ashwell and Oscar Asche (17 February), the title role in *Richard II* with Oscar Asche and Lily Brayton (10 September) and Zakkuri in David Belasco's *The Darling of the Gods* (28 December).
- 1904 Revivals of earlier successes. New production of *The Tempest* in which he plays Caliban with William Haviland as Prospero and Viola Tree as Ariel (14 September). Establishes Academy of Dramatic Art (later RADA).
- 1905 Plays Benedick in *Much Ado about Nothing* with Winifred Emery as Beatrice (24 January). New version of *Hamlet* without scenery at special matinee (24 March). Inaugurates Annual Shakespeare Festival (24–9 April) with performances of *Richard II* (24 April), *Twelfth Night* (25 April), *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (26 April), *Hamlet* (27 April without scenery), *Much Ado about Nothing* with Maud Tree as Beatrice (28 April), *Julius Caesar* (April 29). Plays Isidore Izard in *Business is Business*, Sydney Grundy's version of Octave Mirbeau's *Les Affaires sont les Affaires* (13 May) and Fagin in Comyns Carr's adaptation of *Oliver Twist* (season begins 4 September). *The Tempest* revived as a Christmas production (26 December).
- 1906 Plays title role in Stephen Phillips's *Nero* (25 January). Commences second Annual Shakespeare Festival (23–9 April) with performances of *The Tempest* (23 April), *1 Henry IV* (24 April), *Twelfth Night* (25 April), *Hamlet* (26 April), *Much Ado about Nothing* (27 April), *Julius Caesar* (28 April) and special matinee of *Hamlet* without scenery (29 April). Plays the title role in *Colonel Newcome*, Michael Morton's adaptation of Thackeray's *The Newcomes* (29 May and revived 29 October). Responsible for the production of *The Winter's Tale* with Ellen Terry as Hermione and Charles Warner as Leontes (2 September). Plays Antony in *Antony and Cleopatra* with Constance Collier as Cleopatra (26 December).
- 1907 Tree and his company invited by the Kaiser to perform in Berlin at the Royal Opera House: repertoire included *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Richard II*, *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Trilby* (6–21 April). Commences third Annual Shakespeare Festival (22–7 April) with performances of *The Tempest* (22 April), *The Winter's Tale* (23 April), *Twelfth Night* (24 April), *Hamlet* (24 April matinee), *Julius Caesar* (25 and 27 April matinee), *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (26, 27 April). Special revival of Wilde's *A Woman of No Importance* (22 May).
- 1908 Plays Paragot in W. J. Locke's *The Beloved Vagabond* (4 February) and Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* (4 April). Commences fourth Annual Shakespeare Festival (20–5 April) with performances of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (20 April), *Merchant of Venice* (21, 22, 23, 25 April), *Hamlet* (24 April, 25 April matinee). Opens as Mephistopheles in Stephen Phillips and J. Comyns Carr's *Faust* (6 September) and produces W. Graham Robertson's *Pinkie and the Fairies* with Ellen Terry, Marie Lohr and Mrs Patrick Campbell (19 December).

- 1909 Tree knighted (announced 25 June). Plays Sir Peter Teazle in *School for Scandal* with Marie Lohr (7 April). Commences fifth Annual Shakespeare Festival (21 June–3 July with performances of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* with Ellen Terry and Constance Collier replacing Madge Kendal (21–4 June), *Twelfth Night* (25 June), *Julius Caesar* (26, 28 June), *Hamlet* (29 June, 1 July), *Merchant of Venice* (30 June, 3 July), *Richard III* with F. R. Benson's company (30 June matinee, 2 July), *Macbeth* with Arthur Bouchier's company (3 July). Plays the High Priest in *False Gods*, J. B. Fagan's translation of Brieux's *La Foi* with Mrs. Patrick Campbell and music by Saint-Saëns (14 September). Plays the title role in L. N. Parker's adaptation of René Fauchois's *Beethoven* (25 November).
- 1910 Commences sixth Annual Shakespeare Festival (28 March–29 April) with performances of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (28 March–8, 9, 19 April), *Julius Caesar* (2, 12–15, 23 April), *Twelfth Night* (7, 9, 16, 21, 22 April), *Hamlet* (11, 14 April with H. B. Irving's company matinee, 16, 23 April), *King Lear* with Herbert Trench's company (12 April matinee), *Merchant of Venice* with Arthur Bouchier's company matinee (13 April matinee, 25, 26 April), *Taming of the Shrew* (18 April) and *Coriolanus* (19 April), both with F. R. Benson's company, *Two Gentlemen of Verona* with William Poel and the Elizabethan Stage Society (20 April), *Henry V* with Lewis Waller's company (21 April matinee), *Richard II* (27, 28 April). Finishes with special matinee performance in which H. B. Irving, Arthur Bouchier and Cyril Maude collaborate (29 April). Plays Cardinal Wolsey in *Henry VIII* with Arthur Bouchier and Violet Vanbrugh (1 September–8 April 1911).
- 1911 Plays Cardinal Wolsey in William Barker's film version of *Henry VIII* (9 February 9). Commences seventh Annual Shakespeare Festival (17 April–6 July) with performances of *Midsummer Night's Dream* (17 April–20, 25, 26 May matinee), *Julius Caesar* (22–31 May), *As You Like It* with Oscar Asche's company (30 May matinee), *Merchant of Venice* (1–3 June), *Twelfth Night* (5–10 June), *Richard III* with F. R. Benson's company (6 June matinee), *Othello* with Oscar Asche's company (8 June matinee), *Taming of the Shrew* with F. R. Benson's company (June matinee), *Henry VIII* (12–24 June and 28 June–1 July), Coronation Gala Performance with scenes from *The Merry Wives of Windsor* with Ellen Terry and Madge Kendal, the Forum scene from *Julius Caesar* directed by Granville-Barker and a specially composed masque *The Vision of Delight* with Lily Langtry, Mrs Patrick Campbell, Lena Ashwell and others (26 June), *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (3–15 July). Plays title role in *Macbeth* with Violet Vanbrugh (5 September).
- 1912 Plays title role in *Othello* with Laurence Irving as Iago and Phyllis Neilson-Terry as Desdemona (9 April). Commences eighth Annual Shakespeare Festival (20 May–8 June) with performances of *Merchant of Venice* (20–2 May), *Twelfth Night* (23–5 May, 31 May matinee), *Othello* (25 May matinee, 1 June), *Henry VIII* (27–31 May), *Julius Caesar* (3–5 June), Euripides's *Iphigenia in Tauris* with Granville-Barker's company (4 June matinee), *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (6–8 June). Produces L. N. Parker's patriotic pageant play *Drake* with Lyn Harding (3 September–12 March 1913).

- 1913 Compiles collection of his own essays and articles on the theatre and Shakespeare in particular in *Thoughts and Afterthoughts* published by Cassell. Commences ninth Annual Shakespeare Festival (9 June–7 July) with performances of *Merchant of Venice* (9–14 June), *Twelfth Night* (16–21 June), *Julius Caesar* (23–8 June), *Romeo and Juliet* (30 June–7 July). Plays Jacob in L. N. Parker's *Joseph and his Brethren* (2 September–14 January 1914).
- 1914 Plays Professor Higgins in Shaw's *Pygmalion* with Mrs Patrick Campbell (11 April) and the last of his new roles when he doubles Peggoty and Mr Micawber in L. N. Parker's adaptation of *David Copperfield* (24 December).
- 1915 Arrives in New York 24 November with his daughter Iris and travels to California for work on the film of *Macbeth*. Returns to New York 7 March 1916.
- 1916 Third American tour (March 1916–April 1917). Meets and begins relationship with Muriel Ridley. Plays title role with Constance Collier as Lady Macbeth in John Emerson's film production of *Macbeth* (premiered Rialto Theatre, New York, 4 June and at His Majesty's Theatre, London, 22 June). Birth of Paul Ridley-Tree (29 December).
- 1917 While staying at Constance Collier's house in Kent, Tree falls and ruptures a tendon in his leg (16 June). Has an operation but during recovery suffers an embolism and dies suddenly (2 July).



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## I. EARLY RECOGNITION

'Herbert Beerbohm Tree', *Theatre* (1 January 1881), p. 52. Image published with permission of ProQuest. Further reproduction is prohibited without permission.

'Herbert Beerbohm Tree', in Arthur Goddard, *Players of the Period* (London: Dean and Sons, 1891), pp. 195–210. British Library, shelfmark 011795.ee.47.

Tree's early career followed a well-worn path, that of a middle-class youth who worked as a clerk in his father's corn business in the City and participated in amateur theatre to offset the boredom and predictability of office work. Similarly the trajectory of his development in the period to 1886 was a typical one: single performances at matinees in support of worthy causes, secondary roles with established actors and their companies, provincial tours with companies that presented versions of current London musical successes, and occasionally roles which allowed Tree to exercise his ingenuity and transformative ability. Nonetheless, there were a number of specific roles which he performed during a period of rapid development from 1878 to 1886 which act as markers and provided the critics and audiences with the evidence of the emergence of a unique talent. Even if some of these performances were not unqualified successes, they introduced him to styles and people whose significance would be enduring when he became a manager in his own right (see Chronology above for a more detailed account of his early career).

Initially Tree's ability to transform himself was noted in his assumption of older roles. Thus his performance as the Marquis de Pontsablé in the provincial tour of *Madame Favart* was reported as: 'Mr. Beerbohm Tree, however, is the artist with whom rest the chief comic honours of the production and as the Marquis de Pontsablé was droll to a degree, his assumption of the airs of an antiquated fop being all but inimitable.'<sup>1</sup> He complemented this two years later by playing the Marquis de Château Laroche in Arthur Matthison's otherwise undistinguished 'domestic story' *Brave Hearts* at the Criterion Theatre in London: '[the role] provides Mr. Beerbohm Tree with a part in which the capabilities of this rising actor have good scope. The mild shabby old man who has fallen upon evil days, but who is still a gentleman ... grasps and retains the sympathy of the audience.'<sup>2</sup>