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Staging The Delinquent, Edwardian Theatre, and *The Hooligan*

W.S.Gilbert is best known as a dramatist and librettist who produced fourteen comic operas with his collaborator, composer Arthur Sullivan. Less familiar is his last work *The Hooligan* (1912), one of the first realist representations of the young urban working-class male seen on the twentieth-century British stage. This article explores the Edwardian conditions of social and cultural volatility reflected in the authoring and production of this play. It discusses the period as one where narratives of gender and class that underpin contemporary perspectives were shaped and contested. It demonstrates how hegemonic systems of cultural production created binary distinctions between the 'ideal' of the 'Imperial Youth' and the alien, working-class 'other'. Gilbert's authoring of the working-class male subject and his representation in a commercial theatre were subject to both market controls and middle-class 'anxieties'. This historical perspective indicates continuities between these factors and the contemporary representation of the young urban working-classes. Martin Heaney is a senior lecturer in Drama, Applied Theatre and Performance at the University of East London. He is co-director of the Centre of Applied and Participatory Arts and has published articles in various journals, including *Research in Drama Education*. His book chapter 'Edward Bond and The Representation of Adolescence' is forthcoming in *the Routledge Guide to Theatre for Young People* (2021).

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In an influential history, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (1968), Samuel Hynes identifies the Edwardian period as the years before the First World War which had its roots in the 1890s and ended in August 1914. He characterizes this epoch as having occupied a pivotal position, 'a brief stretch of history' which, nevertheless, 'contained the beginnings of many ideas that we recognize as our own'.[1] From the late nineteenth century, simultaneous transformations brought about by mass industrialization and urbanization had radically altered patterns of employment, education and social mobility. In the early years of the twentieth century, new technologies such as aircraft flight and the telephone were adopted. Fast-paced social change occurred in an era of political volatility. Distinct parallels can be found in patterns of social

change between these developments and those of the early twenty-first century with its accelerated waves of globalization, technological innovation and political and intergenerational discord.

The late Edwardian years and, in particular, the pre-War period 1911-1912, were marked by political unrest, led notably by the Suffragettes, Trades Unionists and protests for and against Irish Home Rule. With the emergence of the 'New Drama' of the Court Theatre founded in 1904, the theatre of the Edwardian period reflected both this sense of unrest and fundamental shifts in belief, including a growth in rationalist materialism and a decline in adherence to organized religion. In a commentary which captures these developments, theatre historian Joseph Donohue describes a movement among Edwardian dramatists to a 'newer, moral realism... that views society simultaneously in social and moral aspects as a matrix of moving values, rather than as an essentially monolithic conglomeration of persons and classes with fixed attributes'.[2]

The 'New Drama' of leading playwrights such as Shaw and Ibsen were at the forefront of this movement, expressed in plays that put forward innovative readings of gender and sexuality. Realist treatments of the urban young in this period also reflected a similar desire to engage with notions of identity, political justice and the economic developments responsible for producing new claims for youth autonomy. However, these representations were bound up with fear of the working-classes, a preoccupation with a 'Hooligan problem' that manifested clear distinctions to do with both class and an incipient anxiety around the pace of change. Further investigation of these representations and archetypes can illuminate the ideas and discursive positions that can be regarded as foundational narratives in contemporary thinking about the working-class young and the working-class male in particular.

Discussions about the disruptive urban working-class male can be charted not only across social commentary, but within policy documents and the wider popular discourse of the Edwardian era. Spencer Gibb's treatise *The Problem of Boy Work*, in which he describes how new technologies were transforming society, makes a symbolic association of 'boys' with the speed and spatial presence of technological change:

> Boys are what we set moving. Boys are the material in which we deal. Boys are our tools: every wire has a boy at the end of it... why should they not join in the rollicking, reckless, restless movement?[3]

Gibb details the negative impact upon the young of the casualized labour patterns typical of the new mass industries, that did not encourage the development of skills and more permanent paths of employment amongst their workers. Other social histories detail changing patterns of consumption and relative affluence for boys or adolescents (there is considerable flux in terminology in this period). They tended to remain at home longer and marry later, seeking alternative spaces for socialization in the street. As Paul Thompson observes in his history of Edwardian England, a mean age of marriage 27 years for men and 25 for women created a gap between leaving school and the independence of marriage that was twice as long as in the 1970s.[4]

These demographic shifts increased the presence of youth in the family home, but this was not a process without tensions. Thompson records how physical punishment for the young working-class remained common in the Midlands and Industrial North as 'one of the immeasurable costs of the industrial revolution… wrought indiscriminately on the bodies of children'. He describes how the Edwardian years were marked by 'striking self-restraint' among the young because of less social space and the 'cumulative weight of three generations of Victorian puritanism'. This account is corroborated by data indicating that 'the general

illegitimacy ratio, as a percentage of live births, had fallen from six percent in the mid-nineteenth century to four per cent in the 1900s, despite later marriage'.[5]

New youth formations and identities grew in the spaces of the street that became alternative spaces of socialization for the urban young. Robert Roberts describes a prototype youth club of a group such as the 'Scuttlers' in Salford who 'constituted an open-air society, a communal gathering which had great importance socially, culturally and economically' .[6] Jon Savage's social history *Teenage. The Creation of Youth 1875-1945* (2007) documents a proliferation of these groups across the United Kingdom and other industrialized societies.[7] The increased spatial presence of visibly distinct and autonomous youth formations challenged politicians and reformers who viewed this presence as a manifestation of cultural decline.

The Social and Symbolic Re-Ordering of Youth and Class Identities

These radical shifts in urban identities and the spaces inhabited by the urban young instigated a far-reaching symbolic re-ordering of youth identities in which the restraint of the youth 'body', or its disciplining, was a primary goal. This imperative is manifested both within theory generated in the period and within government policy and social reform movements across a wide political spectrum. The creation of the figure of the 'hooligan' as the embodiment of a youth 'threat' and its corollary, the 'saving' of corrupted urban youth, were axiomatic to these reforms. The philosophy of restraint underpinning this re-ordering of ideas can be charted through analysis of the debate around the 'rediscovery' of adolescence from the late nineteenth century onwards.

John Springhall's study identifies 'youth' as the Victorian word commonly used when describing the period between childhood and adulthood; that is, until the 1880s when 'adolescence' began to be used[8]. Historian John Neubauer similarly identifies the term

‘adolescence’ as only having entered the major Western languages in the late nineteenth century.[9] This ‘rediscovery’ can be attributed to the emergence of Darwinian readings of evolution, which emphasized biological determinism and reasserted the value of the ‘natural’ within industrialized environments. These new readings of adolescence were also fundamental to a range of political measures, taking place alongside the social initiatives and cultural representations which led in turn to a demonization of the urban young as ‘hooligans’.

The perceived corruption of nineteenth century urban society by mass industrialization led to a surge of debate, particularly in the United States, over the best means to educate the young within social environments that had been radically altered. Narratives of adolescence that emerged in this context were often informed by religious thought and, in particular, by Puritan thinking that was profoundly retrospective in character. John Kett describes these narratives as part of a nostalgic view for a lost arcadia, ‘when young people were firmly in their place, subordinated to the wise exercise of authority and bound tightly by affective relationships to family and community'.[10]

As founder of The American Psychological Association, Granville Stanley Hall was a leading thinker in this revision of youth identities, advocating new systems of physical restraint to curb certain vices or excesses, foremost of which was masturbation. Hall’s theories popularized a revival of the ideas of youth, typical of Rousseau and the Romantics, as an age when ‘primal’ or ‘wild’ instincts were revived. Without adult intervention and constraint, Hall argued, adolescents would follow ‘natural’ instincts to disrupt the social order. An increase in ‘hoodlumism’ and ‘juvenile crime’ in youth were, in turn, symptomatic of failures to recognize the ‘nature and needs’ of adolescence, ‘and perhaps most of all, its perils’.[11]

Hall's emphasis on the 'natural' needs of the young obscured a more critical analysis of the social conditions created by the mass industrialization of labour. His theories also legitimized a view of the urban young as primary agents in the social disruptions perceived to accompany processes of mass industrialization. In turn, the figure of the 'hoodlum' or 'hooligan' emerged within educational thinking and policy informed by this essentialist theorizing of adolescence. Savage illustrates how, in Great Britain, these ideas were further influenced by the values of militarist masculinity and fears of a rebellious underclass:

Early thinking about adolescence focused on the control of the urban poor. The 1903 governmental 'Committee on Physical Deterioration' identified the problem of the lad from the 'rougher classes' who slipped through the net of church, school, or voluntary organisation and recommended 'drill and physical exercises' so that 'the male adolescent' could 'bear arms with very little supplementary discipline'.[12]

The Edwardian desire for a symbolic re-ordering of youth identities was driven by biopolitical imperatives of revitalizing the youth body in order to achieve fitness for military service, so neutralizing the potential threat of the urban working-class young. Connections between these ideas of adolescence and the emergence of the 'Hooligan' can be further identified through analysis of the rhetoric, key concepts and terminology underpinning the social formations that had been developed in Edwardian society to establish male adolescent compliance. The importance of 'drilling' as a disciplinary tool, was recognized across the political spectrum in the undertaking of social reform.

The failures of the late-Victorian Boer War were widely attributed to a weakened working-class body which had to be restored for the sake of Britain's imperial future. Jonathan Rose's history details how military training was undertaken across a wide range of organizations for the young, including some led by liberals and socialists. At least nine Settlement Houses sponsoring some kind of 'drilling' group, while foremost among a number these new organizations were the Boy Scouts, founded in 1908.[13] Baden-Powell's physical

'drilling' of the young was accompanied by a system of symbolic revitalization, largely drawn from the cultural imaginary of Empire, which employed both performance and fiction as tools and was accelerated by new systems of cultural reproduction. Scouting utilized, in particular, the iconography of nineteenth century adventure fiction and its affective hinterland, described by Jonathan Rutherford in his analysis of masculinity and Empire as the 'compulsion to escape the idleness and comfort of domesticity'.[14] The cultural imaginary of Empire and new systems of cultural reproduction driving the foundation of the Boy Scout movement were also instrumental in creating the alien 'other' of the 'Hooligan'.

As historian Eric Hobsbawm describes them, the Boy Scout movement was an exemplary 'invented tradition' in its enabling of inherently 'factitious' rituals to underpin state institutions in the absence of legitimising narratives of 'divine' authority'.[15] Hobsbawm's analysis draws attention to the performativity involved in the inculcation of 'certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past'.[16] Elleke Boehmer, in her edition of *The Scouting Handbook,* details Baden-Powell's love of performance, his rituals and yarns full of 'native' wisdom that were linked to repetitive, para-military activities such as tracking designed, in Baden-Powell's words, to prepare for 'what is *possible*, not only what is *probable* in war'.[17]

Predicated on Robert Baden-Powell's own belief in a 'sporting masculinity', Scouting fused Romantic ideas of chivalry and public school discipline in the service of patriotism. Historian, Geoffrey Pearson, describes the considerable ambivalence of Baden-Powell and other Edwardians concerning the 'hooligan' instincts of the young male: 'what was never entirely clear was whether Hooliganism represented the end-point of the evolutionary deterioration of the 'Imperial Race', or just the kind of rough boys needed as a warrior class to defend the empire'.[18] However, there can be little doubt over Baden-Powell's contempt for the undisciplined 'hooligan' young and, by implication, the working-class. Pearson

documents how Baden-Powell, addressing the National Defence Association in 1910, spoke of 'hooligans' as 'fellows of character if you can turn them the right way; and no doubt these fellows will be of some use to us in the future, instead of being absolute waste material, fit only to be buried.[19]

The manufacture of contempt for the urban young was accelerated through the same mass media that popularized the Boy Scout movement as a paradigm of imperial youth. Mass circulation newspapers had gained importance as literacy levels rose from the late nineteenth century onwards as channels of hegemony. Thus, when the *Daily Express* was founded in 1900 with the motto, 'Our Policy is the British Empire', this newspaper undertook to publish *The Scout,* the house magazine of Baden-Powell's movement, with considerable success and sales of 100,000 by the end of 1908.[20] Emerging at the end of the nineteenth century, the 'hooligan' archetype can be understood as a similar product of dominant forms of mass media. The term first appeared in the British press in the summer of 1898 in reports of bank holiday disturbances. Reports focused on gangs and street violence which were, as Pearson describes them, 'unprecedented' aspects of a phenomenon representing an agglomeration of concerns surrounding the pace of social change:[21]

> The name of the Hooligan, in fact, provided a crystallising focus for any number of overlapping anxieties associated with imperial decline, military incapacity, the erosion of social discipline and moral authority, the eclipse of family life, and what was feared to be the death rattle of 'Old England'.[22]

Developing his argument in a perspective written after the 2011 'English' Riots, Pearson notes how the 'the judgement of foreignness is very much part of the dead-end discourse against troublesome youth' and 'the prejudices implicit in these narratives and their contingency to other discourses of nationhood and Britishness'.[23] The 'hooligan' was, from its inception, constructed as an 'un-British' other,[24] and was given an Irish name and

identity.[25] Representations of the 'hooligan' were held to be antithetical to hegemonic ideas of Empire and national identity. They became, in effect, sites on which a coalescence of anxieties surrounding social identities and fears of working-class insurgency could be re-enacted and explored.

Pearson notes how a number of contemporary commentators observed how the creation of this archetype impeded authentic engagement with the problems of working-class youth. He cites an article in *Reynolds's Newspaper* of 14 August 1898 which 'viewed the Hooligan panic as an indictment of the hypocrisy of a civilisation' that took 'so painful an interest about moral handkerchiefs and hymn books for the barbarians of the wild Soudan' while turning a blind eye towards 'the far wilder barbarians they may find within a few paces from their own street-doors'.[26]

The production of anxieties surrounding the 'hooligan' increased in 1911, the year before the performance of W.S. Gilbert's eponymous play, in the wake of industrial unrest led, in some cases, by working-class youth in a series of 'Children's Strikes'. Historian Dave Marson's study of these strikes describes how agitants described variously as 'schoolboys', 'children' or 'youths', took part in a wave of protest that swept across England and Wales in imitation of the transport and dock worker strikes of the summer of 1911.[27] His accounts, gathered from contemporary news reports, document the emergence of a distinct generational consciousness and a political agenda directed against the increased use of physical restraints on the young in the form of corporal punishment.

Other reports indicate the extent to which essentialist ideas of 'wild' urban youth and the 'Hooligan threat' were used to legitimize violent sanctions against the young protesters. Robert Roberts' account of the events illustrates the readiness of the government and Home Secretary Winston Churchill to put down the strikes with force.[28] In crushing riots and

disturbances that occurred during a General Strike in Liverpool, *The Times* newspaper of 8 August 1911 reports how Churchill distinguished between leaders of unrest and 'hooligans' who 'of course join in wherever mischief is afoot. It is in their nature to do so, and everyone knows it'.

The emergence in the mass media of the 'hooligan' as a caricature of a criminal urban working-class youth had restricted a more objective engagement with the changed social situations of urban populations. Pearson describes these media characterizations as 'convenient metaphor' that masked far more complex issues to do with rapid social and cultural change[29]. He concludes that 'if it had not been for the energies of the press in promoting the new word… then no doubt the 'Hooligan' would have passed into obscurity'.[30] Pearson also demonstrates how the trope of the hooligan or troublesome adolescence had a durational influence in subsequent twentieth-century media caricatures that linked manifestations of working-class youth agency and affluence to ideas of social and moral decline. Discussing reaction to the appearance of the 'teddy boy' in British cities and resorts in post-Second World War Britain, Pearson comments:

The crystallising focus for these anxieties in 1950s Britain was not some generalised 'adolescent'. It was always assumed, as we will repeatedly find in these hooligan discourses, that 'the adolescent' was a boy: when the other sex figures at all it is as mothers, usually neglectful ones. What also tended to go unmentioned was that he was, specifically, a working-class boy.[31]

The caricature of the 'hooligan' was also subject to contingent notions of class threat and female working-class moral corruption. For Pearson, it compressed 'into a single image the ravages of modern trends such as high-speed living' and 'urban anonymity'.[32] It was an image that was to have considerable longevity in British culture and performance.

Continuities in the role of the media in the construction of the 'hooligan' can be further explored through comparative analysis of processes of 'othering' and class differentiation in the early twenty-first century construction of the 'chav'. My key reference in this analysis is Imogen Tyler's analysis of the 'chav mum' 'as a term of vilification for white working-class women which details the close connections between perceived threats to the governing order and the creation of a 'new vocabulary of social class'.[33] The next stage of the discussion seeks to illuminate the common parameters in Edwardian and twenty-first century processes of symbolic re-imagining and 'othering' of working-class identities. Tyler details how the role of performance and repetition served to stereotype class antagonism within a period of social volatility.[34]

Drawing on Claudia Casteneda's theories of figuration, Tyler describes how social identities are created through a generative performed process of repetition where 'specific figures acquire accreted form and accrue affective value in ways that have significant social and political impact'.[35] To illustrate this process, Castaneda discusses the example of 'Vicky Pollard', the creation of the middle-class writers of *Little Britain* Matt Lucas and David Walliams, to illustrate how the character name 'has taken on an extraordinary resonance, often replacing the term "chav" as a synonym for this imagined social type it independently populates'.[36] Such caricatured figures 'are mobilised in ways' that 'attribute superior forms of social capital to the subject positions and social groups they are implicitly or explicitly differentiated from'.[37]

The emergence of the 'chav' figure can be regarded, Tyler argues, as an intrinsic part of a process of 'class making' and 'othering'; that is, of a differentiation and marking out of class identities that attends a period of social upheaval and inequality. While Tyler's analysis applies for the most part to the construction of white female working-class identities, it offers

a counterpoint to the construction of the 'hooligan' that highlights the continuing role of the media in the creation, through performative repetitions, of demonized working-class subjects.

W. S. Gilbert and *The Hooligan*

W.S. Gilbert's (1912) play *The Hooligan* had its first performance at the Coliseum Theatre London on 27 February 1912. In representing a working-class subject, it was the first realist drama to be produced for an Edwardian music hall audience. The play can be examined in relation to the 'figuration' of the young 'hooligan' and as a social record of a counter-cultural challenge to legislative barriers that restricted realist representation of the working-classes. A history of the play's production can also illustrate the hegemonic ideas shaping both the content of the play and the social space in which it was performed. A cultural materialist perspective will be adopted here to map the emergence of new forms of expression, and the shifts in the ecology of theatre-making that attended the staging of this play. This approach reflects Raymond Williams' argument that innovation in theatre performance and production may identify 'new kinds of speech, which were also new ways of what could be publicly spoken'.[38]

My focus in what follows is the relationships between the author, his working-class subject and audience, and the use of new 'authentic' demotic speech patterns as markers of social identity. In a comparative analysis with the production of John Galsworthy's *Justice* (1909), I also offer an exploration of the means by which representations of working-class identities were differentiated from those of middle-classes subjects.

New forms of highly capitalized music-hall entertainment had transformed the social spaces of the theatre and restricted working-class attendance and interaction with the stage. Licensing controls were used to reduce drastically the number of saloons, and small halls that

could produce entertainment. This trend was reinforced by a licensing ‘purge’ undertaken by the London City Council between 1889-1891. Working-class places of entertainment such as ‘the penny gaff’ disappeared to be replaced by larger, more regulated music halls.

Dagmar Kift’s history illustrates how these controls were aimed at constraining behaviour in the halls, including alcohol consumption and soliciting. This led to proprietors making ‘a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate expressions of approval’ with increased attention to incidents of ‘riotous’ behaviour, which had previously been attributed to high spirits.[39] In addition, higher prices meant displacing young audiences from the stalls for those who could afford elevated stalls prices. As Kift argues, such practices, detached the halls from their working-class roots and, as a result, led them to lose their vitality and a culture of ‘knowingness’ between working-class audience and performers. Fears of losing their license led proprietors to instigate systems of self-policing, creating house rules and prohibiting material deemed offensive; this meant that artists had to submit material for what was, in effect, prior censorship.[40] These controls and the accompanying ‘professionalization’ of the performer led to a homogenized event that stifled anti-establishment comment and tolerated and promoted content in support of the British Empire.

However, a vibrant 1912 West End season reflected a renaissance in interest in experimental form, following both the cultural sensations of the December 1910 Royal Academy’s first display of post-impressionist painters Monet and Gauguin and the revolutionary performances of Diaghelev’s *Ballet Russes* foregrounding the internationally acclaimed Vaslav Nijinsky. The 1912 season included a production of *Oedipus Rex* directed by Max Reinhardt in a radically innovative staging which revolutionized the relationship between the audience and stage with new effects achieved through lighting and mass movement. The play was first performed in Frankfurt at the Albert Schumann Circus for an audience of five thousand. Permission to perform was initially blocked in England by the

Lord Chamberlain on the grounds of its subject of incest but, following petitions, the play was staged at the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden. New devices such as rampways running through the stalls permitted flows of crowds through the theatre, much greater proximity between the audience and the stage action, and a revolutionary sensation of animation. These new patterns of representation reflected the social dynamics of the period and its volatility, unrest and mass protest.

Leading West End producer, Oswald Stoll, who had profited from the commercialization of the larger music halls, was also engaged in seeking to transform his theatres and the plays he could offer. He had built up a highly successful empire through a process of mergers with rival firms Moss and Thornton. In a history of the management and structure of the hall, Tracy Davis calculates the number of his theatres in different English cities to be 35 in 1906, making it the world's largest theatre enterprise.[41] Stoll had taken an interest in the 'new' drama produced at the Court Theatre but was aware of the commercial difficulties in sustaining the work of experimental writers. Sidney Blow, one of Stoll's actors and collaborators, details the producer's discomfort with the 'monotony' of his offerings offering to suburban audiences and his desire to challenge the constraints that had limited the range of plays he could produce.[42] Prior to 1912, plays could not be produced in music halls because they were not under the jurisdiction of the Lord Chamberlain. Gilbert's biographer Jane Stedman records that W.S.Gilbert wrote a successful public letter with Somerset Maugham and others in 1910 that overturned a rule forbidding the performance of plays in music halls[43]. Stoll saw an opportunity to widen the repertoire of the music hall and Blow was authorized to negotiate with leading dramatists to produce a one-act play.[44] Blow offered a commission firstly to George Bernard Shaw, who refused, stating that he could not accept the constraint that new plays be restricted to thirty minutes.

Gilbert's acceptance of Stoll's invitation was motivated, in part, by a desire to seek legal justice for the young. Gilbert began his career as a lawyer, joining the Education Department of the Privy Council in 1857 and working as a lawyer and journalist before his successful collaboration with composer Arthur Sullivan. Stedman records that he retained a degree of scepticism towards the law and the police, striving always to ask the question, 'What chance had this man had?'[45] As he told 'The Clubman' of the *Sketch,*[46] Gilbert intended to point out that 'the punishment of a man who never had been given a chance to rise out of the gutter should never be the same as the punishment of the man who had thrown away his chances'.[47]

Born in 1836, before Victoria came to the throne, Gilbert remained a Victorian in sensibility. Facing an investigative Parliamentary Committee in 1909, he spoke in favour of censorship, stating that the stage was not a proper platform to discuss relations between the sexes or radical political ideas. According to Samuel Hynes, this belief rested on his 'paternalistic assumption' that it was the duty of the English gentleman to 'shelter the minds of weaker vessels'.[48] Here, Gilbert reflected the ideas of his age in his desire to protect the young from sexual knowledge, yet he was more progressive in challenging the restraints of censorship on theatre production. Gilbert responded energetically to this commission and after a period of research at Pentonville prison, the play was written in a matter of months and finished on 2 February 1911. Written as a thirty minute 'character sketch', the play is a study of Solly, 'a hooligan under sentence of death'. Having killed his girlfriend in a crime of passion, Solly is represented as unfit and a product of familial, generational and societal failure. He is described by warders as 'soft-spined' and 'like a wet hammock'.[49] While Solly speaks of himself as 'feeble-minded; the doctor said so, and 'e 'd know. Then I've never had no chance; I've never been taught nuffin', and I've got a weak 'art'.[50]

This representation of the body of the working-class male as enfeebled reflected normative Victorian tropes of childhood that linked notions of lost innocence to the loss of 'natural' environments. Hall's idea that, in an industrial age, 'young people leap rather than grow into maturity'[51] had appeal at a time when, as historian Peter Coveney argues, there was increased engagement in fiction with the idea of the child as a vehicle for social commentary and fascination with its 'nemesis' of 'juvenile corruption'.[52]

While Gilbert's representation of the young working-class male reflects these dominant ideas, it also offers a plea for a more progressive attitude to the young and a deeper consideration of the social conditions that shape youth identities. Gilbert asks the audience whether Solly should be judged, as Solly puts it, 'like a bloke that's been brought up fair and strite and taught a tride' for the crime of killing his girlfriend.[53] In this respect, Gilbert broadens the range of discussion of the mass media figuration of the 'hooligan' of the time. Nonetheless, this vision of reform and redemption also limited the scope of working-class agency, as a comparison with John Galsworthy's *Justice* (1909) illustrates.

Pleas for social justice with regard to incarcerated youth were many among Edwardian reformers, who recognized the harshness of penal conditions. In this respect, John Galsworthy's play had brought the issue to the centre of public debate and was influential in promoting subsequent reform. The play concerns a young law clerk, William Falder, who forges a cheque in order to raise sufficient money to elope with the woman he loves, who is married to an alcoholic.

Galsworthy focuses on the harshness of punishment which ultimately leads to the law clerk's death. Anthony Jackson's history of theatre as an educational medium, *Theatre, Education and the Making of Meanings*, identifies Galsworthy's play as 'one of the very few plays to which one can ascribe a direct and immediate impact upon the social system'.[54] This

view is corroborated by criminologist Mike Nellis who describes how the play's first night was attended by the then Home Secretary Winston Churchill and the Chairman of the Prison Commission Sir Evelyn Ruggles-Brise and 'influenced the decision later that year to reduce the period spent by prisoners in confinement'.[55]

Galsworthy's play was progressive in its intentions and social impact. Closer analysis and comparison with Gilbert's *Hooligan* reveals commonalities between both authors' concern with social justice for the young and the normative ideas of criminality that underpinned their characterization. It also illustrates a significant differentiation between the representation of lower-middle class and working-class people. Galsworthy's research at Lewes prison led to his persuasive analysis of the links between solitary incarceration and nervous debilitation among the young and his strong argument that juveniles aged between 16 and 22 be removed from the adult prison system. These arguments inform the final appeal to the jury by Falder's barrister Hector Frome:

> Is a man to be lost because he is bred and born with a weak character? Gentlemen, men like the prisoner are destroyed daily under our law for want of that human insight which sees them as they are, patients, and not criminals... I beg you not to return a verdict that may thrust him back into prison and brand him for ever. Gentlemen, Justice is a machine that once someone has given it a starting push, rolls on of itself.[56]

Galsworthy's correspondence with Ruggles-Brise indicates that he shared the dominant essentialist ideas of a youth body corrupted by industrialization, as represented by Gilbert in *The Hooligan*. Nellis describes how Galsworthy writes to Ruggles-Brise that some children of all the classes were criminal because of 'a taint in their blood, a lesion in their brains'.[57] Nellis argues that Falder's eventual reprieve reflects a more sympathetic approach. Falder's lower middle-class status made him more appealing to a middle-class

audience than someone from the poorer classes would have been.[58] However, according the same levels of sympathy and attributes of agency to a working-class young 'criminal' is more problematic in *The Hooligan*. Despite receiving the news that his death sentence is to be reprieved, the news prompts Solly the working-class 'hooligan' somewhat improbably and melodramatically to have a heart attack and die.

Gilbert's 'Character Sketch' was performed as the last piece before an interval during which the band played selections from *The Gondoliers*. The second half of the programme included a mimed play *Samarun* which dealt with violence and sexuality and was performed by Max Reinhardt's Deutsche Theatre Company from Berlin.[59] The reception of the play indicates that its subject and material were both unfamiliar and, to some extent, unwelcome to its audience. Stedman notes that Stoll described the play as 'grim, a *tranche de vie* unlike the usual programmes he presented'. Its opening night was reported in the *Pall Mall Gazette* as a 'triumph of morbid realism' accompanied by hisses from spectators.[60] However, Blow notes the favourable response to actor James Welch whose performance of Solly held the audience from start to finish and led to repeated curtain calls.[61]

Other reports of the play's reception confirm that there was a good level of audience identification and pleasure in its representation of working-class identities and with the performance of James Welch as Solly, who had previously played the role of Lickcheese in the first performance of Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession.* Welch, described by Stedman as both 'accomplished in Cockney dialect and capable of both comedy and pathos',[62] was engaged to play the role for a three-week run at £300 pounds a week. The run was extended for two more weeks as a consequence of its success.[63]

The identification of Welch's 'Solly' as a Cockney is significant in that it connotes an existing history of representation of working-class identity. In his discussion of music-hall

Cockneys, Derek Scott argues that music-hall representations were part of a 'simulacrum of identity', or an 'imagined real' where performances adhered to a representational code in a perpetuation of already existing representations which invited reflexive responses from audiences.[64] Shaw's representation of the Cockney drew on these music-hall origins and Gilbert replicated his use of language in the speech of Cockney characters, typically in the addition, subtraction and substitution of letters.

While the characterization of a Cockney might be an attempt at social realism, it can also be interpreted as part of a process of figuration and 'othering', a textual replication of Solly's embodiment of working-class physical 'corruption'. This reading of the adoption of demotic speech patterns to capture working-class language is advanced by Carolyn Steedman in her study of nineteenth-century East End social reformer Margaret McMillan. McMillan had been a pioneer in her use of 'dialect' to create verbatim accounts of urban poverty. In an argument that demonstrates the implicit conservatism of this pattern of representation, Steedman discusses McMillan depictions of working-class childhood in a 'precise evocation of beauty in sordid surroundings' as 'an already thwarted possibility' [65]. These descriptions wed Romanticism and socialist thought in a new version of the child in 'a kind of marriage between innocence and mortality'.

Steedman also cites Raymond Williams's argument that this this type of representation of the demotic may have been praised for its 'apparent exclusion of self-conscious authorial commentary', but it actually marked a process whereby observation, or commentary, has been completed within narrative; hence, it has become a 'whole way of seeing at a "sociological" distance'.[66] This perspective illustrates how this attempt at realism, while seeking to be reformist in intention, simultaneously revealed social distance and separation between author and subject. In relation to authorial 'distance', it is significant that Blow records Gilbert battling with Welch, who was renowned for adlibbing, to adhere to his

text[67]. These authorial controls on the performance of working-class identities in *The Hooligan* (to a largely suburban audience), contrast markedly with the subversive performances of early Victorian drama, which invited participation with a ‘knowing’ working-class audience.

Conclusions

Gilbert’s representation of Solly embodied normative late Victorian and Edwardian ideas of a ‘corrupted’ and enfeebled youth ‘body’. At the same time, Solly is a subject of sympathy as one who has not enjoyed privilege or opportunity. As such, the play interrupts the generative process responsible for images of the hooligan prompted by the mainstream newspapers of the period. Gilbert draws attention to how these representations ignored social conditions, and the play was seen as a significant contribution to campaigns for legal reform. These factors indicate a capacity for Edwardian drama to challenge normative ideas of ‘Hooligan’ identity. However, the circumstances of the play’s production illustrate how this progressive capacity was compromised by other systems of control. The initial restraints on the production of this piece demonstrate the extent to which hegemonic ideas legitimizing the ‘restraint’ of working-class youth impacted upon the participation of the young as audiences in theatre spaces and, also, on the limited range of representation of working-class identities.

The experimental Late Edwardian theatre was adventurous in its formal invention and in its challenges to restraints both in the field of production and willingness to engage with representation offering greater psychological realism. Just one year after an editorial complaining of ‘barrenness’ on the West End stage, commentators writing in *The Stage Year Book* of 1912 point to a change in the appetites of British audiences, turning from ‘old-fashioned conventionalism’ to a greater interest in motive and character. However, the style

of production of *The Hooligan* illustrates the extent to which the discussion of working-class identities was dominated by hegemonic ideas of a working-class 'threat'. While Gilbert sought to deepen understanding of social conditions which led to working-class crime, a discussion largely absent in the figuration of the hooligan in the mainstream press, normative assumptions of working-class 'corruption' and lack of agency were embedded in his characterization of Solly and the production of his text. In addition, the first realist performance of a young working-class male took place in a space from which the young working-class had been largely excluded.

Pearson's analysis demonstrates how normative tropes of delinquency are recycled and repeated in the staging of middle-class anxiety across different periods. This analysis of *The Hooligan* indicates how the Edwardian 'foundational' staging of working-class identities was bound up with middle-class anxieties surrounding social change and normative ideas of adolescent disruption. It also demonstrates the extent to which representation of these identities was restrained by controls operating in highly capitalized, state-controlled theatre. The figuration of working-class 'chav' or 'hooligan' identities through repeated performance demonstrates the potential for cultural representation to collude in the perpetuation of ideas of working-class inferiority. In Edwardian society, as now, these normative tropes can obstruct engagement to improve the lives of the young. As Pearson argues, awareness of the relationship between the notion of the 'hooligan' adolescent and perceptions of delinquency or moral decline is necessary to guard against the 'historical amnesia and a deep cultural pessimism' which may deter us 'in our attempts to fashion realistic responses to the current actualities and dilemmas'.[68] Gilbert's *The Hooligan* provides a historic example that prefigures the 'class-othering' in representations of working-class identities in the twenty-first century. Paying closer attention to the connections between this play and the contemporary authoring of working-class identities can help to uncover the assumptions and

limitations of ‘market’ conditions, which continue to limit the representation of the urban young.

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