'And What a Place for a Shopman!'

Liberty's, Regent Street, and the Intersection of Empire and Commercialism, 1875 – 1927

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Senior Honors Thesis
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Foreword

When I first considered writing a senior thesis in the spring of 2013, I knew that I wanted to write about London. The city has always played an active role in my imagination as well as my childhood and adult life. My family and I moved from North Yorkshire to California in 1998, and visiting London, either from York or Sonoma County, meant trips to the theatre, fish and chips, and hours spent traversing the city streets. I remember staying in London a few weeks before we moved to California. My parents took my sister and me to Hamleys Toy Shop on Regent Street, where we spent an entire afternoon playing with plush animals and train sets winding around glitter-covered mountains. Perhaps this was simply a ploy to distract my sister and me from the eventual chaos and stress of packing our lives into boxes, but all I can remember are the feelings of awe and joy as we stood outside the shop, surrounded by flags and hundreds of other families and Londoners. To some, Regent Street only formed part of a well-worn commute between tube lines and bus stops, but to others like myself, the street created a dreamscape of consumer magic: a place which felt other-worldly and English simultaneously. London's West End has always sparkled, and my childlike wonder has only grown with time.

As a student of History, urban life has remained a topic of my fascination, from medieval cities to the modern development of the "megalopolis." Cities, like humans, are organisms, and their historical growth mirrors that of a child transforming into an adult. Over the 2012-13 academic year, I lived in Madrid, Spain, and had the good fortune to take a nineteenth- and twentieth-century urban history course on my new city. In addition to the conventional lectures and discussions, we traveled as a class into Madrid itself,

exploring historic plazas and understanding the development of various sectors of the urban economy and society. The course taught me how to walk through a city, how to understand its spaces and to be able to fit historic events into their architectural and spatial environments. My experience in Madrid encouraged me to look at all cities in this manner, and so I found myself developing a new and deeper relationship with a city already close to my heart: London.

My choice of Regent Street and Liberty's as the subject of my research was an easy one. Many of my fondest memories had revolved around the West End, and it felt natural to write about something whose history felt as personal and intimate as my own upbringing. My mother brought me to Liberty's for the first time in December 2011, and the store's architecture immediately indicated to me that this was not "just another department store." As my research progressed over the past several months, subsequent visits with my mother have stayed in my mind as contemporary foundations for my historical analysis of the store's contents and architectural design. The store, like the rest of London, has occupied my thoughts and my heart. I have poured over maps of the city, read contemporary articles on historic and modern buildings, and have plans to relocate and begin my post-college life in London. My history and future remain inextricably tied to the fog-covered banks of the Thames.

This thesis, while a strong representation of my dedication to and interest in historical research, would not have been possible without an incredible support system. My visit to the City of Westminster Local Archives Centre owed greatly to the help of Alison Kenney, who graciously and kindly helped me navigate my first archive experience and allowed me to pour over every document in the Liberty's Archive

catalogue. At the University of California, Santa Barbara, the Inter-Library Loan retrieved innumerable books and primary sources, and miraculously provided me with a wealth of *Builder* periodicals, which consequently represented a bulk of my primary source material. I would also like to thank my fellow Senior Honors Seminar students and Dr. Stephan Miescher for their attentive edits and warm encouragement. Special thanks to my American and English family who all showed a great deal of support and love, even when my topic seemed vague, and encouraged me to keep writing even when I felt that my words had already been used. My close friends Katie Thompson and Melissa Buckley have been invaluable parts of my life, offering nothing but love and support as I embarked on my research project. From the long evenings of revision to the morning discussion of sources over coffee, both women have taught me more about writing, research and most importantly self-confidence than I ever thought possible.

Finally, this thesis would have been impossible without the guidance of my esteemed mentor, Dr. Erika Rappaport. This thesis is dedicated to her, and to all that she has helped me achieve. Her knowledge and passion for all things British, whether architectural, cultural, political or otherwise has influenced me more ways than I can put into words. Despite complicated circumstances, she has consistently given me astute and helpful advice, from my source analyses to the structural and thematic arrangement of this thesis. Her own writing has been an immense inspiration to me, and I feel honored to have had the opportunity to work with such a renowned historian and caring individual.

Introduction: Designing and Defining Modern London

In January of 1912, the British architectural journal *The Builder* published an editorial that imagined rebuilding London as an "Imperial" metropolis. The style and scale would be monumental, and would send a clear message to London's visitors and inhabitants the global reach of the Empire. The editors understood the difficulties involved in transforming a historical "city of many villages" and a modern city with an already highly concentrated built environment into "a capital city of sufficient grandeur" reflective of what the editors saw as a population with "a wider and more international outlook."[1] Such a change would achieve "nothing less than a complete reversal of our present mental attitude towards architecture and of our conception of London."[2] By that they meant that the *laissez faire* attitude towards governing and building the city needed to be replaced by bold and comprehensive central planning, such as that demonstrated in rival cities such as Paris, Vienna and Berlin.

Following the path laid out by previous propositions for an imperial London, the journal published just such a plan, beginning with the demolition of Buckingham Palace. A new palace would be reoriented so that a great avenue—similar to the Champs-Élysées in Paris—would traverse Green Park "as a grand processional way from the Palace to Westminster" (Figure 1).[3] The design also proposed to develop the South Bank of the Thames as the imperial center, complete with an imperial Parliament House and various "embassies of foreign Powers" and the offices of "different dependencies or Crown Colonies" built atop the Thames itself, while river commerce would continue

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[1] "Imperial London," *Builder*, January 5, 1912. Vol. 112, no. 3596, 11.
[2] "Imperial London," *Builder*, January 5, 1912. Vol. 112, no. 3596, 11.
[3] "Imperial London," *Builder*, January 5, 1912. Vol. 112, no. 3596, 11.

underneath.[4] The Empire, in both a political and architectural sense, would unequivocally be present in the metropolis. Imperial imagery would confront the London tourist and inhabitant at every turn; the strength of the British Empire would be impossible to ignore. The plan's mention of a split-level imperial-commercial waterway suggested, however, that any proposal would also have to acknowledge and make way for commercial and practical considerations. This plan begged important questions: to what extent should the British Empire be visually incorporated into the capital city? Was architecture the primary way to embody empire? Lastly, was London simply an imperial capital and nothing else?

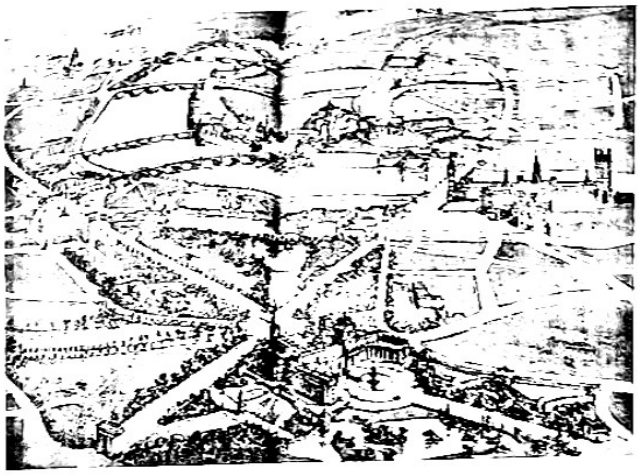

Figure 1: London looking towards the South end of the City towards Westminster (on right), courtesy of the *Builder*.

London's early twentieth-century history never fulfilled the imperial dreams of planners. Rather its built environment reflected the tensions between their ideals and the artistic sentiments and practical concerns of architects, politicians, businessmen and consumers. As Erika Rappaport and others have argued, these groups struggled to define London as at once the center of a varied empire, a cultural, artistic, financial, leisure and

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4 "Imperial London," *Builder*, January 5, 1912. Vol. 112, no. 3596, 11.

shopping center, a royal metropolis, and a home to millions of inhabitants. London was an imperial capital, but it was also the seat of the British government, and the center of British and global commerce. Moreover, the electric lights in Piccadilly Circus and department stores in Oxford and Regent Streets, transformed the West End into a pleasure center, inviting men and women from all classes to leave their obligations behind and devote themselves to diversion, leisure and freedom.[5]

Regent Street, in particular, posed a considerable thorn in the sides of those groups who looked to define London under a singular heading. In 1813 the Regency government sought to establish an economic space for the middle and upper classes, in which "narrower Streets and meaner Houses," or unsightly slums, intentionally vanished from view and made space for a centrally planned shopping space to take form.[6] The Prince Regent commissioned his favored architect, John Nash (1752-1835), to design a street that could compete with the impressive and markedly linear urban spaces of Paris and Vienna. These cities encompassed the strength of their governments, and due to the recent memory of the Napoleonic Wars, the royal lands of Marylebone Park would serve as the canvas to create an urban space worthy of comparison to its continental

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[5] For a general overview of England's twentieth century political history, see Charles Loch Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars: 1918-1940* (London: 1955); Walter L. Arnstein, *Britain Yesterday and Today: 1830 to the Present* (Boston: 2001). For general overviews of London's modern history, particularly its social and cultural fluctuations in the twentieth century and interwar period see Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Week-End: A Social History of Great Britain 1918-1939* (New York: Norton, 1994), Gavin Weightman, et al. *The Making of Modern London* (London: 2007), Judith Summers, *Soho: A History of London's Most Colourful Neighborhood* (London: 1989.), Mike Hutton, *Twenties London: Sex, Shopping and Suburban Dreams* (Sussex: 2011), Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2010), Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[6] Quoting John Nash, Laurel Flinn, "Social and Spatial Politics in the Construction of Regent Street" *Journal of Social History* 46, no. 2 (Winter 2012), 368.

competitors.[7] Prior to the development of the royal lands, London had been identified as a collection of villages rather than a cohesive whole. The intention behind the creation of Regent Street was indisputable: the street would establish the Prince Regent as a benevolent leader intent on developing London for the sake of his subjects—albeit only those of a certain social class. By manipulating the flow of commerce and trade from East-to-West to North-to-South, Nash and the Crown made it clear that the eastern part of the city did not fit in with their plans for Regent Street. While Oxford Street remained in the East-West orientation, Regent Street blocked off the working class living in the East End by simply making them unable to pass through the new architectural boundaries put in place. Lower class commerce, which had existed in spaces behind Regent Street such as St. James's Market, moved north to Oxford Street and Holborn and further eastward. This move was largely symbolic; the new street would represent the elegance of the Regency period,[8] with its sweeping colonnades and luxury shops while conveniently ignoring the larger social problems embedded into the architecture and layout of the rest of the city.

Regent Street preoccupied London's intellectual and political circles from its inception in the first half of the nineteenth century to its contentious completion over one hundred years later. The street traversed the imaginations of various groups and its spatial identity shifted with larger social and political shifts, with each interpretation competing

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[7] For a complete history of Regent Street, see Hermione Hobhouse, *A History of Regent Street* (London: MacDonald and Jane's, 1975).

[8]The Regency Period (1811-1820) refers to the period in which the Prince of Wales (later King George IV) ruled as a proxy for his father, King George III. The period, commonly associated with excessive and luxurious lifestyles of the upper classes, could be easily represented in the elegance of spaces such as Regent Street, or cities such as Bath in Somerset County. For an examination of Regency London and urban layout, see Deborah Epstein Nord, "The City as theater: from Georgian to Early Victorian London," *Victorian Studies* 31, no. 2 (1988), 159-88.

for a palpable space in its own imagined urban environment. However steadfast and established, the space proved malleable and limitless even within the confines of its physical existence.

The rise of mass commercialism in the late nineteenth century prompted a shift in relations between the owners of Regent Street, the Crown, and its inhabitants and long-standing businesses. The increase of print advertising and heightened competition between stores urged shopkeepers to reach out to these new consumers, ostensibly middle-class women, through eye-catching window displays and enticing sales and promotional offers.[9] At the exact moment that advertising skyrocketed as a means of commercial development, the imperial government formalized its control over a wider swath of territories, and with this renewed vigor many architects, politicians, and writers such as The *Builder* editors, believed that the Empire's capital city should accurately display an architectural style suitable to a formidable imperial superpower. These efforts proved successful on a superficial level in other areas of Westminster, namely Trafalgar Square and government buildings along Whitehall, but Regent Street's dual identity as a commercial space and a government-owned space inflamed tensions over what kind of architectural image it would present to the world.

These tensions that ended up delaying the streets rebuilding were incorporated into the final design that took shape in the 1920s and resolved in one of the street's most famous stores, Liberty's. Opened in 1875, Liberty's encompassed the complexity of Regent Street's identity with the sale of "Oriental" fabrics and antiques, many of which came from the Empire, and its self-proclamation as an authentically English store. The

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[9] Erika Rappaport, "Art, Commerce, or Empire? The Rebuilding of Regent Street, 1880-1927," *History Workshop Journal*, Issue 53, (2002), 96; Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 5.

store's founder, Sir Arthur Lasenby Liberty, harbored close ties with London's artistic community; the Aesthetes in the late-nineteenth century and the Bloomsbury group in the early twentieth.[10] Liberty's therefore represented an altogether distinct perception of commerce and empire, one more tied to the aesthetic pleasure gleaned from visiting Regent Street and examining its buildings rather than an overwhelming spectacle of lights and imposing grey Portland stone columns. The store's promotional materials, the goods it sold, its interior design and especially the exterior of its entirely new building in 1924 blended "bohemian" aestheticism, monumental neo-classical visions of empire, a revival of neo-Tudor Englishness and a celebration of Elizabethan mercantilism and maritime adventurism. Liberty's had occupied the same premises since 1875, but the new stores looked to blend the spatial arrangement of small stores with the larger artistic and historic ideologies coming to the fore in the 1920s. It promoted a domestic and artistic vision of empire and Englishness that appealed to its upper-class female clientele and the new mass market emerging in interwar Britain.

This thesis will examine the relationship between empire and commercialism on Regent Street, particularly focusing on public debates that emerged immediately prior to World War One and then reappeared in the interwar years. The debate, largely between architects, artists, shopkeepers and politicians, underscored the multi-faceted nature of Regent Street's identity. These groups continued to fight for their specific architectural design through the 1920s, with tensions mounting as a result of a weakened empire and a shaken British economy following the war. Liberty's redesign of its Tudor shop and East India House in two completely distinct styles echoed the debates between artists and

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[10] For a complete history of Liberty's, see Alison Adburgham. *Liberty's: a Biography of a Shop*. (London: Allen & Unwin), 1975.

architects about the choice between presenting imperial strength and commercial pragmatism. This thesis will explore the complex interconnections between a store whose products were imperial yet whose aesthetic relied on a domestic and pre-imperial perception of commerce.

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With this thesis I aim to build on an already rich historiography of London's layered identity. In the late nineteenth and twentieth century Regent Street contained overlapping and occasionally contradictory definitions. Many cultural historians have discussed the West End as a space of shifting gender, class and race dynamics. Central London, with its layered identity, consequently allows for historians to examine the city along a host of variables and factors. Rappaport, for instance, has argued that the West End acted as a liberator for young women in the metropolis, providing them not only the opportunity to move freely throughout the cityscape, but also confirmed their role as prime consumers in a rising culture of mass commercialism.[11] The cosmopolitan nature of the city and the early twentieth-century rejection of mass commercialism for an artistic niche culture in neighborhoods such as Soho has been examined by Judith Walkowitz.[12] The city also acted as a magnet for colonials. Angela Woollacott has argued that Australian women flocked to the metropolis in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a result of an "inherited cultural memory," which suggests that London itself

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[11] Rappaport, *Shopping*, 5.

[12] Judith A. Walkowitz, *Nights Out: Life in Cosmopolitan London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

was a microcosm of the entire British Empire.[13] The shifting dynamics between classes and genders, particularly in the West End, underscores the impossibility of defining London with a single word or category. The imperial nature of the city, however, remained in many parts of the city backed by evidentiary support, although the extent of the impact of these imperial motivations remains a point of contention for scholarly debate.

Recently, historians have argued that the construction of imperial buildings, such as those in Trafalgar Square and along Kingsway, succeeded in linking imperial strength with a British national identity.[14] London was an international city, as the editors of the *Builder* also recognized, and thus the city needed to present itself as a paradigm of an imperial metropolis. The example of the Victoria Memorial and the reconfiguration of an imperial avenue following Queen Victoria's death in 1901, as examined by Tori Smith, further underlined that not only did various interpretations of "stateliness" exist, but also various parts of the city could best present its imperial reach.[15] London's international identity underlined a complexity of the nature in which public presentations of the empire geared itself not only towards the British populaces, but also towards colonial subjects and tourists, as has been discussed by Felix Driver and David Gilbert in their study of imperial metropolises. They argued that a definite intersection between empire and urbanism existed, and that developments in transportation and symbolic advertising

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[13] Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian Women, Colonialism, and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 4.

[14] Jonathan Schneer, *London 1900: The Imperial Metropolis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 23; M.H. Port, *Imperial London: Civil Government Building in London, 1850-1915* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Rodney Mace, *Trafalgar Square: Emblem of Empire* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1976).

[15] Tori Smith, "'A Grand Work of Noble Conception: the Victoria Memorial and imperial London," in Felix Driver and David Gilbert, eds, *Imperial Cities: Landscape, Display and Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 22-25.

brought the empire directly into the psyche of Londoners.[16] The advent of mass commercialism in the 1880s allowed for empire to be consumed in new and creative ways; print culture promoted the spectacle of empire within the metropolis, and scholars such as Anne McClintock have examined the impact of these visual representations of empire and their consequent racialization of imperial imagery.[17]

The intersection of Empire and commercialism is what this thesis aims to investigate. Regent Street presents a particularly crucial example, in that the technical owners of the street, the Crown, had relinquished control for a large part of the nineteenth century regarding the superimposed social and cultural definition of the street. Undeniably, Regent Street was a center of international commerce, and following World War One the British government saw the opportunity to resuscitate a weakening imperial image through the redesign of the street's architectural identity. Laurel Flinn has studied the creation of Regent Street in the early nineteenth century and the spatial politics regarding slum clearance and the protection of shopkeepers. She argues that Regent Street's commercial nature was confirmed almost immediately following its completion, and that any later definitions, imperial or otherwise, would naturally come into conflict with one another. Rappaport has also written about the redesign of Regent Street in the late nineteenth century, and argues, like Flinn, that the street was a "battleground between competing visions of English society, economy and culture."[18]

This thesis looks to build upon these diverse discussions of London and shed light upon the true complexity of defining the city through architectural, cultural and artistic

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[16] Felix Driver and David Gilbert, eds, *Imperial Cities*, 4.
[17] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995), 208.
[18] Rappaport, "Art, Commerce, or Empire?," 95.

means. The complexity of this question required a varied body of sources. Architectural journals and serials such as the *Builder*, the *Architect's Journal* and the *Architect* provided technical and professional commentary on both the redesign of Regent Street and the construction of Liberty's Tudor Shop and East India House. Opinion articles from influential members of London's intellectual community in newspapers such as the *Times* provided a social element to the debate over Regent Street, and my own personal travels throughout the West End over the last year encouraged a more spatial and modern understanding of the street's significance to London's identity as a whole. My spatial study of Regent Street also brought me inside Liberty's Tudor Shop, whose contemporary store still retains many aspects and architectural details promoted in the advertisements and promotional pamphlets I examined in the City of Westminster Archives. Through careful study of public presentation, media coverage and professional discourse, this thesis will provide a multi-faceted response to a multi-faceted question.

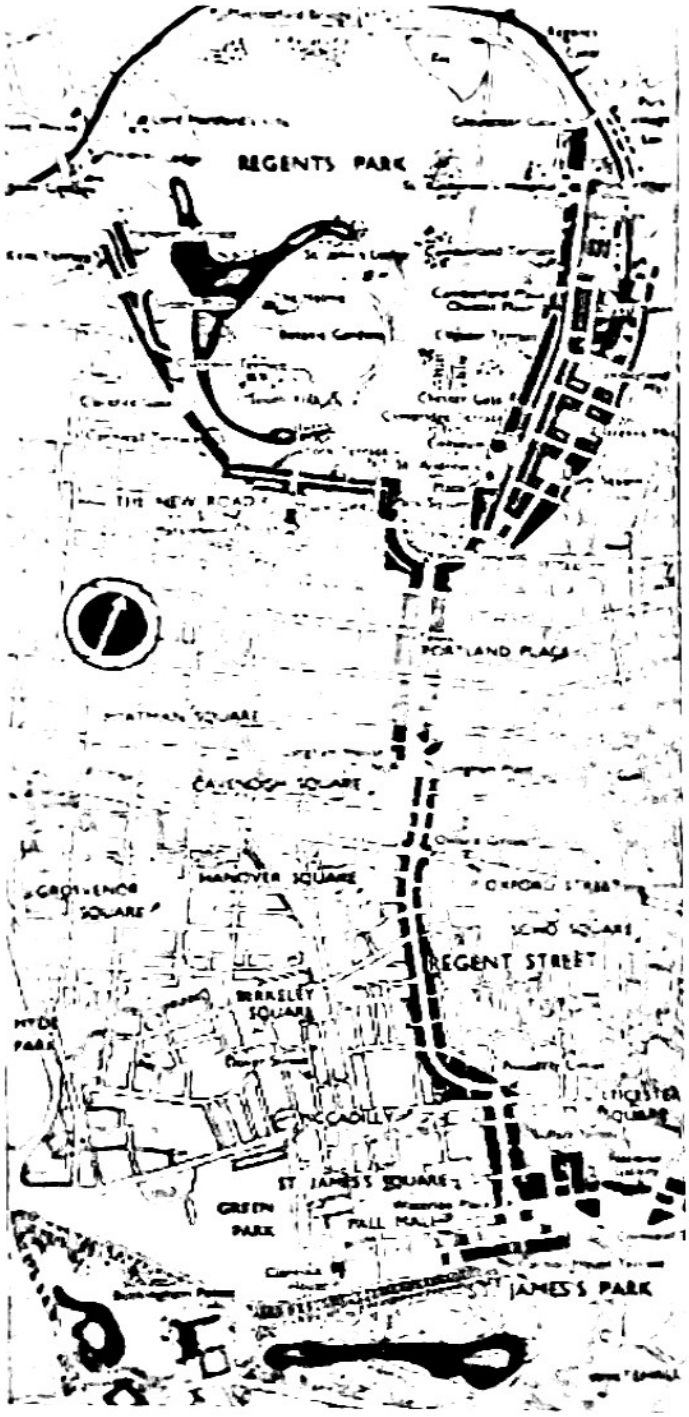

Figure 2: Map showing John Nash's plan for Regent Street, John Summerson, *John Nash: Architect to King George IV*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1949.

Chapter One: 'What IS to become of Regent Street?'

Entering the Fray: Public Debates, 1912-1917.

In 1891, Charles Dickens' son, Charles Dickens, Jr., published *Dickens's Dictionary of London*. This book, along with a host of new London guidebooks, provided extensive descriptions for tourists, teaching them how to experience the urban landscape. Dickens saw Regent Street as the nucleus of the West End, and integral in the commercial activity of the city (Figure 2). He remarks—somewhat sardonically—that Regent Street "has something of that uniformity of design which is by some considered the highest beauty of street architecture." His qualification that only "some" would consider Regent Street a handsome representation of urban planning emblematized the wider public opinion on the space as an entity. As Dickens' guide suggests, the variety of visitors to Regent Street defied the street's architect John Nash's original intentions of an exclusive space for the upper rungs of British society, and became a place where "pedestrians of every class, from the fashionable lounger to the street Arab" coalesced.[19] The social space, as Henri Lefebvre's hypothesis suggests, went beyond the material boundaries of buildings and cross-streets to become an area of cross-class interaction and superimposed social definitions.[20] Londoners from the aristocracy to the working class saw Regent Street as a space that permitted their public enjoyment.

Regent Street, as discussed previously, had been built in 1813 out of a desire to raise the architectural and urban sophistication of London to that of its continental rivals, such as Paris, Berlin and Brussels. The street's architect, John Nash, utilized an architectural style that was simultaneously celebrated as a representation of grace and

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21 Charles Dickens, *Dickens's Dictionary of London* 1890-91, 206-207.
20 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 86-87.

beauty and derided for embodying all the pitfalls of Regency excess and luxury.[21] Regent Street, in spite of its controversial reception in the public eye, remained a space that encouraged middle-class men and women to spend time and money. The street's inviting ambience helped establish a culture of consumption that would persist and expand in coming decades. The reconstruction of the street in the 1920s and the public discussion preceding it for several decades represented a new type of controversy regarding architectural style and use. Regent Street's now well-established commercial identity would be challenged by new political and architectural desires to transform the street into an imposing representation of imperial strength, rather than a superficial and consumer-based urban playground.

In response to this threat on the West End's consumer culture, the public took to the printing presses, voicing their opinions, whether professional or personal, in London's newspapers and serials. The Piccadilly Hotel had been a preliminary attempt by architect Norman Shaw to redesign the West End in a style more suited to the opulence and strength of the British Empire (Figure 3). Being the first constructed design for the new Regent Street, the hotel's unveiling prompted a veritable landslide of public commentary and dismay about the street's architectural and commercial future. For example, civil engineer Mark Judge's September 1912 letter to the editor of the *Times* embodied the idea of a fluid urban space in Edwardian London. Judge accused the Piccadilly Hotel Company of exploiting their political influence and using "shareholders' money…[and] extending beyond their own boundary."[22] The hotel's imposing columned façade

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[21] Rappaport, "Art, Commerce, or Empire?" 96.
[23] Mark H. Judge, "The Regent-Street Quadrant," The *Times,* London, 27 Sept. 1912, 7, The *Times* Digital Archive. Web. 10 Oct. 2013.

contradicted, according to Judge, the environment of Piccadilly and the West End as a whole. Instead of projecting an inviting and luxurious image to the discerning public, the hotel stood imposingly over guests and incongruously placed itself in the midst of a commercial space. Public discussion widely criticized the hotel for being superfluous and unattractive. Judge's comment of the shareholders exceeding their boundaries underlined the tension between the public, which included residents of the West End and shopkeepers, and those who technically owned the space, the Crown. Space, according to Judge, was precious within the urban sphere, and the boundaries that govern economics should also govern urban development. He continued with a description of an existing shop which "[the architect] Mr. Woodward has 'not a word to say against,'" posing further examination of the relationship between an urban economy in its native space and the larger, imperial and governmental forces which dictated urban development.[23]

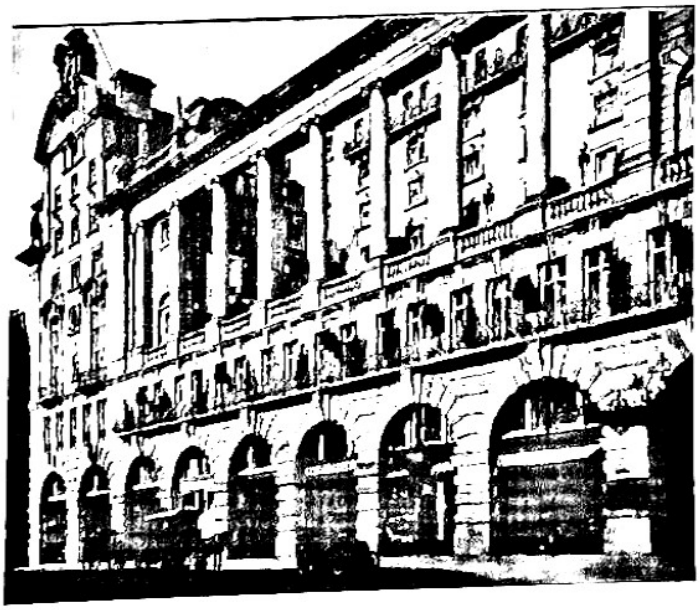

Figure 3: Façade of the Piccadilly Hotel, designed by Sir Norman Shaw, completed in April 1905. Hermione Hobhouse, *A History of Regent Street.* London: MacDonald and Jane's, 1975.

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23 Judge, "The Regent-street Quadrant," 7.

The Piccadilly Hotel also served to aggravate previous sentiments about the future of the rest of London's built environment. Judge noted the recent public expenditure on the creation of Kingsway and Aldwych, designed in a similar manner to that of the Piccadilly Hotel. He further confirmed his displeasure with the city government's choice by asking, "What useful purpose have they [the buildings] served?"[24] Judge's position as a civil engineer and architect of sanitation systems in London naturally shaped his disapproval of the proposed Regent Street design. The buildings on both Kingsway and Regent Street conflicted with their intended uses, making them incompatible and impractical. His critique that the Crown sacrificed "reasonable sanitary conditions…in order to secure a palatial façade" resonated throughout the entire public discourse surrounding Regent Street. Appearance, according to Judge, mattered more to the Crown than pragmatic design, and his letter made clear his disdain for an imperial government more concerned with its global reputation than the welfare of its own capital's inhabitants. Regent Street, by design, remained destined to inspire conflict throughout the architectural, political and commercial communities throughout London, with each group overlaying their own ideas on the space.

The construction of Regent Street took place exactly a century prior to Judge's letter, and the new redesign would come to fruition in the following decade. Beginning at the turn of the century, the pending renewal of shops' ninety-nine year leases brought the fate of Regent Street as an urban entity into public consciousness. Dickens' guidebook twenty years before Judge's letter also acknowledged the commercial nature of Regent Street. Although he did not explicitly criticize royal actions regarding the street, he

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[24] Judge, "The Regent-street Quadrant," 7.

commented: "No thoroughfare in London is more thronged during the season, or presents a gayer aspect." Furthermore, he observed that the street was "not distinguished for public buildings."[25] This held true in 1912 as Judge wrote his letter to the *Times* editor. Regent Street endured as a commercial center, and such a nature would be difficult to wholly eliminate.

Another letter published by The *Times* in October 1912, this time from famous artist and art critic Roger Fry, continued in a similar utility-driven tone regarding designs for the Regent Street Quadrant and the Piccadilly Hotel. He critiqued a previous letter, which had claimed sacrificing art for utility would rob the city of its beauty, by countering: "the writer adjures us…as though that were not the very root of our aesthetic disasters." Fry persisted, arguing from the perspective of an elevated intellectual pedestal that those purchasing and collecting art "for art's sake," such as the "millionaire who buys Old Masters that he does not like" were the root causes of the "deadening [of] all artistic impulse and effort." He, like Judge, singled out the Piccadilly Hotel as an example of ornamental and architectural excess overpowering the need for practicality. "We make buildings for our need," he stated, "and then…cover them with a mass of purely nonsensical forms which we hope may turn them into fine architecture."[26] This implicit jab at the then-ailing Norman Shaw, architect of the Piccadilly Hotel, applied itself to a broader critique of Regent Street at the turn of the twentieth century.

Imposing imperial architecture, desired by the Crown and put forth in designs by Shaw and later Reginald Blomfield, denied the buildings of their practical use, as Fry

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[26] Dickens, *Dictionary*, 207.

[26] Roger Fry, "The Regent-Street Quadrant," The *Times* London, 3 Oct. 1912, The *Times* Digital Archive. Web. 10 Oct. 2013.

suggested, and instead put them at the will of architecture "for the empire's sake." Fry unapologetically threw his support towards the shopkeepers and directly decried architects—and in this moment Royal architects—as being unfit to solve problems of practical, commercial architecture. Fry believed that shopkeepers, particularly those involved in elite and artistic commerce, should be "as vigorous in their demands for plate glass as ever they like," he declared, "and then let a really good engineer solve them their problem." Engineers, he claimed, proved more capable of addressing the specific concerns of Regent Street shopkeepers in maintaining a consumer-accessible space, since architects, although theoretically capable to confront such issues, had proved themselves unfit in this moment. If architects acted with practicality in mind, he suggested, then "we [the London public] may get something really satisfactory instead of another piece of polite architectural humbug."[27] Fry's demands for utility confirmed Judge's earlier critiques of the proposed Regent Street design. The "architectural humbug" he described represented the efforts of the Crown and its then-architect, Sir Norman Shaw. The response of Fry and others to the Piccadilly Hotel accentuated a palpable tension between the Crown's desired imperial architecture and the artistic community's demand for simple, aesthetically pleasing and practical buildings.

British poet Selwyn Image responded to Fry's argument of sacrificing utility for "art's sake," and instead suggested that a level of compromise be reached between the two parties.[28] Appearing as a mediator between shopkeepers and the Crown, Image stated: "But Regent's-quadrant, I submit, does not exist merely for the sake of the

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[28] Fry, " The Regent-street Quadrant."

[28] Selwyn Image, "The Regent-Street Quadrant," The *Times*, London, 5 Oct. 1912, The *Times* Digital Archive. Web. 24 Feb. 2014.

shopkeepers who elect to trade there…there must be give and take on both sides."[29] This insistence on compromise would haunt advocates and opponents of the redesign of Regent Street throughout the remainder of its construction. Neither side could stand to concede on any aspect, and indeed the ultimate design would be laden with moments of architectural disconnect and fragmentation.

Both Fry and Image represented part of the artistic facet of public discourse on Regent Street, and both men existed within alternative circles of British culture. Image, a poet who studied under famed Victorian art critic John Ruskin,[30] represented the aesthetic evaluation of art and architecture in that the beauty of something only existed in as far as its practical use remained viable. Roger Fry, a contemporary of Image and Ruskin, played a crucial role within the alternative lifestyles of the Bloomsbury group.[31] These men could all easily be termed as anti-imperial, in so far as that their artistic and social inclinations leaned towards to more philosophical and less bellicose cultural interactions and exchanges. Their evaluation of Regent Street consequently stemmed from this belief in finding purpose in art and architecture and thinking about it within its contextual space. The desire of the Crown to impose a single design on the entire street reflected a desire for unity and the perceived support of the people behind these imperial endeavors. An urban space in which purpose—and in many respects commerce—reigned supreme, however, would remind the London visitor that the city's inhabitants, while holders of a

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29 Image, "The Regent-street Quadrant," 1912.

30 For a recent biography of John Ruskin and his contributions to art criticism and literature, see John Batchelor, *John Ruskin: A Life* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2000); for an engaging study of Ruskin's influence on public art museums and the social experience of art, see Amy Woodson Boulton, *Transformative Beauty: Art Museums in Industrial Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

31 For a discussion of the Bloomsbury Group and its figures, see Peter Stansky, *On or About December 1910: Early Bloomsbury and its Intimate World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); for Roger Fry's involvement in Bloomsbury, see chapter 4, 70-125.

vast empire, upheld a vibrant domestic economy, made strong by Regent Street's purveyors of both foreign and local high-quality goods.

On the following day, an interesting response to Fry and Image came from Mr. William A. Pite, a member of the Royal Institute for British Architects (RIBA) and a well-known architect in London. He countered the accusation made by Fry that architects would be unfit to address the problems befalling the Piccadilly Hotel. Architects, he maintained, were the only legitimate actors in solving any of the public's architectural queries. He, too, criticized the ornamentation of the Piccadilly Hotel and acknowledged the need for compromise between commercial needs and aesthetic wants, but stated, "the building must be a complete whole."[32]

Shopkeepers, supported by Fry and Judge, did not wish to impart an explicitly imperial message upon either the façades or the interior layout of their stores. Already embroiled in the expansive trade of luxury goods, shopkeepers desired an architectural design that would lend to the promotion of their own brands, with additions such as large plate-glass windows, unfettered by cumbersome columns.[33] The average Londoner, it could be said, sought an architectural style that promoted utility, practicality and sense. As Pite suggested, the "wholeness" of the building had been rendered impossible due to the overarching tension between preserving Regent Street as a commercial space and the Crown's desire to transform it into an emblem of imperial preeminence.

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[33] William A. Pite, F.R.I.B.A, "The Regent-Street Quadrant," The *Times*, London, 4 Oct. 1912, The *Times* Digital Archive. Web. 10 Oct. 2013.
[33] Rappaport, "Art, Commerce, or Empire?"

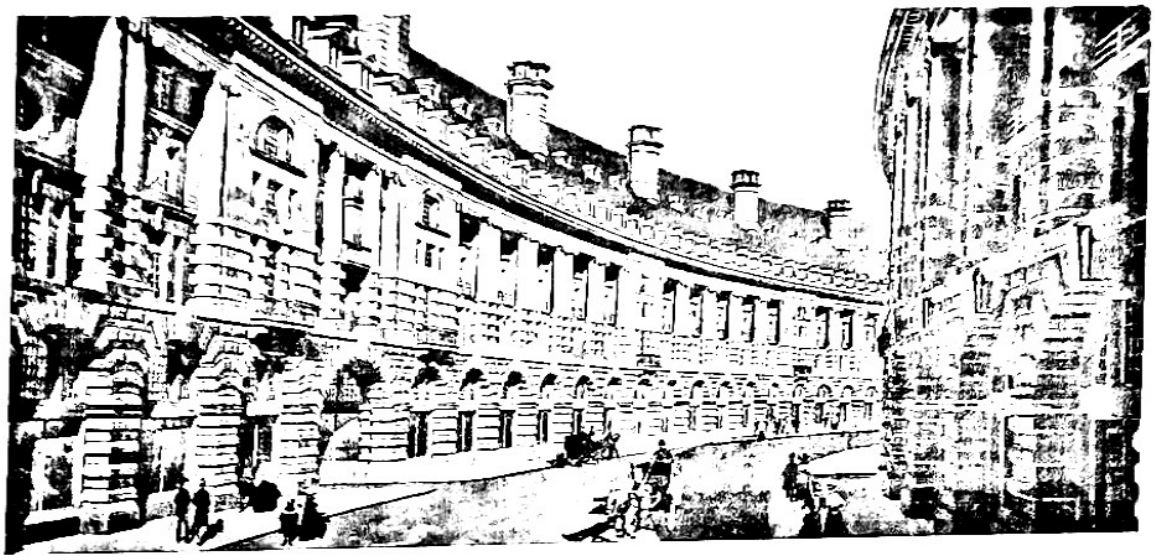

Figure 4: Norman Shaw's design for the Piccadilly Hotel and the Quadrant as displayed at the Royal Academy in 1906. John Nash's Quadrant was demolished in 1848. Hermione Hobhouse, *A History of Regent Street.* London: MacDonald and Jane's, 1975.

The Piccadilly Hotel represented only one point of contention within the redesign. The Quadrant, made up of the row of curved buildings that connected Piccadilly Circus to the remainder of Regent Street, faced demolition in 1848 (Figure 4). Instead of recalling the idyllic breezeways of Mediterranean countries, Nash's design exposed the less desirable underbelly of London to its middle-class wanderers, and consequently sparked indignation from many shopkeepers beneath its archways. Architectural historian E. Beresford Chancellor's pamphlet, *Liberty & Regent Street,* commented on this particular situation:

> The use of the colonnade in London is distinctly opposed to its requirements in Bologna and other Italian cities. There the heat of the sun drives people to these shelters; with us it is the rain which shepherds us to such havens. But colonnades...have never been wholly popular in a country where so much is done that is done elsewhere, but where it is heresy to suggest its possibility...[referring to the Quadrant] young ladies of a later time [1840s] were solemnly warned never to walk in these arcaded haunts of iniquity...[34]

[35] E. Beresford Chancellor, *Liberty & Regent Street* (London: Liberty & Co., 1924), 7.

Here, Chancellor addressed the problems and unforeseen consequences of Nash's particular design for Regent Street. While the street, with its North-South orientation and limitation on working class commerce suggested an air of refined society, the Quadrant's covered walkway almost immediately became a haven for prostitution. The creation of these urban spaces, therefore, was subject to the realities of society; indeed upper- and middle-class men were inclined to associate with prostitutes in the alcoves of the Quadrant. However, the inhabitants of Regent Street regarded middle-class consumer habits with the utmost importance. The original design sought to imbue the street with a particular sense of spectacle and commercial exclusivity. Chancellor, quoting James Elmes' *Metropolitan Improvements* (1828) couched himself clearly in the camp of the shopkeepers in the importance of Regent Street:

> [Its] wide handsome fronts, calculated for broad showy shop-windows, wherein goods and manufactured articles of the most splendid description, such as the neighbouring world of wealth and fashion are in daily want of, may be displayed to the greatest advantage.[35]

Regent Street, according to Elmes, Chancellor, Judge and Fry was a space made beautiful by its inhabitants and the commerce instigated by these entrepreneurial individuals.

The new design, first envisioned by Norman Shaw and then Reginald Blomfield following Shaw's death in 1912, expanded on the Crown's desire for an explicitly imperial message on Regent Street, much to the chagrin of shopkeepers. A petition submitted by shopkeepers highlighted the general debate of the London public as well as Elmes' declaration in favor of commerce, stating that the "heavy columns on the ground floor will take up a great proportion of the shop window space" and that the shops would

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[36] Chancellor, *Liberty & Regent Street*, 4.

be "entirely hidden from the view of persons walking up and down the street, excepting the actual window they may be opposite."[36] Clearly, Judge, Elmes and the Regent Street shopkeepers all felt the need for practical architecture, eschewing the Crown's "impractical" imperial ideological concerns.

The tension between practicality and aesthetic beauty intensified in the late nineteenth century, following the demolition of the Quadrant in 1848. The thriving commerce along Regent Street exacerbated traffic flow throughout the western part of the city, prompting the London City Council to finance the creation of a new street, Shaftesbury Avenue, in 1876. The Council's creation in the mid-nineteenth century marked a turning point in the relation between the city's architecture and its residents. Now, choices of urban planning came from the voices of individuals living in the city itself rather than a royal figurehead. Furthermore, the creation of Shaftesbury Avenue underscored the impact that Regent Street had on the commercial atmosphere of the West End. The new street would allow Regent Street to maintain its identity as a street for upper- and middle-class leisure and consumption rather than a congested thoroughfare of carriages and wagons. Although London's West End would be constantly plagued by traffic throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth centuries, efforts made by the London City Council to protect Regent Street's elite definitions remained significant.[37]

Further discussion of Regent Street's controversial nature appeared in architectural journals such as the *Builder*. In November 1912, an article regarding the proposed heights of buildings in architect Norman Shaw's new design echoed concerns from Chancellor and other observers. Stating that "the height of buildings to be erected

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[37] Erika Rappaport, "Art, Commerce, or Empire?" 102.
[38] Hobhouse, *A History of Regent Street*, 75.

shall not exceed that of the present structures, so that the sunshine and light and air of the street shall not be interfered with," the writer clearly placed his allegiance with the shopkeepers, who saw the openness and free-flow of air through the street as a means of enticing shoppers to enjoy the entire commercial space.[38] The practicality of the space championed by Chancellor and Judge presented itself in this article as well; excessively tall buildings would throw off John Nash's original design of an alluring urban playground and transform the street into an austere example of imperial dominance. Furthermore, the *Builder* article strengthened Chancellor's sardonic comments about the use of the covered walkways of the Quadrant as shelter from rain and not sun, implying that taller buildings should not impede the brief instances of sunny weather in England.

However, not all who published their opinions stood in favor of the commercial side of the debate. A brief opinion letter from "Y.E.T" on 28 December 1917 responded to the public outcry of shopkeepers, asking: "Is it of any use to call attention *again* to the waste of precious labour involved in the window-dressing of shops?" The writer continued, citing vice and temptation as degrading aspects of urban life, and suggested that all shopkeepers give up their marketing ploys in order to stave off "a good deal of unnecessary buying, which comes of excessive window-gazing."[39] Naturally, shopkeepers existed on the public displays of their goods as well as the "unnecessary buying" that these displays engendered, but Y.E.T's letter exposed the curious and multifaceted nature of Regent Street as a whole. Depending on one's perspective, the street could mean many things. In an age of mass-consumption the street represented a

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[39] "Regent-street Rebuilding," November 1, 1912, *Builder*, Vol. 103, no. 3639, 513.
[40] Y. E. T., "Window Dressing," *Times* London, 28 Dec. 1917, The *Times* Digital Archive. Web. 10 Oct. 2013

pilgrimage site for shoppers looking for the newest object or diversion, but it also symbolized a part of London traditionally associated with the royal family and the aristocracy, and thus deserved to a certain extent a level of elite discretion in its commercial ventures. Interpretations of the street depended on from where one stood within the city's social parameters. Y.E.T's letter to The *Times* also accentuated points of contention regarding the existence of consumer culture as well as gender dynamics on Regent Street and in the West End as a whole. Window displays, such as the one Y.E.T. criticized, were primarily directed towards women, who undoubtedly were seen as the main actors in London's consumer culture. Since women in 1917 now firmly held a place in public society—save for the political vote—male shopkeepers had no choice to create a space that would be enticing to their primary consumers.[40] Y.E.T's letter reflected the parallel line of public discussion that regaled the existence of masculine and consequently imperial architecture.[41]

In the 1920s, discussions over Regent Street reached a boiling point. Journals such as the *Builder* and *Punch* published commentaries and extensive columns about the proposed design for the street, and the discussion became increasingly attached to the symbolic importance of the buildings in relation to the political crises facing the imperial government. By 1926, the original design envisioned by John Nash in 1813 had long been replaced by darker stone columns and the threat of political intervention on a traditionally commercial street. The surprisingly long duration of public discussion over Regent Street suggested a keen relationship between the city's shape and the city's

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[40] For a thorough discussion on the role of women in the West End, see Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[41] Rappaport, "Art, Commerce, or Empire?" 96.

inhabitant. Changes made to the shape inevitably changed the individual, altering habits and patterns of movement throughout the urban fabric. Regent Street as a whole retained its importance throughout and beyond the Victorian and Edwardian periods, as shown in a brief rhyme published in *Punch* on 6 August 1924:

> But sadly retreat
> From Regent-Street—
> Where builders smash
> The scheme of Nash.[42]

Although Nash's plans had not existed in their complete form since the early-Victorian period, his memory was sustained and revived through the media and public discourse. *Punch*'s penchant for satire and humor also struck a chord in the argument between builders, architects and engineers. Nash, in the eyes of the poem, was seen not solely as a builder but a designer of city life and a creator of urban space.

Criticism of the transformation of the West End also arrived from London's intellectual and literary community. In her essay "Oxford Street Tide" (1924), Virginia Woolf, one of the most notable British writers of the first half of the twentieth century, critiqued the transient nature of Oxford Street and its surrounding tributaries, describing it as "a breeding ground" and "a forcing house of sensation." The sensations, she continued, transformed the mind into "a glutinous slab that takes impressions" as the street "rolls off upon it a perpetual ribbon of changing sights, sounds and movement."[43] These comments also reflected the shifting nature of Regent Street at this time. The spectacles of window displays and the false facades of buildings throughout the West

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[43] Quoting *Punch* in Anne E. Lewis, "Liberty's Tudor Shop", Open University dissertation, 1975, in the City of Westminster Archives Centre, 788/121, 7.

[43] Virginia Woolf, "Oxford Street Tide" in *The London Scene: Six Essays on London Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 1975.), 21.

End created an environment, as Woolf describes it, more akin to a ribbon—easily removed and altered—than to its actual constructed materials. Her essay should be read within the context of her active role in the Bloomsbury group, in which she and other intellectuals gathered to discuss the creation of an ideal society amidst a rapidly fluctuating social reality. Many of these shifts came from the rise of mass consumerism in the London scene, and members of the Bloomsbury Group saw themselves as responsible for resuscitating bygone means of cultural expression.

The title of Woolf's essay revealed much about her vision of a fluid urban scenario. The juxtaposition of a commercial "tide," or ocean with the actual built environment was also telling. Previously occupied by aristocrats in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the estates of those in the West End "required the illusion of permanence." Conversely, the modern-day moguls of the West End, she remarked, "seemed to delight in proving that we can make stone and brick as transitory as our own desires."[44] Her displeasure with consumer culture stood in close association to architectural journalists and critics of the time. The preference of creating an urban scene based on plate glass and the latest trends rather than on a lasting architectural style clearly bothered many in London's intellectual community.

While the essay does not mention Liberty's Tudor Shop by name, the references to the integrity of Elizabethan architecture implicitly brought the store into the wider urban discussion. Woolf stated: "Many a country cottage built to house farmer or miller when Queen Elizabeth was on the throne will live to see these palaces fall into the

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[44] Woolf, "Oxford Street Tide," 24.

dust."[45] Neo-Tudor architecture thusly became associated with stability, virtue, and the home, while commercial emporiums would concede to "a vigorous prod from an umbrella point."[46] Liberty's functioned as a mediator between the modern commercial world and Woolf's envisioned idyllic domestic world. Woolf's complimentary tone towards Tudor and neo-Tudor buildings echoed Stewart-Liberty's insistence on using British craftsmen and men-of-war ships to construct his new shop, with Liberty's Tudor shop providing the permanence that Woolf believed was missing from the West End's commercial architecture. Stewart-Liberty, it seemed, intended the building to remain indefinitely. Mass consumption in the form of department stores and advertisements, according to Woolf, represented fleeting trends and would eventually be forgotten by future societies. We can see in our modern day that her desire to eliminate mass-consumption never came to fruition, but the persistence of Liberty's in London's contemporary, luxury shopping scene reflects the strength of certain economic habits, particularly those of the upper classes for whom quality and continuity remain paramount with regard to their purchases.

Coupled with the opening of Liberty's Tudor shop in 1924, Woolf's essay offered a counter-narrative of commercial consumption in the West End. This narrative suggested that shopping and the acquisition of goods made a home or person more beautiful, rather than simply keeping up with current trends. The high standard to which Liberty's kept its architectural style and fabric design reflected the desire of Woolf and other Bloomsbury intellectuals to fight the rising tide of mass-consumed culture. Both groups, instead, chose to focus on the integrity and beauty of singular items, such as a handcrafted piece

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[45] Woolf, "Oxford Street Tide," 23.
[46] Woolf, "Oxford Street Tide," 23.

of furniture. Bloomsbury intellectuals, however few in numbers, represented Liberty's ideal clientele following the War. Just as Liberty's had associated itself with the Aesthetes of the late nineteenth century, the Liberty's of the 1920s became a cornerstone in the revival of an idealized and nostalgia-fueled society, in which the history of the nation shaped the contemporary identity of its citizens.

In a February 1926 issue of the *Builder*, H.L. Mencken, an American journalist and satirist published a tirade against the spatial decisions made by architects on Regent Street and surrounding streets. Similar to shopkeepers protesting the incongruous nature of Blomfield's design, Mencken decried how "half the most exquisite buildings [were] scrapped and thrown on the muck heap," and if given the chance, he would "go out with a packet of dynamite, blow up all the monstrosities in Regent-street, get hold of Nash's old plans and slave-drive a few thousand…until we'd got the thing back as it used to be—a superb crescent full of grace and beauty."[47] Mencken's comments mirrored other voices in the public fray. Consumer culture and the spectacle of newer architectural designs had overrun the integrity of the space itself, and architects pandered to the whims of politicians and overzealous supporters of empire rather than those to whom Regent Street still held aesthetic importance. The "superb crescent full of grace and beauty" had been replaced with sky-high advertisements and flashing lights. London, according to Mencken, lost its identity with the arrival of mass culture and imperial advertising, along with its signature architectural sophistication. Commentary on Regent Street's final design, unveiled in 1927, also echoed the sentiments of the architects, artists, city-planners and city-dwellers that had shaped the public discussion of the Edwardian and

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47 "Regent-street and Piccadilly-circus," February 19, 1926, *Builder*, Vol. 130, no. 4333, 307.

interwar periods. Architects and shopkeepers proved unwilling to compromise, resulting in a street whose unity and architectural integrity cracked and wavered under the weight of the diverse interpretations of its two-mile stretch.

'A Union, not a Unity,' 1920-1927

The new and completed Regent Street opened with a royal procession on 23 June 1927 (Figure 5). Onlookers crowded the sidewalk beneath immense Union Jacks lining Sir Reginald Blomfield's new facades.[48] The royal procession employed certain aspects of previous royal spectacles, but the subdued nature of the procession seemed to acknowledge Regent Street's contentious history. The Crown's wishes and Blomfield's design had prevailed over the demands and numerous public appeals of architects, shopkeepers and Londoners alike throughout the first decades of the twentieth century. Large and imposing ribbed stone columns jutted out over shop windows, obscuring most goods from view. Public opinion even in 1927 remained divided. The *Daily News* stated that the new street was: "a better piece of work than it is painted by its critics…It is more suited to the flashing bus and the rapid stream of polished motorcars than to the old-fashioned coach-and-four. It is a part of changing London and changing England."[49] What was this changing London? The city in the inter-war period now accommodated wealthy foreigners in its commercial spaces, and England's aristocracy made way for entrepreneurial businessmen in their elite social circles. Regent Street's original intentions remained buried deep in London's past. What had been a nineteenth century

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[48] Hobhouse, *Regent Street*, 135.
[49] Hobhouse, *Regent Street*, 135.

elite commercial experience with "old-fashioned coach-and-fours," had now become a modern space where the sale outstripped the exclusive, the trend surpassed the timeless.

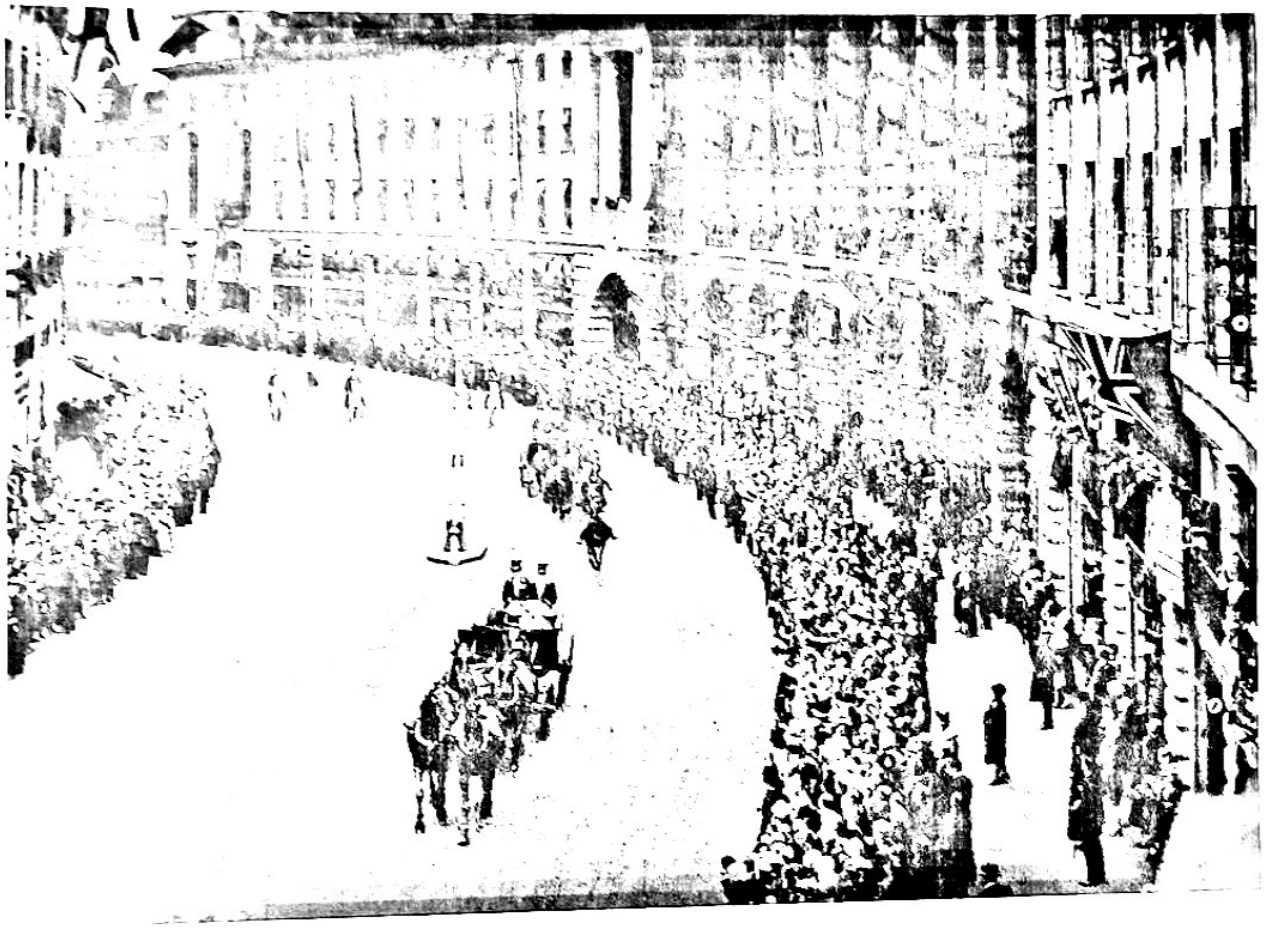

Figure 5: King George V and Queen Mary drive along the Regent Street Quadrant, 23 June 1927 during the Royal Procession. The ribbed facades of Blomfield's design were unpopular for many in the architectural community after its completion. The street remains almost unchanged today. Hermione Hobhouse, *A History of Regent Street.* London: MacDonald and Jane's, 1975.

Imperial definitions of Regent Street rested largely on political realities of British imperial policy. Following the war, new political tensions both at home and abroad accentuated the weaknesses of the British Empire. Rising tension in the Levant under the British mandate of Palestine weakened Britain's role as a global peacekeeper. Gandhi's movement of civil disobedience in India after the war raised further anxieties about the

future of the Empire. A redesign of Regent Street therefore proved essential to maintain an outward appearance of imperial solidity and vitality.

Lamentations on the perceived loss of Regent Street appeared in *The Builder* before the Royal Procession. The journal published a transcript of a lecture given by Professor C. H. Reilly, F.R.I.B.A., on 17 September 1926. Reilly's position on the new Regent Street echoed other commentators such as Mencken, Chancellor and Elmes, but sentimentalized John Nash's original design through his discussion of the new facades. A teacher at the Liverpool School of Architecture, Reilly supported Neoclassicist architecture, such as that of the National Gallery and British Museum in Trafalgar Square. Blomfield's design of Regent Street, however, displeased Reilly, claiming that the lack of uniformity in style went against traditional conceptions of Neoclassicism. The unity and "wholeness" of the street had been obvious through Nash's design, in which one could feel "a superior and welcoming urbanity" in the truly metropolitan environment:

> Built in stucco, it was repainted every spring, and always looked bright and clean. The height of the buildings was such that the sun could reach the facades. There were fine wide curved wall surfaces which seemed designed to catch the play of light and shadow. But better even than that was the courteous attitude of one building to another. Each echoed some detail of scale or proportion of its neighbor. Each block was designed like a palace, stretching from side street to side street, and on a larger scale than any of the buildings in the new street, however much taller they might be.[50]

Discord between the new buildings, Reilly suggested, reflected the decades of public debate and tension surrounding the new buildings. The harmonious relationship between Nash's buildings mirrored the tranquil relationship between architect and city dweller. Instead of struggling to reach stylistic compromises between shopkeepers and politicians,

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[50] C. H. Reilly, "Regent-street and Modern Architecture," 17 September 1926, *Builder* Vol. 131, no. 4363, 441.

Regency architects relied on their talent as designers to create an aesthetically pleasing space. The street, according to Reilly, had been "in every sense of the term, Metropolitan." He claimed: "No other capital in Europe had anything like it."[51] Reilly looked at the old street as an example of design continuity, and acknowledged Sir Reginald Blomfield's refusal to continue Sir Norman Shaw's controversial design for the Piccadilly Hotel along the remainder of the Quadrant. He noted that Blomfield had "wisely done nothing to break it [the street's curve]."[52] Reilly did not compliment Blomfield for his innovative design; instead, he thanked the Royal Architect for doing "nothing" and thus preserving some of the street's original identity. Modern conceptions of mass consumption dissipated Nash's vision of creating a space of luxury and elite commerce in the twentieth century. His architecture created a complete metropolitan space, as Reilly noted, and consequently set London apart from other European metropolises. The new Regent Street mourned the loss of this distinction. Now, the street catered to the individual whims of shopkeepers instead of seeking aesthetic unity within the built environment. His comparison between the new and old Regent Streets conjured images of good and evil. The grey Portland stone of the new design would turn black from the lack of sunlight behind overly tall rooflines, and would cast ominous shadows over shoppers as they traversed the pavement. In contrast, the bright white stucco of Nash's design exuded a sense of perpetual springtime, fueling visitors with an energy befitting of the diverting West End. Reilly's commentary also illustrated a wider wistfulness of other architects and shopkeepers. Reilly not only disliked the somber aura

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51 C. H. Reilly, "Regent-street and Modern Architecture," 17 September 1926, *Builder* Vol. 131, no. 4363, 441.

52 C. H. Reilly, "Regent-street and Modern Architecture," 17 September 1926, *Builder* Vol. 131, no. 4363, 441.

of the new Regent Street, but also mourned the loss of a London whose status as a global power did not rely on imposing imperial architecture.

Another article published in the *Builder* on 14 January 1927 echoed Reilly's sentiments. Writer V.M. Christy commented on Regent Street's inharmonious architectural tone: "As a street with a definite unity, a character of its own, it died during the last few years… It is a union, not a unity; an aggregation of sumptuous and cleverly designed buildings, rather than an apparently natural society of mutually interested units actuated by a single aim." In the same manner of Reilly, Christy viewed the street as a fractured image of architecture. Regent Street abounded with potential, and yet the political struggle behind the final design left its aesthetic beauty muted and diminished. The image of "an aggregation of buildings" underlined the discord between shopkeepers, politicians and architects.

Both Reilly and Christy denounced the Crown's dismissal of John Nash's original design in favor of one that symbolically promoted the Empire. Christy carried this disunity further, stating: "One of the first impressions created by the street architecture of this almost totally new street is that the parts make the whole, rather than that the whole is compounded of contributory lesser parts."[53] The lack of agreement from architects regarding Sir Reginald Blomfield's design further subtracted from the street's undeniable potential. Regent Street's "wholeness," as noted by architect William Pite in 1912 fragmented under these variables. Regent Street moved from an impressive display of architectural might into "an essay on the magnification of the unimportant." Its demotion to something "unimportant" suggested not only the futility of the argument between

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[53] V.M. Christy, "Regent-street," January 14, 1927, *Builder*, Vol. 132, no. 4380, 51.

architects and shopkeepers, but also the misplaced efforts of the Crown in endeavoring to superimpose an imperial statement on an existing urban definition. No longer did Regent Street stand for a united upper class, a separate entity of elite enjoyment. Foreign influence and a rapidly changing global commercial scene forced Regent Street to adapt and accept London's new economic and social realities. Christy's preoccupations with the street's redesign reflected his larger preoccupations with state of British society as a whole.

These two commentators embodied the overall sentiment of frustration that permeated the ultimate design and presentation of Regent Street. Their displeasure with both the austere architectural style and the persistence of advertisements superimposed on the street acted as a somber conclusion to a thirty-year public debate. At the moment of the royal procession in the summer of 1927, both sides felt defeated. Instead of appearing within a frame of white stucco, advertisements and bright window displays sat in stone casings, surrounded by columns and classical ornament. The Crown's intended vision for Regent Street as a manifestation of imperial strength, security and solidity became muddled and obscured beneath the thriving and ever-changing commercial nature.

Liberty's Tudor shop embodied the refusal of the larger commercial community to comply with the prescribed neoclassical style along Regent Street. Christy commented on its incongruous and striking nature in his editorial. He declared: "unquestionably [it is] one of the most magnificent commercial monuments of London." This magnificence ostensibly represented the store's commercial philosophy as well as its architectural frame of mind. Christy's complimentary tone towards Liberty's contrasted his overall critiques of Regent Street. Mass advertising and department stores, according to Christy,

detracted from the graceful unity of Nash's design. Liberty's Tudor Shop succeeded in salvaging the beauty of the entire street without the addition of "sulky cherubs or misplaced weapons of war" atop its roofline.[54] Excess and style remained mutually incompatible in Christy's eyes. He saw Liberty's, along with others, as a beacon of architectural integrity in a sea of mass consumed columns. Regent Street and more specifically Liberty's Tudor Shop exemplified the inevitability of conflict within urban spaces, as Lefebvre's theory of social space suggested. The construction of Liberty's East India House and Tudor Shop in 1924 punctuated decades of argument and conflict over the fate of Regent Street. The firm's audacity in constructing a building so drastically different and yet so physically close to that of the new Regent Street confirmed Liberty's status as a commercial powerhouse in the West End. The bold move also highlighted the ability of inhabitants of a given space to shape it beyond its creator's original intentions. The superimposition of a new type of imperial identity, radiating from the core of Liberty's Tudor shop defied any preconceived notions of how the metropolis ought to appear to its inhabitants and visitors.

Political and economic realities in twentieth-century Britain paired with its capital city's diverse urban fabric confirmed that empire remained a variable within a complex equation. Those who participated in the debate, either in support or opposition to either Liberty's or Regent Street, highlighted the ability for an urban space to retain multiple definitions with relative ease. While mass consumption flourished in the late nineteenth century and well past World War One, many of London's elite such as the Aesthetes of the 1890s or the Bloomsbury intellectuals of the 1920s pushed back against these

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[54]V.M. Christy, "Regent-street," January 14, 1927, *Builder*, Vol. 132, no. 4380, 51.

widespread notions of commerce to preserve what they saw as the city's true identity. Reilly and Christy's arguments regarding the finished street reflected decades of contention and discord between those who inhabited the street and those who owned it. Regent Street served as a perfect example of Lefebvre's theory on superimposed spaces: those who filled the city shaped it more than those who simply governed it.

Although the space had always existed as a commercial cornerstone, the further discussion of Liberty & Co. will illustrate how commerce and empire could intertwine harmoniously within the space while also faithfully adhering to the original conception of Regent Street as a space of upper-class pleasure and consumption. In the eyes of Liberty's founder Arthur Lasenby Liberty, empire only thrived when British industry also thrived, and those who proved capable of diffusing this message remained the upper echelons of British society. The next chapter of this thesis will examine the more concentrated effects of this lively public discourse on Liberty's in the twentieth century, paying particular attention to its redesign of its premises into two separate buildings, each with a distinct architectural style reflective of the various definitions of architectural integrity on Regent Street.

Chapter Two: Empire and England Meet at Liberty's

Liberty's on Display

Liberty's reputation as a retailer of luxury fabrics instantly arrived to public attention with its opening in 1875. The store came to fruition as a result of Sir Arthur Lasenby Liberty's experience working as an apprentice for Mr. John Weekes on Baker Street, and later for Farmers & Rogers' Great Shawl and Cloak Emporium at numbers 171, 173 and 175 on Regent Street between 1862 and 1874. After being profoundly intrigued by the International Exhibition of 1862, Lasenby Liberty founded an Oriental Warehouse in 1864 directly adjacent to Farmers & Rogers, of which he took the foremost responsibility.[55] His interest in "Oriental" goods anticipated the widespread frenzy for such items in the late nineteenth century—a frenzy that simultaneously reflected an uptick in imperial imagery and interest in the mass market and the Aesthetics movement of the late-Victorian period. In 1875, with a loan from his father-in-law, tailor Henry Blackmore; Lasenby opened his own premises at number 218 Regent Street.[56] The store expanded upon the established pool of clients from his time at the Oriental Warehouse of Farmers & Rogers, and consequently gained enough profit in the coming years to expand along Regent Street and create a larger space in which to present his carefully chosen goods. The store instantly became popular among the artists and elites associated with the Aesthetics movement and Liberty's reputation circulated at first not through advertisements but by word of mouth. The Aesthetes concerned themselves with the

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55 Lara Kriegel, *Grand Designs* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.), 181.
56 Alison Adburgham, *Liberty's: A Biography of a Shop*, (London: Causton and Sons, Ltd., 1975), 9-21.

redefinition of art as an outlet for sensuous pleasure rather than moral instruction[57]. Liberty's, with its sumptuous fabrics inspired by Chinese and Japanese prints, catered to these pleasure-seeking individuals while also cementing their wider reputation as a store with finesse and a conscientious attitude regarding the latest trends.

In a review of the shop in the periodical *The Architect*, Edward W. Godwin, an architect and promoter of the Aesthetics movement described the shop as "from front to back and top to bottom literally crammed with objects of oriental manufacture."[58] The review also complimented Liberty for stocking a wide variety of interesting antiques and carpets, which suggested that although its size remained limited, the potential of the new Regent Street shop was impossible to ignore.

Figure 6: Sir Arthur Lasenby Liberty, named High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire, 1899. Alison Adburgham, *Liberty's: A Biography of a Shop*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1975.

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57 Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and their Possessions*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 63-77.

58 Quoting E.W. Godwin in Adburgham, *Biography of a Shop*, 21.

Arthur Liberty's reputation as an innovative retailer knew no bounds (Figure 6). Theatre productions in the West End utilized his fabrics for their costume design, particularly those plays that took place in Japanese or Chinese settings. Oscar Wilde became undoubtedly one of the store's most significant patrons. His widespread popularity and use of "art silks," synonymous with Liberty silks, in his theatrical productions in the 1880s garnered a significant amount of publicity for Liberty's. The insertion of Liberty fabrics into a new and increasingly popular form of entertainment provided the store with a wider range of customers; theatregoers could continue their dramatic experience in Liberty's and potentially obtain items that the larger swaths of society could not afford.[59]

Arthur Liberty made the acquisition of unique and exotic goods his personal mission throughout his years as owner and head of the firm. He and his department buyers traveled throughout Persia, China and North Africa to obtain "ancient embroideries of wonderful colourings" and "thousands of rare and ancient curios…from all corners of the Moslem world."[60] In 1884, Liberty and E.W. Godwin established a costume department. Doing so ensured that the firm would have control over not only the sale of the fabrics themselves but also the way in which they appeared publicly on the human form.

While the store provided a variety of "Oriental" fabrics, shifts in public taste prompted Liberty's to import raw silks and other materials from Japan, China and India, and then utilize British manufactures to create a product more suited to the more subdued

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[59] Adburgham, *Biography*, 30-31.
[60] Adburgham, *Biography of a Shop*, 93.

English fashion.[61] This tactical shift confirmed Liberty's desire to attach itself to the domestic British economy in as many ways as possible. The popularity of Eastern goods aside, Liberty and his buyers recognized the importance of selling their goods under the auspices of British fashion trends, which often times opted for shades more subdued than Eastern styles. The creation of a newer, softer "Umritza cashmere" by the firm in 1879 prompted further expansion into the retail of various fabrics in the 1880s and 1890s. Umritza cashmere, for example, served as the catalyst for the widespread popularity of Liberty fabrics in the late nineteenth century. Reviews of the new fabric described it as being the perfect combination of East and West, possessing "all the best qualities of the Indian make, combined with the durability and closeness of English manufactures."[62]

The effort expended by Mr. Liberty and his buyers to obtain the finest fabrics from various corners of the empire reflected the store's larger commercial goals. Although the store's fabrics faithfully echoed Japanese, Chinese and Indian patterns and styles, the emphasis placed on the store's participation in the British economy transformed these fabrics into a distinct part of British consumption. Shoppers therefore felt their contribution to the domestic economy when purchasing from Liberty's. The store succeeded in domesticating exotic fashions, allowing consumers to feel simultaneously part of London's high society and a wider global community of fashionable individuals.

The "cheapness" commonly associated with imperial products and mass consumption in London represented exactly what Liberty's sought to avoid in selling to

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61 Adburgham, *Biography*, 31. Sarah Nichols, "Arthur Lasenby Liberty: A Mere Adjective?" in *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, Vol. 13, 1989, 75.
62 Adburgham, *Biography*, 32.

his store's discerning and elite clientele. The strength of imperial sentiment and propaganda within the consumer culture of the late nineteenth century had little impact on Liberty's public image. Though the store represented a meeting of East and West, the presentation of its fabrics and merchandise disassociated it from any larger political message. Instead, Liberty's focused on the quality of the goods and their appropriateness for upper class British individuals and their homes. Mr. Liberty's interest in Eastern goods stemmed not from feelings of obligation towards the British Crown or the Empire but from a desire to reestablish connections with the island nation's early modern commercial roots, both domestic and overseas.

In 1902, Liberty's presented its silk wares in the British Silk Exhibition. Public opinions on the Exhibition as a whole noted the importance of reincorporating silk production into the spectra of British manufacturing, citing it as a matter of national importance. Liberty's presentations of silks, according to numerous publications, best represented the quality of British silk manufacturing. As the *Daily Telegraph* noted:

> No better proof of the beauty and quality of silks of English manufacturers could possibly be afforded than in the charming exhibition…the display is due to the energy and enterprise of Messrs. Liberty…at this exhibition ladies can see for themselves that in design, texture, colourings and adaptability they can demand nothing better.[63]

The article instructed ladies visiting the silk exhibition to look no further than Liberty's in their search for fine textiles. By selling silk, Liberty's immediately honed in on a particular consumer demographic: wealthy women both in Britain and abroad. They did not need to plaster newspapers with bright advertisements; indeed, the newspapers reported on the quality of Liberty fabrics with equaled enthusiasm. Liberty's became a paragon of design and style, and the straightforward tone of the article emphasized the

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[63] "British Silk Exhibition" in *The Daily Telegraph*, 10 February 1902, 788/40/3, City of Westminster Archives Centre, 9.

ease with which the fabrics themselves impressed their quality and value upon consumers.

An article in the *Standard* echoed the sentiments of the *Daily Telegraph*, stating, "In furtherance of the British silk industry, Messrs. Liberty, the recognized leaders of that important enterprise, have organized a fresh exhibition…entirely from [Liberty's] own stocks."[64] Liberty products presented in a wider commercial setting outshone competitors according to these journalists. The *Standard* acknowledged Liberty's preeminence in London's commercial environment, as well as its crucial role in the protection and promotion of British industry. Though silk had traditionally been seen as a product of China, Liberty's had succeeded in appropriating the material and other foreign goods and transforming them into products of national and royal pride. An additional article in *Lady's Pictorial* magazine declared: "To see these lovely Liberty-fabrics is to be filled with a keen desire to offer a loyal obedience to a Royal command, and to become positively eager to forward home industries."[65] This article, clearly directed towards upper- and middle-class female readers, placed ideas of monarchical importance in the aesthetic beauty of Liberty's fabrics. The writer suggests that through the consumption of these silks one can feel directly involved in the economic workings of ones own country. Naturally, Liberty's "British-made" silks sold at a higher price due to the careful attention paid to the dying of the silks by local manufactures, but their quality and symbolic importance propelled upper-class consumers to purchase them through a sense of national duty. Ladies who lived comfortably without feeling compelled to work could purchase

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64 "British Silk Exhibition" in *The Standard*, 8 February 1902, 788/40/3, City of Westminster Archives Centre, 8.

65 *Ladies' Pictorial*, February 15, 1902, 788/40/3, City of Westminster Archives Centre, 15.

these silks and other Liberty textiles and feel that they too had made a contribution to the betterment of the economy and the British nation as a whole.

In the years following World War One, Liberty's customer base shifted with the arrival of new social elites in the commercial scene. Businessmen who had profited from the war now looked to the finest London retailers to furnish their homes. These men, while not possessing hereditary titles, lived as lavishly as had landed aristocrats before the war. Liberty's thus profited from the revived interest in their home furnishings amongst this new elite. While Liberty's had prided themselves in the exclusivity of their shop, these new men could afford the "Liberty Lifestyle" and thus would not be turned away by class prejudices. While many aspects of the British social hierarchy remained intact following the War, these new moneyed elites used their purchasing power to improve their chances of entering the upper echelons of British nobility and high society. History may not have granted these men titles, but their success in business granted them and their wives access to the same retail spaces and fashionable products.

The "traditional surroundings" of Liberty's shops, organized in a "Chester row" along Regent Street emitted a sense of comfort and homey appeal, making purchasing from Liberty's all the more alluring. Catalogues from the post-war years displayed available furniture in rooms in the "William and Mary Style," with others displaying items such as a "James II settee."[66] Liberty's own design aesthetic coupled harmoniously with the emerging trends of the new British elite. The style of furniture revived the memory of historical figures from sixteenth and seventeenth century England, allowing those "new money" elites to connect themselves, at least symbolically, to Britain's

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66 "Tamworth Suite in Solid Oak" in Liberty Specimen Furnished Rooms, c. 1900, 788/106/9, City of Westminster Archives Centre. Adburgham, *Biography*, 104; Cohen, *Household Gods,* 68-9.

aristocratic and royal history. The shop itself remained the only place from which to purchase these pieces. The craftsmanship of the beds, chairs and armoires, as well as the overall layout of the store itself, which will be discussed in detail in the following section, propelled Liberty's as the forerunner of furniture design and retail in London.

Furniture played a symbolic role in Arthur Liberty's and later his nephew, Ivor Stewart-Liberty's business models. The permanence of these objects reflected the store's mission to provide lasting, "ageless," and often times "historic" designs. Purchasers of these Liberty pieces often times involved themselves in a rapidly globalizing economic world, but by choosing Liberty's as their primary source of interior decoration they made a clear statement as to the strength of a revived British identity within the country itself.

While Liberty's presented itself as a protector of domestic industry, interwar commerce still regarded imperial holdings as being part of the British economy, and therefore a facet of Liberty's diverse and exclusive products. Precious stones found in colonial holdings, for example, existed within the realm of both British and imperial consumption. In 1923, an engineer working in a jade mine in Tawmaw, Burma approached Liberty & Co. with a piece of jade "the size of a football." Liberty's marketing team presented themselves on the forefront of London's jewelry design, stating: "When few other London firms handled it [jade] at all, [Liberty's] collected jade amulets and beads of rare colouring and carving from remote localities."[67] The press release couched the fervor with which they pursued these new resources in an urban context, one of intra-commercial competition, rather than one of imperial expansion and promotion. Furthermore, as historian Alison Adburgham notes, the acquisition of the

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67 "Four Photographs of Chinese Jewelry Workers," 1920-25, 788/65 (b & c), City of Westminster Archives Centre.

Burmese jade mine served as a romanticized revival of the merchant adventurer spirit, in which commercial ventures created an empire based on cultural and economic exchange not solely political control.[68] Similarly to their new premises on Regent Street, the jade mine confirmed Liberty's symbolic push to redefine how empire arrived into British society and culture. Liberty's used empire in a way that sustained their connections to upper-class clientele and luxury goods, as is made obvious in their procurement of a jade mine rather than the exploitation of cheap Indian labor to create affordable, imperial goods.

Liberty & Co. consistently looked to distance itself from other London department stores throughout the early twentieth century. The store recognized its protagonist role on the commercial stage, but through its exhibitions and architectural design, Liberty's aimed to repackage mass commercialism in a unique and artistic presentation. In June 1926 Liberty's Lace Exhibition took place in the new shop and public commentary spread throughout numerous British periodicals. Lace, long considered a British trade in need of revival, imbued Liberty's with a sense of national duty in reclaiming traditional markets. The positive reception of the exhibition in the British media also underscored Liberty's importance within the scope of Regent Street's commercial power. An article in *The Sketch* on 2 June 1926 noted that at Liberty's: "Exquisite pieces of every kind are included, some of royal interest, and with keen romantic histories, taken from old collections."[69] The royal interest referred to a veil on display worn by the French Empress Eugenie on her wedding day. Liberty's possession

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[68] Adburgham, *Biography*, 103.

[69] "Liberty's Lace Exhibition," in *The Sketch*, 2 June 1926, 788/41/3, City of Westminster Archives Centre.

of the veil further connected the store with elite and royal interpretations of commerce, rather than a spectacle geared towards the masses. Empress Eugenie would have been widely familiar for Liberty's clientele and the exhibition of her wedding veil in the store would have generated considerable public interest. By combining foreign elites, British upper-class customers and British lace, Liberty's transformed into a space in which Britain remained in control, even while the realities of an economic recession existed beyond the shop's walls.

Advertisements for seasonal fashions also geared themselves towards upper- and middle-class purchasers, as seen in ads throughout the late-Victorian and Edwardian period. In an advertisement from 3 August 1878, the *Medical Examiner* supposedly promoted Liberty's bathing costumes by exclaiming "we can imagine nothing more delightful on a hot summer day than a complete outfit of Oriental Silk."[70] The ad included an image of elegantly clad upper class ladies lounging by the seaside on an idyllic summer holiday. Appearing in *The Queen*, a ladies magazine widely read by upper- and middle-class women, this advertisement placed Liberty's directly in the center of their target demographic, as only women of elevated status could afford a "complete outfit of Oriental Silk." Through the placement of these foreign silks in a clearly British landscape, the advertisement converted widely diffused images of the "Orient," into appropriate clothing choices for the selective upper-class woman. Even in the late-nineteenth century, at the zenith of imperial interest, Liberty's appropriated the mass consumed "Oriental" fashion trends. The store instead focused on the quality of their own

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[70] Advertisement in *The Queen*, 3 August 1878, 788/106/6 (a), City of Westminster Archives Centre.

fabrics, hybridizing the imperial commercial experience with the luxurious domestic lifestyles of Britain's upper classes.

Figure 7: Liberty & Co. Advertisement in *The Lady's World* magazine, 1887.
Courtesy of City of Westminster Archives Centre.

Images from *The Lady's World* periodical in the 1880s presented Liberty silks and laces on women standing in luxuriously furnished rooms (Figure 7).[71] Even in these early moments of the shop's existence it remained clear that the shop aimed to repackage mass consumption in boutique form by directly targeting the upper-class consumer, one who could afford to purchase dressed draped especially for them. The presentation of the models in an opulent sitting room also suggested Liberty's connection to high society as a whole. The shop itself could serve as a place of dignified social interaction rather than simply existing to entice customers with low prices and flashy banner advertisements.

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[71] *Ladies World Periodical*, 1880s, 788/73 (1-5), City of Westminster Archives Centre.

A later advertisement from 1911 continued to promote Liberty's as a site of elite consumption in the same manner, citing fabrics with "designs and colourings unobtainable elsewhere."[72] The catalogues' use of adjectives such as "grace, richness and durability" further portrayed Liberty's as a shop consumers could depend on for quality fabrics, fabrics worth their elevated prices. Their newspaper advertising silence in periodicals such as the *Illustrated London News* spoke louder than those who plastered its pages with special offerings and seasonal deals.[73] The image that Liberty's diffused throughout the public eschewed various existing ideas of consumption in Edwardian London. Liberty's advertising campaigns remained unapologetic in their choice of demographic. The allegiance to the lifestyles of the upper classes in the metropolis reflected the urban context in which the store itself existed.

Advertisements from the 1920s reflected the larger shifts in British society, with regard to fashion as well as gender. Following the enfranchisement of women in 1918 and the rise of the new "flapper," feminine fashion tastes shifted from what had prevailed in the decades preceding the war. Young women who came of age between 1914 and 1918 now looked to live a freer lifestyle, one with shorter dresses and longer parties. Liberty's fully recognized the existence of mass commercialism in the 1920s, but looked to reimagine the familiar fashion tropes in other Regent Street and Oxford Street stores. In a dress catalogue from 1924 a woman in a draped Grecian style gown represented a

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72 "Liberty fabrics for Dresses and Upholstery, Autumn and Winter Fashions," 1911, 788/42/1, City of Westminster Archives Centre.

73 The UC Santa Barbara Library's Special Collections contains several editions of the *Illustrated London News* from its inception in 1848 until 1888. While newspaper advertising for commercial ventures did not take off until the 1880s, it is significant that, while his competitors filled the pages with flashy advertisements and announcements of sales, no mention existed of Liberty & Co. either in image or type advertising.

more conservative image of the flapper fashion (Figure 8).[74] Their focus on retaining a graceful and "timeless" style within a constantly changing consumer culture separated Liberty's from its competitors. The 1920s represented a departure from previous fashion styles, but Liberty's carefully crafted and packaged an entire lifestyle, directed towards a primarily aristocratic clientele. Liberty's customer had been known since the 1880s to rely more on the quality and luxuriousness of the fabrics rather than the idea of being "up-to-date." Liberty's actual clientele still proved to be largely middle-class women but by presenting their fashions under the aura of an intended aristocratic audience, the store in many ways offered these women a chance to at the very least dress as if they were part of the peerage.

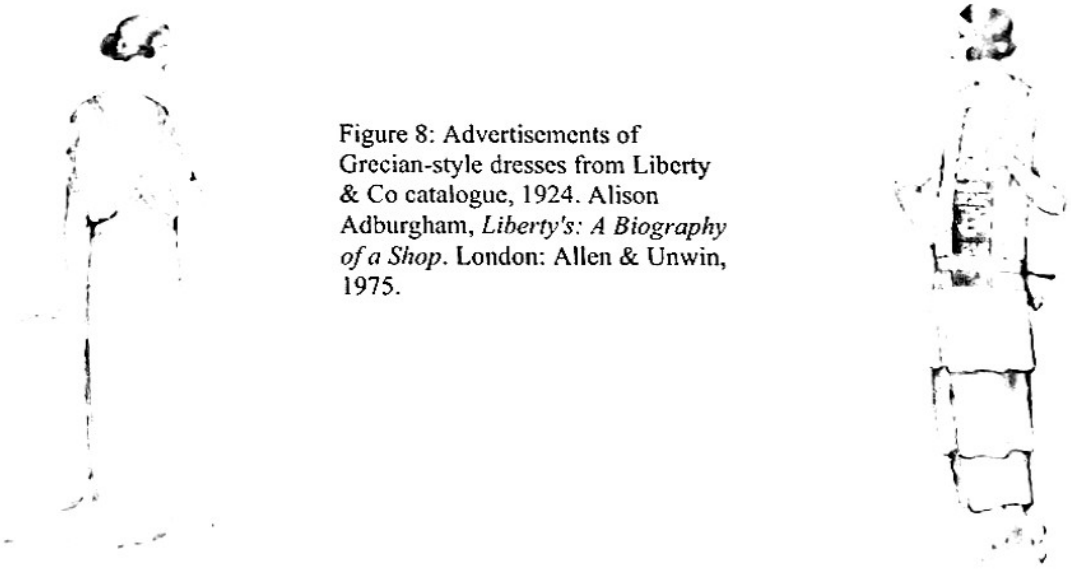

Figure 8: Advertisements of Grecian-style dresses from Liberty & Co catalogue, 1924. Alison Adburgham, *Liberty's: A Biography of a Shop*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1975.

Liberty & Co. remained untouched in the realm of furniture, and their adherence to the nostalgia of bygone centuries cemented their position as a retailer of integrity and

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[74] *Ladies World Periodical*, 788/73 (1-5), City of Westminster Archives Centre; Adburgham, *Biography of a Shop*, 106.

genuine quality. Decisions made by the firm with regard to pricing also reflected the store's commitment to luxury retail. Liberty's remained a space in which shoppers, male or female, could make purchases deliberately and in a manner that recalled shopping habits of the first half of the nineteenth century. Instead of being bombarded with sales and up-to-the-minute trends, Liberty's customers perused the shop's contents thoughtfully. By encouraging this practice, Liberty's maintained a strong connection to its Aesthetes roots and its founders belief that "beautiful things" would transform consumers in a mass market into "artistic patrons."[75] This insistence on tradition permeated every aspect of Liberty's business, including their final building design and the decisions made within the context of the Regent Street redesign.

Selling the "Wonder Shop of the World"

As discussed previously, London in the interwar years witnessed extensive shifts in gender and class dynamics. These shifts, while largely radiating from a commercial core, also came from the severe psychological shock of the First World War. After the war tangible technological developments lessened the gap between the upper, middle and working classes. Improvements to the metropolitan underground, which brought middle-class shoppers from more distant suburban boroughs in less time, fueled the expansion of a new, suburban, consuming public in twentieth century London. Additionally, the arrival of American tourists into commercial centers shifted the way in which middle-class Londoners experienced the city center.[76] American cities such as Chicago and New York

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[75] Quoting A.L Liberty in Ashmore, "Liberty and Lifestyle," 79. See also Cohen, *Household Gods*, 65.
[76] Rappaport, *Shopping*, 149.

rose rapidly—literally and figuratively—in the inter-war years. Increased foreign investment in London—in particular American capital—altered the consumer dynamic of stores such as Liberty's from the English aristocracy to foreign elites and wealthy businessmen and tourists.

Despite this alteration of London's consumer society, the store did not "stoop" to the level of general consumption and massive advertising campaigns. Liberty's Tudor Shop became a symbol of a real "English" experience for wealthy tourists, rather than a potentially confusing and overwhelming visit to a store such as Selfridges. Both the Tudor Shop and East India House opened in the same year, 1924. The distinctive style of the new Tudor shop, fifty yards from Regent Street on Great Marlborough Street, garnered the firm far more media attention than its equally striking frontispiece, the East India House, located directly on Regent Street. In a review of the grand opening on 9 May 1924, the *Builder* commented on the ongoing struggle between political aspirations for the street and Liberty's staunch refusal to play by the rules:

> Messrs. Liberty rejected the scheme of having on this site a Renaissance [Tudor] building which might be linked in design with their new East India House in Regent-street, and decided to erect their present black and white building. With a view to maintaining the domestic scale, the motive of design has rather been a series of shops—a Chester 'row'—than a single great pile. The examples of the craftsmen's works with which Messrs. Liberty concern themselves will be shown in rooms of a height and kind that people love to live in, where the wares can be judged by a true scale of domestic surroundings and not dwarfed or given fallacious qualities as in the vast emporia with stories 20 ft. high or more.[77]

This article confirmed Liberty's aspirations of being a model home for well-to-do shoppers. The writer complimented the "authenticity" of the building, and while not concerning himself with the symbolic nature of the neo-Tudor style, he underscored the

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[77] "Messrs. Liberty & Co.'s New Premises, Argyll-Place, W." May 9, 1924. *Builder*, Vol. 126, no. 4240, 755.

crucial role of Liberty's in the business of home design. Their dedication to the presentation of their goods ensured that pieces available for purchase could be seen in an environment that echoed that of the elite customers' homes. Liberty's goods remained out of the price range of many middle-class Britons, particularly after the economic downturn of the early 1920s. Nevertheless, the sense of comfort and luxury throughout the Tudor shop, as opposed to the "great pile" of department stores dotting the West End, served as a welcome haven for those shoppers looking to pass the afternoon pleasantly on Regent Street. Liberty's, deeply concerned with the prosperity of its shop, sought to secure its place in a competitive London environment. The Neo-Tudor building remained unequivocally English and consequently virtuous amidst the quickly globalizing commercial setting.

The writer poorly veiled his disdain for London's mass consumer culture. The exaggeration of the size of "vast emporiums," likened them to the new structural phenomena in the 1920s in the United States, the skyscraper. With the invasion of commercial images on the historic skyline and the excess of consumption demonstrated in department stores, Liberty's stood as a testament to the integrity of other buildings in London, in contrast to those built in the colossal neoclassical style. The spectacles presented to shoppers in the expansive "emporia," exhibited at stores such as Selfridges, contradicted the context of their intended environment (Figure 9). Liberty's, on the other hand, offered shoppers the opportunity to imagine their own home within the store and thus be more inclined to spend their money as they wandered through the space.

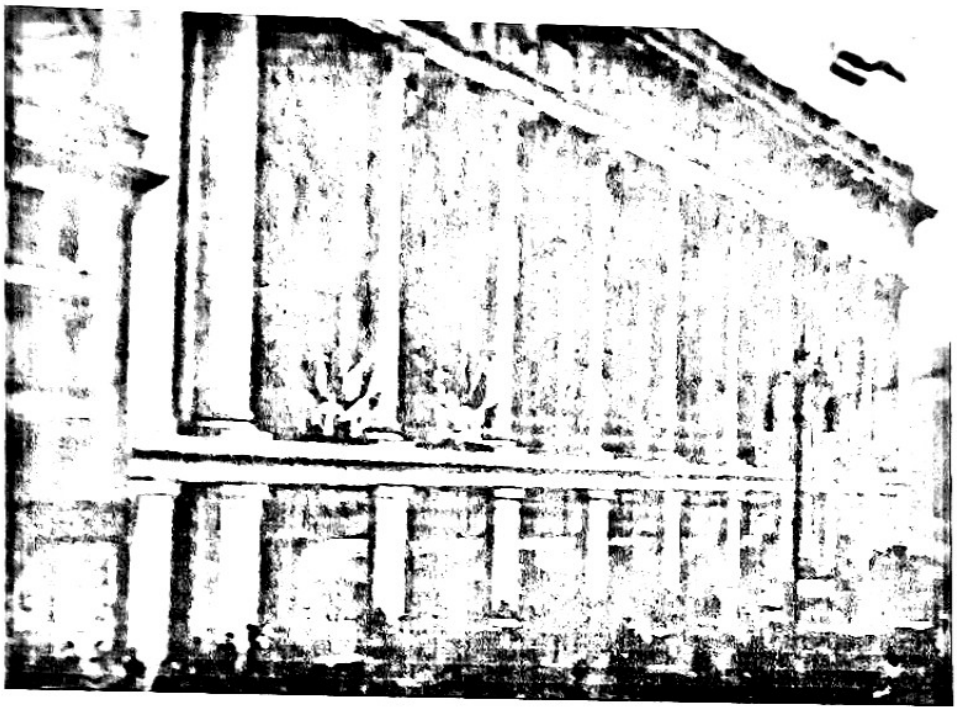

Figure 9: Photograph of Selfridge's Opening Day, March 15, 1909. Erika Rappaport. *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

In keeping with the praise of Liberty's from independent commentators, E. Beresford Chancellor's pamphlet *Liberty & Regent Street* (1924) noted that "the most beautiful and original [building] is that which Messrs. Liberty have, in pursuance of the scheme to keep Regent Street true to the Renaissance style, masked their amazingly clever copy of the Elizabethan manner." The pamphlet, though published by Liberty's in order to market the two new premises, did not stand alone in its complimentary tone towards the store. Clearly, the neo-Tudor design, which Chancellor and others referred to as the "Renaissance style," impressed him more than the Crown-mandated Neoclassicist design. However, Liberty's East India House proved an exception to this rule as his discussion of the store progressed (Figure 10). Atop the building, which occupied a central position on Regent Street itself, stood a decidedly imperial frieze: Britannia in the center, surrounded by her doting colonial subjects (Figure 11). These subjects represented

the synthesis of empire and artistic commerce that Liberty's own business sought to capture. Although the depictions of African girls carrying palm fronds and sailors bringing urns of spices to Britannia conveyed the imperial message of the Crown, the focus remained on economic activity rather than mere political subjugation. The addition of Chinese sailors in the frieze also emphasized Liberty's commitment to "Oriental" goods not directly associated with the geopolitical boundaries of the British Empire (Figure 12). While imperial in nature, the frieze subtly yet defiantly focused on the commercial identity of its location. The lower façade successfully combined the demands of the Crown and the public, providing ample viewing space of shops' wears, while also maintaining an imperial sense of control with the uniform Portland stone columns. Chancellor described the façade as the ideal combination of political motivations of empire and its economic roots:

> It represents the wealth of the East and West being borne by ship, camel, elephant, etc., to Great Britain, which is typified by a central statue of Britannia...watching the mercantile pageant below, [and breaks] the skyline in a most arresting way.[78]

Regent Street, at the surface level, remained under royal control, but in reality the shopkeepers, in particular the more prosperous, controlled the 'how' of empire rather than the 'what.'[79]

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78 Chancellor, *Liberty & Regent Street*, 4-16.

79 Rappaport, "Art, Commerce, or Empire?" 100.

Figure 10: Liberty's East India House on Regent Street today. Construction ended on the East India House and the Tudor Shop in 1924. http://ornamentalpassions.blogspot.com/2010/05/liberty-co-regent-street-w1.html

Figure 11: Detail of the East India House frieze with Britannia (center) surrounded by imperial subjects. http://ornamentalpassions.blogspot.com/2010/05/liberty-co-regent-street-w1.html

Figure 12: Detail of Chinese sailors carrying Liberty's silks and antiques from the East. http://ornamentalpassions.blogspot.com/2010/05/liberty-co-regent-street-w1.html

Liberty's Tudor Shop on Great Marlborough Street sat immediately outside of the physical boundaries of the redesign. The new building defied all rules of Royal architectural intention. Placed immediately behind the East India House, the Tudor building remained plainly visible to visitors of Regent Street. Acting as a tantalizing reminder to the Crown of the limit of their control over the commercial and architectural nature of the street, the new shop redefined the commercial understanding of empire under black and white gables reminiscent of Tudor London (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Liberty's Tudor Shop today—the façade remains identical to its completion in 1924. Situated directly behind the East India House alongside Regent Street, the Tudor shop would have been fully visible from Regent Street. This was intentional, as the Tudor Shop sought to fully reject and redefine the architectural environment of the new street.
Image courtesy of the *Telegraph* (telegraph.co.uk)

In a promotional pamphlet that would have certainly be sold at both Liberty premises, Arthur Lasenby Liberty's nephew and successor Ivor Stewart-Liberty critiqued

the Crown's vision of a Neoclassical and "imperial" architectural homogenization of Regent Street. He proclaimed it "not sufficiently distinctive to house the particular trade of 'Liberty's'," whereas the Great Marlborough Street location "strove to introduce a Tudor feeling which gave to Liberty's old and rather inconvenient premises a curious charm and an atmosphere of a home."[80] Stewart-Liberty became the heir to the commercial enterprise in 1913, and his uncle had insisted that he hyphenate his surname with Liberty before assuming his role as head of the company. Familial continuity within the Liberty leadership therefore strengthened their image of intimacy against a rising tide of mass consumption.

The distinction of Liberty's as a homey and welcoming space for the well to do directly responded to not only the redesign but also to the transformation of imperial goods as objects of indiscriminate mass consumption. Although many of Liberty's retailed goods came from the geographic boundaries of the Empire, the manner in which they presented these goods denoted the "curious charm" in a homey atmosphere, rather than an imperial relationship between store and product.[81] Liberty's "Tudor Shop" pamphlet went as far as to distinguish itself from competing stores whose layouts serve to overwhelm the customer rather than to invite enjoyable consumption. The design of Liberty's also invited a particular type of customer; one who was discerning in their taste in fabrics and styles. The ease of the Liberty shopping experience allowed goods to be "judged on their true merits" rather than purchased due to the sheer spectacle and intensity of the displays.[82]

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[80] Ivor Stewart-Liberty, *Liberty's Tudor Shop: Great Marlborough Street* (London: Liberty & Co. 1924), 4

[81] Stewart-Liberty, *Liberty's Tudor Shop*, 3.

[82] Stewart-Liberty, *Liberty's Tudor Shop*, 4.

Stewart-Liberty celebrated the choice of style as representing "the most genuinely English period of domestic architecture," and linked Liberty to the "by-gone days when…the merchant adventurers displayed, in the beautiful gabled buildings of old London, the productions of their handicrafts and the treasures for which they sailed so far and endured so much."[83] This connection to Elizabethan London was unmistakable. In Stewart-Liberty's eyes, the store's imperial relationship derived from the British East India Company's initial voyages eastward in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In an impressive display of wealth and authenticity, Liberty's used the timbers of three Men-of-War ships—the HMS Hindustan, "The Britannia," and the HMS Impregnable—to construct the Tudor shop. By publicizing this fact, Liberty's made a clear point to associate itself with the country's maritime history, rather than the more modern and industrialized images of empire.[84]

Liberty's Tudor Shop, therefore, looked to revive England's mercantilist history, rather than perpetuate contemporary imperialism. This revival continued through the interior space, where "there is no repetition of the same ornament; there is ever the freshness of new discovery." By using British craftsmen who created unique woodcarvings and paid painstaking attention to every detail, the shop achieved "'something' which…is impossible to get from men who are obliged to do their work in the efficient, but soulless, factory of our time." Stewart-Liberty emphasized his shop's commitment to promoting "human" British industry and connected the store's interior design with the promise of a personalized shopping experience. Everything within and ornamenting the shop was "made in the true old traditional way" and with English

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83 Stewart-Liberty, *Liberty's Tudor Shop*, 6.
84 Stewart-Liberty, *Liberty's Tudor Shop*, 11.

materials, which created an unusual juxtaposition between the largely east and South Asian products sold in the store and the spaces that housed them.[85]

Stewart-Liberty wrote this pamphlet with a distinct audience in mind. He stressed the exotic luxury associated with his profoundly English store, and paid less attention to the political motivations associated with the products' origins. As historian Erika Rappaport has noted, stores that had traditionally sold to an aristocratic and upper-middle-class market advertised sparsely, and focused on the quality of their products over the allure of enticing, exotic images.[86] Stewart-Liberty had a full understanding of his clientele and the cultural circles that they moved through and aimed to provide, as Sarah Cheang notes, "authentic taste and culture whilst offering a safe, feminine…environment."[87] Taste, culture and quality therefore ensured Liberty's particular place of primacy in the commercial world.

Luxury, Stewart-Liberty's pamphlet suggests, was an idea that rose above simple definitions of empire and commercial ventures. In the 1920s, empire, propelled with mass-consumed imperial marketing campaigns, sat in the hands of the middle and working classes. Elite consumption, as viewed by Stewart-Liberty, relied more on the integrity of the products and the aesthetic beauty of the retail space than the imbuing of products with a charged imperial message. As a result, Liberty's Tudor Shop distanced itself from mass-produced advertisements plastered on public transport and billboards throughout the metropolis and instead remained true to its elitist definition of commerce. Selectivity and attention to detail overpowered ideas of national unity and jingoistic

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[85] Stewart-Liberty, *Liberty's Tudor Shop*, 14.
[86] Rappaport, *Shopping*,151.
[87] Sarah Cheang, "Selling China: Class, Gender and Orientalism at the Department Store," *Journal of Design History* 20, no.1, 2007, 2.

enthusiasm.[88] The Tudor shop embraced the idea that luxury was an English production, and that national pride should derive from domestic history as opposed to expansion into foreign land. Indeed, as early as 1876 the store had cemented its place, as E.W. Godwin noted, as a space where the social elite could see and be seen by their upper-class peers.[89]

Regent Street as an entity maintained the appearance of elite commerce and upper-class enjoyment in the 1920s even as the public debate between shopkeepers and architects charged on. The world's perception of London as a paragon of imperial might, according to critics and politicians, became symbolically dependent on the final outcome of the redesign of Regent Street in the neoclassical style. The street according to shopkeepers, however, relied heavily on the architectural virtue of Liberty's new Tudor shop, and the street's commercial future became dependent on the perpetuation of commerce-minded design.

Although the media praised both of Liberty's new buildings, Liberty's East India House premise was not mentioned in Stewart-Liberty's pamphlet. This suggests that Liberty & Co. felt that compliance with the Crown's architectural desires wouldn't interfere with the strength of their business as a whole. Additionally, by using the same architect—Edwin Thomas Hall—for both the Tudor shop and the East India House, rather than the Crown-appointed Reginald Blomfield, Liberty's succeeded in flouting the wishes of the Crown while also remaining within the relative boundaries of the prescribed Roman style. Chancellor's extensive praise of the East India House also

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88 Jingoism is a term commonly associated with imperial patriotism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Great Britain. The enthusiasm and fervor of "jingoists" also became associated with the lower classes, which popular politicians such as Benjamin Disraeli made into supporters of imperial ventures.

89 Sarah Nichols, "Arthur Lasenby Liberty: A Mere Adjective?" in *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, Vol. 13, (Summer 1989), 78.

underlined Liberty's penchant for design and aesthetic beauty, regardless of circumstance. Whilst Stewart-Liberty deemed the Tudor Shop a more apt representation of Liberty's design philosophy, it remained clear that the East India House demonstrated a level of national and imperial grandeur and extravagance associated with the store's products. Nevertheless, the East India House was as popular in the media as the Tudor Shop, although for its amalgamation of imperial strength and the solidity of English commerce. In December 1927 and within the context of the unveiling of the new Regent Street, The *Architectural World* published an article specifically lauding Liberty's efforts with the East India House: "In Liberty's…we read a solemnity, and almost bank-like strength and well-being. Here is character unmistakable, the indication of an Empire trade, wide spans suggesting an imperial breadth of commerce, the Royal arms as a discreetly arrogant hallmark of distinction."[90] Liberty's, with its "bank-like" East India House and "traditional" and artistic Tudor shop, had succeeded in hybridizing the various definitions of not only London's diverse commerce but also its architectural identity. The East India House stood completely apart from Blomfield's final design for Regent Street. Their ability to sell the empire while also expressing "a top-hatted and fur-coated wealth…very English and patriotic" version of elite commerce set Liberty's apart from other mass market department stores.[91] In Liberty's, empire and commerce intersected, creating a flurry of exotic and artistic products, which, as a result of their amalgamation, became the marker for how the middle-class consumer experienced Regent Street as a whole.

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[90] Quoting The *Architectural World* in Adburgham, *Biography*, 112.
[91] Quoting The *Architectural World* in Adburgham, *Biography*, 112.

Articles about the opening of Liberty's Tudor shop appeared in every major newspaper in Britain and several newspapers in the United States. On 26 May 1924, Ivor Stewart-Liberty invited editors and reporters to "inspect" the new space and join him for a celebratory luncheon.[92] Responses flooded the Liberty office, and most invitees accepted the invitation and offered kind words of enthusiasm about Stewart-Liberty's venture. One response, from the editor of *The Tatler*, a journal of society and the stage, declared that Liberty's "attractive and wonderful buildings add to the beauty of Regent Street."[93] This in the context of the contentious redesign underlined the role Liberty's played as a purveyor of authentic British architecture, as well as a preserver of historical glory. His inclusion of both the new East India House and the Tudor shop as "wonderful buildings" suggested that the firm's strong architectural presence on the street as a whole reflected its strength as a commercial giant in a sea of competing enterprises. More interesting, however, remained the letters from American editors. One letter from Fairchild Publications dated 22 May 1924 requested invitations to the grand opening and luncheon "in view of the great American interest in the store."[94] Although Liberty's prided itself in its markedly elite and British customer base, the rising influence of Americans within the London commercial scene necessitated a certain degree of inclusion of transatlantic consumers. Fairchild Publications owned publications such as *Women's Weekly*, and therefore responded to the opening of Liberty's in the interests of their female readership. The *Chicago Tribune* and *New York Tribune* sent journalists to

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92 Correspondences to Ivor Stewart-Liberty, May 1924, 788/125 (b), Records of Liberty and Co Ltd on Regent Street, City of Westminster Archives Centre.
93 *Tatler* editor to Stewart-Liberty, 788/125 (b).
94 Fairchild Publications to Stewart-Liberty, 788/125 (b).

report on the opening as well, which further suggested to a certain degree a globalization of urban consumer culture, whether in Britain or the United States.

Many editors sent less senior—often women—journalists, stating prior engagements or travel conflicts. The higher concentration of female reporters underlined new opportunities for women in post-war Britain. Their coverage of Liberty's grand opening reflected latent sexism in the working world. Women journalists, according to their male editors, could only report stories deemed "feminine," such as the opening of a new shop in the West End. The *Illustrated London News (ILN)* also accepted the invitation, but only after first refusing. Consequently, Stewart-Liberty sent a personal letter and entreated that not only a representative attend, but that the editor himself cancel his prior arrangements and clear his schedule.[95] Due to the publication's important role in the British media, Stewart-Liberty's insistence on their presence displayed his desire to have the new shop represented in the paper. The *ILN*'s widespread popularity and use of captivating images in conjunction with text epitomized a new visual culture in twentieth century Britain. Seeking to maintain their connections to elite consumers and avoid the "demoralizing" consequences of mass-consumption, Liberty's continued to rely on word-of-mouth to publicize their products. However, by the twenties, Liberty's status as a powerhouse in London commerce allowed it to seek media exposure through journalism, rather than paying for advertising space. Furthermore, by reaching out to the press personally, Stewart-Liberty ensured the pleasant reception of his new building in all media outlets. His inquiry after the *ILN* editor confirmed his commitment to building

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[95] Editor of *Illustrated London News* to Ivor Stewart-Liberty, May 1924, 788/125 (b), City of Westminster Archives Centre.

rapport with journalists in an age where media attention superseded aristocratic patronage.

These letters and articles spoke to Liberty's popularity, but maintained Liberty's reputation as a retailer of luxury goods and not as a producer of mass consumed items. Press releases from the store itself tied royalty from Europe and the empire to Liberty's products. One press release claimed that the Indian princes of Bikaner, Jodhpur, Rampur, Gwalior and Kashmir "have been attracted by the fame and the irresistible charm of the new buildings and their contents, and have thus paid a tribute of admiration…in 'the wonder shop of the world'—a title which has been graciously given by our American visitors."[96] With the opening of the new East India House and the Tudor shop, Liberty's identified itself as a global store, one under the auspices of a powerful empire but serving only its elite subjects.

Liberty's welcomed anyone who could afford its products, regardless of nationality and skin color. The press release's mention of American visitors further acknowledged the United States as a buying power within London while also commenting on Americans' relative naivety with regards to British history. The Tudor shop remained a novelty for foreigners with its black and white façade and hand-carved oak balustrades, but for aristocratic Britons it was simply a modern manifestation of their rich cultural traditions. *The Architect's Journal* published an article following the shop's grand opening, and proclaimed Liberty's as the genuine heir to British architectural tradition:

> The age of Shakespeare has been termed 'the spacious age'…it was the age of all sorts of great things—galleons, colleges, cathedrals, theatres, timber-framed

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96 Press Release by Liberty and Co, Ltd, May 1924, 788/125 (b), City of Westminster Archives Centre.

> houses, and wooden staircases...We are usually too busy to remember those times: books have to be printed about them, writers and artists have to be very busy with pen and pencil to call them to mind. Not one of us would quarrel with Messrs. Liberty for building a reminder in our London streets...And what a place for a shopman! What a setting for his goods! In what other English building could one see the silks to better advantage or handle the brocades from France and Italy, Japan and Shantung?[97]

Similar praise appeared in numerous publications, but the *Journal*'s comments encompassed Liberty's real aspirations as a purveyor of pre-industrial luxury goods in London commerce. Liberty's, according to the writer, had built a space in which foreign visitors could consume both British history and British products. The interior of the store recalled the "spacious age" of Elizabethan England, when structures such as churches and theatres represented a collective effort of a community, as opposed to contemporary department stores built solely for commercial gain. Tudor buildings represented the integrity of craftsmanship in architecture, and in contrast to its neighbors along Regent Street and Oxford Street, Liberty's Tudor shop sought to recall this honorable station.

The writer also drew upon wider spread nostalgia throughout British society. Within the context of the Regent Street reconstruction and the larger transformations of Central London, the writer complimented Liberty's for placing a "reminder" in the middle of the changing urban environment, allowing for the familiar to stand in contrast to the foreign and for "merchant adventurers" to stand up to empire. The writer's clear definition of Liberty's Tudor shop as an "English building" and Mr. Stewart-Liberty as a "shopman," rather than simply a businessman, confirmed the very image that the shop wished to convey. In contrast to Selfridges', which presented its wares with all the excitement of a theatre production, Liberty's store remained focused on the commitment

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[97] Article about Liberty's Tudor Shop in *The Architect's Journal*, June 4, 1924, 788/123, City of Westminster Archives Centre.

to its customers, a business model that had catapulted it to success in the late nineteenth century. Furthermore, the writer's adulatory tone regarding the contrast between the exotic fabrics and the store's interior highlighted Liberty's as an authentic representation of British commerce as well as a forward-looking center of pleasure and consumption.

The establishment of the Tudor shop altered preconceived ideas about empire, and the new shop made it clear to consumers that Liberty's looked to define empire in fully English terms. In his promotional pamphlet, Stewart-Liberty stated: "Liberty & Co. venture to claim that in the past their goods have earned a reputation for distinctiveness, and have been shown in an atmosphere differing from that of any other shop in the world." This proclamation cemented their dominant role in Regent Street's commerce, which consequently allowed them the freedom of architectural design in the face of a royal mandate.[98] E. Beresford Chancellor also praised the Great Marlborough Street premise for its ability to revive English mercantilist history. He described it as a space that transports the mind to a time "long before the New World was called in to purchase the products of the Old," and prior to the modern political involvements in urban life.[99]

Despite the bubbling tensions over Regent Street in the 1920s, Liberty's East India House and Tudor shop represented a commitment to British history through architecture and design, while also imbuing the street with a sense of interconnectivity between imperial trade and domestic industries. The construction of two distinct premises as part of a singular commercial enterprise confirmed the complex nature of Regent Street's commerce. The West End, Liberty's implied, could be English and imperial while also being commercial and artistic. Media support, as well as the support of upper-

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[98] Stewart-Liberty, *Liberty's Tudor Shop*, 22.
[99] Chancellor, *Liberty & Regent Street*, 16.

and middle-class patrons from its opening in 1875 to its unveiling of the two new stores, highlighted Liberty's ability to adapt to the changing tide, as Virginia Woolf put it, of mass commercialism. Liberty's successfully repacked, both literally and figuratively, various threads of London's commercial web: the imperial and exotic, the domestic and patriotic, and the artistic and unique. While critics of Regent Street decried the dissonance between individual buildings following the reconstruction, the store managed to harmoniously incorporate all of these perspectives into a distinctively "Liberty's" product.

Conclusion: Bright Lights, New City?

In many respects, commercial culture along Regent Street in the 1930s and 40s echoed that of previous decades. Within the context of surrounding streets such as Tottenham Court Road and Oxford Street—spaces that touted the excitement of mass culture with constant fervor—Regent Street still held on to the elite ideas of consumption that had so defined it from its creation in 1813.[100] Regent Street's new facades were no longer new by the advent of World War Two; indeed, the plate glass so celebrated by shopkeepers throughout the early twentieth century fell victim to the Blitzkrieg in 1940, while many of Blomfield's facades withstood the raids.[101] This irony curiously sums up the entire public debate over Regent Street's reconstruction. Proponents of imperial architecture over commercial appeal had stated that plate glass windows would make

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[100] Walkowitz, *Nights Out*, 168.

[101] Hobhouse, *A History of Regent Street*, 142-7.

Regent Street look impermanent and subject to the whimsy of the individual.[102] The destruction of shop windows in the Blitz served as a sober reminder of the realities of war for those who had become accustomed to enjoying Regent Street as a space of commercial diversion.

The chaos of the Blitz aside, Regent Street retained its identity as a center of global commerce throughout the Depression and the War. Liberty's remained; both its East India House and Tudor shop survived the War, and even experienced a certain level of economic boom with a second wave of American tourists flocking to London in the post-war period. In the first tourist season after the war, Americans spent nearly $200,000 at Liberty's.[103] Furthermore, their continued fascination with the store's silks and ornaments transformed Liberty's from a retailer of artistic styles for a mass market to a purveyor of goods that would later be described as "kitsch." While the post-war period may have depicted a level of "renaissance" for Liberty's, the rapidly growing influence of the United States in the realm of fashion and design soon outstripped that of British commerce.[104] The disintegration of the empire in the post-war period, along with a host of other social and political shifts, weakened Britain's role as a protagonist on the global stage. Heightened levels of tourism to London helped revive the war-torn city economically, but also confirmed London's new identity as a type of cultural and architectural relic in a rapidly changing world. Regent Street acted as a microcosm of this urban phenomenon. The popularity of shops such as Liberty's did not dwindle

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102 For a complete discussion of reflections on the Regent Street design, see Chapter One of this thesis, 32-40.

103 Adburgham, *Biography*, 127.

104 For a detailed history of Liberty's "Renaissance," see Adburgham, *Biography of a Shop*, Chapter 14.

dramatically, despite alterations to the overall economic ambience, but the street did shift from serving a decidedly upper class, English clientele, to a more international customer.

The continued fame of Liberty's today and the massive numbers of tourists who visit contemporary Regent Street confirms that London commerce has not died, but hassimply adapted to a new type of global economic environment. Walking down Regent Street in the contemporary Christmas season, one is awed by the spectacular array of lights and colors suspended high above the pavement, as well as window displays that create a fantasyland of seasonal consumption that prove impossibly alluring to the casual window-shopper. Liberty's, too, takes part in this modern display of mass commercialism, although the juxtaposition of the Tudor shop and up-to-the-minute fashion designers confers a lighthearted and whimsical approach to modern commerce.[105] The mass market, as we are made aware of every day, is alive and thriving, and Liberty's has succeeded in adapting to an age where technology has made journalistic promotion of the store irrelevant, while also retaining a commitment to all things artistic, beautiful, and most importantly, English.

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[105] A current discussion of Liberty's has been wonderfully presented in a three-part Channel 4 (UK) documentary "Liberty of London," which follows the store from July to December as it prepares for the frenetic Christmas season on Regent Street.

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