

**“The Arithmetic and Logic of Life”:  
The Forces of Commerce and Capital in a Revival of Edward  
Bulwer-Lytton’s *Money***

**James Fisher**

Though our brother is on the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers . . . It is by imagination that we can form any conception of what are his sensations.<sup>1</sup>

—Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*

The Vices and Virtues are written in a language the World cannot construe; it reads them in a vile translation, and the translators are *FAILURE* and *SUCCESS!*<sup>2</sup>

—Alfred Evelyn, *Money*, (V, III)

Theatre students are frequently instructed that the vigorous and energetic theatrical world of the nineteenth century produced little drama of lasting significance prior to Henrik Ibsen’s social problem plays. Most Victorian theatre was overly sentimental and melodramatic, as the cliché goes; quaint and colorful perhaps, but finally too simplistic and flatly-dimensional for sophisticated audiences at the dawn of the twenty-first century. The era, it seems, applied its repressions too fiercely for dramatists to delve below the surface of human experience, hindering serious questioning of prevailing values. The naive moralizing and stereotypical characters of this period made for a barren dramatic age.

The condescension directed at nineteenth century drama also results from another presumed hindrance. These supposedly unwatchable plays are often multi-scene works requiring large casts and are, as such, too daunting in scope for even the most adventurous of directors and producing organizations. Published scripts of many nineteenth century plays can be difficult (if not impossible) to locate;

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publishers apparently believe that readers and prospective audiences are not interested. The National Theatre of Great Britain's recent—and rare—production of Edward Bulwer-Lytton's 1840 comedy, *Money*, handily disproves many of the absurd generalizations about the stage of the 1800s. As deftly directed by John Caird, the NT production recovers the theatrical traditions of the era and demonstrates the unique style and thematic validity of at least one representative early Victorian play.

*Money* is certainly ripe with the sentimental situations, melodramatic plot devices, and broadly-drawn characters that seem to support many of the negative generalizations about Victorian drama; but it is also a thoughtful, heartfelt, and surprisingly cynical meditation on the corrosive powers of commerce and capital on human relations. Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, published less than a hundred years before Bulwer-Lytton wrote *Money*, describes its environment in theoretical terms. Bulwer-Lytton puts a face on Smith's concepts. Peeling away the outer layers of melodramatic stage conventions also reveals Bulwer-Lytton's themes to be impressively contemporary. Money—and its absence—is the play's central issue, with particular emphasis given to the destructive effects of class distinctions and poverty on life and love. Bulwer-Lytton ends his play with the proverbial happy ending expected of a vintage melodrama, but this gesture provides satisfied amusement and in no way diminishes the impact of *Money*'s searching and timeless thesis.

What makes *Money* so valuable? To some extent, the answer is to be found in the parallels between its central concerns and those of late twentieth century society, and within the character and background of its author. Bulwer-Lytton,<sup>3</sup> born in 1803, essentially wrote himself out of poverty with novels that captured the contemporary imagination. Friend to Lady Caroline Lamb, Disraeli, and Dickens, Bulwer-Lytton successfully pursued careers as a politician, novelist, and playwright, more or less in that order. He served in various political posts (including Colonial Secretary [1858-59]), vigorously campaigned against slavery, and was a central force in the repeal of the theatrical patents by the Theatre Regulation Act of 1843. Bulwer-Lytton was, however, more reformer than revolutionary by nature; as a politician, he was a sharp observer of social issues who sought to bring about slow change. He transferred his keen observational skills to the theatre, working generalized—and impassioned—statements of his social beliefs into the stage traditions of the period. His reforming politics were never more in evidence in his drama than in *Money*.

Bulwer-Lytton's brief dramatic career in the late 1830s, inspired in part by his admiration for celebrated Shakespearean actor William Charles Macready (1793-1873), was only a temporary interruption in his fervent political pursuits and in the composition of a long string of popular novels. Among these, *Pelham* (1828), *Paul Clifford* (1830), and *Eugene Aram* (1832) were generally well-received, but

*The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834) became his most popular work and the one for which he is most remembered. Its success was followed by another in *Rienzi* (1835), a novel used as the basis for Wagner's 1842 opera of the same name.

While awaiting publication of *The Last Days of Pompeii* and completing *Rienzi* in 1834, Bulwer-Lytton met Macready at a dinner party. Over the intervening months the actor and the writer became close friends, leading Bulwer-Lytton to write a drama, *Cromwell* (1834), in hopes that Macready might produce it. Macready was not satisfied with the script and Bulwer-Lytton attempted to revise it, ultimately abandoning the project as unsalvageable. He started over with a new play, *The Duchess de la Vallière* (1837), a five-act drama in blank verse dedicated to Macready, who agreed to stage it. *The Duchess de la Vallière*, which dealt with the tragic romance of a soldier and a courtier during the reign of Louis XIV, opened on January 4, 1837. After a few performances and an apathetic audience response, Macready was obliged to close the production. Disraeli, for one, was disappointed about *The Duchess de la Vallière's* premature end, writing that it "proves the public taste is lower even than I imagined it."<sup>4</sup>

Despite the negative response to his first produced play, Bulwer-Lytton completed *The Lady of Lyons; or, Love and Pride* (1838), a melodrama about life during the French Revolution. As James L. Campbell, Sr., explains, *The Lady of Lyons* "focuses on the breakdown of class barriers and the rise of a middle class of talent and wealth,"<sup>5</sup> and, as such, anticipates themes Bulwer-Lytton explored more fully and directly in *Money*. *The Lady of Lyons* opened at the Covent Garden Theatre on February 15, 1838 and was a triumph for Bulwer-Lytton, Macready (in the heroic role of Claude Melnotte), and Macready's co-star, Helen Faucit, who was applauded as the play's heroine, Pauline. The success of this five-act play, much of which was due to Macready and Faucit, led to a long run and the play became a staple of the nineteenth century theatrical repertory.<sup>6</sup> Unabashedly melodramatic and sentimental, *The Lady of Lyons* has not had significant revivals in the twentieth century despite its tremendous popularity in the five decades following its original production.

Macready next played the lead in Bulwer-Lytton's *Richelieu, or the Conspiracy* (1839), a five-act melodrama that brought another personal success for the actor when it opened on March 7, 1839 at the Covent Garden Theatre. *Richelieu* was followed by Bulwer-Lytton's *The Sea Captain; or, The Birthright* (1839), but this five-act drama was not well-received during its brief October 1839 run, partially due to Thackeray's savage attack on it published in his satiric journal, *Yellowplush Papers*. Despite Bulwer-Lytton's willingness to revise *The Sea Captain*, Macready indicated a preference for another play. Bulwer-Lytton obliged, writing to Macready in early June 1840:

The more I think, the more I am persuaded, that since you dislike

Tragedy, Pure Comedy would be the thing. And all, in this, I will ask you to do is to give me an idea of the sort of Comic Character which will suit yourself. No doubt, in your stage experience—you have often said—“If I could get such or such a character fully elaborated, I could make a great hit in it.” Think but of this, & give me the fullest conception of it you can. What I want is—that all is pathos & height should not be apart from the comic, but belong so essentially to it (as in *Don Quixote*) that you should almost laugh & weep, ridicule & admire in a breath.

My fault is to separate the comic from the grave, but I think I could do much if I once saw how to blend the two in one conception.<sup>7</sup>

Intrigued, Macready agreed with the idea of a comedy and suggested reversing Bulwer-Lytton’s original notion of a “rogue” character for him. Macready thought that the character might be more interesting as a true gentleman who is seen as a rogue (or failure) by those around him. By the end of June, Bulwer-Lytton had arrived at a workable plot for a play initially titled *Appearances*, expanding on and rethinking Macready’s suggestions. Bulwer-Lytton’s health was uncertain and doubts about when and where—or if—the play would be staged slowed progress. He wrote to Macready for a definitive answer in late August of 1840:

Do you still want my Play? Frankly yes or no. I can now copy it fairly. I have heightened the individuality of your character—by what I think a happy afterthought & given the whole play a purpose & philosophy it wanted before. This may you conjecture by the Title I now suggest

The Egotists

or

The Sin of the Century

I propose carrying Egotism thro’ many of its various Shades . . .  
I have been ill again.<sup>8</sup>

By September 1, 1840, Bulwer-Lytton was completing the writing of the play and was able to fully describe the numerous characters in his correspondence and he renamed the play *Money*. Aside from some small suggestions from Macready, Bulwer-Lytton departed from his usual dramatic method of borrowing a plot and characters from history or a literary source. *Money* is a completely original conception and Macready responded with a general enthusiasm coupled with an eye toward adding improvements and polishing. Rehearsals for the original

production of *Money* took more than six weeks. It was apparently a frustrating period for both Macready and Bulwer-Lytton. The author's presence at rehearsals caused some discomfort for the cast, and even Macready noted that he "became very nervous—quite ill-tempered, and spoke harshly to the actors—haughtily, I should say, certainly unphilosophically,"<sup>9</sup> as a result. Despite the tension, few serious problems were found with the play except concern about how its resolution should be worked out. Ultimately, Bulwer-Lytton decided on a stylized toast to conclude the play underscoring *Money's* inherent cynicism about the human necessity for financial security. He uses the key players to make his point, cleverly revealing a bit of each character's persona, from Clara's abiding goodness to the lisping Sir Frederick Blount's call for "pwudence":

Graves: But for the truth and the love, when found, to make us  
tolerably happy, we should not be without—

Lady Franklin: Good health;

Clara: A good heart;

Smooth: An innocent rubber;

Georgina: Congenial tempers;

Blount: A pwoper degwee of pwudence;

Stout: Enlightened opinions;

Glossmore: Constitutional principles;

Sir John: Knowledge of the world;

Evelyn: And—plenty of Money!<sup>10</sup>

*The Lady of Lyons* and *Richelieu* are undeniably in the standard melodramatic vein, but *Money*, verbose by contemporary standards, is a decidedly more complex and less formulaic work. Macready exchanged detailed letters with Bulwer-Lytton as rehearsals for the play proceeded during November 1840, wondering in a November first letter whether or not Bulwer-Lytton might compose a traditional comic prologue, since "It is so long since a Comedy was produced."<sup>11</sup> Bulwer-Lytton replied on November 3, 1840 that:

I have a superstitious horror of such things. I shall never forget the cold damp thrown over the Theatre when Mr H. Wallack in black shorts stepped forward to freeze the Audience with the prologue to La [Duchesse de la] Vallière. Besides—the Play is already long & the 10 minutes occupied by Prologue & Epilogue it's to be spared. I will think over it, but not with a good heart. There are no persons to whom such things could be trusted except yourself—and out of the rest, perhaps Miss Faucit?<sup>12</sup>

No prologue was written for Macready's production, but there is no mistaking that *Money* is in a sense both a throwback to earlier British comic traditions and a forward glimpse of the socially-conscious comedies that increasingly appeared on London stages over the next several decades prior to the rise of the modern era inspired by Ibsen and played out on English stages by George Bernard Shaw and his contemporaries from the 1890s.

In reviewing the NT's production of *Money*, critic Michael Billington writes that "loot is at the root of most drama,"<sup>13</sup> and if that is not completely born out of a study of world drama, it is certainly the case that economic deprivations and related issues are often cataclysmic and catalytic elements in much drama since 1800. It is most certainly at the heart of *Money*. Billington notes that the play depicts "the viciousness of Victorian values,"<sup>14</sup> and presents a society in which poverty, not money, is the actual root of all evil. It presents an upper class world of comfortable security, while the middle and lower classes are seen to be facing almost continual disintegration of their hopes and dreams, as well as the stresses of ever-present need in their daily reality. Despite the lust for cash that pervades the world of the play (especially as seen in a rich array of secondary characters), Bulwer-Lytton does not assume that money in itself means happiness. If poverty destroys happiness, wealth does not necessarily bring contentment. This is at least true for a time for *Money*'s hero, Alfred Evelyn.

Poor cousin and intellectual oddity, Evelyn is catapulted to immense wealth by an unexpected legacy. He has a witty intelligence, a profound resentment of being an outsider, a genuine nobility of spirit, and an idealism that is becoming embittered through painful experience with the world. His soured anguish is touchingly portrayed by the remarkable Simon Russell Beale in the NT production; Beale's beautifully shaded performance exposes the character's tormented dilemmas in all of their complexity. Underestimating the love, wisdom, and virtue of the woman he loves, Clara Douglas, Evelyn is crushed when she rejects his proposal of marriage because she believes that he must marry into money to fulfill his potential. From the sad example of her own father's tragic circumstances, Clara sees that her lack of money will hold her beloved back: "A marriage of privation—of penury—of days that dread the morrow! I have seen such a lot! Never return to this again."<sup>15</sup> In the NT production, Victoria Hamilton plays Clara with an endearingly dippy quality, an approach that may be essential in making the rapidity of decisions that effect her and Evelyn plausible to contemporary audiences schooled to seek the psychological motivation and evolution of a character's behavior. Hamilton's Clara is radiant and resolute, and her love for Evelyn is obvious, but he believes incorrectly that her rejection is due to her interest in money and security for herself. When Evelyn's unexpected inheritance is revealed, he bitterly turns away from Clara and offers his hand to the dim and mercenary Georgina Vesey (played in the NT production by Sophie Okonedo), the daughter of his former employer, Sir John

Vesey (boldly acted with silky smarm in the NT staging by Denis Quilley). Vesey is a greedy humbug of a merchant who gets by on the appearance of wealth. Early in the play, he announces to Georgina, that “as I spend all that I have, I can have nothing to leave you,”<sup>16</sup> for he expends his meager income on creating the illusion of prosperity. Money is all to Vesey who, at one point, says of Evelyn that, “I love him as a son-and I look to his money as my own.”<sup>17</sup> Vesey also proclaims that “One must have a little management in this world,”<sup>18</sup> and this comment, like others in the play, chills an audience hearing it in the cold corporate climate of the late twentieth century. Vesey cynically states the maxims of greed with the matter-of-fact awareness of who and what he is: “First men are valued not for what they are, but what they seem to be. Secondly, if you have no merit or money of your own, you must trade on the merits and money of other people.”<sup>19</sup> Vesey’s credo excludes the decent and compassionate, as represented by Evelyn, who, at the beginning of the play, is frantically trying to borrow ten pounds to help his aged nurse, and Clara, whose fundamental and unshakable goodness does not seem to fit anywhere in Vesey’s world view.

Evelyn is not a happy man despite his wealth—“What’s money without happiness?”<sup>20</sup>, he bitterly laments, thinking of Clara, who is similarly distraught. Evelyn wastes part of his fortune on bouts of gambling, becoming increasingly morose about his situation—“When I was poor, I hated the world; now I am rich I despise it,”<sup>21</sup> he cries, realizing his serious error in judgment regarding his imminent betrothal to Georgina. With the faint hope of breaking his engagement to her, Evelyn creates the illusion that his resources have been squandered and that he will, in the very near future, be penniless once again. Under the guidance of her avaricious father, Georgina, ever the fortune-hunter, is relieved to seek a more reliable income from a marriage to the foppish Sir Frederick Blount. Freed of his bond with Georgina, Evelyn is able to reunite with Clara, and concludes:

Ah, Clara, you—you have succeeded where wealth had failed!  
 You have reconciled me to the world and to mankind. My  
 friends—we must confess it—amidst the humours and the follies,  
 the vanities, deceits, and vices that play their part in the Great  
 Comedy of life—it is our own fault if we do not find such natures,  
 though rare and few, as redeem the rest, brightening the shadows  
 that are flung from the form and body of the TIME with glimpses  
 of the everlasting holiness of truth and love.<sup>22</sup>

Humor and sophistication are added to *Money* by a secondary romantic plot involving Vesey’s widowed sister, Lady Franklin, and Graves, a pompous, self-pitying widower dedicated to the constant memorializing of his late wife who, it turns out, was an unpleasant harpy. Lady Franklin and Graves are played memorably

by Patricia Hodge and Roger Allam, respectively, in the NT production; both prove that boldly-drawn caricatures need not lack depth, complexity, and humanity. It is obvious that many of *Money's* secondary characters are similar caricatures, burnished by a tone of cynicism and worldliness. This is especially true of Vesey, but extends into a variety of other character types from Stout, an acquisitive political operative seeking Evelyn's money in support of a candidate in his debt, to Blount, the lipping idler to whom Georgina finally attaches herself.

The play is enthrallingly plotted, with a thick Dickensian texture of caricature, sentiment, and episodic vitality set against the populous hell of Victorian London, a setting not unlike that found in Dickens' *Oliver Twist* or *David Copperfield*. Bulwer-Lytton's tone and themes in *Money* are thematically in spirit with those of Dickens, but somewhat darker as Evelyn comes closer to despair and total ruin than some of Dickens' similar figures. Dickens heard *Money* read on November 17, 1840 and commented that he "had not supposed that Bulwer could do anything so good," and years later, on April 17, 1848, stated in a speech to the General Theatrical Fund dinner that it was the best British comedy since the days of Goldsmith and that it "hit on the right vein."<sup>23</sup> Bulwer-Lytton and Dickens maintained friendly relations and Dickens accepted suggestions from Bulwer-Lytton about *Great Expectations* as he was working on it.<sup>24</sup> Dickens also saw *Money* in its first performance and, on December 12, 1840, wrote congratulations to Bulwer-Lytton on its "brilliant reception and success," describing the play as "so full of real, distinct, genuine character; and now that I am better acquainted with it, I am only the more strongly confirmed in this honest opinion."<sup>25</sup> How much *Money* may have influenced Dickens' work is difficult to know, but his admiration of the play is clear.

The stressful rehearsal period for *Money* led to the delaying of the opening from November 28, its originally announced starting date, to December 8, 1840. Presented at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, Macready impressed audiences and critics as Evelyn, with Helen Faucit once again in support as Clara, and the production ran for eighty performances in its first season in London. The collaboration of Bulwer-Lytton and Macready is interesting for several reasons, not least of which is that Macready's legendary temper often soured his relationships with other collaborators, and that *Money*, the last of their joint projects, provides evidence of a dramatist who had rapidly gained confidence and skill in the requirements of the stage from a mentor of vast theatrical experience. Unfortunately, Bulwer-Lytton essentially abandoned his involvement in theatre work following *Money*. His few later plays, mostly unproduced, include *Not So Bad as We Seem; or, Many Sides to a Character* (1851); *The Rightful Heir* (1868); *Walpole; or, Every Man Has His Price* (1869); and *Darnley* (published posthumously in 1882). Only *Not So Bad As We Seem* is considered by critics on a par with *The Lady of Lyons*, *Richelieu*, or *Money*.<sup>26</sup> Bulwer-Lytton's growing expertise might well have provided

his era with models for a more ambitious level of dramatic output if *Money* is an example of what he was capable of achieving at his best. As Bulwer-Lytton himself expressed in a letter to John Forster, he hoped to write a play “in a ‘new genre’ that certainly admits stronger and more real grave passions than the comedy of the last century.”<sup>27</sup>

When Macready’s lease on the Theatre Royal lapsed, he moved on to other projects and Bulwer-Lytton’s interest in theatre cooled.<sup>28</sup> Despite his general pleasure with the play, Macready wrote in his diary that he considered Alfred Evelyn an “ineffective, inferior part”<sup>29</sup> and believed that it was subordinate to the role of Evelyn’s innamorata, Clara. This egocentric view is not borne out either in a reading of the text itself or in the NT’s superlative production. Evelyn and Clara are intellectual and spiritual equals in almost every way, but Macready’s view may explain the end of his collaboration with Bulwer-Lytton, who reverted to writing novels.<sup>30</sup> Bulwer-Lytton died in 1873, coincidentally the same year as the death of Macready, his theatrical muse.

*Money* was often revived in the second half of the nineteenth century and its inclusion in the British theatrical repertory reached its zenith when it was given an especially noteworthy all-star revival on May 17, 1911 in honor of the visit of the German Emperor to London for the coronation of George V. Among the well-known actors of the era appearing in the cast were George Alexander as Evelyn, Irene Vanbrugh as Clara, Herbert Beerbohm Tree as Graves, John Hare as Sir John Vesey, Cyril Maude as Blount, Charles Wyndham as Smooth, Fred Terry as Glossmore, and Arthur Bourchier as Stout. Name actors including Henry Ainley and Gerald du Maurier fleshed out the club scene in minor roles. After this special 1911 performance, *Money* slowly disappeared from the active repertory of England’s theatres.<sup>31</sup> Comparatively few revivals have been staged since the 1911 gala, and in recent years only a 1981 Royal Shakespeare Company production provided the play with a major production.

Caird’s staging of *Money* on the NT’s vast Olivier stage makes use of a thirty-five member cast (all of whom join in the chant of “money” on Evelyn’s final line), and reveals *Money* as a work of contemporary value as well as a time capsule of early and mid-nineteenth century London society. Caird’s well-staged and expertly-acted production brings the play to life for a modern audience, but it is not a case of directorial pyrotechnics over-compensating for an inadequate or antiquated play nor is it a production that strains for “relevance”; Caird has simply unlocked *Money*’s depths by efficiently mixing together its inherent comedy and undeniable melodrama through a large, lavish, and persuasively intelligent rendering. The NT recently staged Dion Boucicault’s *The Colleen Bawn* (1860) as well, but this rare revival exaggerated the play’s melodramatic qualities with the goal of creating a camp diversion, an approach that often seems the only way pre-Ibsenite nineteenth century drama gets produced today. Caird is bold enough to play fair with the

melodramatic components of *Money*, acknowledging the fun of them, but playing it all “straight” with an energy and clarity that is engaging and revealing. He succeeds in enticing a late 1990s audience into enjoying the melodramatic brio without laughing at the play’s outmoded structural conventions or, more importantly, overlooking the insightful themes that give the play its true value. Caird takes the play on its own merits, subtly emphasizing the satirical connections that can be made for a contemporary audience who may, he obviously hopes, equate the greed of 1840 with that of the post-Thatcher/Reagan English-speaking world. More than mildly diverting theatrical archaeology, its nearly three-hour performance delivers a sense of completeness and resolution that is a theatrical rarity in any era. The production’s setting by Rob Howell is a giant gold floor in the shape of a coin bordered by the blackened and broken wreckage of houses and furnishings blighted by the profit motive, continually in view to remind the audience of the world of poverty just outside the view of the charmed circle of wealth pervading the play. Virtually the only furnishings used are a batch of golden chairs swiftly moved into various positions to simply (and quickly) establish the play’s ten scenes, ranging from various drawing rooms to an exclusive London club—but all belonging to the same world of privilege.<sup>32</sup> The actors galvanize the play with an energy that brings *Money* to ripe life, combining a moving humanity with the play’s humor and melodramatic paraphernalia.

*Money*’s melodramatic elements are similar to those of so much Victorian literature: sentiment, intrigue, disappointed hopes, thwarted love, suspense, and even the introduction of important documents and letters revealed at critical moments. But Bulwer-Lytton uses these melodramatic embellishments much as Ibsen would; although Nora Helmer of *A Doll’s House* is at the mercy of a blackmailer and is incriminated by a letter in a locked mailbox, Ibsen’s focus remains firmly fixed on her inner moral struggle. Bulwer-Lytton similarly keeps his focus on the moral dilemmas of Evelyn and Clara; if he fails to use melodramatic conventions with the subtlety of Ibsen, these devices drive his action forward and reveal character in much the same manner. Bulwer-Lytton’s interest is in his theme and in exploring the motives of his leading characters, not in the well-worn theatrical conventions of his day, which he uses only to provide a firm and familiar structure for exploring the play’s substantial issues with wit, wisdom, and a guarded idealism. In fact, one of the few significant differences between *Money* and one of Ibsen’s social problem plays is that Bulwer-Lytton is not prepared to allow his action to end in a tragic—or even an unhappy—outcome.

*Money* is an earnest play in its bitter mocking of its age’s love affair with money. Most assuredly intended as an entertainment, *Money*’s comedy nonetheless implicates the conscience of its audience without unduly disturbing it. The implication still sticks at the end of the twentieth century, despite the obvious differences in language, social convention, and fashion. The inequities of a

capitalistic system resulting from the concepts of Adam Smith become transparent, but Bulwer-Lytton stops short of calling for the overthrow of these values; indeed, as is typical of much nineteenth century literature and drama, *Money* places a high value on a sentimentalized faith in self-sacrifice and duty to family and community, and the theory of free trade. The play is more a warning to the wise, stressing in its rich panorama of London society circa 1840 the human costs of the malign and relentless pursuit of money and property, while casting a jaundiced eye at those in his day who prized fortune over friendship and viewed cash as the sole determinant of individual worth. What in these issues is not of concern in the late 1990s?

In the spirit of much melodramatic theatre, *Money* is filled with rhetorical asides that are more exclamatory and explanatory than probingly psychological. For example, "I *am* poor—penniless—a beggar for bread to a dying servant. True!"<sup>33</sup>; "To feel is to suffer!"<sup>34</sup> "A study—a study!—let me examine him! Such men are living satires on the world."<sup>35</sup> "Cruel, cruel, to the last!"<sup>36</sup> "Man is born to be deceived."<sup>37</sup> "There's something good in human nature after all!"<sup>38</sup> "Wealth! What is it without you?"<sup>39</sup> Like such inflamed outbursts, the play also features a florid pictorial morality. Its key scenes are elaborate emotive tableaux, but there is a firm basis in social and economic realism lurking behind the melodramatic trappings. Bulwer-Lytton sees the world as a nineteenth century novelist does, but he is single-minded in his attention to the class and economic inequities of the time, and in the brutality of society's institutions and the lust for cash that a capitalistic system creates. *Money* achieves an impressive mixture of high-spirited foolery with a Hamlet-like disgust of humankind, along with the more typical struggles of a romance between classes and financial position similarly found in the works of other mid-Victorian writers.

Those few critics who have paid some attention to Bulwer-Lytton's plays have traditionally been at odds over *Money*'s significance and quality. Ernest Reynolds views the play as "a bitter satire on Victorian commercialism" that "over-stepped the bounds of true comedy. The characters are too sharply divided between vice and virtue. The author allows his theme to run away with the dramatic balance of the play, and the satire is so exaggerated that it misses the point."<sup>40</sup> George Rowell agrees, but adds that *Money* "gives the theatre a glimpse of the world of Thackeray's novels."<sup>41</sup> Michael R. Booth writes that with *Money*, Bulwer-Lytton "had considerably improved his construction and stagecraft" compared with *The Lady of Lyons* and *Richelieu*, and that it was his "most satisfying play."<sup>42</sup> Booth applauds the "ironic satire"<sup>43</sup> of *Money*, and believes that it is "an important play that looks forward and establishes theme and tone for much succeeding comedy. On the other hand its popular contemporary, Boucicault's *London Assurance* (1841), looks backward, modelling itself on the wit, style and characterisation of an older comedy."<sup>44</sup> Insisting on the play's lasting worth, Booth

states that *Money* is significant

not only because it combined so well many of the distinguishing features of earlier comedy—the mixture of comic, pathetic, and dramatic components in a framework of rhetorical prose, the presence of eccentric, ‘humours’ characters, the glowingly idealized heroine, the firm basis of moral platitude and sentimental indulgence—but also because of its influence upon subsequent comedy.<sup>45</sup>

Booth underscores that “the main themes of *Money*—wealth, class, social ambition, and social pride—became the general subject-matter of so much Victorian comedy that the tracing of influences upon individual plays would be repetitious and pointless,”<sup>46</sup> and that *Money* is “a transitional play and as an influential one it is probably the most important comedy of the nineteenth century.”<sup>47</sup> Booth is close to expressing the full appreciation that *Money* deserves. Its central theme is timeless; it is a play redolent with the pros and cons of a society in which nothing seems to happen without consideration of financial circumstances. The play is packed with action—with twists and turns of its highly-charged plot—but *Money*’s vigor emerges from his questioning of the dogmas of his time, and those are not unlike those at the millennium. What, he wonders, is worth fighting for? Does faith in a particular set of values provide security and contentment? Are money, commerce, and property of greater worth in the world than love, compassion, and true friendship? What can be believed in? What, in fact, *are* values? The play ends with what certainly seems a satiric declaration: money is required for survival and the individual must understand its constructive and destructive powers as the only possible road to happiness.

Frequently overlooked among Victorian literary giants, Bulwer-Lytton’s work pales in comparison with that of Dickens and Thackeray for most modern critics. Even those few critical works devoted to his literary achievements, such as James L. Campbell Sr.’s *Edward Bulwer-Lytton* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1986), focus almost exclusively on Bulwer-Lytton’s novels and offer no more than a few paragraphs on his dramatic writing. This is unfortunate, since *Money* may well be a pivotal work in mid-nineteenth century British drama and worth more to the canon of Victorian literature than Bulwer-Lytton’s more frequently examined novels. Unfortunately, it was Bulwer-Lytton’s last play for over a decade, but also his only genuine comedy and one of the few non-farcical British comedies of its age. Its very staging was a harbinger of the future; according to Russell Jackson, *Money* was “staged with the precise and conscientious realism that Macready brought to his historical pieces—including Shakespeare,”<sup>48</sup> and not in the broadly-conceived farcical vein typical of that time. Although many farcical plays appeared

on London stages in the first half of the nineteenth century, there were comparatively few successful productions in the comedy of manners style. *Money* was one, and it was followed by (and influenced) Boucicault's *London Assurance* (1841) and Tom Taylor's and Charles Reade's *Masks and Faces* (1852), among many others over the remaining decades of the nineteenth century.

*Money* is a "missing link" in the chain of British stage comedy between the writers of Restoration and eighteenth century comedies to the sharp wit of Oscar Wilde, the only nineteenth century British writer of comedies whose plays are produced with regularity today. The traditions of Restoration and eighteenth century comedy—witty repartee, boldly-drawn character types exaggerated from a firm foundation in reality, satirical social commentary—were clearly a significant influence on the style of *Money*, but it, like Bulwer-Lytton's other plays, also owes much to French romantic writers Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas *père*, and to Dickens and Thackeray. Peter W. Graham writes that Bulwer-Lytton, "like Byron before him, writes as what the French call a *moraliste*, one who studies social conventions to understand society, who scrutinizes manners the better to know men."<sup>49</sup> As a moral humanist, Bulwer-Lytton writes what Reynolds calls:

a comedy of purpose, not a true comedy of manners. Lytton adopts the method of the roman à thèse. His hero is so much occupied in lashing the vices of Society that he never appears as a dramatic character at all. Besides, Clara, whom Evelyn finally marries, is too dowdy a figure to hold up against the brilliant society of fops and ladies of quality. The real satire of the play is in the minor characters, such as Dudley Smooth and Sir Frederick Blount.<sup>50</sup>

Certainly, the more obvious humor of the play resides in its minor characters, but Reynolds exaggerates the importance of Evelyn's occasional rants; he is a far more dimensioned character. Evelyn is Bulwer-Lytton's "Everyman" caught up in a profoundly moral struggle to balance the demands (and constraints) of reality with the desires of his heart and a philosophy of life threatened by embittering experiences with the money-mad world around him. Dickens similarly wrote of the damaging effect of money or poverty on the heart, although his heroes usually ended up in middle to upper class comfort. Dickens took an often bluntly satiric—if also warmly affectionate—view of humanity and society. Certainly a sentimentalist regarding matters of love, and gently comic on the subject of human eccentricity, Dickens's personal and deeply-rooted outrage over the class system—and economic injustice in general—was the soul of his works. There are other distinct similarities between *Money* and Dickens's work, especially in the depiction of character types and in melodramatic situation, as well as in its satirization of hypocrisy and the false

values of a corrupt society, but *Money* is more like one of Molière's comedies transposed to London high society. It also calls to mind Hogarth's grotesque satirical view of London life and, as previously indicated, aspects of Restoration and eighteenth century comedy. *Money* is more appropriately appreciated as a model for plays by Boucicault, Taylor, and Reade, as well as such later socially-conscious comedies (and dramas) as T. W. Robertson's *Society* (1865) and *Caste* (1867), Arthur Wing Pinero's *The Times* (1891), Harley Granville-Barker's *Waste* (1907), John Galsworthy's *Strife* (1909), and, to some extent, the early plays of George Bernard Shaw. Bulwer-Lytton has a moral conscience that suggests he is a forerunner not only of late nineteenth and early twentieth century dramatists, but also such millennial theatrical figures as David Hare, Tom Stoppard, Tony Kushner, and especially Caryl Churchill, whose satire *Serious Money* (1987) seems an obvious contemporary counterpart of *Money*.

That *Money* seems especially pertinent in the era of multi-national corporate expansion, in an age in which commerce and technology encroach more and more on privacy and create a more devastating gulf between the "haves" and the "have nots," is not surprising. Strong similarities are to be found in the social conditions of the industrializing 1840s and the corporatizing 1990s. Caird's production recognizes these parallels and acknowledges them, while avoiding the obvious pitfalls of over-emphasizing relevance to present-day connections. The decline of communism and the growing strength of capitalistic societies proves the validity of Adam Smith's theories, but perhaps humanity will still have to face as yet uncomprehended problems springing from the triumph of capitalism. *Money* faces the problems of commerce and capital in 1840 and offers a warning against the harsh realities of a commercial society that seems to have been realized in the late twentieth century. Bulwer-Lytton's instructive comedy examines the momentous effects of wealth, and the lack of it, in an era of heartless disregard for values other than those of property and profit. As Evelyn proclaims, "I've not been rich and poor for nothing,"<sup>51</sup> and the lessons he learns—and those taught to the audience—are of the potential catastrophes of both wealth and poverty in his time and in the unknowable future.

### Notes

1. Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 2nd ed. (London: A. Millar, 1762) 2.
2. George Rowell, ed., *Nineteenth Century Plays*, 2nd ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1972) 112.
3. Bulwer-Lytton was born Edward Bulwer, but changed his name in memory of his domineering mother, Elizabeth Barbara Lytton, at the time of her death in 1845.
4. Quoted in The Earl of Lytton, K. G., *Bulwer-Lytton* (London: Home & Van Thal

Ltd., 1948) 69.

5. James L. Campbell, Sr., *Edward Bulwer-Lytton* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1986) 14.

6. One of the most successful revivals of *The Lady of Lyons* was Henry Irving's Lyceum Theatre production in 1879 that co-starred Irving and Ellen Terry.

7. Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Letters of Bulwer Lytton to Macready 1836-1866* (Newark, NJ: The Carteret Book Club, 1911) 97-99.

8. 103-104.

9. William Charles Macready, *Macready's Reminiscences, and Selections from his Diaries and Letters*, ed. Sir Frederick Pollock, vol. II (London, 1875) 96.

10. Rowell 120.

11. Quoted in Russell Jackson, ed. *Victorian Theatre: The Theatre in Its Time* (New York: New Amsterdam, 1989) 310.

12. 311.

13. Michael Billington, "Review of *Money*," *The Guardian* 4 June 1999.

14. Billington.

15. Rowell, *Nineteenth Century Theatre* 57.

16. 50.

17. 79.

18. 81.

19. 50.

20. 119.

21. 66.

22. 120.

23. Charles Dickens, *The Letters of Charles Dickens. The Pilgrim Edition. Volume Two. 1840-1841*, edited by Madeline House & Graham Story (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969) 163.

24. The connection between Bulwer-Lytton and Dickens is underscored by the 1987 Sands Films version of Dickens' *Little Dorrit*, in which Dorrit meets Arthur Clenman for the first time in front of a wall plastered with posters advertising performances of Bulwer-Lytton's *Money*.

25. Dickens 163.

26. Bulwer-Lytton's dramatic works were published in an anthology for the first time in 1860 (London: George Routledge).

27. Quoted in Dewey Ganzel, *Bulwer-Lytton As Dramatist* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Dissertations, 1958) 211.

28. Macready's rivalry with American actor Edwin Forrest led to the most notorious event of his career a few years after his collaborations with Bulwer-Lytton ended. In 1849, the animosity between Macready and Forrest caused the Astor Place Opera House riot in New York that resulted in over twenty deaths. This, coupled with a lifelong distaste for the profession in which he had scored so many successes, led to his retirement from the stage in 1851 following

a farewell performance of *Macbeth* at the Drury Lane Theatre.

29. William Charles Macready, *The Diaries of William Charles Macready*, ed. William Toynbee, vol. 2 (London, 1912) 110.

30. Bulwer-Lytton completed a few more novels that gained some popularity, including *The Last of the Barons* (1843), *Harold* (1848), and *The Caxtons* (1850), before turning his attention exclusively to political activities.

31. Prior to the special 1911 performance, important revivals of *Money* included a March 1846 Sadler Wells production with Samuel Phelps as Alfred and Mrs. Mary Warner as Clara; an 1848 Haymarket production starring Charles Kean and his wife; a May 1851 Olympic Theatre production; an 1852 Haymarket production with Barry Sullivan and Mrs. Stirling; a January 1854 Grecian Theatre production; a February 1858 Lyceum Theatre production; a February 1860 Princess's Theatre production that continued in repertory well into 1862; a May 1872 Prince of Wales Theatre production starring the Bancrofts (repeated in 1875 and, again, at the Haymarket in 1880); a March 1878 Olympic Theatre production with Henry Neville as Alfred and Bella Pateman as Clara; a May 1882 Vaudeville Theatre production with Neville, William Farren, Ada Cavendish, and Mrs. John Wood among the cast; a May 1894 production featuring Johnston Forbes Robertson, Arthur Cecil, Arthur Bourchier, Henry Kemble, Gilbert Hare, John Hare, and Kate Rorke; and a January 1900 production at the Comedy Theatre.

32. The cast of the NT production featured Denis Quilley (Sir John Vesey), Sophie Okonedo (Georgina Vesey), Patricia Hodge (Lady Franklin), Thomas Brown-Lowe/Thomas Moll (Charley), Victoria Hamilton (Clara Douglas), Simon Russell Beale (Alfred Evelyn), Simon Day (Sir Frederick Blount), Roger Allam (Henry Graves), David Weston (Mr. Sharp), and Jasper Britton (Captain Dudley Smooth), with direction by Caird, scene design by Howell, lighting by Peter Mumford, and original music by Jonathan Dove.

33. Rowell 69.

34. 69.

35. 74.

36. 84.

37. 86.

38. 112.

39. 115.

40. Ernest Reynolds, *Early Victorian Drama (1830-1870)* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, Ltd., 1936) 65.

41. George Rowell, *The Victorian Theatre. A Survey* (London: Oxford UP, 1967) 52.

42. Michael R. Booth, ed., *English Plays of the Nineteenth Century. III. Comedies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press/Oxford University Press, 1973) 157.

43. Michael R. Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 179.

44. 179.

45. Booth, ed., *English Plays of the Nineteenth Century. III. Comedies* 158.

46. 158-159.

47. 158-159.

48. Jackson 310.

49. Peter W. Graham, "Bulwer the *Moraliste*," in *Dickens Studies Annual. Essays on Victorian Fiction*, vol. 9, edited by Michael Timko, Fred Kaplan, and Edward Guiliano (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1981) 144.

50. Reynolds 65.

51. Rowell 112.



Figure 1. Royal National Theatre production of *MONEY* by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, directed by John Caird. Oliver Theatre, opening on 3 June, 1999.  
L to R : Roger Allam as Graves, Oliver Cotton as Lord Glossmore, Sophie Okonedo as Georgina Vesey, Clive Rowe as Stout, Denis Quilley as Sir John Vesey and Simon Day as Sir Frederick Blount Photo Credit: Catherine Ashmore

Figure 2.  
Royal National Theatre  
production of *MONEY* by  
Edward Bulwer-Lytton,  
directed by John Caird. Oliver  
Theatre, opening on 3 June,  
1999.

L to R : Simon Russell Beale  
as Alfred Evelyn, Victoria  
Hamilton as Clara Douglas.  
Photo Credit:  
Catherine Ashmore

