**From the Western Front to the East Coast:**

**Barker’s *The Trojan Women* in the USA**

**Philippa Burt**

When Harley Granville Barker was invited to stage a theatre season in New York following the outbreak of World War One, senior figures within British politics seized on it as an opportunity to promote the British war effort in the United States. It was, however, Barker’s impromptu decision to extend his stay and tour Euripides’s *The Trojan Women* to major colleges on the east coast that saw him come close to realising this goal. Through close examination of the production, the discourse that surrounded it and the changing diplomatic relations between Britain and the United States, this article explores the extent to which Barker used Euripides as a propaganda tool through which to engage and educate the largely isolationist North American public. At the same time, it argues that Barker challenged the propaganda machine by refusing to perpetuate the dominant nationalistic and xenophobic narratives and, instead, presenting a condemnation of all war. Philippa Burt is a lecturer in the Department of Theatre and Performance at Goldsmiths, University of London. Her previous publications include numerous articles and a chapter on Barker’s work with choruses in the forthcoming *The Great European Stage Directors, Vol. 4 Reinhardt, Jessner, Barker* (Bloomsbury Methuen).

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In its review of Harley Granville Barker’s production of *The Trojan Women* at the University of Pennsylvania in June 1915, the *Philadelphia Public Ledger* concluded that the play was ‘so modern in its intent that it might be called “The Belgian Women”.’[[1]](#endnote-1) The newspaper was, of course, not alone in drawing parallels between Euripides’s devastating tale of the sacking of Troy and the scale of death and destruction brought on by World War One that was rapidly spiralling out of control. Indeed, it was a connection that Barker and Gilbert Murray – the translator of the play – exploited, where they used Euripides’s words to comment on the horrors that beset Europe.

The time and place of the production was significant: since the outbreak of war the continued neutrality of the United States had become increasingly contested, with public opinion divided as to which side to support. Using various forms of propaganda, pro-Anglo groups worked to emphasise the commonalities between Britain and North America and make clear the brutality of Germany, as is outlined below. This article locates Barker’s production within this context and examines the vital contribution it made to the propaganda war waged by Britain.

This contribution took two forms. First, it provided the opportunity to showcase the innovations of the British theatre to east coast audiences at a time when German theatrical experiments were already making headlines in New York.[[2]](#endnote-2) The production thus acted as a form of cultural propaganda. Second, and more significantly, Barker used Euripides’s words to bring the reality of the Western front to his audiences, and to open their eyes to the atrocities taking place in Europe and the heinous actions of the invading German forces.

Yet, it was distinct from the rest of the propaganda machine in that it did not herald unquestionably the rights and virtues of the British, or simply replicate the nationalistic and jingoistic sentiments that were common parlance at the time. Drawing on Barker’s detailed rehearsal notes and production plans, this article argues that the production was instead presented as a warning to the Allied forces as much as a condemnation of the actions of the Kaiser.

Little scholarly attention has been placed on Barker’s work with Euripidean tragedy, despite the fact that it was both an important and a consistent feature of his practice as a director.[[3]](#endnote-3) His career was bookended by such productions – *Hippolytus* inaugurated his now legendary seasons at the Court Theatre (now the Royal Court) while his 1915 *The Trojan Women* was among his last practical work on the stage – and, in between, it was included in the repertoire of each of his forays into theatre management. By examining this aspect of Barker’s oeuvre and providing a close analysis of seldom used archival material, this article presents a contribution to the discourse on Barker. Further, in identifying the links between the 1915 tour of *The Trojan Women* and the ongoing machinations of war, it builds on my earlier call for a deeper understanding of how politics underpinned Barker’s work as a director.[[4]](#endnote-4)

**Crossing the Atlantic**

Prior to the outbreak of war and his trip across the Atlantic, Barker had already carved a position for himself in the London theatre scene as a politically active writer, director and actor. With William Archer, he campaigned tirelessly for a National Theatre in Britain, publishing a detailed and fully costed plan of how to achieve this in 1904. He was also an active member of the Fabian Society, where he sat on the Executive Committee from 1907 to 1912, and a regular member of the Stage Society before starting his Court Theatre seasons with partner John Eugene Vedrenne. These seasons, which ran from October 1904 to June 1907, quickly became the home of the New Drama in London, introducing audiences to the work of George Bernard Shaw, Elizabeth Robins, John Galsworthy and St John Hankin, among others.

Following the closure of the Court seasons, Barker continued in his quest to create a socially-engaged theatre that provided an antidote to the dominant ‘star’ system and the long run. He staged a number of similarly experimental seasons in different London theatres with then wife Lillah McCarthy before turning his hand to Shakespeare at the Savoy Theatre.[[5]](#endnote-5) His 1912 production of *The Winter’s Tale* caused a sensation amongst critics and audience members, as did his productions of *Twelfth Night* (which opened later in the same year) and his 1914 *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. While opinion was largely divided for the first two productions, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* was heralded a triumph and critics eagerly anticipated his continued journey through Shakespeare’s canon.[[6]](#endnote-6) Britain’s declaration of war on Germany six months later put paid to these plans.

Barker staged one more production in London following the outbreak of war – Thomas Hardy’s *The Dynasts* at the Kingsway Theatre in November 1914 – but quickly became frustrated by his inability to capitalise on the momentum of the Savoy Shakespeare productions during the enforced break. Charles Purdom cites his decision to give up his lease of the Kingsway as evidence of his increasingly ‘despairing state of mind’ and anxiety about the future of the British theatre.[[7]](#endnote-7) As Barker explained to George Bernard Shaw: ‘I really cannot sit in England and watch theatrical London crumble around me, so the only thing left for us to do is to make a clean cut of our losses, which, since the war broke out, have been pretty severe.’[[8]](#endnote-8)

Given the rather bleak prospects that he faced, it is not surprising that the offer of staging a season of work for the New York Stage Society was particularly appealing at this time. Not only did the invitation guarantee him a fund of £25,000, but it also gave him the freedom to choose his own plays and offered the promise of establishing in New York what had proved impossible in London, namely, a permanent repertory company operating along ensemble lines.[[9]](#endnote-9) Again to Shaw, he explained: ‘I come to America to keep flying the flag.’[[10]](#endnote-10) For its own part, the Stage Society was keen to engage a European director of repute so North American audiences could see for themselves the theatrical experiments taking place across the Atlantic. Indeed, it had previously invited both Max Reinhardt and Edward Gordon Craig, but these plans fell to the wayside.[[11]](#endnote-11)

Barker’s motives for going were added to by friends, colleagues and figures at the very top of British politics. He and Lillah McCarthy enjoyed a close personal relationship with Prime Minister Harold Asquith, who, on hearing of the invitation, applied gentle pressure for them to accept.[[12]](#endnote-12) Not only would it provide a safer outlet for Barker’s frustrations – warning McCarthy that ‘we don’t want [him] as a soldier’ – but, more significantly, Asquith saw it as invaluable propaganda for the war effort and a chance to promote British interests in the United States.[[13]](#endnote-13)

**Impartial Diplomacy and the Propaganda Machine**

The neutral position adopted by North America at this time indicated its rather ambivalent attitude towards Britain and its own role in the war. In his official proclamation of neutrality – issued on 4 August 1914, the same day that Britain declared war on Germany – President Woodrow Wilson set out the parameters of his country’s position and imposed on its inhabitants the ‘duty of impartial neutrality during the existence of this contest.’[[14]](#endnote-14) This proclamation was quickly followed by a more personal appeal to all North Americans to be ‘impartial in thought, as well as action’ and to ‘put a curb upon our sentiments, as well as upon every transaction that might be construed as a preference of one party to the struggle before another.’[[15]](#endnote-15)

Wilson held this position doggedly for over three years in the face of a growing polarisation of public opinion and fractures between members of his own cabinet. Former President Theodore Roosevelt and senior figures within the armed forces admonished him publicly for his failure to prepare the United States for what they saw as its inevitable entry into the war and his passive response to apparent German aggression.[[16]](#endnote-16) On the other side, William Jennings Bryan, a vocal advocate for continued neutrality who was openly sympathetic to the German cause, resigned from his position as Secretary of State in June 1915 in protest against what he believed to be Wilson’s impartiality for the Allied forces.

There were multiple factors that underpinned Wilson’s call for neutrality. First, the large German-American and Irish-American populations made it a political necessity. The 1910 census recorded over 2.5 million German-born and 1.3 million Irish-born immigrants living in the United States, comprising 18.5 per cent and 10 per cent of the total foreign-born population in the country, respectively. While this number had dropped from previous decades, the vast majority of immigrants still came from Germany and Ireland, with the majority settling in New York, Illinois and Pennsylvania. [[17]](#endnote-17) There was, of course, also a growing population of second-generation immigrants, which meant that there was a significant proportion of electorate who were deeply hostile to the British cause. Given the fact that 1916 was an election year, entering the war on the side of the Allies would have been political suicide for Wilson.

Second, as a firm believer in the principles of democracy and liberalism, Wilson sought to transcend the tradition of old dynastic powers fighting for hegemonic control of Europe and replace it with a more internationalist approach that centred on the creation of unions between self-determined nations. ‘No nation should seek to extend its polity over any other nation or people,’ Wilson explained in January 1917, ‘…every people should be left free to determine its own polity, its own way of development, unhindered, unthreatened, unafraid, the little among the great and the powerful.’[[18]](#endnote-18) To this end, Wilson was reluctant to join either side and initially pursued a mediated peace – or a ‘peace without victory’ – that would avoid one side being able to force a peace settlement on the other along with the consequent humiliation and resentment. Given this position, he looked askance at Britain’s naval blockade of Germany and its use of black list practices to starve the country, both literally and metaphorically, as well as Germany’s unrestricted use of submarine warfare.

The adopted policy of neutrality was similarly rooted in the national habitus of North America. Ever since George Washington used his 1796 Farewell Address to call for protection of the country’s independence – warning that ‘the nation which indulges towards another an habitual hatred, or an habitual fondness, is in some degree a slave’ – a policy of isolationism had underpinned its diplomatic relations.[[19]](#endnote-19) World War One made the apparent necessity and success of such a policy all the more clear: the sight of Europe engulfed by war signalled to many North Americans the virtue of its own refusal to become ‘entangled’ in European affairs and alliances. As Washington had asked in 1796:

Why forgo the advantages of so peculiar a situation? Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground? Why, by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalship, interest, humor [sic], or caprice?[[20]](#endnote-20)

Anti-intervention groups on both sides of the political spectrum echoed such sentiments, while the underlying belief in American exceptionalism was used to argue that involvement in foreign conflict was against the American way of life.

Finally, Wilson clung to his neutral stance because he believed that it would strengthen North America’s position in the world and its future prospects, largely due to the indirect role it could play in settling the dispute. As Donald Cameron Watt argues, the President believed that by casting himself in the role of mediator between the warring nations, he – and, in turn, North America – could dictate the final terms of any peace treaty.[[21]](#endnote-21) Of course, this mediatory role marked a shift away from the total isolation of Washington and set a precedent of the United States becoming involved in international conflict, raising questions about the country’s role in the world. These questions have remained pertinent, not least since the election of Donald Trump in 2016 and his neo-nationalist ‘America First’ policy.[[22]](#endnote-22)

The split between the pro- and anti-intervention camps was reflected in the press of the time. Years before the establishment of the so-called ‘special relationship’, the threat posed to North American commercial interests by British competition coupled with the aforementioned presence of significant German and Irish diasporas led many to speak out against any suggestion that the United States should join Britain in the war. Further, a highly organised German propaganda machine leapt into action immediately after the outbreak of war and worked hard to keep the country neutral. Of the three hundred and sixty-seven newspapers in circulation during this period, two hundred and forty-two – or 66 per cent – advocated continued neutrality, while twenty came out in explicit support of the German forces. [[23]](#endnote-23) Included in the latter group were such influential German-language publications as the *Staats-Zeitung* as well as newspapers that fell under the control of William Randolph Hearst, who was the owner of the largest newspaper and magazine empire in the States and the real-life inspiration for Orson Welles’s *Citizen Kane*. Hearst wrote editorials in such newspapers as *New York American* declaring that ‘the war was purely an economic struggle… England and Japan were more menacing to American neutrality than Germany’, and, furthermore, that ‘Americans would be dupes and gulls if they permitted a single drop of American blood to be shed upon foreign soil.’[[24]](#endnote-24)

Public discourse surrounding the war was thus a contested space. Pro-Anglo groups had not only to convince the general public that Britain was its natural ally, but also that the German threat would soon reach its own eastern shores, proving that intervention was necessary for reasons of national security. Jessica Bennett and Mark Hampton have examined closely the propaganda material published by Wellington House – Britain’s War Propaganda Bureau – and disseminated via certain sections of the press, making any further exposition here unnecessary. Such publications as *The Barbarism of Berlin* (G.K. Chesterton, 1914), *After Twelve Months of War* (Charles Masterman, 1915) and *Why Britain is at War* (Sir Edward Cook, 1915) were written to project ‘an image of Anglicized virtues under threat by German barbarism, aggression, and militarism.’[[25]](#endnote-25) By arguing that Britain fought for those very values held dear by the American people – including justice, honour, humanity and civilization – such material emphasized the commonalities between Britain and the United States, creating what Bennett and Hampton call an ‘Anglo-American imagined community’.

Herein lies the significance of Barker’s invitation to New York. While by no means as direct as the Wellington House material, it, too, provided an opportunity of highlighting the deep and lasting bond between the two countries, and to garner public favour by demonstrating the strength and artistic skill of the British theatre.

Barker’s own views on the war were complicated. As a member of the Fabian Society, he was committed to the principles of democratic socialism and favoured an internationalist and anti-Imperialist foreign policy that was largely opposed to such conflicts. Yet, he was far less explicit in his condemnation of it than his fellow Fabian, close friend and collaborator George Bernard Shaw, who caused outrage in his declaration that the war was nothing more than ‘England and Germany jumping at the chance they have longed for in vain for many years of smashing one another and establishing their own oligarchy as the dominant military power in the world.’[[26]](#endnote-26) Like Shaw, Barker was very sceptical and declared to Gilbert Murray that he would sign any protest against it ‘with my blood if anything were to be gained by shedding it’.[[27]](#endnote-27) At the same time, he felt the patriotic pull to contribute to the war and was torn by indecision about what to do. His work in New York provided him with a clear purpose, even if only for a short time.

**Euripides on the East Coast**

Barker’s repertory season opened at the Wallack’s Theatre in New York on 27 January 1915 with a repertoire that included Shaw’s *Androcles and the Lion* and a restaging of his *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The press was generally positive about the season, although the New York audience – used to the length of run being a demarcation of success – struggled to grasp its repertory structures. Numerous articles appeared in journals such as *Theatre* celebrating Barker’s presence in the city, commending the methods he introduced to the New York theatre scene, and reporting on innovations taking place in the British theatre.[[28]](#endnote-28)

 In so far as its intention was to spread awareness of the British theatre and to build closer cultural relations between the two countries, the season was successful. However, Barker became homesick and frustrated, once again pessimistic about the future of the theatre and torn between his commitment to it and his sense of national obligation. In another letter to Shaw, less than a month after the opening of his New York season, he set out his anxiety:

What is going to happen after the war?… It would be a great mental relief to be in the trenches… If there was anything I could do – (I mean not by going “to the front” – for heaven knows I should be no use there…) I should be delighted to drop all plans here – for after all, ultimately, this *isn’t* my job – and to come back to England.[[29]](#endnote-29)

However, during an excursion to the Yale Bowl in New Haven, Barker saw the potential for the space to be transformed into a large Greek theatre, offering the perfect setting for the plays of Euripides and bringing with it a new drive and sense of creative excitement.

 With the help of a committee of prominent academics, including Professors George Pierce Baker of Harvard and William Lyon Phelps of Yale University, Barker organised a short tour of Euripides’s *Iphigenia in Tauris* and *The Trojan Women* to the stadia of prominent east coast universities.[[30]](#endnote-30) Beginning at Yale on 15 May, the productions travelled to Harvard, the College of the City of New York – where it was chosen to commemorate the opening of the new Lewisohn Stadium – and the University of Pennsylvania before finishing at Princeton on 12 June.[[31]](#endnote-31) Although there had been earlier small-scale outdoor productions, this was the first major open-air professional production of a Greek tragedy in the United States, and so garnered a great deal of attention.

 As noted above, Euripides had been a key feature of Barker’s work in London, where he staged his close friend Gilbert Murray’s recent translations of the plays. These were the first professional productions of Greek theatre on the British stage, and, together, Barker and Murray introduced wider Britain to it.[[32]](#endnote-32) Critics agreed that Barker’s first Euripidean production – *Hippolytus* for the New Century Theatre in May 1904 – was a watershed moment in the British theatre, revealing for the first time the continued relevance of the work and laying the groundwork for future productions, including William Poel’s *The Bacchae* and Max Reinhardt’s 1912 *Oedipus Rex* at Covent Garden. Barker staged six further productions of Euripides’s plays (including revivals and restagings), with the majority of these taking place at the Court.[[33]](#endnote-33) Indeed, Euripides was the second most staged writer at the Court behind Shaw, where his plays were presented in dialogue with the emerging New Drama movement.

 Barker’s chief aim was not to present Euripides’s plays as antiquarian artefacts, but, rather, ‘to take a play which was a living thing two thousand years ago and provide for its interpreting as a living thing to an audience of to-day.’[[34]](#endnote-34) With the help of Murray’s translations, Barker was able to use the plays to comment on the social and political situation of the time. His 1907 *Medea*, for example, was ‘deliberately performed against the upsurge of public interest in the movement for women’s suffrage.’[[35]](#endnote-35) Such productions helped to make Euripides both accessible and popular.

 Given this, Barker’s choice of *Iphigenia in Tauris* and, in particular, Euripides’s infamous anti-war play *The Trojan Women* for the stadia tour was no coincidence. Barker had originally staged the latter in 1905, with the shadow of the Boer Wars still looming over Britain. Murray was vocal in his criticism of Britain’s actions in the war, and his translation, coupled with Barker’s production, argued that powerful nations would inevitably ‘sink into subhuman, barbaric treatment of their enemies and rivals.’[[36]](#endnote-36) The parallel was not lost on its audience, with the sociologist Leonard Hobhouse commenting at the time that the production ‘revived troubles that lie too near’.[[37]](#endnote-37)

 The timing of the 1915 production was no less significant, coming, as it did, in the midst of new revelations about Germany’s actions in the war. The sinking of the RMS Lusitania by a German submarine on 7 May 1915 – a week before Barker’s Greek tour began – and subsequent death of 1,198 people aboard, including one hundred and twenty-eight North American citizens, caused outrage on both sides of the Atlantic, with many taking this to prove that Germany was targeting civilians and breaking the rules of war.[[38]](#endnote-38) Five days later, the Committee on Alleged German Outrages released its report – commonly known as the Bryce Report – which examined closely the German army’s treatment of the Belgian population following its invasion. It drew on first-hand evidence, including the depositions of over 1,200 civilians and soldiers and German army documents, and concluded:

1. That there were in many parts of Belgium deliberate and systematically organized massacres of the civil populations, accompanied by many isolated murders and other outrages.
2. That in the conduct of the war generally innocent civilians, both men and women, were murdered in large numbers, women violated, and children murdered.
3. That looting, house burning, and the wanton destruction of property were ordered and counternanced by the officers of the German army… and that the burnings and destruction were frequent where no military necessity could be alleged, being indeed part of a system of general terrorization.
4. That the rules and usages of war were frequently broken, particularly by using of civilians, including women and children, as a shield for advancing forces exposed to fire.[[39]](#endnote-39)

The presence of Viscount Bryce, the respected former Ambassador to the Washington, in the Chair added credence to the findings in the eyes of politicians in the United States, while such prominent newspapers as the *New York Times* ran a number of articles in the lead up to its publication to build public interest and awareness.[[40]](#endnote-40) It was also printed in full in numerous newspapers the day after its simultaneous release in Britain and North America – including in every newspaper in New York – meaning that its contents soon become known across the country. Particular emphasis was placed on the German army’s treatment of women and children, which seemed to prove earlier claims about its barbarism and, in turn, strengthened the growing anti-German feeling.

 While it is not within the remit of this article to discuss the validity of such claims, it is important to note how they provided a context for Barker’s production, and how they primed the audience to experience the horrific sacking of Troy from a contemporary position. At the same time, watching such actions take place on the stage brought a new sense of reality and truth to the newspapers reports of the Rape of Belgium.

 Murray made this link clear in a new preface he wrote for the play ahead of the tour and which was reprinted in full in the *New York Times*: ‘The burden of the Trojan women has now fallen upon others, upon Belgian women, French women, upon the women of Poland and Serbia.’[[41]](#endnote-41) He went on to note that the barbarism seen in World War One was something that he mistakenly thought was a thing of the past – ‘Women and children were safe, prisoners were safe, the wounded were safe. So much seemed certain; and yet the very reverse was true’ – and set out clearly that the Allied forces sought peace while the Germans chose war.

Yet, Murray was careful not to stir up anti-German hatred, but instead, focused on the issue of all warfare. He prayed that the ‘discipline of the Allies may hold firm’ to ensure that the names of German women were not added to the list of those violated by war. His final words, echoing those of Poseidon at the beginning of the play, warned that ‘those who are swift to make war for the sake of gain shall find in their wars not profit, but bitter loss.’ To this end, he invited Woodrow Wilson to write a preface to restate the need for peace, but the common perception of Barker’s presence being tied to pro-Anglo propaganda led the President to decline, believing that any association would compromise his own neutral position.[[42]](#endnote-42)

However, the link drawn between *The Trojan Women* and the horrors of World War One were not solely due to the text or Murray’s words. Rather, it was due also to specific artistic decisions made by Barker.

***The Trojan Women* as a Community Event**

Of particular significance was the choice of staging the works in the large semi-public spaces of the college stadia. Obviously, it was the space of the Yale Bowl that first inspired the idea for the tour, when Barker quickly saw the ease at which the stadium could be adapted to resemble an amphitheatre. But, more importantly, the stadia are spaces central to the everyday life of the campus and associated with sporting events. Indeed, the performances came complete with the ubiquitous peanut seller, who inserted Euripides’s name in his usual calling sales patter.[[43]](#endnote-43) Likewise, the performances all began at 4.30pm – often coinciding with sporting events taking place close by – and, with each lasting two hours, were timed to end as the sun was setting.

 While there are various practical reasons for these choices, they also worked to distinguish the productions from conventional theatre and the expectations associated with them in terms of who would be in the audience and how they should behave. Instead, both *The Trojan Women* and *Iphigenia in Tauris* were presented more like community events, a point bolstered up by the fact that they were, for the most part, only performed once on each site. The openness and familiarity of the space signified that these were performances open to all and to which people could bring food and drinks, as if at a festival or sporting event.

 The size of each venue also meant that it could hold a very large audience. The estimated attendance for the performance at the Yale Bowl, for example, was over 10,000 people, and the numbers were roughly the same for each subsequent performance. Over the course of the run, it was estimated that over 60,000 people saw the two plays, although *Vogue* claimed that it was closer to 100,000 people.[[44]](#endnote-44) The fact that a theatre director could draw such crowds was impressive, but that he could do this for productions of Greek tragedy was nothing short of astounding. It was marvelled at in all of the reviews of the work, where, for example, the *Boston Post* titled its review: ‘Greek Play Delights a Big Audience at Harvard Stadium’.[[45]](#endnote-45)

As well as being large in size, the audience was relatively mixed, demographically speaking. First, Barker ensured that the ticket prices were affordable – for the New York performances, for example, two thousand seats were available for each production at a price of fifteen cents each (about $3.60 by today’s standard). Also in New York, the graduating students from local high schools were required to attend, meaning that there was a generational mix in the audience.[[46]](#endnote-46) The same was true at Harvard, where the *Boston Evening Transcript* reported a high number of prep and high school students in attendance.[[47]](#endnote-47) Barker also wanted to ensure that a large proportion of the audience came from the local community, and so cast students from the colleges or people from the town in minor parts.[[48]](#endnote-48) Not only did this guarantee audiences coming to see their friend or colleague in action, but seeing themselves represented on the stage in this way encouraged the public to see the performance as belonging to them and being part of their community. Further, it again helped them to imagine war and its fateful consequences happening to people they knew and loved.

Of course, presenting the play as a public event also connected it to its origins in the religious festivals of Ancient Greece. Yet, more than any pretensions to historical reconstruction, the setting of the work served the purpose of bringing huge sections of society together so that they could experience, learn about and, to an extent, understand the horrors of war as a group. It became something akin to a civic or religious experience, generating a Durkheimian collective effervescence that bound the individuals together as a community, even if only for a short time.[[49]](#endnote-49)

**The Great Outdoors**

As well as enabling the coming together of huge numbers of people, these large, open-air spaces influenced the style of the performance and the scope of what Barker could achieve. He was a firm believer in the need to stage Euripides’s plays outside, arguing:

The mere transference from outdoors in will prove deadening. And no one who has ever sat in a Greek theatre, and felt how the choric movements, patterned in the circle of the orchestra, both relieve and enhance by contrast the dignity of the individual action uplifted against the proscenium, will easily be reconciled to the disfiguring of all this behind footlights.[[50]](#endnote-50)

In an open-air stadia, the audience and performer share the same space and the same natural light, bringing with it a sense of all being part of the same group. The danger of the footlights, Barker warned, is that they marked a clear distinction between the stage and the auditorium, and thus made it more difficult to establish the necessary bond, without which the play would become a piece of ‘museum theatre’ and not the ‘living thing’ that he sought. Although he had removed the footlights in his earlier London productions of the plays, the small and cramped proscenium-arch theatres in which he had to work limited his plans severely. The stadia productions thus provided him with the first opportunity to stage the plays as he envisioned them.

Of course, there was the danger that the actors would be lost in such mammoth spaces as the Lewisohn Stadium, and so Barker stripped the performance back to a series of striking set pieces with clear movements and gestures. This served a dual purpose. First, it ensured that audience members could see the action on the stage regardless of where they sat in the auditorium. Second, it ensured that anyone who did not know or understand the play could still follow the action. It was not about staging the work as a spectacle in the Victorian sense of the word; rather the aim was to capture visually the terror and pity of the play in a sequence of memorable images in order for the full force of Euripides’s statement on war to be felt.

One particularly startling image came towards the end of the play, when the dead body of Astyanax is delivered into Hecuba’s arms. In the role, Lillah McCarthy looked, as Barker told Murray, ‘like the Queen of the Belgians’, wearing heavy multi-layered robes, a tall, cone-shaped crown and carrying a long hooked sceptre that gave her an impressive stature.[[51]](#endnote-51) However, on the arrival of the body, Barker instructed McCarthy to ‘sit centre, crown and robes off’, with a later instruction for the Leader of the chorus to ‘take Hecuba’s sceptre and crown’.[[52]](#endnote-52) At once McCarthy transformed from a ferocious and magisterial queen into an ordinary, frail civilian cradling the body of a dead child.

This visual effect was enhanced by McCarthy’s performance of the scene. During Hecuba’s long speech, Barker encouraged her to speak with a range of emotions to demonstrate the different manifestations of grief, from the ‘smashing emotion’ of anger to ‘inarticulate sobs’ and ‘hysteria’ as she recalled Astyanax’s promise: ‘Grandmother/When thou art dead, I will cut close my hair/And lead out all the captains to ride by/Thy tomb.’[[53]](#endnote-53) Small directorial details also helped to enhance the realism and tragedy of the sequence. Barker gave McCarthy precise instructions not to look at the body until approximately halfway through the speech, when she delivers the following passage:

Thy curls, these little flowers innocent

That were thy mother’s garden, where she laid

Her kisses; here, just where the bone-edge frayed

Grins white above – Ah heaven, I will not see!

Ye tender arms, the same dear mould have ye

As his; how from the shoulder loose ye drop

And weak![[54]](#endnote-54)

This delay heightened the effect when Hecuba eventually looked down at the body and saw it for the first time, and brought greater significance to her description of his childlike features. Likewise, the direction of ‘a little arm slips out’ on the mention of ‘tender arms’ made the audience all too aware of the youth and fragility of the body being cradled, and the barbarism of those who murdered it.[[55]](#endnote-55)

The audience was enthralled by this beautifully poignant moment and, as the *New York Times* observed, they watched silently as ‘alone on the desolate shore, the white-haired mother of Hector is left to commune with the body of his little son.’[[56]](#endnote-56) It was not difficult to make the connection between such images and the recently released accounts of the atrocities taking place in Belgium such as the witness who ‘saw a Belgian boy of fifteen shot on the village green... and a day or two later, on the same green, a little girl and her two brothers… were killed before her eyes for no apparent reason.’[[57]](#endnote-57) Murray made clear the effect that he and Barker wanted to create, and the impression that they wanted to leave their audiences with that, again, criticised all war: ‘A solitary old woman with a dead child in her arms: that on the human side is the result of the deeds of glory.’[[58]](#endnote-58)

Another pivotal sequence came immediately after this scene when, in the closing moments of the production, the chorus of women carried Astyanax’s body off the stage and seven soldiers appeared with torches in their hands. After Hecuba finished her lament, they stepped forward and lit three large cauldrons positioned around the performance space, signifying the final burning of Troy. The act of starting a fire on the stage created a haunting effect: the audience could see, smell and hear the fire as it grew, filling the stage with dark clouds of smoke and making the destruction of war a visceral and sensorial experience. The *Boston American* described how the ‘moans and shrieks of the women who constituted the chorus, together with the outbursts of magnificent rage and grief of Hecuba... who, at times, was [completely] enveloped in smoke’, gave the scene ‘a [thrill] of realism.’[[59]](#endnote-59)

Again, allusions were made to the well-documented burning of Belgian towns and villages, but this moment was made even more striking by the time at which it was being performed. Barker’s decision to start the performances at 4.30pm not only meant that he could utilise the daylight for the main part of the production, but it also ensured that these final moments were performed in twilight. At the same time, he dressed the chorus in hues of grey and black, and choreographed them in sets of intricate movements that emphasised their collective suffering. For example, as Hecuba lamented the fall of Troy – ‘Lo, the flame/Hath thee, and we, thy children pass away/To slavery… God! O god of mercy!’ – the chorus were instructed to ‘kneel, with heads covered’ before forming ‘two circles, the inside facing outwards, and the remainder facing inwards’.[[60]](#endnote-60) Later, as Hecuba bade farewell to the city and her people, the chorus grouped around her and moved ‘right in a solid mass, with Hecuba in centre… At final trumpet Hecuba’s hand is raised, and the Chorus goes out huddled together, and stooping.’[[61]](#endnote-61)

The colour and collective movement of the chorus coupled with the dim light and building smoke made it difficult to discern any individual member and presented them instead as an indecipherable mass, which had two main effects. First, the faceless group on the stage became representative of all people in the world, demonstrating that such destruction could happen to anyone. Second, as the smoke filled the stage and the chorus moved closer together, they began to disappear from sight altogether, seemingly being consumed by the war and becoming part of the smoke itself. In both instances, the poetic image reinforced Barker’s intention to make clear to his audiences the continued relevance of Euripides and the proximity of war.

**A Successful Campaign?**

Barker was clearly successful in this objective to use Euripides to comment on the war in Europe. Nearly every newspaper article made the connection, some more explicitly than others. *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* for example, observed:

There is something timely in the great open-air performance of “The Trojan Women” before an American audience of many thousand persons at a moment when the eyes of the world are centred on Europe, when the sympathies of neutral nations are concentrated in alleviating the sufferings of war. “The Trojan Women” has been said to be the greatest war play ever written, since it contains a message for peace and plea for consideration for women and children in times of international strife.[[62]](#endnote-62)

The New York *Sun* similarly noted that the action of the play could easily be moved to Belgium, Poland ‘or any conquered land among those afflicted by the misery of the European war’.[[63]](#endnote-63) It is also telling that a great number of the reviews appeared next to or near articles concerned with the war or specific peace efforts.[[64]](#endnote-64) It was, for example, no coincidence that a notice in the *New York Times* informing readers of the upcoming performance at the Lewisohn Stadium appeared underneath a long article on the Lusitania.[[65]](#endnote-65)

 Barker was also successful in his quest to make Euripides popular. Copies of the plays were made available at the stadia and in the local towns and sold in high numbers. 1500 copies of *The Trojan Women* were sold ahead of its Harvard performance, for instance, while the combined sales of both plays in New York reached 5000 before the production opened.[[66]](#endnote-66)

What is difficult to ascertain, however, is the impact it had on North American attitudes to the war. Wilson’s decision to enter the war in April 1917 was, of course, not due to any intervention by Barker, but came as a direct result of the intercepted Zimmerman telegram, which revealed German attempts to secure the support of Mexico and Japan against the United States. Yet, the tour needs to be considered – as I have done here ­– as part of the propaganda campaign to bring British and North American politics together and celebrate the similarities between them in order to create a community that supported each other. It was, for want of a better phrase, part of the long process towards the ‘special relationship’.

In this way, and by bringing large groups of people together to listen to the words of Euripides, Barker was able to bring the Greek tragedian to life and use it to open the audience’s minds, eyes and hearts to the atrocities taking place in Europe.

1. Notes and Acknowledgements:

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 ‘Visual Poetic Charm of Ancient Greek Drama’, *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, 9 June 1915. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The theatre press demonstrates a growing interest in the work of Max Reinhardt. In November 1910, the *New York Times* labelled Reinhardt ‘the most progressive and artistic of Berlin’s theatre directors’ (*New York Times*, 6 November 1910) and, four months later, included a detailed report on his production of *Faust* in Berlin, calling it ‘the supreme dramatic event of the season’ and Reinhardt the ‘great producing genius’ (*New York Times*, 19 March 1911). Soon after, reports circulated that the theatre impresario J. C. Duff sought to engage Reinhardt to produce a season of work in New York, although nothing came of these plans (*New York Times*, 16 April 1911). An exhibition showcasing the Art of the Theatre opened in New York in November 1914, and while the exhibition included work for a variety of European artists, a particular focus was placed on German theatre art, where ‘almost an entire side was devoted to the work done in this country.’ ‘America’s First Exhibition of the New Stagecraft’, *The Theatre*, Vol. 21, No. 167 (1915), p. 28. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. A notable exception is Dennis Kennedy, who provides a detailed discussion of Barker’s work with Attic tragedy. See, *Granville Barker and the Dream of Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1985, pp. 41-50 and 178-85. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Philippa Burt, ‘Granville Barker’s Ensemble as a Model of Fabian Theatre’, *New Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (November 2012), p. 307. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. After the unsuccessful transfer of the Court seasons to the Savoy Theatre, Barker ran a season at the Duke of York’s Theatre in 1910 with Charles Frohman, before running seasons with McCarthy at the Little Theatre (1911), the Kingsway Theatre (intermittently between 1911 and 1913) and, finally, the St James’s Theatre (1913-1914). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. The iconoclasm of Barker’s Shakespeare productions and the subsequent critical response has already been well documented. See, for example, Christine Dymkowski, *Harley Granville Barker: A Preface to Modern Shakespeare* (London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1986), pp. 31-83; Christopher McCullough, ‘Harley Granville Barker’ in John Russell Brown, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Directors’ Shakespeare* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 105-22; and Colin Chambers, ‘Harley Granville Barker: Director Extraordinary’ in Mike Patterson, ed., *The Great European Stage Directors, Vol. 4 Reinhardt, Barker, Jessner*, (London: Bloomsbury, forthcoming 2018). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Charles B. Purdom, *Harley Granville Barker: Man of the Theatre, Dramatist and Scholar* (London: Rockliff, 1955), p. 170. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Barker letter to Shaw, 19 February 1915 in Eric Salmon, ed., *Barker and His Correspondents: A Selection of Letters by Him and to Him* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986), pp. 135-6. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. For a detailed analysis of Barker’s attempts to establish a permanent ensemble company in Britain, see Burt, ‘Granville Barker’s Ensemble’, pp. 307-24. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Barker letter to Shaw, 19 February 1915 in Salmon, *Barker and His Correspondents*, p. 136. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Legend has it that Craig’s reported demands of £100,000 in payment ended any negotiations regarding his proposed season. Purdom, *Harley Granville Barker*, p. 170. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. The relationship between the Asquiths and the Barkers was so intimate that they were one of the few people that Lillah turned to in 1916 after Barker asked her for a divorce so he could marry Helen Huntington. See J. M. Barrie letter to Barker in ibid., p. 181. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Asquith quoted in ibid., p. 170. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Woodrow Wilson, ‘Proclamation of Neutrality by the President of the United States of America’, *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (January 1915), p. 110. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Wilson quoted in Edmund Ions, *Woodrow Wilson: The Politics of Peace and War* (New York: American Heritage Press, 1972), p. 49. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. David R. Woodward, *The American Army and the First World War* (Cambridge:: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 18. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. For a full break down of immigration figures, see the *Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 – Population*, available via the United States Census Bureau at <https://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html> [last accessed 21 August 2018]. There was also over 1.6 million Austrian-Hungarian born immigrants living in the country in 1910, comprising 12.4 per cent of the foreign-born population. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Wilson quoted in Ions, *Woodrow Wilson*, p. 61. For a detailed discussion of Wilson’s concept of national self-determination, see Lloyd E. Ambrosius, ‘Democracy, Peace and World Order’ in John Milton Cooper, ed., *Reconsidering Woodrow Wilson: Progressivism, Internationalism, War and Peace* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008), pp. 234-9. Wilson’s plans for an international body was brought to fruition with the creation of the League of Nations in the aftermath of World War One. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. *Washington’s Farewell Address to the People of the United States* (1796), p. 23. The address is available in full via the United States Government Publishing Office <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/GPO-CDOC-106sdoc21/pdf/GPO-CDOC-106sdoc21.pdf> [last accessed 28 August 2018]. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Ibid., p. 27. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Donald Cameron Watt, *Succeeding John Bull: America in Britain’s Place, 1900-1975* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1984), p. 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. The marked shift in diplomatic relations since Trump’s election is shown most explicitly in its departure – or threatened departure – from such international treaties as the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change, the 2015 Iran Nuclear Deal, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The protectionist policies of the Trump administration also saw it embark on a trade war with the European Union, China and other countries in early 2018 as part of its supposed quest to ‘Make America Great Again’, despite repeated warnings from economists. See, for example, Dominic Rushe, ‘More than 1,000 economists warn Trump his trade views echo 1930s errors’, *The Guardian* (3 May 2018), available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/may/03/donald-trump-trade-economists-warning-great-depression> [last accessed 28 August 2018]. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Jessica Bennett and Mark Hampton, ‘World War I and the Anglo-American Imagined Community: Civilization vs Barbarism in British Propaganda and American Newspapers’ in Joel H. Wiener and Mark Hampton, eds., *Anglo-American Media Interactions, 1850-2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 163. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid., p. 164. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid., p. 157. Pro-Allied propaganda material also included films, caricatures and radio broadcasts, some of which were aimed specifically at the Irish-American population. See, for example, Eberhard Demm, ‘Propaganda and Caricature in the First World War’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (January 1993), pp. 163-92; Luke McKernan, ‘Propaganda, Patriotism and Profit: Charles Urban and British Official War Films in America During the First World War’, *Film History*, Vol. 14, No. 3-4 (2002), pp. 369-89; and Bernadette Whelan, ‘American Propaganda and Ireland During World War One: the Work of the Committee on Public Information’, *Irish Studies Review*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (2017), pp. 141-69. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. George Bernard Shaw, ‘Common Sense About the War’, *The New York Times: Current History*, Vol. 1 (January 1915), pp. 11-2. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Barker letter to Murray, 12 September in Salmon, ed., *Granville Barker*, p. 287. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Articles featured in *The Theatre* include ‘Granville Barker May Head a New Theatre Here’, Vol. 21, No. 168 (February 1915), p. 63; ‘The New Plays’,Vol. 21, No. 169 (March 1915), p. 110; ‘Barker’s New Shakespearean Spectacles’, Vol. 21, No. 170 (April 1915), pp. 196-8; ‘New Art Theatres in New York’, ibid., p. 198; and ‘New Scenic Art of the Theatre’, Vol. 21, No. 171 (May 1915), pp. 248-50; and ‘Behind the Scenes with Mrs Granville Barker’, ibid., pp. 251-3.  [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Barker letter to Shaw, 19 February 1915 in Salmon, ed., *Granville Barker*, p. 137. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. For a detailed discussion of Barker’s production of *Iphigenia in Tauris* and, in particular, his use of the chorus in it, see Philippa Burt, ‘“The mind goes back to the golden fairies…” Granville Barker’s Choral Work’ in Mike Patterson ed., *The Great European Stage Directors, Vol. 4 Reinhardt, Barker, Jessner* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen, forthcoming 2018). [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. The productions were only performed once on each site, with the exception of the College of the City of New York, where there were two performances of each play. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Edith Hall and Fiona Mcintosh, *Greek Tragedy and the British Theatre, 1660-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 492. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. The productions were: *Hippolytus* (Court, 1904), *The Trojan Women* (Court, 1905), *Electra* (Court, 1906), *Hippolytus* (Court 1906), *Medea* (Savoy, 1907) and *Iphigenia in Tauris* (Kingsway, 1912). The latter included three matinee performances at Bradfield College in Oxford. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Harley Granville Barker, ‘On Translating Greek Tragedy’ in J. A. K. Thomson, ed., *Essays in Honour of Gilbert Murray*, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1936), p. 243. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Hall and Mcintosh, *Greek Tragedy*, p. 511. For a full discussion of Barker’s and Murray’s ‘Suffragette *Medea*’, see Hall and Mcintosh, pp. 511-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Murray paraphrased in ibid., p. 508. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Leonard Hobhouse quoted in ibid., p. 509. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Included in the list of North-American casualties was Charles Frohman, the legendary producer and impresario who had previously run seasons with Barker. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. ‘Bryce Committee’s Report on Deliberate Slaughter of Belgian Non-combatants’, *New York Times*, 13 May 1915. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. See, for example, ‘Bryce Report to Blame Germans’, *New York Times*, 21 February 1915; ‘Vanity Cause of War’, *New York Times*, 23 February 1915; ‘Bryce on Belgium’s Woe’, *New York Times*, 9 April 1915; ‘Report of Belgian Atrocities Coming’, *New York Times*, 4 May 1915; and ‘German Atrocities’, *New York Times*, 13 May 1915. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Gilbert Murray, ‘A Sword in Pity’s Hand’, *New York Times*, 13 May 1915. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Purdom, *Harley Granville Barker*, p. 172. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. ‘Greek Drama in Beautiful Settings’, *The Theatre*, Vol. 22, No. 173 (July 1915), p. 13. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Dennis Kennedy, *Granville Barker and the Dream of Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 182. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. ‘Greek Play Delights a Big Audience at Harvard Stadium’, *Boston Post*, 19 May 1915. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Harrison Smith, ‘The Revival of Greek Tragedy in America’, *The Bookman*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (June 1915), p. 415. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. ‘At the Stadium’, *Boston Evening Transcript*, 19 May 1915. Similar arrangements were also made at Princeton, where local school children were given half-price tickets. The University also reserved tickets for alumni, and, in general, charged between $1 and $2 per ticket. ‘Granville Barker to Give Two Greek Plays’, *The Daily Princetonian*, 1 May 1915. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. See, for example, ‘Preparation for Greek Plays Nearly Completed’, *The Daily Princetonian*, 9 June 1915. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Emile Durkheim used the term ‘collective effervescence’ to denote the process by which a group of people share in a religious experience that is outside of themselves and which functions to ‘strengthen the bonds attaching the individual to the society of which he is a member.’ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1976, p. 226. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Barker, ‘On Translating Greek Tragedy’, p. 240. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Barker quoted in Kennedy, *Granville Barker*, p. 181. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. *The Trojan Women*, Lillah McCarthy Prompt Book Copy, May 1915, Victoria and Albert Archive at Blythe House, London, p. 66; *The Trojan Women* with Director’s Handwritten Notes, Harley Granville-Barker Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, p. 67. This archival material is reproduced with the kind permission of the Society of Authors as the Literary Representative of the Estate of Harley Granville Barker. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. *The Trojan Women* with Director’s Handwritten Notes, p. 68. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Euripides, *The Trojan Women*, trans. Gilbert Murray, London: George Allen and Company, 1914, p. 68. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. *The Trojan Women* with Director’s Handwritten Notes, p. 68. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. ‘The Trojan Women Beautifully Given’, *New York Times*, 30 May 1915. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. ‘Bryce Committee’s Report’, *New York Times*, 13 May 1915. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. Gilbert Murray, ‘Two New Forewords to “The Trojan Women”’, *New York Times*, 16 May 1915. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. ‘Trojan Women Well Presented’, *Boston American*, 20 May 1915. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. *The Trojan Women* with Director’s Handwritten Notes, pp. 74-5. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. Ibid., p. 78-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. ‘Gotham Theatre Gossip’, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 30 May 1915. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. ‘Visual and Poetic Charm of Ancient Greek Drama’, *Philadelphia Public* Ledger, 9 January 1915; ‘Parts Well Played in “The Trojan Women”’, *The Sun*, 30 May 1915. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. See, for example, the review in the *Boston Post*, which shared a page with an article titled ‘Peace Necessity: Waste of War Threatens Survival of Race’, *Boston Post*, 19 May 1915. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. ‘Lewisohn Stadium Ready’, *New York Times*, 24 May 1915. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. Niall W. Slater, ‘Touring the Ivies with *Iphigenia*, 1915’, *Comparative Drama*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Winter 2010), p. 449. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)