Hellenism and the Independent Theatre Movement in America.

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Abstract
This dissertation considers influences of the Greek tradition on the rise of the independent theatres in America during the first quarter of the twentieth century. These influences are of two major kinds, those present in the earlier European independent theatre movement, dating back to 1877, with the creation of the Théâtre Libre in Paris, and those found in the American cultural tradition in general. The American branch of the independent theatre movement harbored from its inception a confluence of both these Hellenist strains, as seen in the work of figures such as Maurice Browne, leader of the Chicago Little Theatre, and Jig Cook, leader of the Provincetown Players. The European Hellenist influences are traced to seminal figures in nineteenth century classical studies, such as Nietzsche, Wilamowitz-Moellendorff and Pater, and to theatrical visionaries such as Wagner, Reinhardt, Craig and Yeats. A variety of theatrical practices are considered in relation to Hellenism within the European context, including production management, directing, theatre architecture, scenic design, playwriting, and translation. The international character of the independent theatre movement, which established itself in France, Germany, England, Ireland, Russia, Sweden, and elsewhere, helped trends in classical scholarship, itself an international activity, to resonate in the experimental theatres. The Greek tradition in the United States began in the early colonial period, when colonists were lured to the New World with promotional parallels made between North America and lost island of Atlantis. Henceforth, in every period of the nation's history, the Greek presence assumes varied, often distinctly American forms: studies of ancient Greek constitutions by the Founding Fathers; Greek curriculum in schools; philhellenism of the early national period; Greek revival architecture; Greek letter societies; Greek-styled numismatics. These and other forms of the Greek presence in America provide an impression of the climate in which Greek-influenced work first appeared at early independent theatres in the United States. A review of the direct and climactic Greek influences in the work of early, leading independent theatres in the America points to a pattern of Hellenist influence that has never been adequately recognized. This study provides the first, general record of that pattern.

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The American theatre is over 200 years old. The birth of professional theatre in America began in 1752 with the opening of the Dock Street Theatre. It had a company of actors (all from Europe) and a repertoire of plays popular in London at the time, including Hamlet, Richard III, the Merchant of Venice and others. Throughout the 19th century, theatre culture was associated with hedonism and even violence, and actors (especially women), were looked upon as little better than prostitutes. In the late 19th and early 20th century vaudeville was popular in the theatre world. Vaudeville was a theatr...