Anselm Heinrich

Theatre in Britain during the Second World War

In this article Anselm Heinrich argues for a renewed interest in and critical investigation of theatre in Britain during the Second World War, a period neglected by researchers despite the radical changes in the cultural landscape instigated during the war. Concentrating on CEMA (the Council for Encouragement of Music and the Arts) and the introduction of subsidies, the author discusses and evaluates the importance and effects of state intervention in the arts, with a particular focus on the demands put on theatre and its role in society in relation to propaganda, nation-building, and education. Anselm Heinrich is Lecturer in Theatre Studies at the University of Glasgow. He is the author of *Entertainment, Education, Propaganda: Regional Theatres in Germany and Britain between 1918 and 1945* (2007), and with Kate Newey and Jeffrey Richards has co-edited a collection of essays on *Ruskin, the Theatre, and Victorian Visual Culture* (2009). Other research interests include émigrés from Nazi-occupied Europe, contemporary German theatre and drama, and national theatres.

CONTEMPORARY commentators on theatre during the Second World War and immediately after claimed that they were witnessing a 'revolution in the arts', both with respect to the perceived quality of wartime repertoires as well as, and perhaps more importantly, to the introduction of state subsidies. Bernard Miles asserted that the fact that CEMA (the Council for Encouragement of Music and the Arts, which funded theatres and companies) received Treasury money

> within four months of its foundation meant that for the first time in history the state recognized the drama as one of the sinews of the national soul, and this was the most important thing that had happened to the British theatre since the birth of Shakespeare.[1]

Basil Dean hailed the introduction of government support for the arts as 'the most forward step in the advancement of British culture that a British Government has yet taken', and other commentators and practitioners were equally ecstatic.[2] A spate of publications in the early 1940s on opera, ballet, and theatre, the sheer volume of which is astonishing, accompanied a change in cultural policy and perception of the arts, and illustrates the importance attributed to this change.

It is surprising, then, that theatre in Britain during the Second World War has received comparatively little scholarly attention. The radical changes the war instigated especially in terms of government subsidy have at best been briefly alluded to,[3] and even the *Cambridge History of British Theatre* only mentions them in passing.[4] Clive Barker and Maggie Gale's incisive collection of essays concerns the interwar years,[5] Steve Nicholson has done excellent work on censorship and on specific aspects of wartime theatre, such as the politically motivated pageants staged in the Royal Albert Hall in support of the Soviet Union,[6] and elsewhere Simon Trussler has offered an insightful though brief summary of wartime theatre.[7] However, a comprehensive study of this period is still missing.

For example, the crucial role played by CEMA for an emerging cultural policy, which placed popular education and propaganda through the arts at its heart, has only recently been subject to a rigorous investigation; this, however, focuses on policy decisions rather than on the question of what their implementation meant for theatres and their audiences.[8] Too often, CEMA has only been seen as the forerunner of the Arts Council and not as a worthwhile object of study in itself.

 © CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS doi:10.1017/S0266464X10000060

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X10000060 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Overall, the 'revolution in the arts', which the beginning of the war triggered, and which has had long-lasting effects on theatre in Britain, warrants a thorough investigation – if only to refute Dennis Kennedy's claim that, with regard to the Second World War and the destruction inflicted on the city by the Luftwaffe, 'the most obvious effects of the conflict on London theatre were physical'.[9]

After the Outbreak of War

After a short period of closure following the declaration of war on 3 September 1939, theatres all over Britain were subsequently allowed to reopen. The motivation for this decision went beyond the idea of distracting audiences weary of the war effort, and exemplified more general demands on the arts and their role in society. This war against Nazi Germany was no ordinary war, but a conflict between ideologies. It went beyond the 'Hun bashing' of the First World War and developed into a struggle to defend the values of the civilized world against Nazi barbarism.[10] This time what was called for was not just entertainment of the kind that Lena Ashwell (among others) had provided in the French war zones during the First World War; now, Britain seemed to be fighting for its cultural heritage. The theatre which corresponded to these claims had to be uplifting, educational, and national.

As early as the summer of 1940, officials perceived a direct link between a particular repertoire programme and rising morale. One of the issues at hand was anticipation (confounded by events) of a quiet winter in 1940–41, as in the 'phoney war' of 1939–40, with possible weakening of morale. Entertainment for the forces and the civilian population was of the highest importance, but, as officials such as Kenneth Clark stressed, what was called for was not just any kind of entertainment 'of the film or music hall order, but something to occupy people's minds'. He explicitly demanded that the government ought 'to take some active part in stimulating activities of this sort'.[11]

This active part soon began to take shape in the question of the Sunday opening of theatres, an issue which met with increasing support among the general public.[12] In February 1941, the government agreed to allow theatre performances on Sundays for the first time in three hundred years, and commentators celebrated having 'won the battle'.[13] Although Parliament shortly afterwards voted against this initiative by a small majority of eight votes, the government had nevertheless demonstrated how much it was willing to sacrifice for theatrical entertainment during the war – the resistance of the Church had been especially substantial – and how highly it rated its contribution to the war effort.[14]

ENSA and CEMA

More successfully, the government began to support the performing arts through regular state subsidies – for the first time in British history – realizing and increasingly hoping to influence the theatre's propaganda potential. Whereas ENSA (the Entertainments National Services Association) continued to offer an entertainment programme to the forces similar to the one provided during the First World War, CEMA's mission was different and was directed at the home front.[15] The two organizations also differed in their political agenda, since CEMA's aim to foster the arts through state support pointed beyond the end of military action and hinted at a future Britain in which the arts would become an integral part of everyday life.[16]

CEMA was established in January 1940 as a result of a meeting held at the Board of Education.[17] The initial objective was to give financial assistance to drama and music societies who found it difficult to maintain their activities during the war. The broader aim was to boost morale through the provision of art. At first CEMA was jointly financed by the Pilgrim Trust and the Treasury, with the Trust's grant of £25,000 being matched by a government subsidy of the same sum. Two years later the government accepted full financial responsibility for CEMA.[18]

By 1945, the Treasury grant had risen to £235,000,[19] and the overall sum spent on CEMA and (from 1946) the Arts Council between 1940 and 1950 reached over £2 mil-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X10000060 Published online by Cambridge University Press

lion.[20] This financial backing not only meant that the state for the first time in British history had become a patron of the performing arts, but also showed that the arts were seen as being of national importance.

The initial emphasis on amateur societies soon changed to support for professional companies. In diversified programmes CEMA brought classical music, the visual arts, and drama to remote rural areas as well as industrial centres, catered for evacuees, and recognized the need to counterbalance the closure of many customary entertainment facilities, long working hours, and monotonous leisure time.[21] Its support varied from full financial responsibility to no financial connection at all. In between there were block grants, loans, and limited guarantees against loss.[22]

Soon after its foundation, CEMA became associated with many stars and leading ensembles. Sadler's Wells Ballet, Ballet Rambert and Ballet Jooss, for example, toured factories, garrisons, and hostels; and the Old Vic company starring Sybil Thorndike took Shakespeare through Welsh mining villages for several consecutive seasons.[23] After having been seen as a rather un-English exercise with marginal well-to-do audiences concentrated in London, ballet during the war played to capacity houses and successfully found new audiences.[24] Opera, too, took on a new lease of life thanks to the support of CEMA, and Sadler's Wells toured the industrial towns of the North.[25]

'Educational Value' and Propaganda

Chamber music recitals were organized in factory canteens, and symphony concerts were put on for war workers.[26] Pablo Casals played Elgar's Cello Concerto for the standard fee of three guineas, Yehudi Menuhin gave a series of recitals for factory workers, and Myra Hess regularly performed for lunch-hour audiences in the National Gallery, which had been emptied of pictures.[27] CEMA's biggest and most influential undertaking, however, was the opening of the Theatre Royal, Bristol, as the first state theatre in British history, and the establishment of the Old Vic as a true (that is, continental) repertory company with a programme of classics.[28] CEMA's agenda – and by extension that of the government – was not solely philanthropic but part of a wider political programme which sought to provide audiences even in the remotest parts of the British Isles with works of high art from the established canon. In a war which was being increasingly fought on the Home Front, the arts became a vital weapon to remind people what the country was fighting for, and CEMA was precisely providing this 'national service',[29] supporting companies whose programmes were deemed to have 'educational value'.[30]

One of the ways in which help was provided was with exemption from Entertainment Tax, which, according to contemporary practitioners, 'conferred a much larger financial benefit than anything CEMA could afford to give'.[31] The 'educational value' of programmes became in fact central to CEMA's policy. In a highly interesting 'Memorandum on Old Vic Policy' sent by Tyrone Guthrie in September 1943 to CEMA's Lewis Casson, Guthrie stated under the heading 'Education v. Entertainment' that:

> It will be seen the whole trend of this document is to advocate a policy related as closely as possible to the educational life of the country, and distinguishing as much as possible from other theatrical enterprise; i.e. a declared policy of 'Education' as opposed to 'Entertainment'. Suggest: a) If the productions are good and lively enough this does not matter. b) If the productions are dreary they still won't [work] well as entertainment. c) By and large the audiences for whom we cater will be intelligent enough not to be frightened by the label 'Education'; and the audience in search of a 'spree' will not go to Shakespeare etc. anyway. BUT we must be on our guard against the attitude that a classic is only uplifting if it is dowdy; and the devotees who always cluster round a movement of uplift. In other words, our social service must be oblique – it must not reek of social service, but show itself in artistic vitality.[32]

Interestingly this agenda was no secret as CEMA openly stated that it hoped to create 'permanent, educated audiences all over the country' – and the popular success of its projects seemed to validate this approach.[33]

Such an approach only a few years earlier would hardly have been welcomed by many

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X10000060 Published online by Cambridge University Press

audiences and commentators, who would have echoed Norman Marshall's claim that 'the Englishman has nothing against education but he thinks it should be kept in its place. He resents any attempt to mix it with his amusements.'[34] Barry Jackson in Birmingham was thus suspected of 'sinister motives' when presenting a repertoire which was seen as too intellectually challenging. This, however, was exactly what CEMA set out to do.

The government was quick to make use of CEMA's success. Concerning its cultural propaganda it followed a double strategy. On the one hand it became increasingly prepared to subsidize the performing arts on an unprecedented scale, on the other it was keen to associate itself with artists who were supporting the war effort without apparent financial gain. The tour of the Old Vic through Welsh mining villages illustrates this strategy. It was extensively documented and widely publicized by the Ministry of Information. However, although mentioning government involvement, the Ministry stressed the personal touch and basic working conditions of the ensemble – a far cry from the luxurious life style of the theatre stars of the 1930s.[35]

Propaganda publications such as *Bulletins from Britain* promoted this strategy worldwide.[36] They regularly featured articles about the theatre, and in particular about productions of Shakespearean drama, and more or less directly linked the success of these ventures to Britain's war effort.[37]

Regional Theatre – and a National Theatre

Part of this wider programme – and another aspect overlooked by research so far – was a concept of arts provision for all which pointed beyond the end of the war, as exemplified, among other things, by government support for a Civic Theatres Scheme.[38] The scheme proposed that cities should be able to open their own municipal theatres jointly financed by local and state subsidies.[39] At the inaugural meeting of the Provincial Theatre Council in 1942 the Minister of Labour, Ernest Bevin, expressed his hopes that the future theatre would become 'one of our great national institutions to convey to the peoples of the world the real character of the ordinary British people'.[40]

At the heart of the government's support for these plans was not only a belief in the important role regional theatres could play in the war effort, but also a concept of municipal theatre provision which pointed at the long-term future – of which the Local Government Act of 1948 was a direct outcome. It was Section 132 of this Act that empowered local authorities to provide and maintain civic theatres.

Even the idea of a National Theatre, after decades of opposition and fruitless campaigning, from 1942 suddenly received state support.[41] After the outbreak of the war the Old Vic had increasingly developed into a substitute for a non-existent National Theatre. The Shakespearean productions of the early war years featured many stars who were 'appearing for next to nothing at the Old Vic because they realize that the battle of the Old Vic is one we cannot afford to lose'.[42] This 'battle', however, had become more than a struggle for the continuing well-being of the playhouse. Fought with Shakespeare in the vanguard, it was about defending Britain's cultural heritage in total war. According to *Theatre World*, this battle would 'live in the annals of the English theatre for all time' as the artists involved 'have served the cause of culture in this country with unremitting energy and self-sacrifice'.[43]

Acknowledging this service, and realizing its propaganda potential, CEMA stepped in and established at the Old Vic an interim National Theatre with its own repertory company presenting a programme of classics in 1944. CEMA was not only prepared to meet the 'bold and generous expenditure' – in the words of Lord Keynes 'good round sums, well into five figures' – and agreed to pay 'an advance cheque of £5,000' immediately, but also secured the services of a star-studded company headed by two of Britain's most celebrated actors, Laurence Olivier and Ralph Richardson, although both were on active military service.[44]

Lord Lytton, chairman of the governors of the Old Vic, therefore, wrote to the First Lord of the Admiralty and asked for their release.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X10000060 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In his letter he used a dual strategy. First, he stressed the close links between the Old Vic and CEMA, which, 'I need hardly add, expresses the cultural policy of the Board of Education, and is financed by the Treasury'. This hint at CEMA's role as the official body sanctioned by the government to carry out national cultural politics was clearly aimed at adding additional weight to Lytton's letter. Second, he argued on straightforward political and propaganda lines that 'the importance need hardly be stressed of having such a company in existence while the war is in progress', adding that 'the many thousands of overseas visitors in London make it highly desirable that British drama, and particularly the classics, should be presented in the best possible manner'.[45]

The fact that these two actors were indeed duly released to become joint directors of the Old Vic is another indication of how much the political landscape had changed within a few years and illustrates the new role theatre had acquired (also exemplified by the fact that in 1946 both received knighthoods). The institution of the Old Vic as a National Theatre presenting a classical repertoire had come to be seen as part of Britain's war effort, and met with immediate popular and critical acclaim. Audiences packed the performances and commentators claimed that these Old Vic seasons were the best in British theatre for decades. The company quickly became an 'emblem of national consciousness second only to Shakespeare'.[46]

Interestingly, the new Labour government after the war quickly made the National Theatre part of its own agenda. When the National Theatre Bill was presented to Parliament in early 1949, politicians praised the opportunity for it to become a truly popular theatre, making Britain's national heritage available to everyone. The Lord Chancellor, William Jowett, asserted that people could finally reclaim their heritage, which had been the privilege of the ruling classes for so long:

> Britain can now show, with the coming of age of her working classes, that they can emulate the standards given them by their guardians. . . . By the building of a national theatre we shall, I hope, make a real contribution to the idea of a people's civilization.[47]

Shakespeare and the Classical Revival

Classical drama corresponded perfectly to government concepts of entertainment and education. It was felt that this could mark a return to Britain's great theatrical past, make people aware of their national heritage, and, therefore, play an important role in the war effort. In contrast to the First World War, which, as many claimed, had been characterized by cheap entertainment and pointless farces, commentators were anxious to see dramatic standards now reach the highest possible level.[48]

In 1940 Donald Wolfit presented a series of popular lunchtime performances of Shakespeare; the Old Vic company played *King Lear* and *The Tempest* to capacity houses,[49] and even rarely performed Restoration comedies received glittering revivals. The 1943 Festival of English Comedy proved to be one of the highlights of the season, and William Congreve's *Love for Love* was one of the greatest overall theatrical successes of wartime London.[50]

Plays for long regarded as dated and out of step with contemporary taste returned to the stages now, and commentators expressed enthusiasm not only for what they saw as a new kind of adult education but also for the new aesthetic quality of repertoires.[51] They observed that the wartime hunger for entertainment had not just resulted in farce and swing, but in Shakespeare and Elgar.[52]

Shakespeare was of course affirmed as 'our great national poet',[53] and the *Manchester Guardian* asserted that 'no better National Service can be given at the present time, than to present Shakespearean Repertory'.[54] This was in marked contrast to the sparse number of interwar productions of Shakespearean drama, when commentators pointed out that 'Shakespeare is always a difficulty'[55] illustrating a general feeling that 'this kind of highbrow thing was best left to occasional London visits by the *Comédie Française*'.[56]

During the war, however, Shakespeare's plays received an increasing number of pro-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X10000060 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ductions, attracted the country's greatest actors and producers,[57] and were seen by record audiences. In August 1942 alone three new Shakespeare revivals started their runs in London with Gielgud's *Macbeth*, the Old Vic's *Othello*, and Robert Atkins's open-air productions in Regent's Park.[58] And in 1944 the Old Vic at the New as well as Gielgud at the Haymarket established their classical repertory. These ventures more than anything else appeared to contemporaries as the dramatic highlight of the war, the quintessence of what Britain was fighting for.[59]

This sudden revival was no coincidence but was closely linked to the war. Although the use of Shakespeare for political purposes was not new, the scale and quality of the revival not only in London but also in the provinces seems unparalleled in British history.[60]

The 1916 tercentenary of Shakespeare's death, for example, failed to attract enough support to found the National Theatre, that an influential pressure group had been promoting for decades.[61] In the early 1940s, however, their idea not only reappeared on the political agenda, but quickly became reality with a prestigious site for the project found and generous funding provided.

Contemporary commentators clearly saw the connection between this renewed debate and the increased importance of Shakespeare during the war.[62] The Bard was used to establish a link to Elizabethan England – Hitler's invasion army defeated in the same way as was the Spanish Armada,[63] victory against the odds achieved as at Agincourt in Olivier's film of *Henry V*. Other commentators made links with Napoleon, one headline declaring 'Appreciation of Shakespeare Unparalleled Since Waterloo'.[64]

It was made clear that to produce Shakespeare at this particular time was a service to the nation, since, although Britain faced an enemy invasion, her 'spirit is undimmed and her speech . . . is still the speech of Shakespeare'.[65] Corresponding to pre-war calls for concerted efforts for a specifically national propaganda,[66] Shakespeare as a 'national institution' was regarded as a perfect carrier for such a positive approach. The *Bulletins from Britain* regularly featured articles about theatre in Britain, about festivals and memorable productions especially of Shakespearean drama. The fact that Shakespeare's name in particular appeared again and again not only gave 'a reflection of the new spirit in England'.[67] It also made clear that nobody could claim any more that theatre was without a political purpose in this war. It had a clear function and it lived up to it.[68]

It was not only the presence of Shakespearean drama on stage, however, which seemed important, but also the interpretation of his plays. Commentators praised the Old Vic's 1941 production of *King John* for its topical interpretation and its 'consistent warlike atmosphere'.[69] Sybil Thorndike was congratulated on her apparent presentation of Macbeth as Hitler on her Welsh tour, and a particularly strong anti-Nazi message must have been sent out by the performance of Shylock by the émigré Frederick Valk in *The Merchant of Venice* in 1943.[70]

Morrison's Law

The success of the government's new policy towards the performing arts, however, was sporadic. Funding remained limited to a number of flagship companies and straightforward government control of the arts was undesirable in a war which stressed the supremacy of the freedom provided by western democracies over the total dictatorships of central Europe. And yet the government wanted to be sure – just in case.

In a move neglected by researchers so far, Home Secretary Herbert Morrison introduced legislation which allowed in theory for direct state intervention in the arts. In a memorandum on public entertainments in wartime put before the War Cabinet on 27 February 1942, Morrison asked it to 'consider the present position and make a decision on general policy' – including the theatre.[71] He complained that his powers regarding entertainments were restricted to security and safety questions, and claimed that the Home Secretary should have additional powers to prohibit performances if they were detrimental to the war effort. Morrison asserted that:

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X10000060 Published online by Cambridge University Press

it therefore appears necessary that the Government should be empowered to prohibit or restrict entertainments on the ground that they are inimical to the war effort, irrespective of the degree of risk to those present, and that the Defence Regulations should be amended to give control of entertainments in circumstances where the efficient prosecution of the war is in issue.[72]

The Cabinet discussed Morrison's far-reaching memorandum in early March 1942, and only two weeks later the King signed the relevant amendment to the defence regulations.[73] This enabled the Home Secretary to

prohibit or restrict . . . the use of premises . . . for the purposes of any entertainment, exhibition, performance, amusement, game or sport to which members of the public are admitted, in so far as such prohibition or restriction appears . . . to be necessary or expedient.[74]

Morrison had thereby obtained 'control of entertainments' and, in effect, had at least in principle gained total power over the performing arts.[75] Although there is no proof that Morrison actually used his new powers of direct control, the importance of the fact that in theory he would have been able to do so can hardly be overestimated.[76] 'Morrison's law' made possible direct state intervention – a power that commentators so far had solely attributed to Goebbels.

The 'Rebirth of the Theatre'

The Second World War triggered fundamental changes for Britain – and not exclusively in military, political, and socio-economic terms. In this article I have argued that the changes in the arts, as exemplified here by the theatre, have been fundamental and long-lasting – notably, without CEMA there would have been no Arts Council.

More generally, elementary beliefs in the independence of theatre from state intervention, the benefit of its commercial character, and fears of failing to attract audiences for intellectually challenging productions were put into question.[77] Particularly significant is the fact that, although Britain had to cope with the most desperate war effort in its history, only a minority objected to spending public money on the arts. A public opinion survey carried out in 1943 showed that fifty-nine per cent supported continuing government support of the theatre after the war.[78] The 'rebirth of the theatre', in Laurence Olivier's words, was closely linked to the war and to a change in official and public attitude towards the function of theatre in society.[79]

Crucially, as part of the change of attitudes, the increased governmental stake in the arts also triggered the issue of how best to control them. 'Morrison's law', to critics of state intervention, clearly illustrated the possible dangers of the state 'meddling with the arts'.[80] And after the war it became clear that the new powers given to authorities in the 1948 Local Government Act were not always taken up with enthusiasm. Although local authorities now had the option of spending the sum of sixpence in the pound on entertainments, which made a possible total of eight million pounds available for subsidy, a 1958 report commissioned by the Arts Council found the overall picture of local spending on the arts discouraging.

Still, the war years had a profound impact not only on fundamental and long-held beliefs regarding the function of theatre but also regarding tangible outcomes, chiefly among these the decision of Parliament in 1949 to spend £1m to erect a purpose-built National Theatre. In circumstances that the protagonists of the National Theatre movement could only have dreamt of at the turn of the century, commentators noted that 'in spite of the financial difficulties in which the country found itself, no one demurred to the proposed expenditure by the State of a million pounds on a project which a few years before would have been the subject of bitter controversy'.[81] It can hardly be claimed, therefore, that 'the most obvious effects of the conflict on London theatre were physical' – far from it.

Notes and References

1. Bernard Miles, *The British Theatre* (London: Collins, 1948), p. 44
2. Basil Dean, *Theatre at War* (London: Harrap, 1956), p. 530.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X10000060 Published online by Cambridge University Press

3. Janet Minihan's groundbreaking study, *Nationalization of Culture: the Development of State Subsidies to the Arts in Great Britain* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1977) does not put much emphasis on the theatre, while Nick Hayes, in 'Municipal Subsidy and Tory Minimalism: Building the Nottingham Playhouse, 1942–1963', *Midland History*, XIX (1994), p. 128–46, deals with only one – though fascinating – case study. The situation looks much better in respect of cinema – see, for example, James Chapman, *The British at War: Cinema, State, and Propaganda, 1939–1945* (London: Tauris, 1998).

4. Maggie Gale discusses censorship, Entertainment Tax, ENSA, and CEMA in just over two pages in her chapter on 'The London Stage, 1918-1945', in Baz Kershaw, ed., *The Cambridge History of British Theatre, Vol. 3, Since 1895* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 164–6), and Baz Kershaw is equally brief in his contribution on 'British Theatre, 1940–2002', ibid., p. 293–5.

5. Clive Barker and Maggie B. Gale, ed., *The British Theatre between the Wars 1918–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

6. Steve Nicholson, *The Censorship of British Drama 1900–1968, Vols. I and II* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2003 and 2005); *British Theatre and the Red Peril: the Portrayal of Communism 1917–1945* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999); and 'Theatrical Pageants in the Second World War', *Theatre Research International*, XVIII (1993), p. 186–96.

7. Simon Trussler, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of British Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 301–3.

8. Jörn Weingärtner, *The Arts as a Weapon of War: Britain and the Shaping of National Morale in the Second World War* (London: Tauris, 2006). See also Anselm Heinrich, *Entertainment, Education, Propaganda: Regional Theatres in Germany and Britain between 1918 and 1945* (London: University of Hertfordshire Press/Society for Theatre Research, 2007).

9. Dennis Kennedy, 'British Theatre, 1895–1946: Art, Entertainment, Audiences – an Introduction', in Kershaw, *Cambridge History of British Theatre*, p. 32.

10. A claim the Nazis themselves put forward, in particular in the war in the East against the 'sub-human Bolshevists'.

11. See National Archives (NA), Ministry of Information INF 1/260, Home Morale and Education during the Winter 1940–41. Quotation is from page 14 of the file 'Extract from Minutes of Policy Committee, 26 July 1940'.

12. Members of the Theatrical Managers' Association, the Society of West End Theatre Managers, British Actors' Equity, the Variety Artists' Federation, and the theatrical trade unions vigorously demanded Sunday openings 'in the national interest'. They made representations to the Home Secretary and expressed their view that 'entertainment is essential in helping to maintain the good spirits of the military and civil population'. See letter from Horace Collins, secretary of the Theatrical Managers' Association, to Harold Butler, Regional Commissioner, Southern Region, Reading, 11 December 1940. NA, Home Office HO 186, Air Raid Precautions; HO 186/1894 Entertainment.

13. 'Over the Footlights', *Theatre World*, March 1941, p. 51.

14. Opinion polls carried out during the war show that a majority supported Sunday openings. In summer 1943, 58 per cent of those asked 'Would you approve or disapprove of theatres being allowed to open on Sundays, just as they do on other days?' gave a positive answer, 33 per cent disapproved, and 9 per cent said 'don't know'. See NA, Ministry of Information INF 1/292 (Part 3), Home Intelligence Reports, July 1942–August 1943, p. 213–14. Appendix to a public opinion survey compiled by the British Institute of Public Opinion, presented on 24 January 1943.

15. For CEMA's development throughout the war see the 'EL' files in the Archive of Art and Design (AAD), stored at Blythe House, London. See also Weingärtner, *Arts as a Weapon of War*.

16. In the course of the war CEMA's chairman Lord Keynes increasingly worked towards its continuation in peacetime, and in 1946 CEMA became the Arts Council. CEMA, therefore, has to be seen in line with the Beveridge Report, plans for a National Health Service, and the 1944 Education Act. See, for example, H. C. Dent, *Education in Transition: a Sociological Study of the Impact of War on English Education 1939–1943* (London: Kegan Paul, 1944).

17. See 'Cultural Activities in War-Time. Notes of informal Conference held at the Board's Offices' (AAD, EL 1/1).

18. CEMA itself was a relatively small body at first with members appointed by the Minister of Education, who was also answerable to Parliament. Soon, however, CEMA grew in size. In 1942 it had nine members with Lord Keynes as Chairman, an elaborate system of advisory panels of experts with executive power, committees in Scotland and Wales, and ten regional offices in England. The six members of the Drama Advisory Panel were joined by the Drama Director, Lewis Casson, and Drama Assistant, Charles Landstone. In line with rising government support, the directors of CEMA for Music, Drama, and Art became fully salaried in 1942. See Minihan, *Nationalization of Culture*, p. 218; Charles Landstone, *Off-Stage: a Personal Record of the First Twelve Years of State Sponsored Drama in Great Britain* (London: Elek, 1953), p. 66; CEMA, *The Arts in War Time: a Report on the Work of C.E.M.A. 1942 and 1943* (London: Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, n.d., p. 4).

19. See CEMA, *The Fifth Year: the End of the Beginning. Report on the Work of CEMA for 1944* (London: Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, 1945), p. 4.

20. See Geoffrey Whitworth, *The Making of a National Theatre* (London: Faber, 1951), p. 215.

21. In 1944 the Council organized fourteen tours, with 129 weeks' playing time. The actual costs for these 129 weeks were £16,000 – an average of £125 per playing week. The average gross costing per week was about £275, with takings of about £150. See Landstone, *Off-Stage*, p. 55, 59.

22. See CEMA, *Arts in War Time*, p. 14. See also Allardyce Nicoll, '"In Association with CEMA"', *Theatre Arts*, XXVIII (1944), p. 420.

23. See Norman Marshall, *The Other Theatre* (London: John Lehmann, 1947), p. 133–6. For a contemporary account see Arnold L. Haskell, 'Ballet Since 1939', in Arnold L. Haskell, Dilys Powell, Rollo Myers, and Robin Ironside, *Since 1939: Ballet, Films, Music, Painting* (London: Readers Union, 1948), p. 9–56.

24. Commentators noted after the war that 'some hundred centres are now enjoying regular concerts where, only ten years ago, nothing of the kind had ever

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X10000060 Published online by Cambridge University Press

been heard' (Thomas Russell, *Philharmonic* (London: Penguin, 1953), p. 123). Public demand for 'high' culture far exceeded any pre-war expectations (see Minihan, *Nationalization of Culture*, p. 218–20, 225). The growth of ballet companies is hardly imaginable without the war. Sadler's Wells grew from a small company of eight dancers into a substantial organization appearing all over Britain during forty-eight weeks out of the fifty-two (see Marshall, *Other Theatre*, p. 142). Contemporary commentators claimed that 'the British are once more a dancing nation'. It was suggested that male dancers should be exempt from conscription, 'as their absence would jeopardize the existence of something precious for national artistic prestige in the future and useful for public morale in the present.' See Haskell, *Ballet since 1939*, p. 23, 45. See also Audrey Williamson, 'English Ballet, 1944', *Theatre Arts*, XXVIII (1944), p. 733–6.

25. Tours of factory workers' hostels were high up on CEMA's list of priorities. Between July 1942 and December 1943 alone seven companies were sent on tour, and by 1945 sixty-nine hostels were regularly visited by parties associated with CEMA. Most of the hostels had well-equipped theatres with seating capacities of 400 (see Marshall, *Other Theatre*, p. 229; CEMA, *Arts in War Time*, p. 16–17; Landstone, *Off-Stage*, p. 50–1).

26. In 1942–3 CEMA provided over 4,500 factory concerts, sometimes to audiences as large as 7,000 (see Minihan, *Nationalization of Culture*, p. 220). The number of concerts given under CEMA auspices rose to over 6,000 in 1944 (see CEMA, *Fifth Year*, p. 8).

27. For Casals and Hess, see Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939–1945* (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 373; for Menuhin see CEMA, *Fifth Year*, p. 7.

28. CEMA saved the Bristol Theatre Royal from demolition, restored it, placed it in working order, and ran the playhouse on a lease under its own direct management (see CEMA, *Arts in War Time*, p. 10). It is interesting to note that all this happened in September 1942, a particularly difficult month for the Allies with the fall of Tobruk, the German advance towards Stalingrad, and Japanese supremacy in the Far East.

29. CEMA, *Fifth Year*, p. 32.

30. See CEMA, *Arts in War Time*, p. 15–16.

31. Robert Speaight. 'Drama Since 1939', in John Hayward, Henry Reed, Robert Speaight, and Stephen Spender, *Since 1939* (London: Phoenix, 1949), p. 22. See also AAD, EL 1/7 Minutes Meetings 21–37.

32. Letter dated 23 September 1943, Theatre Museum, Charles Landstone Archive THM/201, Box 4.

33. CEMA, *Fifth Year*, p. 32.

34. Marshall, *Other Theatre*, p. 164.

35. As illustrated, for example, in *Theatre*, Somerset Maugham's novel of 1937.

36. The *Bulletin* was an information service for British officials serving throughout the world, which they were asked to disseminate. It was intended to inform about the activities of the British forces as well as the impact of the war upon the home front. It was published by the British Library of Information in New York and directed at the American market as the spelling was American throughout. The *Bulletin*, which is desperately reassuring, features a simple typescript and no pictures.

37. See, for example, Ivor Brown, 'In War, British Drama Finds a New Public', *Bulletin from Britain*, No. 97, 8 July 1942, p. 15–6.

38. See *The Civic Theatre Scheme* as 'Submitted by the British Drama League to The Prime Minister, The President of The Board of Education, and The Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, 12 November 1942' (Theatre Museum, British Drama League).

39. At the annual meeting of the British Drama League Lord Esher vigorously made the case for a civic theatre in Britain after the war and demanded state subsidies (see *Theatre World*, January 1943, p. 31–2).

40. Quoted in Marshall, *Other Theatre*, p. 206.

41. For a detailed overview of the developments in the run-up to the foundation of the National Theatre see the study by one of its most ardent supporters, Geoffrey Whitworth (*National Theatre*).

42. Herbert Farjeon, *The Shakespearean Stage: Dramatic Criticisms* (London: Hutchinson, 1948), p. 161–2.

43. 'War-time Story of the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells Companies', *Theatre World* November 1941, p. 41.

44. Landstone, *Off-Stage*, p. 148, 151.

45. Letter dated 15 March 1944 (Theatre Museum, Charles Landstone Archive THM/201, Box 4).

46. Dominic Shellard, *British Theatre since the War* (London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 4. For contemporary comments see Harold Hobson, *Theatre in Britain: a Personal View* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1984), p. 134–9; Charles Landstone, *Off-Stage: a Personal Record of the First Twelve Years of State Sponsored Drama in Great Britain* (London: Elek, 1953), p. 151; Frances Stephens, 'Over the Footlights', *Theatre World*, October 1944, p. 5.

47. *Parliamentary Debates* (*Lords*), CLI, p. 987–8, 17 February 1949.

48. For an overview of First World War drama see Heinz Kosok, *The Theatre of War: the First World War in British and Irish Drama* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2007).

49. Although the dressing rooms were bombed and the costumes in them destroyed, Wolfit's company continued to play one-hour excerpts from Shakespeare for more than a hundred performances to an average audience of four hundred people a day (see Marshall, *Other Theatre*, p. 133).

50. The acclaimed Festival of English Comedy also coincided with the Arts Theatre's most successful year, which saw its membership rise to 10,000. See Wendy and J. C. Trewin, *The Arts Theatre, London, 1927–1981* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1986), p. 16–17.

51. See Dent, *Education in Transition*, p. 58.

52. See Haskell, *Ballet since 1939*, p. 23. Peter Noble saw the answer to the question 'Has our theatrical taste improved?' clearly in the affirmative. See Peter Noble, *British Theatre* (London: Knapp and Drewett, 1946), p. 180–6.

53. Noble, *British Theatre*, p. 98.

54. Quoted in Rosalinde Fuller, 'A Shakespeare Tour in Wartime', *Theatre Arts*, XXIV (1940), p. 181.

55. See Cecil Chisholm, *Repertory: an Outline of the Modern Theatre Movement. Production, Plays, Management* (London: Davies, 1934), p. 126, 129.

56. Sheridan Morley, *John G: the Authorized Biography of John Gielgud* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2001), p. 151.

57. Sybil Thorndike during her whole career up to 1939 had only appeared in three Shakespeare plays; between 1940 and 1945 alone she appeared in five. See Sheridan Morley, *Sybil Thorndike: a Life in the Theatre* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), p. 149–66.

58. See *Theatre World*, August 1942, p. 5. Gielgud's *Macbeth* was presented 'by arrangement with CEMA' (see *Theatre World*, September 1942, p. 9).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X10000060 Published online by Cambridge University Press

59. Officials claimed that these two ventures 'gave proof of the vigorous quality of the national theatre, its tenacity in preparation, and its brilliance in achievement' (CEMA, *Fifth Year*, p. 5). *Theatre World* made it clear that 'it is a long time since two Shakespearean productions of such stature as the *Hamlet* at the Haymarket and *Richard III* at the New could be seen in London at the same time' (Frances Stephens, 'Over the Footlights', *Theatre World* November 1944, p. 5).

60. Until the mid-nineteenth century Shakespeare's image was dominated by aristocratic interpretations; he was seen 'as an educator for the few'. See Antony Taylor, 'Shakespeare and Radicalism: the Uses and Abuses of Shakespeare in Nineteenth-Century Popular Politics', *Historical Journal*, XLV (2002), p. 362. Later, however, left-wing politicians and Chartists referred to the Bard in their struggle for social justice, and the 1864 tercentenary provided an opportunity to reclaim Shakespeare for popular culture. In the 1930s it was especially the Russian émigré Komissarjevsky who 'was palpably aware of the connection between the theatre and the new ideologies'. See Tony Howard, 'Blood and the Bright Young Things: Shakespeare in the 1930s', in Clive Barker and Maggie B. Gale, ed., *The British Theatre between the Wars 1918–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 152.

61. See Minihan, *Nationalization of Culture*, p. 146.

62. Whitworth, *National Theatre*, p. 144.

63. See G. Wilson Knight, *This Sceptred Isle: Shakespeare's Message for England at War* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1940), p. 1.

64. Headline to Harold Hobson's article reviewing Olivier's *Richard II* at the New (which had by then already attracted record audiences of 37,000 people), in *Christian Science Monitor*, 29 November 1944.

65. See Editorial, *Theatre Arts*, XXIV (1940), p. 767.

66. Stephen Tallents claimed in 1932 that 'no civilized country can today afford either to neglect the projection of its national personality or to resign its projection to others'. See Tallents, *The Projection of England* (London: Faber, 1932), p. 11–12.

67. The *Bulletin* wanted to make the change in audience appreciation clear, and claimed that 'people want to go, at times, to the music halls and to other places of simple entertainment; but they have grown tired of the society comedies and of realistic dramas that deal with the external trivialities of life. From the theatre at its best they seek something of deeper significance corresponding to the new faith they have discovered in their own lives.' See *Bulletin from Britain*, No. 26, 26 February 1941, p. 1.

68. See, for example, Ivor Brown's article for the *Bulletin*, 'In War, British Drama Finds a New Public', *Bulletin from Britain*, No. 97, 8 July 1942, p. 15–16.

69. See 'New Plays in Town', *Theatre World*, July 1941, p. 4.

70. See Herbert Farjeon, *The Shakespearean Stage: Dramatic Criticisms* (London: Hutchinson, 1948), p. 55–6. For the Thorndike claim see Richard Fawkes, *Fighting for a Laugh: Entertaining the British and American Forces 1939–1946* (London: Macdonald and Jane, 1978), p. 71.

71. See NA, Home Office HO 186, Air Raid Precautions, HO 186/742 Entertainment (1942), p. 3.

72. Ibid., point 16.

73. Statutory Rules and Orders, 1942, No. 502, Emergency Powers (Defence), General Regulations.

74. In relation to the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act, 1939. See NA, Home Office HO, 186 Air Raid Precautions, HO 186/742 Entertainment (1942).

75. Officials were quick to stress that the government did not intend to stop entertainments, as wartime policy so far 'has been to permit them to continue on a restricted basis in the belief, that . . . popular entertainments act as lubricant rather than a brake on the war machine'. Although the government may impose restrictions 'as may be needed in the interests of the war effort . . . there is no intention of imposing needless hindrances to recreation or of carrying restrictions so far that total war unnecessarily becomes total misery'. See NA, Home Office HO 186 Air Raid Precautions, HO 186/1894 Entertainment (1944). Statement made by the Minister of Home Security, George Gater, in the House of Commons on 12 March 1942 (enclosure to HS Circular No. 74/1942).

76. The reason for his refraining from any direct intervention was almost certainly twofold. Firstly, the vast majority of theatres did not offer him any opportunity for intervention because their programmes hardly left anything to be desired. Secondly, the military situation for the Allies improved considerably in the course of 1942 and there were fewer reasons for critical remarks from the stage. In general, Home Intelligence Reports regularly showed how popular Churchill was as a military leader and how overwhelmingly the British supported the present war.

77. Commentators remarked that the mistakes of the First World War were not being repeated in the Second, because 'commercial standards never forced the level down to that of 1914–1918' (see Speaight, *Drama since 1939*, p. 29).

78. The survey was compiled by the British Institute of Public Opinion and was presented to the Ministry of Information in May 1943. Answering Question Five – 'Would you favour continuing, after the war, government spending in support of music, theatre, films etc.?' a total of fifty-nine per cent answered yes, twenty-six per cent said no, and seventeen per cent did not know. See NA, Ministry of Information, INF 1/292 (Part 3), Home Intelligence Reports, July 1942–August 1943, p. 105–107, quotes on p. 106.

79. Laurence Olivier asserted that 'no other moment has approached in splendour and achievement the glorious Restoration period, when many notable talents and much vitality and enthusiasm were involved in the rebirth of our theatre. That is, no other moment until now.' Olivier, Foreword to Noble, *British Theatre*, p. 3.

80. Lord Melbourne's infamous 1835 dictum.

81. Whitworth, *National Theatre*, p. 15, who also reprints the crucial parliamentary debates.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X10000060 Published online by Cambridge University Press