

Sarah Bernhardt

Transformative Fame in Britain and America

This chapter discusses the different and changing relationships Bernhardt established with English and American audiences abroad through her theater and film. Exploring, first, the emergence of Bernhardt's theatrical fame, I argue that Bernhardt's success on the stage emerged differently in London than it did in New York. Second, I argue that these initial distinctions in Bernhardt's theatrical reception were later (separately) incorporated into the different advertising materials and producing practices used to promote her films in England and America. Rather than discuss Bernhardt's celebrity as a single, coterminous event—so that England is a stepping-stone to America, or so that film illustrates a previous stage success—I contextualize the emerging spread of Bernhardt's reception abroad. I do this to highlight both local and national differences in the development of Bernhardt's appeal. I also illustrate how theater and film can be newly connected through the interrelated histories of stage and screen. In this context, I build my argument using materials drawn from what Frank Kessler and Sabine Lenk describe as “the rapidly growing accessibility of paratextual source material, data and films themselves, as a result of the massive digitization efforts around the world in the past decade.”¹ This chapter uses newly available materials to develop what we know of Bernhardt's international celebrity. Because our access to historic materials has changed so significantly over the past decade, so, too, has our capacity to understand recent phenomena. Newly able to explore Bernhardt, we can also reexamine aspects of the historical relationship between stage and screen and the fugitive nature of early twentieth-century celebrity culture.

I begin this chapter by returning to Bernhardt's inaugural success on the London stage in the 1879–80 period. Discussing the thrill and novelty of her acting before sophisticated London audiences, I explain that her performances were embraced by an avant-garde culture that shifted, in the 1880s, when London audiences

railed against her tours and partnership with playwright Victorien Sardou, finding her acting “vulgar”; I compare this to Bernhardt’s reception in America, where she was considered “high class” and continued to be praised for her performances. My focus then moves into Bernhardt’s 1905–6 challenge to the Theatrical Syndicate in America and her subsequent move onto the variety stage in England and America. This is an important moment, revealing Bernhardt’s involvement in a key debate in early twentieth-century American theater (opposition to and enforced theatrical Trust). The variety theater—known as the music hall in England—also illustrates Bernhardt’s changing involvement in popular theater. Finally, I explore Bernhardt’s engagement with film. I look at her narrative feature films, made in the 1910s, as evidence of an art nouveau aesthetic she had already popularized on the theatrical stage. I argue, moreover, that the reception of these films was different in Britain than it was in America. As I explain in chapter 4, these transnational reception contexts help to explain why theatergoing publics were motivated to support a cultural, emotional, and military investment in the Allied cause during World War I.

Although I structure my discussion chronologically, I do not believe that Bernhardt’s success in rousing American sympathies for participation in the Great War was inevitable. In my view, it was her willingness to repeatedly tour America, to reach successive generations of audiences across a thirty-year period, that explains why she could eventually be celebrated on film as a “mother” of France. Cleverly growing her international visibility through theatrical and technological change, Bernhardt demonstrates her skill as a theatrical entrepreneur, manager, performer, and businesswoman. *Mothers of France* ends my discussion because it indicates, more than any other work that Bernhardt undertook during this time, the custodianship she claimed for the theater and the importance she saw of its role in the new century. No longer a young actress willfully freeing herself from the hierarchical policies and procedures of the Comédie-Française, she was now a spokeswoman in the New World, using the technology of film as a lightning rod in the global fight for social, political, and (above all) military change.

A NOTE ON THEATRICAL MARGINS

The actresses I explore share a city (Paris), a profession (the theater), a historical period (the Belle Époque), and transnational fame (across England and North America). The three also share dubious and modest personal backgrounds, as well as an involvement in theaters that can be considered geographically and culturally “marginal.” Bernhardt, the daughter of a Jewish courtesan, was also the mother of a son born out of wedlock (Maurice Bernhardt, born in 1864). Notwithstanding her social and cultural marginalization, Bernhardt catapulted herself to international fame and respectability. The first actress to establish a theater in her own name in Paris (the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt, which was the former Théâtre des Nations in the fourth arrondissement, at the Place du Châtelet), Bernhardt concluded her

career while still an actress-manager of this symbolically central city landmark. Before examining how she achieved this extraordinary fame, however, we might consider some of the theaters where Bernhardt performed.

Trained in the French Conservatoire between 1859 and 1862, Bernhardt made only a few, inconsequential appearances at the Comédie-Française on her graduation in 1862 before a dispute forced her departure.² This theater, described by James Brander Matthews as “a republic, protected by the state,” was supported by an annual subvention from the French government. Until 1867, it had the “exclusive privilege of playing the pieces of the classic authors” (that is, by playwrights such as Molière, Racine, and Corneille).³ A departure from this theater meant some years of insecure work. When Bernhardt did perform in a role that brought her Parisian success, it was in a second-tier theater of Paris, the respected Théâtre de l’Odéon (considered a “stepping-stone” to the Comédie-Française).⁴ Here, however, Bernhardt gained fame in the provocative, cross-dressed role of Zanetto, the title character written by the young poet François Coppée in his first 1869 play. The role was considered important enough to be photographed by the respected London studio photographers, W. & D. Downey (fig. 1), although we do not know whether Bernhardt visited England on this occasion, if the Downey’s visited Paris, or if the photograph is correctly dated. In 1872, Bernhardt again achieved success at the Odéon, playing the Queen in *Ruy Blas*. Bernhardt’s celebrated performance in this famous play written by Victor Hugo also marked the return of Hugo to Paris after twenty years of political exile. When Bernhardt was invited back to the Comédie-Française in 1872, she returned as a junior member of the theater but also as one who was clearly unafraid to publicize theatrical exile, marginality, and difference. As we will see, after Bernhardt’s inaugural success in London in 1879, she chose to leave the Comédie-Française. Voluntarily removing herself from this renowned seat and symbol of French theatrical tradition, Bernhardt returned the following year to London with her own troupe of performers, newly playing her own choice of roles.

Where did Bernhardt perform in Paris when she returned from her first tour abroad? In the early 1880s, Bernhardt was in charge of the Théâtre de l’Ambigu on the Boulevard Saint-Martin. Known as the “smallest and least pretentious” of the important theaters devoted to drama and spectacular pieces in the city,⁵ this theater was failing before Bernhardt took it over. In her role as an actress-manager, Bernhardt became “the Director of public opinion, favor, and fame, the media publicist, the great hypnotist of a time that she has captivated and that submits irrevocably to her charm.”⁶ The second theater that Bernhardt managed was the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin, which seated a medium-sized audience (two thousand). This theater was, as Ernest Pronier reminds us, located in the east of Paris, at the entrance of the “popular suburbs.”⁷ Geographically marginal, the theater was also a historically controversial site, as James Brander Matthews explains: it was the “scene of many a pitched battle” between “the young blood which was



FIGURE 1. Sarah Bernhardt in *La Passant*. W. & D. Downey, 1869.
<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8438716n>.

called Romantic and the old school which called itself Classic.”⁸ At the Porte Saint-Martin, Bernhardt worked with the playwright Victorien Sardou, who wrote spectacular works for her, often featuring a death scene. In this period, for example, Sardou wrote *Théodora*, *La Tosca*, and *Cléopâtre* for the actress, each concluding with a spectacular death. Bernhardt subsequently managed the Renaissance Theater (1893–99), which is located beside the Porte Saint-Martin. Once more, this was a theater that was located in theatrical “exile” in the tenth arrondissement. At the Renaissance, Bernhardt commissioned the Czech artist Alphonse Mucha (then little known) to make posters for her theater productions. She continued to employ Sardou as a playwright and invited international celebrities to perform alongside her in the theater; for example, the Italian actress Eleanora Duse performed *La Dame aux camélias* there in 1897.⁹ Years before appearing on film as

a headline French actress, Bernhardt asserted herself visibly and vocally on the margins of Parisian theatrical endeavors.

A THEATRICAL REPUBLIC: THE COMÉDIE-FRANÇAISE IN LONDON, 1879

When Bernhardt initiated her visits to London in 1879 as a *sociétaire* of the Comédie-Française (and thus as a shareholder in the company), she was already a well-known actress within France. As mentioned above, she had established success a decade earlier at the Théâtre de l'Odéon in roles that were socially and politically provocative. What was unique about Bernhardt's fame was the support she drew from a group of youthful admirers who became known within Paris as *les Saradoteurs* (the "Sarah-doters"). A novelty in Paris, this fan group consisted of students, artisans, and young female *midinettes*—young apprentices working in new industries such as the fashion houses on the Left Bank—who were drawn to Bernhardt's idiosyncratic songlike voice, her sinuous physical movement, and her tendency to break established performance rules onstage. Bringing these new "simple folk" into the legitimate theater in France, a traditionally male upper-class space of culture and national achievement in the arts, Bernhardt was the impetus to broader theatrical change. An important part of this change was the rise of the actress in the late nineteenth-century theater as a visible, successful, and respected leader of creative endeavors. As the *New York Times* and the *London World* declared in 1894, the significance of women in the theater in the late nineteenth century made it "the age of the actress."¹⁰ Already, two decades prior to this statement, Henry James had discussed Bernhardt's celebrity as the pinnacle of female achievement. As he observed, "It would be hard to imagine a more brilliant embodiment of feminine success."¹¹

Bernhardt's trip to London in 1879 was her first tour abroad. Because of this, she did not have an identity that was independent of her association with the Comédie-Française. Traveling as a member of this nationally celebrated company, she was part of a group contracted to perform "42 representations, 36 nights and 6 Saturday afternoons" in London between June 2 and July 12. This was a collective effort on behalf of the actors to recoup the money spent on reconstructions needed at their theater in Rue Richelieu, Paris.¹² Importantly, when the English manager of the Comédie-Française, M. M. L. Mayer, contracted with John Hollingshead (the lessee and manager of the Gaiety Theatre), to have "the whole of this distinguished company" perform at the Gaiety Theatre, no actor was promoted above any other. Instead, the cover of the inaugural London program boldly stated, "COMÉDIE-FRANÇAISE 1680. GAITY THEATRE 1879."¹³

It was the longevity of the French company and its link to a respected and contemporary English West End venue that was highlighted on the cover of the Gaiety program. Inside the program, details of the company were offered. On the opening pages, every actor and actress was listed, appearing in capital letters under their

surnames in separate male and female columns. These columns were determined by an actor's length of service (most to least), and headed by the titles "Sociétaires" or "Pensionnaires." The Sociétaires were actors chosen by the Comédie-Française company and were appointed by the French Ministry of Culture when an opening became available through retirement or death. This group was listed ahead of the Pensionnaires, who were in a probationary stage of their career. In the program, there was a hierarchy of gender and roles that theater historians will not find unusual: actors preceded actresses (even in the minor roles), and main characters of a play were listed ahead of minor ones.

As though to emphasize the ensemble nature of the Comédie-Française—where actors worked within a network of carefully balanced relationships—the opening evening at the Gaiety Theatre was carefully choreographed. As the program explained, "M. [Edmond] GOT, as *Doyen* of the *Comédie-Française*, will open the performance by delivering an address written in verse by [the French poet and writer] M. JEAN AICARD. The whole of the Company, on this occasion, will be assembled on the stage."¹⁴ The participatory and inclusive nature of this opening event—as well as the fact that the most senior and longest serving actor of the Comédie-Française delivered this verse—was important. This was an initiative offered by the theater company to a London audience. Moreover, Aicard's lines focused on the reciprocal respect that the French and English theater shared (and that English and French performers and theatergoers, in their turn, held for each other). Entitled "Molière to Shakspeare" [*sic*], Aicard specifically wrote this work for the Gaiety opening. Standing before a bust of Shakespeare and Molière, and addressing first Shakespeare and then Molière, Got celebrated the achievements of both men.¹⁵

Reports of the inaugural evening performance were glowing. As the *London Evening Standard* reminded readers, London theatergoers were familiar with Parisian actors, particularly those from the Comédie-Française, considered the most prestigious and respected theatrical company in the world. The reviewer made a clear case for the sophistication and outward-facing nature of local London audiences, as well as for the cosmopolitanism of the city:

We cannot for a moment consent to regard our distinguished visitors from the Comédie-Française as in any sense strangers. The famous house in the Rue de Richelieu, the brilliant capital of the widely-spreading theatrical republic, is accessible and convenient, and the enjoyments so richly provided there are too tempting to be resisted by Englishmen who are interested in dramatic art. The majority of those who will witness the representations which Mssrs. Hollingshead and Mayer have been able to provide are more or less familiar with the artists they will see as they are accustomed to appear in their own home; and visiting the Gaiety Theatre will be rather renewing friendships than making acquaintances.¹⁶

The opening night program was particular because it did not feature a single play but, instead, presented evidence of French theatrical achievement. Excerpts from

French comedy (Molière's *Le Misanthrope* and his one-act *Les Précieuses ridicules*) and French tragedy (Racine's *Phèdre*) were performed. In a certain sense, therefore, the leading house of French actors was making a case for French theatrical primacy in both comedy and tragedy. Who the Comédie-Française chose to perform these roles was telling. Molière's works were performed by Louis-Arsène Delaunay and Benoît-Constant Coquelin; the former was already Chevalier of the Légion d'Honneur, and both were respected long-term members of the theatrical company. Reports state that the cast of *Le Misanthrope* was "worthy of the task" and Coquelin in *Les Précieuses ridicules* worthy of "high praise." It was, however, Bernhardt (a far younger and newer company member, and the only actress praised in reviews of the evening) who was celebrated. Playing the second act of *Phèdre*, in which Phèdre reveals her love for her stepson Hippolytus, she provoked such fervor that "a scene of enthusiasm such as is rarely witnessed in the theater" followed the fall of her curtain.¹⁷

Spectators responded to a variety of factors in Bernhardt's performance. In the first place, she was remarkable for her pliable physicality. Reviewing Bernhardt's *Ruy Blas* in 1872, French theater critic Francisque Sarcey explained that Bernhardt used the half-turn, a spiraling motion of the body, to arrange her costume around her when she moved. When she transitioned on and off the stage, and as she moved from a seated to a standing position, Bernhardt used the spiral as a gestural motif. Moreover, Sarcey describes Bernhardt's voice as "languid and tender, and well-paced; her diction is so perfect that you do not lose a syllable." Going on to explain Bernhardt's vocal singularity, Sarcey explains that "her voice spreads around [the script's] incises, like oil spreads and envelopes [*sic*], without dropping any detail within the ensemble. . . . With fine and penetrating inflections, she marks certain words with extraordinary value!"¹⁸ At her London debut seven years later, English commentators were similarly struck by Bernhardt's expressive use of her body and voice: Bernhardt performed *Phèdre* with "an intensity of passion and a depth of dramatic feeling [that was] positively startling."¹⁹

It was Bernhardt's ability to perform a range of conflicting emotions in a single scene that was particularly noted at her London debut. The leading stage authority, Percy Fitzgerald, described the "sudden burst" of the actress onto the stage and the extraordinary impact she had on audiences. He singled out her expressive versatility in her performance of *Phèdre*: Bernhardt made his "very pulses quiver" as she transformed from a frail and piteous figure to one of seduction, self-repulsion, and (finally) fiendish despair.²⁰ With the exception of *Phèdre*, Bernhardt's repertoire otherwise contributed to what was considered, in England, a very modern program of plays. This program included *Le Passant*, as well as works by playwrights considered audacious and morally challenging outside Paris (for example, Alexandre Dumas *fils*).

Because of this use of risqué and morally challenging content, the Gaiety's Comédie-Française season indicated the freedom the French enjoyed when

choosing a nationally representative theatrical program. As Ignacio Ramos-Gay explains in an article that focuses on the challenges that this French company presented to London audiences in 1879, the program “included a few subversive modern plays by Émile Augier, Alexandre Dumas *fils*, Jules Sandeau and François Coppée that dealt with unsettled up-to-date problems such as infidelity, divorce, and the progressive disintegration of the bourgeois family.” The Lord Chamberlain, granting the Comédie-Française permission to play these works, positioned the company as “a sort of ambassador, a diplomat entitled to all legal benefits as long as it confined its power of action to the actual, physical space that was reserved for the representation of plays: the Gaiety Theatre.”²¹

Although the Comédie-Française was given special leave to perform roles no other company was permitted to perform in London, Bernhardt was reluctant to perform the “unhealthy” and “perverse” role of Mrs. Clarkson (of Dumas’s *l’Étrangère*). As an article in *The Times* explained, Bernhardt was sensitive about her local reception to Dumas’s “repulsive, illogical, truthless” role. She was particularly concerned about “the opinion the English will form of her.” This concern, expressed before her departure to London, articulated a desire to fit within the moral codes of the “sober and serious public” of London.²² Bernhardt’s concern to perform more challenging modern roles also indicates that she was aware what it meant to perform in a transnational context.²³ Indeed, the fact that Bernhardt wanted to first appear in *Phèdre*, *Andromaque*, or *Zaïre* indicates that a compromise must have been reached: appearing on opening night in a single act of *Phèdre*, she made her first full-length theatrical appearance in *l’Étrangère* on June 3, the second night of the Gaiety program. Bernhardt appeared as Doña Sol in Victor Hugo’s *Hernani* on June 9 and as *Phèdre* again on June 13: it took ten days for her to finally reappear in the full play of *Phèdre* in her own, chosen role. In this context, it is important to remember that Bernhardt first arrived in London as a noted player in a hierarchical company that was structured like a family business. Excelling in the performance of classic tragedy (and in a role with which London theatergoers were already familiar, thanks to Rachel’s fame as *Phèdre* a generation earlier), Bernhardt did not push the bounds of morality on the stage but, rather, was a young avant-garde actress challenging performance tradition and making her own mark on the transnational stage. As commentators argued, “A grander and more tragic performance has not been seen by the present generation.”²⁴

“THE ICE IS BROKEN”:

BERNHARDT AND THE THEATRICAL AGENT

When Bernhardt arrived in London as part of the Comédie-Française’s theatrical *ensemble* in 1879, she differed from her fellow players in one key respect: she had acquired a theatrical agent for the visit.²⁵ This agent—Edward Jarrett—had contacted with her in Paris and organized appearances and activities in England. News of this professional relationship spread fast: Edwin Booth, writing to theater

critic William Winter in July 1879, explained that Jarrett, “as good as any [manager,] . . . is to have Bernhardt.” Concluding with the comment, “So much for England: the ice is broken,” Booth suggested that he was aware of the promotional and popularizing function Jarrett would serve.²⁶ Booth’s comment was premonitory. As Bernhardt explained in her *Memoirs*, “what was really fine, and a sight I shall never forget, was our landing at Folkestone. There were thousands of people there, and it was the first time I had ever heard the cry of ‘Vive Sarah Bernhardt!’”²⁷

Building audiences and organizing visits, booking her for matinées and private drawing room performances, Jarrett also helped to organize an exhibition of Bernhardt’s paintings and sculptures in “a spacious atelier at 33, Piccadilly.”²⁸ These works gave Bernhardt a visibility beyond that which could be gained on the stage alone. Percy Fitzgerald, reflecting on Bernhardt’s tour two years later, stated that “one of the most singular incidents of the visit of that strange artiste, Sarah Bernhardt, was the somewhat naive exhibition of her talents in other directions. Securing a public room in Piccadilly, she invited all the notables and connoisseurs to an afternoon reception, to come and admire her powers as a painter and sculptor. For two or three hours there streamed in here a crowd of all the curious, and the ‘fine fleur’ of all that was distinguished in London.”²⁹

The painter John Everett Millais, the poet Theodore Martin, the Swedish opera singer Cristina Nilsson, the composer Julius Benedict, the journalist George Augustus Sala, the novelist and journalist Edmund Yates, and Charles Dickens attended the event. As the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* stated, the reception was attended by literary and artistic London, who regarded the actress herself (and not her artworks) as “the great attraction of the Exhibition.”³⁰ This reception was depicted in a sketch by the French artist René Lelong, showing the actress talking to the British prime minister, William Gladstone (fig. 2). The celebration of Bernhardt as an actress who could bring together creative and political leaders contrasts with her reception as an artist in France. For example, when she entered the Paris Salon of 1874, Auguste Rodin charged her not with eccentricity but with *saloperie* (rubbish, filth).³¹

Bernhardt’s decision to bring artwork to London at the same time that she performed in the city indicates that she knew and appreciated the medium’s unique cultural context. When, in the second half of the nineteenth century, Britain became the world’s leading industrial and commercial nation, London “quickly emerged as the world’s principal and commercially most attractive market for contemporary art.”³² Tapping into this market, Bernhardt was aware of the British taste for contemporary art (as opposed to Old Master paintings from the continent). By keeping a focus on French themes and people in her works, she indicated an awareness of this market demand. The art galleries in Bond Street, for example, were divided between the German Gallery, the Dutch Gallery, the Continental Gallery, the Japanese Gallery, and the French Gallery. Ensuring her performances at the Gaiety Theatre remained in the public eye, her work also included a bronze bass-relief entitled *Art Crowning Shakespeare and Molière*.³³



FIGURE 2. *Sarah Bernhardt Conversing with William Gladstone at Her London Exhibition of 1879.* Oil on canvas board. Rene Lelong. Image courtesy of the Art Renewal Center, www.artrenewal.org. www.artrenewal.org/Common/Image?imageId=9504.

In 1878, the famous Belgian art dealer, Ernest Gambart, purchased a sculpture of Bernhardt's called *La Mère du pêcheur*. This was exhibited at his famous villa in Nice. Bernhardt's ties to Gambart, the foremost dealer of French art in London and the founder of the French Gallery (the first commercial art gallery in London), did not escape the notice of public.³⁴ As Pamela M. Fletcher explains, we can understand the importance of Gambart when we appreciate that "in establishing the French Gallery, Gambart drew upon the legitimizing authority of the Academy, while laying the groundwork for its displacement."³⁵ In my view, Bernhardt used the legitimizing authority of the Comédie-Française in a similar way, capitalizing on its international renown to subsequently generate audiences for her own French theater abroad. John Hollingshead, reflecting on Bernhardt's opening season in the *Gaiety Chronicles* some decades later, confirms this view. He states that as soon as she realized her commercial value to audiences in London, Bernhardt "offered to come back the following year and bring with her a selected company."³⁶

NEW AND VULGARIZED: BERNHARDT IN THE 1880s

When Bernhardt returned to London in 1880 with her own company, she was part of the “French Season of plays” that opened on May 24 at the Gaiety Theatre. No longer a member of a prestigious ensemble company, she was now an independent attraction in an annual summer event. Opening the first two weeks of an eight-week program presenting “50 pieces, old and new,” she was advertised under the heading “FRENCH PLAYS.” The Gaiety program stated that Bernhardt would appear every evening with M. COQUELIN [of the Comédie-Française] “supported by Mesdames JULLIEN, JEANNE BERNHARDT, DEVAYOD, KALB, &c., &c.”³⁷ In Bernhardt’s first “Gaiety Programme,” the title of the play was given precedence, as it had been with the Comédie-Française, heading the page. Male actors were again also listed ahead of females. Moreover, Bernhardt’s name appeared in the same size font as all other players; there was no effort to distinguish her as a unique attraction. It was not until 1887, when Bernhardt performed in another West End theater, the Lyceum Theatre, that the format of the program changed. Still publicized within a “Season of French Plays,” she was now listed as a celebrity attraction in all-caps (fig. 3).³⁸ Moreover, she was advertised presenting a “Special Performance” for the public (act 2 of *Phèdre* and acts 4 and 5 of *La Dame aux camélias*). Bernhardt was evidently aware of the draw of specific “emotional” scenes and was now famous enough to claim individual billing.

Records show that Bernhardt appeared in London in a variety of West End theaters—usually those with the most seating and therefore available audiences—before the end of the nineteenth century. She performed in the French Season at the Gaiety Theatre (1879–86), Her Majesty’s Theatre (1886, 1890), the season of French Plays at the Lyceum Theatre (1887–89), the Royal English Opera House (1892), Daly’s Theatre (1894–95), the Comedy Theatre (1896), Adelphi Theatre (1897), Lyric Theatre (1898), Fulham Grand Theatre (1898), and the Adelphi, Fulham Grand, and Comedy Theatre in 1899.³⁹ Increasingly, Bernhardt was billed separately from the “French season,” had her name highlighted and visually differentiated on theatrical programs, and gradually changed her performance style. As early as 1887—just seven years after her first independent tour of London in 1880—criticisms were directed at her acting. A review of her performance in the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* stated: “The French playgoing public in London is limited, and especially the public prepared to pay old-fashioned opera-prices for the privilege of seeing a foreign ‘star’ supported by an indifferent company.”⁴⁰ Perhaps it was in relation to this difficulty of attracting an implicitly elite and wealthy “French playgoing public” in London that Bernhardt’s performance style began to change around 1888, during her tenure at the Lyceum Theatre. While it was accepted that physically she had become “more matronly and less pliable” (Bernhardt was then forty-four years old), it was her acting—deemed “less artistic”—that caused comment. As one reviewer wrote in the influential *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, Bernhardt’s long tours and journeying had “induced



FIGURE 3. Cover of Lyceum Theatre program, August 3, 1887, showing Bernhardt as a feature attraction.
Source: Author's private collection.

a careless and indifferent tone—a scrambling, hurried method of delivery, and evident signs of weariness that are much to be deplored.” Without the discipline of the Comédie-Française (“alone and uninfluenced”), she forgot that refinement and dignity were essential to her art.⁴¹

The vulgarized method of acting, “deliberately adopted by the actress,” was associated with Bernhardt’s new partnership with the playwright Victorien Sardou.⁴² Reflecting on the premiere of *La Tosca* in 1888 (and recalling that this was a play written specifically for Bernhardt by Sardou), a review in the influential weekly London paper *The Graphic* stated that Bernhardt “seems now under M. Sardou’s inspiration to have given up her genius to melodrama of the picturesquely harrowing kind; and, if the end and aim of the histrionic art is to afford satisfaction to the play-going public, she is abundantly justified.”⁴³ In my view, Bernhardt’s annual engagement with London theaters saw her identity as a French theater actress change and adapt. Rather than limit French theater to a determined summer season in a specific theater, Bernhardt drove commercial and cultural change. When we realize that the Lyceum could seat around 2,800 people—as opposed to the 1,126 of the Gaiety Theatre or the 1,319 of Her Majesty’s—we realize that Bernhardt’s changing theaters, programs, and acting styles coincided with the emergence of larger audiences for her West End productions.⁴⁴ Her broad physical gestures onstage—similar to the gestures we see on film, particularly in the use of her outstretched, supplicating arms in the death scene of *Queen Elizabeth*—were developed and honed in theaters like the Lyceum. These large venues

accommodated huge audiences and used theatrical space in different ways. On the *Queen Elizabeth* film, we see a frontal fall that could only be broken by a cushioned floor. In *Camille*, we see a spiral that spins her nightdress around her as she dies. In these ways, film framed and captured the phases of Bernhardt's large theatrical movements developed on the international stage. Moreover, Bernhardt developed new commercial opportunities for the theater that included (but were not limited to) her involvement in film. Challenging what Richard W. Schoch describes as "the mid-Victorian theatre's self-conscious emulation of the cult of the gentleman,"⁴⁵ Bernhardt helped forge an international market for French theater that was separate from playwrights such as Molière, performance traditions of the Théâtre Française, and the focus on *ensemble* productions.

ACTING IN AMERICA: CHANGES IN BERNHARDT'S APPEAL

Bernhardt's relationship to American audiences differed from the relationship she had with the theatergoing public of West End London in the 1880s. First arriving in New York in 1880, on the heels of her first independent Gaiety season, she was not introduced as a member of the Théâtre Française. Instead, Bernhardt was an individual actress and French theatrical celebrity. With Henry E. Abbey as her agent, she tapped into and profited from an emerging network of transnational business relations. As Michael Bennett Leavitt, in his book *Fifty Years in Theatrical Management*, explains, Abbey used the American Marcus R. Mayer, "one of the best business managers at the time," to assist in the organization of Bernhardt's trip from London.⁴⁶ Abbey was already partnered with John B. Schoeffel; the two leased and managed theaters in New York, Buffalo, Boston, and Philadelphia. Although there are no records of the financial terms of these relationships, it is evident that Bernhardt's promotion in America was distinct to the avant-garde eccentricity that first marked her renown in London.

Bernhardt's American appeal was promoted through the prestigious crowds she had drawn in London and across Europe. As Booth's inaugural theater program stated, in London "the most distinguished men in art and letters, the proudest and wealthiest of England's most exclusive nobility—even Royalty itself," had paid homage to her. In the capital cities of Europe, Bernhardt had been feted "as never was an actress before." Booth therefore brought the actress to the American public as an incomparable *artiste*; she was a theatrical celebrity of the new generation.⁴⁷ Reiterating that Bernhardt arrived in New York on the heels of Parisian and London success ("the two greatest cities of the world"), the program anticipated that "the general verdict of France and England will be cordially and unanimously sustained in America."⁴⁸

The triangulation of Bernhardt's success in Paris, London, and New York—the cultural capitals of the Western world—was an important aspect of Bernhardt's

appeal in America as the New World. Bernhardt arrived from the Old World of London, the global capital of commerce, where her transnational celebrity was formed thanks to the enthusiasm of the city's elite, theatergoing audiences. Originating from Paris, Bernhardt boasted roots in one of the oldest and most prestigious acting companies in the world. Reports of Bernhardt's inaugural opening at Booth's Theatre in New York on November 8, 1880, indicate that audiences welcomed the actress as a celebrity, even before she appeared on the stage. On her opening night, for example, one thousand sightseers packed the street. The crowd of ticketholders (fifty-plus yards deep) was so tightly packed that no one could move within it, and tickets were bought at triple or quadruple prices. The *New York Times's* review of Bernhardt's opening stated that her reception was extraordinary, even for Bernhardt herself: "A gentleman who was present with her at her receptions in London and Paris says that last night's demonstration, in unanimity and enthusiasm, far surpasses anything in Mlle. Bernhardt's previous experiences."⁴⁹

The most obvious difference between Bernhardt's London and American reception can be seen in the playbill used to promote her New York debut. Appearing in Booth's Theatre on November 9, 1880, she was a single headline act—"The Great French Artiste"—whose national origins were reiterated in the spelling of the word *artist*. Playing in a "Specially selected company, from the Parisian theaters, under the management of Henry E. Abbey," Bernhardt was presented through the intermediary of an agent. Drawing on actors from Parisian theaters, and not a specific national theater, Bernhardt is framed as a headline celebrity. As the playbill stated, Bernhardt was accompanied by "The Grand Orchestra" playing excerpts of well-known, contemporary music. In this way, the program was French but filtered through familiar auditory references. For example, Bernhardt's performance was accompanied by excerpts from *The Pirates of Penzance* (first shown in New York on December 31, 1879), American Rudolph Aronson's 1880 "Sweet Sixteen Waltz," and a selection from Edmund Kretschmer's 1874 opera *Die Folklinger*.⁵⁰ Clearly, while Bernhardt was a Parisian celebrity, she was also a contemporary performer whose work accommodated New York musical trends and fashions.

The advertisements accompanying Bernhardt's performance at Booth's Theatre indicate how the actress was localized and commercialized for New York audiences. Rather than appear in a simple list of players, Bernhardt was presented as a celebrity embedded in commercial culture. In a practice typical of the period, advertisements in the program implicated neighborhood shops and businesses in the theatrical play, stating (for example), that "the furniture used in the plays are from the warerooms of Lowenbien & Son, Fourteenth Street."⁵¹ Moreover, advertisers adapted Bernhardt for their own use: there were the "Latest" Sara [*sic*] Bernhardt Crimps" from Stiebel's (an importer and manufacturer of human hair goods that are "Warranted Naturally Curly"), "Ed Pinaud's SARAH BERNHARDT EXTRACT for the Handkerchief," "MAX WATERMAN'S EXCLUSIVE

Sarah Bernhardt GLOVES," and "BERNHARDT DRESSES" from Jerseys Latest fashions.⁵² Outside the theater, Bernhardt's New York fame was translated into commercial goods that could be purchased by a general public that did not necessarily have to attend the theater in order to enjoy Bernhardt's presence in the city. It was reported, for example, that New Yorkers had given Bernhardt's name to "every imaginable article of everyday life." This included the marketing of Sarah Bernhardt bonbons, hats, boots, plates, and portraits. Moreover, when she visited the Park Theatre to watch Clara Morris perform, she was "enthusiastically received by the audience, who rose as she entered, while the orchestra played the 'Marseillaise.'" ⁵³

This spread of Bernhardt's image and name across quotidian objects, as well as the spontaneous and direct association between Bernhardt and the national anthem of France, illustrates the depth of the embrace that the New York public offered Bernhardt. Whereas a highbrow and theatrical Paris-London exchange best characterizes Bernhardt's first tour to England, in America her New York reception was nationalized, generated by a mass of people who were not necessarily regular theatergoers, and commercialized to an extent that provoked comment, even in the American press.

In New York, Bernhardt represented the theatrical leadership of the Old World, as well as the capacity of emerging manufacturing industries in America. Prime among these industries, particularly in cities like New York (which had increasing numbers of women with available wages to spend), were items marketed for female audiences and use. These included beauty products (such as hair goods and lotions for handkerchiefs), as well as fashion (such as shoes, hats, and dresses). It also included collectible prints, autographs, and music. Indeed, on a program for the Globe Theatre in Boston (dated Dec. 18, 1880), Bernhardt was theatrically and commercially promoted on the program. In the playbill, patrons were advised that music such as the "Quand Meme Polka" will be played. This polka was dedicated to her by one A. Spencer and clearly drew inspiration from her famous motto, *Quand même* (meaning "even though," "notwithstanding"). The Globe program also announced that "the only Correct and Authorised Librettos of Mlle. Bernhardt's Plays" are now "illustrated from designs made expressly by Mlle. Bernhardt, and their genuineness is certified to by the artist's autograph signature." Joined to this was the announcement that "photographs of Mlle. Sarah Bernhardt, taken from life in this country by [Napoleon] Sarony, are for sale by the Libretto Boys in the theater."⁵⁴ A reproduced signature or image, available as a novel item of merchandise that was sold by a team of young salesmen in the theater, indicated the changed purchase that American audiences had on Bernhardt's theatrical celebrity.

When Bernhardt subsequently traveled (on this first tour to America) to McVicker's Theatre in Chicago in 1881, an art exhibition was publicized on the theatrical program. As it announced, "The Sarah Bernhardt Art Exhibition" at

O'Brien's Gallery was an event "visited by throngs of fashionable people (nearly 50 000) in New York, Boston and Philadelphia."⁵⁵ Instead of connecting Bernhardt's works to a French Gallery, as they were in London, or linking her to famous art dealers like Gambart, Bernhardt's exhibition was part of a commercial touring show. The increase in people who could access her artworks, now traveling alongside her theatrical tour, was significant. While Bernhardt's first Gaiety appearance was successful, and while her Grafton galleries show drew the literary and artistic crowds of London, her first American tour gave her access to a public that did not necessarily attend galleries, go to the theater, or understand French. As a commentator remarked, Americans were "making still more of their talented guest than did her London admirers two years ago, which is saying a great deal for Transatlantic enthusiasm."⁵⁶

CONTRASTS AND COMPARISONS: ACTING ADRIENNE LECOUVREUR

The choice of Bernhardt's opening role in New York—Eugène Scribe and Ernest Legouv  s *Adrienne Lecouvreur* (1849)—focuses on the French actress as a theatrical subject. Adrienne Lecouvreur was a renowned French actress of the early eighteenth century, a member of the Com  die-Fran  aise, known for her "natural" style of acting and famous for her mysterious death (attributed to poisoning). In adopting this role, Bernhardt self-referentially played an actress from the Com  die-Fran  aise playing the role of an actress. *Adrienne Lecouvreur* also allowed Bernhardt to perform a death scene, now a signature aspect of her theatrical repertoire. For audience members in New York, the role of Adrienne Lecouvreur was particularly significant because it allowed Bernhardt's acting to be compared to other French actresses in the same role. In this respect, it functioned as *Ph  dre* did in London, in terms of enabling a generational Bernhardt/Rachel contrast. As the *New York Times* explained, "Many in the audience were, fortunately, able to compare their impressions of her [Bernhardt's] acting with that of other famous artists who have performed with success in the same part, notably Rachel, Avonia Jones, [Fanny] Janauschek, [Marie] Seebach, [Adelaide] Ristori, and [Helena] Modjeska."⁵⁷ Because the play was written for Rachel by Scribe and Legouv  , and because the part was considered one of Rachel's most powerful, Bernhardt's performance highlighted the emergence of a new generation of French theatrical prowess. Her performance of Adrienne's death (celebrated for being "full of truth and beauty"), as well as her unique voice, attracted commentary. Bernhardt was described as having a startling effect on the audience; her voice, considered a "perfect art," boasted an enunciation so distinct that "each whisper is heard with the sharpness of a bell struck suddenly."⁵⁸

Bernhardt's subsequent return to America in 1887, after a tour of South America, again saw her perform in New York. This time, however, her tour was

organized by Henry E. Abbey, who was now joined by Maurice Grau and John B. Schoeffel. Performing more than 250 times, this was one of the most successful tours of America ever undertaken by a European star.⁵⁹ Abbey, Grau, and Schoeffel formed a management partnership—known as Abbey, Schoeffel & Grau—on the heels of this success. The partnership of “three progressive and energetic managers, with years of experience, familiarity with the people of the various countries to whose people they propose to cater”—Grau for Europe, Abbey and Schoeffel for South America and North America—was “a novelty in theatrical enterprise.” The first company to “cater to the amusement of the people of two continents,” Abbey, Schoeffel & Grau evidence Bernhardt’s transnational appeal.⁶⁰ Indeed, it was Bernhardt’s capacity to build publics and audiences for her performances abroad, particularly in America, that motivated and put into place their focus on marketing and managing tours of European theatrical stars to North and South America. The French actor Coquelin and the Italian opera singer Adelina Patti were later signed to this management company; Bernhardt completed her “Farewell Tour” of America under their management in June 1887.

Abbey, Schoeffel & Grau not only organized tours of European stars to America, they also managed theaters for these tours. The theater where Bernhardt appeared in New York in 1887—the (appropriately named) Star Theatre—was managed by the trio from August 1887. When Bernhardt first appeared in the Star Theatre between March and June in 1887, she was appearing in an established venue that had been renovated and renamed just four years earlier. In addition to offering gaslight, new velvet carpets, fresh décor, and a newly painted domed ceiling, it boasted “the best practical stage in America,” constructed by the master mechanic Mr. Dorrington. As it was explained, “anything that can be done on a stage can be done on this, without tearing it to pieces.”⁶¹ In this context, it is important to remember that Bernhardt led changes in theatrical management and business practices in America, just as she appeared in theaters and contexts that associated her with modern development. She was an actress from Paris, but this did not mean that she was tied to rigid and tired traditions or practices.

Bernhardt performed *La Dame aux camélias* in the Star Theatre on her opening night in March 1887.⁶² Reviews of her performance speak of the merits of her acting; we are told that “Her art has no blemishes.”⁶³ Bernhardt’s subsequent performance in Sardou’s *Fédora* was similarly celebrated. For the first time, this role was performed in French for American audiences, and the impact was tremendous. As the reviewer in the *New York Times* stated, Bernhardt “is still the greatest of living actresses, accomplishing startling results with seeming spontaneity and perfect naturalness. . . . Her art has today reached its zenith, and in finish and force her acting is seen at its best.”⁶⁴ The attention given Bernhardt’s “naturalness” alerts us to the contextual specificity of what was “natural” on the late nineteenth-century stage. Here, the difference between a New York audience celebrating Bernhardt’s artistic return, and critics in London (in the same year)

lamenting Bernhardt's theatrical vulgarization, indicates the extent to which Bernhardt was promoted and interpreted differently by audiences abroad.

MODERNIZING MOVEMENT: BERNHARDT IN AMERICA

When Bernhardt traveled in America, she did so in fitted train cars and later (in 1905) in her own "Sarah Bernhardt Special" train.⁶⁵ A published itinerary from her tour of America in 1905 and 1906 shows the railways she traveled, the times that she departed and arrived in cities and towns, and a photograph of the train she used. Entitled "The Sarah Bernhardt Special Reducing the Time between New York and Chicago on Its Record Run November 20, 1905," the image documented Bernhardt breaking modern speed records. Calling the train a "marquee in motion," Sharon Marcus explains that "this metonym for the actress, a container identified with and advertising the star it contains, endows the words 'Sarah Bernhardt' with the modernity of speed, the evanescence of smoke, and the propulsive momentum of an object moving at a record-breaking pace toward the beholder."⁶⁶ I add that the easily calculable times (listed above the photograph of the train) proved that Bernhardt had a personalized train and itinerary. Unlike most actors who relied on resources such as Harry Miner's annual *America Dramatic Directory* for programming their theatrical season, Bernhardt was in the unusual position of having no need to negotiate railroad timetables, distances, or census tables.⁶⁷

Moving with speed between cities, Bernhardt was also able to choose the venues for her productions. Particularly after the turn of the century, during the era of "the Trust" (the theater syndicate comprising Al Hayman, Abraham (Abe) Lincoln Erlanger, Charles Frohman, Marc Klaw, Samuel Nixon, and Frederick Zimmerman, formed in 1896), this ensured her ongoing presence on the American stage. Indeed, on her 1905–6 tour, Bernhardt was in contract with Lee Shubert, who had declared independence from the theater syndicate. This meant that Bernhardt could not perform in the chain of theaters (roughly five thousand legitimate theaters) running across America that the Trust controlled. When Bernhardt first appeared in New York, she appeared in the Lyric Theatre, which was at that time leased by the Shubert brothers. But because of Shubert's later independence from the Trust, Bernhardt was forced to perform in more unusual venues. As Stephen M. Archer explains, she performed in "conventional halls, skating rinks, a combined swimming pool–auditorium in Tampa, a summer theater five miles outside Little Rock, [and] a boathouse in St. John, Missouri."⁶⁸ In *Stagestruck Filmmaker*, David Mayer notes that Bernhardt was not just forced into these new venues; she also defied the syndicate. Consequently, she hired and appeared in a Barnum & Bailey circus tent during her 1905–6 tour.⁶⁹ Photographs of this tent, which had the capacity to hold six thousand people, were taken by one Geo. R. Lawrence Co. on April 30, 1906 (fig. 4). Captioned the "Sarah Bernhardt Tent," the photograph also



FIGURE 4. *Sarah Bernhardt Tent, Chicago*. Gelatin silver print. Geo. R. Lawrence Co., 1906. Photograph courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.

shows the tent advertising an Earthquake Relief Fund Benefit. Because the San Francisco earthquake had occurred two weeks earlier, on April 18, we have evidence that Bernhardt used her celebrity to engage charitably in American current affairs. In this way, she both challenged monopoly industry and presented herself as a celebrity who invested in national infrastructure and regeneration.

Bernhardt's ability to meet the Trust with a cultural and financial challenge of her own indicates her awareness of the theater's audience. In bringing her performance to a variety of venues across America, Bernhardt broke free of the limitations of the legitimate theater. Quite literally, Bernhardt performed the same plays but did so in changed circumstances. The step between this form of theatrical adaptation to the popular music hall in London and variety stage in America is not great. It should therefore come as no surprise that just four years after she challenged the Trust, Bernhardt agreed to perform in the London Coliseum.

CELEBRITY CHANGE: BERNHARDT AT THE LONDON COLISEUM, 1910

The London Coliseum was a music-hall venue boasting the largest seating capacity of any theater in the West End (2,359). It was best known for its variety acts and was a draw for popular audiences. Programs from the Coliseum indicate that Bernhardt was newly marketed to London audiences in the 1910s. While I have identified an initial separation in London between the 1880 Gaiety theatrical program and Bernhardt's self-promotion through artworks in a Piccadilly gallery, a generation later, Bernhardt associated herself with the West End. Promoted as a celebrity act in a mixed single-act Coliseum program, Bernhardt was advertised alongside a host of businesses. A note in the Coliseum program indicates that of the thousands of buyers of the programs, "one or two" were critical of this mixing of the theatrical program with advertising. As readers were told, "by spreading the names throughout the booklet, value is added to the advertisements, the revenue from which enables the Programme to be sold at one penny instead of sixpence."⁷⁰

This explanation indicates not just that the Coliseum was seeking to make its program affordable to a popular audience but that some of those who might have sought out Bernhardt on this stage were habituated to another form of theater (the legitimate theater) and were not used to seeing an order of program spread between pages promoting local businesses.

In his article “Conversions and Convergences: Sarah Bernhardt in the Era of Technological Reproducibility, 1911–1913,” Charles Musser speaks, in a related context, of new forms of publicity joining Bernhardt’s theatrical stage appearances. Focusing on the recording contract Bernhardt signed with the Edison Phonograph Company in 1910, Musser explains that there was a “new seriousness and a new effort to coordinate them [records] with her Anglo-American stage career.” As Musser shows, the English paper *Lloyd’s Weekly News* advertised Bernhardt records that could be shipped from America to arrive in London in time for Bernhardt’s appearance at the Coliseum.⁷¹ As the program for the Coliseum indicates, these records were also advertised to the public attending the Coliseum show. Captioned “Thomas A. Edison,” the advertisement reads: “Tonight you will hear that greatest of actresses SARAH BERNHARDT in some of her famous parts. It will doubtless be for years a pleasing memory; but how much more so would be a souvenir of the occasion in the form of a perfect reproduction of her marvelous voice on an EDISON RECORD.” Stating that Bernhardt had refused to make records for any other company, the promotion elides her ongoing engagement in the phonograph industry.⁷²

Moving into emerging media while forging ways that the theater could be enjoyed at home, Bernhardt multiplied the ways she could reach audiences. This placement of the Edison advertisement within Bernhardt’s Coliseum theater show was novel; it indicated the ways the variety stage was expanding audiences through promotion of emerging commercial industries. Because many of these Coliseum advertisements focused on female personal care and hygiene, they can also be compared to the advertisements that accompanied Bernhardt’s earlier appearances in America. For example, a “unique and exclusive Complexion Specifics known as ‘de la Reine’” was advertised to London audiences: “Ladies are now given the opportunity to test them,” and this “only extends to Madame Bernhardt’s Season.” A product called Icilma Natural Water was presented in a full-page advertisement featuring a photograph of Bernhardt wearing the opulent headdress from *La Princesse Lointaine*. Announcing that they had “the pleasure in presenting a facsimile of the handwriting and autograph of Mme. Sarah Bernhardt” Icilma Natural Water promised to restore beauty to so many complexions.⁷³

These advertisements were aimed largely at young women, who constituted a newly visible part of the modern industrial workforce. Women also needed to be convinced that they could bring themselves and their families to a music hall and be respectfully engaged by a theatrical program. Bernhardt was a good choice in this regard: associated with the legitimate theater and with Paris as a global capital

of art and culture, Bernhardt was known to speak to foreign publics in her native French. If, in 1888, critics in London were speaking of Bernhardt's acting being "vulgarized" by her trips abroad, some twenty years later Bernhardt promised London audiences a short and very much abbreviated and spectacular view of her work as a theatrical attraction on the variety stage.

The performances that Bernhardt presented at the Coliseum were taken from her most famous roles, presented as single-act excerpts from her most engaging scenes. In 1910, for example, she presented the third act of Sardou's *La Tosca* (summarized as "Torture Scene"); in 1911, her program included *Théodora* (act 3, the death scene), *La Dame aux camélias* (act 5, the death scene), *Le Procès de Jeanne d'Arc* (act 2, the trial scene), and *Fédora* (act 3, the revelation scene). Each of these famous acts involved Bernhardt performing death or featured her in an emotionally tense and engaging scene. For example, a review of *Fédora* written more than twenty years earlier (in 1887) isolated the third act of the play as being "the most impressive passage in the performance" with the climax of the act—when Vladimir's villainy is revealed—as "such an exhibition of passion as few other actresses would dare to attempt, and none could present so successfully as Bernhardt."⁷⁴

The Coliseum program offered these sectional, isolated glimpses of Bernhardt's performance across successive nights and weeks. Bernhardt did not present an evening of extracts; each week she presented just one act of a single play. A scene that might hold a particular affordance for English audiences (for example, *Queen Elizabeth*) ran for two weeks.⁷⁵ A special sheet was offered in the 1910 Coliseum program with a printed explanation of what Bernhardt's play was about and what would occur in the scene in which she was performing. In *La Tosca*, for instance, we are told where we are (Rome, 1800), who rules (the Minister of Police, Baron Scarpia), and who Mario Cavaradossi, Floria Tosca, and Cesare Angelotti are (a revolutionary, a great singer, and the republican leader). The background to the scene is described, and then the action in the scene is relayed like a story. Using clear and simple language ("In vain she [Maria] begs") ensures that audiences will understand the emotions and motivations of each character.⁷⁶ This background and introduction to Bernhardt's work also indicates that while she was featured on the music-hall stage as a special attraction, a degree of narrative explanation and context had to be set in place for London audiences.

In 1911 and 1912, large and specially printed programs of the "Sarah Bernhardt Season" were available for three cents (fig. 5). These elaborate programs included longer synopses of each play, highlighted sections of the Coliseum's single acts, and page-size photographs of Bernhardt in her role taken by photographers of global repute (e.g., by "Bert, Paris" and "Downey, London").⁷⁷ The introduction to the 1911 Sarah Bernhardt Season program opens with a discussion titled "Madam Bernhardt and the Variety Stage." Arguing that the 1910 appearance of Bernhardt in the Coliseum drew the attention of leading newspapers in England, Europe, and America, it called the program an "epoch-making event" with "far-reaching

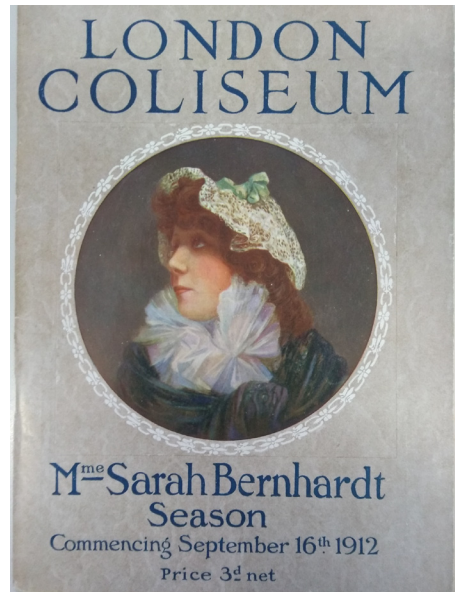


FIGURE 5. Cover of the Bernhardt Season, London Coliseum, 1912. Courtesy of Special Collections, Exeter University.

effect upon the entertainment world.”⁷⁸ The inclusion of Bernhardt as a globally renowned theatrical actress performing alongside attractions such as Loie Fuller,⁷⁹ or “the famous Madame Yvette Guilbert Diseuse,” “Eight Lancashire Lads, Wonders in Wooden Shoes,” one “Fred Barnes, Descriptive Vocalist,” and “The Bioscope, Illustrating Interesting Incidents”⁸⁰ indicates the changing scope of the music hall in London and the widening of Bernhardt’s popular celebrity. Marketed to family and evening audiences, she appeared daily at the 2:30 p.m. matinee and at the 8 p.m. show six days a week (the theater was not open on Sundays). Bernhardt was therefore a performer whose fame reached mothers and children and who prompted legitimate theatrical practices to flow into the popular stage via the association of a lead actress with her own titled season, the printing of specially colored tribute programs, the naming of playwrights in program details, the specification and naming of the performed acts, the availability of translated and theatrical synopses, the use of theatrical portraits to illustrate a role, and the encouragement of audience members to involve themselves in paratheatrical initiatives. For example, in 1912 the Coliseum invited the public to sign their own copy of the “National Tribute to Mme. Sarah Bernhardt” on the occasion of her sixty-eighth birthday, encouraging the inclusion and involvement of anonymous theater attendees in recognition of her acting.⁸¹ The Coliseum also offered the *Bernhardt Birthday Book* for sale from attendants, which included photographs and “quotes for every day of the year from Mme. Bernhardt’s repertoire of plays and other sources.”⁸² Again, this was a product that could be used by everyday audiences, who were invited to list their own family and friends within a Bernhardt-inspired year.

These new ways of engaging the London public in Bernhardt's fame might also be considered within the context of the Coliseum's theatrical show itself. Placing Bernhardt as the eighth or ninth act (in a program of around thirteen or fourteen attractions) meant that she was the first act after intermission. We might guess that this placement ensured that audiences remained for the full show (since doors were shut during performances). Appearing after the interval also indicates that Bernhardt's act might have taken more effort to mount and stage; possibly, time was needed for this. Moreover, because the program was two or three acts shorter in the second half than the first, we might surmise that the length of her performance was longer than other attractions. But while the music hall included film as an attraction, the title and subject of the films screened were not listed. It is therefore the bioscope itself, the film projection machine, that is featured as a theatrical attraction on the Coliseum program.

If considered as a theatrical attraction, the bioscope takes the spectacular display of mechanization on the stage to its extreme (that is, in the removal of live performance and in its dependence on the workings of a machine as a theatrical attraction in itself).⁸³ We might consider, in this context, the fact that the bioscope is listed as displaying "interesting incidents" and not featuring specific people, events, or theatrical scenes. Moreover, just as Bernhardt always opened the second half of the music-hall show, so, too, did the bioscope also always close it. It is difficult to determine whether we should see this final program item as a clearing space—that is, as a moment signaling the end of the program, when patrons might begin to exit—or as an attraction that audiences would eagerly await. In either instance, we cannot deny that it was the spectacle of the theatrical variety show before a large audience in central London that is significant. In other words, both Bernhardt and the bioscope are part of theater history and film history in the kaleidoscope of theatrical attractions that constitute popular entertainment in early twentieth-century London.

I, TOO, SAW SARAH BERNHARDT: VARIETYDOM IN AMERICA

Just as London was the first city in which Bernhardt realized her potential as a French theatrical star, so, too, did Bernhardt's successful season at the Coliseum prompt her to expand "varietydom" to include the Vaudeville stage in America. On her American tour following her first Coliseum appearance (the American tour was undertaken from 1912 to 1913), Bernhardt appeared in an Orpheum Circuit vaudeville tour facilitated by Martin Beck. As Charles Musser comments, most biographies about Bernhardt focus on her career in the legitimate theater and give scant coverage of the 1910–13 period. As he argues, rather than view these years in terms of decline and approaching old age (Bernhardt was in her late sixties), we might instead appreciate that Bernhardt "not only embraced a series of important

innovations that were of cultural and political significance, she understood how different media forms could be made to converge in ways that produced maximum impact and synergy.”⁸⁴

When Bernhardt entered American vaudeville programs, she was positioned as a French actress bringing legitimate French theater to popular audiences. Like the Coliseum program in 1911 explaining that Bernhardt had impacted the entertainment industry by making herself affordable to popular audiences on the variety stage, the Palace Theatre in 1912 explained in its preface that Martin Beck had convinced Bernhardt “that to appear at moderate prices” was “a duty she owed the public.”⁸⁵ Rather than present Bernhardt in her own season accompanied by a range of theatrical attractions, in America Bernhardt was marketed through the management of Martin Beck. As the program read: “Martin Beck offers Sarah Bernhardt in Vaudeville.” Replacing Bernhardt’s status as an independent and famous actress with the aspirations of Martin Beck, audiences were told that Beck worked to make vaudeville “parallel the achievements of the most notable epoch of the drama” and that the inclusion of Bernhardt was the “crowning success of a career filled with achievements.”⁸⁶ In addition to framing Bernhardt within the context of Beck’s entrepreneurship, the details of Bernhardt’s plays were different from Bernhardt’s London appearance. While she was marketed through a program featuring single acts taken from her most famous plays—*La Dame aux camélias* (act 5), *La Tosca* (act 4), *Théodora* (act 3)—Beck did not focus on the action within each act so much as the synopsis of each play. The act numbers and names of the performers were provided in small type in the margins of the page. Moreover, on the Beck program advertisements were replaced by unattributed photographs of Bernhardt in theatrical roles.

In advertisements for Bernhardt’s Palace Theatre program, publicity focused on the availability of her live performance. As one announcement stated: “It is the desire of Mme. Bernhardt and her management that before her departure for France she plays a metropolitan engagement so that none need remain away, nor deny themselves the delight of seeing this most famous of the world’s players because of the price of seats. It is for this reason that a scale has been determined so generous in its provisions that each may say in future days ‘I, too, saw Bernhardt.’”⁸⁷ Unlike Edison records, sold in London as records of a significant event and included in theatrical publicity, patrons were told that Bernhardt must be seen to be remembered. In this announcement, there is again emphasis on Beck as her manager and agent.

After the launch of Bernhardt’s Palace program, her appearance in the variety theater included many popular acts. A May 1913 repertoire listed, for example, “NAT M. MILLS ‘The Happy Tramp,’” “VON HOVEN ‘The Dippy Mad Magician,’” “THE STANLEYS In ‘Shadowgraphs,’” and “EDISON’S MARVELLOUS TALKING MACHINES.”⁸⁸ Similar to the Biograph films that completed Bernhardt’s London Coliseum program, film was integrated into the variety show as a

theatrical attraction. Evidence of this integration of stage and screen is confirmed by Julius Cahn's *Official Theatrical Guide*, which, by 1912, included both variety theater and film. Published in New York, the guide materialized the "radical changes" that swept through the American theater industry in the early teen years. Newly expanded to include vaudeville theaters, theatrical agencies, acts and performers, as well as moving picture houses and picture exchanges, Cahn's guide modernized its list of theaters, hotels, newspapers, railroads, express companies, theatrical managers, producers, agents, plays, and attorneys.⁸⁹ While the theater was in a process of expansion and change, Beck's patrons were assured that nothing had changed in Bernhardt's performance. The emphasis on her continued legitimacy as a French actress stood in contrast to the publicity that first accompanied her tour in America. In an interesting reversal, the young actress who provided the opportunity to market anything from hair crimps to furniture in 1880 was, by 1913, a respectable attraction presenting French theatrical culture to the American masses. Again in an interesting contrast, Bernhardt was integrated into "the people's palace" (the Coliseum) almost contemporaneously in London. There, she promoted commercial products for women and leveraged new business around her reproduced voice and image.

FRAMING FILM

Bernhardt entered film in 1900, when she made a brief excerpt of the fencing duel and death scene of *Hamlet*. Part of Paul Decauville's Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre program at the Paris Exhibition, the work is notable for a variety of reasons. First, it featured her cross-dressed in a Shakespearian role that she had recently (and famously) made her own by commissioning a translation of the work into French.⁹⁰ Second, she appeared on a variety program that was shown in an international context (the Paris Exposition). This joined the phonograph and film and featured famous excerpts of performances from the contemporary French stage. Alongside Bernhardt, the program boasted "Coquelin aîné" in the duel scene from *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Gabrielle Réjane in the mime scene of *Ma Cousine*, Little Tich (Harry Relph) in his Spanish dance, and Cléo de Mérode in her Javanese dance. Today, this program seems to suggest the recorded version of the variety or music-hall programs that were to come. As such, the initiative puts theater at the intersection of reproductive technologies, while promoting film as a French product ripe for commercial experimentation and export.

Following this experimentation into recorded theater, Bernhardt's entrance into narrative film is difficult to trace. We know that she made a lost film, *La Tosca*, directed by André Calmettes for the French company Le Film d'Art in 1908. For unknown reasons, *La Tosca* was not released in America until 1912.⁹¹ We can hypothesize that Bernhardt helped select the role—*La Tosca* was one of her biggest successes on the American stage—but we do not know why it was released

several years after its original production. We also do not know why it did not join the release of *Sarah Bernhardt at Home* (1912) and *Madame Bernhardt in Her Adaptation for the Cinema of Adrienne Lecouvreur* (1912) in the UK.⁹² Indeed, there remains little record of these films' transnational circulation or impact. In 1916, *La Tosca* reappears in the trade press, advertised along with "all kinds of advertising matter, including three styles of posters, heralds, posters and slides."⁹³ In this context, *La Tosca* joined other media to commercialize Bernhardt's presence in America. In consequence, it is *La Dame aux camélias*, directed by André Calmettes and Henri Pouctal for Film d'Art in 1911, that allows us to address Bernhardt's transnational impact in film.

INAUGURATING THE CELEBRITY DOUBLE-FEATURE FILM

La Dame aux camélias (renamed *Camille* for American audiences) was released with Réjane's *Madame Sans-Gêne* in America as a combined theatrical program on February 18, 1912. A five-reel program—marketed as a "Complete Evening's Entertainment of about Two and One Half Hours, Presenting the Divine Sarah, the World Renowned Emotional Actress, and Mme. Réjane, Famous French Comedienne, at Their Best"⁹⁴—was offered to exhibitors in February 1912 as advertised in *Moving Picture World*. Promoted as "one of the largest money-makers since the discovery of motion picture art" for state rights in America, Canada, and Mexico, the film was offered in the context of a touring theatrical road show.⁹⁵ Moreover, with Bernhardt headlining a bill with Réjane, another contemporary French actress who could also boast "her own [theatrical] company," the program represented the success of the French actress-manager. With state rights sold through the French-American Film Co. and copyright protection guaranteed through lawyers listed in New York and Paris, Bernhardt was again associated with the legitimating efforts that Beck had earlier promoted in vaudeville. As an advertisement explained beneath the title "Why" (and note the way in which the Bernhardt train is now cast as cumbersome and unwieldy): "Instead of a train-load of people to carry and tons of scenery in presenting the world's greatest emotional actress before the public you require only a machine and a picture screen in giving a production of merit of the highest class. An entertainment for all classes. You come again and again" (fig. 6).⁹⁶

An emphasis on the booking agent, the efficacy of the touring road show, and the capacity to enjoy repeat viewings of the actress's performance enabled Bernhardt to reach American theatergoers. Whereas she first arrived in America with customs to negotiate, a theatrical syndicate to challenge, and a middle-class audience to engage, Bernhardt was now an industrial product, enmeshed within commercial exhibition and distribution networks. Her awareness of the ways in which exhibitors selling *Camille* capitalized on her theatrical road show is evident

THE MOVING PICTURE WORLD

AN ADVANCEMENT IN THE ART OF MOTION PHOTOGRAPHY

The Surest State Right Proposition Ever Offered

The Talk of the Universe

SARAH BERNHARDT

WORLD FAMOUS EMOTIONAL ACTRESS

IN "CAMILLE" 2 REELS --- 225 FEET

AND

REJANE "SANS-GENE" 3 REELS --- 3050 FT.

AND HER OWN COMPANY

THESE TWO SUBJECTS COMBINED, ARE AN ENTERTAINMENT OF THE HIGHEST STANDARD OF ABOUT TWO AND ONE HALF HOURS.

FOR STATE RIGHTS

FRENCH-AMERICAN FILM CO.

403 TIMES BLDG., NEW YORK

SPECIAL NOTICE

These pictures are copyrighted and fully protected by the UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE.

The producers guarantee these pictures under the law. No other company can duplicate them.

One should remember and watch are directed and the production of one within the production of all.

ATTENTION: SOCIAL, LITERARY, & HUMOROUS. NEW YORK, ALBERT MATTER, PARIS.

IMPORTANT

A Full Line of Special Pictorial Paper in Four Colors by The Courier Company, New York. Also Full Line Small Advertising Matter, Photos, Etc.

Rejane's Comedy --- An Incident in French History During the Reign of Napoleon Bonaparte.

FIGURE 6.
Advertisement featuring Sarah Bernhardt and Réjane in the first double-feature bill in America. *Moving Picture World*, Feb. 17, 1912.

in an interview Bernhardt gave to Jean Levêque of *Le Journal* in 1914. Reflecting on the capacity of film to reach large audiences through its cheap prices (and remembering that this film toured America at the same time that Bernhardt entered Vaudeville), she stated:

I remember that, in a recent tour I made in America with *La dame aux camélias*, our troupe was followed by a cinema company. Everywhere I stopped, and frequently in a theatre right next door to where I was playing, the movie version of *La dame aux camélias* was also showing. It so happened that the posters for the two events were sometimes put right up next to each other. However, every night both theatres were full—but in the one you paid only fifteen or twenty sous while in the other it cost fifteen or twenty francs.⁹⁷

A MANIFESTLY MODERN AFFAIR

Marketed by the French-American Film Company, the two French feature films were distributed in America by a company whose name reiterated Bernhardt and Réjane's transnational appeal. Located in the Times Building in New York, the French-American Film Company was also modern. The Times Building sat geographically block-bound by Broadway, Forty-Second Street, and Seventh Avenue and was a new steel construction (built in 1904) that was linked to the New York subway.⁹⁸ The Bernhardt-Réjane program demonstrated that the company was "new, artistic and thoroughly up-to-date in the way of the feature film."⁹⁹ Part of this appeal lay in the films' use of kinemacolor, a new development in film technology that was introduced by George Albert Smith in 1906 and that was subsequently exploited by the Anglo-American entrepreneur Charles Urban.¹⁰⁰ When the Bernhardt-Réjane program was released, the French-American Film Company (through its president, Mr. A. Anderson, a former theatrical manager) highlighted

the theatrical genesis of the films: they were made with the “famous Society Film d’Art, of Paris,” and the original cast of the first productions of these plays on the French-speaking stage were employed as cast members.

Reinforcing theater-film connections, the use of famous players in famous Parisian plays was called a “motion picture revival.” As revivals, the two films circulated in much the same way that plays were also said to be revived generationally in the theater, once successful.¹⁰¹ Moreover, film was discussed as the single region of the theater that Bernhardt had not yet explored. In this sense, film was regarded in terms of theatrical outreach rather than as a separate artistic or technological field.¹⁰² Furthermore, it was stipulated that the reels (five in all: two for *Camille*, listed as 2,275 feet, and three for *Madame Sans-Gêne*, listed as 3,050 feet) were offered together as a single evening’s entertainment and should only be exhibited in first-class theaters.¹⁰³ In addition, “appropriate music” was prepared for the film screening, and a “fine line of advertising” was offered buyers. Because of the quality of these French films and the materials that supported their exhibition, it was argued that “their appearance will set a new standard in the motion picture exhibition business and give a wonderful impetus to the feature picture in America.”¹⁰⁴

The publicity that accompanied the double-feature bill was organized by Walter J. Kingsley, the publicist for the French-American Film Company in America. Known as a “newspaper man of long experience”—Kingsley had worked for the *London Daily Express*, the *London Daily Mail*, and the *Yokohama Daily Advertiser* in the US—he was also a theatrical press agent for Bernhardt, Forbes Robertson, George M. Cohan, and Raymond Hitchcock. In addition, Kingsley was the personal press secretary for the Countess of Warwick, had served as press agent for the Folies-Bergère Music Hall, as well as for the Japanese government in the build-up to the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5, and had worked closely abroad with the famous theater entrepreneur Michael B. Leavitt.¹⁰⁵ Kingsley was a good advocate for the *Camille/Madame Sans-Gêne* initiative, believing that film was “the best field for advertising enterprise.”¹⁰⁶ As such, he led the campaign that promoted Bernhardt and Réjane’s program across the US. He offered four-colored billing for both films, as well as “photographs, cuts, booklets, press matter. Perfect publicity everywhere.”¹⁰⁷ Kingsley’s advertisements in trade presses were the first to offer a double-bill feature-film program running (like a theatrical production) for two and one-half hours.¹⁰⁸ Kingsley was also the first publicist to reproduce autographs of a celebrity actress (Bernhardt) in his advertisements¹⁰⁹ and to flaunt the success of the states-rights distribution system, selling prints to distribution companies across America.¹¹⁰

In addition to Kingsley’s promotions, a special lecture series was developed by W. Stephen Bush of the *Moving Picture World’Art* to assist audience reception of the two Film d’Art films. Bush noted in March 1912 (in his initial review of Bernhardt and Réjane’s works) that *Madame Sans-Gêne* needs “an explanatory lecture, otherwise much of the charm and [a] considerable [amount] of the meaning of the

story will be lost upon the average audience.”¹¹¹ He went on to sell his “Lectures on Special Films,” using the Bernhardt/Réjane lecture to headline his advertisement (he also sold “How to Put On the Passion Play,” “How to Put On the Crusaders, or Jerusalem Delivered,” and “Key and Complete Lecture for *Dante’s Inferno*”). Significantly, Bernhardt and Réjane are the only actors listed in his advertisement; offered together for \$1.00, his typescripts were copyrighted and sold from New York.¹¹² Although we do not have a record of what was written in these lectures, they appear to be reminiscent of the theatrical synopses offered in the variety theaters of London and New York. Through initiatives like these, Bernhardt and Réjane enabled publicists to develop the services they offered American audiences. Transnational film was not only making French theater available to early twentieth-century audiences in America; it helped Americans rearticulate why the Parisian actress was uniquely important to the development of the mass medium of film.

The double-feature film was a boon for legitimate theater revenue in the quieter summer months in America. Hence, in New York the films were screened in Frohman’s Lyceum Theatre, and in Illinois the films were screened for the first time in another legitimate theater, the La Salle Theatre, on Madison Street (a report explains that they were projected onto the theatrical curtain).¹¹³ Similarly, in Boston, moving pictures were shown for the first time in Steinert Hall (the hall was usually reserved for “first class musicians”).¹¹⁴ In the same way, in Washington they were screened in the Columbia Theatre. This first-class release of the films allowed audiences to see the actresses appear as they did in the flesh: when the program traveled to Canada, it was explained that they were touring as though they “were exploiting Mme. Bernhardt herself.”¹¹⁵ The use of first-class theaters boosted summer revenue, when theater audiences for more expensive venues were scarce. Indeed, in an article by Robert Grau, “Theatre Men in Pictures,” it is explained that Frohman was impressed “when the exclusive and fashionable Lyceum Theatre, after housing failure after failure, was kept open several months in the mid-summer, profitably, with moving pictures.” Frohman’s use of kinemacolor film productions gave him a profit of \$10,000 for one week; the combined profits of three other theaters did not amount to half that sum.¹¹⁶ While we do not know if the films in question were indeed those of Bernhardt and Réjane, we might presume as much. This is because they were released in the summer of 1912, were screened at the Lyceum Theatre, and (as Grau argues) “the greatest incentive provided for the theatrical producers was the amazing debut in filmdom of the greatest living exponent of dramatic art—Sarah Bernhardt and her most distinguished confrère, Gabrielle Réjane.”¹¹⁷

The cheapest seats to watch Bernhardt’s live theatrical performance when she was on tour in America was \$2.00, in the “peanut gallery.” Film instead offered a seat to performances at anything from ten to fifty cents. Although prices did vary—in the La Salle Theatre they were only offered from twenty-five to fifty cents, for example—it was the higher costing fifty-cent seats that were in greatest

demand.¹¹⁸ Such demand indicates that Bernhardt and Réjane's first-class theatrical release attracted literary, artistic, and wealthy patronage. In some theaters, however, efforts were made to democratize access and the availability of these films. Hence, a report in *Moving Picture News* stated that a vaudeville house operated by one Tom Moore in Washington, DC (The Plaza), exhibited the Bernhardt/Réjane program for just five cents. As the article explains: "Think of it! These costly pictures, which diplomatic, social and educational Washington has been flocking to see at the Columbia Theatre for fifty cents, were placed before the public for five cents. Many who regretted their neglect or inability to see these two French actresses in motion pictures in previous exhibitions, but who under other circumstances would have scorned a five-cent show, could not resist this opportunity."¹¹⁹

Moore went on to install kinemacolor in the Plaza, exhibiting two reels a week alongside black-and-white films. While we can speak of emerging middle- and upper-class American audiences for the cinema being encouraged by the debut of Bernhardt and Réjane in a double-feature bill, we might also recognize popular audiences emerging thanks to the broad appeal of these two French actresses on film.

An article that discussed the appearance of the Bernhardt and Rejane program in America is clear about the program's impact. "Do you know what it means?" Robert Grau asked readers in 1912. Casting the two actresses as avant-garde, in terms both business and creative, Grau states that the Bernhardt/Réjane program was

merely the avant courier for the highest stampede of stars and celebrities of the speaking stage that the world has ever known. It means also that the film manufacturers are face to face with the problem of meeting the increased demand for a better output from their clients; . . . [patronage] can only be held fast in this era of great competition by bringing into the theatre of cinematography the stars of the regular stage, so that the precedent established by Bernhardt and Rejane will quickly be followed by a galaxy of potent stars whose names will prove so compelling that the movement will result in that "new era of the picture play" so often predicted by the present writer. . . . Moreover, it is the intimate relation between the audience and the picture play that has created the "intimate theatre" movement now spreading all over the world. . . . But this is not all; the day is not far off when instead of the Frohmans and the Erlangers and the Shuberts controlling the new plays of the famous writers of to-day these important factors in the scheme of theatricals will be signed up by the large capitalized film manufacturers, and this will mean that the three-reel photo-play will predominate, and it won't be called a feature film—just an ordinary release, under new conditions created by the vogue of the splendid productions that are to come in the next few months.¹²⁰

Three months after the Bernhardt/Réjane feature was sold in America, some of Grau's predictions were realized. This is particularly true of the movement of established actors onto screen. As Margaret I. MacDonald explained in an article

entitled “Nat C. Goodwin to Star in the Silent Drama,” Bernhardt and Réjane startled the world when they entered film. The two actresses exhibited “nothing short of the most astonishing condescension” when they made *Camille* and *Madame Sans-Gêne*; as a result, one of the greatest stars of the American stage, Nat C. Goodwin, was now similarly entering film. Because the Bernhardt/Réjane program was seen as the herald of new business and artistic practices, Goodwin’s engagement was secured by a Mr. H. A. Spanuth, “the young and enterprising president and manager of the General Film Publicity and Sales Company” in New York City.¹²¹

LEGITIMATE FILM: *QUEEN ELIZABETH* IN AMERICA

The film that most often marks Bernhardt’s importance to film history is *Queen Elizabeth*.¹²² Released soon after *Camille*, in August 1912, *Queen Elizabeth* is a good example of the transnational interests that shaped early film production. As I noted in my introduction, the work was produced in London, financed by Americans, and made by Bernhardt. J. Frank Brockliss, the European representative of the American Lubin Company, produced the film.¹²³ The production company was Bernhardt’s own, the Histrionic Film Company. As the credits for *Queen Elizabeth* state, Bernhardt used the “Dresses, Armor and Furniture from the Sarah Bernhardt Theatre, Paris.” The cast, too, was French, featuring those who were in Bernhardt’s original theatrical production at the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt in 1912: Lou Tellegen as Essex; Mlle Romain as Arabella, the Countess of Nottingham; and Max Maxudian as Howard, the Earl of Nottingham. Uncredited, but nevertheless in the original production, is Jean Angelo (who remained Seymour), and Albert Decoeur (who remained Drake).¹²⁴ Funded with help from New York exhibitor Adolph Zukor, Bernhardt ensured that the film remained a European production.¹²⁵ Given that London was “the centre of European film trade, the clearing house through which all films passed,” there is a logic in this choice.¹²⁶ Indeed, a generation after she left London for New York on her first American tour, Bernhardt again departed London as a leading actress in a high-class feature film, debuting before a select audience in a legitimate Broadway theater.

Queen Elizabeth was produced with money provided by Adolph Zukor; in exchange, he released the film in North America through the newly formed Famous Players Film Company. This company, established in collaboration with the New York theater impresarios Charles and Daniel Frohman, was organized to have *Queen Elizabeth* as its headline attraction and to sell the film on a states’ rights basis. The film was screened to a select audience in the Lyceum Theatre in New York on July 12, 1912, and Frohman adapted American theatrical language and practices to advertisements for the film. In a manner similar to Martin Beck’s promotion of Bernhardt’s vaudeville initiative, *Queen Elizabeth* was released under a banner stating: “DANIEL FROHMAN PRESENTS SARAH BERNHARDT IN THE PHOTOPLAY ‘QUEEN ELIZABETH.’” Discussing this promotion of the

actress, Zukor commented: "I designed posters with large photographs of Sarah Bernhardt, following the pattern of stage posters rather than gaudy movie bills."¹²⁷ The film was subsequently released through an arrangement with Marcus Loew to the Loew theaters in New York.¹²⁸

This effort to bring *Queen Elizabeth* a high-class cultural status is evident in the Chicago souvenir program, available on the film's general release at the Powers' Theatre, on August 12, 1912. The film program, presented with no publicity or photographs, is reminiscent of legitimate theater programs of the late nineteenth century. It lists all characters and players and is headed by Bernhardt, whose name is differentiated in bold capital letters. Instead of the play dividing into acts, we are told that the "photo-play" is in four parts. The choice of these words ("photo-play," "parts") associates a legitimate theatrical play and film. The lists of supernumeraries traditionally placed at the bottom of theatrical programs is also repeated on Bernhardt's program when we are told that *Queen Elizabeth* features "Executors, Courtiers, Soldiers, Attendants." Finally, *Queen Elizabeth* was advertised as a "HISTORIC PHOTO-PLAY OF THE PASSION AND PATHOS OF 'QUEEN ELIZABETH.'" Instead of being described as a romance or melodrama, the film was associated with terms traditionally used in descriptions of fine art. The biography and discussion that preface this page reiterated the legitimacy of Bernhardt's newest endeavor. Hence, *Queen Elizabeth* was "the crowning triumph of her brilliant career" and ensured "Bernhardt's art and fame will be sustained by history."¹²⁹ Tellingly, the newly established *Photo-play* magazine—one of the first magazines to engage film audiences in the US—featured *Queen Elizabeth* on its September 1912 cover. This shows Bernhardt as Queen Elizabeth surrounded by her court while Lou Tellegen (as Earl of Essex) kneels to swear allegiance to her.¹³⁰

Advertisements in the film trade press reinforced the legitimating claims that Frohman and Zukor made. In one ad, published in *Moving Picture World* a few weeks before the film's release, *Queen Elizabeth* was not called a photo-play but a "Photo-Pantomime." Reassuring viewers that action was legible through a focus on the pantomime, the advertisement also stated that the film was not "a sensational masterpiece" but "an immortal epic of human frailty and futility." The film provided a "series of moving paintings" that included priceless documents surrendered by the English government from the British Museum to provide "the last convincing detail in a thrillingly realistic production." Explaining that the film was "artistically tinted and toned," the advertisement claimed that it is "a half mile of Rembrandt." Discussions and comments about the film reiterated this high-class billing in America. As another article explained, "The exhibition will be billed like a high-class legitimate road attraction and will be presented with special music and lecture."¹³¹ We know that seats were sold on a reserve-seat basis, as was the practice with legitimate dramas, and that music was written for the film by Joseph Carl Breil. Audiences also paid an increased film admission, with prices between



FIGURE 7. Penzance Pavilion Pictures program cover revealing the localization of Bernhardt's global media empire. Courtesy of the Bill Douglas Cinema Museum, Exeter University.

twenty-five cents and a dollar.¹³² It is therefore hardly surprising that the *Chicago Post* reported that “there is a new sort of picture audience” watching Bernhardt’s film, one that was “quiet, attentive, and very well dressed.”¹³³ Confirming this, Zukor stated that Bernhardt’s film helped break the “prejudice of theatrical people [that is, cultured, upper-class Americans] toward the screen.”¹³⁴ The success of the film drew other famous theatrical actors to film, helping to inaugurate the longer playing feature film. In this way, *Queen Elizabeth* became a significant precursor to a new category of spectacle in the cinema.

LOCALIZING *QUEEN BESS*

When *Queen Elizabeth* was released in Britain, the context of Bernhardt’s appearance shifted. The legitimate theaters and theater managers from the country’s major cities did not monopolize the film’s release. Nor did entrepreneurs band together to control the rights to the film across regional or county zones. Instead, *Queen Elizabeth* was engaged in an ad hoc manner by theaters already involved in the screening and promotion of film. For example, a program published by Penzance Pavilion Pictures, Cornwall, promoting a three-day special screening on December 2, 3, and 4, 1912, proclaimed *Queen Elizabeth* “THE GREATEST PICTURE PROGRAMME OFFERED IN THE WEST OF ENGLAND!”¹³⁵ Renamed *Queen Bess: Her Love Story*, the film presented both a popular romance to regional audiences and a national claim to the celebrated Tudor Queen (fig. 7). Stating that the film was “The acme of perfection,” “the finest thing ever attempted and ever produced in the Cinematograph World,” the ad offered patrons a vision of Bernhardt entering a new media. The film was no longer advertised as a photo-play

or photo-pantomime but as a “thing” produced in the global context of French filmmaking (“the cinematograph”).

Significantly, the Penzance Pavilion Pictures program was a locally produced booklet rather than a series of advertisements published in national trade presses or a special souvenir edition published for a famous theater. Moreover, Penzance Pavilion Pictures was a newly built site that opened in 1912, offering a public space in which to enjoy film screenings. In keeping with the inclusive nature of the screening, the film was billed a “Great Attraction at Popular Prices,” with children listed at half price (three cents). A “Special Early Performance of the ‘Queen Bess’ Picture [is offered] each Evening at 6” and “will last one hour”; presumably this was an effort to reinforce the family-friendly nature of both the film and the venue. A longer program, running for two hours, followed this screening, offering Bernhardt’s work in “plenty of other fine Pictures, each Evening at Eight.” Rather than being ‘a series of moving paintings,’ the work emerged in a familiar and familial variety format.

Without any listing of cast members, and mention only being made of a “renowned company,” it was the story of *Queen Elizabeth* that the program focused on. Offering a five-paragraph synopsis of narrative action, we follow “the gallant Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex,” “the young and beautiful wife, Lady Nottingham,” and the queen, a “broken-hearted and grief-stricken woman.” This description of the film’s story was also employed in the Bernhardt souvenir programs that the London Coliseum offered its audiences in 1911, 1912, and 1913. Yet while short and clear synopses of the play contextualized the single-act excerpts that Bernhardt would perform, in the Penzance program the description of the film contextualized all theatrical action.

Unlike the souvenir program offered to audience members at the Powers’ Theatre, photographs illustrated the synopsis of the film. The same photograph used by Frohman and Zukor to advertise *Queen Elizabeth* in their poster is one of the seven shots included in this booklet to describe the film. Whether these photographs (and possibly slides) were standard supplies used to promote the film, we do not know. What is interesting is that English theatrical photographers were included in the program. On page 2, a full-page photograph with the caption “A recent portrait of Mme. Sarah Bernhardt” is therefore provided, “Copyright Dover Street Studios” (fig. 8).¹³⁶

Bernhardt’s appearance in this “Queen Bess” picture was also used to promote local businesses. In one example, we see Bernhardt dressed as Queen Elizabeth on a cigarette card. On the rear is a description of a gown she wore in this role, its Spanish style, and an advertisement for draper Geo. T. Gunner of “High St. Tonbridge” in Kent.¹³⁷ This attention to Bernhardt’s use of couture in theatrical costume becomes a business offering local services to residents interested in contemporary textile and fashion. Moreover, Bernhardt was associated with cigarettes, a product available on a mass scale and intimately associated with modern



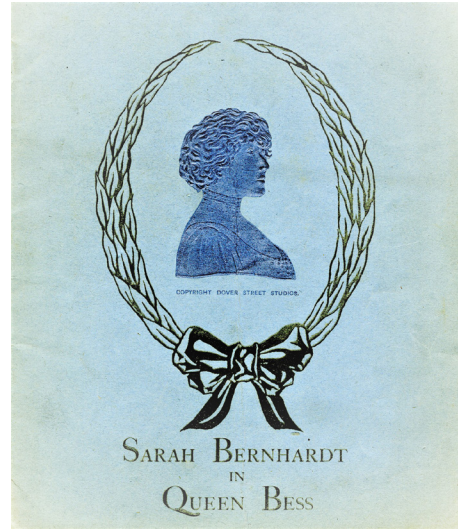
A Recent Portrait of
Madame Sarah Bernhardt

FIGURE 8. A Recent Portrait of Mme. Sarah Bernhardt, "Copyright Dover Street Studios," inside Penzance Pavilion Pictures program, 1912. Courtesy of the Bill Douglas Cinema Museum, Exeter University.

urban culture. Again, while we do not know when this portrait was made, we can assume that Bernhardt entered film in order to remain circulating and relevant to the English public. In this context, her commercial adoption by local English salespeople reflects her growing celebrity and the ongoing spread of her contemporary relevance.

In a separate English program, this time printed "By Arrangement of The Gaumont Film Hire Service," *Queen Elizabeth* is again localized. With a blue cover showing a heraldic profile of Bernhardt surrounded by a golden wreath ("Copyright Dover Street Studios"), the program includes a longer six-page introduction to the film (fig. 9). Again, photographs illustrate key scenes; the film is titled "Queen Bess Her Love Story"; and—in a departure from the Penzance program—the five key players are listed. What is interesting is the way Bernhardt is incorporated into national history. As the opening page states, Queen Elizabeth and Bernhardt "possess many mental characteristics in common. . . . [Bernhardt] is representing a personality very akin to her own." Moreover, the film depicted a period—the Elizabethan Age—that "abounded in individual greatness. It was the age of Shakespeare, of Spenser, of Raleigh, of Drake and of Philip Sidney . . . and it was amidst the varied activities of these great characters that English literature burst forth into its most vigorous form." Highlighting the importance of global supremacy, it is explained that "the repulse of the Spanish Armada marked

FIGURE 9. *Queen Bess*, cover of a 1912 film program showing the renaming of Bernhardt's *Queen Elizabeth*. Courtesy of the Bill Douglas Cinema Museum, Exeter University.



the period in Elizabeth's reign when the national spirit rose to its highest point. England, which had long been weighted down by doubts and fears, then first awoke to consciousness of her true position."¹³⁸

Allowing empathetic engagement with a queen who was traditionally conceived as cold and calculating, audiences were promised that the work would "touch the heart." Bernhardt, a foreign celebrity, was presented as a passionate performer, enabling local audiences to revisit their relationship to the longest serving (at that time) and most powerful woman in the history of England. Here we return to Max Pemberton's articulation of Bernhardt's womanly charm and sympathy. Instead of efforts to ennoble Bernhardt and make her a "high-class" legitimate attraction, she was an emotional woman performing a romantic drama. This affective engagement with history and the theater links the film to its audience and Bernhardt to the British people. This capacity for the film—and even the film's narrative—to move viewers in an emotional or meaningful way is lost today. Ironically, it is American business and management strategies, seen through figures such as Martin Beck, Adolph Zukor, and Daniel Frohman, that shape our interpretation of Bernhardt's film. Bringing British and American families to French films in local movie theaters, believing and investing in new technology, ensuring that emotional affect is not lost in the mechanization of live performance, and ensuring audiences for the theater expanded as new media evolved—these are the genuine achievements of a sixty-eight-year-old French actress continuing a global career.

My exploration of pivotal moments in Bernhardt's career has highlighted many differences between England and America. These differences include the reception of her films, changing formats for her stage performances, the use of wildly

shifting venues to perform within, as well as her involvement in an ever-changing range of commercial and cultural initiatives. My decision to discuss Bernhardt in terms of the changing contexts of her celebrity in England and America was motivated by my aim to join theater history to film history; I want to bring a fresh awareness of our need to look more broadly at early theatrical films and the women we see within them. In arguing that Bernhardt's importance to the theater included her involvement in film, I am suggesting that the late nineteenth-century stage and early silent film were separable but mutually sustainable industries, with financial, creative, and (above all) public leisure and pleasure overlap. Bernhardt had the optimism, vision, and fortitude to see a creative future in early film. In my next chapter, I demonstrate that she was not alone in envisioning the future as a harbinger of theatrical possibilities. As we will see, Gabrielle Réjane was her Parisian contemporary, a professional partner to many of Bernhardt's initiatives. Réjane, too, was a late nineteenth-century actress who set audiences alight with enthusiasm. She illustrates the ways in which theater history can also enrich and illuminate a lost body of comic film. In Gabrielle Réjane's case, therefore, it is not tragedy and grand emotions that characterize an elided and often misinterpreted actress but the galvanizing performances of one who knew how to shake things up through sexual and class comedy.