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SHERIDAN KNOWLES IN CONTEXT

by

ANTHONY DRAGO

Volume 1

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1995

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

SHERIDAN KNOWLES IN CONTEXT

by

Anthony Drago

Advisor: Professor Morris Dickstein

This dissertation is a wide-ranging, detailed contextual study of the pre-Victorian phase (1815-31) of the dramatic career of the once famous but now forgotten early nineteenth-century verse dramatist, James Sheridan Knowles. It is divided into three parts: part one concerns Knowles in the context of politics and society; part two in the context of early nineteenth-century drama; and part three in the context of early nineteenth-century theater, including his professional relationship with Edmund Kean and with William Charles Macready, who acted in the four plays focussed on in this study: Caius Gracchus, Virginius, William Tell, and Alfred the Great. It attempts to show how Knowles's plays reflect their age in terms of politics, social ideals and developments in the theater, with melodrama exerting the dominant and most vital dramaturgical and theatrical influence. By relating Knowles and his plays to the period in which they were written (a turbulent era that extended from Waterloo to the Great Reform Bill), one can gain a greater appreciation of why Knowles was esteemed so highly in his own age and why his verse plays succeeded in the theater whereas so many others written by his contemporaries did not. Portraits of Knowles, along with copies of original-night playbills and other illustrations are included.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation has taken me a long time to write, and would not have been completed had I not received two precious gifts of time: one in the form of a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities that freed me from teaching for a full year, in 1993; the other from the English Department in the form of extensions of time. For the last of the extensions I thank Bill Kelly.

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I was fortunate in finding another receptive audience among the ABD faculty who participated in the CUNY Faculty Advancement Program created to help CUNY faculty in completing their doctoral dissertations. My two mentors, David Sternberg, the program's Head Mentor, and John Eggers, my chairman, provided valuable advice on dissertation survival. They also offered encouraging comments on early drafts of my

work, as did Jane Young and Manette Berlinger. They were all conscientious and enthusiastic readers.

For their encouragement, I wish to thank my colleagues at BMCC (especially Gerald Cohen, John Eggers, Abbey Kupersmith, Robert Lapides, Goran Moberg, and Jane Young), fellow graduate students (especially Steven Schnur), friends (especially Michael and Debra Kaufman), and my concerned dentist, Bernard Biron. To them all, I am grateful. I owe a special debt to Stanley Russell, who has been a rigorous intellectual mentor and best friend since undergraduate days.

I thank my family for their loving support. My mother and father, Anthony and Gabrielle, and my sister, Gabrielle, understood that when I was not able to call or visit them as often as we both wished, it was because I was living in the early nineteenth century. To my parents, I dedicate this dissertation. Finally, I wish to thank my wife, Young who helped me in countless ways and whose faith in me was inspirational and sustaining. Sharing the pleasure and pain of writing this dissertation has brought us even closer.

For permission to reproduce illustrations, I wish to thank the Harvard Theater Collection of The Harvard College Library, the Huntington Library, and the Garrick Club. Permission to quote from the Knowles Ana was kindly granted by the Harvard Theater Collection. Sara Hodson, Curator of Literary Manuscripts at the Huntington and the librarians at the CUNY Graduate School Library--particularly Marilyn Geels and Amy Beth, were always most helpful in time of need, as was Judy Waldman, the Dissertation Assistant.

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Textual Note

In this study I have used both acting and reading texts of Knowles's plays. The acting texts are of two kinds: 1) licensing copies and 2) printed acting editions such as Cumberland's and Dolby's. The Lord Chamberlain's licensing manuscripts of Virginius, Caius Gracchus are in the Larpent Collection of the Huntington Library (catalogued in Dougald Macmillan, Catalogue of the Larpent Plays in the Huntington Library (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1939). The licensing manuscripts of William Tell, and Alfred the Great are in the Lord Chamberlain's collection in the British Library (indexed in British Museum. Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts. Plays Submitted to the Lord Chamberlain, 1824-1851: Additional Manuscripts 42865-43038 (London, 1964). The printed text used is the two volume, 1864 edition of Knowles's Dramatic Works, a reprinting of the 1856 edition, which Knowles personally prepared for publication.

The difficulty of determining an "authoritative" acting text of an early nineteenth-century play is addressed by John Bush Jones in "Editing Victorian Playwrights: Some Problems, Priorities, and Principles," Theatre Survey, 17, no. 1 (1976), 106-123: 1) "the well known 'collaborative' nature of the theatrical enterprise in this period" calls the "very meaning of the 'authoritative text' into question (107); 2) plays often underwent

"extensive revision . . . after licensing" (117); 3) "alterations [were] made in stage productions . . . sometimes not by the author at all but by an actor or manager with or without the playwright's approval. Some of these stage alterations may never have appeared in print . . . but remain buried only in such documents as prompt copies for particular productions" (118).

In addition to plays, I have used a variety of other writings by Knowles: lectures, poems, a debating exercise for schoolchildren, a novel, and a theological polemic. The lectures were published posthumously from Knowles's notes in 1873.

Note on Abbreviations

DL = Drury Lane; CG = Covent Garden; Hay = Haymarket. "CG, X14" means a play was performed fourteen times during its first run at Theatre Royal Covent Garden.

INTRODUCTION

The subject of this study is James Sheridan Knowles and four of his historical plays in the context of their time. Knowles is a once famous but now forgotten early nineteenth century British dramatist. Of the eighteen five-act plays in blank verse that he wrote during his twenty-eight years of playwriting (1815-43), five were based on well-known historical or quasi-historical personages and events: Caius Gracchus (1815), Virginius (1820), William Tell (1825), Alfred the Great (1831), and John of Procida (1840). These plays comprise what may be called an "historical" group within Knowles's oeuvre. The use of historical or pseudo-historical matter (in the case of the Swiss hero Tell) as a "magnifying agent"[1] for the representation of heroic actions sets these plays apart from Knowles's other plays, which are domestic dramas and comedies. This study limits itself to four historical plays written early in Knowles's dramatic career--1815-1831, to be exact--when the author was attempting to integrate domestic subject matter with political themes in a recognizable historical setting.

One of the aims of this contextual study, which focuses on the first four of Knowles's five historical

[1] Herbert Lindenberger, Historical Drama: The Relation of Literature and Reality (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1975) xi.

plays, is to shed light on one author's effort to revitalize the moribund verse drama in the post-Napoleonic period. This study also seeks to examine how the plays reflect their own time and use history to indirectly comment on their age--a stretch of pre-Victorian time which, for the sake of convenience, may be referred to as the "Regency."[2] The four plays were written and staged in the tumultuous period of popular discontent between the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the passage of the Reform Bill. Caius Gracchus, the first, was written and first staged (in Belfast) midway in the official Regency, a few months before the Battle of Waterloo; Alfred the Great, the fourth, was staged on the eve of the Reform Bill, the legislation that ushered in "the decade of reform." During this period of popular discontent, the unpopular and debauched George IV ruled and reigned, first as Regent and then as king, eventually sinking into decrepitude. On the London stage, the upstart and equally debauched Edmund Kean first appeared to singlehandedly and instantly revitalize the art of acting. But after a brief period of supremacy, he too rapidly deteriorated physically, leaving William Charles Macready as his unchallenged successor. Both actors were close friends of Sheridan

[2] As R.J. White writes, "'Regency is a term which has a legitimate application to English life for some few years after the official term of the Regency came to an end in 1820. . . ." White extends the term until Queen Victoria's accession--Life in Regency England (New York: Putnam's; London: Batsford, 1963) vii.

Knowles (as he was called[3]) and contributed to his emergence as a successful and famous dramatist in the 1820s.

This study is based on the premise that "dramatic forms have a real social history,"[4] and follows the advice offered by Joseph Donohue:

> . . . it remains arguable that the proper study of the theater encompasses values that are social, moral, political and intellectual, as well as literary and aesthetic. These values, as reflected in the texts of individual plays of the early nineteenth century, can best be observed if the theatre itself is acknowledged to exist in a lengthy and wide historical continuum.[5]

In arguing that "the plays of the early nineteenth century repay attention," Donohue voiced the hope that historians would one day "justify the intuition of present students that the age of Edmund Kean was not only a complex age, but one of real, if controversial, dramatic vitality."[6] Donohue provides the lead as to how to do this when he writes of "how important it is

[3] "James" was the name of Knowles's father, and "Sheridan" that of his father's first cousin, the playwright and orator Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816), who was thirty-three years old when James Sheridan was born in Cork. James Knowles and R.B. Sheridan were first cousins as a result of the marriage between James's father, John Knowles, and Frances Sheridan, the sister of the actor Thomas Sheridan, R.B. Sheridan's father.

[4] Raymond Williams, The Long Revolution (New York: Columbia UP, 1961) 299.

[5] Joseph Donohue, Theatre in the Age of Kean (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975) 142.

[6] Donohue, Theatre, 142.

to relate the forms of dramatic entertainment not only to the conventions of art but to conditions of society which together give it substance and life."[7] This study is an attempt to demonstrate that Knowles's plays possessed dramatic vitality in their own age, and that this vitality is best measured by criteria that is theatrical, performative, and cultural rather than aesthetic. The plays are treated as playtexts written for performance in a particular kind of theatre for particular actors and a particular kind of audience by a playwright who knew exactly the nature of the theatrical experience he was aiming to bring about.

The contexts (Parts I, II, and III) that are brought to bear on Knowles's plays have to do with politics and social history, drama, and theater. Their relevance lies in the light they shed on Knowles's treatment of historical subject matter, especially his predisposition toward domesticating it, and his style of dramaturgy. His domestication of historical subject matter was governed, as I hope to show, not only by the dictates of theatrical taste and values current at the time but also by a combination of political and social values and religious beliefs--an ethos, one may say--that Knowles, out of personal conviction, sought to infuse into his plays. This contextual study has

[7] Joseph Donohue, rev. of Next Week--East Lynne: Domestic Drama in Performance, 1820-1874, by Gilbert B. Cross, Theatre Survey 20 (1979) 135.

several aims: in terms of content, it is concerned with showing how Knowles's plays express, through the idealization of British ideals and values, the spirit of the age in which they were written; in terms of dramaturgy (and mise en scene), it is concerned with showing how Knowles mingled traditional conventions with modern ones found in the popular melodrama; in terms of language, it is concerned with Knowles's verse as effective stage speech rather than with its literary merit. It is also the aim of this study to put Knowles the man into the context of his time.

Three of the plays (Caius Gracchus, Virginius, and William Tell are examined piecemeal as illustrative of their age from different points of view: political and social, dramatic, and theatrical conditions in the various chapters. Alfred the Great is the only discussed that is examined in a separate chapter (Part I, Chapter 4). The play's beloved protagonist, its political allusion and its production at a time of high political moment justify extended treatment. The use of King Alfred as a subject in English drama prior to Knowles's Alfred is surveyed in an Appendix. Biographical information about Knowles and individuals (Hazlitt, Kean, Macready) who had an influence on his life is an essential part in this study and I have freely interpo-

lated it throughout this study where it is deemed relevant.[8]

It is not an exaggeration to say that most, if not all, of Knowles's plays--tragedies, dramas, and comedies--are domestic dramas in disguise, reflecting the contemporary ethos of hearth and home. Horne summed up Knowles's essence, both as man and dramatist when he wrote in The New Spirit of the Age, "The age is domestic, and so is he."[9] No pre-Victorian dramatist of the legitimate stage had his finger more firmly on the domestic pulse of his time than Knowles; and certainly no dramatist strove more earnestly to dignify "the ties that bind"[10] and invest with moral authority the cherished domestic values of his age. English audiences were delighted to hear, to quote Horne again, a "modern

[8] Most of my biographical information is taken from The Life of James Sheridan Knowles by his son, Richard Brinsley Knowles, privately printed in 1872 (hereafter cited as Life). The tradition of nineteenth century biography was to "establish [the] heroism" of its subject (see A.O.J. Cockshut, Truth to Life: The Art of Biography in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Harcourt, 1974) 16). R.B. Knowles's biography of his father is no exception, though it is by no means uncritical. I have supplemented this indispensable source of facts about Knowles's life with comments and observations from contemporaries who knew him. There is no modern biography of Knowles. Leslie Howard Meeks includes a biographical chapter on Knowles in his Sheridan Knowles and the Theatre of His Time (Bloomington: Principia P, 1933) which is mainly based on the Life. The best recent sketch of Knowles's life is found in St. John Sweeney, "The Nineteenth Century Shakespeare, a Literary Life," The Journal of Irish Literature 13 (1984) 3-53.

[9] Horne, 239.

[10] The full phrase, taken from a popular hymn, is "sweet are the ties that bind." Asa Briggs identifies it as "a key phrase in the 1850s and 1860s--see his The Making of Modern England, 1783-1867: The Age of Improvement (1959; New York: Harper and Row, 1965) 447.

English heart" beating beneath "the strange garments of the actors."[11] They would have been disappointed not to hear such a heart beating in a modern historical play, and its presence or absence could mean the difference between whether a play succeeded or failed in the theater. The taste of the time demanded that heroic impulses be presented in terms of British ideals and values, with the impulses themselves softened by domestic feeling of a recognizable kind.

Knowles's attunement to the domestic sensibility of his age makes him a representative early-nineteenth writer of the theater in a way that the Romantic writers are not, for what theater audiences wanted in the 1820s was, in Murray's Keatsian words, "a theatrical life of sensations rather than thoughts."[12] Born in 1784, Knowles was considerably younger than the older generation of Romantic poets (born in the 1770s) and somewhat older than the younger generation. The most literary and intrinsically interesting plays of the early nineteenth century (from the point of view of poetry, characterization, theme, symbolism, and so on) were written by the Romantics and early Victorians--Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Keats, Shelley, and Browning, among others. As acting plays, however, most of the dramatic works of these writers are defective

[11] Horne, The New Spirit 239.

[12] Christopher Murray, "Elliston's Productions of Shakespeare," Theatre Survey 11 (1970) 116.

(at least by contemporary standards) because their primary interest is in introspection and objectification of subjective states--in what Harold Bloom calls the "power of the mind over outward sense" and the flowing over of an "overfilled inner self."[13] The plays are lyrical and "expressionist dramas, the various characters revealing moods of one mind."[14] This is not to say that all the plays of the Romantic writers should be labeled closet drama, or that the Romantics lacked a sense of the dramatic. In the words of a recent commentator:

> . . . the dramatic tendency was important to the Romantic poets but . . . its central energies were derived from an engagement not so much with the external world as with the rich diversities and complexities of self. They were self-dramatizing rather than dramatizing.[15]

The Romantics have aptly be termed "ventriloquists rather than chameleons."[16] Much of the drama that they wrote constitutes a "theater of the mind," of "the soul" or of "the imagination," terms which convey how

[13] Harold Bloom, "The Internalization of the Quest-Romance," in Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Norton, 1970) 9, 8.

[14] Nineteenth-Century English Verse Drama, ed. with intro. by Gerald B. Kauvar and Gerald C. Sorensen (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1973) 8.

[15] Timothy Webb, "The Romantic Poet and the Stage: A Short, Sad, History," The Romantic Theatre: An International Symposium, ed. Richard Allen Cave (Bucks: Smythe; Totowa: Barnes, 1986) 10.

[16] Webb 10

far removed the plays of the Romantics and Early Victorians are from the "smell of the lamps and the orange peel," as the intoxicating atmosphere of the early nineteenth-century theater has been described.[17] In the few cases where a play by a Romantic writer succeeded on the stage (Coleridge's Remorse and Byron's Werner and Sardanapalus come to mind), it was only after being adapted to "fit" the stage, a process that invariably resulted in evisceration of its introspective innards.[18]

In contrast to the Romantics, Knowles shows little interest in exploring mental processes in his plays; his protagonists, rich in sentiment and feeling, are not given to introspection. For Knowles, "incident and situation" were the lifeblood of performed drama.[19] This is why he judged Maturin's Bertram to be dramatically superior to Byron's Sardanapalus, even though he

[17] James Robinson Planche, Recollections and Reflections, 2 vols. (London: Sampson and Low, 1901) 1: 17. Gas was introduced to Drury Lane in 1817. Fruit vendors traditionally sold oranges in the auditorium of the theaters; in addition to being eaten, oranges were occasionally thrown on the stage as a sign of displeasure with the performance.

[18] Byron's Marino Faliero, the only one of Byron's play to be staged in the author's lifetime, was a failure when produced at Drury Lane in 1820 in spite of being heavily cut--Thomas L. Ashton, "The Censorship of Byron's Marino Faliero," Huntington Library Quarterly 36 (1972): 27-44.

[19] James Sheridan Knowles, Lectures in Dramatic Literature (London, 1873) 41.

recognized Byron to have been Maturin's model.[20] "The great aim of the dramatist, so far as the success of the acting poem is concerned," asserted Knowles, "should be to excite expectation, and to keep it up throughout. To effect the latter, every new stage of his action should present some new object of interest."[21] Invention or plot, in other words, was primary; poetry was essential, but subservient to it. This simple and straightforward dramatic credo is far removed from that of the Romantic writer, for whom drama was valued as another mode of exploring the mysterious labyrinth of consciousness.

As a dramatist, Knowles was highminded in his aspirations, but unlike the Romantic writers he was not afflicted with ambivalence about writing for the stage; the theater was his medium, and it may be said that he circulated in its currents as a fish does in water. He separated himself from the popular drama by writing in verse (he never wrote a play in prose) for what has been called a "neo-Shakespearean theatre,"[22] but he was not alienated from that drama or the theater that nurtured it. Nor did he chafe against the physicality of the stage and the conventions of representation, most

[20] Knowles discusses Byron and Marturin as playwrights in Lectures in Dramatic Literature 34-37.

[21] James Sheridan Knowles, Lecture on Macbeth (London, 1875) 2.

[22] St. John Sweeney, "The Nineteenth Century Shakespeare, a Literary Life," Journal of Irish Literature 13 (1984) 47.

likely because he did not feel them as constraints on his dramatic imagination. The gulf between the "poetic drama" and stage representation in Knowles's time was most keenly felt in the case of Shakespeare's plays. Knowles yielded to no one in "high devotion"[23] to Shakespeare's genius, but he appears not to have been troubled, as were his friends Lamb and Hazlitt, among other Romantic writers, by the disparity between imaginative realization of the text in the study and theatrical repesentation. One cannot easily imagine him making the following statement, written by Lamb:

> It may seem a paradox, but I cannot help being of opinion that the play of Shakespeare are less calculated for performance on a stage, than those of almost any other dramatist whatever. There is so much in them, which comes not under the province of acting with which eye, and tone, and gesture, have nothing to do . . . . how obvious it is, that the form of speaking, whether it be in soliloquy or dialogue, is only a medium, and often a highly artificial one, for putting the reader or spectator into possession of that knowledge of the inner structure and working of mind in a character.[24]

It is indicative of Knowles's theatrical orientation toward drama that, most of the time, as Christopher Murray notes, "the interpretation that Knowles gave to

[23] The term is from Joseph Donohue, Dramatic Character in the English Romantic Age (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970) 189.

[24] Charles Lamb, The Complete Works and Letters of Charles Lamb (New York: Modern Library, 1935) 291-2.

Shakespeare's plays in his lectures was mediated by stage performances."[25]

A. An Overview of Knowles's Dramatic Career and Reputation

Knowles's obscurity is illustrated by the fact that he was recently misidentified by an English critic writing in the New York Times as "the American playwright Sheridan Knowles."[26] In being forgotten, Knowles shares the fate of most of the minor dramatists of the early nineteenth century, a period that is remembered for its star actors rather than its drama. In the eyes of his pre-Victorian and Victorian contemporaries, however, Knowles (1784-1862) was no less than "the leading and most admired dramatist of his time."[27] Hazlitt praised him as "the first tragic dramatist of the age."[28] The playwright Edward Fitzball called him "our modern Shakespeare."[29] While these

[25] Christopher Murray, "James Sheridan Knowles: The Victorian Shakespeare?" Shakespeare and the Victorian Stage, ed. Richard Foulkes (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) 173. Murray's fine essay is the best general introduction to Knowles.

[26] The critic was Benedict Nightingale. See his "For the Macbeths, Marriage is Murder," New York Times, 1 May 1988, Sect. 2: 5.

[27] The Revels History of Drama in English, eds. Michael Booth et al. (London: Methuen, 1975) 6: 43.

[28] William Hazlitt, The Spirit of the Age (1825; London: Oxford UP, 1970) 302.

[29] Edward Fitzball, Thirty-Five Years of a Dramatic Author's Life, 2 vols. (London: T.C. Newby, 1859) 2: 104.

statements strike us as extravagant today, they were not so regarded in the early nineteenth century. In 1833, the Edinburgh Review pronounced Knowles "the most successful dramatist of the day."[30] This judgment was made on the basis of the stage success of three plays out of six which had been produced at Covent Garden and Drury Lane between 1820 and 1832: Virginius, William Tell, and The Hunchback. In the last, Knowles had made a successful debut as an actor on the London stage in the part of Master Walter.

Knowles's success as a writer of both tragedy and comedy--the genres sanctioned by the authority of classical and Renaissance critics--raised him above other dramatists whose achievement was limited to either tragedy or comedy. As a nostalgic link to the Elizabethan age, the golden age of verse drama in English, Knowles came closer than any other living dramatist of his time to fulfilling Britain's need in the post-war period for a living cultural symbol that was commensurate with its newly won status as the leading power in Europe. Extrapolating from the example of the Elizabethan era, thoughtful observers of society clung to the belief that "the vitality of drama is inseparable from the health of the body politic."[31]

[30] The Edinburgh Review, 57 (1833): 281.

[31] George Steiner, The Death of Tragedy (1961; New York: Dramabook-Hill and Wang, 1963) 109.

Shelley, who held this belief, expressed it eloquently in his Defense of Poetry:

> . . . the connection between poetry and social good is more observable in the drama than in whatever other form: and it is indisputable that the highest perfection of human society has ever corresponded with the highest dramatic excellence; and that the corruption or the extinction of the drama in a nation where it has once flourished, is a mark of a corruption of manners, and an extinction of the energies which sustain the soul of social life.[32]

How different this is from "the modern view that a dearth of dramatic poetry is a natural state of affairs."[33] The idea that verse was "a stale and useless convention that stood in the way of a living drama" had not yet taken hold.[34]

Knowles's plays were admired because they adhered to traditional conventions of characterization, form, content, and stagecraft. The question of to what extent, if any, "Elizabethan proclivities" led Knowles "far astray," as Nicoll puts it, is not addressed in this study.[35] It is impossible to say whether or not Knowles would have been a better dramatist if he had

[32] Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," Shelley's Poetry and Prose, eds. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (New York: Norton; Toronto: McLeod, 1977) 492.

[33] Steiner 109.

[34] Moody Prior, The Language of Tragedy (1947; Midland-Indiana UP, 1966) 390.

[35] Allardyce Nicoll, A History of English Drama, 1660-1900. 6 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1952-59) 4: 173.

shed Elizabethanism, which led him into faults such as archaism and syntaxical inversion. Murray is probably correct when he states that "Knowles, however unsurely, aspired to realism, but was held back by the conservatism of the age. Consequently, his plays are suspended between Shakespeare and realism."[36] Shakespearean models held a strangle-hold on all serious verse drama in Knowles's time.

The obvious surface derivativeness of and Shakespearean resonances in Knowles's plays should not blind us to the fact that his contemporaries perceived them as refreshingly original. This point of view is exemplified in the following statement from the Dublin University Magazine of 1852: "adopting the style of the elder dramatists, he has had the courage to think for himself."[37] "In so far as Knowles was a good dramatist he broke away from the centuries-old slavery of imitative writing," writes Murray.[38] At a time when characterization and language was artificial in the legitimate drama and superficial and formulaic in the popular drama, Knowles's protagonists were highly individualized and passionate characters who shared a common humanity and spoke, at times, a stage speech that was startlingly direct and unflorid. This was recognized by

[36] Murray 167.

[37] Dublin University Magazine 40 (1852) 435.

[38] Murray, "James" 167.

Lamb, Hazlitt, and Dickens (close friends of Knowles), who praised Knowles's plays for the understanding they showed of the human heart.[39]

At the same time, Knowles "had something of a reputation of a primitive who was little read in the great literature of the past and who took his models directly from nature rather than from art."[40] The notion that Knowles was an unlearned genius is expressed by Hazlitt in his tribute to Knowles, whom he tutored as a boy, in The Spirit of the Age:

> The most unconscious, the most unpretending, the most artless of mortals, he instinctively obeys the impulses of his natural feeling, and produces a perfect work of art. He has hardly read a poem or a play, or seen any thing of the world; but he hears the anxious beatings of his own heart and makes others feel them by the force of sympathy. Ignorant alike of rules, regardless of models, he follows the steps of truth and simplicity; and strength, proportion and delicacy are the infallible results.[41]

In 1847, in the Athenaeum, a critic referred to Knowles as the "King of Uneducated Dramatists."[42] This percep-

[39] For Lamb, see his commendatory verse, "To J.S. Knowles, Esq.: On his Tragedy of Virginius," The Complete Works and Letters of Charles Lamb 553; for Hazlitt, see his tribute to Knowles in The Spirit of the Age 301-302; For Dickens, see a letter to Knowles dated 26 May 1847, in Knowles, A Collection of Ana (London, 1874) 177.

[40] Sweeney 48.

[41] William Hazlitt, The Spirit of the Age: or Contemporary Portraits. (1825; London, Oxford UP, 1970) 302.

[42] Athenaeum Feb. 1847, quoted in Sweeney 48.

tion of Knowles as a uneducated primitive is an unfounded fiction, however.[43]

When his tragedy Virginius first burst upon the London theatrical scene on the stage of Covent Garden in 1820, Knowles, says Leslie Meeks, "seemed destined along among his distinguished contemporaries to wed poetic drama to the living theatre."[44] In 1820, Knowles was a thirty-six-year old schoolmaster who had begun to doubt that he could fulfill his lifelong ambition to be a playwright. He had dabbled in poetry and playwriting from an early age, and in his early twenties he had thrown over a promising career in medicine to try his hand at acting and playwriting in the provinces. The experience had been frustrated and he turned to school teaching out of financial necessity. So strong an impression did Virginius make on the London theater that Knowles was instantly dubbed "the Author of Virginius." Although Knowles's next staged play, the tragedy Caius Gracchus (a reworking of the 1815 version) proved to be only a success d'estime at Drury Lane in 1823, Knowles demonstrated his staying power with the drama William Tell, performed at Drury Lane in 1825. His first attempt at comedy in 1828, The Beggar's Daughter of Bethnal Green proved to be a painful fail-

[43] In refutation, it is is enough to cite Knowles's lectures on drama, poetry, and oratory.

[44] Leslie Howard Meeks, Sheridan Knowles and the Theatre of His Time (Bloomington: Principia P, 1933) 10.

ure. These disappointments spurred Knowles on to greater success.[45] The Hunchback, a comic drama staged at Covent Garden in 1832, solidified his reputation and demonstrated his versatility.[46] Once his reputation was secure, he gave up schoolteaching and moved from Scotland to London to pursue a career as an actor, and to devote himself to full-time playwriting and part-time lecturing.

In 1832, Knowles's most productive years still lay ahead of him. Between 1832 and 1843, he wrote almost a play a year, a total of ten plays.[47] In the year of Queen Victoria's accession, 1837, it was generally acknowledged that Knowles was the leading dramatist of his age.[48] He had added to his high reputation by writing three new plays, all of which were produced in London in their year of composition: The Wife: A Tale of Mantua at Covent Garden in 1833, The Daughter at Drury Lane in 1836, and The Love Chase (a comedy) at the Haymarket in 1837. Of the three, The Wife and The Love Chase were successes. The Love Chase had a run of eighty-four performances, which Meeks calls "a record

[45] Caius Gracchus had been successfully produced in Belfast in 1815.

[46] Knowles also adapted Massinger's The Fatal Dowry for the nineteenth-century stage in 1825.

[47] Knowles also had a hand in The Bridal, an adaptation of Beaumont and Fletcher's The Maid's Tragedy, which was staged in 1837.

[48] The Revels 6: 48.

almost unique for the time."[49] 1837 also saw the London production at Covent Garden of Brian Boroihme; or The Maid of Erin, an immature romantic melodrama that Knowles had written in 1812 when he was a member of a Belfast acting troupe.[50] The Beggar of Bethnal Green, a revision of his first comedy, was successfully produced in 1834 at the Victoria (formerly the Coburg), the largest of the minor theaters. In addition, in 1832 he wrote and had produced at Covent Garden The Vision of the Bard (1832), a masque paying tribute to Sir Walter Scott shortly after his death.

Knowles dramatic career extended only six years into Queen Victoria's reign because he abandoned playwriting to write fiction in 1843,[51] and, more importantly, to become a Baptist minister. In 1838, two dramas, Woman's Wit; or Love's Disguises and The Maid of Mariendorpt were staged, at Covent Garden and the Haymarket, respectively. A year later, his drama Love was staged at Covent Garden. In 1840, Knowles returned to historical tragedy with John of Procida; or The Bridals of Messina, produced at Covent Garden. His comedy Old Maids was produced at the same theater in 1841. His last tragedy, The Rose of Arragon was produced at

[49] Meeks 120.

[50] Brian Boroihme was produced in Belfast in 1812.

[51] Knowles wrote two novels: Fortescue, published in 1846, and George Lovell in 1847; neither was a financial success. He had published a number of tales prior to his retirement from the stage.

the Haymarket in 1842. His last play, produced at Drury Lane in 1843, was The Secretary, a comedy. Several of these plays enjoyed moderate success, but none enyoyed the success of Virginius, Tell, or The Hunchback or won a place in the permanent repertory. When Knowles retired from playwriting his fame was at its height.

Knowles may have "scarcely deserved the critical encomiums heaped upon him by his contemporaries," as one recent commentator writes,[52] but it was his extraordinary success in the theater that accounted in great measure for his high reputation in his own age. According to one theater historian and biographer, audiences responded to his plays "with the enthusiasm usually reserved for spectacle, opera, and melodrama starring trained horses, dogs, and monkeys."[53] The remark makes the important point, with only slight exaggeration, that uneducated theatergoers--who generally preferred spectacle, farce, opera, pantomime, and melodrama to dialogue-drama--found Knowles's poetic dramas extremely appealing. In our non-poetic age, this fact is striking and almost incomprehensible. While Knowles was by no means the last dramatist to uphold the ideals of poetic drama on the English stage, it is

[52] Richard Fletcher, English Romantic Drama, 1795-1843 (New York: Exposition P, 1966) 145.

[53] Alan S. Downer, The Eminent Tragedian: William Charles Macready (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1966) 61. The context of Downer's words are Knowles's tragedies; I have extended them to Knowles's plays in general.

important to acknowledge that he may well have been the last poetic dramatist to attract a mass audience and to win its loyalty.[54]

Of course, as John Genest, the contemporary spokesman for traditionalism in the drama, observed in 1830, "success [in the theater] cannot with propriety be considered the criterion of merit."[55] But in Knowles's case stage success and merit happily coincided. "As the first of serious dramatists at mid-century," wrote George Henry Lewes, Knowles "held a sort of monopoly of the serious drama . . . . no other writer of the same class being able to fill a theatre."[56] In the provinces as well as London, Virginius, William Tell, and The Hunchback were "stock pieces of the repertory of every leading actor in England."[57]

[54] John Westland Marston (1819-1890) succeeded Knowles as the standard bearer of poetic drama, but he did not achieve Knowles's popular following. His dramatic career began in 1842 with the production of The Patrician's Daughter and ended forty years later, during which he wrote more than twenty plays. In 1847, he dedicated one of his plays to Knowles in the following words: "Inscribed to the author of Virginius, a student in the mystery which finds the heart out, be there one to find, offers this tribute to a master"--Lawrence A. Wood, Jr. "James Westland Marston, LL.D.: Neo-Elizabethan Dramatist in the Victorian Age," diss., Western Reserve U, 1955, 285.

[55] John Genest, Some Account of the English Stage (Bath, 1832), IX, 564.

[56] G.H. Lewes, intro. to Selections from Modern Tragedies, 2 vols. (London, 1867) 1: 238-239.

[57] Ernest Bradlee Watson, Sheridan to Robertson (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1926) 249.

A measure of Knowles's high stature in his own time is that he was commonly referred to as a "modern Shakespeare."[58] His contemporaries, writes Murray, "had no hesitation about granting him equal rank with Shakespeare's contemporaries."[59] The few adulants of Knowles went further and ranked him with Shakespeare.[60] In addressing the phenomenon of "Shakespearean comparison" in his article on Knowles, Murray concludes, as one might expect, that the comparison "has no real basis . . . [it] was only an illusion, one more expression of a Victorian ideal."[61] The comparison arose, Murray argues, because of Victorian notions--current in Pre-Victorian times--about how Shakespeare

[58] Charles Rice, an avid playgoer and amateur critic also called Knowles a "modern Shakespeare" in The London Theatre in the Eighteen-Thirties, eds. A.C. Sprague and B. Shuttleworth, London: Society for Theatre Research (1950) 9. Those who used the comparison meant that Knowles was "on a level with poets only inferior to Shakespeare" (quoted from The Morning Chronicle (1833) in Life 98), not his equal. Charles Lamb was, I believe the first to favorably compare (not equate) Knowles to Shakespeare in his "To J.S. Knowles, Esq,: On his Tragedy of Virginius, 1820." Histories of the drama note the Shakespearean comparison: In his History of the London Stage (1904; New York and London: Benjamin Blom, 1969) 158, H. Barton writes, "Knowles was hailed as Shakespeare Redivivus"; The Cambridge Guide to World Theater (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988) 554, states that Knowles was "considered in his time a rival to Shakespeare."

[59] Murray, "James" 178.

[60] For example, R. Shelton Mackenzie, Knowles's friend and fellow Irishman, declared: "He is inferior only to Shakespeare. He equals him in originality of thought and expression. It is no hyperbole to say that, since Shakespeare, no dramatist save Knowles, has written so much from and to the heart!"--from a "Memoir" in The Dramatic Works of James Sheridan Knowles, 2 vols. (Boston, 1838) 1, quoted in Murray, "James" 164.

[61] Murray, "James" 178.

should be staged. "Victorian staging of Shakespeare precluded ambiguities and offered clearcut, vivid interpretations," writes Murray.[62] In a word, it tended to be melodramatic in keeping with contemporary taste. It also emphasized the domestic interest of the plays. It is easy to see why Knowles's contemporaries overvalued his plays if one recognizes that he succeeded in combining Shakespearean features--"his use of comedy, his characterization of women and his emphasis on domestic situations"--with contemporary elements--"his fondness of a well-made structure, his use of melodramatic situations and his moral idealism."[63] There was also a strong illustrative or pictorial element in staging Shakespeare that helped to create the illusion that the plays of the two dramatists "actually coincided."[64] Knowles and Shakespeare were perceived as similar because Knowles's "contemporary features correspond to some degree with the manner in which Shakespeare was then interpreted and staged," says Murray.[65] Fittingly, given the perceived Neo-Shakespeareanism of his plays, Knowles was considered the leading contender for the position of curator of Shakespeare's birthplace when it was purchased in 1847

[62] Murray, "James" 177.

[63] Murray, "James" 167.

[64] Murray, "James" 178.

[65] Murray, "James" 167.

(a plan that "failed for want of funds"[66]).

In one sense only, Knowles's contemporaries found his plays superior to Shakespeare's: his pre-Victorian sensibility forbid him from ever writing a line that would "raise a blush on the cheek of modesty (to use a favorite Victorian word).[67] In the early nineteenth century, his attention to decorum and delicacy counted for a great deal. The moral "purity" of his plays explains why even many of his religious friends who abhorred the theater as the "Devil's house" (Presbyterians and Quakers, for example) attended his plays when he was performing in them in Glasgow.[68] As Richard Foulkes states, there was a "public distaste for certain aspects of Shakespeare unadulterated."[69] This led, in 1807, to the "ultimate moral, and hence political, policing of Shakespeare's text" known as Family Shakespeare.[70] Performance texts of Shakespeare's plays were as scrupulously policed as the often reprinted bowdlerized reading texts. In Knowles's plays, as in

[66] John William Cole, The Life and Times of Charles Kean, 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1859) 1: 338 fn.

[67] Louis Marder, His Exits and His Entrances: The Story of Shakespeare's Reputation (London: Murray, 1963) 110.

[68] Memoir of an "old pupil" of Knowles's, quoted in Life 103.

[69] Richard Foulkes, "Introduction," in Foulkes 3-4.

[70] Jonathan Bate, Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism, 1730-1830 (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1989) 203.

the Family Shakespeare, there was nothing that "could give offence to the religious and virtuous mind."[71]

Perhaps the term "theater-poet" best fits Knowles because he was a dramatist whose strength lay in writing plays that combined literary values (however modest) with theatrical ones. Lewes, one of the finest theater critics between Hazlitt and Shaw, lighted on this perfect German term to describe Knowles.[72] By uniting poetic ideals with sound dramaturgy, Knowles succeeded in doing what many other dramatists tried but failed to do: bridge the chasm between literature and the stage that criticism itself was responsible for creating by fostering the idea that the two were antagonistic. Criticism in Knowles's time is responsible for "the fixed idea that dramatic worth and popular appeal were mutually exclusive."[73]

Knowles's plays were successful on the page as well as on the stage. His reputation in his own age was boosted by an expensive two-volume collections of his plays, prepared by the author himself and printed in

[71] Anonymous editor of The Family Shakespeare, quoted in Marder 111.

[72] Lewes, Selections 1: 239.

[73] Gary J. Scrimgeour, "Drama and the Theatre in the Early Nineteenth Century," diss., Princeton U, 1968, 13.

1841-1843, and 1856.[74] The first two editions, published by Edward Moxon (who specialized in drama of literary merit) "covered him with literary glory."[75] When Knowles's plays were printed in the "Routledge's Poets for the People," series in 1883, Knowles had long ceased to be a people's poet, but the edition is a posthumous testimony to the fact that he had enjoyed his day in the sun as a people's poet in the theater of the early nineteenth century.

The arc of Knowles's reputation descended fairly gracefully after he abandoned playwriting. By 1850, his reputation was still high enough in literary circles to lead to the submission of his name on a short list of candidates for the laureateship after Wordsworth's

[74] The first edition of Knowles's plays was published in two volumes in Boston (U.S.) in 1833: Select Works of James Sheridan Knowles: Prose Tales and Four Plays, with a Memoir. A one volume edition of the four plays was published in London, Baltimore, and Calcutta in 1835. The 1841-3 edition--The Dramatic Works of James Sheridan Knowles was published in two stages: two volumes, containing ten plays was published in 1841; two years later, five more plays were published in a third matching volume. In 1856, a two-volume edition of sixteen plays (The Secretary was the added play) was published by Routledge, who had bought the copywright from Moxon; this was advertised as "an elegant and extremely cheap edition, of which the text has undergone a thorough revision by the Author"--John Russell Stephens, The Profession of the Playwright: British Theatre, 1800-1900 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1992) 122. In 1883 (and reprinted in 1890 and 1892), a one-volume edition was published by the same publisher in the "Poets of the People" series, priced at 2S and in paper for 1S /6d. Cheap editions of the individual plays were regularly printed at the time of stage production. Virginius was printed thirty-four times between 1820 and the end of the century; at a time when the publishing industry was in the doldrums, the seven editicns of The Hunchback and six editions of The Wife of Mantua by 1833 is evidence of the popularity of Knowles plays in print.

[75] Stephens, The Profession of the Playwright, op. cit., 122.

death. As late as 1859, one theater biographer called Knowles "the first of living dramatists," adding, "if votes were collected by ballot to decide on the comparative pretensions of all the dramatists of the present age, we are inclined to think a large majority would assign the first post of honour to Knowles."[76] But Knowles's star was already fading. As one commentator puts it, he was "a victim of his own inflated reputation."[77] When Knowles died in 1862, it is reported that "there was hardly a voice heard raised in lamentation at the passing of the playwright."[78] The decade of the 1860s was when drama began developing in the direction of Robertsonian "cup and saucer" realism; Knowles's plays were stigmatized as stagey and old-fashioned. In one commentator's words, "the price that Knowles paid" for his acclaim, "was to be hustled unceremoniously from his throne by the advocates of the new drama."[79]

The break between Knowles and Robertson was not as clean as the pioneers and advocates of the new drama such as Archer believed, however. The perspective of time has allowed us to see that, as Gilbert Cross

[76] Cole 1: 338.

[77] The Cambridge Guide to World Drama, ed. Martin Banham (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988) 554.

[78] Erwin 327.

[79] John Cargil Thompson, 50 British Plays, 1660-1900: A Reader's Guide (Totowa: Barnes) 345

points out, "the domestic sentiment of Knowles," was one of the seedbeds out of which "grew the social drama of Robertson, Pinero, and Shaw."[80] Similarly, Donohue, speaking only of Virginius, says that it is a

> drama so thoroughly Victorian, in spite of its early date, that to follow its tendencies would be to find no culmination short of the early plays of Shaw and the transplantation of Ibsen to England, and the growth of the Independent theater movement throughout Western Europe.[81]

B. Twentieth-Century Criticism of Knowles

Even though, to quote Donohue again, "the scholarly study of nineteenth-century drama in English has some of age,"[82] Knowles's plays are seldom written about, not to mention unread and unperformed.[83] The

[80] Gilbert Cross, Next Week--East Lynne: Domestic Drama in Performance, 1820-1874 (Lewisburg and London: Bucknell UP, 1977) 17. Cross mentions Bulwer and Marston along with Knowles as being seminal influences on the social drama.

[81] Joseph W. Donohue, Jr. Dramatic Character in the English Romantic Age (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1970) 6.

[82] Donohue, Rev. of East Lynne 134.

[83] Twentieth-century criticism on Knowles can be counted on the fingers of one hand. In addition to the two introductory articles by Murray (1986) and Sweeney (1984) already cited, there is only Malcolm Elwin's "Sheridan Knowles: The Early-Victorian Shakespeare," London Mercury 22 (1930), aimed at the lay reader. Harry M. Ritchie's "Kean Versus Macready: Sheridan Knowles's "Virginius," Theatre Survey 17 (1976) 28-37, is the only specialized article that I have found. Scattered remarks can be found in standard histories of the drama, such as volume 4 of Alardyce Nicoll's History of English Drama, and more recently volume 6 of The Revels History of Drama in English.

recent renaissance of scholarly interest in the drama of the Romantic period, for example, has passed Knowles by. Meeks's Sheridan Knowles and the Theater of the Time, published in 1933, is still the only book full-length study of his plays. Originally a dissertation, this pioneering, meticulously researched book is invaluable to any student of Knowles for its generalized commentary and wealth of scholarly detail.[84] It describes the circumstances surrounding the composition and production of Knowles's plays and their reception and stage history.

Meeks's work is mildly polemical in that it takes issue with two influential critics of the time, William Archer, a militant champion of the "new drama," and George Saintsbury, both of whom had disparaged Knowles in print.[85] Meeks sometimes seems to share the views of Knowles's detractors when he belabors the point that Knowles's plays lack intellectual appeal, as if it were puerile of the author to reflect his age by writing plays about sentiments and feelings rather than ideas.[86] Meeks is sympathetic to Knowles, but not

[84] Meeks's book is an enlarged but only slightly revised version of his Yale 1926 dissertation.

[85] Willaim Archer damned Knowles by calling him a dramatist of "robustious un-nature"--The Old Drama and the New (Boston: Small, Maynard, 1923) 171; For George Saintsbury, Knowles was a "mediocre" writer "content to dwell in decencies forever"--History of Nineteenth-Century Literature (London, 1896) 422.

[86] For example, see Meeks, 95.

infrequently an apologetic tone creeps into his writing.

Meeks achieves his stated purpose of giving Knowles "long due credit for his labors."[87] But his now outdated book does not succeed in placing Knowles in the context of "the theatre of his time" (to quote the key words of title). This failure was pointed out by Arthur Dubois in his review of Meeks's book. In his review, Dubois writes, "Somehow in the vain search for lasting qualities in Knowles, Mr. Meeks never discovers his significance in the theatre of his time."[88] DuBois, who calls Meeks's book "commonplace," is especially critical of its first chapter, entitled "The Setting." This chapter purports to describe the theater of Knowles's time, but succeeds only in briefly surveying the poetic drama of the Romantic poets and other writers with literary ambitions: namely, the acted and unacted plays of Baillie, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Byron, Browning, Talfourd, Milman, Sheil, Procter, Taylor, and Mitford.[89] This puts Knowles in good company, but does nothing to illuminate the popular sources of Knowles's appeal or the relationship between his plays and a theater of his time, a theater in which

[87] Meeks 21.

[88] Arthur E. DuBois, rev. of Sheridan Knowles and the Theatre of His Time by Leslie Howard Meeks, Modern Language Notes 1 (1934) 56.

[89] The names are listed in the order in which they appear in Meek's chapter.

melodrama was the "pervasive aesthetic."[90] Dubois's valid criticism of the chapter is worth quoting:

> 'The Setting' is decidedly the least adequate. The story of the 19th century theatre is not a list of otherwise great men who failed to write great acting drama for a variety of reasons, but a series of movements, the slow currents of which were stirred chiefly by competent actors, directors, and playwrights.[91]

There is a need for a study of Knowles that to the texts and uses social context to illuminate their form, content, and sources of vitality brings us closer to the texts as they were experienced in performance.

[90] Peter Brooks, The Melodramatic Imagination (New York: Columbia UP, 1985) 81.

[91] Dubois 56.

PART I

KNOWLES IN THE CONTEXT OF EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY POLITICS AND SOCIETY

Chapter 1

Politics in an Age of Transition: Revolution vs. Reform

Knowles was born into an age of revolution when "politics was the vortex into which all issues were pulled," first by events in France and on the Continent and then by civil unrest within Britain itself.[1] He belonged to the generation that grew to manhood during the period of the Napoleonic wars. He matured as a dramatist in the 1820s, a decade of extraordinary popular discontent. Fortunately, class warfare was averted when the discontent was channeled into an organized, nationwide movement for reform that resulted in peaceful, constitutional change that pointed Britain in the direction of democracy. The transitional period that followed the defeat of Napoleon and the end of the "Great War"[2] was one of a gradual "liberal awakening"[3] and this liberalism is reflected in Knowles's early historical plays.

[1] Dewey Ganzel, "Patent Wrongs and Patent Theatres: Drama and the Law in the Early Nineteenth Century," PMLA 76 (1961) 393.

[2] "Great War" was the term used by Knowles's contemporaries to refer to Britain's long war with Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. "Transitional" is the word historican most commonly use to describe the the post-Napoleonic period.

[3] The Liberal Awakening (1815-1830) is the title of the second volume of Elie Halevy's magisterial six volume A History of the English People.

Knowles and his generation also witnessed what has been called "a revolution by diffusion."[4] This phenomenon was the social and moral transformation of British society, from top to bottom, through the influence of Evangelicalism. The Evangelical movement is central to the formation of a middle class[5] ethos or "ideology" that idealized the values of hearth and home and exalted the feminine character in accordance with what is commonly known as the "doctrine of the separate spheres."[6] "Domesticity" is still a useful, if quaint, word to describe an interest in the "homelier pas-

[4] Gertrude Himmelfarb, Victorian Minds: A Study of Intellectuals in Crisis and of Ideology in Transition (1952; New York: Harper and Row, 1968) 284.

[5] "Middle class" is a vague umbrella term that includes diverse segments of the population. The pre-industrial terms used to make discriminations in social hierarchy was "ranks," "orders," and "degrees." For a discussion of the complex term "class" see Asa Briggs, "The Language of 'Class' in Early Nineteenth-Century England," in The Collected Essays of Asa Briggs (1960; Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1985) 1: 3-33; Raymond Williams, Keywords (New York: Oxford UP, 1976) 51-59. Refering to the "the actual political situation of the reform movement between the 1790s and the 1830s," Williams notes that "both the self-conscious middle classes and the quite different people who by the end of this period would describe themselves as the working classes adopted the descriptions useful or productive classes, in distinction from and in opposition to the privileged or the idle. The distinction was between the "People" (i.e., "'labourers, artisans, tradesmen and every profession useful to society' and the privileged class that composed the aristocratic government. In the The Making of the English Working Class, E.P. Thompson uses the term "working class" to refer to the artisans, craftsman, and other skilled manual labourers.

[6] On the ideology of domesticity, see Catherine Hall, "The Formation of Domestic Ideology," Fit Work for Women, ed. Sandra Burman (New York: St. Martin's, 1979) 15-31; Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850 (Chicago; U of Chicago P, 1987) 149-192.

sions"[7] (love for one's children, wife, husband, etc.). By 1819 (the year of Queen Victoria's birth), this ideology had been converted from a religious to a secular ideal that had diffused itself into the mainstream of British society. It governed gender behavior and included a fully formed cult of womanhood based on what one commentator has called "the mystique of domesticity."[8] It possessed the power of an unofficial code among all classes and even left its mark on the institution of monarchy itself. Knowles's plays are suffused with domesticity, though always in a larger political setting that is a reminder of the interconnection between politics and domestic life.

This first chapter traces the changing political conditions that brought Britain to the brink of revolution in the first two decades of the early nineteenth century and then led to a temporarily peaceful resolution of social conflict through constitutional change in 1832.[9] It also considers some of the consequences of these changing conditions, and the nature of Knowles's politics, including his opinion on some of the social controversial issues of the day. A knowledge of political conditions is helpful in assessing the political

[7] Dubois 104.

[8] Scrimgeour 518.

[9] The Chartism movement, which continued the popular struggle for reform, is beyond the scope of this study.

bite or lack of bite of Knowles's plays in his own age.[10] The second chapter describes the nature of the "revolution by diffusion" that "domesticated" British society along with some manifestations of the domestic ethos in British life, and then considers Knowles's involvement to it.

A. The Political Context

The French Revolution was the fount of politics in early nineteenth-century Britain. For Shelley, the Revolution was the "master theme of the epoch in which we live."[11] This violent "world historical event," (to use Hegel's words) caused an upheaval in Western civilization and stamped the new century with a menacing revolutionary character. To the student of early nineteenth-century English history, the Revolution and its aftermath are like the pole star to an ocean navigator, a fixed point that must never be lost sight of.

In the 1780s prior to the French Revolution, the cause of reform was respectable and had many sup-

[10] The political bite of Knowles's plays is considered in Chapter 6.

[11] P.B. Shelley, letter to Lord Byron, 8 Sept. 1816, Letters of P.B. Shelley, ed. F.L. Jones, 1: 504, quoted in M.H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (New York: Norton, 1971) 328.

porters. Within a few years of the Revolution, however, supporting reform became a dangerous undertaking. E.P. Thompson helps us to understand the reversal by pointing out that the Revolution "initiated three simultaneous processes among the British: a panic-struck counter-revolutionary response on the part of the landed and commercial aristocracy; a withdrawal on the part of the industrial bourgeoisie and an accommodation (on favorable terms) with the status quo; and rapid radicalisation of the popular reform movement."[12] The middle classes, he adds, retreated into a "repressive and anti-egalitarian ideology."[13] By 1795, the Revolution had transformed the political climate in Britain from mildly liberal to counter-revolutionary, causing a petrification of Britain's political institutions that lasted until the reign of William IV:

> In the forty-odd years between the French Revolution and the accession of King William IV, the political institutions of Great Britain had remained frozen in a posture which every year became more anachronistic. It was the revolution itself which was largely responsible for this misfortune.[14]

[12] E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (1963; New York: Vintage, 1966) 807-808.

[13] Thompson 807.

[14] Philip Ziegler, King William IV (1971; Newton Abbot: Reader's Union, 1973) 145.

From 1793, the year when England declared war on Revolutionary France, until the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, "war was the single most important fact of British life."[15] During this period of twenty-two years, Britons lived in an almost continuous state of war with France.[16] "No string of quotations, no statistics," writes George Steiner, "can recapture for us what must have been the inner excitement, the passionate adventure of spirit and emotion unleashed by the events of 1789 and sustained, at a fantastic tempo, until 1815."[17]

England had fought many wars with its traditional enemy France over the centuries, but the "Great War" was different any of them, and aroused in Britons more than conventional Francophobia.[18] In addition to being about power, territory, and trade, this war was also about ideology. The Revolution had given birth to Jacobinism, a radical anti-monarchical, anti-aristocratic, anti-religious, and anti-property ideology that was viewed as posing a serious threat to the

[15] Betty T. Bennett, ed. and intro., British War Poetry in the Age of Romanticism: 1793-1815 (New York and London: Garland, 1976) ix.

[16] The Peace of Amiens, signed in 1802, provided a fourteen-month respite.

[17] George Steiner, Bluebeard's Castle 11.

[18] Including the "Great War," England and France fought seven wars after 1689: 1689-1697; 1702-1713; 1739-1748; 1756-1763; 1778-1783; 1793-1802; 1803-1815.

stability of British institutions, and, indeed, to the very existence of Britain's form of government--constitutional monarchy. It rested on the subversive principle of republicanism, which included the doctrine of egalitarianism and belief in advancement through merit. Conservative Britons were especially alarmed by this ideology because the working or artisanal class[19] found it so appealing. The ideology itself was attractively packaged for export in cheap editions of Thomas Paine's Rights of Man, a feisty and plainly written reply to Burke's Reflections on the French Revolution. Burke had eloquently put the anti-Jacobin case, resting it on wisdom, experience, and tradition as well as precedent and constitutionalism. Dismissing Burke's work as a theatrical performance, Paine offered a new "constitution" based on "the light of reason" and "first principles"[20] that repudiated the English Constitution and authority of tradition. Paine's book was

[19] Following E.P. Thompson, I have used the terms "artisanal class," "working class" and "industrial classes" interchangeably. "In 1830," writes Thompson, "the characteristic industrial worker worked not in a mill or factory but (as an artisan or 'mechanic') in a small workshop or in his own home, or (as a labourer) in more-or-less casual employment in the streets, on building-sites, on the docks." He notes that "the largest [and most radical] single artisan trade was that of shoemaking, with 133,000 adult male workers estimated for 1831, followed by tailoring with 74,000."--Thompson 234.

[20] Thompson 91.

a "huge popular success"[21] among the members of that class.[22]

To the loyalist British mind, republicanism (a peaceful ideology in itself) came to be equated with Jacobinism--that is, with violence, bloodshed, and extremism of every kind In general, the extremism of the Revolution gave added impetus to the disposition of English political thinkers, dating from at least the seventeenth century, to look back to early history in search of the principles of liberty and law. This disposition crystallized into a theory of "lost rights" called "the Norman Yoke," a myth which held that Anglo-Saxon times had been a golden age of constitutional rights that had been destroyed by the Normans.[23] Burke links hands with his predecessor Coke, whose defense of the common law rested on the argument of historical precedent. To the Jacobin mind, the golden age lay in the future; for many Britons it lay in a mythical past.

The Tory government of William Pitt the Younger, which dominated the politics of Britain for twenty years as head of the ministry (1783-1801, and 1804-

[21] Marilyn Butler, Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background, 1760-1830 (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1981) 78.

[22] Burke's Reflections on the French Revolution had sounded the alarm bell in 1790. Paine was declared persona non grata and tried for treason in absentia.

[23] Christopher Hill, "The Norman Yoke," Puritanism and Revolution (1958; New York: Schocken, 1964) 50-122.

1806), reacted to the threat by adopting a series of repressive measures (most notably the Seditious Societies Act and the suspension of Habeas Corpus) to censor and control the press, and curtail the liberties of British subjects in the name of rooting out home-grown Jacobinism.[24] This was a defensive response to a threat that was perceived to be real, however much the actuality of the fear is open to interpretation. The siege mentality verged on paranoia. During the war years, the Tory government represented itself as "the defenders of the freedom of Europe, threatened with French domination,"[25] with the war depicted "as a crusade for freedom against the forces of military tyranny."[26] To combat that tyranny, the Tories logically and effectively appealed to the British love of liberty--in the same way the Whigs had done in during the wars with Louis XIV and Louis XV in the early

[24] On English Jacobinism see E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (1963; New York: Vintage, 1966; Carl B. Cone, The English Jacobins (New York, place, 1968); J. Ann Hone, For the Cause of Truth: Radicalism in London, 1796-1821 (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1982); Albert Goodwin, The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1979).

[25] Elie Halevy, A History of the English People in 1815, tr. by E.I. Watkins with foreword by Asa Briggs (1924; London and New York: Ark-Routledge) 175.

[26] Linda Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837 (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1992) 311. I am indebted to Colley's penetrating book, a major contribution to our understanding of the formation of the British nation, for many of the insights in this chapter.

eighteenth century.

In the politically repressive climate, many Britons believed that the "loose popular notions" comprising "the idea of the Englishman's 'birthright' (i.e., "the rights of every adult male in the country"[27]) were endangered.[28] E.P. Thompson has enumerated these notions as:

> Freedom from absolutism (the constitutional monarchy), freedom from arbitrary arrest, trial by jury, equality before the law, the freedom of the home from arbitrary entrance and search, some limited liberty of thought, of speech, and of conscience, his vicarious participation in liberty (or in its semblance) afforded by the right of parliamentary opposition and by elections and election tumults (although the people had no vote they had the right to parade, huzza, and jeer on the hustlings), as well as freedom to travel, trade, and sell one's own labour.[29]

In the name of protecting the nation from foreign domination, one of an Englishman's most precious and vaunted traditional rights, the government was infringing or trampling upon a number of other rights. The right to trial by jury proved to be the only legal instrument for protecting the individual against the

[27] Hill 68.

[28] Thompson 25.

[29] Thompson 79.

government's violation of an Englishman's "birthright."[30]

Under the leadership of James Fox, the Whigs credibly cast themselves in the 1790's as "the friends of the people" who stood for the "right of resistance" to the influence of the Crown. The word "people," it should be noted was "crude, undefined term" in this period.[31] Even though most Whigs, like the Tories, were descendants of aristocratic families, they--not the Tories--were the architects of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, which established "the limitations of the prerogative of the Crown to infringe . . . personal rights and liberty of conscience."[32] For the Whigs, liberty was a precious heritage and "encomiums to liberty signified the continuity of a tradition, however inflated, which linked their present with a glorious past, a prototypical Whig interpretation of history,'" writes Abraham Kriegel.[33] Whereas the Tory tended to value loyalty above all else, the Whig tended or professed to believe that liberty was the supreme

[30] The acquittal of Thomas Hardy in 1794, and of Henry Tooke and John Thelwall soon after in treason trials was a blow, though only a temporary one, to the government's repressiveness.

[31] Stanley Jones, Hazlitt: A Life, from Winterslow to Frith Street (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989) 234.

[32] Thompson 23.

[33] Abraham D. Kriegel, "Liberty and Whiggery in Early Nineteenth-Century England," Journal of Modern History 52 (1980): 255.

value, "the one value to which all others were subordinated."[34] The Whig were thus identified with the love of liberty. Fox, in the view of many, had "dedicated his life to the defense of liberty."[35] But with England's declaration of war on France in 1793, nationalism (or patriotism) was "appropriated by the conservative establishment,"[36] a circumstance that drove most of the Whig Opposition--and eventually even Fox--into the camp of those who supported the war effort. The "Foxite" Opposition, committed to protesting government repression and advocating a policy of peace, economy, and reform, was a remnant of a party. By 1806, both of Britain's great statesmen, Pitt and Fox (after reconciling himself to the war and joining the "Ministry of All-the-Talents"), were dead, and Britain had launched a campaign to dislodge the French from the Peninsular. Patriotism distracted most Britons from their domestic discontents during this time and it continued to do so until Napoleon was decisively defeated at Waterloo in 1815.

Because the war with France was an ideological conflict, it is almost impossible to exaggerate the

[34] Kriegel 254.

[35] James Mackintosh to Lord Holland, August 15, 1819, Holland House Papers, B.L. Add. MSS 51653, fol. 91, quoted in Kriegel 254.

[36] Marc Baer, Theatre and Disorder in Late Georgian London (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1992) 192-193.

deep and long-lasting consequences events in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France had on the social, political, and intellectual life of early nineteenth-century Britain. The siege mentality already referred to hardened public attitudes toward almost everything. As Hazlitt put it, "The 'horrors' of the French Revolution were, it seems, to become a Medusa's shield to screen every species of existing vice or folly from the glance even of ridicule, and to render them invulnerable and incorrigible."[37] The climate was hostile to even mild change, thus causing a postponing of "the real business at hand, namely, an assault on the unreformed British state and its monarchy."[38]

Following the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815, Britons found themselves in the abnormal situation of being undistracted by war or serious external threats. Peace brought with it a sense of fatigue and ennui.[39] As one contemporary observer said, "peace had cut off the supply of excitement" causing the "chord" to become "unstrung. . . . Then came the bill, which

[37] Thomas Holcroft and William Hazlitt, The Life of Thomas Holcroft, ed. Elbridge Colby, 2 vols. (1925; New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968) 2: 101.

[38] Linda Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837 (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1992) 268.

[39] See Steiner, Bluebeard's Castle 11.

even when it can be paid, seldom exhilarates."[40] Reformism, which had been ruthlessly trampled underfoot during the war years but not by any means extinguished, reawakened with new hope and vigor. Increasingly in the post-Waterloo period Britons became preoccupied with the long deferred task of reforming the antiquated and elitist machinery of government. For different reasons, both the Tory government and the Whig opposition emerged from the war in a weakened position. The Tories were identified with a reactionary political settlement restoring the status quo ante in Europe that shocked lovers of liberty.[41] The leaderless Foxites, on the other hand, were disunited, "defeated and demoralized, reduced to the condition of a permanent Opposition."[42] The disarray of the two parties, along with economic hard times, gave the radical democrats the opportunity to increase their political power in London and other urban centers. Thus began a period of precarious transition characterized by internal strains and ten-

[40] Richard Ford, review of Oliver Twist, Quarterly Review 64 (June, 1839) 84, quoted in Robert L. Patten, George Cruikshank's Life, Times, and Art (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1992) 1: 121.

[41] The Treaty of Vienna reinstalled the Bourbons in France and the legitimate monarchy in Spain; it also denied the Italian and German nationalist aspirations. Hazlitt never ceased denouncing the principle of "legitimacy" (heredity rule) that was the basis of the Treaty. Philanthropists were disappointed by Castlereagh's failure to secure an agreement among the European powers to abolish the slave trade.

[42] Halevy, A History of the English People in 1815 3.

sions so severe that it seemed to many that the country was headed toward revolution.

The struggle for reform versus revolution was resolved in 1832, when Britons rejected political revolution and chose constitutional reform in the interests of achieving social stability and peace. The great Reform Bill was a repudiation both of extreme Toryism that resisted change in the name of tradition, and extreme radicalism that advocated change in the name of democracy. It was a victory for the values of compromise, moderation, and stability. It mandated "the first major reconstruction of the British representative system since Oliver Cromwell's rule in the 1650s."[43] By broadening the franchise, it struck a decisive blow against an entrenched aristocratic form of parliamentary government that had ruled England since the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89. without tampering with the "Constitution of King, Lord, and Commons"--the legacy of the Settlement of 1688--which was still considered "the guarantee of British independence and liberties."[44] In relative terms, it "created a radically different electoral landscape" that was "considerably more democratic" in spite of the fact that "eighty percent of adult males had been left

[43] Colley, Britons 345.

[44] Thompson 78.

without the vote."[45] Marc Baer discerns "a trend--from Jacobities to Wilkites, from Foxites to Burdettites, and finally in the Chartists--whereby violence was replaced by nonviolent forms of political engagement."[46]

It is easy to overlook the fact that the first reform movement, in spite of it nonviolent character, was looked upon as threatening to social stablility, especially during the peak periods of its militancy, in 1814-1819 and 1830-1832. Even supporters of parliamentary reform were alarmed by the program of the radicals, summarized in the formula, "universal suffrage, annual parliaments, and secret ballot." The realization of these democratic ideals was beyond the pale of political possibility. Lord Grey, the veteran Whig leader who shepherded the First Reform Bill through parliament, declared, "there is no one more decided against annual parliaments, universal suffrage, and the ballot, than I am."[47] In opposing the radical platform, Lord Grey was in step with national sentiment. For, as E.P. Thompson puts it:

> the stance of the common Englishman was not so much democratic, in any positive sense, as anti-absolutist. He felt himself to be an

[45] Colley, Britons 349.

[46] Baer 236.

[47] Lord Grey, quoted in Thompson 811.

> individualist, with few affirmative rights, but protected by the laws against the intrusion of arbitrary power. More obscurely, he felt that the Glorious Revolution afforded a constitutional precedent for the right to riot in resistance to oppression.[48]

Referring to the "less articulate responses of the "free-born Englishman,"[49] Thompson states that Britons in this category "claimed few rights except that of being left alone." This vague but deeply held constitutionalism of the average Briton--a right that needs to kept in mind when reading Virginius and William Tell..

Waterloo was a watershed moment in British history. With this battle, Britain had won a life-and-death struggle with her seemingly eternal arch-enemy France, thus removing the main threat to her external security. This greatly enhanced her standing in the world and her own self-image, catapulting Britain into preeminence among the European nations as a military, industrial, commercial, and colonial power: "that right little, tight little island," in the words of Dibdin's popular war song, emerged "uninvaded, undefeated [and], mistress of the seas."[50] Yet the boost to the national

[48] Thompson 80.

[49] Thompson 81.

[50] Cecil Woodham-Smith, Queen Victoria: Her Life and TImes, 1819-1861, 2 vols. (London: Hamish Hamilton) 1: 1.

ego resulting from this newly acquired prestige was accompanied by a feeling of malaise that went beyond the natural emotional letdown that resulted from the cessation of excitement that came with peace. Britain was experiencing a "profound loss of direction"[51] caused by a effects of a number of dislocating phenomena. These included revolutions in industry and agriculture, rapid urbanization, economic depression, a population explosion, as well as skeptical intellectual currents. The impact of these phenomena took their toll on the national psyche. Old certainties (political, social, economic, and religious) were called into question without being replaced with new ones. "Progress" was releasing anarchic energies that threatened to pull apart the fabric of society.

Contrary to expectation, the end of the "Great War" did not bring peace and plenty. Instead, peace opened a Pandora's box of evils that exacerbated discontent. As the nation was forced to suddenly shift to a peacetime economy, harsh and intractable "economic realities asserted themselves."[52] There was, first of all, an enormous wartime bill to be paid. In addition, there was the slump in world trade, and widespread

[51] Colley, Britons 322.

[52] Norman Gash, "After Waterloo: British Society and the Legacy of the Napoleonic Wars," Transactions of the Royal Historical Society 28 (1978): 145.

unemployment, caused by the rapid demobilization of a half million soldiers (300,000 in 1816 alone) serving in Europe and several hundreds of thousands at home.[53] Military pensions and half-pay ballooned the national debt.[54] Bad weather ruined crops, creating food scarcities for several years. The "economic disillusionment,"[55] along with fatigue and ennui, that set in shortly after Waterloo as a result of these adverse conditions has aptly been called the "shock of peace."[56] The national mood soured as Britain was afflicted with "hardship, unemployment, agrarian riots, machine-breaking, protest marches, and by 1817, localized insurrection."[57] "The years 1815-1819," writes Marilyn Butler, "produced unrest during which England probably came nearer to serious violence than at any other time during the French Revolutionary period."[58] Thompson calls these four years "the heroic age of radicalism."[59]

[53] Colley, Britons 312.

[54] Pensions and half-pay for officers in the post-Waterloo period amounted to five million pounds, an enormous sum that put a strain on the budget--Gash 17.

[55] Halevy, The Liberal 4.

[56] Colley, Britons 7.

[57] Butler 88.

[58] Butler 139.

[59] Thompson 601.

Although constitutionalism prevailed in the end, those who lived through the tumultuous decade of the 1820s may be excused for fearing that change, however justified or needed, might be accomplished by bloody insurrection in the French manner rather than by peaceful means. Walter Houghton stresses that the early nineteenth century "was shot through, from top to bottom, with the dread of some wild outbreak of the masses that would overthrow the established order and confiscate private property."[60] The dread of violence hung over Britain like a thunder-cloud from the 1790's to the 1840's, the last decade when "contemporaries talked openly of class war and imminent revolution."[61] The fear of revolution that haunted Britons throughout most of the early nineteenth century was a legacy of the French Revolution.

Social discontent was not unique to this period, of course, but the character of the discontent was. In Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837, Linda Colley calls attention to "the peculiarly bitter quality of popular protest"[62] which discontent produced in the decades following what she aptly calls "the outbreak of

[60] Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870 (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1957) 55.

[61] Asa Briggs, Victorian People: A Reassessment of Persons and Themes, 1851-1867 (1955; New York: Harper and Row, 1963) 1.

[62] Colley, Britons 321.

peace."[63] The nature of the protest in this period was different from anything that had been seen in Britain before. So too was the scope and degree of the protest. Unlike the ritualized tradition of localized food riots, for example, the new forms of popular protest "drew its strength from the changes in the social and economic structure of the country."[64] The fact that the protest manifest itself mostly in non-violent forms gave cold comfort to those who felt threatened by change. In a word, what alarmed conservative Britons and, of course, the British government was a phenomenon that Linda Colley has called "people-power:"[65]

> The years between Waterloo and the accession of Queen Victoria--and especially the late 1820s and early 1830s--were arguably the only period in modern British history in which peoplepower--as we have seen it operate in parts of eastern Europe in the late twentieth century--played a prominent and pervasive role in effecting significant political change.
>
> The sheer number of men and women from all social classes, and from all parts of Great Britain, who took part in marches, in demonstrations and in petitions during these years was astonishing.[66]

[63] Colley, Britons 7.

[64] J. Stevenson, "Food Riots in England, 1792-1818," Popular Protest and Public Order: Six Studies in English History, 1790-1920, eds. R. Quinault and J. Stevenson (London: Allen and Unwin, 1974) 67.

[65] Colley, Britons 362.

[66] Colley, Britons 362.

It was a time when the force of the "people" was felt as it never had been felt before: when the British masses spoke with a single voice for "peaceful and orderly constitutional reform."[67]

The gradual involvement of people of all classes in politics was a most unsettling development in the post-war period. Formerly, politics had been the preserve of the privileged few. Earlier expressions of nascent political self-consciousness among the middle and artisan classes had come to nothing. In the 1770's, "people-power" had found a symbolic rallying point in John Wilkes, but that power had been manipulated rather than mobilized; in the 1790's, an informed radical political self-consciousness had been stimulated by the French Revolution among Dissenters and artisans and then harshly repressed. Both expressions of popularism in politics had failed for lack of popular support and from fear instilled in the propertied classes. This was not the case with reformism in the post-war period, when reform became identified with the nation's rapidly expanding newer middle classes who were not sharers in the wealth of "Old Corruption"--Cobbett's term for the

[67] Colley, Britons 361.

"evils associated with the whole structure of government and society."[68]

War had a great deal to do with the birth of this new phenomenon of "people-power." Politics during the war became, to paraphrase Clausewitz, "the business of the people." It is no wonder that, as Colley remarks, that "in the early years of the war the British government was--rightly or wrongly--as afraid of the people as it was of the enemy."[69] Nevertheless, the government had no choice but to encourage an active rather than passive loyalty and the concept of citizenship "on a wider scale, and at a lower social level" as the French brought the war closer to home.[70] This is illustrated in 1803, when the rumor of an imminent invasion from across the Channel panicked the

[68] Goodwin 23. The most flagrant corruption was the existence of rotten (or pocket) boroughs, areas legally entitled to send representatives to parliament no matter how few voters inhabited them. These parliamentary seats were openly bought and sold or controlled by patronage. Another "corruption," was that only owners of land were allowed to vote; owners of commerical and industrial property were excluded. By 1831, Britain's House of Commons represented only a small percentage of the population. One example of the disproportion in representation is enough to demonstrate the inequity of the system: Corwall, a sparsely populated area, was represented by forty-four members, while whole cities such as Manchester, Birmingham and Leeds were not represented at all. W.D. Rubinstein makes an important distinction between the older middle classes who had established a "nexus between the Pitt-Liverpool Tory governments" and the aristocracy and the newer middle classes who were excluded from this nexus--W.D. Rubinstein, "The End of Old Corruption in Britain, 1780-1860" Past and Present 101 (1983): 80-81.

[69] Colley, Britons 289.

[70] Colley, Britons 371.

British population. The threat of a French invasion of England had existed from 1793, and became a near reality under Napoleon, who made "the conquest of Britain . . . his primary strategic objective" from 1798 to 1805.[71] An invasion of England, it turns out, was a strategic objective beyond Napoleon's military capacity to carry out, but the British could not have known this at the time. To defend the country, the government issued arms to a half million Britons, most from the working population. Its willingness to do so was a sign that it "had abandoned, at least for a while, the repressive attitude toward popular participation adopted in the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution."[72] It was a sign, too, that nationalism had become "diverse enough to cross class and political boundaries."[73]

It is difficult to exaggerate the dread that the word "people"--the disenfranchised masses whom Burke contemptuously referred to as "the swinish multitude"[74] --aroused in propertied Britons at this time, when the combination of politics and the people conjured up

[71] Colley, Britons 286. Napoleon declared himself First Consul in 1803 and Emperor for life in 1804.

[72] Colley, Britons 310.

[73] Baer 193.

[74] Edmund Burke, Reflections on the French Revolution, quoted in Thompson 90.

fearful specters. The most fearful of all was, of course, the Terror in France, which, in the words of Malcolm Kelsall, "confirmed the danger which faced a state when the mob became institutionalized as the sole arbiter of power."[75] Britain had its own example of the rule of "King Mob" in the Gordon Riots of 1780, when for nearly a week London was at the mercy of a rampaging, property-destroying, drunken mob. The memory of these riots was still vivid in the early nineteenth century as a symbol of "the power of the mobilised metropolitan crowd" to paralyze the workings of government in an age when there was no police force to maintain order.[76] The French Revolution and the Gordon Riots, as Kelsall points out, had a "parallel significance" and "no better argument against giving power to 'the people' can be envisaged than the conduct of 'the mob' in 1780."[77] It is recorded that Lord Liverpool, the Prime Minister from 1815-1827, ominously remarked while in office, "One insurrection in London and all is lost."[78] But as J.E. Cookson has pointed out, what alarmed Lord Liverpool and his government

[75] Malcolm Kelsall, Byron's Politics (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1987) 18.

[76] Roger Wells, Insurrection: The British Experience, 1795-1803 (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1983) 254.

[77] Kelsall 18.

[78] Quoted in Wells 254.

most, especially in 1819 (the year of "Peterloo") was not spontaneous outbreaks of discontent or even the "threat of insurrection," but organized discontent that proceeded along legal lines. "Most alarming of all," writes Cookson, "under the immemorial privilege of petitioning and public assembly, the common people were fast discovering the confidence which comes of discipline and large numbers."[79]

Dedicated to the cause of helping the people discover and exercise their power within a constitutional framework were a number of mostly charismatic and incredibly energetic leaders of a splintered reform movement. In London, the victory of the Westminster radical M.P. Sir Francis Burdett (along with Lord Cochrane) in a hotly contested election in 1807 signaled a revival of the reform movement throughout the nation. In spite of the label "radical," Burdett and Cochrane (and Byron's friend Hobhouse, who later replaced Cochrane) were cautious constitutionalists opposed to popular agitation and universal manhood suffrage, as was the working class radical Francis Place, whose mentors were Bentham and Mill. Outside of London, were a number of "intractable individualists"[80] who

[79] J.E. Cookson, Lord Liverpool's Administration: The Crucial Years, 1815-1822 (Hamden: Archon, 1975) 180-181.

[80] Thompson 626. On the personalities of the radical leaders, see 607-630.

were suspicious of each other's power and often worked at cross purposes. These included Major Cartwright, William Cobbett, and Henry "Orator" Hunt, whose power-base was chiefly outside of London and in the countryside. These three leaders dedicated themselves, by pen or voice, to stirring the pot of popular agitation and denouncing abuses such as the Corn laws (passed in 1815 and not repealed until 1846), the income tax, tithes, and paper money. They were moderate reformers, but they were considered to be rabblerousers not only by the government but by other moderate reformers such as Place. Politically, they were quite distinct from one another. The pre-war veteran Cartwright, the senior leader (born in 1740) and a living link to the radicalism of the 1780's and 1790's, argued for universal manhood suffrage on grounds of historical precedent. He represented the "instinctive reaction" of the "British working-class radicals. . . to defend the case for parliamentary reform in terms of dubious Anglo-Saxon 'liberties' rather than of French democracy"--that is to say, in terms of "ancestral" rather than "natural" rights.[81] This argument was best left vague in the interests of unity, for as Hill points out, "the rallying cry of a return to the true principles of Saxon freedom could unite the two wings

[81] Goodwin 21. See Chapter 7 for the significance of King Alfred in this connection.

[i.e., the middle and lower classes] so long as those principles were not too closely defined."[82]

Outside of London, the disenfranchised looked to popular but gentlemanly leaders and opinion-moulders like Cobbett (a converted Tory) and Hunt. Cobbett, the publisher and author of the Political Register, was the foremost journalist of the reform movement, and Hunt its foremost public orator. In John Belchem's words, both championed "the interests of the hard-working plundered against the parasitic plunderers"[83] They were "adept at pitching their rhetoric just on the right side of treason."[84] The government looked upon them, in the words of Lord Liverpool, as "'promoters of confusion,' who were destroying 'all respect for established authority and ancient institutions.'"[85] Cobbett, a "pragmatist and apologist of gradualism"[86] who advocated a limited rather than universal suffrage, is credited with fathering "an Independent radical press after the Wars" and with creating a mythology of radicalism (e.g., the demonization of the Prince Regent, and the Lords Castlereagh and Sidmouth) that links him

[82] Hill 105.

[83] John Belchem, 'Orator' Hunt: Henry Hunt and English Working-Class Radicalism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) 3.

[84] Thompson 626.

[85] Lord Liverpool, quoted in Cookson 181.

[86] Belchem 6.

with Hazlitt, Knowles's mentor.[87] More extreme than Cobbett was the charismatic Henry "Orator" Hunt, who was "the most popular and flamboyant figure in radical politics in the early nineteenth century."[88] Hunt was a tall, handsome man who sported a white top-hat and was endowed with a stentorian voice whom the people referred to as the "Champion of Liberty." Reformers despised him almost as much as party politicians.[89] Place scornfully branded him a "mob orator"[90] and demagogue for his scandalous "speechifying and courting the crowd."[91] Hunt was in the "Wilkite tradition" of the "independent, gentlemanly leader," but he differed from John Wilkes in that "his name became synonymous with the uncompromising programme of democratic rights" (universal suffrage, annual parliaments, and the ballot) rather than just "the abstract notion of liberty," and he has been credited with transforming "the non-represented crowd into an independent, proudly self-sufficient, and organized political force" that brought

[87] Thompson, 627. Hazlitt describes Cobbett as "unquestionably the most powerful political writer of the present day," quoted in Thompson, 627. Other influential radical journalists included T.J. Wooler, editor of The Black Dwarf, and the Paineite Richard Carlile, editor of the Republican.

[88] Belchem 3.

[89] Belchem 3.

[90] The term is that of the radical Francis Place, quoted in Belchem 1.

[91] Belchem 39.

"constitutional mass pressure from without for the restoration of the constitutional democratic rights of all."[92]

In the absence of political organization at the national level (the Seditious Societies Act of 1799 made such organization illegal), the people looked to individualists like Hunt for leadership. According to Belchem, Hunt's "bravura performance" at Spa Fields in 1816-1817 "opened a new era in popular protest and politics. . . . by enrolling the people in mass agitation for the full democratic programme of constitutional rights"--a defeat for both the moderates and the revolutionary Spenceans. Buttressed with "the myth and folklore of English libertarian history," which exploited anti-absolutist sentiment, Hunt's constitutionalist program exerted wide appeal.[93]

The radicals or reformers described above contrasted with conspiratorial-minded Jacobin radicals like the Spenceans who amateurishly masterminded the botched insurrection called the "Cato Street Conspiracy" in 1820. The Spenceans ominously proclaimed the right of the people to resist oppression by force, a venerable if vague Whig doctrine sanctioned by the Glorious Revolution of 1688. In Thompson's words, "rad-

[92] Belchem 12-13, 4.

[93] Belchem 4, 5.

icalism was a generalised libertarian rhetoric, a running battle between the people and the unreformed House of Commons within which one issue after another was thrown to the fore."[94] Radicals of all kinds compensated for their lack of electoral power by using rhetoric "to hint, warn, or bluster about the ultimate recourse of the people to physical force."[95] Unlike the Spenceans, most radicals who resorted to the rhetoric of violence were bluffing.

Inspired by Hunt and Cobbett, the so-called "swinish multitude" soon showed that it was capable of transforming itself from a mob into a potent political force to be reckoned with. Vox populi spoke more impressively than it ever had before in the orderly, "semi-militarized spectacle"[96] of over 50,000 people who gathered to hear "Orator" Hunt speak on August 16, 1819 at St. Peter's Field near Manchester.[97] The military atmosphere of the late wars had had the result of making marching and drilling, often in ranks to the sound of bugles, "a feature of political agitation in the industrial areas."[98] Accordingly, the masses

[94] Thompson 604.

[95] Thompson 625.

[96] Gash 151.

[97] Henry Hunt had addressed an earlier public assemblage at Spa Fields in 1816.

[98] Gash 150.

marched in orderly ranks to the accompaniment of music and banners such as "Liberty and Fraternity." It was disciplined massive demonstrations of "people-power" of this kind that alarmed the government, magistrates, and conservative Britons generally more than spontaneous mob riots. The peaceful event led to tragedy when the local magistrates panicked and ordered the Hussars to disperse the crowd. After the dust had settled, eleven people (nine men and two women) had been killed and hundreds injured. The magistrates were later praised by the Regent himself for preserving law and order.

"Peterloo," as the bloody incident at St. Peter's Field was satirically called, proved to be a turning point in the fortunes of the reform movement because it was "a tremendous moral and propaganda victory for Hunt and the radicals."[99] Because of it, says R.J. White, "Parliamentary Reform came of age as a popular programme."[100] The spilling of British blood by British troops shocked the nation and attracted the sympathy of the middle class. But as the passage of the Six Acts immediately after Peterloo reveals, repression under the unpopular Prince Regent (soon to be king) was still the government's answer to extra-parliamentary "peoplepower." Among other things, the Acts prohibited

[99] Belchem 5.

[100] R.J. White, Waterloo to Peterloo (1957; Baltimore: Penguin [1968]) 189.

mass meetings and "the slightest semblance of martial array" among the populace."[101] It also gagged reform publications like The White Hat (an obvious allusion to Hunt) a middle class organ which attacked the Commons as "not the representative of the people, but the representative of an oligarchy."[102]

The discovery of the so-called "Cato Street Conspiracy," foiled by the government shortly after the passage of the Six Acts, seemed to justify the repressive countermeasures that the government had taken after Peterloo. It certainly played into the hands of those who claimed that the fear of revolution was real rather than imagined. The bungled conspiracy may be considered as an epilogue to the post-war radical reform movement. It was a symptom of disillusionment over "the effectiveness of platform and petition politics"[103] that drove one Arthur Thistlewood, a republican radical, to involve himself in a plan to

[101] Cookson 193. The Six Acts consisted of 1) the Seditious Meetings Bill; 2) the Training Prevention Bill; 3) the Seizure of Arms Bill; 4) the Newspaper Stamp Duties Bill; 5) the Blasphemous and Seditious Libels Bill, and; 6) Misdemeanors Bill. The first three Acts were aimed at restricting public meetings and the training of people in the use of arms; the fourth and fifth at the press, and the sixth at the travelling orators themselves--see Cookson 193-195.

[102] The White Hat, 1, 135, quoted in Hill 105.

[103] Roger Sales, English Literature in History, 1780-1830: Pastoral and Politics (New York: St. Martin's, 1983), 142. Sales is especially good on the theatrical aspect of the episode (see 157-165).

assassinate the British cabinet at a public dinner in the winter of 1820. Thistlewood and his pathetic but idealistic accomplices, having been set up by a government informer, were arrested in the midst of the preparations for their coup d'etat. At his trial, he proudly described himself as a latter-day Brutus and Cassius striking a blow against tyranny. The Cato Street conspiracy of 1820 was Jacobinism's last gasp on British soil.[104]

The voice of the people, so clearly heard near Manchester, again spoke loudly in London a year later during the so-called "Queen Caroline affair." In the words of Thomas Laqueur, this "affair" was the popular "agitation on behalf of a not very-virtuous queen whose still less virtuous husband, George IV, wanted desperately to divorce her" on charges of adultery.[105] Laqueur calls the outpouring of pro-Caroline popular

[104] The illegal Jacobin tradition of underground agitation, of which the Cato Street Conspiracy may be considered a culmination, had inspired periodic attempts at insurrection. In 1802, for example, Colonel Despard, an Irish nationalist with a genuine disgust at political corruption and sympathy was arrested for building an underground revolutionary army with the apparent intention of launching a coup d'etat in the name of the "glorious cause of Liberty. Among Despard's last words before he was excecuted in 1803--Thompson 484. In 1817, Jeremiah Brandreth, a former Luddite and unemployed weaver, led an uprising (the "Pentridge Rising") in Derbyshire in 1817, which is notable for being "one of the first attempts in history to mount a whole proletarian insurrection, without any middle-class support--Thompson 668.

[105] Thomas W. Laqueur, "The Queen Caroline Affair: Politics as Art in the Reign of George IV," in Journal of Modern History, 54 (1982): 417.

sentiment in the form of demonstrations "a central event in the history of popular politics."[106] What made the agitation dangerous in the eyes of the government was "the self-consciousness of the people in feeling their power," writes Laqueur.[107]

In this instance, however, people-power expressed itself not in quasi-military form (as at St. Peter's Field) but in rituals of theater, carnival, and misrule that were, interestingly enough, tolerated by the government.[108] The popular protests on behalf of Queen Caroline is one example of what Marc Baer calls "the interpenetration of theatrical and political cultures"[109] that was characteristic in this period. It also illustrates what Edward Bulwer meant when he remarked, "the English, instead of finding politics on the stage, find their stage in politics."[110] The queen's degrading trial, which resulted in her acquittal, has been aptly described as "the mirror image of Marie-Antoinette's execution in France," though as political theater it had the character of "domestic

[106] Laqueur 421.

[107] Laqueur 427.

[108] For a discussion of the Queen Caroline Affair from a theatrical point of view, see Roger Sales 167-186.

[109] Baer 226.

[110] Edward Lytton Bulwer, England and the English, ed. with intro. Standish Meacham (1833; Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1970) 305.

melodrama and royalist fantasy,"[111] leavened with farce, rather than tragedy.[112] Laqueur's point is that by being theatricalized ("transformed into melodrama, farce, and romance") a great deal of reforming and revolutionary energy was dissipated and "rendered harmless."[113] At the same time, the theatricality of the protest should not mislead one into underestimating its seriousness. As Baer observes, "explicit theatricality should not mask the potential for even revolutionary outbreaks; and the theatricality of popular movements does not make them any less political than the dramatics of high politics."[114] Following hard upon the heels of Peterloo and the Cato Street Massacre, the prosecution of the queen was seized on by radicals and reformers, who found it symbolic of "Old Corruption," as grist for their political mills

It is sometimes overlooked that the decade of the 1820s was a period when the reform movement and radicalism in general collapsed for lack of direction and mass support. After Peterloo, Hunt retreated from confrontational tactics, naively resting his case on public opinion and the courts. The "propaganda triumph" of

[111] Thomas Laqueur 465.

[112] Colley, Britons 265.

[113] Laqueur 418.

[114] Baer 230.

Peterloo proved "a pyrrhic victory" for the radicals.[115] It marked the end of "the heroic age of radicalism" and the beginning in earnest of the middle-class phase of the reform movement. Compared to the decade of the Regency (1810-20), the decade of the 1820s under George IV was relatively quiet. Improved economic conditions from 1820-1825 dampened the fires of radical discontent, making possible an uneasy truce in the conflict between Old Corruption and reform. In 1824, Wooler ceased publication of The Black Dwarf with the lament that there was no "public devotedly attached to the cause of parliamentary reform."[116] But reform was not a dead cause by any means. A new generation of young, middle-class reformers (e.g., Henry Brougham, Joseph Hume, and the Benthamite radical John Cam Hobhouse) were emerging in order to, as Wilberforce put it, "rescue the multitude out of the hands of the Hunts and Thistlewoods."[117] After Peterloo, the middle class saw the wisdom of seizing the initiative from the faultering radicals on the issue of reform. So too did the Whigs, whom Peterloo had stirred out of their "long and sulky hibernation" to "assume once more its role of

[115] Belchem 6.

[116] T.J. Wooler, quoted in Thompson 810.

[117] William Wilberforce, quoted in Thompson 709.

traditional leaders of the people."[118] In undertaking the politically delicate task of supporting reform, the cautious Whigs, led by Lord Grey, saw themselves as "fulfilling the duty traditionally imposed upon them by their wealth, their rank and their political ideology."[119]

The cry for reform, Carlyle scornfully wrote in 1829, is one that "every one now sees, must and will be answered: Give us a reform of Government!"[120] In the Britain of 1829, the simplistic idea that parliamentary reform was the panacea for the ills afflicting society was a national mind-set. This idea went hand in hand with the equally simplistic, but extremely seductive, idea that the aristocratic controlled government had been responsible for these ills through their financial extravagance and corruption and imposition of burdensome taxes during the wartime period. The aristocracy was conveniently made a scapegoat. It was therefore widely believed that the country could be restored to pre-war prosperity if government spending

[118] R.J. White, Waterloo 196.

[119] Colley, Britons 345.

[120] Thomas Carlyle, "Signs of the Times," in Carlyle: Selected Words, Reminiscences and Letters, ed. Julian Symons (1829; Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1970) 29.

was curbed and controlled.[121] The intense anti-aristocratic bias that typified the reforming zeal that gripped Britain in the last years of the second decade of the nineteenth century, a bias that had been preached by radicals for at least two decades, is expressed in these words from The Manchester Gazette and Times written by the middle class radical Archibald Prentice:

> The want of a thorough reform in the Commons House of Parliament will be treated as the great source of the poverty, misery and crime that reigns among the labouring classes of the country; of the dreadful prevalence of embarrassment and insolvency among the middle classes, and the shameless, abandoned profligacy, which has scattered to the winds of heaven the hereditary respect of Englishmen for the aristocracy of their native land.[122]

George, as Regent and as King, along with his Tory ministries had long intransigently opposed parliamentary reform, and if it was to occur, a jolt to the status quo was needed to transform the political climate even further. In the summer of 1830, in the midst of preparations for a general election, that jolt

[121] In response to public pressure, the government made drastic cuts in spending and downscaled, policies in the words of Norman Gash that "helped ironically to create the very conditions which it was hoped to avoid--Gash, 153 and 156.

[122] Archibald Prentice, The Manchester Gazette and Times, 30 May 1829, quoted in Briggs, The Collected Essays (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1985) 1: 189.

came with double force. The first propitious event was the death of a decrepit George IV, at age 67. Suddenly, a new king reigned, William IV, George's only surviving brother,[123] just three years younger than he but in excellent health (see Fig 7). Most importantly, he was perceived by the British people as a friend of reform.[124] While personally unenthusiastic about parliamentary reform, the new king, unlike the old, at least recognized its necessity. The second event was the "July Revolution" in France, which deposed the Charles X (the last Bourbon) and placed Louis Philippe on the throne. Occurring less than a month after George IV's death, this peaceful revolution stimulated renewed agitation for reform on the part of the working classes. In England and the English, a work that mixes history with penetrating sociological analysis of British society in the post-Napoleonic period, Bulwer comments on the suddenness with which the British people whole-heartedly embraced reform in July of 1830:

> Just at a time when with George the Fourth an old era expired, the excitement of a popular election at home concurred with the three days of July in France, to give a decisive tone to the new. The question of Reform came on, and, to the astonishment of the nation

[123] The Duke of York, the next in line for the throne after George, died in 1827.

[124] The importance of this perception to Knowles's Alfred the Great is discussed in Chapter 7 in the context of the concept of the "Patriot King."

> itself, it was hailed at once by the national heart. From that moment, the intellectual spirit hitherto partially directed to, became wholly absorbed in, politics. . . .[125]

In the new liberal climate, the term "people," formerly pejorative, now took on a positive meaning as a collective term referring to the sum total of Britons who supported reform. William IV was not as liberal as he was publicly perceived to be at the beginning of his reign, but he took a momentous step toward reform when he entrusted the ministry of the government to the Whig party under Lord Grey, ending forty-seven years (1783-1830) of Tory rule. "The return of the Whigs to power meant that some sort of reform bill was inevitable," writes Asa Briggs.[126]

The near simultaneity of the two events--the change in monarchy and the revolution in France--resulted in explosive pressures for political reform. By 1831, the liberal Lord John Russell, a staunch advocate of reform, could declare that "the Reformers were the nation."[127] In deciding to swim with the tide of public opinion, the Whigs made a significant departure from the politics of the late eighteenth-century when, in John Derry's words:

[125] Bulwer, England 288.

[126] Briggs, The Making 236.

[127] Colley 346.

> popular movements were no more than ancillary," [and] when "party. . . meant a parliamentary group, not a national movement, and opposition was a means of gaining greater consistency of support in the commons, not a vehicle for a radical programme or a revolutionary creed.[128]

By bowing to public opinion, the Whigs were, in effect, confirming the truth of the observation about people-power made by Bulwer:

> while social habits descend from the upper to the lowest class, political principles, on the contrary, are reverberations of opinion travelling from the base to the apex of society. The Aristocracy form the Manners of Life, and the People produce the Revolutions of Thought.[129]

The passage of the Reform Bill thus marked a new stage in British politics, one in which pressure from the people and the press played a decisive part in the legislative process. However, the First Reform Bill faced an uncertain fate. When after the Whigs introduced it for the second time to the Commons on March 22, 1831, it passed by only a single vote. The euphoria of the Whigs and the people at that moment is described by Macaulay, then a young Whig M.P.:

[128] John W. Derry, Charles James Fox (New York: St. Martin's, 1972) 437.

[129] Bulwer, England 108.

> You might have heard a pin drop as Duncannon read the numbers. Then again the shouts broke out, and many of us shed tears. I could scarcely refrain. . . . We shook hands, and clapped each other on the back, and went out laughing, crying, and huzzaing into the lobby. And no sooner were the outer door opened than another shout answered that within the House. All the passages and the stairs into the waiting rooms were thronged by people who had waited till four in the morning to know the issue. We passed through a narrow lane between two masses of them; and all the way down they were shouting and waving their hats, till we got into the open air. I called a cabriolet, and the first things the driver asked was, Is the Bill carried? Yes, by one. Thank God for it, Sir. And away I rode. . . .[130]

The result was a cause for rejoicing], but it was just the beginning of a long, suspenseful drama that did not end until June 4, 1832, when the Great Reform Bill became the law of the land.

Popular agitation during the period from Waterloo to the Reform Bill was a sign that Britain was redefining itself as a nation--a "nation" in the loose sense of an "invented" or "imagined political community."[131] The invention of the British nation was an evolving process that had been going on since the Act of Union had joined Scotland to England and Wales in 1707. Patriotism (the early equivalent of nationalism) rested

[130] Thomas Macaulay, Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay (London, 1876) 1: 203, quoted in Ziegler 184.

[131] The term "imagined political community," quoted in Colley (Britons 5), is from Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (1991 edn.) 6.

on the firm foundation of British Protestantism (or anti-Catholicism) from at least the time of the Reformation, when the English were instilled with the notion that England was a nation favored by God. With the Glorious Revolution, which guaranteed a Protestant Succession, and The Act of Union, Protestantism became a national ideology of a geographically greater England officially known as Great Britain (though the new name never displaced the word "England" in the hearts of Britons).

Paradoxically, the Georgian and pre-Victorian periods were also periods of fervent patriotism as well as deep discontent and the former is just as deserving of attention as the latter. "From the highest to the lowest, the British loved their nation with a passion," writes Cecil Woodham-Smith.[132] Disaffection and patriotism, even among the discontented elements, were not incompatible, as was demonstrated after 1793, when Napoleon's repeated threats to invade England unleashed a floodtide of patriotic feeling among "the free-born Englishman," for whom "liberty" meant, above all, freedom from foreign subjugation. As is clear from the chorus of the popular song, "Rule, Britannia," the British defined themselves negatively: "Rule Britannia, rule the waves,/ Britons never will be slaves" is the

[132] Woodham-Smith 3.

song's defiant refrain. When the British government passed a Defence of the Realm Act in 1793 and again in 1803, a massive outpouring of ordinary people, including artisans, tradesman, shopkeepers, and professionals answered the call to defend their imperiled country. Even former members of the London Corresponding Society were prepared to become defenders to their country against invasion. The citizen volunteers who joined the militia or organized "their own private volunteer corps of infantry or cavalry" for "home defence duties"[133] at this time are to be distinguished from those volunteers who enlisted in the regular army, which the Duke of Wellington himself scornfully described as "composed of the scum of the earth--the mere scum of the earth."[134] The former had more of a stake in their society than did the latter, and the practice of posting militia members in different parts of the country and relocating them tended break down the provincialism of those serving and open their eyes to what it meant to be a member of the larger British community.

Colley cautions us not to be misled by historians who condescend to patriotism in this period by equating it with "visceral chauvinism, or simple-minded

[133] Colley, Britons 288.

[134] The Duke of Wellington in Earl Stanhope, Notes of Conversations with the Duke of Wellington (London, 1888), 14, quoted in Peter Burroughs, "Crime and Punishment in the British Army, 1815-1870, The English Historical Review, 100 (1985) 548.

deference, or blinkered conservatism."[135] In contrast, she stresses the progressive political implications implied in nineteenth-century patriotism; that is to say, "Being a patriot was a way of claiming the right to participate in British political life, and ultimately a means of demanding a much broader access to citizenship."[136] Even more significantly, it was evidence of a capacity to transcend the provincialism of being Scots, Welsh, Irish or English (in the limited geographical sense) and to identify with Britain as a nation.

Referring to patriotism after Britain's defeat of Napoleon, Woodham-Smith writes, "British belief in the superiority of the British nation knew no bounds. . . . [and] it was almost a religious conviction that the British possessed a sense of justice and fair play to be found nowhere else."[137] This observation reflects the "condescending sense of innate superiority" that the British felt "over their Gallic neighbors."[138] Hazlitt's deflation of John Bull's tendency to engage in moral posturing deserves quoting: "He will have it that

[135] Colley, Britons 5.

[136] Colley, Britons 5. In placing a positive emphasis on patriotism and loyalism, Colley's book serves as a corrective to many previous studies exploring British radicalism and dissent.

[137] Woodham-Smith 2.

[138] Gash 146.

he is a great patriot, for he hates all other countries; that he is wise, for he thinks all other people fools; that he is honest, for he calls all other people whores and rogues."[139]

For Britons, the victory over France also brought with it the challenge to "constitutional complacency" because it required a redefining of British national identity. The issue of identity was all the more pressing because of Britain's newly won superpower status. Historically, as Colley has persuasively argued, Britons had forged their identity as a "single people" not from "any political or cultural consensus at home" but primarily "in response to conflict with the Other."[140] In the late seventeenth century, throughout the eighteenth and until the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, that "Other" had been France, against whom Britain waged war seven times since 1689.[141] These wars forced Britons to define themselves "as Protestants struggling for survival against the world's foremost Catholic power."[142] Periodic war with Catholic France served as a reinvigorating tonic to remind Britons that

[139] William Hazlitt, "Character of John Bull," in The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, ed. P.P. Howe (1930-34; London and Toronto: AMS P, 1967) 4: 99.

[140] Colley, Britons 6.

[141] See fn. 17.

[142] Colley, 5.

British identity and Protestantism were inseparable. The numerous Catholic Irish (who comprised one quarter of the population of the British Isles in 1800) were considered alien to British identity because they shared the same religion with the French, Britain's arch-enemy. This pattern of national renewal through recurrent war with France ended with Napoleon's defeat: "Waterloo finally slew the dragon" of "the Other," writes Colley.[143] For the first time since 1689, England could no longer distract itself from its own long neglected internal tensions and divisions in the name of showing a united front against a common foe.

The most daunting challenge to the myth of British national identity in this period was the incorporation of Ireland into the United Kingdom in 1800. This second Act of Union had been dictated by political expediency during the war. Dissidents in Ireland (both Catholic and Protestant) had historically relied on France for support. In 1797, Ireland was in such a state of civil unrest that it was feared that if a French invasion force landed in Ireland a civil war might break out.[144] The insurrection of 1798, incited by the United Irishman, a nationalist group, acted as a catalyst in bring-

[143] Colley, Britons 322. Ironically, Revolutionary and Napoleonic France was a Non-Catholic enemy.

[144] J.C. Beckett, A Short History of Ireland (London: Hutchinson U Library, 1967) 126.

ing about the hasty legislative union of the two countries. Politically, this union was logical in that it "completed a natural process by which a single system of government was extended over the whole British Isles."[145] But it also had the effect of injecting "a disruptive element" into British politics.[146] Irish politics, carried out "in an atmosphere of anger, fear, and perpetual frustration,"[147] became the bane of British politicians. It caused the fall of three governments: Pitt's ministry in 1801, Grenville's in 1807, and Lord Grey's in 1834.

Of course, the union did nothing to solve the festering "Irish Question," which continued to be a major source of tension and bitter division in British politics after the war as it had been before and during the war. The "question" was whether or not Irish (and British) disabilities that prevented Roman Catholics from enjoying the same civil and political rights, especially that of serving in parliament, should be removed. The British government had always treated Ireland (unlike Scotland and Wales) like a colony and its Catholic inhabitants like a subjugated people. The Irish tended to accommodate the British prejudices

[145] Beckett 131.

[146] Beckett 136.

[147] Galen Broeker, Rural Disorder and Police Reform in Ireland, 1812-36 (London: Routledge, 1970) 1.

against them by succumbing to a colonial mentality. Under the Union, the political status of Ireland in relationship to Britain was ambiguous and was to remain so until the Catholic Emancipation Bill of 1829. The passage of this Bill was a sure sign of the gradual liberalization of public opinion that took place in the late 1820s. Even Wellington, an implacable conservative, and his Tory ministry saw the wisdom of it. George IV had followed in the footsteps of his father in steadfastly opposing emancipation on grounds of conscience, but by 1829 he was too sick to put up any resistance when Wellington introduced the Bill, which, among other things, permitted Roman Catholics to sit in parliament. It was a harbinger of the Great Reform Bill to come only three years later.

The "Irish Question," only temporarily resolved by Emancipation, was superseded by what may be called a "British Question," which could not be addressed through legislation. What did it mean to be British in a nation that had newly incorporated a country having the same religion as its historic arch-enemy into a union of exclusively Protestant peoples? What did it mean to be a patriot and citizen in such a nation in the new century? These were the critical questions of self-identity that faced Britons in the last decades of the Hanoverian succession. Emancipation presented Britons with the challenge of forging a new identity

that incorporated Catholics into a Protestant myth of identity that excluded Catholics by definition.

For a perspective on the period of painful transition from Waterloo to Chartism just described, one may do no better than turn to John Stuart Mill's The Spirit of the Age, a series of essays published in the Examiner on the eve of the Great Reform Bill. The title is significant, for the phrase, "spirit of the age," occurs frequently in the writing of the early nineteenth century and is a key to how the age conceived of itself. There is no better entree to understanding the significance of the phrase than the opening paragraph of Mill's essays:

> The 'spirit of the age' is in some measure a novel expression. I do not believe that it is to be met with in any work exceeding fifty years in antiquity. The idea of comparing one's own age with former ages, or with our notion of those which are yet to come, had occurred to philosophers; but it never before was itself the dominant idea of any age.[148]

For Mill and other liberals the term, according to John Kinnaird, "could only mean, for better or (if one's

[148] John Stuart Mill, "The Spirit of the Age," in The Emergence of Victorian Consciousness, ed. George Levine (London: The Free P, 1967) 70.

politics were Toryish) worse, 'the march of mind.'"[149] The term, according to Mill, conveys "an idea essentially belonging to an age of change,"[150] and the sense of organic historical consciousness he describes was to become the defining trait of the whole century. In the word "change," fraught with intellectual and ideological meaning, lies the essence of what was meant by the term "spirit of the age" in Mill's time. The welcoming attitude toward change was the product of an evolutionary theory of history that supplanted Voltaire's philosophy of history with Herder's.[151] While the idea predated the French Revolution, it received sufficient historical validation from that cataclysmic event to gain currency in the popular mind once the dust from the alarming upheaval caused by the Revolution. Early in the new century there was a strong feeling that the

[149] John Kinnaird, William Hazlitt: Critic of Power (New York: Columbia UP, 1978) 305. Kinnaird points out that "the phrase 'spirit of the times' was not unknown" in the eighteenth century, when it was often used pejoratively and "did not generally connote 'progress' or beneficient tendencies"--305 and 412 fn. 11. In traditional English usage, the phrase "spirit of the age" was a metaphor of "a unity of tendency bred, shaped, or determined by the age itself." Under the influence of German Romantic usage (zeitgeist), the phrase took on a literal meaning: "a tendency of mind which is itself a power--an 'intellectual' force moving through the age and transforming it"--in short, a transcendent Time-Spirit--305. Shelley uses it in this sense. Kinnaird assumes that "there was not much German influence (until Carlyle's time) on the meaning of the English term"--412 fn. 11. The phrase is used loosely by many authors (e.g., Richard Fletcher, English Romantic Drama, 72) without an attempt at definition.

[150] Mill, "The Spirit of the Age," quoted in Levine 70.

[151] Kinnaird 412, fn. 11.

age was different and even discontinuous from preceding eras.

Mill described his own era as one of "moral and political transition. . . . in which the multitude are without a guide."[152] "Mankind have outgrown old institutions and old doctrines," he wrote, and have not yet acquired new ones."[153] In Mill's view, his age was perilous because of its "intellectual anarchy." "No fixed opinions have yet generally established themselves in the place of those we have abandoned," writes Mill.[154] As a result, "every one must judge for himself as he best may."[155] To the discomfort of liberal-minded men like Mill, "the new liberalism [which he represented] was "for making every man his own guide and sovereign-master, and letting him think for himself, and do exactly as he judges best for himself."[156] This, in a word, was one of the meanings of the word "democracy," a concept which evoked high anxiety even in those who advocated change, for it was the uncharted territory toward which the "march of mind" was leading the nation.

[152] Mill, The Spirit, quoted in Levine 78.

[153] Mill, The Spirit, quoted in Levine 73.

[154] Mill, The Spirit, quoted in Levine 75-6.

[155] Mill, The Spirit, quoted in Houghton 96.

[156] Mill, The Spirit, quoted in Houghton 96.

Mill was relatively optimistic that the outcome of the March of Mind toward democracy would be accomplished without bloodshed:

> Worldly power must pass from the hands of the stationary part of mankind into those of the progressive part. There must be a moral and social revolution, which shall, indeed, take away no man's lives or property, but which shall leave to no man one fraction of unearned distinction or unearned importance.[157]

Many others, however, could not share Mill's confidence that violence could be averted. In 1831, Britons, as Mill saw it, were sharply divided into two camps, consisting of:

> . . . those who are still what they were, and those who have changed: into the men of the present age, and the men of the past. To the former, the spirit of the age is a subject of exultation; to the latter, of terror; to both, of eager and anxious interest. The wisdom of ancestors, and the march of intellect, are bandied from mouth to mouth; each phrase originally an expression of respect and homage, each ultimately usurped by the partisans of the opposite catch-word, and the bitterness of their spirit, turned into the sarcastic jibe of hatred and insult.[158]

[157] Mill, The Spirit, quoted in Levine 85.

[158] Mill, The Spirit, quoted in Levine 71.

B. Knowles's Politics

In terms of Mill's two political camps, Knowles belongs with "the progressive" rather than "the stationary part" of mankind--with "those who have changed" rather than "those who are still what they were." He was in sympathy with the age's democratic spirit and reformist zeitgeist, though he was no ideologue or even a political thinker like his mentor Hazlitt. Knowles's son calls his father "a Whig and a great deal more," adding that "he boldly avowed his opinions."[159] Earlier in his biography, he uses the word "radical" to describe him.[160] In this period, it must be stressed, political labels are fraught with ambiguity. The terms "Whig" and "Tory," for example, do not refer to political parties but to "moods and standpoints which served as frames of reference."[161] Perhaps more useful are the polar terms "loyalist" and "radical," which describe, respectively, those who opposed or advocated radical reform of the political system. The former "believed in a narrowly aristocratic constitution in which political

[159] Life 63.

[160] "He was one of the few radicals I have met who had not at heart a profound veneration for good birth"--Life 1.

[161] Bruce Coleman, Conservatism and the Conservative Party in Nineteenth-Century Britain (1988) 17, quoted in Baer 5.

power and property went hand-in-hand, and were defenders of the Church and Crown."[162] The latter believed in a constitution based on egalitarianism. Occupying a middle ground between the two extremes were the Foxites. As the phrase "a great deal more" suggests, Knowles cannot be neatly described with a political label. Needless to say, he was not a radical in the Paineite sense.

To the extent that Knowles was a "Whig" in his political principles, he was of the Foxite kind. His hero from early youth had been his famous cousin Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Fox's close friend and political ally, and a gadfly of Pitt, Fox's political enemy.[163] Sheridan carried the Foxite banner in Parliament after Fox's death in 1806. For Knowles, Sheridan was a romanticized figure. As a boy, he had repeatedly been told the story of his elopement at age twenty with the beautiful, and much admired young singer, Elizabeth Linley, and the two duels he bravely fought with one of

[162] Baer 5.

[163] As soon as Sheridan won a seat as a Whig in Parliament in 1780 (from Stafford), he neglected playwriting and the operation of Drury Lane (see Chapter 1) and, with Edmund Burke as his model, devoted his energies to shining as an orator in Parlimentary debate, a traditional way of enhancing one's social status. He denounced the Treaty of Amiens which left Napoleon the master of the Continent as a hollow peace "which all men are glad of, but no man can be proud of"--Briggs, The Making 144. His standing as a Foxite is somewhat compromised by the fact that he was an intimate friend and drinking companion of the Prince Regent, later George IV.

his rivals as a consequence. The young Knowles not only hero-worshipped his older cousin, but also reverenced him as a father-figure.[164] Of course, the aging, debauched, irresponsible Sheridan that Knowles came to know after the family moved from Cork to London when Knowles was nine years old, did not live up to his romantic image. As Thomas Moore, Sheridan's first biographer wrote of his subject, "He was one of those persons who in the whirl of worldly pursuits, revolve too rapidly round Self, to let anything rest long upon their surface."[165] Yet Sheridan's heart was in the right place, and he helped the Knowles family get established in their new home. He may have helped the young Knowles secure a position in the Stamp Office in London after he left home in 1800 soon after his mother's sudden death and his father's remarriage soon after. There were moments of high excitement too, as when Knowles enjoyed the privilege of standing on the speaker's platform while Sheridan delivered a eulogy on Fox at his funeral.[166]

[164] Knowles's first meeting with Sheridan is depicted in fictional guise in his novel Fortescue (1846). On the autobiographical elements in the novel see Sweeney 4-8.

[165] Thomas Moore, ed. Memoirs of the Life of Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1858; New York: Greenwood P, 1968) 2: 229.

[166] James Sheridan Knowles, Lectures on Oratory, Gesture, and Poetry (London: James McHenry, 1873) 73. This fact is not mentioned in the Life.

To the extent that Knowles was a radical he was considerably less of one than Hazlitt, whom he affectionately called his "mental-father."[167] He was raised in a liberal household and once Hazlitt entered that household to become his informal tutor, the teenage Knowles was, it may be inferred, exposed to the ideals of the dissenting tradition: chiefly, individual rights, popular sovereignty, the right to resist oppression, and progressive reform. Later, Knowles gave Hazlitt a great deal of credit for raising up what he called his "infant mind" high enough "To catch a glimpse of some rare sight alone / Within the reach of manly vision" during this formative period in his upbringing.[168] Like Hazlitt's politics, Knowles's rested firmly on the bedrock principle of civil and religious liberty. For Knowles, as for Hazlitt, politics transcended party politics; it was "a matter of human dignity, human rights and liberties, and the constitutional means if their assurance and preservation."[169]

There are certain important differences between Hazlitt's and Knowles's politics that should be stressed, however. One is that Hazlitt's ideological

[167] Life 11.

[168] From verses by Knowles, quoted in Life 11.

[169] Jones 238.

fanaticism (e.g., his hatred of kings and kingship) was alien to Knowles's genial and tolerant nature. So was Hazlitt's Rousseauean "celebration of the uncorrupted natural man" and "extreme subjectivism."[170] For Knowles, natural man, without God's grace, was corrupt and evil and, for him, the Bible was the ultimate authority, not Enlightenment texts. Knowles's liberalism was always colored by an evangelical temperament[171] and a Calvinist caste of mind--apparently fostered by his mother, to whom he was extremely devoted as a boy--that became more pronounced as he got older. If Hazlitt's sympathy for the oppressed, as Jones says, "sprang from a hatred of the indignity of their enslavement rather than from distress at their deprivation,"[172] Knowles's sprang from Christian love and his own natural altruistic impulses. Knowles's evangelicalism makes him a paradoxical figure in the sense that evangelicalism is generally considered to be out of step with the "March of Mind" that characterized the spirit of the age.

The early phase of Knowles's life, before he left for Ireland to become an actor in a circuit company is

[170] Herschel Baker, William Hazlitt (Cambridge: Belknap P, 1962) 78.

[171] Knowles's evangelical temperament is discussed in Chapter 2.

[172] Jones 237.

not without signs of both patriotism and liberalism, the latter manifesting itself in humanitarian actions during the time he worked in medicine as a assistant to Dr. Robert Willan, a distinguised dermatolgoist. His patriotism is shown by his voluntary involvement in the defence of his country in 1804. After the Treaty of Amiens, which tested Napoleon's good will and found it wanting, was broken in May of 1803 a state of war again existed between England and France. Napoleon had declared himself emperor and was planning an invasion of Britain. An army of 100,000 men and a fleet of 2,000 flat-bottomed boats were assembled at Boulogne in preparation for the event. In response, Britain feverish took military countermeasures to defend itself.[173] Knowles bought an ensign commission some time in 1804 and served in the militia in Wiltshire, the Tower Hamlets, and the Isle of Wight for about two years.[174] In view of his voluntary involvement in the defence of his country, it is unlikely that Knowles shared the belief, held by Hazlitt and other radicals, that the wars against France "had been a deliberate attempt by the British aristocracy to crush revolution and support despotism and tyranny on the continent

[173] For example, martello towers and beacons were built, canals dug, and catamarans filled with exposives, creating a kind of primitive torpedo that could be used against French vessels.

[174] Life 13-16.

because they feared the triumph of liberalism and democracy at home."[175]

Knowles was transformed, almost overnight, it seems, from a soldier to a doctor. It is such an improbably occurence for a man whose passion was the theater, that the circumstances are worth recounting. Knowles had become acquainted with Dr. Willan while serving in the local militia in London about 1806.[176] The doctor, in anticipation of his own retirement, persuaded Knowles to give up his commission become his pupil and protegee, which Knowles did, though less than eagerly because his heart was set on being a playwright.[177] Thus Knowles had the extraordinary good fortune of being chosen by a famous and wealthy doctor to succeed him in his lucrative practice. The profes-

[175] Gash 153.

[176] Dr. Robert Willan (1757-1812) was the first doctor in Britain "to arrange diseases of the skin in a clear and intelligible manner, and to fix their nomenclature on a satisfactory and classical basis." This classification is still used today for diagnostic purposes. Among the many medical work he wrote was multi-volume The Description and Treatment of Cutaneous Diseases (1798-1808)--DNB 20: 284.

[177] Knowles purchased a commission of ensign in the Wiltshire militia. He was first stationed on the Isle of Wight and then to the 2nd Tower Hamlets, a poor district in the district of East London. Half a million civilian volunteers served in all, Colley estimates--309. In 1804, it was reported to Parliament that 176,000 Britons were "serving within Great Britain in the militia, in the regular army and in various volunteer corps--Colley, Britons 293.

sion of medicine was securely within his grasp of the twenty-four year old Knowles had he so desired it.[178]

Dr. Willan was also a friend of Jenner and a loyal and active supporter of smallpox vaccination at a time when it was still encountering fierce opposition from conservative practitioners of medicine and a misinformed, gullible populace. The belief in vaccination was ridiculed mercilessly by Gillray, Cruikshank, and other caricaturists of the time.[179] The Royal Jennerian Society for the Extermination of Smallpox had been established in 1803, with thirteen centers in London alone. On Dr. Willan's recommendation, Knowles was given the appointment of "Resident Innoculator" in the London headquarters at Salisbury Square. Dr. Willan also obtained for his protegee the degree of Doctor of Medicine, which was necessary for the appointment as Innoculator. Usually the vaccination was done at the centers, but during an epidemic Knowles was required to visit the infected neighborhoods himself, "armed with" Jenner's "spell of power."[180] These were areas such as St. Giles--the Irish quarter--one of the most squalid

[178] Medicine was the profession that both Knowles's parents wished him to pursue; Andrew Peace, his grandfather on his mother's side, had been a physician in Cork.

[179] See Patten, 1: 110.

[180] Life 17.

in all of London.[181] Knowles describes his experiences vaccinating the indescribably wretched inhabitants of this area matter-of-factly in footnotes to "Vaccination, a Dramatic Poem."[182] In one of the notes, Knowles writes:

> The small pox is attended with a dreadful mortality in some families. It is not uncommon for a little circle of domestic affection ahd happiness to be completely annihilated by such a visitation. About two years ago I had a melancholy opportunity of witnessing this. The small pox made its appearance in St. Giles's in London, a quarter inhabited by the lower orders of my countrymen. In my official capacity, being then the Resident Innoculator to the Jennerian Society, I attended the poor people every day for the course of six or eight weeks. The scenes which I witnessed are not to be described. Domestic affection has made the heart of the Irishman its peculiar shrine. Nearly the half of those who caught the small pox fell victims to it. . . . [at this point Knowles describes the affliction of one family]. Language becomes dumb when it would describe such misery as this. But what a contrast did the cow-pox produce! I saved about forty children by vaccinating them in time. . . .[183]

[181] A graphic description of the squalor of St. Giles quarter can be found in Flora Tristan's London Journal: A Survey of London Life in the 1830's (London: George Prior, 1980) 133-140.

[182] The poem was published in Poems, in 1810. In a footnote Knowles writes that "at a period. . . . when I happened to be peculiarly interested in the cause of vaccination. . . . My object was to expose the anti-vacinnists, whose doctrines deserved to be combated by no other weapon than that of ridicule: whose practices were a course of systematic falsehood, calumny and misrepresentation; or else the effect of fanaticism, wrought up to an excess of insanity"--Poems (Waterford: John Bull, 1810) 26-27.

[183] From "Vaccination: A Poem," Poems, quoted in Life 18.

Knowles chafed against the routinized drudgery of his job.[184] Still, the work itself gave him great satisfaction. "No man ever more enjoyed the luxury of doing good," writes Knowles's son.[185]

Knowles first publicly declared his radical and liberal political principles in the early 1820s by co-founding a Whig newspaper in Glasgow, where he was a popular and successful schoolmaster in a school he had established. He had impulsively given up medicine for the stage, and then, in turn, given up the stage for teaching, his father's profession. Knowles was about thirty-six and had only fairly recently tasted instant fame as the author of Virginius when he undertook this risky journalistic venture. In fact, the venture would not have been possible were it not for the four hundred

[184] An early nineteenth century historian of vaccination, who obviously had no sympathy for poets or writers, has left this unflattering portrait of Knowles as a vacinnator, which is worth quoting since it is not found in the Life or any other biographical sketch of Knowles: "The new Vaccinator was jocund and volatile and fancied himself a poet. . . . He hated the trammels of business, and always had a ready gibe to flout at order. So, when mothers brought their children early in the morning to be vaccinated, he was sometimes fast asleep; and when they carried them late, he had perhaps strolled abroad. Even when seated seriously at home, the drudgery of registering cases was apt to be postponed, while he was listlessly rhyming a piteous sonnet to his semptress"--James Monroe, History and Practice of Vaccination (London, 1817) 216, quoted in Letters of Edward Jennner, ed. Genevieve Miller (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins UP, 1983) 46. No doubt the writer did not know that when "strolled abroad" at night, he was visiting the theater or participating in an amateur theatrical, and that his leading a "double life," as it were, was the reason he slept late in the morning.

[185] Life, 17.

pounds he had been paid for his play. Although Knowles's responsibility consisted of running the literary department of the newspaper (his partner ran the political), as co-owner Knowles endorsed the political views expressed.

The Free Press (as the paper was significantly called) "took an extraordinarily liberal line on such issues as abolition of capital punishment, repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, free trade and parliamentary reform."[186] It also took a strong stand in favor of Catholic Emancipation, the issue closest to Knowles's heart and the one on which he was "red-hot."[187] Courageously, it crusaded against "local evils."[188] Most notable was its support of the striking handloom weavers, a self-employed group of semi-skilled workers whose lives were becoming increasingly wretched in this period.[189] Many of these workers were ex-soldiers who had served in the Napoleonic Wars.[190] Many, too, were Irish Catholic. The wages of weavers

[186] L.W. Conolly, The Censorship of English Drama, 1737-1824 (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1976) 109.

[187] Life 76.

[188] Life 77.

[189] See E.P. Thompson 269-313, for the history of the decline of hand-loom weavers in the decade after Waterloo and the government's role in that decline. The local magistrates' bloody suppression of a strike of 10,000-15,000 weavers in Manchester in 1808 was a prelude to Peterloo.

[190] See Gash 150.

had been repeatedly and remorselessly cut to the point that many of them lived on the edge of starvation in sordid surroundings. By siding with the strikers, Knowles's newspaper was taking a radical stand in favor of trade unionism and a minimum wage. "Liberty found in it a champion worthy of her cause," writes Richard Brinsley Sheridan: "weavers and reformers read it, gloried in it, swore by it."[191] In a city where three of the four newspapers were Tory and one "feebly Whig,"[192] the Free Press was sui generis. Its popularity among the working classes led to its attaining a circulation that exceeded that of any other newspaper in Western Scotland.

Knowles's risk in publicly proclaiming his politics was not just financial. The decade of the 1820s was a time when the distinction between liberalism and radicalism was often blurred in the minds of conservatives. Knowles's had been operating a successful school for boys in Glasgow since 1816 when he undertook his risky journalistic venture.[193] It seems that Knowles risked repeating his father's experience of being punished by sticking his neck out politically. Public opinion over reform was still sharply divided

[191] Life 77.

[192] Life 77.

[193] Life 76.

and the political climate illiberal in the 1820's, even more so in Scotland than in England. With the suspension of Habeas Corpus in 1817 and the subsequent enactment of the Six Acts in 1819, it must have seemed to reform-minded Britons that the clock was being turned back to the repressive 1790's. After Peterloo, the political climate had calmed down somewhat, and it will be recalled that in the early years of the 1820s the momentum of the reform movement had slowed and control of the movement was passing from radical to middle class hands. Still, it was dangerous to be political in the early 1820s. Characteristically, Knowles was indifferent to the danger. Of the imprudence of his father's involvement in a liberal newspaper venture at this time, Knowles's son writes:

> Nothing could be more hazardous for a man in his position than to be mixed up in an undertaking of this kind, in days when party spirit ran high. But his independence was of too sturdy a character to calculate consequences.[194]

"Mindful of his father's experience," writes the son, Knowles might have refused to involve himself in so risky an undertaking as publish his liberal political views in a newspaper.[195]

[194] Life 76.

[195] Life 63.

The paternal experience alluded to occurred in 1793 when Knowles was a young boy of nine living a rather idyllic middle class life in Cork. There his Church of Ireland father, James Knowles, headed a thriving school for children of the Cork gentry. At this time, conservatives throughout Britain were alarmed by the alliance of the Roman Catholic leaders with the United Irishmen, a Presbyterian organization founded by Wolfe Tone in 1791 with the purpose of abolishing the constitution of 1782 and the constructing "an ideal democratic state" independent of Britain in accordance with French revolutionary principles.[196] Knowles's father, who was capable of discoursing "for hours on the glories of the British Constitution,"[197] was "a consistent advocate of religious liberty,"[198] and he was not at all reluctant to put his principles into practice. This was shown when he displayed his Roman Catholic sympathies publicly. After signing a

[196] Beckett 127. This controversial "union of the discontented" had been endorsed by the Anglican bishop of Derry--see Edmund Curtis, A History of Ireland (Norwich: Jarrold and Sons, 1965) 331. At the end of 1792, a National convention was held in Dublin to demand emancipation, and petitions for its passage were circulated.

[197] Life 9.

[198] Life 6.

petition for Emancipation,[199] he supported a liberal newspaper editor-friend who had been arrested on charges of libel against the government. He stood bail for the man and escorted him into prison; the quiet drama of this moment of principled action is described in the Life:

> My grandfather walked with him from the court to the prison through the crowded streets, accompanied by a guard of soldiers, and entered the prison along with him.[200]

James Knowles and his family paid dearly for these acts of conscience. His conservative gentry patrons, who were angered by such behavior, punished the schoolmaster by withdrawing their children from his school, thus dooming it to extinction. Thus, at the tender age of nine, Sheridan Knowles experienced the harsh reality of British politics.

By fearlessly (and somewhat recklessly) sallying into journalism on the liberal side, Knowles was following in his father's principled footsteps. Though unlike his father in many ways, Knowles resembled him in that, "what he considered right he would do and say,

[199] This bill, passed in 1793, allowed Catholics to vote, hold office and judicial appointments, attend universities, and join the army and navy. It was one step in a process of freeing the Catholics from restrictions and penalties imposed on them from the time of Henry VIII.

[200] Life 7.

irrespective of what people might think of him."[201] Knowles's ardent support of Emancipation in the 1820s has the mark of being a continuation of unfinished business that his father had begun by signing a pro-emancipation petition in 1793.[202] Even though involvement in the cause of Emancipation had blasted his father's career as a pedagogue a generation earlier, Knowles was undeterred. In the mid-1820s, Knowles not content to be, in his own words, a mere "looker-on, profuse in idle sympathy" as the issue was hotly debated.[203] In spite of his Protestantism, Knowles had been committed to the cause of improving the lot of poor Irish Catholics since his days as a vaccinator, as he himself declared:

> Though a Protestant myself, and clad with all the privileges of one, I never valued the pride of my position--I never trod my native land with the rejoicing limbs of a freeman--while my fellow countrymen, of the opposite creed, went shackled.[204]

In addition to signing petitions for Emancipation, Knowles contributed to the cause by writing a number of

[201] Life 143.

[202] See "Biographical Sketch" in Introduction.

[203] James Sheridan Knowles, The Idol Demolished by Its Own Priest: An Answer to Cardinal Wiseman's Lectures on Transubstantiation (London: Longman, 1851) 306.

[204] Knowles, Idol 306.

inspirational pro-emancipation verse songs, both before and after the Bill was carried in 1829.[205] It is to these songs that Knowles is most likely referring when writes of "the humble, but zealous efforts of my pen" on behalf of emancipation."[206] One such song is addressed to the forty shilling freeholders who had been enfranchised by the Catholic Relief Act of 1793. As forty shillings was a low voting qualification, the number of voters increased rapidly; by the mid-1820s, there were 100,000. However, many of them were renters, and thus under the thumb of landlords.[207] In the general election of 1826, they had revolted against their landlords and elected pro-emancipation candidates in several counties.[208] This assertion of independence, a mortal blow to the anti-emancipation forces, was the fruit of the Catholic Association of Ireland, an organization founded by Daniel O'Connell and other bar-

[205] Life 76-8.

[206] Knowles, Idol 307.

[207] Broeker writes, "Prior to 1829, the forty-shilling freehold franchise in Ireland included those who rented as well as those who owed the requisite amount of land; thus the landlord was in a position to control the votes of his tenantry by threats of eviction"--Broeker 168.

[208] For example, in the Waterford election of 1826, Lord George Beresford, one of the Irish ruling junta, had been beaten by Villiers Stuart, a liberal Protestant.

risters in 1823[209] as a "political pressure group"[210] for the purpose of achieving emancipation by constitutional means.[211] Like Henry Hunt, O'Connell was a charismatic public speaker, a "tall and commanding presence with a magnificent voice which tens of thousands could hear."[212] To the Irish peasantry, for whom emancipation meant deliverance from a kind of feudal tyranny, he was like "a new Moses" who had the authority of an uncrowned king.[213] Unlike the military-minded Wolf Tone, "he opposed rebellion and force, expressed sincere loyalty to the Crown, and stated that Irish freedom was not worth the shedding of a single drop of blood."[214] The Irish government's attempts to suppress the organization failed; since O'Connell was a "master of the law,"[215] he was much more effective an adversary than Tone had been.

[209] Among the founders was Richard Lalor Sheil, the radical Irish M.P. and the author of Evadne (C.G., 1819, 30X), one of the most popular tragedies of the period. Sheil was also a member of the reform-minded select parliamentary committee that inquired into the state of the drama in 1832.

[210] Broeker, 161.

[211] The Catholic Association of Ireland had been suppressed in 1825 but reemerged in reconstituted form as the New Catholic Association of Ireland.

[212] Edmund Curtis, A History of Ireland (1936; Norwich: Methuen, 1965) 359.

[213] Curtis 358, 359.

[214] Curtis 360.

[215] Broeker 161.

Since Knowles had left the land of his birth in 1793 as a boy, a number of Catholic peasant and Presbyterian uprisings had taken place and been crushed with great loss of life, and Tone himself had committed suicide after being captured in an abortive insurrection in 1798.[216] It was fear of further Catholic insurrections that had led the ruling Protestants to push for legislative Union with Britain in 1800 as a means of securing the Protestant ascendancy. A year later, Pitt pushed for the emancipation which he had promised in 1799 as part of conditions of Union, but George III refusal to consent on the grounds that it would violate his Coronation oath was a fatal stumbling block that doomed it. Rather than oppose the King's will and risk unbalancing his unstable mind, Pitt resigned. Thus Catholics were forced to suffer the indignities of disability for another twenty-eight years.

In the Ireland of the 1820s, it was the peasants who were least patient in waiting for emancipation to come, and by 1824 the incidents of outrage against property in the rural areas committed by peasant banditti belonging to subversive agrarian secret societies had risen alarmingly. In 1824, British officials, unable to distinguish the activities of the

[216] The most bloody was the Wexford insurrection of 1798, which, led by a Catholic priest, took a month to suppress.

peaceful Association from those of violence-prone agrarian secret societies, "were bracing themselves for the shock of revolution."[217] Even when the government became convinced that the Association was indeed committed to peaceful methods as it professed, the question was whether O'Connell could manage the delicate and dangerous strategy of simultaneously exploiting the threat of revolution while maintaining its authority over "a peasantry poised on the edge of revolt."[218]

That Knowles approved of O'Connell's peaceful tactics--the ballot rather than the bullet--and repudiated both the violence of the Catholic secret societies and that of the Orangemen and Brunswickers (militant protestant organizations), is clear from the content of these verses addressed to forty shilling freeholders prior to the Clare election of 1828:

> March! March! March to the poll, my boys!
> Mind, my boys, mind that you march in good order.
> . . . .
> Broils, feuds--they break the law, my boys;
> Strive in good fellowship, vie in good order!
> Drain not the maddening cup,
> Slavery fills it up.
> . . . .
> Cheer! Cheer! First for the King, my boys,
> Soon may his crown be the pride of your border:
> Next for the jewel so green in its ring, my boys:
> Erin the land you'll redeem from disorder.[219]

[217] Broeker 164.

[218] Broeker 161.

[219] Untitled, in Life 78-79.

Knowles's instructions to the voters to march in orderly formation and abstain from alcohol ("Drain not the maddening cup") is a literal description of what actually occurred: "40,000 of the peasants went so far as to renounce all forms of alcohol for these days, and the large masses of peasants moved in and out of town in military formation, led by 'officers,'" writes one historian.[220] The impressive military-like "discipline of the lower classes" during the election recalls the similar discipline displayed by the masses who had assembled at St. Peter's Field nine years earlier. It is also clear from the reference to the king that Knowles believed that Ireland should accept the authority of the English monarchy. The song ends with a vision of peaceful union or brotherhood among the differing inhabitants of the British Isles achieved in the name of the ideal of civil and religious liberty:

> Catholic, Protestant,
> English, Scotch, Irish, no matter their border
> Creed, laws they differ in,
> One is the cause they'd win,
> Liberty! Civil--Religious--that's order.

In the Clare election the long struggle for emancipation came to a victorious climax when O'Connell won a seat in parliament. By law, the Catholic O'Connell was

[220] Broeker 181.

debarred from being seated in parliament, but if the law were enforced, revolution might well be the result.

In the song, "Farewell to You, Anglesea," Knowles effusively expresses Ireland's gratitude to Lord Anglesea, the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, after his sudden recall by the Duke of Wellington in 1828.[221] Although a Tory, Anglesea was secretly in sympathy with the Canningite Opposition.[222] He served as Lord-Lieutenant for only a year (December 1827-December 1828) during the Duke's ministry, but it was during the most critical period in the struggle for emancipation. By the time Anglesea was replaced, emancipation was assured, although Anglesea himself could not have known this.[223] To Knowles and other outside observers, Anglesea appeared to have changed from a law-and-order enemy of emancipation to its champion (from "a cloud--naught but tempest portending,/. . . to "the sun out of chaos ascending," to use Knowles's images[224]). Anglesea

[221] "Farewell to You, Anglesea," which consists of six stanzas of eight lines each with a riming pattern of abab/ cdcd, is printed in Life 79-80. The marquess of Anglesea had replaced the marquess of Wellesley, the duke of Wellington's elder brother, who had resigned the position in December 1827.

[222] Elizabethan Longford, Wellington: Pillar of State, 2 vols. (New York and London: Harper and Row, 1972) 2: 163.

[223] What Lord Anglesea didn't know is that Wellington had already resigned himself to the inevitability of emancipation, but was forced to conceal this from him until he obtained the king's consent to bring the question up in parliament--see Broeker, 174.

[224] "Farewell to You, Anglesea," Stanza 5, in Life 80.

had earned the respect of the Irish Catholics by his public support of emancipation, of the Catholic Association and his unpolitic outspokenness in demanding that Whitehall stop stalling and take action. For these reasons, Wellington quickly lost confidence in his Lord-Lieutenant, and arranged for his recall. For the same reasons, to Knowles and the Irish Catholics it seemed that Anglesea was being "'martyred' by Wellington,"[225] and was therefore a hero. Knowles calls him "the foe that turns friend"; he lauds him for responding to "humanity's call,"[226] a reference to Anglesea's sensitivity to the wretchedness of the Irish poor who became ("a brother/ Alive to our sores, and as ready to heal!"), which in itself would have been enough to endear him to Knowles's heart.

While the song is chiefly an encomium to Anglesea, it also implies a rejection of two common stereotypes that Protestant English had of Irish Catholics: first, that their religion made their loyalty to the crown and the nation suspect, and second, that they were incorrigibly lawless and resistant to the civilized

[225] Broeker 203.

[226] "Farewell to you, Anglesea," Stanza 1, in Life 79.

virtues.[227] Knowles reminds Anglesea, a former cavalry commander under Wellington at Waterloo, of how Catholics (in great numbers) loyally fought side by side with Protestants in the Napoleonic Wars--a fact raised by one of the citizens in Caius Gracchus--and stresses how, once the wars were over, they pursued the goal of emancipation through legal means:

> When with Catholic France at shillalagh we play'd
> You forgot the poor Roman, to treason a stranger,
> When he bled by the Protestant banner you bore.
> For O, could you believe that the loyal in danger
> Would cease to be true, when the battle was o'er?
> . . . .
> Tho' the loyal with insult and wrong would
> have fired us
> With hatred alike for the law and the throne
> You found us no conclave of traitors contriving
> The downfall of order in Liberty's name;
> But Patriots openly, legally striving
> To rescue their race from oppression and shame.[228]

Again, we note that Knowles's unquestioningly deep commitment to the cause of civil and religious liberty coexisted with a concern that the Irish show respect for order, legality, and constitutionality. Knowles's reference to "Patriots openly, legally striving" is an obvious allusion to the Catholic Association use of peaceful methods of achieve their ends. There is an

[227] Robert Peel, for example, who was intimately involved in Irish affairs in the 1820s, attributed violence in Ireland to a "natural predilection for outrage and a lawless life which I believe nothing can control," letter to Lord Liverpool, dated 15 October, 1813, quoted in Broeker 2.

[228] Stanza 1 and 4.

implication in Knowles's defense of the Irish Catholics that they are capable of assuming a British identity.

As Galen Broeker points out, "It was the threat of revolution, not revolution itself, that would force the British government to grant emancipation."[229] The Duke of Wellington, the Prime Minister, Robert Peel, the Home Secretary, and George IV were all opposed to emancipation in principle, but ultimately gave in to it for pragmatic reasons. The resistance to emancipation had been so strong and the struggle against that resistance so arduous and prolonged (lasting decades), that when the Bill became law in 1829, it took a while for the reality of success to sink into Knowles's mind:

> so tedious was the struggle for emancipation--so apparently hopeless--and yet, the successful issue so constantly and so yearningly longed for by me, that when, at last, it arrived, I felt, for months, as one in a flattering dream![230]

In first flush of enthusiasm over the success of the struggle of emancipation, Knowles was idealistic, perhaps naively so, about the possibility of the various British Isles forging a unity that transcended religious differences. This is shown in his song "The

[229] Broeker 184.

[230] Knowles, Idol, 306..

Shamrock, Leek, Thistle, and Rose,"[231] which is a repudiation of party and faction ("What's a party, at most, to a nation?"[232]) and "an invitation to political fellowship"[233] based on a common political identity:

> What to me is the creed of my neighbor,
> To the virgin and saints let him pray;
> For the same constitution we labour,
> Let the laws be the same we obey

The chorus announces the theme of unity through national identity:

> Then boys, doff the lily forever![234]
> The Shamrock, Leek, Thistle, and Rose
> Are our national emblems, then never,
> O never wear any but those

The emblems, of course, represent Ireland, Wales, Scotland, and England, respectively. Knowles, speaking as a Protestant and from personal experience (he had many Catholic friends, including priests), again defends the loyalty of Catholics:

> My creed's not the Catholic's, purer
> Or not, he should still have his due.

[231] "The Shamrock, Leek, Thistle, and Rose," in five stanzas with a rime pattern of abab/ cdcd and a chorus (efef) is printed in the Life 81-82.

[232] "The Shamrock, Leek . . .," Stanza 2.

[233] Life 80.

[234] The lily, a symbol of purity, is the attribute of a number of saints but is particularly identified with the Virgin Mary.

I have found him a friend, ne'er a surer!
Deserve it, he'll prove so to you
My life on his loyalty!--try him!

The song ends with a toast to the king, and the two leading Tories of the time, Wellington and Peel, in the name of "One King, with one people--one Law!"[235] From this vision of unity of British peoples, it can be inferred that Knowles did not support O'Connell's determined efforts to repeal the Union, and he must have been grieved by the violence that erupted in Ireland after the Whigs took office in 1830. Civil unrest began with the campaign of passive resistance against the tithe, a campaign which Protestants considered as an attack on private property. Soon the agrarian secret societies were again committing brutal acts of violence in the rural areas. With the Catholic Association dissolved, there was no internal moral authority capable of checking the reign of terror launched by these banditti societies. In response to rising tide of violence, the Coercion Act of 1833 was passed. Emancipation did not redeem Ireland from disorder as Knowles had hoped.

Fortunately for Knowles, Glasgow in the 1820s was not as hostile to his public expression of liberal politics as provincial Cork had been to his father's in

[235] Stanza 5.

the 1790s. Knowles's school continued to prosper, owing in great part, no doubt, to its owner's extraordinary personal popularity and his reputation as the author of Virginius, both of which acted somewhat like a protective charm. While Free Press prospered in terms of readership, its aggressive liberalism made it a thorn in the side of conservative interests, a circumstance that led to the demise of the newspaper within three years for lack of advertising revenue. The venture had been initiated by Knowles's partner-owner, and there is no question but that Knowles was out of his depth in getting involved in it. He was fortunate in emerging relatively unscathed from what was a risky enterprise for a schoolteacher. In his son's words, the experience showed that Knowles was "too little a man of the world to be a practical politician."[236] His talent lay in playwriting, acting, pedagogy and bringing more than a touch of humanity to the profession of schoolteaching rather than in crusading journalism, even though his heart had been in the venture for the approximately two years it lasted.

As his Emancipation songs indicate, Knowles had felt a sense of loyalty to Britain as an "invented nation" made up of English, Welsh, Scots, and Irish. Moreover, he was proud to be British. He declared as

[236] Life 76.

much to an audience in Albany, New York, during his visit to America in 1835-1836: "You make me prouder of being a British subject--for I am, and ever shall be, proud of being so--you make me prouder of being a British subject than ever I felt before."[237] He spoke of Britons and Americans as springing from one "national mother."[238] Knowles was one of the few literary men returned to England with a positive impression of American society. The feeling was reciprocal. President Jackson told Knowles that "he had never shaken hands with a European with so much pleasure."[239] It seems that Knowles had no difficulty simultaneously admiring Jacksonian democracy and British constitutional monarchy. By mid-century, with England poised to enter the high noon of Victorianism, Knowles had these glowing words to say about Britain and its new queen:

> the most august sovereign of Europe--the most august, because the most exemplary!--the most beloved and trusted of the governed!--a monarch without a leaning to party!--herself and her subjects one!--no imagination, no object, no wish upon her part, but their enlightenment and happiness; their independence of foreign sway, and their liberties at home.[240]

[237] Life 121.

[238] Life 121.

[239] Life 122.

[240] Knowles, The Idol 301.

These words reveal a genuine admiration not only for Queen Victoria as an ideal monarch but also for the principle of constitutional monarchy established by the Revolution of 1688 in which modern British identity was rooted. They imply, too, a belief that Britain's prosperity depended on the character of its monarch: on his ability to win the love of his subjects, to unselfishly dedicate himself to their welfare and happiness, and to stay above party politics. By this criteria, George IV stood condemned and his brother, William IV, shone as a beacon of hope, at least in 1831 when Alfred the Great was produced and reform was a national rallying cry. There was another criterion, too, by which George IV stood condemned, and which explains why he was so despised by Britons: the ethos of domesticity, the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 2

Evangelicalism and the Ethos of Domesticity

What is so striking about the political history of the turbulent period between Waterloo and Chartism is Britain's success in avoiding revolution in the face of intense social and economic dislocation. Elie Halevy, the French historian who was so impressed with this fact that he devoted his life to attempting to explain it, called it the "English miracle."[1] The "miracle," according to Halevy, was explained by the uniqueness of British individualism, which he found to consist of an unanalyzable "mixture" of "Evangelicalism and Utilitarianism."[2] Out of this mixture of the spiritual and the secular--this odd coupling of pietism and rationalism--was born, in the words of his Halevy's English biographer, "a pervasive liberal reforming temper capable of reconciling antagonistic ideologies and competing classes."[3] Halevy claimed, that these two disparate movements--one spiritual, the other secular--provided a common social ethic that played a decisive role in stabilizing British society during the transi-

[1] Elie Halevy, quoted in Mryna Chase, Elie Halevy: An Intellectual Biography (New York: Columbia UP, 1980) 90.

[2] Elie Halevy, A History of the English People in 1815, tr. E.I. Watkin (1924; London and New York: Ark-Routledge, 1987) 511.

[3] Chase 88.

tional decades when class conflict and other centripetal forces threatened to tear the society apart. They created a climate in which the moral energies of reform could be directed in constructive rather than destructive channels. Both placed a high value on humanitarianism and civic virtue. But it was "the stabilizing moral influence of evangelical religion, particularly Methodism," that Halevy credits with sparing Britain the grief of revolution.[4] While certain modern historians repudiate Halevy's thesis and have attempted to refute it, this writer finds it still the most satisfying explanation.[5]

A. Evangelicalism: The Social Context

Of the two movements, it is evangelicalism that is of concern here for several reasons: First, because Knowles's temperament was evangelical, and the movement had a deep affect on him personally when as a young man

[4] Asa Briggs, foreword, A History of the English People in 1815, by Elie Halevy viii.

[5] For a discussion of that debate over the Halevy thesis that is sympathetic to Halevey, see Gertrude Himmelfarb, Victorian Minds 292-99. Himmelfarb's main point is that the rejection of Halevy's thesis is a victim of fashionable revisionism unsubstantiated by hard scholarly evidence; she defends Halevy against the attacks of the Marxist historians E.P. Thompson and E.J. Hobsbawm. For a more detailed defense of Halevy's thesis see Chase, Elie Halevy 87-120.

he heard Rowland Hill preach at London's Surrey Chapel; second, it was the source of the domestic ethos that suffuses early nineteenth century domestic drama in general, and Knowles's plays in particular. In Gilbert Cross's words, only "the social and political revolution" generated by Evangelicalism, one that propagated a "shared ethic" cutting across class boundaries, "can explain the middle-class morality and idealism that permeates domestic drama."[6]

"Evangelicalism" as an historical term is used to describe "a fairly discrete network of Protestant Christian movements arising during the eighteenth century in Great Britain and its colonies."[7] In Great Britain, its purpose was to re-spiritualize the Established Church by returning it to its vital Christian roots.[8] The term also describes "a consistent pattern

[6] Cross, 174.

[7] Mark A. Noll et al., eds, Introduction, Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestanism in North America, the British Isles,and Beyond, 1700-1990 (New York and London: Oxford UP, 1994) 6.

[8] Evangelicalism's debt to Wesley is so obvious as to need no explanation. Regarding terminology, Gertrude Himmelfarb points out that the terms "Evangelicalism" and "Methodism" differ in present and past usage. Originally, they were originally interchangeable terms, but today the former refers to Low-Church Anglicanism and the latter to sects outside Anglicanism. To avoid confusion, I have followed Himmelfarb's practice of using "Evangelicalism" to refer to a form of Anglicanism and "evangelicalism" as an umbrella term for both--Victorian Minds 279, fn. 3. See also Houghton, 228, who prefers the term "Christian revival."

of convictions and attitudes."[9] This pattern has been identified as consisting of four elements: "biblicalism (a reliance on the Bible as ultimate religious authority), conversionism (a stress on the New Birth), activism (an energetic, individualistic approach to religious duties and social involvement), and crucicentrism (a focus on Christ's redeeming work as the heart of essential Christianity)."[10]

Whatever side one takes on the controversy over the "the Halevy thesis," one cannot deny that evangelicalism was a politically conservative force that encouraged "gradualism, stability, and social cohesion."[11] Nor can one deny that it had a morally renovating effect on British society in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Evangelicalism was thus instrumental in setting the stage for the Victorianism to come, and it is impossible to imagine British society achieving "equipoise" in the latter half of the century without the moral revolution it effected. If there was a "spirit," "ethos," or "frame of mind" (Houghton's well-known phrase) that can be identified as "Victorian" by mid-century, it was in

[9] Mark A. Noll, et. al., introduction, Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestanism in North America, the British Isles and Beyond, 1700-1900 (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994) 6.

[10] Noll 6.

[11] Himmelfarb 299.

great measure a product of evangelicalism.[12] As one modern commentator writes, "it is not too much to say that, more than any other single factor, the Evangelical Movement in the Church of England transformed the whole character of English society and imparted to the Victorian Age that moral earnestness which is its distinguishing characteristic."[13]

That peculiar kind of "earnestness"--or taking life seriously--is perhaps the most important and certainly the most demanding of the Victorian ideals that can be traced to Evangelicalism. This highly connotative word implies a whole cluster of moral and religious qualities. If, as Houghton says, the importance of earnestness was not recognized in the society at large until around 1830,[14] one can nevertheless first hear its voice clearly at the end of the eighteenth century in the writings of the two leading Evangelicals of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Hannah More and William Wilberforce,

[12] This view is argued by Himmelfarb in Victorian Minds 275-292.

[13] Canon Charles Smyth, "The Evangelical Discipline" Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians (1949; New York: Dutton, 1966) 98.

[14] In the year 1835, writes Samuel Butler in The Way of All Flesh, "the word 'earnest' was just then beginning to come into fashion."

who reached their maturity in the 1770's.[15] The appeals to earnestness of More and Wilberforce, both of whom were Tories, fell on receptive ears in the Georgian and, especially, the Regency period, when their influence reached its peak.

Evangelicals believed that a religiously based serious-mindedness was a cure for the ills of society, which were simplistically attributed to failings of character and conscience. In particular, it was felt that many of those ills could be cured if the lethargic consciences of the governing aristocracy (those whom George Eliot called "Old Leisure"[16]) could be awakened. The demands of earnestness on an individual's life were considerable: it included, for example, a concern for

[15] Canon Charles Smyth writes: "the high seriousness of the Victorians may be traced back to the publication in 1797 of Wilberforce's best-seller: A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians to the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country contrasted with Real Christianity"--in Ideas and Beliefs, 98. As a member of the "Evangelical Party," in parliament, Wilberforce was a voice of Christian conscience and led the successful crusade to abolish the slave trade in 1807 and slavery in 1833. Hannah More (1745-1833) popularized Christianity in countless best-selling tracts and other writings, including religious plays. Her most popular work was Christian Morals, 1813. According to Davidoff and Hall, "Her Cheap Repository Tracts, written in simple language for the poor, together with her pioneering work in establishing Sunday schools . . . were widely heralded as having made a vital contribution to the stabilizing of English society in the difficult years after the French Revolution"--Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850 (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987) 167. Both Wilberforce and More continued to be influential in the early decades of the new century.

[16] The characterization of "Old Leisure" appears in George Eliot's Adam Bede.

one's inner spirituality; for self-improvement in manners and morals; and a sense of duty to something larger than oneself. Houghton has described the ideal of moral earnestness as a recognition that

> human existence is not a short interval between birth and death in which one fingers as many guineas as possible and eats all the good dinners he can, but a spiritual pilgrimage from here to eternity in which he is called upon to struggle with all his power against the forces of evil, in his own soul and in society.[17]

"Serious Christians," write Davidoff and Hall, "waged a constant struggle with their unreconstructed selves, valiantly confronting their weaknesses and denying their baser impulses."[18] The concern "with the pervasiveness of sin, the sense of oneself as depraved, weak and inadequate" and "a constant fear of backsliding" gave rise to an "obsession with self-examination."[19] The most powerful weapon in this struggle was the power of prayer. Moreover, "all serious Christians were exhorted to turn their backs on 'the world,'" which in the strictest sense included past-

[17]Houghton 221.

[18] Davidoff and Hall 88.

[19] Davidoff and Hall 87.

times such as card playing, dancing, reading novels and going to the theater.[20]

Evangelicalism can be viewed as an emotional, defensive response to the intellectual threat posed by the "March of Mind" to religious belief. But this is too narrow a way of viewing a movement that offered its adherents a much needed source of identity and community as well as "personal comfort and security and unstable and unsafe world."[21] That Evangelicalism because of its political conservativism served as valuable prop to the stability of British society during the French Revolution is undeniable. Still, a distinction needs be made between what a vital religious movement such as Evangelicalism professes and the social consequences of its teachings, which may (and in this case, did) have subversive implications or consequences, however unintended. The eighteenth-century Methodist who declared that "Wesleyanism is as much opposed to Democracy as it is to Sin" was indulging in wishful compartmentalization.[22] The central tenet of Evangelicalism that every individual was equal in the sight of God (and therefore had equal opportunity for salvation) had an inescapably democratizing effect on

[20] Davidoff and Hall 90.

[21] Davidoff and Hall 77.

[22] G.M. Young, Portrait of An Age: Victorian England (London, 1949) 427, quoted in Himmelfarb 281.

society and thus subverted, however subtly, the principle of hierarchy. The widespread diffusion of the evangelistic ethic of moral and social reformation, in the words of Gertrude Himmelfarb, "initiated the democratic revolution. It was the acceptance of a single moral code [one which transcended class and party] by the entire population that first breached the barriers separating the 'two nations.'"[23]

Evangelicalism was commonly called "the religion of the heart" because its concern was "to get beneath the forms, to transform the meaning of religion from within.[24] It was an attempt to return to living a life of "real" as opposed to "nominal Christianity," to use Wilberforce's distinction.[25] Wilberforce, along with Hannah More, was still the leading and most influential spokesman of the Evangelical movement in Knowles's time. As the most prominent member of the Evangelical religious community known as the Clapham Sect, he is immortalized as "the great crusader against slavery"[26] who spearheaded the successful legislative campaign in Parliament to abolish the slave trade and slavery. But abolitionism was only part of Wilberforce's and the

[23] Himmelfarb 283.

[24] Hall 17.

[25] William Wilberforce, quoted in Davidoff and Hall 83.

[26] Colley 356.

politically powerful Sect's larger organized effort to transform the morality of the nation though extra-Parliamentary agitation. By the time Knowles had reached his majority (1805), Evangelicalism had become a strong voice for moral and humanitarian reform within the establishment through the politically powerful Clapham Sect.[27] The Sect's influence was felt through personal example as well as through missionary activity and the dissemination of their religious principles by means of printed media. A reading of Sect members' diaries and journals reveals that they earnestly practiced what they preached; their personal households were modeled on the principles they so fervently espoused. The Sect was a vital moral center within the political establishment from which Evangelicalism's influence radiated outward into the society at large. Its anti-slavery campaign had the effect of "steering the 'middling ranks' toward liberalism and a national consensus rather than towards a more radical perspective and an alliance with the new industrial proletariat."[28] It thus can be seen as playing a "mediating role . . . in the transitional period between the era of mercantile capitalism and the recog-

[27] Included in the Sect were "prominent members of parliament, bankers, lawyers, editors, writers, and philanthropists"--Himmelfarb, 280.

[28] Hall 30.

nised dominance of industrial capitalism."[29]

Evangelicalism must also be credited with providing the solid moral underpinnings for another distinguishing characteristic of Victorianism: the exaltation of hearth and home. The Victorian period stands out as a time when, in the words of Asa Briggs, "the domestic ties of the family itself were sung more loudly than any other period in English history."[30] The sentimental idealization of family life found its perfect icon in Queen Victoria and her consort Prince Albert, who were devoted to family life.[31] Through their example, family life became more publicly exalted than it had ever been in British history. In all genres of Victorian literature, the home is regularly idealized as a place of sanctuary offering protection from a hostile outside world. The exaltation of home life found its most characteristically Victorian expression in Ruskin's Sesame and Lillies:

> This is the true nature of home--it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division. In so far as it is not this, it is not home; so far as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate into it. . . ceases to be home. . . . But so far as it is a sacred place, a vestal temple, a temple of the

[29] Hall 30.

[30] Briggs, The Making 447.

[31] Queen Victoria married Prince Albert in 1840; they raised a family of nine children.

> hearth watched over the Household Gods. . . so far as it is this. . . so far it vindicates the name, and fulfils the praise, of Home.[32]

Houghton offers this comment on the "psychological and ethical appeals" of Ruskin's definition of home:

> It was both a shelter from the anxieties of modern life, a place of peace where the longings of the soul might be realized (if not in fact, in imagination), and a shelter for those moral and spiritual values which the commercial spirit and the critical spirit were threatening to destroy, and therefore also a sacred place, a temple.[33]

Presiding over the "vestal temple" of home and diligently maintaining it as a moral haven was the "angel in the house,"[34] as Coventry Patmore's described the middle-class Victorian ideal of womanhood in his poem of the same name.[35] It was her responsibility to

[32] "Of Queens' Gardens," Sesame and Lillies, sec. 68, in Works, 18: 122, quoted in Houghton 343. In his note, Houghton comments: "This lecture [delivered in 1864] of Ruskin's is the most important single document I know for the characteristic idealization of love, woman, and the home in Victorian thought"--343 fn. 7.

[33] Houghton 343.

[34] From Coventry Patmore's poem (1854) of the same name.

[35] In Defining Voices, the editors argue for a spectrum of opinion on the woman question in the Victorian period: "we can speak more accurately not of positions but of a set of competing, though not mutually exclusive, myths or models for woman's place in society." They enumerate four: 1) "the familiar Angel in the House; 2) "the model of complete equality" 3) "the Angel out of the House" and; 4) "apocalyptic feminism"--the idea of a "female savior leading the way to a fuller humanity and ushering in a new era of community and love"--Defining Voices, Vol. 1 of The Woman's Question: Society and Literature in Britain and America, 1837-

insure that the home was a peaceful retreat where her husband could find solace after returning from the bustle of the outside world. As Colley writes, the "ideal woman was . . . indispensable to the well-being of the state through her private influence on her citizen husband and education of her children."[36] In short, "since woman's place at home was so valuable, it was important that she stay there."[37]

The exaltation of the home was thus inseparable from the exaltation of feminine character and both were part of what has been called a "domestic ideology." This ideology included the key belief in a doctrine of separate spheres, meaning that woman's proper sphere was the home and family, and man's was the outside world--work, power, politics. However, it should be noted that Evangelicalism also offered women opportunities to be useful and busy "angels" outside of the house as participants in a variety of voluntary public activities such as fund raising for patriotic subscriptions, philanthropic work, Sunday school teaching, anti-slavery societies, collecting petition signatures, loyalist parades. And, as the unmarried Hannah

1883, ed. Elizabeth K. Helsinger, et al. (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1983) xiv-xv.

[36] Colley 273.

[37] Colley 273.

More's career as a phenomenally successful author demonstrated, writing offered another outlet for women who were talented with their pen.

The exaltation of the home and the feminine character that is identified with the Victorian period was already firmly established in the mainstream of British society as a secular ideology by 1819, the year Queen Victoria was born. The veneration of domestic ties that characterizes the Victorian period was a culmination of a process that had been begun in earnest in the late eighteenth century by middle-class Evangelicals for whom domestic life was a religious ideal. A typical idealized description of the home is found in the guidebook for young women written by the Birmingham minister John Angell James, Knowles's exact contemporary, and a prominent Evangelical spokesman for the domestic ideal:

> There are few terms around which cluster so many blissful associations as that delight of every English heart, the word HOME. The elysium of love--the nursery of virtue--the garden of enjoyment--the temple of concord--the circle of all tender relationships--the playground of childhood--the dwelling of manhood--the retreat of age. . . which throws its spell over those who are within its charmed circle; and even sends its attractions across oceans and continents, drawing to itself the thoughts and wishes of the man that wanders from it to the antipodes;

> this,--home--sweet home--is the sphere of wedded woman's mission."[38]

The phrase "wedded women's mission" implies the "doctrine of separate spheres.": Such a separation made it possible for the home to be idealized as "the psychic center of life."[39]

Ideally speaking, while a wife was expected to subordinate her will to her husband's, she was also expected to exercise "a gentle and improving sway over her husband."[40] Women, it was generally believed, were naturally superior to men morally because "purity" was their inheritance. To preserve their God-given "purity" and elevate men by serving as their "superior consciences,"[41] it was necessary that they maintain an apartness from the world. What was called the "doctrine of female influence" was based on the belief that "women were more open to religious influence than men because of their greater separation from the tempta-

[38] John Angell James, Female Piety or the Young Woman's Friend and Guide through Life to Immortality (5th edn. 1856) 63, quoted in Davidoff and Hall 115.

[39] Martha Vicinus, "'Helpless and Unfriended': Nineteenth-Century Domestic Melodrama," When They Weren't Doing Shakespeare: Essays on Nineteenth-Century British and American Theatre, eds. Judith L. Fisher and Stephen Watt (Athens and London: U of Georgia P, 1989) 175.

[40] Colley, Britons 239.

[41] Joan N. Burstyn, Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1984) 31.

tions of the world and their 'natural' characteristics of gentleness and passivity."[42] For a woman, achieving moral excellence meant cultivating and practicing qualities such as modesty, lack of affectation, forbearance, and rationality (control of head over heart and suppression of violent feelings) Evangelicalism was aptly called "the religion of the home" or "of the household" in this period because if women, with their special aptitude for faith, could be contained within that home, then a space would be created for true family religion."[43] It is easy to attack this doctrine as a product of paternalism, but Colley stresses that it had a contractual aspect to it:

> women refrained . . . from invading the public sphere, the realm of action, on the understanding that their moral influence would be respected and recognized. They accepted a vulnerable position in life, on condition that men would maintain and respect them.[44]

The importance of be an "angel-wife" who sought satisfaction in selflessness at home was repeatedly and insistently impressed upon millions of young British women throughout the century in influential conduct books. The flood of prescriptive writing during

[42] Davidoff and Hall 115.

[43] Davidoff and Hall 115.

[44] Colley 263.

Knowles's period was indicative of the high anxiety among moralists that many women were not content with living exclusively or even at all within the domestic sphere. "If British women were being urged to remain at home more stridently in this period than ever before," writes Colley, "it was largely because so many of them were finding an increasing amount to do outside the home."[45] The impact of urbanization on female manners and morals was of particular concern because cities offered an increasingly array of distractions and seductions (opportunities, looked at from another point of view) to escape from the restricting confines of domestic life. Evangelicals looked upon public places such as "theatres, assembly rooms, lending libraries, concert halls, elegant squares and enticing bow-windowed shops"[46] as well as pleasure gardens as places that young women should be sheltered from. Plays and music, argued Evangelical preachers, would unhealthily kindle their emotions and imagination, novels could sully their purity, and the sight of fashionable clothing in shops might awaken their vanity and lure them into the vice of consumerism. Such worldly temptations could lead to the corruption of a woman's manners and morals, causing her to neglect or abandonment of family

[45] Colley 241.

[46] Colley 241.

duties and responsibilities and even lose her "virtue."

Evangelicals were also concerned about young women from working class families who left the parental home and migrated from the country to the city in search of work in shops or as domestic servants. Without moral guidance, such women were susceptible to going astray and many to came to London ended up as prostitutes. But there was a sharp line separating working class women and leisured middle class women. The former were excluded by their social and economic status from achieving the ideal of womanhood being discussed unless they were raised from their low social state through a fortunate marriage--for a woman's class was determined by her husband's.

Although the Evangelicals preached against the world and against the theater, it would be a mistake to believe that they had no taste for literature on the page. The primacy of scripture did not necessarily mean that literature--i.e., poetry and plays--was beyond the pale. In the late eighteenth century, "the pre-eminent poet of home and domesticity"[47] was the evangelical poet William Cowper, who was hugely popular with the middle classes. His poetry celebrated of domestic values and rural life within a religious context. In

[47] Davidoff and Hall 166.

the The Task, his most famous poem, written a year after Knowles was born (1785), domestic happiness is lauded as man's only remaining link to his prelapsarian state:

> Domestic happiness, thou only bliss
> Of paradise that has survived the Fall.
> . . . thou are the nurse of virtue.[48]

The appeal of Cowper's poetry was that it "validated a manliness centered on a quiet domestic rural life rather than the frenetic and anxiety ridden world of town and commerce."[49] It offered an attractive, if impractical, alternative to the "entrepreneurial ideal" that was based on reflection on "the calm minutiae of everyday life in the home, the garden, the fields and woods."[50] While Cowper's alternative ideal was not practically realizable for most middle class families, it served to bind domesticity to religion because it "elevated the private sphere and asserted that the homely duties and private prayers of domestic life provided the best way to be close to God," and thus to salvation.[51] As far as dramatic literature was con-

[48] William Cowper, The Task, Book 3, quoted in Davidoff and Hall, 149. (Hall, 237).

[49] Davidoff and Hall 166.

[50] Davidoff and Hall 157.

[51] Davidoff and Hall 166-167.

cerned, according to D.W. Bebbington, while the anti-theatrical prejudice of the evangelicals did not allow them to attend theatrical performances with a good conscience, "many of them enjoyed reading selected dramatic works in the privacy of their own homes."[52] Thus, Knowles was able to command an audience of the religious for his plays through the medium of print.

In respect to the "woman question," it is important to point out that the debate about the nature and role of women that ensued in the wake of the French Revolution and Britain's war with France intensified anxiety about "women's place" and female behavior in general. On this issue, as on most others, conservative sentiment hardened, as the question of the division of the sexes became fraught with political implications. The Napoleonic war, in particular, increased the opportunities of British women to involve themselves in civic life, including both pro and anti-war activism. During this time, Colley writes, "both sexes, but particularly women, were deluged by conduct books, sermons, homilies, novels and magazine articles insisting that good order and political stability necessitated the maintenance of separate sexual spheres."[53]

[52] D.W. Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s (London and Boston: Unwin Hymin, 1989) 66. The evangelical's interest in literature reflects Enlightenment influences.

[53] Colley 253.

The spectacle of mobs of lower class women--"furies of hell, in the abused shape of the vilest of women," Burke called them[54]--actively participating in political affairs during the early stages of the Revolution, and the spectacle of France's queen on trial and then her subsequent execution, shocked the sensibilities of Britons. The fate of Marie-Antoinette drew this comment from Burke:

> Little did I dream that I should live to see such disasters fallen upon her in a nation of gallant men, in a nation of men of honour and of cavaliers. I thought 10,000 swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult--But the age of chivalry is gone . . . On this scheme of things, a king is but a man; a queen is but a woman; a woman is but an animal . . . . All homage paid to the sex in general as such, and without distinct views, is to be regarded as romance and folly.[55]

Colley points out that these words "made an enormous impression on contemporaries."[56] Far from being a expression of vapory romanticism, it rested on a bedrock premise on which Victorianism was built: "the quality of a civilization" could be judged "by the way

[54] Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in france, quoted in Colley 252.

[55] Edmund Burke, in B.W. Hill (ed.) Edmund Burke: On Government, Politics and Society(1975) 337-344, quoted in Colley 252-253.

[56] Colley 253.

that women were treated within it."[57] The establishment of an egalitarian society in France was viewed by Britons as a subversion of the natural order of things: "the loss of deference for kings, queens, nobles, and rich men seemed to call into question the deference of wife for husband, perhaps even the deference of children for father."[58] From a domestic standpoint, the French Revolution revealed the danger of "overturning the 'natural' sexual order, and the importance of maintaining the separate spheres.[59] Britons generally viewed the new Republic's attempt to regulate family life and subordinate family ties to a concept of obedience and duty to a godless State and led them to cherish even more the domestic ideals and religious values that the godless French had trampled on.

Britons interpreted their victory over Napoleonic France as another proof that they were God's chosen people and morally superior to other peoples. After Waterloo, more Britons than ever would have agreed with the Bishop of Durham's statement (made in Parliament in 1807) that Britons "were a people more favoured by Heaven than any other nation had been from the com-

[57] Colley 253.

[58] Lynn Hunt and Catherine Hall, A History of Private Life, ed. Michelle Perrot (Cambridge and London: Belnap P, 1990) 4: 45.

[59] Hunt and Hall 4: 44, 45.

mencement of time."[60] The victory over France had been achieved by military and naval might, but most Britons attributed it to the superiority of the British character. Victory was considered a triumph of morality over ideas--of the heart over the head. It was seen as discrediting the idea--derived from Enlightenment thinkers and propagated in England by Godwin and Paine--that "the rational application of knowledge could recreate society."[61] As Asa Briggs puts it, for most Britons "only moral standards, supported by 'vital [as opposed to 'rational'] religion,' were guarantees of social order, national greatness and individual salvation. They were held to be necessary foundation both of morale and victory"[62] Most Britons believed that their nation's power was "founded on religion, on freedom, and on moral calibre."[63]

In 1815, the Morning Chronicle spoke for the majority of Britons when it boasted:

> It is to the cultivation of the moral qualities that England is indebted for power and influence. From the want of them France

[60] Bishop of Durham, quoted in Colley 353.

[61] Douglas Dakin, "The Historical Background," in Byron's Political and Cultural Influence in Nineteenth-Century Europe: A Symposium, ed. Paul G. Trueblood (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities P, 1981) 23.

[62] Briggs, The Making 172.

[63] Colley 359.

> may be mischievous, but she will never be great.[64]

Britons were in the habit of defining themselves in opposition to the perceived characteristics of the French, both male and female.[65] By the eighteenth century, this habit had become ingrained in the British character. Britons stereotyped French males as effeminate, devious and preoccupied with fashion, food, etiquette, and sex; females as vain, self-indulgent, frivolous, scheming, power-hungry and sensual.[66] In contrast, Britain prided itself on the masculinity of its men and the modesty of its women.

"How intimate is the connexion," wrote Mrs. Ellis in one of her popular conduct books, "which exists between the women of England, and the moral character maintained by this country in the scale of nations."[67] As a "representation of the private,"[68] woman was considered a vulnerable creature in need of male protection. "The belief in the natural differences and complementary roles of men and women" became "the com-

[64] Quoted in Briggs, The Making 172.

[65] One can discern this in Shakespeare's plays (e.g., Henry V).

[66] I am indebted to Colley (251-52) for this list of qualities.

[67] Sarah Ellis, quoted in Colley 276.

[68] Hunt and Hall 45.

mon sense of the English middle class," write Davidoff and Hall.[69] A great deal of energy was directed at directed at domesticating men, a process that required a "reorientation of the masculine attitude."[70] The spokespersons for domestic values discouraged men from engaging in "rough amusements and convivial excesses"[71] and from seeking personal and social pleasure in exclusively male company at coffee houses and other gathering places. It attempted to instill in men a "sense of duty" toward one's wife and family,[72] and it encouraged them to find pleasure in family life at home.

B. Domesticity and the Monarchy

The British people hungered for domesticity in their monarchs and in the members of the royal family, especially as it was so rare a command among the English aristocracy, who were notorious for their moral laxness. The object of this section to describe its presence or absence in the three Hanoverian monarchs

[69] Davidoff and Hall 149.

[70] Houghton 341.

[71] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," quoted in Houghton 342.

[72] Houghton 42.

who reigned before Queen Victoria, who became its shining exemplar.

The public display of grief that followed the death of Princess Charlotte, George IV's only child, in 1817 is a clear sign of the hunger in the populace at large for domesticity. A child of a loveless marriage between George and Caroline, she had defied her father and married Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg for love in 1816. When she died in childbirth at age twenty-one, the British people felt the loss personally.[73] "It really was as if every household throughout Great Britain had lost a favourite child," remarked a Whig politician of the age.[74] Charlotte, George's only heir, had rejected the lax aristocratic mores of her father, and gave promise of being a queen with solid middle class domestic values. When one obviously aggrieved woman mourned her death in verse, she fittingly did so in terms of the domestic ethos already described:

> T'was her with calm and condescending grace,
> To rule in woman's chiefest empire, Home;--
> T'was hers to keep the sabbath in its place,
> Mid the meek worship of the village dome.[75]

[73] The loss was intensified by the fact that Charlotte's child was stillborn.

[74] Quoted in Linda Colley, "The Apotheosis of George III: Loyalty, Royalty and the British Nation, 1760-1820," Past and Present, 102 (1984) 125.

[75] From Gentlemen's Magazine 87 (1817), 610, quoted in Colley, 273.

The Princess had become a cult figure, and her death left a void that would not filled for many years.

The respect that Britons accorded their monarch was determined in large part by the domestic example he set. It was generally assumed that a naturally ordered domestic life (i.e., one lived according to Christian tenets) was the foundation of good rule. The interrelation between and the inseparability of the domestic and the political in the eyes of ordinary Britons is summed up in the following quatrain from an "Ode to George the Fourth and Caroline his wife" by "John Bull":

> A Father to the nation prove,
> A Husband to thy Queen,
> And safely in thy people's Love,
> Reign tranquil and serene.[76]

As John Bull's Ode reveals, the Britons wanted a king who was a good husband. The assumption underlying the verse is that a king who is a good husband and a father to his subjects will reign securely because he will command loyalty--and even the love--of his subjects. What the British people got in George IV, both as Regent and as king, was, in Hunt's words, a "despiser

[76] John Bull (pseud.) "Ode to George IV and Caroline his wife" (1820), quoted in Davidoff and Hall 152.

of domestic ties."[77] In this George was consistent throughout his life. Within a few years of his Regency George had squandered the legacy of domesticity that his father, George III, had built up over five decades (1760-1810). This explains why the Ode is addressed to him.

George III ended his life a madman, but one who had earned his people's love.[78] His eldest son's unseemly haste to exercise regency powers when his father had first been stricken with an attack of madness in 1788 had first turned the public against him, and he was to remain intensely unpopular for the remainder of his life as did two other of his four brothers. Partly through personal determination and example, and partly through circumstance (above all, the French Revolution), George III succeeded in transforming the image of the Hanoverian monarchy into a popular institution that was domestic in substance as well as appearance. Throughout his forty-nine years of marriage, George's devotion and fidelity to his wife, Queen Charlotte, was exemplary. His "cult of domestic virtue," which earned him the respect of his people, "was not to be surpassed even by his grand-daughter,"

[77] Leigh Hunt, "The Prince on St. Patrick's Day," The Examiner, 221: 22 March 1812, quoted in The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt (1850; New York: AMS P, 1965) 2: 273-284.

[78] George III's rule ended, in effect, in 1810, when he was declared mentally incompetent and George became Regent.

writes one historian.[79] The queen, too, like her husband, was "a totem of morality."[80] By virtue of his virtue, simple tastes, and ordinary and folksy ways, George III succeeded in making the monarchy popular. His domesticity was memorialized by the caricaturist Gillray's homey print of him eating boiled eggs by his fireside with his wife next to him. Having enjoyed a "belated apotheosis" during the Napoleonic Wars,[81] George III died a venerated father-figure, with over 30,000 people making the journey to Windsor to pay their respects at his private funeral.[82] The significance of George III's contribution to the image of the monarchy has been well summarized by Colley:

> For the bulk of Britain's population, it was not so much . . . material developments that made a difference as the evolution of a new kind of magic and mystique. . . . it was no longer enough for royal apologists to emphasise that George III ruled with divine approval because he was a Protestant and a constitutional monarch. A more personal foundation for monarchy was wanted. And it was duly found, by giving the very old notion of the king's two bodies a new and more secular twist. Yes, the line now went, George III was on a different level from all his subjects, the inhabitant of splendid places and the fulcrum of unprecedented ceremony; but was also a husband, father, a mortal man subject to illness, age, and every mind of mundane vulnerability, and, therefore, essentially the same

[79] White The Age 7.

[80] Colley 268.

[81] Colley, Britons 229.

[82] Colley 230.

> as his subjects. . . . Herein lay the essence of a newly invented royal magic.[83]

At great damage to the institution of the monarchy, George IV thumbed his nose at domesticity. His shabby treatment of his wife (the former Princess Caroline of Brunswick) shortly after their marriage, in 1795, gave the people further reason to dislike him. He further alienated the public by establishing the Milan Commission to conduct an investigation of his wife's alleged adulterous behavior in Europe, where she had gone into voluntary exile. After the mentally incapacitated George III died and his son became king, a point of political crisis was reached when, in 1821, George not only refused to allow his estranged wife attend his Coronation but also spitefully decided to humiliate her by having her tried in the House of Lords for adultery after she insisted on returning to claim her queenly prerogatives.[84] His attempt earlier to strip her of her title and have his marriage dissolved had failed, with the public all the while enthusastically backing the queen. George's treatment of his

[83] Colley, Britons 232. Colley quotes The Times, reporting on the funeral of George III on November 20, 1820: "It is an important truth that most of the qualities which George III possessed. . . were imitable and attainable by all classes [italics Colley] of mankind"--232.

[84] George died in January 31, 1820. The Coronation took place on July 19, 1821.

queen earned him the nation's unqualified contempt. The idea of having his wife tried for treason was entirely his own, and he turned a deaf ear to the sound advice of his ministers against pursuing so unpopular a course of action. In obstinately clinging to it, George badly misjudged public sentiment. The "Caroline Affair," which has already been discussed from a political point of view,[85] may profitably be considered for what it reveals about the ethos of domesticity in early nineteenth century Britain.

Hazlitt observed that the trial of Queen Caroline "was the only question I have ever known that excited a thorough popular feeling. It struck its roots into the heart of the nation; it took possession of every house or cottage in the kingdom."[86] In this sordid royal soap opera, the people rallied to the defense of a queen whom they idealized into "a blameless British woman"; Similarly, the "notoriously immoral monarch"[87] was demonized into a persecuter of innocence. The affair had aroused the conscience of a whole nation and produced an extraordinary outpouring of popular support for the accused Queen.

[85] See Chapter 1.

[86] William Hazlitt, "Commonplaces" no. 73 (15 Nov. 1823), in Howe, 20: 126, quoted in Laqueur 417.

[87] Colley, Britons 268.

The issue that was trumpeted by Whigs and radicals alike who came to the defense of the Queen, and by the chiefly pro-Caroline press, was "the sacred right to safety and security of all British women."[88] In the words of one M.P.,

> The beauty--the goodness--the very helplessness of the sex are so many claims on our support, are so many sacred calls on the assistance of every manly and courageous arm. . . . whilst an example is held up to every ruffian in the land to abuse and insult the wife, that he promised to cherish and protect, is it unreasonable to apprehend the degeneracy and decay of our national morals?[89]

Chivalry was not dead, as Burke had lamented! Such declarations of support for the queen in the name of chivalry may strike us as melodramatic, but they were genuinely felt in the early nineteenth century. They indicate the extent to which an aristocratic ideal had become incorporated into the bourgeois notions of domesticity. The close identification of both middle class and working women with their "injured queen" is expressed in a contemporary ballad:

> Attend ye virtuous British wives
> Support you injured Queen,
> Assert her rights; they are your own,

[88] Colley, Britons 266.

[89] Anon, The King's Treatment of the Queen, Shortly Stated to the People of England (1820), 4, 32, quoted in Davidoff and Hall, 151.

As plainly may be seen.[90]

Despite the fact that circumstantial evidence overwhelmingly pointed to the queen's guilt, in the eyes of her people Caroline was a "woman wronged" and they rallied to her side. The king's action affronted the domestic sensibilities of the middle and lower classes to the point of moral outrage. One informant for the Home Office reported hearing the following seditious exchange in Cheltenham: "God bless the queen," said one man. "God damn the king," said a second. "Amen." said a third." This conversation must have been repeated many times throughout England, says Laqueur.[91] In the end the "public voice" prevailed,[92] saving the queen from the consequences of the Bill of Pains and Penalties. Caroline's acquittal was celebrated with bonfires and illuminations throughout the nation. "All here is ecstasy, 'Thank God the country is saved' is written on every face and echoed by every voice," wrote the young Macaulay from Cambridge to his Evangelical father.[93] In a real sense the country had been saved by being delivered out of the

[90] Quoted in Davidoff and Hall 152.

[91] Laqueur, " Queen Caroline Affair" 424.

[92] A term used by Major Cartwright, quoted in Laqueur 431.

[93] Thomas Macauley, quoted in Davidoff and Hall 151.

hands of those had sought to capitalize on the royal domestic quarrel in order to destabilize the institution of monarchy.[94] With the Queen's death on August 7, 1821, the "affair" ended. George reigned for nine more years, but he never gained his subjects respect, much less earned their love.

Genuine, if somewhat dull, domesticity returned to the English throne with the Duke of Clarence, who became William IV at age sixty-five in 1830. Clarence was no despiser of domesticity like his brother. After a spell of wildness in the navy, the Duke had fallen in love with Mrs. Jordan, the famous comic actress, and settled into a life of faithful, retiring, unmarried domesticity with her that lasted twenty years and produced ten children.[95] Their devotion to each other gradually won the approval of the public. Prompted by the death of Princess Charlotte (the heir presumptive) in 1817, the Duke ended his long liaison with Mrs. Jordan to marry, at age fifty-two, the Princess Amelia Adelaide of Saxe-Meiningen. She was a home-loving young woman twenty-seven years younger than he who has been called "a Victorian before her time."[96] When he acceded

[94] Queen Caroline died Augu

[95] Astonishingly, Mrs. Jordan continued her career on the stage in spite of her childbearing.

[96] Ziegler 156. William married the Princess Adelaide on July 13, 1818.

to the throne at age sixty-five he had been contentedly married for thirteen years. Adelaide had exerted a reforming influence on her rough-mannered husband that was observable to all. She had put his precarious finances in order, and had induced him to drink more moderately and speak less uncouthly. In 1830, the Marquess of Anglesey, had impressed on the soon-to-be king an important lesson taught by George III, namely that "royalty must go hand in hand with an appearance of domestic bliss."[97] He had rightly told the Duke that "The advantages of a female Court after so long an absence of any thing of that sort, were incalculable."[98] Through Queen Adelaide, the improving female influence was felt. The queen did her best to make her weather-beaten old husband look and behave less like a ex-navy man and more like a king. The public was pleased to find in their new king "a faithful and affectionate husband."[99] This was the king whom Knowles found worthy of being the dedicatee of Alfred the Great in 1831.

C. Knowles's Paradoxicality: The Evangelical Christian as Theater-lover

[97] Colley, Britons 235.

[98] Marquess of Anglesey, quoted in Colley, Britons 235.

[99] Ziegler 291.

Earnestness and religious devotion (on the one hand) and a passion for theater (on the other) were odd bedfellows in the early nineteenth century, but in Knowles these usually conflicting elements co-existed in harmony. Knowles was devoutly religious by temperament, yet passionately devoted to the theater. Most of Knowles's literary friends who were devotees of the theater--as playwrights, critics, and patrons--had secular temperaments. Lamb, Procter, Hazlitt, Hunt, Talfourd, and Reynolds, for example, all "boasted of their 'freedom from the shackles of religious sentiment of every kind,'" writes Baker, quoting Benjamin Haydon, who knew them all intimately.[100] Macready was intensely religious, but found the profession of acting degrading and humiliating. His diaries attest to the "constant torment" of following a profession that he despised.[101] One cannot imagine Knowles writing that the stage "should be shunned as infection or as death--for purity cannot live there, or wondering whether it was "the proper business of a human being, with the 'god-like qualities' peculiar to him, to expend his life in repeating parts of plays, and trying to represent human

[100] Bejamin Haydon, Autobiography, 2 vols., 1: 145, quoted in Herschel Baker, William Hazlitt (Cambridge: Belknap P, 1962) 30.

[101] Downer 19.

passions."[102] These are characteristic Macreadyisms. Knowles, in contrast to Macready, genuinely loved the theater, and the profession of acting, and the audiences for whom he wrote and performed. Moreover, Knowles believed, at least until 1843, that by writing plays he was nurturing a God-given talent and promoting "the interests of morality and religion."[103] Even after he became a Baptist minister he refused to preach against the theater or to "denounce his former mode of life, or his former associates."[104]

Knowles's belief that he was doing God's work as a playwright was rooted on his reading of Scripture. For Knowles the Bible sanctioned the idea that the stage was a instrument "second only to the Pulpit in improving society." This conviction allowed him to devote himself to elevating the stage in good conscience. In an epistolary debate that he had with four clergyman in 1836, Knowles asserted, in opposition to the anti-theatrical divines, that "the Almighty has employed the drama as a vehicle of Revelation."[105] "The stage,"

[102] The Diaries of William Charles Macready, 1833-1851, ed. William Toynbee (1912; New York: Blom, 1969) 1: 398, 420.

[103] James Sheridan Knowles, "A Correspondence with Four Clergyman in Defence of the Stage," in Lectures on Oratory, Gesture, and Poetry (London, 1873) 220.

[104] Life Rev. Alfred C. Thomas, "Sermon Occasioned by the Death of James Sheridan Knowles," quoted in Life 139.

[105] Knowles, "A Correspondence," Lectures on Oratory 217.

Knowles argued, "is an improvement of the drama" because "its effect is enhanced by personation" (thus his lack of interest in writing closet drama). He concludes that drama, "In the main is favourable to morality."[106] One may infer from Knowles's lectures point of view of profundity) that he believed that the heart and the active imagination, when aroused by intensely felt emotion, was made receptive to the influx of moral and religious truth.[107] The Evangelical language helps us understand how Knowles could live his life with his heart divided between religion and home and the theater. In Knowles's view, Shakespeare's plays were luminous with this truth, or what Knowles called "the light of philosophy and Christianity--the light of natural and revealed religion harmoniously and invigoratingly blending."[108] In this sense, his own playwriting aimed at emulating Shakespeare. While Knowles's high opinion of the stage importance in society was shared by many other observers, few were individuals of deep religious conviction.[109]

Knowles's son does not address his father's paradoxicality directly, but he comes close to touching

[106] Knowles, "A Correspondence" Lectures on Oratory 217.

[107] Knowles, Lectures on Dramatic Poetry 43, quoted in Murray 173.

[108] Quoted in Murray 73.

[109] In Chapter 2.

on it when he cautions the reader not to "judge of him as of ordinary men," and stresses his uniqueness:

> He was so completely sui generis. I cannot say I ever met any one who, in the leading point of his character, even approximately resembled him.[110]

In respect to Knowles's spiritual nature, the son writes, "I have rarely known a man who had a stronger sense of religion, deeper veneration for it, or who carried out its precepts more in the practice of his life."[111]

Knowles showed a "strong religious tendency" from childhood. This was fostered by his pious mother's upbringing,[112] which, it appears, was devoid of the "exclusive and narrow-minded spirit" that characterized Hazlitt's Dissenter upbringing--something that Hazlitt himself later condemned.[113] In any event, any early exposure to pietism came from his mother rather than

[110] Life 157.

[111] Life 140.

[112] Not much is known about the particulars of Knowles's education at home; judging from facts given in the Life, it is possible that his mother was raised as a noncomformist. Her father, the doctor Andrew Peace, may have been an Irish Presbyterian rather than an Anglican.

[113] William Hazlitt, Letter to his son, No. 19, in The Letters of William Hazlitt, ed. H.M. Sikes (New York: NYU P, 1978) 218-19.

his Church of Ireland father.[114] His mother, who was "a well-educated, intellectual woman"[115] with a highly developed appreciation of literature, encouraged him in his literary pursuits, which his unpoetical father did his best to discourage.[116] In this parental conflict, Knowles's mother prevailed. By twelve he had already attended the theater and tried his hand at playwriting.[117] With his mother's permission, the stagestruck boy busied himself constructing a toy-theater and was allowed to use her drawing-room to produce plays of his own devising on its juvenile stage to the delight of invited audiences. Jane Knowles's sudden death in 1800 was a terrible loss to the sixteen year old boy, who had grown extremely close to his mother.

Six years or so after his mother's death, Knowles was deeply touched by Evangelicalism. This happened

[114] According to the Life, James Knowles, Sheridan's father, "was strongly attached to the Church of England, of which all his family had been members, and some of them clergymen"--6.

[115] Life 8.

[116] Knowles's son tells of how when the father discovered that his son was "in the habit of sitting up at nights scribbling, he made it a point to go himself to his bed-room, and take away his candle," adding that his father, in anticipation of this, would "secrete candles, and light them when he was gone."--Life 9.

[117] It had not been generally recognized that it was not uncommon it was for many young boys (and girls) in middle class (non-Evangelical) and especially artisanal homes to attend the theater at this time. Scott and Southey were four when they saw their first play, Lamb was six, and Dickens was eight. "There is no doubt that English children were reared on the drama from an early age"--George Speaight, Juvenile Drama: The History of the English Toy Theatre (London: MacDonald, 1946) 116-7.

when he came under the spell of the "earnest, eloquent, eccentric preaching" of the famous Rev. Rowland Hill at Surrey Hill Chapel in London.[118] The twenty-six year old Knowles was now earning a living as a doctor under the tutelage of Dr. Willan. By temperament and upbringing Knowles was open to the influence of a preacher of Hill's earnestness and eloquence. Hill, who was "something of a rebel within the church fold,"[119] was according to Robert Southey, Hill was a "performer as great in his time as Kean or Kemble."[120] The theater analogy brings home the point that Knowles was receptive to being "thrilled" (to use a favorite word of the time) by powerful oratory, whether is emanated from parliament, the theater, or the pulpit. Thousands of worshipers thronged to hear Hill's preach at the Chapel, which the independently wealthy preacher had had built especially for him. Surrey Chapel offered religious instruction to over three thousand children in thirteen Sunday schools, but services were held daily, not just on Sundays. Hill, who was in his six-

[118] DNB, 862. Unless otherwise indicated, facts about Hill (1744-1833) have been taken from this source. The Rev. Rowland Hill (1744-1833) is not to be confused with the Rowland Hill of penny-post fame.

[119] Paul Saunders. Edward Jenner, The Cheltenham Years, 1795-1823: Being a Chronicle of the Vaccination Campaign (Hanover and London: UP of New England, 1982) 146.

[120] "Roland Hill," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 14th ed., 557.

ties when Knowles first met him, had been an active humanitarian (visiting prisons and the sick, for example) and philanthropist for many years. He seems to have served as a religious mentor, and perhaps as a father-figure, to Knowles during this unsettled period in his life when conflicting aspirations were pulling him in different directions. It appears that Knowles was somewhat estranged from his own father after the latter's remarriage and in need of spiritual guidance. The importance of Hill and Surrey Chapel in Knowles's life during this time is reflected in the fact that he attended services during the week, as well as Sundays. Although Knowles and the militantly freethinking Hazlitt--who rejected his Dissenting religious upbringing--remained close friends during this time, in London his life had taken a sharp turn away from Hazlitt's intellectual (though not literary) influence.

The good works that Knowles zealously performed while under the Rev. Hill's spell suggest that he was inflamed with brotherly love as a result of Hill's preaching. Hill's fervent sermonizing on the subjection of prostitution had such a strong effect on Knowles, for example, that he devoted himself to using his own considerable powers of moral suasion to reclaim young streetwalking prostitutes (mostly young runaway

country-girls) "from sin and destruction."[121] The son characterizes this personal moral crusade to save the bodies and souls of Fleet Street prostitutes as "one of the wildest and noblest exploits that it ever entered into the mind of a young man of four-and-twenty to undertake."[122] He calls it the work of "an enthusiast worthy to be a disciple of St. Vincent de Paul."[123] The son records that Knowles succeeded in six cases out of the seven he attempted. Success was usually achieved by reuniting the runaways with their parents and then having the wayward girls placed in an institution (e.g. The Magdalen or The London Female Penitentiary) where "fallen women" were rehabilitated. In one case, he gave up his own lodging to a young prostitute until he could make arrangements for her to be institutionalized. He then wrote to the girl's parents to explain their daughter's circumstances and enlist their help.

Such impulsive generous action was characteristic of Knowles at his most ardent. What it showed, says the son, is that his father had "a heart intensely earnest and compassionate, and a mind fearless of appearances or consequences, wherever it recognized what it held to be a duty." In taking upon himself the idiosyncratic

[121] Life 22.

[122] Life 21.

[123] Life 23-4.

mission of reclaiming prostitutes, Knowles revealed himself to be one of the "earnest," though one should not go so far as to say "dreadfully earnest."[124] It would seem that the inflamed Knowles, who had to be dissuaded from preaching in the streets himself, had undergone a conversion of sorts, but there is no evidence in the Life that he underwent a radically transforming inner spiritual experience of rebirth that is associated with conversion.[125]

Knowles proved invaluable to the Rev. Hill because he could put the skills he had learned as an innoculator in the London Jennerian Society to good use in the mass inoculations of congregants (most of them poor) that regularly took place at Surrey Chapel after the services, which attracted hundreds of worshipers. Hill was a close friend of Jenner, a staunch advocate of inoculation, and "one of the leading nonmedical practitioners" of vaccination in Britain.[126] "I am ready to vaccinate tomorrow morning as many children as you choose," he announced to his congregations after

[124] Houghton uses the term "dreadfully earnest" of Carlyle--The Victorian Frame of Mind 226.

[125] Davidoff and Hall (87) describe the conversion experience as "the flooding of the soul with God's grace, the melting [i.e., renunciation] of self or individual identity and individual will, [and] being duiged by and leaning completely on God's will and his mercy, through Jesus Christ.

[126] Saunders 147.

each sermon.[127] By participating in this humanitarian service, Knowles satisfyingly integrated his life as a doctor into his religious life.

But Knowles's refusal to give up his involvement in amateur theatricals both as a playwright and actor suggest that he was still, as the Evangelicals would have said, "entrapped in worldliness." The worldliness took the form of acting lead parts in and writing plays for an amateur theatrical company and attending the theater, all of which Knowles continued to do simultaneously as he performed the duties attached to Dr. Willan's practice and involved himself in activities, both practical and spiritual, at Hill's Chapel. Knowles was living what may be called a double life and it is no wonder that one historian of medicine, obviously privy to a first-hand account, commented on Knowles's sleepiness when patients arrived early in the morning to be vaccinated.[128] It may be presumed that Knowles did his best to keep his nocturnal life a secret to Rev. Hill, if not Dr. Willan. Generally, Evangelicals considered the theater to be a place of moral depravity that Christians visited at the peril of their souls. Christians need only to read Wilberforce's most famous tract--A Practical View of the

[127] Rev. Edwin Sidney, Life of Rev. Rowland Hill (London, 1834) 227, quoted in Saunders 147.

[128] See p. 96, fn. 185.

Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians. . . Contrasted with Real Christianity--to be fully alerted to the seriousness of the peril posed by theatergoing, as much from the patrons themselves as from the entertainment.[129] The violence of Evangelical anti-theatrical feeling is illustrated by the words Hill himself spoke to his congregation from the pulpit on the morning of September 20, 1808 upon being informed that Covent Garden was on fire (as reported by Theodore Hook, a playwright):

> Great news, my brethren, great news," he told his congregation, "a great triumph has taken place over the devil and the stage-players--a fire in one of their house--oh may there be one consumed every year! It is my fervent prayer.[130]

Knowles was spared the pain of hearing these words of exultation over the destruction of a building that for him was a revered cultural temple. He had left London two years earlier to join an acting company in the provinces. He had chosen to involve himself in the world with a vengeance, as if to prove, in his son's

[129] Jonah Barish, The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice (Berkeley and London: U. of California P, 1981) 303.

[130] Reported by Theodore Hook in the Preface to his play Killing is No Murder (1809), quoted in David Mayer III, Harlequin in His Element: The English Pantomime, 1806-1836 (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1969) 242.

words, that he was "a man whom nature had nature had made to be a law to himself."[131]

Knowles's conversion experience came late in life, after he had distanced himself the theater by giving up playwriting.[132] Once he had received "into his heart the love of God in Christ his Savior,"[133] he looked back on his involvement in worldliness with regret. "It was the bitterest regret of his last years that he had spent so much of his life 'without God, and without hope in the world,'" says Knowles's son of his father.[134] Yet Knowles's nature was such that worldliness never totally dominated his mind. His son remembers his father as a person who "seemed. . . to have lived in the world to a great extent rather as one not quite belonging to it than as a man bearing an earnest and active part in its work."[135] He says that he "stood always stood apart from his human surrounding. . . as if, in mixing with the world, he came out of an inner world of his own, which more or less is the case with all of us, but which in him was a transit from his habitual world to one to which he did not properly

[131] Life 51.

[132] Financial necessity compelled Knowles to write fiction and continue acting in his plays, however.

[133] Life 148.

[134] Life 148.

[135] Life 157.

belong."[136] These words provide the best gloss on the cryptic statement that concludes Hazlitt's brief portrait of Knowles in The Spirit of the Age: "He has been cradled in song, and rocked in it as in a dream, forgetful of himself and of the world!"[137]

What should not be lost sight of is that Knowles's religious nature expressed throughout his life, not just during the years of his association with Surrey Chapel or after his conversion late in life. One way in which it expressed itself was through prayer. Knowles obviously believed in the power of prayer and prayed daily. "I do not believe the sun ever rose or set upon him in all his life that he did not pay the Christian's homage to his Creator," writes Knowles's son.[138] Knowles always prayed for spiritual help before beginning to write a new play, and after the triumphant opening night of The Hunchback in 1832 at Covent Garden, which was also the occasion of his debut as an actor on the London stage, his thankfulness found its characteristic outlet in prayer. Knowles's has left us this account of an intimate moment of pious thanksgiving after the first performance:

[136] Life 157. This inwardness explains many of the instances of his "odd" behavior, including his absentmindedness and lapses in attention.

[137] Hazlitt, The Spirit 302.

[138] Life 14.

> As soon as they let me away from the front, I ran trembling and panting to my dressing-room, and bolting the door, I sank down on my knees, and from the bottom of my soul thanked God for his wondrous kindness to me. I was thinking on the bairns [Scottish for children] at home . . . and if ever I uttered a prayer of a grateful heart, it was in this little chamber.[139]

The fervor of Knowles's religious temperament, the sincerity of his gratitude, and his deep love for his family are all strongly conveyed in this passage.

C. Domesticity in Knowles's Life and Plays

The close connection between Knowles and the spirit of his age was most succinctly put by R.H. Horne in The New Spirit of the Age: "The age is domestic, and so is he."[140] Horne's words capture a twofold truth

[139] Life 93.

[140] Horne 239. The New Spirit of the Age, written in self-conscious emulation of Hazlitt's The Spirit of the Age, was actually co-authored by Elizabeth Barrett. Horne, as editor, took full responsibility for the views expressed. Of the twenty-five essays on forty literary figures, a fair number were written by or in collaboration with Miss Barrett. Although it is impossible to identify the author of each portrait. Evidence for assigning authorship of the essay to Horne rests on several factors: the intimate knowledge of the theater that is displayed throughout the essay, the aggrieved tone of the personal criticism leveled at Macready, and the diatribes against public taste, the press, conditions in the theater generally, and theater managers in particular. Macready had been the manager of Covent Garden when Horne's submitted his Romantic tragedy Cosmo de' Medici in 1837 for production. Macready's rejection of his drama was a source of embitterment to Horne, who was obsessed with the idea that it was his destiny to write Neo-Elizabethan and non-domestic poetic drama

about Knowles: that a domestic ethos pervades Knowles's plays, and that Knowles himself embodied that ethos. Of the relationship between Knowles and his plays, the son writes, "His plays "are the best index to his character. It is reflected in them as in a mirror."[141] What is reflected in the plays most clearly is what the son calls his father's "domestic instincts," which, he says, were "the deepest and strongest in his nature."[142]

Knowles's domestically-oriented life testifies to the strength of his "domestic instincts," which were instilled and cultivated, no doubt, by his loving, middle class parents. As the first surviving son after the death of two earlier infants to smallpox, Knowles was fussed over by his parents. From infancy to age nine, when the family moved from Cork to London, the young Knowles had a second mother in the person of a nurse

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that would regenerate the stage. In sum, Horne was a disappointed and disillusioned man had tried and failed to swim against the tide of taste. For Horne, Knowles represented the dramatist who catered to the domestic taste of his age instead of attempting to transcend it with passion and imagination, as he himself did---see Ann Blainey, The Farthing Poet: A Biography of Richard Hengist Horne (London: Longmans, 1968) 16-19, 78-9.

In short, the reader who reads Horne's essay on Knowles (and Macready) should be aware that Horne had an axe to grind, and that his biases affect his attitude toward Knowles's domestic plays. The statement, "The age is domestic, and so is he," is made with distaste, if not a little contempt.

[141] Life 163.

[142] Life 67. Domesticity in Knowles's plays is discussed in Chapter 4.

who doted on him, and whom he loved like a second mother. Being raised and educated at home surely contributed to his love of domesticity. It meant that there was to be no sharp dividing line between his childhood and boyhood of the kind experienced by Lamb or Coleridge, who at the tender age of six were forced to leave home and live at Christ's Hospital where the object of education was to transform a small boy into an adult as quickly as possible. The living with older, often bullying, boys naturally speeded up the process. Knowles, in contrast, was allowed to grow up in the bosom of his mother's love, his father's concern, and the company of his younger siblings. He was spared being subjected to the harsh words of headmasters, who often had no sympathy for boys who cried from homesickness, as the unhappy young Coleridge discovered:

> Boy! the School is your father. Boy! the School is your mother. Boy! the School is your brother! The School is your sister! the School is your first cousin and your second cousin and all the rest of your relations! Let's have no more crying![143]

As one commentator writes, to a boy these words, which one might imagine being spoken by Mr. Squeers, "seemed to imply the final severance of all domestic ties."[144]

[143] S.T. Coleridge, quoted in Morris Maples, Romantics at School (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967) 55.

[144] Maples 55.

Knowles's relationship to his mother, as already noted, was extremely close and loving. "Mother and son were of one mind in all things," writes Knowles's son.[145] Jane Knowles referred to her son as her "'blessing and her pride'"[146] and she provided him with the only formal education he was to have in life. She gave him both a religious and literary education and encouraged his "lisping in verse."[147] Shakespeare, Milton, and the Bible were learned at his mother's knee. His father's effort to discourage his poetic bent, which manifest itself in boyhood, does not appear to have caused him unhappiness. It appears that his mother's support was all that was needed to make him happy. When his father was not home, mother and son spent a great deal of time together reading and talking about his writing. Knowles's mother instilled in her son high moral principles of conduct and a chivalrous attitude toward women. Knowles abruptly left home at the age of sixteen because, after his mother died and his father remarried, he could not get along with his stepmother.

During his bachelor days in London, Knowles capacity for domestic feeling revealed itself in the heart-

[145] Life 9.

[146] Life 12.

[147] Life 9.

felt sympathy he felt for the smallpox ravaged families which he visited in the London slums on his inoculation rounds during the brief time he practiced medicine. His self-appointed mission to rescue prostitutes was eccentric but motivated by a genuine evangelistic passion based on the sanctification of domestic values.

The fact that Knowles got married at age twenty-five shortly after he joined an acting troupe is the most convincing evidence of his strong "domestic instincts," for this was a phrase of his life when he was without financial security and thus in no position to marry. The promiscuity that gave the theater a bad name in Knowles's time does not mean that acting companies were unsuitable places for young men of good and even religious character to meet young women of similar character who were domestically inclined and who therefore would likely make good wives and mothers. In an age when the opportunities for young women to work and earn wages were severely limited, the stage attracted many talented young women, even girls, of good character. It appears that there was no dearth of such women in provincial companies judging from the fact that many actors (notably, Kean and Macready, as well as Knowles) found model wives and mothers among the aspiring actresses who joined circuit companies. After the glamour of being an itinerant player wore off, many of these young women were only too willing to quit the

stage and live a conventional domestic life. In 1809, soon after joining small circuit company, Knowles found such an aspiring actress in the pretty eighteen year old Maria Charteris. The soon-to-be Mrs. Knowles is described as a young woman "of mild and retiring manners," and "intense religious feelings,"[148] and it may be supposed that Knowles was attracted by these qualities, which were desirable woman who was to be entrusted with the upbringing and education of his future children. Maria was an orphan from Scotland who had joined the company with her younger sister. Knowles promptly fell in love with her, wrote verses praising her beauty and character, and then proposed to her. They were married only three months after their first meeting.[149] Mrs. Knowles turned out to be the angel of the Knowles's household once the couple, weary of the hardships of an itinerant actor's life, quit the stage and began to live a respectable middle class family life.

Knowles had lost caste by becoming a professional player, but instantly regained it as soon as he became a schoolmaster in Belfast. Home was always where Knowles's heart was, especially during the years when he lived in Scotland (1815-1830), when his house was

[148] Life 28, 30.

[149] Knowles married Maria Charteris on October 25, 1809.

bustling with children of all ages. Together the couple raised nine children.[150] Macready, who knew Knowles intimately from 1820 on, attests to his love of domesticity: "His heart was in his home, and with the greeting of his friends and the plaudits of the theatre ringing in his ears, he was longing impatiently to return there.".[151] Although he was a member of many clubs and attended many convivial dinners with associates from the theater, based on all accounts Knowles was a family man to his heart's core and was happiest being in the bosom of his family. He delighted in doing such domestic things as reading, playing the piano and singing. His child-like nature delighted in activities such as sailing, playing games like marbles and flying kites, and performing gymnastics, all of which he did with his family. Dickens playfully wrote him a letter with the domestic salutation, "Daddy Knowles."[152] "Even under the pinchings of poverty," writes Macready, Knowles "would seek indemnity from the hard dealings of fortune in the little swarm of children that clustered around him, and would suggest comfort to their mother in the very cause of her anxiety, exclaiming, "Look at

[150] The first child, James, was born while the couple had quit the stage.

[151] William Charles Macready, Reminscences ed. Frederick Pollock (London, 1875) 160-1.

[152] Knowles, Ana.

them, Maria; are we not rich in these?"[153] There was little tragedy in the Knowles's family, but when the oldest son James, a doctor, died at sea in the prime of life, the grief-stricken father wept in the streets after hearing the news.[154]

Knowles's domestic "instincts" are also evident in the kindly way in which he treated the boys he taught--like adopted children or younger brothers rather than pupils. He was the antithesis of a Mr. Sqeers in every respect. "He loved his 'boys' with an affection greatly analogous to that of a father," reminisced one of his former students, who reciprocated his love.[155] In addition to being an enlightened pedagogue, "Paddy" Knowles (as he was called by his "boys") touched the lives of his pupils with his "kindness, empathy, enthusiasm and the ability to generate enthusiasm."[156]

The generosity Knowles showed toward his father, which according to his son stemmed from a "strong filial piety,"[157] is another indication of his domestic disposition. After his "stage-fit"[158] subsided, and he

[153] Macready 160-1.

[154] Life 106.

[155] Life 85.

[156] Sweeney 14.

[157] Life 10.

[158] Life 25.

got on his own financial feet, Knowles helped his father in every way he could. Financially speaking, James Knowles never recovered from the blow he received in Cork.[159] When his son quit his well-paid position as assistant to Dr. Willan to become an actor, James Knowles was too angry (both father and son had a quick temper) to even say goodbye to his son. In an extraordinarily generous act, Knowles tried to help his father in 1814 by recommending him for the position of headmaster of the English Department of the newly established Belfast Academical Institution, a position that had been offered to him. The father obtained the appointment, but his old-fashioned methods of teaching elocution, learned long ago from Thomas Sheridan, alienated his pupils and he was forced to resign. For all of his later life until his death in 1840, James Knowles lived in the Knowles's household as a dependent, first in Scotland and then in London. Knowles's filial piety was again strikingly demonstrated when he paid the huge expenses of a costly and prolonged lawsuit that his father had foolishly initiated over a pronouncing dictionary he published.

There is one occurrence in Knowles's otherwise exemplary life as a husband and father that must have pained Mrs. Knowles. A year after the death of his

[159] It is not clear from the Life how James Knowles supported his family after his transplantation to London.

first wife in 1841, Knowles married Emma Elphinstone, identified discreetly in the Life as a "former pupil."[160] Knowles first met his wife-to-be more than five years earlier when he was acting in Philadelphia during his tour of America in 1834-5. She was a young aspiring actress, and when Knowles returned to England she accompanied him, ostensibly as his pupil.[161] He helped her build an acting career and she performed the lead roles in several of his plays. The attachment itself was a matter of public knowledge, both in England and America, and Knowles made no effort to conceal it. The exact nature of the attachment is a matter of conjecture.[162] For what it is worth, in his diary, Macready's alludes to Miss Elphinstone as a "Delilah" who "has shorn the head of Sampson." He crytically writes of Knowles-Sampson as having "parted with his purity of mind." The implication of Macready's words is that Knowles and Emma were involved in a sexual relationship, one in which the woman was viewed as the temptress.[163] Whatever the circumstances were which led up his involvement with Emma Elphinstone, a young woman young enough to be his daughter, it appears that after

[160] Life 133.

[161] These facts are not mentioned in the Life.

[162] Non

[163] Macready, The Diaries 29 November 1836, 1: 363.

twenty-six years of marriage, at age 51, Knowles may have lapsed from the domestic ideal of marital fidelity.

Given Knowles's propensity toward the domestic, it was natural that he should infuse domestic interest into the political plots that he inherited from his sources. Knowles characterization of women was especially much admired in his own day because it reflected the exaltation of the feminine character that was an essential tenet in the domestic ethos of pre-Victorian Britain. Of Knowles's uniformly virtuous female characters, John Cole wrote in 1859, they "present no Clytemnaestras, Messalinas, Medeas, or Lady Macbeth. He reserves the dark, the stormy, and the evil passions for the workings of man's heart, and the process of man's machinations."[164] Domestic interest typically centers around a father-child relationship (as in Virginius, Tell, and Alfred the Great) and the husband-wife relationship (as in Caius Gracchus, Tell, and Alfred the Great), with the former being of paramount interest. In Caius, there is a powerful depiction of a mother-son relationship, but this is uncommon relationship in Knowles's plays. In most cases, the domestic is presented as a bulwark and defense against evil in the outside world.

[164] John William Cole, The Life and Theatrical Times of Charles Kean, 2 vols (London, 1859) 2: 338.

In all of the plays--Caius Gracchus and William Tell, the doctrine of seperate spheres is a given, with Caius's and Tell's wives, Lucinia and Emma, both fulfill the ideal of being "angels in the house." Virginius's dead wife fulfills the angelic feminine ideal for him in memory. The nubile Virginia (little more than a symbol for passive innocence) is on the point of being the angel in Icilius's house when her life is tragically cut short. Ina, prevented from committing suicide by her lover Oswith, will, it may be presumed, live to be the angel of his house. The plays present an interesting mixture of women who are strong (Cornelia, Emma, and Elswith, King Alfred's queen) and vulnerable (Lucinia and Virginia). Yet even the strong women accept the doctrine of seperate spheres, with Caius's matronly Roman mother, Cornelia, serving as the most forceful spokesperson of this aspect of the domestic ethos. However varied in age or temperament, Knowles's feminine characters are all satisfied to be circumscribed within the domestic sphere. The spirit of Nora Tesman is, of course, nowhere to be found in Knowles's plays. Conflict within the usually harmonious unit of the family occurs in only two of the four plays: first, when Caius's wife does her best to keep her husband locked within the domestic sphere and second, when Ina, the Danish king's teenage daughter in King Alfred, rebels against her father's authority.

The values of "home and hearth" are very much in evidence in the plays being discussed here, but only Tell's cottage is a home that resembles at all a "vestal temple" in Ruskin's sense. As a moral sanctuary from the dangers of the world, it exemplifies the Cowperian ideal of being situated from the "frenetic and anxiety ridden world of town and commerce,"[165] represented by Altorf. But it also functions as a symbol of purity in a world where liberty-loving individuals are threatened with imprisonment, loss of eyes, and even of life. Caius's house, however, is situated in the midst of the frenzied Roman street politics, within walking distance of the Roman Forum and of the Tiber River, where the body of Tiberius, Caius's murdered brother was brutally disposed of. So too, is the motherless household of Virginius, which is destroyed by outside evil. For Alfred, home is a peasant hut that serves as his temprary refuge from evil and a place for stoic- Christian reflection on his adversity.

Of the four plays, Tell is the only one in which the glow of Evangelicalism is felt, doubtless because its characters, setting, and story give Knowles the opportunity to depict an intact family that draws its strength from its faith in God. The Tell family is a pious family for whom praying to Christ is as natural

[165] Davidoff and Hall 166.

as breathing. Judging from his depiction of the Tells, Knowles appears to question the Evangelical notion that woman is necessarily man's "superior conscience." Religiously speaking, William is as attuned to God and to he noumenal in nature as is his wife, Emma. Piety is also an important part of King Alfred's character, but the tragic separation of Alfred from his wife and child make any depiction of family life impossible. The earlier Roman plays, of course, are unsuitable for the expression of overt Christian piety, but their depiction of family life is, despite their pagan setting, recognizably middle class English.

Whichever aspect of familial relationship that Knowles treats in his plays, it is fatherhood and father-daughter love that is the author's master theme.[166] The theme of fatherhood is invested with religious, even mystical, overtones: as Murray puts it, "fatherhood in Knowles is divine."[167] The spiritual nature of fatherhood is felt rather than expressed in Knowles's plays, but in The Maid of Mariendorpt, a later play, it is made explicit. This occurs when the heroine, Meeta, attempts to explain her concept of filial love to her housemaid Esther. Like Virginia and Ina (in Alfred), Meeta has been raised by a widowed

[166] Other than Tell, the only other play in which Knowles focuses on the father-son relationship is John of Procida.

[167] Murray 171.

father.[168] It is her wedding day, and while preparing for her nuptials, she is preoccupied with thoughts of her father rather than her bridegroom, which naturally strikes Esther as odd. Esther, it is discovered was raised by a widowed mother and never knew her own father. Therefore, she has only a conventional notion of what filial love means. Meeta, however, has experienced the depths of filial love because she was raised from an infant by her widowed father. Her father was to her a "nurse," an "instructor, playmate, companion, father, all, together"[169] The conversation about filial love between the two women is worth quoting in full because it expresses Knowles's religious notion of fatherhood:

> Meeta: You lost your father
> When you were but an infant. You don't know
> What 'tis to love a father.
> Esther: Do I not?
> Yes, but I do! It is to honour him,
> So we are bidden--that is, to obey him--
> Respectfully entreat him!
> Meeta: Nothing more?
> Esther: What more?
> Meeta: O, much!--O, very much!--Such things
> We do to those that are indifferent to us,
> Compared to a father! There is something
> more--
> Better--less earthly--more o' th' grain of
> Heaven--

[168] A number of Knowles's plays focus on the relationship between a widower and his only daughter (e.g., Virginius, The Hunchback, The Daughter, The Beggar of Bethnal Green, as well as The Maid of Mariendopt.

[169] Knowles, Dramatic Works (London: Routledge, 1864) 2: 130.

> A love that indefinable! that holds
> Ourselves as nothing, respect of cherishing!
> That's ever kneeling though no limb be bent,
> And looking up with ever-watching will,
> Anticipating wishes!--It is worship--
> Although no lip be moved, no eye be strain'd,
> No hand be clasp'd--next to that which hath
> acceptance
> Above--O'the soul! O, how I love my father!
> To say 'before my life' is to say nothing--[170]

For nubile daughters like Virginia and Ina, the bond of love between father and daughter is strong without being verbalized, and it is clear that for widowed fathers like Virginius and Guthrum, love of their daughters is what gives significance to their lives. The typical widowed father in Knowles's plays is invariably loving, tender, and protective toward his daughter, who is the apple of his eye--or as Virginius says, "knit to his heart," a fittingly homely image that links the father-daughter relationship to its domestic milieu: hearth and home.

The theme of fatherhood's spirituality is one that evolves in Knowles's work, reaching its maturity in plays like The Daughter and The Maid of Mariendopt, where fatherhood functions as "a source not only of authority and order in a frightening world but a symbol of transcendental love," to use Murray's words.[171] In the early plays being considered here, fatherly love is

[170] Knowles, Dramatic Works 2: 129-130.

[171] Murray, "James" 171.

mainly felt as a source of security in an uncertain world that is full of terrors, especially for women. It is here that the domestic and political spheres of Knowles's historical plays intersect and merge, with the common theme being that tyrannous and lustful impulses of men in power threaten the domestic security of every individual. It is significant that the protagonists--Virginius, Caius, Tell, and King Alfred--all have strong familial ties, whereas, the four respective villains--Appius, Opimius, Gesler, and Edric--are without domestic ties of any kind. Emotionally isolated and alone, the villains without family and not coincidently without religion or moral scruple. In Alfred the Great, however savage the destruction wrought by the Danes on Saxon families in their king's name, the king's love for his daughter Ina is enough to redeem him from being the villain of the play. The protagonists, ranging the social hierarchy from peasant to king, are all domestic as well as political heroes, and their indignation at political repression is fueled by outrage over the domestic havoc it wreaks. The political and the domestic are thus vitally connected in Knowles's historical plays.

There is no denying that by focusing on (some would say exploiting) the domestic, Knowles was catering to the taste of pre-Victorian audiences, but it one can hardly accuse him of manufacturing domestic feeling

for public consumption. The feelings of his characters ring too true for their sincerity to be impugned. Murray provides the corrective to the view that Knowles was a mere exploiter of domestic taste: "the domestic ideal was a conviction carrying almost mystical fervour in his work, so that one must consider that he expressed the feeling of his age by expressing his own convictions."[172] The political meaning and bite of Knowles's representations of domesticity is one of the subjects discussed in the next chapter.

[172] Murray, "James" 170-171.

Chapter 5

Liberty and the Censorship of Historical Drama

While the distinction of being "the outstanding example of a determinedly political playwright" in the early nineteenth century has justly been accorded to Edward Bulwer,[1] it must be recognized that Knowles was the most politically controversial dramatist in the decade immediately after Waterloo.[2] During a turbulent time when political censorship weighed heavily on the drama, Knowles courted controversy and invited attacks from the Tory press by injecting liberal politics into his playwriting. The liberalism of his four early historical plays allies them thematically to the dramatic compositions of Schiller, Alfieri, Byron, Shelley, and other writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Knowles reflected the spirit of the age by making liberty (with its implied antithesis tyranny) the grand and unifying theme of all his historical plays.

[1] John Russell Stephens The Censorship of English Drama, 1824-1901 (Cambridge UP, 1980) 45.

[2] Born in 1803, Bulwer was nineteen years younger than Knowles. When Knowles's Caius Gracchus was first staged in Belfast in 1815, he was twelve years old. Bulwer wrote his first novel (Ismael) in 1820 and his first play (The Duchess of Valliere in 1836.

A. Politics and the Two Faces of Liberty

The politics of Knowles's plays resists neat formulation, but Richard Fletcher has usefully characterized it as "a vaguely democratic devotion to liberalism."[3] Stephens quotes Fletcher's low-key characterization approvingly, and uses it to describe the political tone of other historical plays of the period, such as Talfourd's Ion (1836).[4] L.W. Conolly, however, finds the characterization too weak in light of the fact that in the case of Virginius "several short passages on tyranny and the right of the people were cut from the acting version of the play" and in the case of Caius Gracchus there was a delay in its licensing.[5] This is a telling point, for given the constraints of censorship on the drama at the time Knowles was writing, it is reasonable to conclude that the vagueness of their politics was dictated by necessity. Protesting the cuts in Virginius in print, Hazlitt asked, "Is the name of Liberty to be struck out of the English language, and are we not to hate tyrants even in an old

[3] Fletcher 145. Stephens uses Fletcher's phrase to describe not only Knowles's political plays but also the content of the historical tragedy as a whole during the early nineteenth century--41. No critic has discussed the politics of Knowles's plays at length.

[4] Stephens 41.

[5] Conolly 110-111.

Roman play?"[6] The answer to the first of Hazlitt's questions was an emphatic "Yes, if the censor deemed it offensive."

The domestic interest of Knowles's plays is so strong that it is easy to undervalue or even dismiss as insignificant the politics in the plays. Knowles's younger contemporary Richard Henry Horne did so, in effect, when he complained, "the only way in which Mr. Knowles personifies our age, is in his truly domestic feeling."[7] In fact, Knowles's plays reflect the politics of his age as well its domestic ethos, and their author, as has been shown, was as earnest about politics as he was about domesticity. The Life is explicit about this: "His political principles were both decided and strongly felt, and in . . . his early life he avowed them without flinching."[8] The point needs to be stressed, moreover, that idealizations of domesticity such as those found in Knowles's plays could have liberal political implications in the 1820s.

"Politics" in the early nineteenth century, it should be stressed, was a comprehensive term that

[6] William Hazlitt, Rev. of Virginius, London Magazine 7 (1820), quoted in Hazlitt on Theatre, eds. William Archer and Robert Lowe (1895; New York: Dramabook-Hill and Wang, n.d.) 170.

[7] Richard Henry Horne, "Sheridan Knowles and William Macready," in The New Spirit of the Age (London, 1844) 239. Horne, who was himself a dramatist, had an axe to grind. He was a so-called "Unacted Dramatist" who believed that his plays had been unjustly rejected by commercial-minded theater managers. His essay on Knowles and Macready is colored by his grievance.

[8] Life 76.

referred to "relations within the body politic,"[9] not only to "party" ideology, and could include almost any controversial subject. In his 1795 lectures "On the Political Prostitution of our Public Theatres," the radical John Thelwall pointed this out:

> If we consider seriously any subject whatever, though it may seem to the superficial observer as far removed from politics as the equator from the poles, we shall find, if it is a subject that had any meaning or connection whatever with any principle of common sense or morality, that it is in reality a question of politics.[10]

Persons of every political persuasion--Tories, Whigs, loyalists and radicals, however much they disagreed on other things, agreed in principle with Thelwall's broad definition of the word "politics." Even manners and morals (as Thelwall's statement makes clear) were subsumed under the word "politics" in this period, for they, too, had political overtones and repercussions.

In the absence of political writings by Knowles himself, there is no better introduction to the political temper of his historical plays than Hazlitt's Political Essays, a collection of his journalistic essays published in 1819, the year of Peterloo. In the

[9] Jonathan Bate, Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism, 1730-1830 (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1989) 204.

[10] Bate, 176-177.

preface to this work, Knowles's mentor asserted his political credo:

> I am no politician, and still less can I be said to be a party-man but I have a hatred of tyranny, and a contempt for its tools; and this feeling I have expressed as often and as strongly as I could. I cannot sit quietly down under the claims of barefaced power . . . . I deny that liberty and slavery are convertible terms, that right and wrong, truth and falsehood, plenty and famine, the comforts or the wretchedness of a people, are matters of perfect indifference. That is all I know of the matter. . .

"This is the only politics I know; the only patriotism I feel," Hazlitt declared in the preface.[11] Hazlitt's political writings are "almost purely the expression of this feeling," writes Stanley Jones, Hazlitt's most recent biographer.[12] In declaring himself "the avowed enemy of fixed, immovable, arbitrary power,"[13] Hazlitt, a passionate hater--as the essay "The Pleasure of Hating" shows--characteristically describes his politics in negative rather than positive terms: in terms of hate rather than love as if his love of liberty sprang from a hatred of tyranny or "barefaced power." Hazlitt pours the vials of his contempt on Tory, Whig, and radical alike. Knowles's own politics

[11] Hazlitt, Complete Works, ed. Howe 7: 7-9.

[12] Jones, William Hazlitt 239.

[13] Howe, 7: 242.

closely resembled "politics of liberty"[14] (to use Jonathan Bate's term) of his mentor as it is described above, except that Knowles did not share Hazlitt's hatred of kings and of legitimacy. In terms of British party ideology, this politics is identified with the Foxite Whigs, who posited liberty as the supreme value to which all other values are subordinated.

However one chooses to characterize the politics of Knowles's historical plays, it is noteworthy that London audiences found their glorification of liberty palatable even though, if taken seriously, it had subversive implications. The enthusiastic acceptance of Knowles's historical plays in the theater was surely owing in great measure to their domestic interest, which masked the severity of the implied criticism, sugar coating the pill, as it were. But it may also be attributed to the fact that Knowles embodied his liberalism in patriot-heroes who were easily recognizable, beneath their historical disguises, as freeborn Englishmen. Britons could identify with Knowles's protagonists indignation at tyrants and tyrannous acts because they were motivated by a patriotic idealism and a concept of civic virtue that was considered to be characteristically British. No matter what historical guise in which he is presented--Roman, Swiss, or Anglo-Saxon, the Knowlesian hero is a recognizable Briton

[14] Bate 9.

possessing the heart of a "freeborn Englishman." As such, he was viewed, I would argue, as an embodiment of a concept of British liberty that served as both the constitutional justification for political protest against government repression and a source of an insular patriotic pride in Britishness. The fervent language of patriotism that the Knowlsian hero spoke was familiar and appealing, resting as it did on the historical antithesis between liberty (understood in a British rather than a Jacobinical sense) and tyranny. It had complementary as well as critical overtones, depending on the ear of the hearer. To British ears, "Britons never will be slaves," is the succinct, self-congratulatory and passionately defiant message that Knowles's plays convey.

The simple antithesis of "liberty versus tyranny" is the master theme of all four of Knowles's historical plays: the positives of "liberty" and "freedom" are opposed to the negatives of "tyranny," "slavery" and "corruption" in a melodramatic manner, calculated to stimulate the patriotic juices of British audiences. The ambiguous and elusive terms "liberty" and "tyranny" were key words in the vocabulary of early nineteenth century political discourse (as they had been throughout the previous century). They were repeatedly appropriated, manipulated, and redefined by radicals, Whigs, and loyalists alike to suit their own ideological ends. As E.P. Thompson points out, "patriotism,

nationalism, even bigotry and repression, were all clothed in the rhetoric of liberty."[15]

In historical drama, the meaning of these emotive, chameleon terms varies according to the particular author's political views and the manner in which he treats familiar subject matter, with the political climate at the time the play was written serving as an indispensable context to guide interpretation. In the period immediately after Waterloo these terms had vibrant political overtones in the theater. One can argue, of course, that Knowles was using the antithetical terms "liberty" and "tyranny" merely for dramatic or rhetorical effect. However, given Knowles's personal political convictions and involvement in political causes during the 1820s, this argument is not plausible.[16] The question, then, is not whether Knowles historical plays have political meaning, but what the nature of that meaning was.

Two objective factors that are helpful in assessing a play's political bite (or lack of it) when it was first staged, is its licensing history and reactions to the play in the political press. For example, when these factors are considered in the case of Virginius and Caius Gracchus, the plays emerge as spirited protests against political repression and the rampant

[15] Thompson, The Making 78.

[16] These convictions have been described in Chapter 1.

immorality and corruption of the Regency, which took its impress from the Regent himself. One critic calls the plays "pills--even if sugared pills--to cure the immorality of the reign of George IV."[17] Both plays raised the hackles of the Tory press, which branded the Roman plays as dangerously liberal. They also raised the eyebrows of the Examiner of Plays and it is said that George IV himself had a hand in the censorship of Virginius.

In William Tell and Alfred the Great, Knowles earnestly continued to use history (in his characteristic loose manner) as a vehicle for the glorification of liberty (with all it subversive implications) in a political climate that was still illiberal but gradually moving in the direction of liberalization. After Alfred (which he began writing in 1825), Knowles's interest in mixing politics with his playwriting waned, probably owing to progressive political developments in the society at large: in particular, the passage of the Catholic Emancipation Act in 1829, the death of the reactionary George IV, and the passage of the Reform Bill in 1831. In the plays Knowles wrote after Alfred, politics is of minor importance.[18] Though the plays are

[17] Richard M. Mears, "Serious Verse Drama in England, 1812-1850," diss., U of North Carolina, 1953, 69.

[18] For example, The Hunchback, The Wife, The Maid of Mariendorpt, The Love Chase, Love, and The Rose of Arragon.

not devoid of political implications, the themes of these plays revolve around romantic love.[19]

It is generally acknowledged that Knowles's early historical plays express their author's strongly held liberal convictions.[20] Meeks, whose treatment of Knowles's politics is cursory, goes so far as to identify the "democratic ideals" proclaimed by Dentatus (a role that Knowles himself played to Macready's Virginius) with the author's personal beliefs: "Dentatus in his defiance of tyranny is Knowles in his courageous, outspoken stand against political oppression in his own time."[21] More recent critics refrain from equating the author with his characters in this way, but that Knowles did in fact identify closely with his protagonists--Virginius and Tell in particular--is clear from a conversation he had with a close friend shortly after he returned from a disappointing acting tour of Ireland in 1834. It was his first visit to the country of his birth in forty years, and he had arrived with the reputation of being England's most esteemed

[19] John of Procida, 1840, as already noted, is an exception.

[20] William McNeill's dismissal of the serious intent of Knowles's plays early in the century cannot today be taken seriously: "Nothing could be more absurd than to say that [Knowles's] themes were chosen to permit the denunciation of tyranny. If Knowles had chosen his themes for that purpose," says McNeill, "the dramatic censor would have done his duty in that case"--William McNeill, A History of the English Drama from 1788-1832 with Special Reference to Theatrical Conditions. Diss. Harvard UP, 1909: 472.

[21] Meeks, 75.

dramatist. Yet owing to their politics his plays (i.e., Virginius and William Tell) had been given a cold reception. "My plays are too liberal for the aristocratic illiberals of Ireland. . . . [they] breathe the noble sentiments of liberty, and such are not the sentiments of the influential classes of Ireland," Knowles declared to his friend. The boycott of Knowles's plays by the "aristocratic illiberals" of Ireland suggest that the politics of his plays depended, to some extent, on the eye of the beholder. In the eyes of the ultra-conservative Protestant ruling class, his plays were subversive. Knowles consoled himself by looking forward to his upcoming trip to America, where his plays were understandably popular because of their perceived democratic bias. Anticipating a warm reception, Knowles described America as "a place where the feelings and the reality of liberty exist in their most glowing form--and not the form alone, but the embodied spirit."[22] Knowles, in other words, conceived of liberty as a spirit or zeitgeist, and because he was deeply religious, it was to him a sacred spirit that was God's divine gift to man. This spiritual conception of the term "liberty" is most clearly expressed in William Tell, where the pious, impassioned, liberty-loving Swiss hero is obviously a mouthpiece for his author, who possessed the same

[22] R. Sheldon Mackenkie, "Memoir of James Sheridan Knowles," New-York Mirror, October 4, 1834, 4.

qualities.

The four plays being discussed are similar in plot as well as theme. Each of the plots is built on the struggle of a people to throw off the yoke of oppression in the name of liberty. The two Roman plays, Virginius and Caius Gracchus, which belong to the genre of historical tragedy, pit the plebeians against the patricians during critical junctures in the history of the Roman republic; William Tell, depicts the successful uprising of the Swiss peasants against their Austrian overlords in the Middle Ages; Alfred the Great, depicts the Anglo-Saxons' defeat of the invading Danes.[23] As one might expect given Knowles's religious temperament, Tell and Alfred possess a strong Christian flavor, not a common quality in the stage drama of this period. Writing at a time when "the meaning of a play could be found in the life and experience of the principal character or characters,"[24] Knowles was free to give expression to his Protestant piety once he shifted from pagan to Christian characters. The happy outcome of events in both Tell and Alfred is attributed to the workings of Providence, and even the Roman plays suggest that a higher destiny is an work in the unfolding of events.

[23] John of Procida, which depicts the uprising of the Sicilian people against their French overlords in 1282, also falls into this political category.

[24] Michael R. Booth, Theatre in the Victorian Age (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1991) 134.

Knowles's protagonists, all of whom attain stature as political heroes, incarnate the spirit of liberty that his plays glorify. Each of these male-centered plays fleshes out the abstraction of liberty by embodying it in a larger-than-life patriot-hero who is identified, historically or quasi-historically in the case of the legendary Tell, with the ideal of liberty and involves himself in the struggle to keep that ideal alive in the face of brutal tyranny. The heroes range from low to high on the social scale and include two "commoners" (Virginius and Tell), an aristocrat (Gracchus), and a king (Alfred). Each of the heroes functions as a rallying point for opposition to tyranny. In three of the plays--Virginius, Tell, Alfred, the hero is an instrument or agent of political change, just as he was in the historical or quasi-historical sources that Knowles loosely followed. These three plays end with a liberation from tyranny.[25] Only in Caius, the earliest of the plays in point of view of time, are the forces of tyranny triumphant. The pagan political heroes Caius Gracchus and Virginius are emblems of civic virtue, public-spiritedness, and patriotism; the Christian political heroes Tell and Alfred also possess these qualities but they are, in addition, intensely pious and devout. In their trials, Tell and Alfred both draw strength from and are

[25] Four, if one includes John of Procida.

sustained by religious faith; their love of liberty, the keystone of their politics, is inseparable from this faith, just as Knowles's was in his own life.

This chapter, which examines the political dimension of Knowles's historical plays, is divided into two sections. The first discusses the nature of the political hero and villain and some of the possible political meanings in three of the plays (Alfred the Great is discussed in the next chapter) in the context of historical drama and censorship. The second surveys the record of censorship or lack of censorship in the case of all four plays, paying particular attention to the individual censors.

A. Political Meaning, Historical Drama, and Censorship

Long ago, Ernest Bradlee Watson declared, rather too facilely, that "of the nation's political life [in the early nineteenth century] almost nothing is traceable in the drama."[26] Watson's statement, made long ago, expresses according to L.M. Conolly, "the usual view of the relationship between politics and drama in the early nineteenth century."[27] But this view has been so modified in the light of recent scholarship that it

[26] Ernest Bradlee Watson, Sheridan to Robertson (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1926) 5.

[27] Conolly 107 [in 1976].

is no longer an accurate generalization. Even though it is true that censorship prevented the stage from dealing with politics in an overt or substantial way, many traces of the political life of nineteenth century England can still be found in its drama.[28]

Historical drama has traditionally been used to mirror contemporary concerns and the superficial remoteness of the historical events being dramatized is more apparent than real. "It has long been a commonplace that historical plays are at least as much a comment on the playwright's own times as on the periods about which they are ostensibly written," writes Herbert Lindenberger in his book Historical Drama.[29] Historical drama has an almost inescapably political dimension. Dramatists are rarely, if ever, interested in dramatizing history for its own sake; their interest in history lies in using it for some immediate purpose. In the words of one historian, history serves the dramatist "as an arsenal for the defense of moral and political principles to which he is already committed."[30] Once the dramatist's historical guise is penetrated, an historical play takes on a relevance it did not have before. For the dramatist, the attraction of historical subjects lies in its capacity for dou-

[28] See Conolly and Stephens, passim.

[29] Lindenberger 5.

[30] Ward 419.

bleness. It recreates an illusion of the past while simultaneously alluding to the present. Its topicality can manifest itself in various ways: allegorically or analogically through character, plot, setting, and theme, or through allusions and references in the text. Knowles is no different from other authors of historical drama in using history as a vehicle for conveying political principles and for commenting on contemporary issues.

Owing to the constraints of censorship, the early nineteenth-century dramatist was compelled, in Fletcher's words, "to feign a kind of blindness"[31] toward contemporary problems that can "all to easily can be mistaken for moral indifference or lack of concern."[32] Resorting to historical guises remained the only recourse available to the politically minded dramatist who wrote for the patent theaters in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Satire, wit, and ridicule were effective only in dramatic pieces that lent themselves to improvisation and thus could escape the Licenser's eye.[33] By disguising his politics in borrowed robes and communicating indirectly through

[31] Fletcher 32.

[32] Fletcher 32.

[33] See Martin Meisel, "Political Extravaganza: A Phase of Nineteeth-Century British Theater," Theatre Survey 3 (1962) 19-30; also David Mayer III, Harlequin in His Element: The English Pantomime, 1806-1836 (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1969).

historical guises, a dramatist could comment on his own times without seeming to do so since the correspondences between past and present were left to the eye of the beholder.

The plot patterns of most historical plays, as Lindenberger observes, have to do either with "either with the transfer of power from one force to another or with means by which a force already in power manages to stabilize itself against the onslaught of contending forces."[34] There is an inherent bias, however, in favor of change. To again quote Lindenberger: "drama is less concerned with the continuities of history than with its disruptions."[35] This is borne out by the fact that "conspiracies provide the central fable shaping the vast majority of historical dramas."[36] For the reasons given above, over the centuries the English government justifiably eyed historical drama suspiciously. Many of the historical plays that it found offensive or dangerous enough to suppress on political grounds belonged to the genre of tragedy, which, of course, depended on history as a source of its dignity and verisimilitude. These included tragedies such as Tate's The Sicilian Usurper (an adaptation of Shakespeare's

[34] Lindenberger 31.

[35] Lindenberger 31.

[36] Conspiracy, says Lindenberger, is "that aspect of the historical process that more readily lends itself to dramatic treatment"--30.

Richard II) and Lee's Lucius Junius Brutus in the Restoration, Brooke's Gustavas Vasa, Thomson's Edward and Eleonora, and in the early eighteenth century, and Shee's Alasco and Mitford's Charles the First in the early nineteenth century.

Two of Knowles's plays, Caius Gracchus and William Tell belong to the conspiracy pattern. The former, as befits tragedy, adheres more closely to the pattern, but does not conform to the paradigm of the pattern, Julius Caesar, which Lindenberger calls "the tragedy of the 'tainted idealist.'"[37] To this sub-genre belong Otway's Venice Preserv'd, Schiller's Don Carlos, and Byron's Marino Faliero, all of which are dramatizations of failed conspiracies that depicts the idealist-hero (Brutus, Pierre, Carlos, and the Doge Faliero, respectively) in an ambivalent light. Each of these heroes is willing to compromise his ideals by dirtying his hands. "The idealism of the conspirator becomes questioned in the course of the play," says Lindenberger, "with the result that those large abstractions which he voices--liberty, republicanism, justice, hatred of tyranny, and the like--are subjected to the audience's critical examination."[38] Such ambiguity is foreign to Knowles's plays, the protagonists of which are untainted

[37] Lindenberger 34.

[38] Lindenberger 35.

idealists who lead revolts against an authority that is evil because it is oppressive and arbitrary.

To some extent personal feeling enter into their actions: Caius Gracchus is driven to exact revenge on the Senate for the murder of his brother Tiberius; Tell, after being made to undergo the cruel ordeal of shooting an apple off his son's head, dispatches Gesler with an arrow in much the same way he would exterminate a predatory animal. Yet it would be inaccurate to call either of these idealistic protagonists "tainted." Like Caius Gracchus and William Tell, Virginius is also a play that is concerned with the transfer of power from an oppressive few to the people, but the transfer is accomplished without conspiracy; it happens spontaneously on the altar of almost ritualistic-sacrifice (the killing of Virginius's daughter), an act that sparks a popular revolt against the lustful tyrant Appius. Alfred the Great, which is about a king's struggle to reclaim his throne from foreign invader who is a tyrant, has, of course, nothing to do with conspiracy.

The Tory government which ruled England (almost continuously from 1783 to 1830,[39] a period of almost fifty years) understandably took a dim view of historical plays that depicted patriot-heroes leading

[39] The only exception was the year 1806-7.

uprisings against authority.[40] Generally speaking, it regarded the self-proclaimed patriot with the same distaste that Dr. Johnson did, and would have agreed with his definition of him as "a factious disturber of the government." The unsettled nature of British society in the first two decades of the early nineteenth century meant that "dramas founded on plots, conspiracies, and social upheaval"[41] would be viewed with nervousness by the government and subjected to close scrutiny. As a leading authority on censorship of the drama points out, "the vexed question of Irish politics. . . has an obvious relationship with the authorities' proscription on the more general topic of revolution" in this period.[42] The government tended to suspect plays that celebrated patriotism aimed at overthrowing the established order of things as incitations to revolution in Ireland. The danger of such plays was felt more keenly after the rise to prominence of Danny O'Connell and his founding of the Catholic Association in 1823, which succeeded in wresting the leadership of the Roman Catholic church from the aristocracy and ecclesiastics and giving it to the clergy and peasantry--itself almost a revolutionary act.

[40] Stephens 47.

[41] Stephens 54.

[42] Stephens, 55.

The unsettled nature of the Irish Question makes it tempting to read Knowles's Tell as an allegory advocating allusively for the uprising of the Irish peasantry (represented by Tell and the other conspirators) against the British, represented by the brutal Gesler. In 1824, a year before the staging of Tell, a play called Alasco had been heavily censored on the suspicion that it was a subversive allegory meant to encourage revolution in Ireland was the most publicized case of censorship during Knowles's early years of playwriting.[43] In this pseudo-historical play, the censor saw a parallelism being drawn between the conspiracy of the Polish Catholics led by the Catholic Count Alasco against their Protestant Prussians overlords and the Irish Catholic movement for Emancipation against the entrenched power of allied Anglo-Irish Protestantism. The censorship of Alasco is worthy of note because it describes the censor's state of mind a year after the licensing of Caius Gracchus and a year before William Tell was submitted for licensing, both plays which glorified conspiracies against an established order.[44]

The Tory's government's attitude toward Knowles's first three plays (a liberal government was in office

[43] The censorship of Shee's play is discussed in more detail in the next section.

[44] The censorship of Alasco is further discussed in relationship to Knowles's Tell in the next section.

when Alfred the Great was staged) can be gauged from reviews in the conservative press.[45] It is noteworthy that it is the Roman plays that were the subject of sharp attack on account of what was termed their "democratic spirit."[46] They seemed to side with the people against the ruling classes, and approve of "people-power." The John Bull called them "democratic, ranting, trashy plays"[47] In its review of Caius Gracchus, Fraser's Magazine a full thirteen years after the staging of Caius Gracchus, saw the play as formenting anti-aristocratic sentiment: "War is declared against the very idea of aristocracy; and in favor of whom? A mere herd of men, who, by the showing of the very hero of the play, are worthless, most worthless."[48] Of the two Roman plays, Caius is certainly the more liberal, even radical because of its indictment of a corrupt ruling aristocracy at time when the government was sensitive to criticism of any kind. It is a bold, youthful work, that gave the impression that its author was a firebrand when it was staged in 1823, three years after Virginius. Of course, this was a false impression since Caius had been written in 1815, five years before Virginius, a milder play politically. Significantly, once

[45] [Add Note: Tory newspapers were subsided by the government.]

[46] In the John Bull 20 November 1823, cited in Meeks 140.

[47] Archer, Macready 68.

[48] Fraser's Magazine 8 (1836) 458-459, quoted in Meeks 212.

Knowles stopped writing plays based on Roman history, he began to be praised rather than criticized for writing plays extolling liberty.

The hostility of the Tory press to Knowles's Roman plays suggests that in the post-Waterloo period the government was particularly sensitive to plays based on stories or episodes from Roman republican history. Several reasons for this sensitivity may be adduced. First, the word "liberty" itself, closely identified with Roman history, had been tainted with republicanism as a result of having served the propagandistic purposes of the French theater, especially after the establishment of the Commune (1793).[49] These included older plays Voltaire's Brutus and Death of Caesar, which were revived to served the cause of republican virtue, and newer ones like Andre Chewier's Caius Gracchus, which transformed the oppressed Roman plebeians into sans-culottes and the oppressors into French aristocrats, and Tibere. The Death of Caesar (Morte de Caesar) was an extremely popular play that portrayed Caesar as an arrogant tyrant and his murder as a noble and lawful act.

A second, related, reason is that stories from Roman history "provided episodes to point a political

[49] Michele Root-Bernstein, Boulevard Theater and Revolution in Eighteenth-Century Paris (Ann Arbor: UMI Research P, 1984) 223.

moral"[50] or lent themselves the advocacy of progressive ideas that could be construed as critical of the status quo. The association of Roman models with patriotic rhetoric as an instrument of opposition to government can be traced back to the polemical works of Lord Bolingbroke (e.g., "On the Spirit of Patriotism") in the early eighteenth century. In the words of Hugh Cunningham,

> To oppose the 'corrupt' government of a Walpole, or the 'tyranny' of a George III was to withhold loyalty to the state as it existed while proclaiming a 'patriotic' intention of restoring it to its ancient purity. One person's patriot was another traitor, and patriotism itself was subject to constant definition and redefinition.[51]

Cunningham persuasively argues, in opposition to Betty Kemp,[52] that far from losing its vitality in the early nineteenth century, the "oppositional vocabulary of patriotism" served as "a constantly reforged tool of opposition, and as a means of possessing the past."[53] In other words, the radical's appropriation of the

[50] John Loftis, The Politics of Drama in Augustan England (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1963) 122.

[51] Hugh Cunningham, "The Language of Patriotism, 1750-1914, History Workshop, 12 (1981): 9.

[52] Betty Kemp, "Patriotism, Pledges, and the People" in A Century of Conflict 1850-1950, ed. Martin Gilbert (New York: Atheneum, 1967): "This use of the word patriotism as synonymous with love of the true constituion, and therefore with zeal for constitutional reform, if not opposition, was dead before 1832, and probably died during the Revolutionary wars"--39.

[53] Cunningham 9.

rhetoric of liberty for the cause of a higher patriotism than loyalism in the 1790s, survived the government's largely successful attempt to reclaim it in the name of loyalism during the revolutionary and Napoleonic period. It is a point that is well worth keeping in mind when assessing the political relevance Knowles's historical plays.

A third reason is that episodes from Roman republican history naturally lent themselves to being applied to contemporary British politics, in particular the agitation on behalf of radicals to enlarge the powers of the people. The Roman class conflict (patricians vs. plebeians) was easily analogized to apply to class conflict in contemporary British society, which had become increasingly bitter after the war years. The plebeian mobs in Roman plays were identified with the frightful spectre of "people-power" and the advocates of that power with radical-democratic tribunes of the people like Henry Hunt. The story of Appius and Virginia with its plebeian hero Virginius, in particular, was closely identified with national movements for freedom before the French Revolution, a fact that apparently caused the Tory government to take notice of it when Knowles's play was submitted for licensing. However, Knowles's depiction of the plebeians in Virginius, as in Caius Gracchus, is quite critical, even satirical, reminding one of Shakespeare's depiction of plebeians in his Roman

play. Fraser's Magazine was correct when it called them, "worthless, most worthless." They certainly reveal themselves to be unworthy of the earnest efforts of Caius, the aristocrat-turned-tribune, to ameliorate their lot. Their fickleness lead to his death just as it had of his brother Tiberius's years earlier. It is unlikely that Knowles would have depicted the plebeians in so unflattering a light had he been a man of radical or democratic sympathies and a supporter of tribunes of the people like Hunt.

It should be stressed that it was virtually impossible for an English dramatist to write a play about Roman history without inviting his audience to draw parallels or analogies between Roman and English society. "English Neo-Romanism,"[54] as the practice of drawing such parallels has been called, was a long-established and venerable one in England, and had grown into a major "industry" during the Augustan Age among men of letters steeped in classicism. That Roman history was very much alive at the time Knowles was writing is illustrated by the mentality of the Cato Street conspirators. When its leader Thistlewood (along with four co-conspirators) stood on the scaffold and declared, "I die in the cause of liberty," he thought of himself as a latter-day Brutus. As E.P. Thompson points out, he "derived his justification for his plot

[54] James William Johnson's term, in The Formation of English Neo-Classical Thought (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1967) 105.

from the Roman apologists of tyrannicide."[55] According to Thistlewood,

> Brutus and Cassius were lauded to the very skies for slaying Caesar; indeed, when any man, or set of men, place themselves above the laws of their country, there is no other means of bringing them to justice than through the arm of a private individual.[56]

This is a radical reading of Roman history, but its difference from the Whig reading that justified revolution against tyranny in the name of "liberty" is one of degree, not kind.

The rise and fall of Rome had, as Addison Ward says, a "special relevance" to English politics as a political archetype owing to the "observation that both countries had 'mixed' governments, composed of monarchical, aristocratic, and popular elements, whose balance assured a maximum both of stability and personal liberty."[57] Within such a mind-set, "by an easy step Rome becomes a metaphor for England, and the principal agents in Roman history are converted to morally weighted archetypes to be used in English political controversy."[58] In the words of John Loftis, "the conception of the 'patriot' as it was reinterpreted for

[55] Thompson, The Making 706.

[56] Arthur Thistlewood, quoted Thompson 705.

[57] Ward 418.

[58] Ward 418.

opposition use had as its central ingredient the ideal of the disinterested Roman lover of liberty, of which Addison's Cato is the classic English expression."[59] The habit of using Roman history as a lens through which to point a political moral that could be applied to English politics in large part explains the attraction that this history had for English dramatists after the success of Cato, a play which gave birth to what Nicoll calls "the pseudo-classical school in drama," a school that Knowles gave lip service to in his two Roman plays.[60]

The two most popular episodes taken from the history of the Roman republic were taken from Livy's early books: the story of Lucius Junius Brutus and the fall of Tarquin and that of Appius and Virginia. Both were perfect vehicles for illustrating in stark relief the theme of liberty vs. tyranny. Significantly, both combined the theme of sexual violation of innocence with that of the downfall of a tyrant, thus making a vital connection between politics and the sphere of domestic life. The story of "Virginius" as found in Livy gave dramatists maximum imaginative scope because, lost in

[59] Loftis 123. "The political meaning of Cato was and still is an enigma," but when it was first produced in 1713 both Whigs and Tories claimed it as an allegory supporting their party: "The more literal-minded of the Whigs would have it that Cato, champion of personal freedom and possessor of an unshakeable presence of mind and clalm, respresented the Duke of Marlborough; whereas the Tories professed to see a resemblance between Caesar the tyrant and Marlborough"--Loftis 58.

[60] Nicoll 2: 85.

the mists of time, it has the character of legend or myth. As Ward points out, the "semi-mythical figures in the early books of Livy are exactly as useful as concrete historical personages like Caesar and Cato"--or Caius Gracchus--once they "have been simplified, shorn of all ambiguity, and reduced to the condition of myth."[61]

The Appius and Virginia story was a popular one among politically minded English dramatists from at least the early sixteenth century, although none of the staged versions proved popular enough with audiences to remain in the repertory. Webster's early seventeenth-century version had been resurrected for the Restoration stage by Thomas Betterton.[62] John Dennis, the first to politicize the story after Webster used the story (in his Appius and Virginia, DL, 1709) as a vehicle for Whig propaganda.[63] In 1742, the story was allegorized into an attack on Walpole by Robert Morris in his unstaged Fatal Necessity.[64] Through the character of Appius, Walpole is "accused of bankrupting the nation, oppressing the people with heavy taxes, losing

[61] Ward 419.

[62] Betterton's adaptation was called The Unjust Judge, or Appius and Virginia.

[63] According to Nicoll, Dennis's play expresses "the patriotic enthusiasm aroused by Marlborough's victories"--2: 86. It lasted only four performances.

[64] Morris's play was never acted or even submitted for licensing.

the nation's commerce," and causing England's decline in international reputation.[65] Later in the century the story was dramatized by Miss Brooke (1760), Crisp (1754), Moncrieff (1755), Bidlake (1800), and Henry MacKenzie (1820), most of whom used the story to point a political moral.[66] In the hands of non-English authors in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the story was used, as already noted to extol movements for political freedom on the Continent before the Revolution: La Beaumelle (1760), Chabonon (1769), Less-

[65] Clement Ramsland, "Whig Propaganda in the Theatre, 1700-1742," diss., U of Minnesota, 1940, 162.

[66] I have not examined Brooke's play, but examination of those of Crisp, Moncrieff, and Bidlake reveal them to be fraught with political meaning. For example, Henry Crisp ends his play with this exhortation, spoken by Icilius: "Again fair Liberty / Smile o'er th'afflicted land!--For such a jewel, / A patriot breast must know no price too dear;---/ Not ev'n a daughter's blood!--Remember Tarquin, / His exiled race, and Brutus's guilty sons. / Great Curtius, Cocles, and th' Horatian brother! / Heroes of old, who for their country bled, / And all the'illustrious list of mighty dead! / Warm'd with their distant rays, let us aspire / To trace their steps, and emulate their fire! / T' extend our fame beyond this narrow span, / And in the Roman to forget the man!"--Henry Crisp, Virginia. A Tragedy (London: Tonson and Draper, 1754) 74; in John Moncrief's the moral is pointed in the epilogue (written by the author) rather than at the end of the play. The epilogue contrasts the security of English liberty with the fragility of Roman liberty owing to the superiority of the British constitution ("one well-jointed State, of Form compleat / Commons and Peers, pois'd by the Scepter meet"). The epilogue ends with praise of George III, "the Father of his People"--John Moncrieff, Appius: A Tragedy (London: Millar and Wilson, 1765); John Bidlake, champlain to the Duke of Clarence, and like Knowles a schoolmaster, ends his play with these didactic lines, spoken by Lucius, Icilius's brother: "May all usurpers learn from Appius's fate / The many ills that flow from public hate. / Blest is the prince who in the heart can reign; / Their interests one, if rightly understood: A soverign's highest bliss is public good. / By winning mildness more than force to sway / Those hearts who not from fear but love obey"--John Bidlake, Virginia, or The Fall of the Decimvirs, A Tragedy. London: Murray and Highly, 1800, 56.

ing (1772), Alfieri (1773), and LaHarpe (1786), among others, wrote plays on the subject. Knowles was following a well trodden path in using this familiar story to extol liberty (its subtitle is The Liberation of Rome), and, in particular, British liberty, but in making the part of Virginius (rather than Appius or Virginia) preponderant and introducing Dentatus as a character, he was emphasizing the theme of liberty, and thus play's political meaning.

In his Remarks to the Cumberland edition of Virginius (1826) D.-G. draws an implicit parallel between Virginius and the concept of the freeborn Englishman when he speaks of Knowles's Virginius as possessing an "ardent love of liberty, of a free-born citizen."[67] It is easily overlooked that the first impression that the audience gets of Virginius is not as a father but as a patriot who prizes his liberty. His sense of injustice aroused by the acts of tyranny that have been carried out since Appius was elected first Decemvir, Virginius asks one of the leaders of the people why they elected the patrician Appius to office and then proceeds to point out the folly of their choice. His first soliloquy (1:1) sums up his low opinion of the political judgment Roman people:

> You help'd to put your masters on your backs.
> They take their seat, and made you show your paces;
> They ride you--sweat you--curb you--lash you--and

[67] Knowles, Virginius (Cumberland edition) London, 1826, 7.

You cannot throw them off with all your mettle!

Virginius then rebukes Icilius, his son-in-law to be, for supporting Appius's election. After Virginius leaves (he is not willing to stay to see Appius adulated by the people), the crusty Dentatus (described in a Roman source as the "Roman Achilles") arrives and damns the people with his sarcasm, all of it richly deserved. In the next scene (1.2) in Virginius's house, Dentatus makes the key point of the play about those he calls the "noble Decimvirs," one that forshadows Appius's lust for Virginia: "No man's property is safe from them. Nay, it appears we hold our wives and daughters but by the tenure of their will. Their liking is the law."[68] This is the painful truth that Virginius is to soon learn at the cost of his daughter's life and his own sanity. Suspecting that Icilius, who impatiently seeks Virginia's hand in marriage, may be in league with Appius, Virginius confronts the young man and challenges him to grasp his hand as a sign of his loyalty to the cause of liberty:

> Thou seest that hand? it is a Roman's boy;
> 'Tis sworn to liberty--It is the friend
> Of honour--Dost thou think so?

[68] Dentatus adds that the Senators of Rome, frightened by the "audacious rule" of the Decimvirs, have retreated to their villas, leaving the Roman people at the mercy of the newly elected "demi-gods of the good people of Rome."

By taking Virginius's hand, Icilius is swearing "an oath deadly to tyranny." After the marriage ceremony (2.2), Virginius reminds Icilius that "The first and foremost debt a Roman owes, / Is to his country; and it must be paid."

Appius soon reveals himself to be the tyrant he is accused by Virginius of being. After Appius, who is described by Virginius's brother as "the violator of all order," commits the outrage of having Virginia--now the wife of a Roman citizen--dragged through the streets on the pretext that she is he slave of his client, Icilius denounces Appius to his face as a violator of maidenhood (3.3):

> Is't not enough you have depriv'd us, Appius,
> Of the two strongest bulwarks to our liberties
> Our tribunes and our privilege of appeal
> To the assembly of the people? Cannot
> The honour of the Roman maids be safe?

Icilius thus unites the theme of political tyranny with that of domestic honor, which a strong appeal to pre-Victorian audiences. British audiences would have immediately grasped the point: that the loss of liberty poses a threat to domestic happiness. Political tyranny is a threat to the right of the free-born Englishman to enjoy domestic security. The play's political meaning depends on the audience finding some sense of relevance in Virginia's plight. Many in the British audiences of 1820 would surely have associated the lustful Appius with George IV, who during his ten-year reign as Regent

had been denounced by radicals and liberals alike as a tyrant and was notorious for his profligacy. As Richard Mears states, "the historical setting of a well-known story allowed Knowles. . . [to] indirectly criticize the behavior of George IV."[69] It is no surprise that the new king is reported to have asked to examine the play before it was licensed for staged.

The story of the rise and fall of Caius Gracchus, in contrast to that of Appius and Virginia, was a neglected subject among English dramatic authors. Knowles was the first dramatist to present either of the Gracchi brothers on the English stage. John Carysfort's tragedy Caius Gracchus, published in 1810, predates Knowles's, but was never staged.[70] Carysfort's play is noteworthy because the author subscribes to "the Republican myth," according to which the Gracchi were seditious underminers of the state's stability and order--in short, enemies of true liberty.[71] This myth

[69] Mears 74.

[70] In J.J. Carysfort. Dramatic and Narrative Poems London, 1810, 2 vols, 1.

[71] The litmus test as to whether or not a writer subscribed to the Republican "myth" was his view of Julius Caesar, which, in turn, conditioned his view of the Gracchi. The writer who viewed Caesar as a tyrant who robbed Rome of its liberty was likely to view the Gracchi as seditious tribunes who paved the way for Caesar's usurpation of power. On the other hand, the writer who viewed Caesar as a benevolent despot who rescued Rome from the grip of a tyrannous oligarchy is likely to view the Gracchi favorably, as Knowles does.

Knowles entered the larger historigraphical controvery concerning whether Julius Caesar was a tyrant or a hero in a small but engaging way by writing an academic excercise in argumentation entitled, "Debate on the Character of Julius Caesar." This debate was written for his students at the Belfast Academic Institution about the time he wrote Caius Gracchus, and was later included in

rested on "the idealization of the Roman Senate, and allegorical equation of 'the Republic' with 'Liberty' or 'Virtue' or 'Patriotism.'"[72] Historic personages that were supporters of senatorial (i.e., aristocratic) power were idealized, and those who contributed to the weakening or destruction of that power were villified. The pantheon of stock heroes included Cicero, Cato, and

his textbook the Elocutionist, first published in 1823. Significantly, the debate concludes with a vindication of Caesar's usurpation of power: "Mr Chairman, I think that the times in which Caesar lived, called for, and sanctioned, his usurpation. I think his object was, to extinguish the jealousies of party; to put a stop to the miseries that resulted from them; and to unite his countryen. I think the divided state of the Roman people exposed them to the danger of a foreign yoke; from which they could be preserved, only by receiving a domestic one." Although the debate form precludes identifying Knowles definitively with any of the thirteen speakers (seven pro and six con), it seems probable that the last speaker (the thirteenth) expresses the author's own views, especially as the speaker's characterization of the Roman people closely resembles that found in Caius Gracchus, where the Roman people are characterized as fickle, gullible, easily manipulated, and, more culpably, betrayers of the hero who had dedicated himself so ardently to their cause: "Gentlemen talk of what are called, the people, as if they were the most enlightened part of the community! Are they the guardians of learning!--or of the arts?--or of the sciences? Do we select counsellors from them?--or judges?--or legislators?. . . or rather, do we not consider them as little cultivated in mind?--little regulated by judgment?--much influenced by prejudice?--greatly subject to caprice!--chiefly governed by passion!--of course, Sir, I speak of what are generally called, the people, the crowd, the mass of the community. . . Look, Sir, to the proceedings of the forum!--What they did, they undid; what they erected, they threw down; they enacted laws, and they repealed them; they elected patriots, and they betrayed them; they humbled tyrants and they exalted hem!" The reference to the betrayal of elected patriots (i.e., tribunes) may be taken as a pointed allusion to the Gracchi. The fact that this speech is, uniquely among all the speeches, written to be declaimed with the same nervous broken rhythms that characterize Knowles's style of verse writing at his most impassioned lends credence to the claim that it it is written with personal conviction.

[72] Ward 413.

Brutus. The gallery of stock villains were the Gracchi, Marius, Sulla, Cataline, and Julius Caesar, with the latter considered the arch-villain. In Tory histories, such as Nathaniel Hooke's Roman History (1738-1771), this interpretation of Roman history is reversed, with the Gracchi and Caesar extolled as heroes.

In Carysfort's play although Caius is depicted as noble, the author's sympathies in the struggle for power between the senate and the people are clearly on the side of former (i.e., the nobility). Cornelia, Caius's mother, serves as his mouthpiece; twice she pleads in vain with her son, an elected tribune, to desist from conspiring against the senate to enlarge the freedom of the people. She is a spokesperson for the British concept of a balanced constitution and denounces her son as an advocate of "rash, and wonton innovation" [i.e., the increase in tribunitian power] who would "O'erturn the state, thus wisely balanc'd."[73] Caius is a highminded man of "patriot virtue." He is not motivated by personal ambition, as the senator Opimius alleges. However, he is understandably driven by a sense of honor to exact revenge on the senate for murdering his brother. While it is granted that the people have legitimate grievances against the patricians, the play makes it clear that Caius efforts to alter the Roman constitution were misguided.

[73] Carysfort 1: 38.

Opimius, who is also depicted as noble, calls him a "factious spirit" who is sowing the seeds of "wild licentious anarchy." His stoic mother agrees and after her son's death, she puts love for country over love for her son, speaks the play's final words: "The senate has done nobly / Prais'd be the gods! The commonwealth is saved."

So that there is no mistaking his political intent, Carysfort appends a short essay to the play in which he says of Caius that "if his plans had been successful, he might have destroyed his country."[74] Opimius, as well as Gracchus his mother Cornelia are presented as "images of virtue," but Cornelia is especially praised for being a mother who "was bound not only as a parent to her children, but as a citizen to her country." This "steady adherence to principles of duty," asserts Carysfort, is a subject that "should peculiarly interest the British people, whose greatest boast it is that they are free."[75] Carysfort, the author of Thoughts on the Constitution (1783), intended his play to point a political moral concerning the danger of altering the British constitution by enlarging the franchise.

Knowles's play, in contrast, appears a play about social protest, reflecting the sense of social disloca-

[74] Carysfort 103.

[75] Carysfort 104.

tion and economic malaise that following in the wake of the Napoleonic wars. Following Plutarch only loosely, Knowles's treatment is heavily weighted in favor of Caius against the senate, who are depicted as unprincipled and selfish oppressors of the people without any redeeming virtues. Like Carysfort's Caius, Knowles's Caius decides to enter the dangerous political lists for mixed motives (liberty and revenge), but he is a man of impeachable integrity and is genuinely dedicated to improving the lot of the Roman people (he says tells the people he "would die to do you good"--3.2). His sincerity is proved when he enacts radical of legal reforms (land, judicial, and enlargement of the franchise), which surely reveal Knowles's personal reformist sympathies. The vexing constitutional issue raised (in Plutarch) by the controversial reforms enacted by the Gracchi is not touched on.

Knowles's play contains many passages that had contemporary application, some of which were surprising pointed. In standing for election as tribune, for example, Caius denounces the patricians in the presence of the plebeians for their lack of patriotism, selfishness, and addiction to heavy drinking:

> Ye men of Rome, there is not respect
> For justice! . . .
> Your great men boast no more the love of country.

> They count their talents--measure their domains--[76]
> . . . --and with their floods
> Of ripe Falernian, drown the little left
> Of virtue (2.3).

Such a comment is nothing less than a direct criticism of the English aristocracy of Regency England, and it is surprising that it is was not censored in the licensing manuscript. But Caius is raising an issue that goes beyond personal vice; the "great men" are abusers of the law, using it oppress the poor, a point that Caius makes in the same speech:

> The laws! The laws! Of common right, the hold!
> The wealth, the happiness, the freedom of
> The nation! Who has hidden them--defac'd them--
> Sold them--corrupted them from the pure letter?
> Why do they guard the rich man's cloak from a
> rent,
> And tear the poor men's garment from his back?
> Why are they in the hand of the proud man's grasp,
> a sword,
> And in the hand of the humble man, a reed?

Caius himself is a man of moral rectitude who does not abuse the law for his own benefit, as he could do if he were corrupt. During his period as quaestorship, a position traditionally held outside of Rome, he does not take advantage of his position to enrich himself as was commonly done at the time. Caius's reference to his own honesty ("I . . . return'd in poverty, that might /

[76] In the licensing manuscripts, this line replaces "They enlarge their palaces--dress forth their banquets," which is crossed out (by whom, it is impossible to say). The omitted lines (which appears in the printed version) appears to be a pointed allusion to the Regent's penchant for architecture and feeding.

Have amass'd treasures"--2.2.) would probably have been taken as a allusion to the rampant corruption among colonial officials of the East India Company.[77] In proposing new laws after being elected tribune to remedy the plight of the poor, Knowles has the compassionate Caius make a pointed reference to the tens of thousands of soldiers (many wounded and maimed) who swelled the ranks of the unemployed during the war years (3.2):

> Thousands of brave men,
> Wandering about the streets of Rome, without
> Means, or employment to procure them!

Many of British soldiers subsisted by begging during this period.

One of the bitterest speeches (cut in performance) in the printed edition of the play is spoken by one of the plebeians. After insulting two patricians who are speaking ill of Caius, the outspoken plebeian Titus makes this powerful appeal to the audience's sympathy for social justice on behalf of the lower orders being exploited by the rich and powerful (2.3):

> Do you wonder
> that the order which wins your battles on the fields, should refuse your blows in the city? You despise us when you have no need of us; but if an ounce of power of peculation is to be gained through our means, O! then you put on your sweet looks, and bowing to the very belts of our greasy jackets, you exclaim, "Fair gentlemen!--kind fellow-citizens!--loving comrades!--

[77] For this insight, I am indebted to Mears 72.

> sweet, worthy, gentle Roman!--grant us your voices!" Or, if the enemy is to be opposed--O! then we are 'men of mettle!--heroes!--(poor starved devils!)--'the defenders of our country! --(that is, your cattle, as you call us)--and so indeed we are. We bear your Patricians on our backs to victory!--we carry them proudly, through the ranks of the barbarians! They come off safe--we get the knocks, the pricks, and the scratches. They obtain crowns and triumphs--we cannot obtain a dinner! They get their actions recorded--we get our's forgotten! They receive new names and titles--we return to our old ones with which you honor us:--"the rabble!--the herd!--the cattle! --the vermin!--the scum of Rome!"

This is sharp social criticism that is unparalleled in the stage drama of the day.

At the same time that Knowles makes a case for reform, he depicts the Roman people, as D-G says, as "fickle, treacherous, and cruel."[78] At first, when Caius as tribune legislates reforms that benefit them, the people him enthusiastically; however, after the Senate in connivance with a second tribune outdoes Caius, they shift their support without realizing they are being tricked. Once Caius loses the tribuneship, the Senate abrogates Caius's laws. The people thus prove unworthy of having the noble Caius as their champion, just as they did when Caius's brother Tiberius was their champion. Cornelia attempts to convince her son of the people's unworthiness ('Tis a hopeless struggle! So sunk are all, the heart of public virtue-- / Has not the blood to make it heat again"--

[78] D-G, Remarks to the Cumberland edition of Caius Gracchus.

4:2). She implores him not to go to the Forum, but gives in when she realizes that he is acting according to the principles ("virtue" and "honor") that she taught him (4.2). After proving his patriotism, Caius martyrs himself for the cause of liberty. History repeats itself as tragedy when Caius, deserted by the people, falls on his sword to escape the vengeance of the senators.

Like Caius Gracchus, William Tell was an "historical" figure who also came late to the English stage, probably in part because of he was made to serve the republican cause in the French theater, most notably in a version by Lemierre, also known as The Swiss Sans-Culottes. The story's appeal reached a peak in France during the revolutionary years because the Jacobins identified their cause with that of the Swiss oathtakers on the field of Rutli. The usefulness of the story as a vehicle for Painite ideas was not lost on one anonymous English radical author, who in 1792 wrote an opera based on the story of William Tell called Helvetic Liberty. It was, says Conolly, "full of revolutionary sentiment and talk of the people's natural rights and liberties."[79] The piece was understandably rejected by the manager of the theater to which it was submitted for obvious political reasons.

[79] Conolly 86.

Schiller's Wilhelm Tell, based primarily on the Chronicon Helveticum by sixteenth-century historian Tschudi, was completed in 1803 and staged in Germany in 1804. 1803 was the year that England again declared war on France and Napoleon was making plans to invade England. As "the most notable play in modern literature upon the theme of national resistance to foreign tyranny,"[80] Schiller's drama had potential as an allegory against Napoleonic imperialism, but this potential went unrealized in Britain during the war years since it had no stage history in England at that time.

Lack of appreciation for Schiller's play in Britain during the first decade of the nineteenth century is easily explained. The fascination of British audiences in German drama had reached its peak in England in 1798-1800 during the Kotzebue craze. Kotzebue's extraordinary popularity (which has been attributed to the "tinge of immorality" in his plays[81]) had aroused on onslaught of virulent attacks on the German drama from the conservative press, led by the Anti-Jacobin Review. In 1799, the Review deplored the fact that

> the immortal bard of Britain should give place in our theater to the mad effusions of

[80] Calvin Thomas, The Life and Works of Friedrich Schiller (New York: Henry Holt, 1906) 411.

[81] Doulgas L. Milburn, "German Drama in England," diss. Rice U, 1964: 86.

> such distempered heads as Kotzebue, Schiller, etc, is a most mortifying reflection to every Briton capable of appreciating the merit of literary productions.[82]

Schiller was indiscriminately lumped together with Kotzebue as an exponent of the despised "German School." The case against Kotzebue's politics was put by Scott in his remarks on Kotzebue's plays in his "Essay on the Drama" (1814):

> The most obvious fault of this species of composition is, the demoralizing falsehood of the picture which it offers us. The vicious are frequently presented as objects less of censure than of sympathy; sometimes they are selected as objects of imitation and praise. There is an affectation of attributing noble and virtuous sentiments, to the persons least qualified by habit or education to entertain them; and of describing the higher and better educated classes, as uniformly deficient in those feelings of liberality, generosity, and honor, which may be considered as proper to their situation in life.[83]

For the reasons stated, Scott brands Kotzebue's plays as "the groundwork of a sort of intellectual jacobinism." This is the same charge that the Anti-Jacobin had leveled against Kotzebue's plays in 1799:

[82] The Anti-Jacobin Review (1799), quoted in Thomas Rea, Schiller's Dramas and Poems in England (London: Fisher Unwin, 1906) 5.

[83] Sir Walter Scott, "Essay on the Drama," in The Miscellaneous Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott Britannica (3 vols.; Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1851) 1: 614.

"One most striking feature distinguishes all Kotzebue's dramas, the great are vicious, the low are virtuous.[84] The criticism of both the Anti-Jacobin and Scott exemplifies the inseparability of politics and morality to pre-Victorian mind. Both Goethe and Schiller as well as the popular Kotzebue (whose plays audiences flocked to see) were targets of this attack. Many conservatives agreed with Mrs. More, who considered the German drama "not the work of divinely inspired genius but of infernally inspired barbarians."[85] The seeming impiety of works such as the youthful Schiller's Die Rauber shocked English sensibilities and hindered a clear-sighted appreciation of Schiller and led him to be tarred with brush of Jacobinism.

By 1825, the year Knowles wrote William Tell, Schiller's reputation in England had undergone a belated critical reevalution that did justice to his high literary stature. The reassessment of the German drama in England had begun with Mme. de Stael's visit to England in 1813 and the publication there of De

[84] Sheridan's Pizarro, an adaptation of Kotzebue's Die Spanier in Peru, oder Rollas Tod, was tarred with the same brush by the liberal Monthly Mirror in 1799, even though it was obvious that Sheridan had exploited Kotzebue's play as a vehicle for arousing patriotism at a time when anti-French sentiment was intense. While the Mirror praised the play's patriotism, it condemned its characterization of Pizarro as "only meant as a malevolent portrait of men in high stations, although it is disguised with a cloak of history"--Monthly Mirror, 8 (July 1799) 39, quoted in Gary J. Scrimgeour, "Drama and Theatre in the Early Nineteenth Century," diss. Princeton U. 1969, 351. On Kotzebue, see Srimgeour, 349-353.

[85] Milburn 93.

l'Allemagne (translated as On Germany in 1813, which published extracts of Schiller's Tell. Ten years later, Carlyle, the man most responsible for elevating Schiller reputation among the English, published his Life of Schiller in monthly installments in the London Magazine The life was published in book form in 1825, the same year that the first complete translation of William Tell was published.[86] The universal political significance of the story of William Tell may be gathered from Carlyle's statement that the revolt of the Swiss was "the first descent of Freedom to our modern world, the first unfurling of her standard on the rocky pinnacle of Europe."[87] The translation, in turn, stimulated a critical review of the play in the Monthly Review. The first dramatization of the Tell legend to appear on the London stage was seen at the Coburg in 1821[88]; in 1823, an adaptation of Schiller's play, entitled The Beacon of Liberty was staged at Covent Garden.

[86] The translation of William Tell was the work of Samuel Robertson. Nicoll mentions a translation by Roche in 1818 and Grosett in 1812, but apparently these were not complete--4: 86 fn. 2.

[87] Thomas Carlyle, Life of Friedrich Schiller (1825; New York: AMS P, 1969) in The Works ofhomas Carlyle 25: 173-74.

[88] Nicoll 4: 86, fn. 2. But I have not seen it mentioned elsewhere. The play does is not listed the "Complete Reference list for German plays in England from 1750-1850" appended to Douglas Lafayett Milburn, "German Drama in England," 1750-1850, with a List of German Plays Published and Performed," diss, Rice U, 1964: 128-91.

Except for its similar political theme and Rousseauistic natural setting ("Switzerland as a second Eden"[89] that figures figures prominently in the action, Knowles's version is different in almost every respect from Schiller's. Rather than being epic in scope as Schiller's plays is, Knowles is self-consciously domestic, narrowing the focus to Tell and his family rather than ranging over three cantons to characterize the Swiss community at large. Gone is Schiller's spaciousness, variety of incident and triple plot, all of which contribute to giving the impression that the hero of the play is the Swiss people. This sense of communal presence is obscured in Knowles's play in accord with the author's purpose making the protagonist prominent.

Both Tells are pious and are depicted as having been shaped by the sublime landscape in which they were raised. Other than this, however, the characterization of Tell in the two plays have little in common. Schiller's Tell is a solitary, unreflective man of few words who shuns political involvement and is a marginal character in terms of the conspiracy. Peace-loving, he favors "patience" and "silence," not revolt, as an answer to oppression.[90] He is not present (and not missed

[89] Charles Passage, Friedrich Schiller (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1975) 189.

[90] Friederich von Schiller, Wilhelm Tell, trans., Gilbert J. Jordon (New York: Bobbs-Merill, 1964). Tell speaks these words in conversation with Stauffacher in 1.3. All future references to Schiller's play is to this translation.

by the conspirators) in the famous oathtaking scene on the meadow of Rutli (2.2), where a collectivity of Swiss assemble at night to secretly swear on oath to take action against foreign tyranny. He turns into an active conspirator only after being toyed with and tormented by Gessler.

Knowles's Tell is a fiery but stern patriot who broods over the suffering of the enthralled Swiss people and is obsessed with overthrowing the tyrannical governor and recovering the precious gift of liberty. In his wife's words, he has "a heart bursting with the sense of wrong" (5.1). He is outspoken, emotional and somewhat estranged from the townspeople, who in his opinion do not feel their thralldom keenly enough ("I'd have it gall them--eat into their flesh," he tells Verner, one of the co-conspirators). Tell, as he tells others with obvious pride, is "from the mountains." When he witnesses the townspeople of Altorf obediently bow to Gesler's cap, which has been raised on a pole, he cannot contain or conceal his contempt for their slavishness.

Knowles makes Tell the head of quartet of conspirators, but the fate of the conspiracy becomes a secondary issue as soon as Tell is arrested and chained for courageously coming to the defense of a fellow Swiss who was being hit by the governor's lieutenant for refusing to bow to Gesler's cap. "Bursting with indignation" (as the stage direction reads), the

chained Tell defiantly denounces Gesler's soldiers as "slaves." In contrast, Schiller's Tell is a law-abiding citizen. When he is apprehended for absentminded passing by the hat without bowing, he apologizes deferentially: "Forgive me, sir. It was through oversight, / And not contempt for you, that this thing happened" (3.3). It is at this midway point in the play that Gesler, picking up on a boast by Tell's son, conceives of the cruel idea of the shooting of the apple.

Knowles's intention in deviating from Schiller's play by having Tell arrested appears to be to give Tell an opportunity to denounce Gesler's monstrousness its face, which he does forcefully and at length, revealing the preacher in Knowles. In Gesler, Knowles portrays the sadistic, perverted, and fearfully insecure personality of the tyrant who must destroy what awes and diminishes him. Gesler is as obsessed with rooting out liberty as Tell is with restoring it because lives in constant fear that he will be overthrown by the people he cruelly oppresses. The experience of being lost in the mountains during a storm and saved from certain death by Tell's son Albert only hardens his heart instead of humbling him. His tyrannical impulses assert themselves more fiercely: "How I loathed the free / And fearless air with which he trod the hill!" he Gesler after this terrifying experience at the mercy of the elements. Fortified in his gloomy castle in Altorf and surrounded by soldiers, Gesler is determined to hunt

them down and exterminate all who refuse to submit to his authority. Instinctively he feels that the father of the nameless boy who has saved him is his nemesis. Unless he finds and kills the boy's father, he fears that the man will strip him of power. At the sight of the unidentified Tell in chains, Gesler is unmanned and overcome with the same kind of terror he felt when he was lost in the mountains.

The Swiss mountains represent, of course, the spirit of liberty that Gesler is vainly attempting to extinguish. His terror at the sight of Tell is an indication that the spirit of liberty indwelling in nature also dwells in Tell and, as it were, emanates from him.[91] The opening soliloquy that Tell delivers in Grutli meadow before the other conspirators arrive (1.2) establishes the vital connection between Tell's love of freedom and his sublime and holy habitat:

> Ye crags and peaks, I'm with you once again!
> I hold to you the hands you first beheld,
> To show they still are free. Methinks I hear
> A spirit in your echoes answer me,
> And bid your tenant welcome home, again!
> Hail!--Hail! O sacred forms, how proud you look!
> How high you lift your heads into the sky!
> How huge you are! how mighty, and how free!
> How do you look, for all your bared brows,
> More gorgeously majestical than kings
> Whose loaded coronets exhaust the mine!
> Ye are the things that tower--that shine--whose smile
> Makes glad--whose frown is terrible--whose forms,
> Robed and unrobed, do all the impress wear
> of awe divine--whose subject never kneels in

[91] The relation of this emanation to melodrama is discussed in Part II, Chapter 2.

> In mockery, because it is your boast
> To keep him free!

The stage direction for Act 2 describes these mountains as being "of stupendous height, their tops covered with snow." Tell regards these topographical guardians of liberty as inhabited by a divine spirit.

The tyrant's alienation from the natural beauty that symbolizes liberty is dramatized in the scene where Gesler almost dies of cold in the mountains. "Stupified with terror and exhaustion," as he attempts to trace a path in the mist shrouded mountains, the sinful Gesler identifies with the fearful precipitous voids of nature (symbols of his moral vacuity and darkness) rather than the godly "crags and peaks" that symbolize liberty. He is fascinated with the abyss (a symbol of his own fallen condition) and the possibility of his own descent into it: descent into the abyss:

> it leads me to the precipice,
> Whose brink with fatal horror rivets him
> That tread upon't; till, drunk with fear, he reels
> Into the gaping void, and headlong down
> Plunges to still more hideous death!

Seized with a "sickening faintness" of heart, Gesler lifts his guilty, bloodstained hands to the skies in supplication, as he desperately cries out to God for mercy:

> O heaven, have mercy! Do not see
> The colour of the hands I lift to thee!

This despairing gesture parallels Tell's stretching out of his "free" hands skyward in a worshipful gesture earlier in the play. After being discovered and aided by Albert, Gesler marvels at the boy's courage and questions him:

> Gesler: No one with thee?
> Albert: No one but God.
> Gesler: Do you not fear these storms?
> Albert: God's in the storm!
> Gesler: And there are torrents, too,
> That must be cross'd.
> Albert: God's by the torrent, too!
> Gesler: You're but a child.
> Albert: God will be with a child!

In this child-like expression of panenthism, one feels the spirit of Knowles's evangelicism. Gesler's intuition, based on the conversation he has with the mountain-bred boy, that a God-created nature is the womb that gives birth to the spirit of freedom is correct: "Behind that boy, I see the shadow of / A hand, must wear my fetters, or 'twill try to strip me of my power."

In the captivity scene, when father and son are briefly reunited, Sarem, Gesler's lieutenant, articulates the intimate connection between the sublimity of Swiss nature and the individualism of Tell and his son in a Wordsworthian-like passage:

> They commune still,
> From day to day, with nature's wonders; till
> They see her fiercest terrors without awe,
> And catch, from her, her stern and solemn look

That e'en their mirth seems thoughtful.

Tell also articulates the part nature played in shaping his and his son's freedom-loving spirits when he speaks the following words to his son in Gesler's presence after the tyrant summarily sentences him to immediate execution.:

> He would remember
> The cliff where he was bred, and learn'd to scan
> A thousand fathoms' depth of nether air!
> Where he was train'd to hear the thunder talk,
> And meet the lightning eye to eye!

Another important difference between Knowles's play and Schiller in respect to the political action is taht Tell's wife, Emma, plays a vital role in the success of the conspiracy. She has been enlightened by her husband on the importance of otherthrowing Gesler at all costs, and she does not flinch when she realizes the only way to set the conspiracy in motion is to set fire to the family cottage: "Fire is the signal for the hills to rise" (5.1). As the cottage burns, she exclaims, "Oh, mayst thou be a beacon / To light its sons enslaved to liberty!" and identifies the fire with liberty: "A spirit's in the fire." In Tell as in Virginius, the tyrant imperils domestic security, one of the fundamental rights of the freeborn Englishmen. The blinding of Old Melchtal, Tell's father-in-law, and the imprisonment of his son, as well as the trial of skill itself are all examples of why liberty-loving men must

act to overthrow a tyrant. Once she gives the signal for the revolt, Emma makes the connection between liberty and domestic security explicit: "Oh, be it liberty--Safe hearths and homes, husbands and children." Her words show that she has learned the lesson well that her husband has taught her: namely, that so long as a tyrant like Gesler lives to do his will, the domestic happiness they enjoy in their isolated cottage is imperilled.

B. Censorship of the Drama

The prevailing view among Britons in the latter eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was that the stage was not a place where "political excitement," "party-spirit" or "controversy" belonged. Referring to the period 1660-1800, Calhoun Winton remarks that "most segments of the British society with anything approaching political or social influence believed in dramatic censorship in one form or another" and "society as a whole was quite willing to accept the process, usually without comment."[92] L.W. Conolly, author of The Censorship of English Drama, 1737-1824 writes that he has "been persuaded to recognize that practically all

[92] Calhoun Winton, "Dramatic Censorship," in The London Theatre World, 1660-1800, ed. Robert D. Hume (Cardondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP, 1980) 286-287.

levels of opinion in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries accepted the censorship of dramatic literature as an essential control of a powerful social and political force." British defenders censorship's vital role in securing domestic tranquillity commonly cited the French theater as an example of the degeneracy that would result from an uncontrolled theater.

It is useful to distinguish between what may be termed "official" and "unofficial" censorship (political along with moral) of the stage.[93] Official legal censorship in the post-Restoration period originated with the enactment of The Stage Licensing Act of 1737,[94] which required the managers of Theatres Royal throughout Britain to submit the manuscripts of all new plays (or new passages in old plays) for "permission" two weeks before their date of staging--a process that gradually became known as licensing. The power to grant (or deny) permission or, if necessary, suppress a play, was invested in the Lord Chamberlain, who delegated it to a deputy known as The Examiner of Plays, an office

[93] The information about censorship in this chapter is taken mainly from L.W. Conolly, The Censorship of English Drama, 1737-1824 (1976) and John Russell Stephens, The Censorship of English Drama, 1824-1901 (1980). These recent, authoritative studies supersede the pioneer work of Frank Fowell and Frank Palmer, Censorship in England (1913), which is not always reliable. Dewey Ganzel's seminal article, "Patent Wrongs and Patent Theatres: Drama and the Law in the Early Nineteenth Century," PMLA 76 (1961): 384-396, is also valuable.

[94] 10 Geo. II, c. 28.

which was "a coveted political plum."[95] In London, the Act enabled the government to control if not altogether muzzle political allusion in the drama produced at Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and the Haymarket. "Unofficial" censorship, the power of which should not be underestimated, came from a variety of sources: theater managers, audiences, the Tory Press, and the public at large. "Official" censorship was fully supported by "unofficial" censorship of the stage.

Popular support of dramatic censorship in Britain remained essentially unchanged throughout the early nineteenth century, though dissident voices were occasionally raised against it, just as Lord Chesterfield had attacked the Licensing Act. The Morning Chronicle spoke for the British public on the eve of the new century when it declared: "the impropriety of introducing politics into a theater, as been with most justice condemned."[96] In addressing the issue of political censorship in parliament, R.B. Sheridan, MP. and manager of Drury Lane, spoke for the society at

[95] Dewey Ganzel, Fortune and Men's Eyes: The Career of John Payne Collier (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1982) 48. No examiner was ever removed from office. The security of the position can be judged from the fact that when in 1831 a new Whig Lord Chamberlain, the Duke of Devonshire (appointed in 1830, when Lord Grey became head of cabinet), wished to replace George Colman with John Payne Collier he was powerless to do so because Colman, although ailing, refused to resign. The Examiner was paid 400 pounds per year plus fees collected for reading plays.

[96] Morning Chronicle, 1795, quoted in A.M. Taylor, Next to Shakespeare: Otway's Venice Preserv'd" and The Orphan and Their History on the London Stage (Durham: N.C: Duke UP, 1950), 201.

large when he declared that "a theater [is] not a fit place for politics."[97] This, too, was a representative view. Significantly, there was no organized outcry of public protest or opposition against political censorship, from either outside or inside the theater, during the early nineteenth century.[98] Censorship of the stage was a non-issue during the revolutionary period, during which, after a period of relative tolerance, it was strictly enforced.[99] Even radicals did not consider it an infringement of British liberties.

As in previous centuries, censorship of the drama in the early nineteenth century "was defended and accepted," in Conolly's words, "on the grounds that what went on in the theater was too important in its political, social, moral, and religious consequences to

[97] From the report taken of a speech before Commons, quoted from The Speeches of ... Richard Brinsley Sheridan (London, 1816), iv, 188-189 in John Loftis, Sheridan and the Drama of Georgian England (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1977), 32. That Sheridan was speaking from inner conviction is confirmed by his expression of the same sentiment to Samuel Whitbread privately in a letter dated 1815: "Keep politics out of the theatre," quoted in Conolly, 69.

[98] Occasional protests were lodged by individuals only like Lady Barbarina Dacre, who protested the suppression of her comedy The Whim in 1795. See Conolly. Note on Bulwer as leading anti-censorship advocate.

[99] In the 1780's, "there were the first stirring of a drama broadly critical of the way society was constituted. This drama was "neither censored nor damned on a regular basis"--Scrimgeour, 289? 290. Nicoll finds the lax enforcement of the Act during the late-eighteenth century relative to the period before and after "almost inexplicable." Censorship of satire directed at individual politicians and public figures, however, continued to be applied strictly--Nicoll, History of the English Drama 3: 19.

allow the drama its freedom."[100] When the issue of "freedom" in the theater was argued, as it was vociferously, the issue was universally understood to mean "freedom from the monopoly on legitimate drama enjoyed by the patent houses," not from censorship.[101] What has come to be known as "the struggle for a free stage," boiled down to the conflict between those who argued for the inviolability of the patents as property rights and those who argued against the patentees as abusers of property rights held in public trust and for economic laissez-faireism in the drama.[102]

Perhaps the most convincing evidence of a consensus in favor of censorship in the early nineteenth century is the verbatim testimony that accompanied the report from Bulwer's select parliamentary committee issued in 1832.[103] The minutes of these proceedings, according to Dewey Ganzel, "are, perhaps, the most comprehensive and authoritative source of early nineteenth century theatrical practice."[104] Of the thirty-nine

[100] Conolly, The Censorship 182.

[101] Conolly, The Censorship 172.

[102] The historical struggle against the monopoly is chronicled in Watson Nicholson, The Struggle for a Free Stage in London (1906; New York: Benjamin Blom, 1966). The monopoly was abolished by statute law in 1843.

[103] 1832 Report from the Select Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Laws Affecting Dramatic Literature, intro. Marilyn L. Norstedt in British Parliamentary Papers (Shannon: Irish U. Press, 1968) 1.

[104] Ganzel, 385.

expert witnesses (mostly theater managers, playwrights, and actors, along with two representative of the Lord Chamberlain's office) who testified during the twelve days of hearings, the overwhelming majority voiced their support of political censorship by the Lord Chamberlain. Only a few individuals spoke out in opposition to it.[105] At one point in the testimony, it chairman Bulwer, who was an opponent of censorship, summarized the consensus by stressing its political purpose: "it is universally allowed that a censor is not required to keep immorality from the stage, but to prevent political allusions."[106]

The banning of "political allusion" meant that a playwright had to avoid any reference that could be construed as an allusion to any of the controversial social topics being debated in the press and in the society at large with the exception of the slave trade, which was abolished in 1807. Subjects such as the French Revolution,[107] republicanism, egalitarianism,

[105] For example, Francis Place, George Davidge, and Douglas Jerrold.

[106] Bulwer 305.

[107] For example, Frederick Reynolds' Bastille, was denied a license for performance at Covent Garden in 1789. In 1838, when Edward Bulwer set The Lady of Lyon in the period of the French Revolution, he had to omit any reference to the event, and it was not until 1841, in his collected Dramatic Works that he dared to admit that this play, along with Richelieu and The Duchess de la Valliere, was intended as the last in a trilogy about "the drift of political power from "the One Man" to "the old provincial chivalry" to "the People"--quoted in Charles H. Shattuck, Bulwer and Macready: A Chronicle of the Early Victorian Theatre (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1958) 7.

the Irish question, and reform were taboo. "Reform" was a broad rubric that included any criticism of corruption, changes in the electoral system, inequalities of rank and class and abuses of power and privilege and criticism of a "humanitarian"[108] kind directed against British institutions and society. Overt criticism of social institutions, however mild, was regarded as subversive, as was satire, criticism, or ridicule, direct or indirect, of the royal family, aristocracy, Anglican clergymen, and public figures.

Censorship thus forced the legitimate playwright in the early nineteenth century to steer clear of politics and political controversy, shackling him in a way that the poet, the novelist, the closet dramatist, the writer of emphemera and the visual caricaturist of the period was not. Conolly writes that as a result of censorship, early nineteenth-century "writers who had anything important to say did not, could not, turn to the theater."[109] Stephens, commenting in a similar vein, remarks that censorship succeeded in keeping the early nineteenth-century stage from involving itself with "the larger issues that affected the well-being of

[108] See Nicoll, 3:55.

[109] Conolly, The Censorship 11. However, it should be noted that Conolly also writes that "the early years of the century witnessed a definite trend toward political and social satire in the plays presented at the minor theaters, saloon theaters, penny gaffs, and even sometimes at the major patent theaters. Pantomime and melodrama both hazarded fitful satirical comment on important issues of the time, despite the restrictions of censorship"--108.

society as a whole."[110] Censorship, in Booth's words, prevented the dramatist "from openly depicting, satirically or otherwise, the vigorous political life of the times."[111]

The patentees willingly served as silent partners with the Lord Chamberlain in the process of precensoring plays and ensuring that the production schedules at the theaters operated smoothly without costly and troublesome licensing delays.[112] Theater managers customarily maintained good relations with the Lord Chamberlains's office and treated it with courtesy and respect. Managers functioned, in effect, as the government's first line of defense against seditious subject matter and political allusions reaching the stage.[113] They (or assistant managers or prompters in their behalf) routinely pre-censored (as well as abridged) the copy of the authorial manuscripts they

[110] Stephens 38.

[111] Michael R. Booth, "The Social and Literary Context" in The Revels History of Drama in English, eds. Clifford Leech and T.W. Craik, 6: 40.

[112] The job of altering a text was often delegated to an assistant manager.

[113] Managers and the Lord Chamberlain's office also routinely made compromises with the letter of the law. Both sides silently condoned "irregularities" in the interests of implementing the law to the mutual satisfaction of the government and the theaters. Managers dared not produce a new play without the Lord Chamberlain's approval, but "it was not uncommon. . . for parts of plays to be performed without official approval." This was an indication that officialdom "proved. . . to be tolerant toward those managers who allowed unexamined material to be spoken on their stages"--Conolly 21.

sent to the Examiner for approval. Assessing the source of the censorship is complicated by the fact that it is not always possible to determine whether crossings-out were made by the Examiner or someone else (e.g., the author, manager, or prompter) previous to the submission of the manuscript.[114] There is the additional problem of differentiating the content that was cut out for political reasons from that which was removed for practical reasons of staging.

The first concern of managers was to avoid offending the sensibilities of audiences with political allusions that might incite outbursts on the faction among that audience that would lead to be performances being disrupted. The theaters were noisy, crowded places where emotions could reach a dangerously intense pitch rather suddenly in response to political allusion, whether the allusion was intentional or not. Indeed, "a single line could often spark off political feuding in the audience."[115] Stephens remarks on how "alert audiences were for allusions, which whatever the author's intentions, could be twisted into political reference."[116] The dread that such feuding could lead to riot was never far from a manager's mind. The all-powerful audiences had the last word on what was

[114] See Conolly 4-5.

[115] Conolly, The Censorship 10.

[116] Stephens, The Censorship 46.

acceptable in a play and what was not.[117] Sometimes, an audience was more demanding than the Lord Chamberlain. If an audience demonstrated their objection to certain lines during a performance of a new play, managers always heeded its wishes either changed or omitted the offending lines from future performances if the play was repeated.[118] Because of "unofficial" censorship in the theater, the government was armed with a statutory authority to censor and suppress plays that it seldom had to use.

The Lord Chamberlain left the practical decision of whether or not to license or censor a new play or other entertainment to the Examiner of Plays.[119] Lord Chamberlains were party men (all but one were Tories between 1815-1831)[120] who were swept in and out of office in response to shifting political winds. Whether or not they were familiarity with the theater had no bearing on their appointment and most of them had little interest in it. In contrast, Examiners stayed in

[117] Conolly, The Censorship 84.

[118] The actors performing a particular play could also act as censors of sorts by refusing to speak certain lines that they found objectionable.

[119] According to Stephens, the Examiner made most of the decisions either "alone or in consultation with his immediate superior, the Comptroller"--Stephens 17.

[120] For a list of Lord Chamberlains and Examiners of Plays see Appendix A in Stephens, 157. The single Whig Lord Chamberlain was William George Spencer Cavendish, 6th Duke of Devonshire, who served in the office twice, 1827-8 under Canning's administration and 1830-1834 in Grey's.

place, often for decades, performing their duty until death or illness ended their tenure.[121] More often than not, they had some connection to the theater. As the Examiner and Licenser of Plays was the person who actually read the dramatic manuscripts, the power of Examiners over plays was virtually absolute. Lord Chamberlain rarely overruled the decisions of their Examiners. Therefore, as Stephens says, "the Lord Chamberlain's authority over the drama was of less practical significance than that of his Examiner of plays."[122]

Censorship was more dependent on the individual perceptions and judgment of an Examiner that one might tend to assume. The only prohibition which was spelled out in the Act were references construed as "hurtful or prejudicial to His Majesty's Royal Person, State, Crown or Dignity."[123] This injunction was written into the Examiner's Oath of office, and served as an umbrella protecting individuals, including politicians and churchmen as well as the king, from satire or criticism.[124]

[121] The Examiner was paid 400 pounds per year plus fees collected for reading plays.

[122] Stephens, The Censorship 17.

[123] From the Oath taken by Examiners of Plays upon taking office, printed in Frank Fowell and Frank Palmer, Censorship in England (1913; New York: Burt Franklin, 1960) 354.

[124] An amusing instance of censorship was the suppression of the name of Doctor Kitchener's in a pantomime called Harlequin and the Talking Bird in 1824. The doctor, a well-known gastronome, was "a close friend of the king. . . [and] was popularly thought to have encouraged George IV's obesity." To mention Kitchener's was tantamount to commenting on George's IV's fatness--see Mayer, 239-240.

Culturally considered, the Examiner functioned as an interpreter, in Stephens words, "of the public conscience and tried to objectify the often deeply subject currents of public opinion,"[125] always operating "within the limits of what he thought the public would tolerate."[126] Other than this, the criteria of censorship were left vague and were subject to interpretation. Politically considered, the Examiner's function was "to prevent embarrassment and opposition to the British government from occurring in the theater."[127] It was his duty to protect the public "from immorality, blasphemy, sacrilege, and political ideas endangering the peace and security of the realm."[128] Liberals and radicals naturally saw his function in quite a different light; to them, the Examiner was "an instrument for stifling criticism of political corruption and tyranny."[129]

What is perhaps peculiarly English about "official" censorship is that it had such a human face. That is to say, there was a strong element of informality

[125] Stephens, The Censorship 3.

[126] Stephens, The Censorship 86.

[127] Conolly, The Censorship 73.

[128] Jeremy F. Bagster-Collins, George Colman The Younger, 1762-1836 (New York: King's Crown Press, 1946) 283.

[129] Frank Fowell, and Frank Palmer, Censorship in England (1913; rpt. New York: Burt Franklin, 1970) 150.

and subjectivity and to the process of censorship even though theoretically the Examiner's personal opinions "were strictly of no account in his work."[130] Stephens writes that "however much censorship may be said to rely on some vaguely abstract standard of taste," it was "a personal act influenced, consciously or not, by [the] individual prejudices and predilections" of the Examiner.[131] "In the absence of . . . precise rules,"[132] the Examiner was allowed to exercise his independent judgment and "a substantial degree of personal discretion."[133] Examiners were influenced by the normally staunchly conservative politics of the royal official they served, but they often showed their individuality: they could be as petty, arbitrary, capricious and overzealous in the performance of their official duties as any other bureaucrat; on the other hand, they could be surprisingly tolerant. Their decisions were influenced by the practices and precedents of the past, and by the political pressures of the moment.

In the period 1815-1831, there were six Lords Chamberlain, but only two Examiners of Plays: John Larpent and George Colman. Larpent, a former government employee in the Privy Seal Office, held the position

[130] Stephens, The Censorship 85.

[131] Stephens, The Censorship 17.

[132] Stephens, The Censorship 17.

[133] Stephens, The Censorship 17.

for forty-six years (1778-1824) until his death at the advanced age of eighty-three. Because of his long tenure, Larpent was responsible, in effect, for shaping government censorship policy during the last quarter of the eighteenth and first quarter of the nineteenth centuries. Fowell and Palmer's characterization of Larpent as "a strict and rather bigoted Methodist" who "mercilessly castrated" the "wit and fancy" of "unhappy authors" has been shown to be false.[134] The overall impression one gets from Conolly's characterization of Larpent is that, although he could be "petty and overzealous,"[135] he was as "relatively tolerant,"[136] level-headed, and genuinely considerate toward playwrights and managers as it was possible for a censor to be in politically unsettled times.[137] In the period under discussion, Larpent found it necessary to suppress only

[134] The unfounded source of this characterization is Theodore Hook, whose play Killing is No Murder Larpent had censored, arousing the playwright's indignation. See Fowell and Palmer 161, 164. Conolly (The Censorship 43) corrects the "popular misconception" of Larpent as a castrating censor who had a dislike of the theater.

[135] Conolly, The Censorship 45.

[136] Conolly, The Censorship 43. Conolly has corrected the "popular misconception" of Larpent as a castrating censor who had a dislike of the theater found in Fowell and Palmer.

[137] Conolly, The Censorship 106. Notwithstanding Larpent's unquestioned vigilance during the last thirty-five years, I find it difficult to characterize his censorship practices definitively as either "severe" or "relatively tolerant" (Conolly uses both words to describe them-- 106 and 43--without knowing the total number of plays he suppressed (as well as the reasons for doing so), and what percentage this was of the total plays that he licensed. The same hold true of the plays he censored. Statistics of this kind would be useful.

a handful of plays. But he was exceedingly conscientious[138]; according to one theater manager, it was his practice to cut out of a dramatic text any "dangerous sentences which appeared to meddle in politics in his dangerous times."[139]

It should be noted that Larpent's wife, Anna Margaretta, served as deputy Examiner in all but name,[140] involving herself in the process of reading and licensing and perhaps censoring them.[141] According to Conolly, Mrs. Larpent's "participation in the licensing of plays was often more active than her husband's, particularly when he was ill" and "she seems to have read and approved new plays on Larpent's behalf."[142]

When Larpent died in 1824, he was succeeded by the colorful George Colman the Younger, the first Examiner with a background in playwriting and theater manage-

[138] Conolly infers this from Mrs. Larpent's comments about her husband in her diary--The Censorship 42.

[139] Attributed to S.J. Arnold in Richard Brinsley Peake, Memoirs of the Colman Family (London, 1841), 2: 430, quoted in Scrimgeour, 295. Arnold was also a playwright.

[140] Conolly, The Censorship 9. She has left a diary and a journal that yield insight to her husband's practices as Examiner. They reveal her to be much less tolerant than her husband in regard to censorship.

[141] Conolly states that "it is doubtful if anything was ever censored, let along suppressed by anyone other than Larpent"--The Censorship 42. But in "The Censor's Wife at the Theater: The Diary of Anna Margarette Larpent, 1790-1800," Huntington Library Quarterly 35 (1971), Conolly says that Mrs. Larpent "sometimes even acted as censor herself"--50.

[142] Conolly, The Censorship 41.

ment.[143] A staunch Tory, Colman "attempted to regulate the drama to fit the taste of the most conservative, most frightened and most bigoted English minorities."[144] What one must not not to lose sight of is the fact that "in general his policies were supported by the theatre-going public and were by no means exaggeratedly out of tune with the prevailing temper of the times."[145] Perhaps because he was a boon companion of George IV, Colman considered himself accountable to the king rather than the Lord Chamberlain.[146] What astonished everyone about Colman is that he metamorposed himself as soon as he was appointed, at age 62, from an "urbane, good-humoured hedonist" into "one of the most narrow, humorless, and puritanical censors in the history of the English theater."[147] He is remem-

[143] George Colman the Younger (1762-1836) wrote thirty-seven dramatic pieces and is best known for his popular comedy John Bull (1803); Colman inherited the management of the Haymarket from his father, Colman the Elder, when he became insane in 1789. He obtained the office of Examiner in 1824 after Larpent's death through the influence of George IV's brother (see Stephens, The Censorship 22), the Duke of York and held it until his own death.. Colman held the sinecure of Lieutenant of the Yeoman Guard, an appointed he obtained soon after George IV's accession to the throne.

[144] Findlater, 58.

[145] Stephens, The Censorship 25.

[146] "I am a sword officer of the Crown, and no deputy of the Lord Chamberlain," he defiantly declared when to the new Lord Chamberlain asked him to resign so that that he could appoint John Payne Collier. George Colman, quoted in Richard Findlater, Banned! A Review of Theatrical Censorship in Britain (London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1967) 57.

[147] Bagster-Collins, 296.

bered as the censor who absurdly forbade the word "angel" from being used as an epithet for a woman because it referred to a being in Scripture. His "arbitrary ufficiousness,"[148] made him "the first really controversial Examiner."[149] Both his fanaticism as a censor and his greed in collecting fees caused him to be "the most unpopular, and sometimes the most cordially disliked figure in the English theatre, during his tenure as Examiner," writes Jeremy Bagster-Collins, his biographer.[150]

In testifying before the Select Parliamentary Committee in 1832, Colman declared that his duty in examining a dramatic text was "to object to everything immoral, or politically dangerous."[151] Colman probably spoke for all Examiners, but his plain words tell us nothing of how an Examiner went about defining and identifying what in fact was "dangerous." His censorship of Martin Archer Shee's Alasco in 1824, shortly after his appointment as Examiner does.

[148] Jeremy F. Bagster-Collins, George Colman The Younger (New York: King's Crown P, 1946) 290.

[149] Conolly, The Censorship 24.

[150] Bagster-Collins, 284. Paradoxically, while Colman was fanantical he was also indifferent as to whether or not the managers and actors actually complied with his instructions to delete material to which he objected.

[151] From the 1832 Inquiry, quoted in Bagster-Collins, 298. When pressed, Colman revealed that he was unable to articulate his position more precisely.

Colman believed he had found a dangerous play in Shee's pseudo-historical tragedy. In 1824, there were signs of growing alarm over events in Ireland,[152] and Colman believed (or pretended to believe) that Shee's play was an attack on the established order in Ireland, Colman pounced on it, eager to show his keenness in ferreting out subversion and thus prove his diligence as a new censor. The peasant nature of the Polish rebellion doubtless was a factor in convincing him that he had a subversive allegory on his hands. It was one thing for a playwright to glorify peaceful, happy peasants in a rural setting and quite another to glorify bands of peasants who brandished weapons in preparation for an uprising as was the case in Alasco.The presence of a virtuous priest also raised suspicion.

Shee's play was already in rehearsal at Covent Garden when Colman informed Charles Kemble (who was to play the part of the Polish aristocratic hero Alasco) that he would not license the play for performance until certain cuts (amounting to ninety-two allegedly seditious lines) were made.[153] The following two speeches are typical of the kinds of passages Colman

[152] The growing power of the Catholic Association and the recrudences of the agrarian secret societies.

[153] This figure is based on my own line count. Colman also required the excision of the expression, "Oh, God," which appears a number of times.

censored.[154] In the first, Alasco delivers a warning to the despotic Baron Hohendahl, the governor of the oppressed Polish province:

> Tyrant's, proud Lord, are never safe, nor should be
> The ground is mined beneath them as they tread;
> Haunted by plots, cabals, conspiracies,
> Their lives are long convulsions, and they shake,
> Surrounded by their guards and garrisons (1.3)

In the second, Alasco delivers a portentous warning of rebellion to come:

> When oppression stains the robe of state.
> And power's a whip of scorpions in the hands
> Of heartless knaves, to lash the o'erburthen'd back
> Of honest industry, the loyal blood
> Will turn to bitterest gall, and th' o'ercharged heart
> Explode in execration (1.3).

Informed of Colman's decision, the outraged author withdrew the play (a prerogative seldom exercised by playwrights) and, at the same time, appealed directly to the Lord Chamberlain, who supported his subordinate. Shee then struck back by bringing the issue before the bar of public opinion. First he published a letter of protest in the Times, the Morning Chronicle and the Morning Post aimed at exposing to public censure an action that in his view was evidence of a "harsh, unnecessary, and injudicious exercise of authority"[155]

[154] Since Shee published a copy of the play with the censored passages in italics (mentioned later), there is no uncertainly about what Colman cut.

[155] Peake, 2: 435, quoted in Bagster-Collins, 285.

The letter created a buzz not only in the press but in official circles as well, to the extent that Colman was asked by George IV's private secretary to justify his decision, which he did as follows:

> Although the ferment of the times has greatly subsided, still plays which are built upon conspiracies, and attempts to revolutionize a state stand upon ticklish ground; and the proposed performance of such plays is to be contemplated with more jealousy when they pourtray the disaffected as gallant heroes and hapless lovers. Thus drawn, ad captandum vulgus, their showy qualities and tender distresses of the heart throw a dazzle and an interest round their sedition, while they preach up the doctrine that government is tyranny, that revolt is virtue, and that rebels are the righteous.[156]

Shee then used the licensing copy in his possession to prepare a printed edition of the play with the condemned passages printed in italics and accompanied by a panoply of sarcastic footnotes aimed at showing Colman to be "the judicious Dogberry of the new dramatic police."[157] The press predictably split along political lines on this issue. Shee received a great deal of sympathy from the liberal press, but the ultra-loyalist Blackwood's Magazine congratulated the new licenser

[156] From a letter to Sir William Knighton, George's IV's private secretary, quoted in Bagster-Collins, George Colman The Younger, 286-87.

[157] Alasco, 3, fn.

"on having uncovered and successfully thwarted a devilish conspiracy for inciting Irish revolution."[158]

C. Censorship and Knowles's Historical Plays

Larpent was the Examiner of Plays when Knowles's two Roman plays were submitted for licensing in 1820 and 1823.[159] Owing to their politics, both plays were subject to more than routine scrutiny and to censorship before being licensed. The attention given to Virginius was extraordinary because it was most probably George IV himself who ordered the play to be sent to him for inspection before it was staged. In his Reminiscences, Macready describes the chilling incident, which occurred at the eleventh hour, the evening before its announced opening:

> . . . on the night before the play's performance an order from Carlton House, desiring the MS (which had passed the Lord Chamberlain's office) to be sent there immediately, filled us all with alarm. If course it was immediately sent, and, as reported, subjected to the royal scrutiny. The next morning we were assembled on the stage waiting for it, when it was returned, with only pencil marks drawn over some lines in the part of Appius Claudius, expatiating on tyranny.[160]

[158] Stephens, 40.

[159] The Glasgow performance was "apparently unlicensed," says Conolly, The Censorship--109.

[160] Macready, Reminiscences 210.

There can be little doubt that the lines that were crossed out in pencil include the following spoken by Appius in 2.3, when the decemvir, alone, is exculting in his triumph over the Senate: "Tyranny! / How godlike is thy port! Thou giv'st, and tak'st, / And ask'st no other leave, than what they own / Imperial will accords." The Cumberland edition, based on the acting copy (1820), indicates (by inverted commas) that these lines, along with a number of others, were omitted. The fact that many of the omitted passages (all brief) contained the words "tyranny" and "liberty"--omissions that so outraged Hazlitt--suggest that the play's liberalism was toned down in response to objections that were raised by a higher authority than the Lord Chamberlain. Two days after Knowles's play opened, the Morning Herald noted the unusual circumstances of the censorship in a footnote at the end of its review of the play:

> It is said, that after this tragedy had passed the ordeal of the Lord Chamberlain's Office, the manuscript was demanded for inspection in a higher quarter, and returned with some pencil erasures.[161]

Both the press account of 1820 and that of Macready, written decades later, indicate that the censorship of Virginius occurred after the play had been found

[161] Morning Herald, 19 May 1820.

acceptable for licensing by the Examiner. In view of the fact that the Cato Street conspirators had been tried in April and executed on May 1 of 1820, it would not have been surprising if Larpent had denied a license to a play about "the Liberation of Rome" (the subtitle of Virginius) from the grip of a tyrant.

Although there is no proof that the King himself was personally responsible for censoring Knowles's play, the two accounts suggest that it either done by him or someone (like Knighton, his secretary) acting in his behalf.[162] It seems unlikely, however, that an order to inspect the play would have come from Carleton House unless the usually cautious Larpent had had qualms about its "politics" and passed them on to one of his superiors.[163] There are several good reasons why Larpent would have been anxious that Knowles's play might cause the King embarrassment.[164] For one thing, as Conolly points out, it was "possible to make comparisons between the king, to be crowned in the summer

[162] Interestingly, this is borne out by the fact that the licensing manuscript is uncensored.

[163] The play was sent for licensing on May 8 by John Fawcett, assistant stage manager at Drury Lane. In her diary, Anna Larpent mentions reading Knowles's play the next day. Her comments are confined to its literary qualities (e. g., "some delination of character". . ."some pretty love scenes" . . . "catastrophe horrid") and she notes that Knowles's treatment of the story is "quite different" from Crisp's. She does not mention whether or not her husband read the play--Mrs. Larpent's diary, manuscript (HM 31201) in the Huntington Library, 17 vols., 11 (1820-1821): 55.

[164] There is no evidence of dis-ease about the play's politics in Anna Larpent's diary.

of 1820, and Appius, the tyrant who becomes head of state in Virginius."[165] After all, Peterloo, of which the King had approved, had occurred only nine months before and the repressive Six Acts had followed in their wake. Presumably, this was why lines like the above in praise of tyranny, spoken by Appius, and others referring to "liberty" and people's "rights" were omitted in the stage performance. A second was the play's references to marriage. Innocent as these were, in the theater they might easily be taken as allusions to George's own marital troubles. George had only recently became king after his father's death in February 1820 and the coronation was scheduled to take place on August 1. His wife, Caroline of Brunswick, was threatening to return from exile on the Continent to claim her rights as queen consort--which she did do in June. Under these circumstances, "the new king was unquestionably sensitive about references to marriage."[166] A third possible source of offense were the references to madness, which might be considered in bad taste in light of George III's lunacy. It is easy for the reader to dismiss these allusions are farfetched, but to do so would be to show a misunderstanding of the how interconnected theater and political life were in

[165] Conolly, The Censorship 110.

[166] Conolly, The Censorship 110.

the early nineteenth century.[167]

By the time Caius Gracchus was submitted for licensing in November 1823, Larpent had only two months more to live. This may explain why the delay in its licensing was owing to objections to the play raised by Larpent's wife. Like Virginius, Caius had most likely been previously staged without a license (at Belfast in 1815); the licensing copy is much abridged (less than half the length of the printed text of the play) and omits a number of vehemently anti-patrician passages which, if included, would surely have been struck out by the Examiner as subversive allusions to the ruling British aristocracy. An example occurs when Caius tells the people that they "groan beneath the burdens of the great" and publicly denounces the patricians to their faces as "proud, invidious, [and] insolent" (2.3). One of the most bitter denunciations of the patricians is put in the mouth of the plebeian Titus, who accuses the upper classes of using the people for their own ends, while regarding them as "the rabble!--the herd!--the cattle!--the vermin!--the scum of Rome!" (2.3):

> You despise us when you have no need of us; but if an ounce of power or peculation is to be gained through our means, O! then you put on your sweet looks. . .

[167] By August, 1820, for example, Queen Caroline had become so prominent an issue that, "No matter what the play, allusions to Caroline's case was found by the audience"--Christopher Murray, "Elliston's Coronation Spectacle, 1821," Theatre Notebook 25 (1970-71) 58.

One can imagine the Examiner declaring, "This will never do." Similarly, most (though not all) passages with the inflammatory words "liberty" or "tyranny" were omitted from the acting copy (e.g., the lines "Look to your liberties! / Beware the Senate's arts!" and "Beware her tools!" spoken by Caius or the line of Licinius, Caius's brother, when he states his resolve to fight rather than "vilely live the thralls of tyranny"--5.2). In view of the politically charged nature of many of the omitted passages, it is reasonable to conclude that in the interests of getting the play licensed as expeditiously as possible the play was heavily pre-censored before being submitted for licensing.

But the much abridged version of the play did not have the desire result. The license was not forthcoming. Light on the reason for the delay is shed by James Winston, acting manager of Elliston's Drury Lane. The entry for November 10, 1823 in his secret diary reads:

> Letter from Larpent saying the subject and some of the passages of Caius Gracchus were improper and that the tragedy could not be performed till he consulted the Lord Chamberlain, who was in Scotland.[168]

[168] Alfred L. Nelson and Gilbert B. Cross eds., Drury Lane Journal: Selections from James Winston's Diaries, 1819-1827 (London: Society of Theatre Research, 1974) 76.

With time of the essence, Elliston himself took immediate action to salvage the situation (and avoid a financial loss that would result from waiting for the Lord Chamberlain to return) by paying an unannounced visit to East Sheen, Mortlake, the pleasant rural, residential village outside of London where the fairly wealthy Larpents lived and where the Examiner conducted his business of licensing. Under the circumstances, there was nothing unusual in the expeditious way Elliston dealt with the impasse. In meeting with the Larpents, Ellison discovered that the objections to the play were being lodged by Larpent's wife. The next day, Elliston paid a second, fruitful visit, for he succeeded in securing Larpent's permission to stage the play on condition that he cut out "some passages."[169] How Elliston persuaded Mrs. Larpent that the play's subject itself was not "improper" (subversive?) as she alleged would be interesting to know. In any event, the episode illustrates the cordial informality of the relationship between Larpent and the theater managers and the reasonableness of this particular Examiner, who was willing to resolve conflicts by means of negotiation that resulted in a compromise that satisfied both parties. Elliston, with his keen nose for public relations, capitalized on the licensing delay by printing the following notice on the opening night playbill:

[169] Nelson and Cross 76.

"(In consequence of the Sanction of the Licenser having been at length obtained for its Performance) His Majesty's Servants will represent (for the 1st time) the new Tragedy of CAIUS GRACCHUS." It has already been noted that Meeks attributes the play's short run to Tory press's hostility to the play's liberalism.[170] The audiences, however, cheered and applauded Knowles's play.

Conolly comments that "considering the Larpents' concern about the play, the passages cut out of the manuscript are surprisingly few,"[171] a judgment borne out by this writer's inspection of the manuscript.[172] Perhaps the most prominent of the lightly pencilled through (i.e., probably censored) passages occurs in 4.3, when Caius, having devoted himself to the cause of serving the people by defending the laws, exhorts the people (the censored words are italicized) to muster their courage to oppose their corrupt rulers:

> Now, show yourselves,
> The men you should be--*if your Liberties,*
> *And Rights are dear to you, be faithful to them*
> *Fear not the Senate*.

It is evident that that an appeal to the people's "liberties" and "rights" still, in 1823, conjured up

[170] Meeks, Sheridan Knowles 140.

[171] Conolly, The Censorship 111.

[172] LA 2834 in the Huntington Library.

the spectre of revolution, especially in the context of the vexing Irish question, which was again in the process of approaching a boiling point. The Irish question has a direct bearing on Knowles's next play, William Tell, which was submitted to Larpent's successor, George Colman the Younger.

On April 25, 1825, Drury Lane's Winston sent the manuscript of Knowles's William Tell to Colman for his permission to have it performed. It took Colman nearly a month to grant permission, an unusually long time. On the title page, Colman notes on the licensing copy, dated May 19: "all that was objectionable in this play has been removed by the erasement of certain passages."[173] Like Alasco, Tell is about a peasant uprising against an established order (in fact, one of the most famous and admired in history), and one can only conjecture why Colman did not pounce on it too. Instead, he censored it with a light hand. Certainly, the fact the subject of Knowles's play is intensely domestic and the play itself focuses on that domesticity counted in its favor. So, too, did the fact that it contains none of the polemics that pervade Shee's play in the form of political debates between the young, fiery Count Alasco and the conservative British colonel Walsingham.

[173] In George Colman's handwriting on the licensing manuscript.

Examination of the manuscript reveals that about ninety lines have been crossed out of the licensing copy, mostly from the first half of the play.[174] But these cuts do not compare in importance to the cuts made in Alasco. Colman cut the following lines from the soliloquy Tell delivers while admiringly watching his son practicing at archery (2.1):

> That little arm,
> His mother's arm can span, may help, anon,
> To pull a sinewy tyrant from his seat,
> And from their chains a prostrate people lift
> to liberty!

The following lines (in italics) spoken by Tell to his wife (2.1) were probably cut because they may have been taken as an allusion to George IV's extravagant spending habits, his hypocondricalism, and his deteriorating physical condition:

> Have we
> No treasure? How! No treasure? What!
> Have we not liberty?--that precious ore,
> That pearl, that gem, the tyrant covets most;
> Yet can't enjoy himself--*for which he drains*
> *His coffers of their coin--his land of blood*
> *Goes without sleep--pines himself sallow-pale--*
> *Yea, makes a pawn of his own soul--lacks ease--*
> *Frets, till the bile gnaws appetite away*
> *Forgets both heaven and hell, only to strip*
> *The wearer of it*.

[174] Twenty-four lines of the ninety are of a song which Colman objected to for one reason or another. Stephens makes no mention of William Tell being censored in Censorship of the English Drama.

Oddly, Tell's threat that heaven will exact vengeance in Gesler for the suffering he has inflicted on the Swiss people (4.1) was left intact, though Colman cut out the many references to God and prayer that were central to the theme that the liberty is a sacred spirit bestowed by God. Here religious censorship impinged on political meaning.

The attention that Knowles's plays received from the two censors here described appear to confirm the characterization that at least three of Knowles's plays were pervaded by a "democratic devotion to liberalism"[175] that had a strong political charge in the political climate at the time they were written.[176] Many passages that were less than vagueness were cut from the performance text in advance, though some pointed passages were retained in Caius Gracchus, as already. In general, the vagueness of Knowles's liberalism insured that his plays would not, like Shee's Alasco, which abounds in portentous passages that exceed the bounds of what was permitted on the stage in Knowles's day, be mangled in the process of being licensed.

[175] Fletcher, Romantic Drama 145.

[176] My examination of the licensing manuscipt of Alfred the Great in the British Museum reveals that it was not censored in any way by Colman.

Chapter 4

Two Patriot Kings: Alfred the Great and William IV

In Alfred the Great; or, The Patriot King, Knowles turned for the first time to English history as the vehicle for dramatizing yet again the theme of liberty versus tyranny. The author's historical homecoming is announced in the play's prologue:

> . . . now his muse alights on English ground,
> in England's annals has its story found. . .

The "English ground" that Knowles's muse alighted on was hallowed by history and myth and the subject he chose was England's most admired and beloved king. The play's prologue, calling attention to the play's subtitle,[1] asserts the superior nobility of Alfred to Knowles's previous heroes:

> A worthier page Time's records may not show;
> And now the hand that bade your bosoms glow
> With mutual ardor, in the lofty pride
> Of Freedom won--though by tyrannicide--
> Roth picture forth a still more noble thing
> Than patriot only--even a PATRIOT KING!--[2]

[1] In the licensing copy the title and subtitle reads, "Alfred the Great; or The Patriot King." In the collected editions of Knowles's plays, the subtitle was changed to The Patriotic Monarch. However, in an undated edition published in Glasgow the subtitle reads, The Patriot King.

[2] The prologue was written by one Thomas Atkinson.

Alfred is nobler because he is a "Patriot King," an epithet that signifies more than simply being a patriotic king.

In 1831, the year Alfred the Great was staged, Knowles dedicated his play to William IV, who had acceded to the throne a year earlier. So as to leave no doubt that the play was meant as a compliment to the new king, the dedication was prominently printed in bold letters on the playbill (fig. 14) under its title.[3] In the printed version of the play, a more elaborate dedication makes the play's political intent clear. It reads:

> To His Most Gracious Majesty, William the Fourth, A Patriot Monarch, Destined with the Blessing of God, to Restore the Dilapidated Fabric of His Country's Prosperity, and to Rescue a Devoted People from the Ravages of the Worst of Invaders--Corruption.

Like Tell, the plot of Alfred plot concerns a people's successful struggle to liberate their country from subjugation to a foreign foe, yet the dedication emphasizes what is wrong with England after it had slain the "the dragon" of the "Other" at Waterloo. The threat to Britain's peace and security was now internal rather than external. Knowles identifies that internal

[3] The playbill for opening night, April 28, 1831, reads: "Alfred the great; Or, The Patriot King!! By the author of "Virginius," "William Tell," etc. Dedicated (by Permission) To His Most Gracious Majesty, King William the IVth!!"

threat as "the Worst of Invaders--Corruption" and the new king as the person who has been chosen by God as His instrument for rescuing Britain from that "Corruption" by effecting political and moral reform. Thus Knowles's voiced the fervent hope of million of British people. The word "Corruption," imaged as a foreign foe to be expelled, alludes to a multitude of evils--social, political, and economic--that afflicted Britain in the early nineteenth century. In the context of reform, it was a code word denoting what was commonly termed "Old Corruption."[4] Although the word "liberty"

[4] The most flagrant corruption was the existence of rotten (or pocket) boroughs, areas legally entitled to send representatives to Parliament no matter how few voters resided in them. The e seats were controlled by patronage or freely auctioned off to the highest bidder at Christie's. Beyond this, "Old Corruption," in its narrow definition meant, in Rubinstein's words, "the widespread use of pensions, sinecures, and gratuitious emoluments grants to whom the British government, between the earlier eighteenth century and the Age of Reform, which to bribe, reward or buy" Radicals used it to mean "a rather wide variety of practices which they held to be at the heart of much of what was wrong with Britain's unreformed government." These included "'the political influence of the crown'"--the patronage which the government continued to have at its disposal to bribe or reward members of parliament, voters, municipal corporations and the life--and the pre-existing varieties of corruption, or th. fruits of previous corruption." The latter included sinecures and "the pluralist holding of office by leading government officials with or without real duties to such an extent as to be the source of real wealth to these officials." Other kinds of corruption, in the eyes of radicals, were "the highly unequal emoluments paid in respect of similar services . . . ,the enormous fees earned by many office-holders, especially those in the legal world, the near-universality of nepotism and patronage among aristocratic families, particularly those with links to the Tory party, and nexus which had been built up between Tory government and the older sections of the moddle class." "Old Corruption" also included "the closed municipal corporatins and the East India Company." In its entirely, "Old Corruption" was "one of the major hinges upon which the English ancien regime turned"--W.D. Rubinstein, "The End of 'Old Corruption' in Britain, Past and Present, 101 (year): 55, 57-58.

does not appear in the dedication, its thematic prominence in the play suggests that corruption (like tyranny) can be vanquished if the the spirit of liberty is revived in British hearts. Significantly, he calls William a "Patriot Monarch," an epithet equivalent to the honorific term, "Patriot King." Thus the dedication links William IV to the historical Alfred through the concept of the "Patriot King."

In view of the dedication (which was made with William's permission) the political context of 1831 is therefore highly relevant to how Knowles uses history in this play to comment on his times. But so too is the context of the last years of George IV's reign, for it is during these years when Knowles wrote the play. Four year passed between the time it was first drafted and the time it was staged. The political meaning of Alfred in 1827 (the year it was written) and 1831, the year it was staged is quite different. When viewed in the context of 1831, the play is celebratory, hailing William IV's accession to the throne and the hope symbolized by new monarch's reign: namely, the imminence of reform and the expectation (however unrealistic) that reform would strike a mighty blow against "Old Corruption." When viewed in the earlier context of 1827, it has the force of a critique aimed at exposing George IV's

deficiencies as king. Alfred the Great is unique among Knowles's plays in having two faces. Both contexts will be discussed in this chapter, beginning first with the year of the play's production. First, however, King Alfred's significance as a cultural and political symbol and the uses to which he was put in the English drama will be discussed. In this way, Knowles's contribution to the tradition of the mythification of Alfred as a political and moral hero in the English drama can be better assessed.

A. The Significance of King Alfred

No other English king has been so consistently exalted as an ideal over the centuries through a steady process of "historical" mythmaking as has Alfred. "Each age has created the Alfred it required," writes Alan Frantzen.[5] E.G. Stanley makes the same point in different words: "Every period ascribes to Alfred whatever virtues seem essential to an ideal."[6] When Knowles

[5] Allen J. Frantzen, King Alfred (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1986) 115.

[6] E.G. Stanley, 114, fn. 42.

chose King Alfred the Great and the Good[7] as a subject for a play in 1825, the Saxon King had long been "part of a European and especially British moral and political ideal."[8] He was a certified cult figure: the symbol of English liberty under law (i.e., founded in constitutionalism) and "the exemplar of all 'patriot kings.'"[9] As such he was an important element in the historical "idealogy" that "helped to shape the collective political mentality of the popular masses"[10] during Knowles's formative years.

The process of mythifying King Alfred began soon after his death in the late ninth century and was built on a solid foundation of fact provided by Asser, a contemporary of Alfred's, in his Life of King Alfred,

[7] The epithet "Magnus" (the Great) applied to Alfred can be traced back to John Bale's Illustrium maioris Britanniae scriptorum . . . summarium, printed in 1548--Stanley, 104; the epithet "Bono," (the Good) is found in a late fifteenth century work that is a translation of a lost manuscript--See Stanley, 104.

[8] E.G. Stanley, "The Glorification of King Alfred of Wessex. . ." Poetica (Toyko) 12 (1983) 114, fn. 42.

[9] Albert Goodwin, Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1979) 51. The publication of Alfred's will in 1788 provided impressive documentary support for those who argued that Alfred's reputation as a stateman and guardian of the people's rights was deserved. In the will, Alfred "is clearly seen as subordinating his royal power to the collective wisdom of a loyal national assembly"--Stanley, 106.

[10] Goodwin 51.

written nine years after the Saxon's King's death.[11] Asser's idealized depiction of Alfred was amplified and embroidered on by a host of subsequent chroniclers, annalists, and historiographers over the centuries, creating a rich store of legend and apochcryhra for later poets and dramatists to draw on.[12] However, the mythic Alfred rests on a firm bedrock: genuinely extraordinary qualities of character and equally

[11] Asser based his Life on material in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. His Life was published in a corrupted form in Archbishop Matthew Parker in 1574; the first corrected edition was published by Francis Wise in 1722.

[12] The titles of the most important works of the medieval period, the richest in legend, are here mentioned. Particularly important are the five anonymous Vita S. Neoti (Lives of St. Neot) dating probably from the tenth century and a later Annals of St. Neots, both of which contain the story of Alfred and the cakes. Through the twelfth century "Pseudo-Asser," Parker incorporated the legend in into the corrupted edition of Asser he published in 1574. Interesting, the Lives were a source of legend that was highly critical of Alfred's early life and maintained the misfortune that Alfred suffered at the hands of the Danes was a punishment for his youthful "sins of tyranny and price," and for his refusal to "listen to the grievances of his subjects"--Louis Wardlaw Miles, "King Alfred in Literature," diss., John Hopkins U, 1902, 19, 21-22. King Alfred's life intersects with the lives of two saints: St. Neot, a relative, and St. Cuthbert, both of whom appear to Alfred in visions. Alfred's reputation as a wise man is illustrated in The Proverbs of Alfred and The Owl and the Nightingale. Other important source of legend are, in chronological order: the eleventh century Historia Regum of Simeon of Durham; the twelfth century Gesta Regum Anglorum of William of Malmsbury and De Genealogica Regum Anglorum of Ailred of Riveaux; the thirteen century Chronica Majora by Roger de Wendover and Matthew Paris; the fourteenth century Polychronicon of Ralph Higden (tr. into English by John of Trevisa), Historea Aurea of John of Tynemouth and Mirror of Justices of Andrew Horne; the fifteenth century Bromton Chronicle, attributed to John Bromton, Abbot of Jorvaux and Eulogium Historiarum (anon.), the Speculum Historiale of Richard of Cirencester, the Historia of Ingulf, and Chronicle of John Hardyng--for a survey of medieval sources, see Miles 16-38.

extraordinary "accomplishments as statesman, philosopher, warrior, and man of letters."[13] These qualities and accomplishments, writes Frantzen, "cannot be dismissed as mere fabrication of patriotic adulation and literary mythmaking."[14] D.J.V Fisher answers the question of what made King Alfred "great" in these words:

> What distinguishes King Alfred from any other Anglo-Saxon king was the combination in him of outstanding military ability with an originality of mind and breadth of outlook which gave a new dimension to English kingship[15]

Alfred is justly credited with "defeating the Viking invaders and forging political alliances which led to the foundation of the English state."[16] In doing so, he transcended the concept of "tribal kingship" and became the "the first king in England who identified himself with the 'English,' irrespective of their local affiliations."[17] Alfred may thus be considered the founder of the English monarchy. He also shaped the emerging new nation of England by instituting

[13] Frantzen 3.

[14] Franzten 3.

[15] Fisher 225.

[16] Frantzen 1.

[17] D.J.V. Fisher, The Anglo-Saxon Age, c. 400-1042 (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1973) 225, 224.

"programmes of military, cultural, and civil reform" that served as models of wise governance.[18] These included the building of a navy and the erection of coastal fortifications to defend his kingdom,[19] the compilation and issuance of a law code,[20] the recruitment of scholars and learned men from the Continent to advance learning in his kingdom, and the translating of Latin texts into English so that his subject could read them.[21] The last, literary undertaking is important because the selection of works and the personal commmentary he interpolated into his translations are evidence that "Alfred's thought was concentrated on the effort to live as a Christian and to rule as a Christian king."[22] His dedication to his subjects was rooted in a conception of "royal duty" that assumed "responsibility

[18] Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources, tr. and intro. by Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, 24.

[19] "No other English king before Alfred," writes Fisher, "so clearly realized the importance of a fleet both for offence and defence"--Fisher 220.

[20] "By publishing a set of laws, the first issued in England in a century," writes Frantzen, "Alfred renewed a tradition that had lapsed in the legal, political, and social choas that followed the Viking invasions"--Frantzen 11.

[21] The works that Alfred (with the assistance of scholars and scribes) translated into English were Pope Gregory's Dialogues and Pastoral Care, Bede's Ecclesiastical History, Orosius's Books Against the Pagans, Boethius's Consolation of Philosophy, and Augustine's Soliloquies. For an introduction to King Alfred as a literary author, see Frantzen.

[22] Fisher 228.

to God for the welfare of his people."[23] In light of his substantive achievements, it is no wonder Alfred was a beloved king in his own lifetime and became an English folk hero soon after he died.

In spite of King Alfred's high reputation in the Medieval and Renaissance periods, it was not until the eighteenth century that he Alfred succeeded in dethroning Edward the Confessor as the king "who mattered most" among the Anglo-Saxon kings and became the king dearest to English hearts.[24] Alfred had a down-to-earth humanity that Edward, the saint-king, lacked, and which appealed to the common man. As a Christian prince who was also a warrior, Alfred was a more comprehensive mirror than Edward, embodying a constellation of virtues that included courage, generosity, perseverance, justice, piety, and wisdom. Surely one reason that Alfred eclipsed Edward and came to matter most was because he came to be viewed as the father of the English constitution; that is to say, he identified a concept of civil liberty that was rooted in the rule of law.

Early on, King Alfred was a beneficiary of the Whig interpretation of the Norman conquest, which derived from Sir Edmund Coke, the champion of par-

[23] Fisher 231.

[24] Hill, Puritanism and Revolution 97. It is worth noting that Milton considered both Alfred and Edward as a subject for an epic.

liamentarianism against the Stuarts.[25] According to this interpretation, "the common law was the embodiment of Anglo-Saxon liberties; once the repressive institutions of the monarchy had been abolished freedom was 'by God's blessing restored.'"[26] Alfred came to personify these liberties because he was regarded as the father of constitutionalism. Instrumental in giving historical validation to Alfred's reputation as a lawgiver in the late seventeenth century was Sir John Spelman's Life of Alfred the Great, a mixture of fact and legend first published in English in 1709.[27] Spelman credited with Alfred with creating the court system of justice with the process of trial by jury, and parliament, making him "part of a European and especially British moral and political ideal."[28] Spelman lend historical credence to the high reputation Alfred already enjoyed.

[25] On Coke, see Herbert Butterfield, The Englishman and His History (Cambridge: University Press, 1944), 47-62. Coke's is one of four that E.P. Thompson says was current in the late seventeenth century--"The Norman Yoke," 87-88.

[26] Thompson 87-88.

[27] Spelman wrote his life in 1642-3 and dedicated it to Charles I; a Latin translation was published in 1678). Spelman's biography of Alfred remained the authoratative one until Rheinhold Pauli's scholarly biography, published in German in 1851 (in English translations, 1852 and 1853). Asser's life was not translated into English until 1848. Rapin Thoyras's Histoire d'Angleterre, which was popular in England after being translated into English in 1725, exemplifies the idealization of Alfred in France.

[28] Stanley 103.

The admiration for the Saxon King appears to have been boundless and universal among Britons in the eighteenth century. His popularity transcended politics, party, and faction. Even Dr. Johnson (in London 1738), a man not given to sentimentality wrote about Alfred and his times with nostalgia:

> A single jail, in Alfred's golden reign,
> Could half the nation's criminals contain . .
> No spies were paid, no special juries known,
> Blessed age! but ah! how different from our own!

In his History of England (1754-62), David Hume describes Alfred as the "founder of English monarchy," and eulogizes him as "as the complete model of that perfect character, which, under the denomination of a sage or wise man, the philosophers have been fond of delineating, rather as a fiction of their imagination.[29] Burke, who wrote that Alfred is "generally honoured as the founder of our laws and constitution,"[30] put his finger on a curious paradox that made Alfred's reign unique among English monarchies: "It has been observed, that the reign of weak princes are sometimes favourable to

[29] David Hume, The History of England, 1 (London, 1762), 63, quoted in Stanley 108.

[30] Quoted in Thompson 97.

liberty; but the wisest and bravest of princes is the father of their freedom."[31]

"The combination of Alfred and liberty proved as durable as 'Rule Britannia' which gave expression to it," writes Stanley.[32] Later in the eighteenth century, the Alfred myth became a symbol for moderate (as contrasted with later Paineite) political reformers who wanted to change the constitution. Major Cartwright, for example, forshadowing the Chartists, appealed to the argument of Saxon precedent in his 1776 phamplet Take Your Choice to support his demand for annual parliaments and adult manhood suffrage. For reformers such as Cartwright Alfred served as a symbol of what Albert Goodwin calls the "primitive purity and democratic virtues of a largely unhistorical Anglo-Saxon 'free' constitution."[33] The reformers believed that Alfred had brought this constitution to perfection.[34] However one may differ about interpretations of its pristine nature, the idea that an ideal constitution once existed in a past time in itself served as a yardstick by which the British constitution's present deficiences (or "corruption" to use the then current term) could be

[31] Edmund Burke, An Abridgement of English History, in Works, 2 (London, 1812), Chapt. 4, 295, quoted Stanley, 108.

[32] Stanley 116.

[33] Godwin 50.

[34] Goodwin 50.

restored and purified. It was advantageous to leave the interpretation vague so as not to arouse dissension. For many of those who argued on grounds of Pre-Norman precedent the invocation of Alfred's name implied a repudiation of radicalism and an acceptance of the constitution as an authority. This was the case with the reformer Henry Yorke, who tooks pains to dissociate himself from the arguments of Paine at his trial in 1795:

> In almost every speech I took essential pains in controverting the doctrines of Thomas Paine, who denied the existence of our constitution . . . I constantly asserted on the contrary, that we had a good constitution . . . derived from our Saxon fathers, and from the prodigious mind of the immortal Alfred.[35]

In this connection, E.P. Thompson observes: "for many 18th-century Englishmen who minds were nurtured in a constitutional culture the idea [of repudiating tradition and appealing solely to reason or natural rights] was shockingly unnerving, and in its implications, dangerous."[36]

The "mythology of a golden Saxon past"[37] was a "special form of the whig interpretation which

[35] Thompson 87.

[36] Thompson 88.

[37] William Hick, "The Presentation of the National Petition," The Northern Star, June 5, 1841, quoted in Hill 58.

expounded the history of England in the light of the theory of primitive Germanic freedom."[38] This mythology served a variety of political agenda, from middle class reformers to revolutionaries like the short-lived Society for Spencean Philanthropists.[39] It fed the dream of "the nascent working class" from Owen to Chartism that it "could escape from capitalism by building rural co-operative or communist communities."[40] Cobbett, a Tory convert to radicalism and a man of peasant roots who had been a plough-boy in Surrey, invoked King Alfred's name, among others, in arguing against industrialization, urbanization and change in general:

> The England we are destroying was a far better place for the common man to live in than the England we are now building. I can prove it to you by Alfred the Great and Edward III, by St. Augustine, Fortescue, and the monks of Beaulieu, for I know as much about them as I know about Pitt and Wellington and Castlereagh. I can prove it to you in terms of beer, bread and bacon, of strip-fields and

[38] Herbert Butterfield, The Whig Interpretation of History (London: Bell, 1963) 32.

[39] In 1771, the anonymous Historical Essay on the English Constitution attempted to bolster the radical cause by arguing that the constitution was a Saxon invention under Alfred, and that it provided for democratic government, annual parliaments and trial by jury. In 1798, Thomas Evans, a Spencean who had formerly been secretary to the London Corresponding Society wrote Christian Policy for Salvation of the Empire, in which Alfred was hailed as "the third savior of the liberties of the world" after Moses and Jesus. Evans prophesized a fourth in wich all property would be returned to the people and held in common----Hill, 95, 106-107.

[40] Hill 108.

> common rights and comfortable cottage homes. . . .[41]

Daniel Green has called this mythic glorification of the past the "Arcadianisation of history."[42] The Chartists appropriated Alfred as a symbol of social justice. The following quatrain, published in a Chartist newspaper, succinctly captures what Alfred meant to the lower orders of society:

> Oh, were is the justice of old?
> The spirit of Alfred the Great?
> Ere the throne was debas'd by corruption and gold,
> When the people were one with the state?.[43]

The process of Alfredian mythmaking continued unabated throughout Queen Victoria's reign, reaching its apogee in the late Victorian period when Alfred was "venerated not only as the founder of the British navy but also as the founder of the British Empire."[44]

B. King Alfred's Glorification

[41] Quoted (no source given) in Daniel Green, Great Cobbett: The Noblest Agitator (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1983) 37-38.

[42] Green 38.

[43] William Hick, "The Presentation of the National Petition," The Northern Star, June 5, 1841, quoted in Christopher Hill, "The Norman Yoke," Puritanism and Revolution (1958; New York: Schocken, 1964) 50.

[44] Keyes and Lapidge 48.

as Patriot King in the Drama

Two centuries of enthusiasm and admiration for Alfred produced a plethora of literary creations based on the Saxon King's life, chiefly in poetry and drama--"Rich theme of England's fondest praise/ Her darling Alfred," wrote Wordsworth.[45] Unfortunately, Alfred attracted no first-rate literary talents, and no work of lasting literary merit resulted.[46] King Alfred was so charged with patriotic significance that he was constantly being "used" by amateur authors who were intent on making a point about British glory or arousing patriotic emotion. The use of Alfred as grist for poetic mills began in earnest in 1723, with the publication of Sir Richard Blackmore's Alfred. An Epick Poem.[47] In the early nineteenth century, long poems about Alfred's life (real and imaginary) became a veritable cottage industry as Joseph Cottle (Alfred: An Epic Poem, in Twenty-four Books, 1801),[48] John Fitchett

[45] Ecclesiastical Sonnet XXVII. Wordsworth wrote two sonnets on Alfred in his collection of "Ecclesiastical Sonnets," published in 1822. In number XXVI, he praises Alfred as "The pious ALFRED, King of Justice dear! / Lord of the harp and liberating spear; / Mirror of Princes."

[46] For a list of fictional works based on the life of King Alfred, Miles 114-115.

[47] It should be noted that Alfred was one of the figuers that Milton contemplated as a possible subject for an epic.

[48] Subsequent editions of Cottle's poem appeard in 1804 (2nd), 1816 (3rd) and 1850 (4th).

(King Alfred, A Poem, 1808[49]), and Henry James Pye (Alfred: An Epic Poem, in 1815) all attempted, with indifferent results, to soar to epic heights far beyond their modest talent. The result in the drama was no better. E.G. Stanley observes: "if Alfred fared badly in poetry, especially epic poetry, he fared ever worse in drama, especially poetic drama."[50]

Alfred's glorification in English drama was a late phenomenon that post-dated his glorification in epic form.[51] The phenomenon may be dated from Alfred, A Masque, a semi-dramatic entertainment written by James Thomson and David Mallet in 1740.[52] Thereafter, "England's Darling"--as Alfred was affectionately called[53]--appears as the hero in at least a half dozen different dramatic forms during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, including the masque, opera, tragedy, pantomine, ballad sketches, melodrama, and historical drama. In the period 1740-1850, about

[49] Fitchett's poem, numbering forty-eight books and more than one hundred and thirty thousand lines, has the reputation of being the long poem ever written. It was first printed for private circulation in 1808 and at intervals thereafter until 1834.

[50] Stanley 116.

[51] See E.G. Stanley 103-133; Miles 58-85.

[52] The masque is in two acts.

[53] The epithet "England's Darling" is found in Layamon's Brut, in the early twelfth century, at which time Alfred "was a figure of general and popular interest"--Miles, 27. "Darling of England," a variation of this, is from Wordsworth's Ecclesiastical Sonnet XXVII.

twenty-five titles with Alfred's name alone are cited by Allardyce Nicoll in A History of English Drama, 1660-1900. Invariably, the authors dramatize the period of Alfred's life when he was living in near solitude and secrecy on the isle of Athelney, a marshy area of Wessex (now Somersetshire)--considered the "most celebrated part of his reign."[54] They all include, in one form or another, the story of how Alfred mingled with the Danish enemy disguised as a minstrel. Only the last two include the story--the most famous of all stories about Alfred's life--of how Alfred took temporary refuge in a hut (transformed into a cottage in the plays) and was severely scolded for letting some cakes burn.

Invariably too, the purpose in choosing Alfred as a subject is to wave the flag of patriotism, and the recurrent theme of Alfred as a "Patriot King" was a sure-fire means of stimulating the patriotic juices of British audiences and sending them home with their breasts bursting with patriotic pride.

The Thomson-Mallet masque in which Alfred made his first appearance in the English drama was an occasional piece written at the command of the Frederick, Prince of Wales. This semi-dramatic entertainment is remembered in histories of the drama for introducing the

[54] Lapidge and Keyes 21.

song "Rule Britannia."[55] The interpolation of this song (in the form of an Ode) into the masque is "an index of the patriotic popular conceptions which have been most prominently associated with Alfred's name," writes Miles.[56]

Southey called "Rule Britannia" "the political hymn of this country as long as she maintains her political power."[57] The first of the six stanzas reads:

> When Britain first, at heaven's command,
> Arose from out the azure main;
> This was the charter of the land,
> And guardian Angels sung this strain:
> "Rule Britannia, rule the waves!
> "Britons never will be slaves."

The words, "heaven's command," are key, as Colley points out, because they refer to "Britain's divine origins."[58] Another commentator sees the refrain as a co-mingling of the "newer sentiment" of naval and maritime hegemony ("Rule Britannia, rule the waves) with the ancient and eternal passion for liberty" ("Britons never will be slaves").[59] The Ode is sung at the end

[55] Thomson was its author.

[56] Miles 2.

[57] Robert Southey, quoted in Miles 60.

[58] Colley 11.

[59] Ramsland, 180.

of the masque, providing a rousing conclusion to the patriotic drama.

Although it was written for a coterie audience, Thomson and Mallet's masque became the model for a number of subsequent masques and musical-dramatic entertainments based on Alfred's life that were performed on the London stage for a mass audience later in the century. In 1751, Garrick produced Mallet's Alfred at Drury Lane and played the title role.[60] The new masque retains the Bolingbrokean emphasis of the original.[61] Thomas Davies, Garrick's contemporary and the author of the first biographer of the actor, comments on this conspicuous political aspect of the masque:

> This masque was, I believe, written under the influence, and by the encouragement, of Lord Bolingbroke; nor do the political maxims insisted upon in it differ from those laid down so copiously in his Idea of a Patriot King.[62]

[60] The spectacle opened on February 23, 1751 and ran for seven successive nights (until March 7) without an afterpiece; it was played again on March 9 and on April 19, when an afterpiece was added, for a total of eight performances. Mrs. Bellamy played the part of Eltruda. I find no record of subsequent performances in Dougald McMillan, Drury Lane Calendar, 1747-1776 (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1938).

[61] Bolingbroke, it so happened, died in 1751. Mallet edited the first posthumous edition of his writings in 1754; it was reprinted in 1778, 1809, 1841, and 1844.

[62] Davies, 2: 39.

Notable is Alfred's expression of insular patriotism that is peculiarly British and which identifies Alfred with England's future greatness as a naval power:

> 'Tis naval strength, that must our peace assure,
> Be this the first high object of my care,
> To wall us round with well-appointed fleets.
> In them our sole dominion of the sea,
> Our wealth and grandeur, can along be found,
> The one great bulwark of our separate world

In 1773, long after Mallet had died, Garrick saw fit to produce Mallet's masque again, in his own altered, much gussied up version.[63]

At the same time that versions of the "Alfred masque" were being produced on the London stage, other authors were attempting to give Alfred a "legitimate" life in tragedy, both on the stage and in print. A number of so-called tragedies based on Alfred's life were written in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, but only one--by John Home, the celebrated author of Douglas--was produced on the London stage. According to Carl Stratman's Bibliography of English Printed Tragedy, the first Alfredian tragedy was written in 1753, an anonymous and unstaged work entitled

[63] Garrick's alteration of Mallet's alteration of the Thomson-Mallet masque opened on October, 9, 1773 and ran, like the 1751 version, for a total of eight performances. Except for the opening night, it was supported each night by a variety of stock farces. As I have not seen a copy of this version, I cannot comment on it in detail.

Alfred the Great, Deliverer of His Country.[64] The London stage saw its first production of a tragedy based on Alfred's life in 1778 when Home's Alfred. A Tragedy was produced at Covent Garden.[65] "Neither subject matter nor treatment entitles it to independent treatment," writes Nicoll dismissively of this, Home's sixth and last play.[66] In the same year, Alexander Bicknell wrote The Patriot King; or Alfred and Elvida. An Historical Tragedy,[67] which was never staged. In both "tragedies" the plot is developed far beyond anything found in any of the masques or other musicalized versions.

For a student of historical drama, Home's Alfred has the attraction of novelty. It is a rather daring attempt--for the time--to humanize Alfred by depicting him primarily as a lover, or as the play's Prologue puts it, to "blend the god-like hero with the man." Overall, Home's characterization of Alfred can be viewed as a rejection of the orthodox, one might say

[64] Bibliography of English Printed Tragedy, 1565-1900, compiled and ed. Carl J. Stratman, C.S.V. (Carbondale, Ill.: So. Illinois. UP, 1966). Miles dismisses it as "worthless"--Miles, 63. As I have not read it, I cannot dispute Miles's judgment, but it deserves mention if only because it includes the story of Alfred's burning of the cakes. The play was based on Rapin de Thoyras's Historie d'Angleterre (1724) translated in English in 1743-47.

[65] On January 21, 1778.

[66] Nicoll, 3: 94. The play is not as wretched as Nicoll's remark suggests.

[67] I am unable to say which play was written first.

iconic, conception of Alfred (found in the "masque tradition") as a super patriotic symbol of near demi-god stature, not to say a Patriot King in the Bolingbrokean sense. Home's purpose, as he stated in the Preface to his play is to dispel "an imaginary idea . . of Alfred as an old mortified ascetic sage, of spirit too sublime and aetherial to descend to human passions or human actions."[68] Home, a Scotsman, can thus be viewed as an iconoclast in regard to his depiction of the Saxon King.

The focus of Home's play is on the strong bond of romantic love between Alfred and his bride and how it affects their behavior. The theme of love between husband and wife is tenderly and poignantly present in the Thomson and Mallet's masque, where it power, maintained within strict bounds, has an enobling effect on Alfred. Home develops the love theme in an entirely different direction: Alfred is a husband-to-be whose kingly qualities are affected adversely when this love is crossed by uncontrolled circumstance. Unfullfilled love is viewed as a power that clouds Alfred's judgment and leads him to perform rash actions. Home's Alfred is a man who suffers from the fault of loving too much; the gravity of the fault lies in its being a potential

[68] Preface to Alfred. A Tragedy, pp. ix-x, in The Plays of John Home, ed. with intro. by James S. Malek (New York and London: Garland), 1980.

tragic flaw. The play was a failure because the "historical" Alfred was so deeply imbedded in the national consciousness--and consequently in the the minds and hearts off theater audiences--that Home's deviation from tradition in his characterization of Alfred was unaceptable

The appearance of Bicknell's tragedy in the same year as Home's was probably not a coincidence. Similarities between the two plays (especially in plot and characterization) suggest that Bicknell wrote his play after Home's play was staged and may have been influenced by it in the sense that he reacted against its ahistoricism. Bicknell's self-concious characterization of Alfred as both a political hero (Patriot King) and a man of human feeling (loving husband and father) suggests that his play was intended as a corrective to Home's heterodox depiction of Alfred as a "lover." Bicknell had a personal interest in King Alfred that led him to publish an admiring life (based on Spelman's) of the Saxon King in 1777, a year before he wrote his play. Bicknell depicts Alfred as an exemplar of Bolingbroke's Patriot King, though his play has a tory rather than a whig tone.[69] The prologue,

[69] An interesting sidelight is that Bicknell's play inspired one John William Cowmeadow to write, in 1796, Alfred Konig der Angelsachsen oder der patriotische Konig, a musical piece that has importance because Haydn composed incidental music for it. For our purposes, it is important because it shows that Alfred was also admired as a political ideal in Europe.

which suggests that Bicknell was a monarchist, ends with the hope that "George's rank with ALFRED'S happy reign."[70]

In Bicknell's play, Alfred is mostly passive, which is always the main problem of a dramatist used Alfred as a protagonist. When he first appears (1:3), fleeing alone from a Danish victory, he delivers a long soliloquy affirming the intrepidity of a "mind in conscious virtue bold" and lamenting his country's ruin. Bicknell provides an occasion for the eulogization of Alfred as a Patriot King, in the scene depicting the Saxon soldiers before the final battle. The Saxons, who believing that Alfred has been killed, are determined to avenge his death. Edwyn, a young fiery noble who serves as the assembly's spokeman, sounds the keynote in a long encomnium he delivers in praise of his King (4:1):

> Who would not die, indeed, for such a king?--
> From godlike Alfred might succeeding princes
> Learn to be great and good: learn to acquire
> What only can repay a sov'reign's cares,
> His subject's love. Nay, not his subjects only
> But the respectful love of all mankind.
> In him we saw combin'd so rarely seen,

[70] Alexander Bicknell, The Patriot King; or Alfred and Elvida, prologue, vii. In the prologue, which the author wrote himself, it is stated that the aim of the play is to depict both "A patriot People, and a patriot King." The prologue goes on to explain the term "patriot People," as a people that respects "rule," obeys laws "with duteous Fervour" and bows "submissive to a genler Sway."

The accepted monarch, and the PATRIOT KING.[71]

Edwyn, who refers to Alfred as "the friend and father of us all," goes on to declare:

> His being's end and aim appear to've been
> The furth'rance of his people's happiness
> . . . . .
> Nor did he frown to see his subjects free;
> And as <u>free</u> men, tenacious of their rights.

After he returns from having successfully completed a spy mission in the Danish camp and rejoins his troops in the Forest of Selwood in preparation for a carefully planned surprise attack on the unsuspecting Danes (5:5),[72] Alfred paternally reminds his countryman that it is "your laws, your liberties, and lives" that are at stake." Lastly, Alfred delivers a long speech in which he expresses his profound thankfulness to God for having restored him to his throne, his deep love of his wife and queen deeply, and his determination to rebuild England on a foundation of law so that

> England shall be
> Once more the envy of each neighboring state

His last words point the Bolingbrokean moral that one would expect from a Patriot King:

[71] Act IV, 1, p. 32.

[72] Act V, 5.

> This little Isle, were all her sons but true,
> Tho' the whole world assail'd her, might defy
> their utmost force, and scoff at their invasions--
> And Alfred's life to future Kings shall prove
> That their best safe-guard is their Subjects love.

Bicknell's tragedy, however feeble as drama, is an example of the strength of the link between Alfred and the concept of the Patriot King.

In the early nineteenth century, melodrama--the reigning form, finally claimed Alfred. In 1827 a "music drama" (i.e., melodrama) by Isaac Pocock's called Alfred the Great; or, The Enchanted Standard, produced at Covent Garden as an afterpiece the same year--1827--that Knowles finished his draft of Alfred the Great.[74]

The 1820s, it so happens, was a fruitful decade for the writing of dramatic pieces about Alfred, especially melodramas.[75] Perhaps this was because George IV was considered to have disgraced the institution of the

[73] Act V, 11, p. 66-67.

[74] Pocock (b. 1792; d. 1835) was Knowles's younger contemporary.

[75] Nicoll lists two anonymous melodramas produced at Sadler's Wells: Alfred and Matilda; or, the Test of Guilt and Alfred the Great; or, The Battle of Eddington. both in 1823. In the same year Alfred le Grand, roi d'Angleterre, a ballet, was performed at the Haymarket. In 1824, H.M. Milner's Alfred the Great was produced at the Coburg. In 1829, Alfred the Great, a drama in Five Acts, based on the plays of O'Keeffe and Pocock, was printed anonymously.

monarchy. Pocock's play was loosely based[76] on John O'Keeffe's Alfred; or The Magic Banner licensed as The Magick Banner; or, Two Wives in a House.[77] This bustling play is a "mixed comedy" in the sense that scenes of heroic matter appropriate to a tragedy or historical drama are juxtaposed with scenes of broad comedy. The play abounds in farcical incidents and comic misunderstandings. There is melodrama, too, but it is restrained. The play is an attempt, the first to my knowledge, to yoke the oft-told story of Alfred's successful struggle to reclaim his kingdom from the Danes to a farcical subplot. As such it departs from the masque tradition. From the author's prologue one gets the impression that O'Keeffe was rather concerned that playgoers and critics might find his play offensive because of its novelty; they might consider it presumptuous of a writer of comedy, as O'Keeffe was, to deal with serious historical matters. From the play's prologue, it is clear that King Alfred was a beloved king to early nineteenth-century audiences, and the author could not take for granted that a Drury Lane

[76] Pocock acknowledged his debt in the Advertisement to his play as follows: "This Afterpiece, as I have stated in the bills of the day, is founded partly on an early drama of O'Keeffe's, but the superstructure is wholly different, as may be seen by a reference to his "Magic Banner"--Isaac Pocock, Alfred the Great; or, The Enchanted Standard (London: Miller, 1827).

[77] The play is sometimes referred to as a comedy. The title was changed to Alfred, or the Magic Banner when the play was printed in The Dramatic Works of John O'Keeffe in 1798.

audience in 1796 would accept the innovation of his mingling of high and low In a playful tone, the prologue reassures playgoers that the author, in spite of his reputation as a comic writer, is properly respectful of the "godlike worth," of the "Scepter'd Sage:"

> He like yourselves, can Alfred's fame revere,
> Nor think with wanton levity he draws
> The glorious Founder of our matchless laws.[78]

O'Keeffe assures the audience that he had no intention to "make the Patriot Prince a Peeping Tom," an allusion to Alfred's visit to the Danish camp in disguise and to one of his own earlier pieces, the comic opera Peeping Tom of Coventry (Hay., 1784).

True to his word, O'Keeffe succeeds in preserving Alfred's dignity by keeping him separated from the comedy. Alfred's presence is strongly felt throughout the play and his reputation of justice and lawgiving is referred to a number of times. Most impressive is a speech he gives on universal brotherhood. Otherwise, he is essentially the same pious and philosophic-minded Alfred familiar from the plays already discussed, but his philosophizing and speechifying is muzzled, and he

[78] Prologue to John O'Keeffe, The Magick Banner, from the manuscript licensing copy (Larpent 30) in the Huntington Museum.

is allowed only one brief reflective soliloquy as an outlet for his ruminations.

The masque versions and Bicknell's tragedy indicate that because of the myth (a mixture of fact and legend) that had grown up around Alfred's character and achievement, the Anglo-Saxon king was a natural vehicle for the expresssion of patriotism, as is evidenced by the depiction of him as a Patriot King in the Bolingrokean mould. On the stage, this depiction is strongest in the early masques and less important in the later dramatic treatments, which experiment with mixing comedy with the serious matter. However, in these later plays, the echo of the Patriot King is still heard, however faintly. But the success of Pocock's melodrama suggests that the admixture of comedy to the Alfredian matter succeeded in making the play more entertaining to mass audiences. It also detracted from the seriousness of the subject matter and theme. In Pocock's play, as in O'Keeffe, the comic matter tends to upstage and overshadow the play's hero and to dilute the patriotic rhetoric. The tail is wagging the dog. The characterization of Alfred is debased by the commercial nature of the dramatic product itself, which has the earmarks of a commodity manufactured for the masses.

C. Bolingbroke and the Patriot King

Three principal sources of influence suggest themselves: Bolingbroke's The Idea of a Patriot, Hazlitt's own reformulation of Bolingbroke's principles in his essay "On the Regal Character" (which Knowles most probably read in one of its forms[79]), and the firmly established dramatic tradition itself, deriving from the masque, of exalting Alfred as the paradigm of a patriot king. Knowles may well have been influenced by all three sources, which are difficult to separate from one another. The ideas or principles espoused by Bolingbroke--many of them having become truisms--were "in the air."

Thomson and Mallet's masque was written just two years after Mallet's patron and close friend Henry St. John Viscount Bolingbroke had finished writing Idea of the Patriot King.[80] The expression "Patriot King" does not appear in the text of Thomson and Mallet's masque, but Alfred enunciates several of the principles that are associated with the Bolingbrokean Patriot King such

[79] In addition to being published in two newspapers (The Champion and The Examiner), "On the Regal Character" was included in Hazlitt's Political Essays, published in 1819.

[80] On the dating of Letters, on the Spirit of Patriotism: on the Idea of a Patriot King: and on the State of Parties, at the Accession of King George the First (to give the tract its complete title) see Giles Barber, "Bolingbroke, Pope and the Patriot King," The Library 19 (1964) 70.

as being a father to the people he rules and subordinating his private feelings to the public weal.

Although Bolingbroke himself was a political theorist of Tory affiliation, Idea of a Patriot King is, as Sidney Jackman points out, "a whig, not a tory, document."[81] Thus it was compatible with Knowles's own Whiggishly-inclined politics. In the early nineteenth century, it was still esteemed as an authoritative guide to the general "principles" (to use Bolingbroke's word) by which a British monarch should govern. In glorifying liberty as a sacred flame that must be nurtured by a respect for constitutionalism, Bolingbroke's tract is in tune with what has come to be known as the Whig interpretation of history. The Lockean Whiggishness which underlies Bolingbroke's political thinking is clear from the following passage from his the Idea of a Patriot King:

> The good of the people is the ultimate and true end of government. Governors are, therefore, appointed for this end, and civil constitution which appoints them, and invests them with their power, is determined to do so by that law of nature and reason, which has determined the end of government, and which admits this form of government as the proper means of arriving at it. Now, the greatest good of a people is their liberty. . . . without liberty no happiness can be enjoyed

[81] Jackman, 116. Jackson attempts to rescue the Ideas of a Patriot King from its "dubious reputation," which he argues is undeserved--116. Early in his essay, Bolingbroke states, "I think on these subjects, neither as the Tories, or as the Whigs have thought. . . ."--Works, 2: 383.

> by society. The obligation, therefore, to defend and maintain the freedom of such constitutions will appear most sacred to a Patriot King."[82]

Bolingbroke defines the Patriot King as a man who is himself governed by a strong sense of duty to God and his people. His first concern is the preservation of his people's liberty. Espousing no party, he considers himself the father of his people, and rules from a power deriving from popularity rather than force, fear, or cunning. In contrast to Machiavelli's The Prince, Bolingbroke's the Idea of a Patriot King makes no distinction between ethical and political conduct.[83] Bolingbroke clearly states his disagreement with Machiavelli in his essay:

> He rises no higher than the consideration of mere interest, of fame, of security, of quiet, and of power, all personal to the prince . . . . But he is far from going up to that motive which should above all determine a good prince to hold his conduct, because it is his duty to do so; a duty that he owes to

[82] Bolingbroke, Works (rpt. 1967) 2: 391.

[83] Bolingbroke's originally entitled his essay A Patriot Prince, as if to call attention to his fundamental disagreement with Machiavelli, whose essay The Prince concerns the realpolitick of statecraft. Of Machiavelli, Bolingbroke writes in The Idea, "He rises no higher than the consideration of mere interest, of fame, of security, of quiet, and of power, all personal to the prince . . . . But he is far from going up to that motive which should above all determine a good prince to hold his conduct, because it is his duty to do so

Note: See Jeffrey Hart.

> God by one law, and to his people by another . . . .[84]

The key word is "duty," which is alien to Machiavelli's realpolitik analysis of power; so, too, is "popularity." The Patriot King, unlike Machiavelli's Prince, must earnestly desire to win his people's "esteem" and "affection,"[85] for according to Bolingbroke:

> Nothing less than the hearts of his people will content such a prince; nor will he think his throne established, till it is established there.[86]

Popularity, in other words, is founded on love. It is essential because without it the Patriot King cannot govern with authority:

> Popularity [which is] . . . the sole foundation of that sufficient authority and influence, which other constitutions give the prince gratis, and independently of the people, but which a king of this nation must acquire.[87]

Equally important as the virtue of a Patriot King's public life is that of his private life, since the assumption underlying Bolingbroke's tract is that "the

[84] Bolingbroke, Works (rpt. 1967) 2: 390.

[85] Bolingbroke, Works (Mallet ed.) 2: 120.

[86] Bolingbroke, Works (Mallet's ed.) 2: 91.

[87] Bolingbroke, Works (Mallet's ed.) 118.

character of a great and good king [is] found in that of a great and good man."[88] To be a Patriot King one must live a life of "decorum," free of impropriety of character" and "indecency of conduct."[89] For Bolingbroke, a king's character is formed in "the school of affliction," which he calls "that school out of which the greatest and the best of monarchs have come."[90]

The principles of kingship contained in Bolingbroke's Idea of a Patriot King took on a renewed importance after the permanent incapacity of George III in 1810 because of George's private vices and unrivalled unpopularity among his subjects. In post-Waterloo Britain, there was a widespread sense that the country was critically in need of reform, if not reformation, and that the monarch himself was part of the problem. During his ten year reign, George IV, more than anyone else, had come to personify the existing state of corruption; after his death, the corruption continued to be embodied in the unreformed parliament, and especially the reactionary House of Lords. One is reminded of the old saw, "a fish stinks from the head." George IV, who stained the monarchy with moral disrepute by his profligacy, remained one of the main obstacles to

[88] Bolingbroke, Works (Mallet's ed.) 2: 119-120.

[89] Bolingbroke, Works (Mallet's ed.) 2: 118, 111.

[90] Bolingbroke, Works (Mallet's ed.) 2: 61.

reform of any kind after he assumed the power of regent in 1811. If reform was to become a reality, the king's support was necessary. Although the king was less of a factor in government after 1810, the power of the monarchy was still considerable. As Colley states:

> Neither the Bill of Rights of 1699 nor the Act of Settlement of 1701 prevented a British king from declaring war or making peace, from calling or dissolving Parliament, [or] from appointing any qualified Protestant Britons he wanted as cabinet ministers . . . ."[91]

It is no surprise, then, that the change in monarchs that occurred in 1830 was in itself a cause for popular celebration in Britain and resulted in an immediate liberalization of the political climate. George IV died "unmourned and unlamented."[92] Reform was now "in the air." In July, a bloodless revolution in France further unleashed the pent up energies of reform. The changed climate certainly must have rekindled the interest of both author and actor in staging Alfred.[93] Overnight, as it were, Knowles's patriotic play was in tune with what Bulwer called the "public mind."[94] If produced while the honeymoon

[91] Colley 196.

[92] Briggs, The Making 186.

[93] For a more detailed description of the political climate before and after George IV's death see Chapter IA.

[94] Bulwer 305.

between the people and the William lasted, Alfred would appear to audiences to be a piece that was designed to compliment, through historical analogy, Britain's new monarch. This is exactly how it was perceived by audiences when it was performed for the first time on April 28, 1831.

D. William IV as a Patriot King

When William (fig. 7), Duke of Clarence, became king the contrast between him and his brother George IV (fig. 6) was so great that the Duke of Wellington, then head of the cabinet, declared, "This is not a new reign, it is a new dynasty."[95] Everyone found William's good nature and extrovertive personality refreshing after George IV's gloomy reclusiveness.[96] William had won the hearts of his subjects from the start by his energy, goodnaturedness, informality, openness, impatience with pomp and circumstance, and most important, his responsiveness to his people's will--qualities that George IV conspicuously lacked. Moreover, his private life--at least since his marriage in

[95] Letters of Dorothea, Princess Lieven, during her Residence in London, 224, quoted in Ziegler 154-155.

[96] It is interesting to note that these were but two traits that Knowles and King William shared; others were good-naturedness, generosity, good will, and honesty. Both wore their hearts on their sleeve, and both had a casual sailor-like appearance.

1819--had been a model of virtue and domesticity. Everyone was impressed by thes earnest desire of the bluff and jolly-looking new king of sixty-five years to be a good king, by his conscientious performance of his duties, and by his fairmindedness. Above all, the perception that he was a friend of reform--and thus a friend of the people--immediately endeared the new king to his subjects. Nor should it be overlooked that William's name was considered a good omen for the cause of liberty, since it evoked his namesake William III, the father of the "Glorious Revolution." Dubbed "Great Nassau," William underwent a process of mythicization in the early eighteenth century, when he was "lauded as the founder of the Whig party, the source of British liberty and freedom, and . . . . as England's deliverer from the oppression of James II."[97] As such he was glorified in the drama as "the greatest character of this present age."[98] Thus, in addition to the good and solid qualities that he brought to a throne that had been discredited by his brother, he also brought a magical and mythic name.

Knowles's dedication of the play to William IV was not without justification, although the martial language of the dedication may well strike the reader as

[97] Ramsland 17.

[98] Nicolas Rowe, Tamerlane, Epistle Dedicatory (1702), quoted in Ramsland, 17.

strained. Calling William IV a potential savior of Britain appears to heroicize a man who, according to his biographer, was "extraordinary in his ordinariness."[99] It is unfruitful (not to say absurd) to push the parallel between William and Alfred too far by looking for similarities between the truly extraordinary Anglo-Saxon king, who was distinguished both as a statesman and a military genius, and William IV, a most commonplace man in terms of character and achievement. Knowles certainly did not delude himself into believing that William was an Alfred redivus. It should be pointed out that the comparison of William to Alfred is not only heroic: it expresses the familial affection that the British people felt for their new king, whom they affectionately called "Billy 4th" and "Coconut" (because of the shape of his head), and "the sailor king" because of his experience in the navy.

What is important about the dedication is its implied political message: namely, that just as the England's fate lay in the hands of a king the ninth century, so too did it lay in a king's hands in 1830-31. The difference was that whereas in the ninth century kind of leadership that was required was military, in 1830-31, it was moral, political, and diplomatic. The threat to England's survival in the

[99] Ziegler 151.

former period was a foreign foe; in the latter the "invader" was more intangible, yet no less pernicious. The idea that corruption could be cleansed by a revival of the spirit of liberty is found in The Idea of a Patriot King:

> How inestimable a blessing. . . must the succession of a Patriot king in such circumstances as these. . . ? He, and he alone, can save a country whose ruin is so advanced. The utmost that private men can do, who remain untainted by the general contagion, is to keep the spirit of liberty alive a few breasts; to protest against what they cannot hinder, and to claim on every occasion what they cannot by their own strength recover.[100]

In early 1831 there were grounds on which to confer the exalted epithet of "Patriot King" even to a king who was "a monument of unimaginative common sense."[101] Philip Ziegler, William IV's biographer, makes this impressive case for his modestly-endowed and most ordinary subject:

[100] Works, 2: 395.

[101] Zeigler, 192. It should be noted that, relatively speaking, William was certainly more worthy than the untested Frederick, Prince of Wales, to whom Bolingbroke had wished to dedicate his tract and who was glorifed as a potential Patriot King in what Maynard Mack calls "the cluster of historical-allegorial Opposition plays put forward for the stage during 1738-9"--Maynard Mack, Alexander Pope: A Life (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1985) 758. These overtly propagandistic plays, which included Richard Brook's Gustavus Vasa(1738), David Mallet's Mustapha(1739), and James Thomson's Edward and Eleonora (1739), exalted a man who was described by his own tutor as having "the most vicious nature and the most false heart that ever man had"--Jackman 116.

> Though William might have no understanding of social or economic problems he was far from ignoring his duties as a king. To suggest that he had though deeply about the nature of his royal duties would be to claim for him a capacity for philosophical study to which he did not aspire. Still, as his brother crumbled slowly into decrepitude and death, he had become increasingly preoccupied with the issues that would confront him. He had laid down in his mind certain principles to which he felt he should adhere, had evolved a pattern of conduct to fit, as he hoped, every eventuality. Allowing for certain lapses of varying gravity he followed this pattern with fair consistency. In doing so he earned the right to be considered the first truly constitutional monarch of Great Britain.[102]

One of the primary sources for the principles which William attempted to follow was, in fact, Bolingbroke's Idea of the Patriot King. William himself claimed that the tract was "one of the formative influences of his life."[103]

But actions speak louder than words, and William's actions, at least in the first year of his reign, were not unworthy of a latter-day Patriot King. By the time Alfred was finally produced in April of 1831, William had earned Knowles's complimentary dedication through his earnest efforts on behalf of legislation to reform parliament, without which such legislation would never

[102] Ziegler 147. William began to feel the weight of kingship on his shoulders in 1827 when his elder brother the Duke of York, who was heir to the throne, died.

[103] Ziegler 293.

have been enacted. While not an advocate for parliamentary reform, the King deserved a good deal of credit for bringing it closer to becoming a political reality. He had done so in several specific ways that reflect a self-conscious adoption of Bolingbrokean principle. First, he had decided to turn to Lord Grey and the Whigs after the fall of Wellington's Tory administration in the fall of 1830. This decision revealed his pragmatism and is a measure of the gulf between him and his brother George IV, who, in Lord Grey's eyes, was "little short of anti-Christ incarnate."[104] There had been escalating unrest in industrial and agricultural Britain during the summer of 1830, and William---was sensible enough to realize--as Wellington was not--that repression was not the answer. When Wellington, who was indifferent to public opinion, tactlessly declared that it was his duty to oppose reform, it was clear to the new king that the hero of Waterloo was not the right man to lead Britain in its hour of social and political crisis.[105] The country needed a man like Grey who was pledged to reform, yet, who would proceed prudently. The king's acceptance of Grey (over inferior alternatives such as

[104] Ziegler 168.

[105] Norman Gash writes of Wellington that "His great weakness was his indifference to public opinion"--Norman Gash, Aristocracy and People: Britain, 1815-1865 (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1979) 131.

Lansdowne, Spencer, or Goderich) was evidence of his realization that concessions over reform were essential"[106] if further civil disorder was to be averted.

In retrospect, one may agree with Asa Briggs when he says that "the return of the Whigs to power meant that some sort of reform bill was inevitable."[107] But the inevitability of reform was by no means a certainty to the participants in the battle for reform in 1830-31. The king's role was crucial in its success, as events would soon demonstrate. By entrusting his government to the Whigs, William IV was following Bolingbroke's advice:

> He must begin to govern as soon as he begins to reign. For the very first steps he makes in government will give the first impression, and as it were the presage of his reign; and may be of great importance in many other respects besides that of opinion and reputation.[108]

William envisioned his role in the process of negotiation as in accord with the principle prescribed by Bolingbroke when reforms were demanded:

> . . . as every modification in a scheme of government and of national polity is of great

[106] Ziegler 167.

[107] Briggs, The Making 236.

[108] Bolingbroke, Works (rpt. 1967) 2: 398.

> importance, and required more and deeper consideration than the warmth, and hurry, and rashness of party conduct admit, the duty of a prince seems to require that he should render by his influence the proceedings more orderly and more deliberate, even when he approves of end to which they are directed and lead men for acting with a party-spirit, to act with a national spirit . . . to render by his influence the proceedings more orderly and more deliberate.[109]

In a letter to Lord Grey, William himself quoted from this passage ("to render by his influence the proceedings more orderly and deliberate" in the midst of the negotiations over revision of the original Bill.[110] Ziegler describes how William acted on this principle:

> Confronted with the reforming legislation of his government, he did not oppose it but instead sought to buy time for further consideration, to let tempers cool on both sides, to give the moderates a chance to exert their influence. If change must come, let it at least come slowly and with deliberation.

Of course, deliberateness was all the more called for given his own deep personal anxieties about the wisdom of parliamentary reform.

The staging of Alfred could not have been more timely in terms of the drama that was unfolding on the

[109] Bolingbroke, Works (Mallet's ed.) 86. William himself quoted this passage to Grey, Letter dated October 17, 1831, Grey-William Correspondence, 1: 381, quoted in Ziegler, 203.

[110] William IV, Letter to Lord Grey, dated October 17, 1831, Grey-William Correspondence, 1: 381, quoted in Ziegler, 203.

larger stage of British politics in the spring of 1831. Knowles's play opened on April 4, less than a mouth after the Whigs had gone public with their program. It thus coincided exactly with the end of the first phase of an eighteen-month long legislative drama being played out in parliament between reformists and anti-reformists with the king and his ministers maneuvering behind the scenes. Knowles brought his revised manuscript to Macready in London some time in early April and the Eminent tragedian, who must have been keenly aware of its topicality, must have rushed it into rehearsal, for it opened on April 28. The exciting chronology of external events is worth repeating: Lord John Russell had introduced a Reform Bill on March 1. On March 22, victory had been snatched from the jaws of defeat by a single vote. On April 18, after an Easter recess, when the battle between the Whigs and Tories was joined in earnest, Knowles's play was most likely already in rehearsal. The king, dubbed "Reform Billy" for his support of reform, was staunchly on the side of his ministry. This support was based not on his private feelings but on his Bolingbrokean conviction that "as a Sovereign it was his duty to set those feelings and prejudices aside" in the interests of his subjects.[111]

[111] Zeigler, 187.

On April 19, with the Bill headed for certain defeat, events took on an air of crisis as the Whigs advised the King to dissolve parliament. Bowing to necessity, and accepting dissolution as the "lesser of two evils,"[112] the King took the extraordinary action of personally dissolving parliament on April 22. By doing so, William gave the reform bill a second lease on life and averted what he regarded as "the ultimate evil": a "confrontation between reforming Commons and reactionary Lords."[113] William had unhesitatingly crossed the political Rubicon to avert a constitutional crisis. Already a popular hero, the king became even more of a hero in the eyes of his subjects after his boldly decisive action. It was his finest hour, and the nation exploded in celebration. By using his power and influence to assist the cause of reform, William was perceived as "the champion of the people against privilege."[114] In private, William clung to "his obstinate conviction that the British constitution was the best in the world and should be treated with due love and reverence."[115] He sided with those "those who were for keeping things as they were," to use Mill's

[112] Ziegler, 187.

[113] Ziegler, 191.

[114] Ziegler, 189.

[115] Ziegler 181.

phrase. However, he was wise enough to understand that the spirit of the age, as embodied in the British public opinion, demanded reform.

Based on the public perception of William IV, then, Knowles's dedication was more than a mere exercise in flattery. William IV deserved the epithet of "Patriot Monarch" that Knowles bestowed upon him because he adhered to a sense of duty that transcended personal principles and enabled him to act "against his personal predilection . . . his better judgment [and] . . . even against his conscience."[116] Lord Grey, who worked intimately with the King during this trying period, may be allowed to have the last word on the subject: "if ever there was a Sovereign entitled to the character, His Majesty may truly be styled the Patriot King."[117]

The British people's momentary adulation of their new king goes a long way to account for the success of Alfred. In fact, Knowles's son attributed the play's success, "more to political causes than to the merits of the play." By way of explanation, the son adds, "William IV had just come to the throne and the patriotic sentiments which fell from the lips of 'Alfred' were caught by an enthusiastic audience and

[116] Ziegler 293.

[117] Lord Grey (no source given), quoted in Ziegler 294.

attributed to the liberal king."[118] This account is confirmed by reviews of the play. In Gentleman's Magazine, for example, the reviewer wrote; "The piece was replete with allusions to royal patriotism which were throughout received with the greatest enthusiasm."[119] With the King's popularity at its zenith in April of 1831, it was natural that audiences would identify William with Knowles's royal protagonist and transfer their enthusiasm from William to Alfred.

Although the Life does not give examples of which passages were transferred from Alfred to William, it is easy enough for a reader to spot them. There are only a handful. The most obvious are the patriotic sentiments spoken by Alfred himself. One example occurs when Alfred exhorts his soldiers to "Be strong in hope!. . . [and to] Confirm the stirring spirit of the time/ Till it o'erspread the realm" (2.3). Another is when Alfred, after revealing his identity to his soldiers, says, "We're brothers struggling in one common cause" (4: 3). Still another is the last line of Alfred's rousing speech to his troops in Selwood Forest just before the final battle: "Strike till you're free, or fall!" (5: 2) In the historical context, sentiments such as these express the determination of Alfred and the Saxons to

[118] Life 88.

[119] Review of performance of Alfred the Great on April 29, 1831, in Gentleman's Magazine, May, 1831, 497.

throw off the yoke of foreign domination. In the politically charged atmosphere of 1831, they were interpreted as allusions to reform. There were out-and-out "claptraps" because the audience, being overwhelmingly pro-reform, applauded them enthusiastically. In the 1820s, these claptraps would probably have been censored.[120]

In reporting that the reviewer of the Atlas "sternly resented the apparent clap-traps," Knowles's son asserts that the claptraps were unintended: "In truth their coincidence with the popularity of the new monarch was wholly accidental."[121] If what the son says is true, then the political reception given to Alfred is striking confirmation of Thomas Morton's already quoted observation, made at the 1831 inquiry into the state of the drama, that there was a "tendency of the public in excited times to give it [the theater] a political feature."[122] With Lord Russell declaring that "the Reformers were the nation,"[123] the spring of 1831 was certainly a time of great political excitement: politics colored every aspect of life and the idea of reform was an obsession. It would have been odd indeed

[120] An inspection of the licensing copy of Alfred reveals that it was not censored at all.

[121] Life 88.

[122] See "Censorship of the Drama" in Chapter 3,

[123] Colley 346 (see Chapter 1).

had playgoers not associated expressions such as "the common cause" or "the stirring spirit of the time" with the momentous struggle for reform in which the nation was engaged.

It was through a process of verbal association, then, that a visceral and imaginative connection was established between two kings, one living and one dead, who were separated in time by a thousand years and actually had little in common. In the absence of Knowles's own words, the question of whether the claptraps were intended cannot be settled definitively here, but it stretches probability to believe, given the "tendency" of audiences to find political meaning in lines whether a author intended them or not, that Knowles and Macready were unaware of the reformist resonances of the play's rhetoric. Nor could they have been unaware of the play's timeliness. Moreover, Knowles's extraordinary decision to dedicate his play to the new king was a public invitation to applaud the play's patriotic rhetoric for its contemporary relevance

The dedication of King Alfred the Great to King William gave Knowles an opportunity to go court to present the king with a copy of his play and to be presented.[124] At the moment of presentation Knowles

[124] Life 89.

revealed something essential about himself when he bowed instead of kneeling, as etiquette dictated. Conolly has characterized Knowles's refusal to kneel as "a radical act if ever there was none,"[125] which is one interpretation of Knowles's behavior.[126] Meeks goes so far as to assert, without evidence, that "the ceremony bored him... and chafed his democratic spirit, as he showed by declining to kneel."[127] This is another possible interpretation, though it, too, is not borne out the account of the incident in the Life. While it is certainly possible that Knowles was intent on making a political statement by not kneeling, the explanation given in the Life that the act was prompted by religious scruples (not political principles) suffices, especially when one recalls that Knowles was a deeply religious man: "He felt . . . that homage was due but to One Throne," says R.B. Knowles.[128] It would have been out of character for Knowles to allow court etiquette to overrule his dissenting conscience. If Knowles's intention had been to snub William, it is highly unlikely that he would have dedicated Alfred the

[125] Conolly, The Censorship 109.

[126] It should be noted that Knowles's son said of his father that "he is one of the few radicals I have met who had not at heart a profound veneration for good birth"--Life 1.

[127] Meeks 39.

[128] Life 89.

Great to him in the first place, and it is important to note that when Knowles bowed to the king, he did so "respectfully."[129]

If Alfred the Great had been staged in 1827, there can be little doubt that the politically aware audiences would have viewed this play about a paragon of kings as anything other than a personal rebuke to both the person and rule of George IV in historical guise. And it is reasonable to conclude that Knowles intended it as such. The dedication of the play to George's successor in 1831 in the hope that the new monarch would "restore the dilapidated fabric of his country's prosperity" and "rescue a devoted people from the ravages of . . . CORRUPTION" was, by retrospective implication, an indictment of George IV. The interpretation of the play as a critique does not exclude the possibility that it could might also have been viewed as a pro-reform play. After several years of prosperity in the first years of the new decade after Peterloo, 1826, it so happened, brought with it a renewal of economic distress, and consequent discontent, among the lower orders of society in the industrial areas. In Lancashire, there was machine-breaking and rioting on a large scale that was a reminder of the unrest prior to Peterloo. In addition,

[129] Life 89.

a food crisis increased the anger over the Corn Laws (renewed in 1822), manifest in an outpouring of parliamentary petitions calling for its abolition. This new unrest was a sign of the times: that the festering social, economic, and political problems still remained to be addressed.

George has already been characterized, both as a king and husband. To what has already been said, it may be added that he was an incongruous mixture of qualities. He combined impressive learning, refined taste, and conisseurship in the fine arts with equally prodigious talents for "gross feeding, drinking and whoring."[130] This made him eminently qualified to preside over what R.J. White has called "the unique amalgam of squalor and bravura known as 'Regency England.'"[131] Stamped with the moral imprint of the aristocracy, the word "Regency" has come to be a byword for "rakish manners and polished vice,"[132] dilletantism and dandyism--all of which reeked of eighteenth century immorality that was antithetical to the middle class ethos and the subject of attack by evangelicals.

in 1827, by which time he was in many respects an enfeebled parody of himself, George IV was increasingly

[130] White, Life 105.

[131] White, Life 220.

[132] White, Life 102.

indifferent to affairs of state and inclined toward hypochondria and reclusiveness. His views were "despised" by his own government; yet he "still had enough power to make life difficult for his brisk, progressive ministers.[133] In the context of 1827, Knowles's Alfred the Great can be read as an indictment and repudiation of all that the Regency and George IV, its embodiment, stood for in British life.

The fact that Knowles dedicated the play to Hazlitt in 1826 suggests that the play had a critical edge to it that was aimed at George IV.[134] The dramatic decline of Hazlitt's health within a few years of his visit to Scotland may well have had something to do with Knowles's decision to dedicate Alfred to him. By 1824, Hazlitt was already visibly, even shockingly, in physical decline.[135] The 1826 dedication came none too soon; four years later, Hazlitt was dead at the age fifty-two. A year after Hazlitt's death Knowles changed the dedication to reflect the radically changed politi-

[133] Norman Gash, Lord Liverpool (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984) 231.

[134] Presumably Knowles had finished or nearly finished a draft of Alfred when he decided to dedicate the play to Hazlitt.

[135] After seeing Hazlitt after a gap of six years in 1824, Mary Shelley wrote, "I never was so shocked in my life--gau[nt] an then, his hair scattered, his cheek-bones projecting--but for his voice and smile I shd not have known him--his smile brought tears into my eyes, it was like the sun-beam illuminating the most melancholy of ruins . . . "--Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, ed. B.T. Bennett (Baltimore, 1980) 1: 452, quoted in Jones, 364.

cal circumstances already described, with the consequent shift in the play's political intent. To be sure, there is a certain irony in dedicating a play about a Christian king to a man whose implicit motto was "a Miltonic Non serviam!"[136] Hazlitt was an non-believer, a staunch republican, and an enemy of "the claims of barefaced power" symbolized by kings.[137] There is irony, too, in the fact that Hazlitt had little use for the author of the Idea of a Patriot King, dismissing him as "a boastful empty mouther!"[138] But putting Christianity, monarchy, and Bolingbroke aside, the theme Alfred the Great, like Knowles's three previous historical plays, was one that was dear to Hazlitt's heart: the struggle of liberty vs. tyranny.

The political intent of Knowles's play is perhaps most fruitfully viewed in the context of radical journalism during the Regency period. Hazlitt would have relished the historical-allegorical interpretation of Alfred the Great as a critique of George IV because had been one of George's most courageously outspoken and scathing critics when he was Prince Regent. The danger of attacking the George in print when he was Regent was real. In 1811, Leigh Hunt, writing in his brother

[136] Jones 234.

[137] See opening paragraph of Political Essays.

[138] William Hazlitt, in Howe 17: 174.

John's The Examiner only a month after the Prince Regent had betrayed the Whigs by deserting them as soon as they had ceased to be useful, unleashed an ad hominen broadside against his apostasy to Toryism that landed him in Surrey jail. Hunt, who grandly viewed himself as the "Voice of Public Virtue" raised against the "Licentious Example of the Court,"[139] had denounced George as

> . . . a violator of his word, a libertine over head and ears in debt and disgrace, a despiser of domestic ties, the companion of gamblers and demi-reps, a man who has just closed half a century without one single claim on the gratitude of his country or the respect of posterity![140]

Hunt also ridiculed George's corpulence, and it was probably this more than his attack on his morals that led the government to prosecute Hunt, along with his brother, for libel. After a trial, the two brothers were sentenced to two years imprisonment and a fine of one thousand pounds. Thus Leigh Hunt became a "martyr to the cause of liberalism and freedom of speech."[141]

[139] Leigh Hunt, quoted in Ann Blainey, Immortal Boy: A Portrait of Leigh Hunt (London: Croom Helm, 1985) 55.

[140] The Examiner, March 22, 1812, quoted in The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt 2 vols. (? ; New York: AMS P, 1965) 2: 279. A week earlier, Lamb had written a verse satire on the Regent, "The Triumph of the Whale."

[141] Ernest Bernbaum, Guide Through the Romantic Movement (1930; New York: Ronald P, 1949) 267.

Hazlitt, a kindred political spirit, was one of his many sympathizers who visited Hunt in jail. Stanley Jones, Hazlitt's most recent biographer, claims that former biographers of Hazlitt "have underestimated the threat to liberty that the throne posed at that time" [i.e., during the Regency].[142] Hunt's attack on George, says Jones, "was not solely inspired by the Prince Regent's profligacy but also by the prospect of him embracing his father's policy of interference and intrigue."[143] It was during his association with Hunt's Examiner that Hazlitt, who had early in life aspired to the writing of political philosophy, entered the lists in the "turbulent polemical arena"[144] of political journalism.

On August 29, 1820, The Examiner published a tactless letter from Lord Sidmouth, the Home Secretary, expressing the thanks of the Prince Regent to the magistrates and yeomanry of Manchester for their "prompt, decisive and efficient measures of the preservation of the public tranquillity."[145] These measures

[142] Stanley Jones, Hazlitt, A Life: From Winterslow to Firth Street (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1989) 86.

[143] Jones 86.

[144] The phrase is from Jones 80.

[145] Quoted in Norman Gash, Aristocracy and the People: Britain, 1815-1865 (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1979) 95. Lord Sidmouth was one of the most consistent and firm advocates at this time of taking stern measures to deal with civil disturbances. This stemmed from a genuine fear that "political unrest, if unrestrained, might led to the excesses of the French Revolution." During his tenure as Home Secretary (1812-1822), he proposed a

had resulted in the death of two women, one child and eight men, and the wounding of one hundred thirteen women and nearly three hundred men. Many of dead and wounded had been trampled by the panicked crowds, but many too were the result of by sabres wielded by the charging cavalry. Next to Sidmouth's official letter, the newspaper published "On the Regal Character,"[146] one of Hazlitt's early political essays and a thinly veiled satiric attack on the Prince Regent. The juxtaposition spoke eloquently of the Prince Regent's miserable failure to live up to Hazlitt's ideal of a "great Prince" or a "patriot King." The Prince's ear was exquisitely attuned to Purcell and Mozart, but stone deaf to "the voice of truth and justice" that issued from the mouths of the 60,000 people assembled at St. Peter's Field. Whether viewed in the mirror of Bolingbroke's Idea of a Patriot King or Hazlitt's "On the Regal Character," it reflected back an image of George IV that was antithesis of a Patriot King.

"What is it, then that makes a great Prince?" is the salient question Hazlitt asks and attempt to answer

series of repressive measures, including the suspendion of Habeas Corpus in 1817 and four of the Six Acts in 1820--Lives of the Georgian Age, 1714-1837, ed. William Gould (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1978) 4.

[146] Catherine Macdonald, Born Under Saturn: A Biography of William Hazlitt (New York: Macmillan, 1944) 408.

in "On the Regal Character,"[147] Published in 1817, the essay begins by alluding to the punishment which Hunt had suffered for his article on the Prince Regent five years ago: "In writing a criticism, we hope we shall not be accused of intending a libel."[148] While anatomizing what royalty is and should be, Hazlitt tactfully avoids committing libel by refraining from naming the Prince Regent. However, there can be no doubt that he had George in mind throughout, as when he writes:

> the common regal character is . . . the reverse of what it ought to be: It is the purely <u>personal</u>, occupied with his own petty feelings, prejudices, and pursuits; whereas it ought to be the purely philosophical, exempt from all personal considerations, and contemplating itself only in its general and paramount relation to the State. This is the reason why there have been so few great Kings. They want the power of abstraction: and their situations are necessarily at variance with their duties, in this respect; for every thing forces them to concentrate their attention upon themselves, and to consider their rank and privileges in connection with their private advantage, rather than with public good. . . . A great King ought to be the greatest philosopher and the truest patriot in his dominions . . . . their wisdom and virtue ought to keep pace with their power. . . . There is no sympathy between Kings and their subjects. . . . They consider the claims of justice and compassion as so

[147] "On the Regal Character" was first printed in <u>The Champion</u> on September 28, 1817; it was reprinted in the <u>Yellow Dwarf</u> as "The Little Hunchback," on May 16, 1818, and included in <u>The Political Essays</u> of 1819.

[148] William Hazlitt, in <u>Political Essays</u>, Howe 7: 281.

> many impertinent interferences with the royal prerogative.[149]

Kings are unable to feel sympathy with their subjects, says Hazlitt, because they live isolated in a world of their own:

> The walls of a palace, like those of a nunnery, are the favoured abode of scandal and tittle-tattle. The inhabitants of both are equally shut out from the common privileges and common incidents of humanity, and whatever relates to the every-day world about us, has to them the air of a romance.[150]

It is a passage that Knowles seems to have illustrated by adding the "common incidents of humanity" referred to by Hazlitt when he wrote Alfred's "Adversity's / The nurse for kings" speech ("Knows he the storm / That makes the valiant quail, who hears it only / Through the safe wall. . ."). As the essay progresses, Hazlitt circles in on his royal target. In the litany of royal "graces and accomplishments" that Hazlitt includes in the essay--all irrelevant to the greatness of a Prince--Hazlitt enumerates more than few that applied to George:

> . . . . he may be a good classic, well versed in history,--may speak Italian, French,

[149] William Hazlitt, Political Essays, Howe 7: 284-285.

[150] William Hazlitt, "On the Regal Character," Howe 7: 284.

> Spanish and German fluently; he may be an excellent mimic; he may say good things, and do friendly ones; he may be able to join in a catch, or utter a repartee, or dictate a billet-doux; he may be a master of Hoyle, and deep in the rules of the Jockey Club; he may have an equal taste for ragouts and poetry, in dancing, and in dress; he may adjust a toupee with the dexterity of a fiseur, or tie a cravat with the hand and eye of a man-milliner: he may have all these graces and accomplishments, and as many more, and yet he may be nothing; as without any one of them he may be a great Prince. They are not the graces and accomplishments of a Sovereign, but of a Lord of the Bedchamber . . . . They are . . . foibles and blemishes in the character of a ruler; for they imply that his attention has been turned as much upon adorning his own person as upon advancing the State.[151]

"Charles II was a King, such as we have here described," concludes Hazlitt after reciting the litany, using the last Stuart monarch as a surrogate for George himself. The aptness of the parallel between the two monarchs must have been apparent to any discerning contemporary observer, for to use R.J. White's words: "the Prince was an anachronism. He was playing Charles II, without the wit, refinement or political skill, more than a century too late."[152] It is in the last paragraph of the essay, quoted below in full, that Hazlitt both asks and answers, in negative and positive terms, the essay's central question--"What is it, then

[151] William Hazlitt, "On the Regal Character," Howe 7: 286.

[152] White, Life 105.

that makes a great Prince?" In doing so, he scores several more palpable hits at the expense of the Prince Regent:

> What is it then, that makes a great Prince? Not the understanding Purcell or Mozart, but the having an ear open to the voice of truth and justice! Not a taste for made-dishes, or French wines, or court-dresses, but a fellow-feeling with the calamities of hunger, of cold, of disease, and nakedness! Not a knowledge of the elegances of fashionable life, but a heart that feels for the millions of its fellow-beings in want of the common necessaries of life! Not a set of brilliant frivolous accomplishments, but a manly strength of character, proof against the seductions of a throne! He, in short, is a patriot King, who without any other faculty usually possessed by Sovereigns, has one which they seldom possess,--the power in imagination of changing places with his people. Such a King may indeed aspire to the character of a ruling providence over a nation; any other is but the head-cipher of a court![153]

Given that he was not an admirer of Bolingbroke as a political thinker, Hazlitt would probably not have been pleased to have it pointed out how much his thoughts on the subject of kingship owe to the Idea of a Patriot King, even to the extent of using the term "Patriot king." Perhaps without consciously intending to, Hazlitt reaffirmed the relevance of the eighteenth century political philosopher's ideal of kingship for

[153] William Hazlitt, "On the Regal Character," Howe 7: 287.

the early nineteenth century by applying it to immediate political context.

E. Knowles's Alfred as Patriot King and Poet

"Each age," it has been said, "has created the Alfred it required,"[154] ascribing to him "whatever virtues seem essential to an ideal."[155] Writing on the threshold of the Victorian age, Knowles was less interested in depicting Alfred as an historic precursor of future imperial glory than as a model king possessing virtues to be emulated by British monarchs. Conspicuously absent from Knowles's Alfred the Great; or, The Patriot King is the militant imperialism of "Rule Britannica." The only reference to the sea occurs in Alfred's final speech at the end of the play, in which the Saxon soldiers are addressed as "Sons of the sea":

> You've fought like England's true-born sons, to-da
> You've taught a lesson to her sons to come!
> By your example fired, should e'er a foe
> In after-times invade her shores,
> Her sons, of all descriptions and degrees,
> To succour her, shall grapple soul and hand;
> Rampart her throne with living walls of hearts,
> And teach the fell invader that the sea
> Embraced her, never to betray her glory!

[154] Source?

[155] Stanley 114, fn. 42.

Aside from this stirring rhetoric, Alfred makes no reference to British seapower, which is so prominent in Thomson and Mallet's masque. The patriotism of Knowles's play must, of course, be viewed in a different--more inward-directed--light than the trumpeting patriotism of the masques or of Bicknell's play, the dramatic antecedents to which Knowles's play is most closely related, especially in regard to the characterization of King Alfred as a Patriot King. Knowles's historical play attempts to depict King Alfred as an exemplar of the Bolingbrokean kingly ideal and the paragon of Christian kings. There is nothing in the play to suggest that Knowles was using Alfred as a symbol of the "myth of a golden past" as Cartwright and Cobbett did. Knowles's contribution to the tradition of the mythification of Alfred in the English drama was his depiction as a combination of Patriot King (with all its Christian implications) and poet. In short, Knowles's Alfred embodies his ideal of poet-king.

Knowles's Alfred illustrates all of the Bolingbrokean principles described above. The building of character in "the school of affliction," is the first of the principles to be illustrated in the play. When he first appears (2. 2), Alfred is a hunted fugitive living incognito in a peasant's hut. He believes that his wife and child are dead, victims of Danish cruelty. In his first soliloquy, he is philosophical, revealing

that he is an apt student in "the school of affliction." Armed with Christian fortitude, he humbly submits to being subject to the will of a peasant woman who has a low regard for his worth, spurns his skills, and taxes his patience. It is what he calls a "lesson of dependence . . . taught unto a king--/ Taught by a peasant's wife, whom fate hath made / Her sovereign's monitress." He is aware that the adversity he is experiencing is necessary to his development as a king and as a man. A king, Alfred realizes in a soliloquy that echoes Lear's "naked wretches" speech, must experience poverty and deprivation if he is to be a humane ruler. Palace walls, he observes, insulate kings from hunger, nakedness, and simple things like nature's destructiveness:

> So much for poverty! Adversity's
> The nurse for kings;--but then the palace gates
> Are shut against her!--They would else, have hearts
> Of mercy oft'her--gems, not always dropp'd
> In fortune's golden cup. What thought hath he
> How hunger warpeth honesty, whose meal
> Still waited on the hour? Can he perceive
> How nakedness converts the kindly milk
> Of nature into ice, to whom each change
> Of season--yea, each shifting of the wind,
> Presents his fitting suit? Know he the storm
> That makes the valiant quail, who hears it only
> Through the safe wall, its voice alone can pierce;
> And there talks comfort to him with the tongue,
> That bids, without, the shelterless despair?
> Perhaps he marks the mountain wave and smiles
> So high it rolls!--while on its fellow hangs
> The fainting seaman glaring down at death
> In the deep trough below!

Suffering, Alfred understands, is part of his education, and he believes that he will be a better king because his human sympathies have been enlarged by it:

> Let me extract
> Riches from poverty: from sufferings
> Blessings; that if I e'er assume again
> The sceptre, I may be more a king
> By being more a man!

Alfred thus can accept the adversity of his present situation and even embrace it as an opportunity rather than a punishment. This awareness give Alfred the patience to endure the scorn of Maude, the peasant's wife, who treats the King as a menial servant and scolds him for burning her cakes, an episode that will be closely examined at the end of this chapter.

Alfred spontaneously gives voice to another Bolingbrokean principle in the aside he speaks after he hears a report that some of his loyal solders are in the area searching for him (2:2):

> The land's not lost
> That's left a son to struggle for't! The king
> That's firmly seated in his people's hearts--
> His proper throne--although supplanted,
> reigns.[156]

[156] Cf. William Tell: "The country's never lost, that's left a son / To struggle with the foe that would enslave her!"--which are the last two lines of Tell.

Alfred realizes that the true source of a king's power lies in the "affection" (to use Bolingbroke's term) his people have for him. To him, the report is evidence that he is close to the hearts of his subjects, which, if true, means that he still reigns even though his country has been subjugated by the Danes and the Danish king refers to him as a "throneless king." The idea that true kingship rests on a king's ability to win the hearts of his subjects is one that Alfred repeats several times in the play. The loyalty of his soldiers in his absence and the unquestioning obedience they pay him when he reveals his identity (2.2) is may be taken as proof that Alfred enjoys the popularity of his subjects, even though the only common "people" to appear in the play are the peasant couple who own the cottage where he is hiding. Alfred's popularity is later emphasized when one of the soldiers states (5:2), "The people live but for their king!" The loyalty that the cottage peasants display when Alfred reveals his identity illustrates this statement. While still a disguised observer in the peasant hut, Alfred is deeply moved by his soldiers' display of heartfelt allegiance to him. After listening to an inspirational song praising the king as a hero and savior in a dark time, Alfred reveals his feelings in another aside:

> My heart o'erflows--I shall betray myself!
> What could my palace boast to vie with this?
> Not for its carved roof would I now exchange

> These rafters, 'neath whose shelter--
> vanquish'd,stripp'd
> Of crown and sceptre--I am still a king--
> My people's heart's my throne![157]

Prior to this demonstration of allegiance, Alfred is given an opportunity to act like a Patriot King by quashing a silly quarrel that breaks out when a veteran soldier questions the right of a younger soldier to sit at the head of the dinner table in same the peasant cottage where Alfred, unknown to them, is hiding. The two soldiers are at the point of settling the dispute with swords when Alfred, still disguised, boldly interposes himself and succeeds in shaming the disputants by appealing to their sense of patriotism:

> Hold!--Stop!--Which side's
> The Dane? I stand for England! Can it be
> Your Saxons all! What! Are your foes so few
> You make one of each other? Fie, Sirs! Fie!

Here Alfred achieves on a small scale what Bolingbroke considers to be the "the great object of a Patriot King": "the union of his people."[158] That he is able to exercise authority without identifying himself is evidence of his charisma as a natural leader. The soldiers obey him without knowing why. The episode illustrates

[157] Act II, sc. 2.

[158] Mallet's ed., p. 93.

the Patriot King's ability to affect the behavior of others and inspire obedience. In Bolingbroke's words,

> . . . the sure effects of his appearance will be admiration and love in every honest breast . . . submission and resignation in all . . . . innumerable metamorphoses, like those which poets feign, will happen in every deed. . . .[159]

The mysterious charisma--a kind of spiritual power--possessed by a Patriot King is again demonstrated at the end of the scene when a party of Danish soldiers is spotted. Facing down the prudent counsel of one soldier to beat a hasty retreat, Alfred--now armed with a sword and shield, but still disguised--decisively takes command and order the soldiers to follow a tactical plan to ambush the enemy. The stage directions read: "They mechanically obey him, alternately looking at each other and at Alfred, with an expression of wonder and inquiry."[160]

The most powerful demonstration of Alfred's power to transform others is the uncanny influence he exerts over Guthrum, king of the Danes, when he visits the Danish camp disguised as a minstrel, accompanied with Edwy (3.1). Here is should be noted that Knowles's treatment of Alfred's decision to adopt a minstrel's disguise and enter the Danish camp differs from all

[159] page?

[160] End of Act II, sc. 2.

other previous treatments in that he invests it with symbolic significance. In addition to the practical motive of learning, "the state and numbers of the enemy," Alfred's intent in presenting himself as a minstrel is to rescue poetry from the marginalized status it has been relegated to by the Danes. The dishonored status of the poet under the Danes is conveyed though a story Alfred tells to Oddune of a solitary bard he has observed (Act II, sc. 3). After being maltreated and mocked by the Danes, the bard secluded himself from society and is now playing his harp to no purpose at the bottom of deep cavern. Alfred declares his intention to use the outcast bard's harp as a weapon to liberate England:

> There is a place
> In the glen, where, of its shaggy vesture scant,
> Its sides stand bare, and their huge ribs expose
> Of solid rock; so giddy steep withal,
> That down direct from the precipitous verge
> You many fathoms look.--There have I mark'd
> A lonely wight at the bottom couch'd, with harp
> Playing to the idle echoes by the hour,
> Admiring how they mock'd him--I will use
> That harp!--will use it to expel the foe,
> That thrust its master from the shining hall
> To the dim cavern-cell; spill'd his heap'd dish--
> O'erturn'd his cup, from all sides running o'er,
> And cast him, with that golden song of his,
> To roots and water. . . .

Since Alfred is not aware that his wife and son have both survived the fire, his motive in undertaking this risky venture is solely for the good of his country, which remains his only reason for living. As Alfred says to Oddune:

> Queen and child,
> Except my country, Oddune, I have none --
> That, now, is Alfred's all!--His all, for which
> Alone he cares to live!

Oddune, it may be noted here, is a brave and loyal retainer, but he is not the wise, old counselor of the masques. His most important action in the play is capturing the Raven banner from the Danes and laying at Alfred's feet in the same scene.[161] The importance that Knowles places on Alfred's visit to the Danish camp can be measured by the fact that it occupies two full acts (3 and 4). In contrast, in Bicknell's and O'Keeffe's plays, Alfred's visit is extremely brief and without thematic significance. In Knowles's play, Alfred's presence in the Danish camp is necessary to tie the main and subplots together and to develop the stature of Alfred as both Patriot King and poet.

When Alfred first enters, Guthrum is so "struck by [his] deportment"[162] that he involuntarily rises from his throne, as if captivated by Alfred's charismatic presence. "Who are thou? What are thou?" he asks Alfred. Alfred's answer is a concise defense of poetry

[161] This is the only scene in which the Raven banner is mentioned. Oddune describes how it was made, its magical property, and how the Saxons captured from the Danes. Guthrum and the other Danes do not lament it loss and by the end of the plays its existence is forgotten.

[162] Stage direction.

that has a Shellyean ring to it. It is reasonable to assume that it states Knowles's own belief in the primacy of the poet and poetry in the society:

> I'm the bard
> The son of fantasy,
> Whose world's o'er the air--to mortal vision else
> Impalpable--a paragon to this!--
> Where he communes with forms, whose radiancy
> Outshines the lustre of earth's fairest things!
> Whose title, from above, earth can't confer
> Or take away! whose smile is coveted
> By beauty--valour--their bright mirror, where
> They see themselves more bright! whose tributaries
> Are kings themselves; whose gorgeous state but ser
> To swell his strain, that doeth emblazon them
> Beyond their deeds or titles!

The meaning of these words is lost on Guthrum, but he is impressed, mainly with the minstrel's boldness, a quality he admires, and he requests that Alfred sing a song about beauty. Beauty, sings Alfred, "is the prized of all,"

> She commands the master-string,
> That which lends it all its fire!
> Wanting which he could not sing--
> Rhymeless, numberless, might be,
> Nor e'er had won a name for deathless minstrelry.

Guthrum is so captivated by the minstrel that he commands him to attend him, sensing that he had much to learn from him, as indeed he does:

> Thou art not old--and yet, thou looks't not young;
> Thy brow with wisdom graver than with years--
> I'd talk with you; for great, unless I err,

> Your skill in lore, we little care to search
> Whose school is the battle-field.

Alfred's warm reception in his poet's persona contrasts with the humiliating treatment suffered by the bard whose harp Alfred is using. That Guthrum has much to learn is evident from his earlier contemptuous reaction when he discovers that a packet of papers which has been found in Alfred's tent are poems:

> It matters not,
> A string of Saxon rhymes! Can Alfred fight?
> Who flourishes the pen so much, can scarce
> Be master of the sword! He plays the harp,
> As they report--the harp! Give me the strain
> of the resounding shield![163]

Guthrum's falsely assumes that a man with poetic and musical gifts cannot also be a outstanding warrior; in other words, he cannot conceive of a King Alfred.

In future scenes, Alfred is shown in the capacity of a tutor or teacher to the proud, wilful, autocratic Danish king, who is an obvious foil to the Poet-Patriot King. Guthrum lacks wisdom, humility, compassion, self-control, and many other virtues that the Patriot King possesses. But he is generous-hearted and willing to be instructed by Alfred and has the capacity to broaden his mind under his tutelage. The emphasis on the close

[163] The Licensing copy contains only the line, "It matters not, / A string of Saxon rhymes."

personal relationship, arising out the Danish king's need for advice and counsel, that develops between Alfred and the Danish king (a motif that Knowles may have picked up from Home's play, where it is touched upon without being developed) is one of the hallmarks of Knowles's individualized treatment of the Alfred story. Guthrum's respect for Alfred's wisdom is dramatized several times when at a loss at how to deal with his formerly submissive but now independently minded daughter, he turns to Alfred for counsel (3. 2):[164]

> Now, minstrel, prove thou'rt wise!
> I found thee so when we discoursed of peace!
> of war!--<u>the duties subjects owe to kings, and kings to subjects</u>. Now propound the means
> Behooves a father take, who would untie
> A willful daughter's tongue! [my italics]

The offstage conversations referred to in the italicized line concerning the mutual duties of king and subject are an indication that Guthrum is willing to be tutored in Bolingbrokean principles by Alfred, who serves as a kind of human manual in kingship.[165] Before he can be an enlightened king, however, Guthrum, must become an enlightened father, a process that

[164] The particulars of this father-daughter relationship in Part II, Chapter 4.

[165] One may presume that in this conversations Alfred is enlightening the Danish king by introducing him to ideas found in both Bolingbroke's and Hazlitt's essays.

requires that he undergo an agon. By Act IV, an aside spoken by Alfred (4:1) indicates that the Patriot King has come to respect Guthrum's "regal nature," which shines through despite his failings of temperament and incorrigibly autocratic personality:

> A regal nature his!
> There's something in thee, Guthrum, I could claim
> Close kindred with. . . .[166]

Guthrum can only tolerate so much truth, however, After Alfred's wife, Elswith, enters the Danish camp and infuriates him by speaking of Danish atrocities, Alfred infuriates him further by defending her words as truth and continuing her indictment (4.1):

> But one she seems 'amongst thousands, whom thy sword,
> Ravenous of conquest, hath made widows of,
> And childless mothers! Who, this hour thou feast'st,
> Are famishing!--in their own land, without
> Abode or food--and curse the hour when first
> Thou trod'st upon their shores!

The strong exception Guthrum takes to the words "in their own land" reveals his essential megalomaniacal personality and leads to a confrontation between him and Alfred:

> Surely I heard thee not! In their own land?
> 'Tis mine!--all mine!--their land!--air! water!--they
> Themselves!--All mind! Mine! Mine! They! Thou! Ay, tho
> That mock'st me! bravest me!--thou, I say, art mine!

[166] Spoken as an aside in Act IV, sc. 1.

> My thrall!--my slave!--a worm!--thing for my foot
> To tread upon! Confess it!

Alfred, of course, defies Guthrum, refusing to "confess" anything of the kind. The word "slave," touches the essential British nerve ("Britons never will be slaves"). In calling Alfred a "slave" and "worm," Guthrum suddenly becomes, in British eyes, the stereotypical ogre, a tyrant who tramples on British freedom:

> I'm Guthrum!
> He whose breathe's thy life! A look--
> An only look of whose incensed wreath
> Might strike thee dead! Dost thou not tremble!

Here, Guthrum, comes closest to being a villain; puffed up with his own sense of absolute power, he sounds very much like Gesler when Tell is brought before him in chains. Guthrum goes further and commands Alfred to beg for his life. Alfred's refusal to do so and even denies that Guthrum has the power over his life. This defiance fills Guthrum with a wonder that overcomes his anger:

> Was never Guthrum braved
> By mortal man before!--Not power to take!--
> Guthrum is but a child!--Strong as my wrath.
> My stronger wonder overpowers it quite
> And from a tempest quells me to a calm!

Paradoxically, Alfred's defiance of his power has the same calming effect on Guthrum that his daughter's soo-

thing words have. The wonder that Alfred's defiance evokes in Guthrum is equivalent to the awe that Appius and Gesler feel in the presence of virtue. The difference between the two villains and Guthrum is that Guthrum is capable of surprising the audience by submitting to the power of virtue whereas Appius and Gesler are not--Gesler, in fact, is driven by an desire to destroy it. Guthrum's desire is to benefit from it. "You're always right!" says Guthrum to Alfred.

The conflict between Bolingbrokean principle and personal feelings in Alfred is dramatized when Alfred's queen, Elswith, drawn by the minstrel's music, unexpectedly appears (4.1). She soon recognizes him and he her, although she is emaciated from lack of food. At the same time, his captive young son is brought forward. As Alfred believed both his wife and son to be dead, their presence is a joyous discovery, but he must stifle any public expression of emotion. When Guthrum declares that the price he is asking to release the queen and young prince is Alfred's crown, Alfred explains to the Danish king the principle that forbids a king to consent to surrender his throne for a personal motive:

> He wears it for his people,
> The day he put it on he vow'd himself
> Of them the father! To their parent land
> It wedded them! His proper consort she!
> 'Twixt him and them, he knows not wife,
> or child. . . .

This is to say that a Patriot King's highest duty is to the people he rules, not his family; to surrender his throne would be to betray his duty. As Alfred later tells Oddune, the ransom "he ask'd [i.e., "my people"] your king could not afford to pay (5:2)." To the Danish king, who understands paternal love in a concrete, personal sense only, the minstrel's words make no sense because they describe what is, for him, an abstraction. A king who would chose his "people" over his family, in his eyes, lacks "nature" and "heart." Alfred's reply is that a king who puts his office above personal considerations (i.e., the Patriot King) has more rather than less of nature because he possesses

> The command of nature. The attribute of kings
> who feel their titles. . . .

Alfred's words lead Guthrum, recalling the poet-minstrel's earlier description of himself as "The son of fantasy / Whose world's o'er the air," to mock the poet-minstrel as an airy dreamer:

> Well thou said'st
> Thy world was for the air! Thou dost not speak
> Of things of earth! Thy sayings are not sooth!
> I would thy king were here to prove thee but
> A dreamer! With those jewels in his eye,
> He would to see his crown!

Guthrum's identification of the kingly ideal that Alfred represents with poetic vapours reveals the nar-

rowness of his mind. Alfred is about to leave the Danish camp with permission to seek out King Alfred and deliver Guthrum's message to him when his adherence to principle is put to the test. His wife, conferring with him privately, questions how he could leave her and his son behind if he loves them. Displaying "the command of nature" that is required of a Patriot King, Alfred tells his wife that as king he must overrule the loving husband and father in him, and he asks his tearful queen to show herself worthy of being his consort by accepting his answer (which she does):

> Paramount of all,
> My public function! Husband-father-friend--
> All titles, and all ties are merged in that!
> Approve thyself the consort of a king!

After escaping from the Danish camp, Alfred joins the army of soldiers assembled in Selwood forest (5.2), but does not disclose his identity immediately. He listens to the faithful old warrior Oddune, next in command after Alfred, rallying the troops in his absence. Then, after one of the soldiers exclaims that the English people live for Alfred's sake, Alfred identifies himself in an outburst of intense passion, after which he "bursts into tears."[167] This venting of emotion is a cartharis for Alfred, whose emotions have

[167] The stage directions after his words read: "Bursts into tears. The chief and general soldiers seem affected."

been stifled, for one reason or another, up to this time. Early in the play (2.2), Alfred reveals that despair prevented him from sheding tears at the tomb of his supposedly dead wife and child:

> I sat upon their tomb one day--one night.
> Then, first, I felt the thraldom of despair!
> The despot, he! He would not let me weep!
> There were the fountains of my tears as dry
> As they had never flow['d. To bursting swell'd
> My heart; and yet no sign would he let forth
> With vent to give it ease!

Later, in the Danish camp, when he discovers that his wife and son are alive, he must deliberately stifle his joy. The outburst of words that follows his outburst of tears, meant to convey Alfred's fatherly love for his people, was probably the most emotionally demanding moment in the play for Macready:

> The King
> Lives only for his people! Oh, my people!
> You are the drops of blood that make your king!
> And do I see you once again in arms!

After Alfred reveals himself to the Saxon army assembled at Selwood Forest, he informs them that his wife and child are "in the spoiler's power" (5.3.) He then delivers a stirring rhetorical speech that rouses his men's patriotism by appealing to their feelings for hearth and home and the domestic values by the Danes. The last eight lines, which are here omitted, concluded with the sentence, "Strike till your're free, or fall!"

> Now think you on the things
> You most do love! Husbands and fathers on
> Their wives and children--lovers upon their mistresses-
> And all upon their country! When you use
> Your weapons, think on the beseeching eyes
> To whet them could have lent you tears for water.
> Oh, now be men or n ever! From your hearths
> Thrust the unbidden feet, that from their nooks
> Your aged fathers drove--your wives and babes!
> The couches your fair-handed daughters used
> To spread, let not the vaunting stranger press,
> Weary from spoling you! Your roofs that hear
> The wanton riot of the intruding guest
> That mocks their masters--clear them for the sake
> Of the manhood, to which all that's precious clings,
> Else perishes. The land that bore you--oh!
> Do honour to her!--Rescue her--Revenge her, or
> Ne'er call her mother more! Come on, my friend!
> And where you take your stand upon the field,
> Thence, howsoever you advance, resolve
> A foot you'll ne'er recede; while from the tongues
> Of womanhood and childhood, helplessness
> Invokes you to be strong! Come on! Come on!

Alfred speaks of revenge, but he himself displays kingly magnanimity and mercifulness after the Danes are defeated and he personally subdues Guthrum in combat, without wounding him. On condition that the Danish king convert to Christianity, Alfred installs him as king of Northern England:

> Guthrum, live
> The friend of Alfred! Serve the God he serves!
> To wear a crown, thou needs't not fight for one
> Except to keep it. Fair Northumbria
> Receives thee for her king--[168]

[168] Act V, sc. 3.

The play ends with Alfred commemorating his victory over the Danes by establishing the institution of trial by jury, which, in effect, limits the power of the monarchy in perpetuity for the common good. The rights of the individual are thus protected against a king's exercise of arbitrary power. In Alfred's words, it is

> an act
> As shall from future kings remove the power
> To make their public functions pander to
> Their private gust!

Born of a sense of duty that is indistinguishable from love, this statesmanlike act of royal largesse is Alfred's gift to a loyal people. It establishes a mechanism for implementing an egalitarian ideal within the realm of law. As Alfred tells his soldiers (5:3):

> private right,
> Which guarded, fortifieth, more than arms,
> The conservator of the public weal,
> Be sacred even from the scepter's touch!
> Thus to a people faithful to their king,
> A faithful king an institution gives,
> That makes the lowly cottage lofty as
> The regal dome--holds justice paramount
> Of all--before her throne the peasant and
> The king himself on equal footing brings!

In establishing trial by jury Alfred fulfills a cardinal Bolingbrokean principle, namely that

> The good of the people is the ultimate and
> true end of government. . . . [that] the
> greatest good of a people is their liberty

> . . . . [and that] without liberty no happiness can be enjoyed by society. The obligation, therefore, to defend and maintain the freedom of such constitutions will appear most sacred to a Patriot King.[169]

Thus Alfred "has struck a blow for liberty!"[170] which is stronger that can be accomplished by force of arms because it lays a cornerstone of the English constitution. Guthrum, newly enlightened by Alfred's example to the nature of royal duty, points the moral for the audience:

> Great the victory
> That kings gain o'er themselves. Blest are the heads
> That bow to sway like thine!

If William IV attended a performance of Knowles's play and witnessed the enthusiasm of audiences,[171] he would have understood that the nation was waiting expectantly, not for another King Alfred, but for a king who could be, at the least, a leader respectful of and even inspired by the Christian morality and political ideals for which the Anglo-Saxon stood. Imploring the help of God like Alfred, he might humbly nurture the spirit of liberty, not by military means but being

[169] Bolingbroke, Works 2: 391.

[170] Oddune's words to Alfred's soldiers in Selwood Forest.

[171] I have not been able to determined whether or not William IV attended a performance of Alfred the Great.

an pious, moral, and enlightened monarch. In the political climate of 1831, being such a monarch meant serving as a catalyst in bringing about reform at a time when the nation seemed to many observers to be on the verge of revolution. The implied message that seems to be directed to William in Alfred the Great--the most politically overt of Knowles's plays--is made explicit in the dedication--is that, as Bolingbroke wrote in The Idea of a Patriot King, "A Patriot is the most powerful of reformers."[172]

[172] Bolingbroke, Works 2: 397.

PART II

KNOWLES IN THE CONTEXT OF EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY DRAMA AND DRAMATURGY

Chapter 1

The Drama: Change, Continuity, and Division

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the drama took its cue from developments in the theater and was increasingly dominated by theatrical values. A sign of this domination is that few dramatic works of this period can stand alone as texts, independent of their theatrical milieu. "Where the theater led, the drama followed,"[1] is how one recent historian of the theater sums up the handmaidenly status of drama to the theater at this time. It was if the theater had taken drama captive. The aim of this chapter describe the captive state of the drama in the immediate decades preceding and during the time he began writing. This chapter contains three sections: the first is entitled "The Co-existence of New and Old"; and the second "Drama's Divided State," which concerns the unnatural polarization of the drama into legitimate and illegitimate that was characteristic of this period. The theatrical conditions that dominated the direction that drama are fully discussed in the next part of this study.

[1] Michael Booth, Prefaces to English Nineteenth-Century Theatre (Manchester: U of Manchester P, n.d.) 3.

A. The New Co-existing with the Old

In surveying the drama of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century theater, one is impressed with the continuity of repertory in this age of revolution. Even a cursory examination of the playbills of the period reveals the inherent conservatism of the English stage: Shakespeare and stock plays made up the backbone of the early nineteenth-century repertory, just as they had in the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, in this period, when history itself--as a result of the French Revolution--became theatrical, it must be acknowledged that the theater and its drama underwent a revolution (non-violent to be sure) of its own. The revolution took place in 1792-1812, the period when the two patent theaters were enlarged and rebuilt more than once and when their monopolistic hold on the drama was challenged by a mushrooming rise of minor theaters. In the words of Michael Booth, this period is marked by a "social and theatrical change which meant the end of an old and established order and the development of new patterns of patronage, taste, and drama that transformed the theatre."[2] It was during this period that the theater "was becoming more dependent upon novelties

[2] Michael R. Booth, "The Social and Literary Context," The Revels History of Drama in English, ed. Michael R. Booth et. al (London: Methuen, 1975) 6: 7.

than upon standard plays."[3] It was more dependent, too, on visual stimulation. As one young contemporary playgoer observed of audiences: "they do to see, and to hear, the play."[4] By the time Virginius was staged in 1820 the revolution was over and the new patterns were firmly fixed.[5]

With the enlargement and subsequent democratization of the patent theaters audiences in the 1790s, the drama developed in the direction of spectacle and melodrama to satisfy the taste of new audiences.[6] That taste was for a theatrically-oriented dramaturgy that gave audiences an experience of "total theater." Audiences wanted a theater that aroused "the emotions directly through theatrical techniques rather than stimulating thought by dialogue."[7] The taste for total theater existed before the French Revolution, but the Revolution was a powerful stimulus to making theater more of an existential reality because it gave history the appearance of theatre. It also gave birth

[3] Alan Downer, "Players and Painted Stage: Nineteenth Century Acting," PMLA, 61 (1946) 522.

[4] Actors and Editors, a Poem; by an Undergraduate (London, 1817), quoted in Downer, "Players and Painted Stage," 524.

[5] It may be added that these conditions lasted well beyond the Robertson-Bancroft era of the 1860s.

[6] The nature of the new audiences is described in the next chapter.

[7] Gary J. Scrimgeour, "Drama and the Theatre in the Early Nineteenth Century," diss., Princeton U, 1968: 551

to melodrama, a new form that soon became the supreme in the theater.

In regard to the visual component that became so important to the drama in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Scrimgeour makes the important point that "spectacular drama [i.e., a drama of visual effects rather than words] was not merely new to the English tradition but antipathetic to it, and that it clashed with the previous drama and temporarily drove it from the boards."[8] This clash first occurred in a way that was startlingly noticeable and disturbing (to conservative observers like Genest and Boaden) in the last decades of the eighteenth century. The source of the visual influence on drama, however, was not history itself. It was opera and pantomime, two popular eighteenth century forms that maintained their popularity in the early nineteenth century among all classes. It is often forgotten that pantomime was the most popular form of the age, and that a clown, Joey Grimaldi, not Edmund Kean or William Charles Macready, enjoyed the most popularity over the longest time on the London stage in the early nineteenth century.[9]

[8] Sccrimgeour, diss., 84.

[9] Joseph Grimaldi (1778-1837) was forced to retire from the stage in 1823 by a disabiliting illness. For an authoritative account of his life and times, see Richard Findlater, Joe Grimaldi: His Life and Theatre, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978).

Martin Meisel has described the dramaturgical aspect of the revolution that took place in the drama in the last decade of the eighteenth and the first decade of the nineteenth centuries as "a change in the relationship of the subordinate parts to the design of the whole" and "a change in the fundamental building block of the play."[10] According to Meisel, the old "building block" (or "unit of action") of a play, which was "transitive and rhetorical," was replaced by a new one that was "intransitive" and pictorial.[11] The early nineteenth-century audience's impatience with the old dramaturgy was shockingly demonstrated when it hissed the plays of Vanbrugh and Congreve at Drury Lane in 1819.[12]

In the new pictorial dramaturgy, the emphasis was placed on what were called "situations." As defined by Edward Mayhew in 1840 in his Stage Effect; or, The Principles which Command Success in the Theater, a situation is

> some strong point in a play likely to command applause; where the action is wrought to a climax, where the actors strike attitudes, and form what they call 'a picture,' during the exhibition of which a pause takes place; after which the action is renewed, not con-

[10] Meisel, "Speaking Pictures," 51

[11] Meisel, "Speaking Pictures" 51-52.

[12] Barry Sutcliffe, Introduction, Plays by George Colman the Younger (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983) 8.

> tinued. . . . In its purposes it bears a strong resemblance to the conclusion of a chapter in a novel.[13]

In Meisel's words, "from about 1770-1870, the term situation implied a pictorial effect in drama, and effect was likely to mean a strong situation realized pictorially."[14] Mayhew's definition of a "situation" is virtually indistinguishable from a "dramatic tableau," which, to quote Meisel again, "presented a readable, picturesque, frozen arrangements of living figures" for the purpose of temporarily arresting the action.[15] These pantomimic pictorializations of emotion were calculated claptraps. In Sheridan's The Critic (1779), Puff explains that the objective of the new dramaturgy is to obtain the greatest applause "without the assistance of language, sentiment or character."[16] The influence of this pictorial aesthetic on Hazlitt's judgment as a drama critic is seen in his review of Virginius. One of the reasons that he praised Knowles's tragedy so highly as an acting play was that it lent itself so well to pictorial staging:

> Besides the merits of Virginius as a literary composition, it is admirably adapted to the

[13] Quoted in Meisel, "Speaking Pictures" 52.

[14] Meisel, "Speaking Pictures" 54.

[15] Meisel, "Speaking Pictures" 61.

[16] R.B. Sheridan's The Critic.

> stage. It presents a succession of pictures. We might suppose each scene almost to be copied from a beautiful bas-relief, or to have formed a group on some antique vase.[17]

Hazlitt is here referring to the pictorialism that inhered in the text and that was realized in the staging. The effect created through the arrangement or composition of figures on the stage is difficult if not impossible to appreciate from reading a text.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a variety of non-verbal means were employed to stimulate applause, including visual, aural, and ingenious kinetic effects achieved through the use of complex stage machinery. In Meisel's words,

> 'real' waves, ships sailing off the stage or inking through it, forts blowing up and tenements burning down--these too were part of the dramatist's arsenal. . . . sensation in its primitive sense, but sensation charged with wonder over the imitation of a difficult reality or the creation of a marvelous impossibility, was the underlying principle of dramatic effect.[18]

The fact that the "scenographic art on the one hand and the spectacle of actor and grouping on the other were

[17] London Magazine, no. 7, July, 1820, Howe: 18: 346.

[18] Meisel, "Speaking Pictures" 54.

independent and even mutually interfering effects"[19] wase not troubling to audiences of the time.

With hindsight, it is clear that the drama of the early nineteenth century theater was blindly and spasmodically but nevertheless inexorably moving away from the traditionalism of its Elizabethan heritage toward realism. The movement toward realism can clearly be seen in the increasing illusionism of scenic design and the innovations in acting style toward the expressive, the psychological and the illustrative that marked the late eighteenth century stage.[20] These tendencies became more pronounced and extreme in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

In praising Kean, it is notable that Hazlitt uses the new aesthetic criterion of pictorialism: in his acting of Shylock and Richard III, Hazlitt finds "a perpetual succession of striking pictures."[21] In discussing acting styles, one cannot ignore differences among the performance genre. Still, one should not necessarily assume that there was an essential dif-

[19] Meisel, "Speaking Pictures" 56.

[20] See Sybil Rosenfeld, A Short History of Scene Design in Great Britain (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1973) 87-110. The tendency to exploit the pictorialism and illusionism in scenic design is observable in Garrick's theater long before the French Revolution, especially after he hired De Louthenbourg as a stage designer in 1771. Realism was also illustrated in the the acting style of Garrick, Mackin, and Cooke.

[21] William Hazlitt, Complete Works, ed. Howe 5: 184, quoted in Meisel, "Speaking Pictures" 56.

ference between the acting style of tragedy and melodrama. The contrary is true, according to Conrad Bishop:

> Since most actors were called upon to play in all genres, staging patterns of all genres were very similar, and a successful effect in one genre would likely be transferred to another.[22]

The new dramaturgy is more evident in the crude melodrama, which exploited it to the hilt, than in dialogue-drama, but it is evident there as well, most conspicuously in pictorialized staging. In fact, the demand that drama feed the eye affected the staging of all drama except farce, which is by definition visual.[23] The predilection for staging Shakespeare's plays illustratively has already been noted.[24] The opening of Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery in 1789 shows clearly that the taste for illustrated Shakespeare was well established in the late eighteenth century.[25] This

[22] Bishop Joy Conrad, "Melodrmatic Acting: Concept and Technique in the Performance of Early Nineteenth Century English Melodrama, diss., Stanford U, 1967: 7.

[23] For a good discussion of the rise of this form see Scrimgeour, 82-146.

[24] See Introduction.

[25] John Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery opened in Pall Mall "with the avowed intention of establishing an English School of History Painting"--Johnathan Bate, Shakespeare Constitutions (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1989) 5. It was the first national gallery. It closed a decade later only because the war had driven Boydell, a titan of the print market, into bankruptcy. The Gallery exhibited painting illustrating subjects from Shakespeare's plays painted by the leading painters of the time. At its height it con-

taste should be seen in the larger context of the English fascination for pictorial illusionism in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. London was a city of "shows" or "exhibitions"[26] as Richard Altick has wonderfully shown in The Shows of London.[27] They were a prime attraction for foreign tourists, like the theaters themselves. Ingeniously executed and engineered visual exhibitions like panoramas and dioramas[28] catered to "the sheer sense of wonder" as well as to "an insatiable appetite for novelty."[29] For the price of shilling or less, these entertainments, again like the theaters, offered Londoners "momentary escape from the dullness, the mental vacuity, the constriction of horizons [and], the suppression of imagination which were too often the price of life in

tained one hundred and seventy paintings. A Folio of engravings of the paintings was published in 1805. See Bate, Shakespeare 45-58.

[26] For a detailed and fascinating history of the kinds of exhibitions available to Londoners see Richard Altick, The Shows of London. In particular, see the chapters on Panoramas (10, 11, 13) on "The Diorama" (12) and "Scenes Optical, Mechanical and Spectral." A second generation Eidophusikon was publically exhibited at various locations in London from 1789-1800.

[27] Richard Altick, The Shows of London. Altick's fascinating book (profusely illustrated) includes a wealth of information about a variety of public exhibitions.

[28] Altick describes the diorama as "a flat picture with an illusion of depth, and, most important, capable for changes in lighting so dramatic as to alter it whole aspect"--Altick, 162. Among the illusion it was used to create was that of time passing--Altick 201.

[29] Altick 1, 3.

the city."[30] The point to be stressed is that the fascination with visual effects in the society at large stimulated the appetite of the London theatrical public for a visually-oriented theater that feasted for the eye.

Early nineteenth-century theatergoers liked their Shakespeare illustrated with spectacular scenery and elaborate sets.[31] For example, a second or third generation version of the "Eidophusikon,"[32] a "miniature moving light-and-sound show" that De Louthenbourg had invented, was used to simulate the storm scene in the 1820 revival of King Lear that starred Kean.[33] Contrary to what one might expect, Kean was enthusiastic about using state-of-the-art stage technology to support his

[30] Altick, 2.

[31] For example, see Carol J. Carlisle, "Macready's Production of Cymbeline" in Foulkes 138-152. Carlisle writes of this 1843 production: "For his finale Macready created a 'striking and beautiful picture.'" For a detailed reconstruction of this picture, see Carlisle 149-150.

[32] Altick, The Shows of London, 3. For an account of Louthenbourg's invention, see 117-127. According to Altick, it was a synthesis of three existing genres: 1) the magic lantern and the Chinese shadows; 2) the use of transparencies, which were common in the theater of the 1770s, especially in pantomime; and 3) clockwork mechanical theaters. It was advertised as the "Eidophusikon, or Representation of Nature," and "Various Imitations of Natural Phenomena, represented by Moving Pictures" when Louthenbourg first presented it at his house in London in 1781--121.

[33] The storm scene was advertised on the playbill as "A Landstorm after the manner of Louthenberg [sic] Eideophusteon, designed by Marinari." Dated 27 April 1820, in the Harvard Theatre Collection.

performance in this instance, though he could not have been happy that the noises produced tended to drown out his voice.[34] The sold-out audiences came primarily, of course, to see Kean act the old king for the first time in London, but the visual (and aural) effects were also an attraction. The playbill lists eleven "exhibitions of scenery" which pictorialized scene locations that Shakespeare had left to the imagination--for example, "Gates of Gloster's Palace," "A View near Dover," and "A Prison." The extensive cutting of the text (and sometimes characters) that was necessary to accommodate such staging was a price that actors and audience were only too willing to pay. Kemble and Macready, the two great actor-managers of Knowles's time, appear to have believed that spectacle could only be as asset in a stage production and never, or rarely, a liability. This led to Shakespeare's plays beingtreated as texts for illustration. It was the pictorialization of Shakespeare which incensed Hazlitt, Lamb, and other Romantics and led them to turn away from Shakespearean productions in disgust.[35] Of course, actor-managers like Kemble, Elliston, and Macready took pains with staging to attract full houses, since good acting alone

[34] Christopher Murray, Robert William Elliston (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1975) 91.

[35] On the production of King Lear starring Kean, Charles Lamb commented on "the contemptible machinery by which they mimic the storm"--Works, 1: 107.

could not do so. Yet one should not reduce the increasing interest in elaborate staging in this period to a matter of economics. It stemmed from an aesthetic which eventually led, unwittingly, to the triumph of spectacle over the spoken word that is evident in the ultra-pictorialized Shakespearean productions of Samuel Phelps and Charles Kean at the end of the half century.[36]

Opponents of spectacularized Shakespeare, like Hazlitt, who sided with the actor against the scenographer, nevertheless still believed that non-verbal elements were essential in the staging of legitimate drama if mass audiences were to comprehend the meaning of the text:

> It is only when the poet's language is explained by the comment of gesture or some sudden change of look, or situation--that is. when tragedy is enlivened by pantomime, that it becomes intelligible to the greater part of the audience."[37]

The term "pantomime" in this context refers to "a language of gesture, attitude and facial expression."[38]

[36] Macready, it might be noted, disapproved of the excess of these productions.

[37] The London Magazine, no. 5, May, 1820, Howe: 18: 328. Cf. Le Fils naturel (1757) and the accompanying essay to Le Pere de famille (1758) of Diderot, who has been called "the true prophet of nineteenth-century pictorial drama"--Meisel, 54-55.

[38] Meisel note.

This language "pictorialized both character and emotional response in a manner deliberately larger than life and in ways that had to be harmonious, pleasing, and beautiful."[39] It could be both individualized and idiosyncratic as well as stylized and stereotypical. What was important about it is that it was "universally accessible to the visual understanding of audiences."[40]

While it is true that the popular drama increasingly overpowered and overshadowed the legitimate drama--with the exception of Shakespeare--in the early nineteenth century, it did not suddenly drive the stock pieces of the Georgian theater off the stage. The fading of the old pieces from the repertory was gradual, almost imperceptible. The fact that the old pieces continued to be produced suggests that they still pleased audiences, if not mass audiences at least a sizable segment of the playgoing public.

The revival of numerous old plays--comedies such as The Clandestine Marriage (1766), and tragedies such as Jane Shore (1714)--is evidence of the theater's ability to maintain a continuity with past tradition in a time of revolutionary change. In Covent Garden's 1819 season (the year before Knowles's debut there), for example, Shakespeare's plays and the stock pieces of

[39] Meisel note.

[40] Michael Booth, "Pictorial Acting and Ellen Terry," in Foulkes 78.

the Georgian theater still predominated.[41] Revivals of older tragedies included Rowe's Jane Shore, Otway's Venice Preserv'd (1682), Moore's The Gamester (1753), and eight by Shakespeare.[42] Revivals of older comedies included Goldsmith's She Stoops to Conquer (1773), Sheridan's School for Scandal (1777), Colman's The Jealous Wife (1761), Farquhar's Beaux Stratagem, Holcroft's The Road to Ruin (1792), Lillo's The London Merchant (1731), and three by Shakespeare.[43] With a total of fourteen productions, Shakespeare was well served. Eight of these productions were tragedies (Romeo and Juliet, Julius Caesar, The Merchant of Venice, Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, Richard III, and Coriolanus; three histories (Henry IV, Henry VIII, and Henry V; and three comedies (Twelfth Night, The Winter's Tale, and The Comedy of Errors. Revivals of relatively recent plays included Lewis's The Castle Spectre (1797), Kotzebue's The Stranger (1798), and Sheridan's Pizarro (1799), all melodramas,[44] Milman's

[41] This first part of this season ran from January 1 to July 19. After a summer recess, it continued on September 6 and ran until December 27. The total number of performance nights was two hundred and fifty nine.

[42] In chronological order: Romeo and Juliet, Henry IV, Part I, Henry VIII, Julius Caesar, The Merchant of Venice, Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, Henry V, Richard III, and Coriolanus.

[43] Twelfth Night, The Winter's Tale, and The Comedy of Errors..

[44] Of course these plays were not advertised as such. Pizarro, for example, was labelled as a tragedy.

Fazio, a tragedy, and three adaptations from Scott's novels, which fall into the category of melodramas.[45] Of the three new tragedies produced, Sheil's Evadne was the only success; Lewis's Fredolfo, and an adaptation of Schiller's Mary Stuart both failed. The following year at Covent Garden, when Knowles's Virginius was the successful new tragedy of the spring season (one of only two new tragedies[46]), the repertory displays the same preponderance of the tried and true. The case was identical at Drury Lane. Shakespeare and the stock plays continued to serve as the backbone of the repertory of both patent theaters throughout the decade of the 1820s.

The power of tradition and the ambition of star actors to shine in acting vehicles ensured that the legitimate drama--old and new--would retain a pride of place on the program regardless of the shifting of taste and the coming and goings of vogues.[47] The politics of major-minor theater rivalry was also a factor in the retention of dialogue drama in the repertory. For what was dubbed the "national drama"

[45] Guy Mannering, Rob Roy, and The Heart of Mid-lothian. The rage for staged versions of Scott's novels lasted from 1814-25--see Scrimgeour, 392.

[46] The other new tragedy in the 1820 season at Covent Garden was Damon and Pythias, which featured a choral epithalamian in Act III.

[47] This point is discussed is the next chapter.

was, after all, the ostensible reason for the existence of the patent theaters. In the midst of revolutionary change the patent theaters clung to the national dramatic heritage as a means of confirming and justifying their "legitimacy."[48] This explains why verse dramatists like Knowles, who perpetuated that heritage, were so esteemed.

B. The Drama Divided

It is in the early nineteenth century that a cleavage developed between drama as art and as entertainment. This bifurcated way of conceiving of drama is denoted by the terms "legitimate" and "illegitimate," which, descriptively, meant "legal" and "illegal." Originally, the term "legitimate" referred to the "regular forms" of spoken drama (tragedy, comedy, and farce), those genre reserved for performance in the "legitimate" theaters (in London, Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and the Haymarket) which by virtue of the Licensing Act of 1737 enjoyed a monopoly over such drama. But as tragedy and comedy became more irregular and mixed, it came to be applied to any dialogue-drama that emulated traditional models. The term "Illegitimate" described a variety of kinds of popular

[48] A definition of the terms "legitimate" and "illegitimate" is given in the next section.

drama, usually heavily dependent for its appeal on spectacle and music, that developed in the minor or "illegitimate" theaters. These minor theaters were restricted to performing musical entertainment. It is well known, however, how ingenious the minor theaters became in circumventing the law by incorporating songs, recitative and incidental music to dramatic pieces in order to disguise their dramatic nature. The term "burletta," impossible to define and therefore not subject to prohibition, was the "legal umbrella" under which this subterfuge was flagrantly practiced. The patent houses protested, but could do nothing, outside of costly and time-consuming litigation, to quash this infringement on their rights.[49] By the end of the 1820s, the minor theaters were asserting their right to produce serious drama in competition with the majors.

The terms "legitimate" and "illegitimate" were also used judgmentally by the conservative critical establishment who vainly sought to demarcate "boundaries between high art and mass culture."[50] "Legiti-

[49] Donohue, Theatre in the Age of Kean (Totowa: Rowman, 1975) 42. On the ambiguous "form" burletta, see 46-50. Shakespeare's plays and many of the stock pieces were favorite subjects for transmogrification into burletta.

[50] Stephen Watt, "Historical Drama and the 'Legitimate Theatre," in When They Weren't Doing Shakespeare: Essays on Nineteenth-Century British and American Theatre, eds. Judith L. Fisher and Stephen Watt (Athens and London: U of Georgia P, 1989) 187.

mate" was a term of commendation, used for drama that was traditional, and therefore, the implication was, of a higher quality. "Illegitimate" was a term of opprobrium, used to denigrate the newly emerging hybrid forms of spectacular and sensational drama that were aimed at satisfying the entertainment ethic of new audiences. The term "legitimate" came to connote a drama of superior quality based on literary merit, moral worth or other artistic criterion based on past models. As Scrimgeour puts it, the general view was that "the fewer the stage tricks, the more high-minded the play."[51] The tendency, however, was toward more and more stagetricks in the form of "melodramatic spectacle and animal extravaganza,"[52] whose stars were four-legged (horses, dogs, elephants) and winged (birds) rather than two-legged. When the "illegitimate" drama of "stagetricks" invaded the purlieus of the legitimate theater and dazzlingly and raucously proclaimed its presence, the conservative critical establishment registered its protest, lamenting the "decline" of the drama and the vitiation of audience taste. The protest was in vain. In spite of it, the illegitimate drama established a solid foothold on the patent house stages and eventually came to dominate the program.

[51] Scrimgeour 382.

[52] Revels 6: 110.

The rise of melodrama (or melo-drame, as it was originally spelled), a drama accompanied by music, caused a further muddying of the waters of formal and moral distinction. Melodrama was a malleable form which was, in Thomas Dibdin's words, "non-descript in the regular drama."[53] It exposed the insufficiency of the two terms to do justice to the emerging drama and compounded critical confusion in a way that was advantageous to the reputation of the minor theaters where musical drama first flourished.

It is on the basis of the popular or illegitimate drama that theater historians assert that the drama of this period is characterized by "vitality" and an "incessant experimentation and growth" rather than stagnancy or unhealthy decline.[54] The forms that were stagnating in this period were tragedy and comedy. As Scrimgeour puts it, "Tragedy and comedy failed, but drama flourished."[55]

For the uninitiated student of literature, reading the plethora of drama that was produced in this period is an exciting but also a bewildering experience because of the proliferation of dramatic kinds. Nicoll

[53] Thomas Dibdin, Reminiscences of Thomas Dibdin (London, 1927), 1: 336, quoted in Kurt Tetzeli V. Rosador, "Victorian Theories of Melodrama," Anglia, 95 (1977): 88.

[54] Scrimgeour, diss., 31.

[55] Scrimgeour, diss., 32.

lists sixty-six dramatic species and sub-species.[56] There is an appearance that anarchy reigned. "Perhaps the most confused period in the history of the English stage is around the year 1800," writes Bertrand Evans, when "new impulses were coming and going in every direction,"[57] without discernible direction or critical guidance. New foreign influences, mainly French and German were blending with old native ones. The result was eclecticism, experimentation, hybridization, and fragmentation of forms. The bustle of activity is confusing and seemingly anarchic. Theater journeymen churned out dramatic concoctions according to formula. In the last two decades of the eighteenth century and the first two of the nineteenth, "the conventional dramatic genres became in the nineteenth century so blended on the one hand and so fragmented on the other, that it is best to forget about definitions altogether," writes Booth.[58] The stage was driven by a hunger for novelty in the new audiences that could be satisfied only by spectacle and sensationalism. The new dramatic taste widened the already existing cleavage between the so-called "legitimate" and "illegitimate" drama.

[56] Nicoll 4: 246-247.

[57] Bertrand Evans, Gothic Drama from Walpole to Shelley (Berkeley: U of California P, 1947) 162.

[58] Booth, "Prefaces" xvii.

In the drama, the movement is more obvious in the illegitimate drama, but it is observable in the legitimate as well. What this period witnessed was the "destruction of a decayed dramatic tradition by one more vital and varied," writes Scrimgeour.[59] A new drama, "popular, inartistic, undisciplined, triumphed over the tradition we call "legitimate."[60] Knowles's poetic plays belong to the so-called "decayed tradition" that was in the process of being destroyed and displaced, however gradually. To win popularity in the theater, Knowles was obliged to draw from the sources of vitality that fed the popular drama.

Knowles's rapid rise to preeminence after 1820 was a result, in great part, of a theatrical void that resulted from the failure of the greatest literary figures of the age to write good acting drama. As Meisel puts it,

> The nineteenth century, a period of huge audiences and massive productivity in English drama, is strewn with the calamitously wrecked hopes of good, even great, poets and men of letters to create a drama that would not be simply popular but elevating, literary, endowed with high seriousness, and immortal like the tragedies of Shakespeare.[61]

[59] Scrimgeour, diss., 31

[60] Scrimgeour 3.

[61] Martin Meisel, Shaw and the Ninteenth-Century Theater (1963; New York: Limelight, 1968) 3.

This void was by no means new. It had existed from at least the early eighteenth century, when, it is generally agreed, "drama as a literary outlet" suffered a "deep decline" as a result of the deflection of artistic energies prose fiction and other narrative modes, and, in Paul Hunter's words, "cultural conduits were shifting from public and communal ones to private and subjective ones."[62]

In the early nineteenth century, the commercialization of the theater that took place to please mass audience taste discouraged many of the best writers from writing for the stage. "What encouragement has a man of Education and the feeling of a Gentleman to write either Comedy or Tragedy for Drury Lane?" asked Coleridge gloomily.[63] Although his Remorse (a reworking of Osorio, rejected by Sheridan in 1796) was a success in 1813, Coleridge soon gave up the theater in disgust.[64] Byron, who was the most savvy of all the Romantic writers in matters of the stage, asked, "Who

[62] J. Paul Hunter, "The World as Stage and Closet," in British Theatre and the Other Arts, 1660-1800 ed. Shirley Strum Kenny (Washington: Folger, 1984) 271-271, 279. In his article, Hunter explores this phenomemon, which contains an insightful analysis of what Hunter calls the "phenomenology of the English closet."

[63] Collected Lettes of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1956-1971) 4: 721, quoted in Webb 9.

[64] Coleridge interest in theatricality is evident The Fall of Robespierre, co-authored with Southey in 1794.

would condescend to the drudgery of the stage, and enslave himself to the humours, the caprices, the taste or tastelessness, of the age?"[65] And after witnessing the damning of Ina, a tragedy by Mrs. Wilmot, Byron wrote, "It is . . . a good warning not to risk or write tragedies. I never had much bent that way; but, if I had, this would have cured me."[66] Timothy Webb writes that Marino Faliero, the only one of Byron's plays staged in his lifetime was "in some senses. . . generated by an opposition to the practices of the contemporary stage"[67]

By default, then, the domain of legitimate drama in the early nineteenth century was ceded to lesser literary figures like Knowles, who virtually singlehandedly filled the literary void from the 1820s to the 1843, the year he stopped writing plays. In Meeks's words, "when melodrama, scenic extravaganzas, and crude foreign borrowings were threatening to submerge plays of an artistic nature, he strove to

[65] Medwin's Conversations of Lord Byron, ed. Ernest J. Lovell, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1966) 93, quoted in Webb, 42.

[66] Lord Byron, The Complete Poetical Works, ed. Jerome J. McCann, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980-86), 4: 290-291. On Byron's ambivalence about writing for the stage see David Erdman, "Byron's Stage Fright: The History of His Ambition and Fear of Writing for the Stage" English Literary History 7 (1939): 219-43.

[67] Webb 46.

preserve the high traditions of the English stage."[68] Intended as high praise, this statement basically means that Knowles wrote a number of stageworthy poetic dramas in emulation of the Elizabethan drama at a time when the stage was being flooded with so-called illegitimate forms of entertainment.[69]

Because he emulated the Elizabethan drama, Knowles was perceived to be on the side of the angels by "the critical keepers of the drama's conscience."[70] A playwright was obliged to follow the literary example of Shakespeare and the other Elizabethans if he wished to be recognized as a "legitimate" dramatist--a term with literary cachet. The word "Shakspearolatry" was not coined until the 1860s, but the phenomenon of exalting Shakespeare into a cultural icon dates from at least the middle of the eighteenth century and was consecrated in 1769, at David Garrick's Shakespeare Jubilee celebration at Stratford-on-Avon.[71] "After the Jubilee, it was universally acknowledged that Shakespeare was at the very least, the National Poet

[68] Leslie H. Meeks, Sheridan Knowles and the Theatre of His Time (Bloomington: Princpia P, 1933) 181.

[69] I use the term "Elizabethan" comprehensively to include Jacobean.

[70] The phrase is taken from Sutcliffe, "Introduction" 2.

[71] On the Jubilee, see Martha W. England, Garrick's Jubilee (n.p.: Ohio State UP, 1964; on Shakespeare's reputation, see Louis Marder, His Exits and His Entrances: The Story of Shakespeare's Reputation (London: John Murray, 1963) 17-41.

and for many people not merely a poet but a god," writes Jonathan Bate.[72] By the time Knowles was born, Shakespeare, "had become the nation's history teacher."[73] By the time Knowles stopped writing plays, he was elevated to the status of "the world's greatest moral teacher."[74] Knowles was himself one of the ardent worshipers at the shrine of what he called "the stupendous, universal genius of Shakespeare."[75]

The nostalgic flavor of Elizabethanism that was associated with Shakespeare was regarded as the hallmark of the serious dramatist and the serious dramatist was encouraged to "Elizabethanize."[76] Blank verse, soliloquizing, the five-act structure, and the multiple plot were de rigeur. One of the less fortunate results of this decorum is wordplay, archaisms and straining to write a pseudo-Elizabethan blank verse purified, of course, of Elizabethan bawdy.

The playfully defensive tone of G.H. Lewes's essay "On the Decline of the Drama," published in 1850 indi-

[72] Jonathan Bate, Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism 1730-1830 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 30.

[73] Marc Baer, Theatre and Disorder in Late Georgian London (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1992) 197.

[74] Baer, 197.

[75] James Sheridan Knowles, Lectures on Dramatic Literature (London, 1873) 91.

[76] See Richard Fletcher, English Romantic Drama, 1795-1843: A Critical Study (New York: Exposition P, 1966) 71.

cates how entrenched the idea of emulation of a moribund tradition had become

> Light the faggots! Clear your throats for execration! Ransack your memory for epithets like stones to cast at our heretical heads! We are about to utter heresy of so black a dye that it will be take breath from some of you! It is nothing less than a conviction that the greatest injury yet sustained by the English drama was the revival of admiration for the Old English Dramatists.[77]

Even at mid-century, Elizabethanizing was not only the high road but the only road to critically esteemed dramatic achievement. Ironically, it was Thomas Lovell Beddoes, the dramatist (unstaged) most endowed with a genius for writing luminous Elizabethan-like poetry, who cautioned against emulation.[78] Beddoes's powerful words, in a letter written to a friend in 1825, are worth quoting for the imagery alone:[79]

> The re-animations are vampire-cold. Such ghosts are Marloe [sic], Webster, &c are bet-

[77] G.H. Lewes, "On the Decline of the Drama," Literary Criticism of George Henry Lewes, ed. Alice R. Kaminsky (Lincoln: U of Nebraska) 145.

[78] According to Gerald McDaniel, Beddoes was "the writer who was perhaps the most sensitive to the risk, and eventually to the futility of writing the obsolate Elizabethan blank-verse drama, was Beddoes himself"--Gerald G. McDaniel, "Thomas Lovell Beddoes and His Lteratary Conexts: a Critical History and Analysis," diss., U of Texas, 1976: 29

[79] Beddoes was the author of two unactable dramas, The Bride's Tragedy, written when he was nineteen, and published and reviewly favorably in 1822; Death's Jest-Book was published posthumously in 1850.

> ter dramatists, better poets, I dare say, than any contemporary of ours--but they are ghosts--the worm is in their pages. . . . With the greatest reverence for all the antiquities of the drama, I still think that we had better beget than revive--attempt to give the literature of this age an idiosyncrasy and spirit of its own, and only raise a ghost to gaze on, not to live with--just now the drama is a haunted ruin.[80]

Beddoes contended that the dramatist who aspired to restore the drama to its former splendor should be "a bold trampling fellow--no creeper into wormholes--no reviser evern--however good."[81] He was a distinctly minority voice in opposing emulation of the Elizabethans. So, too, was that of Edward Bulwer, who in 1833 in England and the English stated:

> The Drama, which ought to be the first intellectual representative to reflect every important change in the literary spirit of the world, has with us been the last, and is now going back to Elizabeth's day for an inspiration. . . . It seizes on what is most hacknied, and announces its treasure as most new. . . . This will never do. To revive the Stage we must now go forward, the golden bridge behind us is broken down by the multitude of passengers who have crossed it.[82]

[80] Thomas Lovell Beddoes, letter to Thomas Kelsall dated January, 1825, quoted in H.W. Donner, Thomas Lovell Beddoes: The Making of a Poet, 1935, 595.

[81] Beddoes, quoted in McDaniel 29.

[82] Edward Lytton Bulwer, England and the English, ed. Standish Meacham (Chicago: The U. of Chicago P, 1970) 307.

The view that Elizabethanism was a "dead hand"[83] that devitalized the drama was one that only a few early nineteenth century dramatists or observers of the drama shared. It is fair to say that no serious dramatist of Knowles's time who wrote a tragedy (or, much more rarely, a comedy) thought of himself as administering artificial respiration to exhausted dramatic forms. Certainly Knowles did not. Critical orthodoxy sanctioned and the Elizabethan revival spurred the emulation of Elizabethan models as a worthy endeavor. Equally unorthodox was the view that an emulation of Elizabethan drama impeded the drama's development toward realism, a view commonly found in modern assessments of the early nineteenth century drama.

The sheer quantity of Neo-Elizabethan "reanimations" that were published in this period is staggering. The tragedies alone, all in five-act blank verse of course, number in the high hundreds. Traditional comedy, in contrast, was virtually extinct. In the prolific five year period of 1819-1823, for example, Carl Stratman lists the titles of sixty-nine new historical tragedies that were published.[84] The authors were "professional dramatists, poets, novelists, minis-

[83] Tucker Brooke uses the term "the dead hand of Elizabethanism" in Albert C. Baugh, A Literary History of England (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1948) 1268.

[84] Carl J. Stratman, "English Tragedy: 1819-1823, Philological Quarterly 41(1962): 465-74.

ters, lawyers, politicians, a geologist, and a professor of Hebrew."[85] Their names include Beddoes, Byron, Hemans, Maturin, Mitford, Pennie, Proctor, Sheil, Shelley, Walker, and, of course Knowles.

The typical tragedy in this period, according to Stratman, was set in Renaissance Italy, aped Elizabethan conventions and style, and was artificial in construction and characterization. But these tragedies are more than Beddoes's "haunted ruin." They reveal a tendency to indulge in Kotzebuean excesses of sentimentality, pathos, sensationalism, and horror.[86] This Kotzebuean aspect of the tragedies is a reminder that verse drama of the age could not insulate itself from the popular drama around it. It was dependent on "infusions . . . from current theatrical fare"[87] for its lease on life, however fashionable it was for dramatic authors to lament the decline of theatrical taste in the prefaces of their plays. Sixteen of the tragedies listed by Stratman were staged published at either Drury Lane and Covent Garden; fifteen others were staged in theaters outside of London. This tells

[85] Stratman 467.

[86] Stratman, 468. Almost a third of the sixty-nine were set in Renaissance Italy (Stratman, 467), which still retained a degree of the symbolic power it had acquired in the Elizabethan era as a setting fit for thoughts and deeds of violence, depravity, and political treachery.

[87] Source?

us that a taste for tragedy--that is, verse drama--did exist in the theater in spite of the popularity of melodrama.

Significantly, a dozen of the sixty-nine published tragedies were written for the closet. The writing of closet drama was a significant phenomenon in this period because it was a sign of the widening gap between literature and the stage. It was also a way of protesting against conditions in the theater. To Knowles, of course, writing closet drama had no attraction. Knowles wrote all his plays with staging in mind. To other dramatists writing closet drama it was a way of declaring their condescension toward or contempt for the state of the theater, though some dramatists became closet dramatists only as a result of circumstance when their plays suffered rejection by theater managers.

By following the Elizabethan literary example while improving on and refining the moral content of their models, dramatists like Knowles won critical esteem that was denied to the prose writers who, experimenting with new dramatic modes and genres, provided the bulk of the dramatic entertainment for both the major and minor theaters. In his biography of Charles Kean, Knowles's contemporary John Cole calls Knowles the "most successful imitator" of the Elizabethans.[88]

[88] John William Cole, The Life and Theatrical Times of Charles Kean, F.S.A, 2 vols. (London: 1859) 1: 337.

In his view, Knowles emulated the strengths of the earlier drama while avoiding their less appealing aspects. Cole offers this balanced appraisal of Knowles:

> He. . . has much of their vigour and intensity, their nature, [and] their strong sense of the harrowing and pathetic, their power of condensed expression, and sometimes more than their flowing poetry. He occasionally copies their conceits, and deviates into their verbal obscurity; but he never emulates their coarseness, or heightens a plot by their unnatural and revolting extravagances.[89]

Knowles's Neo-Elizabethanism accounts for why he was accorded esteem as a dramatist whereas Edward Bulwer, who exploited French influences, was not, in spite of the fact that his The Lady of Lyons (CG, 1838) was the most popular five-act play of the early nineteenth century.

In spite of the compromises he made with popular taste, Knowles was viewed as an upholder of the legitimate drama, whereas the prose "playwrights" (a term without literary cachet) were generally regarded as its subverters. Knowles dramatic achievement is properly viewed as part of a Neo-Elizabethan renaissance that was sparked by the success of Coleridge's tragedy Remorse, which was praised for resisting the dominating French influences and remaining loyal to a native

[89] Cole 1: 337.

English tradition going back to Shakespeare and other Elizabethans like Massinger and Middleton. In so far as he was a Neo-Elizabethan, Knowles was, writes Booth, "part of a larger effort to deflect the whole course of the drama from the channels in which it was inevitably running and to recapture the vanished glories of an Elizabethan drama that had received the accolade of 'literature.'"[90] Moody Prior describes the situation of the Neo-Elizabethan playwright of this age when, in Bulwer's pregnant phrase, "kings were no longer destinies"[91] as "analogous to a king dispossessed of his throne who nevertheless feels the responsibility of living up to the family traditions of royalty."[92] The futility of the movement designated as "Neo-Elizabethanism" in the words of Booth quoted earlier: "Where the theater went the drama followed."

Of course, legitimate dramatists like Knowles accounted for an infinitesimal fraction of the plays produced on the early nineteenth-century stage. Most of the plays were written by journeymen or hack playwrights employed at a fixed weekly salary by the theaters themselves, both major and minor. To produce a constant supply of dramatic fare, the major and minor

[90] Booth, "Prefaces" 72.

[91] Bulwer, England and the English. ?

[92] Prior, 224, 414?

theaters kept a stable of playwrights who could be relied upon to write prolifically and rapidly. This was indespensible to the efficient operation of a theater. These house playwrights were adept at attuning themselves at a moment's notice to the latest rage, vogue, or novelty and producing a theater-piece on demand. As competition among the theaters was keen, playwrights had to write at a furious pace. Playwriting itself soon came to resemble an assembly-line process, with journeyman playwrights hectically churning out drama as if it were a product manufactured to fill a consumer demand. For every play that Knowles wrote (one a year was his best rate), the best of the journeymen playwrights could and sometimes did write (or adapt) dozens of dramatic pieces.

The debasement of drama into a manufactured commodity was especially evident after 1815, when an exceptionally young generation of middle-class playwrights born in the 1790s and after entered the theater and industriously engaged themselves in the task of pleasing audiences by whatever means required. These writers were astonishingly productive and supplied the bulk of the new theatrical fare from 1815 to the 1850s. They include Buckstone, the Dibdin brothers, Fitzball, Moncrieff, Jerrold, Peake, Pitt, Poole, and

Planche, to name only some of the most prolific.[93] The nine dramatists named above alone produced well over a thousand pieces; the Dibdins (father and son) wrote many hundreds between them, and Moncrieff over two hundred. Tom Dibdin was capable of writing up to six plays a year for Covent Garden in the 1810s.[94] In their capacity as "jobbers" these writers were mostly engaged in "translating [and Anglicizing] plays from the French, cribbing novels, stealing plots from each other and from older drama, [and] churning out dialogue to fit scenery or stars."[95] Individualization was by no means absence from their work, but the commercial atmosphere tended to encourage writing according to a formula rather than originality. Although these facile writers were looked down upon as scribblers in their own time, and are sometimes sneered at by modern critics, it must be acknowledged that they were enormously talented and wrote body of drama that repays study because it is vitally theatrical. Furthermore, as Horne stated, it "reflects the tone and temperament of the age."[96] Some, like the American-born John Howard Payne, an American

[93] Planche was been credited with writing over 400 pieces; Fitzball over 200, Pitt about 200, Buckstone over 100, and Jerrold, 50--Scrimgeour, 404; Stephens, 118.

[94] Stephens, 147.

[95] Scrimgeour 404.

[96] Horne, The New Spirit of the Age, 241.

who wrote of the London stage, and Douglas Jerrold, were extraordinarily versatile writers who could cross the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate at will.[97]

There is no better introduction to the mixed nature of the repertory in the early nineteenth century theater than the nightly playbills that advertise its drama. These oddities reflect the theater of their time like a mirror, providing information about repertory that is invaluable for drawing conclusions about the nature of audience taste and how it changed over a period of time. One is impressed by the sheer quantity of entertainment an early nineteenth-century playgoer was given for the modest price of admission--five hour to six hours' worth, consisting of at least a double,

[97] Douglas Jerrold, for example, was the author of the melodrama Black Eyed Susan and the historical tragedy Thomas a Becket, a five-act play in prose. Both works were performed in the same year (1829) and the same theater (the Surrey), an occurence that illustrates the blurring of distinctions between the repertory of the major and minor theaters that occurred after about 1820. The significance of the production of Thomas a Becket at the Surrey is explained by Victor Emeljanow: "It demonstrates clearly a determination on the part of the popular dramatists to be taken seriously by the literary world." It also an assertion of right on the part of a minor theater "to produce the most serious of legitimate drama," with the implication that "its patrons were as discriminating as those of Covent Garden and Drury Lane"--Victor Emeljanow, Victorian Popular Dramatists (Boston: Twayne, 1987) 32.

and often a triple bill.[98] Occasionally, one finds the program augmented with one of more of the following: an overture, interlude, a ballet, songs, dances, and a variety of entr'acte entertainment, including specialty acts. The program seems to have been created on the principle of the more entertainment the better and with the purpose of sending the audience home with a feeling that it had seen a "whole show" and thus gotten its money's worth.

The double bill traditionally consisted of a main-piece followed by an afterpiece, as was the tradition throughout the eighteenth century. However, in the late eighteenth century the various kinds of drama that were programmed in both slots increased. In the early eighteenth century, the mainpiece customarily consisted of one of three kinds: tragedy, comedy (referred to as the "regular" or "legitimate" drama) or opera. The early nineteenth century theatre continued this tradition, but one notes a significant change. Many new pieces that do not fit into any of the above three categories begin to appear as mainpieces--plays such as The Castle Spectre, Pizarro, and Rob Roy, which are really precursors of the melodrama-to-come. They sometimes justified

[98] The observation also applies to the early eighteenth century, but the program followed a more predictable pattern at that time, since the second offering was usually a farce--see Stone, The London Stage, 1747-1776, cxiv. The performance began (after 1817) at seven, and ended about midnight.

their pride of place on the program by masquerading as more dignified forms, as was the case with Pizarro, which billed itself as a tragedy. This development reflects a tendency toward the blurring and mingling of genres that began in the late eighteenth and continued in the early ninetieth century. The result was a greater variety of pieces that intruded themselves into the privileged first slot of the program. The after-piece, which occupied the second slot, was usually a piece of light entertainment. In the early eighteenth century, it was usually a farce. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the slot was filled with operas, pantomimes, burlettas, spectacles, and melodramas in addition to farces. In both slots, a new spectacular and melodramatic fare of the kind produced in the minor theaters was offered to attract the masses to attend the theater. The theater rarely presented an identical program two nights in succession: either the mainpiece or the afterpiece changed, or both. Constant change of at least one of the attractions maximized the drawing power of each night's program.

It is difficult to discern any rationale governing the pairings other than that a verbally-oriented dramatic piece is usually combined with one that is

visually-oriented.[99] The object was apparently to offer a program that pleased the taste of both discriminating players and the masses (who usually arrived at half-price time), though many discriminating playgoers (Hazlitt and Horne, to name just two) were capable of enjoying both the main and the afterpiece with seemingly equal pleasure The pairing of the verbal and visual on one program actually reflects a tension of opposites in the theater between the critically esteemed legitimate or traditional dialogue-drama and the critically despised illegitimate or popular drama. The position of primacy that tragedy, comedy, and drama commanded on the program is misleading in that, from a commercial point of view, it was more often than not actually secondary in importance to the afterpiece that followed it. Culturally speaking, the play was the thing; but financially speaking, the play was not the thing. The afterpiece (except in cases were visually splendid dramas like Rob Roy were given as mainpieces) was the money-maker, and subsided the cost of producing the more prestigious forms of drama. Because of this, managers were inclined to invest more money into stag-

[99] It is interesting to compare the program in the early nineteenth century to the dramatic variety shown in the ancient Greek theater, which appended a comical satyr play to the performance of a tragic trilogy. The main difference is that in the Greek theater the four plays comprised a unity (tetralogy), of which the Dionysian spirit of the satyr play was viewed as an organic part. In contrast, the combinations found in early nineteeth-century playbils are hodgepodges, dictated by commercial considerations.

ing afterpieces, especially those that were gave promise of being "cash cows." A traditional play was often "gotten up" with a minimum of expense, which often meant not spending money on new scenery and costumes. Mainpieces typically outnumber afterpieces by about three to two for the simple reason that successful afterpieces were milked for their drawing power, remaining on the program night after night. In 1819 at Covent Garden, for example, the pantomime Harlequin Munchausen, ran for thirty-two successive nights before it was replaced. The run of thirty performances enjoyed by Sheil's new tragedy Evadne in the same year, nearly equaling that of the pantomime, was highly unusual.

Each program exemplifies the oddity of juxtaposition that is typical of the theater program in this period. For example, on the playbill dated April 28, 1820, the revival of King Lear starring Kean referred to earlier is paired with The Jew and the Doctor, a farce; a few days the same play is coupled with a pantomime, Shakespeare vs. Harlequin. During its first run, Knowles's Virginius was coupled with a variety of afterpieces: Honest Thieves (fig. 11), a farce; Midas, a burletta; The Battle of Bothwell Brigg, a melodrama based on Scott's novel The Antiquary; Harlequin Cinderella, a pantomime; and Inkle and Yarico, an opera, to mention only five programs. In contrast, Knowles's second tragedy Caius Gracchus (fig.10) was

paired for all seven performances of its brief run at Drury Lane in 1823 with only one afterpiece, the spectacular melodrama The Cataract of the Ganges.[100] On opening night at Drury Lane in 1825, William Tell (fig. 12) was paired with a farce entitled The Sleeping Draught. On opening night at the same theater in 1831, Alfred the Great was followed with the display of a diorama by Stanfield, after which a two act Operatic Drama entitled Legion of Honor was performed.

The afterpiece The Cataract of the Ganges is worth pausing over because it is a clear sign that the tail (afterpiece) had come to wag the dog (mainpiece), and that the traditional repertory system was being replaced by the "hit run." It played continuously for several months and ranks as one of the most spectacular and most expensive stage displays of the early nineteenth century, costing the lessee Robert William Elliston 5,000 pounds, an emormous sum to spend on a single production at the time.[101] Combining equestrian with aquatic drama (specialties of Astley's and Sadler's Wells, respectively) this ephemeral afterpiece featured, in addition to a dozen spectacular changes of exotic scenery (the setting was Hindustan), a bevy of dancing girls, numerous slaves, two military bands, and

[100] Based on an examination of the original playbills in the Harvard Theatre Collection.

[101] Nicholson Watson, Sheridan to Robertson 155-156.

a full-scale battle. This was all a prelude to a breathe-taking spectacular finale in which the heroine encircled by flames, escapes her pursuers in the nick of time by ascending an actual waterfall on horseback. The afterpiece was a sensation with the public and attracted large houses during it continuous run of several months.

The unpredictable and sometimes bizarre pairings can be amusing (e.g., The Bridal, an adaptation of Beaumont and Fletcher's Maid's Tragedy with the farce My Young Wife and My Old Umbrella!). It may be presumed that a modern playgoer who had undergone the emotionally wrenching experience of a tragedy would not be in the mood to enjoy a comic piece immediately afterward. The sensibilities of early nineteenth-century playgoers were less "purist." After seeing a tragedy they expected to be entertained by a lighter piecer which would send them home in a merry mood.[102]

The bifurcated nature of the dramatic program in the early nineteenth century protected the legitimate drama from competing with illegitimate drama for patrons, since the former was, in effect, subsidized by

[102] It may noted that modern taste has no difficulty in appreciating dissimilar moods within a single dramatic piece, as the theater of the absurd has demonstrated. But the early nineteenth-century practice had some parallel in the double-bill feature of neighborhood movie houses when I was growing up, where a "heavy" and a "light" film were often paired on the same program.

the latter. If the legitimate had been forced to pull its own financial weight in the patent theaters without the drawing power of the illegitimate drama, one wonders how it would have managed to survive as long as it did.[103]

[103] Actor-managers like Samuel Phelps proved in the 1840s and 1850s that the legitimate drama could be produced profitably at smaller theaters like Sadler's Wells, where Knowles's plays, along with Shakespeare's, were a staple of the repertory. Phelp's productions drew mixed audiences.--see Shirley S. Allen, Samuel Phelps and Sadler's Wells Theatre (Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 1971, Appendix I, 316-321.

Chapter 2

The Triumph of Melodrama and Resurgence of Tragedy

Robust melodrama, elbowing tragedy and comedy to the side, shared the throne with pantomime in the early nineteenth century theater and was the locus of vitality and experimentation. This upstart form was "the most significant phenomenon of the era,"states Joseph Donohue.[1] But as Robert Corrigan writes, "Not only was melodrama the prevailing form of popular entertainment, it was the dominant modality of all nineteenth-century British life and thought."[2] Melodrama most satisfied the taste of the age because it expressed the age's spirit. Peter Brooks writes that the fact that "melodrama should have been born during the Revolution, and come of age [in France] with Pixerecourt's Coelina in 1800, is far from an accident."[3] It is the form that best exemplifies the move-

[1] Donohue, Theatre 106.

[2] Robert Corrigan, intro., Laurel British Drama: The Nineteenth Century (Dell, 1967) 14-15.

[3] Peter Brooks, The Melodramatic Imagination (1967; New York: Columbia UP, 1984) 44, to which I am indebted for many of my points. On the nature of melodrama, Gerald Bentley's essay in his The Life of the Drama (New York: Atheneum, 1967) 195-218 is seminal. Pixerecourt is considered to be the father of melodrama. On melodrama in France, see Marvin Carlson, The Theater of the French Revolution (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1966); Michele Root-Bernstein, Boulevard Theater and Revolution in Eighteenth-Century Paris (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1884), esp. 215-241; Frank Rahill, The World of Melodrama (Univeristy Park and London: Pennsylvania State UP, 1967), 3-100. On melodrama in England, see Frank Rahill, The World of Melodrama, 103-193; Maurice Willson Disher, Blood and Thunder:

ment of drama in this period toward "total theater."[4]

In England, melodramatic elements are prominent, of course, in Elizabethan and Restoration drama and in eighteenth century sentimental comedy and domestic tragedy, but melodrama did not crystallize into a form with definite qualities, as it had in France during the Revolution, until the turn of the century, after which it rapidly triumphed on the stage. It reached its ripest form before the new century in Lewis's The Castle Spectre, a gothic melodrama billed as a simply a "drama."[5] "By 1800, the pattern of melodrama was set, and the rest of the century made additions and variations only," writes Booth.[6] The first play to advertise itself as a melodrama (a word meaning "music drama") was Holcroft's gothicized A Tale of Mystery, a translation of Coelina, produced at Covent Garden in 1802. The novelty of Holcroft's spectacular melodrama was not in its use of music per se (many previous plays had used

Mid-Victorian Melodrama and Its Origins (London: Muller, 1949; Michael Booth, English Melodrama (London: Jenkins, 1965) and Prefaces to English Nineteenth-Century Theatre (Manchester: Manchester UP, n.d.).

[4] Brooks 46.

[5] "Dramatic Romance" was another label used for plays that are today recogized to be melodramas.

[6] Booth, Prefaces 24.

incidental music)[7] but in the integral combination of abbreviated dialogue and dumbshow, and music. Holcroft's play contained one hundred and fifty-two specific musical cues for orchestra.[8] It substituted pantomime and theatrical effects for dialogue (what dialogue there was, was simplified) and provided a programmatic score that expressed the inner feelings of the characters and the tenor of the action. Through music Holcroft evoked feeling in the audience points in the action; this use of music on the English stage was a novelty.[9]

Melodrama came naturally to a people like the British who regarded themselves as favored by God and conditioned their view of history. Wylie Sypher describes this modality as "the oversimplification into polarities and oppositions that may be animated my

[7] Plays called "music dramas" had been staged in the late eighteenth century. J.C. Cross's The Purse; or the Benvolent Tar (Haymarket, 1793) is an example.

[8] Scrimgeour 137. The cues are imbedded in a blizzard of stage directions. For example, in Act I when Fiametta enters with Francisco, the mute hero, the stage directions read "The stage dark: soft music, but expressing first pain and alarm; then the successive feelings of the scene," etc.--quoted in Scrimgeour, diss., 137.

[9] Kemble's Lodoiska (1794) pre-dates A Tale of Mystery in using music in this way, though less intricately--see Paul Ranger, "Terror and Pity reign in every Breast": Gothic Drama in the London Patent Theatres, 1750-1820 (London: Society of Theatre Research) 46.

emphatic instances."[10] The predisposition of Britons to see history in terms of polarity is evident in the view Britons took of the war against the French during the Revolution and Napoleonic periods. According to this view, the war was an "international morality play"[11] which pit British virtue against French vice, with first Jacobinism and then Bonapartism cast as the villain on the stage of history.[12] In some of the propaganda prints of the time, Napoleon is actually depicted with Satanic characteristics.[13] As a result of the French Revolution and its aftermath, history itself became a "a theatre of tensions between abstractions"[14] like "liberty," and "equality." For Britons, the war ended just like a melodrama: good was rewarded and evil

[10] Wylie Sypher, "Aesthetic of Revolution: The Marxist Melodrama," the Kenyon Review, 10: 3 (Summer, 1948), 433 or 434, quoted in Corrigan.

[11] Patten, George Cruikshank's Life, Times, and Art, 2 vols. (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1992) 1: 114.

[12] See "Boney's meditations on the Island of St. Helena--or--The Devil addressing the Sun, most famous Napoleon print of all, designed by George Cruikshank in collaboration with George Humphrey. The print depicts Napoleon as having horns, feathered wings, and cloven hoofs; his words is adapted from Satan's address to the sun in Book IV of Paradise Lost--See Patten, 115.

[13] See the print entitled "Boney's meditations on the Island of St. Helena--or The Devil addressing the Sun," the most famous print of all, designed by George Cruikshank in collaboration with George Humphrey. The print depicts Napoleon with horns, feathered wings, and cloven hooves; the words he speaks are adapted from Satan's address to the sun in Book IV of Paradise Lost--Patten 115.

[14] Wylie Sypher, "Aesthetic of Revolution: The Marxist Melodrama," quoted in Corrigan, 17.

punished. The morally dichotomous vision of melodrama was a theatrical equivalent to the historical struggle that Britons had lived through during the war years. The continuation of the tendency of Britons to see their history through a melodramatic lens is evidenced--to cite the one most striking example--by the British people's theatricalization of the Queen Caroline Affair into a "domestic melodrama."[15]

Without being religious, melodrama--of whatever kind--satisfied the audiences' need to view life as a struggle between good and evil, which ended, through the workings of Providence, with the reward of good and the punishment of evil. In the post-Napoleonic period, audiences wished to see a representation of life that emotionally validated this transcendent moral truth rather than one that mirrored the ordinary workaday world in which they were enmeshed. Playgoers of all classes wished to be see plays where merit was more important than birth, and where goodness was rewarded and evil punished--a confirmation that the universe is just. There were limits to an audience's tolerance for representations of ordinary, workaday reality, but virtually no limits to their appetite for fantasy and

[15] Thomas W. Laqueur, "The Queen Caroline Affair: Politics as Art in the Reign of George IV." Journal of Modernistory 54 (1982): 465

fairy-tale.[16] They wished to see plays that "endowed everyday life with meaning and significance."[17] Melodrama was a theatrical equivalent of a transcendent world-view that affirmed that life had meaning.

Bentley describes melodrama as a "Naturalism of the dream life,"[18] by which he means that it presents in naturalistic terms an allegory of life as spectators wished it to be. In Booth's words, "melodrama is a dream world inhabited by dream people and dream justice, offering audiences the fulfillment and satisfaction found only in dreams."[19] Brooks makes the same point when he speaks of a "melodrama of psychology."[20] This is to say, the melodrama presents "exteriorized conflict and psychic structure."[21] Melodrama gives us, in Brook's words, "a drama of pure psychic signs--called Father, Daughter, Protector, Persecutor, Judge, Duty, Obedience, Justice--that interest us through

[16] A example of limits of an audience's tolerance for everyday reality and attendant social criticism is the damnation of Jerrold's the Factory Girl at Drury Lane in 1832--see Victor Emeljanow, Victorian Popular Dramatists (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1987) 39. 39.

[17] Gilbert B. Cross, Next Week-East Lynne: Domestic Drama in Performance, 1820-1874 (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1977) 170.

[18] Gerald Bentley, The Life of the Drama (New York: Atheneum, 1967) 205, 217.

[19] Booth, English Melodrama 14.

[20] Brooks 35.

[21] Brooks 35.

their clash."[22] By eliminating and inhibiting "ambiguous emotional possibilities,"[23] the melodramatist aims at arousing a monopathic response in the playgoer. The intensification resulting from the limits placed on the range of emotional response compensated for the loss of emotional breadth and depth. "The full emotional potential runs off in a single channel, with a stimulating rush," writes Robert Heilman.[24] This narrowing of the emotional conduit explains how great actors could thrill audiences with melodramatic effects.

To a vast number of Britons in the early nineteenth century, especially those displaced persons who lived and worked in the urban centers, this drama of psychic signs was not only appealing but psychically necessary. People needed and wanted to be comforted and reassured in a variety of ways in this unsettled time, as well as offered an escape from their drab lives through romantic fantasy and emotional thrills. Beyond these escapes, melodrama it offered satisfaction on a deeper level. According to one theater historian, many of the individuals who constituted the new audience were:

[22] Brooks 35.

[23] Heilman, 95.

[24] Heilman, 96.

> Burdened with a strong but ill-focussed sense of personal grievance, readily understandable in men and women caught in a rapidly changing society. Ignorance and limited opportunities kept them down, and prevented any understanding of their situation beyond a strong sense that somebody was against them, and their accusations were against individuals rather than the social system.[25]

One reason the melodrama appealed to the working classes was because it offered a means of vicariously satisfying their individual sense of injustice. In melodrama, the playgoer could "see himself on the stage, to thrill to a personal and inward rather than a generalized appeal."[26] Martha Vicinus views the rise of melodrama as "a cultural response to the growing split under capitalism between production and personal life" that had a divisive effect on the family, which was, in her words, "the psychic center of life." Melodrama helped to preserve this psychic center, says Vincinus, because it offered an "ideal of domestic happiness" that "assuaged fears an audience might have about being too committed to the goals of an industrializing

[25] Robertson Davies, "Playwrights and Plays" Revels, ed. Booth et. al, 6: 222.

[26] Davies, Revels 6: 221.

society."[27] Thus melodrama had a psychological value because it reduced tensions created by "conflicts between the home and the outside world."[28] This explains why working class people found a play like Virginius, which took middle class values like "death before dishonour"[29] as axiomatic, appealing. To be more explicit: even working class women who had lost their virginity early in life could identify with stage heroines like Virginia and her father in their high valuation of "honor" (i.e., virginity). As Booth explains, even though "personal honour was a luxury. . . it was a luxury they would have liked to enjoy; melodrama offered them a vicarious enjoyment of it, in terms that went straight to the heart."[30]

Beyond the literal definition of melodrama as "drama played to music," melodrama is defined more by its vision, and structures (dramatic and affective), and characterization than its subject matter (which can be, among other things, heroic or domestic, sophisticated or simple, realistic or fairy tale) or tone

[27] Martha Vicinus, "Helpless and Unfriended": Nineteeth-Century Domestic Melodrama," in When They Weren't Doing Shakespeare: Essays on Nineteenth-Century British and American Theatre, eds. Judith L. Fisher and Stephen Watt (Athens and London: U of Georgia P, 1989) 175.

[28] Vicinus 175.

[29] Davies, Revels 6: 222.

[30] Davies, Revels 6: 222.

(which can be comic or serious). Plot is, of course, essential because "exciting incidents were strung together to provide a vehicle for stirring the emotions rather than the mind."[31] The outcome of events was governed by the belief--voiced by the characters--that human affairs are guided by a Providence that comes to the aid of persecuted virtue and innocence. In a melodrama, the play's action takes on "an aura of the Providential," and "suggest "the workings of a higher, more enlightened design."[32] The design is in the form of a "ritual" that "involves the confrontation of clearly identified antagonists and the expulsion of one of them."[33] Through the workings of a higher power, evil is expelled and poetic justice is served. The powerless triumph over the powerful because melodrama is always sympathetic with the powerless. Booth describes melodrama as

> a world of certainties where confusion, doubt, and perplexity are absent; a world of absolutes where virtue and vice coexist in pure whiteness and pure blackness; and a world of justice where after immense struggle and torment good triumphs over and punishes evil, and virtue receives tangible material rewards. . . . The emphasis on sensational and rapid action is part of melodrama's concentration on externals, which produces two main things: complete subordination of

[31] Cross 57.

[32] Brooks 34.

[33] Brooks 17.

> character development to the story line, and rigid moral distinctions. The two are closely related, for moral position is identifiable with character type; audiences could know at once, by the initial appearance and first speeches of any person in melodrama, his or her character and forthcoming role in the play.[34]

Devoid of psychology, as "pure psychic signs" the characters are absolute and whole.[35] Whether or not a play is a melodrama should be judged by how closely it conforms to the criteria described above, not by whether or not it uses music in the way Holcroft's A Tale of Mystery does.

The characters of melodrama, less important than the plot, are stereotypes or stock characters. The most intriguing and powerful character (from the point of view of plot) in melodrama is the villain because he sets the plot in motion. "In the clash of virtue and villainy," writes Brooks, the villain ". . . constitutes the active force and the motor of the plot."[36] It is the villain who "thinks, chooses, initiates action, alters his plans, makes new ones"[37]--all calculated to achieve his objective of gaining power over

[34] Booth, English Melodrama 14-15.

[35] On the wholeness of the characters of melodrama, see Heilman, Tragedy and Melodrama (Seattle and London: U of Washington P, 1968) 79.

[36] Brooks 34.

[37] Booth, English Melodrama 18.

the heroine. "The force of evil in melodrama," writes Brooks, "derives from its personalized menace, its swift execution and its declarations of intent, its reduction of innocence to powerlessness." The villain is normally conscience-less, except in Gothic melodrama--a species with which Knowles's plays have nothing essential to do. If he has a residual pang of conscience, he quickly tramples it underfoot. Because the villain was so important in the plot and the character itself the most vital in the play, famous actors prized the villain's part. This desirability of roles is, of course, reversed in Knowles's plays, where the hero, not the villain, was more vital and always played by the most famous actor.

Booth distinguishes two kinds of villains: "the grim, determined, immensely evil; and the shifty, cowardly, half-comic." In some cases (e.g., Captain Alvaney in the Lear of Private Life) the villain, like the "repentant rake" of sentimental comedy reforms. More often, since the villain incarnates the "darkness and violence of melodrama," the play ends happily with his death. Of the not overly-intelligent hero little needs to be said; he is usually passive, "the pawn on his chessboard."[38]

[38] Booth, English Melodrama 18.

The heroine, the villain's intended victim, is the most central character in melodrama because the play's structure is "centered on female chastity" or "feminine purity."[39] "Total goodness and extreme weakness combined to make the heroine the emotional center of the melodrama," writes Grimstead.[40] She embodies virtue (even when that virtue is lost to a seducer), and is a paragon of the passive virtues of "modesty, patience, and meekness."[41] The threat to her angelic virtue and virtues posed by the villain was the essence of the melodramatic structure. Characteristically, that threat is "presented in physical, specifically sexual terms," writes Grimstead.[42] The pattern, as Brooks explains, is one of "blockage and a victory over blockage." "What is blocked, submerged, endungeoned" is not "the drive to erotic union" (as in comedy) but "virtue's claim to exist qua virtue."[43] This is clearly exemplified in Virginius and Tell, where the villains will not allow virtue to exist without corrupting or punishing it.

Pathos aroused by suffering within a family (is there a source of suffering more intense?), is another

[39] Grimstead, Melodrama Unveiled: American Culture and Theater, 1800-1850 (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1968) 228.

[40] Grimstead 228..

[41] Grimstead 275.

[42] Grimstead 175.

[43] Brooks 32.

basic characteristic of melodrama, one which conditions the affective structure of the play. On this crucial aspect of melodrama's subject matter, Brooks offers this insight:

> the familial structure that melodrama (like Greek tragedy) so often exploits contributes to the experience of excruciation: the most basic loyalties and relationships became a source of torture. Like the characters, the audiences experience basic emotions in their primal, integral, unrepressed condition.[44]

As Vicinus says, "the focus on the family and its emotional conflicts gives melodrama its archetypal power."[45] Brooks serves as our best guide to understanding the significance of this aspect of melodrama:

> When we say "father" and "daughter" in real life, it is in a lower key, with an accommodation to convention and the complication of experience. When we utter the same terms in melodrama, it is to name the plenitude of the pure, and excessive feeling. The emotions and conditions expressed are almost overwhelming in their instinctual purity; they are too strong. Yet, here, surely, is a profound source of melodrama's appeal and persistence.[46]

[44] Brooks 35.

[45] Martha Vicinus, "Helpless and Unfriended" 175.

[46] Brooks 42.

In the period under discussion, melodrama manifest itself various forms. The first forms of melodrama, Gothic and spectacular, emerged in the late eighteenth century and continued into the early nineteenth century, exerting a strong influence on other genre (e.g., tragedy and comedy) as well. Patriotic melodrama (military and nautical recreations in documentary detail of Briton's victorious battles on land and sea) was an early nineteenth century during the Napoleonic wars and was the most dependent on spectacle. Melodrama and spectacle were a natural combination, especially in large auditoria of the patent theaters where subtle effects were often lost on much of the audience simply because playgoers were too distant from the stage to see facial expressions clearly. This is why, in the late eighteenth century, the first kind of melodrama to flourish was "spectacular melodrama," the kind that were vehicles and occasions for scenic designers to awe audiences with a display of the whole panoply of their impressive art.[47] Domestic melodrama--which we will return to at the end of this chapter--came last and lasted longest, eventually evolving into social drama in the late nineteenth century.

In speaking of the drama in terms of "forms," however, one can easily fail to appreciate how fluid,

[47] For an excellent discussion of spectacular melodrama, see Chapter III of Scrimgeour, diss., 82-146.

varied, and eclectic the drama was in the early decades of the new century. The plays of this period s are not easily categorized: "confusingly multifarious forms"[48] characterize the drama of this time, writes Booth, adding that "the conventional dramatic genres became in the nineteenth century so blended on the one hand and so fragmented on the other that it is best to forget about definitions altogether."[49]

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[48] Booth, intro., The Magistrate and Other Nineteenth-Century Plays (London: Oxford UP, 1974) vii.

[49] Booth, "Foreword," Prefaces xvii.

vehicles and occasions for scenic designers to awe audiences with a display of the whole panoply of their impressive art.[50] Domestic melodrama--which we will return to at the end of this chapter--came last and lasted longest, eventually evolving into social drama in the late nineteenth century.

From the 1780s to the 1820s, immediately preceding the beginning of Knowles's career, Thomas Morton and Colman the Younger were the two leading popular dramatists.[51] Both these men of the theater were professionals, mercenary to their fingertips, and exquisitely attuned to "the sensitive barometer of audience response."[52] They are foils to Knowles in that they represent the marked tendency toward eclecticism and hybridization of generic forms. Colman was the master of a new form of "mixed drama," which consisted of a blend of tragedy, comedy, and opera. The Mountaineers (1793), pseudo-tragic concoction interspersed with songs that exploited history and geography for atmospheric effect, held the stage for forty years. The Iron Chest (1796), an adaptation of Godwin's radical novel Caleb Williams illustrates Colman's talent

[50] For an excellent discussion of spectacular melodrama, see Chapter III of Scrimgeour, diss., 82-146.

[51] Donohue, Kean, 89. Colman's later career as an Examiner of Plays had already been discussed in Chapter 3 of Part I.

[52] Sutcliffe 20.

for debasing tragedy into melodrama-- in contemporary terms, his musicalized restyling of a serious novel is equivalent to the transformation that serious literary works undergo to give them mass appeal on the Broadway stage. John Bull (1803), Colman's most enduring play, was a precursor of domestic melodrama. This is the same Colman, it may be noted, who will be discussed in a later chapter in his capacity of Examiner of Plays.[53]

Colman's development as a playwright illustrates how theatrical taste compelled an author with a literary inclination and talent to compromise his literary standards. With The Surrender of Calais (1791), a verse play, Colman emerged as "the white hope of serious drama."[54] However, in the interests of financial necessity he soon abandoned verse and seriousness and chose to become a melodramatist specializing in formulaic audience-pleasing sentimentalized concoctions of action and situation. who had "grown restless with the old and familiar styles of dramatic entertainment" and craved novelty.[55] Of Colman, Scrimgeour writes, "we have a perfect example here of a dramatist caught between critics and audience,

[53] The playwright Colman became Examiner of Plays in 1824. His attitudes and practices as Examiner are discussed in Chapter 4.

[54] Scrimgeour, diss., 56.

[55] Sutcliffe 18.

between his desire to write a serious play and the need for that play to entertain."[56]

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[56] Scrimgeour, diss., 68.

[57] Donohue, Kean, 89.

[58] Sutcliffe, 20.

[59] Source of quote?

Broadway stage. John Bull (1803), Colman's most enduring play, was a precursor of domestic melodrama. This is the same Colman, it may be noted, who will be discussed in a later chapter in his capacity of Examiner of Plays.[60]

Colman's development as a playwright illustrates how theatrical taste compelled an author with a literary inclination and talent to compromise his literary standards. With The Surrender of Calais (1791), a verse play, Colman emerged as "the white hope of serious drama."[61] However, in the interests of financial necessity he soon abandoned verse and seriousness and chose to become a melodramatist specializing in formulaic audience-pleasing sentimentalized concoctions of action and situation. who had "grown restless with the old and familiar styles of dramatic entertainment" and craved novelty.[62] The Iron Chest (1796), as Colman's adaptation of Godwin's novel was called, was the product of the same kind of dramatic talent that Broadway employs today to restyle a serious work into a rip-roaring Broadway musical entertainment for the masses. Of Colman, Scrimgeour

[60] The playwright Colman became Examiner of Plays in 1824. His attitudes and practices as Examiner are discussed in Chapter 4.

[61] Scrimgeour, 56.

[62] Sutcliffe, 18.

writes, "we have a perfect example here of a dramatist caught between critics and audience, between his desire to write a serious play and the need for that play to entertain."[63] Knowles did not solve this tension, but he stuck to his standards and refused to stoop to conquer as Colman did.

The three most phenomenally successful new plays produced at the very end of the eighteenth century were all produced at Sheridan's Drury Lane in three successive years. They were "Monk" Lewis's melodrama The Castle Spectre (1797) a tour de force of Gothicism, the sentimental drama The Stranger (1798), and the romantic tragedy Pizarro (1799), another example of spectacular melodrama masquerading as tragedy. The actor-manager John Philip Kemble starred in all three plays which were financial windfalls when first produced. The huge commercial success of each of the above melodramatic plays at the very end of the old century presaged melodrama's preeminence in the new. All three plays were stock pieces in the repertory in the decade of the 1820s.

The Castle Spectre is built on a typical persecution plot initiated by its stock Gothic castle-dwelling, remorseful villain (Earl Osmond) against the innocent heroine maiden, Angela. The castle is not any

[63] Scrimgeour, 68.

castle but Conway Castle, an edifice that "had become part of the Gothic consciousness" though the painting of de Loutherbourg and Turner.[64] The play opened on a distant view of castle painted by Thomases Greenwood, senior and junior, based on a model by de Louthenbourg.[65] The most sensational scene, amounting to a coup de theater, is the appearance of the spectre who haunts Conway castle, the spirit of the murdered Evelina to her daughter Angela in the oratory of the castle. It is a scene that evokes the appearance of the ghost in Hamlet on the ramparts. Lewis's Spectre, however, communicates only in pantomime, and the emotional effect of the scene is enhanced by lighting effects, organ music and a chorus of female voices, all of which combine to create an atmosphere of sheer terror. It was this scene, described in the text in a long detailed stage direction, that made Lewis's play the "runaway success" that it was.[66]

[64] Paul Ranger, 'Terror and Pity reign in every Breast': Gothic Drama in the London Patent Theatres, 1750-1820 (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1991) 117.

[65] For a discussion of the sets and scenic effect in The Castle Spectre, see Ranger 116-125.

[66] Donohue, Theatre 100. The stage direction for the appearance of the spectre and the pantomime that ensues reads: [The folding-door unclose, and the Oratory is seen illuminated. In its centre stands a tall female figure, her white and flowing garments spotted with blood; her veil is thrown back, and discovers a pale and melancholy countenance; her eyes are lifted upwards, her arms extended toward heaven, and a large wound appears upon her bosom. Angela sinks upon her knees, with her eyes riveted upon the figure, which for come moments remains motionless. At length the Spectre advances slowly, to a soft and plaintive strain; she stops opposite to Reginald's picture, and gazes on it in silence.

The Castle Spectre is a culmination of a melodramatic type which served as the lifeblood of scores of plays--including many tragedies--produced on the stage between the 1770s to the early 1820s, by which time its vitality had spent itself.[67] The power to be gained by grafting melodrama to tragedy is exemplified, for example, in the tragedies of Sheil, the most popular writer of tragedy immediately before the success of Virginius. In respect to Knowles, the gothic mode is useful only as a negative point of reference: it defines what Knowles plays are not. A gothic motif is seldom encountered in Knowles's mature plays. Gesler's castle in Tell, a use of the conventional stronghold "within which the villain could exercise unfettered power" is a notable exception.[68] There is touch of the gothic in the early romantic

She then turns, approaches Angela, seems to invoke a blessing upon her, points to the picture, and retires to the Oratory. The music ceases. Angela rises with a wild look, and follows the Vision, extending her arms towards it] After Angela bids the spirit not to leave (Angela: Stay, lovely spirit--Oh, stay yet one moment!) the direction continues: The Specter waves her hand, as bidding her farewell. Instantly the organ's swell is heard; a full chorus of female voices chaunt 'Julbiate' a blaze of light flashes through the Oratory, and folding doors close with a loud noise.] Angela: Oh! Heaven protect me. [She falls motionless on the floor.]

[67] Walpole's The Mysterious Mother (1768), was the the first Gothic drama. Lewis's play was labelled as "a drama of a mingled nature, Operatic, Comical and Tragical." Paul Ranger writes that after 1820, "no new ground was broken in the presentation of gothic plays"--Ranger v.

[68] Donohue, Theatre in the Age of Kean 100.

play, Leo, or The Gypsy and a gothic atmosphere in The Daughter, his only melodrama, but, generally speaking, in Knowles's plays the gothic spirit is present internally rather than externally, in the evil heart of the villain; the gothic was not an integral part of Knowles's sensibility as it was, for example, of Lewis's and Maturin's.

The most successful and certainly most theatrical "tragedy" (really a melodrama masquerading as a tragedy) of the last decade of the late eighteenth century was Sheridan's patriotic potboiler, Pizarro. Knowles knew it well because he acted the leading role of Rolla, with his wife as Cora, when he was a provincial player in Ireland; it remained one of his favorite plays. Donohue calls it "perhaps the most representative play of its era."[69] Its popularity can be gauged from the fact that it retained its place in the repertory until 1840.[70] It is an operatic, declamatory, and sentimental play that mixes "pathos, spectacle, [and] song"[71] that depended for its effectiveness on a collaboration among various artistic departments in the

[69] Joseph W. Donohue, Jr., Dramatic Character in the English Romantic Age (Princeton: Princeton UP,. 1970), 126. Donohue says that its popularity in the early nineteenth century is comparable to that of The Beggar's Opera in the eighteenth.

[70] See Fig. 9 of a 1833 performance at Covent Garden.

[71] Donohue, Dramatic Character 128. The music consisted of "operatic music, processional hymns, and lyrical songs"--126.

theater: musical composers, scenic designers, machinery-makers, decorators, and costumers. It was another example of how tragedy took on the trappings of melodrama in this period. A German visitor who appears to have been familiar with the Kotzebue original on which it was based condemned it as "a veritable monstrosity with the head of a lion and the body of a monkey."[72] As the play's popularity--in the provinces as well as London[73]--demonstrated, "Monstrosity" was not a liability on the English stage at this time.

Set in Peru at the time of the Spanish conquest of the Incas, Pizarro bustles with the action of battle scenes, but its climactic action is the thrilling rescue of an infant by Rolla, the noble, self-sacrificing Peruvian warrior hero. This part was played to a tee dozens of times by John Philip Kemble from 1799 (Fig. 8) onwards. Rolla belongs to the dramatic type of the "artificial hero," tracing his dramatic lineage from Tamburlaine, Dryden's Almanzor and Aureng-Zebe, and Addison's Cato.[74] Rolla's artificiality lent itself perfectly, as Donohue points out, to Kemble's formal,

[72] Anon., Sittengemalde von London, 61, quoted in John Alexander Kelly, German Visitors to English Theaters in the Eighteenth Century 161.

[73] It may be noted that Pizarro was one of the plays that Knowles acted in Belfast during his brief early career as an actor in the provinces. He played Rolla and his wife Cora.

[74] Donohue, Dramatic Character 153.

classically statuesque acting style. Kemble was as suited to play Rolla as Macready was to play Virginius a decade later. Pizarro is the stock remorseful but ambition-driven villain, after whom, interestingly, Sheridan named the play (Kotzebue had called it Die Spanier in Peru; Oder Rolla's Tod). The play ends with Rolla escaping from the Spaniards with the infant uplifted on one arm (Fig. 10) and gallantly delivering it safely to its frantic mother (the woman he loves) before dropping lifeless at her feet, a victim of a stray bullet from a Spanish musket. There follows a magnificent funeral procession for Rolla that fills the stage, which is accompanied by a dirge and a symphonic finale. The final curtain falls on a tableau of grief.

Jingoism was an important factor in the play's success when it was first produced. Set in Peru at the time of the Spanish conquest of the Incas, the Incas and Spanish, respectively, represent British virtue threatened by French imperialism--the moral antinomies of good and evil. The timeliness of the allegory (Britain was then at war with France) and the play's loyalist patriotism ensured its success. It was written to make money and it did, which made it the only money-making tragedy of the decade, and the only tragedy other than Hannah More's Percy to run for more than ten performances between 1777-1802. speaks to the sad state into which tragedy had declined in this period. Pizarro

long run of thirty-one performances moved Southey to lament in a letter, "Our stage seems to have reached the very depth of depredation. It is impossible to sink below 'Pizarro.'" When compared to Pizarro melodramatic excesses, Knowles's plays, however melodramatic they seem to the modern reader, are chaste and modest.

Economic desperation is a powerful incentive; smarting under the competition from the innovative minor theaters in the first decade of the new century, the managers of both patent houses decided to emulate the minors by presenting melodramatic spectacles featuring breathtaking scenic effects, and even used trained animals as stars. Thus the patent theaters took a giant step toward obliterating the historic and proud distinction between themselves and the minor theaters, the nurseries of the melodrama. This madness, a craving for novelty, which manifest in the late eighteenth century, became more pronounced in the early years of the century.

A financially unstable Drury Lane, owned by Sheridan and managed by Kemble, was the first to stoop in order to conquer when in 1803 it produced the "blockbuster hit" (to use an apt Hollywood term) in the form of a canine-melodrama, The Caravan; or the Driver and His Dog.[75] Carlo, its dog hero (a Newfoundland

[75] By Frederick Reynolds, produced at Drury Lane.

retriever, not a man dressed as a dog) dove from a high rock into real water to rescue a drowning child.[76] Calling the dog his savior, Sheridan credited the piece with saving him from bankruptcy.[77] It author, Frederick Reynolds, was typical of a facile new breed of young dramatist (Colman and Morton were two others of note) that had seized the day in the "new theater" in last decades of the old century. Many years later, Bulwer aptly commented: "When the Drama has once gone to the dogs, it will be a matter of time to heal the marks of their teeth."[78] In the gestures of dumb animals, which included elephants, lions, birds, bulls, boa constrictors and monkeys, "the text of muteness,"[79] a characteristic of melodrama, became literalized.

The psychological turning point in the history of the patent theaters was the introduction of hippodrama

[76] According to A.H. Saxon, the only previous instance when horses had appeared on a patent house stage was at Covent Garden in 1793, when they were used for verisimilitude in a fox hunt scene (with real fox and hounds) in a Christmas pantomine--A.N. Saxon, Enter Foot and Horse: The History of Hippodrama in England and France (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1968) 92 fn. 18.

[77] Sheridan rewarded Reynolds with perpetual free admission to his theater, an unheard of privilege.

[78] Bulwer, England and the English 304.

[79] A term used by Brooks 56.

at Covent Garden in 1811.[80] It was an innovation that inspired many jeremiads on the debasement and perversion of theatrical taste and the desecration of the temple. Blue Beard, a Colman creation that had the distinction of being the most popular afterpiece of the late nineteenth century, was the vehicle for this novelty. In 1811, it was newly outfitted as an equestrian spectacle and revived with phenomenal success.[81] The conservative James Boaden, who was enthralled by the acting skill of the horses, wrote:

> the audience were in raptures, as at the achievement of a wonder. . . astonished at the sagacity, or recollection, of the noble animals before them.[82]

The addition of horses gave Colman's piece of new lease on life, and it remained a popular afterpiece in the 1820s.

[80] For the history of hippodrama, see A. H. Saxon, Enter Foot and Horse: A History of Hippodrama in England and France (New Haven: Yale UP, 1968) 92 n. 18. According to Saxon, the only previous instance when horses had appeared on a patent house stage was at Covent Garden in 1793, when they were used for verisimilitude in a fox hunt scene (with real fox and hounds) in a Christmas pantomine. The immediate incentive to produce a hippodrama was inspired by the success of The Blood Red Knight at Astley's. It ran for one hundred and seventy-five successive nights netted the proprietors a profit of almost 20,000 pounds.

[81] "Monk" Lewis was the author of Timour, and Thomas Colman the Younger of Blue Beard, or Female Curiosity, first performed at Drury Lane in 1798.

[82] James Boaden, Memoirs of Kemble 2: 542, quoted in Sutcliffe 43.

Indignant critics vociferously protested the intrusion of circus into the patent theaters as a degradation of the national drama. But protests fell on deaf ears because the spectacles were cash-cows for the theaters. The equestrian revival of Bluebeard in 1811, for example, produced receipts of over 20,000 pounds during the forty-one nights of its run.[83] The production by itself accounted for the increase of 20,000 pounds in box-office receipts in the 1810-11 season as compared to a year earlier.[84] But there is no doubt that the introductions of horses permanently damaged the public image of the patent houses as temples of national drama. There is direct between this popular innovation and that of Van Ambergh's lion taming act at Drury Lane, which the young Queen Victoria eagerly went to see seven times in the space of six weeks in 1839, a fact that terribly depressed Macready, then manager of Covent Garden.

Perhaps the spectacular melodrama reached its zenith in the The Virgin of The Sun[85] (an adaptation of

[83] Frederick Reynolds, The Life and Times of Frederick-Reynolds. Written by Himself (1827; New York: Blom, 1969) 2: 404.

[84] The receipts for 1809-10 were L 77,575, those for 1810-11 were L 98,110. "Report from the Select Committee on Dramatic Literature with the Minutes of Evidence," British Parliamenary Papers (1832) Stage and Theatre 1, Shannon: Irish UP, 1968, Appendix 13, 249.

[85] Based on Marmontel's Incas and Kotzebue's Virgin of the Sun.

Kotzebue's Die Sonnenjungfrau) and The Cataract of the Ganges,[86] Produced at Covent Garden in 1813, the former offered spectacles of destruction: of "the Temple of the Sun by an earthquake, and of a large Moorish vessel by a waterspout."[87] The latter, produced in 1823, featured, in addition to a dozen spectacular changes of scene, an actual waterfall which the equestrian heroine, licked by flames, ascended in the nick of time, escaping her pursuers. Bulwer pointed the obvious moral for the drama when he wrote:

> The two large theatres, having once gorged the public with show, have rendered themselves unfit for dignified comedy and sober entertainments, because they have created a public unfit to relish them.[88]

Many conservative lovers of the drama would have agreed with Kemble when, in 1816, he lamented to the French actor Talma that "our world in London are [sic] at present mad for splendid sights at the Theatre, and the most impossible extravagances are the most certainly admired."[89]

[86] By T.W. Moncrieff.

[87] Reynolds, 2: 391.

[88] Bulwer, England the English, 304.

[89] MS. letter, Kemble to Talma, 14 May 1816 (Folger Library), quoted in Herschel Baker, John Philip Kemble (1942; New York: Greenwood P, 1969) 332.

B. The Resurgence of Tragedy

In the the atmosphere of spectacle and circus that characterized the theater in the first two decades of the early nineteenth century, tragedy struggled to maintain its standing, if not its dignity, and actually managed to stage a brief comeback from its debased state. In this brief survey of its resurgence, an eye will be kept out for signs of domestic interest in the plays, since it is this aspect of Knowles's Virginius that impressed audiences (and readers) so deeply. From 1800 to 1813 was a period of dearth in the performance of tragedy in London, with only five new tragedies staged; only two were modestly successful, Lewis's gothicized Alphonso, King of Castile (10x CG, 1802)[90] and Joanna Baillie's De Monfort.[91] Scott declared Baillie to be "the best dramatic writer whom Britain has produced since the day of Shakespeare and Massinger."[92] De Monfort was one in a series plays illustrating particular human passions--love, hate, ambition, jealousy,

[90] The failures were Pye's Adelaide (1800); Godwin's Antonio (1800) and Faulkner (1807), and Lewis's Adelgitha (1808).

[91] Joanna Baillie wrote twenty-eight plays, only even of which were staged, mostly in Scotland, where Scott championed her.

[92] Virginia B. Lamb, "Joanna Baillie's Plays on the Passions" Viewed in Relation to Her Dramatic Theories," diss., Kent State U, 1973: 188.

and remorse.[93] The life of its protagonist, the Marquis De Monfort, has been poisoned by an obsessive, self-consuming hate for another man of equal rank (Marquis Rezenvelt). Montfort brutally kills Rezenvelt when he is deceived into believing that the man is secretly engaged to be married to his noble sister. One of the ways in which Baillie's differ from Knowles's plays and indeed from all other dramas written in the period is that they were written to conform to the author's own critical and psychological theories. Kemble produced De Monfort in his own altered version, with lavish sets and costumes, and, in Genest's words "aided by the charms of music" to lighten the play's heaviness at Drury Lane in 1800.[94] Byron was a backer of the play and tried unuccessfully to persuade the Drury Lane committee, during the time he was a member, to revive it. Kean revived it in 1821. The play's prologue boasted that Baillie "had restored Shakespeare to the stage."[95] However, Baillie's play did not succeed in sparking a revival of tragedy.

[93] The plays corresponding to the passions of love, hate, ambition, jealousy, and remorse are, respectively, Basil, De Monfort, Ethwald, Romiero, and Henriquez.

[94] John Genest's scrap-book, quoted in Margaret S. Carhart, The Lie and Work of Joanna Baillie (1923; n.p., Archon, 1970) 115. The play ran for eight performances. See Carhart 110-132 for the stage history of De Monfort.

[95] Margaret S. Carhart, The Life and Work of Joanna Baillie (1923; n.p.: Archon, 1970) 115.

A renaissance of sorts was stimulated, however, by the success of Coleridge's Remorse in 1813. In spite of being a tragedy dependent on melodrama and spectacle (a picture of an assassination attempt being engulfed in flames being the most spectacular effect) Remorse redeemed tragedy in the eyes of many contemporaries from the stain resulting from the immense popularity of Sheridan's Pizarro.[96] To Coleridge's surprise, it succeeded in spite of the fact that he refused to infuse it with pathos, which he considered a vitiating element in contemporary drama.[97] In his resistance to pathos, Coleridge viewed himself as a purifier of the drama. The play's new name underlined its Christian theme, which Baillie had taken as a subject for her unstaged play, Henriquez. Fletcher claims that Remorseis "the true father of Romantic drama," and deserves the distinction of being "the first contemporary drama to be performed on a nineteenth-century London stage composed

[96] Remorse had a "remarkable successsful run of twenty nights"--Kauvar and Sorenson intro. to Nineteenth-Century Verse Drama (Rutherford: Fairleigh-Dickinson UP, 1973) 59. It was revived in 1817. In the meantime, Coleridge's "dramatic entertainment" Zapolya (1815) was rejected by both Covent Garden and Drury Lane, even though Byron favored it. Interestingly, it was transformed into a melodrama and produced without his permission at the Royal Circus and Surrey Theater in 1817. According to Sheridan, Orosio had been rejected by Sheridan because of the "obscurity of the three last acts"--quoted in Webb, 14.

[97] In 1813, Coleridge, with good reason, expressed doubt that his Remorse could sustain a long run because it lacked pathos, either what he called "vulgar" or "true dramatic" pathos"--Collected Letters, ed. Griggs, 3: 430-431, quoted in Webb 19.

wholly in blank verse."[98] Regardless of his literary virtues, Hazlitt found it defective because it philosophized on passion instead of expressing it:

> He is a florid poet, and an ingenious metaphysician, who mistakes scholastic speculations for the intricate windings of the passions, and assigns possible reasons instead of actual motives for the excesses of his characters.[99]

Elsewhere, Hazlitt calls Remorse a "spurious tragedy," tainted with the "sophistry and paradox" of German transcendentalism."[100] For Hazlitt and others the slavish indebtedness of English tragedy to German drama (and of English comedy to French drama) was proof of "the poverty indeed of our present dramatic genius."[101] It should be overlooked that Remorse owed much of its success to its spectacular staging, which included a scene (3:1 of "gothic opera" that includes "off-stages voices, music from a glass or metal instrument, necromancy, [and] a huge painting of the assassination

[98] Fletcher 20.

[99] Howe 18: 309.

[100] The London Magazine, April, 1820 in Howe, 18: 309. Hazlitt cites a soliloquy of Ordonio's in which he constructs an elaborate rationalization ("What? If one reptile sting another repile,/ Where is the crime? . . .) to justify fratricide.

[101] Howe 18: 304. In comedy, a parallel proof of that poverty was the British stage's indebtedness to French drama.

attempt [by Don Ordonio] engulfed in flames."[102] The visual effects made audiences more willing to tolerate the density and intellectual complexity of Coleridge's thick-textured verse, which were cut heavily cut in performance.

A respectable number of modern tragedies were performed on the London stage between Coleridge's Remorse and Knowles's Virginius, but only a few were successful.[103] The next successful tragedy after Remorse was the Reverend Henry Hart Milman's Fazio. It ran for a respectable fifteen nights in 1815, just five nights fewer than Remorse.[104] Like Coleridge's play, it is a drama of remorse--a popular Christian theme at the time--in the Neo-Elizabethan mode, but its treatment of that theme is much more domestic. Set in the Spain of Phillip II, Coleridge's play is about two brothers, one of which takes it upon himself to play the role of "benevolent avenging dectective"[105] in an effort to induce remorse in his younger brother, who, years ago,

[102] Kauvar and Sorensen 60.

[103] The unsuccessful tragedies were: Lady Dacre's Ina (1815); Maturin's Manuel (1817) and Fredolpho (1819); Dimond's The Bride of Abydos (1818); Dillon's Retribution (1818); Twiss's Carib Chief (1819), Bucke's The Italians (1819).

[104] It should be noted that although staged after Remorse, Milman, later Dean of St. Pauls, wrote Fazio while he was an undergraduate at Oxford in 1811 or so. A version of the play, entitled The Italian Wife had been produced, without Milman's knowledge, at the Surrey in 1815.

[105] Kauvar and Sorensen 60.

instigated a plot to kill him. His strategy fails, but the play does end with the brother's repentance. Milman's play is about the dissolution of a happy marriage. The play is a domestic tragedy in the loose sense that A Yorkshire Tragedy, Heywood's A Woman Killed with Kindness, and Lillo's The London Merchant are domestic tragedies: they "present common people as heroes."[106]

Milman's treatment of domesticity is quite different from Knowles's. The Italian Renaissance setting is used to lend plausibility to the expression of intense passion. When Knowles used a comparable setting (though high rather than low characters) in The Wife, A Tale of Mantua (1833), it was for romantic purposes, to create a perfect wife, Mariana. She has unshakeable and faith in the power of innocence to shield her from an evil plot to falsely accuse her of adultery in her husband's absence. Her faith is justified when her husband returns and refuses to believe her calumniators. Its idealized depiction of married life is Victorian rather than Renaissance Italian. Milman's concern is to arouse

[106] Henry H. Adams, English Domestic, or, Homilectic Tragedy, 1575-1642 (1943; New York: Benjamin Blom, 1965) 1. "The lowly social station of the tragic protagonist is the one invariable characteristic of the genre," writes Adams, who defines the genre as "a tragedy of the common people, ordinarily set in the domestic scene, dealing with personal and family relationships rther than with large affairs of state, presented in a realistic fashion, and ending in a tragic or otherwise serious manner"--Adams 1-2. Fazio conforms to this definition.

pathos for Fazio and his wife Bianca once their happiness has been shattered by the husband's greed and obsessive infatuation (sexually innocent) with a femme fatale who had spurned his love before he married. His presentation of married life before the husband's fall of a couple who has been married for just three years is merely rhetorical, devoid the touches of naturalism which were Knowles's trademark, and which he had already given evidence of in 1815 in Caius Gracchus, written and also staged in the same year as Milman's play, but in Belfast rather than London.

The opening words of Milman's play, spoken by the Fazio to Bianca, celebrating their marriage of three years, is typical of the stilted quality of Milman's verse:

> Why what a peevish envious fabulist
> Was he, that vow'd cold wedlock's atmosphere
> wearies the thin and dainty plumes of love;
> That fond husband's holy appetites
> Like the gross surfeit of intemperate joy,
> Grows sickly and fastidious at the sweets
> Of its own chosen flower![107]

These words take on an ironic ring after Fazio fatally drawn to the cold, calculating Arabella. Milman's talent for depicting domesticity feeling is limited to

[107] Act I, sc 1, Henry Hart Milman, Fazio: A Tragedy (Oxford: Collingwood, 1816) 1. The publication of the play in Oxford was no doubt related to the fact that Milman was a fellow of Brasen Nose College of Oxford Univerity.

showing affectionate wife cling to her husband and to the exchanging of kisses. There is no scene where domestic bliss is shown instead of being just talked about. Only two passages that stand out as genuine evocations of domesticity. One is spoken by the wife, Bianca, after the couple is suddenly transformed from poverty to wealth after the husband, Fazio, steals hidden gold from his dead uncle. Bianca, uncomfortable in the palace into which they move after their enrichment, longs for her former humble home (3:1) in a way that faintly anticipates the mournful lament of the homesick Clari in John Howard Payne's Clari; or the Maid of Milan, a domestic melodrama which also treats the remorse theme. Although the circumstances of the heroine in both plays is entirely different, both share an unhappiness with life in cold palaces and long for the humble and warm surroundings they have left. Bianca's nostalgic enumeration of familiar "domestic things" is equivalent to Clari's singing of "Home, Sweet Home":

> Oh, in our old poor narrow home, if haply
> He ling'd late abroad, domestic things
> Close and familiar crowded all around me;
> The ticking of the clock, the flapping motion
> Of the green lattice, the grey curtain's folds,
> The hangings of the bed myself had wrought,
> Yea e'en his black and iron crucibles,
> Were to me as my friends. But here, or here,
> Where all is coldly, comfortlessly costly,
> All strange, all new in uncouth gorgeousness. . .

The second is spoken by Fazio after he has been imprisoned for the murder of his uncle, of which he is innocent but for which he will be unjustly executed. (4:1). Together, the remorseful husband and wife reminisce about their lost happiness, identified with their former state of poverty (4:1):

> How exquisitely happy have we two
> Sate in the dusky and discolour'd light,
> That flicker'd through our shaking lattice bars!
> Our children at our feet, or on our laps,
> Warm in their breathings slumbers, or at play
> With rosy laughter on their cheeks!

This is the first and last reference in the play to the couple's children, which do not appear in the play. The mention of the children is a convenient rhetorical topos that Milman uses to evoke pathos for the couple who have lost "Eden." Milman's penchant in Fazio for glorifying domesticity in retrospect, after it has been lost, is not shared by Knowles, whose depiction of domesticity is of the moment and not accompanied by rhetorical fanfare.[108]

[108] While in prison (5:1), Fazio moralizes about his tragedy: "This yellow pestilence / Laid waste my Eden; made a gaudy bird of me, / For soft Temptation's silken nets to snare. / It crept in to us--Sin came with it--Misery / Dogg'd its foul footsteps--ever deepening Sin, / And ever-darkening Misery. Both Fazio and Bianca have reason to be remorseful at this point: Fazio because he succumbed to the temptation of greed, and to his obsession with Arabella; Bianca because by attempting to revenge herself on the woman she believes to be her rival causes her husband to be unjustly sentenced to death for murder.

In 1816, Charles Maturin's gothicized tragedy Bertram; or, The Castle of St. Aldobrand, about the consequences of infidelity, with Kean as Bertram, its Byronic villain-hero ("sublime even in his guilt") created a sensation in London.[109] The play was immortalized in a famous attack by Coleridge, who detested it. The stage family of Byronic villain-heroes to which Bertram belongs begins with Baillie's De Monfort. The proud, gloomy, world-weary hero, now a leader of a gang of banditti, is by accident of a shipwreck put in proximity with the woman he loved and still loves. She also loves him--her heart is "Bertram's still, and Bertram's ever" (1:5) she tells her maid, before she knows he is washed ashore.[110] Many years have passed since they last met, and Imogine is now, unknown to Bertram, the wife of the man (Aldobrand) who inherited the estates that were wrongfully taken from him and the mother of his child. Bertram's obsessive hatred of Aldobrand, who is absent from the castle when Bertram appears, is similar to that of De Monfort for Raszevelt. Imogine, who still loves Bertram is attracted to the "wild and terrible grandeur" of the

[109] Maturin was a poor curate of St. Peter's church in Dublin. The success of Adelaide by his friend Sheil had impelled him to write a play.

[110] Rev. R.C. Maturin, Bertram; or The Castle of St. Aldobrand: A Tragedy, Oxberry's edition (London: Simkin and Marshall, 1827). Act III, sc. 2.

shipwrecked stranger even before she knows his identity. After hearing him speak, she is frightened by "an awful thrilling in his voice" (2:3). On the point of divining his identity, Imogine exclaims:

> My senses blaze--between the dead and living
> I stand in fear--oh God!--it cannot be--
> Those thick black locks--those wild and
> sunburnt features
> He looked not thus--but then that voice--
> It cannot be--for he would know my name.
> (2:2)

After Bertram discloses his identity, she shrieks and falls into his arms, evoking these words from Bertram:

> Thus pale, cold, dying, thus thou art most fit
> To be enfolded to this desolate heart--
> A blighted lily on its icy bed--
> Nay, look not up, 'tis thus I would behold thee.
> That pale cheek looks like truth--I'll gaze no more--
> That fair. that pale, dear cheek, those helpless arms,
> If I look longer they will make me human

Bertram pronounces a hideous curse on Imogine for marrying another man, even though she explains her that she did so only in order to save her poor father from starvation. When Bertram asks, "could a father love thee / As I have loved?" the reader recognizes how far Maturin's self-centered gothic hero is removed from the sphere of domestic feelings and from the sensibility of the Knowlesian hero. Imogine describes herself as "a dutiful . . . daughter," but Bertram is unable to comprehend the meaning of a daughter's self-sacrificing love.

When the conversation is interrupted by Imogine's young child, who enters and clings his mother, Bertram grabs the child and kisses it, after which he rushes out. This is one of two occasions when Maturin uses Imogine's child melodramatically as a wordless reminder of Imogine's married state and the domestic values she has committed herself to. Thus it is a warning of the abyss that waits her if she falls sexually. The next time when the child interrupts them is in the convent, where Imogine has gone to confess herself to the unresponsive Prior. Bertram comes upon her accidently, and Imogine soon succumbs to what Bertram calls the curse of their "fatal passion." After having sunk into his arms, she consents to his proud request to meet with him for a last time to comfort his desolate heart. It is at this point that the child runs in to report that his father has returned. As the sight of the child, Imogine is suddenly filled with guilt. The contempt Bertram feels for Imogine's conventional values reveals how dead this egotist and societal-outlaw is to the power of domestic feelings or indeed to the feelings of anyone except himself:

> Imogine: (Falling on the child's neck.) What have I done, my child; forgive thy mother.
> Bertram: (Surveying her with stern contempt.)
> Woman, oh woman, and an urchin's kiss
> Rends from thy heart thy love of many years--
> Go, virtuous dame, to thy most happy lord,
> And Bertram's image taint your kiss with poison.

Bertram leaves with a curse. The appearance of the child has not deterred Imogine, however, from meeting Bertram for a last time as she promised. The scene ends with her voicing confidence that it will be an innocent meeting: "My boy, my boy, thy image will protect me." The meeting occurs off-stage, but from Bertram's remorseful soliloquy in the first scene of Act IV it is clear that they have committed adultery:

> I should have bearded him in hall of pride--
> I should have mated him in fields of death--
> Not stol'n upon his secret bower of peace.
> And breath'd a serpent's venom on his flower.

The last two lines suggest the sexual act, as does Imogine's description of their meeting: "We met in madness and, and in guilt we parted." She, too, feels humiliated: "I <u>was</u> the honored wife of Aldobrand; / I <u>am</u> the scorned minion of a rufian."[111] Self-described as "mad with horror and remorse," Imogine's mind becomes filled with gothic imagery that is reminiscent of Beddoes <u>The Bride's Tragedy</u>: "Oh hang me shuddering on the baseless crag-- / The vampire's wing, the wild-worms's sting be on me."[112] Perversely, the sinful act will lead to his killing of Imogine's husband. In Dale

[111] Act IV, sc. 1, p. 41.

[112] Act IV, sc. 1.

Kramer's words, "The chain of events that makes him determined to kill Aldobrand begins with the humiliating awareness that, by defiling Aldobrand's wife, he had both debased himself and erased the justification of his resentment against Aldobrand."[113] Imogine goes mad when Bertram kills her husband soon after he returns. Carrying her child, the mad Imogine bursts into the convent and seeks confesses her guilt to the appalled Prior and monks, who offer no comfort. Imogine's frightened child, for the last time, becomes the means by which Imogine's is made aware of the gravity of her dereliction from motherly and wifely duty:

> Child: Dear Mother, take me home---
> Imogine: Thou has no home--
> She, whom thou callest mother left thee none--
> We're hunted from mankind-- (Sinking down)

But the domestic note soon turns to a gothic one, as Imogine, shrieking in horror, hallucinates a bloody corpse: "It moves--it moves--it rises--it comes on me." After Imogine dies, Bertram unlike De Monfort, Bertram refuses to feel for killing Aldobrand, but holds himself to blame for killing the woman he loved and takes his own life in the Roman fashion. Maturin's play was

[113] Dale Kramer, Charles Robert Maturin (New York: G.K. Hall, 1973) 63.

naturally enough admired by Byron himself (who was then part of the Drury Lane management); it had been recommended to him by Scott.

The play should be viewed in the larger context of literary gothicism which flourished at this time in Byron's drama, Shelley's Cenci, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, and Dr. Polidori's The Vampyre, to name three works that are gothic in spirit. A play flavored with gothicism is what one would expect of the author of the novel Melmoth the Wanderer (1820). The play is full of gothic motifs (a castle, monastery, madness) and contains some impressive opportunities for spectacle: it opens, like The Tempest, with a storm and shipwreck, and presents a procession of knights in the last act. The play also enlists the aid of music and song. There are many opportunities, too, for broad and violent physical gestures and for posturing on the part of actor who plays Bertram, as when he strikes his heart and declares, "No dews give freshness of this blasted soil"[114] But it is important to realize that Maturin aspired in Bertram to the writing of high tragedy, with poetic language that was appropriately exalted

The comments Knowles made on Maturin' play in his lectures give us insight into his own criteria for good

[114] Act II, sc. 1, p. 25.

drama, his own sense of decorum regarding subject matter, and his humanistic and moralistic middle class attitudes and values. Knowles objected to the subject of Bertram as unfit for the stage, but praised the play for the "felicity" of its plot, it characterization, and lifelike dialogue, concluding: "Bertram will live as long as the language of his country is read or spoken. The confidence of the prediction reminds us of what admirers of Knowles said about Virginius. Knowles finds a lack of poetic justice in allowing Bertram, a man "savage and revolting selfishness" to "make his exit out of life with eclats" after the wrong he had done to Imogine and her husband. Unlike Coleridge, Knowles does not object to the morality of the play. In fact, Knowles finds several useful lessons in the play, one of which is that "the man who covets and compasses the possession of a woman whose heart is irrevocably plighted to another, commits a moral wrong which may recoil upon himself."[115] Another moral has do with a woman's need to guard her "honour." Imogine did not guard it vigilantly enough. This leads Knowles to assert that "Imogine deserves her fate" because

> she allows the tenderness of the mistress to prevail over the duty of the wife, over her sense of what she owes to her own honor, which. . . she subjects to suspicion by granting an interview with Bertram. She does

[115] Knowles, Lectures on Dramatic Literature 2: 36.

> fall, and ruin follows ruin. The wreck of her virtue involves that of her peace; to the wreck of her peace, ensures that of her reason; and her death completes the catastrophe. A more instructive moral lesson I cannot conceive; one that impressively cries, Beware! to the being that would deviate a hair's breadth from the path of rectitude.

One cannot imagine a fallen character like Imogine or a supreme egoist like Bertram in a play by Knowles.

The success of Brutus by the American-born John Howard Payne at Drury Lane in 1818 is of importance in connection with Knowles because of its extraordinary popularity and the fact it was a Roman not a "romantic" tragedy. It ran thirty-nine consecutive nights and amassed a total of fifty-two performances in all during its first season. With Kean starring in the lead part, Payne's Brutus was the first successful historical tragedy of the early nineteenth century. Knowles's Virginius, a year later, was the second, and it was by design rather than coincidence that Knowles's tragedy came so quickly on the heels of Payne's. The stories of Virginius and Brutus are linked in two important ways: first, there is a parallelism in the tragic action, which consists, respectively, of a father killing his own child and a father, acting as a judge, sentencing his child to be killed; second, both characters are certified symbols of political liberty and are associ-

ated with the downfall of tyrants in the history of the stage.[116]

Finally, the overwrought plays of the prolific Richard Lalor Sheil, who quit playwriting in 1819 to devote himself to law and politics (Irish M.P.), deserve mention. The first was Adelaide, or The Immigrants at Drury Lane in 1816; the second was The Apostate at Covent Garden in 1817; the third, Evadne; or The Statue, also at Covent Garden 1819, was the most popular with thirty performances, with Macready, as Amurath, again acting a diabolical villain's part.[117] Sheil's plays catered to the taste for "tear-drenched horror" that derived from the Gothic drama, which had enjoyed a rage in the 1790's, and represent the gothic spirit's last hurrah.[118] They illustrate, too, how melodrama could be made to masquerade as tragedy. In his slashing review of Adelaide, or The Emigrants, Hazlitt condemns the play as a "vulgar tragedy" with an "unintelligible" and "absurd" plot, written in language made up of "nonsense and indecency."[119] He found it unworthy of the talents of its luminous young star,

[116] Another similarity is that both characters were passed up Shakespeare as subjects for a play.

[117] The two plays by Sheil that were produced were Bellamira (1818) and .... Evadne had a stage life of sixty years--Donohue, Theatre in the Age of Kean 137.

[118] Fletcher 49.

[119] Howe 5: 308-09.

Eliza O'Neill, whom he ranked second only to Mrs. Siddons[120]) Sheil's plays are not devoid of domestic touches, but they seem rather hackneyed compared to those of Knowles (discussed later). In The Apostate, for example, Sheil depicts a loving father-daughter relationship between Florinda, the heroine, and her father, Count Alvarez that is central to the action of the play. There is pathos felt for Alvarez when a fire breaks out in his palace and he is dragged out crying "Where is my child" (1:2). When the enraged father threatens to curse his daughter for loving the high-born Heymeya because he is a Moslem (1:3)--a scene that faintly echoes the council scene in Othello, where Brabantio denounces his daughter for loving a Moor--Lorinda replies calmly (as Desdemona does) but obediently (unlike Desdemona) as one would expect of a dutiful convent-bred daughter who cannot imagine disobeying her father's will:

> In infancy I gaz'd upon your face
> With an instinctive reverence, that grew
> To reason's tender dictate--Never yet
> Have I offended you; and let me say
> My tears may flow from eyes long used to weeping,--
> My form may wither in the gripe of grief--
> My heart may break indeed--Love can do this--
> But never can it teach Florinda's hand
> To draw down sorrows on a father's age,
> Or to deserve his curse.[121]

[120] Howe 18: 283.

[121] Richard Lalor Sheil, The Apostate (London: Murray, 1817) 15.

The iambic pentameter verse is smooth enough, but too declamatory to convey intimate emotion. Ultimately, Florinda is torn between her love for her father and the wish to obey him, and her love of Heymeya, the man who saved her life in the fire. Faced with her father's implacable opposition to her love, Florinda, in her pride, can boast to Heymeya:

> With all my sex's folly, still I bear
> My sex's dignity--I've not the pow'r
> To crust the fatal passion in my breast,
> But I can bury it. . . .

These words have an eighteenth century rhetorical flavor that is quite foreign to Knowles's style. For the hero, the conflict is a conventional one in the heroic drama: love vs. honor. In this case, the conflict is between the hero's love for a Christian woman on the one hand and his honor as a Moslem warrior and leader on the other. This hoary melodramatic plot convention is one that remains unexploited in Knowles's own plays. A word must be said about the play's fiendish wicked villain, Pescara, played by Macready, who was highly praised for his performance in the part. He is the classic diabolic, conscience-less, persecuting villain, who looks backward to Jacobean tragedy and forward to melodrama. The convent-bred innocence of the virgin heroine perversely inflames his sexual passion. At one point, he mesmerizes Florinda by recounting a

symbolic and erotic dream of her marrying him, in the midst of which, as he speaks of draining a cup of joy he loses his self-control and seizes her:

> Des:: I quaff'd; was nectar,
> And thrilled within my heart--Then, then,
> Florinda!--
> Flor: Let me implore you--(Struggling.)
> Des: Then, within my arms
> Methought I press thee.
> Flor: Hold!--This violence--

When the hero foils his plot to possess the fair Florinda (Act IV, sc. 3), Pescara raves in exclamations:

> Fury! despair!
> Love, rage, and madness, seize upon my heart!
> Fight for your prey and rend it.--Now revenge!
> Revenge, where art thou? Hast thou held thy cup
> High to my burning lip, to mock my thirst;
> Then, as I clutched, to dash it from my grasp?--
> Traitors and slaves! gone; fled are all my hopes!
> thus wither'd in an instant--tumbl'd down--
> Hurl'd headlong from the height to which I toil'd!

At the end of the play, he sadistically gives Florinda the choice of being his wife or listening to Heymaya's cry out in pain as he tortures him hideously:

> Pes: Be my wife.
> Flor: Thy wife! Oh! no! it is too horrible!
> Pes: I'll hunt for life in ev'ry trembling limb,
> and chase it down. The diving steel shall
> plunge--
> Nay, do not stop your ears--for his shrill
> screams
> Shall pierce the solid deafness of the tomb!

He then seizes her and forces her to watch the torture, which he delightedly describes in grisly detail:

> Pes: The wheel goes round--See, the red froth of blood!
> His hair stands up, and drips with agony!--

Like the conventional heroine of melodrama, Florinda reacts to the sight of her hero's suffering by fainting in the villain's arms.

In sum, the popularity of Fazio, Bertram, Brutes, The Apostate and Evadne is a sign that the taste for blank verse and for tragedy enjoyed a revival in immediate post-Waterloo period. This was explained in part, but not wholly, by "Kean fever,"[122] which gripped London shortly after he debuted at Drury Lane a year before Waterloo. The appeal of these plays for contemporary audiences which is explained up by Donohue:

> It is perhaps understandable that audiences become enamoured of the idiom of these plays because of the high emotions they stirred and the echoes they raised of traditional dramatic art. Extravagantly pseudo-Elizabethan in language, they appear to idealize Shakespearean practice but meanwhile emulate concepts of dramatic character that go back. . . [to] the affective techniques of the Jacobean private theatre."[123]

[122] Alan S. Downer, The Eminent Tragedian: William Charles Macready (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1966) 57.

[123] Donohue, Theatre 138-139.

Donohue characterizes the idiom of these plays as "hothouse verse and prose" and rejects their "claim to true conservatism."

The difference between Virginius and the modern tragedies just described is captured in these words of the play's prologue, written by James Hamilton Reynolds, which trumpets that difference:

> To-night, no idle nondescript lays waste
> The fairy and yet placid bower of taste:
> No story, piled with dark and cumbrous fate,
> And words that stagger under their own weight;
> But one of silent grandeur--simply said,
> As though it were awakened from the dead!
> It is a tale--made beautiful by years;--
> Of pure, old Roman sorrow--old in tears!
> And those you shed o'er it in childhood may
> Still fall--and fall--for sweet Virginia.

No one was more struck by the virtues of Virginius in relationship to other modern tragedies being produced on the stage during this period than Hazlitt, who attended one of the first performances and praised the play highly in several reviews. In addition, in The Spirit of the Age (1825), Hazlitt wrote, "There is no doubt that Virginius is the best acting tragedy that has been produced on the modern stage"[124] and on the basis of this one play he called its author "the first tragic writer of the age."[125]

[124] William Hazlitt, The Spirit of the Age (1825; London: Oxford UP, 1970) 302.

[125] Hazlitt, The Spirit 302.

Hazlitt heaped praise on Virginius in part because he was he was so dissatisfied with the poetic drama (i.e., tragedies) which immediately preceded it, which include all the tragedies mentioned above. The reasons for his dissatisfaction are worth looking at more closely. The best source for Hazlitt's strictures on modern tragedy are found in his review of Bertram. One of his sharpest attacks on the prevailing theatrical taste for operatic spectacle at the expense of poetry made in The London Magazine:

> The craving of the public mind after novelty and effect is a false and uneasy appetite that must be pampered with fine words at every step--we must be tickled with sound, startled with show, and relieved with the importunate, uninterrupted display of fancy and verbal tinsel as much as possible from the fatigue of thought or shock of feeling. A poem [or poetic drama] is to resemble an exhibition of fire-works, with a continual explosion of quaint figures and devices, flash after flash, that surprise us for the moment and leave us no trace of light or warmth behind them. Or modern poetry in its retrograde progress comes at last to be constructed on the principles of the modern OPERA, where an attempt is made to gratify every sense at every instant, and where the understanding alone is insulted and the heart mocked.[126]

In reviewing Bertram, Hazlitt finds three deficiencies in the play. The first is a lack of action:

> Its beauties are rather those of language and sentiment than of action or situation. . . .

[126] Howe 11: 170.

> The general fault of this tragedy, and of other modern tragedies that we could mention, is, that it is a tragedy without business. . . . There is a want of that necessary connection between what happens, what is said, and what is done, in which we take the essence of dramatic invention to consist."[127]

The second deficiency concerns the reliance on sentiment and sensibility rather than passion, which for him is a characteristic of an "artificial and effeminate" society:

> Mere sentiment is voluntary, fantastic, self-created, beginning and ending in itself; true passion is natural, irresistible, produced by powerful causes, and impelling the will to determinate actions. The old tragedy, if we understand it, is a display of the affections of the heart and the energies of the will; the modern romantic tragedy is a mixture of fanciful exaggeration and indolent sensibility; the former is founded on real calamities and real purposes: the latter courts distress, affects horror, indulges in all the luxury of woe. . . to fill up the void of action.[128]

The third concerns the author's lack of sympathetic imagination:

> The poet does not describe what his characters would feel in given circumstances, but lends them his own thoughts and feelings out of his general reflections on human nature, or general observation of certain

[127] Howe 5: 304-5.

[128] Howe 5: 305.

objects."[129]

In sum, Hazlitt is criticizing Maturin (and by extension, all the tragic writers of his age) for being ventriloquists rather than chameleons.

In 1820, Hazlitt was surprised to discover that someone had actually written a good tragedy at last.[130] For Hazlitt believed that the spirit of his age (utilitarianism) was inimical to the writing to good drama: "The age we live in is critical, didactic, paradoxical, romantic, and critical, but not dramatic," he declared.[131] It was Knowles, his old friend, and he was naturally surprised, having recognized Knowles's dramatic talent but not his genius when the boy was his pupil. "There is none now living that can write a whole tragedy but the author of Virginius, and nobody thought of his writing one, he wrote," he declared.[132] In contrast to Coleridge's "spurious" tragedy, Hazlitt found Virginius "real"[133] Was Hazlitt simply puffing his younger friend's play for old times's sake when he

[129] Howe 5: 305.

[130] Howe 18: 368

[131] Howe 18: 302.

[132] Howe 19: 110.

[133] Howe, 18: 304-06. It may be noted that Hazlitt never mentions the tragedy Caius Gracchus, which had been produced in 1823.

praised Virginius so highly? It is improbable to think so, since it is clear that the play fulfilled his avowed criteria of good tragedy and the play had proved its power in the theater.

In his review of Knowles's tragedy, Hazlitt wrote that it is "undoubtedly the best dramatic composition that has for many years been produced on the stage."[134] The emphasis on "dramatic" (rather than "poetic") makes the point that Knowles's play, whatever its deficiencies as poetry, was "admirably adapted to the stage."[135] Its gripping dramatic interest set it apart from other modern tragedies, including Remorse, which he judged superior to Virginius in poetic power but inferior in dramatic power. The "void of action" is filled not with affectations of horror but with a "real" calamity (the killing of a daughter by her father) with which ordinary persons can identify. Hazlitt's statement of the play's dramatic power is based on observation in the front of the pit (his usual place) of the theater. Hazlitt describes the reaction he saw and heard as Knowles's play was being performed:

> We have seen plays that produced much more tumultuous applause; none scarcely that excited more sympathy. There were no clap-traps, no sentiments that were the understood signals for making a

[134] William Hazlitt, London Magazine, July 1820.

[135] Howe 18: 346.

> violent uproar; but we heard every one near us express heartfelt and unqualified approbation; and tears more precious supplied the place of loud huzzas.[136]

Praising Virginius as "an original piece of writing,"[137] Hazlitt is particularly impressed with the simple, "straightforward manner" in which the story is told, without the aid of "adventitious" stage effects--"tyrannies of the stage," as he calls them--to divert the eye as was common in the popular drama:

> there is no pink fire. . . no trees moving up and down. . . nor rivers bursting their banks. . . such things we have seen in our time, but we do not like them.[138]

Instead, he finds a "colloquial and highly spirited" diction,[139] which, he says, is "all that we can wish for, or require, in dramatic writing."[140] It is "the true language of life [i.e., nature], which almost all authors of late years have been afraid to venture on;--there is no fustian or unecessary mystification.[141] Hazlitt does notice the unmusicality of Knowles's

[136] Howe: 18, 347.

[137] London Magazine, June, 1820, 693.

[138] Hazlitt, London Magazine (June, 1820) 693.

[139] Hazlitt, London Magazine (June, 1820) 693.

[140] Howe, 18: 347.

[141] Hazlitt, London Magazine (June, 1820) 693.

verse, a besetting fault of all the plays. Hazlitt's silence on what is usually called the "Elizabethanism" of Knowles's language indicates his approval of the conservative aspect of the play's aesthetic. This is predictable from a critic who was not comfortable with literary experimentation. But it was the unconventional colloquiality of the poetic language, not its derivativeness that other critics found objectionable. On this point, Hazlitt vigorously defends the simplicity of the play's language:

> Some cold, formal, affected, and interested critics have not known what to make of this. It is not what they would have done. One finds fault with the style as poor, because it is not inflated. Another can see nothing in it, because it is not interlarded with modern metaphysical theories, unknown to the ancients.[142]

Finally, Hazlitt is pleasantly surprised to find a tragedy which is free of egotism::

> Strange to say, in this age of poetical egotism, the author, in writing his play, has been thinking of Virginius and his daughter, more than of himself! This is the true imagination, to put yourself in the place of others, and to feel and speak for them.[143]

[142] Howe 18: 345.

[143] Howe: 18: 345.

Knowles, according to Hazlitt, possessed the chameleon-like dramatic imagination that was lacking in "this age of poetical egotism":

> . . . he hears the anxious beatings of his own heart, and makes others feel them by the force of sympathy. . . . By thinking of nothing but his subject, he rivets the attention of the audience to it.[144]

Hazlitt is here recognizing in Virginius the fruits of his own "conception of the sympathetic character of the imagination,"[145] as set forth in his Essay on the Principles of Human Action (1805). That is to say, the imagination "through a kind of sympathy [antithetical to self-love] the imagination can identify itself with whatever comes before it."[146] Knowles, who was acquainted with Hazlitt in London while the subject matter of this essay was gestating in his mind, restated Hazlitt's seminal theory in one of his own lectures:

> To succeed in individualisation, the poet must utterly forget himself, as though the souls of his dramatis personae had taken entire possession of his faculties, his reason, his imagination, his affections, and his passions, to use them as his own; or as

[144] Howe 18: 345.

[145] Walter Jackon Bate, intro. to William Hazlitt, in Criticism: The Major Texts (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1952) 283.

[146] John M. Bullitt, "Hazlitt and the Romantic Conception of Imagination," Philogical Quarterly, 24, Pt. 4 (1945) 354.

> though for a time he had cast off his own identity, his own existence, to put on the existence of other beings.[147]

While tragedy was making a visible if erratic comeback in the six years preceding the production of Virginius, the taste of audiences for melodrama and spectacle proved as strong as ever. But it was now combined with a taste for sentimentalized domestic interest. This craving was satisfied by melodramatized stage adaptations of Scott's historical novels. By 1815, a rage for Scott dramatized had developed that was helping to blur the distinction between the major and minor theaters. It has already been noted that during its first run, Virginius, as the mainpiece, shared the bill with The Battle of Bothwell Brigg, an adaptation of Scott's The Antiquary. The practice of producing stage versions of Scott's novels had begun in the minor theaters, and by 1818 had spread to the majors. The rage lasted about a decade.[148] During this time, the two major and a number of minor theaters vied to outdo each other in writing adaptations of Scott's novels. Most of these adaptations were featured as mainpieces,

[147] Lectures on Dramatic Poetry, Lect. 4, 98-99.

[148] The first adapation of a Scott novel, Guy Mannering, had appeared in 1815. In this period, writes Scrimgeour, "twenty-five of Scott's novels were translated to the stage, some in as many as ten different versions"--Scrimgeour, diss., 392. Scrimgeour examination of the signficance of this phenomenon . . .

in the privileged slot. This was one of the signs that the impetus to the resurgence of tragedy--a resurgence or revival in name only, since the spirit of tragedy had been long dead--could not long endure.

Knowles could not have seen any of the productions of the tragedies described above in the period 1813-19--at least on the London stage--because he was working and living in Ireland and then in Scotland during this time. By 1820, then, when Knowles's made the trip from Glasgow to London to see the production of his Virginius, modern tragedy had made its presence felt, however much it depended on theatrical technique to enhance its appeal. However, the 1820s would be less hospitable to tragedy than the previous decade was.[149] In a letter to Elliston around 1821, a frustrated Maturin, whose tragedies Manuel and Fredolfo, failed on the stage in 1817 and 1819, respectively, wrote, "It is useless to hope for the success of what is called the regular drama. I must learn to adapt myself to the taste of the public."[150] Adapting oneself to the taste of the public, if one were a verse writer like Knowles,

[149] In the 1830s and 40s, conditions would become even less hospitable to tragedy.

[150] Charles Maturin, letter to Robert Ellison, undated, ca. 1821, quoted in George Raymond, Memoirs of Robert William Elliston (1846; New York: Blom, 1969) 2. 215.

meant turning away from tragedy toward "drama."[151] This is, in fact, what he did when he wrote William Tell and Alfred the Great, plays that used some of the theatrical techniques popular in the melodrama and but ended happily, according to melodramatic formula, with virtue triumphant and evil vanquished.

[151] After Virginius, Knowles waited twenty years to write a new tragedy, John of Procida in 1840. When that was not a success, he turned back to comedy and drama.

SHERIDAN KNOWLES IN CONTEXT

by

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Chapter 3

The Melodramatizing of the Domestic

The presentation of domestic subject matter in Knowles's plays has two interrelated but different and easily distinguishable aspects, both of which were important in terms of explaining their contemporary audience appeal: the melodramatic and the non-melodramatic or what may be called, for want of a more precise term, "naturalistic." The object of this chapter to view the former aspects of this presentation in the four historical plays in terms of the melodramatic patterns and techniques already described.[1] These include a moral and metaphysical pattern (e.g., the antinomy of good and evil and the concept of poetic justice); a plot pattern (evil persecuting the good and the innocent); a technique of prolonging situations for their emotional effect (chiefly, the arousal of pathos), and the use of pictorial staging (notably the tableau) and scenic design. In the "dramas" (Tell and Alfred), music is used to heighten emotional effects.

Like Milman, Maturin, Sheil, and other writers of tragedy, Knowles was strongly influenced by the prevailing melodramatic dramaturgy of the theater of

[1] The non-melodramatic or "naturalistic" aspects of Knowles's presentation of domestic subject matter is discussed in the next chapter.

his age. This is what Nicoll means when he says of Alfred the Great that Knowles was "indulging in tricks of the inferior style,"[2] implying that Knowles was simply catering to audience taste. But this is not the case. Instead of deploring this dramaturgy as a sign of debased taste as most of the Romantic poets who turned dramatists did, Knowles embraced it. This is clear from the scattered critical comments on drama in the lectures that he began delivering in the 1820's. Characteristically, these comments are oriented toward theatrical values in that they consider a dramatic work as a collaboration between author and actor in performance, not as a text to be read in the study. Often, they are based on his personal experience in the theater, as an actor and spectator.

The mode of staging Shakespeare in the early nineteenth century, as already descibed,[3] was melodramatic, and Knowles comments on Shakespeare reveal that he was in perfect accord with it. In defending himself against the critic (Knowles called him the "hypercritic") who charged him with relying too heavily on melodramaturgy, Knowles cited the example of Shakespeare. In Macbeth, his favorite play by Shakespeare. Knowles has this to say about the moment when Macduff with the

[2] Nicoll, 4: 79.

[3] For comments on the staging of Shakespeare in the early nineteenth century, see the Introduction.

"force of a flash of lightning. . . blasts" Macbeth with the stunning revelation that he has been "Untimely ripped" from his mother's womb:

> Here was the dramatist. Here was perception of the use of situation and incident. And here let me recommend the modern hypercritic to apply for such a lesson of ingeniousness, discretion, and justice as will prevent him from denouncing the modern dramatist for availing himself of the instruments which Shakespeare deemed it no disgrace to use--nay, for which there was never yet a popular play that did not derive a considerable portion of its effect.[4]

"Macbeth is the most melodramatic tragedy in the whole range of the drama, and it to the credit of Shakespeare that it is so," Knowles declared.[5] In what amounts to a statement of his dramatic credo, Knowles rests his case for the primacy of "incidents and situations" in drama on their power to arouse an intense response in the spectator that can be measured in physical terms.

One of the most thrilling moments for Knowles occurred in Mrs. Siddons's acting of the sleepwalking scene: "I smelt blood! I swear I smelt blood," Knowles

[4] James Sheridan Knowles, Lecture on Macbeth (London, 1875) 94.

[5] Lectures on Macbeth, 78.

told the American actor Edwin Forrest with a shudder.[6] Kean's Hamlet impressed Knowles with its power of every scene "to arouse, to amaze, to appal, to melt, to awaken every chord of the human heart into thrilling, exquisite vibration."[7] He is particularly impressed with the fact that Kean is able to elicit tears in the scene with Ophelia, something he had never seen done before.[8] "Power" is a key word in a key word in Knowles's critical vocabulary; so too is "thrilling." Both occur often. The words span the gulf between the stage and the pulpit; for Knowles both met on the common ground of intense feeling. "Thrilling, exquisite vibration" is what Knowles felt in his heart when he heard the preaching of Hill and when he heard great actors like Kean and Mrs. Siddons act Shakespearean tragedy on the stage.

For Knowles, "power" was conveyed through voice, gesture, and feeling or passion, not by mere mechanical theatrical effects like the appearance of the spectre, accompanied by splendid effects of colored light and organ music, in Lewis's The Castle Spectre. These theatrical effects were of less interest Knowles than

[6] W.R. Alger, Life of Edwin Forrest 2: 545, quoted in Leslie Howard Meeks, Sheridan Knowles and the Theatre of His Time (Bloomington: Principia P, 1933) 52.

[7] Knowles ,Lectures on Dramatic Poetry 94. Knowles was of the opinion that Hamlet was deficient in action.

[8] Lectures on Dramatic Poetry, Lect. 4: 94.

the effects achieved with the human voice and body through spoken verse dialogue. Knowles believed that if the actor feels what he is acting, and identifies strongly with his part, he will arouse an emotional response in the spectator. Knowles uses the word "passion" in the same way Hazlitt's does in his theater criticism to mean intense feeling that communalizes the audience's response. For Knowles passion is "the lightning which melts the diversified assembly into one mass, so that they become but one man and have but one heart."[9] In the terms of melodramaturgy, this power was felt as pathos. That pathos was the lifeblood of Knowles's plays was fully recognized by his contemporaries.

Knowles's plays cannot be reduced to melodrama, but there are obvious similarities between the nature of melodrama discussed in the previous chapter and Knowles's early historical plays.[10] With the exception of Caius Gracchus, each is structured, both dramatically and affectively, according to a melodramatic pattern that is based on a morally dichotomous (good vs. evil) vision of life; each seeks to arouse a monopathic emotional response, even though the heroes and villains

[9] Lectures, 141 (also see Murray 173).

[10] Anon., The Thespian Preceptor; or, A Full Display of the Scenic Art, London, 1811, 59, quoated in Kurt Tetzeli V. Rosador, "Victorian Theories of Melodrama," Anglia 95 (1977) 87.

transcend the stereotypes of melodrama. In two of the plays--Virginius and Tell, the plot is set in motion by a conscience-less villain, as is the case in melodrama. The plot in these two "dramas" follow the archetypal classic melodramatic plot: the villain's persecution of good, with poetic justice being served by the final curtain. In both "dramas" there is a strong sense that human affairs are guided by a Providence that comes to the aid of persecuted virtue and innocence. The plays are thus genuine attempts, born of a religious faith, to allay anxiety and uncertainty about the human condition. In this sense, they are more substantial than melodrama, the convention of which may or may not be the expression of a felt metaphysic. This sense of Providence is dim in the tragedies; Virginius has some of it, but Caius Gracchus, in which good is defeated by evil, none. All four plays, however, resemble melodrama in that they are conceived of as homages to virtue (i.e., goodness), which is embodied in its virtuous protagonist, who are patriots in the best sense as well as moral exemplars inside and outside the home.

Finally, all four plays contain a "big and throroughly exploited emotional scene,"[11] one in which a tension-building, suspenseful situation is prolonged for the purpose of arousing intense pathos. In Vir-

[11] St. John Sweeney 17.

ginius it is the scene where Virginius kills his daughter in the Roman Forum; in Tell, it is the apple-shooting scene. In Caius Gracchus, it is the scene where Caius's wife desperately tries to prevent her husband from leaving home to join the conspirators. In Alfred the Great there are two such scenes: the one where King Alfred must pretend not to recognize his wife and child, and another, more powerful, where the Danish King Guthrum comes close to stabbing his own daughter, an action that links the play to Virginius.

A. Caius Gracchus

Caius Gracchus, Knowles's early, ambitious attempt at tragedy in the Shakespearean manner is the least melodramatic of the four plays and, like Virginius, requires little scenic support. In his introductory remarks to Cumberland's edition of Caius Gracchus, D.G. remarks that the play will have "limited interest"to the "general spectator, who looks for bustle and stage-trick." The interest of the play is mainly on the divided mind of the virtuous but flawed hero (because he is motivated by revenge as well as civic virtue), who belongs to the world of tragedy rather than melodrama. He is the initiator the action (his entry into the political arena after a life of domestic

retreat) that brings about his downfall and death. Opimius, the villain, holds the office of consul and is the initiator of the action only in the sense that his prosecution of Caius's friend, Vettius, leads to Caius involvement in the dangerous game of Roman politics. As a villain, the consul Opimius is much less individualized and prominent than either Appius (in Virginia) or Gesler (in Tell). He is a representative of the patrician class's determination to maintain power against Caius's challenge to that power rather than a man of overweening individual ambition like Appius or of cruelty like Gesler. His opposition to Caius is based on political principles, though once Caius attains power as tribune, it takes on a strong personal animus which derives, we may infer, in large measure from the fact that Caius is his social equal. Immediately after Caius has been elected tribune, Opimius, galled by being bound by the people's will and by Caius's arrogance (as he sees it) fumes these melodramatic words to his fellow consul:

> Gods! that a man I could take
> By the throat and smite--yea, set my foot upon
> For perfect loathing,--whom I should think it
> righteous
> To slay in a temple--ay, by Hercules!
> At the altar of a temple,--that a man
> Like that should order me, and do it too
> By vilest instruments! It is a task
> for patience![12]

[12] Act III, sc. 1.

Knowles's bent for melodramatic dramaturgy is most obvious in the leave-taking scene (4:4), where Caius's wife, Licinia, is aroused to the point of hysteria by Caius leaving the house to join the conspirators. Licinia uses all her powers as wife and mother to prevent her husband from going to his certain death. This is the play's "big" scene, and is evidently meant primarily to arouse pathos for the soon-to-be widowed wife. Caius, too, deserves sympathy for he is divided: he is pulled in one direction by a combination of political duty and personal vendetta and in another by his love of family.

The scene begins when, Lucinia, his wife, in the grip of a well-founded fear, rushes out of the house and grabs hold of her husband in an effort to prevent him from leaving. As his wife clings to him, Caius calmly tries to pacify her with reassuring words and a kiss, pretending he is just going for a walk. But she refuses to let go of him:

> I cling to you, as though my arms were bound
> About you by a spell!

By pretending she is ill, she succeed in getting her husband to take her as far as the threshold, which he will not cross. She vainly demands that he say ("You must not--will not [go]." As he walks away, again she catches hold of his robe, this time discovering a sword

under his arm, a discovery that intensifies her fear. She begs him not to risk his life and abandon his family to help a people she considers unworthy:

> You would go forth
> To sell you life for an ungrateful people.
> To quit your wife and child for men, look'd on
> And saw your brother murder--and will now
> Betray even you to death!
> . . . . --Go not, my Caius!
> My lord!--My husband!--Father of my child!
> Go not, but hear your poor distracted wife.!

Caius continues to maintain his resolve and refuses to admit that he is in any danger. Refusing to believe him, she claims that as his wife he has obligations to her that take precedence over any pledges he has made to others:

> Come into the house! Come in!
> If I'm thy wife, whose interest in thee
> Shall push by mine?--Whose claim to hold thy pledg
> Calls on thee with a right can shut out mine?[13]
> Thou shalt not go!

The trumpet sounds, a signal he must go if he is to fulfill his pledge to the conspirators. He insists that his wife let go of his robe, and attempts to force her to do so, causing her pain. She then agrees to let go if he will kill her, a remark that startles him into tenderness. Responding to his tenderness, she "nearly

[13] According to the Cumberland edition, there line were omitted in performance.

faints in his arms."[14] It is clear from the exchange at this point that she mistakes Caius's sudden change of tone for a willingness to submit to her demand:

> Caius: Gods! I have kill'd thee!
> Licinia: No! Or, if you have , 'tis with a sudden draught
> Of too sweet life! . . . .
> You will not go!--you'll stay with me! you'll come with me!--
> You'll live for me--Come in! Come in! Come in!--

The words "You'll live for me," which leap off the page, require comment. They reveal Licinia's self-centered notion of marriage. It is this notion which accounts for her excessive happiness at the beginning of the play and her excessive unhappiness after Caius breaks out of the shell of his domestic life to involve himself in the rough and tumble of Roman politics.

The entrance of Lucinius, Lucinia's brother and one of the conspirators, at this point, leads Licinia to resort to an appeal to his husband's sense of fatherly love. She tricks Caius into waiting while she goes into the house to get their child. When Lucinia returns she is holding their young child (he can't be more than two because they have been married only three years), and she promptly hands him to her husband to hold. She kneels before him in supplication. This is

[14] Stage direction.

the ultimate appeal to Caius's domestic feelings, but he does not react with tenderness she as expects. Instead of melting, he reproaches her with unkindness. She is crushed and replies to his reproach with bitter sarcasm that is aimed at both her husband and her brother, whom she feels have betrayed her:

> Husbands are call kind,
> That break the foolish hearts are knit to them--
> And fathers kind, who their own children do
> Make orphans of--and brothers kind, who play
> The parts of bloodless strangers. . . .

At his request, she takes their child back. Still on her knees, she asks the gods for a blessing for her son and then gives her husband a piercing look that rivets him. The trumpets sound again, and Caius, who seems rooted to the ground with not a little guilt, finally tears himself away with the help of Lucinius. As he leaves, he utters a final blessing on his wife, who having played her trump card and lost, makes no further effort to restrain him:

> --More blessings light
> Upon you
> Than I feel pangs who curse the things I'd bless!

One can be sure that the playgoer of Knowles's day, who preferred sentiment to stoicism, was prepared to shed tears over this powerful domestic scene.

In the final scene of the play, Caius, fleeing alone after the defeat of the conspirators, takes

refuge in the Temple of Diana, where he reunites with his wife, mother, and son, who have also taken refuge there. Then, after giving his family a last embrace, commits suicide by falling on his sword. The consul Opimius, the villain, and his guard arrive at moment later to find him dead at the feet of Cornelia, his stoical mother. The situation, as the stage directions indicate, was pictorially staged so that the final curtain falls on a tableau that melodramatically exploits again--this time visually--the pathos inherent in the sight of an innocent child.

The use of tableaux was a characteristic pictorial device of melodrama. Tableaux are characteristically found "at moments of crisis and climax, where speech is silenced and narrative arrested in order to offer a fixed and visual representation of reactions to peripety."[15] The high value that Knowles placed on pictorialism is indicated by the comments he made in his lectures on the cavern scene in Macbeth (4:1). Knowles exclaimed, "What is picture should it suggest!. . . Let not a word be spoken, till the audience have had time to study the picture."[16] The comment points up not only the tendency toward pictorial staging of Shakespeare's

[15] Brooks 61.

[16] Knowles, Lectures on Dramatic Literature 150-151.

plays, but also the importance of pictorial melodramaturgy in his own plays.

The stage directions (here quoted in full) indicate the movements the actors are required to made after Caius kills himself to create the striking tableau that ends the play:

> A dagger drops from beneath Caius's robe.--He falls dead.--Licinia throws herself on the body. Cornelia, with difficulty, supports herself.--The Consul and his troops are heard approaching.--She makes a violent effort to recover her self-possession; snatches Caius's child from the attendant, and hold it in one arm, while with the other she points to Caius; confronts Opimus and the rest, who immediately entering, stop short--The curtain drops.

In visualing this tableau, one should recall Kemble holding Cora's infant aloft in one arm (with a dagger in the other) as he makes his escape in Sheridan's Pizarro. The moment is immortalized in a painting by Sir Thomas Lawrence (Fig. 10) and in prints of the period. Knowles's idea of having Cornelia hold Caius's son in one arm well have been inspired by Pizarro (one of his favorite plays) and would have been an obvious tip of the hat to his famous cousin.

B. Virginius

In Virginius, Knowles shifts the focus of interest from the shattering of domestic happiness through conflict between husband and wife to its destruction by forces outside the charmed circle of family life. Like Caius Gracchus, Virginius is billed as a tragedy, yet other than its power to arouse pity and fear through its plot, it is not a tragedy because it fails to explore "ambiguous emotional possibilities" or divided consciousness and personality as true tragedy does.[17] Instead, it concerns itself with "the realm of social action, public action, within the world"--as is characteristic of melodrama--rather than with "the realm of private action, within the soul"--as is characteristic of tragedy.[18] Furthermore, Virginius, unlike Caius Gracchus, attains no tragic recognition.[19] The story's power lies in the pathos of a formulaic plot: the outrage of an innocent young girl being persecuted by a powerful, sexually threatening villain while her father remains powerless to prevent the outrage. Lamb, after hearing Knowles read part of Virginius to him in

[17] Heilman 95.

[18] Heilman 97.

[19] Caius, it may be argued, achieves a tragic recognition when he says, after he has lost the tribuneship (4:4), "It shall be writ in blood, / The man who labours for the people's good / The people shall give up to sacrifice." Perhaps Shakespeare did not choose Virginius as a subject for a tragedy because it resists tragic treatment.

1820, was moved to pen verses praising the pathos of the play as worthy of Shakespeare:

> With wonder I
> Hear my old friend (turn'd Shakespeare) read a scene
> Only to his inferior in the clean
> Passes of pathos: with such fence-like art--
> ere we can see the steel, 'is in our heart.[20]

Much pathos is extracted from the parent-child relationships in Virginius, William Tell, and Alfred the Great. In Virginius, writes Donohue, "pathos arises first from the very fact that Virginia is a widower, his daughter half an orphan, and Knowles makes much of the fact that this is a motherless family."[21] The pathos becomes painful when the father and daughter suffer from Appius's relentless persecution of Virginia, creating tension that builds steadily as the play progresses, reaching its dreadful climax in the Forum scene.

Virginius is a personification of virtue, both as a father and patriot; her daughter Virginia, personifies female virtue and innocence in as pure a dramatic form as possible. In this respect and in her passivity and utter defenselessness in the face of sexual persecution, Virginia conforms to the pattern of

[20] "To J.S. Knowles, Esq.: "On his Tragedy of Virginius," The Complete Works and Letters of Charles Lamb (New York: Random House, 1935) 553, lines 8-12.

[21] Donohue, Age of Kean 138.

the ideal heroine of melodrama. Appius is an instantly recognizable villain of the "determined" and "immensely evil"--without being grim-- type. The melodramatic quality of the opposition between good and evil is Virginius is intensified by fact that the oppressor Appius is a powerful ruler and Virginius a plebeian centurion (one of the lowest ranks in the Roman army), not patrician, as in Livy, Knowles's source. The tragedy lies in the necessity of committing the horrible deed of killing his own daughter, not in any inner conflict within the father over whether or not to kill his daughter.

Appius's persecution of Virginia evokes intense pathos in several scenes. One of the most pitiful is the scene where Virginia being dragged through the street by Appius's henchman Claudius, after he gone to her school and seized her as planned (3:2). This action is found Webster's Appius and Virginia, but Knowles's depiction of it, though briefer than Webster's, is much more powerful. In Webster (3:2), Appius's henchman, named Marcus, accompanied by four lictors, makes the attempt to seize Virginia, but is unsuccessful. The incident occurs when Virginia is walking in a market area accompanied by her nurse and a clown. When Marcus rudely grabs her and declares that she is not what she seems, Webster's Virginia, who is never at a loss for words, responds exactly like the conventional spirited

heroine of nineteenth-century melodrama does when a man takes liberties with her person:

> Uncivil sir,
> What makes you thus familiar and thus bold?
> Unhand me villain![22]

Moreover, perceiving at once that Marcus is a tool of Appius, she denounces him to his face:

> Thou wilt prove thyself
> The cursed pander for another's lust;
> And this your plot shall burst about your ears
> Like thunderbolts.

At this point Icilius, the young man betrothed to Virginia, enters to prevent the seizure. Then Appius enters to announce that he will resolve the conflict the next day at a public trial. Knowles's treatment of the same scene (3:2) is much more dramatic than Webster's because it is less verbal. She is on her way to school when she is seized by Appius's tool, Claudius. His masterstroke is to have Virginia remain absolutely mute while being dragged, implying that this shocking act has temporarily deprived her of her power of speech. He relies on what Books calls "the text of muteness"--a powerful communicator of meaning in melodrama--to arouse pathos on the stage. The only per-

[22] John Webster, Appius and Virginia in The Complete Works of John Webster, ed. F.L. Lucas, 3 vols. (1927; New York: Gordian, 1966).

son who shouts for help is Virginia's faithful nurse. She also functions as a commentator on the injustice of the seizure and on Virginia's inability to speak or to resist the violence being done to her:

> her mother was
> A free-born woman--and her father is
> A citizen!--a Roman!--good Virginius,
> As I said before--Virginius, the centurion,
> Whom all of you must know--Help! help! I say,
> You see she cannot speak to help herself;
> Speak for her, masters--help her, if you're men.

Several citizens who are present, including Icilius's brother, attempt to rescue Virginia, but Claudius stands on his rights. Violence is averted when everyone agrees to let Appius adjudicate the dispute.

Another pathos-arousing scene is when Virginia, her uncle Numitorious, and Icilius, wait anxiously for Virginius to return from the wars to help them argue their case before Appius in the Forum. In this scene, the mood is gloomy and despairing as the appointed hour rapidly approaches. Virginia, tense from waiting, turns desperately to her uncle for words of reassurance that her father will come to rescue her.

> Not come! not come! I am sure of it!
> He will not come! Do you not think he'll come?
> Will not my father come? What think you uncle?
> Speak to me, speak--O give me any words,
> Rather than what looks utter.

Sensing the inability of her uncle and betrothed to help her, Virginia imagines that she will be

humiliatingly dragged through the streets a second time:

> Must I go forth with You? Must I again
> Be dragg'd along by Claudius as his slave,
> And none to come to succour me?--Icilius!
> Icilius! Does your true betrothed wife
> Call on you, and you hear not? My Icilius!
> And I to be your wife or Claudius's slave?

There is pathos in her fear of being abandoned: "And will you give me up?" It is at this moment of tension that Virginius suddenly appears to rescue the family from despair. With Virginius's arrival, the emotional tension releases like a coiled spring and pathos gives way to hope. Even though Virginius is in fact powerless to thwart Appius's will, the presence of her father gives Virginia a sense of much-needed security and dispels her fear imaginings. his energy and anger inspire hope, uplifting the audience as well as the characters.

At the tribunal scene, Virginius's confidence and Virginia's sense of security melt away rapidly as Virginius realizes his powerlessness. He delivers a powerful speech denouncing Appius, but to no avail. The people make a show of effort to assist him, but are driven back by Appius's lictors. At this point the pathos for the suffering of father and daughter again begins to build, this time to be resolved by a horrible action. So as not to distract from the father and daughter relationship, Icilius is not permitted to dis-

play his heroic mettle on this occasion and from this point on speaks few words. The climax of pathos felt for Virginia is reached just before the father kills her (4:2). The pathos lies in Virginia's fear of abandonment and the father's desperation. When Appius adds the weight of his own testimony to that of his henchman and his slave, this fear intensifies to the point that Virginia is described as trembling. Her fear increases when her father, stalling for time, asks Appius for a few moments to say goodbye to his daughter. Virginia naturally interprets these words to mean that her father intends to abandon her, and she is terrified:

> Virginius: . . . .
> A little time for parting! Let me take
> The maid aside, I pray you, to confer
> A moment with her nurse; perhaps she'll give me
> Some token. . . .
> Appius: Well!
> Look to them lictors!
> Virginia: Do you go from me!
> Do you leave! Father! Father!
> Virginius: No, my child;
> No, my Virginia--come along with me.
> Virginia: You will not leave me! Will you take me with you?
> Will you take me home again? O, bless you, bless you!
> My father! My dear father! Art thou not
> My father!

The word "home" evokes the loving, secure world of domesticity that Appius's sexual appetite has shattered. There is intense pathos in the question, "Art

thou not / My father?" Earlier Virginia had expressed absolute confidence that she was Virginius's daughter; now the proceedings have so confused her that she can actually conceive of the possibility that Virginius might not be, after all, her real father.

A good argument can be made for ending the plays with Virginius's killing of his daughter, as many of the earlier treatments of the story did. But Knowles's purpose in continuing the play another act is to arouse more pathos. When he is first seen (5:1), his mind, as Icilius describes it, is "tottering between despair and madness"[23]; it rapidly sinks into madness. This is surely the least convincing of the melodramatic happenings in the play. The object of pathos here is to arouse the audience's tears, which were generally considered to be a sign of emotional and moral health.[24] Virginius himself sheds no tears, repressing them in the stoical Roman fashion. In this respect, he is contrasted to the weeping Icilius. Finding one of Icilius's tears on his hand before his mind is darkened by madness, Virginius reproaches the young man he insists on calling a "boy" through play: "A tear, boy! Fie, for shame." Virginius's inability to shed tears

[23] Act V, sc. 1, spoken by Icilius.

[24] For a discussion of the signficance of tears in Victorian lierature, and the philosophical roots of sentimentality, see Fred Kaplan, Sacred Tears: Sentimentality in Victorian Literature (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987) 93 and passim.

arouses Numitorous's concern. Icilius, using his own experience as a guide, suggests that Virginius be shown the urn containing Virginia's ashes as a way of inducing him to vent his grief in tears. The sight of the urn has the desired effect and the play ends in catharsis, with Virginius's sanity restored after he "bursts into a flood of tears."[25]

The Machiavellian, power-hungry Appius is the most complex character in the play, but is still recognizable as the conscience-less villain of melodrama. His election as a Decimvir, one of ten rulers entrusted with executive and judicial authority, quickly goes to his head. In the manner of a melodramatic villain, he reveals himself to be a hypocrite and villain soon after the Roman people have elected him to power. In a soliloquy, he declares himself to be a worshiper of power without limit. Confronted with opposition to his overweening ambition, he ruthlessly takes steps to eliminate it, as is shown when he cynically induces the veteran warrior Dentatus, a gadfly who is his severest critic, to enlist in the present wars in order to put him in harm's way. He soon contrives to have this honorable military hero brutally assassinated.

[25] Stage direction. Knowles's remark that Virginius suffered from "a fit of temporary sanity" implies that his sanity is restored once he shed tears of grief.

After Appius is smitten at first sight with Virginia's unself-conscious beauty and driven by an ungovernable lust to possesses her, he is equally ruthless. He immediately takes action to satisfy his desire to possess her sexually and will stop at nothing, including disposing of the two men dearest to her, father and her betrothed, Icilius. After an effort to corrupt Virginia with bribes fails, he conceives of a bold stratagem to gain possession of her by legal means. In Webster's play, which is more sympathetic to its nominal hero Appius,[26] and in other dramatic versions of the Roman tale that pre-date Knowles's as well, it is Appius's tool, not Appius himself who conceives of the stratagem. Enlisting his ward Claudius as his pander and tool, it is Appius in Knowles's play who hatches the plot to claim that Virginia is really the daughter of one of his female slaves who sold her to Virginius's wife as an infant.

As Appius himself is to serve as judge and sole arbiter in the case between Virginius and Claudius, there is no impediment to its success other than massive public protest, which does not materialize. Even Virginius, who speedily returns to Rome from the wars to confront Appius when he hears of the plot, cannot

[26] For example, Webster's Appius and Virginia, written from a viewpoint that is sympathetic to aristocracy, allows Appius to kill himself in the Roman fashion, an act admired for its bravery.

prevent the unjust judge from perverting the law to serve his personal ends. He can do nothing to help his daughter except save her from certain rape by killing her.

While Appius conforms to the pattern of the melodramatic villain in essential respects, he transcends that pattern in his capacity to respond to Virginia's beauty and goodness, and to introspect. Interestingly enough, he speaks some of the most poetic lines describing Virginia. He sees her for the first time when he is hearing cases at the tribunal (2:4). She is walking within sight of the tribunal on her way to school. The stage direction indicates that his eyes are "riveted" to her. The sight of her overwhelms him with pleasurable sensations, yet he is sensitive to the angelic nature of the goodness that so powerfully attracts him:

> Her eyes look up to heaven
> Like something kindred to it--rather made
> To send their glances down, and fill the earth
> With worship and with gratulation--What
> A thrill runs up and down my veins; and all
> throughout me!

In a sense, the arousal of Appius's sexual appetite by Virginia's innocence is analogous to that of Angelo by Isabella's saintliness in Measure for Measure. Appius's response to Virginia's beauty (he singles out her "gait," her smile, and her nubility) is so physiologi-

cally intense that his mental faculties are disoriented and he is unable to continue the judicial business he was engaged in before her presence distracted him. "An oppressive closeness / Allows me not be breathe," he says as he excuses himself and leaves. The "thrill" and "closeness" are symptoms of a consuming lust that can be quenched only in Virginia's arms. As he tells his Claudius a few moments later:

> I burn, my Claudius, brain and heart.
> There's not
> A fibre in my body but's on fire.

Appius's capacity for reflection is revealed in his soliloquies, the most introspective of which is spoken before he pronounces judgment in the Forum for the first time (3:2). Puzzled by the nature of the passion that has overmastered his reason, he makes an attempt to understand it:

> It is not love, if what I've felt before
> And call'd by such a name, be love--a thing
> that took its turn--that I could entertain,
> Put off, or humour--'tis some other thing;
> Or if the same, or it hath found
> Some other part of sensibility
> More quick, whereon to try its power, and there
> Expends it all?

Self-ensnared by innocence, Appius is learning something about himself for the first time, but this soliloquy is as far as the process of self-probing is

allowed to go. In the first Forum scene (3:3) Appius sounds a genuinely philosophical note when he exclaims:

> O! the pause
> That precedes action! It is vacancy
> That o'erweighs action's substance.

The fear that he has overreached himself gives rise to this awareness. Most of all, he is worried that Claudius will succumb to Virginia's tearful pleading:

> What I fear
> Is, that his courage can't withstand her tears
> That will be sure to try and succour her'
> Pointing, as 'twere, to every charm, and pleading
> With melting eloquence.

Appius's apprehension is an sign that, however morally corrupt he is, he apprehends the power of virtue over evil. Another sign that he sensitive to the power of virtue, and that he has conscience, however repressed, is when he confesses to Claudius that the thought of looking at Virginius fills him with a kind of fear, which he calls awe.[27] This is the same awe that Gesler feels when the heavily chained Tell is brought before him or Alfred the Great inspires in both the Danish king and Edric. The virtue that radiates from Knowles's father-heroes is apprehended as fearful awe by the villain because it poses a real threat to his evil power.

[27] Rudolph Otto refers to the "primal numimous awe"--see Brooks.

In Virginius, the power of good to disable evil by awing it is made explicit in a single sentence spoken by Appius at the climactic tribunal scene (Act 4:2):

> There's something awes me at
> The thought of looking on her father!

It is important to point out that Virginius's power derives not only from his virtue but also from his fatherhood, which, as already shown, is an expression of Knowles's own personal religious sensibility and experience of fatherhood.[28]

None of Appius's fears, it turns out, are realized, but events prove that he has indeed overreached himself. His judgment in Claudius's favor and his gaining possession of Virginia through a legal subterfuge proves a hollow victory. Appius's lust is also responsible for his own downfall since the Virginia's death leads the Roman people, led by Virginius, to rise up in revolt against the unjust judge and his tyrannical rule.

Compared to Appius, Virginius seems to be even more whole in his goodness than Appius in his evil. This is part owing to the fact that Virginius is a character who feels rather than thinks. Knowles characterizes him with such gusto that he easily dominates

[28] Knowles's concept of fatherhood has already been discussed in Part I, Chapter 2.

the play in spite of the interest in the villain arising from his complexity. Virginius possesses a charisma that the cold and cerebral Appius lacks. In making Virginius rather than Appius the main character, Knowles departed from all the earlier version of the famous story (e.g., the Appius and Virginia of R.B. (c. 1564) and Webster (1608)[29]; Moncrieff's Appius (CG, 1753) and Crisp's Virginia (DL, 1754). He reverses the importance of the two male characters, subordinating Appius to Virginius, while endowing the villain with some measure of introspection. Virginius is an outspoken and passionate citizen, who fearlessly denounces folly where he sees it; he is a courageous soldier, a friendly mentor to Icilius, a hearty friend to Dentatus, and a tender, loving father to Virginia, with strong paternal instincts. In being endowed with strong paternal instincts, Virginius is far removed from a romantic hero. In his enforced passivity, he resembles the characteristic hero of melodrama. He is a man of action, but he is forced to react to the villain's actions rather than initiate any actions of his own.[30]

[29] R.B.'s Appius and Virginia is a morality play in the form of domestic tragedy. Among the allegorical abstractions among its dramatis personae are Haphazard (the Vice character), Conscience, Justice, Rumor. According to Adams, R.B.'s play was "the first of the English domestic tragedies to exploit the pathetic possibilities of a death scene"--Virginia's--Adams 77.

[30] The same observation may be made of Othello.

Icilius is a young man of solid qualities, even though he never emerges from Virginius's shadow. He is cast in the mold of the typically brave and strong romantic hero. Twice he comes to the rescue of endangered goodness: first, when he intervenes to save Dentatus from being mauled by an angry crowd; second, when in Virginius's absence, he saves his treasure, Virginia, only recently betrothed to him, from being taken into custody by Appius before the trial. The latter is a classically melodramatic moment with the dauntless hero appearing in a nick of time to save the distressed and defenseless damsel as she pleads to be rescued from the clutches of the villain:

> Virginia: O save me! Save me!
> icilius: [entering] Virginia's voice--
> Virginia! [rushed to her]
> Virginia: O, Icilius! [Falls fainting in his arms]

Virginia's involuntary swooning in Icilius's arms speaks more eloquently than words in this tense situation. But as strong as Icilius is in character and right arm, he remains a relatively colorless character beside the vigorous, passionate, bluff, and quick-tempered (a defect mentioned but not really shown[31])

[31] Numitorious describes Virginius as "over quick in temper" (Act III, sc. 4). But the scenes in which Virginius reacts with anger (when he discovers that Dentatus has been murdered; that his daughter and his good name with it has been humiliated) can hardly be adduced as examples of his being "over quick in temper."

Virginius. Virginius also has a strong sense that justice will prevail and that the people will rise up to help his cause ("A fire / Is kindled, that will blaze at but a breath / Into the fiercest flame"--4:1). He is also has faith in his power of moral suasion. He is cruelly stripped of every one of his hopes in the Forum scene.

The father's killing of his daughter is convincingly melodramatic in the naturalness of its unfolding. Pressed to surrender his daughter to the soldiers, the stage direction indicates that Virginius at this point is "perfectly at a loss what to do." In this suspenseful moment, as he takes the terrified Virginia aside to talk to her, Virginius "looks anxiously around the Forum," and notices "a butcher's stall with a knife on it." Finding a butcher's stall and a knife is not as improbable as it seems when one recalls that the Forum at this time in Roman history, its pre-marbleized state, was a modest place in republican Rome containing many shops and stalls. Thus it does not stretch credibility for Virginius to conveniently spot a butcher's knife just lying around. Somehow, Virginius manages to pick it up and conceal it in his toga, without his daughter or anyone else noticing. The unfolding of this scene in its critical last moments is evidence that Virginius's killing of his daughter is unpremeditated, driven by a desperate anxiety of to save his daughter's honor.

Only after securing the knife is Virginius sure of what he must do, and he is confident once he is possessed of the means to do it. As Appius's lictors advance to seize her, Virginia shrieks and faints, thus sparing her the pain of being killed. After kissing his daughter for a last time, Virginius plunges the knife into his daughter's limp body with the words, "There is one only way to save thine honour--'tis this" (Fig. 18) He then departs, shouting a fitting curse at Appius ("I do devote thee to th' infernal gods"), as he runs out of the Forum past the amazed soldiers, leaving his dead daughter in the arms of a stunned Icilius. The audiences were stunned as well. The stabbing of Virginia was an emotionally electrifyingly moment in the theater that evoked tears and gasps from early-nineteenth century audiences. Thrilling in its horror, the scene is arguably the most sensationally dramatic in all of early-nineteenth century drama.

The pictorialism of the staging of the moment when Virginius kills his daughter is something that is easily missed by the modern reader. Hazlitt's comment that Virginius presented "a succession of pictures" such as one might find on antique bas-relief or vase is worth recalling. Other remarks of this kind about Virginius (the only play Hazlitt reviewed) may be culled from Hazlitt's writing, such as "all his situations

form classic groups."[32] The inherent pictorialism of Knowles's first tragedy is principally what Hazlitt is referring to when he says that the play is "a sound historical painting."[33] The play is both a speaking and a mute picture, or series of pictures.

The most important picture in the "succession" that Hazlitt spoke of occurs, of course, when Virginius is about to strike the blow that will kill his daugher. a moment in time captured in a drawing of Macready's 1838 production by George Scarf.[34] A great deal can be learned about Macready's staging of Virginius from Scarf's drawings, as this insightful comment of Murray's on the drawing mentioned reveals:

> In the picture, in spite of the mob of soldiers and the lictors, there are really only three characters: Virginius, about to kill his passive daughter, and Appius, rising in disbelief from his chair as if to prevent what he himself has brought out. The non-involvement of everybody else, their virtual indifference, gives a primal tragic form to the sacrifice.[35]

As in the stage direction indicates and the drawing illustrates, Virginia is at this moment in a semi-conscious state: "Virginia shrieks, and falls half dead

[32] The Spirit of the Age, Oxford ed., 302.

[33] Hazlitt, London Magazine, 7, July, 1820, 169.

[34] See illustration.

[35] Murray 176.

upon her father's shoulder." The inarticulate cry, followed by an involuntary action, Virginia's last action of the play, speaks as eloquently as her cry speaks piercingly. The act is characteristic of her passivity in the face of evil, as uncomprehendingly she looks to her father for protection, like a young child rather than the young woman of marriageable age that she is. Although Virginia is far from being inarticulate, one can say of her at the end of the play what Brooks says of a mute character in Coelina: "muteness become symbolic of the defenseless of innocence."[36] In Virginia is centered "the passivity of response to anguish" that is central to melodrama. Virginius, who is usually never at a loss for words, is reduced to muteness himself by the sight of his mute, tearful daughter just before they leave hand in hand for the forum to hear the judgment that is to seal Virginia's fate (4:1):

> *For me,*
> I shall be mute--my eloquence is here--
> Her tears--her youth--her innocence--her beauty!
> If orators like these can't move the heart,
> Tongues surely may be dumb.

As in the stage direction indicates and the drawing illustrates, Virginia is at this moment in a semi-conscious state: "Virginia shrieks, and falls half dead upon her father's shoulder." The inarticulate cry, fol-

[36] Brooks 60.

lowed by an involuntary action, Virginia's last action of the play, speaks as eloquently as her cry speaks piercingly. The act is characteristic of her passivity in the face of evil, as uncomprehendingly she looks to her father for protection, like a young child rather than the young woman of marriageable age that she is. Although Virginia is far from being inarticulate, one can say of her at the end of the play what Brooks says of a mute character in Coelina: "muteness become symbolic of the defenseless of innocence."[37] In Virginia is centered "the passivity of response to anguish" that is central to melodrama. Virginius, who is usually never at a loss for words, is reduced to muteness himself by the sight of his mute, tearful daughter, just before they leave their house to go hand in hand to the forum to hear the judgment that is to seal Virginia's fate (4:1):

> For me,
> I shall be mute--my eloquence is here--
> Her tears--her youth--her innocence--her beauty!
> If orators like these can't move the heart,
> Tongues surely may be dumb.

With Virginia dead, the punishment of the villain must follow in the last act of the play. It is the "law" of melodrama. Knowles believed it would be wrong to have Virginius kill Appius in sane mind because it

[37] Brooks 60.

would be construed as an act of personal revenge. It is clear that Virginius is crazed and not responsible for what he does when he strangles him at the very end of the play. This is how Knowles explains his rationale for having Virginius kill Appius while he has lost his reason:

> After having excited such an interest in Virginius it would have been indecent to represent him in the attitude of taking the law into his own hands. I therefore adopted the idea of his destroying Appius in a fit of temporary insanity, which give the catastrophe the air of a visitation of providence.[38]

Knowles wants the audience to feel that heaven had a hand in Appius's death.

Virginius is not a play that requires lavish sets; it can be played quite well on a bare stage with a minimum of props, as it probably was many times in the provinces. Ironically, the scenery for the original performance far from enhancing the production actually worked against it. According to Hazlitt, "the scenery allotted to this tragedy encumbered the stage, and the simplicity of the play:"[39]

> Temples and pictured monuments adorned the scene, which were not in existence till five

[38] Knowles, quoted in Meeks 73.

[39] Hazlitt, London Magazine, July 1820, in Archer and Lowe 172.

> hundred years after the date of the story, and the ruins of the Capitol, of Constantine's arch, and the temple of Jupiter Satar, frowned at once on the death of Virginia, and the decline and fall of the Roman Empire.[40]

The anachronistic sets (the play took place in the early centuries of the republic, but the sets were of the later empire) worked against the simplicity of the story and even the action itself in the Forum scene where Virginius is supposed to find a knife on a butcher'stall. They also clashed with the theme of liberty associated with republican Rome. This seeming lack of attention to historicism, which is uncharacteristic of the fastidious Macready, is easily explained by constraints of budget that Macready was under in producing a play by a then unknown playwright. In the interest of keeping costs at a minimum, he used "old stock settings which had served for Julius Caesar, and Cato, and Coriolanus.[41] In later years, Macready was much more careful about the historical accuracy of his sets and scenery.

Having observed the many similarities between Virginius and the patterns of melodrama, it is with justification that Downer calls the play "a 'legitimate'

[40] Hazlitt, London Magazine, July 1820, Archer and Lowe 172.

[41] Downer 65.

form of melodrama"[42] or J.C. Trewin an "actable melodrama."[43] One hostile contemporary reviewer anticipated Downer by calling it "something of a higher order of Melo-drame."[44] In Virginius, it is plain to see that Knowles achieved a compromise between the legitimate and the illegitimate drama, though it is questionable that he would have viewed his achievement in these terms.

C. William Tell

The melodramatic pattern woven out of humble domestic cloth that Knowles weaves in Virginius is also clearly discernible in William Tell. Gesler is a "grim, determined, immensely evil" villain holds the power of life and death over all the citizens of the Cantons, including Tell and his son. He is much more "immensely evil" than Appius because he takes pleasure in instilling fear and causing pain like Pescara, the villain of Sheil's The Apostate. In this sense, Gesler, who is

[42] Downer, The British Drama: A Handbook and Brief Chronicle 274.

[43] J.C. Trewin, no source given, St. John Sweeney, " The Nineteenth Century Shakespeare," The Journal of Irish Literature 13 (1984) 17.

[44] Anon. review, May 1820, unidentified clipping in Harvard Theatre Collection.

identified with a castle, is a cousin of to the Gothic villain. Unlike Appius, he is fiendishly cruel and sadistic, motivated by a desire to destroy good--physically and mentally--because it dares to brave his power. In this respect, he seems more monstrous and less human than Schiller's Gessler. Knowles's Gesler has a heart that is absolutely corrupt. He delights in being an oppressor and is pleased when Tell tells him of the suffering he has caused the Swiss. This is most apparent when he proposes the almost impossible trial of Tell's long-bow skill as a condition for saving his life and that of his son: to hit an apple placed on his son's head. Gessler makes the condition with the expectation that Tell's arrow will miss its mark and hit the child instead, a possibility that Gessler anticipates with pleasure, for his objective is, as he says, "exquisite vengeance." His motivation for that vengeance is an almost motiveless malignity.

But Knowles gives us an equally appalling example of Appius's fiendishness, one that is original with him. It is when Gesler imprisons Tell's son, in spite of the fact that the boy saved his life by guiding him to safety after he had become lost in the Alps in a snowstorm, a scene that Knowles puts in the play. Gesler's purpose is to discover the identity of Tell, whom he intuitively fears even before seeing him. This act, ungrateful as it is, at least can be rationally justi-

fied as a tactic aimed at ferreting out and ultimately capturing a man whom Gesler strongly and rightly suspects poses a threat to his power. But Gesler's perverse desire to see Tell's son slip and fall to his death even as he is guiding him to safety over the treacherous mountain paths is appallingly evil. Only a man with a depraved heart could wish such harm to the innocent and good-hearted boy, as Gesler does in these words:

> How I loathed the free
> And fearless air with which he trod the hill!
> Yea, though the safety of his steps was mine,
> Oft as our path-way brink'd the precipice,
> I wish'd to see him miss his footing and
> Roll over![45]

It is clear from these two examples that Gesler represents a more infernal order of evil than the less practiced Appius, whose evil stems a greed for power and sexual appetite only. Gesler is a virtuoso in evil.

In Tell, virtue is found an isolated cottage on a side of towering Swiss Alps, a fair distance from the nearest town, Altorf. The pious family consists of the courageous Tell, his devoted wife and his bright, winsome son, Albert (the emblem of defenseless innocence that is essential in melodrama) in an isolated cottage situated on the side of the Swiss Alps, a

[45] Act III, sc. 3.

fair distance from the nearest town, Altorf. This brings us to the subject of scenic design, for scenery is almost indispensable in this play of the great outdoors which identifies the majestic mountains with the divine spirit of liberty. As one would expect, it utilizes scenic spectacle extensively.

Three of the most talents scenographers of the time, Clarkson Stanfield, David Roberts, and Gaetano Marinari were responsible for painting the magnificent scenery--in the form of painted paroramas--that supported the original production in 1825 by making nature come visually alive in this play. Too often, it is forgotten how great the talent of such men were and how important they contribution was to theater of their time. Of the first two scene painters, a contemporary source wrote, "the masterly delineations and exquisite effects of these two artists became deservedly the admiration of the whole town."[46] Marinari, an experienced veteran who painted scenery for the opening productions of Mozart's operas at the King's theater and who staged the storm in the Lear production mounted for Kean, was equally admired.[47] These expert panoramists were in direct competition with the panoramists who displayed their art for public viewing for a fee in

[46] G. Raymond, 2: 329, quoted in Rosenfeld, A Short History of Scene Design 108.

[47] See Rosenfeld 69.

"great rooms" in various locations in London.

The production of Knowles's Tell was enhanced by no less than nine panoramas (Fig. 13) depicting such scenes as "The castle and town of Altorf," "William Tell's cottage in the mountain," a "mountain torrent," and "The market place in Altorf."[48] For the reader to appreciate the effect these scenes had on the audience (even in a fully lighted auditorium), it must be pointed out that they were three dimensional and complex in effects. In Altick's words,

> To the painted scenery, consisting not merely of backcloths but of wings, raking pieces, ground rows, and other devices for creating perspective, were added various kinds of Louthenbourg lighting tricks.

The introduction of gas in 1817, as Altick says, "made it possible to light the stage more brilliantly [and] more flexibly" than in Louthenbourg's day.[49] The pictorializations in Tell was a manifestation of the tendency toward realism already mentioned. There was an emphasis on "topographical accuracy" because "every panoramist knew that the public expected to be shown

[48] Taken from the playbill of May 11, 1825. The other scenes depicted were "The Pass of Grutli" (executed by Andrews and Adams), "The entrance to Gesler's castle" the "environs of Altorf," the "Vicinity of Gesler's Castle," and "The Fortifications from the land side."

[49] Altick, The Shows 185.

places and events as they actually were."[50] The scenery in Tell may well have been based on actual sketches of Altorf and the surrounding landscape. The affinity of these panoramas with the "cult of immensity" in historical painting of the time--Benjamin Haydon comes to mind--is obvious.[51] The mountainous landscape of Switzerland was a popular subject for the panoramist's art. At a performance of Tell, critics would have particularly scrutinized the panorama of the mountain torrent by Stanfield, "the leading marine artist of the period."[52] For, in the eyes of critics, again in Altick's words

> the standard touchstone of an artist's success was the realism of his representation of water, with its motion, its limpidity and liquidity, and its constantly shifting reflection of light.[53]

The reader of Tell can only imagine the contribution that the visual scenery makes to an appreciation of the text. For example, to appreciate Tell's passionate love of his country and his identification (in a

[50] Altick 185-186.

[51] Altick 186.

[52] Altick 190.

[53] Altick 190.

Wordsworthian sense) with the natural landscape that is his haunt and which surrounds his humble cottage, one must imagine its grandeur and sublimity. The description of the scenes in the text help us to do so. For example, in Act II, scene 1, we must visualize

> Tell's Cottage on the right of a Mountain--a distant view of a lake, backed by mountains of stupendous height, their tops covered with snow, and lighted at the very points by the rising Sun, the rest of the distance being yet in the shade. . .

In the stage production, this scene was represented by a panorama by Roberts which rendered the piety of Tell's wife's opening soliloquy credible:

> We need his care that on the mountain's cliff
> Lodge by the storm, and cannot life our eyes,
> But piles on piles of everlasting snows,
> O'hanging us, remind us of his mercy.

Similarly, Tell's overly-long spontaneous apostrophe to the mountains (1:2), here quoted in part only is aided by the scenographer's art:

> Ye crags and peaks, I'm with you once again!
> I hold to you the hands you first beheld,
> To show they still are free. Methinks I hear
> A spirit in your echoes answer me,
> And bid your tenant welcome home, again!
> Hail!--Hail! O sacred forms, how proud you look!
> How high you lift your heads into the sky!

This fervent soliloquy can sound hollow or even ridiculous when read in the study. But with the

mountains before our eyes, as it were, the speech at least has a chance of sounding emotionally convincing. In later productions, playgoers could hear the music Rossini composed for his opera Guilliaume Tell as an accompaniment to the action.

Tell is the virtuous, pious, courageous peasant hero who is also a conspirator against the oppressive rule of Gesler. Like Virginius, Tell has a strong sense of justice and is a passionate advocate of liberty. He is boiling over at the outrages committed by the Austrians against the Swiss. His bursting into tears when old Melchtal at his cottage with his eyes torn out (Fig. 22), a victim of Gessler's barbarity, shows his compassionate heart. and has difficulty holding himself in check, as is shown when he refuses to bow to Gesler's cap, an act that lead to his capture. As Tell is a peasant and Gesler the governor, the disparity between the power of evil over good is even great than in Virginius. Yet Tell, like Virginius, radiates a power than emanates from his virtue--and his fatherhood.

What is intended to be a morally instructive tableau occurs when Tell is brought before Gesler in chains in Act 4. This is the first time Gesler has seen Tell and as he is firmly bound he had no reason to fear him. Yet he does. Gesler's henchmen order him to kneel in submission before the govenor, but are unable to

move themselves to physically force him to do so. This is because Tell emanates a power (stemming from virtue) that mysteriously awes them into immobility. At a complete loss what to do, they look at the seated Gessler for instructions. However, Gesler himself is no help because he too is transfixed. In an anti-naturalistic technique most familiar to us from Eugene O'Neill Strange Interlude, he comments on what has happened until he is finally aroused out of his reflections by a sense of reality:

> They fear far more
> To inflict that he to suffer. Each one calls
> Upon the other to accomplish that
> Himself hath not the manhood to attempt!
> Why don't they take him from my sight? Behold!
> He has brought them to a pause; and there they stand
> Like things entranced by some magician's spell,
> Wondering that they are masters of their organs,
> And not their faculties. They gaze on me
> As one expected to perform a part
> Which he forgets to fill [Rises] They must not see me
> So lost.

According to theatrical convention, Gesler's disconnectedness is a private moment witnessed only by the audience. The villain is given the function of directing the audience to "Behold!" the static scene, but it is invited, by the conventions of melodrama, to go beyond this and interpret, even as Gesler speaks, the moral import of the picture or "frozen image"[54] they

[54] Meisel 54.

are seeing. They are expected to do so in a way that the villain is incapable of doing however much he is awed by Tell's God-given power. They are expected to understand that freedom and power is founded on virtue on trust in God, purity, and virtue.

Unlike Virginius, Tell is a preachy spokesman power of virtue, as this speech delivered to Gesler's face in defiance of his threats to have him killed:

> It cannot take away the grace of life--
> Its comeliness of port that virtue gives--
> It head erect with consciousness of truth--
> Its rich attire of honorable deeds--
> It fair report that's rife on good's men's tongues!
> It cannot lay its hands on these, no more
> Than it can pluck the brightness from the sun,
> Or with polluted finger tarnish it.[55]

One scene is when Gesler has Tell's son--a boy of perhaps ten or eleven--arrested and imprisoned simply because the boy won't reveal his father's name after saving his life (3:3). Another is when Tell, sentenced to death, tearfully blesses his son without acknowledging him (4:1). Pathos for father and son increases when Gesler maliciously sentences the boy to death too. That Gesler is no respecter of domestic ties and enjoys the suffering he is causing Tell--his sadism increases his stature as a melodramatic villain--is made brutally clear in the exchange between Tell and Gesler:

[55] Act IV, sc. 1.

Tell: To die! For what?
Gesler: For having braved my power, as thou
hast! Lead them forth.
Tell: He's but a child.
Gesler: Away with them!
Tell: Perhaps an only child.
Gesler: No matter.
Tell: He may have a mother.
Gesler: So the viper hath;
And yet who spares it for the mother's sake?
Tell: I talk to stone! I talk to it as though
'Twere flesh, yet know 'tis none!
No wonder! I've
An argument might turn as hard a thing
To flesh--to softest, kindliest flesh, that
e'er
Sweet Pity chose to lodge her fountain in!--
But still 'tis naught but stone!

When Gesler asks Tell if the boy is his child, Tell answers by bursting into tears and embracing Albert. Then he acknowledges Albert as his son, and reveals his own name for the first time. Tell's feats as a boatman and archer, which are public knowledge, lead to Gesler's cruel proposal that he will spare the lives of both father and son if Tell shoots the apple off his son's head.

Knowles's treatment of the apple-shooting scene is strikingly more melodramatic than Schiller's.[56] In Schiller's Wilhelm Tell, the shooting scene is brief and the son is not a factor in the proposal itself, which occurs rather off-handedly when Gessler, passing on horseback, stop to inquire about a hubbub created by

[56] Schiller's play preceded Knowles's by twenty-one years.

a man who failed to pay homage to the hat placed on a pole. When he discovers the man is Tell, he rather matter-of-factly proposes the proof of skill.[57] He picks an apple from a nearly apple tree and gives it to Tell. There are several prominent Swiss citizens present who protest Gesler's inhumanity. After one of his son's is placed, Tell attempts to shoot, but has a failure of nerve. He asks to be released from the trial, tearing off his upper clothing and exposing his breast, as if the sight of a father's loving heart might arouse compassion in the stony-hearted Gessler. Tell tries to shoot again; his hands tremble as he undergoes a tremendous struggle. Finally, he masters his emotions and successfully prepares to shoot. Meanwhile, Rudenz, a young nobleman, denounces Gessler and an altercation breaks out which distracts everyone from the shooting. In the confusion, Tell lets his arrow fly and suddenly all the attention is refocused on his success. Gessler is truly astonished that Tell shot at all, and calls him crazy for attempting the shot, which is something that one cannot conceive of Knowles's more diabolic villain as saying.

In Knowles play, there is no one to challenge Gesler's perverse will. What is most distinctive about

[57] In Schiller's play the weapon is a cross-bow; Knowles changed it to a low-bow, a weapon traditionally associated with English yeoman.

Knowles's villain is the deliberate manner in which he informs Tell of details of the cruel conditions:

> Gesler: I would see you make
> A trial of the skill with that same bow
> You shoot so well with.
> Tell: Please you, name the trial
> You would have me make.
> Gesler: You look upon your boy
> As though instinctively you guess'd it.
> Tell: Look upon my boy!--What mean you? . . . .
> Gesler: I would see
> Thee hit an apple at the distance of
> A hundred paces.
> Tell: Is my boy to hold it?
> Gesler: No.
> Tell: No!--I'll send the arrow through the core!
> Gesler: It is to rest upon his head.
> Tell: O, Nature!
> Thou hearst him!
> Gesler: Thou dost hear the choice I give--
> Such trial of the skill, thou'rt master of,
> Or death to both of you, not otherwise
> To be escaped.
> Tell: Oh, monster!
> Gesler: Wilt thou do it?
> Tell: Ferocious monster! Make
> A father murder his own child!

Appalled by Gesler's conditions, Tell can not believe that a human being as unnatural as Gesler lives upon the earth. Gesler's hard-heartedness is beyond the realm of his moral comprehension:

> Who's he
> That bids me do it!--Show him me,--the monster!
> Make him perceptible to my reason
> And heart! In vain my sense vouch for it!
> I hear he lives!--I see it!--but it is
> A prodigy that nature can't believe!

Once Tell resolves to accept the challenge, pathos gives way to suspense, which is prolonged when Tell

asks that the trial be postponed till the next morning on account of darkness.[58] Tell is painfully aware of how the arrow might miss the mark pierce his son's brain, or eye, or his cheek.The next morning as Tell makes the arrangements for the shoot (Act V, sc. 2), he must struggle to suppress his fatherly feelings, as they threaten to unnerve him. Every detail is the subject of attention and suspense: the placement of the boy, the picking of the apple, and the picking of the arrow.[59] He relies on a friend, the trusty Verner, to place Albert on his knees, facing away from his father, and with the apple's stem facing him. This he dare not do himself. Verner eagerly informs Tell of his son's courage, his steadiness, his clear looks, and his "relying love and reverence," believing that it will cheer Tell to hear these things. But the opposite is true. As he attempts to steel himself for the task at hand, Tell cannot endure these human details about his

[58] Gesler grants Tell's request that he and his child be allowed to spend the night in the same dungeon. This is the one of several instances where one might say that Gesler shows a spark of humanity. The all occur in the last act in connection with the details of the trial: Gesler permits Tell to shoot with the sun at his back instead of in his eyes; he allow Tell to choose the apply himself after first choosing the smallest from a basket of arrows; he allows Tell to chose the arrow after Tell rejects two chosen by one of his henchmen, and insists on making such a critical choice himself.

[59] It is the arrow that must be selected with most care. At first one of Gesler's henchmen picks for Tell. But Tell rejects two arrows and then insists on selecting the arrow himself, which Gesler consents to.

son and bids Verner to stop talking:

> Man! Man! Man!
> No more! Already I'm too much the father
> To act the man!

At first, Tell will not allow his son to speak with him before he shoots; however, when he sees how much a last hug and kiss would mean to his son, he relents, and Albert runs into his arms. Tell assures him again that he will hit the apple, and shows no sign of nervousness, as Schiller's Tell does. As he selects an arrow from his quiver, he appears surprisingly relaxed and confident. He deftly manages to hide a second arrow under his vest--it is the arrow intended for Gesler's heart.[60] He asks everyone to pray for him. Then he orders everyone to keep silent and not to move as he prepares to shoot.

As soon as it is apparent that the arrow has hit its mark, "a shout of wonder and exultation bursts from the crowd,"[61] and Tell falls unsteadily to his knees in an attitude of reverent gratitude. Albert rushes up to his father, but Tell is too filled with emotion to speak. Gesler honors his word; father and son are free. But when Albert opens his father's vest to allow him to

[60] In Schiller's Tell, Gessler notices that Tell has concealed a second arrow. This act leads Gessler to imprison Tell instead of freeing him after his hit the apple.

[61] Stage direction.

breathe more freely, the second, concealed arrow drops to the ground. Gesler demands to know why Tell concealed the arrow. Tell, finally finding his voice, tells him bluntly, "To kill thee, tyrant, had I slain my son." Then Tell suddenly takes aims at Gesler as he slowly retreats. Everyone follows Tell with their eyes "in breatheless and motionless suspense"[62] in a tableau of sorts. Suddenly, the arrow is released and Gesler falls dead. The play ends with news that Gesler's castle has been captured.

It is the details that make Knowles's version of the apple-shooting scene emotionally absorbing if not compelling. The prolongation of this scene to exploit its potential for pathos and suspense is comparable to the prolongation of the Forum scene in Virginius. Both reveal Knowles's dramatic genius for extracting pathos from a familiar story.

Power is of no avail to the villain in the end. The good characters, after undergoing emotional agony at the hands of the villain, emerge unscathed and the play ends happily. The villain appropriately meets his just punishment, death. It is clear that God is on the side of Tell and the Swiss. Earlier, when Gesler had asked the chained Tell why the suffering Swiss sometimes smile, he replied that it is because they are

[62] Stage direction.

expecting vengeance. "From whence?" asks Gesler. "From Heaven!" is Tell's firm reply and the tone of the play confirms his belief that he is the instrument of God's justice. When Tell's arrow finds its mark in Gesler's heart, the organ symbolizing his moral rottenness, it is likely that the audiences of his day believed that the hand of Providence has guided it. From what has been said, it should be clear that Tell, both has the feel of melodrama and conforms neatly to the melodramatic pattern.

D. Alfred the Great

Alfred the Great is melodramatic in the sense that it ends happily with the just cause (liberty) prevailing over evil (tyranny). There is a persecution plot only in the sense that a whole people is oppressed. That oppression is embodied in Alfred's ravaged wife, Elswitha, who functions as an allegorical figure of avenging wrath (in words only) against the depredations done to the Saxon people by the Danes. But she remains an abstraction in the play and when she suddenly appears in the Danish camp, the Danish King, Guthrum, has no desire to see her suffer more. He does not persecute helpless innocence in the person of Alfred's captive queen, as is the case in at least two eight-

eenth century plays about King Alfred.[63]This is no surprise, for Guthrum is depicted as a nominal villain only, subject to the reforming influence of Alfred, who exercise that influence when he visits the Danish camp disguised as a minstrel. The real villain is Edric, the Saxon traitor, who set fire to Alfred's castle and home. Edric is minor villain, however, not worthy of being spoken of in the same breathe as Appius, Gesler, or even Opimius.

There are two focusses of psychological interest in the play. One is King Alfred's effort to exercise a moral and religious influence over the Danish king, with the ultimate intent of converting him to Christianity. The other is the relationship of Guthrum, the Danish king, to his innocent nubile daughter, Ina, a character somewhat resembles Virginia at the beginning of the play. Like Virginius, Guthrum is a widower, but unlike Virginius, he lacks the feminine sensibility. As in Caius Gracchus, Knowles exploit the pathos inherent in conflict within the family, but this time between father and daughter rather than husband and wife. Guthrum is a doting but egotistical father, and Ina an equally doting daughter, but a conflict arise when Ina falls in love with a captured Saxon and plights her troth to him without her father's knowl-

[63] See Chapter 6.

edge. Guthrum has other plans for his daughter: to marry her to Edric, the Saxon traitor who has served him loyally. When Guthrum insists she show filial duty and bow to his will, the conflict becomes potentially tragic. Edric, for his part, speaks like a conventional villain Edric acts and speaks like a conventional villain when he draws his sword with the intention of killing his rival and declares, "Force will exact that frowardness denies!" To the question, asked by Oswith, of whether he "couldst wed the bride that loathed thee?" Edric reveals his genuine villainy by answering in the affirmative.[64]

The impasse between father and daughter, who are equally determined not to give in, is resolved temporarily by Alfred, who suggests a trial by combat--a melodramatic emblem--between Edric and Oswith, that Oswith, the emodiment of honorable virtue, wins. The impasse returns when Guthrum discovers the minstrel is Alfred and takes out his wrath on Oswith by sentencing

[64] In the two volume edition of Knowles's plays this scene is more elaborate than the licensing copy. Ina is indignat at Oswith, when, occupied with drawing his sword, he fails to give her his hand as proof that he has plighted his troth. Ina becomes increasing shrill in the scene, until Oswith calls her his "Bride!--Wife!," after which Ina, who obviously feels compromised by her confession, refuses to leave him even though he tells her he wants to be alone. Her words are almost unintentionally humorous as she threatens to "cling to thee till death / Disjoins us! Drag me if thou wilt, I'll ne'er / Let go my hold!" The image of the clinging Ina evokes her behavior with her father, and also reminds us of Lucinia's clinging to Caius Gracchus to prevent him from leaving her.

him to be sacrificed to the god Odin. Ina reaction is to withdraw into a catatonic state that leads to madness, a stock melodramatic device for arousing pathos.

The central emotional scene in the play occurs when Guthrum finds the courage to visit his immobile daughter (5:1). The stage direction reads, "Edith withdraws the curtain, and Ina is discovered sitting in the state of fixed abstraction. Edith raises her, and leads her forward to a couch, Ina moving as if it were mechanically." Ina's zombeyish state, leads Guthrum to reflect on the irony of what he has done:

> Why 'tis enough to make the sickly heart
> Break out in laughter, when the very work
> Our eyes would week them tearless at, our hands
> May boast the making of!

Sitting beside his daughter, Guthrum takes her to his bosom and, on his knees, tenderly begs her to speak to him. If she does not, he tells her, he will go mad:

> My Ina! Ina!--
> My child! you'll speak to me?--What are you ill?
> How feel you?--You look well!--There, my own girl,
> Lie in your father's bosom!--Speak to him!
> What say'st thou, Sweet?--Wast not about to speak?
> Thou wast. Go on, go on!--Speak to me--Ina;
> Or I'll go mad! Dost hear?--On my knees
> I pray you speak to me!

Nothing induces Ina to speak: not the physical contact, not the begging, not the threat of madness. Suddenly, his tenderness turns to self-pitying anger, as he accuses her of dissembling:

> Now, this is wilful!
> Away!--You but dissemble!--'Tis put on!--
> For shame, for shame! You've seen my eyes in tears!
> You're seen my knees upon the ground!--You know
> It is your father--your old father, and
> You'll not speak to him!--Think you he can't see?
> Why, any one could do't! To fix the eye
> And keep the visage motionless, and sit
> As you were riveted to your seat! A child
> Were scant of wit that lack'd such obvious power--
> Of simulation!

He alternates between extremes, first harshly threatening, then tenderly entreating:

> I renounce you, Ina!--[Going]
> Will you not speak to me, my child? Speak to me
> [Returns]
> A word--a whisper--anything!--a sign--
> To show me that you are not worse than dead--

Finally, overcome with frustration at his daughter's utter lack of response, Guthrum attempts a desperate measure, a show of violence aimed at rousing his broken-hearted daughter from her zombeyish state. In order to get a reaction, he runs toward her with raised dagger in hand, shouting "I will try / If life be in thy heart!. Regardless of Guthrum's non-violent intent, the sight of a loving but frantic father poised to stab his defenseless daughter in the heart because he thinks she is deliberately ignoring him must have shocked audiences. The horror of the moment evokes Virginius's

killing of his daughter, however different the circumstances and the motive.

Even this show of violence has no effect on Ina: "I'd scare a stone!" says Guthrum. But Ina is suddenly roused from her inert condition by "Wild, discordant music," music that signals the start of the religious ceremony in which Oswith will be killed by the priests as a sacrifice. She speaks, but in madness and without recognizing her father's presence. By lingering on Ina's madness, Knowles arouses intense pathos of the most sentimental kind. As her father listens and looks on helplessly in anguish, Ina speaks poignantly of their relationship:

> Ina: I should like to get
> My father's blessing first!
> Guth: Thou has't it, Ina!
> Ina: I know I have. Who says he does not love me?
> I'll not believe it, though he were to kill me!
> He do't in madness and he'd kill himself
> When he had found he had done it! Bless his Ina?
> He always blesses me!--at morning when
> He sees me first, and then, again, at night!
> Yea, oftimes through the day! He'd bless me, though
> I broke his heart; and I'll bless him, although
> He has broken mine!

She then fantasizes grotesquely about her wedding with Oswith:

> We'll wed
> As never lovers did. We'll have our nuptials
> Of a new fashion. Who'd be bid to them,
> Let him bring tears with him, he'd welcome--such
> As gush with sobs! We'll have no smiles at them!
> The meanest churl gets handfuls when he weds!

> No songs! such minstrelsy a beggar buys
> For thanks! No, give us shrieks! and laughter! but
> Such laughter as it withers joy to hear!--
> As breaketh from the heart of madness!

Guthrum comments on his daughter's madness and how it threatens his own sanity:

> Perception's all within; without is none.
> Passion hath drunk up sense! I feel a touch
> Of her condition while I look upon her--
> God mad!

In words that echoing both Lear and Othello, he laments:

> You had a daughter yesterday--
> Brag of her now! Point to her cheek, and ask
> If ever grew such smiles as blossom there!
> And bid the ear that listens to her, note
> The sweetness that it feasts on!

The sound of music changes his mood and in an agony of self-reproach, he rushes out to preside over the ceremony, resisting the impulse to kill his daughter in body has he has killed her in mind:

> What! not go through the task thou hast begun
> So bravely? Slay they child and finish it!
> [Rushes out]

With her father gone, Ina reveals that she has a dagger of her own, and is prepared to use it to take her own life. The scene ends with her speaking these words and leaving for the site where Oswith is to be sacrificed:

> When I first thought I should become a bride,
> Wondering how I would deck me, I ran through
> The ranks of fairest flowers to pick me one
> To set it in my bosom; and I remember
> It was a rose I pitch'd on--There's my rose!
> [Draws a dagger and returns it to her bosom]
> [Music]
> The rites begin,--Let me steal after them,
> And watch the time! I'm coming to thee, Oswith!
> I'll show thee how a Danish maid can love!

The play appears to be headed toward a tragic catastrophe.

There is no scene of comparable intensity involving the protagonist or his wife, though Knowles does attempt to arouse pathos from the separation of the family. The first attempt occurs when Elswith wanders into the Danish camp in so emaciated a state that her own son doesn't recognize her (4:1). The grotesqueness of the characterization ("My name is Woe! I am the child of Wrath!) as an allegorical figure representing the suffering Saxon people dehumanizes her and makes it difficult to identify with her as a mother when the child shrinks from her. Elswith makes a desperate but vain plea to be given her child:

> He is my child! Believe it for my tears,
> My choking utterance, my bended knees,
> And my imploring arms that sue to you,
> And ask you for my child!

Observing the scene, Alfred gives thanks to Providence for preserving his wife and child, but is tortured by the necessity of containing his joyous feelings:

> Oh, happiness, thou comest out of time!
> Thou choosest ill the place to greet me in!
> Thou mockest me to hold thine arms to me!
> I dare not rush to their embrace! . . . .
> Better were it far
> I had not now been told on't.

There is intense melodramatic pathos in both Elswith's and Alfred's situations, but no genuine domestic interest of the kind aroused by Guthrum's relationship with his daughter. There is more pathos in necessity of husband and wife to contain their feelings after Elswith recognizes the minstrel to be her husband. Exemplifying the Patriot King in this situation (as already described), Alfred is duty bound to suppress his conjugal and paternal feelings and leave Elswith for the sake of the public good, in spite of her protestations:

> And must thy leave me? Oh! I have searched for thee
> Many, and many a day! Now fear'd thee, dead!
> Now hoped thee, living! Search'd for thee alone!
> One falling now; and now another off;
> With my strong love unequal to keep pace.
> Sleeping in woods and caves! On foot, by dawn;
> Ne'er giving o'er till night again!
> . . . . Art thou found,
> But to be lost again?

What genuine emotion there is here is smothered in rhetoric. Following this scene, Elswith disappears from the play until the final scene. After Alfred has subdued Guthrum, she and the boy are led on to stage by Oddune When Alfred sees his wife and son, he acknowledges their presence with only four words, "My queen

and son!" There is no emotional reunion, and Elswith has no lines to speak. In this respect, the end of Alfred the Great parallels William Tell, in which Emma appear on stage without speaking.

The last scene of Act 5 is an opportunity for a spectacle in the operatic manner (Aida springs to mind) of spectacular melodrama) with a solemn procession that floods the stage with human bodies: Danish chiefs, soldiers, priests, and boys, all marching to a chorus of praise to Odin:

> The statue of Odin is in the centre; before it is an altar prepared for sacrifice. Enter procession of sacrifice, in the following order:--Danish Chief, with a body of Danish Soldiers; a body of Danish Chiefs, and, AMUND, EDRIC, and GUTHRUM; a body of Danish Priests; Assistants with torches; Boys carrying censers; one Boy with a cushion, on which the knife of sacrifice is laid; Chief Priest of Odin; OSWITH; a body of Danish Soldiers.

This scene presents a welcome visual contrast to the rest of the play, which takes place in a cottage and in and around a tented camp. Oswith, prepared to die, refuses Guthrum's last minute offer to exchange his loyalty "for life!--for love!-- / For liberty!" The priest is about to plunge the ceremonial knife into Oswith's bared breast when Ina rushes in. Exclaiming "Oswith, I wed this thus!" she is about to stab herself in the heart when Oswith, with a heroic effort, frees

himself and prevents her. This leads Guthrum to spare Oswith's life, in defiance of the priests:

> Oswith, live!
> Although the God himself demanded him
> He shall not die who saves my Ina's life!

Thus tragedy is averted. Presumably, Ina's sanity is restored when Oswith's life is spared (since she speaks no more line it is impossible to tell from the text). It is at this point, with the Danes distracted, that the Saxons, led by Alfred, attack. A few moments later, the Danes are driven off the stage in defeat and Alfred has overcome Guthrum in combat. The victory is seemingly almost bloodless.

Overall, there is a strong sense that the Saxons are God's chosen people and that Providence has a hand in protecting Alfred and granting the Saxons victory over the Danes at the end of the play. Alfred's piety, his submission to God will, and Guthrum's willingness of convert to Christianity after being defeated by a king he recognizes as his superior in character all contribute to creating the impression that Providence is working its ends through Anglo-Saxon history and that King Alfred is its agent or instrument. It should also be noted that the action, as in Tell, is occasionally accompanied by music. Thus Nicoll is quite justified in saying that Alfred "is very little but a

self-conscious melodrama," though his dismissive tone is less than just.[65]

It is no accident that two historical plays which were most popular and which endured longest on the stage were Virginius and William Tell, plays that were classically melodramatic in plot, character, and vision. The melodramatic elements in both plays go a long way to account for their appeal in Knowles's own age and beyond.

[65] Nicoll, 4: 79.

Chapter 4

Domestic Drama and Representations of the Domestic

It has been shown that Knowles had a talent for melodramatic dramaturgy, in particular for arousing pathos to an excruciating pitch of tension. But it is equally important to recognize that Knowles was most praised in his own day for touching the hearts of theatergoers with domestic interest that was quiet, tender, and subdued, all of which was quite novel when one compares his plays with those of his contemporaries, both legitimate and illegitimate. This interest typically consists in moments of affection and tenderness between two family members--most commonly fathers and daughters, husbands and wives, or, in the case of William Tell, between a father and his young son. These moments co-exist with and provide a pleasing contrast to the moments of melodramatic suspense, emotionalism, and passion. It is in the representation of quiet domestic interest in verse dialogue that Knowles excels, and it is the aim of this chapter to isolate such moments from the four plays being examined and describe their qualities within the context of the taste for domestic drama that came to dominate all forms of the drama in the 1820s, including melodrama and tragedy.

Termed "touches of nature" in the theater jargon of the time, these representations were expressed in a conversational verse style that struck contemporary audiences (and critics like Hazlitt) as fresh and direct compared to the "cumbrous" (Hazlitt's term) verse of the poetic drama in Knowles's time. Sometimes that style was limpidly clear, at others times nervously jagged. Occasionally, it is marred by conceits, but these were often cut in performance. At its best it was natural or colloquial, bringing what has been called, for lack of a better term, a new "naturalism" (not of course by modern standards) to stage speech. The naturalism was especially striking in the historical drama, where convention dictated a dignity of characterization. By domesticating historical drama, Knowles brought close to the bosoms of ordinary Britons, so that it seems to have an immediate relevance to their lives--whether in actuality or fantasy. This breaking of the mould of conventionality was Knowles's original contribution to the drama of his time.

= A. The Rise of Domestic Drama

The 1820s and 1830s were the decades when domestic drama flowered and came of age as a genre detached from its musical origins, becoming the most popular of all

forms of melodrama.[1] The vogue for dramatic adaptations of Scott's novels heralded the triumph of domestic drama. Hastily written in a competitive spirit under extreme pressure by journeyman playwrights for mass consumption, these cobbled together dramatic entertainments were perhaps the most conspicuous manifestation of the taste for the domestic on the London stage in 1820. the year that Knowles made his London debut. The popularity of these adaptations, in Scrimgeour's words, signified "the public triumph of melodrama" in a form that represented, says Disher, "a revolt against mystery and terror" characteristic of the gothic.[2] In the Scott adaptations, terror is supplanted by pity; pantomimic action [indicated in the text] abounds and dialogue is kept to a minimum. The last two features are distinguishing earmarks of melodrama. The adaptations are rich in spectacle of action ("battles, tournaments, robbery by night, burning castles,"[3] for example) and set design (picturesque panoramas on the one hand and domestic interest ("an emphasis on the personal emotions of the private or domestic selves of their characters"[4]) on the other. For this reason,

[1] Gilbert Cross writes: "Domestic drama became increasing popular through the 1820s as audiences exerted pressure on authors to write to a well-tried formula--Cross 17.

[2] Disher 66.

[3] Scrimgeour 394.

[4] Scrimgeour 396.

Scrimgeour calls these plays "the strongest bridge between the Gothic dramas of the first decade of the century and the domestic melodramas of the third."[5]

Scrimgeour aptly calls domestic drama "Gothic drama tamed." The word "tamed" should be understood to mean domesticated and moralized or make moral. The taming began to manifest itself in the first decade of the new century in the shift in setting from the castle--the stronghold of the villain's power--to the cottage, a symbol of rural lost innocence. This shift is exemplified in the romantic melodramas produced immediately before and during the rage for dramatized Scott: for example, William Dimond's The Foundling of the Forest (1809) Isaac Pocock's The Miller and His Men (1813) and George Soane's The Innkeeper's Daughter (1819). Pocock's piece, a "famous thriller" that enjoyed a long life on the stage, ingeniously combines "violent romantic intrigue," "broad comedy," and "over-powering stage effects."[6] Booth writes that "almost every play of the time is an instance of the engulfing flood of domestic taste,"[7] a statement that impresses us with the pervasive influence this taste had in the

[5] Scrimgeour 396.

[6] Rahill 114-115. Rahill notes the The Miller and His Men remained popular until late in the century. Pocock also adapted a number of Scott's novels for music, including Rob Roy. which was produced as Rob Roy MacGregor; or Auld Lang Syne (CG, 1818), with Macready in the lead part.

[7] Booth, Prefaces 41.

early nineteenth century, pulling all other genres, including tragedy, into the orbit of familial life. The new taste was another manifestation of the domestic ethos which had worked its transforming power in British society.[8] The taste for domesticity was not for naturalism per se but idealism in situations of intense feeling that evoked pathos.

One cannot be precise about the origins of domestic melodrama. Scrimgeour writes, "no specific time or place can or need be assigned as the beginning of domestic melodrama because, rather than being a revolution against the preceding styles of drama, it was a re-formation of elements already present, a new amalgamation."[9] Its content, for example, came from eighteenth century sentimental comedy; its style of presentation from spectacular melodrama. One can see the two disparate elements coalescing in plays like The Maid and the Magpie, a hit in three different versions in 1815.[10] The heroine of the play is a servant-girl accused of stealing a silver spoon. She is sentenced to death for the alleged crime, but saved in the nick of time by the discovery in a spectacular scene that the real thief is a pet magpie.

[8] See Part I, Chapter 2.

[9] Scrimgeour 381.

[10] The three versions were written by Pocock, Arnold and T. Dibdin. The play was a translation of Caigniez's La Pie Voleuse; the story is best known today through Rossini's opera, La Gazza Ladra (The Thieving Magpie).

It is a sign of the pervasiveness of the influence of domestic taste that in 1820, along with Virginius, two other notable productions depicting the intense pathos of the father-daughter relationship were produced in London theaters: Shakespeare's King Lear and W.T. Moncrieff's The Lear of Private Life; or Father and Daughter, which has been called "the first domestic drama."[11] From the point of view of domestic interest, these three plays are about the father-daughter relationship; they are further linked in that each includes the spectacle of a father driven mad by his daughter's unconventional behavior. Moncrieff's play, based on Amelia Opie's novel Father and Daughter,[12] was staged at the newly built Royal Coburg,[13] south of the Thames, a theater that specialized in melodrama and catered to urban working classes audiences. It is recognized as the first full-fledged domestic drama. 1820 was also the year that Kean starred in a new production of Lear,

[11] Cross 17. James Kenney's Ella Rosenberg, which contains many of the elements of domestic drama, is commonly cited as a precursor of it.

[12] Gilbert Cross calls it "the first domestic drama," Next Week--East Lynne, 17. An adaptation of Amelia Opie's novel, Father and Daughter.

[13] The newly built Coburge was called "royal" because it was opened "under the patronage of H.R.H. Prince Leopold of Saxe Coburg," Princess Charlotte's husband, in 1818. Managed by Moncrieff, it "indulged in melodrama of the most startling nature; performed before audiences of the 'lowest kind'"--Nicoll, 4: 230. It was one of the largest of the minor theaters and was renamed the Victoria in honor of Queen Victoria. It attracted a mainly working class audiences. Knowles enjoyed a triumph there as an actor just before he left for his American tour. His The Beggar of Bethnal Green was a success there in 1836.

the first to be seen on the London stage in ten years out of deference to the madness of George III. The Lord Chamberlain would surely have suppressed the play had a manager attempted to produce it while the old, white haired king (who resembled Lear in his own age) raved on in his dotage. During this time Lamb had "captured it for the closet."[14] Soon after the old king's death in January, 1820, the play became the "hottest property of the season."[15] Elliston hustled it into production at Drury Lane and it became the theatrical event of the season. With the death of George III, it was again safe to depict madness on the stage without fear of incurring the suspicion that one was alluding to the condition of the pathetic king.

Shakespeare's King Lear requires no further comment aside from re-emphasizing the fact that in Knowles's time Shakespeare's plays were staged to highlight their domestic interest. Kean's Lear was itself a Lear of private life, both by virtue of Tate's text, which added scenes with Cordelia,[16] and Kean's interpretation, which unlike's Kemble's before the ban,

[14] J.S. Bratton, "The Lear of Private Life: Interpretationf of King Lear in the Nineteeth Century," in Shakespeare and the Victorian Stage 125.

[15] Bratton 127.

[16] Kean deserves credit for playing the original version for three nights. He wanted to display his powers over the dead body of Cordelia. But he had difficulty carrying Cordelia (the weighty Mrs. West) on to the stage, and so returned to less physically demanding version of Tate.

mixed domestic tenderness with passion.[17] Moncrieff capitalized on the interest in King Lear that Kean's acting had stimulated by alluding to the long unseen tragedy in the title to his play about a modern day Lear.

The frenzy of Moncrieff's play is worth summarizing because it contrasts with the subtler dramaturgy of Knowles's plays. Even Knowles's melodrama The Daughter (1836), the only one of his dramatic works with a contemporary setting, and contains a murder and a powerfully emotional scene of a father casting his loving daughter out of his heart, is more restrained than Moncrieff's melodrama. What is important to stress is that In spite of its contemporary setting, The Lear of Private Life has less of a "realistic feel" than Virginius, even though it has the advantage of treating its domestic subject matter in a recognizable contemporary setting (a rural village.[18]) and using prose to do it. This is owing to the monotony of its melodramatized treatment of the father-daughter relationship, which is so overwrought as to render the drama more artificial--at least in the eyes of a modern reader--than Knowles's plays about ancient Romans.

[17] spelling?

[18] The use of the village as a symbol of lost purity and innocence was common was a common motif in the theater of the 1820s--see Booth? Mag. ix.

The Lear of Private Life belongs to the species of melodrama that relies on the convention of a virtuous heroine who errs and repents and a seducer-villain with a conscience who repents by the end of the play, thus ensuring a happy ending. Its plot (the basis of melodrama) is representative of scores of plays that were being written for the minor theaters in Knowles's time. The good, old widowed father, Fitzwarden (the modern Lear, and a stock type), goes mad after his daughter, Agnes elopes with the man who seduced her, the faithless Captain Alvaney. Left alone in the cottage they shared, he goes mad, and is put in an lunatic asylum. As soon as she discovers her father's condition, she is guilt-stricken and flees her lover be with her father, in spite of a raging snow storm, hurling these words at the man who seduced and betrayed her:

> Horrible monster, let me instantly away! What is the story that rages now without to that which rages here? . . . . I will arise and go to my father's house [she does not realize he has been confined] and tell him I have sinned. When he sees his child--his penitent child--return worn and unprotected through the horrors of a winter night to beg at once his pity and his pardon--surely he will--he must now forgive me![19]

With her baby in her arms, Agnes sets out in search of her father. She finds him accidently in the forest where he has wandered after escaping from a lunatic

[19] Quoted in Booth, English Melodrama 128.

asylum. He is almost unrecognizable: hideous, moaning, raving, rattling his chain; in his dementia he tries to strangle his daughter. She is saved from death by his keepers, who capture him and lead him away. A second, peaceful, reunion takes place in the father's cell at the asylum. The daughter's presence is a balm, restoring him to sanity, and there is a climactic scene of "rapturous forgiveness and reconciliation."[20] The repentant "villain," now a Lord, marries the woman who child he has fathered. The frenzied expressions of madness, grief, and repentance, and forgiveness in Moncrieff's play are typical of the popular melodrama of the day but quite foreign to the spirit of Knowles's plays in spite of their melodramatic features.

B. The Domestication of Tragedy: in Virginius

The homey domesticity of Virginius is far removed from the raw emotionalism of Moncrieff's melodrama as it also is from the florid emotionalism of Sheil's tragedy The Apostate. This is most apparent in the characterization of the Roman father, a man, like King Lear, of quick temper, who seethes over the outrage

[20] Booth, English Melodrama 128. The way in which Agnes restores her father to sanity shows Shakespeare's influence on the minor drama: she poses "as a portrait of herself in the manner of Shakespeare Hermione"--Disher 85.

committed against his daughter and his good name, but who does not rave. When his gorge rises, he has makes an effort to himself down. When, far from Rome in a military camp, he is told about the outrage against his daughter (2:1) he is, of course, infuriated, even more so because he senses the masterminding hand of Appius behind the action. His first impulse is lay violent hands on Appius in revenge. Then he masters his anger by telling himself, in an echo of Lear, that he must be patient. The choppy rhythm and the disturbed syntax of the verse conveys Virginius's fury. His speech by fragmenting under the pressure of emotion:

> Patience! Prudence!
> Nay, prudence, but no patience--Come! a slave
> Dragg'd through the streets in open day! my child!
> My daughter! my fair daughter, in the eyes
> Of Rome! O! I'll be patient. Come! the essence
> of my best blood in the free common ear
> Condemn'd as vile! O! I'll be patient. Come!
> O they shall wonder--I will be so patient.

But by the time he had returned to Rome, he has totally mastered his violent impulses, and only allows himself to express them in a controlled manner in front of this daughter: "I will not take him by the throat and strangle him!" After Virginius kills his daughter to save her from what was referred to in the nineteenth century as a "fate worse than death," madness is a blessing that releases him from the unendurable burden of knowing what he has done and even, perhaps from the desire to take his own life, which happens in R.B.'s

Appius and Virginia. Virginius who begins to show signs of losing his wits after the overthrow of Appius (5:1). He believes she is stall alive, and when he does not find her at home, he goes to the prison where Appius is incarcerated, fixed on the idea that she is with him. When he enters the cell of his dungeon (5:3), he hallucinates a sight of his violated daughter and strangles Appius in revenge. The sight of his daughter's ashes restore him to sanity, as Icilius and Numitorius, his brother, repeatedly call his name. The voice of Icilius strikes a chord in the father, reminding him by association of his daughter's:

> That voice--that voice--I know that voice!
> It minds me of a voice that was coupled with it,
> And made such music, one to hear it was
> Enough to make it ever after be
> Remember'd.

The words echo those that Lear speaks over his daughter's dead body. Icilius then places an urn containing Virginia's ashes in Virginius's hand, At the sight of the ashes he bursts into "a passion of tears," and on Icilius's neck, as in anguish he cries out his daughter's name. The Lear-like echoes in Virginius's words, with an urn substituting for Cordelia's corpse. It should remind us of how powerful the influence of Shakespeare was in this period. Even though King Lear had been absent from the stage for ten years, it remained a strong model for both the legitimate and illegitimate drama.

Knowles's treatment of the well known story of Virginius (or Appius and Virginia) is that, Donohue's words, "although the central situation of the play concerns the threatened violation of Virginia's 'honour,' there is little talk about honour in the abstract." Instead, the primary "emphasis remains on natural filial and paternal affection and--clearly a subsidiary value--on the natural love of a young man and woman for one another."[21] Donohue is here referring to the "touches of nature" which distinguish Knowles's plays from those of his contemporaries, and Knowles's treatment of the story of Virginius from all previous English dramatic treatments, stage and unstaged versions. Webster's Appius and Virginia, dated about 1608, mixes "elements of both domestic and orthodox tragedy."[22] In two versions in the mid-eighteenth century, Henry Crisp's Virginia: a Tragedy, and Moncrieff's Appius: A Tragedy, the domestic elements are much less prominent. The same may be said of George Soane's 1820 version produced at Drury Lane, entitled Virginius; or the Fall of Decimviri, which starred Kean and competed with Knowles's version at Covent Garden.[23]

[21] Donohue, The Age of Kean 138.

[22] Adams 80.

[23] Soane's play on the Virginius-Appius-Virginia subject matter is discussed in Part III, Chapter 2. John Payne's version in the same year, it has already been noted, is not extant.

In Virginius, the "touches" impress all the more because they take place in indoor scenes that are juxtaposed in the structure of the play with public scenes involving Roman politics. The opening scene of Virginius, for example, is full of excitement and tumult resulting from the election of Appius as Decimvir, which has just taken place. The scene is a Roman street and Virginius is roundly ridiculing the citizens he meets for electing Appius Decemvir, after which he converses with Icilius, who was misled into supporting Appius's election. After Virginius leaves, Appius enters with a crowd of citizens and assures them he will use his power in their interests. After Appius leaves, Denatatus, heaps the vials of his contempt on the citizens for choosing Appius. Incensed, the citizens menace Dentatus, and Icilius has to save him from the crowd's anger.

After this hurly-burly of actions, it is a surprising and pleasant contrast to meet Virginius again in a calm atmosphere among "everyday realities of home life."[24] He is doing something most unusual for soldier: examining his daughter's sewing, an embroidered sampler to be precise for evidence that she is in love with Icilius, as her watchful nurse suspects from the pattern and design of the letters. He finds it in the intertwined letters of Icilius and his daughter.

[24] Donohue, Theatre 158.

Virginius then summons his daughter for gentle questioning to find out more about the state of her feelings:

Virginia: Well, father, what's your will?
Virginius: I wish'd to see you.
To ask you of your tasks--how go they on--
And what your masters say of you--what last
You did. I hope you never play
the truant?
Virginia: The truant! No. Indeed, Virginius
Virginius: I am sure you do not--kiss me!
Virginia: O my father!
I am so happy when you're kind to me!
Virginius: You are happy when I'm kind to you!
Am I not always kind? I never spoke
An angry word to you in all my life,
Virginia! You are happy when I'm kind!
That's strange; and makes me think you
have some reason
To fear I may be otherwise than kind--
Is't so, my girl?
Virginia: Indeed, I did not know
What I was saying to you!
Virginius: Why, that's worse
And worse! What! when you said your
father's kindness
Made you so happy, am I to believe
You were not thinking of him?
Virginia: I-- [Greatly confused]
Virginius: Go fetch me
The latest task you did
Virginia goes out] It is enough.
Her artless speech, like crystal,
shows the thing
'Twould hide, but only covers.
'Tis enough!
She loves and fears her father
may condemn!

Audiences were charmed by this conversation between a father and his daughter, with its affectionate teasing. It was a scene that was original with Knowles, not found in any of the previous dramatic versions of the story. It reminded audiences of how a well-bred father and daughter might talk in a middle class English home.

The familiarity of the scene to Britons was enhanced by the acting of the fetching Miss Foote, who was so delightful in the early scenes in the part of Virginia. Hazlitt commented that she played the Roman maid "with a little bit, a delightful little bit, of the English schoolgirl in her acting."[25] The diction of the conversation may seem bald to us, but Hazlitt praised the play for the simplicity of its language and for being "free from the cumbrous phraseology which has of late years weighed down almost all dramatic writing."[26] The so-called baldness was welcome relief from the heavy, declamatory verse that was characteristic of tragedy.

The betrothal scene (2:1) also sounds a peculiarly English domestic note. It is another which touched the hearts of audiences with the pathos felt for Virginius as he gives away his beloved daughter. Icilius is Virginis's choice to be his daughter's husband, but it is impossible for him to preside over the ceremony without shedding tears. During the fifteen years that he had been both a father and mother to his daughter she has been only comfort and a delight to him. This is evident moments before the ceremony when Virginius seems to be stalling for time. The time is not propitious for romantic thoughts, he soberly tells the adoring Icilius, because a war going on. Icilius, who has

[25] Hazlitt, quoted in Downer 69.

[26] Hazlitt, London Magazine, July, 1820.

waited impatiently for this moment for some time, seems momentarily stunned by Virginius's willingness to postpone the ceremony. Obviously moved by Icilius's disappointment, Virginius proceeds with the ceremony, which is rather formal, involving a written contract to be signed by both parties and witnessed by Numitorius, Virginius's brother. Leading his daughter by the hand toward Icilius, Virginius delivers a speech that expresses his love for his daughter, who conforms to the ideal of feminine purity and delicacy held in pre-Victorian period:

> You are my only witnesses
> That this young creature I present to you,
> I do pronounce--my profitably cherish
> And most deservedly beloved child;
> My daughter, truly filial--both in word
> And act--yet even more in act than word
> And--for the man who seeks to win her love--
> A virgin, from whose lips a soul as pure
> Exhales, as e'er responded to the blessing
> Breathed in a parent's kiss. [Kissing her]

Hearing these words, the overjoyed Icilius reverently kneels before the precious gift that is being bestowed upon him. Virginius, his voice choked with emotion and with tears streaming down his face (as acted by Macready), then requires Icilius to take a public oath promising that he will be both a father and a husband to his daughter. In the process of giving his daughter away, Virginius sheds tears, even as he speaks, his voice choked. He explains to Icilius:

> Didst thou but know, young man,

> How fondly I have watch'd her, since the day
> Her mother died, and left me to a charge
> Of double duty bound--how she hath been
> My ponder'd thought by day, my dream by night,
> My prayer, my vow, my offering, my praise,
> My sweet companion, pupil, tutor, child!--
> Thou wouldst now wonder that my drowning eye,
> And choking utterance, upbraid my tongue
> That tells thee she is thine!

In Webster's version of the scene there is no equivalent passage to the above. The Jacobean playwright's depiction of the ceremony, as one would expect, is unsentimental. Virginius declares his paternal love publicly in a few matter-of-fact words (1:4):

> Here I give up a father's interest,
> But not a father's love that I will ever
> Wear next my heart, for it was born with her,
> And grows still with my age.

Virginius's ambivalence in Knowles's version is not developed into a source of emotional tension in the character. It is simply presented as the expression of natural feelings of a heart divided; once expressed, the ambivalence never reappears. In Virginia herself, there is no trace of conflict between paternal and romantic love. Such tension is a fruitful theme, as demonstrated in Sheil's The Apostate, but it is of no concern to Knowles here.

The mood of the betrothal scene is soon eclipsed by Appius's menacing action of having Virginia seized and dragged though the streets by his tool Claudius. Rescued by Icilius, she Virginia stays safely at home

with her uncle and Icilius anxiously awaiting Virginius's return before the appointed day of judgment when Virginia's fate will be decided (4:1). Fatherhood is very much on her mind and the thought that she is not her father's daughter is unbearable to Virginia:

> Virginius not my father!
> Virginius, my dear father, not my father!
> It cannot be; my life must come from him;
> For, make him not my father, it will go
> From me--I could not live, an he were not
> My father.[27]

To her, the proof she is Virginius's child lies in her feeling that she is. Flying into her father's arms after he suddenly appears, she affirms his fatherhood in this moving exchange:

> Virginius: My child! my child! [Virginia shrieks and rushes into her father's arms]
> Virginia: I am! I feel I am! I know I am!

The sight of his daughter rekindles his rage against Appius (the "Blister'd villain"), but it magically disappears as quickly as it came, when he is distracted from his own emotions by the perception of a resemblance that he notices at this instant between his daughter and his long dead wife.

[27] Note on Act, scene.

This perception leads to one of the most admired "touches of nature" in the play: Virginius's relating of a vivid memory ("as a thing of yesterday") that rises in his mind after he is reminded of his wife. It is a fifteen-year memory of his wife, then a young mother, giving him Virginia to hold when she was just a baby. First, there is the perception itself of seeing his wife's face--and more than her face--in his daughter's, which occurs as Virginius looks at his daughter at the same time she is looking earnestly at him for an answer to a practical question. Virginius is too distracted to pay attention to what she is saying. All he can blurt out is, "I never saw you look so much like your mother in all my life!"--one of the most admired lines in the play. In spite of its resistance to scansion, the line has more effect--its length and the moment it occurs has a great deal to do with that--than the line spoken by Alvarez to his daughter Florinda in The Apostate: "I see thy mother in thy face."[2829]

Concerned that her father might do something rash, Virginia repeats her question, but her father is much too preoccupied with the newly awakened memory of his wife and the infant Virginia that his daughter's face has conjured from his memory to pay heed to her words.

[28] The Apostate, Act I, sc. 1, page 8.

[29] See Chapter 1 of Part II for the context of this line in The Apostate.

The memory must be told, because the resemblance that he saw was of the nature of spirit, of soul::

> It was her soul--her soul, that play'd just then
> About the features of her child, and lit them
> into the likeness of her own. When first
> She plac'd thee in my arms--I recollect it
> As a thing of yesterday! She wished, she said,
> That it had been a man. I answer'd her,
> It was the mother of a race of men;
> And paid her for thee with a kiss. Her lips
> Are cold now--could they but be warm'd again,
> How they would clamour for thee!

It words must out, though the time is appropriate for recollection, and even though, judging from the lack of response, no one is interested at this tense moment in his sentiments..

The note of parental and paternal nurture (the two being one and the same because Virginius is both father and mother to his daughter) is sounded even more poignantly (and poetically) when Virginius pleads his case publicly in the Forum before Appius (5:2) and the people, who watch and listen to the proceedings from a distance:

> Here are the ears that listen'd to her sighs
> In nature's hour of labour, which subsides
> in the embrace of joy!--the hands, that when
> The day first look'd upon the infant's face,
> and never look'd so pleased, help'd her up to it,
> And thanked the gods for her, and pray'd them send
> Blessing on blessing on her--Here, the eyes
> That saw her lying in the generous
> And sympathetic fount, that at her cry
> Sent forth a stream of liquid living pearl
> To cherish her enamell'd veins. The lie
> Is most abortive then, that takes the flower--
> The very flower our bed connubial grew--
> To prove its barrenness!

This speech is a compelling a proof of Virginius's fatherhood because of its its images of nature and natural processes (labor pains succeeded by joy at the feel of the new born, flowing breast milk, flowers, the nuptial bed). It has the authority of lived experience. Ironically, it has no value as proof at a tribunal before a corrupt judge, who demands dry proofs of Virginius's fatherhood that he cannot produce. The attempt to refute the lie is hopeless. In Appius's tribunal, lies are accepted as truths.

Many modern critics have made the point that when tragedy focuses too intensely and exclusively on domestic feelings, as Virginius does, it runs the risk of denaturing itself as a tragedy by substituting pathos for pity and fear.[30] Scrimgeour hints at this when he writes, by "going against the grain of verse tragedy. . . . domestic subject matter contested rather than cooperated with the verse and grandeur."[31] The point, which has validity, harks back to words of the French late nineteenth-century critic Augustin Filon, who noted with disapproval that in Virginius "the rules of Diderot and Sedaine's Drame Bourgeois seem to have

[30] On this basis, some critics have denied Othello as high a place in Shakespeare's canon as tragedy as Hamlet, Lear, and Macbeth.

[31] Scrimgeour 388.

been transferred to Roman tragedy."[32] Diderot was a pioneer in the struggle "to tone down the loudness of classical tragedy and to curb its sensational stage effects, guided as he is by the bourgeois fondness for the intimate, the direct and the homely."[33] This statement of Diderot's views accurately describes Knowles's intent and achievement in his two Roman plays, Virginius and Caius Gracchus. Filon wrote slightingly of this achievement, ridiculing Knowles's depiction of a Roman household in Virginius as "tranquil, well-behaved, Christian,--I might even say, Puritan."[34] "Doubtless the Romans of the republic were men like ourselves," he admits,

> but a true picture of their humanity should reveal characteristics different from ours. The author should either have sought out these characteristics, or else have restricted himself to that sphere of great passions and heroic madnesses in which all the centuries meet on common ground[35]

[32] Augustin Filon, The English Stage: Being an Account of the Victorian Drama, trans F. Whyte (London, 1897), p. 51. Michel-Jean Sedaine (1719-1797) was a French dramatist and author of Le Philosophe sans le savoir (1765), "drama bourgeois written under the influence of Diderot which interprets his dramatic theories better than their originator could do in his own plays"--The Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre, ed. Phyllis Hartnoll (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1972) 487-488

[33] Arnold Hauser, "The Origins of Domestic Drama," in The Theory of the Modern Stage, ed. Eric Bentley, (Baltimore: Penguin, 1968) 408.

[34] Augustin Filon, The English Stage (London: Milne, 1897), 53.

[35] Filon 54-5.

"The paternal emotion of Virginius prepares us but ill for the heroic crime which he is to commit," Filon declares.[36] Of Virginia, Filon remarks that she "might have got her ideas on rectitude from Miss Edgeworth."[37]

Filon's objection to the "contrast between the antiquity of the events and the modernness of the characters" in Virginius had already been registered by Horne, who was a devotee "passionate imaginings" in the drama,[38] in his The New Spirit of the Age, published in 1844:

> In what consists the interest and force of his popular play of "Virginius?" The domestic feeling. The costume, the setting, the decorations, are heroic. We have Roman tunics, but a modern English heart,--the scene is the Forum, but the sentiments are those of the "Bedford Arms." The affection of the father for his daughter--the pride of the daughter in her father, are the main

[36] The English Stage, 53.

[37] Augustin Filon, The English Stage: Being an Account of the Victorian Drama (London and New York: John Milne, 1897) 51.

[38] Horne, who was the author of three unacted trasgedies when he wrote these words, was ambivalent toward what he called Knowles's "genius for domestic interests." Horne praises Knowles's genius when he writes that he has "devled into the human breast, and traced the winding of the affections. . . with genuine truth and varied knowledge. But in the context of the essay in which these words appear, it is clear that Horne regards Knowles's genius as falling far short of the ideal of dramatic composition because it is "limited. . . to the emotions elicited by modern social intercourse." For Horne, the talent for dramatizing social emotions ranks far below the talent for dramatizing "passionate imaginings" of the kind he poured into his own tragedy Cosmo de' Medici. It was "passionate imaginings that "unacted dramatists"--a title they wore like a badge of honor--like Horne had dedicated themselves to restoring in the stage drama of their day. The rejection of his plays by stage managers was a source of bitterness--"Knowles and Macready" in The New Spirit of the Age (London, 1844) 240.

> principles of the play, and the pit and galleries and even much of the boxes are only perplexed with the lictors and the Decemviri, and the strange garments of the actors."[39]

This seemingly matter-of-fact statement is actually a complaint that the mingling of the heroic with the domestic in Virginius makes for incongruity.

Most contemporary reviewers of Virginius were not troubled as Horne was by the mingling of ancient and modern.[40] Fraser's Magazine, for example, noted without disapproval that "The Virginius of Mr. Knowles is not a Roman patriot so much as he is a father."[41] Blackwood's Edinburgh, calling the play "purely a tale of domestic life," singled out for praise the "charming home scene at the house of Virginius" in the first act Virginius appears "the unaffected and happy father, in the bosom of his family."[42] In his remarks to the Cumberland edition, D.G. speaks of the "dignity" and "paternal tenderness" of Macready's performance without any suggestion that the two qualities clashed.[43] An exception was the reviewer of the Morning Herald, who found the

[39] Horne 239.

[40] The subject is not commented upon in The Monthly Review (Sept. 1820) 43; Blackwood's Magazine (June, 1820), 7; in Hazlitt's reviews in The London Magazine; or in an unidentified review dated May, 1820 (found in the clipping file of Harvard Theater Collection).

[41] Fraser's Magazine 13: 453, quoted in Meeks 204.

[42] Blackwood's Edinburgh, June, 1820, 7: 308, 309-10.

[43] Virginius in Cumberland British Theatre, 1826-29, 38: 8.

overt domesticity to be a violation of classical decorum and an effeminization of the hero's character:

> Virginius appears in a domestic character, which however amiable in the master of a modern family, is ill adapted to the hardy marks that should characterise the noble Roman, and savours somewhat of the ridiculous. --Tracing the secret of a love-sick girl through samplers and drawings, and inquiries respecting a young lady's progress under his masters, ill become the dignity, and antique date of the toga.[44]

Needless to say, strictures of decorum such as those expressed in the Morning Herald carried no weight in the theater. The enthusiasm of audiences for Virginius came from the ease with which they could identify and sympathize with the Roman father and his daughter. This was precisely because they could feel a "modern English heart" (not a Roman one) beating beneath the "strange garments of the actors." If the play had not depicted characters with whom the Britons could relate to, it is difficult to imagine how the play could have been the popular success it turned out to be. The domestic interest of the play was, in fact, the reason for its success. Nicoll calls the mixture of the tragic and the domestic in Virginius its "fatal weakness," yet he pays the tribute due to Knowles when he remarks that he

[44] Morning Herald, May 19, 1820, in the extra-illustrated edition of Pollack's Macready's Reminiscences as collected by J.H. Leigh, 2: 210 (The Huntington Library).

> was at least far ahead of his companions that he endeavoured to treat his theme in a vivid, rather than in an artificial, manner. This domesticity, foolish as at times it may appear, is a thousandfold more to be treasured than the spurious heroicism of other authors.[45]

Contemporary critics were also sympathetic to the domestication of tragedy, which, of course, would have occurred regardless of whether they approved of it or not. In reviewing Milman's tragedy Fazio in 1818, the British Stage praised the dramatist's exploitation of the domestic as a legitimate means by which to arouse feeling:

> the woes of domestic life, or of a private family, open all the springs of tenderness that can actuate the soul, which more ready to feel, from self-acknowledgment, the fortune and vicissitudes of a character that moves upon an equal footing[46]

The natural development of the tendency toward viewing tragedy in domestic terms was for the tragic dramatist to desert the destiny of kings and other high personages as Bulwer advocated. Bulwer urged the tragic dramatist to turn his back on the "Magnificent" and embrace the "Simple"--by which he meant "tales of a household nature, that find their echo in the hearts of

[45] Nicoll, 4: 172.

[46] The British Stage, 2 (March 1818) 62, quoted in Scrimgeour 387.

the people--the materials of the village tragedy, awakening an interest common to us all; intense yet homely, actual--earnest--the pathos and passion of every-day life. . . .[47] In writing on the story of Virginius, Knowles had found his tale of a "household nature" that found its "echo in the hearts of the people" in Roman antiquity. This was a unique achievement for a dramatist in his age.

C. Marriage and the Domestic Ethos Through the Lens of Roman History: Caius Gracchus

Caius Gracchus is Knowles's first attempt to domesticate history and comparisons between it and Shakespeare's Coriolanus are inevitable given that the plots of both plays concern patrician-plebeian conflict, and both plays have an identical family configuration among the leading characters: independent-minded, virtuous son; submissive wife; and dominating, masculinized, stoical, widowed mother. But Cornelia, Caius mother, is the only character who resembles her Shakespearean "counterpart." She is Roman matron cast in the mold of Volumnia. The characterization of the protagonists of both plays is so starkly contrasting, as is Caius's wife Licinia and Virgilia, Coriolanus's (or Caius Martius as he is called before being renamed)

[47] Bulwer, England and the English 307.

wife. Licinia is a most un-Roman wife. Her self-centered notion of marriage has already been noted.[48] Caius becomes a figure divided between home of home and love of country, a conflict uncharacteristic of a Roman hero. His situation makes for terrible tension in the married life of the recently married couple, now the parents of a young boy. Much of the non-melodramatic domestic interest of the play lies in what remains unsaid rather than said as their formerly happy domestic life disintegrates as Caius is pulled deeper and deeper into the mire of Roman politics. This domestic focus gives the play its originality and dismissing Knowles's play as one modern critic does, as "Coriolanus with water" is pointless.

Knowles's Caius (at the beginning of the play) is a studious man who is untested in battle, far removed in reputation and temperament from Shakespeare's Caius Marcius, an Achilles-like solitary figure who is described as "war machine" who lives by a violent warrior ethic.[49] Caius Gracchus is mild and balanced, his manners civil and courteous, not choleric, volatile, and abrasive like Caius Martius. Caius Gracchus is highly attractive both as a public and a private man. He has genuine compassion, not contempt, for the people, the plebeians, even though he is a patrician.

[48] See Chapter 3 of Part II.

[49] Note.

Yet he has sought refuge in the bosom of his family. The only life he has known is that of a family man. In his remarks to the Cumberland edition of the play, D--G. states the challenges, Shakespearean and otherwise, that Knowles faced in writing Caius Gracchus for the early nineteenth-century stage:

> Mr. Knowles has. . . not only the fearful odds of contending with Shakespeare [i.e. Coriolanus] in the delineation of the same characters and the same passions, but he has to contend with novelty; which, in modern times, is greater odds than Shakespeare.[50]

Knowles lowered the odds on both counts, at least among theater audiences in his own day, by adding the kind of quiet domestic interest that they craved, the very thing that Coriolanus lacks. Thus, while the comparison of Knowles's play with Shakespeare's is inevitable, it is by no means fatal.

The emotionally gripping, melodramatic scene in Caius Gracchus in which Caius's wife makes the disillusioning and embittering discovery that neither she or her child, or the domestic life they stand for, are of paramount value in her husband's life has already been discussed. The aim here is to shed light on the domestic relationship of the couple so that one can appreciate how this sorrowful realization is made to

[50] Cumberland ed.

seem as if it arises out of the hero and heroine's character.

Following the structure of Virginius, Caius Gracchus opens with a turbulent public scene (actually two) and then shifts to a contrasting domestic scene. The contrast between public and private life is even stronger in Caius because the atmosphere is more turbulent, since a friend of Caius's slain brother has been sentenced to die for treason by his political enemies. Caius is shown unexpectedly coming to the condemned man's rescue by publicly speaking in his defense and earning him an acquittal. Caius cannot in good conscience abandon his brother's noble friend to an unjust death. The third scene act is set in Caius's home, and opens on a note of pure domestic bliss. However, it is a scene in which domestic happiness is talked about rather than, as in Virginius, actually shown. Lucinia's Caius's wife is sitting with her friend Livia doing neddlework, a traditional feminine task which conjures up in the modern reader's mind the doctrine of the separate spheres.[51] The first words of the scene are spoken by a very contented Lucinia:

> I am the happiest wife in Rome, my Livia!
> The happiest wife in Rome!

[51] For a discussion of the doctrine of the separate spheres see Part I, Chapter 2.

Politics is of no interest to her, and she has no wish that her husband hold political office. When Livia mentions other husbands of wives that they know who have advanced themselves politically, Lucinia shows no envy or admiration. She is happy that her husband is content to say at home with her and do domestic things like read to her and play with their child. They are like king and queen in a domestic kingdom of their own making. As she says to her friend:

> My queendom is, to be a simple wife,
> That is my government, my husband's house.
> Where, when he sits with me, he enthron'd
> Enough. You'll smile but, Juno be my witness.
> I'd rather see him, with his boy upon
> His knee, than seated in the Consul's chair
> With all the senate round him.

She continues in this vein, singing the praises of "Home, Sweet Home," the locus of her husband's life:

> I do not care for greatness.
> It is a thing lives too much out of doors;
> 'Tis any where but at home . . . .
> 'Tis a month
> Since Caius took a meal from home, and that
> Was with my brother. If he walks, I walk
> Along with him. If I choose; or, if I stay
> Behind, it is a race, 'twixt him and the time
> He promis'd to be back again, which is first,
> And when he's back, and the door shut on him,
> Consummate happy in my world within,
> I never think of any world without!

As Lucinia's speaks of her happiness, she sheds tears of joy. This is a further indication that Caius's wife is far removed from the conventional Roman stage wife, who was, like Brutes's Portia--the model of all Roman

wives--a stoical helpmate, self-controlled, submissive and supportive of their husband's public careers. As Cornelia is about to enter, Licinia candidly remarks that her mother-in-law disapproves of her wish to limit the scope of her husband's interests to herself alone:

> She sometimes chides me, that I'd have my Caius
> Live for his wife alone.

This last remark is highly significant, because it reveals the self-centered and therefore flawed nature of Lucinia's marital ideal.

Everything Lucinia says in this scene about her married life of three years with Caius is true; up until now he has shunned politics and public life and lived a domestic life. However, even as she speaks her image of an ideal married life lies in ruins. The audience knows that Caius has already made the choice to cross the Rubicon that separates a secure reclusive private life from the perils of public life by defending a friend of his dead brother in the Forum. The fact that Lucinia's ideal has already been shattered without her knowledge tends to undercut, by means of dramatic irony, its validity. While her ideal of marital happiness is rooted in domestic values that Knowles's contemporaries idealized and venerated, it goes to far in expecting that a husband can find complete satisfaction within the confines of the domestic sphere. Lucinia's ideal of domestic bliss is beautiful but unnatural. It

is also fragile because Caius cannot sustain his life of isolation from public affairs on which her happiness rests. The sense of public duty that has been part of his upbringing as a member of a prominent aristocratic family, the influence of his strong civic-minded mother, and the thought that his brother's murder has gone unavenged powerful forces that act to pull him out of a narrowly circumscribed domestic orbit. In retrospect, Caius's stepping outside the private sphere is an action which has an air of inevitability about it.

As the tragic consequences of this act work themselves out according to the laws of probability that accord with the tragic hero's character, the possessive Lucinia discovers that domestic bliss is not the paramount value in her husband's life as she had believed. Cornelia, Caius's wonderfully stoical matron mother, who Lucinia describes as "the kindest mother" a daughter-in-law could have, is Knowles's mouthpiece for the conventional doctrine of the separate spheres that Linda naively rejects. She tries to educate the inexperienced Lucinia to the nature of men, and thus prevent her from the shock of disappointment. When Lucinia, now anxious because Caius is late coming home, asks Cornelia whether she believes her son should become involved in the trial of Vettius (she is aware of the fact that he is under sentence of death), Cornelia refuses to pass judgment because she it con-

siders it none of her (or an woman's) business:

> Think what is passing on Olympus! One way
> Or the other, what concerns it us? Men have
> Their proper business, which no part it is
> Of ours to help to manage.

Lucinia, suspecting that her mother-in-law knows something about Caius she doesn't, presses her to disclose it. At this point, Cornelia sits her daughter-in-law down and gives her a brief lecture on the doctrine of the separate spheres, hoping to disabuse her mind of what is to her a silly romantic notion about men:

> Have men
> No parts to play but lovers?--What! Are they
> No citizens as well?--Have they not crafts,
> Callings, professions?--Women act their parts
> When they do make their ordered houses know them.
> Men must be busy out of doors--must stir
> The city;--yea, make the great world aware
> That they are in it. . . .

When Lucinius, Lucinia's brother, arrives with the news that Caius has spoken on behalf of Vettius--and thus in effect come out of the domestic closet-- emotional Lucinia, justifiably fearful that her husband will end up murdered like his brother, predictably bursts into tears of unhappiness ("An hour ago, I was the happiest wife," she laments). In contrast, Cornelia, as one would expect, exults in her son's display of courage and civic activism, even though she expects it to lead to his death. This is the attitude one would expect from the daughter of Scipio Africans.

Lucinia's un-Roman display of personal unhappiness provokes a very Roman lecture from Cornelia, the gist of which is that Caius's love of country is stronger than his love for his wife--or mother. Cornelia tells Licinia that just as she accepts the fact that her son lives his wife more than her, Licinia should accept the fact that Caius loves his country more than his wife:

> I am his mother.--Is he not dear to me?
> My youngest son, and last? Yet do I bear,
> What I do know must come! I know my son!
> Know thou thy husband--know thou Caius Gracchus.
> He loves his mother well--Licinia better--
> His country best! As I, his mother, grudge not,
> That he prefers thee--thou, his wife, repine not,
> That he prefers his country--Both of us
> Make up our minds to all may follow.

This is sound advice, but Lucinia is temperamentally incapable of profiting from it.

Caius then enters the house to the accompaniment of cheering citizens in the background. He announces that he has been appointed questor by Opimius and must leave Rome immediately. The position, which gave young, ambitious, high-born Romans an opportunity to test their mettle on the field of battle and earn a reputation, was the traditional stepping stone to higher political office in the Roman republic.[52] Cornelia stoically accepts this news, and congratulates him for

[52] More specifically, as one scholar puts it, being elected "quaestor" was "the first step on the cursus honorum, the progression of advancement through the chief offices of the Republic"--Franklin L. Ford, Political Murder: From Tyannicide to Terrorism (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1985) 51.

having saved his brother's friend, but Lucinia is withdrawn, her feelings hurt because he had not confided in her. She greets him with a reproach:

> Caius: What, my Licinia! Don't you speak to Caius?
> Lucinia: You never said a word to me!

This first exchange between husband and wife reveals the fundamental problem in their relationship: Caius cannot talk to his wife about his aspiration to live a life outside the private sphere; his wife says she wants him confide him in her, but her self-centeredness prevents him from doing so. Knowles's Caius is not portrayed as a politically ambitious man, but the enthusiasm he displays as he informs his family of his new honor (Caius is unaware that Opimius has conferred it on him for ulterior motives) suggests that he welcomes an opportunity, for whatever reason, to break out of the restricting private or domestic sphere in which he has willingly confined himself since his marriage. Lucinia is stunned by the news that her husband must leave her so suddenly and immediately dwells on her own unhappiness:

> What's to become of me?

Lucinia's public display of unhappiness provokes Cornelia, who had already advised her daughter-in-law to greet her husband with a happy face, however sad she

feels), to deliver another mini-lecture of sorts on the meaning of love, from a Roman point of view:

> . . . if you love him,
> Would'st thou have thy husband be the lowest man
> in Rome? Thou knowest none may hope to gain
> The horours of the state, who have not shown
> Their prowess in the field. A Roman wife
> Is married to her husband's glory, not
> His ease and pleasure!

It is worth stressing again that Caius is not a Coriolanus type who thrives on military action and has little sensitivity to his wife's feelings. This is shown by his tender and cheering parting words to his disconsolate wife as he hastily prepares to depart. It is another Knowlesian "touch of nature":

> I'll send you letters, love, day after day
> . . . .
> Keep up your heart, love; I can come to you,
> You know, at a day's calling--think of that!
> Or you can come to me;--and you will write
> Me letters, won't you. Every word of which
> I'll kiss, and think it is the hand that trac'd
> them!
> There now--and, love, remember, as I shall,
> Sad parting makes sweet meeting.

Licinia next appears with Cornelia in scene two of Act II. A period of time has passed and new that Caius has distinguished himself as questor and done great service to the republic has reached Rome. Lucinia is indifferent to Caius's fame. She knows that his achievements have aroused the Senate's resentment and therefore his life is in danger. Caius suddenly enters and greets his wife with unabashed emotion, like a mid-

dle class Victorian husband might do who has just returned from a business trip to the Continent:

> Licinia, thank the gods! we meet again.
> How is our boy, love? How art thou thyself?
> Let me look at thee!--Well as my heart could wish
> Great Jove, to look on such a precious thing,
> And call it mine! You may smile, Marcus, but
> There's such a thing, as loving one's wife--Licinia!
> Am I not with thee again? Let him who thinks
> The world is worth is home, exchange home for it
> A little time, he'll find he has lost a world,
> Not found one![53]

It is obvious from this passage praising of "Home, Sweet Home" that Caius has missed domestic life. Caius words are a pre-Victorian expression of the Victorian domestic ethos.[54] It also characterizes Caius as a man for whom the values of hearth and home are primary, even though they are subordinate, as Cornelia says, those of country. It shows him to be free of political or worldly ambition. That other Roman males find his glorification of domestic life and romantic love unmanly or sentimental is indicated by Caius's remark, "You may smile, Marcus." Licinia does not have any words to speak in reply, but we can assume she is emotionally overwhelmed by her husband's sudden return.

[53] It is interesting to note that the severely cut licensing version of the play includes only the following lines: "There's such a thing as, as loving one's wife / Let him who thinks / The world is worth his home, exchange home for it / A little time, he'll find he has lost a world, / Nor found one." The Cumberland acting edition, however, prints the whole passage as it appears above.

[54] See Chapter 2 [Readers: are connecting notes like this necessary?].

Caius becomes immediately embroiled in public affairs when he is summoned to appear before the Censors to face the charge of returning to Rome without permission (3:3). Caius defends himself, but the consul Opimius, Caius's arch-enemy, accuses him of treason. After delivering a rousing speech defending himself and attacking the patricians, Caius takes the bold step of asking the people to elect him tribune. In the same scene, Lucinia and Cornelia enter in search of Caius. Fearful, Licinia wants to go to the Forum to find Caius, but Cornelia, who is ever mindful of the propriety and good form, is appalled at this idea, since it would reflect badly on Caius:

> All Rome
> would talk of it! When did you know a wife .
> Follow her husband to the Forum? Why,
> T'would set all fingers pointing; and they'd say
> Caius did well to take a wife to school him.

In terms of the "doctrine of the separate spheres," Lucinia, in Cornelia's opinion, is attempting to overstep a woman's proper private sphere and enter the domain of the public by wishing to be with her husband in a political setting. The women's search is ended when Caius appears, after having been elected tribune. Cornelia blesses her son, even though she has a premonition of his tragic death, an eventually which she accepts with stoic resignation. As she says, this is a consequence of having reared her sons to be "companions of the gods." She tells Lucinia to summon her

strength to behave worthily of her husband in public, especially now that he is tribune. Lucinia tries her best to do so, but she can only manage to stammer out a few words of congratulation before fainting in her husband's arms, overcome by the news and the effort to suppress her real feelings.

In the next domestic scene (3:2), again set in Caius's house, Cornelia, at Lucinia's urging, tries to dissuade her son from going with a group of citizens to the Forum to confront Opimius concerning the abrogation of certain laws he had passed as tribune. At this point, Caius has become disillusioned with the fickleness of the people, who have deserted him for another tribune. He stood for election a second time, but lost through vote fraud. He is once again a private citizen without official power, but he is angry that Opimius and the senate have arbitrarily abrogated his laws. Knowing that he is marked man, in joins with his supporters to fight force with force. In this scene, Cornelia, fearful that her son will be killed, temporarily stops being a Roman mother and becomes simply a mother, only to encase herself in steel and become again a Roman mother. As Caius tries to go, she takes his hand and says becomes uncharacteristically sentimental:

> I can almost think you still
> The boy did con his lessons at my knee,
> And I could rule in all his little mood
> With but a look.--Ay, Caius--but a look
> Of your mother's, made you calm as sunshine in

> your biggest storm! I would not lose you, Caius!
> Caius, I would not lose you!--Go not to
> The Forum![55]

The motherly domestic note of this passage has the ring of autobiography; Cornelia's words describe the idyllic bond that Knowles's had with his own mother, who was his only teacher, as a child and boy.

Cornelia's words project calmness and firmness rather than emotionality. She remains self-controlled in spite of her fear and marshals cogent reasons why her son should not go, even though he has given his word. The first is that he is being driven to sacrifice himself by a deep desire to revenge his murdered brother's death, something Caius has already admitted to; the second reason is that his cause--the people's welfare--is worthless because the people not worth serving, which has already been proved and which Caius has himself declared; the third is that the struggle against the senate is hopeless, an opinion which the tone of the play sustains. "So sunk are all, the heart of public virtue / Has not the blood to make it beat again!" his mother forcefully concludes.

Cornelia's view of the republic is so despairing, and her advice to give up struggling against evil so contrary to the principles that she has brought him up

[55] These lines are not in the licensing copy.

to believe, that Caius can only answer with a barrage of questions:

> And should I therefore sink with the base times?
> What, mother, what?--Are the gods also base?
> Is virtue base? Is honour sunk? Is manhood
> A thing contemptible--and not be
> Maintain'd?

The posing of a series of questions that are meant to be rhetorical questions in verse whose rhythm is broken verse convey Caius's astonishment at what his mother is telling him. He then recounts to her his memory of watching a shipwreck with her from the shore when he was a child. Of all the crew only one intrepid mariner survived, an experience that taught a lesson he has not forgotten, instilled in him by his mother, that "the brave man ne'er despairs." Caius now wants to act on the motto his mother drew from that experience, but he suddenly, inexplicably it seems, gives in to his mother, telling her that he will be ruled by her and won't go to please her.

One cannot be certain of how to interpret Caius's yielding words to his mother. Does he really want to please his mother, as he says, or are his words calculated to move her to relent and give him her blessing to go? The latter is the more likely interpretation, for if the son were reconciled to submitting to his mother's wish, why would he strike a nerve in her by pretending indifference to public opinion, the very thing she is so sensitive too?:

> let men say what they list of me.
> I care not if they whisper as I pass,
> And point, and smile, and say to one another,
> "Lo the bold Tribune Gracchus! Lo the man
> Did lord it o'er the senate!" What is't to me.

If Caius purpose in saying these words, which do seem calculated, to change his mother's mind, they do succeed in achieving that effect. "You must go to the forum," she insists, in spite of her forebodings that he will be killed. The Roman mother, in the end, prevails over the mother.

Events do not fall out well for Caius after he leaves for the Forum. A turning point occurs when the people murder one of Opimius's lictors. The act enables Opimius to legally obtain greater powers to enforce public safety--powers he can use against Caius and his supporters. Caius is at this point fatalistic; his spirit of resistance is sapped. Yet he pledges to join the conspirators against Opimius in spite of himself. The next domestic scene again takes place in Caius's house late at night, in an apartment, where Lucinia has fallen asleep on a couch waiting up for husband to come home. Caius enters without seeing her, and reflects, in a soliloquy, on the strangeness of his reactions to familiar domestic objects now that he has irrevocably committed himself to a course of action that will most probably lead to his death:

> I thought
> At first the house was not my own--and never

> Look'd it so like my own.--A hundred objects,
> Day after day I've passed, with just as much
> Of consciousness as they had not been here,
> I now distinguish with a feeling of
> Such recognition, as invests them with
> The worth of precious things--The common couch
> Stands in our supper-room, a dozen times
> A day I've thrown myself upon, without
> Thought it supported me--when now I pass'd it,
> I could not help but stop, as it had been
> Some special minister of happiness
> Did challenge salutation.

Caius speaks like a man who is looking at familiar objects in a new light.[56] This passage amounts to phemomenology of Caius's sense of double-consciousness--a novel and strange feeling of being simultaneously disconnected or alienated from familiar objects that are associated with the domestic side of his life and having a profound "recognition" of the those objects. This double-consciousness arises from this the existential fact that he has committed himself to a course of action that is almost certain to lead to his death. Caius's singling out of the couch, an object he had formerly taken for granted, as a "special minister of happiness" that calls to him and demands recognition or "salutation," brings to mind Cowper's "The Task," a poem which uses a humble sofa as a point of departure for profound moral reflection on "the calm

[56] A parallel can be drawn between this descriptive passage and one in Fazio (1:3), spoken by the hero immediately after he steals his dead uncle's money. Both passages describe how the appearance of objects change according to one's inner state but do so in different imagery; Knowles's imagery is domestic, while Milman's is gothic ("socketless pale eyes look glaring at me as I pass" and so on).

minutiae of everyday life in the home."[57] There is irony in the fact that the very couch that demands recognition from him for supporting him so many times in the past is, at that very moment, unknown to him, supporting the most precious "object" of all, his sleeping wife. As the scene makes clear after she wakes, Caius is unable to fully connect with her and she with him.

At the unexpected sight of Licinia asleep on the couch, Caius melts. He attempts to steel his resolve with a reflective apostrophe to "Conspiracy," which reveals his deep sense of guilt over the domestic havoc he is causing as result of choosing country over family:

> Come now, conspiracy, thou bold redresser
> Of grievances, doubly stake thy life![58]
> Thou wilt achieve beneath the peaceful brows
> Of the household eaves, that never thought
> to see it,
> What were done better in the stony eyes
> Of frowning battlements--and lead along
> The streets, where children, wives and matrons
> tread,
> Mar's revels, fitter to be acted on
> Some far removed, unfrequented waste;-
> Come now, and while the silken threads of sleep
> Hold they unconscious, unoffending victim.
> Look on, and scan they plea of conjuration.

[57] Davidoff and Hall 157.

[58] I have followed the terminal punctuation at the end of this line in the two volume edition because it seems to make more sense than the open puncutuation of in the Cumberland.

"I must not look on her again," he tells himself, and he is about to steal away to bed when his wife awakens with a shriek from a nightmare in which her husband was stabbed to death by senators. Caius naturally goes to comfort his wife, and holds her tightly in his arms as she asks. His deadly paleness alarms her, and she asks the cause. Caius, unable to tell the truth, attributes his paleness to the fright he says he felt when he cried out. She wants to relate her dream to him, but he is not in the mood to hear it, or indeed listen to her talk at all, doubtless out of fear that being with her will further unnerve him. She relates the dream anyway, and as she mentions the detail of his being stabbed, Caius, who can not endure listening, puts his hand to his head as if he is suffering from a severe headache. Whether the pain is real or pretended it is impossible to say, but he wants to end this conversation and go to sleep ("Come to rest, love," he repeats several times). Still being held by Caius on the couch, Licinia wants to talk, not go to bed. She wants him to reassure her that there is nothing for them to fear, but can't talk directly to what she is fearful of. She takes refuge in the sanctuary of domesticity: she begins talking of their boy, whose birthday it is tomorrow. She also reminds him that it is the date of their wedding anniversary. In his mental turmoil, Caius appears to have forgotten both things. For Caius, this domestic talk is torture, but when his wife asks him what is

paining him, he lies and says the headache. She thinks he looks unwell and he is worried he won't be well tomorrow--"most of all tomorrow." The scene ends with both husband and wife struggling to control their feelings: she her deep fears and he his pity and guilt for her. For a moment, at the very end, he "shuts down" and he loses control; but after snapping at his wife, Caius quickly gets a grip on himself again:

> Licinia: Are you sure
> 'Tis nothing need be fear'd.
> Caius: Don't question me!
> The slightest voice distract me!
> Licinia: Does it, Caius?
> You're ill indeed, then! You are
> very ill.
> What shall be done for you?
> Caius: You drive me mad!
> Don't mind me, love!--Don't mind me!--
> Come to rest.

This is a remarkable domestic scene (is there anything like in the drama of the time?) in the sense that it presents a conversation at a critical moment in the lives of a married couple that is without substance, leads nowhere and accomplishes nothing because it is conducted by two persons who can not communicate directly about what they are feeling most deeply at the moment. They are alone, yet there is an emotional barrier that prevents them from speaking from and to the heart.

The sequel to the above scene is the melodramatic of Caius's leavetaking. The scene is parallel to the one previously discussed between Caius and his mother,

though totally different in tone and intensity. It now remains to consider how the fourth scene of Act 5 ends after Caius has departed from the embittered Lucinia, leaving on her knees holding her child. Again, Cornelia's is her daughter-in-law's teacher, though Lucinia can not learn from it. When Cornelia enters, shortly after her son has left, Lucinia is in a suicidal frame of mind, for which Cornelia has no patience, especially as she is displaying her grief publicly. Cornelia's advice to her daughter-in-law is for her to "think him dead as I do." When Licinia questions her motherly feelings, Cornelia explains how she is a mother in a higher sense than Lucinia is capable of comprehending:

> Yes!
> The mother of the virtue of my child!
> The fashion of his body nature fix'd
> I had no choice ain't . . . .
> But of his worth, the modelling was mine--
> Say that is dead, and you may say I'm dead!

Lucinia remains in awe of her mother-in-law stoicism:

> I cannot answer this!--I can but marvel
> The weight bows me to earth, should seem to
> light to you.

At this point, Livia enters and urges them to seek sanctuary from the fighting outside. Cornelia suggests the Temple of Diana, and they all exit. It is in the Temple where there is a brief and final reunion of Caius and his wife and mother. Unable to escape, Caius

significantly, after a last embrace with his mother asks his wife to give him his child. He then hands it to his mother, with his last wish:

> Mother, be you a parent to my wife,
> A tutor to my child. The lessons you
> Did make me con, teach him; none else--he cannot
> Learn better!

Caius's insistence that his mother rather than wife be the educator of his child is a vindication of his mother's values and a rejection of his wife's narrow concept of love. Maintaining the traditional values of his famous family, Caius chooses virtue over love, even though the exercise of virtue has cost him his life.

D. Pious Family Life in the Swiss Alps: William Tell

William Tell is unique among Knowles's dramatic works because it presents an idealized family that is complete, consisting of a father, a mother, and a child. Husband and wife are pious Christians--in an evangelical sense--who are in earnest about religion and live by their Christian beliefs. Freed from the constricting conventions of a Roman setting, Knowles was able to give, for the first time, uninhibited literary expression to his evangelistic temperament in Tell, a circumstance that may explain the leisurely pace of the action and the lingering over details. In Tell's wife Emma, Knowles depicts a mother who is truly

an "angel in the house" (or cottage to be exact). She fulfills the function expected of a wife in a Christian household, that of being the moral teacher and guide to her child. The impressive maturity of the relationship between Tell and his wife, which includes an ability to share inner feelings, appears to be offered a touchstone by which the shortcomings of the relationship between Caius and his wife can be measured. Unlike Caius's wife, Tell's fearless, uncomplaining, and submissive. In respect to her courage and her absolute support of her husband, Emma may be contrasted to both Caius's wife, and the wife of Schiller's Tell, Hedwig.

The Tell family is first introduced as a family in the first scene of Act II. The scene takes place in the family cottage on the side of a mountain, with majestic mountains and a lake visible in the distance. It is the cottage where Tell himself was born and grew up and has deep feelings for. The scene is the counterpart of, though very different in content and tone from, the much briefer first scene in Act III of Schiller's play.

When the curtain rises on the Tell family in Schiller's play, domestic tranquillity appears to reign, but this is only an appearance, not reality. The family is seen in a tableau, with Tell is busy fixing a gate with his axe, his wife Hedvig is "engaged in housework," and their two sons, Walter and Wilhelm, are

"playing with a small crossbow."[59] One of the sons is merrily singing about fearlessly hunting with the crossbow in the mountains. When the son asks his father to fix the bowstring Tell refuses because he wants his sons to grow up being independent. After the boys leave, Hedwig tells her husband that she would prefer that their sons not yet learn to use a crossbow. He disagrees, since he feels that "they should learn everything, and learn it well," so as to prepare for life.[60] She is anxious that if they learn to use the crossbow, they will spend a lot of time hunting and thus be away from home. This comment about being away from home moves Tell, a man of Romantic and even Faustian temperament, to declare his own love of wanderlust and striving:

> I was not born to be a herdsman, Hedwig;
> I always have to chase some fleeting goal,
> And only can enjoy my life completely
> When I must work to win it every day.[61]

Hedwig has no sympathy whatsoever with her husband's Romantic idealism, as is shown by her self-centered response in the form of a litany of vividly imagined fears:

[59] Stage directions, 3:2, 1, Friedrich von Schiller, Wilhelm Tell, trans. Gilbert J. Jordan (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964) 90.

[60] Schiller, Wilhelm Tell 91.

[61] Compare Goethe's Faust who says, "He only earns his freedom and existence, / Who daily conquers them anew."

But you are not concerned about my fears--
How I may worry, waiting here for you;
For I am terrified at what they tell
About your daring trips and risky ventures.
At each farewell my trembling heart is sure
That you will not come back to me again.
I see you lost in wild and icy mountains,
Or failing in your leap from crag to crag;
I see the frightened chamois jumping back
To drag you down with him into the gorge;
I see you buried by an avalanche;
I see the glacier's treacherous abyss
Split under you, and see you falling down,
Interred alive in such a dreadful grave!
For death, in a hundred changing forms, pursues
And snatches at the daring Alpine hunter.
Yours is indeed a miserable calling
That takes you to the very brink of death.

This catalogue of disasters sounds, with a vengeance, a most familiar and sour note of mundane domesticity. . It appears that Tell is married to a woman who can be rather a scold (her name, after all, means "strife" or "fight"), and it is difficult not to be a little amused by the excessive nature of her response. However, as the scene progresses, it becomes clear that Hedwig is in a state of intense dread. Making no attempt to assuage his wife's fears, Tell answers simply that he trusts in God for his safety.

Tell then gets ready to depart for Altorf to see his wife's father. His wife is fearful that he is involved in a plot against the governor. She disapproves of her husband's willingness to serve his country in any way he can. She then delivers another rebuke to him for risking his life to row a man across the lake in a storm. For her, taking such a risk is

tempting God not trusting him. "Did you never think of wife and children then?" she asks reproachfully. The question speaks to the heart of the conflict between the feminine desire to tame and domesticate the male in the interests of securing tranquillity in the domestic sphere and the male's desire to find fulfillment in the exciting but dangerous public sphere of action--a theme explores in Caius Gracchus. Tell's wife wishes her husband wouldn't be so kind and friendly to everyone and would think of his own welfare more. More to the point, she knows Gessler holds a grudge against him, and schrewdly observes that he hates men like Tell who do the right thing. Tell then tells the story of how he recently refrained from taking revenge on Gessler when he had the opportunity to do so when they accidentally met on the deserted mountain pass. She urges him to go hunting in order to stay out of trouble, but he is determined to keep his word and go to Altorf. Next, she asks that her husband not take one of the sons with her, but the boy is too eager to accompany his father to be denied. The second son stays with the mother, and the scene ends with the mother embracing him while she anxiously watches her husband leave with one of their sons.

Knowles's scene of family life in the Tell household (which is at least six times the length of Schiller's) abounds in "touches of nature." Schiller's scene, in contrast, their are fewer of these touches

and they are more generalized than Knowles's, perhaps reflecting the author's own romantic spirit, which found itself in conflict with binding domesticity. The scene begins, like Schiller's, outdoors in nature but it is a sublime nature integrated with the consciousness of the characters. Emma, alone, is addressing an apostrophe to the morning that becomes a hymn to God's mercy.[62] Given the setting and Emma's response to nature, one would not be surprised to hear her repeat Cowper's famous maxim, "God made the country, man the town." This passage is a counterpart to Tell's earlier apostrophe to the mountains ("Ye crags and peaks, I'm with you once again!). It establishes at once the common love that husband and wife have of the magnificent natural landscape in which they live and their spiritual attunement to one another.

Albert, a bright, happy child, then appears perched on one of the promontories; Emma is surprised and delighted to find her son is up so early and praises him for rising with the sun. She speaks the first of several maxims of the kind one would expect to find in an early McGuffy reader: "He never lies a-bed / When it is time to rise." She then questions her son about the meaning of his morning prayers, which he is diligent about saying every morning. A belief in

[62] Knowles changed the original Teutonic name, Hedwig, to Emma, a name that became popular in England after the publiction of Jane Austen's novel of the same name in 1816.

prayer, and the importance of daily private prayer was a central part of life in an evangelical household. Albert answers--as he has no doubt been taught by his mother to answer--that he prays in Christ's name:

> The name of Him who died
> For me and all men, that all men and I,
> By trust in him, might live

It is clear from these words that the Tell's household is religious in the devout evangelistic sense, a household that lives by the values of Christian scripture. The mother conscientiously reinforces her son's answer:

> Remember that!
> Forget all things but that!--remember that!
> 'Tis more than friends or fortune; clothing, food;
> All things of earth; yea, life itself. It is
> To live when these are gone, where they are nought
> With God!--My son, remember that!

Emma then asks her son to draw a moral lesson from observing nature. This is a two step process. First, the boy is asked to translate the perception of sunlight shining on a snowy mountain peak into thought. Albert, who it can be assumed is used to being questioned and tested daily in this manner, gives the right answer without hesitation:

> That as the peak
> Feels not the pleasant sun, or feels it least!
> So they, who highest stand in fortune's smile,
> Are gladden'd by it least, or not at all!

It is an answer that would have gladdened the transcendentalist heart of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emma, sounding like a schoolteacher, then instills another maxim: "The lesson that's remember'd pays the teacher." She then deepens the lesson he has conned from the school of nature by asking what profit he can make of it. Again, he is prepared with a ready answer:

> Rather to place my good in what I have,
> Than think it worthless, wishing to have more;
> For more is not more happiness, so oft
> As less.

Thus ends Emma's instruction to her son in what she calls "the lesson of content"--a lesson that teaches content with one's God-given lot. Albert, however, is not content with only answering questions; he has questions and opinion of his own. He knows that goodness and contentment are supposed to go together. Yet he has observed that his father, who he knows is good, is not content, and as he sees it, with good reason:

> Nor would I be content, were I a man,
> And Gesler seated on the rock of Altorf!
> A man may lack content and still be good.

Her husband's discontent is not a subject that Emma wishes to pursue with her child, and she abruptly breaks off the conversation with an excuse. The boy, sensing that he may have made his mother angry, asks to be reassured with a kiss that she is not. In its domestic simplicity, this touching interchange between

mother and son is representative of the elemental homely domestic interest that made Knowles's plays appealing to contemporary audiences:

> Albert: You're not angry?
> Emma: No, no, my boy.
> Albert: You'll kiss me?
> Emma: Will I not!
> The time will come you will not ask
> your mother
> To kiss you!
> Albert: Never!
> Emma: Not when you're a man?
> Albert: I would not be a man to see that time:
> I'd rather die, now that I am a child,
> Than live to be a man, and not love you!
> Emma: Live--live to be a man, and love your mother
> [They embrace--Albert runs off to the cottage.

With Albert gone, Emma unburdens her mother's heart, which is pained by the thought that her son will one day grow up and leave home. But, characteristically, she reconciles herself making the best of a process that is natural:

> Why should my heart sink? 'tis for this we rear
> them!
> Cherish their tiny limbs; pine if a thorn
> But mar their tender skin; gather them to us
> Closer than miser hugs his bags of gold;
> Bear more for them than slave, who makes his flesh
> A casket for the rich purloined gem--
> To send them forth into a wintry world
> To brave its flaws and tempests!--They must go;
> Far better, then, they go with hearty will!
> Be that my consolation.

These poignant lines could only have been written by a man who was himself a loving father and felt the joys and anxieties of fatherhood--and who had an imagination that could identify itself with a mother's pain. In

fact, when he wrote these lines, Knowles and his wife were busy raising a brood of children, a number of whom were already in their teens.

Albert then re-enters with a bow and arrows and a target to shoot at. Assuring his mother that he does not mean to brag, he tells her that he wishes to be like his father when he grows up. She leaves this to God's will, but in words that reveal her pride in her husband she replies, "'twill content me / If you are only such a man!" There are few wives, one surmises, who would pay such a high compliment to their husbands. Albert then shoots an arrow, eager that his mother praise his skill. But she doesn't, and goes into the cottage. Albert shoots another, unaware that his father is watching him from a distance. In a soliloquy that comments admiringly on his son's shooting, Tell glories in the thought that his boy, whose "little arm" is bending a bow so vigorously, "may help, anon / To pull a sinewy tyrant form his seat, / And from their chains a prostrate people lift / To Liberty!" From this soliloquy, it can be seen that Tell is preoccupied with the oppression that the Swiss people are suffering under Gesler's rule. Having depicted the close relationship between mother and son, Knowles now depicts the close relationship between father and son and husband and wife.

As soon as mother and son see Tell, they give him a warm welcome home, both running into his embrace.

Emma is overjoyed to see her husband home earlier than expected. While they are conversing, Albert resumes his practice, which soon distracts Tell's attention from what his wife is saying. This time the father is more critical of his son's shooting; he finds points to correct, and he excitedly begins to coach his son on how to shoot accurately (Fig. 19). His wife is puzzled that her husband seems not be share her happiness in watching their child. Tell gets increasing agitated as his son misses the target repeatedly since to do so in a situation where his life is threatened (e.g., by an animal) might result in his death. He then puts enormous pressure on his son to succeed by telling him that the target is Gesler's heart:

> How would you fare,
> Suppose a wolf should cross your path, and you
> Alone, with but your bow, and only time
> To fix a single arrow? 'Twould not do
> To miss the wolf! You said, the other day,
> Were you a man, you'd not let Gesler live--
> 'Twas easy to say that. Suppose you, now,
> Your life or his depended on that shot!--
> Take care! That's Gesler! Now for liberty!
> Right to the tyrant's heart

Albert rises to the challenge posed by his father and hits the target and earns his father's praise.

Tell now turns to his wife and explains why he heart is heavy rather than joyful, even though he has many things to be thankful for. The answer is summed up in one word: Gesler. From his wife's mild reaction to his anger that Gesler is possessed of the power to

destroy their domestic tranquillity at will, Tell realizes he must educate his wife to the reality of the threat that Gesler's arbitrary power poses to their freedom and happiness.[63] Tell finally impresses upon his wife how much they have to lose and how desperately Gesler is to take it away from them, something she was not aware of before. He then relates a story he read in one of the Roman annalists of how the women of a tribe then living in Switzerland killed themselves and their children rather than allow themselves be subjected to Roman tyranny. It is evident by now that Tell is extremely concerned that his wife realize how serious the political situation in the Cantons is, and, as soon becomes clear, he wishes her to be prepared to make a similar choice between life and death if he should die in the uprising aimed at overthrowing Gesler. This con-analogy between past and present remains unspoken, but it explains the meaning behind Tell's insistence that his wife must make a choice:

> Then, Emma,
> Make up thy mind, wife! Make it up! Remember
> what wives and mothers on these very hills
> Once breathe the air you breathe.

Appalled by the story of self-immolation that her husband has just told, Emma, exclaiming "O, William!", clings protectively to Albert, who is standing nearby.

[63] The passages in which Tell explains the danger posed by Gesler are quoted and discussed in the next chapter.

This instinctively material behavior draws a rebuke from Tell, who insists his wife stop hugging the boy and that Albert leave them and go make himself useful in some way:

> Emma, let the boy alone!
> Don't clasp him so--'Twill soften him! Go, sir!
> See if the valley sends us visitors
> To-day. Some friend, perchance, may need they guidance.
> Away! [Albert goes out.] He's better off from thee, Emm
> The time
> Is come, a mother on her breast should fold
> Her arms, as they had done with such endearments,
> And bid her children go from her, to hunt
> For danger--which will presently hunt them--
> The less to heed it!

These stern words, disapproving of the affection Emma lavishes on their young son, are unexpected. In his anti-sentimentalism concerning how mothers should refrain from being too affectionate to their young sons and encourage them to be independent when they reach a certain age, Tell sounds positively Roman--more Roman than Virginius or Caius Gracchus ever do. It should be recognized that Tell's view that a male child of his son's age should be forced to become an independent little adult as soon as possible was a view that was as British as it had been Roman. This view underlay the stern and sometimes harsh pedagogical practices of the British public [i.e., private] school system. Tell's words are motivated by his own sense of responsibility as a father to prepare his son for the difficulties he knows he must face in life, especially as they now exist under an tyrannical overlord like Gesler. This

reflect a common English concern that feminine over-protectedness of boys, manifested in physical displays of affection, will weaken or retard the growth of a boy's will. Tell is motivated too by a sense of urgency and stress now that he has become a conspirator.

There is potential for conflict between husband and wife in Tell's assertion of his will about how their son should be raised, but Knowles is not interesting in depicting domestic discord. Emma is not a contentious or self-centered type--far from it. She immediately submits to her husband's will not because she is by nature a docile woman but because she sees the wisdom of her husband's way of thinking given the circumstances he has described:

> William, you are right!
> The task you set me I will try to do.
> I would not live myself to be a slave.
> I would not live to be the dam of one!
> No! woman as I am, I would not, William!
> Then chose my course for me. Whate'er it is,
> I will say, ay, and do it, too--Suppose
> To dress my little stripling for the war,
> And take him by the hand, and lead him to't!
> Yes, I would do it at thy bidding, William,
> Without a tear--I say that I would do it--
> Though, now I only talk of doing it,
> I can't help shedding one!

Emma's willingness to be guided by her husband in this matter of parenting is taken by Tell as another sign of the beauty of soul which attracted her to him in the first place and led him to chose her to be his bride, and he pays this supreme tribute to her character:

> Did I not chose thee
> From out the fairest of the maids of Uri,
> Less that in beauty thou didst them surpass,
> Than that thy soul that beauty overmatch'd?
> Why rises on thy matron cheek that blush,
> Mantling it fresh as in thy virgin morn,
> But that I did so? Do I wonder, then,
> To find thee equal to the task of virtue,
> Although a hard one? No, I wonder not!

However, Tell feels reluctant to burden his pure-hearted wife with unpleasant truths. In the following passage, we also learn that the difference of opinion just witnessed--about how to raise their boy--is only one they have ever had

> Why should I, Emma, make thy heart acquainted
> With ills I could shut out from it--rude guests
> For such a home! Here, only, we have had
> Two hearts; in all things else--in love, in faith,
> In hope, in joy--that never had but one!
> But henceforth we must have but one, also.

At this point, Emma surprises us with her gentle sense of grievance that her husband is withholding information from her because he may feel she is not strong enough to bear it. As his wife, Emma wants her husband to take her fully into his confidence. She would have no less, and her words reveal a remarkably mature concept of love and marriage:

> O, William, you have wrong'd me--kindly wrong'd me!
> When ever yet was happiness the test
> Of love in man and woman? . . . .
> William! William!
> That man knew never yet the love of woman,
> Who never had an ill to share with her!

William is not eager to burden her with the information about the conspiracy to which he has pledged himself to overthrow Gesler, but he feels compelled by necessity to disclose it to her.

But before Tell tells his wife of the conspiracy, he shares with her some of the moments alone in the wildness of the mountains when he felt the spirit of liberty most strongly. The long, lyrical passage, which contains echoes of Wordsworth's Prelude, provide insight into the nature of this ideal marriage that Knowles has taken pains to present. The ease with which Tell can share his innermost spiritual experiences with his wife is an indication that they are do indeed share one heart in two bodies:

> When I wedd'd thee,
> The land was free! O! with what pride I used
> To walk these hills, and look up to my God,
> and bless him that it was so! . . . .
> I loved
> Its very storms! Yes, Emma, I have sat
> In my boat at night, when, midway o'er the lake,
> The stars went out, and down the mountain gorge
> the wind came roaring--I have sat and eyed]
> The thunder breaking from his cloud, and smiled
> To see him shake his lightnings o'er my head,
> And think I had no master save his own!
> You know the jutting cliff round which a track
> Up hither winds, whose base is but the brow
> To such another one, with scanty room
> For two a-breast to pass? O'ertaken there
> By the mountain blast, I've laid me flat, along;
> And while gust follow'd gust, more furiously,
> As if to sweep me o'er the horrid brink,
> And I have thought of other lands, whose storms
> Are summer flaws to those of mine, and just
> Have wish'd me there--the thought that mine was
> free
> Has check'd that wish, and I have raised by head,
> And cried in thralldom to that furious wind,
> Blow on!

Not insignificantly, Emma is familiar with "the jutting cliff" that he is referring to. From this it may be inferred that she has accompanied him on his wanderings and can therefore identify with the pleasure he takes in exposing himself to nature's violence--wind, lightning, thunder--in order to be inspirited with its liberating force. Emma's empathic response contrasts sharply with Hedwig's intensely fearful imaginings, which show a total inability to understand her husband's Romantic temperament:

> I almost see thee on that fearful pass,
> And yet, so seeing thee, I have a feeling
> Forbids me wonder that thou didst so.

He then suddenly brings her back to a fearful earthly reality by revealing that he is one of four men who have dedicated themselves "to pull the tyrant down." Emma passes the test of her mettle admirably, and Tell, rewarding her fortitude, is willing and ready to disclose everything with his wife:

> Emma: I did not start!--
> Tell me more, William!
> Tell: I will tell thee all!

Tell's choice to confide his involvement in a conspiracy to a wife contrasts with Caius's determination to conceal his involvement from his wife, even though she tells him she wants to be his confidante. Both

wives value domesticity, but respond in opposite ways when that domesticity is threatened. Caius's wife takes a narrow view, thinking only of herself and her child, without regard to principle. Emma is willing to accept the personal sacrifices her husband's choice may entail, and is willing to view that choice in a larger frame, one which involves a commitment to a principle that transcends it effect on their personal lives.

The entrance of the old father, Melchtal, recently blinded on Gesler's orders, interrupts the leisurely conversation between Tell and his wife and raises the pitch of emotion. Upon realizing he has been blinded by Gessler, he embraces the old man, weeps (Fig. 22) and then Tell denounces the bestiality of the deed and its doer. Emma's stoicism is now put to the test, as Tell, impatient to take action, he prepares to leave. Emma brings him his quiver of arrows, and as Tell tries to calm himself he notices a cheerful look on his wife's face that heartens him and leads him to compare her to an angel:

> I thank thee for that look!
> Now seem'st thou like some kind of o'er-seeing angel,
> Smiling as he prepares the storm, that, while it
> Shakes the earth, and makes its tenants pale,
> Doth smite a pestilence. Thou wouldst not stop me?

Emma's answer is a firm, "No." Nor, she says, would she object to their boy being pressed into service She bravely lead Albert to him for instructions, a gesture that touches Tell:

> Well done--Well done! I thank you, love--I thank you!

Tell wants his son to set out immediately on a night mission through the mountains to deliver a message to Melchtal's son, one of the four conspirators. He hurriedly gives him instructions then goes out with his son to accompany him for the first mile. The scene ends with Tell vowing revenge for the outrage to old Melchtal.

Knowles's depiction of Tell's wife as emotionally steady is further developed in the first scene of Act V, when Emma's strength is tested to its breaking point the next night. Neither her husband or son return from their respective trips--her husband to Altorf and her son to Mt. Faigel--and unable to sleep she describes herself, unable to sleep, as "grown / An idiot with my fears" and "sick with terror." Both have been imprisoned by Gesler, but of this she has no knowledge in her isolated cottage with the mutilated Melchtal as her suffering companion. Both should have returned home by now. The thought of an avalanche even crosses her mind. When a stranger, not knowing he has come to the Tell cottage, brings "News to harrow parents's hearts and make / The barren bless themselves that they are childless"--the news that her husband is in Gesler's power and must shoot an apple from his son's death to save their lives--Emma reacts with calm, controlled

rage in manner one does not usually associate with a feminine sensibility:

> I'm the wife of William Tell!
> Oh but to be a man! to have an arm
> To fit a heart bursting with the sense of wrong!
> Unnatural--insufferable wrong!

She then invokes the spirit of nature (Christian decorum forbid her to call on God for revenge) to inspire her and exact revenge on Gesler for this act of inhumanity against her family:

> Spirit of the lake and hill,
> Inspire thy daughter! On the head of him
> Who makes his pastime of a mother's pangs,
> Launch down thy vengeance by a mother's hand.

The inspiration comes when the stranger tells her that the signal for the uprising is fire. Inspirited with her own husband's love of liberty, she sets fire to the cottage as a signal for the uprising to take place. As she watches her cottage burn, she cries out exultantly,

> Blaze on! blaze on! Oh mayst thou be a beacon
> To light its sons enslaved to liberty!

The signal triggers one fire after another, and the hills "redden with vengeance." The action of setting fire to the cottage is melodramatic, but Emma's demeanor is calm and level-headed as she boldly sacrifices her home to ignite the uprising in her husband's absence, an uprising which succeeds, as she hopes, to destroy tyranny.

E. Lessons Learned by Kings: A Father's Remorse and Cakes Burned in Alfred the Great

Knowles's treatment of the familiar story of Alfred's struggle to liberate his country from the invading Danes is stamped with the Knowlesian signature: the strong domestic interest and pathos arising from a parent-child relationship. What is unusual is that the locus of the play's most vital domestic interest is the widowed Danish King Guthrum, Alfred's anatagonist. Alfred is also a husband and a father of a very young son, but the domestic interest aroused by his relationship to his wife and child pales in comparison to that between the Danish King and his daughter. Guthrum is a sympathetic and loving father who unwittingly drives his daughter to the brink of suicide. The fact that the antagonist is portrayed with sympathy (he is no villain) changes the affective structure of the play from one that is melodramatic, based on the opposition of good and evil, to one that is psychological, based on an opposition of wisdom vs. folly arising from ignorance, with Alfred embodying the former and Guthrum the latter.

Ina, Guthrun's young daughter of marriageable age,: young, beautiful, sweet, innocent, inclined toward submissiveness and strongly attached to her father, whom she idolizes (in these respects, Ina

resembles Virginia) in spite of his volatile temper, which she knows how to calm. But in the course of the play that father-daughter bond will be stretched to the breaking point when her father condemns the man she loves to death, leading her passively rebel against her father's autocratic authority.

When the play opens, Ina has already fallen in love at first sight with the Saxon warrior Oswith, having seen him when he came to the Danish camp as Alfred's herald. The complications arising from this love eventually makes it impossible for Ina to continue her child-like co-dependent relationship of filial obedience to her father. Ina is also the most vital source of the play's pathetic interest. Significantly, the pure-hearted Ina is also, along with Alfred, a source of moral enlightenment in the sense that she instinctively articulates a charmingly naive utopian vision of society that is selfless and, in its implications, egalitarian in respect to the distribution of material wealth.

The warrrior-king Guthrum makes a triumphant entrance at the head of his troops in the first scene, boasting that of his victory over the Saxons that "England's won" and Alfred is a "throneless king." A number of Saxon soldiers have been captured and Oswith, it turns out, is among them. Ina discovers only that Oswith, the man she loves, is one of the prisoners but that her father is angrily ordering him to be delivered

up to the priests as a blood sacrifice to the god Odin. Recognizing Oswith's nobleness, Guthrum had offered the Saxon herald his freedom on condition that he become his friend, a condition that the loyal Oswith scornfully refuses. Enraged that his offer of friendship has been spurned, Guthrum abandons Oswith to his fate. He is, of course, totally unaware that he is the man whom his daughter loves. Ina, desperate to save the man she loves, immediately interposes herself, but indirectly, without revealing her personal interest in Oswith.

At first, Ina has difficulty getting the attention of her infuriated father. Finally, she succeeds by physically clinging to him, an action that instantly pacifies him, as he himself acknowledges:

> Ah, thou ever art
> My sweet and welcome calm, that glads me, sun-like,
> When summer days are breathless with the joy
> Of his enriching beam--I'm smooth again!
> Not a ruffle! not a ruffle!

Ina knows her father's sudden changes of mood intimately. Later, she warns Oswith about her father's volcanic nature in these words:

> Fierce as 'tis sudden is my father's wrath;
> And ever in the hour of social cheer
> Most to be fear'd, and look'd for. . . [64]

[64] Act IV, sc. 1.

It may be assumed that Guthrum was accustomed to being held tightly by his daughter because he shows no suspicion that she has an ulterior motive in this instance. It is a physical greeting that Ina, in lieu of a wife, has given her father a hundred times (as she later says) after he has returned safely from a battle. There is nothing insincere in her demonstration of affection, even though it has an ulterior motive in this case. Ina is greatly relieved that her father has returned safely. He, too, welcomes her warm-hearted embrace. But when, in her great anxiety, Ina verbally negates his command to have Oswith taken away to be killed (by crying, "No, no!), the volatile father again erupts, causing her daughter to withdraw in fright. His daughter's withdrawal causes him to relent:

> Nay, Ina, if I rage,
> 'Tis not at thee!--Why start away from me?
> Come back, and cling to me again! close, close?
> My child, beloved and only, tell me if
> Thou canst, how much I love thee!

Guthrum's belief that love can be quantified echoes (in a converse way) Lear's demand that his daughters to tell them how much they love him. In her desperation, Ina's only recourse is to distract her father by fussing over him so that he won't repeat his order to have Oswith sent away. Ina succeeds by engaging in rituals of affection which were most likely learned on her father's knee and became habitual behavior over the years.

This part of the scene is full of the Knowlesian "touches of nature" that delighted contemporary audiences. These touches include Ina's telling her father how impressive he must have looked on the battlefield wearing the plume she made, and promises to knit him another scarf to replace the torn one he is wearing:

> Your scarf!--Is't whole?
> No, no, a rent is here! Come, take it off.
> False as it is, you shall not wear't again!
> I'll knit you another, every loop of which
> I'll fasten with a spell, that it shall prove
> An amulet against the thrust of spear,
> Or stroke of Falchion.

The conversation depicts how emotionally close father and daughter are. While talking and fussing over him very much the way a doting wife would, she continues to cling tightly to him. Again pacified, this time by her words as well as presence, Guthrum significantly tells his daughter, with obvious pleasure, "You make / A child of your father!" These words hint at the co-dependency of the relationship. He needs her to calm him down, but the relationship is always on his terms. He also reveals how dear his daughter, who is his own child, is to him and how possessive his love of her his:

> My child, my child!
> Ay, every inch my own--When thou wast born,
> I wish'd a son. I would not give thee now
> For troops of them!

As Guthrum is material-minded, he asks his daughter to let him show his love for her in the same way he displays it to his leigeman, by asking for something material. He even makes the suggestion that she ask him for a kingdom:

> My girl! my girl!
> My idle girl! my foolish, loving child!
> My Ina! What! and have I won the fight,
> And shalt now thou become the richer for't?
> By Odin, but thou shalt! Come, ask me something!
> Name me some gift. Come, measure, if thou canst
> Thy father's love for thee! What wilt thou ask?
> Ask me a kingdom!

But a kingdom is the last thing on Ina's mind. She is now in a position to request that her father spare Oswith's life, but rather than asking for the boon directly, as her father bids her do, Ina displays great self-control and engages her father in a conversation in which she adopts the role of the parent or tutor. She sweetly attempting to expand her father's moral horizons beyond their egocentric boundaries while artfully leading up to her unusual request:

> Ina: When thou art happy, what
> Most wishest thou?
> Guth: That happiness may last.
> Ina: No, no! Not that. Thou wishest others happy.
> Guth: I do! I do!
> Ina: And so do I. When I
> Am happy, I'd have all things like me--not
> That live and move alone, but even such
> As lack their faculties. Then could I weep,
> That flowers should smile without perception of
> The sweetness they discourse. Yea, into rocks]
> Would I infuse soft sense to fill them with
> The spirit of sweet joy, that everything
> Should thrill as I do. Then were I queen,
> I'd portion out my realms among my friends,

> Unstud my crown for strangers, and my coffers
> Empty in purchasing from foes their frowns,
> Till I had bought them out; that all should be
> One reign of smiles around me! I am happy
> To-day--to-day! that brings thee, father, back,
> The hundredth time, in triumph and in safety!
> This day, that smiles so bounteous upon Ina,
> She'd make to smile e'en upon Ina's foe--
> Let not the Saxon die!

The innocence of Ina's speech, which reveals the vast difference in the mentality of father and daughter, is touching, and the enthusiasm with which Guthrum allows his daughter to reverse the child-parent relationship is amusing. Guthrum, who prides himself on his giving nature, grants his daughter's wish without asking why and without suspicion or understanding, even though his boon causes his daughter to violently catch her breathe:

> He lives!--My child!
> What makes thee gasp?

In this moment, Ina is given the opportunity to speak from the heart, but she cannot, though her stumbling response suggests that she wants to unburden herself. Instead, she covers her feelings with a lie, pretending that it was concern for her father's welfare that made her gasp for breathe:

> How near--how near to you
> Was death that day! 'Twas well for Ina that
> Your armour proved so true. She had not else
> A father, now to ask a boon of, and
> To get it soon as ask'd.

Guthrum makes the boon even more joyous to Ina by making Oswith her personal slave.

This interchange between father and daughter doubtless charmed audiences, but it was also meant to suggest a relationship that was flawed because it was intimate only on the father's terms. From Guthrum's words, it is clear that the father values his daughter as an adjunct of his own ego rather than an individual in her own right. Her love and attention, as he says, makes him feel good. Events prove how painful the consequences stemming from such an inhibited relationship can be. Given her father's autocratic and volatile temperament, and the fact that she does not know whether or not Oswith loves her in return, Ina should not be blamed Ina for resorting to "manipulative" behavior to accomplish her end of saving her lover's life and for lying rather than speaking the truth. The tense situation is resolved in Ina's favor, but it is only a temporarily resolution and one that leads to more serious consequences for both father and daughter.

The scene ends with Ina and Oswith together, expressing their delight in being thrown together by circumstance. Ina unburdens her heart to her female friend, Edith, and Oswith to the audience in a soliloquy. As Ina removes Oswith's chains with her own hands, shedding tears of joy as she does so, Oswith marvels to himself at the whiteness and warmth of Ina's hand and wonders whether his sudden love for her has

incapacitated him was a warrior. The audience knows that he is as much in love with her as she with him because in an earlier soliloquy, observing the Danish princess with her father, Oswith had revealed that Ina's extraordinary beauty instantly enslaved his reason and his will:

> Such things I have heard of--angel forms,
> Which magic raises--mocking fairest things
> Of earth; but fairer--to entrance earth's son's--
> Things they would deem of heaven, though found on earth!
> Which, once beheld, their helpless functions seize
> With ravishment, that leaves them but the power
> To gaze or listen, till no warning effort
> Of reason, or stronger will avails, to tear
> The charmed sense away!

The mutual attraction of Ina and Oswith for each other is meant to provide a love interest in this mainly political play. However, the romantic subplot is mainly a device for exploring the psychological nature of a father-daughter relationship and exploiting that relationship for its melodramatic possibilities.

A new and more serious complication for the lovers arises when Guthrum, in a giving mood and still blind to his daughter's love for Oswith, grants Edric's request for his daughter's hand in marriage as a reward for his services (Act III, sc. 1). Edric is the villain of the play, though of a decidedly minor rank in Knowles's gallery of villains. He is not worthy of being spoken of in the same breathe as Appius or Gesler, or even Opimius. He was formerly one of Alfred's

chiefs and a friend of Oswith's, but he has changed sides and now serves the Danish King. One of his "services," it is later revealed (Act V, sc. 3), is that he set fire to the royal palace where Alfred's queen and her children were sleeping, an act that allowed Edric to capture of Alfred's very young son, Ethelred, who is now in Ina's charge. In fact, Alfred's son was the only survivor of that devastating fire, which led to a merciless slaughter of Saxons. "Edric's treacherous heart / Can own no touch of mercy!" is how Ina expresses her loathing for the Saxon traitor.

For Edric's deed of destruction and his capture of Alfred's son, Guthrum is so grateful that he bids Edric think of him as a father and invites him to request a boon ("Ask what thou wilt, by Odin it is thine") for what he miscalls Edric's "love." It is Guthrum's overindulgence in fatherly feeling that emboldens Edric to ask for Ina's hand:

> Thou badst me call thee father. With the leave
> Give me to the right to hail thee by that title.
> I ask they daughter's hand.

Guthrum, true to his magnanimous nature, consents without hesitation ("I give it thee"). It is at this point in the plot that Alfred enters the Danish camp disguised as a minstrel. Guthrum's willingness to grant Edric's request shows his generosity and that he is not so possessive of his daughter that he would maintain her as his child all her life. But it also shows a

gross insensitivity to his daughter's feelings. Thus, Guthrum presents the paradox of a doting father who has no hesitation about arranging his daughter's marriage without her consent, expecting her to obey him out of filial duty as she has always done in the past.

This complication reaches its crisis when Edric, seeking out his newly acquired prize, comes upon Ina and Oswith just as he, in the manner of a Petrarchan lover, is confessing his love for her on bended knee. It is a melodramatic moment and almost leads to a duel between the two men.[65] Oswith, since the time he last appeared, has gained his freedom owing to Ina's influence over her father. But he is unhappy being free because the chains of love hang heavily upon him. He is troubled because he feels guilty for choosing love over honor, in a situation where the two values are in unreconcilable conflict. Calling himself an "apostate," Oswith succumbs to his love for Ina as if it were his fate. While he was a slave, he could avoid making the choice, but now he has freely chosen to be enslaved to her.

Edric's assertion that Ina belongs to him, compels Ina, in her own defense, to cast off her natural virgin modesty and boldly confess her love for Oswith, asking

[65] Oswith and Edric do engage in a duel in the licensing copy, but in two volume edition they are about to engage when Guthrum enters to stop them.

him to plight his troth with her there and then, in Edric's presence:

> Believe him not.
> Oswith, believe him not--believe the maid
> That all forgets herself with thought of thee,
> Casts off the bashful 'tire of virginhood,
> And unenforced, confesses she's thine own!

Edric acts and speaks like a conventional villain when he draws his sword with the intention of killing his rival and declares, "Force will exact that frowardness denies!" To the question, asked by Oswith, of whether he "couldst wed the bride that loathed thee?" Edric reveals his genuine villainy by answering in the affirmative.[66]

Guthrum arrives just in the two men from fighting a duel over his daughter. He attempts to reconcile Ina to Edric, but as it becomes clear to him that his "Silly fawn" is determined to disobey his command to regard Edric as her friend, he meets stubbornness with stubbornness, tyrannically asserting his fatherly authority over his rebellious daughter:

[66] In the two volume edition of Knowles's plays this scene is much more elaborate and revealing of Ina's indignation and outrage when Oswith, occupied with drawing his sword, fails to give her his hand as proof that he has plighted his troth. Ina becomes increasing shrill in the scene, until Oswith calls her his "Bride!--Wife!," after which Ina, who obviously feels compromised by her confession, refuses to leave him even though he tells her he wants to be alone. Her words are almost unintentionally humorous as she threatens to "cling to thee till death / Disjoins us! Drag me if thou wilt, I'll ne'er / Let go my hold!" The image of the clinging Ina evokes her behavior with her father, and also reminds us of Lucinia's clinging to Caius Gracchus to prevent him from leaving her.

> --My child, beware! You know
> I brook not thwarting! I must not be gainsaid!
> Call him thy friend! Come! Show me thou'rt my child!
> My flesh! my blood! that owe themselves to me,
> And should be subject to me!

When his appeal is met by silence, an increasingly angry Guthrum turns to threats, evoking Lear just before he curses daughters:

> Wilt now speak?
> Take counsel! Something's rising in my heart
> That bodes not good to thee! One more I say,
> Resist me not! Submit!

It is at this critical point that Guthrum shows his good judgment by turning to Alfred, who has witnessed what has happened, for advice on how to "untie / A wilful daughter's tongue." Alfred offers him the wise counsel that stops this confrontation of will from going any further:

> Force but subdues
> The weak; but, with the strong, 'tis met by force.
> . . . . .
> Chiding her nature thou but chid'st thy own!
> She's they soul's bright and fair reflecting glass!

Guthrum's reply proves that Alfred has enlightened him about how similar his daughter's nature is to his. Relenting, he invites her to embrace him, which she promptly does. It is clear that neither wishes to prolong the confronation.

You're right!
She's all her father's child! Come to me, Ina.
[She rushes into his arms]

Guthrum then explains to his daughter that he has sworn an oath to give her to Edric in marriage. Ina is appalled that her father would force her to marry a man she does not love:

> Without my heart! What, father, give my hand
> Without my heart!

Guthrum responds by insisting that she doesn't know what love is, but he quickly retracts his statement, observing the signs of love everywhere on her person even as she speaks. When Guthrum asks his daughter whom it is that has lit the flame of love, kneeling before him, she replies that he has:

> Thou, father, thou; whose fondness for thy child
> Would sketch for her the man thou'dst have her wed;
> How he should be among his peers in rank--
> And that the first--without a peer in worth!
> Most brave!--most true!--most generous!--most good!
> Fit to be a challenger of all the noble field,
> In all achievements of supreme renown;
> And bear the palm from all! Nor yet to lack
> Those qualities of visage, and of form,
> Which to these other richer graces join'd,
> Make the consummate men! But that I saw
> My father such a man, I should have deem'd
> A phantom 'twas he drew for me; for ne'er,
> Except in him, saw I embodied wealth
> Or so rare worth--until I saw it there!
> [Pointing to Oswith]

This passage is comparable to the one Meeta speaks in The Maid of Mariendorpt but is without a hint of transcendence and has a different emphasis. Whereas Meeta is explaining why her thoughts are fixed on her father rather than her husband-to-be, Ina is explaining how her love for the ideal man has been transferred from her father to a younger man because that man resembles her father so closely. This is not a truth that Guthrum has ears to hear. Instead of being sympathetic to his daughter, Guthrum peremptorily condemns Oswith to death, his reason being that he spurred his offer of friendship, which he characterizes as an act of love. This personal insult (as he takes it) is such a sore point with Guthrum, that he obsesses on it, especially now that Oswith seeks to marry his daughter:

> . . . he spurn'd me! Ay! refused
> The hand of a victorious king, through faith
> To an uncrowned fugitive! He did!
> I spared him at my child's beseeching! He
> That spurn'd the parent, now would win the child!
> He dies!

In an aside to Guthrum, Alfred predicts the tragic consequence that will be ensue if he persists in this course of action:

> Thy Ina dies! See, how she hangs,
> Half dead, already on thy shoulder! Much
> Thou lov'st her! If none other calls thee father,
> Beware thou are not childless!

Guthrum's response shows that he can only think in terms of self-justification and that he still thinks of his daughter as an adjunct of himself:

> Am I in the wrong?
> Demand I more than is a father's due?
> What is her life, but portion of my breath?

In revising the play for publication, Knowles added lines that are worth quoting because they show Alfred leading Guthrum to an important insight into his daughter's seemingly willful behavior. What Alfred gets Guthrum to see is that his daughter's opposition to his will is governed by the same kind of love that led his dead wife to oppose the will of her father and cleave to him, even though he was an enemy of her father:

> Minstrel, thou'rt right! Deep does thy wisdom search!
> Her mother, Eva, was my only love,
> As I was hers! Though daughter of my foe,
> She left her father, friends, land, faith, and all,
> To follow me. She did!--She did!

Guthrum then asks Alfred to help extricate him from his predicament. He has sworn an oath to Odin that Edric may marry his daughter, and he does not know how to save his daughter's life without violating his oath. Alfred proposes a bloodless trial by combat, which Guthrum agrees to. Alfred, who is confident the loyal Oswith will win, reveals his identity to him by giving him a ring to wear in combat. As two combatants fight off-stage, Alfred describes the contest to Ina while

simultaneously offering her hope that Oswith, the embodiment of virtue will triumph over the disloyal Edric, as indeed he does. The vindication of virtue through trial by combat echoes the combat between Edgar and Edmund in King Lear. With the conflict between father and daughter solved, Alfred announces that he is leaving the Danish camp. But Guthrum, who finds Alfred a good companion, refuses to let him go. The third Act ends with Edric vowing revenge against Oswith and the minstrel, whom, he suspects, is not what he seems.

The resolution that Alfred has labored to create crumbles when Edric recognizes the minstrel's real identity. In the ensuing uproar, Alfred escapes and Oswith is captured after wounding Edric. Act 4 ends with a raving Guthrum, forgetting the wisdom of Alfred and reverting to infantilism, taking out his wrath out on Oswith, whom he sentences to be sacrificed to Odin. His words, that include the blood-curdling words statement that he would sooner kill his daughter himself than give her to Oswith, have the same effect on Ina as Medusa had on those who had the misfortune to gaze on her Gorgon's face. Ina is instantly transformed into a stonified state that modern psychology would describe as catatonic. Guthrum, observing the transformation, is chilled to the bone by the sight. But unwilling to face the seriousness of his daughter's condition, he tries to make light of it:

I give him! Odin, take him!--He is thine!

By thy victorious spear he bleeds to thee.
Give him my child!--the traitor! Give him my blood!
I'd pour it out upon the altar first!
I would, with mine own hand! I'd look on her!
And do it! Look on her! Up, girl, and hence!
Ha! Do I see a statue or my child?
That cheek is marble by its hue!--Those eyes--
The chisel makes as good, for any touch
Of sense that's in them! What is it I've done?
Oh! they have loved and pined, and loved again
As fresh as ever! Take her to her couch!
She'll sleep--will she sleep? There, gently!
I am grown
From fire to ice with looking on her. Ha!
For what have I done this?

The last Act--which seems to take place the next day--opens with Guthrum being told by the priests that if he spares Oswith's life and violates his oath to Odin, as he wishes to do, there will be dire consequences to his people. The condition of his daughter, who is lying concealed on bed on a curtained inner stage, has not changed. She has not slept. Apparently emotionally torn between wanting and not wanting (out of fear) to see his daughter, Guthrum, at first testily refuses to see her, but immediately takes back his impulsive words. It is clear from this remark that he has not had the courage to see his daughter since her affliction. In his anguish, he experiences <u>anagnorisis</u>:

I thought myself a father!
I though as never father loved his child
I loved my Ina! 'Twas my pride to show it;
Yea, even when she ruled me like a child!
I used to think that of my fiercest mood
She was the mistress, from my wildest flight
Could call me down but lit my eye upon her!
I'm not a father!--No, I never loved her
But as a child, a toy!

This insight into the self-centered nature of his love for his daughter ("I never loved her / But as a child, a toy") is a pathetic admission of Guthrum's failure as a father. The melodramatic scene that ensues has already been examined in detail.[67]

In contrast to the relationship between Guthrum and his daughter, the relationship between Alfred and his wife pales. It is devoid both of the "touches of nature" and intense melodramatic interest. Having escaped death during the destruction of the royal caste, during which time she is separated from her young son, she is frantically searching for her husband. She is so distraught and dressed so wretchedly that when she presents herself to a band of Saxons as their queen, they don't believe her and abandon her. Alfred is given the opportunity to speak to her only once in the play, guardedly, in the Danish camp (4:1) after she wanders there in a pitiable state, "pale, emaciated, and in wretched attire"[68]

Elswith strays into the Danish camp while Alfred is entertaining Guthrum with his harp, accompanying Edwy, *who is singing a song with a significant refrain* aimed at Guthrum's imperiousness:

> But the might's with the right.

[67] See Chapter 3 of Part II.

[68] Stage direction.

From the cloud breaks the light;
And the head, high at morning--may lie low ere the night!

Guthrum, who is plying himself with drink, is relaxed and jovial. He is oblivious to the subversive meaning of the song. The mood is convivial. Elswith, drawn by the sound of harp music, intrudes on this sociable scene like a funereal spectre, and takes the liberty of sitting down near the annoyed Guthrum, interrupting his pleasure. When Guthrum informs her that she had sat down next to the great Guthrum, she is not impressed and answers grimly:

> What of that?
> I have sat down with Despair--a greater chief
> Than Guthrum--one could make him gnash his teeth!
> Ay, could he, mighty as your master is!
> I've sat down with Despair! Now show me Death!

Alfred's heart almost bursts as he recognizes his transmogrified queen. Guthrum dismisses her as mad, but Alfred disagrees, attributing her seeming madness to a disorder of the heart rather than the mind. Ina thoughtfully offers her food, which she rejects as too rich for her stomach:

> Famine partakes not such! She feeds on haws,
> Acorns, and roots, and berries! Give me these!

Guthrum, annoyed by her gloomy presence, orders her removed, but but Alfred intervenes, threatening in the name of chivalry, to kill anyone who lays a hand on

her. Observing his wife and son alive (his son was captured by the Saxons earlier), Alfred gives thanks to Providence for preserving his wife and child, but is tortured by the necessity of containing his joyous feelings:

> Oh, happiness, thou comest out of time!
> Thou choosest ill the place to greet me in!
> Thou mockest me to hold thine arms to me!
> I dare not rush to their embrace! . . . .
> Better were it far
> I had not now been told on't.

There is intense melodramatic pathos in both Elswith's and Alfred's situations, but no genuine domestic interest of the kind aroused by Guthrum's relationship with his daughter. There is more pathos in necessity of husband and wife to contain their feelings after Elswith recognizes the minstrel to be her husband. Exemplifying the Patriot King in this situation (as already described), Alfred is duty bound to suppress his conjugal and paternal feelings and leave Elswith for the sake of the public good, in spite of her protestations:

> And must thy leave me? Oh! I have searched for thee
> Many, and many a day! Now fear'd thee, dead!
> Now hoped thee, living! Search'd for thee alone!
> One falling now; and now another off;
> With my strong love unequal to keep pace.
> Sleeping in woods and caves! On foot, by dawn;
> Ne'er giving o'er till night again!
> . . . .
> Art thou found,
> But to be lost again?

What genuine emotion there is here is smothered in rhetoric. Following this scene, Elswith disappears from the play until the final scene. After Alfred has subdued Guthrum, she and the boy are led on to stage by Oddune When Alfred sees his wife and son, he acknowledges their presence with only four words, "My queen and son!" There is no emotional reunion, and Elswith has no lines to speak. In this respect, the end of Alfred the Great parallels William Tell, in which Emma appear on stage without speaking.

Judging from his rather grotesque characterization of Alfred's wife, Knowles was mainly interested in using her as a symbolic figure of suffering and as means of dramatizing (rather mechanically, one might add) Alfred's ability to adhere to principle when faced with a conflict between his sense of kingly duty and his private feelings.

Alfred's very young son is a mere physical presence, seen but not heard, and father and son never exchange so much as a word. As a result, emotionally speaking, Alfred's family is more nominal than real. If may judge by reading the text, one feels a lack of connection among the family members: between husband and wife, between father and child, and between mother and child. Knowles is so intent in idealizing Alfred as the father of his country, capable of exercising what he calls "the command of nature," that his appeal as a real father and as a husband is diminished. The lack of

domestic interest--especially the "touches of nature," in the depiction of Alfred and his family is doubtless one of the reasons the play had a brief stage life.

The most famous episode about Alfred, that of the burnt cakes, has been reserved for last because of its self-contained quality. Home and Bicknell omitted this humorous episode from their tragedies, probably on grounds of decorum. O'Keeffe was one of the first to include it a play about Alfred in comedy The Magic Banner has also been described. Knowles's treatment of it, while preserving the essentials of the original sources, is both different from O'Keeffe's, much more extended, and is used to greater dramatic and thematic effect. In Knowles's play, the site of this incident becomes the cottage of a fisherman named Edwin, located in Mercia,[69] where Alfred was been hiding for some time. As Oddune says after he has discovered Alfred's whereabouts, "A monarch's head beneath a peasant's roof / Contented shelters" (2.3). When Alfred is first introduced (2.1), it is near dinner time, and he is "discovered trimming some arrows, with an unfinished bow beside him."[70] Maude is kneading flour to make the cakes for dinner. Edwin, her husband, it out hunting. Maude, observing Alfred, is the first to speak. In an aside, she remarks disparagingly on Alfred's limited

[69] In O'Keeffe's play the cottage belongs to the carpenter, Gog.

[70] Stage directions.

usefulness--he can fashion a bow and trim an arrow, but he can't do real work like plowing, sowing, and reaping, or even make a fire. "He has hands and arms, but not the use of them!" she declares. She orders him to lay logs on the fire. She then complains that he has failed to kill any game for ten days, and blames his poor aim rather than the scarcity of game. The implication is clear that he has failed to earn his keep. When Maude asks Alfred what he expects to eat for dinner, he confidently replies, "What Heaven sends!"

Maude then scornfully challenges Alfred to show his skill at something by simply watching the flour cakes she is toasting so she can turn them before they burn. The cakes are the only sure food for dinner in this poor household unless her husband returns with a catch. Alfred is glad to help, but as soon as Maude leaves he becomes preoccupied with his own thoughts. He begins his soliloquy by reflecting on the irony of a king taking orders from a peasant woman and learning "the lesson of dependence" from a peasant's wife. The peasant couple live a harsh life of base subsistence, yet they are not discontent with their lot, and Maude, as Alfred observes, performs her housewifely role without complaint. As Alfred's thoughts turn to his private sorrows, Maude again briefly returns to sternly remind him of to mind his task. Maude refuses Alfred's offer to turn the cakes himself, fearing that he will break them. As soon as Maude leaves, Alfred again

lapses into lofty philosophic reflection, forgetting about the cakes. Just as Maude returns to find the cakes burned, Alfred is nobly concluding:

> Let me extract
> Riches from penury; from sufferings
> Blessings; that if I e'er assume again
> The sceptre, I may be more a king
> By being more a man!

Alfred is promptly confronted with the charcoaled cakes, which she holds in front of his face while she delivers these instructively chastising words:

> Maude: Is this your care?
> Ne'er did you dream that meal was made of corn?
> Which is not grown until the early be plough'd;
> Which is not garner'd up until 'tis cut;
> Which is not fit for use until 'tis ground;
> Nor used then till kneaded unto bread!
> Ne'er knew you this? It seems you never did,
> Else had you known the value of the bread;
> Thought of the ploughman's toil, the reaper's sweat,
> The miller's labour, and housewife's thrift;
> And not have left my barley cakes to burn
> To very cinders!
> Alfred:I forgot, good dame!
> Maude: Forgot, good dame!--Forgot! You ne'er forgot
> To eat my barley cakes!

There is sobering humor in watching a peasant instruct an inattentive King Alfred in the step-by step process of how bread is produced from corn, assumes as she does that he is ignorant of the immense amount of work--"the ploughman's toil, the reaper's sweat, / The miller's labour, and housewife's thrift" that goes into the making of bread. Maude's words may well have been meant as a rebuke to the upper classes (here represented by

the Alfred in the guise of a hunter) and others who took the labor of the peasants for granted, and may even allude sympathetically to the food riots that occurred in Cornwall during the winter of 1830-31.[71]

So far, the hardworking Maude epitomizes the solid virtues of the peasant class, but she slides down the moral scale quickly when she refuses to give any food to a starving old man who knocks on the door of the cottage just after she had lectured Alfred:[72]

Maude: Come in--[Enter an old man] What want you?
Old Man: Food!
Maude: Want calls on want, when you look here for food!
Old Man: Good dame, to say I have not tasted food
Since morning yesterday, is not to speak
My need more urgent than it is.
Maude: Whate'er
Thy need, we cannot minister to it--
Seek richer quarters.
Alfred: Stay! He's in the gripe
Of straitest want! There's food, and give it him!
Maude: What! when we've scanty stock for three days more!
Alfred: We breakfasted this morning; yesternight
We supp'd, and noon ere then had seen us dine.
Since yestermorn he had no touch'd meal!
Who'er lacks food, 'tis now his turn to eat.

Morally, Alfred suddenly towers over Maude by virtue of his generous heart. The language is rather stilted for conversation, but the last line has a aphoristic and socialistic ring to modern ears. By giving the starving

[71] J. Stevenson, "Food Riots in England, 1792-1818" in Quinault and Stevenson, publisher, date, page. Food-riots were a common form of public protest in England. They often involved the seizure of commodities such as wheat, barley, and butter, and setting of a fixed, fair price for their sale.

[72] This incident is taken from the life of St. Cuthbert [see Miles for exact citation].

man his own portion, Alfred proves that he deserves the love of his people and, citing the parable of the loaves and the fishes, he reveals his faith that God will provide for them, even if a miracle is required:

> The hand that fed
> So many thousands with what only seem'd
> Provision for a few, can, also, make
> The remnant answer for many a meal!

Alfred's faith and act of charity earns him a hearty blessing from the old man:

> O strong in faith!--In mercy rich! Whoe'er
> Thy art, that hand is with thee! Wast thou great,
> And art thou now brought low?--'twill make they fall,
> They rise--thy want, abundance--thy endurings,
> Enjoyings--and they desolation, troops
> of friends and lovers, countless!

This is the language and vision of melodrama, and no sooner has the old man pronounced his blessing than Alfred faith is rewarded: Maude's husband, Edwin, returns loaded down with a month's provisions provided by a band of Saxon soldiers, who follow the husband in. This instant reward, which shows Alfred to be a man favored by God, affirms the melodramatic nature of the play. The husband's generosity contrasts to his wife niggardliness, as he tells her to

> Take it in, and ply
> Thy housewifery; for friends must eat of it--
> Guests, sure of welcome, who supply the board
> They ask their hosts to spread. . . .

With the arrival of the soldiers, the atmosphere of the scene changes from domestic to martial. Having fulfilled her usefulness, Maude fades into the background as she cooks and cheerfully serves, dropping out of the play altogether after the conclusion of the scene without ever learning the identity of the extraordinary guest whom she contemptuously ordered around like a scullery maid. It may be said that Knowles successfully integrates this curiously humorous episode of the burning of the cakes into his serious play because rather than diminishing Alfred's dignity it augments it by providing, through a domestic setting and situation a added moral and religious dimension to a king that Knowles elsewhere in the play is portrayed as a Patriot King and poet.

PART III

KNOWLES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY THEATER

Chapter 1

Conditions in the Early Nineteenth-Century Theater

When Knowles began his career as a London dramatist in 1820 the theaters were suffering acute financial distress, and were about to slide into insolvency. Inept management, high fees paid to star actors, spiraling overhead and production costs, and increasingly keen competition from the minor theaters had all taken their toll, and would continue to do so as the decade progressed.[1] Peace had taken its toll on the box office receipts, too, for instead of the bringing prosperity as most Britons expected, the end of the Napoleonic Wars brought a general economic depression that hung like a black cloud over the theaters.[2] Theaters were competing for a shrinking audience among the city's swelling population, which in 1820 numbered

[1] Stephens lists reasons given for the decline of the drama in the despositions before the Parliamentary Select Committee appointed to inquiry into the subject: "incompetent management, the levels of actors' salaries, excessive production expenses unmatched by receipts, unwelcome competition provided by the attack on the patent monopoly from the proliferating minor theatres, religious scruples, even late dinner-hours--The Profession of the Playwright, 31.

[2] In 1817, Gentleman's Magazine reported on the gloomy state of the theaters in the immediate post-war years: "scarcely any description of property has been more seriously affected by the general distress than th Public Theatres; even in the Capital they have been almost without exception, entirely shut up, or their rents reducted one-third; some to half their former produce, and other allowed to be used for the payment of taxes and repairs--March, 270, quoted in Watson Nicholson 349.

over 1,300,000.[3] The regular theatergoing public among this population was not sufficiently large to ensure the patent theaters with consistently full houses. These economic conditions only aggravated many long-standing complaints about the theaters, of which two were most common: they were too large for proper hearing and seeing and the taste of audiences was debased, (leading to a debasement in the drama) and the monopoly system which gave the patent and other theaters royale the exclusive right to perform the legitimate drama. In London, these amounted to three theaters: Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and the Haymarket which Knowles wrote for, and which therefore are the subject of this chapter.

A. The Playwright in Economic Hard Times

The new century began badly for the two winter theaters when they were both destroyed by fire within nine months of each other in 1806. Covent Garden was rebuilt in record time, rising like a phoenix from its ashes in 1809; the rebuilding of Drury Lane, slowed by

[3] This approximation is based on the census of 1821, which reported a population of 1,379,543. One can get a sense of how fast the population of London was growing by comparing the census figures. The figure for 1810, the year of the official census 959,310; in 1811, 1,139,355; in 1841, two years before Knowles retired from playwriting, it was 1,949,277. From 1800-1841, then it had nearly doubled--The London Encyclopedia, ed. Ben Weinreb and Christopher Hibbert, 614..

financial entanglements caused by Sheridan's irresponsibility, dragged on until 1812. In rebuilding, both theaters incurred enormous debt, increased by the necessity to pay inflated wartime prices of materials and labor. This debt was an additional financial pressure to produce drama that was income-producing.[4] Covent Garden attempted to raise additional income to cover the cost of this debt by a raising ticket prices when it reopened in 1809, but was prevented from doing so by the success of the O.P. riots. Unable to charge more for a commodity that was costing them more to produce, the theaters were stuck between a rock and a hard place. The financial plight of the oversized theaters was increased when they failed to attract sufficient patrons to consistently fill them to capacity. The theater managers were therefore driven by economic necessity to cater to mass taste, no matter how debased.

By 1820, the competition among theaters for the patrons was keener than ever and distinction between the majors and minors had disappeared in all but name.[5] There were eleven theaters offering theatrical

[4] Covent Garden's had cost 300,000 to rebuild. Of this amount, only 136,000 was raised by public subscription, and the insurance claim. Another 10,000 was received from the Duke of Northumberland as a gift. This left a debt of 164,000 pounds--Baer, 21.

[5] Scrimgeour,

entertainment of one kind or another in or near London. In addition to the three royal theaters (Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and the Haymarket), there was the King's Opera (devoted exclusively to Italian opera) and a number of so-called "minor" theaters.[6] It was of no avail that the patent theaters enjoyed a monopoly over the performance of the legitimate drama, for it was the illegitmate forms of musical drama that had become the chief attraction to theatergoers at major and minor alike.[7] The era of domination by the majors had come to an end, and "the loci of originality" had passed to the minors[8]. For the first two decades of the century, the competition from the minors had steadily cut into attendance at the majors, forcing the latter to compete with the upstart minors on their own dramatic low ground--the nadir being reached by the introduction of animals into drama. In this suicidal endeavor, the majors drained themselves financially by mounting ever

[6] The term "minor" refers to the fact that they were prohibited by law from performing the "major" repertory, not to their size. The most recently built (1918) of the minor theaters, The Royal Coburg (named after the Princess Charlotte's husband, the Prince of Saxe Coburg) had a seating capacity that almost equalled the Big Two.

[7] The theaters were also competing with other forms of theatrical and non-theatrical entertainment: exhibition halls, which offered a miscellany of curiosities, ranging from awe-inspiring panoramas and ingenious mechancial clockwords to animals and human freaks; pleasure gardens featuring musical and song programs; puppet shows; and an assorted variety of other entertaiments--see Altick, The Shows of London.

[8] Scrimgeour, 381.

more spectacular productions. Even the annual Christmas pantomimes, a dependable cash-cow before 1820 failed after 1820. The minors waged a successful "war of attrition" against the majors that would spell financial ruin for all except the most economically managed theaters in the years ahead.[9]

Before considering how the two large patent theaters were managed, it needs to be stressed that competent management could only achieve so much and no more given the *enormous* payroll and the *increasing* costs of production. Owing to the variety of drama they offered, the patent theaters were required to maintain four separate companies: one for tragedy, one for comedy, one for opera, and one for pantomime and ballet--a total of from sixty to one hundred actors, singers, and dancers.[10] Also on the payroll were a small army of carpenters, scene-painters, technicians, decorators, dress makers, salaried playwrights and numerous other personnel such as prompters, readers, advisors. In addition, the theater was obliged to pay free-lance dramatic authors fees for their plays.

Management at the two patent theaters, unfortunately, was more often than not less than competent. Of the Big Two, Covent Garden was better

[9] Stephens 25.

[10] See Tomlins (107) in Donohue Theatre 77.

managed owing to the acute business sense and attentiveness of Thomas Harris and then of his son Henry, who succeeded his father as manager in 1809.[11] Under the Harris managements, Covent Garden showed a slim profit margin in the first two decades of the new century. However, beginning with Charles Kemble, who succeeded Henry Harris as manager in 1822, it stumbled financially, and in 1829 was seized for taxes owed. The sharp decline in average annual receipts at Covent Garden within the twenty year period 1810-30 is indicative of the plight of the London patent theaters when Knowles began writing for them. In the decade before Knowles's debut, Covent Garden took in 85,738 pounds, which gives the appearance of prosperity. However, in the decade following Knowles's debut, the theater experienced a financial reversal. The take dropped to 57,603 pounds per year--which translates into a steep thirty percent drop in attendance.[12] The falling off can be attributed to the competition from popular minor theaters like the Adelphi.[13] In a deposition before the Parliamentary Select Subcomittee investigating the state of the drama in 1832, Henry Harris, the businesslike manager of Covent Garden said that "he

[11] Thomas Harris managed Covent Garden from____; Henry, his son, took over management when his father died in 1809- ?

[12] 1832 Report, Appendix 13, 249.

[13] 1832 Report, qq. 1,825, 1831, quoted in Stephens, 31.

never knew in the morning whether he should not shoot himself before night."[14] After Harris, beginning in the mid-1820s, a succession of lessees, most of them business speculators, were "utterly broken on the cruel rack of major theatre management."[15]

After Garrick retired as manager, Drury Lane was never financially stable. Under the chronic mismanagement Sheridan, its fiscally irresponsible absentee-manager, it suffered one financial crisis after another, and often teetered on the brink of bankruptcy.[16] After Sheridan was forcibly removed from the helm after the fiscal reorganization that followed the 1808 fire, the theater was ineptly run by a Committee of gentleman amateurs. In 1814, the theater was temporarily saved from ruin by Edmund Kean (Fig. 30). On the sixty-eight nights he played during his first season, receipts doubled (from 212 to 484 pounds).[17] But the theater's savior soon became its destroyer, as his drawing power diminished and his autocratic per-

[14] Quoted in FitzSimons, 134.

[15] Donohue, Theatre in the Age of Kean, 40. At Drury Lane: Elliston (1826); Bunn (1839), Hammond (1840); Covent Garden: Captain Polhill

[16] In 1776, Garrick sold Sheridan his share in Drury Lane. Sheridan was manager of Drury Lane from 1788-1809 during which time he diverted the income from the theater to pay his private debts, which were endless. Salaries were not regularly paid; it was Sheridan's fiscal irresponsibility that caused the Kembles to switch to Covent Garden.

[17] FitzSimons, 74.

sonality asserted itself. Owing to his phenomenal success, Kean had managed to carve out a personal power base within the theater since his triumphant debut that enabled him to thwart the committee that had engaged him, which was unable to oppose him with a unified front. Kean's destructiveness revealed itself through his arrogance, paranoia, dissipation,[18] and his abuse of the considerable power he had managed to wrestle from a grateful but weak-willed committee, now newly reconstituted as a subcommittee.[19] Out of its deep gratitude the earlier committee had unwisely granted Kean the authority a free hand in choosing and stage managing his own plays. Considerable considerable additional expenses and a number of box-office failures was the result.[20] Kean, for all his phenomenon drawing power on certain occasions, over the long run, was another example proving the rule that "one man alone

[18] "In May 1815," FitzSimons writes, "when Byron became a member of the committee, he was amused to find how much time was spent discussing ways of making Kean abstain from alcohol"--91.

[19] The five members of the subcomittee were Lord Essex, Lord Byron, the Hon. George Lamb, the Hon. Douglas Kinnaird, and Peter Moore, M.P. Byron, who maintained an attitude of bemused detachment, comments: "We were but few, and never agreed! There was Peter Moore who contradicted Kinnaird, and Kinnaird who contradicted everybody: then our two [stage] managers, Rae and Dibdin, and our Secretary Ward! And yet we were all very zealous and in earnest to go good, and so forth"--Peter Quennell, ed. Byron: A Self-Portrait, Letters and Diaries, 1798-1824, 2: 635.

[20] Kean's income averaged 10,000 pounds a year for more than sixteen years, all of it spent by the time he died--Hillebrand, 198.

cannot fill a theatre."[21]

The novel experiment of running a theater by means of a committee, having proved a dismal failure, was abandoned in 1819. Bowing to financial necessity, the well-meaning but bumbling committee rented the theater to Robert William Elliston, a man of proven managerial competence and flamboyant personality who had established a impressive record of management at the minor theater level.[22] Elliston was unquestionably the most qualified person for the job. He was a leading and extremely popular actor (an additional asset in a manager) at Drury Lane (from 1804-1815) and the Haymarket, thus putting him in the honorable English tradition of the actor-manager.[23] He had also been a leading spokesman against the monopoly, and had "built

[21] Hillebrand, 226-27.

[22] Robert William Elliston was affectionately immortalized by Charles Lamb, his friend, in two essays of Elia. "Wherever Elliston walked, sate, or stood still, there was the theatre," wrote Lamb in "Ellistoniana." According to the writer of his obituary, "Elliston was the undoubtedly the most versatile actor of his day," in Gentlemen's Magazine 101, Pt. 2 (1831) 184, quoted in Christopher Murray, Robert William Elliston, Manager 2. Curiously, Elliston bore an uncanny resemblance to the Price Regent, something he exploited in his daily life and on the theater when he stage a simulation of George IV Coronation in 1820, playing the part of the king himself to the hilt.

[23] He had managed the Surrey and Olympic (1815-1818) theaters. Before that he had been Colman the Younger's acting manager at the Haymarket. His reputation as an actor was considerable: Murray writes that "by 1807 he had no rival in high comedy, and was ranked just behind John Phlip Kemble and George Frederick Cooke in tragedy" and quotes Hunt's judgement that he was "the greatest actor of the present day"--2.

the little Olympic theatre into a rival of Drury Lane and Covent Garden by slowly converting burlettas into something approaching regular drama," writes Scrimgeour.[24] In hiring Elliston, the committee, in effect, co-opted its arch-enemy.

Elliston, it appeared, was just the kind of manager that a financially ailing "people's theater" had need of, and the committee looked to him as they would to a savior whose theatrical magic would prove more enduring than Kean's had. He combined the instincts of a showman with a talent for administration, and a shrewd business sense.[25] His "gift of handling actors,"[26] was demonstrated when he brought the willful Kean to heel with tactful firmness, though he never succeeded in asserting his control over him as he did over other actors.[27] With the experienced Elliston at the helm, the financial prospects of the beleaguered theater were, if not bright, at least more promising

[24] Scrimgeour, 405.

[25] Murray, 4.

[26] Murray, Elliston 145.

[27] Kean, who had been one of the bidders, was infuriated that he was rejected, and was especially galled by the selection of Elliston who had caused him trouble earlier in his career. After Elliston became lessee, Kean tried without success to break his contract with Drury Lane but his threats to leave for American came to nothing and he eventually submitted to Elliston's will and stayed at the theater. But Elliston could not force Kean to play characters he did not wish to or succeed in overcoming his fear of playing with Macready.

than they had been since Kean's had suddenly appeared like a white knight to take London by storm in 1814 and lift the theater out of the doldrums. Indeed, Elliston showed himself to be a competent and conscientious manager. Against impossible odds, he operated the theater at a profit for four seasons before succumbing to ill health that affected his soundness of judgment.[28] In the last years, as the formerly sure hand of "the Great Lessee" faltered, the Committee lost confidence in him. Their refusal to renew his lease forced him into bankruptcy.[29]

After Elliston's management ended in 1826, the patent theaters were worse off than ever because of his strategy of cut-throat competition had upset the delicate equilibrium that had traditionally existed between Drury Lane and Covent Garden. Elliston's management marks a visible downward turning point in the history of the patent theaters. Drury Lane after Elliston entered the darkest days in its long and glorious his-

[28] For example, the receipts for the 1819-20 season were 44,000 pounds, 10,000 pounds more than in 1818-19, the last year under the committee's management. Receipts for the 1820-21 season were 42,000 pounds; for 1821-22, 50,000 pounds. In 1822-23, the receipts jumped to 60,000 pounds; in 1823-4, receipts were 61,115 and expenditures 45,000 pounds, for a healthy profit of 16,115 pounds; in the 1824-5 season receipts had risen were 67,000 pounds but expenses had also risen, to 56,000, cutting the profit to 11,000 pounds --Murray, 92, 96, 98, 102, 106.

[29] The committee at this time was composed of John Calcraft, William Linley, Sir Edward Codrington, BenBenjamin Oakley, William Church, Sir George Browne, G.H. Robins, and Douglas Kinnaird.

tory. It changed hands frequently, in itself a sign of its deteriorating financial condition. Furthermore, its prestige plummeted, as its stage became the showcase for spectacle and pantomimic drama. For four years the theater was in the hands of an American theater owner, Stephen Price, who is remembered for his fascination with the spectacular and for novelties like trained animals.[30] Kean was a mere shadow of his former, fiery self, suffering from an advanced stage of a mental and physical decline. The Committee was so dissatisfied with Price that it paid him to withdraw as a tenant in 1830. Equally undistinguished and unsuccessful were his successors, Alexander Lee, a publisher and composer, who lasted only a year and Captain Polhill, a wealthy former M.P., who lasted two years.[31] In an attempt to economize on costs, the managements of the two theaters was united in 1833 under Alfred Bunn, formerly Elliston's stage manager at Drury Lane.

[30] Price had been chosen by the shareholders in the belief that with his business experience he could realize a maximum interest on their shares. The rent was maintained at 10,000 pounds were year, which is approximately what Elliston had paid. Kean, who was in America at the time, again tried and failed to become the lessee. Price was neither actor nor playwright, owned and managed the Park Theatre in New York from 1808 until his death in 1840. rental was 10,600 pounds, but he failed to come up with the money.

[31] The brief period of management by Captain Polhill is best remembered for having made a futile attempt to stamp out the star-system of payment by putting a ceiling of twenty-five pounds a week on actor's salaries.

The financial plight of the theaters naturally reduced the amount of money that managers were willing to pay for new plays. In the first decade of the new century it was still possible for a professional dramatist to earn a more respectable living (e.g., 500-600 pounds a year) and support a family in a middle-class lifestyle. The scale of remuneration was not substantially different than it had been in the late eighteenth century.[32] High fees had lured many writers, including Coleridge and Lamb, to write stage plays.[33] Playwrights such as Thomas Holcroft, Thomas Dibdin, Frederick Reynolds, and Mrs. Inchbald, all of whom wrote for the two patent theaters in the period of the 1780 to 1810, a time when the theaters could afford to pay playwrights generously for their work. In 1786, for example, Mrs. Inchbald was paid 705 pounds for Such Things Are, a comedy. Reynolds, who was one of the most successful writers of illegitimate drama for the patent houses, referring to his hit The Caravan; or the Driver and His Dog (DL, 1803), writes in his autobiography with obvious self-satisfaction and not a little

[32] Frederick Reynolds and Thomas Dibdin are examples. Reynolds estimated his lifelong income from playwriting at 19,000 pounds--Life and Times. According to Stephens, Reynolds was paid a fee of 300-500 pounds per play, which meant to he could earn about 800-1000 pounds per year.

[33] Lamb wrote that "the profits of acting plays are now so large that a very shadow of a hope ought to make me glad"--Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb, ed. Edwin W. Marrs, Jr, 1: 179.

astonishment,[34] "I cleared three hundred, and fifty pounds simply by a dog jumping into a small tank of water!"

In the depressed economy in the post-Napoleonic period the patent theaters, crying poverty, found any excuse they could to pay less than the full price, to play as little as possible, to delay payment, or even renege on a contract.[35] If an author had the great good fortune to have his play read[36] and accepted for production, he had no choice but to sell his play outright, together with the copyright, for a fixed sum.

[34] According to A.H. Saxon, the only previous instance when horses had appeared on a patent house stage was at Covent Garden in 1793, when they were used for verisimilitude in a fox hunt scene (with real fox and hounds) in a Christmas pantomine--Foot and Horse, 92, n. 18.

[35] As Michael Booth (in Revels) has observed, "the economic aspect of playwriting in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has received very little attention, but it is important because the remuneration involved partially determined the quality of the drama"--6: 46. My information has been taken mainly from the following sources: E.B. Watson, Sheridan to Robertson 434-436; The Revel's History of Drama in English 6: 47-57; Stephens, The Profession of the Playwright 25-47.

[36] Getting the theater to read one's play could be a formidable obstacle for new and unknown dramatic authors. Lamb is a case in point. In 1799 he submitted his tragedy John Woodvil to Drury Lane to be read. After hearing nothing for a year, Lamb inquired about the fate of his manuscript, only to be told that it had been lost and that he should send a second copy, which he did. It promptly rejected, which was the deserved fate of the overwhelming majority of manuscripts. Many manuscripts were not even read, especially at Drury Lane. Byron tells of coming upon a dusty trove of about five hundred unread plays that had accumulated over the years on the shelves of Drury Lane when he served on the subcommittee that managed the theater. After reading a number of them, he concluded, "I do not think that, of those which I saw, there was one which could be conscientiously tolerated"

The playwright negotiated with the theater's management for the most advantageous terms (called "making a bargain"). There were two basic types of contracts, stipulating payment on different terms, that he could enter into.[37] Once terms were agreed upon, the playwright normally had to wait for payment until the play was actually performed, beginning with the third performance.[38] If the play was not performed, he received nothing. Early in the century, on the basis of a run of twenty performances, the "official" going rate at the two large patent houses for a five act tragedy--"the benchmark of dramatic literature"[39]--was 400 pounds; the rate of a comedy was half that amount. But

[37] In the 1790s, the payment of a fixed sum had replaced the old benefit system (an arrangement by which the author received a percentage of box-office receipts after house expenses had been deducted on the third, sixth, and ninth nights) in the 1790s. This change was to the author's advantage--See Stephens, The Proffession 25-26. The two types of contract, as described by Stephens, were: 1) "a fixed sum of 33 pounds 6s 8d for the first nine nights of the run. . . followed by a lump sum of 100 pounds on the twentieth [and fortieth] night"; 2) A fix sum of 300 pounds paid "in three equal instalments on the third, sixth, and nineth nights of representation, followed by 50 pounds on both the fifteenth and twentieth nights"--Stephens 26. Up to the twentieth night, both contracts were identical in the amount of income produced. According to Michael Booth, no written contract was signed between the playwright and the theater, which makes one wonder how disputes were settled--page?

[38] Payment was often in promissory notes rather than cash. It is difficult to see how the contract could be enforced if, as Michael Booth states, that "there was no signed contract between author and manager"--47.

[39] Stephens, 36

unknown authors normally received half the rate.[40] Playrights were given a "take it or leave it" choice. Once the theater bought the copyright of his play, the author received no further remuneration, regardless of how many times the play was revived in succeeding seasons. Payment was usually made in the form of promissory notes (known as "bills") that were redeemable at a later date. In the interval, the anxious dramatist had to hope that the theater did not go bankrupt, leaving him holding a worthless note.

Compared to what minor theaters such as Coburg or even the Surrey paid for melodramas and light theatrical fare like burlesques, the prices paid by the patent theaters seemed handsome enough.[41] The Haymarket paid better than the minor theaters, but considerably less than the patents. Whatever the fees, it was considerably better being an independent dramatist rather

[40] The sum was payable on the third, sixth, and nineth performances. At the Surrey in 1829, Elliston paid 50 pounds of a melodrama; at the Coburg the sum varied from 20 to a high of 50 pounds. However, at the Adelphi (the best paying minor), Moncrieff as paid 20o pounds for Tom and Jerry; or, Life in London (1821). He considered himself well paid, even though his play ran for over three hundred performances, thereby enriching the theater owners--see Stephens, The Profession 33, 41, 44.

[41] For example, at the Surrey in 1829, Elliston paid 50 pounds of a melodrama; at the Coburg the sum varied from 20 to a high of 50 pounds--see Stephens 33.. However, at the Adelphi, Moncrieff was paid 200 pounds for Tom and Jerry or, Life in London (1821). He considered himself well paid even though it ran for over three hundred performances, thereby enriching the owners of the theater--see Stephens, 33, 41, 44. At the minor theaters, authors were usually paid much less for melodramas, burlesques, and lighter theatrical fare.

than a professional house playwright on a low weekly salary. Douglas Jerrold, a friend of Knowles's who worked as a house dramatist at the Coburg and then at Drury Lane for 5 pounds a week, described the profession of playwriting as one of "continual labour with scanty and uncertain reward"--except the one certainty of "poverty, stark-naked poverty, with grey hairs."[42]

Dramatists at the very beginning of the century could derive substantial income from selling the copyrights of their plays to a printer provided the manager of the theater did not insist on him surrendering it to him as part of the contractual agreement. The the author who retained the copyright waited until the play was produced to sell it since the lack of copyright protection meant that a play became public property as soon as it was printed. The copyright value of a play at the turn of the century reached a high of 1000 pounds. This source of income began to dry up in the post-Napoleonic period, hitting "rock bottom" in 1832, the year of Knowles's popular The Hunchback. According to Douglas Jerrold, even though Knowles was a privileged author, he "was able to get scarcely any-

[42] In review of T.J. Thackeray's On Theatrical Emancipation and the Rights of Dramatists in The New Monthly Magazine (May, 1832), quoted in Nicoll, A History of English Drama, 4: 57. Jerrold is singular among the playwrights of the period in leaving the theater for journalism. He is best known as the editor of Punch.

thing for [the copywright]."[43] Thus, even when all sources of income from playwriting are added together, it was almost impossible for a legitimate dramatist writing in the decade of the 1820s to earn the amount his predecessors had earned only twenty years or so earlier. The income that professional dramatists derived from writing for the legitimate theaters continued to decline as the half-century advanced.

In comparison to playwriting, novel writing was considerably more financially rewarding in the same period. Bulwer-Lytton, looking back on his careers in both genres, had this to say about the disadvantages of writing rather than novels from a financial point of of view:

> To speak frankly--no play can pay me in a pecuniary sense. For the least time it takes is about half the time of a novel. The utmost pay it can receive is not half the profit derived from a fiction.[44]

Bulwer's first play, La Valliere brought home this fact to the author when it earned him about 200 pounds, less

[43] 1832 Report, q. 2,832.

[44] Bulwer's Letters, no. 74, dated 1840 [1843]. Charles Shattuck, "The Dramatic Collaborations of William Macready," diss. 158. Shattuck believes the letter is incorrected dated.

than half of what he expected.[45] In contrast, his first novel, Pelham: The Disowned published in 1828 had earned him 500 pounds; Devereaux, his second, published in 1829 had earned his 800 pounds; and his third, Paul Clifford, published in 1830, had earned him 1,500.[46] The comparative "low market value of drama after about 1820 or 1830" caused many dramatists who were not facilely prolific at playwriting to "abandon the drama entirely."[47] Knowles himself was on the point of doing so in the late 1820s. Only men of wealth like Scott, Byron, Shelley, and Bulwer could afford to disregard monetary reward when writing for the stage.

Relief from exploitation was slow in coming for playwrights. It was not until 1830, at the earliest,[48] that a number of disaffected playwrights dedicated themselves to "agitating through parliamentary means, in the reformist spirit of the age, for redress on the

[45] After the failure of La Valliere, Bulwer wrote for fame and to aid the cause of the national drama rather than money. His Lady of Lyons was given as a gift to Macready. Shattuck estimates it would have earned him less than 500 pounds, if Macready had been in a position to pay him what it was worth, which he was not--158.

[46] Shattuck 157. When Knowles turned to novel writing himself in the late 1840s several years after he gave up playwriting, he obviously did so for the money. His two novels, Fortescue, and George Lovell, both published by Moxon in 1847, earned him a disappointing total of 600 pounds. A few year later he was offered 500 pounds to write another novel, but refused.

[47] Booth note

[48] Stephens 175.

key issues of the patent monopoly and dramatic copyright."[49] Knowles was a leading and active member, responsible for framing an unsuccessful petition on behalf of copyright protection that was presented by R.L. Sheil (now an M.P.) to parliament in the summer of 1832.[50] By this time two of his plays (Virginius and Tell) had become stock pieces in the provinces. Yet he derived no monetary gain from these performances, no matter how many times they were performed. The next year the lot of the playwright was significantly improved with the passage of the Dramatic Copywright Act,[51] called "Bulwer's Bill" because Bulwer played a major role in its enactment. It was based on the recommendations made by the report submitted by the 1832 Select Committee that Bulwer had pushed to create and which he headed. The legislation led to the formation of the Dramatic Authors' Society in 1833, an organization that acted as a kind of agency to represent

[49] Stephens 175.

[50] Nicholson 339.

[51] Bulwer's Copywright Act of 1833 empowered the Dramatic Authors' Society to protect the dramatic copywrights and collect performance fees. After Bulwer's Bill, the Society established a scale of fees to be charged for performances of plays by its members, both in London and the provinces, according to the size and status of the theater, the genre, and the length of the play. Knowles's plays, because of the author's high reputation, commanded the highest fees by far, as much as five time higher in the case of William Tell, The Wife, and The Hunchback. In London, the Society granted theaters the right to perform a play for a specified period rather than selling the copywright--Stephens, The Profession 176.

authors in the setting of a scale of fees for the performances of plays in London and the provinces. The most popular the piece, the higher the fees charged.

Considering the dismal economic facts of the 1820s and 1830s Knowles fared relatively well financially. From the very beginning, Stephens writes, "Knowles, against the trend, made a healthy profit."[52] Unlike the majority of serious dramatists who negotiated contracts with the patent theaters, he was never forced to accept a half-rate payment or a disadvantageous contract.[53] He was consistently paid full-rate for his plays. By 1832, as the only serious dramatist with a "reputation for attracting good houses,"[54] he was well on his way to becoming the best-paid legitimate playwight of the pre-

[52] Stephens 36.

[53] Stephens, 36. Stephens cites the example of Mary Mitford, who sold her first tragedy Julian to Covent Garden in 1823 for the sum of 200 pounds; she settled for the same half-rate three years later for The Foscari--37. Stephens points out that there were the "variety of contracts negotiated during the 1820s" reflected the financial insecurity of the two large patent houses--38. An example of an unlucky author was John Howard Payne, author of the the most successful tragedy of the half-century; his Brutus ran for fifty-two performances, yet because he had contracted payment on a benefit system wound up with less than 200 pounds in his pocket--37. Normally, authors were paid with redeemable promissory notes rather than cash. Theaters used every excuse they could to delay payment, and it was not uncommon for authors to have to wait a year for payment. At any one time, the theaters were in arrears to countless authors for various sums owed.

[54] John Russell Stephens, The Profession of the Playwright: British Theatre, 1880-1900 44.

Victorian theater. He could command respectable fees for his plays because he was a "valuable property."[55]

Nevertheless, the fact remains that Knowles could not make a living from playwriting alone and was hard pressed financially (partly owing to a large family to support and partly owing to his generosity and lack of practicality in money matters--Macready called it a "want of method in his affairs") until he turned to acting to supplement his income. Shortly before he retired from playwriting, Knowles complained that he was a poor man in spite of the success of his plays:

> I wish myself anything but a literary character, as I stand before you a poor man, after having produced fifteen plays, all of which, if I might judge from their reception and criticisms upon them, have been successful.[56]

Success had not translated itself into sufficient pounds to enable him to support himself by playwriting. Over a period of twenty-three years, Knowles career earnings from playwriting amounted to only 4,600 pounds, which amounts to about 200 pounds a year.[57] In contrast, exactly a generation earlier, Frederick

[55] Stephens, 36.

[56] Theatrical Observer, No. 6419, July 21, 1842, quoted in Ernest Bradley Watson, Sheridan to Robertson: A Study of the Nineteenth-Century London Stage, 1926, 250 Knowles was wrong about the number of his plays that were staged..

[57] Meeks 54.

Reynolds, earned over 19,000 pounds during a career that lasted forty years.[58] Knowles earned considerably more money in ten years of acting than he did during twenty-three years as a playwright.[59] Acting was his bread and butter, as he acknowledged:

> To my brief success an actor, I owe what I should in vain have looked for as an author--emancipation from debt, a decently furnished house, the means of giving my children ample education, relief from the doubt whether to-morrow might not bring short commons, or none at all.[60]

In a nine month tour of America (the El Dorado for actors) as an actor in his own plays in 1834-1835, Knowles earned the princely sum of nearly three thousand dollars. This was more than three-fifths of the total sum he earned during his playwriting years. His playwriting years during the period 1820-1831, before he took up acting again, were years of struggle to make financial ends meet. The particulars of his earnings

[58] The Life and Times of Frederick Reynolds, 2: 421. Reynolds describes his "dramatic life" and one "of incessant labour, stuggle, and uncertainty, during more than forty years," beginning at age 19 and ending at 60." In comparing the incomes of the two playwrights, an adjustment has to be made for the fact that Reynolds's energies were not divided as Knowles's were and his career lasted seventeen years longer than Knowles's.

[59] Quote critic in Life on Knowles becoming an actor.

[60] Life, 100-101. Stephens estimates that Knowles made about 15-20 pounds a week as an actor--"certainly it could have been nothing like the 30 pounds per week which a star performer like Macready extracted from Alfred Bunn in the mid-1830s"--21.

from the four historical plays are given in the section discussing Knowles's collaboration with Macready.

B. Theaters and Audiences

A convincing argument can be made that the source of most if not all of the patent theaters' financial woes in the early nineteenth century was their obsession with bigness. The commitment to bigness was made in the last decade of the eighteenth century, when the auditoria of both theaters were radically enlarged and transformed,[61] making the patent theaters into "palaces of entertainment for the masses."[62] Given the fact that only two patents (not counting the Haymarket's summer patent) existed, expansion of the two existing facilities rather than construction of a third theater appears to have been a logical response on the part of the patentees to the increased demand for entertainment resulting from the rapid growth in London's population.

In terms of the history of British theater architecture, the expansion of the theaters in the 1790s was revolutionary because it resulted in the

[61] Drury Lane was razed in 1791 and totally rebuilt; Covent Garden's auditorium was rebuilt within its existing shell.

[62] Gary Scrimgeour, 550. Actually, in physical dimensions, their size was closer to that of Carnegie Hall (cap. 2,800) than the Lincoln Center Opera House.

replacement of the traditional fan-shaped auditoria with a horseshoe shape, after the continental model, a shape that increased the theater's seating room.[63] The capacity of the rebuilt Drury Lane, which opened in 1794 (Fig. 24), and of the enlarged Covent Garden was nearly double the size of the same theaters in Garrick's era.[64] The actual figure, usually put at 3,611, fluctuated according to subsequent changes. The rebuilt Drury Lane of 1812 had a capacity of 3,200 (raised to 3,590 in 1822). In 1812, Benjamin Wyatt, the designer of Drury Lane after the fire, restored the circular shape of the auditorium (Fig. 25), but this was "adapted to the horseshoe form" when the theater was altered according to the designs of Beazley in 1822-23.[65] The seating capacity of the rebuilt Covent Garden

[63] Richard Leacroft, The Development of the English Playhouse

[64] The original Drury Lane, built by Sir Christopher in 1694, seated 500. It succeeded in respecting the Elizabethan tradition of smallness, despite the fact that was obliged to accommodate itself to serving two traditions: the dramatic (primarily auditory) and the operatic (primarily visual). Subsequent enlargements to the theater in the eighteenth century compromised its original intimacy, but did not destroy it. Its capacity in 1762 was about 1,800; in 1791, before its demolition, it was 2,300. See Richard Southern, The Georgian Playhouse (London: Pleiades, 1948), 15, 20. For the capacity of the Drury Lane of 1794 (3,600) and the Covent Gardent of 1792 (3.013) see Charles B. Hogan, The London Stage, xliii-xliv. However, according to Leacroft (based on I. Donaldson, "Holland's Drury Lane, 1794," T.N., xvi, 92) the capacity of Drury Lane in 1808, just before it burned down, was 3,013. Leacroft points out that the original plans for the Drury Lane of 1812 called for a capacity of 3,919.

[65] Leacroft 193.

of 1809 was somewhat smaller (3,100) than its rival (Fig. 26). Relative to the Georgian theater, the size of the stages of both re-built theaters were immense, with Drury Lane's possessing a depth of nearly ninety feet. The "conscious choice of design which moved the two buildings away from the idea of 'theater' and towards the idea of 'opera house'"[66] (which Covent Garden eventually became in 1847) was fatal to their financial stability because it made the cost of operating them prohibitively expensive. The costs of running the theaters and mounting lavish productions proved to outpace the income derived from the larger audiences.

It is a chicken or egg question as to whether the enormous size of the patent theaters or the debased taste of the audiences attending the new theaters was responsible for the re-orientation of the drama in the direction of spectacle and melodrama. Whatever the cause for the shift in orientation, the legitimate drama, which required distinct hearing and seeing, was put at a severe disadvantage in the new enlarged theaters, a point that is amusingly made by the Colman

[66] Scrimgeour, 162. According to Francis Place, a contemporary observer, the managers were hoist with their own petard: "The monopopy led them to construct large houses; they built the public out. This appears to me to be the cause of all their difficulties. . . . if the houses had not been more than from half to two-thirds their present size they would have flourished. It is the excessive outlay, and the high prices for admission, the consequences of the monopoly, inducing them to build houses which cannot be filled, which had ruined them"--1832 Report, q. 3694 and 3704.

the Younger in the prologue to his occasional drama New Hay at the Old Market, produced in 1795 at the smaller Haymarket, a theater he inherited from his father:

> Since the preference we know
> Is for pageantry and shew,
> 'Twere a pity the public to balk--
> And when people appear
> Quite unable to hear
> 'Tis undoubtedly needless to talk.
> Let your Shakespeare and Jonsons go hang, go hang!
> Let your Otways and Dryden's go drown!
> Give us but elephants and white bulls enough,
> And we'll take in all the town.[67]

The size of the theaters together with the taste of the audiences explains why Colman and many other modern playwrights cast their lot with "pageantry and shew" when they wrote for the two winter theaters. They became collaborators with the scene-painter, carpenter, stage-machinist and lighting man in the production of dramatic pieces that were eye-filling and heart-pounding. Significantly, Wyatt, referred to his new auditorium as the "Spectatory" and conceived of the Proscenium as "being a frame to the picture."[68] As Leacroft points out, this language reflects "the predominance of scenic spectacle over the actor at this time."[69] Wyatt's intention was "to make the actors a

[67] Quoted in Scrimgeour, 82.

[68] Leacroft 167.

[69] Leacroft 167.

part of the scenic picture."[70] The era of the "picture-frame" theater had arrived.

In contrast to Colman, the traditionalist playwright like Richard Cumberland was grim concerning the detrimental effect of bigness on the legitimate drama. Cumberland's specialty was sentimental comedies, which depended for their success on the actors being scene and heard. He had enjoyed some of his greatest successes in Garrick's theater and he wrote bitterly in his autobiography, published in 1806, of the new Drury Lane and Covent Garden, which he lamented,

> so enlarged. . . as to be henceforward theaters for spectators rather than playhouses for hearers. . . . The splendor of the scenes, the ingenuity of the machinist, and the rich display of dresses, aided by the captivating charms of music, now in a great degree supersede the labors of the poet.[71]

Joanna Baillie, like Cumberland, blamed the size of the theaters (Fig. 26, 27) rather than the debased taste of the audience for the theatrical public's preference for the visually oriented illegitimate drama over legitimate plays. In the Preface to her third volume of Plays on the Passions, published in 1812, Baillie explained why audiences at the two large theaters were not hospitable to her plays:

[70] Leacroft 170.

[71] Cumberland, Memoirs, page?

> But when I say, present circumstances are unfavourable for the reception of these plays upon the stage, let it not be supposed that I meant to throw any reflection upon the prevailing taste for dramatic amusements. The Public have now to chose between what we shall suppose are well-written and well-acted plays, the words of which are not heard, or heard but imperfectly by two-thirds of the audience, while the finer and more pleasing traits of the acting are by a still greater proportion lost altogether; and splendid pantomime, or pieces whose chief object is to produce a striking scenic effect, which can be seen and comprehended by the whose. . . . We ought not then to find fault with the taste of the public for preferring an inferior species of entertainment, good of its kind, to a superior one, faintly and imperfectly given. . . .
>
> The size of our theaters then is what I chiefly allude to when I say, present circumstances are unfavourable to the production of these plays. . . . Nothing can be truly relished by the most cultivated audience that is not distinctly hears and seen, and managers must produce what will be relished.[72]

Sir Walter Scott made the same point in his essay on the drama for the Encyclopedia Britannica, published in 1832. The bigness of Drury Lane and Covent Garden, he wrote:

> has rendered them unfit for the legitimate purposes of the Drama. The persons of the performers are, in these huge circles, so much diminished, that nothing short of the mask and buskin could render them distinctly visible to the audience. Show and machinery have therefore, usurped the place of tragic poetry; and the author is compelled to

[72] Joanna Baillie, "Preface" to Third Volume Plays on the Passions (1812), Works, p. 232, quoted in Virginia Lamb 27-28.

> address himself to the eyes, not the understanding or feelings of the spectators. . . . Thus we have enlarged our theatres, so as to destroy the effect of acting. . . . [73]

What Scott meant when he stated that the "effect of acting" had been destroyed was that the size of the theaters had a detrimental effect on acting. Specifically, "actors were obliged to elevate their voices to an uncomfortable pitch; their movements and gestures became more exaggerated."[74] Lord Torrington, full of nostalgia for "Old Drury" (demolished in 1791), complained, that "the nice discrimination of the actor's face and of the actor's feeling, are not lost in the vast void of the new theatre of Drury Lane."[75]

Actors responded in various ways to their new working space. Kemble obliged the galleries. When the "gods" shouted that they could not hear, Kemble raised his voice. In order to be heard in the galleries, he declaimed Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy.[76] Mrs. Siddons, on the other hand, refused to accommodate herself, continuing to speak and act as she had always done, even though the subtleties of her voice and

[73] Sir Walter Scott, The Miscellaneous Prose Works, 1: 615.

[74] Hogan xliv.

[75] The Torrington Diaries, ed. C. Bruyn Andrews (London, 1938) 4: 18-19, Hogan xlv.

[76] Joseph 200.

expressions were lost on the galleries.[77] Kean, too, did not oblige the galleries. He refused to compromise his art by coarsening it to adapt it to the large theaters.[78] Macready, unlike Kean, suffered from "an over-anxiety to make everything he said reach every one of his audience."[79] He therefore made a virtue of necessity by developing a distinctive habit of pausing during his speaking of the verse. This device, known as the "Macready pause," served as a means of enhancing the comprehensibility of what he was saying by allowing "a climactic effect to register on the audience."[80]

In the two patent theaters, a patron could be assured of seeing and hearing distinctly only if he sat on one of the benches in the pit (Fig. 28) or in one of the favorably located boxes. The galleries were the least favorable location for seeing and hearing because of their remoteness from the stage.[81] This situation

[77] Hogan xliv.

[78] See Joseph 274.

[79] Matthews and Hutton, 3: 21, quoted in Joseph 302.

[80] Downer 71.

[81] The problem had been exacerbated by the conversion from fan shape characteristic of Georgian theaters to that of a horseshoe, in imitation of the Italian and French models in the 1790s. It is difficult to exaggerate the effect of this change. The conversion from a fan to a horseshoe shape increases the capacity of the seating while increasing the distance from the stage to the back of the auditorium. This distance is magnified when the size of the horseshoe is enlarged beyond the proportions of the original fan shape, as was the case when the two patent theaters expanded in the 1790s. In Holland's 1794 Drury Lane, for example, the distance was one hundred feet as compared to sixty feet in "Garrick's theater"--an increase of 66%. While a spectator in the

presented a major problem for actors because the galleries, the bastions of John Bull, contained about one-third to one-half of the total audience. The chronic unruliness of gallery spectators (deferentially dubbed "the gods") made hearing even more difficult. Hazlitt, who has been described as "a very close observer of the technique of acting,"[82] had left an observation on Kean's acting that makes it clear how inadequate the galleries were for seeing the expressions on an actor's face and hearing modulations in his voice:

> We saw Mrs. Kean's Sir Giles Overreach on Friday night from the boxes at Drury Lane theater, and are not surprised at the incredulity as to this great actor's powers entertained by those persons who have only seen her from that elevated sphere [i.e., the galleries]. We do not hesitate to say, that those who have only seen him at that distance, have not seen him at all. The expression on his face is quite lost, and only the harsh and grating tones of his voice produce their full effect on the ear. The same recurring sounds, by dint of repetition, fasten on the attention, while the varieties and finer modulations are lost in their passage over the pit. All you discover is an abstract of his defects, both of person, voice, and manner. He appears to be a little man in a great passion. The accompaniment of expression is

galleries had a full view of the entire stage, it was impossible for him (especially in the "one shilling gallery") to see nuances of expression and difficult for him to hear sounds not projected at full voice. For a detailed discussion of this development and scale diagrams and copies of theater plans, see Richard Leacroft, The Development of the English Playhouse, 128, 134-135, 138-39, 144.

[82] Donald J. Rulfs, "The Romantic Writers and Edmund Kean," Modern Language Quarterly, 11 (1950) 426.

> absolutely necessary to explain his tone and gesture. . . Without seeing the workings of his face, through which you read the movements of his soul, and anticipate their violent effects on his utterance and action, it is impossible to understand or feel pleasure in the part.[83]

The importance of seeing Kean's changing facial expressions as one listened to his voice is explained by Joseph:

> Spectators who could not see his [Kean's] facial changes--the swift move from one one passion into the next, which anticipated the new tone about to be sounded in his voice--missed more than half of the effect: such spectators, too far back to see these pantomimic changes, received an impression of a stereotyped trick of manner, introduced merely to entrap the applause of the 'general.'[84]

Kean's face, said Hazlitt, was "the running comment on his acting."[85] He could read that comment from one of the boxes, but it should be noted that not all boxes were satisfactory for the purpose of seeing and hearing nuances. The preferred location of discriminating devotees of the theater like Hazlitt, Hunt, Byron, Henry Crabbe Robinson and Tom Moore was the front of the pit.

[83] Hazlitt, Examiner, Feb. 28, 1816 (McNeill, 27).

[84] Bertram Joseph, The Tragic Actor 273.

[85] Howe, 8: 284 (or 284f.--check).

The Covent Garden where Virginius was produced in 1820 was identical to the rebuilt Covent Garden of 1809. However, the Drury Lane where Knowles's Caius Gracchus, William Tell, and Alfred the Great were produced had undergone an additional inner transformation since its erection in 1812. In the summer of 1822, Elliston spent a lavish 20,000 pounds on rebuilding, redesigning, and redecorating its interior.[86] "The Great Lessee," as Elliston was dubbed, had two objectives in undertaking the alterations. The first was to make the theater aesthetically more attractive and socially more inviting in order to attract a better class of patron, especially those of "the lost upper-middle class.[87] The second was to enhance the theater's capacity to mount spectacles, and hence make the theater more competitive with Covent Garden.[88] To this end, he had the backstage area reconstructed. The advantages of this renovation were manifest on the opening night of the 1823 season when a packed house

[86] For details about Elliston alterations on the theater, see Christopher Murray, Robert William Elliston, Manager: A Theatrical Biography (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1975) 98-100. Samuel Beazley was the architect.

[87] Murray, 99, 149. The distribution of the seating was as follows: the smaller pit held 800, the boxes, which had been increased, held 1,230; the galleries, 900 (the lower, 550 and the upper, 350); the slips, 150--Leacroft, The Development of the English Playhouse, 193.

[88] Because of the way its backstage area had been designed, Drury Lane's capacity to mount spectacular productions had been infeior to Covent Garden's.

was dazzled and thrilled by one of most spectacular pantomimic dramas in the history of the London stage: The Cataract of the Ganges.[89] Elliston's "horse piece" made maximum use of the newly enlarged stage area. In The Examiner, Hunt praised the newly transformed Drury Lane as "the most finished theatre in Europe."[90]

In his determination to bring "drama to the level of the people,"[91] Elliston pushed the patent theaters further in the direction of expensive illegitimacy: that is to say, "a theatrics of music, pageantry, scene, and lighting effects" that was extremely costly to produce.[92] This was the P.T. Barnum side to Elliston, who refused to recognize any distinction between major and minor theaters in respect to repertory. Both patent theaters were on a treadmill that they could not get off from: the "getting" up every season of so many new productions with ever-more splendid scenic effects to stimulate the jaded appetites of an apathetic public. The policy that Elliston pursued was a continuation, but at much higher

[89] Watson, Sheridan to Robertson, 155-156. See Frederick Reynolds, The Life and Times of Frederick Reynolds. Reynolds was Elliston's advisor at the time. The huge expense (5,000 pounds) was justified by the receipts.

[90] Hunt, quoted in Murray 190

[91] Watson, 174-75.

[92] Murray, 151. Murray writes that "Elliston may be credited with shaping the taste at the minor theatres, while succumbling to it at the majors"--151.

financial risk because of the increasing costs, of a practice that had begun after the enlargement of the two theaters in the 1790s. What had begun as an matter of expediency then now became, because of heightened audience expectation, an inescapable burden.

The immense size of the auditoriums and the stages of two winter theaters contrasted sharply with the modest size of Haymarket, the third patent theater in London, whose season was limited to the summer months. This comparatively small theater remained intact until 1821, when it was razed and rebuilt on a scale that retained the actor-audience intimacy that made this theater ideal for the performance of the legitimate drama.[93] The Haymarket was less comfortable than the winter theaters, but an actors could be assured that the actors would be distinctly heard and seen by every-one in the audience, an impossibility in the two larger houses.[94] The Haymarket would have been an ideal space for the production of all of Knowles's plays. As it was, three of his plays were produced there.[95]

Periodically in the early nineteenth century, beginning in 1804, it was proposed that a third winter

[93] See Richard Southern, The Georgian Playhouse, 20.

[94] Demographics.

[95] The three plays produced at the Haymarket were The Love Chase, The Maid of Mariendorpt, and The Rose of Arragon were first produced there.

theater of modest size and devoted to the performance of the legitimate drama should be built.[96] The idea made a great deal of sense in terms of promoting the performance of the legitimate drama, but it remained an unrealized ideal. Knowles himself petitioned for a third theater in 1833. The petition, which was rejected, was an act of protest against the union of two patents under one management (that of Alfred Bunn).[97] The union caused Knowles to temporarily sever his relationship with the patent theaters and affiliate himself, both as an actor and playwright, with the Victoria (formerly the Coburg). This, the largest of the minor theaters, served as a temporary haven for the legitimate drama during one of its darkest periods.[98]

One of the givens that Knowles had to accommodate himself to as a playwright, then, was the operatic size

[96] For the first attempt to build a third patent theater, undertaken by a Colonel Greville, see Nicholson 161.

[97] For the story of Knowles's rejected petition to open a third theater for the legitimate drama, see Watson Nicolson, The Struggle for a Free Stage (1906; New York: Benjamin Blom, 1966) 356-388. His opposition was made clear in a letter to Bunn, dated September 23, 1833: "As I consider the present monopoly to be an insult to the public, an injury to the actor and the author, and an unwarranted departure from the purpose for which the Patents of Theatres Royal, Drury Lane, and Covent Garden were granted--namely, the maintaining of two distinct rival companies of comedians, I think it is due to my own respectibility to state, in reply to your letter, that no consideration whatsoever can induce me to connect myself with either of these establishments"--quoted in Alfred Bunn, The Stage, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1840) 1: 90.

[98] See Life, 109-110.

of the patent theaters. Fourteen of Knowles's eighteen plays were produced at these two theaters, among them the four historical plays here being considered. Both theaters were relatively new when Knowles's first two plays were produced there: Virginius at Covent Garden in 1820 and Caius Gracchus at Drury Lane in 1823.[99] Throughout his career, Knowles stoutly resisted the temptation to turn his back on the tradition of dialogue-drama even though in their enlarged state the two winter were less than satisfactory for the performance of this kind of drama. As described in the last chapter, Knowles accommodated himself to the patent theaters by utilizing melodramaturgic and scenic effect that made his plays more comprehendible to the audiences of Drury Lane and Covent Garden. The success of the first productions of all four of Knowles's historical plays, and especially the long-term success of Virginius and Tell, is proof that verse plays could be enjoyed by early nineteenth-century audiences even though they had difficulty hearing every word or seeing every facial expression.

A second "condition" that was commonly adduced as an obstacle to the writing of verse drama was the change in the composition of theater audiences who

[99] Both had been gutted by fire within six months of each other: Covent Garden on September 20, 1808, and Drury Lane on Febrary 24, 1809.

attended performances at Drury Lane and Covent Garden in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In 1816, one critic described the coarsened taste of the new audiences as follows:

> The public are no longer to be attracted by a certain round of established plays, and a certain number of stock scenes; at theatres where they can neither hear nor see, they must have the stimulus of perpetual and expensive variety to make them come at all, and to keep them in tolerable good humour when they are there; their sense of hearing is only to be gratified by noise, and their sense of seeing by glare.[100]

Much remains unknown about the exact composition of early nineteenth-century audiences, but it is safe to say that the audiences were radically different than those which attended Garrick's theater.[101] Prior to Covent Garden's expansion in 1791 and the rebuilding of Sheridan's newly Drury Lane in 1794, "the predominant pattern of taste was that of an educated middle-class audience leavened with aristocratic spice," writes

[100] Dramaticus, An Impartial View of the Stage, 1816, 3, quoted in Revels 6: 7, fn. 2.

[101] "Too little is know about the audience of the early nineteenth century London audiences," writes Donohue, Theatre in the Age of Kean, 149. The cautious tone of recent scholars contrasts with the authoritative tone of early scholars like Nicoll, who in 1953 wrote: "All contemporaries are agreed on one thing; the spectators in the larger theatres during the first decades of the century were often licentious and debased, while those in the minor playhouses were vulgar, unruly, and physically obnoxious"--4: 8.

Michael Booth.[102] Joseph Donohue describes it as consisting of a "healthy balance of social classes in a carefully planned architectural space."[103] This "healthy balance" was upset after the theaters were enlarged by the influx of large numbers of lower middle class spectators and the corresponding flight of the upper class and upper middle class.[104] Some of the words commonly used by theater historians to describe the early nineteenth-century audiences are "a miscellaneous mob,"[105] "rough and disreputable,"[106] licentious and debased,"[107]"rowdy and illiterate,"[108] "combatively noisy,"[109] and "autocratic" and "fickle."[110] Noise, rowdiness, and occasional violence was an accepted part of the theatergoing experience,

[102] Revels, 6: 7.

[103] Dononhue, "Theatre at the End of the Eighteenth Century.," 369.

[104] Baer rejects as "one dimensional" the explanation that the presence of the "plebians" caused the upper classes to shift their allegiance to the opera. Even other factors such as the upper classes' late dining hour (seven or eight o'clock) he says "miss the mark"--Theatre and Disorder 49.

[105] Rahill, 112.

[106] Baugh, 1265.

[107] Nicoll 4: 8. Quote Scrimgeour on orange peel.

[108] Rowell.

[109] Scrimgeour, 140.

[110] Marc Baer, 71.

which was far removed from what it is today.[111]

The boisterous, volatile character of audiences in this period was owing chiefly to the unrefined and uneducated spectators who sat in the uncomfortably hot and crowded galleries. "Clearly," writes Donohue, "the gallery was the backbone of the theatre, to be ignored or slighted only at peril."[112] It was "the most vociferous segment of the theatre audience, never too inhibited to call out for what pleased them most."[113] Determined to get their "shilling's worth of show,"[114] the galleygoers were aptly dubbed the "gods" for their power as well as their physically elevated position. This power derived, in part, through sheer numbers, for whereas the "boxes and frequently the pit [were] poorly attended. . . the galleries were full."[115] In the absence of the aristocracy, the fashionable, and the respectable middle class, the lower-middle and working class spectators in the galleries dominated. According to A.H. Saxon, "the age of those self-appointed arbiters of public taste, the pit critics, had come to

[111] See Cross 95.

[112] Joseph Donohue, Theatre in the Age of Kean, 153.

[113] Donohue, 153.

[114] Richard Cumberland, quoted in Leacroft, 155.

[115] Revels 6: 8.

an end, and in their place the gallery 'gods' now reigned supreme."[116]

The domination of the galleries was a late eighteenth century phenomenon. The composer Haydn had commented on it during his visit to Covent Garden in 1791:

> The common people in the galleries of all the theatres are very impertinent. They set the fashion with all their unrestrained impetuosity, and whether something is repeated or not is determined by their yells.[117]

With the coming of economic hard times in 1815, and the decrease in theater attendance that resulted, the power of the galleries increased. Actors often played to half empty theaters from curtain time (six-thirty to seven) to half-price admission time (between eight and nine o'clock or after the end of the second act of the mainpiece).[118] Half-price time attracted a significant number of new customers to the cheaper seats. These customers were interested in seeing the afterpiece rather than the mainpiece. Many of them were disposed

[116] Saxon, 91-2.

[117] The London Stage, 1660-1800 ed. William van Lennep et al. Pt 5, 1411

[118] In 1832, Charles Kemble, manager of Covent Garden, stated before the Select Committee on Dramatic Literature, that, generally speaking, theaters were "never above one-half full"--1832 Report 52. Before 1825, people were admitted for half-price at the end of the second act of the mainpiece. After 1825, half-price began at nine o'clock, regardless of what was being performed on stage.

toward rowdiness. A good number were intoxicated, having come straight from the pubs. Beginning in 1818, admission prices were cut in order to attract "people who previously could not afford to sit anywhere but the gallery."[119] They favored visual (spectacle, pantomime, opera, farce) rather than spoken drama that demanded concentration.

The upper classes had deserted the theater for the opera, which was then fashionable, performed at the King's Theater.[120] The late dinner hour observed by the upper classes also made it difficult for them to attend the theater before eight o'clock.[121] The respectable middle class on the whole were not theatergoers owing

[119] Revels 6: 9. Prices of admission tended to decrease over the half-century. An attempt by Kemble to raise prices at the newly built Covent Garden in 1809 caused a major riot (OP riots) that resulted in the re-establishment of the old prices, which were were 5S for boxes, 3S for pit, 2S for lower gallery, and 1S for upper gallery. In 1818, the prices were lowered. From 1835-42 prices at Covent Garden they were 4S for boxes, 2S for the pit, and 1S for the gallery. The prices at minor theaters were less by as much as half.

[120] "One of the most constant grievances of the managers throughout the first half of the century was that only their pits and galleries were filled, for only on rare occasions could the aristocracy be induced to attend," writes E.B. Watson, 7. "The fashionable world remained faithful to the Italian Opera House until its destruction in 1867 [the year Covent Garden was converted to an opera house]"--Sheridan to Robertson, 14-15.

[121] Donohue writes, "Although the normal dinner hour in the late eighteenth century was 4:00 P.M., most people of fashion dined later and took longer to ear, and so were seldom able to arrive at the theater before 8:00 P.M."--"The London Theatre at the End of the Eighteenth Century" in The London Theatre World, 1660-1800, ed. Robert D. Hume (Carbondale and EdwardsvilleL Southern Illinois UP, 1980) 337.

to religious and moral scruples. The presence of prostitutes, who crowded the lobbies and brazenly displayed themselves in the boxes, was another deterrent for respectable families. The patent theaters were notorious for tolerating if not encouraging prostitution because it attracted young men to the theater who might not otherwise have attended. In his 1832 essay on the drama for the Encyclopedia Brittanica, Scott declared,

> . . . no man of delicacy would wish the female part of his family to be exposed to such scenes; no man of sense would wish to put youth, of the male sex, in the way of such temptation.[122]

By default, then, the theater was delivered over to the lower middle class and the working classes.

Christopher Murray makes an important point when he states, "the crowds that thronged the major theatres were only indirectly interested in drama."[123] Exactly what drew them to the theater is not easy to say, but it had something to do with entering an enchanted land remote from actuality and with the pleasure of having a communal experience. The constant interaction that took place between audience and actors in the early nine-

[122] Sir Walter Scott, "Essay on the Drama," The Miscelleneous Prose Works (London and Edinburgh, 1850), 1: 616.

[123] Murray, 149.

teenth century is something that it is difficult for the comparatively passive and polite modern theatergoer, sitting in the dark on his best behavior, to appreciate.[124] William Worthen uses the words "affective" and "sentimental" to describe the interactive aspect of the theater of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, where audience response was "swift and vigorous."[125] Critical approval or disapproval of what was happening on stage was constantly being expressed--the former by applause, the latter, most commonly, by hissing.[126] The closest analogy to early nineteenth century theater that exists today is in opera, where audiences applaud (or sometimes boo) a singer after he sings a virtuoso arias. Frequent applause was an indispensable stimulus to the performers in the early nineteenth century as it is to opera singers today, and they worked hard to evoke it. The most intoxicating experience for actors was to have the pit spontaneously in applause. But the similarity ends

[124] The extrovertively demonstrative audience was already a thing of the past by 1859. Cole writes, "Audiences now-a-days are more numerous than ever; but they sit, for the most part, in silent admiration. A round of applause is as startling as a peal of thunder in a cloudless sky. Where is it to come from? The stalls, boxes, and even the pit, are too genteel to clap their hands; and the Olympian deities are awed into silence by their isolation, and the surrounding chill"--Cole 1: 93.

[125] Worthen 82.

[126] Hissing in the theater had been established by law (King vs. Leigh, 1775) as an "inalienable right to instantaneous disappropation"--Bauer, 73.

there. In the early nineteenth century theater audiences spontaneously applauded "not only single speeches [which were comparable to arias] but also single lines and even single words."[127] In Shirley S. Allen's words,

> Actors measured their success by the amount of applause that followed immediately upon their most effective 'points,' and without stepping out of character they encouraged such response by emphasis, gesture, pause, or other dramatic device. This special designation of certain passages was expected by audiences and was not considered detrimental to theatrical illusion.[128]

The most intoxicating experience for an actor was having the pit spontaneously rise in applause.

The theater of the early nineteenth century is like that of the eighteenth century in that it was a place where emotion flowed freely. Despite the highly-structured quality of the performance, the spectators' feelings were expressed with striking immediacy: "They burst freely into tears; the ledges of the boxes were frequently white with the handkerchiefs that were in constant employ. Following a death scene both men and women wept; the women screamed, and sometimes fainted,"

[127] Charles Beecher Hogan, The London Stage, 1776-1800: A Critical Introduction, xcii-xciii.

[128] Allen 13.

writes Charles Hogan.[129] In a sense there was as much theater taking place in the fully lighted auditorium as on the stage during a performance, and, according to Worthen, "the audience responded to its own performance much as it did to the performance on the stage."[130] The theatricality of the spectators' behavior was a function of their sympathetic involvement with one another. Rather than defeating the dramatic spectacle, the performance on the near side of the stage seemed to broaden it, to form part of the evening's entertainment. The term "sentimental theater," as used by Worthen, encompasses the audiences' response both to the actors' and to its own performance.

It is noteworthy that the "new" audiences preferred the large patent theaters, where numbers added to excitement to the interaction, to smaller theaters. In his autobiography, Frederick Reynolds, the popular playwright of the generation preceding Knowles's, noted this fact and gave several good reasons why this was the case:

> though the public usually censure and abuse large theatres, yet, in <u>their hearts</u>, they infinitely prefer them to those of a less size: involuntarily feeling that in addition to their superior cheerfulness, accommodation, and magnificence, they afford far more

[129] Charles Beecher Hogan, Introduction, <u>The London Stage, 1776-1800: A Critical Introduction</u>, cxcvi.

[130] William B. Worthen, <u>The Idea of the Actor</u>, 82.

> scope for the effects of those lasting theatrical stars,--scenery, pageantry, and music.[131]

In one important sense the new audiences were no different from the old: they insisted on being acknowledged as masters in the theater. Marc Baer speaks of the existence of "an implied contract between audience and actor."[132] Spectators considered it their right, for example, to express their opinion about what was occurring on stage at any point in the performance. While audiences could be extremely adulatory toward the performers, they demanded that performers show them proper deference. For instance, in return for their applause, audiences expected performers to show their gratitude by bowing in acknowledgement. "Even the hint of pretentiousness or dictation could swing an audience from idolatry to violent opposition," writes Baer.[133] When the audiences felt abused or displeased, they showed their displeasure by punishing actors, playwrights, and managers.

The ways in which audiences, who were "easily offended, sensitive to disrespect and very jealous of

[131] Frederick Reynolds, The Life and Times of Frederick Reynolds, 2: 378.

[132] Baer, 71.

[133] Bauer 71.

their rights,"[134] showed their disapproval were crude and harsh by modern standards. Audiences punished actors by hissing them, crying "Off," or throwing fruit or even bottles at the stage. Missiles usually came from the direction of the galleries. The idolized Kean first felt the force of an audience's disapproval after he missed a performance at Drury Lane in March of 1816 because of drunkenness. Skeptical of the claim that he had met with an accident, a segment of the public made its displeasure known during his next performance by hissing and crying "Off, off, apology, apology." His voice drowned out by the protest, Kean had no choice but to interrupt the performance, step to the front of the stage, and address the audience in an attempt (successful, it turned out) to appease the protesters, who, in FitzSimons words, "were using the incident to express their distaste for his infamous behaviour offstage."[135]

Kean was prey to hubris in the sense that he believed that he his debauched private life could be kept separate and apart from his public persona and would not affect the public's reception of him in the theater. He behaved as if he were an exception to the

[134] Playfair, Kean 156.

[135] The incident occurred in March 26, 1816; See W. Macqueen-Pope, Theatre Royal, 218-219, and FitzSimons 97-98, and Playfair, Kean 156-159 for varying accounts.

rule that an actor--and especially a star actor--was, in the audience's eyes, a servant of the public. After being tried and found guilty of adultery (Cox vs. Kean) by a jury in 1825, Kean was punished by being "tried" again in the theater. Macready, in contrast to Kean, led a morally exemplary life, and never gave an audience cause to show its displeasure at him personally, either by his off-stage behavior. He despised being at the mercy of the public, but he kept his contempt for his profession confined to his diaries.

The way that audiences punished playwrights was by damning their plays. The audience served as a mass judge and jury for each new production, and did not hesitate to exercise their right to mercilessly "damn" a piece that failed to please them. Turin, Lamb, and Godwin are three dramatic authors who experienced this brutal form of punishment. Knowles experienced it too when his comedy The Beggar's Daughter of Bethnal Green (sandwiched between William Tell and Alfred the Great) failed to please a Drury Lane audience in the fall of 1828 in spite of a strong cast.[136] "It was quite certain that the author had ill-wishers in the house, who very early commenced their operations of damnation," writes a reviewer in the Morning Chronicle, and

[136] The Beggar of Bethnal Green, Knowles's first comedy, was produced in 1828. The cast included Ellen Tree as Bess, Farren as Old Small, Liston as Young Small, d Cooper as Wilford, Bess's lover, and Mrs. Faucit as Queen Elizabeth.

"it was not without a good deal of interruption [by 'hisses, cat-calls, and cries of 'Off,' 'Off'"] that the piece was brought to a close."[137] The damnation of his first comedy was a decisive experience in Knowles's development as a dramatist, influencing him to turn away from historical drama. It occurred at a time when financial need led him to consider giving up the writing of drama altogether. The experience of failure stimulated Knowles to re-dedicate his energies to writing a comedy that would be applauded rather than hissed--The Hunchback was the triumphant result.[138]

Managers were punished by having their theater torn part. This most serious form of audience disapproval--called a riot--occurred about every ten years in the patent houses.[139] From the early eighteenth century, riots in the theater were a traditional outlet for venting emotion and engaging in a ritual of destruction: the tearing apart of pit benches, pulling down of curtains, or breaking of chandeliers. But

[137] Morning Chronicle, no date, quoted in Life 72. The quotation is taken from a detailed account of the play's reception.

[138] See Life 74. Knowles's son says that his father had written to a leading publishing house in Edinburgh offering to write a history of the Spanish Inquisition. .

[139] For a survey of theater riots in the London patent theaters in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see St. Vincent Troubridge, "Theatre Riots in London," Studies in English Theatre History (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1952) 84-97; Stephen Tait, "English Theatre Riots," Theatre Asts, 24 (Feb. 1940) 97-104.

audiences did not normally riot without good reason. On September 18, 1809, when the newly-built Covent Garden opened, a faction of the audience believed it had abundant reasons to register its outrage: the conversion of gallery space to private boxes, the raising of pit prices, and the engagement of a famous Italian soprano at an exorbitant fee--to list them in order of importance. These began the issues that sparked the most momentous theater riots in the history of the English theater, known as the O.P. (for "Old Price") riots. Nothing reveals the assertive nature of early nineteenth-century audiences better than these riots. They dwarf all previous theatrical riots in their scope and duration, but were different in kind from eighteenth century riots in being organized and non-violent.[140] which wracked Kemble's new Covent Garden the first night it opened on September 12, 1809 (Fig. 29) and continued for sixty-six successive nights thereafter.[141]is commonly acknowledged that these riots were the most determined and persistent assertion of rights that John Bull as theatergoer had ever made in

[140] For example, the Chinese Festival Riots of 1755 , the most destructive riots during Garrick's management of Drury Lane. Named after the French ballet that provoked them, they lasted six nights culminating in a ritual of destruction on the last night that left the theater in a shambles--See Stone, The London Stage, 1747-1776, clxxxiv. See also St. Vincent Troubridge, "Theatre Riots in London," Studies in English Theatre History, 1952, 91-2.

[141] Kemble was an owner of one sixth of the shares as well as the actor-manager of the theater.

the history of the English theater. Through these riots, a faction of the public made its will known that it considered itself entitled to a voice in the management of the theater. It was particularly outraged at the increase in the number of private boxes, which was interpreted as a catering to the wealthy at the expense of John Bull.

Riots were invariably were successful in achieving their purpose, and the O.P. riots were no exception. In the end, management complied with all of the rioters' demands: they rescinded the price increases, removed the offending boxes, and disengaged the Italian singer succeeded in wearing the proud and inflexible Kemble down and forcing him to bend to its will. He delivered a humiliating public apology to the audience from the stage. Some theater historians have ventured to generalize about the larger significance of management's capitulation to the O.P. rioters. George Rowell writes, for example, that the success of rioters "mark the triumph of mob-rule in the English theater."[142] Nicolson Watson writes that the victory of the O.P.ers signified "the triumph of democracy."[143] Booth speaks for many theater historians when he stresses the class-

[142] Rowell, 3.

[143] Nicholson Watson, Sheridan to Robertson, 9.

consciousness that underlay these epic and highly theatrical riots:

> A series of nightly disturbances originating in the pit over a two-month period during which the rioters shouted, blew catcalls, sounded rattles, jeered, danced, waved banners and battled the management's hired bruisers, was a certain indication of class antagonism operating in the theatre auditorium.[144]

But Elaine Hadley cautions against "applying a strict class analysis to the O.P." because it "dehistoricizes the conflist" and "identifies the participants in terms that they would not recognize." "The O.P. faction was not a proletarian consciousness. . . . It did not represent any class; it opposed the emergent idea of class," writes Hadley.[145] The most extensive and penetrating analysis of the riots is found in Marc Baer's recent book Theatre and Disorder in Late Georgian London. Bauer also opposes the interpretation that the riots were the manifestation of a class-consciousness. Instead, he stresses the existence of a "popular constitution,"[146] held by patricians and plebeians alike, according to which "a public theatre was public prop-

[144] Revels 6: 9.

[145] Elaine Hadley, "The Old Price Wars: Melodramatizing the Public Sphere in Early-Nineteenth-Century England," PMLA 107 (1992): 528.

[146] Baer 79.

erty."[147] According to this constitution, the people had a traditional "right to respond to unwanted innovation with disapprobation and negotiation"[148] in the name of "'cheap theatre.'"

In Baer's words, "the upheaval was brought on by an autocrat so intoxicated with his ability to have his own way on the stage that he trampled the rights of the audience."[149] That autocrat, John Philip Kemble, was identified with the Establishment[150] and attacked as "greedy, obstinate, and insolent."[151] The O.P.ers viewed themselves as representatives of John Bull and saw their protest as "the attempt to preserve the audience's freedom against a theatrical tyrant."[152] In lampoons and prints, Kemble was likened to Napoleon. The actor-manager argued in vain from the stage that the cost of rebuilding the theater justified of the price rises. The audience would have none of "laissez-faire" capitalism. Through an organized campaign of peaceful but ritualized protest that reduced the stage

[147] Baer 76.

[148] Baer 77.

[149] Baer 69.

[150] Kemble, one sixth owner of Covent Garden, served as a symbol of the management.

[151] Baer 71.

[152] Baer, 79.

performances to dumb-show, the rioters persisted in asserting their rights.

The riots, which had the quality of a theatrical performance, were the talk of all London, even temporarily eclipsing interest in the progress of the war. Events inspired a flood of phamplets, most of which were polemical. But some conveyed the theatricality of the events, as, for example, the phamplet entitled, "THE UPROAR! or John Bull and the manaer. A melo drame, performed six nights, with unbounded applause, at the Theater Royal, Covent-Garden; with the choruses, and accompaniments for the horn and song, called John Bull's concert."[153] Interest in the night-by-night melodrama was not limited to the metropolis. It extended to the nation-at large, which was kept abreast of news as it occurred. Knowles had left London and was acting in a circuit company in Ireland at the time of the riots, so he could not have witnessed or participated in events first hand. Nevertheless, one can be certain that he followed the course of the riots with keen interest. The riots sent a clear message to actors and managers alike: they were the servants of the public, and when they forgot that

[153] James Fullarton Arnott and John William Robinson, English Theatrical Literature, 1559-1900: A Bibliography (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1970) 1282.

fact they would be punished. This was the attitude of the audience for which Knowles wrote.

C. Actors and Acting

It is axiomatic that stage plays are dependent on actors for their success. This dependency was greater the early nineteenth century than it is now because acting was more virtuosic at that time and theaters operated on a repertory system. In Booth's words,

> In any consideration of nineteenth-century drama we must never forget the skill of the great actors in transforming what today seem pages of lifeless and unreadable text into *tours de force* which electrified audiences and stirred memories years after the event.[154]

In a repertory theater, as Robert D. Hume points out, a special relationship exists between actors and audiences:

> the same actors again and again, and there is a special pleasure in seeing how they will adapt themselves to different roles, and in returning to savor the details of an interpretation one knows well. To read a playtext from this period without an appreciation of the actors who mounted it--and for whom it was usually specifically tailored--is to rob oneself of one of the best ways of

[154] Booth, *Prefaces*, 18.

> understanding the potentialities of the roles.[155]

Thus, as Hume writes, "*Know the actors* is an excellent piece of advice for readers." Without a knowledge of the particular actors who performed in specific plays it is impossible to fully appreciate the appeal these plays had for their original audiences.

Male star actors dominated the early-nineteenth century theater, just as they did in the eighteenth century. In what was an actor's theater, more often than not, playwrights wrote for male rather than female stars because male stars--especially if they were actor-managers--were in a position of power to have their play produced. Star actresses like Mrs. Siddons and later Miss O'Neill did not have equivalent power, although they proved many times over that a female could fill a house as well as a male. Generally speaking, the male talent outshined that of the female during the time Knowles was writing. This was partly owing to the fact that young female actresses at the height of their fame prematurely retired from the stage--which still had a social stigma attached to it--after receiving attractive offers of marriage. Miss O'Neill and

[155] Robert D. Hume, "The Multifarious Forms of Eighteenth-Century Comedy," in The Stage and the Page: London's "Whole Show" in the Eighteenth-Century Theatre (Berkeley: U of California P, 1981) 28.

Fanny Kemble are two of the most famous cases in point. One of the reasons that Knowles began his career by writing historical plays may well have been because their heroic action made them natural vehicles for a male star. Knowles only turned to writing non-historical plays, oriented toward a female lead, once he established his reputation, and therefore could afford to be more independent of Macready. His first "heroine" play was The Hunchback, written immediately after Alfred the Great.[156]

However high his own valuation, the early nineteenth-century playwright had no choice but to accept his subservience to the star actor. It was not until the late nineteenth century that the dramatist shed his lowly status and became the master in the theater. The playwright's subservience is reflected in the average playbill of the period on which the author's name is conspicuously absent.[157] In the bills advertising Virginius, Caius Gracchus, William Tell, Alfred the Great, Knowles's name, as one would expect, does not appear. William Tell (CG, 1825), for example,

[156] An exception were several of the plays of Richard Lalor Sheil (e.g., The Apostate and The Hugonet, which were written as vehicles Miss O'Neill, during her brief tenure as an actress. In fact, so closely was Sheil's playwriting tied to Miss O'Neill that he stopped writing plays not long after she retired from the stage to marry. Milman's Fazio is another play written expressed for Miss O'Neill.

[157] It should be noted that many dramatists preferred to have their play advertised anonymously in case it failed.

was advertised as being by "the Author of Virginius." It was only after Knowles had established a reputation and his name had drawing power that his name appeared on the playbills, first in small letters (The Wrecker's Daughter, DL, 1836) and then prominently, in bold type (e.g., Woman's Wit; or, Love's Disguises (CG, 1838) and Love (CG, 1839).[158]

While authors' names were generally omitted from playbills, it is worth noting that those of musicians, scene-painters, decorators and costumers who contributed to the production were scrupulously included. The names of these contributors to the production--along with their particular contribution--were listed on the playbill after the actors. Another sign of the playwright's subservient status was the fact that reviewers often omitted his name in a review of his play.

The hierarchy that placed the playwright below the star actor reflected a simple fact of theatergoing in the early nineteenth century: namely, that playgoers came to the theater to see their favorite actor play a particular part rather than to see the play. For example, audiences came to see Kemble as Rolla, Coriolanus

[158] Information about playbills is based on an examination of the playbills in the Harvard Theater Collection.

or Pendruddock,[159] Mrs. Jordan as Peggy,[160] Miss O'Neill as Isabella,[161] Kean as Shylock, Richard III, and Sir Giles Overreach (Fig. 32),[162] Charles Mayne Young as Rienzi, or Macready as Wosley, Virginius, or William Tell.[163]The Edinburgh Review declared in 1833,

> People go not so much to see the play, as to see the great performer who give effect and celebrity to some particular character in it. The common language of society corresponds with this practice. The performer, and not the play, is the usual inducement which we hear persons hold out to others. 'Virginius' and 'Rienzi' are two of our most successful modern tragedies; yet what is the language of those who would advise others to go and see them? 'You will like Macready's acting in 'Virginius'--'By all means see Young in 'Rienzi'--as if these dramas were mere vehicles for exhibiting to advantage the talents of the actor.[164]

Significantly, the reviewer concludes his observations with the statement, "the author is . . . unfairly defrauded by society of the consideration due to him."[165] Knowles, fortunately, did not suffer this fate.

[159] In Cumberland's Wheel of Fortune.

[160] In Garrick's adaptation of Wycherley's The Country Girl.

[161] In Milman's Fazio.

[162] In Massinger's A New Way to Pay Old Debts.

[163] In Shakespeare's Henry VIII.

[164] The Edinburgh Review (July, 1833) 57: 311.

[165] The Edinburgh Review, 311.

Star consciousness was, of course, as present in the theater of Garrick as it was in that of Kemble and Kean, but in the early nineteenth century it became extreme, especially after Kean's sudden rise to stardom. The more power that a star actor arrogated to himself, the more subservient the playwright's status became. The supremacy of the star actor over the dramatist also had financial consequences for the author. It was generally deplored that the beleaguered patent theaters, now a captive of the star system, were forced to pay more than ever for star actors but less for five-act plays. The star system forced managers to pay star actors exorbitant sums; Kean's salary of 50 pounds per performance was the most egregious example. This left the managers with less money to pay authors, as R.B. Peake, a playwright who was also the treasurer of Sheridan's Drury Lane, attests: "the individual [star] is paid such a monstrous sum for his nightly performance that the manager is incapacitated from giving a proper remuneration to the author."[166] Decrying the star system at the 1832 inquiry, the playwright Moncrieff lamented that "it has been the ruin of the theaters, and the ruin of the drama."[167]

[166] Richard .B. Peake, Memoirs of the Colman Family, 1840, 1: 414.

[167] 1832 Report, q. 3171.

Theatergoing at the two rival theaters was so star-centered that it occasionally had the character of a gladitorial contest or a prize fight, arousing a kind of "blood" excitement in audiences. The vying of star actors, especially in the same part in two separate productions, was a public sport from 1814 to 1820, when Kean reigned supreme at Drury Lane. Thomas Harris the proprietor of Covent Garden, preoccupied with overthrowing Kean, resorted to what has been called "the foolish game of duplication"[168]--that is, the game of finding an actor who could "out-Kean Kean in Kean's own roles."[169] Such competition was good box-office since it aroused public interest. As a result of this futile effort at imitation a number of talented tragedians--including Conway, Terry, Amherst, Edward, Cobham, and, the best of all the lot, Booth--had their careers on the London stage brought to a premature end because they challenged Kean and were defeated by him. In 1820, for example, Henry Harris mounted a production of King Lear starring Booth to compete with the production starring Kean at Drury Lane. Kean was the clear victor over his talented imitator. Othello lent itself to the spectacle of two actors vying in the same production, one playing Othello, the other Iago. Audiences flocked

[168] Hillebrand 38-39 (check page).

[169] Harry M. Richie, "Kean Versus Macready: Sheridan's Knowles's Virginius, Theatre Survey, 17 (1976) 29.

to see Kean as Othello duel with various challengers: Junius Brutus Booth in 1817, Charles Mayne Young in 1822, and Macready in 1832.[170]

Kean's string of successes over his challengers was brought an end in 1819, when Macready, who was then on the threshold of stardom, challenged him in the part of Richard III. Macready was different from Kean's other challengers in that he possessed his own highly individualized style and held his own against the formerly invincible Kean. "The rival Richards became a great attraction and both theatres were well attended on the nights Kean and Macready played the part," writes FitzSimons. The two rival actors competed again, the same year, as Coriolanus. Kean had wisely not undertaken the role out of fear that the public would compare him disadvantageously to Kemble, who reigned in that role in the memory of veteran playgoers. Macready, therefore, had the field to himself. But once Macready had scored a hit, Kean was obliged to undertake the part, for, in FitzSimon's words, "he could not allow Macready to succeed in a role that he dared not attempt himself."[171] Such was the gladitorial spirit of rivalry that governed the theater of Knowles's time. Then Macready luckily stumbled upon Knowles's Virginius and

[170] Kean also play Othello to his son, Charles Kean's Iago in 1833, but this was not presented in a spirit of rivalry.

[171] FitzSimons 135.

used it to challenge Kean again. In the duel of the two Virginiuses, which is described later, Macready won hands down. Macready's triumph was a turning point for the author and for both rival actors.

Early nineteenth-century playwrights were obliged to tailor their plays for particular actors. As Downer explains,

> plays were shaped to the special talents of the actor, if not in first draft, certainly by first performance. And it was standard procedure for the actor to reshape them with his own pen, guided by the advice of a sort of cabinet of literary friends. The product was a series of vehicles. . . hack-written or custom-tailored, and singularly revealing of the star's peculiar talents and the taste of his audiences.[172]

"The play was chiefly a wagon for a star," writes Donohue, "and the sooner the playwright realized that his task was to fashion such vehicles, in as self-effacing and even self-degrading way, the sooner he achieved his goal of performance--and counted the proceeds of his benefit night."[173] .

Since star actors looked upon new plays are vehicles for the enhancement of their reputation and had the power to change texts in any way they saw fit in order to display their peculiar talents and please

[172] Downer 61.

[173] Donohue, Dramatic Character in the Romantic Age, 7.

audience taste, it was natural that the vanity of star actors would clash with the pride of literary authors.[174] Many authors were understandably ambivalent about writing for the stage. Sir Walter Scott was repelled by the idea of having to write "for low, ill-informed and conceited actors, whom you must please, for your success is necessarily at their mercy. . ."[175] Byron felt the same way. With obvious distaste, Byron told Medwin,

> one must write for particular actors, have them continually in one's eye, sacrifice character to the personating of it, cringe to some favourite of the public, neither give him too many nor too few lines to spout, think how he would mouth such and such a sentence, look such and such a passion, strut such and such a scene. Who, I say, would submit to all this?[176]

However, most writers were not troubled by Byron's scruples, and were willing to "submit to all this." For all his protestations against having to write with one eye on the star actor, Byron himself was inspired to write for the stage by Kean's acting.[177] So were many other writers: Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats among

[174] Based on Downer, 61.

[175] From The Private Letter-Books of Sir Walter Scott, ed. Wilfred Partington, 1930, quoted in Revels, 6: 194.

[176] Webb, 42.

[177] See Peter J. Manning, "Edmund Kean and Byron's Plays," in Keats-Shelley Journal 21 or 22? (1972-73) 188-206.

them. All desired to secure Kean in the leading parts of their plays. Robertson Davies, therefore, gives a rather misleading impression that authors were fastidiousness about having their texts tampered with by actors when he states that "most writers were willing, and perhaps more than willing, to have their plays shown on the stage if the theatrical folk would respect their texts."[178] Few authors possessed such literary vanity; most who submitted their plays to a theater did so with the expectation that their texts would be cut and altered, sometimes drastically, in performance. Most authors accepted alteration as the price that they had to pay for having their play performed. Many wisely deferred to the star actor's theatrical judgment because they knew that the actor was more saavy about the theater than they. Many authors willingly gave the actors carte blanche to cut their text as much as they saw fit. Coleridge, for example, was so lacking in literary vanity that the actors of the greenroom dubbed him "the amenable Author." In his own words, he showed either an "utter indifference or prompt facility in sanctioning every omission that was suggested" during the rehearsals of Remorse.[179] Knowles was also an

[178] Revels, 6: 193.

[179] Coleridge, Collected Letters, ed. E.L. Griggs, 3: 428, 432, quoted in Timothy Webb, "The Romantic Poet and the Stage," in The Romantic Theatre, ed Cave, 15.

"amenable" author. Like Coleridge, he was devoid of autorial vanity and disposed toward displaying a "prompt facility" in agreeing to Macready's suggestions during his long and fruitful partnership with that star actor.

Star actors prized good original tragedies as vehicles by which they could advance their reputations and many dramatists obliged by writing plays for male stars like Kemble, Kean and Macready and female stars like Mrs. Siddons and Miss O'Neill. The need for new plays was as great for the established star as it was of the up-and-coming one, which is the main reason Kean felt obliged to perform as Virginius. Shakespearean roles were the touchstones of judgment, but they were not sufficient in themselves to keep an actor's reputation fresh and growing in the public's eye. Star actors needed parts they could call their own. In Downer's words,

> To an ambitious actor, the playwright was second only to the manager in ensuring his progress. To have a personal vehicle, a star part especially designed for his talents, was a necessity in a profession that prospered by dividing its efforts between metropolitan repertory and starring engagements in the provinces.[180]

[180] Downer 23.

When viewed from an actor's perspective, Knowles plays are properly considered as star vehicles of this kind. In fact, Knowles wrote Caius Gracchus and Virginius for Kean, and William Tell and Alfred the Great for Macready. As one might expect, the respective plays are admirably suited to the performance styles of the two actors.

Now that the virtuoso style of acting of which Kean and Macready were exponents has long vanished, modern readers tend to fail to discriminate between one virtuoso style an another, as if they were all roughly the same. But it is wrong to speak, as theater historians sometimes do, in generalized terms of the obsolete "virtuoso old school style"[181] of early nineteenth century actors. Such homogeneity obscures the fact that early nineteenth-century acting styles--tragic and comic--were highly individualized. Generally speaking, in the years when Knowles was developing into a mature dramatist the formal, declamatory style of acting was being supplanted by styles that were expressive, psychological, and illustrative, a development that affected the interpretation of character.[182] In the first two decades of the half-century the stage

[181] James Thomas, The Art of the Actor-Manager: Wilson Barrett and the Victorian Theatre (Ann Arbor: UMI Research P) 4.

[182] [Add Note: On acting style, see articles by Downer]. The compatibility of Knowles's verse style and Macready's acting style is discussed in Chapter 4.

was "dominated. . . by two great exponents of strongly contrasted acting styles, Kemble and Kean."[183] Kemble was an exponent of the declamatory "classical" style that earned him the epithet, "the last of the Romans." Kemble's dignified style was perpetuated during the years London was gripped by "Kean fever" by his protege Charles Mayne Young. Kean's style was radically different, more psychological and "romantic."[184] In this sense, the two actors can be said to represent two different "schools" of acting, even though Kean had no disciples. Macready inherited Kemble's title of "Last of the Romans," but possessed a style that was different from both Kemble and Kean, though he was commonly compared to both. It was closer to that of Talma, the French actor. As a youth and young man, Knowles saw both Kemble and Kean perform, but in under very different circumstances. Whereas impression of Kemble's acting was gathered from performances on the stage, his familiarity with Kean's style was gained first hand by performing on the same stage with him during the nearly two years they both acted together as members of Andrew Cherry's circuit company in Ireland and Wales. The

[183] Rowell, Victorian Dramatic Criticism, xv (see BB: Crit. of Vict. Drama).

[184] A summary of contemporary commentary on Kemble and Kean's acting style can be found in Bertram Joseph, The Tragic Actor (New York: Theatre Arts, 1959) 186-218 and 265-279, respectively.

influence of Kean, and then Macready on Knowles's dramatic career is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 2

Writing for the Star Actor

Knowles was stagestruck at the age of eleven when he was brought to see his first play. His first opportunity to see the superstars Kemble and Sarah Siddons perform on a regular basis came after he left home at age sixteen in 1800 and moved to London, where he lived until 1808.[185] The two Kembles, brother and sister, then reigned supreme as king and queen of the English stage at Drury Lane and were at the peak of their powers, often playing together in the same play.[186] After 1802 they reigned from Covent's Garden's stage. At age twenty-four, turning his back on a lucrative career in medicine, Knowles left London to follow the calling of his heart--the stage--without having any realistic notion of the arduous apprenticeship which aspiring actors must undergo to learn their craft.

Knowles was soon forced to face the difficulty of achieving the goal which he set for himself. It was

[185] It is clear, for example, that he saw Miss O'Neill play the part of Belvidira in Otway's Venice Preserv'd from the reference to her pronouncation of the monosyllable "No," when she replies to Jaffier's question of whether or not she is afraid--Lectures on Oratory, 64.

[186] Kemble (1757-1823) managed Drury Lane from 1788 to 1796 and again from 1800-1802; he managed Covent Garden from 1802 until shortly before his retirement in 1817.

brought home to him by two failures, at the Theatre Royal at Bath--the traditional stepping stone to a London career--and at Dublin's Crow Theater, where he ambitiously performed the role of Hamlet. These failures made him painfully aware, apparently for the first time, of the limitations of his talent and, not incidentally, the high price he had paid socially as a result of his decision to depend on the theater for his livelihood.[187] Later in life, after he had become a famous dramatist, Knowles passed judgment on his own extreme naivete as young idealist when delivered this admonition to "young aspirants to the stage":

> A young man is fascinated by the applause with which an actor is received. He hears of such and such a man who has made a fortune on the stage, and he thinks it a most delightful way to make a fortune. He soon finds out power residing in himself which entitles him to the top of the tree, and he quits the dreary craft or business to which his anxious friends would have him devote himself, and which, if followed, would ensure him comfort, if not affluence, to enter on a pursuit not only the most precarious and deceitful, but absolutely the most laborious which any man can embrace; and worst of all, a pursuit which abounds with impediments to the success of real talent, such as nothing but extraordinary good luck can possible surmount. He thinks that when he commences actor, he shall have nothing to do but enact Hamlet, Macbeth, etc.[188]

[187] Note on Lamb.

[188] Knowles, Lectures on Oratory 134c.

"What a tragedy he is preparing for himself!" declared Knowles. These words are transparently autobiographical. So too is the detailed description of the professional rigors of the life of a beginning provincial player:

> He has to master every walk in the profession--pantomime, melodrama, farce, comedy, tragedy. . . . and then the various kinds of business which he must play. To-night a country boy, to-morrow night a walking-gentleman, next night a gentleman's servant, the night after a fop, the night after that an old man; perpetually "shifting his walk," as it is called, at the caprice or for the convenience of the manager.[189]

Pride prevented Knowles from returning to London in defeat. Instead, he joined various circuit companies to gain much needed acting experience as a provincial player. Circuit companies, of which there were many good ones in the first decade of the nineteenth century, were excellent schools for aspiring actors, for they were looked upon by the London managers as training grounds for London talent. They had not yet degenerated into the kind of company depicted by Dickens in Nicholas Nickleby. By serving an apprenticeship in one or more of these companies a talented actor could learn and hone his craft before live audiences of all kinds. The best actors of the age--including John

[189] Knowles, Lectures on Oratory 134c.

Philip Kemble and Sarah Siddons had served such an apprenticeship, enduring in the process a "life of vagabondage and privation,"[190] before receiving the opportunity to make a bid for fame before a London audience.[191] Knowles's appeal as an actor lay in his earnestness, passion, and a "gift for effective speech."[192] But he also had a good singing voice (inherited from his mother) which was a prized talent in a theater that was becoming increasingly musicalized.[193] Knowles's career as an actor-singer appears to have progressed as well as could be expected during his roughly three years as a provincial actor. He played secondary parts and attained a certain status as a "principal singing gentleman," but it appears that because of his limited talent he could progress so far and no further.[194] In performing before audiences on a regular basis, Knowles gained valuable practical expe

[190] Hershel Baker, John Philip Kemble, 25.

[191] The provincial apprenticeship of actors varied greatly: for Kemble, it was only seven years; for his sister, longer, and it is well known that she failed in her debut and Drury Lane and returned to the provinces for more experience before her instant stardom at Drury Lane in; Cooke lasted over twenty-seven years, which may be a record for a star; Kean's lasted ten.

[192] Meeks 31.

[193] Knowles, Lectures on Oratory..., 134c.

[194] Hillebrand 63. Knowles's son offers this description of his father as a singer: "he had himself much of the breezy, weatherbeaten look, and off-hand manner of a sailor, and he sant Dibdin's songs with a cheery rolling voice that put you in mind of a wet sail and a flowing sea"--Life, 31-32.

rience in stagecraft and became familiar with the stock repertory as well as with contemporary melodrama and lighter pieces. His familiarity with the theater and its drama was to stand him in good stead when he launched his career as a dramatist in London.

Knowles began his acting apprenticeship with Smithson's company at Wexford, Ireland, in 1809 at age 25. The experience was sobering. Of his less than ebullient state of mind during his one year stay there, Knowles's son writes:

> Now he had an opportunity of realizing all he had sacrificed. He had discovered that success upon the stage is not to be accomplished at a bound, and that he must begin at the bottom of the ladder before he could hope to rise. I cannot doubt that he felt bitterly the mistake he had made. . . .[195]

After marrying a young actress whom he had met in the same company,[196] Knowles quit Smithson's and joined the respected circuit company of Andrew Cherry (immortalized in Byron's "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers"[197]), which

[195] Life, 27.

[196] Knowles married a Miss Catherine Charteris on Oct. 25, 1809.

[197] In the section satirizing the state of the drama, Byron writes: "Shall sapient managers new scenes produce/ From Cherry, Skeffington, and Mother Goose?/ While Shakspeare [sic], Otway, Massinger, forgot,/ On stalls much moulder, or in closets rot?--Byron, Poetical Works (Oxford UP, date) lines 590-593. Cherry was an accomplished actor and minor comic talent whose most successful play was Soldier's Daughter (DL, 1804). Hillebrand says that Cherry left Drury Lane of his own accord because "he preferred to be a king in a small realm rather than a mere subject in a great one"--Hillebrand 50.

covered southern Wales (Swansea, Caermarthen, Havefordwest) and Waterford in Ireland. This was a step up the provincial ladder for Knowles, but more importantly it brought him, by chance, in proximity to Edmund Kean, who had been hired by Cherry a few months before to play leads.[198]

A. Knowles and Kean

When Knowles first met Kean in Cherry's company he was twenty-three and Kean twenty.[199] They immediately became close friends and acted in many plays together (Fig. 31). Kean was then at the half way mark of a ten year provincial apprenticeship which he loathed. During these purgatorial years, one biographer describes him to "a hound straining at the leash"[200] His moderate success at age eleven as a prodigy in London (he was billed in 1801 as "The Celebrated Theatrical Child"[201]) had spoiled him for the provinces. His sights were set on becoming the monarch

[198] Kean was hired by Cherry in June of 1809.

[199] The date of Kean's birth is uncertain, but Knowles was three years older than Kean if one accepts the probable date of November 4, 1787 as Kean's birthdate.

[200] Hillebrand 32.

[201] FitzSimons, 6.

of the English stage, in spite of his diminutive size and stature, both formidable obstacles for a tragic actor. To earn his bread, he had to swallow his pride and endure the humiliation of playing parts in which he was admired but which he personally despised, like Harlequin and Chimpanzee, a monkey role in Perouse, a melodramatic pantomime, instead of the tragic leads he believed he was born to perform. The anodnye of drink was his constant companion during these unhappy years.

Kean's presence in Cherry's company was an extraordinary stroke of good luck for Knowles, as he was then depressed over the lack of opportunity to use his playwriting talent. Knowles was not without playwriting experience (he had composed two verse plays for a group of amateur actors while pursuing his medical career in London), but he was at an impasse and in need of encouragement.[202] Now that he knew his limitations as an actor, acting by itself could not satisfy him. According to R.B. Knowles, "at this time he had such small hope of succeeding as a writer that he had thrown down his pen in despair of lifting it again."[203] Kean saved Knowles from despair and kindled his creative fires through his example, what the son calls the

[202] A Spanish Story and Hersilia, which survive in fragments only, were written in 1806. The latter is a gothic melodrama whose plot hinges on the machinations of a lustful monk to seduce the heroine, Hersilia, an innocent young maid.

[203] Life 31.

"inspiring influence that Kean's acting exercised over the author's mind."[204] Kean, who was not without pretensions to literary talent himself also encouraged him to write a play for him to perform in.[205] The result was Leo, or the Gipsy, a romantic play in five acts. Kean starred as the virtuous hero Leo and Knowles acted the part of Hugo, his base-minded friend. It was a success and, according to one of Kean's early biographers, Kean was so pleased with the play that when he was engaged at Drury Lane he wanted to make his debut in it, but could not locate the manuscript.[206] Knowles's next play, called Brian Boroihme, was the second manifestation of Kean's inspiration, though exactly when it was written and whether or not Kean actually acted the part of Brian, the Celtic king (to Knowles's Voltimer) is not at all clear.[207]

[204] Life 32.

[205] It is claimed that Kean wrote a number of dramatic compositions, including a melodrama called The Cottage Foundling, or, The Robbers of Ancora. All of the manuscripts are lost--see Hillebrand 64.

[206] The play was never published; the first two acts and a portion of the third were published by Procter in his life of Kean. Bryan Procter ("Barry Cornwall")--The Life of Edmund Kean, 1: 147-148.

[207] Based on a play by D. O'Meara of the same name. It was produced on April 20, 1837 at Covent Garden with Knowles as Brian. Hillebrand concludes that Knowles's version of O'Meara's play "owed its existence to Kean," and follows the Life in stating that Kean acted Brian while Knowles acted Voltimer. Hillebrand cites a newspaper notice in the Waterford Mail of a fifth performance of Brian Boroihme on January 30, 1811 (no cast given)--Hillebrand 61. But the Life says that Knowles wrote Brian Boroihme for the Belfast Theater in Talbot's company, after he left Cherry's. If so, Kean could not have acted in it, because when he quit Cherry's

The restless Kean left Cherry's company in a fit of rancor over a salary dispute in 1811, bringing an end to a brief but vital period of partnership between Knowles an actor of genius. During this time, Knowles had acted secondary parts to Kean's leads. For about eight years after Kean's departure, Knowles and Kean were out of touch. Knowles and his wife quit Cherry's company and joined Talbot's company in Belfast. They were by now weary of the acting life, and were seeking an alternative livelihood. Knowles was already the father of a son and another child was on the way; his wife wanted the security of a settled life in which to raise their children. Deliverance from the arduous life of a strolling player came when Knowles was offered a teaching position at a ladies' school in Belfast. By accepting the position, Knowles erased the stigma of being an the equivalent of being a "rogue and vagabond," restored himself to gentlemanly middle class status and insured a sufficient income to support his growing family. The next step was to open his own school, which he soon did. Its success of which led to his being offered the prestigious position of head-

company he crossed the channel for Whitehaven, and thereafter was occupied playing engagements in England up to the time of his Drury Lane debut. There is no record of Kean being in Belfast to play in Knowles's play. If Kean did act the part, it could only have been during the time he and Knowles were together in Cherry's company in 1811. The disparity between accounts had gone unnoticed in Kean biographies.

master of the English Department at the Belfast Academical Institution, an honor he declined, as already mentioned, in order to allow his father to be appointed to the. After Knowles's father proved to be unsuitable, and resigned under pressure, Knowles decided to cut his ties to Belfast and try his fortunes in Glasgow, where he again opened a school that prospered.[208] During his four years in Belfast, Knowles ripened into a mature playwright. He had abandoned acting, but not playwriting and soon showed how quickly his dramatic talent was maturing by writing the tragedy Caius Gracchus, which was performed at the Theatre Royal, Belfast, for which it was written, in February of 1815 "to the rapturous plaudits of a crowded house.[209] Judging from the characterization, language, and dramatic power of the revised version of the play performed at Drury Lane eight years later, Knowles's first Roman play was a significant advance over Leo the Gypsy and Brian Bohoieme. The play may or may not have owed its subject to Kean,[210] but the inspiration of

[208] According to Walter Bayham, Knowles taught "elocution at his own class-rooms in Reid's Court," and received "a good income from his class fees (L 2, 2s. per session"--Walter Bayham, The Glasgow Stage (1892; Benjamin Blom, 1971) 108.

[209] Review in Belfast News-Letter, quoted in Life 64.

[210] Meeks says that "it is not unlikely that Kean suggested the story to Knowles," while admitting that "there is no authority for the statement"--Meeks, "The Life and Dramatic Works of James Sheridan Knowles," diss., 176. Richard Fletcher asserts that Kean suggested the subject (Fletcher 134), but in his dedication to the play Knowles credits one John Patterson with suggesting the subject to him.

Kean's acting was certainly a factor in the sudden ripening of his dramatic talent.

For his part, Kean experienced a prosperity that exceeded anything that anyone who knew him could have predicted, but only after two more years of frustration and suffering as an obscure provincial actor, much of it brought about by a pattern of self-destructive behavior. Against his wife's wishes and subjecting his family to great hardship, Kean clung stubbornly to his seemingly impossible dream of becoming the leading tragedian in England, in spite of being reduced, at one point, to beggary. Fulfilling this dream meant proving his ability before a London audience at either Drury Lane or Covent Garden, but neither theater was interested enough in him to give him a chance to show his genius.

Then Kean suddenly experienced what Hillebrand calls a "change of fortune which has scarcely its equal in the annals of the theatre."[211] His purgatorial wandering came to an end in the fall of 1813 at the Theatre Royal at Exeter. There, by chance, Dr. Joseph Drury, who was a friend of some of the managers of the committee that managed Drury Lane, happened to see him perform, probably in one of his Shakespearean roles.

[211] Hillebrand 88.

Dr. Drury was so impressed that he brought Kean to the attention of the Drury Lane managing committee, which was then in desperate search of a tragedian to save the theater from bankruptcy. There was no risk and little expense involved in attempting to arouse a theatrical public out of its apathy with a new actor, especially one who was not particular about the size of his starting salary. After being observed by the manager of Drury Lane, S.J. Arnold, in November of 1813, Kean accepted the modest terms offered and was engaged, with his first appearance to be in a character of his own choice. The road he had travelled had been arduous and embittering. It had cost him the life of his first born son, a boy of four, who died immediately after the contract was signed. Now the long anticipated hour of his triumph in London was at hand, a triumph that would lead, indirectly and unwittingly, to Knowles own triumph as a dramatist six years later.

Knowles and Kean again met, after roughly a separation of seven years, in Glasglow in 1818, where the now famous actor had come to star at the city's Theater Royal.[212] Kean had fulfilled his seemingly overweening ambition of becoming the uncontested monarch of the English stage. He had challenged Kemble, the reigning king of tragedy, for the crown in February of 1814, a

[212] This was Kean's second engagement in Glasgow. His first occurred in 1815, while Knowles was still in Belfast.

month after his debut as Shylock in a dramatic duel in the part of Richard III. Byron had missed Kean's debut as Shylock on January 26, 1814 at Drury Lane, but saw his Richard III on February 19. "By Jove, he is a soul! Life--Nature--truth without exaggeration or diminution," Byron declared in awe.[213] Byron's ardent reaction is representative of the electrifying effect that Kean's new style of "romantic" acting had on London. Douglas Jerrold described his Shylock as impressing audiences "like a chapter in Genesis."[214] In 1814, the classical style, which Kemble had revived in reaction against Garrick's naturalism, was ripe for overthrowing and the original and passionate Kean was the instrument of its overthrow. In 1816, Kean again soundly defeated Kemble in another duel when the latter, now on the defensive, foolishly challenged the challenger in the role of Sir Giles Overreach. Kemble retired from the stage the next year and it is accurate to say that his own failure and Kean's astounding success as Sir Giles helped drive him into retirement. Once Kemble retired, the crown was Kean's to wear without dispute.

Knowles's remarks on Kemble and Kean (as well as other actors) are recorded in his lectures. It is clear

[213] Letters and Journals, 2, 385-386, quoted in Peter Manning, "Edmund Kean and Byron's Plays," Keats-Shelley Journal (21 or 22), 1972 or 1973, 189..

[214] Douglas Jerrold, quoted in FitzSimons 2.

that he did not share Hazlitt's nostalgia about Kean's displacement of Kemble: "We wish we had never seen Mr. Kean," Hazlitt wrote in 1816. "He has destroyed the Kemble religion; and it is the religion in which we were brought up."[215] Like most of the Romantics writers--as indeed, Hazlitt himself--Knowles favored the more natural style of Kean over the mannered, classical school of Kemble, a style of "musical declamation"[216] which derived from Betterton. Knowles admired "the noblest Roman of them all," but would have agreed with Hazlitt's characterization of him as an "icycle on the bust of tragedy." He found Kemble's face, figure, and the dignity and grace with which he moved impressive, but objected to his "sententious, pompous, measured delivery, seldom bowing to the dictates of ever-varying nature."[217] By "measured delivery," Knowles is referring to the slow, sing-song recitation of Kemble's declamation, often a subject of ridicule, as in the following anonymous verses:

> His solemn voice, like death-bell heard afar,
> Or death-watch clicking in an old crackt jar,
> He measures out monotonous and slow,
> In--one--dull--long--sing--song--to--joy--or--woe.

[215] William Hazlitt, The Examiner, October 27, 1816.

[216] Ludvig Tieck's term, quoted in Hillebrand, 332.

[217] Knowles, Oratory, 131-132.

[218] Thespiad, 16, quoted in Baker, 254.

In contrast, Knowles found Sarah Siddons thrilling. She was for him, as Reynolds painted her, an embodiment of Melpomene, the Tragic Muse, and the touchstone by which all tragic acting should be judged. He described her acting as "one continuous flashing of intensely excited imagination," and remarked that "one would almost think as soon of looking for another Shakespeare, as looking for another Siddons."[219] He may well have said the same thing about Kean.

In a welcoming tone, Knowles wrote that Kean's "style forms a new era in the history of acting in our times."[220] It is commonly acknowledged that the style of Kean's acting was romantic.[221] Knowles, of course, does not use the word "romantic" to describe Kean's acting style. He speaks of Kean's "transcendent . . . power," a power which enabled the actor to triumph over

[219] Knowles, Macbeth, 18, 17. "Her scenes. . . were one continuos flashing of intensely excited imagination,"and one would almost think as soon of looking for another Shakespeare, as looking for another Siddon." His references to Mrs. Siddon's acting (Elvira in Sheridan's Pizarro, Zara in Young's tragedy, and the Shakespearean characters Volumnia and Lady Macbeth) indicates that he saw Mrs. Siddons act in these parts.

[220] Lectures, 134a, in a lecture delivered before a Belfast audience in 1822.

[221] For example, see Donald J. Rulfs, "Romantic Writers and Edmund Kean," Modern Language Quarterly (11), 1950 436; Downer, PMLA (61) 1946; 522. Downer writes that "Edmund Kean and William C. Macready represent the earlier and later stage of romanticism as accurately as Shelley and Tennyson"--522.

"all the impediments of a defective figure."[222] He speaks also of Kean bringing the stage "into a closer resemblance with that of nature," meaning that he approved of Kean's non-elocutionary style.[223] What gave Kean's acting the impression of being close to "nature" was his ability to identify inwardly with the character he was playing and to project his intuitive grasp of the parts he played with intensity and passion. According to Joseph, Kean "seized intuitively on those parts which suggested themselves to him immediately and made them live intensely and dominate the whole."[224]

One aspect of Kean's extraordinary technique that was highly effective in projecting "naturalness" was, to use Joseph's words again,

> his custom of changing suddenly from the grand style to the familiar in speaking. On the one hand, the energy and intensity of his grand manner compelled conviction; on the other, the manner into which he changed was 'easy, conversational and unstagey'; the two manners when combined, were unique in their impact.[225]

It goes without saying that this is a different kind of naturalism than is meant when the word is used today.

[222] Knowles, Lectures 134b.

[223] Lectures, 134.

[224] Joseph 264.

[225] Joseph 272.

Kean's forte was "rapidity and energy."[226] In contrast, Kemble's careful, studied style aimed at an "ideal of a consistently developing intensity [that] allowed for changes from long periods of quiet to sudden and tremendous outbursts of passion, but not for swift transitions from one emotion to another" of which Kean was a master.[227] Kean's sudden changes in voice, it should be keep in mind, were accompanied with subtle facial changes, sometimes "fluently melting into one another,"[228] which coordinated exactly with his vocal transitions. Hazlitt said of these pantomimic changes that they were "the index to his mind."[229] With his "perfect muscular control,"[230] Kean could make even the a sudden transition of emotion of the most extreme kind (e.g., from "vehemence to familiarity"[231]) seem totally natural, and he was extremely fond of displaying his skill in this respect. He could rely on it make "points" that elicited applause for their originality. Owing to the frequency with which Kean employed this startling effect, which could cause men as women to

[226] FitzSimons 56.

[227] Joseph 193.

[228] Lewes, quoted in Joseph 274.

[229] Hazlitt, quoted in Joseph 273.

[230] Joseph 275.

[231] G.H. Lewes 18. Lewes criticized Kean for being "fond, far too fond, of abrupt transitions."

faint, Kean's detractors criticized these aspects of his style as violent and spasmodic. But Hazlitt praised it for "giving perpetually fresh shocks of delight and surprise."[232]

Kean's comparatively natural style of acting was not totally new to Knowles. As a young man, he had seen natural acting from George Frederick Cooke, who is commonly considered to be "the first exponent, in the nineteenth century, of 'natural' tragic acting."[233] Kean may be considered a disciple of the much older Cooke, even though he claimed never to have seen him act.[234] There is a clear line of descent from Garrick and Macklin to Cooke and Kean,[235] and Kean clearly belonged to what Knowles called the "school of Cooke."[236] Knowles praised Cooke highly for the "vigor" and "nature" of his acting, but he also criticized him

[232] Hazlitt, 5: 179, in Donohue, Theatre, 4.

[233] Hillebrand 331. Cooke's biographer, Don B. Wilmeth, maintains that Cooke "deserves to be remembered as the precursor of the romantic style embodied by, and historically credits to, Edmund Kean. . ."--Don B. Wilmeth, George Frederick Cooke: Machiavel of the Stage (Westport: Greenwood P, 1980) 3.

[234] Hillebrand's view is that the close resemblances between their acting (e.g., their interpretation of Shylock and Richard III) is "liked to have resulted from adoption by Kean of some matters of business developed by Cooke, which would be common theatrical knowledge."

[235] Don B. Wilmeth, Cooke's biographer, contends that Cooke "deserves to be remembered as the precursor of the romantic style embodied by, and historically credited to, Edmund Kean--George Frederick Cooke: Machiavel of the Stage 3.

[236] Knowles, Lectures on Oratory 132.

for his "coarse" and "rough" delivery.[237] Compared to Cooke, Knowles found Kean to be more refined, in spite of his love of abrupt transitions. He praised the "modulation" of Kean's voice as being "the most melodious that I ever heard"--a remark that evokes Keat's later remark that Kean's "tongue must seem to have robbed 'the Hybla bees and left them honeyless.'"[238]

In preferring the romantic Kean over the classical Kemble, Knowles aligned himself with the non-declamatory school of acting, the school that was in accord with his own pedagogical principles of conversational delivery. As his lectures on oratory clearly reveal, Knowles was a champion of natural over artificial elocution--which made him a lifelong pedagogical antagonist of his own father, who had been trained in the "old school" of elocution by Thomas Sheridan himself. Above all, Knowles urged the elocutionist (a category in which he included the actor as well as the orator and divine) "to cultivate the language of nature." He regarded the "fine tones, well-ordered inflections, correctly varied pitch, and all the rest" as "quite a secondary consideration."[239] Graceful

[237] Knowles, Lectures on Oratory 132-133.

[238] Knowles, Lectures on Oratory 134. Keats, quoted in Rulfs, 429.

[239] Knowles, Lectures on Oratory 64.

delivery was, for Knowles, always subordinate to the expression of feeling.[240] Knowles's preference for a "naturalistic" or conversational elocution is a key to understanding his own style, especially the "touches of nature" and other effects which required the style of an actor like Kean or Macready for their realization.

The 1818 reunion, the first since their lean circuit days, was a disappointment for Knowles, who was again in need of encouragement from Kean. Knowles's playwriting talent had lain dormant for want of hope since he had moved to Glasgow, and it was natural for him to hope that now that Kean was in a position to "do him a good turn"[241] he would do so. Full of expectation, he showed Kean the manuscript of Caius Gracchus only to be told by Kean that he was awash in unread manuscripts of tragedies, as if Knowles's play were not deserving of special consideration. Kean did offer to read it but the author was so put off my his friend's lofty airs and coolness that he bid Kean goodday and too his manuscript with him.

The "spoiled hero"[242] apparently had a bad conscience about how he had slighted his friend, for on his next visit to Glasgow the following year he made it

[240] See Lectures on Oratory 61.

[241] Life 65.

[242] Hillebrand 61.

a point to seek Knowles out with the purpose making restitution. He asked Knowles to write a play on the subject of "Virginius" and promised that, if it were accepted for production, he would star in it. This promise rekindled Knowles's creative powers, and he at once set his pen to work on the congenial subject that Kean had proposed, which, in Knowles's son's words, "would open rich veins of feelings" and "appeal to those domestic instincts which were the deepest and strongest in his nature."[243]

Hazlitt observed that "the story of Virginius sacrificing his daughter, in order to preserve her from the lust of the decimvir Appius, is known to every school-boy."[244] The story, lost in the mists of legend, was first told by Livy and retold numerous times since.[245] In the late eighteenth century, it was a popular subject for dramatic treatment on the stage and in the closet, both on Continent and in Britain.[246] During this period, several tragedies based on the story were seen on British stage, but John Webster's remained the most well-known. The story was apparently a favorite of

[243] Life 67.

[244] Hazlitt, London Magazine, 1820, 693.

[245] The story is first told by Livy in Book III of his History of Rome and later in the Roman Antiquities of Dionysus of Hallicarnsus..

[246] Note on various productions. Closet plays: by Bidlake (1800) and Henry McKenzie.

Kean's, whose preoccupation with it is evident from the fact that he asked three different authors to write a play based on it. The play would differ from Webster's in that the Roman father rather than the villain Appius would be the lead character. The first dramatist to be asked was John Howard Payne, the American-born playwright and author of "Home, Sweet Home." Payne received the commission soon after Kean read his Brutus. After finishing his version of the Virginius story, Payne showed it to Kean, but the actor, according to Montrose Moses, "tossed it aside nonchalantly, and would have nothing to do with it."[247] The rejection, it appears, had more to do with Kean's coolness toward Payne than the merit of the play.[248] Knowles was the second dramatist to be asked.

When Kean suggested that Knowles write a play on the subject of "Virginius" he had just recently enjoyed a phenomenal success in the role of Lucius Junius Brutus in Payne's The Tragedy of Brutus; or, The Fall of Tarquin, a play that catered to what Hillebrand calls the public's "weakness for togas and fasces."[249] It ran for a record-breaking fifty-three consecutive

[247] Montrose J. Moses, Representative Plays by American Dramatists (1925; New York: Benjamin Blom, 1964) 96. Payne's play survives only in a fragment published in the London Magazine.

[248] On Payne's Virginius, see Grace Overmyer, America's First Hamlet (New York: New York U, 1957) 186-188.

[249] Hillebrand 180.

nights in the 1819 season.[250] Payne had written his tragedy expressly for Kean as a vehicle for restoring the actor's waning popularity. Kean was then smarting from his recent failure in Ambrose Philips's The Distressed Mother, a feeble adaptation of Racine's Andromaque.[251] Longing to show the public that his talent was not limited to the representation of villains, he had eagerly accepted it, and it had accomplished its purpose, exceeding the expectations of both actor and author.

One may infer that when Kean suggested the subject of "Virginius" to Knowles, he was, looking for another "Roman play" to follow up on his recent triumph as Brutus and add futher lustre to his reputation. Payne's play owed its sensational popularity to "the wonder of Kean's acting,"[252] but Payne deserves due credit for making the play an appealing vehicle for Kean's talents and for making the story appealing to pre-Victorian audiences. The role of Brutus gave Kean an opportunity to display his genius for projecting abrupt transi-

[250] The run began on January 13, 1819, but this does not count a run of twenty-three consecutive performances when the play first opened on December 3, 1818. It was discontinued on December 27 only because the theater had to honor prior committments. According to Hillebrand, the total receipts for the run were over 10,000 pounds, a most respectable sum for a tragedy.

[251] Influenced by Talma's success in the role of Orestes, Kean performed the part in Philip's play in October, 1819. It was withdrawn after six performances.

[252] Moses, Representative Plays 95.

tions, particularly "his transition from seeming idiocy to intellectual and moral elevation," which the European Magazine described as as "powerful, natural and exaggerated."[253]

The parallel between the stories of Brutus and Virginius is pointed out by Livy, who writes that Appius's lust for Virginia, the chaste daughter of Virginius

> was no less shocking in its consequences than that which had led, through the rape and the death of Lucretia, to the expulsion of the Tarquinii from the city and from their throne; thus not only did the same end befall the decemvirs as had befallen the kings, but the same cause deprived them of their power.[254]

Both stories are concerned with how lust leads to a tyrant's overthrow. The chief difference is that in Tarquin's case, the rape is accomplished; in Appius's it is thwarted through Virginia's death. The rape of Lucrece is the action that transforms Brutus into a political hero and leads to a revolt against Tarquin and the establishment of a republic. In Livy, the death of Virginia to save her from Appius leads to a revolt against the rule of the Decemviri and the re-establishment of the republic. It is noteworthy that in

[253] European Magazine, no date given, quoted in Grace Overmyer, America's First Hamlet 165.

[254] Livy, Book III, 143.

his dramatic treatment of the story, Knowles, whose source was Livy,[255] makes an explicit link between the two stories by having Virginius denounce Appius as a "Second Tarquin" in the Forum scene (4:2). Both Payne's and Knowles's plays end with the "monstrous denouement"[256] of a father killing his only child. The grief-stricken Brutus, placing love of country above paternal love, pronounces the death sentence on his son. The act is both less hideous and less pathetic than seeing a father stab his own daughter, but is analogous. The act of parental sacrifice that gives both plays their primal power is commented on by D-G in his "Remarks" to the Cumberland edition of Virginius:

> Great as was the sacrifice that Brutus made by devoting his offending son to the violated laws of Rome, far greater was that of Virginius, who sacrificed his only child, that had never offended, and with his own arm struck the blow.[257]

Even though Knowles had to steal time from his hectic thirteen your teaching schedule to write, he managed to finish his play in just three months.[258] It

[255] Meeks Sheridan Knowles 67.

[256] Grace Overmyer, America's First Hamlet (Washingon Square: NYU P, 1957) 164.

[257] D--G, "Remarks" to Cumberland edition of Virginius 7.

[258] Life 63. His teaching day began at seven in the morning and ended at ten at night.

is obvious that the play was written as a vehicle for Kean, who was notoriously sensitive to and intolerant of competition from other actors. Knowles made the part of Virginius so prominent that the Monthly Review, in its review of the play, wrote that the play was written "too exclusively (as it would appear) for the appropriate representation of one character."[259] Both the villain and the heroine paled in comparison with the hero. Although Kean was physically not suited to playing Roman heroes, Knowles's characterization of Virginius, aside from the quiet, domestic moments, was tailor-made for the intense style of acting, full of abrupt transitions, at which Kean excelled. There are a number of speeches which suggest that Knowles wrote the part of Virginius with with an eye toward giving Kean the opportunity to display his technique for expressing a variety and wide range of emotions within a short space of time (and perhaps more than one emotion simultaneously).

The epitome of such a speech occurs when Virginius suddenly returns from the wars to confront the slander on his fatherhood and protect his daughter from being taken away from him (4:1). Upon entering, he utters a torrent of words, some of the which are spoken to his brother and Icilius, and others of which are spoken to

[259] Monthly Review, Sept. 1820, 54.

his daughter, all of whom are concerned with calming the excited Virginius down:

> Brother! Icilius! thank you! thank you.
> --All
> Has been communicated to me. Ay!
> And would they take thee from me? Let them try it!
> You've taken your measures well--I scarce could pass
> Along, so was I check'd by loving hands
> Ready to serve me. Hands with hearts in them!
> So thou art Claudius's slave? And if thou art,
> I'm surely not thy father! Blister'd villain!
> You have warn'd our neighbours, have you not, to attend
> As witnesses? To be sure you have. A fool
> To ask the question. Dragg'd along the streets too!
> 'Twas very kind in him, to go himself
> Anyd fetch thee--such an honour should not pass
> Without acknowledgement. I shall return it
> In full! In full!

The broken rhythms of this speech makes it a tour de force for an actor of Kean's virtuoso technique. It abounds in opportunities for displaying his unique ability to make a series of abrupt transitions sound natural through an modulations of voice accompanied by pauses.[260] Within fifteen lines, the actor is called upon to accomplish no less than eight sudden shifts in tone: from authority ("All / Has been communicated to me), to defiance (Let them try it!), to approval ("You've taken your measures well"), to irony ("So thou art Claudius's slave? And if thou art, / I'm surely not thy father!"), to outrage ("Blister'd villain!"), to mild anxiety ("You have warn'd our neighbours, have you

[260] Another speech that affords an opportunity for abrupt transitions is Virignius's soliloquy at the end of 3:5.

not. . .), to self-deprecation ("A fool / To ask the question"), to outrage again ("Dragg'd along the streets too!"), to sarcasm ("'Twas very kind of him . . .), "heroic wrath"[261] shall return it / In full!). But the most unexpected and therefore most effective transition of all comes in Virginius's next line, spoken to his daughter in response to her beseeching words, "Dear father, be advised--Will you not father?" It requires the actor to allow his anger to suddenly melt away and in its place display the most intimate and tender paternal feeling:

> I never saw you look so much like your mother
> in all my life!

"In performance," writes Downer, this last "shift of tone was unexpected, revolutionary, and completely successful."[262] It was a quintessential Knowlesian "domestic touch."

There is an obvious correspondence between Knowles's nervous, abrupt style of writing in this passage (and in the part of Virginius as a whole) and Kean's style of delivery. It can be attributed not only to Knowles's success in tailoring the play to Kean's peculiar talents, but a similarity of temperament between the author and actor. Knowles, like Kean, was

[261] Downer's words for the climax of the speech, 66.

[262] Downer 66.

naturally spontaneous, energetic, and impulsive. As his friend R. Sheldon McKenzie said, he wrote "from the heart, to the heart."[263] One cannot doubt that had Kean acted the part of Virginius in Knowles's play, as Knowles expected him to do, he would have triumphed in the role.

What Knowles did not know as he hurried wrote Virginius was that his perverse friend had asked a third dramatist, George Soane, to write a tragedy on the same subject. It appears that even before Knowles finished his tragedy, Soane's had been accepted (with Kean starring as Virginius) for production at Drury Lane. Presumably, Kean, for whatever reason, favored Soane's tragedy over Knowles's without even reading his friend's play. To his great disappointment, Knowles discovered that his play was not wanted soon after he had completed it. By treating Knowles so shabbily, Kean abruptly put an end to a dramatic partnership that gave great promise of benefiting the actor as well as the author.

Kean had let Knowles down terribly and dashed his hopes, but he had inspired him to write a first-rate acting play. Knowles acknowledged this fact and placed a kind construction on the rejection of his play in a speech delivered to a Belfast audience in 1822,

[263] McKenzie [see intro. for source]

> . . . it is more than probable that but for him, the humble talents which, before they received the London stamp of approbation . . . would have remained to this day--perhaps for ever--unappreciated except by yourselves. Seven years had elapsed since a tragedy of mine had been successfully represented on your boards, without my once resuming the pen. The fact was, I knew it was so difficult for an unknown author to open for himself an avenue to the London theatres, that I wanted sufficient stimulus of hope to excite to labour. That stimulus an actor supplied. At his instance, a play was written. Circumstances certainly prevented its being brought out under his auspices, but I thought it my duty to acknowledge the share he had in bringing it into existence. . . . that actor was Edmund Kean.

Knowles again acknowledged his debt to Kean, this time tearfully, in 1833, the year Kean died, before the Edinburgh Shakespeare Club.[264]

After the Virginius incident Knowles not only did not hold a grudge against Kean, whom he still considered to be his friend,[265] but again wrote a part for Kean to perform. In 1831, Knowles offered The Hunchback to Drury Lane in the hope that Kean would play the part of Master Walter, a much less demanding role than Virginius. But Kean refused, most probably because the lead male part was eclipsed by the lead female part,

[264] Life 31.

[265] Evidence of their continuing friendship occurs is given by Baynham, who mentions that Knowles, in the company of the manager of the Glasgow theater, met a "partially sober" Kean at Greenock, Scotland, when the actor arrived to perform in 1820--The Glasgow Stage 90.

that of his ward Julia.[266] For Kean, being upstaged by another actor in a modern drama was intolerable. The actor expressed his egotistical attitude toward new parts plainly in a letter he wrote to a friend who had submitted a tragedy to him, "unless the entire interest centered in the character, designed for him, it would neither suit his reputation, nor the interests of the Theater, that it should be accepted."[267]

Kean's rejection of Virginius, combined with a stroke of good luck, was to lead Knowles into an unforseen and more fruitful partnership with the twenty-six year old actor who was poised to challenge the older Kean, if not for supremacy at least for recognition as a star in his own right: William Charles Macready. Virginius was to become to be Maceady's stepping stones to stardom. Kean had carelessly let what was to instantly become a highly desirable acting vehicle slip through his fingers. Kean's loss was to become Macready's gain.

B. Knowles and Macready

The names of Knowles and Macready's are inseparably linked in histories of the early-nineteenth

[266] Meeks, Sheridan Knowles 91.

[267] Kean, quoted without source, in Hillebrand 183.

century theater beginning with Virginius, which remained in Macready's permanent repertory until he retired in 1851. In recognition of the professional partnership between between author and actor, R.H. Horne entitled one of the essays in The New Spirit of the Age, "Sheridan Knowles and Macready." Both men, as Horne puts it, "continually exerted themselves to open new springs, or recall the retiring waters." The inclusion of author and actor in the same essay reflects a fact of the 1830s and 40s, namely that "ninety-nine men out of every hundred allude to and think of them when discussing Dramatic Matters."[268] The Knowles-Macready collaboration was advanced the careers of both men. On the one hand, by acting in Knowles's plays, Macready established the author's reputation as a dramatist; on the other, Knowles's plays were important vehicles on which Macready built his reputation as an interpreter in "modern" drama.

Knowles generously acknowledged the enormous debt he owed to Macready publicly in a speech delivered from the stage of the Victoria theater in 1833, just before he departed on his lucrative tour of America. According to one newspaper account of the speech, "Knowles expressed his obligations to Macready. . . observing. . . how deeply he was indebted to him for his success as an

[268] Horne, The New Spirit of the Age 239.

author.[269] The debt began with Virginius, which Macready used his influence to get produced. Had Macready not done so, as Knowles, speaking of himself in the third person, himself put it, "it was a thousand to one that he should never have acquired any name as a dramatist."[270] In Downer's words, "it is a testimony to Macready's sense of time and taste that he recognized the possibilities for success in the work of an unknown playwright."[271]

Fairly detailed accounts of the Knowles-Macready collaboration are found in Alan Downer's standard biography of Macready and an unpublished dissertation by Charles H. Shattuck entitled "The Dramatic Collaboration of William Charles Macready."[272] Both accounts rely heavily on Macready's Reminsicences. Biographers of actors have a natural tendency to treat dramatic authors as adjuncts of actor's careers and their plays as "incidents in the lives of actors and theaters."[273] Downer is no exception; in his biography, Knowles's plays are treated as "incidents" in the

[269] Unidentified newspaper, quoted in Life 115.

[270] Identified second newspaper, quoted in Life 115.

[271] Downer 62.

[272] Charles H. Shattuck, "The Dramatic Collaboration of William Charles Macready," diss. U of Illinois, 1938.

[273] Gary G. Scrimgeour, "Drama and the Theatre in the Early Nineteenth Century," diss., Princeton U, 1968, 92.

career of Macready. This is to be expected. But one may object to the author's partiality for his subject, most evident when he characterizes Knowles as a "hack" dramatist who "managed to deceive even the best of the contemporary critics."[274] More precisely, Downer presents Knowles as the most eminent in Macready's stable of hack playwrights, and the first in point of time.[275] From the biographer's perspective, Knowles is to be valued for providing Macready with "a series of vehicles. . . hack-written or custom tailored, and singularly revealing of the star's peculiar talents and the taste of his audiences."[276]

Downer denies Knowles integrity as a dramatist by lumping him in the same category with such true hacks as T.J. Searle and George Soane, the author of a rival play on the story of "Virginius." The fact that Macready prepared for the stage four of Knowles's plays and that they all proved to be ideal vehicles for him does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that their author was a slavish "hack" writer. Macready must be given enormous credit for his contribution to the success of Knowles's plays. At the same time, his col-

[274] Downer 61.

[275] After enumerating other authors who wrote plays for Macready, Downer states, "Of these hacks Knowles was the first in time and stature"--Downer 61.

[276] Downer 61.

laboration with Knowles deserves to be described without the gratuitous condescension toward Knowles that mars Downer's otherwise admirable account.

The relationship that Macready formed with Knowles in 1820 is notable for being the first of many actor-author partnerships that the actor developed with a number of dramatic authors over the course of his long and distinguished career on the London stage.[277] Once he attained stardom, Macready justly conceived of himself as the high priest of dramatic art and a friend of modern dramatists. Dedicating himself to the cause of the legitimate drama, he became a tireless nurturer of new talent, thus distinguishing himself from both Kemble, his predecessor, and Kean, his rival. Kemble had been so committed to "the treasures of our ancient authors" that he was not a seeker out of new plays--in fact, it may be said that he had an aversion to them.[278] Kean was interested in new plays exclusively as vehicles for his own self-aggrandizement and tended to treat authors shabbily, even if they were his

[277] The subject of Macready's literary relationships with dramatic authors is the subject of a dissertation by Charles Shattuck entitled "The Dramatic Collaboration of William Charles Macready," U of Illinois, 1938. Shattuck's study is devoted to Macready's collaboration with Bulwer and Browning. Other authors are discussed in what Shattuck calls a "skimming survey" arranged chronologically: Knowles, C.E. Walker, Barry Cornwall, Richard Lalor Sheil, Mary Russell Mitford, G.W. Lovell, and Thomas Noon Talfourd.

[278] Baker 126.

friends (as has already been shown in the case of Knowles). His passionate style of acting gave a number of writers the impetus to write a play, but within a few years of his debut it is accurate to say that "his arrogance was discouraging the best contemporary authors from writing for the stage" rather than encouraging them.[279] He lacked Macready's collaborative gift and theatrical vision.

During the decades of the 1820s, 30s, 40s, Macready presided over what Charles Shattuck called "an English dramatic renaissance, which many Englishmen then living thought a great one."[280] He stood at the head of the movement, "dominated and directed it," and "brought the fruit to bear."[281] Most of the writers who aspired to contribute to that renaissance, including Knowles, looked to Macready to embody what Thomas Noon Talfourd called their "noblest conceptions."[282] By the time Macready retired in 1851, he had deservedly earned the reputation as the "inspirer, director, promoter, champion, and friend of writers of plays."[283] In 1859, Cole reflected the representative view when he wrote,

[279] FitzSimons 129.

[280] Shattuck, 1: vi.

[281] Shattuck, 1: vi.

[282] Shattuck 1: vi.

[283] Shattuck 10.

"The modern drama is almost identified with the name of Macready: Knowles, Bulwer, Talfourd, Shiel, and Byron, may claim him as their predominant illustrator."[284] At a Valedictory dinner, Bulwer paid the retiring Macready the highest compliment possible when he said, "He has identified himself with the living drama of his period, and by so doing he has half created it."[285] Bulwer continued his tribute by evoking three characters (other than those in his own plays) that Macready was most closely identified with. Two of them are from plays by Knowles: "Who does not recollect the rough and manly vigor of Tell, the simple grandeur of Virginius. . . . And who does not feel that but for him these great plays might never have obtained their hold upon the stage, or ranked among those masterpieces which this age will leave to posterity?" asked Bulwer.[286]

Macready was no less than a midwife to the legitimate drama. His unique and multi-faceted contribution to fostering new drama in the theater of his time has been particularized by Shattuck:

> During the course of his career there were few of the 'highminded' dramatists whose work did not pass through his hands. He read and criticized hundreds of plays, and brought dozens of them to production. He suggested

[284] Cole 2: 21.

[285] Bulwer, quoted in Shattuck, Bulwer and Macready 1.

[286] Shattuck, Bulwer and Macready 2.

> subjects. He advised in plotting and writing. He cut and arranged for the stage and enforced alterations. He paid generous royalties, or secured just ones. He provided costumes and settings. He fought critics. He even bargained with publishers for favorable copyright terms.[287]

Downer usefully terms the plays that were the product of Macready's close and sometimes intense collaboration with a number of "highminded" dramatists as "The Macready Plays." These dramatists (other than Knowles) and their works include Bryan Waller Procter (Mirandola), Thomas Noon Talfourd (Ion), Mary Russell Mitford (Julian) and Bulwer (Cromwell, The Duchess De La Valliere, The Lady of Lyons and Richelieu), and Browning (Strafford, and A Blot in the 'Scutcheon. Most of the authors--Browning was a singular exception--welcomed Macready's advice on how to alter their plays to improve their stageworthiness. The plays by these authors owed much of their stage success to off-stage as well as onstage assistance of Macready.

At least two of Knowles's plays--William Tell and Alfred the Great--may accurately be termed "Macready plays" because they were commissioned by Macready as vehicles for his talent. Still, there is an important difference between Knowles and the authors cited above. Unlike Knowles, they were novices in the theater, who

[287] Shattuck, "The Dramatic Collaboration of William Charles Macready" vii.

had little if any experience with matters of stagecraft. They relied on Macready to point out "stage deficiencies" in their plays and correct them.[288] Procter and Talfourd are examples. They were gentleman-amateurs dramatists, lawyers by profession and poets by avocation. They, like many of the dramatists with whom Macready collaborated, were personal friends of the actor. They submitted their plays with the expectation that he would help them make them more stageworthy. They were rarely, if ever, disappointed, though they frequently found that he objected to more than they expected him too. They often received more constructive criticism more than they bargained for--sometimes a "through analysis" of "stage deficiencies" and a "program for revision."[289] These collaborations often put a strain on the friendships, and were not without tensions and hurt feelings. In Browning's case, the strains of collaboration led to the collapse of a promising friendship between the actor and young poet.

Dramatic authors sought Macready's advice with varying degrees of dependency. Some requested advice not just after the play was written, but "counsel in

[288] Macready's term, Shattuck 1: ?

[289] These terms are taken from Shattuck's discussion of Macready's response to Bulwer's Cromwell. The term "stage deficiencies" is Macready's; the other two terms are Shattuck's--1: 94.

the planning and the writing" of the play as well."[290] For example, when Procter asked Macready to help him construct the blueprint of a plot, the actor obliged him. The closeness of his collaboration with Procter is indicated by an entry that Macready made in his diary: "I may really aver he [Procter] almost wrote the play of Mirandola under my inspection."[291] Similarly, Macready aided Mrs. Mitford in the writing of The Foscari and Rienzi.[292] As Shattuck has demonstrated, Macready made a substantial authorial contribution to the composition and revision of scores of plays in order to make them stageworthy and theatrically viable.

Knowles, too, was the beneficiary of Macready's sound dramatic judgment. During the years that he and Macready enjoyed a collaborative relationship, the actor routinely "cut and arranged" the text of Knowles's plays for the stage and suggested alterations, just as he did with every other author, though exactly what those alterations were it is not always possible to determine. What he did not do is assist Knowles in the composition, plotting and writing; Knowles, unlike many other writers, was fully capable of doing this by himself without Macready's help.

[290] Shattuck, Bulwer and Macready 3.

[291] Macready's Diaries, June 30, 1835, quoted in Shattuck 22.

[292] Shattuck, Bulwer and Macready 5.

Knowles and Macready were certainly "dramatic collaborators," but in a less intimate sense than, say, Talfourd or Bulwer, who sat at Macready's feet, as it were, as pupils and learned the act of stagecraft from him. Knowles's had a sure grasp of stagecraft before he met Macready. He knew how to write an effective scene, how to achieve the theatrical effects he wanted, and his finger was securely on the popular pulse.

Knowles, for his part, was an extraordinarily cooperative and compliant partner in the collaboration, almost totally devoid of literary vanity. As Macready himself put it, "Knowles had less of the tenacity of authorship than most writers."[293] Because he had absolute confidence in Macready's judgment in dramatic matters, Knowles invariably made the alterations the actor suggested without protest. According to Murray, "it is quite clear that Knowles allowed his early plays to be altered and revised by Macready in order to ensure the best results."[294] Knowles rightly believed that Macready's motive in proposing changes in his plays transcended self-aggrandizement. By Knowles's own account, the object of Macready's alterations "was not to make his [Macready's] own part but that of others

[293] Macready, Reminiscences 303.

[294] Murray 166.

more prominent, and so increase the general effect of the play."[295]

In discussing Knowles's collaboration with Macready, it is important to keep in mind that Caius Gracchus and Virginius were written before the playwright had seen Macready act. Both plays, as already pointed out, were written with Kean in mind; Kean suggested the story of Virginius to Knowles and may also have suggested that of Caius Gracchus.[296] That they turned out to be ideal vehicles for Macready's individual style is fortuitous. By happy accident, Knowles's writing style and Macready's acting style were artistically symbiotic. "Between them playwright and actor struck the right chords in the public mind," writes Murray.[297] These were the chords of hearth and home. William Tell and Alfred the Great, in contrast, were deliberately written at Macready's behest as vehicles for him, and as one might expect, both plays--Tell, most successfully--were tailored to display

[295] Unidentified newspaper report of a speech given by Knowles before an audience from the stage of the Victoria Theater in 1833--Life 115, fn. 1.

[296] Meeks writes that "it is not unlikely that Kean suggested the story to Knowles," pointing out that Kean "had a great liking for subjects from Roman history. . . . "--Meeks, Sheridan Knowles 139. However, Knowles dedicated the play to one John Patterson, with the words "at your suggestion I wrote this Tragedy."

[297] Christopher Murray, "James Sheridan Knowles: The Victorian Shakespeare? Shakespeare and the Victorian Stage, ed. Richard Foulkes (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) 166.

Macready's peculiar talents, especially that of displaying domestic feeling.

Knowles's Virginius came to Macready's attention quite by accident through a friend, John Tait, a Glasgow publisher. Shortly after suffering rejection, Knowles had arranged to have Virginius produced at the Theater Royal in Glasgow. His twofold purpose was "to console himself for his disappointment" and "to see how his play would act."[298] It acted well, even though the actors were merely competent. Tait attended one of the play's fourteen or fifteen performances and liked the play so much that he wrote to Macready touting Knowles as "a man of original genius"[299] and recommending that his actor-friend read it.[300]

In his Reminiscences, Macready has recorded the heady excitement that overcame him when, out of sense of duty to his friend, he read the manuscript of Virginius for the first time in April of 1820:

> The freshness and simplicity of the dialogue fixed my attention; I read on and on, and was soon absorbed in the interest of the story and the passion of its scenes, till at its close I found myself in such a state of

[298] Life 67.

[299] Macready, Reminiscences 207.

[300] Baynham says that Knowles requested Tait to send Macready the manuscript of Virginius.

> excitement that for a time I was undecided what step to take.[301]

What he had discovered, according to Shattuck, was a play that "dwarfed into insignificance every new play he had yet encountered."[302] After reading the play a second time to confirm his intoxicating first impression, Macready wrote a letter to Knowles praising the play and offering to do his best to have it accepted for production, while at the same time "pointing out some little oversights."[303]

To understand why Macready was so excited by Knowles's play, one must realize how dissatisfied he was with almost all the parts he had been given to perform so far. In contrast to Kean, who had attained popularity "with the dazzling brilliancy of a meteor"[304] in Shakespearean tragic roles with a month of his debut. In contrast, Macready's rise to popularity had been gradual, accomplished by doing as much as he could

[301] Macready, Reminiscences 207.

[302] Shattuck, "diss." 11. Macready's high opinion of the play can be gathered from this comment: "the star of Alfieri's genius looks pale on this subject before the lustre of that of Knowles, and so long as there is a stage, and actors capable of representing the best feelings of our nature, so long will the pathos, the poetry, and passion of 'Virginius' command the tears and applause of its audience"--Reminiscences 211.

[303] Source? Unfortunately, it cannot be said what these oversights were since Macready's letter to Knowles is not extant.

[304] Review of Richard III from the Courier, quoted in Macready, Reminsciences 198.

do with inferior parts, most of which he despised. Knowles attributes Macready's failure to take London by storm at his debut in 1816 as Kean had in 1814 to the fact that Macready's acting style was not fully developed when he debuted at Covent Garden in 1816. In Knowles's words, Macready

> appeared in London long before his powers were matured. . . . Their growth in London was rapid, but it was not appreciated because it was watched. Had he remained a provincial actor for some years longer. . . and had he then appeared on the London boards, he would have burst upon the public with an effect as electric as ever attended the debut of the successful actor.[305]

In three seasons at Covent Garden, Macready had played over thirty parts, nearly half of which were in new plays.[306] His acting abilities were highly regarded, but his considerable talent had been mostly wasted. It is quite probable that had Macready not felt duty-bound to assist his brother financially, he would have quit the stage in disgust and entered the Church.

Macready's first new part was the noble savage Gambia in the popular opera The Slave. The young actor soon graduated to depraved villains in five-act

[305] Knowles, Lectures on Oratory 134c.

[306] According to Shattuck, he played six Shakespearean roles for a total of nine nights, eleven roles in stock plays for a total of thirty-six nights, and fourteen roles in new plays for the total of two hundred and eleven nights--Shattuck, "Dramatic Collaboration," 1: 4..

tragedies, parts that he performed so powerfully and passionately that he almost became type cast in them. Among the array of villains played by Macready was Pescara, the monstrous Spanish governor who delights in torturing the Moorish hero on the rack, in Sheil's The Apostate (1817). His led to his being cast as the villain in two more of Sheil's plays, again opposite Eliza O'Neill: the Italian Moor Amurath, who fiendishly persecuted Christians in Bellamira (1818), and Lodovico, whose evil is all the more fiendish because it is masked, in Evadne (1819). These plays and others had served to advance his reputation, but he regarded the parts he played as beneath his powers. In revivals too, Macready was usually cast as the villain: Glenalvon in Douglas (1818), Dumont in Jane Shore (1818), and Ducas in Lewis's Adelgitha. The role of Rob Roy, the romantic outlaw-hero, in Pocock's musical version of Scott's Rob Roy (1818) was an exception, though the character did have a darker side. It was hardly a role that did justice to Macready's rapidly maturing powers, however. Given the acclaim accorded Macready for his interpretation of villainous parts, it was logical that Harris continued to cast him in diabolic parts and insisted that he attempt Richard III.[307]

[307] In Cibber's adaptation.

Macready's triumph as Richard III in October of 1819 proved to be what he himself describes as "the turning point" of his acting career. He had proven his ability to compete with Kean on his own ground. Harris had cleverly forced him to perform it in a desperate attempt to save the theater from financial ruin. The Covent Garden of 1819, which Macready describes as 'a sinking ship," was then at its lowest ebb, prompting Harris to make the remark, already quoted, that he "did not know in the morning when he rose whether he should not shoot himself before the night."[308] Payrolls had gone unpaid for several weeks during the new season. Macready was reluctant to undertake the role of Richard III because it meant inviting invidious comparisons with Kean and thus putting his reputation on the line. Playing Richard was a direct challenge to Kean, whose performance as the Plantaganet king was universally admired. Macready's success as Richard rescued Covent Garden from bankruptcy (payrolls were resumed) and elevated the actor to the position of "undisputed head" of the theater. His success in Coriolanus, which competed with the ghost of Kemble, added to his laurels and his preeminence at Covent Garden.

With his destiny now in his own hands, Macready declared his determination "with jealous diligence [to]

[308] Macready, Reminiscences 194.

secure the place I had won."[309] Harris next asked Macready to play King Lear in the first production of Shakespeare's tragedy to be seen in London for over ten years. The ambitious but cautious actor wisely refused on go head to head with Kean in this great part and appeased Harris by performing villainous Edmund instead. Fresh from his Shakespearean triumphs and unencumbered with the task of learning the part of King Lear, Macready was in a position to throw all his energy into the production of Knowles's play in April of 1820. Furthermore, in Harris's eyes, Macready had earned the right to choose a play of his own to be produced. The decision of whether or not to produce Virginius still rested with Harris, but Macready's opinion now carried a great deal of weight.

In his very first season at Covent Garden, Macready had learned how important a new play could be in advancing his reputation. In 1816, he wrote. "An original part is justly considered (as Kemble before me, as I myself in the Slave[310] had already proved) of the greatest service to an actor. . . . The average actor or manager is served by a new play, and he knows it."[311] By 1819, his fourth season, Macready's name had

[309] Macready, Reminscences 201.

[310] Macready played the role of Gambia in Morton's musical play The Slave in 1816, his first year at Covant Garden.

[311] Macready, Diaries, 102-103, quoted in Dubois 107.

"come to be synonymous with new plays."[312] But the overwhelming number of the new plays he had acted in were not, to put it mildly, to his liking; Knowles's play was because the part of Virginius was radically different from those he had so far played. It offered Macready the long wished for chance to escape the hated villain roles with which he had become identified and play a tragic hero who embodied the ideals of virtue, liberty and paternal love--ideals that were dear to him personally.[313] It promised to give scope to his thwarted desire to act in a part in which he could movingly display "the better feelings of the heart."[314]

Moreover, the part's intermingling of "pathos, fury, Roman nobility and parental domesticity, pride and devotion"[315] made it tailor-made for Macready's personal acting style, which was evolving toward the naturalistic. It was a style that revolved around fatherly feeling and love of home, which were prominent aspects of Macready's own domestically-oriented character. Knowles's play thus appealed to his deepest domestic feelings of the soon-to-be married twenty-seven year old bachelor. As he read Virginius, Macready

[312] Shattuck, "Dramatic Collaboration," 1: 5.

[313] See Downer 51-55.

[314] From a review of Virginius in the Morning Herald, May 19, 1820.

[315] Downer 68.

realized that a treasure had fallen into his lap. The notice that Kean's Virginius would open on May 29 prompted Macready to rush the play into production with the intent of beating Kean to the punch. It was another episode in the gladitorial game. In the process, the actor encountered no obstacles from its delighted and grateful author.

Knowles made his total lack of authorial "tenacity"[316] known to Macready at the very outset of their correspondence. In a brief, reply to Macready's first letter that Knowles sent with a revised copy of the play, he told the actor to "make any alterations you like in any part of the play, I shall be obliged to you."[317] In a second, long letter that Knowles wrote the day after the first, he again gives Macready carte blanche to make any alterations that he deems necessary:

> Now my Dear Mr. McCready, don't stand upon any formality with me--cut out what you like. I leave the management of the thing in your hands. . . . Of one thing I am satisfied . . . If you find other corrections necessary--Now once and for all will you make them yourself, & not wait for the result of a communication to me--[318]

[316] Macready's term.

[317] Knowles, letter to Macready, dated Glasgow, April 20, 1820.

[318] Knowles, letter to Macready, dated Glasgow, April 21, 1820, quoted in Downer, 63, where it is printed in full.

This is quintessential Knowles. It is doubtful that the actor ever met with a more admiring and agreeable author. The words, "I speak with submission to a master of effect" reveal that Knowles had a high regard for Macready's professional judgment before their correspondence began.

Knowles's letter, which exudes heartfelt gratitude, provides some insight into Macready's role in the play's revision, and, his characteristic fastidiousness about diction. Knowles assures Macready that he has done his best to attend to all his "hints" because he is "convinced of their propriety." He refers to his revised copy as "cut to reduce the whole to time" and suggests that "if further cutting [is] necessary" Macready may end the fourth act with Viginius's exit from the Forum--a good suggestion that Macready followed.[319] Knowles also refers to an unspecified alteration that Macready had requested in the last scene in the third act, where Virginius enters to discover the warm body of the slain Dentatus. Judging from the contents of Knowles's letter, the sum total of the alterations were not substantive. There is only one difference of opinion between the two men, concerning the word "squeak." Macready, curiously enough, objected

[319] See page 125.

to it. In his letter, Knowles argues for its retention, but ends by declaring "I am not fastidious about many words--much less one."[320]

Once he had gained Harris's permission to produce Knowles's play, Macready rapidly set the wheels of production into motion, taking on (at the request of Fawcett, the stage manager) the responsibility of "getting it up," which is to say, "the arrangement of the action and the grouping of the scenes."[321] He personally directed the play and supervised all the details of staging and rehearsals. He tutored the young Maria Foote (Virginia) in the artless art of unaffected simplicity and doubtless the "delightful little bit, of the English schoolgirl" that Hazlitt found so appealing in her acting was a result of Macready's tutelage.[322] Macready also directed the other actors in their roles and was innovative in insisting on full cast rehearsals, a departure from tradition that prompted at least one of the older actors, who resented being subject to the younger actor's authority, to complain. Macready apologized to the actor but did not relent.[323] As no

[320] Knowles, letter to Macready, quoted in Shattuck 12.

[321] Macready, Reminiscences 209.

[322] Hazlitt, quoted in Downer 69.

[323] It is from this first production of Virginius that "the institution of modern rehearsal procedure" can be dated, according to John C. Thompson 347.

money was allotted for new sets or costumes, Macready had to make do with old sets and pay for new costumes out of his own pocket.

Macready, always an eager and earnest learner, applied himself with a total devotion worthy of the most dedicated Stanislavsky-trained actor to understanding the part of Virginius. The fact that Kean would soon make the attempt to eclipse his Virginius with a Virginius of his own gave him an added incentive to excell in the part. In his own words, during the weeks preceding the first performance,

> My every thought was engrossed by Virginius. I had perfected myself roughly in the words of the part before presenting the play, and with the first of morning and the last of night the images it offered were present to me, whilst every vacant hour was employed in practice, to give smoothness to those pathetic touches and those whirlwinds of passion in the part, which in the full sway of their fury required the actor's self-command to ensure the correctness of every tone, gesture, and look.[324]

Characteristically, Macready thought of his part in terms of contrasts: a balance of "pathetic touches" and "whirlwinds of passion," all of course subordinated to a "wholeness or unity of design" that was "one of the most frequently praised aspects of Macready's

[324] Macready, Reminiscences 210.

acting."[325] Kean, in contrast, had a tendency to make a "point" at the expense of character.[326] So that the other actors could not read the notations that he made on his personal manuscript of the play, he wrote them in Latin, Greek, and Italian.

Macready also put himself at the service of its "very happy"[327] author, taking on duties that are ordinarily performed by a manager or the author himself. He undertook the task of negotiating contract terms with Harris and secured for Knowles a better than average contract: 400 pounds for twenty nights, with the promise of another 100 the next season if the play were revived, which it was. This last stipulation was unusual. Knowles was fortunate that Macready had taken his play under his protective wing. There is no doubt that if Knowles, an unknown dramatist, had been forced to negotiate on his own he would not have been so well paid for his first play. As one of the unknowns, Knowles would doubtless have settled for two hundred pounds for his first play. Four hundred was the kind of windfall of which unknown dramatists only dreamed, and the play's instant and complete success in the theater gave Knowles a strong monetary incentive to continue

[325] Downer 80.

[326] Lewes on Kean as Othello, quoted in Joseph 273.

[327] Knowles describes himself as such in a letter to Macready dated April 21, 1820.

writing plays. Macready also took on the responsibility of selling the copyright of the play.[328] It also saw to it, at Knowles's request, that a suitable prologue (by Barry Cornwall) and epilogue (by John Hamilton Reynolds) were written.

One can well imagine how deeply the constitutionally emotional Knowles was affected by Macready's zeal and kindnesses, especially after being treated rather unfeelingly by Kean, whom he had known intimately and believed to be his friend. Knowles properly showed his gratitude for everything Macready had done by dedicating the play to him:

> My dear Sir,--What can I do less than dedicate this Tragedy to you? This is a question which you cannot answer; but I can. I cannot do less; and if I could do more, I ought and would.
>
> I was a perfect stranger to you; you read my play and once committed yourself respecting its merits. This, perhaps, is not saying much for your head, but it says a great deal for your heart; and that is the consideration which above all others makes me feel happy and proud in subscribing myself
>
> Your grateful friend and Servant,
> James Sheridan Knowles.

Virginius; or The Liberation of Rome was first performed on the night of May 17, 1820. It was an

[328] It was sold to Ridgeway, a friend of Knowles. John Murray, who Macready had first approached, rejected it.

instant success[329] and "first won for Macready the acclaim of a London audience."[330] It remained in Macaready's repertory until his retirement in 1851. The Monthly Review declared: "Mr. Macready. . . has advanced his reputation more by the performance of this play than by all his former efforts."[331] Macready has left this account of the first-night audience's enthusiastic response:

> With the progress of the play the rapt attention of the audience gradually kindled into enthusiasm. Long-continued cheers followed the close of each succeeding act; half-stifled screams and involuntary ejaculations burst forth when the fatal blow was struck to the daughter's heart, and the curtain fell amidst the most deafening applause of a highly-excited auditory. The play was an unquestionable triumph, which Knowles had sat in the pit to witness and enjoy.

Macready's recollected account, written years after the event, implies that the curtain was rung down immediately after the catastrophe, only allowing time for Virginius to devote Appius to the infernal gods and rush off stage while the amazed lictors look on. This is the most theatrically effective curtain. According to the licensing copy, however, the fourth act curtain

[329] The cast included Charles Kemble (Icilius), Terry (Dentatus), Abbott (Appius Claudius), and Miss Foote (Virginia).

[330] Donwer, 176.

[331] Note, page 55. Source Downer?

was delayed some forty lines or so after the catastrophe, as Icilius and Honorius succeed in preventing Appius's lictors from seizing Virginia's dead body. Macready's own prompt copy confirms the accuracy of his recollection.[332] It would appear, then, Macready took Knowles's suggestion to heart and cut out the lines prior to the first performance. Interestingly, in its review of the play the Times makes the point that the fourth act should end immediately after the catastrophe.[333] Many subsequent commentators on the play have expressed the same opinion.

Hazlitt declared in one of several reviews of Virginius which he wrote that "Knowles owes every thing, that an author can owe, to the actors," and pronounced Macready's performance in the part of Virginius "his best and most faultless,"[334] adding in another that he was "superior to everything that he has before done," including his Richard III.[335] In his "Remarks" to the Cumberland edition, D-G offers this appraisal of Macready's as Virginius:

[332] Based on the author's examination of Macready's prompt copy in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

[333] In later printed editions, the act does end with Virginius's words to Appius, an abridgement that makes for a more effective curtain.

[334] Hazlitt, "The Drama: No VII" in London Magazine, July, 1820, Howe, 18: 343.

[335] Hazlitt, London Magazine, June 1820, 694.

> Mr. Macready's performance is nervous and bold--it has much of the dignity and paternal tenderness of this illustrious Roman. His early interviews with Virginia were tender and playful--he warmed with every scene, and the dreadful agony of his spirit, and the convulsive tremors of his frame, while he is meditating his last great sacrifice, were finely depicted."[336]

From reading various reviews of Knowles's play, one can form a clear impression of the manner in which Macready delivered specific lines and passages and interpreted particular scenes. The Morning Herald, for example, praised Macready for the power and naturalness with which "he yields his child with tears even to the lover of his choice" in the betrothal scene.[337] In the opinion of the Times, the "tone with which in the judgment scene he uttered the words, 'My poor child here, who clings to me for protection'--was truly pathetic."[338] The Monthly Review mentions that Macready's delivery of the line, "To be sure she will--a most wise question that!" in the Forum scene (4.2) had "an effect which electrifies the audience."[339] In the reading, these words are easily passed over, yet in

[336] D-G, "Remarks" 8.

[337] Morning Herald, n.d., quoted in Macready, Reminiscences 210.

[338] Review of Virginius in Times, quoted in Macready Reminiscences 210.

[339] Anon. reivew of Virginius, Monthly Review 55.

performance Macready made something of them. They are Virginius's interposed, sarcastic and abrupt answer to a brother, Numitorious's naive question whether the female slave of Claudius will swear that her perjured testimony is true. Another reviewer is impressed by Macready's "half sullen, half furious despair, when Virginius finds the hand of power and injustice upon him" in the Forum scene.[340] In Macready's acting of the somewhat Lear-like ending, the Morning Herald praises the actor's "heart-rending recognition of his child's remains when returning reason assures him of the reality of his grief." The final curtain falls on the father weeping over his daughter's ashes.

Macready's success as Virginius was owing in great part to the uniqueness his acting style, which Knowles's play was a perfect vehicle for displaying. However, it was inevitable that reviewers of the play would bring up Kean's name by way of comparison. This was only fair since Macready had been influenced, not to say inspired, by Kean and had not yet completely shed traces of some of the less desirable aspects of his style. Macready himself is reported to have said that his aspiration was to combine the styles of Kean and Talma (rather than Kean and Kemble).[341] Only a year

[340] Review of Virginius, dated May, 1820, unidentified clipping in the Harvard Theater Collection.

[341] Joseph 290.

before his performance of Virginius, Hazlitt had pointed out that Macready is "apt to be too sudden and theatrical in his contrasts, from a loud utterance to a low one. . . ."[342] D-G faulted Macready's Virginius for attempting (and failing) to imitate Kean in the mad scenes in Act V "by straining his voice from the lowest note to the top of the compass," but he does not make this charge in the first four acts. The Morning Herald praised Macready for correcting some of his faults. One of them, according to the Herald, was the "love of sudden transition," a Kean-like characteristic. In Virginius, wrote the newspaper, this love "was controuled within the bounds of propriety."[343] Another of Macready's faults was a tendency to "rant." In Virginius, Macready reformed this fault. According to the Herald, "His rich manly voice, which has too frequently tempted him to rant, was on the present occasion subdued and mellowed down to a tone of requisite touchingness."

Most critics recognized the originality of style in Macready's acting as Virginius. Hazlitt struck this keynote in the first of his reviews:

> . . . there was no predecessor whose style it was necessary for him to avoid or rival: he

[342] Examiner, Dec. 5, 1819.

[343] Anon. review of Virginius, in Morning Herald, May 19, 1820, clipping in Huntington Library.

> was to be the carver of his own fortunes. . . we have a great dislike to hear of such and such a person trying to 'get up' to Mr. Kemble's or Mr. Kean's performance of a part. Each of those gentlemen have great merit in their respective styles. . . but there may be more styles than two. . . .[344]

Macready had been rapidly evolving into a mature actor since his debut at Covent Garden in 1816, and by 1820 his "third style" had crystalized. It had evolved away from "mere violence, redundancy, artificiality, and formalism," and toward "variety, naturalness, and self-abandonment."[345] In developing his style, Macready had also weaned himself away from the tendency to overdo abrupt transitions in the manner of Kean. Macready, as Joseph says, "had to master Kean's transition from the grand to the colloquial and make it his own."[346] This Macready did by skillfully combined "pause, transition, and colloquialism"[347] to achieve a different kind of naturalness than Kean. While Macready's "sudden transitions in voice"[348] derived from Kean, his use of them

[344] Hazlitt, London Magazine, June, 1820: 642.

[345] Downer 70.

[346] Joseph 296.

[347] Downer enumerates these three elements, 80.

[348] Downer 75.

differed from Kean's in that he did not sacrifice identification with the character to make a "point."[349]

Macready's object was, in Downer's words, "inner realism of feeling."[350] This realism came from a total identification with the character he was performing. His aim, as he himself expressed it, was "to fathom the depths of character, to trace its latent motives, to feel its finest quiverings of emotion, to comprehend the thought that are hidden under words, and thus possess oneself of the actual mind of the individual man."[351] As the Monthly Magazine wrote in 1821, Macready's forte was projecting character by seizing on "all those minute traits which circumstances impart to an individual--to form a correct outline, and to fill up with those diversities, brought into complete harmony."[352] This was quite different than Kean's forte, which was to reveal "startling truths."[353] How passionately Macready identified with the part of Virginius is attested to by an anecdote. As Westland Marston relates it, the actor who played Appius felt Macready's hands choking him in the stragulation scene

[349] Downer 80.

[350] Downer 76.

[351] Macready, Reminiscences 2: 424, quoted in Downer 80.

[352] Monthly Magazine, February 21, 1821, quoted in Downer 80.

[353] Downer 80.

during the performance and took the precaution of wearing a collar bristling with steel pins to protect his throat from Macready's vehemence during the next performance.[354]

The language of Knowles's play and Macready's acting style were, in effect, complementary, each requiring the other to be fully realized. Knowles, the playwright who is credited with bringing a colloquial style into tragedy, found in Macready the ideal actor to speak his verse and, in turn, Macready found in Knowles's writing style "the ideal medium of the expression of his art."[355] Both met on the common ground of colloquiality. Concerning Macready's colloquial touches in Virginius, Downer writes:

> The appearance of the colloquial in his first great original success, Virginius, was due to the nature of the playwright. Macready simply applied his new-found transitions to the part. This combination produced the new effect of the touch of nature which carried home to 'the business and bosoms of men' the reality of the suffering of the patrician in a way that Kemble and Cato had totally failed to do.[356]

Macready's rhythmically unmusical elocution and delivery suited him perfected as a speaker of Knowles's

[354] Marston 8, quoted in Downer 77.

[355] Revels 6: 128.

[356] Downer 75.

often metrically deficient verse, which was written as if it was meant to be chopped up into prose in the speaking. This is exactly how Macready spoke it. Chopping up verse into prose was, according to Fanny Kemble, the secret of his much admired "natural style" of speaking verse.[357] In retrospect, Macready could look back and remark on "the colloquial groundwork of my acting."[358] By 1833, writes Downer, "it was generally recognized by his critics, by his successors, and by Macready himself that the domestication of acting was to be his principal contribution to the spirit of his time."[359]

Macready's was, like Kean, an ideal interpreter of speeches with broken rhythms like the one in 4.1, already cited, that begins, "Brother! Icilius! thank you! thank you. / --All / Has been communicated to me." He excelled Kean in colloquial lines requiring paternal tenderness, like "I never saw you look so much like your mother in all my life!" According to the eyewitness Westland Marston, "Here Macready's transition from overmastering wrath to tenderness was made with such nature and force of contast, that many of the audience

[357] Kemble, quoted in Joseph 302.

[358] Diaries 1: 5, quoted in Downer 75.

[359] Downer 75.

wept."[360] Marston adds, "Knowles gave his exponent numerous chances for such colloquial touches."[361] To the extent that these touches, which include what Macready called "pathetic touches," were important to the play's success, one can say that Macready was a more effective interpreter of the part of Virginius than Kean would have been.

But what of Macready's acting in the contrasting "whirlwinds of passion" that are as necessary to the part's success as the "pathetic touches"? Knowles answers this question himself:

> Mr. Macready excels in passages of tender emotion, but he absolutely transcends himself in those of high and impetuous feeling. You see the passion flashing in his eye and flaming on his cheek, and you hear it in the thunder of his voice--the finest voice upon the stage. Here he never thinks of his delivery, but give his utterance the rein, and lets it bound along with all the freedom of wild and headstrong nature.[362]

Macready may have lacked Kean's "flashes of lightning" and his extraordinary pantomimic gifts, but, on the authority of Knowles himself, he yielded little to Kean in terms of physical energy and passion.

[360] Westland Marston, Our Recent Actors, 1: 36. Marston is describing a performance in saw in the 1830s.

[361] Marston 1: 36.

[362] Knowles, Lectures on Oratory 134c.

Kean must have been galled in the extreme to discover that his friend's play, which he had commissioned and then rejected, was so successful at the rival theater and that a rival actor whom he was beginning to fear had garnered so much acclaim in a character that he had envisaged himself triumphantly introducing to London audiences. On the night of May 29, 1820, twelve nights after the opening of Knowles's Virginius; or the Liberation of Rome, Kean opened in Soane's Virginius; or The Fall of the Decimvirs (Fig. 33) in a bid to outdo his bold challenger. It was a total failure, and was withdrawn after three nights and never printed.[363] Since Soane's rival play is virtually unknown (existing only in manuscript), some space is devoted to it here for purposes of contrast.

It is impossible to say for certain why Soane's play, a reworking of an earlier unstaged play by John Bidlake,[364] failed, but there is no disputing that it is inferior to Knowles's in every way: characterization, plot, structure, language, and depth of pathos. In retailoring the play for Kean, Soane enlarged and heroicized the part of Virginius, providing Kean with a series of opportunities to display his

[363] The manuscript of Soane's play is in the Larpent Collection of plays (LA 2152) in the Huntington Library.

[364] John Bidlake's play was entitled Virginius, or the Fall of Decemivirs. Bidlake was champlain to the Duke of Clarence and Master of the Plymouth grammar school.

virtuosity by indulging in heroic bombast and rant, almost all of it aimed at excoriating Appius. In Ritchie's words, Soane "designed the role to show up Kean's ability to build emotional arias depending on broken rhythms, vocal leaps, and physical violence."[365]

When Virginius first appears, he is an heroic figure on horseback being greeted by idolizing throngs of cheering Roman citizens. To make his entrance more probable, Soane elevates him from a centurion to a general. His purpose in coming to Rome is to serve as a spokesmen for his legions, who are seeking redress of their grievances, but he is also boiling with rage over the brutal assassination of Dentatus. Blaming Appius and the rest of the Decemvirate for the treacherous deed, he is hell bent on revenge in the name of the Roman people and the ideal of liberty.

In most of the scenes in which he appears, Virginius is described by either himself or another character as being convulsed with intense emotion of one kind or another. The intensity of the part is reflected in the normatively hyperbolic language ("Furies, that mock me in your horrid toils, / Ride now through earth in blood"). The heroicizing impulse at work in Soane's play is also evident in the self-

[365] Ritchie 35. However, examination of the "arias" reveals that the are written in conventional black verse that is quite smooth compared to Knowles's.

conscious echoes of Kean's most famous Shakespearean roles (Richard III, Macbeth, and King Lear) that are planted throughout the play.[366] It is a fault of Soane's play that it keeps the audience stretched at a uniformly high pitch of emotion, without intervals of relief or repose. For example, it conspicuous lacks the tranquil indoor domestic scenes which made Knowles's play so endearing to the audiences of 1820 because they recognized in Virginius and Virginia a familiar middle-class pre-Victorian English father and daughter. Soane's father and daughter are both too conventionally heroic to exert that appeal.

Soane sounds a domestic note early in the play when he depicts a reunion scene between father and daughter (and father and Icilius), but the brisk manner in which he disposes of the domestic feelings in his scene suggests that the author had little talent for or interest in depicting domesticity for its own sake. Soane has Virginia, accompanied by Icilius, unexpectedly appear before Virginius as he is riding though the streets of Rome on his way to confront Appius in the Forum. Soane's intention is undoubtedly to remind the audience that the beloved patriot is also a loving father, but it is questionable whether he does so with much success. Virginius has just expressed his

[366] Richard III, Macbeth, King Lear.

dedication to vengeance with a gruesome image of self-mutilation (if my arm / Err in its direful aim, like Scaevola, / The traitor I'll disown, / And burn it piecemeal from my honest limbs.) when his daughter appears, asking her father why he has shunned her. The sight of his distressed daughter has a sudden softening effect on the grimly determined father, temporarily displacing his bloody thoughts with those of home sweet home. In the speech to his daughter, which is supposed to convey domestic feeling, Kean was given an opportunity to accomplish a sudden transition from the heroic to the tenderly paternal that could not have failed to move the audience:

> My child! my daughter! my Virginia!
> I had forgone the sweet delights of home,
> For sterner duties call'd: my only one!
> Each absence from the boisterous field of strife
> But makes thee dearer.--blest, ah, blest the hour
> That gave thy solace to my widow'd heart!
> That smile! it was thy mother's and that look,
> Such as she once shed on me--speak love! speak!
> For then I hear her voice.

The last three lines--observing that his daughter's smile and facial expression remind him of his dead wife--are meant to give Kean the opportunity to evoke pathos. They closely resemble the similar lines in Knowles's play already quoted, but have only a fraction of their poignancy, chiefly because Soane has not prepared the dramatic ground with equal art.

The encounter between the grimly determined father and anxious daughter is extremely brief. Virginius dismisses her premonitory fears by assuring her that her innocence is sufficient to protect her from harm; he warmly greets and praises Icilius, Virginia's ardent suitor, but summarily rejects as untimely his request for permission to marry Virginia. Soane's Virginius is so much the high-minded Roman patriot when he first meets his daughter and Icilius that he has little time or inclination to indulge his fatherly feelings. He gives Virginia and Icilius the briefest of blessings before he moves on to his meeting with Appius, leaving the impression that when patriotism calls fatherhood must take second place. Both Virginia and Icilius are awed by Virginius's "bright example," and "nobleness of soul" in this encounter. Kindled by her father's stern patriotism, Virginia exclaims, "like thee, / "I live alone for Rome!"

Ideal domesticity is absent from Soane's play. There are no scenes presenting "the everyday realities of home life" or "natural filial or paternal affection"[367] of the kind that give Knowles's play its distinctive domestic tone. In place of this there is much talk of revenge and of honour in the abstract. No where is the difference between the two play more evident as

[367] Donohue, Kean 138.

when Soane follows his source in having Virginius express fear that his daughter will yield to temptation after hearing the report that Appius has tempted her virtue with luxurious gifts. Once Virginia has been abducted and her birth impugned, Soane transforms the hero a heroic Roman to a suffering father, almost pathetic in the helplessness and despair to which he is reduced. Oddly, Appius's scheme drives a wedge between suffering father and daughter rather than binding them closer and Virginia is driven to side with her father against Icilius, who believes Virginius's determination to clear his name is folly. An especially unpleasant glimpse into Virginius's disturbed mind occurs when the false assumption that she had been polluted by Appius leads him to wallow in self-pity and withdraw into a psychological cocoon. He talks of being childless, and enjoins Icilius to avoid her, a most unnatural request. His daughter, who complained of being shunned by her father in the beginning of the play, now complains of being forsaken. Virginius has difficulty forcing himself to look upon his daughter and giving her the comfort she desires and deserves.

Soane's Virginia possesses none of the endearing girlish charm and maidenly vulnerability; she is more the indignant stoic Roman maid than the terrified English. Far from being at a loss for words, she is highly articulate, and ably defends her honor against

verbal assault in three separate scenes, two with Appius and one with Claudius. She is brave (and naive) enough to make a secret (and improbable) arrangement to meet Appius alone outside the gates of Rome in the dead of night with the intention of appealing to his better nature--a scene that strains credibility to the breaking point and would be inconceivable in Knowles's play. Fortunately, her father accidently shows up to save her from certain rape. In the tribunal scene, which is the concluding scene in Soane's play, Virginia is presented as the initiator of her own death. Fully aware that her father is wrestling with the idea of killing her and that fear has paralyzed him into inaction, she demands that father to act, and quickly too, to save her from "Pollution." When Virginius shrinks from killing her, she asks him to give her the knife so that she can do the deed herself. His daughter's resolve gives Virginius the courage to do the dread deed, presumably with a knife that he had concealed on his person all along.

The scene is without the pathos with which Knowles invests it, although it attempts to arouse pathos for the father by giving Kean "an opportunity to replay the Lear-Cordelia death scene"[368] as a guilt-ridden Virginius reacts in horror to what he had done:

[368] Ritchie 35.

> Distraction! Gone? Soft! Soft!--she breathes!
> Her lip moves not--it quivers--now its still!
> Her eyes are fix'd! they glare on me! her murderer!
> Fall mountains on me! hide me from this sight!

In Soane's play the father's killing of his daughter becomes an act of tragic irony rather than necessity, for no sooner is Virginia killed than Icilius at the head of a popular uprising. When the dying Virginia calls Virginius father, he replies, "I am no father!--could a father do this? / Had I but delay'd!" (5.2). Had he not heeded her command and waited a moment longer, the play would have ended happily.

Kean choice of Soane's play may be viewed as a miscalculation in public taste. According to Ritchie, the triumph of Macready and the failure of Kean in their respective parts as Virginius marked the triumph of the domestically-oriented acting style of the former over the heroically-oriented style of the latter. The success of Knowles's *Virginius* was thus, Ritchie claims, a pivotal moment in the history of the English theater because it marked a radical change of taste from "florid emotionalism"[369] to "sentiment, family tenderness, and simplicity of tone and diction."[370]

[369] Ritchie, 35.

[370] Ritchie, 32.

Eight years after being defeated in the Virginius duel, Kean decided to challenge Macready directly by showing the London public what he could do in the part of the Roman father in Knowles's play. The decision was an act of desperation to bolster his sagging reputation. The performance itself a triumph of the will over infirmity, for by this time Kean's powers, both physical and mental, were severely impaired by profligacy and alcohol. Virginius was the first new part that he had attempted to learn since his humiliating failure in Ben Nazir, the Saracen (1827), and he had great difficulty mastering the lines. "The only remarkable thing about Kean's Virginius was that he performed it without loss of memory," writes FitzSimons.[371] One reviewer has left us this evaluation of Kean's uneven performance:

> His parting with the child was exquisitely played, and in the more subdued parts he was eminently successful. But when Virginius [sic] is made a slave, rage appeared more the frothy ebullitions of a choleric man than the terrible indignation of a noble Roman. His physical powers are unable to excecute his design. In all scenes requiring great exertions he became exhausted. . . .[372]

[371] FitzSimons 228.

[372] No source given, Playfair 280.

The production was discontinued after only three performances.[373] It was Kean's only attempt to perform in a play written by Knowles.

Caius Gracchus, the second of Knowles's plays to be produced in London, also owed its production to Macready. Having enjoyed a triumph in Virginius, Macready naturally was wished to act in another of Knowles's plays. It was at Macready's urging that Knowles "exhumed and remodelled" it.[374] In 1823, however, the year of its production, Macready was associated with Drury Lane rather than Covent Garden. Henry Harris's withdrawal from the position of manager of Covent Garden in 1822 had begun a period of conflict between Macready and Charles Kemble, his replacement. The relationship between Macready and Kemble had always been strained, and now with Harris gone and Kemble in charge, it became intolerable. Moreover, Covent Garden had been crippled by the mass defection of stars from Kemble's to Elliston's theater. Its acting talent was impoverished to the point of being unable to properly cast its plays. Macready withdrew from the Covent Gar-

[373] The Age, Dec. 26, 1828, in what appears to have written by a reviewer that was anti-Macready, wrote, "his delivery of certain passages, abounding with a pathos of a delicate, deep, and phrenzied character, in that clear, expressive, and poetical undertone, which is peculiar to the actor, was above all praise, and left all competition in the race for fame behind him"--quoted in Downer, 112.

[374] Meeks, Sheridan Knowles 139.

den at the end of the 1822 season and began negotiating with Elliston about salary and parts in the summer of 1823.[375]

During the summer he also visited Knowles in Glasgow. His object was to "discuss with him the scenes he had completed and those projected of Caius Gracchus, which was to be forwarded to Elliston at Drury Lane with all dispatch."[376] Macready was obviously looking for a new play of quality to advance his reputation at Drury Lane, and it is clear that he found the part of Caius Gracchus highly attractive and was eager to act in it. It is impossible to access Macready's contribution to the play's revision, but according to Knowles it was significant. The first edition of the play contained a prefatory note that acknowledged Knowles's considerable debt to Macready:

> The Author of this tragedy has simply to remark that there is not an Act--hardly a Scene--of it, that is not indebted for improvement, to the talents and taste of his Friend, Mr. Macready.[377]

[375] Macready quickly settled on 20 pounds a night for forty nights; it was the negotiations about parts that was time-consuming, for Macready was particularly sensitive to not creating a difficulty between himself and Kean.

[376] Macready, Reminiscences 215, quoted in Meeks, Sheridan Knowles 140.

[377] Knowles, Prefatory note to Caius Gracchus, quoted in Shattuck, "Diss." 16.

According to Downer, Macready was drawn to the play "by a number of rhetorical speeches in praise of liberty."[378] In his Reminiscences Macready does not mention his unquestionable affinity with the play's liberalism, but he does offer a fairly detailed critical assessment of the play's strengths and weaknesses:

> This play, although not one of the best from the gifted author's pen, abounds in passages of lofty thought, and is marked by the impress of his genius with that truth of character so constantly observable in his writings. But among scenes of striking power, pathetic situations, and bursts of heroic passion, there is great inequality. Whole pages are given to the cavillings of the plebians, who in their contentions neither sustain the dignity of tragedy nor recall the ideas of the Roman people. Indeed the mob, though advancing the action but little, is too prominent an agent, whilst the familiar language of their altercations often descends to vulgarity.[379]

Macready tells us that "the most energetic parts and the domestic interviews" in the part of Caius, "laid strong hold on my sympathies," leading him to apply himself "to the study of the part with no ordinary alacrity and ardour."[380] Macready reserves his highest praise for the character of Cornelia:

> . . . in the poet's conception and draught of Cornelia we see before us the mother of the

[378] Downer 97.

[379] Macready, Reminiscences 290.

[380] Macready, Reminiscences 292.

> Gracchi, the ideal of the Roman matron. She gazes on her offspring with all a mother's fondness, but with an unflinching eye looks through the transitory brightness of the present to the darker destiny that awaits the future, and steels her soul to the inevitable sacrifice of her beloved son upon the altar of his country.[381]

It is clear that Macready's felt that the success of the play depended not only on his own acting but also on that of the actress who played Cornelia, a part that, in Macready's words, "required the commanding genius of a Siddons."[382]

In a letter dated September 8, addressed to Frederick Reynolds, Elliston's assistant, Macready describes Caius Gracchus as "sterling."[383] It is clear from the letter that he was still awaiting Elliston decision in the matter. Elliston must have answered Macready in the affirmative soon after, for the play was produced a month after Macready made his debut with the new company in mid-October as Virginius and had played already Rolla, Hamlet, Macbeth, and Leontes. Knowles and Elliston signed a contract nearly two weeks before the play opened. The terms, which Stephens calls "unusual," were generous enough: Knowles received 200

[381] Macready, Reminiscences 291.

[382] Macready, Reminiscences 292.

[383] Macready, letter to Reynolds dated Sept. 8, 1823, quoted in Downer 94.

pounds in promissory notes before the play was acted, and was promised additional payments of 33 pounds on the twelfth, fifteenth night, and eighteenth nights, 100 pounds on the twentieth night, and 50 on the twenty-fifth--a grand total of 450 pounds.[384] As the play ran for only seven performances, Knowles realized only 200 pounds in addition to the sum of 100 pounds that Elliston generously paid Knowles for the copyright. In the advertisement to the printed text of the play, Knowles acknowledged Macready's role in the play's revision and made known his satisfaction with the Drury Lane manager's largesse:

> The Author of this tragedy has simply to remark that there is not an Act--hardly a Scene--of it, that is not indebted for improvement, to the talents and taste of his Friend, Mr. MACREADY; and that he cannot find terms adequate to convey his sense of the liberality with which he has been treated by Mr. ELLISTON.[385]

Caius Gracchus opened on the night of November 18, 1823. The production had been prepared with care, but the cast, according to Macready, was less than satisfactory.[386] He felt that he had not been given suffi-

[384] Stephens, The Profession 36. It was uncommon for a new tragedy to run for more than three performances.

[385] Advertisement to Caius Gracchus, T. Dolby, 1823.

[386] Macready as Caius, Mrs. Bunn as Cornelia, Mrs. West as Licinia, Archer as Opimius, Terry as Titus, and Pope as Drusus.

cient time to learn the part, yet he allowed Elliston to persuade him to perform anyway. On opening night, Macready felt that the success of the play rested completely on his shoulders. Terry (in the part of Titus) was the only actor whom he thought supportive. Unfortunately, in Macready's opinion, the part of Cornelia had been given to "an actress of but moderate power." She was Mrs. Bunn, the wife of Alfred Bunn, Elliston's assistant stage manager. Bunn, formerly the manager of the Birmingham theater, had only a month before been engaged by Elliston with the understanding that his wife would be cast in leading roles.[387] Macready knew the limits to her talent because he had only recently acted Macbeth opposite her Lady Macbeth, but he was powerless to object to her being cast as Cornelia. In spite of a weak Cornelia, Macready judged the opening night to be a success, for he speaks of leaving the theater "with the cheers of the audience and the congratulations of friends still ringing in my ears."[388]

According to the Morning Herald, Macready's performance as Caius on opening night was "not at all

[387] See Alfred L. Nelson and Gilbert B. Cross, Drury Lane Journal: Selections from James Winston's Diaries, 1819-1827 73.

[388] Macready, Reminiscences 292.

inferior to his Virginius.[389]" The reviewer found "the passages of conjugal tenderness and emotion were as true to nature in the present character as those of paternal feeling in the former." Among the scenes he praises is the one between son and mother, where Caius "exorts her reluctant approbation to his going forth to the assembly of the people to vindicate the Tribunitian laws." In this scene, he lauds "the contrasted quietness and mortified submission" with which Macready delivered the line, "I would have shown I was your son if you would have let me." The reviewer also praised "the dignified firmness" thrilling expressiveness with which Macready speaks the words, "My monument," which Caius says to his mother in reply to the question, "If I lose you what will remain to me?" The reviewer also praises the quiet way in which Caius "buries the poniard in his heart under the concealment of his robe" in the concluding scene. In Macready's words, "The death of Gracchus, stabbing himself with a dagger concealed under the folds of his toga, is nobly conceived and startling in its effect."[390]

It is not really accurate to say that Caius Gracchus was a failure, even though it lasted only seven

[389] Anon. review in the Morning Herald, Nov. 19, 1823, quoted in Macready, Reminisceneces 292. All subsequent quotations from this review are from this source.

[390] Macready, Reminisceneces.

performances. Macready attributes the play's brief run to Bunn's decision to withdraw the play because his wife was not adequate to playing Cordelia. According to Meeks, the hostility of the Tory press to the play's liberalism also contributed to its withdrawal.[391] In the winter of 1823, Macready toured the provinces with it. H.B. Baker reports that the play would have revived the next season if Kean had not refused to act in the play because Macready was in it.[392]

Two years after the success d'estime of Caius Gracchus, Knowles enjoyed a popular success equal to Virginius when William Tell was produced at Drury Lane, with Macready--his art now fully developed--performing the part of Tell. But it was a sign of the times that the production of the play brought Knowles's no financial reward. Furthermore, Macready's growing dissatisfaction with management's treatment of him and of dramatic authors in general, and what he regarded as Knowles's lack of responsibility almost caused the production to be canceled.

Knowles's situation (he was still chained to his schoolmaster duties in Glasgow) had not changed much in two years, but this could not be said of Drury Lane and Macready. By 1825, Elliston was fighting a losing

[391] Meeks, Sheridan Knowles 140.

[392] H.B. Baker, Our Old Actors (London: Bentley, 1878) 2: 349.

battle with insolvency. His extravagance had caught up with him and his finances had turned sour. The 1823-24 season had been, in the words of one of the assistant managers, "successful but unprofitable," making it necessary to secure a bank loan to pay salaries.[393] The members of the Drury Lane sub-committee were by now disillusioned with Elliston and looking for ways to oust him from management. The wily Elliston held on by his fingernails, but his days were numbered. The result was that Knowles ultimately received no payment for his labor Tell. Whatever the exact terms of the contract were, the promissory notes that he was paid[394] turned out to be worthless when the theater declared bankruptcy after Elliston collapsed on the stage while playing Falstaff and the sub-committee, waiting like vultures to pounce on their prey, canceled his lease the next season. The only money that Knowles earned from the play was from the sale of a handsome edition that sold for 3s 6d "in a superior octavo form, instead of the usual 12mo."[395] The price and binding was worthy of a tragedy.

In the winter of 1825 Macready had undergone the sobering experience of nearly dying of an inflammation

[393] Murray, Elliston 111.

[394] The terms of the contract are not reported in any of the sources I have used.

[395] Stephens, The Profession 126.

of the diaphragm. After three months of slow recuperation, the actor, with his youth behind him, resumed his acting career. One of the first characters he played upon his return was William Tell, the first part that Knowles wrote expressly as a vehicle for Macready. Virginius had served the actor well for five years, and, as Meeks puts it, "he was ready to make a bid for additional fame in a new play by the same author."[396] Macready suggested the subject to Knowles during a visit to Glasgow in early 1825, before his illness. Singificantly, Macready, always in tune with public taste, steered Knowles away from tragedy to "drama," an important development in his art because it was a step toward full-fledged domestic drama that was to become Knowles's trademark.

Knowles had applied himself with his usual diligence and ardor, producing a passionate play that was overwritten, yet filled with genuine feeling, both romantic and domestic. As soon as Macready was well enough, Knowles showed it to him. Doubtless, the author realized that his play was in need of Macready's criticism and of cutting, but Downer surely overstates the weaknesses of the draft when he writes that "in its original form it had all the faults of Knowles's style and few of its virtues: it was shapeless, strung-out,

[396] Meeks, "Diss" 123.

and crabbed." Even Macready's evaluation of the play is more generous than this.

Macready praised as "admirable" the scene in which the father instructs his son in shooting and responds to Melchthal's story of his brutal blinding, and those between Tell and Gesler, including the climactic shooting of the apple. However, Knowles had made a major misjudgment in placing Tell's soliloquy at the end rather than beginning of the play. As soon as Macready pointed this, Knowles unquestioningly acknowledged the fault and corrected it. Macready has left the following record of the matter:

> The principal scenes in it are equal to the best that the gifted author has ever written; but in its original draught it could not have been more than partially successful. The conspirators before the gate of Altorf deciding in brief and prosaic language of Gesler opened the play, which was the only introduction to the character of the hero. After the fall of Gesler, with which, of course, the interest of the play terminates, the invocation of the mountains, a soliloquy, was the subject-matter of a single scene, and the description of the eagle followed in another, suspending with mere poetical language the release of the audience. Knowles had less of the tenacity of authorship than most writers. He was open to conviction, and immediately that it was pointed out to him how much effect would be obtained by using these speeches in the early part of the play as developments of character and arguments of the story, he unhesitatingly made them introductions to the meeting on the field of Grulti, and brought the play rapidly to a close after the death of the tyrant.[397]

[397] Macready, Reminiscences 303.

One of the main faults of Tell was that it is encumbered with a superfluous comic subplot, which accounted for its extreme length. Macready retained the subplot but cut out some of its "irrelevant parts."[398] Later, he would add years to the stage life of Knowles's play by cutting out the subplot entirely and producing it in three instead of five acts.

Drury Lane's desperate finances made time of the essence, and the play was "reshaped and rushed into rehearsal,"[399] with Macready taking on the onerous responsibility of "getting up" the play, a task that overburdened him. The preparations were considerable: in addition to the casting, staging, rehearsals, there was new scenery, dresses and decorations and accompanying music, provided by H. Bishop. Macready threw himself into the preparations with his usual conscientiousness, but became so frustrated with the haste with which everything was being done that on the morning of the day before the play was announced to open he walked off the stage during rehearsal and took to his bed. In his weakened condition, the strain of undertaking the task of rehearsing the play had obviously taken its toll. He refused to perform until he was given ade-

[398] Meeks, Sheridan Knowles 129.

[399] Downer 104.

quate time to learn his lines and properly prepare the play for performance. He was determined not to be pressured into repeating the experience of Caius Gracchus, especially considering the precarious state of his health.

In an apologetic letter of explanation to Elliston the next day, Macready blames Knowles for somehow preventing him from learning his part. As Downer explains it, Macready could not concentrate on his part because he was "continually at work with the author putting it [the play] into playable shape."[400] Macready also accuses Knowles of deserting him in a time of need:

> . . . the question of the play's performance was, for three or four days, mooted by Mr. Knowles himself, which interfered with my study, and, at the time I said so, he had engaged to stay in town and assist me, which he has not done, but left me entirely to my own resources.[401]

Macready stood his ground until the late afternoon of the next day, when he showed his sense of professional duty by relenting. The entreaties of Elliston, Calcraft

[400] Downer 101.

[401] Macready, letter dated May 11, 1825, quoted in George Raymond, Memoirs of Robert William Elliston (1969; London, 1846) 2: 434. I have not been able to discover what business (his schoolmaster's duties?) kept Knowles from leaving London.

(the chairman of the sub-committee) and a number of other members of the committee prevailed upon him.[402]

On May 11, 1825, William Tell, advertised as "by the author of Virginius," was performed with great success.[403] The enthusiastic audience was unaware that Macready was busy memorizing his unlearned lines in the last act during the time he was not on the stage in the early acts of the play. Even the usually hostile arch-Tory John Bull praised the play and "the splendid acting of Mr. Macready."[404] In a review of a later shortened three-act production, the scene where Tell parts from his son is commented on admiringly:

> The enforced cheerfulness, the confidence and ease which he assures for the purpose of keeping up the boy's courage, while his heart is wrung with agony and his spirit sinks under the peril of his position, were expressed with great skill.[405]

In the original production, after Macready, the greatest attraction among the actors was the infant

[402] James Winston gives an account of the crisis in his Diaries, dated May 10, 1825--See Drury Lane Journal 111 He mentions that Knowles's father accompanied Elliston on the trip to Hamptstead Heath to persuade Macready to come to the theater to perform that night.

[403] The cast included Macready as Tell, Archer as Gesler, Miss Clara Fisher as Albert, Younge as Melchtal, and Wallack as Michael. The first run lasted eleven performances.

[404] John Bull, quoted in Meeks,

[405] Anon. review in the Times of a performance on Nov. 19, 1832, quoted in Meeks, Sheridan Knowles 109.

prodigy Clara Fisher (then aged fifteen), who affectingly played the part of Albert, Tell's son.

In later years, Macready tired of the play, finding it, unlike Virginius, too melodramatic for his taste. Yet he could show initiative in producing an old warhorse. In addition to truncating the play by removing its subplot and producing it as a three-act play, he "interpolated choruses from Rossini's opera, performed by a company of eighty singers" into a new production of Tell in 1832.[406]

Two years after the success of Tell Knowles set to work on Alfred the Great; or, The Patriot King, which Macready commissioned shortly after the success of Tell. By 1827, Knowles had finished a draft of the play and sent it to Drury Lane,[407] doubtless with the expectation that it would be accepted for production and put into rehearsal within a reasonable amount of time, with Macready playing the part of Alfred. The simplest explanation for the four year gap (1827-1831) between its composition and its production is Macready's absence from London for a good part of this period. His engagements at Drury Lane were few and far

[406] Archer Macready 120. The motive was competitive: Bunn had announced a production of Rossini's Guillaume Tell.

[407] See the Times of April, 1831: "The play of Alfred was four years ago sent in to Drury Lane by Mr Knowles, although various circumstances have prevented it from being earlier brought out"--quoted in Meeks, 213.

between (with none of them new characters) as a consequence of a mutual antipathy between him and Stephen Price, its new speculator-manager.

In the fall of 1826, after Elliston's removal, Macready had sailed for America, where, in a highly successful nine month tour, he earned 50 pounds a performance. He returned to England in June of 1827, but played only sporadically at Drury Lane the following season; as Covent Garden was still managed by Charles Kemble, Macready was estranged from both patent theaters. After two triumphant engagements in Paris, he began a series of starring engagements in the provinces which extended over two seasons (1828-30). His absence from London gave him a chance slow his pace as well as register a protest against management mentality.

While Macready was acting in the provinces, Knowles, having given up his classes, had more time to devote to playwriting. With Alfred on hold indefinitely, he responded to the encouragement of friends by trying his hand, for the first time, at comedy. The result, The Beggar's Daughter of Bethnal Green, as already mentioned, was damned by a Drury Lane audience in 1828. This failure served to make Knowles even more determined to succeed at comedy rather than driving him back, as one might expect to the haven of historical drama on which he had built his considerable reputation. As soon as Macready got wind of the fact

that Knowles was "wasting" his time on another comedy, Macready travelled to Glasgow to dissuade him from continuing. However, he changed his mind after reading the first act of The Hunchback, the first draft of which was finished by 1830.

It was about this time that Knowles made a major change in his life, giving up teaching and embarking on a career as "a lecturer on oratory, poetry, and drama."[408] In 1830, he moved his family from his beloved Glasgow to the seaside town of Newhaven, near Edinburgh, where his oldest son was attending medical school. His mind was mainly on his new play, The Hunchback, but several events had conjoined to revivify his interest in the shelved Alfred. One was the prospect of Macready's imminent return to Drury Lane in the fall of 1831 in the wake of Stephen Price's departure. Another was the death of George IV and the accession of William IV in June of 1830. With these momentous national events, Alfred suddenly took on a political relevance in the atmosphere of resurgent pro-monarchal sentiment that sweep the nation after the popular William replaced the unpopular George that it did not have in 1827. This congeries of events and expectations led Knowles to dust off a play that he had been forced to lay aside and begin the task of "remodeling" it in the

[408] Life 75.

summer of 1830.[409] According to the Life, he was dissatisfied with the original draft; this suggests that Knowles revised it extensively, but the Life also says that "only one passage was added after the accession of William IV.[410] In any event, during this time Knowles was only peripherally involved with Alfred. According to his son, his "heart was mainly set" on his new comedy The Hunchback, which he was working on simultaneously, with Kean in his mind's eye as actor who would perform the part of its protagonist.

When Macready returned to Drury Lane in the fall of 1830, Alexander Lee, a musician, was serving as manager for the wealthy but theatrically ignorant Captain Polhill. Lee was not eager for Macready "to step out of his customary roles,"[411] but the actor managed to persuade him to produce the play and on April 28, 1831, Alfred the Great; Or, The Patriot King, advertised on the playbill as being "by the Author of

[409] In the preface to The Hunchback, Knowles states that he "remodelled" Alfred while living at Newhaven in the summer of 1830.

[410] The two statements in the Life regarding the changes Knowles in the original draft appear leave an unclear impression. We are told that Knowles "remodelled" the play ("putting it into the shape in which it ultimately appeared") because he was dissatisfied with the first draft. This suggests Knowles may have revised it extensively. But we are also told that "only one passage was added after the accession of William IV [June, 1830]"--87-89. We are also told in the Life that Knowles "heart was mainly set" on his new comedy The Hunchback, which he was working on simultaneously--87.

[411] Downer 124.

'Virginius,' 'William Tell," &c," with a dedication by permission to William IV, opened. Knowles was paid 300 pounds for his play, which ran a total of fifteen performances before it was withdrawn and heard from no more.

By way of accounting for the play's lack of subsequent stage history, Archer comments that the part of Alfred was, "not strong enough to hold its place in Macready's repertory."[412] The "problem" with the play from a star actor's point of view is not that the part of the "patriot king" is ungrateful, but that the scenes of strongest domestic interest center on the relationship between the Danish King and his daughter rather than on Alfred and his queen. This fact may have had more than a little to do with Macready's lack of interest in adding the play in his repertory. No play that contained characters that competed with the star actor to the point of overshadowing him, as Alfred the Great did, could hope to find a permanent place in a star's repertory, even if like Macready he was concerned with the overall design of the play. In this respect, Knowles lacked foresight when he wrote his second play for Macready. But on a deeper level, the "problem" is a sign that Knowles's talent was expanding beyond the bounds of historical drama into the realm of

[412] Archer, Macready 83.

the domestic drama, which is the direction where his talent was headed in the dozen years that remained of his dramatic career.

In the period 1820-1831, Knowles could not have helped but learn something about stagecraft from Macready in the course of making the revisions of his plays suggested and sometimes insisted on by the actor. But the actor's primary contribution to the success of early Knowles's plays was made as an actor, arranger, and director, in the fullest sense. As the person who usually took responsibity for "getting up" Knowles's plays for production, Macready attended to myriad aspects of performance and production that were indispensable to their success: the adaptation of the playscript to the theater, rehearsals of the other actors, the grouping of the actors on the stage, costuming, and scores of other matters that required looking after. Macready carried out these responsibilities with a paintakingly, obsessive conscientiousness that was beyond the call of duty. His performances were no less obsessive and self-critical, and the fact that he was often dissatisfied with them should not mislead us into underestimating their fineness. It was chiefly in his dual professional capacity as star actor and director that Macready should be considered Knowles's "dramatic collaborator."

There is also what may be called an "unconscious" level to Knowles's collaboration with Macready deriving

from the intimate connection between life and art in the lives of both men. In spite of their contrasting characters and personalities, Knowles and Macready both infused the domestic spirit that reigned in their lives into their art. Knowles's "heart was in his home," as Macready said.[413] The same may be said of the reserved, aloof Macready, who was "just such an earnest, home-loving, devoted father as he delighted to portray on the stage."[414] The considerably older Knowles was already a husband and father of a large and happy family when he wrote Virginius. Macready was still a bachelor when he first performed it, but domestic feeling was ingrained in his character. Once he married and began raising a family his performances in domestic parts deepened. Significantly, he married (in 1824) a child-wife who had aroused his paternal instincts when she played Virginia with uncommon innocence and sensibility at age fifteen to his Virginius. He was thirty-two and she nineteen. From then on "the emotions of his private life" then became "the tools of his public performance."[415] After a performance of Virginius in 1833 he wrote in his diary: "Much I did well--in the betrothment of Virginia the thought of my own beloved

[413] Macready, Reminiscences page.

[414] Downer 76.

[415] Downer 76.

wife and child flashed across me, and I spoke from my soul--the tears came from my heart."[416] It was Macready's belief that "he did not act well if he had not identified himself with his character."[417] In the case of the two "Macready plays" written by Knowles which the actor is most closely identified with because they were part of his permanent repertory and were acted by him hundreds of times--Virginius and William Tell--this identification came from his experience of being a husband and father.

It was Knowles's great good fortune that he was cultivated by this exacting actor of near genius who at once realized that Knowles's plays could be "precisely adjusted"[418] to his own style of acting. It was his good fortune, too, that his deep desire be a supplier of plays for Kean remained unfulfilled, for Kean, for all his extraordinary genius, neither would nor could have done for him what Macready did do.

Macready singlehandedly launched Knowles's career with Virginius; he enhanced it with William Tell, and to a lesser degree Caius Gracchus and Alfred the Great. His familiar "domestic" style made him the ideal inter-

[416] Macready, entry for Sept. 13, 1833, The Diaries of William Charles Macready, 1833-1851 ed. William Toynbee, 2 vols. (1912; Benjamin Blom, 1969) 1: 63.

[417] Downer 77.

[418] Downer 80.

preter of the leading parts in Knowles's plays. In all, he acted the lead parts in six of Knowles's plays over a twenty-three year period. After Tell, however, Knowles was in a position to strike out on his own and declare his independence of Macready, which he did with his first comedy, which was written the year after Alfred the Great. As Christopher Murray has observed, the plays Knowles wrote after Alfred "are far less vehicles for a star actor and more in tune with contemporary interest in melodrama on the one hand and comedy of manners on the other."[419]

The relationship between Knowles and Macready became strained when Knowles took the bold step of performing the lead role of Master Walter in his second comedy, The Hunchback. Macready could never forgive Knowles for his ambition to be a star actor in his own plays, though he was not averse to performing with him in the same play at benefits. After 1832, their friendship, which had been "fitful and romantic" in the best of times suddenly cooled owing to Macready's "jealousy and bad temper."[420] This put to an end to the most fruitful phase of a dramatic collaboration between an

[419] Murray 167.

[420] Downer 62.

actor and author that was as ideal as any that has ever existed.[421]

[421] The collaboration entered a second phase during Macready's brief tenure as manager of Covent Garden (1837-39) and Drury Lane (1841-43).

CONCLUSION

Knowles will remain a minor figure in the history of early nineteenth century drama because he was a minor talent. He was a dramatist for an age and when that age passed away, his plays were doomed to oblivion. His plays are primarily worth reading as a means of understanding that age better. In many respects they are representative of its taste and values. To be fully appreciated and fairly judged, they must be placed in the context of their time, as this study has attempted to do.

Knowles is important to the history of English drama because it was a continuator of a tradition of verse drama going back to the Elizabethan age. He was one of the last practitioners of that tradition whose plays enjoyed popularity on the English stage. The early nineteenth century witnessed a revival of verse drama that underwent three phases of development on the English stage: from serious Gothic verse drama representing itself as tragedy (inaugurated by Coleridge's Remorse) to historical tragedy in the 1820s

and then from historical tragedy to domestic drama in the 1830s. This study has focussed on Knowles's contribution to the second phase of this revival in the period of the 1820s, which consisted of two of his most enduring plays, Virginius and William Tell. The former, although not the first historical tragedy to be seen on the London stage (to Payne's Brutus goes that distinction), was the first of its type by a British dramatist, and its success was owing to Knowles's talent for using history as an idealized mirror in which Britons could see themselves and their nation in the most flattering light. and for the combination of emotional glow and thrill. Tell, along with Alfred the Great, are examples of a transitional type of historical drama linking Knowles's historical tragedies with his later domestic dramas.

The historical drama of this second phase was a also moral drama shaped by middle class values and pervaded by domesticity. As a form of moralized and "domesticated history,"[1] it filled a moral vacuum in the drama that was felt in the popular Gothized verse plays of Maturin and Sheil. It was also a melodramatized drama geared to appeal to popular taste. They filled audiences with a satisfying emotional glow while thrilling them with intense pathos. The four historical that Knowles wrote in this period exhibit

[1] Mears 237.

male protagonists who are patterns of domestic and civic virtue.

It was natural for Knowles to abandon tragedy (Caius Gracchus and Virginius) for historical drama with a happy ending (William Tell and Alfred the Great) given the shift in taste to melodrama that took place by the early nineteenth century. This shift reflects pervasive changes in the social ethos that were at work during and after the Napoleonic Wars in reaction against the moral laxness of the aristocracy in general and the Regency period in particular. The new ethos laid the groundwork for the Victorian period to follow.

In following in the direction of domestic drama,, Knowles weaned himself away from dependency on historical subject matter and overt Shakespearean influences, though, by choice, he clung to his Elizabethan verse style. It was equally natural for him, given his talent for arousing pathos out of domestic situations, to abandon historical drama (though not historical settings) and exploit this pathos in domestic drama that focussed on the suffering of a heroine (e.g., Julia in The Hunchback and Mariana in The Wife) Thus Knowles went go to contributeg further to the undermining of conventional tragedy, just as his earlier efforts had helped to briefly revive it. His achievement after 1831 (drama and comedy, chiefly) is as worthy of examination as his achievement before 1831, but it falls outside the scope of this study.

Knowles's development as a dramatist during the 1820s, it has been shown, is best explained in relationship to the conditions existing in the theater of his day and his friendship with Kean and Macready, two of its leading male actors. Both were catalysts in bringing Knowles's plays to birth, and influential in determining their character as star vehicles for the expression of a new "realism" (relatively speaking) in the portrayal of domestic relationships.

It has also been shown that the historical plays Knowles wrote in the 1820s had liberal (i.e., reformist) political overtones and contained veiled allusions to contemporary events and situations that are easily decoded if one is familiar with the political and social history of the period. These overtones Knowles to be a liberal, although not a flaming liberal like his early mentor Hazlitt. Once the political context is taken into account, Knowles plays take on vitality and relevance that they have lost with the passage of time and the changes in dramatic taste.

In a word, Knowles brought a particularized, sincere kind of domestic interest and colloquialism of style to verse drama at a time when it was in desperately in need of an antidote to overwrought passion. He ministered to the anxiety of the age, providing cultural and religious sustenance at a time of great turbulence and confusion. In the theater of his time, his plays were felt to be new and stimulating and

audiences reacted by elevating him to a position of eminence that is to us today almost beyond comprehension and which even to this sympathetic reader of his plays is difficult to fathom.

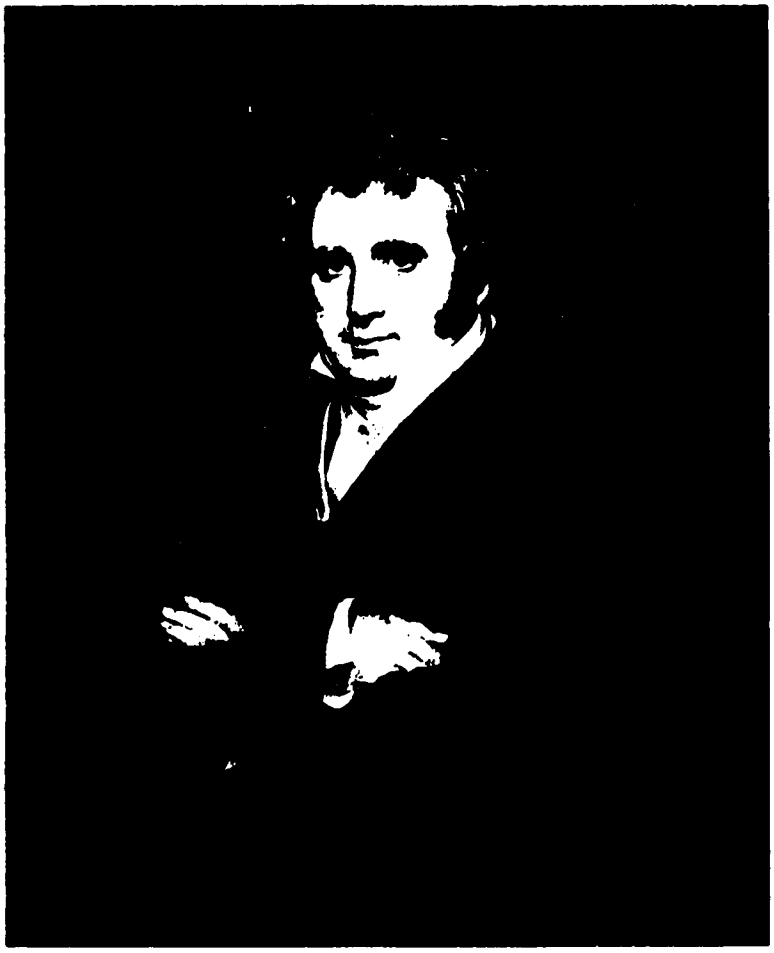


Fig. 1

Fig. 2

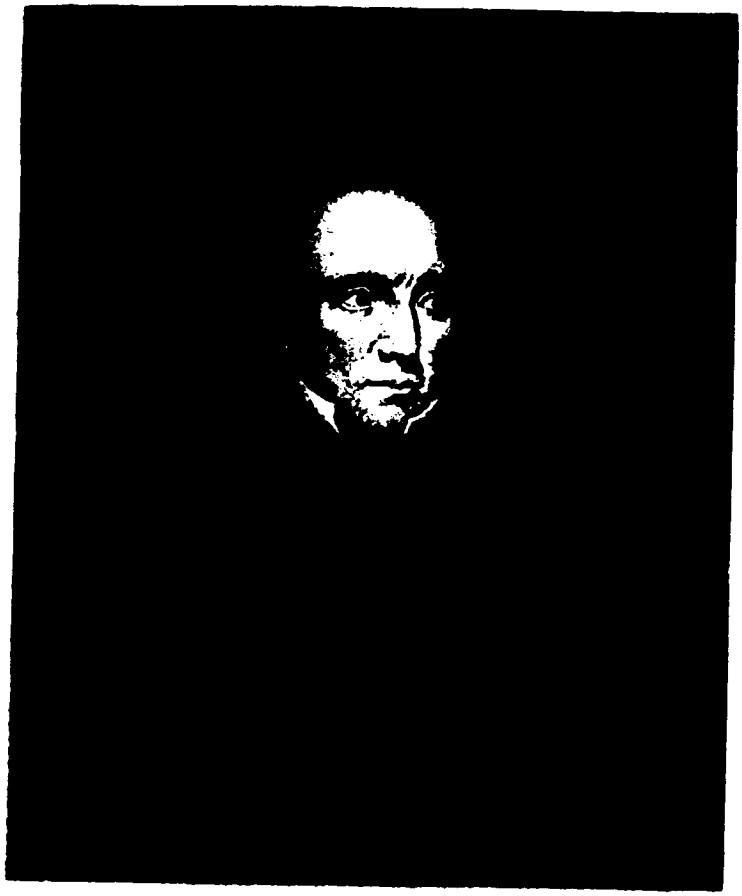


Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

THIRTY SEVENTH NIGHT.

Theatre Royal, Drury-Lane,

This present SATURDAY December 21, 1799,
Their Majeſties Servants
will perform (for the 6th. Time this Seaſon) a Tragedy in Five acts called

PIZARRO.

The SCENERY, DRESSES, and DECORATIONS, entirely New.
The Muſick, Airs, Chorusſes, and Marches, incidental to the Piece,
Compoſed by Mr. KELLY.
The Symphony preceding the Play, and thoſe between the Acts,
Compoſed for the occaſion, by Mr. DUSSECK.

Ataliba, Mr. POWELL,
Rolla, Mr. KEMBLE,
Alonzo, Mr. C. KEMBLE,
Pizarro, Mr. BARRYMORE,
Almagro, Mr. CAULFIELD, Gonzalo, Mr. WENTWORTH,
Davilla, Mr. TRUEMAN, Gomez, Mr. SURMONT,
Valverde, Mr. PALMER, Las-Caſas, Mr. AICKIN,
Orozembo, Mr. DOWTON, Blind Man, Mr. CORY,
Centinel, Mr. HOLLAND, Orano, Mr. ARCHER,
Attendant, Mr. MADDOCKS, Boy, Maſter CHATTERLEY,
Soldiers, Mr FISHER, Mr EVANS, Mr WEBB, Mr CHIPPENDALE.
Cora, Miſs BIGGS,
Elvira, Mrs. SIDDONS.

The Vocal Parts by
Mr. SEDGWICK,
Mr. DIGNUM, Mr. DANBY.
Mrs. CROUCH,
Miſs DE CAMP, Miſs STEPHENS,
Miſs LEAK, Miſs MENAGE.

Meſſrs. Cooke, Tett, Caulfield, Jun. Sawyer, Danby, Jun. Aylmer,
Willoughby, Bardaleau, Clark, Mead, Elliot, &c. &c.
Meſds. Arne, Menage, Roffey, Menage, Jun. Wentworth, Chippendale,
Jacobs, Butler, Saunders, Gawdry, Benſon, Coates, &c. &c.

The SCENERY Deſigned And executed by
Meſſrs. MARINARI, GREENWOOD,
DEMARIA, BANKS, BLACKMORE, &c.
The MACHINERY, DECORATIONS, and DRESSES under the
Direction of Mr. JOHNSTON,
And executed by him, Mr. UNDERWOOD and Mr. GAY.
The Female Dreſſes Deſigned and executed by Miſs REIN.

To which will be added a Farce called The

LYING VALET.

Gayleſs, Mr. HOLLAND,
Sharp, Mr. SUETT,
Juſtice Guttle, Mr. MADDOCKS, Beau Trippit, Mr. FISHER,
Dick, Mr. WEWITZER.
Meliſſa, Miſs HEARD,
Kitty Pry, Miſs MELLON, Mrs. Gadabout, Mrs. SPARKS.

Boxes 6s. Second Price 3s. Pit 3s. 6d. Second Price 2s. Gallery 2s. Second Price 1s.
Upper Gallery 1s. Second Price 6d. NO MONEY TO BE RETURNED.
Places for the Boxes to be taken of Mr. Fulbrook at his Office in Little Ruſſel-ſtreet.
Printed by C. Lowndes, next the Stage-Door. *Vivant Rex et Regina!*

On account of the number of Ladies and Gentlemen who have been diſappointed of Places for the Tragedy of PIZARRO,
The Public are moſt reſpectfully informed that the 38th. night will be on Monday next, Being the laſt time of performing till the Holidays.
On Thurſday (firſt time this Seaſon) the Tragedy of GEORGE BARN[illegible]

Fig. 8

Theatre Royal, Covent Garden

(Having been Re-Painted and generally Beautified, and a NEW STAGE having been laid down)

WILL OPEN FOR THE SEASON

This Evening, MONDAY, OCTOBER 7th, 1833,

WITH AN OCCASIONAL ADDRESS,

TO BE SPOKEN BY MISS TAYLOR,

After which will be performed Sheridan's Tragic Play of

PIZARRO!

PERUVIANS.

Alzilba, ... Mr. YOUNGE,

Rolla, ... Mr. KING,

(From the Theatre Royal, Dublin, his First Appearance in London.)

Fernando, Miss TOMKINS, Orozembo, Mr. BARTLEY,

Huasca, Mr. BLANCHARD, Topac, Miss MARSHALL, Huasca, Mr. TURNOUR,

Orano, Mr. MEARS, Haris and Rimo, Messrs. RUSSELL and BRADY, Capac, Mr. F. SUTTON,

Cora, ... Miss PHILLIPS,

PRIESTS, VIRGINS, MATRONS, &c. &c.

THE TEMPLE OF THE SUN.

High Priest, Mr. SEGUIN.

Mesds. Betts, H. Cawse, Chester, Somerville, Pearley, Mapleson, East, Allcroft, Goodwin, Connelly, Perry, Bodon, R. Bodon, &c. &c. Messrs. Henley, Chant, Miller, East, R. Jones, C. Tett, Allcroft, R. Tett, Tulkien, T. Jones, Galli, White, G. Smith, &c. &.

SPANIARDS.

Pizarro, ... Mr. G. BENNETT, Alonzo, ... Mr. COOPER,

Las Casas, Mr. MATHEWS, Almagro, Mr. BAKER,

Davilla, Mr. HENRY, Gonzalo, Mr. PAYNE, Valverde, Mr. PERKINS,

Gomez, Mr. IRWIN, Pedro, Mr. J. COOPER, Centinel, Mr. MEADOWS,

Elvira, ... Miss PLACIDE,

(From the American Theatres, her First Appearance on the English Stage.)

Previous to the Play, the BAND will perform

CHERUBINI'S Overture to "ANACREON."

And in the course of the Evening,

MOZART'S Overture to "ZAUBERFLOTTE.

To which will be added, a New Farce, called

MY NEIGHBOUR'S WIFE!!

Mr. Somerton, Mr. COOPER,

Mr. Brown, Mr. MEADOWS, Mr. Smith, Mr. BARTLEY,

Mrs. Somerton, Miss TAYLOR,

Mrs. Brown, Miss KENNETH, Mrs. Smith, Miss MURRAY. *(her First Appearance.)*

The Evening's performances will conclude with GARRICK'S Dramatic Romance of

CYMON.

The OVERTURE composed by Mr. BISHOP.—The ORIGINAL MUSIC by MICHAEL ARNE.

Cymon, Miss TAYLOR,

Merlin, Mr. DIDDEAR, Dorus, Mr. BLANCHARD,

Linco, Mr. HARLEY, Damon, Mr. IRWIN, Dorilus, Mr. J. COOPER,

Sylvia, Miss SHIRREFF,

Urganda, (*the Enchantress*) Miss INVERARITY,

Daphne, Miss LEE, Fatima, Mrs. GIBBS, Dorcas, Mrs. C. JONES,

The Songs will be Sung in the following Order:—

Air. Cymon. (Arne) *You gave me lost sweet a young lineet.*

Air. Urganda. (Sir John Stevenson) *Yet one callon before you leave me.*

Air. Sylvia. (Arne) *Yet cubile sweet sleep dentes me*

Duet. Cymon & Sylvia. (Bishop) *Oh, take this message, gentle youth.*

Air. Sylvia. (Arne) *O why should I sorrow.* *Song.* Damon. (Arne) *When I was young.*

Air. Sylvia. (Bishop) *From duty (the Shepherd strays.*

Trio. Sylvia, Damon, Linco. (Bishop) *Full of doubt and full of fear.*

Air. Sylvia. (Arne) *This cold flinty heart.* *Air.* Cymon. (Arne) *Come on, come on.*

Air. Cymon. (Arne) *Turn from me.* Finale. *Moment of Triumph.*

Vivant Rex et Regina.

GEORGE BARTLEY, Stage Manager.

A New Male-Drama, called

THE FERRY AND THE MILL!

Has been commenced in Preparation, and will be produced in the course of a few Days.

On Wednesday, O'Keefe's Opera of **FONTAINBLEAU; or, OUR WAYS IN FRANCE.**

With a New **Interlude.** And the Fairy Piece of the **FORTY THIEVES.**

On Friday, Shakspeare's Comedy (with New Music) of **TWELFTH NIGHT.**

With **GIOVANNI IN LONDON.** Don Giovanni, Mr. FITZWILLIAM.

The Doors will be opened at half-past Six, and the Performances commence at Seven.

Fig. 9

Fig. 10

First Night of the NEW TRAGEDY!

New Theatre Royal, Drury Lane.

This Evening, TUESDAY, November 18, 1823,

(In consequence of the Sanction of the Licenser having been at length obtained for the Performance)

His Majesty's Servants will represent *(for the 1st time)* the new Tragedy of

CAIUS GRACCHUS.

Flavius, Mr. THOMPSON, Opimius, Mr. ARCHER,
Fannius, Mr. POWELL, Tullius, Mr. WEBSTER,
Caius Gracchus, Mr. MACREADY,
Decius, Mr. POPE, Licinius, Mr. PENLEY, Perpenna, Mr. MERCER,
Verrius, Mr. YOUNGE, Fulvius Flaccus, Mr. YARNOLD,
Titus, Mr. TERRY, Probus, Mr. W. H. WILLIAMS, Marcus, Mr. GATTIE,
Scipio, Mr. FITZWILLIAM, Quintus, Mr. HUGHES,
Lictor, Mr. HOWELL, Lictor, Miss CARR.

Cornelia, *(Mother of Gracchus)* Mrs. BUNN,
Licinia, *(Wife to Gracchus)* Mrs. W. WEST,
Livia, Miss SMITHSON.

The PROLOGUE to be spoken by Mr. TERRY.
The EPILOGUE by Miss S. BOOTH, Miss L. KELLY, and Mrs. ORGER.

To conclude with, *(for the 87th time)* a Grand Drama of Action and Spectacle, *(founded on an ancient custom of the Hindoos)* called The

Cataract of the Ganges;

Or, The Rajah's Daughter.

With entirely New Scenery, Machinery, Dresses and Decorations.

The Scenery, by Marinari, Stanfield, Roberts, Andrews, Hollogan, Read, and Assistants.
The Machinery, by Mr. Baker, Mr Neil & Assistants. The Dresses, by Mr. Banks & Miss Smith.
The Properties and Decorations, by Mr. Kelly and Assistants.
The Hydraulic Apparatus, under the superintendance of Mr. Monro.
The Music of the Piece, composed and arranged by Mr. Hawes.

Produced under the Direction of Mr. Wallack.

The Spectacle under the superintendance of Mr W. Barrymore

Arbim, *(Emperor of Hindostan,)* Mr. POWELL, Jim Sabob, *(The Rajah of Canara)* Mr. YOUNGE,
Meharen, *(Grand Brahmin of the Jakrajah Tribe,)* Mr. WALLACK,
Ian, *(a young Hindu Warrior,)* Mr. PENLEY. Usbegan, *(a Hindu Peasant)* Mr. J. BARNES,
Ambassador, *(from the Emperor of Hindostan,)* Mr. WEBSTER,
Mordaunt, *(an Officer in the English Army, attached to the Rajah of Canara,)* Mr. ARCHER,
Jack Robinson, *(Mordaunt's Servant,)* Mr. HARLEY.
Combatants by Messrs. PAULO, BLANCHARD, and HOWELL.

Princess Deen, *(Daughter of the Emperor of Hindostan,)* Miss PHILLIPS,
Meenah, *(a female Hindu Peasant of the Jhalla Tribe)* Mrs. HARLOWE,
Ellen, *(her Daughter,)* Miss POVEY, Zemina, *(of Canara)* Miss L. KELLY,
Officers, Guards, Slaves, Brahmins, Rajahs, Standard Bearers, Singing Girls, Dancing Girls, Female Attendants, &c. &c.

THE CATARACT;

Or, The RAJAH'S DAUGHTER,

Was played last Night, for the Nineteenth time, to a house more crowded than on any former night of its representation—and as it continues so unprecedentedly successful, it will be performed

EVERY NIGHT UNTIL CHRISTMAS;

and for the accommodation of the Public, the Doors will still be opened at a Quarter past Six—the Box-Office closed at Half-past Three—an* ADDITIONAL PIT DOOR *thrown open, and all ORDERS totally suspended!

Mr. MACREADY

Will appear this Evening in the new Tragedy of Caius Gracchus.

Mrs BUNN

Will appear this Evening in the new Tragedy of Caius Gracchus.

Fig. 11

Never Acted.

THEATRE ROYAL, COVENT-GARDEN

This present WEDNESDAY, May 17, 1820,
Will be produced, *for the first time*, a New Historical TRAGEDY, called

VIRGINIUS;

OR,

THE LIBERATION OF ROME.

With new Scenery, Dresses, and Decorations.
The Dresses by Mr. PALMER & Miss EGAN

Appius Claudius by Mr. ABBOTT,
Virginius by Mr. MACREADY,
Icilius by Mr. C. KEMBLE,
Claudius by Mr. CONNOR,
Siccius Dentatus by Mr. TERRY,
Numetorius by Mr. EGERTON,
Spurius Oppius by Mr. WHITE, Vibulanus by Mr JEFFERIES
Marcus by Mr CLAREMONT, Publius by Mr MEARS,
Honorius by Mr. NORRIS, Valerius by Mr. VEBY
Lucius by Mr. COMER, Cneius by Mr KING
Titus by Mr FAUCIT, Servius by Mr. ATKINS,
Sextus by Mr CRUMPTON, Guard by Mr TREBY,
Patricians, Messl. COLLET and GOURLET,
Plebeians, Messl. Menage, Montague, Williams, George, Heath, Grant Goodwin, Platt, &c.

Virginia by Miss FOOTE,
Servia by Mrs FAUCIT,
Slave by Mrs CHIPP.

The Prologue to be spoken by Miss S. BOOTH,
The Epilogue by Miss BRUNTON.

To which will be added the Farce of

Honest Thieves.

Col. Careless, Mr. CONNOR, Capt. Manly, Mr COMER, Mr. Story, Mr CLAREMONT,
Justice Day, Mr FAUCIT, Abel, Mr. CHIPPINDALE,
Obadiah, Mr. W FARREN,
Bailiffs, Messl, Crumpton, George, Platt, Peter, Mr Heath, Constance, Mr. Williams
Teague, Mr. JOHNSTONE, who will introduce the favourite Songs of

'The Hero of Ballinacrazy,' and *'The Tight Irish Boy,'*

Ruth, Miss FOOTE, Arabella, Miss BEAUMONT, Mrs Day, Miss DAVENPORT.

A Private Box may be had for the Season, or nightly, of Mr. Brandon at the Box-office

☞ *NOT AN ORDER can be admitted.*

Due notice will be given of the next performance of
The new highly popular Musical Romance of
HENRI QUATRE; or, *Paris in the Olden Time.*

There also will be produced, for the first time, a New Musical Drama, in 2 acts called
The BATTLE of BOTHWELL BRIGG.
[*Founded on a story in the popular* TALES OF MY LANDLORD.]
With new scenery, Machinery, Dresses and Decorations
The Musical composed and selected by Mr. BISHOP.
The principal characters by Mr DURUSET, Mr. CONNOR, Mrs BLANCHARD, Mr. ABBOTT,
Mr. CHAPMAN, Mr. BARNES Mr. EMERY, Mr. COMER, Mr JARRY,
Mrs DAVENPORT, Miss M. TREE,
Mrs T. HILL Mrs CONNOR.

Fig. 12

New Theatre Royal, Drury Lane.

This Evening, WEDNESDAY, May 11, 1825,

His Majesty's servants will perform, (for the First Time) a New Historical Play, called

William Tell

By the Auth[illegible]

With New Scenery, Dresses, and Decorations,

The interspersed Music, composed by Mr. H. R. Bishop.

AUSTRIANS.

Gesler, (*Governor of Waldstetten*) Mr. ARCHER.
Sarnem, (*his Lieutenant*) Mr. THOMPSON,
Struth, (*his Seneschal*) Mr GATTIE.
Rodolph, Luitold, Gerard, (*his Castellains*) Mr. COMER, Mr. HOWELL, Mr. FENTON.
Bruno, (*Servant to the Seneschal*) Mr. KNIGHT.
Amelia, (*Step-Daughter to the Seneschal*) Miss POVEY,
Agnes (*her Cousin*) Mrs. YATES.

Archers—Messrs. Brown, Foster, jun. Gassio, Gregory, Hope, Phillips

SWISS

William Tell, Mr. MACREADY,
Albert, (*his Son*) Miss CLARA FISHER.
Melchtal, [*Ernie's Father*] Mr. YOUNGE.
Ernest, First, [*Patriots in league with William Tell,*] Mr. WEBSTER. Mr. ARMSTRONG
Verner, Mr. MERCER. Waldman, [*a Burgher of Altorf*] Mr. HUGHES,
Michael, [*his Son*] Mr WALLACK.
Jaghelli, [*Michael's Friend*] Mr PENLEY.
Ernest, Theodore, [*Inhabitants of Altorf.*] Mr. YARNOLD, Mr. O. SMITH,

Interpreter's—Master EDMONDS, Mr. FOSTER, Mr. SHERIFF.

Messrs. Gibbon, Honnor, Leach, Plumstead, Rowcroft, Rouse, D. Smith Vining, &c. &c. &c.

Emma, [*Tell's Wife*] Mrs. SUNN.

Soldiers, Mountaineers.....Messrs. Austin, Arthur, Baker, Crowther, Green, Gorham, Jones, Peters, Simpson, Taylor, Turner, Wilson, Winter.

Messrs. Bent, Carr, Crowther, Curry, Gossett, Greenfield, Hopes, Holmes, M. Neal, Perry, Vokney, Webster Wilmott, J. Williams, L. Williams

In the course of the Play the following New Scenery.

The Castle and Town of Altorf.....*Marinari.*
THE PASS OF URUSLI.....*Andrews & Adams.*
William Tell's Cottage on the Mountain.....*Roberts.*
MOUNTAIN TORRENT . . *Stanfield.*
The ENTRANCE to GESLER'S CASTLE.....*Roberts.*
The Market Place of Altorf.....*Roberts.*
ENVIRONS of ALTORF.....*Marinari.*
VICINITY OF GESLER'S CASTLE..*Roberts*
The Fortifications from the Land side......Marinari.

To conclude with the Farce of The

SLEEPING DRAUGHT.

Doctor Vincolo, Mr. HUGHES, Farmer Bruno, Mr. GATTIE.
Popolino, Mr. HARLEY.
Rinaldo, Mr. MERCER, Gabriotto, Mr. YARNOLD, Yaldo, Mr. HOWELL,
Signora Francesca, Miss SMITHSON, Nonna, Mrs. ORGER.

VIVAT REX. No Money to be returned. J. Tabby, Printer, Theatre Royal, Drury Lane.

The Public is respectfully informed, that

DER FREISCHUTZ

Will be performed on Tuesdays and Saturdays during the present month.

The New Drama of

ABON HASSAN,

To-morrow Evening, and twice in every week till further Notice.

To-morrow, A favourite Historical Play. With ABON HASSAN.
On Friday, A favourite Historical Play.
On Saturday, (17th time) DER FREISCHUTZ.

A New Romance, with Music, called

FAUSTUS.

With entirely New Scenery, Machinery, Dresses, and Decorations.

Fig. 13

Theatre Royal, Drury-Lane.

This present THURSDAY, September 26, 1816,

Their Majesties' Servants will perform (FIRST TIME) this Season) the last new Tragedy of

BERTRAM;

OR

The Castle of St. Aldobrand.

The new Musick incidental to the Tragedy, composed by Mr. T. COOKE.

Bertram, Mr. KEAN,
St. Aldobrand, Mr. BENGOUGH,
(His first Appearance in that Character.)
Prior of St. Anselm, Mr. HOLLAND,
Father Hilary, Mr. POWELL,
Farther Bernardo, Mr. R. PHILLIPS,
Father Antonio, Mr. BARNARD,
Hugo, Mr. CARR, Pietro, Mr. COVENEY,
Bandit, Mr KENT, Mr. COOKE, Page, Miss CARR,
Monks—Messrs. Miller, Goodwin, Hopes, Matthews, Vials, Appleby.
Knights—Messrs Ebsworth, Cooper, G. Wells, Brown, Jameson.
Imogine, Miss SOMERVILLE,
(Her first Appearance this Season.)
Clotilda, Miss BOYCE, Teresa, Miss COOKE,
Child of Aldobrand and Imogine, Miss G. CARR,

The Vocal Parts by Mr. PYNE, Mr. SMITH, Mr. J. SMITH,
Messrs. Ebsworth, Jones, Dibble, Clark, Cook, Odwell, Mead, Wilson,
Evans, Warner, Buggins, Caulfield,

To which will be added, the musical Farce of

HIT OR MISS!

Dick Cypher, Mr. HARLEY, Janus Jumble, Mr. WALLACK,
Adam Sterling, (2d. time) Mr. GATTIE,
Jerry Blossom, Mr. KNIGHT, O'Rourke O'Daisy, Mr. JOHNSTONE,
Miss Augusta Caroline Honeymouth, Mrs. SPARKS,
Clara Sterling, Mrs. COOKE, *(her second Appearance in that Character.)*
Dolly O'Daisy, Mrs. BLAND.

Boxes and Places to be taken of Mr SPRINGS, Rotunda, Brydges-Street,
From Ten till Four, and of whom may be had a Private Box, (Nightly.)
Doors to be opened at *half* past *Four* o'Clock, the Performance to begin at *half* past *Six* precisely,
Boxes 7*s.* Second Price 3*s.* 6*d.*—Pit 3*s.* 6*d.*—Second Price 2*s.*
Lower Gallery, 2*s.*—Second Price 1*s.*—Upper Gallery, 1*s.*—Second Price 6*d.*
Vivat Rex et Regina.—*No Money to be returned.*—Lowndes, Printer, Marquis-Court, Drury-Lane.

Mr. KEAN

WILL APPEAR

This Evening, in BERTRAM,
On Saturday, in A NEW WAY TO PAY OLD DEBTS,
On Monday, in OTHELLO.

Miss SOMERVILLE

Will appear for the first time this Season,
This Evening, in the Tragedy of BERTRAM.

In Consequence of the great Demand for Places to MASSINGER's Play of A NEW WAY TO PAY OLD DEBTS which was honoured on Saturday Evening with the highest Approbation, the Publick are respectfully informed, that it will be repeated on *Saturday* next.

The Publick are respectfully informed, that the Farce of the Blacksmith of Antwerp, is unavoidably postponed on account of the Indisposition of Mr. MUNDEN.

On Saturday, Massinger's Play of A NEW WAY TO PAY OLD DEBTS,
Sir Giles Overreach, Mr. KEAN, *Lady Allworth*, Mrs. KNIGHT,
On Monday SHAKSPEARE's Tragedy of OTHELLO. *Othello*, Mr KEAN.
Iago, (first time) Mr. BENGOUGH, *Desdemona*, Mrs. BARTLEY, her first appearance this Season,) *Emilia*, Mrs. KNIGHT, (first time.
On Tuesday, SHERIDAN's Comedy of the RIVALS, *Sir Anthony Absolute*, Mr. DOWTON,
Sir Lucius O'Trigger, Mr. JOHNSTONE, *Acres*, Mr. HARLEY,
Faulkland Mr. RAE, *Captain Absolute*, Mr. WALLACK, *David*, Mr. KNIGHT,
Lydia Languish, Mrs. MARDYN, (Their first appearance in those Characters,)
Julia Mrs. DAVISON. *Mrs. Malaprop*, Mrs. SPARKS,

Fig. 14

THEATRE ROYAL, DRURY LANE.

This Evening, THURSDAY, APRIL 28, 1831.

Their Majesties' Servants will act a new Historical Play, in 3 Acts, called

ALFRED THE GREAT;

Or, The PATRIOT KING!!

(By the Author of "VIRGINIUS," "WILLIAM TELL," &c.)

DEDICATED (BY PERMISSION)

To His Most Gracious Majesty, KING WILLIAM THE IVth!!

ENGLISH.

Alfred,.....Mr. MACREADY,
Oddune, Mr. J. VINING, Oswith, Mr. H. WALLACK,
Edric, Mr. YOUNGE, Egbert, Mr THOMPSON, Kenric, Mr. COOKE,
Edwy, Mr. SINCLAIR,
Oswald, Mr. HONNER, Arthur, Mr. EATON, Edgar, Mr. BLAND,
Edwin, Mr. FENTON, Conrad, Mr. HAMMERTON,
Ethelred, (*Child*) Miss SWIFT, Arnold, Mr. CATHIE,
Elswith, (*Queen*) Miss HUDDART, Maude, Mrs. C. JONES.

DANES.

Guthrum, Mr. COOPER,
Ismund, Mr. S. JONES, Oscar, Mr. C. JONES, Haldane, Mr. HOWARD,
Otho, Mr. YARNOLD, Soldier, Mr. HOWELL,
Priest, Mr DOWSING, Boy, Master FENTON,
Ina, Miss PHILLIPS, Edith, Miss FAUCIT.

In the course of the Evening, the **BAND** will perform,

F. De Winter's Overture to DAS UNTERBROCHENE OPFERFEST;
And A. Lee's Overture to THE INVINCIBLES;

After which will be Exhibited, the New and Splendid

DIORAMA,

Designed and painted by Mr. STANFIELD.

To conclude with, a new PERADIC DRAMA, in 2 Acts, called The

Legion of Honour!

The MUSIC by Mr. ALEXANDER LEE.

Philippe Galliard, (*aged* 102) Mr. FARREN,
Jerome Galliard, } *his* { Son, Mr. DOWTON,
Pierre Galliard, } { Grandson, Mr. LISTON,
Antoine Galliard, } { Great Grandson, Mr. BLAND,
François Ledru, (*Gardener & ci-devant Corporal of Dragoons*) Mr. HARLEY,
Horace Galoupé, (*Drum Major*) Mr. BENSON HILL,
Hector, (*his adopted Son*) Miss POOLE,
Madame La Ronde, (*Aubergiste*) Mrs. ORGER,
Isidora, (*her Niece*) Mrs. WAYLETT.

The new Operatic Farce, in Two Acts, entitled

The LEGION of HONOUR,

Having been received with such unbounded Applause, will be performed every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday until further notice.

The PLEDGE, or CASTILIAN HONOUR,
will be performed early in the next week.

...rrow, **A new Historical Play.** And **HOFER, the Toll of the Tyrol.**
...day, **A new Historical Play. A Ballet.** And **The LEGION of HONOUR!**
...day, **A new Historical Play.** The **Brigand.** And **other Entertainments.**
...day.....**The SCHOOL for SCANDAL.**
Sir Peter Teazle, ... Joseph Surface, Mr Cooper, ...
Charles Surface, Mr Wallack, ... Sir Benjamin Backbite, Mr. Farley, Crabtree, Mr. W. Bennett,
... Mr Reynolds, ... Mr Younge, ... Mr Webster, Trip, Mr. Balls, Snake, Mr. Thompson,
... Mr Harley, ... Lady Teazle, Miss Chester, Lady Sneerwell, Mrs Faucit,
... Mrs Orger, ... Maid, Mrs Webster.

With a Ballet. And The LEGION of HONOUR.

... Theatre Royal, Drury Lane.

Fig. 15

DOLBY'S BRITISH THEATRE.

CAIUS GRACCHUS.

I. R. Cruikshank, Del. *White, Sculpt.*

ACT V. SCENE 3.

Fig. 16

DOLBY'S BRITISH THEATRE.

VIRGINIUS.

I. R. Cruikshank, Del. *White, Sculp.*

Virginius. The colouring is good,
The figure's well design'd. 'Tis very well!—
Whose face is this you've given to Achilles?
Virginia. Whose face?
Virginius. I've seen this face! Tut! Tut! I know it
As well as I do my own, yet can't bethink me
Whose face it is!
Virginia. You mean Achilles' face?

ACT I. SCENE I.

Fig. 17

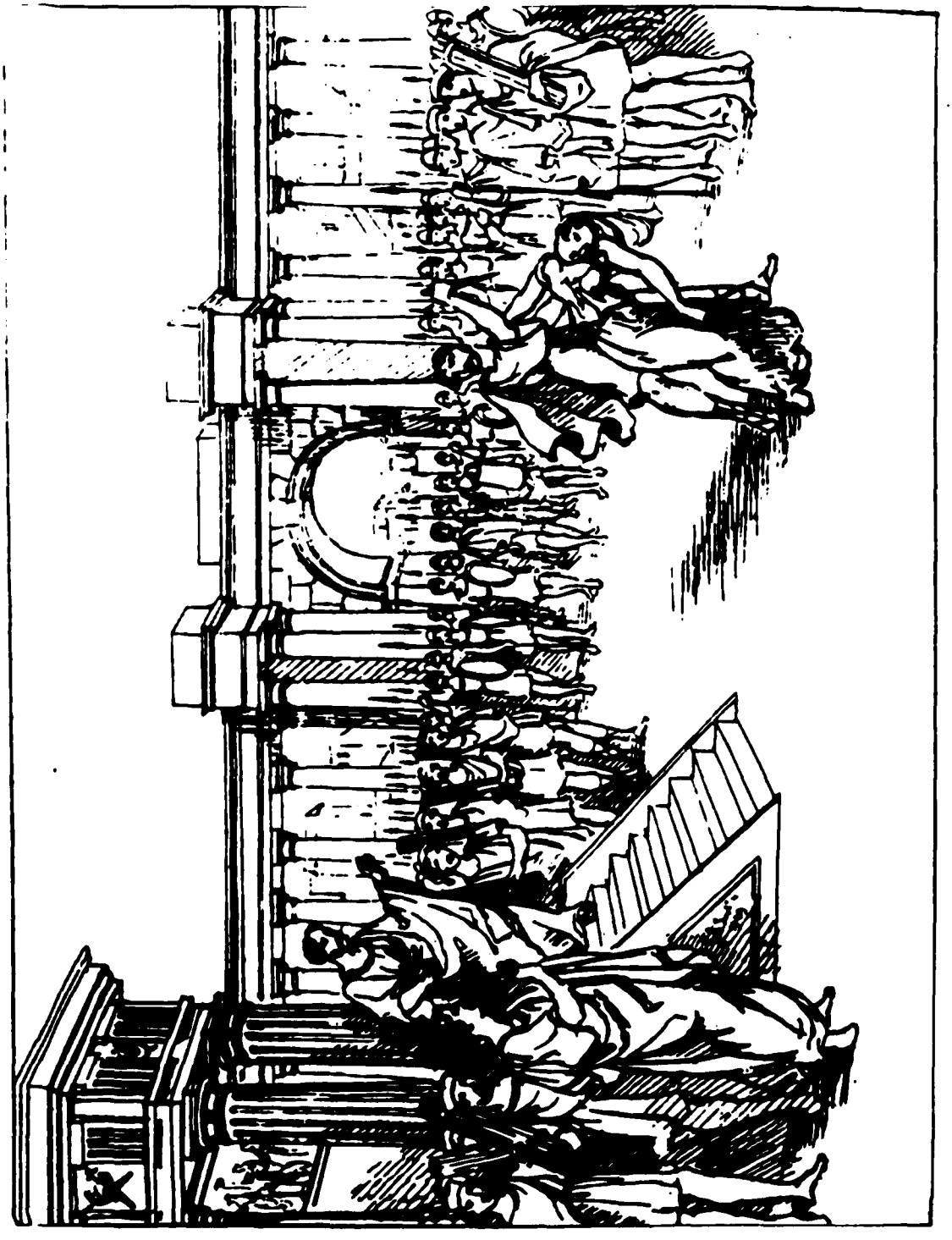


Fig. 18

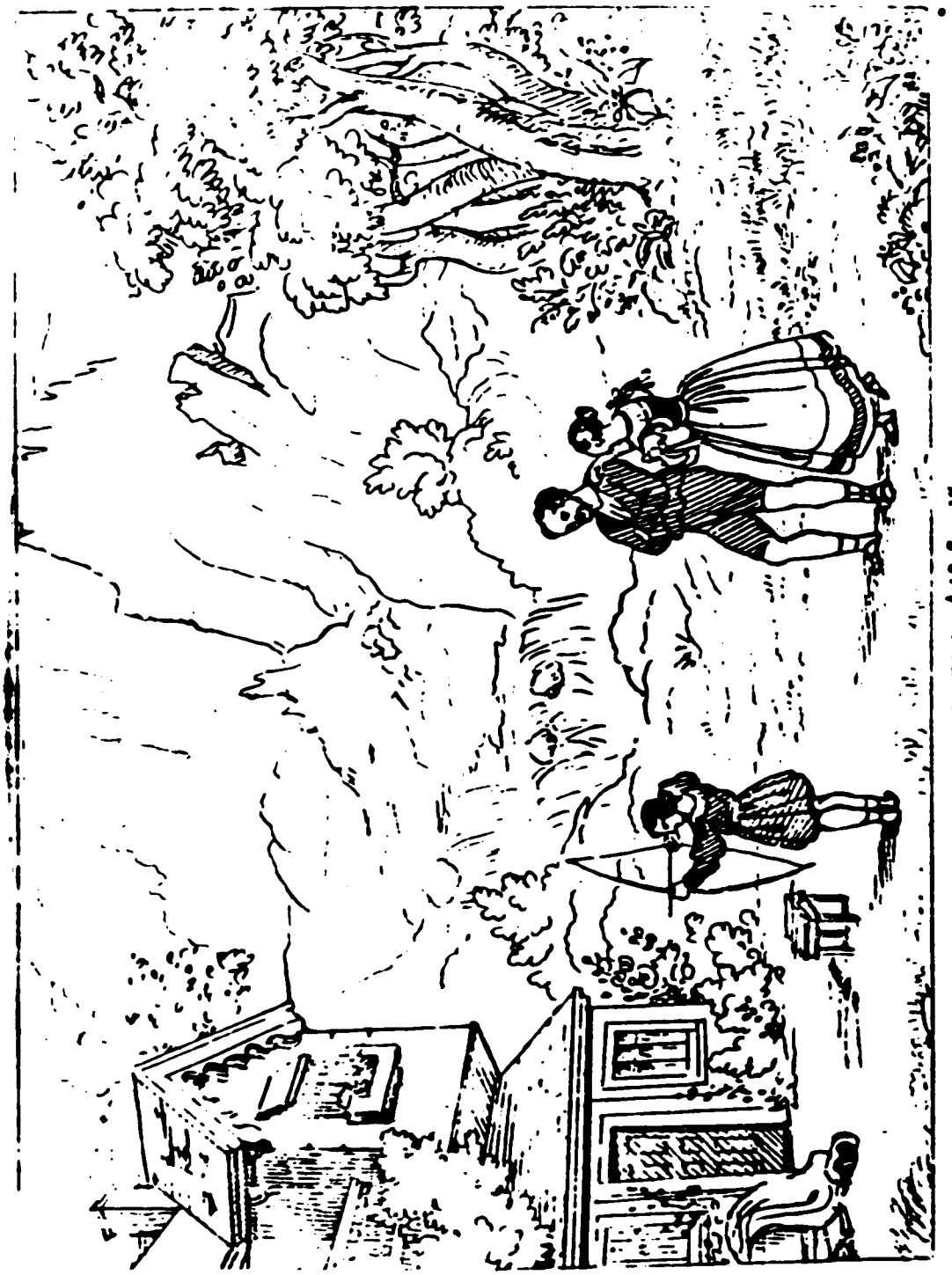


Fig. 19

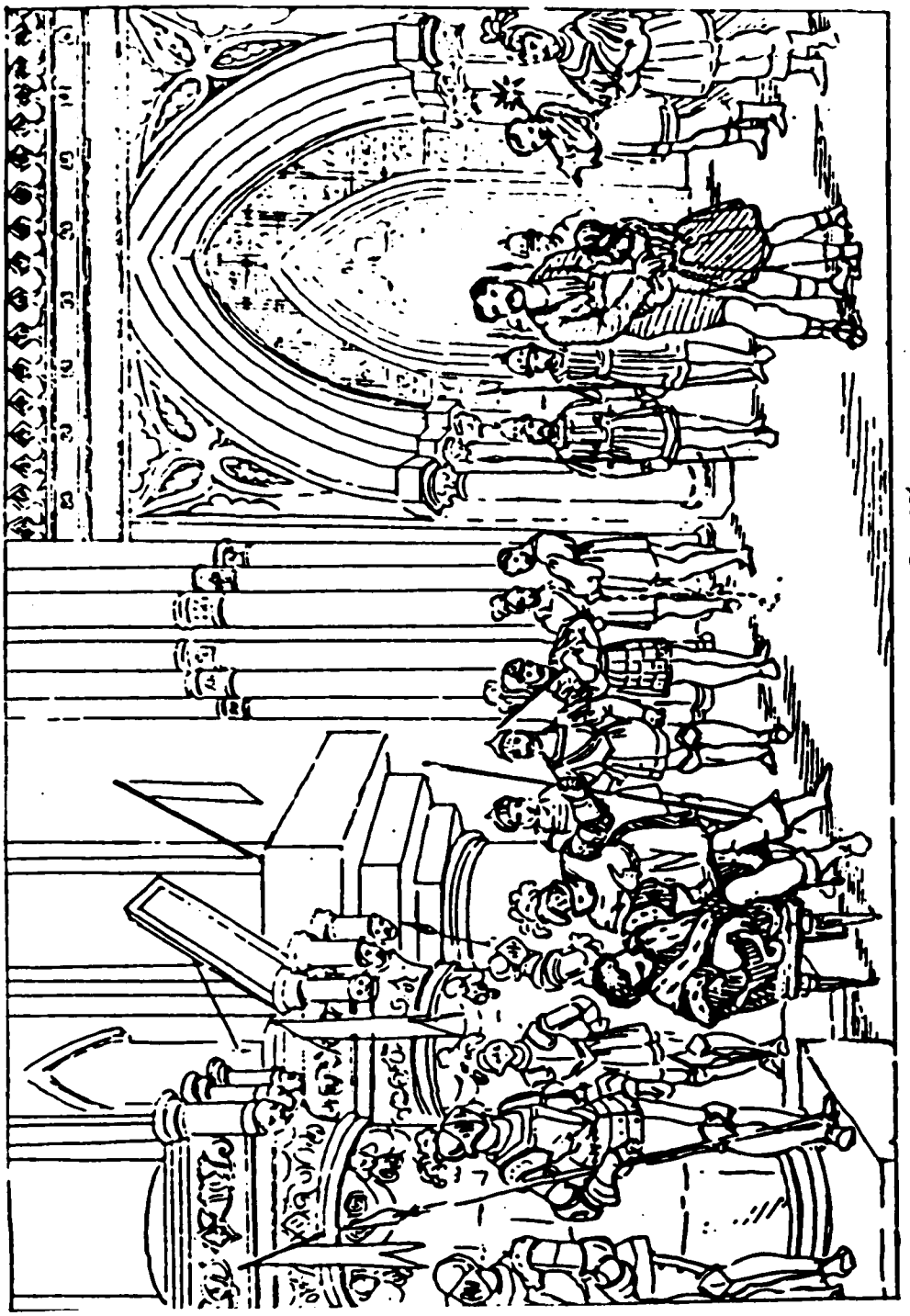


Fig. 20

Fig. 21

Fig. 22

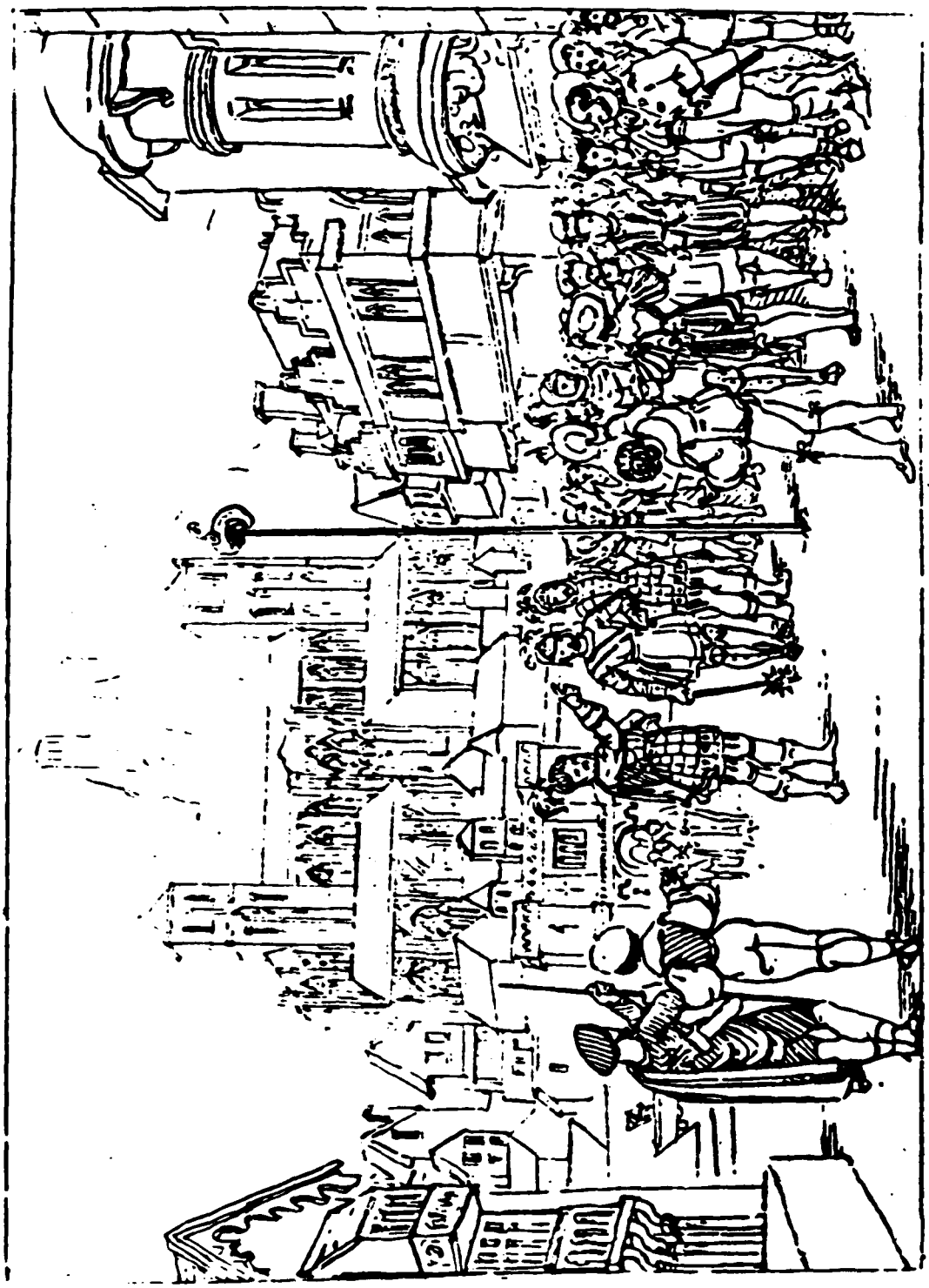
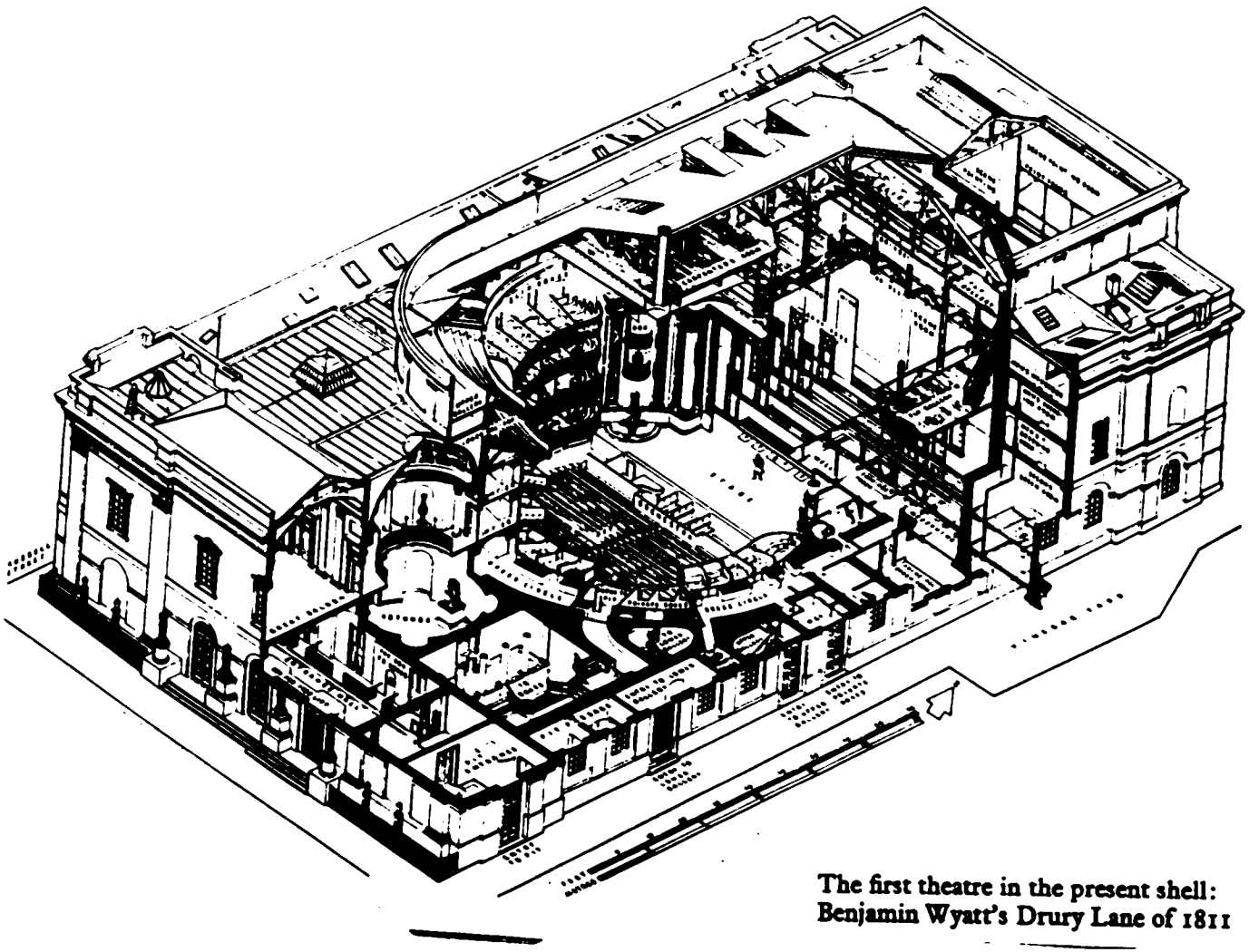


Fig. 23



The first theatre in the present shell:
Benjamin Wyatt's Drury Lane of 1811

Fig. 24

New Drury: Henry Holland's Drury Lane of 1794

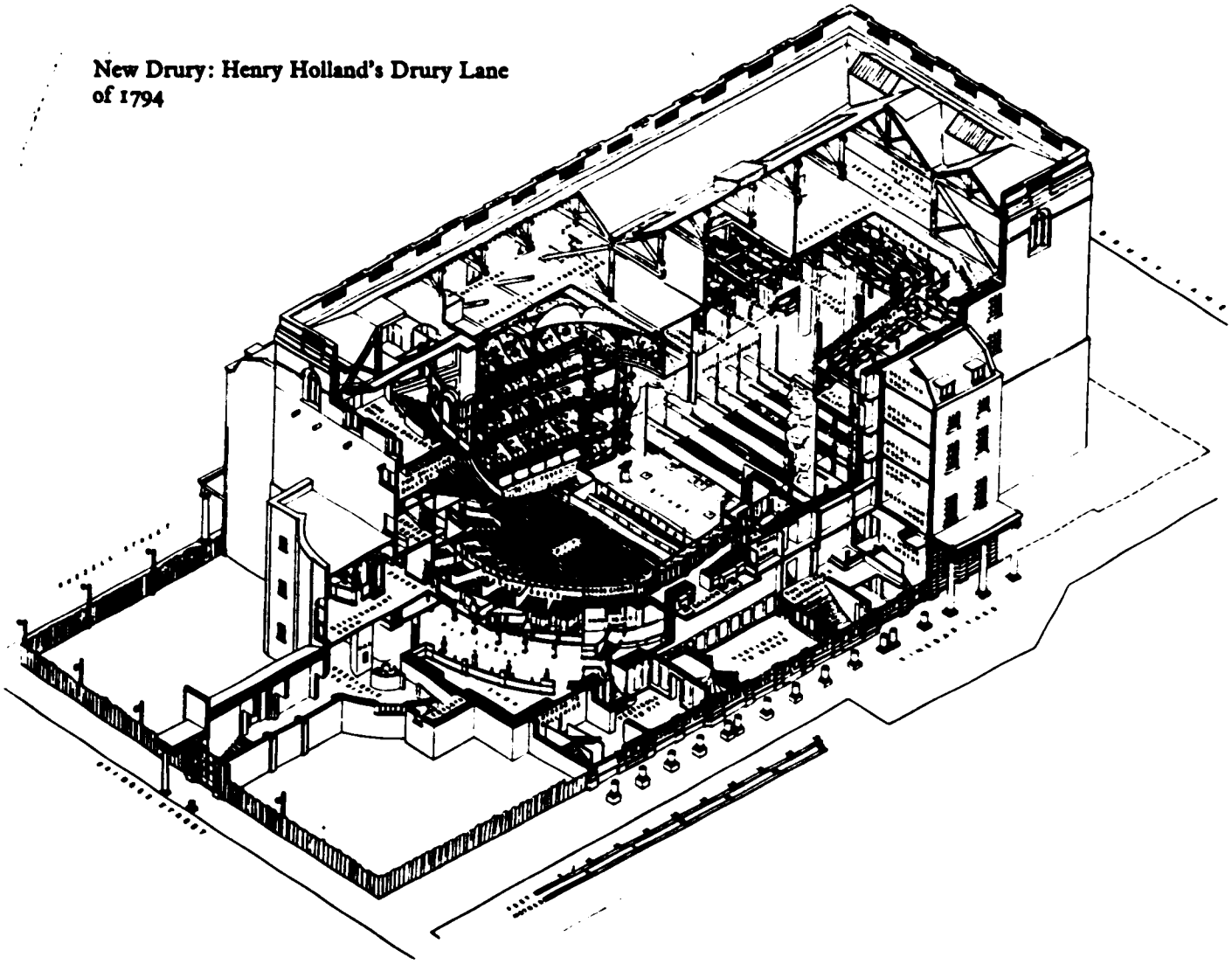


Fig. 25

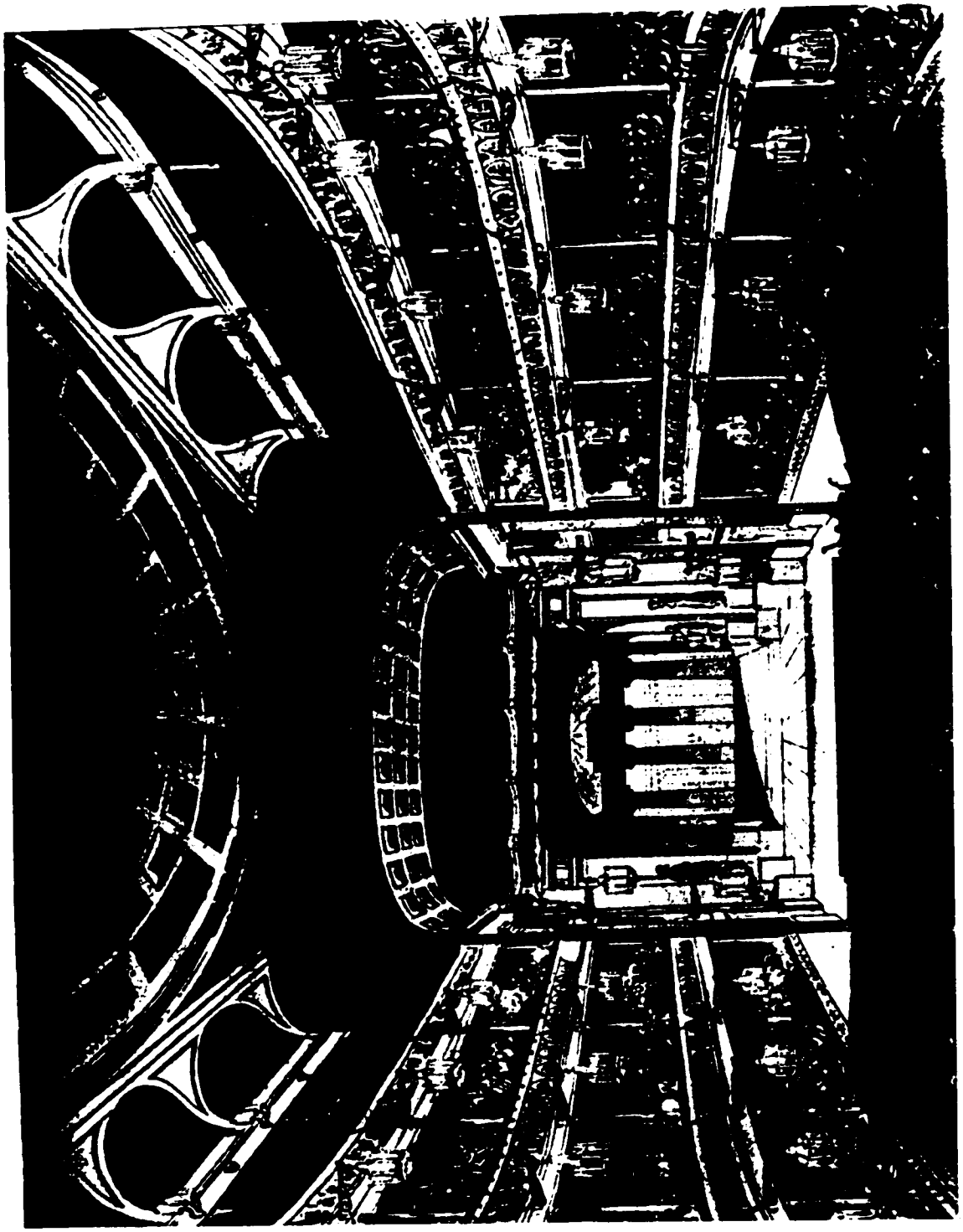


Fig. 26

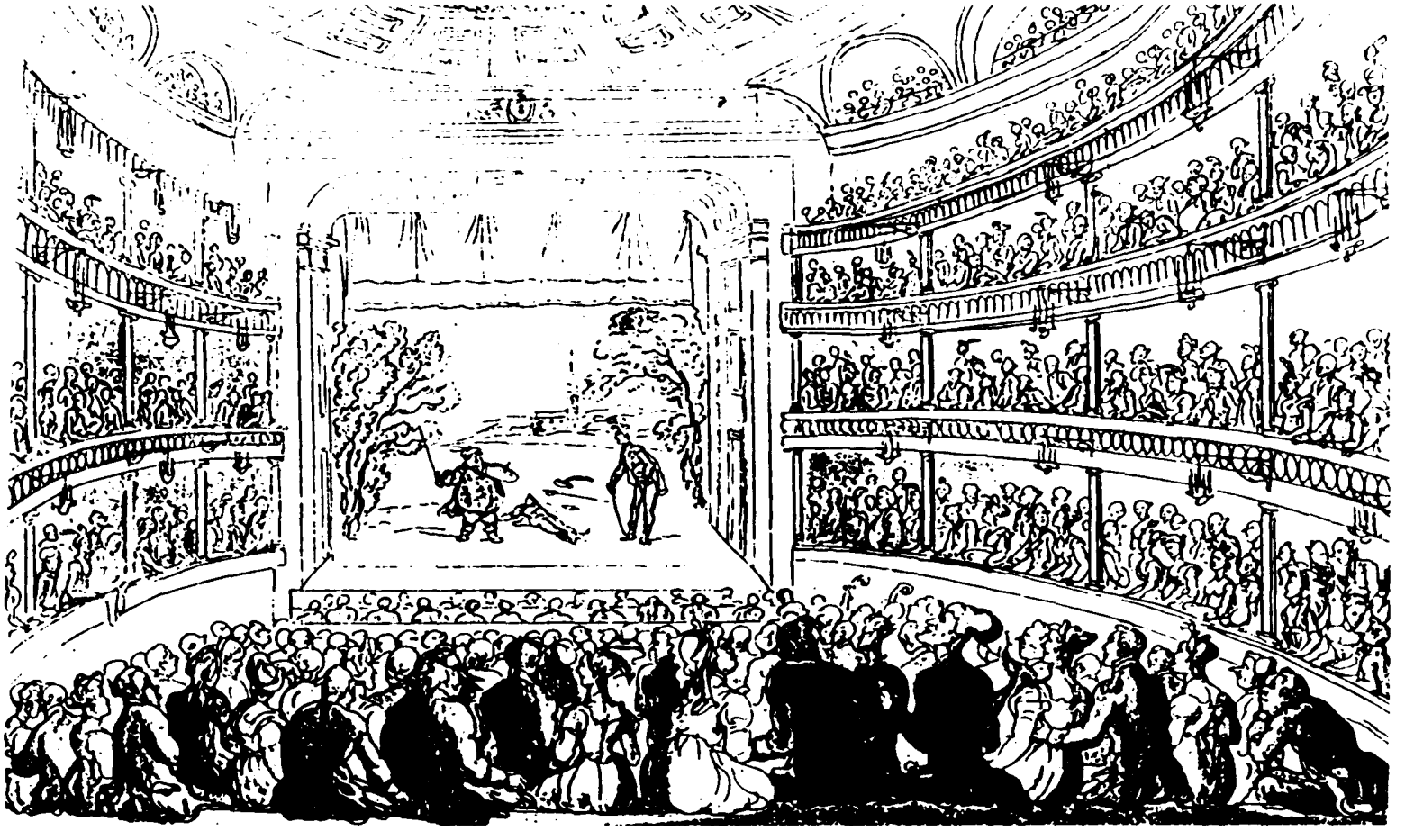
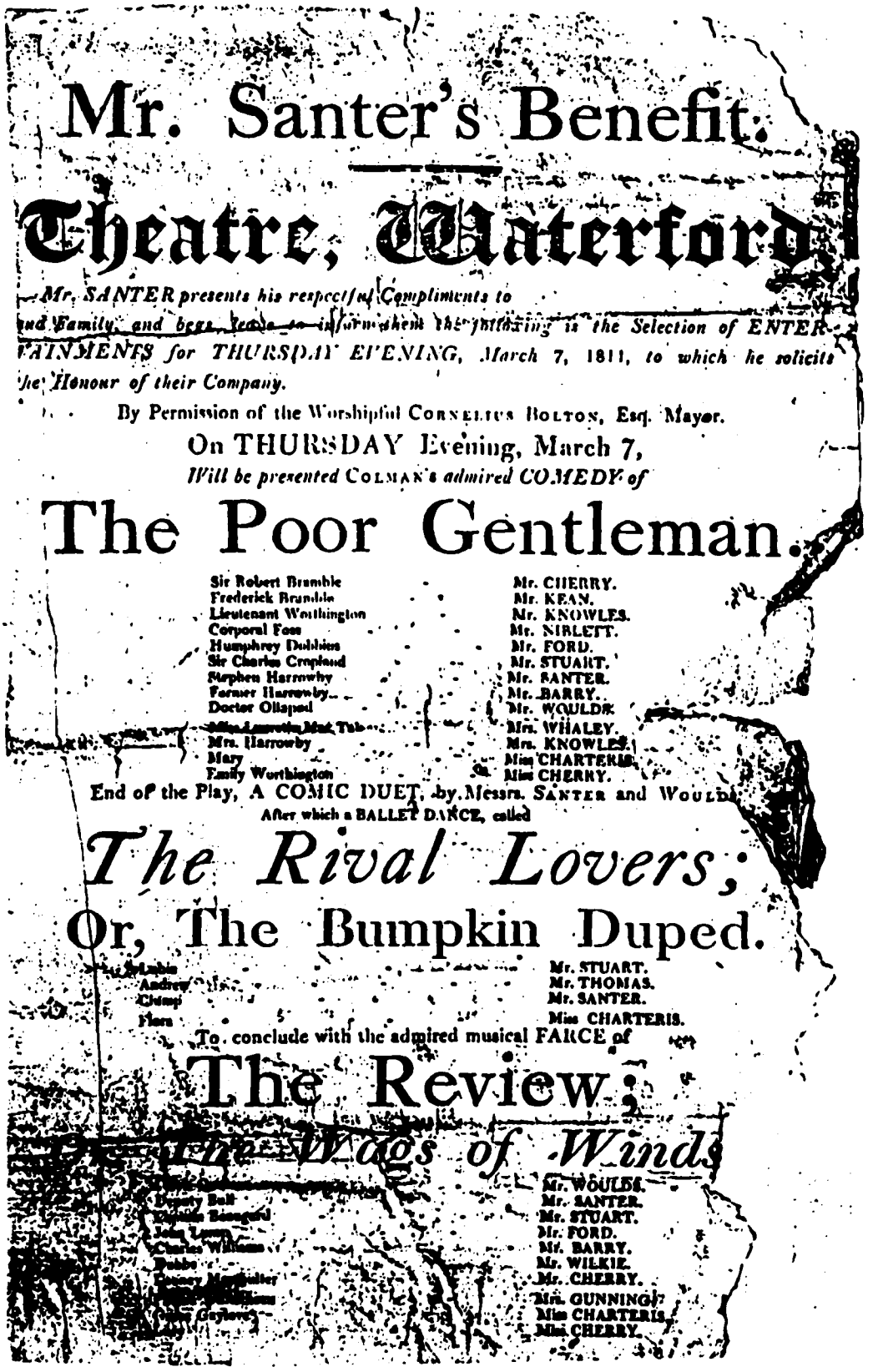


Fig. 27

Fig. 28

Fig. 29

Fig. 30



Mr. Santer's Benefit.

Theatre, Waterford.

Mr. SANTER presents his respectful Compliments to and Family, and begs leave to inform them that the entertaining is the Selection of ENTERTAINMENTS for THURSDAY EVENING, March 7, 1811, to which he solicits the Honour of their Company.

By Permission of the Worshipful CORNELIUS BOLTON, Esq. Mayor.

On THURSDAY Evening, March 7,

Will be presented COLMAN's *admired COMEDY of*

The Poor Gentleman.

Sir Robert Bramble	Mr. CHERRY.
Frederick Bramble	Mr. KEAN.
Lieutenant Worthington	Mr. KNOWLES.
Corporal Foss	Mr. NIBLETT.
Humphrey Dobbins	Mr. FORD.
Sir Charles Cropland	Mr. STUART.
Stephen Harrowby	Mr. SANTER.
Farmer Harrowby	Mr. BARRY.
Doctor Ollapod	Mr. WOULDS.
Mrs. Harrowby	Mrs. WHALEY.
Mary	Mrs. KNOWLES.
Emily Worthington	Miss CHARTERIS.
	Miss CHERRY.

End of the Play, A COMIC DUET, by Messrs. SANTER and WOULDS.

After which a BALLET DANCE, called

The Rival Lovers;

Or, The Bumpkin Duped.

Andrew	Mr. STUART.
Chimp	Mr. THOMAS.
Flora	Mr. SANTER.
	Miss CHARTERIS.

To conclude with the admired musical FARCE of

The Review;

The Wags of Winds

	Mr. WOULDS.
	Mr. SANTER.
	Mr. STUART.
	Mr. FORD.
	Mr. BARRY.
	Mr. WILKIE.
	Mr. CHERRY.
	Mrs. GUNNING.
	Miss CHARTERIS.
	Miss CHERRY.

Fig. 31

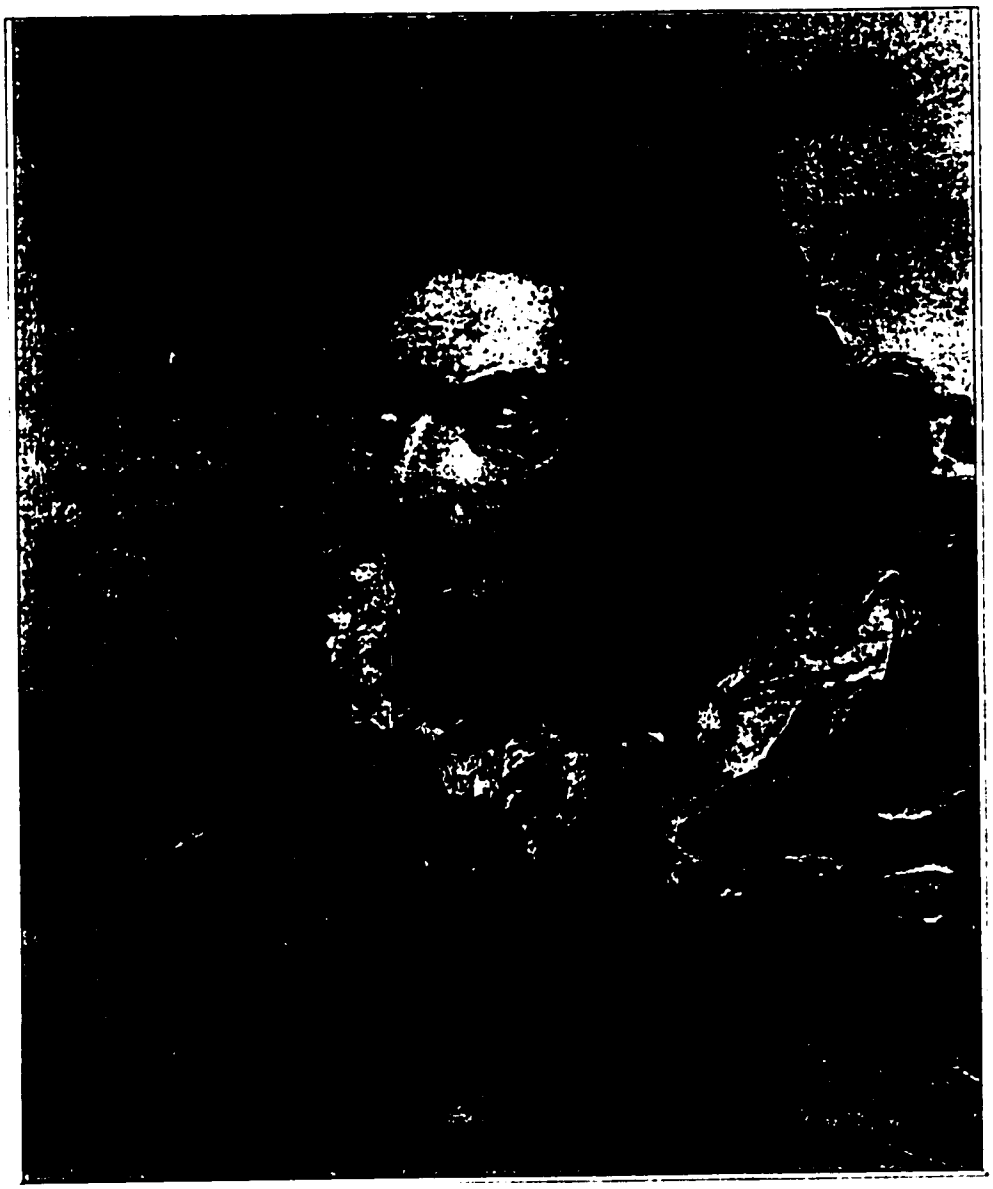


Fig. 32

Never Acted.

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THEATRE ROYAL, DRURY-LANE.

This Evening, MONDAY, May 29, 1820.

His Majesty's Servants will perform, (*for the first time*) a new Tragedy, called

VIRGINIUS:

Or, The Fall of the Decemviri.

With New Scenery Dresses, &c.

Virginius, Mr. KEAN,
Appius, Mr. BAR[illegible],
Minutius, Mr. POPE, Icilius, Mr. PENLEY,
Horatius, Mr. BARNARD, Claudius, Mr. HAMBLIN
Numitorius, Mr. POWELL, Valerius, Mr. FOOTE,
Marcus, Mr. THOMPSON, Caius, Mr. MEREDITH,
Soldiers.—Messrs. Vining, Elliott, Hudson, Moreton, &c. &c.

Plautia, Mrs. GLOVER,
Virginia, Mrs. W. WEST.

The PROLOGUE to be spoken by Mrs. EGERTON,
The EPILOGUE, by Mr. OXBERRY and Mr. KNIGHT.

☞ The Free List of this Theatre is suspended, (the Public Press, and the Reuters of course excepted) until further notice.

After which, the Farce of

WHAT NEXT?

Lord Touchwood, Mr. DOWTON,
Major Topchwood, Mr. HARLEY, Montant, Mr VINING,
Colonel Clifford, Mr. BARNARD, Brief, Mr. HUGHES,
Sharp, Mr. KNIGHT, Snaggs, Mr. OXBERRY,
Mrs. Prudence, Mrs. H[illegible]DYE,
Sophia, Miss CARR, Clarissa, Mrs. ORGER.

The Doors will be opened at Half-past Six o'Clock.
The Performance will commence precisely at Seven.

Boxes 7s. Second Price 3s. 6d.—Pit 3s. Second Price 2s.
Lower Gallery 2s. Second Price 1s.—Upper Gallery 1s. Second Price 6d.
The Box-Office will be open from 10 till 5 o'Clock. Places to be taken of Mr. Runnells, Box Book-keeper.

No Mat[illegible] allowed. J. Cawdell, Printer, Theatre Royal, Drury-Lane.

The Orchestra Boxes are fitted up for those who may be disappointed of Places in the Dress Circle

☞ The Public need not be informed, that

KING LEAR,

From the excellence of

Mr. KEAN's

Performance, and the exertions of the Performers in general, produced, twenty-six times, crowded Audiences.

THE LADY AND THE DEVIL

Is, also, one of the most popular Entertainments of the Season. The Managers must, however, introduce their promised Novelties; and whenever occasion serves, the repetition of *King Lear*, and *The Lady and the Devil*, will be duly announced.

Tomorrow after a TRAGEDY, will be performed, (*first time at this Theatre*) an Extravaganza, called

Giovanni in London

Don Giovanni, Madame VESTRIS, Leporello, Mr HARLEY, Constantia, Miss CARR,
Miss Leporello (Sister to Donna Anna), Miss PEAKE, The Bride (transformed to Fan), Mrs. GLOVER,
&c. &c. Widenose, The Comedy of FASHION AND LEVITY, Nature and Portrait, With the
COBBLER of PRESTON, and PAST TEN O'CLOCK and a HALF.
Being Benefit of Mr. MUNDEN

Fig. 33

Fig. 34

Fig. 35

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