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LINES OF BUSINESS: CASTING PRACTICE AND POLICY IN THE
AMERICAN THEATRE, 1752-1899

City University of New York

Ph.D. 1985

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LINES OF BUSINESS: CASTING PRACTICE AND POLICY
IN THE AMERICAN THEATRE, 1752-1899

by

James C. Burge

A dissertation submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Theatre Arts in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for degree of
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City University of New York

1985

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James C. Burge

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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PREFACE

The traditional "lines of business" casting procedure evolved from the medieval guild system into an incipient trade unionism in the actor-centric nineteenth-century American theatre. The dismantlement and demise of that tradition can be seen as an historical imperative to the emergence of the director as the central functionary in twentieth-century theatre.

The writer's interest in this topic stems from ongoing research into the management and artistic policies of the New York stock company renaissance from 1839 to 1869, and to an abiding curiosity concerning the decline of the actor and the rise of the director as the preeminently creative element in the theatre, according to twentieth-century critical estimation.

No systematic overview of "lines of business" exists. Evidence of the tradition lies in the minutiae of journals, diaries, personal and business letters, contracts and reminiscences scattered throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Many of these contain records of disputes, arbitrations, and litigations arising from casting practices

between actor and manager and actor and actor, comprising rich primary source material.

This investigation traces the origins of "lines of business" casting policies on the English-speaking stage from its late medieval origins to its demise in the late nineteenth century, focussing on the evolutionary nature, changes and accretions of those policies during the time period specified.

In pursuing his investigation, the author is indebted to the gracious and unfailing cooperation of the Librarians of the following collections: the Boston Society, the Brander Matthews Collection of the Columbia University Library, the Augustin Daly Collection of the Folger Shakespeare Library, the Hobblitzelle Theatre Arts Collection of the University of Texas Library, the Harvard Theatre Collection, the Museum of the City of New York, the New York Historical Society, the Performing Arts Collection of the New York Public Library, and the Library of Congress.

The author is greatly indebted to the advice and counsel of his supervising committee from the Ph.D. Program in Theatre at the Graduate School, City University of New York: Vera Mowry Roberts (Chair), Stanley Kauffmann, and Stanley A. Waren. Finally, he acknowledges the interest and support of his friends: Elizabeth Swain, Jay Wilson, and Berne Rosen.

James C. Burge

LINES OF BUSINESS: CASTING PRACTICE AND POLICY
IN THE AMERICAN THEATRE, 1752-1899

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INTRODUCTION

When the Industrial Revolution finally came to the American theatre about 1870, its effect was cataclysmic. In the aftershocks which followed it, the ancien regime was swept away and the very ways and means of theatrical production had been altered completely. The stock company system was the foremost fatality.

Begun, apparently, as a cooperative social pact between actors in the earliest days of the professional, English-speaking theatre, the stock company gradually evolved into a capitalistic theatre producing organization with a clear division between management and labor. Until its demise at the end of the nineteenth century, it was virtually the only system of theatrical production known or apparently even contemplated. As a fairly permanent core of actors, the stock company regularly produced theatre from a repertoire of both old and new plays which were retained and repeated on an alternating basis over a season or series of seasons. If located in a major metropolitan area, it generally owned or leased a theatre which served as the company's home; if itinerant, then that company spent the best part of a season travelling and playing in a variety of makeshifts,

not the least of which was the country barn. It is noteworthy that the twentieth century idea of repertory and the variously proposed National Theatre organizations of today are predicated on the resuscitation of that old stock system of production. Past practicality is now modern aesthetics.¹

Over the course of its three-hundred-year history, the stock company organization spawned two adjunctive systems - the actor's benefit and the lines of business casting procedure. Both must be seen, ultimately, as accretions of theatrical labor-management relations, for both were responses on the part of the actor to the change from a communal to a capitalistic stock structure. Over a long series of disputes with managers owing to that change, the actors were able finally to implement both subsystems as reparations and redresses for what they had lost in terms of effective ownership of the producing organization. The effect of the theatrical revolution in the last half of the nineteenth century, however, was systemic: when the stock company went, its underpinnings - the actor's benefit and the lines of business tradition - went with it. The concessions and advantages hard won by the actor were swept away in the rapidly changing conditions, and it was not until he threw his lot in with the rest of American labor in collective

¹The history of the idea of repertory has been traced by Stanley Kauffmann in Persons of the Drama (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), pp. 348-365.

bargaining that he would again have safeguards in the marketplace. Actor's Equity Association, formed in 1912, was the actor's response to an entirely new set of operating conditions and his grievances over them.

Of the two stock company subsystems, the actor's benefit is far better known to theatre historians. The first such benefit is said to have been given for Elizabeth Barry, the noted tragedienne, in 1685 by James II's royal command. Designed to honor the actress for her contributions to the theatre, the proceeds from the evening were given to her in supplement to her salary. The one-time compliment rapidly became a full-time custom. Despite the Lord Chamberlain's ruling in 1710, that "no benefit plays be allowed, nor tickets given to any person,"² giving an actor his own night with the proceeds therefrom had become so entrenched in the English theatre by this time that Colley Cibber could remark that the terms of the benefit were an important part of every actor's articles (his contract with the management), as importantas, if not more than, his actual stipulated salary.³ Management surcharges for the benefit increased from forty to two hundred pounds during the eighteenth century, making the annuity a risky proposition, and this

²Allardyce Nicoll, A History of the English Drama (Cambridge: 6 vols. Cambridge University Press, 1952), vol. II, Appendix B, p. 279.

³An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber, ed. by B.R.S. Fone, (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1968).

imposition was hotly contested at each juncture by the actors. The establishment of "The Actors Fund for Decayed Actors" in the 1760s was meant to organize a means of collecting and distributing funds on a communal level, but the individual actor benefit persisted and even thrived until the 1880s, when it died out with the establishment of the long run as the pervasive production means. A salient feature of the old stock system, it figured prominently as a working principle in America's first truly professional theatre company, the Hallam troupe. The benefit has been the subject of several scholarly articles and books.⁴

The other adjunct of the stock system and the subject of this essay is the "lines of business" casting tradition. Unlike the actor's benefit, its origins are almost imperceptible and its full maturity as an operational system was apparently the result of a slow, evolutionary process. As an operational definition, the expression "line (or lines) of business" is used throughout this essay to denote the systematic distribution of parts within the given repertoires of an eighteenth or nineteenth century stock company. Exactly what is meant by "systematic" is the subject of this investigation: the genesis of the tradition, the development of the ways and means of role distribution, the disputes incurred between actor and actor and actor and

⁴Sir St. Vincent Troubridge's The Benefit System in the British Theatre (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1967), is, by far, the most comprehensive.

manager over that distribution, the flourishing, ossification and gradual demise of that tradition.

The definition proffered above subsumes another expression, "possession of parts." This is taken to mean the assumption by an actor of the privilege to play and every part in which he has appeared with success before the public in any and all subsequent revivals of the respective play until he resigned the part, retired or died. While the provenance established of this expression cannot be established with any certitude, the principle of an actor possessing or "owning" a role in a given play was, as we shall see in Part I of this essay, a firmly established tenant of role distribution long before the line of business expression was in currency.

That, however, cannot be established earlier than 1775, when Frances Abington, the famous tragedienne of Drury Lane, wrote to her manager and fellow player, David Garrick "the impossibility of my attempting that line of business while I am necessarily engaged in so many plays."⁵ That Abington coined the phrase is highly unlikely, and it may well have been in currency several years before that first extant reference, but probably not before about 1760. Expressions and words used prior to that date which circumscribe lines of business and cannot apparently refer to anything

⁵Oxford English Dictionary (Supplement, 1976), p. 684.

else include: species of character, "caste of characters" or simply "caste," "specialty," different corps engaged in, "walks," "employment," and simply "line" or "lines."⁶

While the genesis of this principle of casting roles in stock companies will be analyzed thoroughly in Part one, it must be noted here that by the time the professional theatre was thriving in America, the tradition had become an integral and inseparable element of the stock system. There are nearly a score of descriptions of this casting system in nineteenth-century American theatre memoirs. Writing of theatrical conditions in America in about 1850, Clara Morris, a noted actress, is most succinct:

men and women were engaged each for a specific 'line of business,' and to ask anyone to act outside of his line was an offense not lightly passed over A company was generally made up of a leading man (heroes, of course), first old man, second old man, heavy man, first comedian, second comedian, juvenile man, walking gentleman and utility man.⁷

The distaff side, she might have added, was generally exactly the same, with the addition of a soubrette or "singing chambermaid." All of the various descriptions of this system are uniform in the type if not necessarily the number of categorizations and in the implication of the rigidity of the system.⁸

⁶Terms used by the anonymous author of The Theatrical Review (London: J. Coote, 1758) in various summaries of careers and critical appraisals of contemporary actors, *passim*.

⁷Life in the Theatre (New York: McClure, Phillips and Co., 1901), p. 39.

⁸Augustus Pitou, MaSters of the Show (New York, 1914), p. 17, says that the rules of categorization were "strictly defined"; Anna Cora Mowatt in Autobiography of an Actress (Boston: Ticknor, Reed and Fields, 1854) speaks of a "chess board" organization and regimentation.

Almost from the date of its first extant usage, the term "lines of business" became pervasive. It is indeed difficult to find a diary, theatrical journal, reminiscence or critical tract of the late eighteenth or nineteenth century - from England or America - that does not expressly mention it or allude to it in some way. Further, private and professional correspondence of a theatrical nature during this period suggests that it had become an obligatory expression in the description or discussion of role and their casting. From such evidence, it would indeed be impossible to deny that "men and women were engaged each for a specific 'line of business'," as Morris claims.

Yet rules and regulations of theatres and many actor contracts which survive from this same period suggest exactly the opposite. They are uniform in their denial of any such casting policy and stipulate, on the contrary, that the management of the respective theatre has the sole authority to cast actors in its employment in any way it might see fit and in any such theatrical presentation which the management might choose to present publicly (which might include, but would not be limited to, circuses, pantomimes, olios, dumbshows, processions, prologues and epilogues). The term "as cast" is used throughout this essay to denote this stipulated right of management to cast actors. While the terminology for this "as cast" might differ from theatre to theatre,

from rules and regulations to contracts, and even from year to year within the same theatre, the essence remained constant: no actor might make claim to any part, and the authority to cast and distribute parts rested solely with management.

The frequency of direct use or allusion to lines of business in primary source materials for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, together with extant playbills and cast lists of production, suggests a practice of casting actors within the professional American theatre that is, therefore, widely discrepant with the official, stipulated policy found in those same theatre's rules and regulations and many of its contracts.

The implications of this discrepancy between casting policy and practice are far reaching: what, for instance, was the exact nature of the little-known and less noted turbulence in the actor-manager relationship during this period; how and why could a practice which was apparently unilateral thrive and flourish in the face of management opposition; what, exactly, was the nature of that opposition and how did it manifest itself; what effect might the line of business practice - where an actor was (or appeared to be) employed for a series of specific parts within a given season - have on the general professional actor population; and finally, and perhaps most significantly, how would that

system affect the selection and production of a repertory of both old and new plays.

In response to these issues, this essay seeks to show that the lines of business casting procedure was never officially cuntenanced by American theatrical stock company management, but that it managed to survive and flourish despite that opposition to become a form of incipient trade unionism on the part of actors as a response to the general working conditions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. With the coming of the long run, "lines of business" was rendered, like its parent stock organization, an anachronism and received its final coup de grace at the hands of the changing dramaturgy and the burgeoning concepts of the director and the ensemble.

Given the wide ranging effect that lines of business appears to have had on the first one hundred years of the American theatre, it is remarkable that it has never been the subject of scholarly research. Nothing of an analytical nature exists and references to the tradition in general histories limit themselves to the questionable observation that actors were "employed" or "engaged" to play a particular line and then go on to a brief description of the various lines.⁹ The lack of scholarship on lines, however, is directly

⁹Sybil Rosenfeld's entry on the stock company in The Oxford Companion to the Theatre, ed. by Phyllis Hartnoll (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967), 3rd ed.; and Oscar Brockett, The Theatre: An Introduction (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1969), 2nd ed., p. 192.

attributable to the broader oversight of theatre history with regard to the stock company system itself. Only Edward Mammen's The Old Stock Company School of Acting treats of that system, and his conclusions about it are predicated on the single example of the Boston Museum Theatre.¹⁰

In order, therefore, to assess the importance and significance of the lines of business casting tradition and to determine its function within the broader stock company system, the following procedure will constitute this essay's historical investigation.

Part I will deal with the stock company structure and its development from the beginnings of professional theatre in England in 1574 to the close of the eighteenth century. Special attention will be given to the changing actor-manager relationship and particularly to casting (or role distribution) practice and policy at the London patent theatres during this period. Theatrical disputes which have as their central or peripheral issue casting practice and policy must also be analyzed. The intent of this part of the essay is to establish the working principles of casting as it informed the stock company format brought from England to America in the eighteenth century.

¹⁰Columbia Univ., 1945. His mention of the lines of business tradition is limited to a fairly short, jocular taxonomy (a utility man is defined, for instance, as "one who can say six lines without too much hesitation," p. 13), and he neither suggests nor acknowledges the practice-policy discrepancy. A three-volume Encyclopedia of American Theatre Companies, edited by Weldon B. Durham, is projected for publication in 1985 and 1987, but it is impossible at this writing to determine what, if anything, this work will have to say about the stock company generally or the lines tradition specifically.

Part II will discuss and analyze in some detail the various "walks" or lines of business on the American stage from 1752--the arrival of the Hallam Company in Virginia--until 1839. It will further demonstrate the symbiotic relationship of the melodrama and the prevalent lines of business, along with the development of the star system on prevalent theatre practice. It will then consider how all these atters affected, and were affected by, the theatre practices of the first three infuential theatre companies: the Hallam Company, the Park Theatre Company, and the Bowery Theatre Company.

Part III will analyze the lines of business tradition by practice, policy and dispute in selected American stock companies from 1839 to 1869. Using the criterion of a stock company (by which is meant a relatively stable core of players formed into a producing unit which has a repertory of both old and new plays which are presented publicly and professionally on a rotating and alternating basis), only those companies which fall within these parameters are the Park Theatre (1798-1848), the Bowery (1826-1851), Mitchell's Olymic Theatre (1839-1850), Burton's Theatre (1848-1857), Wallack's Theatre (1852-1888), and Laura Keene's Theatre (1855-1863).

Part IV will analyze those factors and conditions within the American theatrical climate from 1870 to 1899 which led to dissolution of the stock system and the demise

of the lines tradition. The management, practice and policies concerned with casting in Augustin Daly's company will be assessed, along with the overall effect of the long run and so-called "combo" system, the changing dramatic repertory, and the emergence of the director and the concept of the ensemble. A side-long glance at English and continental parallels, particularly with regard to repertory, the director and the ensemble, should reflect the American theatre's relative position as an innovative force during this period.

To test the validity of evidence from the foregoing practice and policy of stock companies, Part V will follow the careers of three actors who are said to have played the same line of business, that of the Old Man-Low Comedian, over a one-hundred-year period, virtually the entire nineteenth century: Joseph Jefferson (1774-1832), George Holland (1791-1870), and James Lewis (1838-1896). These specific careers have been selected because each actor was considered one of the most representative artists of that line during his respective era and because each was employed by notable stock companies during important transitional periods. Jefferson, for instance, made his American debut in Boston in 1795, played several seasons at both the John Street and Park Theatres in New York, and then moved to the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia where he played out the balance of his career. Holland, who was unusually peripatetic even by nineteenth-century standards, made his American

debut at the Bowery in 1826, moved to the Smith-Ludlow and Caldwell southern circuits until 1843, then returned to New York City where he played every major company of that era (except Laura Keane's) until his death at Daly's Theatre in 1870. James Lewis, on the other hand, began in burlesque in 1866 but moved to Daly's for the premiere season and remained a mainstay of that company, as one of the "Big Four," until his death in 1896. Daly's own death and the subsequent closing of his theatre in 1899 is generally taken as the terminal date for the stock company era in America.¹¹ The emphasis of this part of the essay is on quantitative and comparative aspects of these three careers in terms of the number and range of roles played within what is described, at least categorically, as a single line of business. The analysis of the range of parts, it must be allowed, is restricted to feasibility, for a number of plays produced in this period were not published and are not accessible.

Conclusions may then be reached with regard to the function and historical significance of the lines of business tradition in the stock company era. The appendices include as complete as possible lists of parts played (and categorical typing of those parts, where possible) by Jefferson, Holland and Lewis as well as various lists of line of business categories made at different times during the nineteenth century.

¹¹Cf. Garff Wilson, Three Hundred Years of American Drama and Theatre (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973).

Materials for the following study encompass virtually the entire range of sources known to theatre historians. The bulk of primary evidence herein comes from various theatre collections listed in the bibliography: business and private correspondence between various theatrical personnel; diaries, journals and reminiscences of actors and managers; playbills, cast lists and theatre account books; newspaper and other journalistic accounts; and, finally, the rules and regulations of respective theatres and the contracts between those theatres and various actors.¹² Of secondary source materials, John Genest's Some Accounts of the English Stage from the Restoration in 1660 to 1830 has been particularly helpful in suggesting the nature of casting disputes for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and these incidents have been checked against primary sources for either active

¹²Contracts presented the theatre historian with a particularly thorny problem. None exist for the seventeenth century or what is generally known as the Restoration. A spate of contracts is, however, extant for the first decade of the eighteenth century and is currently located in LC 7/2 and 7/3 at the Public Record Office in London. Cibber's observation that "we neither ask'd any Actor, nor were desired by them, to sign any written Agreement (to the best of my Memory) whatsoever: The Rate of their respective Sallaries were only enter'd in our Daily Pay-Roll" (Apology, II, p. 113) appears to have held good for most of the eighteenth century but Mrs. Siddons' contract with the Drury Lane Theatre in the 1770s and Dorothy Jordan's with the same theatre in 1785 and 1794 both probably owe their survival to the novelty of their respective salaries perhaps as much as to their co-signees' fame. Jordan's, for instance, stipulates a weekly salary of thirty-one pounds, ten shillings and thirty pence a week, which was an unprecedented amount at that time ("Holograph Letters of R. B. Sheridan" at Harvard Theatre Collection). Are we to deduce, therefore, that contracts were signed

participants in those disputes or impartial observers of them, in most cases both.¹³ Two previous works have suggested that the genesis of the lines of business tradition may have considerably pre-dated the currency of that expression in 1775: Thomas W. Baldwin's The Personnel and Organization of the Shakespearean Company advances a rather controversial theory that the means of casting parts in the English theatre was inherent in its first stock companies;¹⁴ and James Lynch's Box, Pit and Gallery treats at some length the effect of "possession of parts" and the rise of the virtuoso performer on England's eighteenth-century theatre and drama.¹⁵ Both

only by "the rich and famous"? But the continuing scarcity of extant business agreements between actor and manager in the nineteenth century, when the use of the printed, standardized contract was widespread, has led the present researcher to an inescapable conclusion: a theatrical contract is, for the actor, an incriminating tool to be disposed of after its expiration; it stipulates, among other things, the dollar amount of his past or even present salary or "worth," and that, like his age, is frequently subject to continuous revision.

¹³10 vols. (1832; rpt. New York: Burt Franklin, 1964).

¹⁴(Rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1961).

¹⁵Subtitled "Stage and Society in Johnson's London" (Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1953).

have been influential and are acknowledged throughout. Two recent publications edited by Judith Milhous have been particularly helpful in clarifying issues about the stock company and its management during the turbulent and formative first two decades of the eighteenth century.¹⁶ The London Stage, 1660-1800 is, of course, the invaluable reference work for this period, and it has spawned at least one article which, making use of the full performance data in The London Stage, describes and analyzes one line of business on the English stage comprehensively.¹⁷

¹⁶Vice Chamberlain Coke's Theatrical Papers, 1706-1715 (Carbondale, Ill.: So. Ill. Univ. Press, 1982; and Thomas Betterton and the Management of Lincoln's Inn Fields, 1695-1708 (Carbondale, Ill.: So. Ill. Univ. Press, 1979).

¹⁷The London Stage, 1660-1800, ed. Robert D. Hume, et al., (Carbondale, Ill.: So. Ill. Univ. Press, 1960), II vols.; Ben R. Schneider, "The Coquette-Prude as an Actress Line in Restoration Comedy During the Time of Mrs. Oldfield," Theatre Notebook, 2 (Summer, 1968), pp. 143-56.

PART I
STOCK COMPANY STRUCTURE AND THE GENESIS
OF THE LINES OF BUSINESS TRADITION
1574-1800

In order to demonstrate what forces of tradition were brought to bear on America's first stock companies, the first part of the study will assess the evolving structure of the English companies from their official recognition in London in 1574 up to the close of the eighteenth century. The actor's relationship to the structure, first as proprietor, then as employee, is of primary importance. The operative conditions of performing must then be examined: the size of the repertory, the ratio of old to new plays, the type of performance pattern, and the frequency of playing. With these factors as background, the ways and means of role distribution may then be analyzed.

The force and effect of the playwright, the manager, the audience, and the actor himself weigh heavily in the casting procedure. Particular attention will be paid to what, if anything, can be construed as theatrical policy (contracts, and rules and regulations), and this policy must then be compared to casting practice as revealed in playbills, records, reminiscences, and memoirs. Because of

the direct influence on later American practice, this investigation is limited to the London patent theatres. Finally, disputes between actors and between actors and managers which center on casting will be dealt with in terms of their significance for the gradual development of what is believed to be the systematic procedure in role distribution which was an integral part of the stock company format brought to America by the Hallams.

For the purposes of clarity in describing this evolution, the two-hundred twenty-six-year period will be divided into three sections of approximately equal length: the Elizabethan period, from 1574 to the closing of the theatres in 1642; the Restoration period, from the reopening of the theatres in 1660 until the passage of the Licensing Act of 1737*; and, finally, the succeeding years of the eighteenth century.

For correct historical perspective, it must be noted that the first professional stock companies in Western Europe were not English but Italian. The provenance of the commedia dell'arte offers theatre history the largest and most perplexing mystery in its twenty-five-hundred-year

*The traditional terminal date of 1700 for the Restoration, justifiable in terms of dramaturgical study, is arbitrary and often confusing with regard to theatre history. The conditions which prevailed in 1660 continued without interruption until the Licensing Act stabilized theatrical production.

scope. Nothing at all is known of these troupes until the middle of the sixteenth century, yet their art and traditions were nearly fully developed by then. Direct evidence of the commedia's influence in England is scant; a handful of facts makes conjecture fascinating but proof impossible.¹ What is significant about the tradition for the present study is the nature of the actors' organization.

The first extant legal document of the commedia informs us that the actors bound themselves into a "social pact" for a limited period, in order to produce some form of theatrical commodity which they hoped would be mutually profitable. Characteristically for the period, nothing much is stipulated in the way of organizational procedure (other than the provision that the cash-box wherein the profits were kept should not be opened without the consent of the entire company and the prohibition that the members should not play at card games with each other when money was at stake). What is interesting is the overall tone of the agreement. All the signatories promised each other "brother love" in the "custom of good and faithful comrades." Each of them further vowed full obedience to the "commander."²

¹Kathleen M. Lea, Italian Popular Comedy (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), II, 339f; and Winfred Smith, The Commedia dell'Arte: A Study of the Popular Italian Comedy (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1965), 170f.

²Dated 25 Feb. 1545, this document is for the Zanini company, directed by one Ser Maphio; from Ester Cocco, Giornale Storico della letteratura italiana (1915), and quoted in Giacomo Oreglia, The Comedia dell'Arte (London: Methenn and Co., 1968; rpt. 1968, New York: Hill and Wang, Drama Books), pp. 140-3.

The stress is on a fully cooperative and mutually beneficial organization of actors with a recognized leader picked from their own ranks.

The continuing commedia tradition actually falls outside the scope of this study, but its casting procedure, as compared to that of the English companies, is worthy of note. The Italian tradition of playing was based on distinct and recognizable character types which appeared without change in a large body of different plot scenarios. Each actor played but one and only one character throughout his career, in contradistinction to his English counterpart who played a multiplicity of roles each season. The Italian tradition further differed from the English in its use of the mask for all but the inamorati (young lovers) and in the extreme physicality and athleticism of its performance. Both factors, therefore, obviated one of the most pernicious elements of the English system -- superannuation, or the playing of a part by a performer who was conspicuously too old for it. But owing at least partially to the limitations in the variety they afforded, the Italian troupes died out by the middle of the eighteenth century when the English companies were rapidly approaching their most glorious period.

The Elizabethan Period, 1574-1642

From their inception, the English theatre companies owed their existence to a patronage and protection system.

The "Acte for the Punishment of Vacabandes" in 1572, whereby players were threatened with branding as "rogues, vacabandes and sturdy beggars," necessitated that the players be licensed.³ The Statute of Retainers of 1572 (reissued 1583), which forbade the maintenance of any but household servants, dictated the conditions of professional playing: Lord Leicester received the first official patent for an adult company of players on May 10, 1574. The players were his sworn servants, and this precedent with some modifications remained in effect for almost two and a half centuries. With James I's ascension in 1603, the London patent companies were moved under the protective wing of the royal family and licensing became a strictly royal prerogative. The royal privilege was maintained by the office of the Lord Chamberlain who, interestingly, though not given statutory regulation over the theatre until 1737, exercised complete control over it. This office and the exercise of its powers figure heavily in the arbitration of disputes and grievances between the actor and theatre management.

The Elizabethan stock company structure is of paramount importance to the present study. It provides a point of departure for the subsequent development of the only means of theatrical production until the last half of the nineteenth

³Alwin Thaler, "Strolling Players and the Provincial Drama after Shakespeare." PMLA, 37 (1922), 257.

century and it provided provincial troupes with an organizational foundation which the Hallams brought to America. Perhaps more importantly, it indicates the actor's original status in the company structure.

The basis of this organization was the banding together of players into associations or partnerships, the members of which acted together, held a common stock of garments and play-books, incurred joint expenditure, and daily or at other convenient periods divided up the profits of their enterprise. In a legal document an associate of such a company is described as a 'full adventurer, storer and sharer among them'; the term in ordinary use was 'sharer'. No doubt the sharing arrangement was in origin traditional; it is described in 1614 as 'accordinge to the custome of players.'⁴

Whatever its provenance, the London-based company, duly licensed and nobly protected, secured a theatre in "the liberties" by paying its owner one-half of the gallery receipts. This rent payment principle probably derived from the arrangement of the strolling players with the inn-yard owners before 1576.⁵ The profits of playing for the company would therefore come from the balance of the gallery and the full receipts of the "yard" or pit.

The original business organization was composed of four elements: (1) a patent or licensed company which rented a theatre; (2) members or sharers of this company who jointly and equally owned the company in mutual participation of profits and expenditures and who were all performing members;

⁴E. K. Chambers, The Elizabethan Stage, I, 352. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923, 4 vols. (hereafter ES).

⁵T. W. Baldwin, The Organization and Personnel of the Shakespearean Company (1927), p. 16.

(3) "hired men" who were ancillary players generally employed on a pro tempore basis; and (4) apprentices or boys who were tied to the company in various ways and who provided it with the performers of female and children's roles.

The sharers require our primary attention. Under the terms of the licenses and patents, each member was entitled to equal privileges and profits and bore equal responsibility in labor and expense. The arrangement therefore sanctioned a cooperative body, and he who played Osric was entitled to the same share as he who played Hamlet. A distinct principle of each company was the fixed number of shares allowed -- between eight and twelve. A new member was, therefore, admitted only at the death or withdrawal of an old member.⁶ The reason for this was obviously economic: based on the lowest number of members possible to effectuate the producing scheme, the fewer those members, the greater the value of the shares. On his entrance into the company each member was required to contribute his equal share to its stock furnishings. If a member died or withdrew, he or his heirs were compensated for the share, whereas if he withdrew without the company's consent, he forfeited that amount.⁷ By the provisions of a License granted in May of 1593, a member was further entitled to the courtesy of being called "Mister" in the bills and on all official documents. The names of all other personnel remained unadorned.⁸

⁶Baldwin, 25.

⁷Baldwin, 22-23.

⁸Baldwin, 72-3.

How profitable a member's share could be is seen in the progression of incomes for a member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men. From 1594 until 1608, he averaged twenty-five to thirty pounds yearly, with an extra three pounds annually for court appearances. From 1608 to 1612 (during which time the company acquired the Blackfriars), a member saw thirty-five pounds for public performances and another ten pounds for court. By 1635, the aggregate total from his share of the Globe, the Blackfriars and the court had climbed to sixty-six pounds. A member of this company therefore doubled his share earnings from 1594 to 1635.⁹

The figures above are exclusive of "householding." This term refers to the business arrangement whereby some select sharer members were made share-holders in the ownership of the theatre building itself. Richard and Cuthbert Burbage inaugurated this procedure in 1599 with the building of the Globe, ostensibly in order to secure the permanency of that company. This arrangement continued with the acquisition of the Blackfriars; and other companies, notably The Queen's Men at the Red Bull and Edward Alleyn's Prince's Men at the Fortune, soon adapted it for their purposes.¹⁰ This business proposition continued and by the settlement of the last extant legal suit between the actors and the Burbage heirs

⁹Baldwin, 162-3.

¹⁰ES, I, 352-5.

in 1635, this managerial expediency had in effect become a recognized right of all sharers.¹¹ It is particularly significant to the present study because, as it ceased with the closing of the theatres in 1642 and would not be revived later, it marks the apex of the actors proprietary status within the stock company structure.

In contrast with the relative permanence attained by the sharers as owners of the company, the "hired men" were merely hired labor employed on a pro temp basis. In Henslowe's virtual takeover of the Admiral's Company, for instance, we find that they were hired for two-year intervals at "top market price for skilled journeymen" of the guilds.¹² One of them might also serve as a pre-performance "gatherer" or ticket-taker if he were trustworthy and on a more or less permanent basis, and the typical London company appears to have required no less than twenty.¹³ Often, the hired man served as the prompter or "book-holder" of the tiring house, and in the continuing evolution of the stock system, this position began to take on an importance to the artistic administration second only to that of the manager in the eighteenth century. Excluded from proprietary membership in the companies and with no opportunity for material advancement,

¹¹Baldwin, 115.

¹²Baldwin, 26-7.

¹³Baldwin, 147.

the hired man, nevertheless, served an integral function within the company.

The apprentice held the lowest position in the organizational structure. Under the medieval laws pertaining to the guilds, which in many ways informed the theatrical companies, an apprentice was required to serve a minimum of seven years before he might attain the status of master -- the guild counterpart to an actor-sharer. The law further stipulated that he must be at least twenty-four years old at the end of the apprenticeship, but the enforcement of these restrictions was left to the guilds themselves. Necessity and inclination, always strong factors in any theatrical enterprise, probably lowered the average age of original enlistment of apprentices to about ten years of age.¹⁴

Regardless of his age, however, when the apprentice entered the company, he entered it as little better than personal chattel. He was indentured to an individual, rather than to the company itself, and that person received wages for him. Henslowe, for example, hired out a boy to one of his companies for a weekly sum.¹⁵ The boy generally lived with his master from whom he received his training and his daily sustenance. Traditionally, the apprentice was selected for and trained to the female counterpart of

¹⁴Baldwin, 33.

¹⁵ES, I, 362.

roles which the master himself played. A hero therefore trained his heroine. Gradually the young charge would be broken into performing with a series of minor roles, then graduated by degrees to the largest parts of his respective repertory. Upon the completion of training, another apprentice was brought in to undergo the same process.¹⁶ The youth was thus trained to an important berth in the producing organization, but only death or retirement in the sharing ranks offered him the opportunity for material advancement and ownership within the company. Without luck in inheriting a vacant sharing position, he moved necessarily to the disenfranchized ranks of the hired man.

In view of the turn the later Restoration companies took in organization, the children's companies required a word. These were extremely lucrative arrangements for their shareholders who were often business men or non-performing speculators. All of the acting personnel were, like the apprentices of the adult companies, unsalaried. Whatever the organization earned went directly to the sharer-manager, and expenses were therefore limited to those of stock furnishings and the sustenance of the boys. We may take Shakespeare's word for their popularity, and little imagination is needed to assess their profitability.

¹⁶Baldwin, 226.

Most importantly, they would prove a potent option for structural organization with succeeding generations.

Categorizing Elizabethan theatre companies within the larger socio-economic context has proved a nettlesome issue. The systematic gradation of apprentices, hired men (also known as freemen or journeymen), and sharers, together with the fact that promotion within the structure was inextricably tied to the master-apprentice relationship, is collectively indicative of a fairly typical medieval organization based on hierarchy and class, where each stratification fit like a cog into a machine.¹⁷ The capitalist features, on the other hand, are found in the use of low wage earners and in the fact that the shares themselves, as we shall soon see, fell into debt and effectively became wage earners themselves. Both the medieval and the capitalistic arrangements were, during this period, in a transitional state. The theatre companies themselves are perhaps best described as "artisanal" -- a term used to denote the transitional nature of a post-feudal, pre-capitalistic business which produced a petty commodity.¹⁸

Whether a guild or a business, the Elizabethan theatre companies owed their existence to the very real, if

¹⁷Baldwin, 26.

¹⁸Muriel C. Bradbrook, The Rise of the Common Player (Harvard University Press, 1962), pp. 39-283; and Walter Cohen, "The Artisan Theatres of Renaissance England and Spain," Theatre Journal, 35 (Dec., 1983), 516.

not well articulated, brotherly democratic bond between its members, similar to that described in the Maphio commedia dell'arte contract. Friendship appears to have been at least as important a tie as the business implications. The persistence of various items in actors' wills, the bequeathing of memorial rings and similar gifts to each other, the service of one member as trustee for another, and similar offices and requests, all attest to an interpersonal intensity in the sharers' relationships.¹⁹ This intangible element may have been the true adhesive of the companies themselves.

The foregoing has described the organizational format of the companies up to the ascension of James I in 1603. Thereafter, many changes took place which tended to alter managerial affairs. It has been suggested that the history of the companies throughout the period may be traced from the names of the famous clowns of the 1580s and 1590s to the tragedians of the 1600s which gave way to the names of entrepreneurs like Beeston and Nathan Field in the 1620s and 1630s.²⁰ This trend points to a tendency away from the communal control by the actors themselves and toward the development of a central control vested in one individual.

As the complexities of operation increased, the companies began to appoint one of their sharers as trustee

¹⁹Thaler, "Elizabethan Dramatic Companies, PMLA, 35 (March, 1920), 141.

²⁰Andrew Gurr, The Shakespearean Stage, 1574-1642 (Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 64.

for the whole. We see, for instance, that the Queen's Men appointed Christopher Beeston to succeed Thomas Greene to such a position in 1612, and the King's Men followed suit with John Heminge shortly thereafter. Other than having custody of the company's deeds and appearing regularly at Court as its payee, almost nothing else is known of the function of these managers.²¹

Apart from the managers, there were occasional outsiders to the company who seemed to exert considerable influence over it. We need look no further than Philip Henslowe for an example. Owing to the survival of his diary, we have a fairly reliable picture not only of the companies themselves but of his dealings with them throughout the 1590s. Henslowe was a small business man who had been alternately involved with the dyeing and starch and pawnbroking businesses. In 1594 he appears to have financed a bear-garden in Southwark and began amassing house property of dubious character. As the theatre owner of the Admiral's Men, he took his one-half share of the gallery receipts in lieu of any fixed ground rent between the years 1592 and 1597. Owing to loans which he made to the company during this period and which were apparently unpaid, he was collecting the entire gallery receipts by 1598.²² We note further in his

²¹ES, I, 353.

²²ES, I, 358.

diary that there were eleven contracts between the actors of the Admiral's Company and himself and that they secure the actors services as employment entered into with Henslowe himself.²³ This is a far cry from the traditional bonds which bound the actors to each other in a communal business organization.

This anomalous situation probably stemmed from Henslowe's need to secure his loans, the repayment of which had probably fallen into serious arrears. We have no evidence that he involved or even wished to involve himself in the internal management of this company, and his motives were almost certainly limited to financial profit and acquisition as a speculator. E. K. Chambers' suggestion that Henslowe was the company's "capitalistic banker" is undoubtedly correct.²⁴ Probable motives aside, however, this arrangement between the owner-actors and some outside individual created a precedent which would have profound effect on succeeding generations in England and America.

Having seen the general organization and personnel structure of the typical Elizabethan stock company, we are now in a position to look at the performing conditions of the period. In terms of the composition of the company, four factors already described caused a large surplus of

²³ES, I, 151-5.

²⁴ES, I, 360-68.

acting personnel: (1) the apprentice system, in which many (if not all) of the members trained a succession of "inheritors"; (2) the fixed number of share members; (3) the children's companies, each of which would necessarily, by its very nature, "retire" its complete performing personnel every ten years or so; and (4) the occasional dissolution of companies. These factors caused an oversupply in acting labor and as the companies were self-perpetuating arrangements wherein only the upper stratum of sharers had any control in policy or profit, the typical actor was therefore a tenuous and even marginal laboring commodity.

The size of the repertory was immense by modern standards. Through three successive seasons, 1594 to 1597, the Admiral's Men are known to have played six days a week in an alternating repertory which varied from thirty-four to thirty-eight plays. In the first of these seasons, twenty-one plays were new to the repertory and were brought out at approximately two-week intervals. Only eight of them survived to be played the following season. During the 1595-1596 season, nineteen plays were new and there were fourteen new plays in the following season. Throughout this period even the most popular plays (which included Marlowe) were performed on the average little better than once a month.²⁵ Successful plays appeared with greater

²⁵Gurr, 57.

frequency at the beginning of the season but diminished to about one a month and generally sustained a position in the repertory as a viable item for no more than two years. The pattern of performing was irregular rotation and alternation, and the choice of which plays would be performed was apparently decided fairly close to the moment.²⁶ This pattern indicates that the companies were dependent on a large and continuous supply of new plays. It also says a great deal about the actor's work load.

One seeks in vain for a suitable explanation as to why the performing pattern of alternation should have been so pervasive. Customarily, it is attributed to the belief that those who attended the theatre attended frequently, which would necessarily have required a changing pattern. Other than the internal evidence of the plays themselves, however, we have no evidence of the audience composition and absolutely none for its attendance habits. The most obvious explanation for alternation, overlooked by all historians, is that the professional Elizabethan companies derived from medieval minstrelsy and court playing. Playing was, until the last quarter of the sixteenth century, seasonally and periodically intensive, revolving around occasions and holidays where an audience was limited and probably

²⁶Gurr, 57.

fixed. Nightly performing necessitated a changing bill in such a situation. When the players moved to the public playhouses, they had had years of this performing custom, and since it apparently continued to work, it was sustained. It also furthered the general company objective: to create and retain the largest possible repertory of established successes which an audience could be relied upon to pay money to see. The large turnover in number of productions was the result of this trial and error quest. The apparently ageless fascination of new plays was all important, and the speed with which they could be brought out -- one every two weeks, if the Admiral's Men may inform the general -- necessitated this distinct performance pattern. Something old had to be played while the new was being prepared.

Both the size of the repertory and the pattern of performing affected the actor's job to a considerable degree:

A member of the company, who was likely to be in every play, had to learn a new role every other week. At the same time, he had to keep in mind thirty or forty others. We do know that the players were used to preparing a script rapidly. Augustine Phillips, in the course of testimony offered on the Essex conspiracy, reveals that the Lord Chamberlain's men had only a day or a day and a half to revive Richard II, a play long off the boards. The fact that the play was actually presented at the Globe is proof of the actors' adaptability.

. . .

But the player's task was still more arduous. There was no opportunity for him to fix a role in his memory by repetition. Rarely would he play the same role two days in succession. Even in the most popular role he would not appear more than twice in one week, and then only in the first month or two of the play's stage life. The consequences of such a strenuous repertory

were twofold. First, the actor had to cultivate a fabulous memory and devote much of his time to memorization; various plays testify to the scorn of the playwright for the actor who is out of his part. Secondly, the actor had to systematize his methods of portrayal and of working with his colleagues.²⁷

Another factor bearing on the actor's job is found in the practice of doubling. By Shakespeare's time, the increase in dramaturgical sophistication and structural technology was such that the doubling of characters by a single actor was limited to the "inferior players," hired men or apprentices who played non-leading female roles, and after 1625, the practice of doubling was in a state of distinct decline.²⁸ What is important, however, is that some if not the majority of the players continued throughout the period to play multiple roles in a performance of a single play.

The distribution of roles is central to this investigation, but for the Elizabethan period there is no direct evidence to point to an identifiable procedure. Our knowledge of how actors were cast then is based on the custom listing the name of the player rather than that of the character in certain prompt copies of plays which have survived. Making use of this limited evidence, Baldwin made a science of detecting some principles of casting. This is now commonly referred to as his "theory of lines."

²⁷Bernard Beckerman, Shakespeare at the Globe, 1599-1609 (New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 27.

²⁸W. J. Laurence, Pre-Restoration Stage Studies (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), pp. 60ff.

This theory may be summarized as follows: through on his analysis of five surviving play lists of the "Shakespearean Company" between 1623 and 1632, he is able to deduce certain routine principles: (1) the typical play was constructed for eight principle characters -- six men and two women or five and three women; (2) the actor-sharers of the company played the major male roles; (3) the women's roles were played by the apprentice boys (usually two major and two minor); (4) seven or eight of the actor-sharers always took "name parts," or roles which had been particularized by the dramatist with a specific character name (Laertes, for instance, as opposed to "a Gentleman"); and (5) hired men were never given major parts but rather were used in a fill-in capacity in unimportant roles.²⁹ These principles are said to point to a systematic division of labor within the acting company and are collectively "a natural and well nigh inevitable consequence of the type of organization in the company."³⁰

It must further be noted that the above exposition is drawn from Baldwin's analysis in which he meant to show that the organization and personnel structure of the company was one, if not the chief, determinant in Shakespeare's dramaturgy. The principles drawn from the plays of the

²⁹Baldwin, 175-77.

³⁰Baldwin, 282.

later Caroline period are therefore inferred to be the same for the Chamberlain's and King's Men when Shakespeare wrote for them. Baldwin's central thesis is that "the plays were regularly fitted to the company -- not the company to the play."³¹ In order to demonstrate this company influence on dramaturgy, Baldwin lists four other working procedures which are perhaps best seen as corollaries to the central hypothesis: (1) every member actor must have a part and that part must be in his "line" (this term is not defined but by inference we may deduce that the role's size, its physical characteristics, its age and the genre of the play as well as the temperament and special skills an actor might possess were determining factors). The use of every sharer necessitated the use of the double plot wherein the play accommodated the company. (2) Characters were fitted to the actors -- both physically and in terms of personality. (3) In order to develop actors for the perpetuation of the company, today's juvenile lead was to be trained for tomorrow's leading man. (4) The parts for hired men had to be cut like ready-made clothing in order to fit successors in this transient class of lines.³²

Baldwin's study suffers from a number of shortcomings, not the least of which is its failure to define

³¹Baldwin, 197, 307.

³²Baldwin, 197.

"lines" sufficiently to preclude ambiguity. The inference that the same dramaturgical principles of a small number of Caroline playwrights were precisely the same as Shakespeare's is highly questionable.³³ Anachronistic assumptions permeate the whole.

For the present study, however, Baldwin's contributions are considerable. While his conclusions are untenable for the entire Elizabethan period, the principles he deduced as operative between 1623 and 1632, particularly with regard to role distribution, are invaluable and provide us with a foundation for an hierarchial superstructure to be found later. His observations on recruitment and replacement, for instance, take into account the fact that little or no time could be allotted to reassigning roles in an emergency and that a successor necessarily assumed all the roles of his predecessor. Armin's replacement of Wil Kemp when the latter decamped from the Globe in 1599 is the clearest example of this practice.³⁴

By the closing of the theatres in 1642, at least three organizational methods had been tested by the stock

³³G. E. Bentley (The Jacobean and Caroline Stage, III, 321-3), for instance, denies Baldwin's theory on the basis that the actor lists for printed plays are spotty and not continuous enough to support Baldwin's assertion, and further, that the absence of an actor's name on a cast list where it "should have been" shows that indeed no operative principle of "lines" was at work there. Bernard Beckerman (Shakespeare at the Globe, pp. 134-37) bases his objections on Baldwin's lack of clarity in defining "lines."

³⁴Baldwin, 50.

companies: (1) the jointly owned and operated actors' cooperative; (2) the entrepreneurial dominated system where the patent or license was held individually rather than collectively and the acting personnel were employees as opposed to owners; and (3) the children's companies, similar to the entrepreneurial ones and differing usually only in the nature of remuneration to the acting personnel (apprentices were not paid). The relationship of the actor to these systems differed and was determined by his position in the hierarchy. Only the first could actor-sharers possibly attain a proprietary status. The casting of the plays was likewise hierarchial and an actor's position in the company determined the size and perhaps the quality of the parts he might play. And, finally, the performing conditions obtained by a large and constantly changing repertory necessitated considerable professional skill.

The Restoration Period, 1660-1737

Of the many changes that were effected with the resumption of professional theatre in 1660, the two that have the greatest bearing on the present study are the precise nature of the performing patents and the introduction of actresses. Both had an immediate impact. The actor's relationship to the stock company structure was permanently altered on the one hand, and, on the other, one of the most salient conventions of the Elizabethan theatre was lost.

Like the theatre of the Elizabethan and early Stuart periods, the new theatre of the Restoration owed its existence to royal inclination. Charles II loved the stage and was an avid audience in the public playhouses as well as at his own court. Following the precedent set by James I, he made theatre in effect a part of the royal household under the tacit supervision of the Lord Chamberlain. This office, attended by a Vice Chamberlain and a secretary, superintended the maintenance of royal palaces, organized entertainments, provided for foreign embassies, and generally saw to the monarch's day-to-day schedule. Given the number of duties and details suggested by such a list, the supervision of professional theatrical activities must be seen as an extremely minor responsibility within the aggregate. The influence of this office on the theatre was considerable, however. Conflicts between actors and managements which could not be peacefully resolved by the parties themselves ultimately found their way to the Lord Chamberlain's desk. His judgments and opinions throughout this period and until 1800 may be characterized as consistently inconsistent. At times he found for actors, at others for management. Those who look for "policy" in this office look in vain. Yet Colley Cibber called the office "the main Spring without which no Scheme, of what kind soever, could be set in Motion."³⁵

³⁵Cibber, Apology, p. 187.

The major difference between the structure of the regular Elizabethan adult companies and those of the Restoration resided within the patents themselves. Whereas in the former the company of sharers were given the patent jointly and severally, the new patents of 1660 were placed in the hands of individuals singularly. D'Avenant and Killigrew received them as sinecures from Charles II for services they had rendered him. The significance of the changed nature of the patents was that the managerial prerogative was therefore vested in one man or his appointees or deputies. The actor in such an arrangement became an outsider to company control and a paid employee.

This situation was not without precedent. The Elizabethan children's companies were predicated on just such an arrangement, and late in the Caroline period, Charles I granted D'Avenant a patent in which the latter was given the right "to entertain, govern, privelege and keep such and so many players" as he should "think fit and approve," the company enjoined "to obey the said Mr. D'Avenant and follow his orders and directions."³⁶

The fall of the actor from effective control of the companies and his descent into paid servitude were given further cognizance by article 7 of the D'Avenant patent, granted temporarily 21 August, 1660, and made official in January of 1663:

³⁶From the document to this effect, quoted by Thaler, "The Elizabethan Dramatic Companies," PMLA, 35 (March, 1920), 152.

no Actor or other person . . . ejected by the same Sir William D'Avenant and thomas Killigrew or either of them or deserting his Company shall be received by the Governor or any of the said other Company . . . without the consent and obligation of the Governor of the Company whereof the said person so ejected or deserting was a member signified under his hand and seale.³⁷

As Milhous has suggested, the text of this provision tends to point up the royal wish for peaceful rather than contentious co-existence between the two companies.³⁸ In view of the general conditions of the period, where all other companies were silenced and suppressed and where an actor not performing for one of the patent theatres was therefore subject to vagrancy throughout the kingdom, this provision must also be seen as an effective indenture. An actor once retained by one company might not move to the other nor better his lot by doing so but must remain in paid servitude to his original employer. This provision became a matter of acute contention and remained so throughout the period.

Before they were courtiers, D'Avenant and Killigrew had both been men of the theatre and playwrights. Perhaps this fact more than any other caused them to temper their agreements with the actors by concessions to tradition. D'Avenant's agreement, for example, states that while he is master and proprietor of his company, the basic financial

³⁷Quoted by Judith Milhous, Thomas Betterton and the Management of Lincoln's Inn Fields, 1695-1708 (Carbondale, Ill.: So. Ill. University Press, 1979), pp. 5-6; and see Leslie Hotson, The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage (Harvard University Press, 1928), p. 218.

³⁸Milhous, Betterton, p. 6.

arrangement was to be that of a sharing scheme with fifteen allotments. He held ten of them (two for the theatre building rental and scenery, one for costumes and properties, and seven for "the maintenance of actresses"). The remaining five shares went to a few of the ostensibly most valued players. The larger balance of the company consisted of actors on salary or "hirelings" as the hired personnel would henceforth be called. Killigrew's agreement with his actors was essentially the same, though unlike D'Avenant he delegated the direction of the company to three actors (Mohun, Hart, and Lacy), each holding a single share and dividing three-quarters of another between them for their services. The divided share had originally been the property of another actor who was subsequently reduced to hireling status. This move created dissension. Killigrew therefore rescinded the order and took the share back personally, a move which proved to be equally unpopular.³⁹

D'Avenant's death in 1668 occasioned a restructuring of The Duke's Company which remained in effect until 1694. The fifteen shares were reduced to ten after all expenses were paid, and the actor-shares were each increased by one-sixth, making them assume full sharing in risk and in profit. Milhous sees this as a return to the full sharing cooperative of the Restoration companies.⁴⁰ The patent still resided

³⁹Hotson, The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage, pp. 207-244.

⁴⁰Milhous, Betterton, pp. 27f.

in one man, however -- D'Avenant's heir, Charles.

By 1682 the theatrical climate was so economically depressed that the two companies merged into one United Company, under the effective control of Thomas Betterton who, as the principle actor of The Duke's Company, had served a management apprenticeship since D'Avenant's death. Under the Articles of Union the lists of plays for both companies were merged and the newly created acting company of forty-two members consisted of twenty-four from the Duke's and eighteen from the dissolved King's. Within five years the roster had diminished to twenty-three players, fifteen actors and eight actresses, but the attrition appears to have been the result of peaceful evolution, with old actors dying off or retiring and some of the younger ones going to Ireland.⁴¹

The theatre in Dublin, it should be borne in mind, had existed since the 1630s; the patent had been renewed in 1661 and operations resumed the following year. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it provided the English actor with a proving ground and a refuge. The history of the Irish theatre, though certainly not within the scope of this study, makes mention of most of the major as well as minor players of the period.

⁴¹Milhous, Betterton, p. 41

Between the years 1682 and 1694 a professional player in London either performed as a member of the United Company or not at all. Milhous has taken pains to suggest that this particular period was relatively tranquil and harmonious with regard to actor-management relations, the result of Betterton's fair and equitable control.⁴² The actors were, for the first time in over forty years, once more in charge of their own theatre and their own destiny under the overall guidance of the acknowledged superior among them.

This relatively stable period was brought to a jolting close in 1691, however, when Christopher Rich, who had acquired the old D'Avenant shares, assumed complete control. Grasping, and involved in the venture solely for monetary gain, Rich reduced the salaries of the players and usurped artistic prerogatives of every sort until the players could take no more. In 1694 they petitioned the Lord Chamberlain for the right to break away from the Drury Lane and form their own company. Without a royal patent derived from the origins of the period to sustain their hopes and without an all-important precedent on which to base their plea, the players' petition was, nevertheless, granted on March 25th, 1695. The decision was a quirk of the Lord Chamberlain's judgment. Known as "The Actors Rebellion," this incident was to serve as a precedent for succeeding generations of disgruntled actors.

⁴²Ibi., p. 41

The granting of the petition created another precedent as well. The company thus formed at the New Theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields was granted a license to perform, as distinct from a royal patent. While both orders contain the right and privilege to act, only the patent is a real property which could be bequeathed, sold or disposed of at will. When, therefore, a licensed company might be dissolved, its right sand privileges would be also.

The license for the New Theatre was vested in the company collectively and this fact in addition to the nature of the sharers' agreement signaled a full return to the Elizabethan joint-stock company. Each sharer (which included actresses who had now achieved parity with the male players) was entitled to a full and equal allotment of ten shares.⁴³ Cooperative self-governance by actors had staged a successful comeback. It would not last for long, however. Owing to a conspicuous lack of operating capital and the generally depressed theatrical period, where there appeared to be an insufficient audience for one theatre, let alone two, this new company was forced to disband in 1707 when a second united company was created at Drury Lane.

The turbulence in theatrical management during the last decade of the seventeenth and the first of the eighteenth centuries provoked a considerable amount of managerial philo-

⁴³PRO, L.C. 711; quoted by Milhous in Betterton, pp. 72-4.

sophy. Sir Richard Steele, writing in The Tatler in 1720 but looking back to this restless period, observed that a company of actors

cannot possibly be govern'd, as to their economy, their Accomodation on the stage, their Salaries and Assisgnment of their Parts, but by themselves and those of acknowledg'd Superiority amongst them.⁴⁴

Cibber, from a vantage point of nearly forty years, similarly remarked that the troubles suggested a "settled Maxim, that no Company could flourish while the chief Actors and the Undertakers were at variance."⁴⁵ The events of these two decades, which entail a complex history of financial dealings between Rich, his partner Sir Thomas Skipworth, Owen Swiney and Colonel Brett, and which is well beyond the present scope, point to self-governance as the only recipe for success. When the control of the theatre was unquestionably in the hands of non-theatrical speculators whose sole motive was financial gain, the actors were contentious and even rebellious.

The Lord Chamberlain intervened at least twice during this period in order to settle disputes over the illegal tranference of actors from one theatre to another. Dogget was apparently as displeased with the sharing scheme at Lincoln's Inn Field as Verbruggen was with Christopher Rich's tyranny at Drury Lane. The Lord Chamberlain therefore author-

⁴⁴#7, 23 Jan. 1720, p. 32.

⁴⁵Apology, p. 107.

ized, on a one-time-only basis because the patents firmly restricted it, that the exchange take place.⁴⁶ At about the same time, Colley Cibber was likewise displeased with Rich and moved to Betterton's company without the former's consent. He was sent back to Drury Lane, which proved a decided nuisance to him because he had already penned two acts of Women's Wit with the New Theatre company in mind.⁴⁷

By 1710 the general conditions of the theatre in London provoked the Lord Chamberlain to issue directives for the establishment of a new managerial policy at Drury Lane. While Collier retained the patent, a license to perform was granted to the actors Cibber, Wilks and Dogget, the latter being replaced by Barton Booth in 1714. Collier was given an annual sum and excluded from management. Sir Richard Steele was brought into the scheme by the granting of a patent to him which was effective during the years 1715 through 1719. His participation was limited to writing for the theatre and exercising what influence he held at court for the benefit of the theatre.⁴⁸ This trio arrangement remained in effect until 1733 and, but for Garrick's subsequent tenure, was the longest and most successful management of the eighteenth century. It is commonly referred to as the triumvirate.

⁴⁶LS, II, i, lxxxii.

⁴⁷Apology, p. 341; and Preface to Woman's Wit, 1697.

⁴⁸LS, II, i, lxxxvi.

Contrary to the Lord Chamberlain's directives, contracts with actors were not issued.⁴⁹ Despite that fact, or perhaps because of it, the twenty-year management enjoyed a real and lasting tranquility. Actors were once again governed by actors, though only the members of the triumvirate partook of profits. Cibber notes that throughout the period, the company employed nearly one hundred forty persons, though this figure comprises the entire list of personnel and is not limited solely to the acting company. The three managers took a fee for their services from the gross receipts.⁵⁰

Meanwhile, Christopher Rich, who had been silenced by the Lord Chamberlain and ejected from Drury Lane, began the remodelling of the Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre. He died before its completion, but his son John, on the strength of the inherited patent, opened that theatre in 1714 and ran it to his own complete satisfaction until 1732 when he built Covent Garden. Rich was an expert pantomimist appearing under the name of Lun, and the house gave much of this period to that particular form of entertainment, leaving the triumvirate at Drury Lane with a frequent monopoly on the drama.

The glories of the triumvirate at Drury Lane came to a sudden end in 1732 when, with Booth and Wilks now dead,

⁴⁹Cibber, Apology, p. 240.

⁵⁰Apology, pp. 203-4.

Cibber sold his interest to one John Highmore. The company was once again under the thumb of a non-theatrical manager, albeit one whose histrionic aspirations proved to be well out of the reach of his talents. Disgruntled and plagued by a series of artistic usurpations of rights which will be discussed later, the largest part of the company under Theophilus Cibber, the retired manager's son, decamped to the New Theatre in the Hay and opened "The Company of Rebels."

The Rebels took particular umbrage over a case pending in the courts which would effectively suppress the company now appearing illegally at Rich's deserted Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre. Their published pamphlet further noted that the other playhouses were actually "overburdened" with personnel and were far more likely to dismiss and release actors than to employ them, thus depriving "above three hundred persons of the Common Necessities of Life." Finally, the Rebels protested that the managers of the patent theatres were able to subject actors to the hardest terms,

a state of most abject slavery, to be bought and sold in a market and to depend absolutely upon the pleasure of anyone who has Money enough to lay out in such a Purchase.⁵¹

The actors were, in other words, taking yet another stand against the imposition of restrictions on them by an

⁵¹The Case of John Mills, Ben Johnson, et al., on behalf of the Comedians of Drury Lane and Covent Garden by Dr. Doran, Their Majesties' Servants, III, 81.

outsider. Matters were intensified when Highmore attempted to invoke the Vagrancy Act against them. Harper of their party was actually detained, but his case was thrown out of court by an irregularity in the charge. Failing this ploy, Highmore threw up his hands at managing a company which had only a few minor actors left, but not before selling his interest to yet another entrepreneur - one Charles Fleetwood. Fleetwood's overtures for the company's return were successful, though the actors were cautious in the employment of a lawyer who was brought in to spell out the specifics of salary, casting and privilege.⁵² Charles Macklin was appointed acting deputy of the company and this position remained virtually unchanged well into the next period.

With regard to the actor's status within the stock structure throughout the Restoration, there was much movement but no advance. He had begun and ended the period as a paid employee. The attempt at fully cooperative and democratic self-governance was confined to the relatively early periods of the United Company and The Rebel Company, 1695-1707. It is significant that at both junctures Thomas Betterton was the leader. Sharing as a viable alternative came to an end with his death in 1710. Thereafter, the most a company of actors asked for or ever got was a benevolent management under the direction of one or several of their own kind.

⁵²Benjamin Victor, History of London and Dublin Theatres, from the Year 1730 to the Present Time. London: T. Davies, 1761, 3V; the legal document does not survive.

The general performing conditions of the period reflect its transitional nature. Curtain times moved from the aristocratic mid-afternoon to the middle or working-class evening, and the frequency of performances increased from three or four in the early years to daily except Sunday by the close of the period. The addition of music and dancing are noted almost immediately at the resumption of playing in 1660, and by the first decade of the eighteenth century this propensity gave rise to a decidedly lengthier bill. Prologues, epilogues, entre-act music, singing and dancing and "specialty acts" (which frequently included the use of animals) were all added to the mainpiece. Around 1715 the afterpiece was added and became a virtual imperative by 1730. The length of performances ranged from three to five hours.

Until 1700 the companies maintained an average of twenty-five to thirty performers, with twice as many men as women.⁵³ The growth of pantomime, ballad and Italian opera after that date necessitated larger companies. We do not know how many of Cibber's one hundred forty employees were actual performers, but a conservative estimate of half that number gives some indication of the increase in the size of the acting and performing personnel by around 1730.

The number of plays a given company performed throughout a season remained astonishingly high. During the 1667-8

⁵³E. L. Avery, et al., The London Stage, 1660-1800, II vols. (1965-68), I, i, c; cited hereafter as "LS."

season at Drury Lane, the Killigrew company performed sixty-five different plays with an equal distribution between old, Pre-Restoration works and new ones appearing since 1660.⁵⁴ The 1721-2 season at Drury Lane saw seventy plays performed over one hundred ninety-two nights, while the competition at Lincoln's Inn Fields did forty-six in one hundred sixty-three nights.⁵⁵ In the season after the passage of the Licensing Act, Drury performed 58 plays over 159 nights with a more or less equal distribution between Elizabethan, Restoration and post-1700 works.⁵⁶ The average number of productions for these three seasons was 64.

One of the most interesting and weighty factors determining the repertory throughout this period may be seen in the competition between the various theatres. Cibber, for instance, informs us that at the Restoration there existed

a private Rule as Agreement ... that no Play acted at one House should be attempted at the other. All the Capital Plays therefore of Shakespear, Fletcher and Ben Jonson, were divided between them by the Approbation of the Court, and their own alternate choice.⁵⁷

This tidy state of affairs did not carry over to new plays, however. Betterton, serving his managerial apprenticeship first under D'Avenant and then alone until the founding of the United Company, discovered that the prominent actors of

⁵⁴LS, I, i, cxxviii.

⁵⁵LS, II, i, cxxvii.

⁵⁶LS, III, i, cxl.

⁵⁷Apology, 55; and corroborated by Charles Dibdin, A Complete History, V, 17.

his own company with their exclusive rights to the great roles of the classic repertory were being defeated, at least at the box-office, by the younger and less experienced players of the new plays at Dorset Garden. He therefore added the expensively mounted operas and masks in order to compete.⁵⁸

The incidence of new plays tells us much about the nature of this competition and the inclination of the actors themselves. From 1660 until the amalgamation of 1682, four times as many new plays were performed as old or about twenty new productions a year.⁵⁹ During the United years, the production of new plays fell to an average of between three and four annually. With the resumption of competition in 1695, the incidence climbed back to the pre-United level of twenty.⁶⁰ While the drop in new plays during the United years may be partially accounted for by the necessities of restructuring and rewelding the newly formed ensemble and combined repertories, the lack of competition during these years was clearly a major factor. Unforced by competition, the company simply stayed with the tried and true.

When competition ensued, however, the public was once more in a position to demand new plays. The passion of "the Town" for the new and novel during the early years is amply attested to by Pepys.⁶¹ Often this necessitated a

⁵⁸Milhouse, Betterton, pp. 18f.

⁵⁹LS, I, i, cxxviii.

⁶⁰Milhouse, Betterton, p. ix.

⁶¹March 1664; 1 Aug. 1667; 5 Oct 1667; 26 Feb. 1669.
Diary.

curious decrease in public options, however. During the 1721-2 season, Drury Lane and Lincoln's Inn Fields mounted no fewer than twenty-one plays against each other, a figure which comprised nearly a third of Drury's repertory for that year and a half of Lincoln's Inn Fields'.⁶²

With the foregoing as background, our investigation may now turn to its central topic of casting practice and policy. The playwright, the manager, the audience and the actor himself all bore considerable weight in this process. While our knowledge of Elizabethan practice is, as we have seen, exceedingly meager the survival of records and biographical accounts, especially after 1700, makes possible an analysis of what we believe to be an evolving, systematic procedure in the distribution of roles within a company.

As the creator of the written role, the playwright exerted the primary force. How far his creation might be influenced by the practical conditions of the performing companies themselves is suggested by John Dennis, a playwright and critical observer of the middle years of this period:

For it has been a Complaint of Two Thousand Years standing that Poets have been us'd to violate their subjects, and to force their Characters out of compliance to their Actors, that is, to their Interest. Most of the Writers of the Stage in my time, have not only adapted their Characters to their Actors, but those actors have as it were sate for them. For which reason the Lustre of the most shining of their Characters must decay with the Actors.⁶³

⁶²LS, II, i, cxxvii.

⁶³Reflections Critical and Satyrical, Works (1711), I, 418.

How far the performing of Congreve's heroines, known to have been created for Anne Bracegirdle, have suffered diminution since her death cannot, of course, be measured. What is significant is the frequency of evidence to suggest that playwrights tended throughout the period to write roles for specific actors. The list is nearly as famous as it is endless. A few of those incidents where playwrights were thwarted in their efforts to create roles for specific actors, however, tell us much the same thing about this practice. An account of Cibber's Woman's Wit which was written "to the Taste of those Actors" at Lincoln's Inn Fields but in which he was "forced to confine the business of my persons to the Capacity of different People" at Drury Lane, where he was compelled to return, has already been alluded to.⁶⁴ Nahum Tate, in his Preface to Cuckolds-Haven (1685) complained that he had written a part for James Nokes who did not appear. That the substitution was not pleasing to Tate is glimpsed in the notation inserted in the dramatic personage: "Alderman Touchstone - intended for Mr. Nokes - Mr. Percival."⁶⁵ Mrs. Behn's literary executor wrote in the Preface to her posthumously printed The Widow Ranter (1685) that the play had failed in its first appearance owing to a "false cast, and given to those whose Talents and Genius's suited not our Author's Intention."

⁶⁴See note 47 above.

⁶⁵John Howard Wilson, All the Kings' Ladies (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958; rpt. New York: Midway Press, 1974), p. 95.

The force of the playwright extended well beyond the printed page of the play, however. In her analysis of eighteenth-century acting styles, Lily B. Campbell notes the extent of his influence:

The zeal with which contemporary writers ascribed an unvarying excellence to the post-Restoration actors sometimes challenges skepticism. But the source of the attributed excellence cannot be denied, once the major premise of the syllogism of critical judgment be allowed. It was assumed that the author of plays knew how they should be acted, and that his interpretation of his own characters was not only the most accurate, but also the most effective interpretation. According to this assumption, the author knew not only how to interpret life in his dramas, but also how to re-interpret these dramas in action. Necessarily, then, the acting of a character should be based upon the traditional following of the author's instructions to the first player of the part, and the closer the imitation of the older actor by the younger, the better was his presentation of the part.⁶⁶

Campbell further asserts that "The result of this theory of the necessary transmission of the interpretation of the character from actor to actor was that the interpretation became fixed, and that acting was considered a matter of mere study."⁶⁷ What this might possibly say about the quality of acting during the period is, of course, immaterial to the present study; what it says about the tradition of acting is extremely pertinent. An actor studied a role by watching it being performed, most probably from the backstage wings. He learned the traditional business or by-play, the line readings which had been handed down from playwright to actor and from actor to actor, and even the appropriate manner

⁶⁶Lily B. Campbell, "The Rise of a Theory of Stage Presentation in England during the Eighteenth Century," PMLA, XXXII, No. 2, N.S. XXV, No. 2, 1917, 164-5.

⁶⁷Campbell, "Rise," 166.

in which it was to be costumed. Everything about a given performance, therefore, emanated from the playwright.

Further instances of this "stock" approach which actors took to their work will be shown throughout the course of this investigation. It should be pointed out here, however, that the pejorative meaning of that term did not obtain until quite late in the nineteenth century, by which time the theatrical tradition had been altered radically. Throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and most of the nineteenth centuries, the origin of descent was all important. The rare and exclamatory references to "originality" (as with Macklin's Shylock or Garrick's Richard) underscore them as exceptional. Theatre historians are perhaps naturally inclined to rhapsodize about such examples, but the function and operations of the regular and the mundane give a much fuller picture.

The manager's prerogative with regard to the casting process was a volatile issue throughout the period. One of the most significant factors in the actors' rebellion of 1695 was Christopher Rich's assertion of the right to cast plays as he saw fit. Cibber informs us that the chief parts of both Betterton and Barry's repertory were reassigned to the younger Powell and Mrs. Bracegirdle "under the Pretense of bringing younger Actors forward."⁶⁸ That this was taken as an indignity by the whole company can be seen from the

⁶⁸Apology, p. 106.

wording of the sixth article of their Petition to the Lord Chamberlain:

When we parted with Our shares the Managers promised to continue to us all the Customary priviledges of shareing Actors but now everything is taken from us, the whole Course & Method of the Dukes Theatre totally changed. All things are Ordered at the will & pleasure of the present Claimers severall [actors] turned out for noe crime & without warning & ignorant insufficient fellowes putt in their places ... tending to the ruine & destruction of the Company & treateing us not as we were the Kings & Queens servants but the Claimers slaves.⁶⁹

In this particular case, the price paid for managerial involvement in casting was large, since the Lord Chamberlain gave the offended players the right to form a rival company. For Christopher Rich, at least, casting interference begat rebellion and rebellion begat competition.

Similarly, in a protest to the Lord Chamberlain's office (which will be quoted more fully later) an actress named Mary Porter objected to the interference by Vanbrugh and Swinney in matters of casting at the Haymarket Theatre in 1707.⁷⁰ This was, of course, a renegade company which was silenced by the Lord Chamberlain soon after. While Porter's complaint is suggestive of a number of factors which will be discussed later, it may be pointed out here that the nature of the petition points to the extreme irregularity in these managers' interference. A procedure in casting had already been established and its normal execution was thereby impeded.

⁶⁹The petition is reproduced totally in Milhous, Betterton, Appendix A.

⁷⁰"Memorial of Mary Porter," PRO, L.C. 7/3.

The particulars of John Highmore's managerial ineptitude at Drury Lane in 1733 are not known, but the extreme measure the actors took in bringing in a lawyer to dictate the actual terms of their casting at the reconciliation certainly suggests that he had precipitated the breach by some form of interference the actors would not tolerate.⁷¹

In all the above cases, it is significant that the offending managers were themselves non-performers. (Swinney had been an actor on the Irish stage but his efforts at The Theatre in the Hay were limited to a managerial capacity.) In comparison to their performing counterparts, the non-performing managers incurred considerably more contention and dispute with their employees, and this pattern was to persist with few variations throughout the eighteenth century.

Our determination of the relations between actors and those managers who themselves performed is admittedly prejudiced by Colley Cibber. He is the dominating source for our knowledge of this period. For him, Betterton could do no wrong and he tends to look at his own managerial accomplishments during the triumvirate years with a nearly equal favor. The non-performing manager is a virtual anathema. But failing other primary sources or the survival of any dissenting evidence to the contrary, Betterton's management

⁷¹Victor, History.

must be seen as a benevolent if not enlightened time for the theatre. Milhous's recent and very thorough study of the Lincoln's Inn Fields theatre supports this conclusion.⁷² In any case, evidence of Betterton's policy toward his actors with regard to casting is slight.

At least with regard to the mounting of new plays, Betterton appears to have followed a general policy of deference to the playwright. In a letter he wrote to Dryden regarding the revivals of All For Love and The Conquest of Granada at the United Company in its last season, Betterton gave final approval to the playwright's casting with certain provisos:

Only Octavian was to be Mrs. Butler, in case Mrs. Cooke was not on the stage. And I know not whether Mrs. Percival who is a Comedian will do so well for Benzayda.⁷³

Managerial deference was, as we shall see, a major component of Garrick's tenure at Drury Lane half a century later, and this marks but another instance of the overriding importance placed on the origin of descent in the creative process.

During the triumvirate, Cibber appears to have exercised somewhat less deference. Victor informs us that Addison decided at the first reading of his Cato that Cibber would play the title role. Cibber, who frequently appears to have had an unusually acute sense of his own capabilities, declined the role and insisted with his co-managers Wilks and Dogget that Barton Booth, if he had no objection to the

⁷²Betterton.

⁷³The Letters of John Dryden, ed. C. E. Ward, 1942, p. 54.

advanced age of the part, was the best choice.⁷⁴ The manager does not relate the particulars of having convince either the playwright or Booth of the wisdom of the decision, but the outcome of Cibbers approach to this problem was salutary. It made Booth, and the play became instantly the greatest tragedy of the eighteenth century with a remarkably durable stage life.

There is considerable evidence to suggest that, while the triumvirate may have occasionally and happily overridden its playwrights, the general policy of role distribution pointed to what would much later be called an ensemble. Colley's son Theophilus noted in his Life of Booth:

Wilks, Cibber and Booth when Managers often acted inferiour parts, thereby setting a good example to the other performers - such was the policy of those times - these great men had judgment enough to know that a good actor could show himself a master of his profession in many a character that has since been despised by some who are far beneath them in merit: and indeed so conscious of their weakness (notwithstanding all their parade) that they never venture to appear but in the most shining characters, the beauties of which support the actor, and place him in the most advantageous light, while they prudently decline any other, where it is necessary for the actor to help to support the part - Mr. Cibber, though justly esteemed the first Comedian of his time, and superiour to all we have since beheld, has played several parts (to keep up the spirit of some Comedies) which you will now scarcely find one player in twenty, who will not reject, as beneath his Mock-Excellence.⁷⁵

⁷⁴Victor, History, II, 29-30.

⁷⁵Quoted In Genest, Some Account of the English Stage, 1660-1830, 10 vols. (1832), II, 552-3.

Two historians of the succeeding period seem to concur. Davies notes that in comparison to those of the late eighteenth century, the actors of the triumvirate frequently took parts that "would scarcely be accepted now by third-rate actors."⁷⁶ Victor likewise notes of this period that

It may here be observed, that it was not usual, at that Time, for the principal Actors to dodge between Theatre and Theatre, for the sake of a little temporary Advantage, till they had lost their Characters and Importance at both. On the contrary, knowing that high Salaries could not be obtained, or at least supported, without full Houses, or full Houses without a Diversity of Attractions, (which could not be procured, if Time was to be wasted in rehearsing old Stock Plays, for the Sake of the new Performers to be introduced in them) they wisely remianed where they were, and thereby kept Possession of the Parts they were perfect in.⁷⁷

The bills of this period also support the general conclusion that actors tended to work in a rare and graceful harmony. A noted revival of All for Love, for instance, featured Booth and Mrs. Oldfield in the leading roles, Wilks in the smallish part of Dorabella and Cibber and Mrs. Porter in the very minor roles of Alexas and Octavia. Here were actors who knew how to support each other.

The ultimate decision in casting matters, however, rested with the manager, and it was as good or as bad as his taste and personal inclination would allow. Personal prejudices account for a good deal. At Lincoln's Inn Fields around 1720, for instance, John Rich (the son of Christopher and an

⁷⁶Thomas Davies, Dramatic Miscellanies, 3 vols. (London: the author, 1785), III, 370.

⁷⁷Victor, History, I, 64-5.

expert pantomimist) exercised his power of casting with a legendary short-sightedness. James Quinn, then but a journeyman, appealed to the manager for an opportunity to play Falstaff. Rich was outraged at the presumption and claimed that no one had any idea of how to play that part except himself. He dismissed the subject by telling Quinn: "It is quite out of your walk. - Never think of Falstaff."⁷⁸ These proved to be famous last words when Quinn subsequently went on to become the greatest Falstaff of the eighteenth century (and by tradition the greatest in history). The title role of Cato was likewise refused him and Rich was undoubtedly much chagrined when the actor later had a considerable success with it. Rich's interests both as manager and performer inclined toward the pantomime and the musical, while his judgments on the literary drama were notoriously uniformed. Contrasted with the example of Cibber's personal refusal of the great Cato plum in the interest of serving the play, these two managements differed radically in their approach to the casting process and in the quality of their decisions.

The interplay between playwright, manager and actor and a glimpse of where the real influence resided in the casting issue may be seen in the following account of David Crawford's Courtship-a-la-Mode. In his Preface to the play the playwright complained that when he had given the play to

⁷⁸Gentleman's Magazine, V. 36 (April 1766), 221.

Betterton at Lincoln's Inn Fields one of the leading actors in the play, Bowman, who had the sides for six weeks "could hardly read six lines on't" at a late rehearsal. As several of the other actors proved equally indifferent to their roles and to the play generally, he subsequently withdrew it from Betterton's management and it was successfully performed at Drury Lane two days later.

We have not evidence that Bowman was personally affronted at the size of his role; he apparently objected only to the playwright's ministrations. Where an actor had been assigned a part which he considered beneath his dignity or station, however, much mischief could ensue. Jo Haynes, a brilliant and irrepressible rogue who had earned a master's degree at Cambridge before going on the stage, was cast by Charles Hart, manager with Mohunm of Killigrew's King's Company, as a senator in Catiline's Conspiracy. Haynes felt his position in the company warranted better casting and he refused the part. We do not know what forces Hart exerted in this dispute, but Haynes did play the senator - with a vengeance. He succeeded not only in upstaging the entire company in the first act but in emptying the theatre in the second with the promise to the audience of more of his antics in the street.⁷⁹ This incident was long famous and most probably served managers with a cautionary tale and a precept: beware the restless actor unhappy with his part.

⁷⁹Life of J. Haynes, pp. 23f.

What Bowman and Haynes had both done in the foregoing examples was to sidestep successfully an open confrontation with their managers over the delicate and controversial issue of the right of refusal of parts. As early as 1675, the rules and regulations of the King's Company had prohibited an actor from declining a part if the company thought him suited to it.⁸⁰ The same provisions most probably obtained at Lincoln's-Inn-Fields where the company structure was ostensibly much more democratic. Bowman had, by passive resistance in refusing to learn his lines, freed himself from either playing the unwanted part or having to pay a forfeit, which was and remained a week's salary until late in the eighteenth century.

The fines and forfeits collected for open breach of a theatre's rules and regulations were traditionally placed in a "kitty," as William Smith tells us in a court deposition around 1700:

The Actors and Musitians forfeitures according to the Method of the Dukes Company which were made by reason of their not attending to performe the Rehearsall of their parts and other Offices of the Stage were never looked upon as this Defendant Conceives as any part of the cleere profitts ariseing by acting in any of the said Theatres. ... Some of them [the fines] have been remitted to engage further diligence in those that made them Or else spent in Treats amongst the Actors or given as Extraordinary Rewards to such whose meritts deserved it & often disposed of in Charityes according to usuall Custome.⁸¹

⁸⁰PRO, L.C. 5/141, 307; also in Allardyce Nicoll, A History of English Drama, 6 vols., rev. ed. (1955-59), I, 324n.

⁸¹Quoted in Milhous, Betterton, 30.

This description appears to have been typical from 1660 to at least 1800, with one notorious exception. When Christopher Rich took control of Drury Lane in 1691 or thereabouts, he appropriated the "kitty" to his own personal use. This was one of the actions which ultimately precipitated the actors' rebellion. Both that action and the particular way in which the funds of the "kitty" were generally dispersed tend to point up the fact that infringements and forfeits were regarded by the actors as a matter among themselves.

The playwright, manager and actor were ultimately, of course, responsible and answerable to their audience. Dr. Johnson's famous observation about the laws of the drama is clearly applicable to matters of casting.

First and foremost in any audience came the King. It should be observed that royal patronage of the drama dwindled steadily over the Restoration period: Charles and James II too an active interest in the stage, but the Hanoverians were largely indifferent, preferring musical entertainment. Intervention in the early years was often direct, however, as we see in the suit of Anne Quin. She had quarreled with the management of the King's Company in 1667 over the casting of an unknown part which she had already played but which had been reassigned for a revival. She petitioned the King through the Lord Chamberlain's office and was duly

reinstated in the company.⁸² While lacunae in the playbills and the unknown identity of Quin's rival make it impossible to ascertain the success of her suit with regard to the retention of that particular role, the case is extremely significant. On the one hand, the order having her reinstated may have set a precedent for the evolving casting procedure, and it is definitely the first extant example of an actor laying claim to a part on the basis that she had performed it previously.

Pepys informs us that Charles II's preference for John Lacy, a low comedian of the King's Company, caused Walter Clun to be replaced as the Lieutenant in The Humorous Lieutenant.⁸³ But there was a definite limit even to a King's power in backstage matters, and even a royal wish might be rescinded on occasion. William Smith, an actor in the same company, was the victim of a green-room assault by a noble gentleman who was subsequently banished from the court. When Smith reappeared after the incident, the largely aristocratic audience, outraged that an indignity should be cast on a gentleman "only for having mistreated a Player," reacted so violently that Smith withdrew from the stage permanently.⁸⁴ While the matter did not have casting as its

⁸²Allardyce Nicoll, A History of Restoration Drama, 1660-1700 (Cambridge University Press, 1928), 321 n.

⁸³Diary, 8 May 1663.

⁸⁴Cibber, Apology, pp. 49-50.

issue, it clearly shows that the wishes of the King in supporting an actor were certainly not sacrosanct.

The more middle-class or even working-class audiences of the early eighteenth were no better behaved. The theatre historian Curll noted, for instance, that at Drury Lane during the 1718-19 season, a riot ensued over the particular casting of Mrs. Oldfield as Andromache in The Distressed Mother. The audience's behavior, believed to have been created by a "posse of profligates" who wanted to see Mrs. Rogers in the part, was not suppressed until the arrival of four Royal Messengers.⁸⁵ As we shall see later, Mrs. Rogers' position at that theatre was somewhat lower than her own great aspirations; with Mrs. Oldfield secure as the leading comedienne and Mrs. Porter as the tragedienne, it is likely that the riot was in some way precipitated by the disappointed Mrs. Rogers.⁸⁶ Audiences were in any case extremely susceptible to suggestion, and this is but one instance in several to follow where actors frequently used the audience, directly or indirectly, as a means to their own ends.

In an anonymous biography of Mrs Oldfield published in 1740, the author discusses the famous rivalry between her and Mrs. Bracegirdle. He cannot decide whether it had been

⁸⁵Quoted by Genest, II, 656.

⁸⁶Ibid.

created by the actresses themselves or by "the Town." It hardly mattered; the audience, as usual, decided the matter. Bracegirdle and Oldfield were pitted against each other in the role of Mrs. Brittle on consecutive nights. The public's palm went to Oldfield. The manager Swinney thereupon gave the latter a more advantageous benefit date and Bracegirdle, affronted at this action, retired immediately.⁸⁷ It was a bitter end to a great career. Similarly, Cibber recalls a riot at Drury Lane in February 1718, when Wilks was replaced by an unknown and inexperienced actor as Cato, and the same thing occurred four years later when a revival of The Rival Fools was performed with only young actors.⁸⁸ The audiences brought certain expectations with them and could prove highly contentious if disappointed.

The rise of newspapers in the years immediately following 1700 tended to intensify the actor-audience relationship. The Tatler, The Spectator and the dailies supplied the public with anecdotal and biographical sketches of certain actors and some began to emerge as conspicuous public commodities. This factor probably bore considerable weight on what James Lynch in his Box, Pit and Gallery has called "the rise of the virtuoso."⁸⁹

⁸⁷Quoted in Genest, II, 375-76.

⁸⁸Quoted LS, II, i, cxxxii.

⁸⁹Pp. 142f.

Before we begin our analysis of the actor and his relationship to the casting process, the emergence of the actress must be considered. The Elizabethan tradition of boys playing women's roles was resuscitated at the Restoration, but along with this came the permission for women to perform. How far this permission was taken as a mandate may be seen in the fact that the old convention disappeared immediately and was never again revived. Thereafter, only women played female roles, except in instances of burlesque or parody. The boys for the most part made successful transitions to male roles: e.g., Edward Kynaston moved to jeune primeur, and James Nokes and another called Angel both became low comedians.

The first actress played in Othello on 8 December 1660. There was no custom for the recruitment of actresses and there are many diverse examples of how the women made their entrance. Elizabeth Barry, the greatest tragedienne of the era, was trained in elocution by Lord Rochester who subsequently introduced her to a delighted Betterton. Ann Bracegirdle appears to have been a child performer of some sort and gradually grew into leading comedy roles under Betterton and Congreve's aegis. Susanna Percival was the daughter of Thomas Percival, a minor actor, and Nell Gwyn, the infamous orange-moll of the King's Company, ascended from the pit. Anne Reeves may have been Dryden's mistress and he

is believed to have coaxed her into her brief career.⁹⁰ The remaining possibility of "the nurseries" as a field for actress recruitment is strong, though there is not direct evidence of it. Not much is known about these acting schools anyway.

No matter where she may have come from, however, once on the stage she had much with which to contend. Staying there may have proved equal to the struggle of getting there. In his study of eighty Restoration actresses, Wilson has cut through a sea of anecdotes to reveal that twelve of them are known to have left the stage to become mistresses or prostitutes; another dozen or so - including the estimable Mrs. Barry - "enjoyed considerable reputations as occasional doxies"; another thirty or so were only on the stage briefly; and, finally, another two dozen, who were reputed to have lived respectable lives as wives and mothers, were nevertheless the subjects of sullyng lampoons on their chastity. Actress and whore were "effectively synonymous."⁹¹ The situation had not changed much in Cibber's time either. He complains about "many frail ones ... who, before they could arrive at their Theatrical Maturity, were feloniously stolen from the tree."⁹²

⁹⁰Wilson, Kings' Ladies, pp. 8-11.

⁹¹Wilson, Kings' Ladies, pp. 20-1.

⁹²Apology, p. 222.

Regardless of her reputation or how hard it was to stay there, once ensconced in the dramatic repertory, the actress exerted a major influence - on old as well as new plays. One of the leading characteristics of the Shakespearean "improvement" was that in nearly every alternation or adaptation, female parts were heightened, lengthened or newly added.⁹³ Desdemonas and Ophelias were, by virtue of the realistic casting, rendered more pathetic.

The fascination for the actress probably centered on a novel sociological aspect: if a gentleman had not in his private forays discovered that women had legs, he now had a public demonstration of that fact. "Breeches parts" became box-office and a principle drawing card of the Restoration theatre. Of 375 plays produced in London public theatres from 1660 to 1700 (which included Pre-Restoration works as well as new plays and adaptations): (1) 89 contained roles "in Boy's Clothes" or "in Man's Clothes"; (2) in 14 other plays, women were assigned parts originally written for men; and (3) at least 3 plays were "acted all by women."⁹⁴ The practice was not limited to the young and shapely, either, because Katherine Carey, a specialist in crones and old women, appeared "disguis'd like a Eunuch" in Joyner's The Roman Empress in 1670.⁹⁵ Nor was the practice confined to

⁹³Wilson, Kings' Ladies, pp. 102f.

⁹⁴Wilson, 73.

⁹⁵Ibid.

strictly dramatic purposes. Nicoll has traced the continuous practice of dressing women as men in epilogues and prologues, sometimes specially advertised, throughout the period.⁹⁶

Far from being a mere characteristic fad of the "licentious" Restoration, it persisted to become a sturdy device of the "exemplary" are on the stage and at the box-office.

Under these circumstances the playwright was compelled to write for the actress. He was constrained by a totally new and realistic convention, and in many cases he needed to pay particular attention to specific actresses who were popular. The general woman of dramatic literature became a particularized entity with distinct physical characteristics and, frequently, a decidedly public reputation.⁹⁷

One critic has even laid the demise of tragedy squarely in the actress's lap: John Banks, a minor dramatist who had the field of tragedy and the heroic laid open to him with the death of Otway and Lee, is said to have abandoned the men of the heroic genre for the tender women in distress in his "she-tragedies" (The Unhappy Favorite and Anna Bullen). Despite the success of this genre with Bracegirdle in the principle parts, the effects are said to have been evastating to the subsequent development of tragedy.⁹⁸ However that

⁹⁶HED, II, 49-50.

⁹⁷Wilson, Kings' Ladies, pp. 107-8.

⁹⁸Arthur H. Scouton, ed., Restoration and Eighteenth Century Drama (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 5.

may be, the entrance of the actress on the stage was met with instant and unflagging favor and she achieved parity with the actor in the public eye almost immediately.

We come now to the actors' collective position in the casting process. If the playwright, manager and audience can be said to have exerted an influence on this procedure, the actor's part in it was virtually immeasurable. He was both the means and the end.

Playbills and biographical accounts of this period suggest that actors tended to specialize in the performance of parts that shared common characteristics. In D'Avenant's company we find that Betterton not only excelled in but was virtually irreplaceable as the tragic hero of either the pensive or militant strain — Hamlet, Hotspur, Othello, Alexander the Great. The pathetic or amorous parts were played by Henry Harris of the same company, and he commanded the part of Romeo throughout the early Restoration. In the Duke's Company, Charles Hart and Michael Mohun divided the leading roles of that repertory between them; Hart took all the gay gentlemen of the comedy of manners (Dorimant and Loveless) while Mohun rivalled Betterton in the tragic and heroic. Samuel Sandford had a complete monopoly on the villains and heavies of the period up to 1700.⁹⁹ John Lacy and Jo Haynes

⁹⁹This particular career is totally anomalous for this period in being the first and only example of what would later become known as "type-casting." Because of his extreme physical and vocal eccentricities, Sandford would not be tolerated by audiences in anything except menacing, "heavy" roles. Cibber, Apology, pp. 76-82.

were known for their rough, rustic comedy roles, Haynes in particular achieving considerable success in his "Epilogue Spoken from an Ass," which would be sustained for succeeding generations by Dogget and Tate Wilkinson. James Nokes, Angel, and Cave Underhill were all noted or low comedy. James Spiller of Rich's company at Lincoln's Inn Fields, though only in the twenties, commanded the repertory of old men and may have led the age in his ability to transform himself unrecognizably from role to role.¹⁰⁰ Drury Lane continued throughout the triumvirate years to specialize in comedy of manners, owing to the presences of Cibber, Wilks and Mrs. Oldfield. The pantomime held center stage in Rich's companies because of his own fame as Harlequin.

Actresses had specialities, too. Mrs. Barry played the greatest tragic heroines almost without exception, while Bracegirdle owed her first and biggest successes to the gay ladies Congreve created for her, though as we have noted she had an effect in the pathetic roles of the "she tragedies." Nell Gwyn, before Charles carted her off to Whitehal, was known for her comic and musical roles, and we have it on Pepys's testimony that her excursions into the tragic regions were without distinction.¹⁰¹ Mrs. Oldfield was a most versatile actress and a major element in the ensemble of the triumvirate, but her fame rested on the excellence of her comedy.

¹⁰⁰Genest, III, 271-74.

¹⁰¹Diary, 22 Aug. 1667.

Statistical proof that actors tended to specialize in the performances of certain specific types of character is offered in a fairly recent survey by Professor Ben Schneider.¹⁰² The article suggests not only some operative principles of the casting process but also the complexity of this type of research as well. Schneider analyzes the performance pattern of 83 specific comedies played in London between 1660 and 1730. The female roles therein were categorized by 113 "clusters" of character traits, and, using the monumental resources of The London Stage, 30,000 cards were punched for every performance of these plays for that period. The tabulated results attest to the general assumption that actors tended to specialize, though not to the extent that Nicoll insisted upon in his assertion that the majority of players "took up one line and only one."¹⁰³ Through a tabulation known as "% of commitment" to the coquette-prude type of character, Schneider found that although most of the actresses included in the study performed a large range of parts, performances of the specific character type ran to an average of about half their respective repertoires.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰²Ben R. Schneider, "The Coquette-Prude as an Actresses' Line in Restoration Comedy During the Time of Mrs. Oldfield," Theatre Notebook, 2 (Summer, 1968), 143-57.

¹⁰³Nicoll, RD, p. 65.

¹⁰⁴Schneider, tables.

However much we are inclined to chalk up specialization to the old truism that human beings tend to do frequently what they enjoy most, a closer look at the casting procedure will show that this process was infinitely more complex.

A hierarchial system accounts for these complexities. Baldwin has, as noted, pointed out the operational policies with regard to casting in the Elizabethan era. If there is a direct continuity between that period and the post-Restoration, it is probably owing to Mohun and Hart who, as boy actors of the earlier period, became the managers of Killigrew's company. Betterton could also point to a direct affiliation with the earlier period by his relationship to John Rhodes. Whether these individuals served as a direct bridge for the transmission of Elizabethan traditions is, however, conjectural.

The identifiable components of this hierarchial system as it existed in the Restoration are (1) seniority, (2) succession, (3) precedence in performing and (4) "possession of parts." While each is a separate and distinct entity in theory, in practice they are almost inextricably fused. An attempt will be made to isolate them for the purposes of description, and this will be followed by an example or two of their interplay within the casting process.

Seniority refers to the principle whereby those actors who had the longest tenure within a company came first in its privileges. Much later in the century, an

anonymous writer described the conditions at Drury Lane around 1718:

At this time of day, seniority of date was considered with as much jealousy in the green-room, as in the army or navy; and an actor that should at once have rushed upon the town, with all the powers of a Betterton or a Booth, in a capital character, would have been looked upon by his competitors for fame as little better than a usurper of talent and applause. Besides, the manager considered acting as a mere mechanical acquisition, that nothing but time could procure; and therefore, everyone in his company was to serve his apprenticeship before he attempted being even a journeyman actor.¹⁰⁵

The so-called "young actors" of the Restoration were the apprentices of the Elizabethan era, and the conditions under which they survived in the theatre did not improve with the passage of time. Cibber informs us that while the probationary period without pay was typically three to six months, he had to wait nine months for any remuneration whatsoever. His own ascent within the Drury Lane company, under Christopher Rich's management, may be read as characteristic. Kynaston's sudden illness prevented him from playing Lord Touchstone in a command performance for Queen Anne of Congreve's The Double Dealer. Cibber took the role on twenty-four hour notice, received the playwright's heartiest congratulations and a small rise in salary. He did not advance beyond this stage until the division of the company occasioned by the rebellion in 1695, however, and even then only slightly. He remained with Rich while most of the outstanding actors of

¹⁰⁵Gentleman's Magazine, 36 (April 1766), 221.

the company departed with Betterton to Lincoln's Inn Fields. There was, however, even among the "poor giddy Pretenders" who remained a pecking order in role choices which did not include Cibber who had been climbing within the company. It was not until a last minute substitution of The Old Bachelor that Cibber finally got his chance at a plum role.¹⁰⁶

The first extant record of a dispute arising from an actor's claim to seniority is found in "The Memorial of Mary Porter", dated 22 October 1707.¹⁰⁷ Genest lists her as having first performed at Betterton's company at Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1699, where she was a "theatrical attendant" to Mrs. Barry.¹⁰⁸ That term is not defined but we may infer that it is the equivalent to the modern understudy, since we know that middle and lower status actors studied their seniors. In this particular case, Porter is known to have been Barry's page and carried her train. Her "Memorial," at any rate, is in the form of a complaint to the Lord Chamberlain:

When several of the Gentlewomen that performed principal Parts, either be neglected or sick, [Porter] at a nights notice study'd and playd them perfect in the next night and to satisfaction for which she hop'd for encouragement or at least to have had such Parts given her by which she might have gaind reputation when there was more time to study. But instead thereof generally those Prts were given to such as were below her.

. . .

¹⁰⁶Cibber, Apology, 102-16.

¹⁰⁷PRO, L.C., 73, #102.

¹⁰⁸Genest, IV, 43.

That a little before their beginning to Play this winter a Gentlewoman was taken in over her head, which will still be a means to take away those Parts from her by which she hop'd to advance herself.

Porter must have felt sufficiently wronged to have lodged such a protest, and she seems to imply that the offending manager, in this case Owen Swinney, had overstepped the bounds of custom and tradition in giving a newly hired actress parts Porter had already played. It is impossible to tell what, if anything, the Lord Chamberlain ruled in this matter or, owing to the absence of playbills, how she was subsequently used at this theatre. Seniority was, however, clearly the central issue in this dispute.

The same actress also gives us the clearest example of the operational principle of succession, whereby a body of parts played by one actress was transferred to another who had most often understudied her and inherited those parts at her death, retirement or in the rare instances when the former might decide to relinquish certain parts for a variety of reasons. At Elizabeth Barry's retirement in 1710, for instance, Porter took over her entire tragic repertory and even the several roles which Barry had acquired in the comic repertory (Angelica in Way of the Rover, Lady Wronglove in Lady's Last Stake and Mrs. Marwod in The Way of the World). Another actress of the Drury Lane company named Mrs. Horton had played some of these parts as

well as some of the tragic repertory, but resigned them all to Porter who had seniority.

With the amalgamation of the Duke's and King's companies in 1682, Betterton fell heir to the parts of Hart and Mohun who retired at that time. In addition, therefore, to his own already large list of roles in the classics, he assumed many of those in the comedy of manners repertory. Despite any complaints which his fellow actors might have had (which have not come down to us in any case), Betterton appears to have retained to roles and been particularly zealous in the acquisition of new ones. He created the role of the youthful Valentine in Love for Love at the age of sixty-four. As the senior member of every company he appeared with from 1682 until his death in 1710, he enjoyed the first privileges of his seniority.

Though he had been hired by Betterton for Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1700, Barton Booth was to wait ten years before he finally succeeded to the master's parts. Robert Wilks had better luck; he had been engaged by Rich at Betterton's insistence. and after a years sojourn in Ireland, was brought back to Drury Lane to take over the repertory of "fine gentlemen" left vacant by Mountfort's assassination in a green-room intrigue in 1692. Unlike Booth, therefore, he moved into a field of excellent parts fairly quickly. Death or retirement were generally the only means by which a line of parts was transferred from one actor to another.

The third principle, precedence in performing, has already been glimpsed in Mary Porter's suit. Having played the parts, she thereby laid claim to the right to perform the subsequently and objected to a newer rival being given the parts.

The fourth and perhaps most potent factor in the hierarchial system of casting is found in the possession of parts. While the expression is indigenous to the last years of the Restoration, the provenance of the right may perhaps be traced to the earlier Elizabethan period, at least in theory.

In the years immediately preceding the interregnum, a publisher named Brome had a contract with the Salisbury Court company which expressly forbade him to publish any of their plays without the collective permission of the actors. Fletcher's plays were not published until 1647, by which time we may presume that the actors who owned those plays had probably given up all hope of ever performing them again. The Lord Chmberlain forbade any other company to do the plays of Wiliam Beeston's company.¹⁰⁹ At least two principles seem to be operative in the foregoing. First, to publish meant to perish. As long as a company retained the script for which they had usually paid a nominal sum and as

¹⁰⁹Milhous, Betterton, p. 16; Bentley, The Jacobean and Caroline Stage, I, 330-1.

long as the script remained unpublished, that company was in possession of the acting rights. Once published, it became, at least in practice, public domain and the property of anyone who might choose to perform it. Secondly, the actors of a company collectively owned the play and it was one of the most valuable items in any stock list. If we may infer from the foregoing a principle of possession with regard to companies and their plays, we can see the same arrangement extended in the Restoration to the actor and his part.

Possession is both abstract and material; this dual nature resides in ownership of right and in the actual holding of a property. One of the most interesting aspects of the possession of parts is that actors frequently claimed the right to a part by virtue of their holding the sides of that part. An actress named Anna Lodi of Swinney's Haymarket made a formal complaint to the Lord Chamberlain in a letter of 6 January 1708:

Sir-

If my last proposition does not please you I shall never agree to no other, because I have maid the Proposition against my Interest upon your desire. If they don't think me fit to act, I desire not to be ut to tryall and I am ready to deliver the parts whenever 'tis your command.¹¹⁰

From this we may infer that Miss Lodi already held or possessed the sides of several parts and that by returning them she

¹¹⁰Vice Chamberlain Coke's Theatrical Papers, 55-6;
emphasis mine.

would effectively relinquish them. Throughout this period and indeed until the demise of the stock company system, an actor got his sides either by copying them from the prompter's script himself, or for a nominal fee the prompter would copy the sides himself and pass them on to the actor so assigned. To be in possession of a part meant, therefore, that the actor not only retained the right to play the part by virtue of the hierarchical structure so far described but also had material ownership of the words of that part.

The most visible casting dispute of this period quite naturally centered around its most popular play. A revival of Gay's The Beggars Opera at Covent Garden in 1736 provoked a storm of controversy. The casting of Kitty Clive for Lucy Brown and Mrs. Cibber (Theophilus' wife) for Polly Peacham was considered by the playwright and Rich the manager as "the perfect cast."¹¹¹ Clive, however, had played Polly since 1733, had made her reputation in that role and was, presumably, aware of what effect the fast rising Mrs. Cibber might make in it. Surviving often means staving off the competition. Clive therefore refused the role of Lucy and claimed Polly on the basis of precedence in performing it. The "perfect cast" was not to be. The operative feature here was Clive's popularity with her audience. She apparently used that as a leverage over the playwright, the manager and

¹¹¹Genest, V, 230-1.

her rival. Nothing is known of the forces these individuals might have exerted to coerce her into relinquishing the part of Polly, but they certainly stopped short of risking the loss of her services. Popularity spells money at the box-office and rarely runs second in any race with artistic principles.

The dispute between the two actresses fanned into a public issue and accounts of the contention filled the tabloids for over a month.¹¹² Henry Giffard's success with an afterpiece on this topic, entitled The Beggars opera; or, the contending colombines at Lincoln's Inn Fields indicates how popular the issue had become.

The significance of this incident, however, may be seen in an article for The London Daily Post and General Advertiser of 19 November 1736, where Clive, in justifying her position and her belligerence in the dispute, claimed she took it as

a receiv'd Maxim in the Theatre, That no Actor or Actress shall be depriv'd of a Part in which they have been well receiv'd, until they are render'd incapable of performing it either by Age or Sickness.

"Clives Maxim," as it soon became known, was predicated on the principles of the hierarchial system of already long duration, but it is the first clear and public statement of that practice. It soon became the tacit agreement between

¹¹²"Spectator," Daily Gazette, 4 Nov. 1736, "AZ," London Daily Post and General Advertiser, 13 Nov.; T. Cibber, Grubb Street Journal, 19 Nov. and 9 Dec.; Daily Journal, 10 Dec.

actors and their managers on which the lines of business tradition was slowly being established.

The interplay between the four components of this hierarchial structure can be nowhere better exained thab in the early performance history of the role of Melinda in Farquhar's The Recruiting Officer. Mrs. Rogers originated it (and thereby gained both the earliest precedent in performance and its possession) at Drury Lane in 1706. After Betterton's move to the Queen's Company at the Haymarket, Mrs. Porter played Melinda, but she resigned the role to Mrs. Rogers when the latter became a member of that company (precedence and possession again). At Drury Lane, Mrs. Knight played the part, but only until Mrs. Rogers rejoined that company in 1709 (seniority, precedence and possession). When Rogers did not rejoin in 1710, the part fell not to Knight from whom Rogers had taken it, but to Porter who was now reestablished at Drury Lane (seniority). Porter subsequently migrated to the Queen's and took Melinda with her. Rogers joined that same company later in the season and reclaimed the role (seniority, precedence and possession) With the consolidation of the companies at Drury Lane in 1711, all three actresses were employed and Rogers took the role (by reason of all four hierarchial components) Finally, Rogers let Drury Lane for good in 1715. Most of Rogers' roles were taken by Mrs. Horton including that of Melinda (succession) Porter would

certainly have been within her rights to have retained Melinda but apparently chose to pass it on to a younger and seemingly more appropriate actress.¹¹³

Another example is nearly as illustrative of the system. A Mrs Moore appears to have had four distinct careers. She played maids from 1699 to 1702; from 1704 to 1710, she specialized in gay and witty heroines; from 1715 she played young prudes after a move from Drury Lane to Lincoln's Inn Fields and continued in this line until her return to Drury Lane in 1718. After a lapse of three years, she returned to that theatre and played old prudes. Schneider found that while she retained a number of roles from career to career, the changes in her type of specialization were the result of losing seniority with each retirement and having to readjust to the constitution of the company at another theatre where certain actresses were in possession of parts she might otherwise have played.¹¹⁴

The rigidity of this system naturally had its effects. One of the most conspicuous was superannuation. Being in possession of a part often meant playing it to the end of one's career. Whether this is attributable to an actor's personal vanity (and it usually is) or whether she or he was compelled by the system to continue in a part for which there may have been no appropriate substitute is, of course,

¹¹³Genest, II, 420-63; Schneider, "Coquette-Prude," 151.

¹¹⁴Schneider, 154.

immaterial to the effect it produced. Anthony Ashton, for instance, complained that Betterton had retained the part of Hamlet well beyond a time when it was seemly and wished that he had resigned the part to the younger Powell. While Ashton did not question Betterton's superiority in Hamlet (or in any other part for that matter), he felt that Powell would ultimately have played it to better effect.¹¹⁵ We have already seen how Betterton created Valentine in Love for Love at the age of sixty, and was still performing it at Congreve's benefit in 1709 at the age of seventy-four; In these particular cases, the absurdity was mitigated somewhat by the fact that in both instances the company was comparatively old in the overall, so that Betterton's age was relatively correct.

The most injurious effect of the hierarchial system was seen in the companies themselves. There was little room in this scheme for the advancement of younger actors. Milhous acknowledges that recruitment was principle drawback of Betterton's company at Lincoln's Inn Fields, and Cibber does the same for the triumvirate at Drury Lane.¹¹⁶ In his earlier years, Cibber informs us that his last-minute substitution as Fondlewife caused him a real problem because he had succeeded to a line in which parts were few or "not to be had." This deficiency could only be remedied by his turning playwright

¹¹⁵Quoted in Genest, II, 457.

¹¹⁶Betterton, Apology.

himself; he wrote Love's Last Shift in January of 1695 around his own performance as Sir Novelty Fashion.¹¹⁷

Failing a visitation by the Muse, a young actor was thus left with few means to advancement. He might wait for the indisposition of a senior actor as Cibber had already done, or he might pick a choice role for his benefit which the possessor would probably not wish to play so late in a season. This approach was a risky proposition, for he had no guarantee that anyone would see him in the role or that he would make enough money to cover the expenses of a benefit charged by the manager.

One further effect of the system may be glimpsed in the anonymous account of why Jo Haynes had, as mentioned, wreaked such havoc when forced by Hart, into a role which the actor felt to be clearly beneath his station. We have seen that a parity existed between sharing actors in the Elizabethan theatre, regardless of the size of the role they played. In the Restoration, however, where all actors had subsequently become paid employees, "Jo's salary being then 50s. a week, freed him from any such obligation."¹¹⁸ From this evidence, and it is the only example of such a situation in the Restoration, we may surmise that the pay scale of actors was a necessary effect of this hierarchial casting

¹¹⁷Genest, II, 68.

¹¹⁸Life of J. Haynes, p. 23.

procedure. There is considerable evidence that this relationship between status and salary was effective in the succeeding period.

Despite its obvious liabilities, the hierarchy offered an ordered structural procedure in the casting of a large and constantly changing repertory where not time could possibly have been found to address these problems as they arose on a day-to-day (or hour-to-hour) basis.

It must be noted, finally, that anything in the way of a statement or a reference to this hierarchy or to casting policy in general is not to be found in the extant contracts of this period. None of the surviving instruments, in fact, mention anything other than the salary, the duration of the contract and the terms of the benefit.¹¹⁹ A curious spate of contracts signed between 1707 and 1710 may perhaps have been used to regulate the actor and manager relationship after the chaos of the preceding years. The use of contracts for the years after 1710 is virtually non-existent, despite the Lord Chamberlain's directive that they must be issued by the triumvirate. Cibber says that

we nether ask'd any Actor, nor were desire'd by them, to sign any written Agreement (to the best of my Memory) whatsoever: The Rate of their respective Sallaries were only enter'd in our Daily Pay-Roll.¹²⁰

This statement would have applied up to the year 1732, and although we have an occasional reference to specific clauses

¹¹⁹PRO, L.C. 73, rpt. in Nicoll, HED, II, 286-92.

¹²⁰Apology, 240.

in contracts in the period which now follows, we may assume that the triumvirate policy was dominant until late in the eighteenth century.

Throughout the Restoration, at least, the actor and the manager appear to have entered into a verbal contract and the casting of that actor was a thing to be hammered out in the day-to-day business of mounting productions. A hierarchial system, based on seniority, succession, precedence in performing and possession of parts had been firmly established by the close of the period, if not considerably before. As we have seen, the success of any given management during this period - at least in terms of its labor relations - can be measured in terms of its compliance with this system. The non-performing, speculative managers who arbitrarily set matters of casting practice were invariably beset with rebellion; the performing managers appear, in their compliance with the system, to have been comparatively unencumbered.

Garrick and the Eighteenth Century, 1737 - 1800

The Theatre Licensing Act, passed by Parliament on 21 June 1737, provided for the legal prohibition of professional playing of any play not licensed by the Lord Chamberlain and restricted playing to only those theatres which had been authorized within the City of London. The act was aimed principally at the indiscretions of playwrights (Henry Fielding in particular) who had so provoked Prime Minister Walpole

that he forced through its passage. The censorship of plays was immediately effective. The effending plays disappeared overnight, and their writers retreated to the safer harbor of the novel.

The restriction on the theatres themselves took another fifteen years to become totally effective. While the right to perform was vested solely in the patentees of Drury Lane and in the Rich family (John having built Covent Garden and moved his company at Lincoln's Inn Fields there in 1732), a number of other theatres had been built since 1705 and operated with impunity under the ruse of a concert formula. The New Theatre in the Haymarket, for instance, was built in 1720 and Samuel Foote subsequently performed there under the guise of offering public "breakfastings" with chocolate. As no money was exchanged at the door, the price of admission having been paid at a local bookshop, Foote could append his performances and circumvent te restrictions. Similarly, William Hallam used the same formula for his efforts at The Wells Theatre in Goodman's Fields. Built by Thomas Odell in 1729 and remodelled in 1733, it served Hallam for his pantomime performances until he move to a serious dramatic repertory in the early 1740s. It was not until the passage of substantive, beck-up legislation in 1747 that the legal means of curbing this and simiar activities could be efected, and it took a further five years for those means to become totally effective.¹²¹

¹²¹LS, passim.

The licensing Act was a major turning point in English theatre history. Among its many consequences, the law gave official sanction and statutory rights to the Lord Chamberlain's office; the powers it had exercised over the theatre by tradition for nearly a hundred and fifty years were now unequivocal. The act had consequences for the American theatre as well. William Hallam was thereby forced to suspend his activities and send his company to the American colonies; but for the Licensing Act, America might well have had to wait considerably longer for its first truly professional troupe.

The monopolistic patents continued to be held by individuals as personal property throughout the period and until Rights Act of 1843. More often than not, the owners were businessmen and speculators interested in the theatre solely for monetary gain. This point of view continued, as it had since about 1690, to have serious consequences for labor relations. With specific regard to casting procedures, management by non-performers tended to be arbitrary and to infringe upon the traditional hierarchy. Actors did not, as we shall see, take the situation lightly.

The Drury Lane patent was sold by Highmore to Charles Fleetwood in about 1733 and, owing perhaps to the latter's inveterate gambling, the fortunes of the house were in serious decline until Garrick and Lacy purchased the patent in 1747

and set out on what is universally regarded as the greatest management of the eighteenth century. Fleetwood, for undisclosed reasons, had summarily dismissed most of the company in 1743; the dismissals included Charles Macklin, Kitty Clive and Garrick, who had recently risen to an unprecedented height of popularity. They and their cohorts made a pact not to rejoin Fleetwood until all their number were satisfied with an agreement. Fleetwood remained adamant in refusing to rehire Macklin, and the group, under Garrick's leadership, finally rejoined the manager without Macklin.¹²² The incident is significant as the first example of an attempt at collective bargaining.

Fleetwood's patent was sold to two City men named Amber and Green in 1744 and passed on to Garrick and Lacy three years later. After Lacy's death, Garrick managed the theatre alone until his retirement in 1776, when it passed to Richard B. Sheridan, who retained it until 1809. While Sheridan appointed Thomas King deputy manager and John Phillip Kemble as his successor in 1788, that owner exercised a close control over every aspect of the house. King's letter to the press at his resignation on 30 September 1788 outlined what he had taken to be his duties as manager: to present pieces approved by the proprietors, to negotiate engagements,

¹²²Appleton, Macklin.

to answer public complaint and to instruct young performers. He complained, however, that these powers were effectively negated at nearly every turn by Sheridan and that, in fact, he had never had any power to enact anything, including the casting of plays or "the liberty of engaging, encouraging or discharging any one performer."¹²³

After John Rich's death in 1761, Covent Garden passed on to a series of promoters and the house was never again in the managerial hands of a performer during the eighteenth century. A decade of dissension ended when Thomas Harris wrested effective control in 1771 and retained it until Kemble took over in 1803. Harris' thirty-two-year management was, in terms of labor relations, perhaps the most potent and controversial of all.

Expiating aristocratic negligence in an accident where Samuel Foote lost a leg, the Lord Chamberlain granted a special patent to him in 1766. He was thus allowed to operate the Haymarket during the summer months when the other two theatres were closed. In the Foote sold his patent to George Colman the Elder who continued to operate the patent under annual issuance throughout the period.

These three theatres then constituted the sum of theatrical activities in London from about 1752 until 1800. Other theatres on the city's outskirts and at the fairs (Bartholomew, Southwark, and Mayfair among them) were oc-

¹²³Genest, VI, 522-5.

casional, and usually presented bills similar to these of the music-halls; as such, they do not fall within the confines of this study.

Following the pattern set in the preceding periods, the size of the repertory remained large and the nightly and irregular rotation of plays continued. In the season after Garrick's retirement at Drury Lane, for example, 45 different plays were performed (of which only 2 were new) with 28 different afterpieces over 180 nights. In the same season, Covent Garden produced 55 plays (4 new) and 30 afterpieces.¹²⁴

One of the most characteristic features of the repertory after mid-century was the increase in the production of Shakespeare. In large measure this increase was in response to the dwindling of new plays precipitated by the Licensing Act. The Shakespearean Ladies Club and Garrick's own proclivities have also been cited as probable factors, to which may be added elements from the larger social context: interest in antiquarianism, a preference for romantic drama, a tendency to inquire into national history and a new-felt pride in earlier English achievement.¹²⁵ Whatever the reasons, Shakespeare (or the mutilations which passed for him) accounted for nearly 25% of the total repertory, and only five of his works failed to

¹²⁴LS, v, i, 105, 108, 109.

¹²⁵Lynch, p. 162.

be produced between 1737 and 1776. Most importantly to the present study, the Shakespearean canon offered actors their greatest parts, and these became the criteria by which they and several succeeding generations of performers would be judged.

The above statistics point to another fact which had great bearing on the actor's work after 1750: with a decrease in new plays, the accent was now upon the maintenance of a large number of stock pieces. The size of an individual's repertory during this period beggars the modern imagination. John Palmer, a noted leading actor during and after Garrick's tenure, appeared in 273 parts in 241 plays (mainpieces and afterpieces) and unnumbered prologues, epilogues, monologues and entr'actes.¹²⁶ Another actor named Woodward, who had an extremely brief career and died at age thirty-four, played 54 major roles at Drury Lane from 1763 to 1769.¹²⁷ A brief glance at nearly any of Genest's summations of various careers will confirm the immense size of an actor's work load.

The result of such a large and constantly changing repertory was that, as Beckerman suggested for the Elizabethan player, the eighteenth-century actor was necessarily a "quick study." The seemingly abnormal ability to memorize a large part within twenty-four hours was a requisite few actors could evade. While the prompter was an ever-present factor

¹²⁶Genest, VII, 346-50.

¹²⁷Genest, V. 248-9.

in any performance, the degree to which he went unused (or at least unheard by the audience) often measured the difference between success and failure. Let one example of the "quick study" serve for a multitude: Thomas Hull appeared opposite Mrs. Siddons as Banquo on 2 February 1785 and had the principle part in the afterpiece, owing to the unannounced indisposition of Robert Bensley. There is no record of Hull's having performed either part previously or on any subsequent night.¹²⁸

As a theatrical performance is a collective endeavor, perhaps the real accomplishment rests not in that of an individual but in the concerted effort of the company. Cross, who was Garrick's prompter at Drury Lane and kept a diary which has survived, probably knew more about backstage conditions than anyone. He relates that on 12 December 1763 the company anticipated a disaster (and the usual accompanying riot) with a performance of The Dupe. In case it should be stopped, the cast of The Strategem was called and remained in the wings. Of the ten actors required for The Stratagem, only three were used in The Dupe, so that this arrangement necessitated the call-up of seven additional actors. They were not needed.¹²⁹ While this is the only occurrence of its kind in Cross's diary and cannot be taken as typical, it does suggest the general state of readiness within such a large repertory.

¹²⁸LS, V, i, ciii.

¹²⁹LS, IV, i, clxxi.

In his analysis of rehearsal practices at Drury Lane under Garricks, Burnim found that they were so much "plot and practice" - a school for underlings (the acting company) where Garrick (the teacher) was required "to transform parrots into scholars and orators." He demanded and apparently received their submission and the whole of it was accomplished by the imitation of his example.¹³⁰ The high incidence of stock pieces might suggest that rehearsals would be fairly slipshod; on the contrary, they were extremely intensive. While the evidence shows that the occasional new production might receive anywhere from three to eight weeks of rehearsal, the general policy with stock pieces cannot be ascertained.¹³¹ Whatever its scheduling configuration, however, we do know that the company was kept almost continually at work. Edward Cape Everard, an actor and dancer at Drury Lane for a short time, describes his day:

The porter, or call-man, used to come to my lodgings of a morning, and, knocking at my door, this little dialogue used to pass: - 'Mr. Everard!' 'Well, James.' 'at eleven, in the Green Room, to the reading of the New play....At twelve, to Much ado about Nothing - Mr. Garrick will be there.' - 'Very well' - 'At one, in the practising room below, Mr. Grimaldi's dances in the Tempest ... At two, on the stage, Mr. Slingby's dance, the Savage Hunters ... At half-past two, Signior Dagueville's Double Festival ... At three o'clock Mr. Atkin's Sailors Revels'.¹³²

¹³⁰Burnim, David Garrick: Director, p. 50.

¹³¹Burnim, 45-6.

¹³²Everard, Memoirs of an Unfortunate Son of Thespis, p. 40.

Garrick appears to have been a perfectionist, and if he did not always have complete control over who should play what part, how it was to be played was firmly within his command.

With the repertory after about mid-century stabilized and remaining more or less the same from season to season, and with infrequent changes in casting and possession of parts firmly limiting the number of actors to be seen in casting and possession of parts firmly limiting the number of actors to be seen in major parts - there was a distinct change in the theatrical climate. In a study of the audiences of this period, Professor Pedicord found that only 1.7% (or 17 in every thousand) of the London population went to the theatre and that those who did were necessarily great frequenters, with box and pit patrons coming much more often than the less privileged lower classes of the gallery.¹³³ Both the incidence of frequent attendance and a relatively unchanging repertory suggest that the audience was coming to see its favorite actors.

James Lynch has characterized this change as "the rise of the virtuoso."¹³⁴ While there is evidence in any historical period that favorites existed, around 1740 the actor appears to begin to see himself as an indispensable commodity in the theatrical transaction, and managers seem to have agreed as measured by their continual acquiescence.

¹³³Pedicord, The Theatrical Public in the Time of Garrick, p. 17.

¹³⁴Lynch, p. 157.

Whether the advent of this practice is Garrick's emergence in the famous 1741 Richard "debut", Macklin's Shylock of a few months earlier or Peg Woffington's unparalleled celebrity in the breeches role of Sir Harry Wildair in 1740 is not as important as the fact that the times were ripe for such a practice. This individual popularity was, as noted, a major aspect of Clive's even earlier success in retaining the part of Plly Peacham over the objections of playwright and manager. An engaging and particularly favored actor could now exert considerable influence over the repertory and management policy.

One of the most visible aspects of the rise of the virtuoso may be seen in virtually any playbill after mid-century. Chetwood, a prompter at Drury Lane and a historian of the period, makes a particularly interesting observation:

formerly characters were printed in the playbills according to their rank in the Drama, as for example in Macbeth Duncan stood first in the bill, tho' acted by an inferiour person; but latterly I have found it a difficult task to content ladies as well as gentlemen, because I could not procure letters large enough to please them; nay some were so fond of elbow room, that they would have shoved every one out but themselves, as if one person were to do all.¹³⁵

Celebrity was raising its head. Kemble later revived the old custom (which dated from the first decade of the century) of presenting the characters on the bills according to their rank in the *dramatis personae* and without consideration to

¹³⁵Quoted in Genest, IV, 374.

their rank as performers. He had apparently attempted thereby to quell disputes; Genest informs us that it did not work.¹³⁶

Throughout the latter half of the century, the increase in an individual actor's specialization caused a decrease in the level of versatility. Davies, for instance, noted that about the time of Garrick's debut, such tragedians as Quin, Johnson, Chapman, Macklin, Woodward, Cibber and Yates, "most of them original in their proper walk," could nevertheless "support the comic muse with great ability."¹³⁷ The same historian laments the decline in versatility in the latter part of the century. Garrick (as an example of an actor who appears to have played equally well at tragedy or comedy) notwithstanding, actors increasingly found and stayed with a specific metier. Mrs. Clive, beyond compare in pert chambermaids and lively soubrettes (along with a series of breeches parts), failed miserably as Portia in The Merchant.¹³⁸ Mrs. Cibber, as we shall see attempted the range of Garrick, and only after a series of monumental failures did she realize that "Melpomene-- could not translate herself into Thalia" and finally gave up trying.¹³⁹

¹³⁶Genest, VII, 57.

¹³⁷Memoirs, I, 24.

¹³⁸Tate Wilkinson, II, 55.

¹³⁹Biographical Dictionary, "Cibber," n.p.

The superstructure of the hierarchial system being already in place and validated by usage and custom, the traditional approach to acting continued. Lester Wallack, a century later, tells the story of his father's experience in trying to bring something new to Tressel in Cibber's Richard III at Drury Lane around 1790:

My father, a young, ambitious actor, came on with the feather hanging from his cap, all wet, his hair dishevelled, one boot torn nearly off, one spur broken, the other gone entirely, his gauntlet stained with blood, and his sword snapped in twain; at which old Wewitzer, who was the manager, and had been a manager before my father was born, was perfectly shocked. It was too late to do anything then, but the next morning Wewitzer sent for him to come to his office, and addressed him thus: 'Young man, how do you ever hope to get on in your profession by deliberately breaking all precedent? What will become of the profession if mere boys are allowed to take these liberties? Why, sir, you should have entered in a suit of decent black, with silk stockings on and with a white handkerchief in your hand.' 'What! after defeat and flight from battle?' interrupted my father. 'That has nothing at all to do with it,' was the reply; 'the proprieties! Sir, the proprieties!'¹⁴⁰

Once established with success, a traditional line reading or tone of voice, gesture or point of characterization as to be repeated without variation. In The actor John Hill cautioned those who played "genteel" comedy: "the judicious player is urged not to differ too much from the last player who excelled in the part".¹⁴¹ As arbitrary as this appears to the modern actor, it must be borne in mind that such practice was a

¹⁴⁰Lester Wallack, Memories of Fifty Years, pp. 81-2.

¹⁴¹p. 196.

necessary element of the origin of descent from the playwright and the only way in which the inherent "style" of a play could be transmitted from one generation to another without significant loss.

Without official status or guidelines, the maintenance of a tradition must be attended to continuously, and this fact may in some way explain the rigidity of the seigniorial system. The historians of the period, however, continued to see it as an implacable element from the larger social context:

...it was the etiquette in the profession, that seniority should be considered with as much jealousy in the Green-Room, as in the War-office or the Admiralty. A performer would have been looked upon as little better than a usurper, who ventured to violate this decorum.¹⁴²

No better (or perhaps more ludicrous) example of seniority can be found than in the Drury Lane tenure of Theophilus Cibber. When he fled to France in 1737 (to evade creditors and the law, owing to a personal debacle in a love triangle with his wife and one Sloper), his line of parts, which constituted nearly every major comic role at the house, fell to Macklin. Upon Cibber's return at the beginning of the next season, Macklin duly surrendered the roles and was thereby demoted.¹⁴³

The ruling precept of casting practice continued to be succession. Frances Abington, for example, returned from

¹⁴²Galt, Lives, p. 108.

¹⁴³Appleton, Macklin, p. 37.

Dublin to Drury Lane only after the more or less simultaneous retirements of Kitty Clive and Mrs. Pritchard, thereby laying claim to virtually the entire province of comedy. Mrs. Yates made her debut at Drury Lane in 1754 but waited twelve years to inherit the line of classical heroines on Mrs. Cibber's death in 1766. Earlier, Henry Mossop, a mainstay of Covent Garden, inherited almost all of Quin's vast repertory. Even John Phillip Kemble, the giant at the end of the century, had to stand peaceably by while the notoriously inferior Thomas King and William "Gentleman" Smith shared the major tragic parts. Kemble arrived at Drury Lane in 1783 and was able to wrestle Macbeth from King by playing it at his own benefit in 1784. Smith, however, persisted with the other major roles until he retired to oblivion in 1788. With King and Smith out of the way, Kemble could finally mount his throne.¹⁴⁴

If the waits were long, the fruits were sweet.

The possession of characters [were] . . . esteemed at this time [1750] the property of the performers. And it was an invariable rule at the theatre, not to make the smallest encroachment on a custom so long established.¹⁴⁵

Once the part had been played with relative success, the actor automatically laid permanent claim to it in all subsequent performances. The continuation of a play in the repertory was a sure sign of its success. I have not found a

¹⁴⁴Baker, Kemble, p. 99.

¹⁴⁵Bellamy, Apology, III, 17-18.

single instance of an actor refusing to play a part in which he had succeeded. At this time, possession and the rights thereto were in the hands of a relatively small number of so-called "capital" performers. They claimed their right by virtue of audience response. The principle dynamic of possession was audience identification of an actor with a particular role or set of roles. Peg Woffington's assumption of Sir Harry Wildair and her success in that part filled the box-office coffers wherever she played it, and audiences would never again tolerate anyone else (especially a man) in that part. The play retired from the active repertory when she did.

Similarly, Macklin was the only Shylock on the London stage from 1740 until he retired the part in the late 1770s. Quin could not be followed in Falstaff until Ned Shuter had some success with it much later in the century, when all those who had seen the former were probably dead. Much Ado About Nothing was a staple at Drury Lane for the first decade of Garrick's tenure, owing to the perhaps calculated irony that it was the first part he played after his marriage to Miss Violetta. The audience saw and enjoyed the parallels between Garrick's domestic affairs and those of Benedick.¹⁴⁶ Even playwrights frequently had to acknowl-

¹⁴⁶Davies, Memoirs, II, 127.

edge that audiences were right, that certain actors often "made" their plays. Home admitted his debt to Mrs. Crawford "who brought the play [Douglas] into repute" and to Mrs. Siddons, "the other who kept it so."¹⁴⁷

The possession of a part applied, of course, only to established plays within the repertory. New plays or newly-mounted revivals of old plays were free of casting encumbrances, and the manager generally had a free hand in distributing their parts. Garrick, like Betterton before him, often side-stepped this potentially explosive issue by the traditional managerial policy of deferring all matters of casting to the playwright. In a letter to Mrs. Abington in 1775, he wrote:

I now again tell you that every author since my management distributed his parts as he thinks will be of the most service to his interest, nor have I interfered, or will interfere, unless I perceive that they would propose something contrary to common sense.¹⁴⁸

This was no lame evasion of Abington's apparent appeal for a part. Georgia Ann Bellamy corroborates the fact that in the original production of Dr. Young's The Brothers both she and Garrick agreed that she was miserably miscast by the playwright as the heroine and that Mrs. Pritchard was better suited to it. The playwright remained adamant and Garrick, true to his word, did not intervene. Bellamy claims to have played the part out of respect for Young.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷Quoted by Genest, IV, 491.

¹⁴⁸Little and Kahrl, Letters of Garrick.

¹⁴⁹Bellamy, Apology, II, 131.

With newly-mounted revivals of old plays the manager was able to steer a course toward his own directorial integrity. It is small wonder, therefore, that Garrick's tenure is marked by many revivals. Davies, in particular, raves at the successful casting of Florizel and Perdita, The Grecian Daughter, Timon, Coriolanus, and Every Man in his Humour. Garrick's management of the last is seen as the greatest example of his acumen:

All the personages were so exactly fitted to the look, voice, figure and talents of the actor, that no play which comprehends so many distinct peculiarities of humour, was ever perhaps so completely acted.¹⁵⁰

Because the production was new and the parts of the play therefore "unpossessed," Garrick was clearly able to "type-cast" Jonson's play. He had a large company to draw from, of course, and appears to have been attentive to the personal eccentricities of even the lowest members. Richard Neale, "a grotesque actor, whose peculiar talent was suited only to particular characters," became a useful commodity in Garrick's hands; when the manager was in difficulty over casting choices, he was known to say "come, I will give it to Neale, for I am sure he will make more of it than anybody else can."¹⁵¹

When free of actors' and playwrights' interference, Garrick

¹⁵⁰Davies, Dramatic Miscellanies, II, 64-7.

¹⁵¹Genest, IV, 300.

consulted the genius of the actors, and though he was not without those prejudices which no man can be entirely divested of, yet, in general the characters were very well suited to those who represented them.¹⁵²

Even actors could agree on this point. John Barrister, who had the distinction of having "made trial" for Garrick as the latter shaved, said the manager could assign "the proper employment to all his employees, excite their useful efforts, restrain their exuberances and, by his care and judgment give to their talents their most effective direction."¹⁵³

Garrick's management of his acting company gives the lie to the notion of him as an arch-egotist who ran Drury Lane for his own self-aggrandisement. Particularly with regard to the males of the company, he was astonishingly magnanimous. After the Romeo competition with Spranger Barry, he reengaged that actor for Drury Lane in 1767 and shared Hamlet with him. To William Powell he ceded all his leading parts when he went abroad during the 1763-1764 season; might just as easily have suspended performances of what he possessed during his sojourn. With "Gentleman" Smith he shared Hamlet and Richard III. His generosity fell to the lower echelons as well. With Ned Shuter he shared Scrub and Sir John Brute, the latter part being given to James Love at a different time. With Thomas Weston he shared Abel Drugger and Scrub, and risked being judged inferior to that ac-

¹⁵²Davies, Memoirs, I, 149.

¹⁵³Quoted by Burnim, David Garrick: Director.

tor.¹⁵⁴ Whether the foregoing examples are seen as Garrick's personal generosity to his fellow players or as part of a broader artistic vision of his management, the English theatre provided only one historical precedent for it.

Garrick's indebtedness to his first manager, Henry Gifford, has never been properly assessed. Gifford regularly managed an outlaw troupe at Goodman's Inn Fields and employed large numbers of performers each season. By what means he was able to evade casting traditions is unknown, but there is clear evidence that he frequently changed casts throughout the 1731-1732, 1735-1736 and 1740-1741 seasons until he appears to have achieved a desired ensemble effect.¹⁵⁵ Garrick made his famous "debut" in Richard III under just such a circumstance. It was Gifford's signature piece to announce many new actors "who never appeared on any stage before." But Garrick had been under Gifford's tutelage at Ipswich for a full season, and his appearance in Richard was the first step in the greatest career of the eighteenth century. It is entirely possible that Garrick's magnanimity in casting was, therefore, something he learned from Gifford's example.

Garrick is reputed to have said, "the plagues of management, in one year, are sufficient to expiate a whole

¹⁵⁴Davies, Memoirs.

¹⁵⁵LS, III, bills for these seasons.

life of sin."¹⁵⁶ While his generosity in role distribution may have appeased his male actors, he had no such device to use in dealing with the other sex. Their squabbling over parts was the bane of his managerial existence, and in time he must have come to see the wisdom in Steele's observation that English actresses could not be governed, only humored. His disgust with them erupted when he turned playwright, as we see in Act I, Scene 11 of A Peep behind the Curtain (Drury Lane, 1767):

Actresses quarrelling about parts; there's not one of 'em but thinks herself young enough for any part; and not a young one but thinks herself capable of any part - but their betters quarrel about what they are not fit for. So our Ladies have at least great precedents for their folly.

What he had to contend with is best seen in his dealings with Suzanna Cibber. She had, of course, learned a valuable lesson from Kitty Clive in the famous Polly rivalry in The Beggars Opera: the meek might indeed inherit the earth, but never a good part from a living actress. It was not a lesson she ever forgot. Thereafter, until her death in 1766, Cibber was as voracious in her quest for new parts as she was tenacious in her hold on the old ones. If Garrick faltered for an instant in casting decisions, Cibber would suggest and demand in a flash. When Mrs. Palmer had to be rejected for the sixteen-year-old ingenue in School for Lovers because of advanced pregnancy, the forty-eight-year-

¹⁵⁶John Jackson, A History of the Scottish Stage (Edinburgh: P. Hue, 1793), p. 170.

old Cibber demanded the part.¹⁵⁷ None of her contracts survive, of course, but a clause in one with Drury Lane apparently gave her the right to chose any character she pleased in any new or newly revived play.¹⁵⁸ Having been on the stage since the mid-1730s, she already had a huge list of possessions. Her appetite increased by what it fed on, however, and she was as a consequence of her articles, forever attempting comic parts for which she was ludicrously inappropriate. Garrick's hands were tied and he had to stand by and wait for the audience's "disapprobation," most particularly in Buckingham's The Chances. Once convinced that she ought not to attempt that role again, she relinquished it and Mrs. Abington played the part.¹⁵⁹ She finally admitted she could not play comedy at all and would no longer try.¹⁶⁰ By then, of course, it was almost too late, she had repeatedly marred Garrick's best efforts with her casting demands and he had less than a decade to go. When word of Cibber's death arrived, he is said to have replied, "Then tragedy has expired with her; and yet she was the greatest plague in my house."¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷Burnim, p. 24.

¹⁵⁸Genest, IV, 404.

¹⁵⁹Davies, Memoirs, I, 187.

¹⁶⁰Davies, Dramatic Miscellanies, II, 408.

¹⁶¹Thespian Dictionary, n.p., "Cibber."

It was a damning encomium.

Cibber, however, was neither the first nor the last in a long line of troublemakers. Kitty Clive was still giving lessons in brinksmanship when Garrick decided to revive Love for Love. Clive was in possession of the sixteen-year-old Miss Price, but he could only wrestle the part away from her by promising that of Mrs. Frail - a part for which she was, with her resounding vivacity, equally unsuited. Her biographer insists that her contentiousness over casting was not a matter of the usual actress vanity but one of sheer "perversity."¹⁶² She was extremely pugnacious and apparently spent her entire career at Drury Lane trying - without success - to capture parts opposite Garrick. It was generally conceded that of all eighteenth century actors she was the one who might have "bested" him. He never gave her the chance, however; the Thespian Dictionary claims that he "feared" her above all others.¹⁶³

Not all the casting failures at Drury Lane could be laid in the lap of the possession tradition, however. Some were simply mistakes in judgment. One of the most interesting attempts by Garrick to alter tradition occurred at Woodward's benefit in 1754. Probably at Samuel Johnson's suggestion, the manager, who played Hamlet, decided that the

¹⁶²Fitzgerald, Life of Clive, p. 74.

¹⁶³n.p., "Clive."

usual casting of Polonius by a low comedian was a time-honored misrepresentation. He therefore persuaded Woodward to play the part as a serious old man. It took another decade or so for this idea to become popular. Initially it was a resounding failure.¹⁶⁴

Likewise, in a revival of Jonson's Epicoene in 1776, Garrick decided to cast Sarah Siddons in the male title role. When she threw off her female disguise and appeared as a boy in the last act, the audience was not surprised - the intended effect - only displeased. Garrick recast the part but the damage was done and the revival damned.¹⁶⁵ Sheridan had somewhat better luck in saving a disastrous first performance of The Rivals in 1775. Lee's Sir Lucius was apparently all wrong, and Sheridan managed - how we are not told - to wrestle the part from him and give it to Clinch who played it thereafter with great success.¹⁶⁶

Garrick apparently initiated something like a casting conference. Cross, the Drury Lane prompter, informs us that Garrick assembled most of the leading actors in August or September for each season of his tenure. The minutes for none of these meetings survive, unfortunately, but we may infer that, given its time of year and the fact that actors were present, whatever could be decided with regard to cast-

¹⁶⁴Genest, V, 408.

¹⁶⁵Genest, V, 485.

¹⁶⁶Genest, V, 459.

ing matters took place here. The repertory for each month of the season was established, and contingencies were no doubt given due attention. This conference was in fact a master planning session.¹⁶⁷

In order to cut short salary disputes and to plan for a given season as much as possible, Garrick also began to require an early summer agreement with his actors. He obviously wanted to know as far in advance as possible who could be counted on for which parts and at what salary. His insistence on this procedure may be seen in his last season, when Jane Pope, the leading chambermaid/soubrette and a valued member of the company, held out too long over her terms and consequently lost her entire line of parts. In the same year, Garrick tried to engage the fast-rising John Henderson for major roles but, having already contracted Reddish and William Smith for many of his parts, lost him to Covent Garden.¹⁶⁸

The early closure of articles initiated by Garrick became a firm management policy, as we see in a public notice of 1799:

Theatre Royal, Drury Lane: The Players are requested to observe that no Person will be considered as engaged at this theatre but by Written Articles, to be signed

¹⁶⁷LS, IV, i, clxix.

¹⁶⁸Burnim, p. 24.

previous to the 15th of August next. By order of the Proprietors. William Powell, prompter.¹⁶⁹

Covent Garden was similarly disposed, as Quick, the brilliant low comedian, found to his regret. His articles with the manager Harris having expired at the end of the 1798 season, he held out for new terms, whereby he should not be required to act in both mainpiece and afterpiece on the same night. Harris, however, had a successor in the wings in one Joseph Munden and he promptly gave this actor all of Quick's roles. Genest suggests that this foolhardy belligerence lost Quick the best position he ever had.¹⁷⁰ The historian also seems to imply that the sun was, at this time, beginning to set on actor autonomy.

One of the most interesting aspects of the two patent theatres in the last half of the eighteenth century is the different approach each took to casting conflicts and disputes. At Drury Lane, Garrick managed to keep matters in relative control. The foregoing examples of obstinacy, particularly in actresses, were all confined to green-room squabbles and hot-tempered letters; in fact, we know of these disputes only by the survival of Garrick's correspondence. Problems - and there were plenty of them - were confined backstage.

¹⁶⁹[London] Morning Chronicle, 18 July.

¹⁷⁰VII, 377-8.

Covent Garden had no such luck. Every dispute over casting which erupted into public print after mid-century was instigated here. Many, in fact, became widely discussed topical issues. In 1762, for instance, Beard, the manager, asked Mrs. Hamilton to take the part of Mrs. Wronglove in a new revival of Cibber's The Ladies Last Stake. Hamilton, who had been a favorite of the former manager, John Rich, and apparently presumed that her favored position would be honored by the new managers, refused the part and demanded Mrs. Conquest, a younger and more attractive role already assigned to Maria Macklin. The managers threatened to sue Hamilton for 20 pounds for refusing the part. She thereupon grandly offered her resignation and was astonished to have it accepted.¹⁷¹ This incident marked the end of her London career and she became a provincial actress - so reduced to penury that she is noted as the first recipient of the Actors' Fund.

If Covent Garden management had served notice that it would no longer brook casting interference by actors, it still had much to learn about peaceful policy-making. The Lessingham affair of 1768 illustrates the results of rule by committee. In the casting of an extremely expensive production of Cymbeline, the four joint-managers were at decided odds over who should play Imogen. Harris, said to have had

¹⁷¹Genest, IV, 658-9.

an extra-theatrical liaison with an actress named Mrs. Lessingham, perhaps naturally favored her and he was supported in this by Rutherford. Colman, with the fourth manager William Powell, stood by Mrs. Yates. Charles Macklin, always a quarrelsome contender in any dispute, stood by Harris and Lessingham. The battle over who would play Imogen raged for weeks, occasioned the printing of four position pamphlets, and ultimately led to the dissolution of committee management. The revival was suspended for the season. When Harris subsequently quarreled with Mrs. Lessingham, the matter was conveniently dropped and Mrs. Yates played the part in following seasons. The significance of this dispute rests in the manager's (in this case, Harris') attempt to wield an arbitrary control over casting matters. Mrs. Yates certainly had the superior claim to the part by virtue of being the theatre's leading actress. Harris simply decided to fly in the face of tradition and seniority by pushing for Lessingham.

How an actor might respond to such highhandedness is best illustrated by the indomitable Georgia Ann Bellamy. During John Rich's last years at Covent Garden, he had the temerity to announce a Miss Wilford for Cordelia in Lear. Miss Bellamy possessed the part, however, and had handbills printed with her name opposite the part. These were distributed to the audience which reacted violently to Wilford's first entrance. Bellamy, waiting demurely in the

wings and "ready in case I should that evening be honored with their preference," went on in her old part "amidst a universal applause." This was certainly one way to keep a part.¹⁷²

The major showdown between actors and managers occurred, perhaps fittingly, in the last weeks of the eighteenth century and quite naturally at Covent Garden. A group of actors who became known as "the Glorious Eight" rebelled at the imposition of four items made part of the rules and regulations of that house: (1) the surcharge by management for actor benefits was increased; (2) the right of actor's orders ("free list" passes to actors) was rescinded; (3) the "sick clause" was revoked; and finally and most pertinent to the present study, (4) the fine for refusal by the actor to play a part as cast by the managers was increased from five pounds to a staggering thirty pounds. The Glorious Eight left the theatre and refused to perform under such conditions.

They issued a printed pamphlet in February, 1800.¹⁷³ It was calculated to win public favor and to show the injustice of the Covent Garden management. The actors claimed that the greatly increased forfeit for refusal of a part gave the proprietors "the power of equalizing professional talents, and making the First Actors in the theatre submit to the

¹⁷²Bellamy, Apology, IV, 145-7.

¹⁷³Joseph George Holman. "A Statement of the differences subsisting between the proprietors and performers of the Theatre-Royal, Covent Garden" (London: privately printed, 1800).

work of the lowest."¹⁷⁴ As proof they cited the example of the pantomime of "The Picture of Paris, where principle performers were ordered to do worse than the work of humble actors - a work only fit for supernumeraries."¹⁷⁵ They further suggested that as a consequence of a "compact" reached by the patent managers in 1778, whereby each house agreed in effect not to hire actors who had proved troublesome at the other house, the relationship between actors and managers had become so strained that

the mere Caprice of a Manager is sufficient for an Actor's expulsion which not only amounts to banishment from one Theatre but approaches nearly to professional annihilation; the managerial compact precluding the other theatre from opening its doors for his admission.¹⁷⁶

Genest affirms the existence of this compact.¹⁷⁷

In response to these accusations the Treasurer of the theatre stated that the thirty-pound imposition had been made a part of the regulations at the end of the 1798-1799 season and that in his fourteen years' tenure in office he remembered only four or five instances when the forfeit was actually invoked. The actors responded that this was only owing to management's awareness of "the improper measure."¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴Holman, p. 47-8.

¹⁷⁵Ibid.

¹⁷⁶Holman, p. 61.

¹⁷⁷Genest, VI, 74.

¹⁷⁸Holman, p. 20.

An impasse had been reached and the eight actors refused to appear as scheduled. The issue was fanned in many public presses, but Thomas Dutton's continual observations on the conflict in The Dramatic Censor may have brought the matter to a head. He claimed to be a disinterested party but he was in fact hysterically anti-actor. His stance did not, however, prevent him from making several acute observations. He recognized, for instance, that the Glorious Eight were in fact a self-appointed body, a minority who were not therefore entitled or empowered to speak for the Covent Garden acting company, let alone the entire profession. He further recognized that the issue of part refusal might center on actor venality: if an actor had the right of refusal, he might exercise it (even in a good part) in order to collect his weekly salary while he played other parts with additional salary at nearby provincial theatres.¹⁷⁹

One of the most interesting tactical aspects of the confrontation was the manager Harris' steadfast adamancy in refusing to recognize this self-appointed committee of eight. He refused to deal with them collectively or even to meet with them on anything but an individual basis.¹⁸⁰ Each actor in his company was bound by his own specific agreement and it was only to that that he would address himself.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹Dutton, I, 290-3, 300.

¹⁸⁰Dutton, I, 290; Holman, p. 6.

¹⁸¹Harris' letter to the committee, 30 Nov. 1799, and printed in Holman, p. 6.

Like Fleetwood at Drury Lane sixty years before, when Garrick and his fellow rebels had been forced to settle with him to the exclusion of Macklin, Harris effectively sidestepped any collective bargaining.

An appeal was finally made to the Lord Chamberlain's office in early 1800. It was initially rejected as being a matter between private individuals which precluded that office's authority. Finally, it agreed to arbitrate the matter, and a decision was handed down which was publicly applauded as fair and equitable. It found for the management. All the actors, except Holman, returned to Covent Garden and resumed performances. They had won nothing.

How far the pendulum had swung may be measured by the statement made in the actors' pamphlet:

The right to the possession of his caste of characters, a most important privilege which appertained to the Actor, has of late years been so constantly violated, that it can scarcely be said to exist.¹⁸²

In the fifty years since mid-century, the possession tradition had begun to sink. What could account for this change?

There are several factors which appear to have coalesced at this time. The excesses of the entire seniority system found their perfect expression in the old problem of superannuation. After 1750, audiences and critics were no longer so willing to bear it with a patient shrug. One critic, for example,

¹⁸²Holman, p. 62.

made this double-hilted cut at a performance of Cibber's
Careless Husband at Drury Lane in 1762:

Mr. Havard as Sir Charles Lafy was tolerable enough. But we with the managers would see the impropriety of putting people of his years in young characters . . . a person of Mr. Havard's appearance is not much calculated for a man of gallantry, nor is there any great likelihood that he would be so general a favorite of the ladies; in one particular, however, we must do him justice with regard to his figure, and that is while Mrs. Clive keeps the part of Edging it is necessary to have so antiquated an admirer.¹⁸³

Compared to other accounts, this one is extremely good natured. An actor who was clearly too old for a given part was beginning to be seen in some quarters as a distinct liability.

Descriptions of the effects of the rigid hierarchial system of casting abound. While it is generally conceded that the last half of the eighteenth century was the golden era for acting, many contemporary accounts tend to counter this impression. John Hill, for instance, claimed to have observed that managers judged parts by the quantity of lines rather than the quality of dramatic effect, with the result that some parts (Montano in Othello, for example) went to "persons somewhat above the degree of scene-shifter."¹⁸⁴ References to a listless deportment on stage are rife, while references to actors who "stayed in character" throughout a performance are rare and exclamatory. However much we may

¹⁸³Gentleman's Magazine, Sept., 1762, p. 538.

¹⁸⁴The Actor, pp. 72f.

be impressed by Garrick and Macklin playing Hamlet and Scrub or Shylock and a witch in Macbeth, the rest of the company saw itself as rigidly and jealously fixed in their own firmaments. Looking back over fifty years, Tate Wilkinson sarcastically observed that there was

a rule fixed in the theatrical corps: most young actors think if it be a principal role, the business is done; for . . . parts make the actor - not the actor the parts.¹⁸⁵

Sheridan's original failure with The Rivals was compounded a year later in his A Trip to Scarborough:

Respecting the getting up of this piece, the performers were extremely inattentive and facetious; it is therefore no wonder that on the first and second representations the Comedy was unfavorably received.¹⁸⁶

This evidence seems to suggest that a malaise of contentment or security had set in. This attitude often had an infuriating effect on managers:

An actor, who had formerly played the Ghost, having, a few seasons ago, at a provincial Theatre, performed the part of Hamlet, when the company returned to the headquarters at Edinburgh, and the play of Hamlet was ordered into rehearsal, the country Hamlet sent in, as an excuse for his non-attendance, that having once acted the part of Hamlet, he could not possibly think of demeaning himself so far, as to appear again in the Ghost.. Let the reader figure to himself the embarrassment of a manager, on receiving five other remonstrances almost at the same time, and much to the same purport. Horatio had performed Hamlet at Aberdeen, the King at Montrose, Laertes at Dundee, Osrick at Perth, and the Player King at Stirling. They are inexorably full of the same importance; one and all, with one voice, cry out, Hamlet, or nothing!¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵I, iii.

¹⁸⁶Walley Chamberlain Oulton, A History of the Theatres of London, 2 vols. (London: Martin and Bain, 1796), I, 57.

¹⁸⁷Jackson, Scottish Theatre, p. 159.

The above is the exasperated wail of one James Jackson, the manager of the Theatre Royal in Edinburgh. While it is not necessarily descriptive of London patent theatres, the fact that many actors from Drury Lane and Covent Garden played there probably suggests the universality of this situation.

There is little concrete evidence - other than the "compact" of 1778 - to suggest that the managers began collectively to stem the tide of actor autonomy. We have seen how the already-old seniority system had begun to harden into an implacable system from the early days of the Restoration. Garrick's tenure at Drury Lane is perhaps remarkable for no better reason than the diplomacy and relative ease with which he dealt with the casting system. Being an actor himself, he was no doubt kindly disposed to it, and as a manager he appears to have done the best he could in spite of it. If there was dissension, it was held at the simmer. When Richard Brinsley Sheridan took over Drury Lane, he assigned Thomas King, an actor, to the management, though Sheridan - as we have seen - allowed him almost no leeway in casting decisions. When Kemble succeeded King, the great actor appears to have followed Garrick's example. His ideal was

a little to curb the desire of the performers to exhibit in great characters and get them to concur cheerfully in such a cast of plays, as should exhibit the fine strengths of the company, and do the utmost justice to the conceptions of the poet.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸Boaden, Life of John Phillip Kemble, II, 279.

As an actor who had waited five years to inherit the parts on which he would found his "religion," Kemble may perhaps be forgiven for mitigating this ideal. However much he worked for it, he continuously bowed to established custom in allowing the senior members of the company their choice of parts in new or newly-revived plays and was personally reticent about assuming roles which belonged to senior veterans.¹⁸⁹

In sharp contrast to the often arbitrary casting decisions of non-performing managers, which as we have seen caused bitter and often public disputes, the actor-managers of the period tended to steer in calmer seas. Obviously, the fact that they were actors themselves made them more mindful of tradition and professional decorum. At any rate, they appear to have had a far less contentious relationship with their companies.

Throughout the eighteenth (and, indeed, even the seventeenth) century, the hierarchial, seniorial system with its inextricable elements of succession and possession remained a sub rosa, tacit understanding within the profession. That most telling of all documents, the contract, simply did not exist, or certainly has not survived. Cibber's description of the terms of each actor's articles being placed in the theatre pay-book appears to have held

¹⁸⁹Ibid.

good until the 1780s. The items were salary, the terms of the benefit, and the dates of the duration of the season (or seasons). Until mid-century, there is absolutely no evidence that an actor might stipulate for parts or the right to parts. After mid-century, there is little evidence to suggest that such stipulation had become a common practice. We have already referred to Suzanna Cibber's articles whereby she was given the choice of parts. Her thirty-year tenure at Drury Lane may partly explain this anomaly. Georgia Ann Bellamy offers the only other corroborative evidence to suggest it might have been more commonplace. In her Dublin agreement with Thomas Sheridan, she claims she

only stipulated for one character, which I was apprehensive my youth might be an objection to.¹⁹⁰

The part was Constance in King John and her apprehension was well-founded. Garrick, who performed John, insisted that she play Prince Arthur since the only other actress of competence in the company was the right age for Constance and far too old for the young prince. Garrick's notion of artistic decorum won the day. So much for part stipulation.

It is not until the last fifteen years of the century, however, that we have any contract which makes clear the terms of employment between actor and manager. Dorothy Jordan's contract with Sheridan at Drury Lane after her

¹⁹⁰Bellamy, Apology, I, 101.

initial appearance there in 1785 is most revealing. She promises

to the utmost of her power and capacity publicly to Act, sing or perform on the stage of the said theatre all and every such parts in all tragedies, comedies, plays, operas, farces, pantomimes, entertainments, masques; interludes and dances and other theatrical performances.¹⁹¹

Ten years later - when she had become to comedy what Mrs. Siddons was to tragedy - she could do no better in terms of casting. The terms of her contract with Sheridan remained unchanged and she was still obligated to perform in anything and in any capacity.¹⁹² The salary, it must be admitted, was an unprecedented thirty-one pounds, 10 shillings a week and it is probably due to this "movie star" figure that the document has survived. Jordan had, as we may infer of all actors of this period, signed a contract to perform parts "as cast" by management. We know from the bills that she specialized and succeeded widely in hoydens and pert chambermaids (the same line of parts Kitty Clive had played a half century before). Genest implies that the retirement of Miss Farren forced Jordan into the line of fine ladies (Lady Teazle):

an unfortunate circumstance for Mrs. Jordan, as it enabled her to throw herself into a line of acting for which she was by no means qualified.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹British Theatre Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum.

¹⁹²Contract in "Holograph Letters of [R. B.] Sheridan," Harvard Theatre Collection.

¹⁹³Genest, VII, 295.

Whether she was personally pleased with that turn of events or not, we cannot know. Under the terms of her contract, however, she does not appear to have had any choice. We may infer that the terms of employment for this leading player were the best that anyone could do: there was simply no casting right of stipulation for any actor.

No theatre rules and regulations have survived, but the events surrounding the rebellion of the "Glorious Eight" at Covent Garden would seem to suggest that they were posted on the actor's call board backstage. Whether anything was mentioned here in terms of casting regulations is uncertain. We do know, of course, that the forfeit for refusal of a part was definitely a prominent article.

At the close of the eighteenth century, therefore, we find that many of the traditional rights of the actor with regard to casting were slowly being abrogated. The actor was perhaps losing his tacit agreement with management over his casting and, as a consequence, was perhaps less the author of his career than were actors in the earlier years. After Garrick's tenure, managements appear to have taken a stronger position in casting matters.

The claim of actors to the possession of a part was beginning to give way to a new battle cry in "lines of business." But for that, we must turn to a new century and a new country.

The Provincial Joint-Stock Company

Before taking up the lines of business tradition in America, it is necessary to examine briefly the provincial stock company organization as it existed in England. Its origins and structure are precisely those of the Elizabethan company, and it was kept alive by succeeding generations of strollers for the better part of three centuries. It continued to flourish despite considerable opposition from Puritans, town councils and the London patent theatres.

Throughout the Elizabethan era, the provincial company met with stern restrictions. After James I took several companies under his royal wing, they were more properly accredited and better protected, but northern areas remained particularly hostile to the strollers through Charles II's reign.¹⁹⁴ Their presence in London was extinguished permanently by royal abrogation of the patent charters in 1660. Dublin, of course, had a royal charter for theatre granted in the Caroline period and it was reinstated with the Restoration.

Structurally, the provincial company was based on the old Elizabethan sharing system, the general business of the company being in the hands of the actors collectively. Each was entitled to a voice in the election of officers and an equal share in profits and responsibilities. The companies

¹⁹⁴Thaler, "Strolling Players," 246-50.

were limited to eight to twelve sharers in the early years, but grew to about sixteen by 1700.¹⁹⁵

While the equality structure remained intact in many companies well into the nineteenth century, there was a strong, mitigating factor at work. Thomas Holcroft, the dramatist, was a stroller during the last half of the eighteenth century and remembers it thus:

A company of travelling comedians is a small kingdom, of which the manager is the monarch. Their code of laws seems to have existed with few material variations since the days of Shakespeare, who is, with great reason, the god of their idolatry. The person who is rich enough to furnish a wardrobe and scenes, commences manager and has his privileges accordingly . . . four 'dead shares' in payment for the use of his dresses and scenes . . .¹⁹⁶

In addition to the dead shares, the manager also maintained a "stock debt," which was an accumulation of unpaid bills. Frequently, this debt list became a ruse of the manager to further reduce the amount of funds which were to be shared collectively. Holcroft saw this list as

a continual subject for discontent to the rest of the actors, who are all, to a man, disaffected to the higher powers. They are, however, most of them in debt to the manager, and of course chained to his galley, a circumstance which he does not fail to remind them of, whenever they are refractory.¹⁹⁷

But the manager had yet another scheme:

Our manager . . . has five sons and daughters all ranked as performers, so that he sweeps eleven shares, that is nearly half the profits of the theatre, into his pocket every night.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵Thaler, "Strolling Players," 259-60.

¹⁹⁶Thomas Holcroft, Memoirs, I, 288.

¹⁹⁷Thomas Holcroft, Life of Thomas Holcroft, I, 230.

¹⁹⁸Life of Thomas Holcroft, I, 154.

To its credit, this arrangement probably cut down on defections and it was most certainly a leverage in the control of deficient discipline. The manager was, after all, responsible and ultimately answerable for the conduct, welfare and profitability of his company.

The strolling companies began to give up sharing and to play on salary during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Charles Dibbin, for instance, mentions a company in 1780 which "being a salary establishment and not a joint-stock concern, ranked considerably above another sharing organization."¹⁹⁹ Holcroft saw the change take place in his company in the early 1790s.²⁰⁰ The old cooperative plan persisted in some cases, however, and Genest saw it as commonplace in the 1830s.

The nature of these companies was essentially itinerant throughout the period, but a few towns began to build theatres. Bath was the first in 1705, Edinburgh had two by 1725, Bristol (a Puritan stronghold) succumbed in 1729 and Leiceister followed in 1750. The metamorphosis of these itinerant troupes into companies with more or less permanent homes began when Bath and Edinburgh received royal patents during the 1767-68 season, followed by Liverpool in 1770 and Bristol in 1778.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹Quoted by Thaler, "Strolling Players," 261.

²⁰⁰Holcroft, Life, I, 183.

²⁰¹Thaler, "Strolling Players," 275.

The casting practice of provincial companies was naturally tempered by the conditions under which they played. Where the company was small, an actor could certainly expect to play more than one or even several parts. In the early sharing days, it behoved all the players to step into the breach (for whatever reason - drunkenness, disappearance, indisposition) and close ranks. The welfare of the company and its profits were at stake. The manager was invariably a performer himself and, in view of the leverage he exerted over the financial affairs, we may assume that he took a lion's share of the leading roles as well.

A new managerial precept in casting began to raise its head at the end of the eighteenth century, and it would have profound effects for the nineteenth.

For these ten years it has been a declared and an avowed rule of this Theatre, that when a performer of supposed superior merit makes his appearance, those in his line are to give way; a general alteration in the cast of characters consequently takes place, according to the situation of the company; and however an individual performer may be displeased at the change, his feelings must necessarily yield to the accommodation of the whole.²⁰²

The writer speaks of Theatre Royal-Edinburgh, a favorite summer spa for well-known performers from the London patent theatres. As the observation above makes clear, the company was forced to bow to the "supposed superior merit" of these actors and to step out of accustomed lines of characters in order to accommodate them. Jackson, the manager, was careful

²⁰²Jackson, Scotish Theatre, p. 161.

to assert that replaced actors ought "not to suffer diminution of their rank," but should be given good roles worthy of their abilities. He who played Othello need not be reduced to a silent senator, but would most appropriately be given Iago or Brabatio. By all accounts, Jackson was a decent sort and we may take his word as good. Nevertheless, this account is the first printed record of a managerial accommodation to the rising and soon-to-be pervasive star system. If it had begun in the provinces, it would flourish in the capitals, particularly in New York.

PART II
LINES OF BUSINESS ON THE AMERICAN STAGE
1752 - 1839

Perhaps the most characteristic feature of the American theatre's first eighty years or so is that it was not American at all - at least not distinctively so. The theatrical tradition moved across the Atlantic from England in 1752 and suffered no sea change; it was British to its core, in terms of personnel as well as custom. The stock company format which the Hallam troupe brought with them was a classic example of provincial joint-stock organization. It was a sharing system and would remain so for forty years. With it came the adjunctive benefit system and the hierarchial structure of role distribution described in the preceding section.

Though it is impossible to ascertain the exact date that the term "lines of business" became current in England, the system to which it refers was, at we have seen, fully operative - and, in fact, an established tradition - by the time of the Hallams.

Before turning to the general performing conditions in America and to an analysis of casting practices at selected theatres from 1752 to 1839, we must first look at the various casting categories.

The "Walks" or "Lines"

In the score or so of descriptive accounts of the lines of business system in theatrical literature of the nineteenth century, there is an amazing uniformity: each of the commentators lists the various lines and describes them briefly, then goes on to assert that these lines were strictly defined in practice. Clara Morris says:

. . . men and women were engaged each for a special 'line of business,' and to ask anyone to act outside of his 'line' was an offense not lightly passed over.¹

Anna Cora Mowatt similarly notes that

. . . the members of a company, in a well-organized theatre, resemble the men on a chess board. Each has his appointed place, and fights his battle for distinction in a fixed direction. . . .²

In other words, although the repetitive use of these categories over the years had become rigid and implacable, observing the tradition was seen as a form of back-stage etiquette.

In theory at least, an actor joining a stock company was to rise gradually through its rank. In his description of this procedure, J. H. Stoddart gives us an ascending list of lines.

In those days the actors had to begin at the bottom of the ladder, passing successively from general utility business, which consisted of anything and everything of a minor description, to respectable utility, which was a step higher. An actor then usually discovered what he could do best, and chose his line of business.

¹Life on the Stage (New York: McClure, Phillips, 1901), p. 39.

²Autobiography of an Actress (Boston: Ticknor, Reed and Fields, 1854), p. 320.

The lines of business consisted of general utility, respectable utility, first walking gentleman, second walking gentleman, first old man, second old man, first and second heavy business, first and second low comedy, juvenile business, light comedy and eccentric business, and leading business, for actresses the grades were leading lady, juvenile lady, chambermaid, the first and second old woman. . . .³

It should be noted that while these categories were apparently universal, the existence of a second or even "third" of any given line depended on the size of the company; a large one had depth, while small ones were necessarily shallow.

The term "utility" is used in various ways in nineteenth-century theatrical literature and usually denotes a level of general competence. Alfred Bunn, a London theatre operator, bewailed the fact that Edmond Price of New York's Park Theatre had lured away from London "every performer of any distinction; (and what is of equal importance) - utility, whom gold could tempt, or speculation seduce."⁴ Bunn saw the utility performers as the linchpins of the theatrical transaction because they

have enacted a given line of business for a series of years and have thereby become the very movers of the machine. Accustomed to playing nightly in every piece and playing many parts in most of them, they are the chief reliance of a theatre in any of the numerous dilemmas in which circumstances involve it. In the same ratio they must be of the utmost importance to the transatlantic stage, and are worth any reasonable sum that can be given them . . . From being habituated all

³Recollections of a Player (New York: The Century Company, 1902), p. 45; emphasis mine.

⁴Alfred Bunn, the Stage: Before and Behind the Curtain, 3 vols. (London: R. Bentley, 1840), I, 27.

their lives to the performance of the entire range of the drama, and being equally good, or bad as it may be, in one part as in another, they might be applied to in all times of difficulty; and from having a quick study in learning, and laying claim to the almost greater advantage of not forgetting, they might at all times be depended upon.⁵

Bunn is here so flattering that his description is probably meant to include the entire corps of competent professional players up to the star level, which would include the levels of walking gentleman, eccentrics, low comedians, and so on.

More typically, "utility" meant for the nineteenth century precisely what Baldwin noted it had in the Elizabethan era. A player of this class "took whatever important part was best suited to his ability, when no fully characteristic representative of his own line was in the play."⁶ It was most emphatically a "swing" position and, as such, brought with it a low social status within the theatrical hierarchy. Edward Everard noted, for instance, that

My utility and versatility were . . . frequently of dis-service to me, and by obliging managers, only procured me with some of my brethren, the name of 'At-All'!⁷

In his Guide to the Stage, a nineteenth-century primer for those attempting to go on the stage, Lemn Rede, took a pathetic glance at this class of performer: "it is (next to the situation of prompter) the Pandemonium of the profes-

⁵Bunn, I, 28.

⁶Baldwin, p. 181.

⁷Memoirs, p. 133.

sion" and noted that it was usually given to the young - but required the old -

to play the inferior parts in every line - to have the most to do - the least notice of doing it - and [to] receive the lowest salary.⁸

At the bottom of the hierarchy, the utility performer and his immediate superior, the respectable utility, could count on the hard and varied work of the theatre and share in none of its glories.

The walking gentleman came next. His purpose, like that of a respectable utility, was to make himself generally useful. He was not to "study capacity." The term "capacity," like "utility," is used in varying ways but, usually denotes a basic competence in a specific field. The walking gentleman, without capacity, would be called upon to play a variety of small parts rather than a line.

James Murdoch provides us with a handy definition:

In September, 1830, I was engaged by Mr. John Sefton, the low comedian of Mr. Vincent De Camp's Southern circuit, as a 'walking gentleman.' This term is used to designate a character in the drama essential to the progress and development of the plot, but performing what may be termed a merely mechanical part in the dialogue; that is, one not partaking of the emotional characteristics of the language of the play. For instance, Guildenstern and Rosencrantz in Hamlet are types of this class, and in Macbeth Donalbain and Lennox. Such parts may be called stepping-stones to higher positions. The young actor who wishes to become acquainted with the details of his profession while playing such parts has ample time to note the action

⁸(New York: S. French, 1859), p. 28.

and speech of the higher personages, and their relation to the argument of the drama. It is this kind of experience which enables the careful student to gain a knowledge of the business of the scene and the proper bearing in language and deportment of the heroes on the stage.⁹

In theory perhaps, the walking gentleman was a transitory "stepping stone" to bigger and more glamorous parts. In this position he had time to linger in the wings and study the various lines to which he might aspire. In reality, however, the position was essentially a treadmill, and few were able to get off.

The "old man line" was indispensable to the nineteenth-century theatre. There is hardly a play of the period that does not feature him in some, usually major, capacity. In his dissertation on Pantalone, James Loomis Rapport makes clear that English pantomime, more than any other tradition, was responsible for the continuance and the continuity of the "old man" from Elizabethan to modern times.¹⁰ However that may be, the line changed imperceptibly. The actor was a representative of a class, whether it be rustic chivalry or urban debauchery, and was immediately identifiable as a type in comedy by his advanced age and, quite often, by his undue propensity for unsuitable action - like love. This situation generally caused a need for punishment in the

⁹James Murdoch, The Stage: or Recollections of Actors and Acting from an Experience of Fifty Years (Philadelphia: J. M. Stoddart, 1880; rpt. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1969), pp. 204-5.

¹⁰"A Lean and Slippered Pantalone - An Historical Examination of the Comic Stock-Type Character-The Old Man" (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Ohio State Univ., 1960), p. 195.

drama and was met with a comic lack of sympathy in the audience. In the more serious vein, like melodrama, however, sympathy was generally everything. As previously mentioned, the part of Polonius (what we might think of as the ultimate in this line) was in the possession of the low comedian line until Garrick changed that in the eighteenth century.

As for the villain or "heavy line," one of its most salient characteristics was that it was absolutely never in possession of the ultimate heavy part - Richard III. This role, like the similar Sir Giles Overreach of Massinger's A New Way to Pay Old Debts, was the first tragedian's. They were plum parts and, as such, went to those at the top. When Coley Cibber adapted Shakespeare's monster in the 1699-1700 season at Drury Lane, he claimed to have created the part for Samuel Sandford. Sandford was "not the stage-villain by choice, but from necessity," for his voice and appearance were so preeminently menacing that he could not be tolerated in any other type of part.¹¹ Sandford was engaged at the rival Lincoln's Inn Fields, so Cibber played the part himself as he imagined Sandford would have and it was a huge success.¹²

¹¹Cibber, Apology, pp. 77, 81-2.

¹²Apology, pp. 81-2.

Stage villany may have many guises but Martin Meisel, in his analysis of nineteenth-century drama, sees a remarkable uniformity:

Compare descriptions of the gentleman-villain, Chandos Bellingham, in Boucicault's After Dark (1868): "BELLINGHAM.-Black moustache; white overcoat, light; black hat; black suit; white vest; gloves, sporting-man type; watch and chain; finger-ring; breast-pin"; and of Compton Kerr in the same author's Formosa; or, The Railroad to Ruin (1869): 'long black moustache, hair rather long and straggling down on forehead; eyebrows shaped to indicate determination.' Gilbert burlesques the type in Engaged (1877) with Belvawney, dressed in 'Black frock coat and trousers, black tie, ample black cloak, long black wig and moustache, pale face, green spectacles.' The green spectacles are for his 'dreadful' eyes with which he exercises a Svengali's power over the hero, Cheviot Hill.¹³

If he was consistently dark and threatening, the stage villain need not necessarily be confined to one social class, however, for there were high and low villains, from upper crust urban schemers (the landlord) to the filthy subterraneans of the streets (Bikey and Old Juda of Daly's Under the Gaslight). A "heavy actor" might, therefore, attain a level of versatility and variety within a range we have come to think of as extremely narrow.

Next on the ascending ladder came the low comedian. In small theatres he might be given the dual line of old man-low comedian, but in the larger theatres of New York these two lines were usually not fused. Part Five of this

¹³Martin Meisel, Shaw and the Nineteenth Century Theatre (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 26n.

study will analyze this particular line in depth, tracing three contiguous careers throughout the nineteenth century. But mention must be made here of the strong traditions surrounding the low comedy line. Custom dictated that it possessed the witches in Macbeth (with the usual effect that they were consequently rendered ridiculous or ludicrous); it was not until Edmund Kean's Thane was presented at Drury Lane in 1814 that this custom began to change.¹⁴ The low comedian also traditionally played the Lord Mayor in Richard III and Roderigo in Othello.¹⁵ These were, of course, the utilitarian sides of the line; an actor of the comic bent had to carry his weight in the more serious fare, and these parts were perhaps the only ones in which he could be trusted. Irrepressibility had been, after all, the sine qua non of the low comedian from the days of Will Kemp.

In his own metier, however, the low comedian had as great a pick of plums as anyone. From Shakespeare he got Bottam, Dogberry, Falstaff, Malvolio or Sir Toby; from old comedy, he came away with Sir Peter Teazle, Sir Anthony, Bob Acres, Sir Lucius O'Trigger or Tony Lumpkin; from the contemporary drama, he was Aminadab Sleek, Lord Dundreary, Dr. Pangloss and Zekiel Homespun, to say nothing of Dickens' characters. The afterpiece or farce was inconceivable without a major, usually leading, role for him. The density

¹⁴George C. D. Odell, Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner, 1920; rpt. New York: Dover, 1966), II, III.

¹⁵Meisel, p. 19.

of these parts, in fact, made the acquisition of a second low comedian an imperative. Not surprisingly, the first low comedian line was well up in the hierarchy and generally commanded a salary second only to the first-line tragedian.

The line next to the top is one of the greatest mixtures of line categories. Sometimes called "juvenile tragedy" and at others "light comedy," those who walked this track had their work cut out for them. In his enlistment (or impressment) of Nicholas Nickleby in Dickens' classic, Vincent Crummles coaxed:

There's genteel comedy in your walk and manner; juvenile tragedy in your eye and touch-and-go farce in your laugh¹⁶

and thereby named the three major departments for this line, Young Norval in Home's Douglas was the definitive role of juvenile tragedy, and the number of young actors who made their debut in it rivals even Richard III for first-line tragedians. The line also encompasses Macduff, Romeo and Laertes, to which might also be added Iago, if there were not a maturer actor of standing in the company. The light comedy aspects entailed the gallant young men of old comedy and the polite young men of the contemporary scene. In his primer, Leman Rede gives a required list of costumes essential for each line, and it is suggestive that the one for light comedy is unquestionably the longest.¹⁷

¹⁶Charles Dickens, Nicholas Nickleby (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 359.

¹⁷The Guide to the Stage, p. 24.

At the apex stood the "first line" or tragedian. Hamlet, Lear, Macbeth, and Othello were his by virtue of his position, and he could, in fact, be counted on to play the major role in everything. As often as not, particularly in provincial companies, the tragedian was also the manager. The first line need not, of course, be tragedy at all. As we shall see in a later section, the particular inclinations of a given actor-manager had everything to do with that company's repertory. If he was, for instance, a low comedian, then tragedy might not even exist in his theatre at all.

One of the most interesting developments within the stock company in America over the first hundred and twenty years or so is the surprising dearth of excellent or even competent company performers of the first line. Presumably, owing to its position, prestige and top salary, it would have been the most competitive position of all, yet consistently we will find that it went begging - to the grief of managers and audiences alike. One reason for such a situation may be what we moderns now call (by virtue of a far less graceful medium) overexposure.

The first tragedian of any stock company was the primary focus of attention night after night. In terms of sheer verbiage and time spent on stage, he had no rival. In time, over a course of seasons, if not weeks, even the most undemanding audiences began to want - if not actively look

for - something new and different. This situation ultimately resulted in a radical development: the star system was born. The precise nature of this phenomenon will be discussed later in this section, but its significance here rests in the answer it brought to the repetitive and unvarying nature of the stock company format and hierarchy.

The drama has always been unbalanced in favor of men's roles, and this fact is naturally mirrored in the distaff side of lines of business. Female correspondents to the above were limited to walking gentlewoman, old women, an ingenue (the equivalent of juvenile tragedy or light comedy), and the leading lady. If a female "heavy" were needed, she was recruited from the ranks of old women. Then there was the pert, "singing chambermaid," a very rough equivalent to male low comedy. Thus, there were fewer female lines than there were male lines.

Supernumeraries, a class of nether-theatrical souls used by managers for processions and crowd scenes of every sort, were not, strictly speaking, members of the company at all, but rather "jobbers," far outside the hierarchy, and usually hired on a nightly rather than weekly or seasonal basis.

I have left what Stoddard's list of lines calls "eccentric business" for last, for it is the most complex and varied of all lines. Until late in the eighteenth century, the term, when used at all, applied to Frenchmen,

foreigners of any and every description, and "those parts that cannot be reduced to any specific line."¹⁸ In other words, everything else. In time, this came to mean a great deal.

Unquestionably, the most successful of all eccentrics was the stage Irishman. Emanating from Shakespeare's MacMorris (Henry V, 1598), it was quite naturally a device of the Irish school (Farquhar, Thomas Sheridan, R. B. Sheridan, Macklin, and O'Keefe), and Howard, Colman, Garrick, and Cumberland number among the English dramatists who used the character. It is interesting to note that from Shakespeare to the Irish literary theatre of 1898 (which finally forced him off the stage), the Irishman remained fixed and inviolable. He was, as Fitz-Simmons has suggested, an Irish naturalization of the parasite slave of Roman comedy.¹⁹ In the hundreds, if not thousands, of plays which feature him, he was either an ingratiating rogue - lazy, crafty, and drunk, or a braggart miles gloriosus. After a century and a half, English audiences still had not had their fill of him, though Genest saw him

as an example of the present preposterous system of writing characters who exist no where but on the stage and which are created for a particular performer - they [the dramatists] qualify the part for the performer.²⁰

¹⁸Rede, p. 28.

¹⁹Christopher Fitz-Simmons, The Irish Theatre (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1983), p. 94.

²⁰Genest, VII, 516-7.

So successful was the character by the 1770s that it could then properly be called a line unto itself. A number of English or native-born actors thus began to play the Irishman almost exclusively. James Johnstone, one of the "Glorious Eight" at Covent Garden, was one of the first, and Lawrence Clinch, said to have saved Sheridan's Rivals after replacing another actor as Sir Lucius, was even earlier.²¹

In America, the Irishman was, if anything, even more popular. He had, of course, figured in the repertory since the beginning, but it was Tyrone Power's appearance in these parts that turned him into a national favorite. Joseph Jefferson III remembers that

. . . his dramatic portraits of Dutchman, Yankees, Frenchmen together with Western and local characters of our own country were speedily and vigorously exhibited . . .²²

as well. After Power came a continuous flow of Irish specialists, most of them Irish born: John Brougham, William J. Florence (and his wife), and Mr. and Mrs. Barney Williams and Dion Boucicault had all attained star status by the late 1840s and 50s. The Irishman was a line of business paved in pure gold for many actors.

Like the Irishman, the Scotsman was also a stereo-comic butt: he had originally been seen as a heavy in Cumberland's The Fashionable Lover (1772), but Holcroft changed all that with The Deserted Daughter (1795).²³ Until John

²¹Autobiographical Dictionary, pp. 334-37.

²²Autobiography (New York: The Century Company, 1889; rpt. Cambridge, Mass: Belnap-Harvard Univ. Press, 1964), p. 222.

²³Arthur H. Sconten, Restoration and Eighteenth Century Drama (London: Macmillan Press, 1980), p. 11.

Emery, all stage countrymen were played more or less the same, in a "Zummerzetshire" accent (which was, of course, no shire at all, but rather a mongrel polyglot of dialects and regionalisms). Emery particularized the Scot, differentiating him from the Welsh and Yorkshireman. These characters were generally known as "country characters."²⁴

The Jew also had his line. From Cumberland's The Fashionable Lover (1772), he had been comic, and Holcroft's Road to Ruin was immensely successful in portraying him as the villain.²⁵ In time the stereotypical gave way to the particularized. Robert Baddeley was the first Moses in School for Scandal, noted for the authenticity of his dialect, and Ralph Wewitzler was so adept at various foreign characters that he drew from Thomas Dutton high praise as "without exception the first foreigner upon the stage."²⁶

While all of the foregoing lines were firmly established in the English tradition by 1800, America added a few of her own over the course of the nineteenth century. As the national drama began to take distinctive steps toward the truly indigenous, characters never seen before made their appearance. There were a number of such characters, but only two of them - the Yankee and Mose, the fire laddie

²⁴[James Winston's] Manager's Notebook (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1970), p. 539.

²⁵Scouten, p. 11.

²⁶Thomas Dutton, I, 119, 188.

- appeared with such frequency that they can properly be said to constitute a line of business in the theatres. In time, various actors emerged who were so successful with Yankee and Mose that they became stars in their own right and withdrew from the stock company to tour in this type of part exclusively.

The Yankee was always a country bumpkin, fierce in his independence and old-fashioned honesty, highly inquisitive and mistrustful of anything urban. He went by a number of names, including Aminadab Slocum, Jedidiah Homebred, Deuteronomy Dutiful, Elam W. Pancake, Zephaniah Makepeace, and Jonathan. He made his first appearance, appropriately enough, in America's first professionally produced comedy, Royall Tyler's The Contrast (1787). Thereafter, he was seen in a number of plays, usually inserted as a device, telling extraneous stories and vignettes, running on in monologues in a Downeast dialect. The Yankee hit his stride in 1825 with Samuel Woodworth's The Forest Rose, with Alexander Simpson as the first native American actor to play him. Thereafter, usually only natives did. The character hit his peak in the 1830s and 1840s and had run his course by the Civil War.²⁷

Francis Hodge has noted the importance of the Yankee as being the first device to crack the English-bound tradition

²⁷Richard M. Dorson, "The Yankee on the Stage - A Folk Hero of American Drama," New England Quarterly, 13 (September, 1940), 478.

by supplying parts which only indigenous actors could perform.²⁸ It must be observed at once, however, that it took nearly fifty years of gradual development to make this so. Thomas Wignell, the original Jonathan of The Contrast, was English, as was Joseph Jefferson I's Nathan Yank in Barker's Tears and Smiles (1807). Both were excellent actors and probably adept, as most low comedians are, at mimicry. Charles Matthews, the Elder, held sway on both sides of the Atlantic for nearly all of the first quarter of the new century. He was a dialect comedian and satirist, and in his own creations - A Trip to America and Jonathan in England - he began the particularization in the playing of the Yankee that made him "the progenitor of all American dialect comedy."²⁹ Matthews was closely copied by James H. Hackett, who flourished in the character from 1826 to 1836, when he was replaced by the high success of George Handel "Yankee" Hill as the Yankee Peddler. In time, Hill brought forty such pieces to the stage, all featuring his American character. He made a major contribution by moving the character from the realm of traditional artificial comedy to that of realistic portrayal.³⁰

Dan Marble succeeded to the line as a favorite, and his career signals the change in the character from the New

²⁸Yankee Theatre (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1964), p. 7.

²⁹Hodge, p. 61.

³⁰Hodge, p. 217.

Englander to the western pioneer. Josh Silsbee, an imitator of Marble, was also popular but added nothing new or innovative. After 1850, as Hodge has noted, the success of this particular line of business could be noted in the proliferation of Yankee specialists; there were at least ten of real distinction by that date.³¹ Over the course of sixty years, therefore, the Yankee had moved from a novel sideline of the low comedian to a distinct specialist.

There was, by contrast, nothing gradual about the development of Mose, the Fireboy. He leapt onto the scene as an accidental success of immediate and almost unparalleled proportions. He was the creation of Frank S. Chanfrau and first appeared in a new and most unpromising play called A Glance at New York, which Ben Baker, the prompter, had written for his own benefit at Mitchell's Olympic in 1848. The play centered around the exploits of one Mose, a representative volunteer fireman of the period in New York. Using the precise costume and accent of this local type, Chanfrau was greeted on his first entrance with a roar of recognition and approval which did not abate for two decades. The initial success owed everything to the fact that the pit and gallery of Mitchell's theatre were as usual packed with the "B'hoys" who comprised the volunteer fire departments at that time. Chanfrau had simply, and quite cleverly, given them one of

³¹Hodge, p. 256.

their own. The play was followed almost immediately with Mose in California, Mose in a Mess, and even Mose in China. Laurence Hutton lists twenty more such pieces, and he is by no means exhaustive.³² Mose, like the Yankee, had become an industry.

These, then, constituted the recognizable lines of business on the American stage over the nineteenth century. They do not encompass the entire range of theatrical acting personnel, however. Nearly every establishment of the period also engaged various dancers, singers, and musicians who might appear in entr'act diversions, and frequently these specialists would double up in the dramatic fare proper at the discretion of the manager.

We rarely find the name of the prompter in the bills, but this is usually owing to his last-minute enlistment as an actor after they had already been printed. As we have seen, the prompter of the Elizabethan era was only a hired man but had the important position of keeping and tending the scripts. By the eighteenth century, and certainly at Garrick's Drury Lane, he was in a position second only to the manager himself in administrative powers. Genest notes that Richard Cross, for instance, Garrick's prompter, understood the business and traditions of the stage better than anyone and from his long and continuous acquaintance with

³²Curiosities of the American Stage (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1891; rpt. New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), p. 47.

all the pieces of the repertory he could step into a breach at an hour's warning and be letter perfect.³³ In America one hundred years later, where the repertory was far less stable and certainly less familiar, much less could be expected. Harry Watkins, the prompter at Burton's Theatre in Philadelphia in 1857, was much put upon:

. . . I have barely the leisure for eating and sleeping, the whole of my time occupied at the theatre. At eight A.M. I go to the Box Office and count the tickets taken on the previous night, [Burton requested me to do this that he might have a check-up on the Treasurer of whom he is suspicious] after this, rehearse, make out bills and cast a new play. This occupies me till past three P.M. Then to dinner. Preparing notices for the newspaper fills the time till dusk and the entire evening is passed in attending to the performance. As I am obliged to play in the majority of pieces, I have little opportunity for study. Winging my parts is about all I am able to do.³⁴

Prompters were generally hard-working, reliable and, in many cases, the unsung heroes of many an evening.

We turn now to the general conditions of performing to see what effect they might have on the actor's work. In some respects, the procedural method of the stock companies for the first century in America was unchanged from what it had been since the Elizabethans. In other respects, a few new and radically different elements - which appeared about 1800 - would ultimately change the stock system, then completely destroy it.

³³Genest, IV, 388.

³⁴Harry Watkins, One Man in His Time: The Adventures of H. Watkins Strolling Player, 1845-1863, from his Journal (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1938), pp. 221-2.

In his analysis of production statistics for New York theatres from 1750 to about 1870, Bruce Klee finds that "unlimited repertory" was the prevailing system. He defines this as a production pattern which presents a body of plays whose total runs are interrupted by a system of irregular rotation.³⁵ In other words, it was the same time-honored, nightly alternating repertory of nearly two previous centuries in Britain. Klee further finds that this system of alternation was caused by the high mortality rate for productions. At the Park Theatre in 1815-16, for instance, only fifty-one percent of the plays presented were given more than one performance.³⁶ Throughout the period from 1750 to 1820, these theatres maintained an average of fifty productions per season.³⁷ It must be recalled that this figure is consistent with all other previous periods.

From about 1825 to 1880, changes began to occur. The average number of productions held at fifty, but the average repetitions of a play were up to 65 percent (contrasted with 43 percent in the 1750-1820 period). Klee accounts for this change, at least partially, by noting the longer seasons. But the real factor in these statistics is that cumulative and/or consecutive runs had greatly in-

³⁵Bruce Brighton Klee, "An Analysis of Production Schedules in Professional Theatres in New York City, 1750-1950 (unpublished Ph.D. diss. Ohio State Univ., 1962), p. 15.

³⁶Klee, p. 15.

³⁷Klee, p. 33.

creased. The alternating method was gradually giving way to the long run.

Until 1820, therefore, the actor was required, by the high mortality rate of productions and the low percentage of repetitions, to be at more or less constant study with his parts. There is no concrete evidence from which to assume that actors hated new plays, but, where the mortality rate on new productions was so high, they must have come to see a new vehicle as a lot of hard work and study for a huge risk. If the play proved unsuccessful, the preparation was dashed and would never be needed again. Old plays, on the other hand, had the built-in virtue of being already firmly established, the pecking order of parts and their comparative standing rendering the whole endeavor a pre-fabricated success.

The after-piece was, from its inception in about 1710, obligatory until the 1825-6 season at the Park Theatre. This short piece was yet another addition to the actor's chores. During that season, however, the after-piece began to be dropped from the nightly bill, and this policy gradually became almost universal. Only eleven of fourteen New York theatres were making occasional use of it by 1880-81.³⁸

The number of weekly performances doubled over the years from 1750 to about 1820. Three performances weekly was the average during the colonial and federal periods, but

³⁸Klee, p. 45.

the Park began giving six performances a week, Monday through Saturday, in the 1818-19 season.³⁹ A word may be inserted here about matinees. Edward Mammen notes that they were first performed at the Boston Museum in its second season, 1844-45, and were regularly scheduled thereafter. Odell asserts that Laura Keane was the first to instigate the matinee as policy in New York, in the 1855-56 season.⁴⁰ I inadvertently found an instance of a matinee much earlier - in 1827 at the Bowery Theatre - but the exact date perhaps explains the anomaly - July 4th. Whenever they began, matinees had certainly caught on by the post-Civil War years and remained a permanent feature thereafter.

The composition of the acting companies was from the beginning almost exclusively English. Most native-born Americans in the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries were too concerned with ferreting out an existence, with building and planting, to enter artistic professions. Acting was neither necessary nor acceptable. It is not, therefore, surprising that these English companies were self-perpetuating in hiring their own. Periodic raids by American managers on London theatres began in 1791 when Thomas Wignell of Philadelphia's new Chestnut Street Theatre brought back an outstanding company. He repeated this in

³⁹Odell, Annals, II, 519, 533.

⁴⁰Odell, VI, 459.

1796 and again in 1797 and was undoubtedly the most expeditious and successful recruiter of the eighteenth century.

By 1827, Francis Wemyss recalled that

The mania for theatrical emigration to America was at its height when I arrived in London. Dr. Hart, of New-York, had engaged a strong reinforcement for the Bowery Theatre of that city. The Boston managers were also exerting themselves to meet the opposition preparing for them by the erection of the Tremont Theatre, of which Pelby was to be the manager . . . Hallam had engaged nearly an entire company for the Walnut Street Theatre, Philadelphia. . . .⁴¹

By the 1830s, recruitment trips were no longer necessary. Recalling Alfred Bunn's assertion that all the best "utility" performers had already left London for America, we see that performers were now making the crossing on their own steam, lured perhaps by the distinct possibility that they might trade up in the profession.

The American actor was, therefore, an outsider to the stock system, until mid-century. To be sure, Edwin Forrest and Charlotte Cushman, both native born, had established themselves as international stars of the first order by the 1830s. As such, however, they were totally anomalous. August A. Adams, a leading man of these years, was probably the first native to gain stock employment, but he was so infamously intemperate that he lost what standing he had and probably made things no easier for another generation of American actors by doing so. Joseph Jefferson III

⁴¹Twenty-Six Years of the Life of an Actor and Manager (New York: Burgess and Stringer, 1847), p. 128.

claimed to be the first native to break through the Chinese Wall of English exclusivity:

Miss Keene had never seen me, either on or off the stage. It was looked upon as a kind of presumption in those days for an American actor to intrude himself into a Broadway theater; the domestic article seldom aspired to anything higher than the Bowery; consequently I was regarded as something of an interloper.⁴²

He is, for course, referring here to his first New York engagement, at Laura Keene's Theatre in 1857. He quickly established himself as an uncommonly talented comedian and soon became one of the greatest stars of the last half of the century. By 1860, the barriers to Americans were dropped and some of the companies began to take on a native hue.

Rehearsal conditions remained throughout this period generally atrocious, at least to our modern eyes. Edward Mammen, in his study of the Boston Museum, finds that a new piece got six rehearsals (one week), each lasting anywhere from two to four hours. During the 1870s and 1880s, he saw a general increase in rehearsal time and frequency.⁴³ Another analyst, however, insists that rehearsals of a new piece were limited to no more than three or four over as many days, that this was, in fact, the most any company could muster or even hope for.⁴⁴ Mammen's study is based on

⁴²Autobiography, p. 140.

⁴³Ibid., 49-50.

⁴⁴David George Schaal, "Rehearsal Direction Practices and Actor-Director Relationships in the American Theatre from the Hallams to Actors Equity Association" (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Illinois, Urbana Champaign, 1956), p. 182.

the single instance in Boston, while the latter is taken from a wide variety of sources throughout the country. We may infer, therefore, that the smaller number is probably more accurate.

For the preparation of a new play, we have no better observer than Anna Cora Mowatt. A society lady of New York who, through her husband's business failure, was "reduced" to the stage, she came to the theatre first as the author of the successful Fashion (at the Park in 1845) and then as a successful debuting actress. A mature, intelligent neophyte, she took nothing for granted, and her observations are most complete. It must be noted that what she here describes is the first rehearsal of her play, one day before its premiere:

The stage was lighted by a single branch of gas, shooting up to the height of several feet in the centre of the footlights. It sent forth a dim, blue, spectral light, that gave a phantom-like appearance to surrounding objects. On the right of the stage was the prompter's table--on the left, the manager's table. Beneath the ghastly light sat a palefaced prompter, with the manuscript of Fashion in his hand. At his side stood the 'call boy,' a child of about ten years of age. He held a long strip of paper, somewhat resembling the tailors' bills of young spendthrifts, as they are represented on the stage. This was the 'call' for the actors, and directed him which to summon from the green-room.

The rehearsal of Fashion had begun. It was singular to see these kings and queens of the stage, whom I had been accustomed to behold decked in gold-embroidered robes and jewelled crowns, glittering in the full blaze of the footlights--now moving about in this 'visible darkness,' some of the men in 'shocking bad hats' and rough overcoats, and the ladies in modern bonnets in place of tiaras or wreaths of flowers, and mantles and warm cloaks instead of peasant petticoats or brocade

trains. I found it difficult to recognize the romantic heroes and injured heroines in whose sufferings I had so often sympathized.

Every actor held his part, to which he constantly referred. It gave me an odd sensation to hear my own language uttered in all varieties of tones, and often conveying a meaning of which I did not suppose it to be susceptible. But I soon discovered that a rehearsal was a very serious affair. There was no laughing, except now and then at the situations of the play,--at which, by the by, I was particularly flattered,--no talking, except in reference to the business of the scene, and now and then a remark from some critical malcontent, which was never intended for the author's ears. There are two dances in the fourth act of Fashion and these were gone through with a business-like gravity that was alarming. While witnessing this solemn rehearsal, I began to fancy I had made a mistake, and unconsciously written a tragedy. Rehearsal lasted several hours.⁴⁵

History assures us that this ragged bunch of readers did, in fact, accomplish the miracle of transforming themselves into dazzling artists - Fashion was a big hit the next night.

Older plays already established in the repertory received even less rehearsal attention. Once again, Mowatt offers us the best glimpse. The occasion is her debut as an actress at the Park a few weeks later, as Pauline in The Lady of Lyons.

The day of my debut was fixed. It was in the month of June, 1845. I had three weeks only for preparation. Incessant study, training,--discipline of a kind which the actor-student alone can appreciate,--were indispensable to perfect success. I took fencing lessons, to gain firmness of position and freedom of limb. I used dumb bells, to overcome the constitutional weakness of my arms and chest. I exercised my voice during four hours every day, to increase its power. I wore a voluminous train for as many hours daily, to learn the graceful management of queenly or classic robes . . .

— - ⁴⁵Autobiography, pp. 204-07.

The day before my debut, it was necessary that I should rehearse with the company . . . Once more I stood upon the dimly-lighted, gloomy stage, not now in the position of an author, to observe, to criticize, to suggest, but to be observed, to be criticized, very possibly - nay, very probably--to be ridiculed, if I betrayed the slightest ignorance of what I attempted . . .

Only those actors who are engaged in the scene rehearsed are permitted to occupy the stage. The play was the Lady of Lyons. Mrs. Vrnou, as Madame Deschappelles, and I, as Pauline, took our seats to open the first scene. The actors crowded around the wings, eager to pass judgment on the trembling debutante. The stage manager, seated at his table, scanned her with cold and scrutinizing eyes. The pale prompter laid his book upon his knee, that he might stare at her more deliberately. Even the sleepy little call boy, regardless of the summons in his hand, put on the sapient look and attitude of a critic . . .

After we had taken our seats, there was a moment's awful silence. It was broken by Mr. Barry's dignified (he was alarmingly dignified) 'Commence, if you please..' . .

During the rehearsal of the third act, I was startled by a sudden burst of applause. It came from a crowd of actors at the side scenes--an involuntary and most unusual tribute

'Go on, if you please--go on,' said Mr. Barry, noticing the pause--and I went on.⁴⁶

Mrs. Mowatt's entire theatrical career may be described as a state of grace. She simply could do no wrong.

Much greater but far less popular, owing to his imperiousness and bad temper, was Charles Macready. Hard-working and exacting, he remembers the exasperation of rehearsals:

It was the custom of the London actors, especially the leading ones to do little more at rehearsals than read or repeat the words of their part, marking on them their

⁴⁶Autobiography, pp. 219-21.

entrances and exits, as settled by the stage manager, and their respective places on the stage. To make any display of passion or energy would be to expose oneself to the ridicule or sneers of the green-room . . . But the difficulty of attaining before an audience perfect self possession, which only practice can give, made me rehearse with the same earnestness as I would act . . .⁴⁷

Macready repeatedly insisted on better rehearsal technique from his fellow actors. He was thwarted at every turn. From a vantage point of nearly fifty years, William B. Wood likewise recalls the mockery made of preparation.

The rehearsals, therefore, so indispensable towards the production of entertainment worthy of an audience, became the strangest exhibitions that can well be conceived. Instead of a quiet and orderly exercise of memory and judgement, and a careful observation of the effects, trial of power, situations and machinery, preparatory to the performance of the piece, it was not uncommon to hear even the principal parts read for the first time on the very day of performance, amid the lounging about and picking up what they chose or could for their duties in the evening. The star of the night, if present at all, sitting at the prompter's table, either writing or affecting to write letters of vast importance, or gossiping with some visitor, to the utter destruction of silence and discipline.⁴⁸

As regards rehearsals and the general observation from the foregoing examples, there does not appear to be a single, dissenting instance. Actors appear universally to have hated the rehearsal process.

One reason for this may be that they got so little out of it. In an analysis of twenty-six prompt scripts from the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia, it was found

⁴⁷From his Reminiscences, quoted in A. M. Nagler's A Source Book in Theatrical History (New York: Dover, 1959), p. 468.

⁴⁸Personal Recollection of the Stage (Philadelphia: 1855), pp. 391-2.

that, aside from the dialogue itself, on none of them did anything like a description of specific stage business exist. The prompters' written instructions were limited to entrances and exits. In the seven comedies included therein, one deduces that in order to have been effective in their parts, actors would simply have had to invent their own comic business.⁴⁹ Whether the actor waited for inspiration at the moment of playing, as Macready charged, or simply walked through or "marked" his performance in such a way as to give his fellow players (and this frequently meant his rivals) no idea of what he was about, an air of secrecy seems to have permeated the entire process.

The tradition of playing parts from the origin of descent appears to have petrified by the nineteenth century. The profession itself esteemed line readings and stage business or "by-play" already established as "correct" by continual usage. At her Park debut, Mowatt says that an older experienced actor "represented to us that I needed an instructor to make me acquainted with the traditionary stage business of old-established plays." Two years later, when appearing with E. L. Davenport in an unspecified play in London, she encountered similar rehearsal rigidity.

⁴⁹Ruth H. McKenzie, "Organization, Production and Management of the Chestnut Street Theatre, Philadelphia, from 1791 to 1820" (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Stanford Univ., 1952), p. vii.

At the request, politely urged, of 'Be so good as to cross to the right--I occupy the left'--the answer dryly returned was, 'Excuse me; I played this part originally with Mrs. Butler, at Drury Lane--I always kept this position--it is the proper situation.' Then there was a significant look at the prompter, which said, 'This republican dust offends us! We must get rid of it!'

The more mildly Mr. Davenport and myself uttered our unavoidable requests, the more decidedly we were answered with objections to our wishes, founded upon the authority of some mighty precedent.⁵⁰

Since the days of Colley Cibber, who consciously aped Dogget's performance as a last-minute substitution in The Old Bachelor, actors had found that giving the expected and customary was a reliable means of success. Critics and audiences alike responded favorably. There are, for instance, dozens of references to "the American Garrick" or "the American Siddons" or "the American Kemble." The most remarkable testimony of critical approval toward this philosophy is found in the New York Evening Post on November 9, 1826. The actor is John R. Duff, lately arrived from London:

Duff has performed Richard the Third throughout in the manner of Cooke: and those who have seen Cooke acknowledge it to be a perfect imitation of his action, manner and enunciation. To those who never saw Cooke this would be a rich treat indeed, and to others it would present reminiscences of great but melancholy interest. We trust that Mr. Duff will take this hint and have Richard the Third for his benefit. The public may be assured that it is no caricature, but a fine delineation; the copy of a master by a pupil of the first order. Duff well knew Cooke, and has often acted with him. This respectable actor has our best wishes; with care and perseverance he cannot fail of gaining on the public favor. He has a voice, figure and expres-

⁵⁰Mowatt, p. 218.

sion, which were displayed with singular felicity on Friday evening in Iago. In fact this performance has greatly raised Mr. Duff in the public estimation; and we now with the kindest feelings advise him to study more and to act less; or, as we should rather say, to call to mind his great archetype Cooke himself, and paint, with the countenance, the deep but inaudible workings of the soul.

John Bernard of Boston's Federal Theatre elicited the following from a fellow manager:

Bernard was far from thinking humbly of his own Shylock. . . [he] fabricated by means of wax an artificial nose, which gave him a strong resemblance to the prints of Macklin, whose matchless performance in this play he dilated upon with vast pleasure. He enjoyed every advantage of studying Macklin, having in London, as well as in the Irish theatres, invariably appeared as the Gratiano.⁵¹

How far all this might go can perhaps be seen in the case of William J. Florence. On William E. Burton's death, Florence, who had followed Burton (by exact mimicry) as Captain Cuttle in Dombey and Sons, bought Burton's original costume, wig, hook and everything for seven dollars at an auction.⁵²

Following an actor in a line of business appears to have carried with it the obligation to imitate the established style and manner of playing. There were no primers for this sort of work. It required close and attentive observation, usually from the wings.

Words are the actors stock in trade and the constant study and memorization of them were as necessary during the

⁵¹William B. Wood, Personal REcollections of the Stage, Embracing Notice of Actors, Authors and Auditors, During a period of Forty Years (Philadelphia: H. C. Baird, 1855), pp. 96-97.

⁵²Undated clipping in "William E. Burton" file at New York Public Library Theatre Collection.

nineteenth century as they had been at any other time. With fifty different plays to be performed in a given season and where these were presented on an alternating and irregular basis - often on forty-eight or even twenty-four hours' notice - an actor engaged by a stock company was expected to be letter-perfect. Many were not, of course, which sometimes gave the prompter a decidedly central voice in performance. Most rules and regulations of the theatres generally stipulated a fine for actors who were still reading their part at the final rehearsal. No such forfeit is found or even admitted to, however, for an actual performance: "going up" on one's lines was the "actor's nightmare" and an abomination which critics generally referred to as "being deficient in study."

Scripts were generally hand-written in little notebooks, known as "sides," and included the words of a single part with no more than three or four word cues. It is entirely possible, therefore, to read through a side of a play without glimpsing a single notion of what it is about. Old, established plays offered no problem here, but an actor's knowledge of a new one appears to have been limited to its initial reading in the green-room -- by the author, the manager or one designated as "stage-manager" (generally an older member of the company who superintended rehearsals). An actor might come to possess these sides by either copying

them himself from the prompter's master-script, if he had the permission of the manager, or by paying the prompter a nominal sum for his sides copy. A manuscript note found in the "J.B. Booth Scrapbook" at the Folger Shakespeare Library reads

Parts written for performers from published plays must be paid by the Performers to the Prompter.

Parts were divided, or at least measured, by "lengths." William Dunlap, our first historian, called a length forty lines.⁵³ Later in the century, the expression came to mean forty-two lines. Twenty such lengths or a total of some eight hundred lines usually constituted a major part. Leman Rede's estimate of the workload for an average actor in a small company (where doubling and tripling was required from nearly everyone) amounted to five hundred new lines per diem, which were to be memorized in the seven hours not committed to morning rehearsal and nightly performing.⁵⁴

The only testimony found to suggest that a heavy workload was not universal is the diary of Mat Field, an actor with Sol Smith and Noah Ludlow's southern circuit:

I have at present easier terms in the trade than I have ever known. The company is very fine and I seldom have more than one part to play a night, and no new study at all. My salary is thirty five dollars a week . . . Three years ago in this city my salary was twelve dollars a week, and I played in both pieces every night almost without exception, and my study was sometimes seventeen lengths a day. . . .⁵⁵

— ⁵³History of the American Theatre, I, 36.

⁵⁴Guide to the Stage, p. ii.

⁵⁵"The Diary of Mat Field," ed. William G. B. Carson Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society (January-April, 1949), 98; entry for April 8, 1839.

The impression of relative ease is compounded by the fact that the company was, at least at this time, presenting only its established repertory, with no new additions. The entry is strongly mitigated, however, by the fact that Field was dying of a gastric ulcer at the time. His relative ease may therefore have been created as a kind-hearted expression by the two managers.

The ability of actors to memorize lines quickly is generally regarded as "abnormal." It is nothing of the kind, but rather the result of an acute level of concentration - one which any "normal" person might attain with application but which few attempt. The nineteenth-century actor was, owing to the general performing conditions, forced to be a "quick study." References to this skill are so numerous in the letters and literature of the period as to become monotonous. Let one example suffice for multitudes. Andrew Jackson Neafie, a useful sort of leading man at the Astor Place Theatre, was drafted to play opposite the visiting star Jean Davenport in The Duke's Wager. He received his part as Richelieu, some thirteen hundred lines, at the morning rehearsal and was at the seven o'clock curtain that same night "dead letter perfect." The same actor was also noted as having studied and performed perfectly the blank verse role of Virginius, also in one day.⁵⁶ The widely-told

⁵⁶Brown, History of the New York Stage, I, 53.

story of an unknown actor in Philadelphia who won a huge wager by memorizing the entire front page of the local newspaper in forty-eight hours was legendary.⁵⁷

For many other actors, however, the acquisition of words was an extremely harrowing experience. With sometimes little or no advance preparation or notice, an actor had to "wing" the part. This expression referred to the common practice of actors sticking their sides in the backstage slots of wings and drops and studying upcoming scenes when they were off stage. Scene shifts played havoc.

As important as memorization, if not more so, was retention. An actor not only needed to be a quick and effective study of new words, but also, given the nature of the repertory, needed to be able to hold on to them, sometimes for years. If, for instance, a last-minute substitution was called, an actor might have little or no time in which to get "back up" in a part. Shakespeare, interestingly enough, offers few problems here. The scansion and imagery make retention surprisingly easier than for almost any other playwright. What an actor might do with the doggerel and sheer nonsense of typical nineteenth century plays, however, is an altogether different thing.

From the foregoing examples, we may infer that the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century actors were fully engaged.

⁵⁷August Piton, Masters of the Show (New York: Neale Publishing, 1914), p. 18.

Their positions required skill and, as often as not, courage. Given the time it required, acting was probably less a profession than a way of life.

The Melodrama

About 1800 in America, two innovating factors were introduced, and both had profound effects almost instantly. On the one hand, melodrama came into the repertory. As we shall see presently, this new genre -- by its inherent characteristics - tended to solidify even further the tradition-based lines of business in the stock companies. On the other hand, the starring system, first seen as a boon to business and prestige, soon became a vice of the system and, after decades of abuse, finally destroyed it altogether.

Melodrama's appeal in America was immense. The earliest ones, by the German Kotzebue, featured the conflict between the vicious and venal aristocracy and the honesty, simplicity, and downright goodness of the common man. These notions were timely and naturally popular with the rising patriotism in America, and provided playwrights with plots from Tyler's Contrast all the way to Mowatt's Fashion and beyond. Melodrama also reaffirmed traditional moral beliefs, pointed toward rectitude in all things, and was invariably providential in seeing virtue ultimately triumph over evil. But its most appealing aspect, at least to its audiences, rested in its emphasis on action. Instead of introspection

and poetry - to which Americans did not seem to be inclined -- melodrama offered thrills, suspense, excitement, and spectacle. It was the most successful species of drama throughout the century.

It was also the most ephemeral. Once thrilled and excited by the complexities of its plot and dazzled by its elaborate scenery, audiences turned to other variations on this theme. To be sure, Kolzebne's Pizarro in Peru and Bulwer-Lytton's The Lady of Lyons saw thousands of repetitions over the century and were among the most successful plays ever produced, but the average melodrama was a much shorter lived phenomenon. There are no statistics to suggest the frequency of repetition, unfortunately, but as we shall see presently at the Bowery Theatre, widely regarded as the home of melodrama, the turnover in productions was astonishing. This situation is particularly interesting in view of the fact that they were the most costly type of drama to produce, relying as they did on many different locales - all replete with local color of every description -- and the nearly obligatory "sensation scene," with its burning buildings or erupting volcanos.

In his analysis of melodrama's popularity, David Grimsted found that during the first half of the nineteenth century various theatres in Philadelphia, St. Louis, New Orleans, and Charleston produced melodramas at an ever-increasing rate, and that they constituted from thirty-eight

to forty percent of those repertories.⁵⁸ Given the large variety of play types performed - from the English Renaissance, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century tragedies and comedies, "turn-of-the-century" comedies, nineteenth-century comedy and tragedy, and opera and ballet - melodrama took a lion's share of the performances.

Perhaps melodrama's inherent characteristics fully explain its success. From another standpoint, however, the genre probably offered playwrights a strong incentive, which may have contributed to its proliferation. Melodramas were written by practical men of the theatre, who knew the structure and composition (and probably the strengths and weaknesses) of the companies for which they were writing. Creating characters meant providing the already employed and permanent acting staff with roles; in other words, writing to lines of business.

Grimsted found, for instance, that melodramas were written almost invariably to formula. As regards the roles, this formula called for (1) a heroine of unquestionable chastity and frightful weakness (the leading lady or, if she proved too old or stout, the ingenue); (2) the villain, perpetrator of the attack on the citadel of chastity, who might have one of two lines, either as a despicable but

⁵⁸David Grimsted, Melodrama Unveiled: American Theatre and Culture, 1800-1850 (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 250-61.

foppish and ridiculous creature of comic melodrama or as the more usual malevolent and menacing monster of the serious strain (the heavy); (3) the hero, either simply perfect or subject to moral vacillations, but always brave enough to protect virtue, serve love, and rescue innocence (depending on his age, either first tragedian or more usually, the second line or juvenile tragedy); (4) the old man, generally full of natural dignity and elevated sentiment, who served either to emphasize the moral through good advice or to set up the conflict in the heroine's struggle over love and duty (old man); old women generally did not appear in serious melodrama (mothers were nearly always dead), but might appear in the comic variety as loquacious, social-climbing parvenues (old women); (5) "lively girls" or servant girls of a light vein (the "singing chambermaid"); (6) old couples, almost always low-comedy stereotypes of marital dissonance (old men low comedians of both sexes); and finally, (7) a national or sectional character of comic relief (any one of the variety of eccentrics).⁵⁹ These then comprised the major characters. Minor roles - and there were generally plenty of them - could be distributed to walking gentlemen and ladies and the more trustworthy utilities. There were, therefore, parts in melodrama for everyone on the acting payroll. As a genre, melodrama has

⁵⁹Grimsted, pp. 171-186.

come into its own in recent modern criticism; further research might suggest the strong influence that the practical matters of the theatre had on its development.

With a part for everyone backstage and money to be made at the box office, melodrama had an irresistible appeal for managers. As we shall see, in time it became about the only thing managers could safely produce with an eye to profits. The genre had a clear accent on ordinary, homespun characters which generally precluded the larger-than-life brilliance of expensive stars. Producing melodrama was "keeping it in the family." Moreover, the plot structure, where the accent is on interplay and action, probably proved unattractive to stars, accustomed to holding center stage with passionate introspections of the classic kind.

Edwin Forrest provides a case in point. After the initial first night of Robert Montgomery Bird's The Broker of Bogota, Forrest predicted the play would "live when our vile trunks are rotten." He did not, however, give it much of a chance to prove him right. It was "a departure from the starring system" (of which Forrest was absolutely dead center at the time) and featured a large cast with equal importance given to many of them. It also had a distinctly patriotic American ring to it. Despite its appeal, Forrest produced it infrequently and eventually dropped it from his repertory altogether. The play appears to have caused problems for Forrest, who wished always to be at the center of

things.⁶⁰ Metamora, also a melodrama, fared far better -- but then it was a bigger part.

Stars' contracts frequently excluded melodrama as a possibility. Macready, for instance, always insisted on a clause in his contracts wherein he was not required to play parts "partaking of the melodramatic character."⁶¹ His prejudice is all the more interesting because an opinion poll, taken in The Theatre Journal of April 18, 1850, listed several melodramatic characters as his most popular. At the very top of the list were Werner and Richelieu, followed in fifth position by William Tell. As an actor's status rose, his inclination for melodrama declined. A letter and contract of J. W. Wallack make this clear. At Drury Lane Theatre in 1817, he signed a standard, printed contract of the period, which typically gave him no voice in casting matters at all; he was simply engaged as cast by the management.⁶² By 1834, in a contract with Alfred Bunn, a list of stipulations included "no melodrama."⁶³ In the intervening seventeen years, Wallack had been to America and had starred (sometimes successfully and sometimes not so successfully)

⁶⁰Grimsted, p. 168.

⁶¹Ernest Bradlee Watson, Sheridan to Robertson: A Study of the Nineteenth Century London Stage (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1926; rpt. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1963), p. 182.

⁶²An uncatalogued ALS, Harvard Theatre Collection.

⁶³Uncatalogued ALS, Harvard Theatre Collection.

in nearly every major house. He now had, he must have reasoned, an image to uphold and melodrama was not part of that picture.

Melodrama, then, was emphatically the province of companies without stars. Eminently efficient in utilization of personnel and financially profitable, it often proved a salvation to theatres headed toward major troubles.

The Star System

The other -- and opposite -- nineteenth-century innovation was the starring system, which today is seen as the principal bane of the nineteenth century theatre. No one knows who the first star was. It may very well have been Thespis himself, and favorites have certainly existed in every period. But Sir John Vanbrugh's letter to the Earl of Manchester in 1699 appears to be one of the first recorded modern instances of an actor rising conspicuously above his fellows. "Dogget was here last week; they gave him thirty pounds to act six times, which he did and filled the house each time." Dr. Doran claimed that this was the first instance of which he had ever heard of the starring system, and it was made all the more remarkable by the fact that Betterton's salary in the same theatre (Lincoln's Inn Fieldd) was five pounds a week.⁶⁴

⁶⁴Dr. John Doran, Annals of the English Stage-Betterton to Kean, 3 vols. (London: John Nimino, 1899), I, 186.

The salary is not what distinguished this engagement, however. Its significance lies in the fact that Dogget was an itinerant, visiting actor, brought in for a limited time to appear with the regular resident company. Arthur Hornblow gives us the handiest definition:

The star system - by which certain players enjoying a large following, are engaged for limited periods on high terms and exploited in such a manner that all the other actors in the same company are overshadowed in consequence.⁶⁵

From the beginning, the star was an outsider. Until the Civil War, of course, those who starred had nearly all been members of stock companies in any of the several lines of business for at least a short time, until their own ambition or an attractive offer from a manager singled them out from the pack. Once an actor had taken the step toward stardom, however, he or she generally could not return as a regular member. A star's life, thereafter, would be spent going from theatre to theatre, in constant travel.

The American genesis of this system is generally attributed to Thomas Abthorpe Cooper, an Englishman brought over by Thomas Wignell for his theatre in Philadelphia. Cooper almost immediately detected a weak spot in the stock companies in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston: none had really first-rate performers in the principal, leading line. Cooper decided to exploit this situation, and after the

⁶⁵Arthur Hornblow, A History of the Theatre in America, 2 vols. (New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1919, rpt. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1965), I, 272.

1796-1797 season in Philadelphia, he took an engagement with the American Company in New York. Wignell sued Cooper for two thousand dollars, as being in violation of an exclusivity clause in their contract. Cooper raised the funds by subscription among his friends, and by 1800 had established himself as an "itinerant star," with regular appearances in Philadelphia on Mondays and Wednesdays, and in New York on Fridays and Saturdays.⁶⁶ Mrs. Whitlock repeated the formula at the Park Theatre in 1802. By 1810, the system had reached a high level of sophistication. In that year, Stephen Price, the manager of the Park, engaged the great George Frederick Cooke for fourteen hundred dollars for the season and leased him and his services out to other theatres.⁶⁷

From the star's standpoint, the system made good sense, as James Fennell asked himself rhetorically in his diary:

. . . I propose this arithmetical question -- I engage with the manager on a regular salary for the season of eight months, and I earn about fifteen hundred dollars independent of my benefit; I engage with them for a few nights, and I gain as much or more; the question then to be resolved is this -- Is it better to labor through six or eight months for an inferior sum, than to obtain a greater reward in one. . . .⁶⁸

The managers also saw the benefits of the system, at least initially. William B. Wood, who in time became one of

⁶⁶Ireland, I, 177.

⁶⁷Odell, Annals, II, 354.

⁶⁸An Apology for the Life of James Fennell (Philadelphia: Moses Thomas, 1814), p. 476.

its most ardent opponents, found it as "not only allowable, but absolutely beneficial and almost indispensable, by enriching the season with variety."⁶⁹ John Bernard of Boston agreed and said stars "shed a temporary glimmer over the dullness of our theatrical hemisphere."⁷⁰ Stars were an answer and a godsend to the tedium and sameness which prevailed night after night.

Stars had no problem in filling their calendars either. The expansion of the theatre to the frontier grew rapidly after 1815: the Drakes created a circuit from Lexington to Cincinnati in that year; James Caldwell began in New Orleans in 1824 and expanded his circuit from Natchez to St. Louis and Louisville; Sol Smith and Noah Ludlow followed suit in 1835. The already established theatrical centers continued to expand too. The Bowery was built in New York in 1826. To the Chestnut and Walnut Street Theatres of Philadelphia were added the Arch Street in 1827 and the Philadelphia Theatre in 1836. Boston had the Tremont in 1827 and the Museum in 1843. J. B. Rice created a theatre in Chicago in 1847, and he was followed by McVicker in 1857. Tom Maguire had a number of theatres in San Francisco by 1850. Each of these (and many more besides) were desperate markets for a continuous supply of starring attractions.

⁶⁹Recollections, p. 447.

⁷⁰John Bernard, Retrospections, p. 343.

Stars were paid a flat fee in the beginning, but once they had reckoned the managers' profits from such an arrangement, they began to look greedily toward a percentage of the house. In a study on William Wood's business dealings with stars from 1805 to 1829, for instance, the most common arrangement appears to have been an equal split after the manager's cost. In other words, stars took one half of the net profits. The most common departure from this policy was when amateurs tried their hand at front and center; they split everything with the manager, paying one half of the expenses and collecting one half of the profits (if there were any, generally depending on how many friends they had).⁷¹

The growth of the system can be calculated by the ratios of star attractions to regular stock performances. In the 1805-1806 season at the Chestnut Street, for example, there were 31 performances of regular stock attractions as opposed to 22 starring. By the 1827-1828 season, stock garnered only 63 performances and starring 127. The ratios were, therefore, gradually reversed over the period, with twice as many starring as stock performances.⁷²

The theatres did not necessarily do well by this arrangement. Wood, for instance, was bankrupt by 1829, and managements in Charleston and Boston also failed in the late

⁷¹Calvin L. Pritner, "Williams Woods Financial Arrangement with Travelling Stars, 1805-1829," Theatre Survey, 6 (November, 1965), 87-88.

twenties. Mrs. G. H. Gilbert, a renowned "old lady" of the post-Civil War period, recalls the effect a star had on business in her first stock company:

. . . Forrest drew good money for the week or fortnight of his stay, but he ruined the business of the theatre for weeks after and weeks before his visit. He was so great an actor that before he came everybody was saving up money to see him; and after he had gone, it was some time before anyone would pay any money to see an inferior man.⁷³

Stars were none too reliable at drawing business, either. Three entries in Sol Smith's diary reveal the financial loss incurred by J. W. Wallack, Jr.'s stay:

Monday 18.

Witnessed the 'Wife' in which all the Wallacks performed, only drew a house of \$280.50.

. . . .

Friday 5. [March, Mobile]

Negotiated a relinquishment of engagement with Wallack Jr. and wife. We pay them \$500 to abandon 5 weeks of their engagement! - Good bargain for us, too.

Saturday 6.

The engagement of all the Wallacks this season, has been particularly unfortunate for us - a dead loss of about \$4000! . . . I do not believe they attracted a dollar to either Theatre this season.⁷⁴

The effects of stars on the regular company have nowhere been better catalogued than by William B. Wood. He is so detailed in his observations that I quote at length:

. . . when a season is made up of a rapid succession of numerous stars, the first effect is that nothing can be arranged ahead. The star is the light of everything;

⁷³The Stage Reminiscences of Mrs. G. H. Gilbert (New York: Charles Scribner, 1901), pp. 116-7.

⁷⁴William Scott Craig, "The Theatrical Management of Sol Smith: Organization, Methods and Techniques," (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Illinois Univ., 1964), p. 80.

the centre about which all must move. He has his own times, his own pieces, his own plan of business, and his own preferences of every sort. One star is very tall, and will play with no person of diminutive stature. The company must be changed to suit him. The next is very short, and will play with no one of ordinary height. Everything has again to be unsettled. One star brings half a company with him, and the stock actors thus displaced, retire in disappointment. The next looks to us for all his support, and the manager must get them all back in the best way he can. The result is that when the star does come everything is to be done impromptu . . .

The important matter of rehearsal.--A star arrives from England with some new pieces of his own, manuscript perhaps, and written probably for himself alone. No one of the company with which he is to play has ever seen them. The star begins his transit. The piece is to be performed at once. But how is it possible for the principal actors to study each of them, a long part, and then to rehearse it with the star in time for the performance? The star will probably not come at all till the very afternoon of the day on which he is to perform. The rehearsal is impossible, and therefore is not attempted.

It has not been unfrequently the case of late that an actor has been expected to learn from three to five hundred lines (sometimes much more) within twenty-four hours, during which he must also appear in the play for the evening . . .

It is a fact well known to me, that during the reign of the star system many pieces which in London occupied the study and labor of the best and most practised actor for weeks have been produced here after a study of as many days, and sometimes of no more than as many hours. As for the meaning, to say nothing of refinement and shades of meaning, the matter was not once thought of. An audience would scarcely credit the fact, that many pieces (manuscripts chiefly) were acted which the performers who played in them never had a chance of even hearing read, nor any means of knowing the drift or object of the story, beyond the scene in which their own parts lay. It was by no means an uncommon thing when I left the theatre, to hear an actor inquire of another during the performance, 'What is this play about?'

The companies here found, night after night, some new person they had never before heard of, announced in big letters--all their own plans deranged, themselves forced into extraordinary and severe study, and their whole time absorbed, and their powers over-worked--

merely that they might act as subsidiaries, or, perhaps, as foils to some foreign adventurer, who possessed no merit half so great as their own; while he took away in one night twice as much as they could earn in their whole weekly wages.⁷⁵

Wood does not appear to have exaggerated his account; I have found not one single piece of evidence to contradict him.

Stars did not rehearse, of course, because they did not need to. Their individual repertories, which they simply repeated from theatre to theatre, were set, they had played the parts - sometimes hundreds of times - and they knew the precise effect they would make. In his analysis of the repertory of the Boston Museum, Mammen found a remarkably continuity in titles played in San Francisco, Philadelphia, and Boston over the years from 1835 to 1855.⁷⁶ That is, in part at least, directly attributable to the sameness, not only in a travelling star's repertory, but in its comparison with other stars. J. W. Wallack, Jr. wrote a letter seeking a nine-day engagement with Sol Smith in 1837. As part of this letter, he included a list of choices for Smith, a veritable menu:

I name a list --
 x Hamlet
 x Richard
 x MacBeth
 Shylock
 Rolla

 x L. J. Brutus

⁷⁵Recollections, pp. 440-3, 447-9.

⁷⁶Mammen, p. 71 n. 2.

Bertrame
 Othello
 Iago
 Don Felix
 Duke Aranza
 Benedick

 Charles Surface
Iron Chest
Rent Day
 Husband of the Ice
 My Aunt
 Spring and Autum
 Children in the Wood
 Adopted Child
 Wolf and Lamb

Those marked x - I never act in farces after.⁷⁷

With regard to the casting of the plays, stars often interfered with the established lines of business and appear to have usurped managerial prerogatives wherever they could. Edwin Forrest, for instance, decided to throw his considerable weight gains at the Walnut Street in Philadelphia in 1867-68 by refusing to include Richelieu in his repertory unless some young man was cast in the part of Francois. The part had initially been assigned, following tradition, to "a soubrette whose line included all boy parts."⁷⁸ Minor stars could be extremely exasperating, as we see in this casting "shopping list" by W. H. Chippendale to Francis Wemyss in Philadelphia, dated January 19, 1845:

. . . Could your own people do a farce the first night? Mr. and Mrs. Skerritt leave us blank in that line. We have got all the dresses but Fortunios - in the piece of Fortunios - they will come with us. Have your properties ready - Can you give u s a new last scene for

⁷⁷Quoted in Craig, p. 52.

⁷⁸Pitou, p. 47.

the comedy? - Do if possible - it gives freshness to the whole play. Can you get little Merryfield? If not Mr. Fisher will play Bob and yourself or who you think best the Mayor.- Have you a better man than Crocker for Roebuck - a fine part - it is too much for C - but he can do it if you can't. Announce Mr. John Fisher - 1st appearance here in 14 years! ⁷⁹

Chippendale sounds as if he believed he owned the theatre.

It was William Archer, however, who captured the sheer self-centeredness of the star in his portrait of William Charles Macready:

this artistic scrupulousness . . . was accompanied by a large amount of the inartistic unscrupulousness of the typical 'star.' His own part was everything; the opportunities of his fellow-actors, and even the poet's text, must all give place to the complete development of his effects. 'When he played Othello,' says George Vandenhoff, 'Iago was to be nowhere! . . . Iago was a mere stoker, whose business it was to supply Othello's passion with fuel, and keep up his high-pressure. The next night, perhaps, he took Iago; and lo! presto! everything was changed. Othello was to become a mere puppet for Iago to play with; a pipe for Iago's master-skill to "sound from its lowest note to the top of its compass".' He would probably have glozed the egotism of this policy by arguing that the opportunities should be to him who can make use of them, and that, without country companies, it was useless to strive for an 'all-around' effect. But the tendency, alas! was dominant whatever his surroundings. Even Fanny Kemble, as Lady Macbeth, had to sacrifice her legitimate opportunities to his self-aggrandizement.⁸⁰

The excesses of this system were clear to all by the late 1820s and the New York Mirror of February 2, 1828, assayed the damage already done:

⁷⁹ALS of W. H. Chippendale to F. Wymss, January 19, 1845. "Original Documents - American and English Stage, No. 7." Harvard Theatre Collection.

⁸⁰In W. C. Macready (1890), pp. 210-11. Quoted in Watson, p. 186.

Ever since the opening of the Bowery theatre, a preternatural excitement has pervaded the theatrical world. The active manager of the really splendid establishment felt, that, at its commencement, something extraordinary was required to stamp a decided character on the house, and give a tone to his proceedings; and this he completely effected by the engagement of Mr. Forrest, the Signorina, and the French dancers. The other managers also felt that it would never answer to be left behind and a tremendous competition was the consequence. When one star was not found sufficiently attractive, two, three, and four were clustered together in the same piece. The public, unused to this prodigal display of talent, threw aside all prudent considerations, and nightly overflowed the theatres. The effect has been, that, by the highly-seasoned intellectual banquet served up to them, their appetites have been so pampered and spoiled, that, like practised gourmands, they have lost all relish for simple, wholesome food, and now think no more of going to see a good comedy, well played by the regular company, than the gourmand would of making a hearty dinner on plain roast beef. Besides, a re-action has taken place in another, and alas! most vital part--the pocket. The public find it easier to support four theatres one year than two.⁸¹

Originally seen as a means of improving production in local stock companies in 1800, three decades had shown it to have exactly the opposite effect. The stars themselves appear to have been pleased with the arrangement - at least financially. The audiences grew insatiable for more variety. Most managers either went bankrupt or limped through the 1830s without much real profit. And the stock actors began to desert, either joining the star to tour in "combo" companies or by turning star themselves. The stock companies were rapidly degenerating into supporting companies, offering only the shabbiest background to the constant pa-

⁸¹p. 239.

rade of weekly attractions. It would not be until the 1840s, however, that a handful of New York actor-managers would begin to redress this situation and return stock to its former integrity.

We turn now to the theatres themselves for an analysis of how they dealt with the lines of business tradition from the beginnings to 1839. Collectively, these New York companies offer a full spectrum of nineteenth-century production management and policy. Individually, they suggest the amazingly vagarious nature of the managerial mind, whether it be as performer or business speculator.

The Hallam Troupes, 1752-1797

The Hallam troupe demands our first attention. From its first appearance in Williamsburg in 1752 until its reformation in 1798, it went through a series of names, beginning as the London Company of Comedians, moving to the American Company when it returned from the West Indies in 1758, and finally settling on the Old American Company when it returned from exile after the Revolutionary War in 1782.

In the following account, I have relied heavily on William Dunlap, a diarist and America's first theatre historian. A sometime artist, he turned to writing and adapting plays (most particularly the melodramas of Kobzebue) for the Hallam company and became its general manager in 1796. Most importantly, Dunlap is more cognizant of the lines of busi-

ness tradition than any other American critic or historian since, doubtless because he was a theatre neophyte who took nothing for granted. Then too, he had also spent time in London. He continuously tries to fit his observations into a philosophical continuum. His difficulties as the company's manager stemmed, one and all, from the rivalry between certain actors over lines of business. He is an eminently qualified source.⁸² George H. Seilhamer also provides a meticulous set of annals for the company.⁸³

The Hallam troupe provides a classic model of the provincial joint-stock company. When William Hallam succeeded Henry Gifford at Goodman's Inn Fields, he probably did not take the strictures of the Licensing Act of 1737 too seriously. But 1750, they were being enforced and he and his company were out of business. As Dunlap tells us, after deciding to send the company to America,

the ex-manager's next step was to find suitable persons to fill up the corps dramatique, and to induce them to join his brother and sister in this theatrical forlorn hope. He succeeded in enlisting a good and efficient company, willing to leave their country (and perhaps their creditors), and fitted to ensure success to the perilous adventure. The emigrants were next assembled at the house of William Hallam; a list of stock plays was produced by him, with attendant farces, and the cast of the whole agreed upon in full assembly of the body politic: which appears to have been a well organized republic, every member of which had his part assigned to him, both private and public, behind and before the curtain. Lewis Hallam was appointed manager, chief magistrate, or king, and William who staid

⁸²History; and Diary of William Dunlap (New York: New York Historical Society, 1930).

⁸³George H. Seilhamer, History of the American Theatre 3 vols. (1888; rpt. New York: Greenwood Press, 1968).

at home, was to be 'viceroy over him,' according to Trinculo's division of offices. The brothers were to divide profits equally, after deducting the expenses and shares. Thus William was entitled to half of such profits as projector and proprietor, and Lewis to the other half as manager and conductor . . . These profits were to be the residue and remainder, after deducting the shares, for this was what is known among players as a sharing company or scheme, and so continued until some time after our revolution. In such schemes the manager has one or more shares as reward for the trouble of governing; one or more shares pay him for the use, wear and tear, of the property; one or more shares according to his abilities or reputation as an actor; and he generally avails himself of the power which rests with him of casting plays so as to keep up his reputation by appropriating the best or most popular parts to himself. The remaining shares, after the manager is satisfied, are divided among the members of the commonwealth, according to ability, reputation in the profession, or the influence obtained by becoming favourites with the public.⁸⁴

The company made no departures from established English tradition, except with regard to the benefit. The custom of assigning benefit dates based on seniority was rescinded, and the more democratic process of drawing lots was established.⁸⁵ Door-to-door solicitation by actors for prominent persons' endorsements at their benefit, known as the "bespeak," also disappeared.⁸⁶

As Dunlap notes, the real power, the sharing scheme notwithstanding, resided with the manager. Initially, this was Lewis Hallam, Sr., who held the first low comedy line at Goodman's Inn Fieldd. Typically for a joint stock venture,

⁸⁴Dunlap, History, I, 7-10.

⁸⁵Lynn Haims, "First American Theatre Contracts," Theatre Survey, 17 (Nov. 1976), 186.

⁸⁶From a playbill of the company, dated February, 1762; quoted in Dunlap, History, I, 48.

Hallam was joined by his wife, son Lewis, Jr., and a daughter, known and unfortunately identifiable only by the name Miss Hallam. Another son, Adam, appeared briefly, then left the enterprise. Lewis, Sr. died in Jamaica during a company sojourn there in early 1755, but not before merging his company with that of one David Douglas. Douglas married Hallam's widow and became the manager until his death in 1775. When the company returned to America after the Revolutionary War, it was under the joint management of Lewis Hallam, Jr. (hereafter simply Hallam) and John Henry. Hallam had over the course of years become the company's leading man, while Henry had begun as a responsible utility and finally achieved a marked success with his Irishmen and serious and pathetic fathers of tragedy. This managerial arrangement lasted until shortly after the engagement of John Hodgkinson as the company's leading man; he was as ambitious as he was versatile. He succeeded in supplanting Henry and with Hallam, or perhaps more correctly -- in opposition to Hallam -- jointly managed the company. Dunlap joined them in 1796 by purchasing one half of Hodgkinson's shares. It must be noted here that at the company's restructuring in 1792, the old sharing scheme was abolished; thereafter, it was a privately held venture (Hodgkinson, Hallam, and later Dunlap), with actors engaged as paid employees.

Throughout its history, the company remained itinerant, with seasons ranging from a few weeks to several months

in Annapolis, Williamsburg, Philadelphia, Hartford, Providence, Charleston, Boston, and New York. The John Street Theatre in New York opened in 1767, became the base of operations and remained so until it was replaced by the Park Theatre in 1798. The composition of the company was in a constant state of flux. We find names appearing in the bills, sometimes prominently, only to here them disappear without a trace a season or two later. Our knowledge of these actors, if we have any at all, is -- at least in the early years -- limited to Hallam's recollection of them as told to Dunlap. The constant turnover in acting personnel may, of course, have been precipitated by political turbulence within the company, but we have no such record of any until the Hallam - Wignell dispute, as late as 1786. More likely, the vicissitudes of a sharing salary and a life of constant travel proved too daunting for "thespians of West India and colonial manufacture."⁸⁷ Whoever these individuals were, they were certainly adventurers, one and all.

The size of the company grew steadily from 12 in 1752 to 32 by 1794. By contrast, Drury Lane's pay list for 1765 included the names of 39 actors, 17 actresses, 11 singers, and 25 dancers, the total number of personnel being about 180.⁸⁸ In consequence of the fact that the repertories for

⁸⁷Seilhamer, I, 150.

⁸⁸Dougald MacMillan, Drury Lane Calendar, 1747-1776 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1938), p. xxii.

these two companies were similar and, in some cases, exactly the same, the American actor was probably far more put upon, in terms of casting diversity, than his English counterpart.

It is impossible within the scope of this study to trace the several lines of business in terms either of the actors who played them or the parts which each encompassed. Part V, however, will attempt a full analysis of one such line - the low comedian - in terms of three successive performers and the parts each played. I have, therefore, limited the present investigation to casting disputes and certain irregularities within the lines of business tradition which might point to a systematic practice in the Hallam company.

Historians have all noted the extreme flexibility within the company, at least initially. Ireland is typical: "every individual sank his special claim to characters for the general good -- the leading members of the company not disdaining to assume the most trivial when necessary."⁸⁹ The conditions of playing in a company of twelve actors with plays that generally required at least twenty parts accounts, at least partially, for this general good will. More significant, however, is the fact that manager Hallam (Senior) was not a leading line player, but a specialist in principal low comedy and serviceable in tragedy as old man. He did

⁸⁹Records, I, 19-20.

not, as a consequence, lay claim to the major parts in mainpieces, nor did he allow any other actor to do so, either. Major leading roles throughout the initial season were distributed fairly evenly, between Singleton (a light comedian), William Rigby (first line in tragedy and comedy and, according to Lewis Hallam, Jr., the first talent of the company) and Patrick Malone (second line in tragedy and comedy). Even Adcock, Bell, and Miller, minor players all, were entrusted with leading parts at least once in the initial season. Everybody had a piece of the pie.

Mrs. Hallam, the first line woman, was cast in a corresponding part, as Portia. In fact, she managed to retain all the female leads until the opening of the John Street Theatre in 1767. As wife of two successive managers, she undoubtedly had an inside track on casting matters and a firm grip on marital felicity. Until the appearance of Miss Cheer in that year, there was never a comparable actress in the company anyway.

Throughout the Hallam and Douglas tenures, this round-robin approach to casting, of both major and minor roles, continued. Contrasting cast lists between New York and Philadelphia make this clear.⁹² While the lists are not complete, they do suggest the ease with which the various parts could be arranged. Except for Mrs. Hallam (Douglas), no actor could possibly be said to have possessed a part.

⁹²Seilhamer, I, 224-7f.

He simply worked a general line of parts, and could step out of it for a major or minor role, as the case or necessity might require. A total reorganization of the company in 1760, for instance, where only Morris and the Hallam-Douglas family survived, must have precipitated the necessity for Douglas, heretofore quite content with small parts, to enact the Moor in that year.

The principle of succession was much in evidence, however. Hallam, Jr., after the initial disaster of his debut (he could not speak and fled the stage), studied Rigby closely and appears, despite his obvious connections with management, to have risen in the company by steady promotion based on actual merit. He became the company's leading man during Douglas' tenure. Harmon had succeeded to Malone's heavy leads (Tamberlaine, Lear, and serious fathers) and with his disappearance, Hallam picked up these roles, as well as Hamlet, Macbeth, Romeo, and Shylock. Hallam, Sr. had been the principal low comedian, and with his death Owen Morris took over all his roles. He had already established himself as the company's principal in eccentric old men (Polonius, Brabantio, King Henry, and Friar Laurence).⁹³

The lines of demarcation in the succession of women were even clearer. Mrs. Douglas had the leads to herself until the appearance of Miss Margaret Cheer in 1766. Seilhamer

⁹³Seilhamer, I, 346.

is convinced that her engagement was necessitated by the advancing age of the former.⁹² However that may be, Mrs. Douglas continued to appear in an ever-dwindling series of minor old woman parts until her death in 1778. Like her predecessor, Miss Cheer was pre-eminent in the line. Nothing is known of her former theatrical career, but it is almost certain that she must have had one. She was immediately successful at her debut and the Pennsylvania Gazette spoke of her as one of the best players in the empire.⁹⁴ Her list of parts is thoroughly consistent with the leading lady line and there are no exceptions. From Mrs. Douglas, she had inherited the only mantle of possession in the company. She appears to have defended it jealously. A Miss Hallam (cousin to Lewis, not sister) requested Miss Cheer's participation in her benefit of The Clandestine Marriage in the leading part. When Miss Cheer was found "indisposed," another play was substituted. Seilhamer assumes that the indisposition might have been more easily covered by Miss Hallam's assumption of Cheer's part but that the latter flatly refused to let Hallam do it.⁹⁵ If this is so, Cheer was exercising a right of possession of a very high order, and, as such, quite uncharacteristic of the company, at least at this time. But Miss Hallam, like scores of ac-

⁹⁴Seilhamer, I, 156.

⁹⁵Seilhamer, I, 205.

tresses before her, simply bided her time and eventually fell heir to all with Cheer's retirement in 1769. In that same year, Miss Wainwright also retired and her second woman line (Amelia, Jessica, and Charmian in All for Love) did not succeed to an individual, but was divided among the Storer sisters (Ann, Fanny, and Maria) and the fast-fading Mrs. Douglas.

Women played men with some frequency. Mrs. Bradshaw appeared as Sir Walter Raleigh in The Earl of Essex and a Miss Kenna is known to have done Carlos in Isabella and Patrick in The Poor Soldier.⁹⁶

But for the redoubtable Miss Cheer, a new member of the company was usually taken on in a minor capacity and moved forward to supporting or lead roles as his or her talent or the exigencies of the moment warranted. Mrs. Love, initially engaged as an entr'act singer and dancer, one of the lowest positions in the company, soon moved to the small part of Jenny Diver and then to the plum of Polly in The Beggars Opera. From Seilhamer's list of parts for her, she appears finally to have secured what looks like the third rank among women.⁹⁷

If one could rise, one could also fall, however. We frequently find the presence in the American theatre of a

⁹⁶Seilhamer, I, 253-4.

⁹⁷Seilhamer, I, 148.

much puffed performer who, having made an undistinguished or disappointing debut, either disappears altogether or is seen in minor parts thereafter. The first such was John Hogg. He debuted as the attractive juvenile Virolet in The Mountaineers and was reckoned a disaster. He subsequently fell into a line of comic old men, for which he proved more adequate. He stayed there for the balance of his career.⁹⁸ Another actor, Tomlinson, who joined the company in 1758 and remained until 1773, was as much the walking gentleman at the end of his career as he had been at the beginning. He was an extremely useful person, his list of parts considerable, and one notes with some relief that he actually did rise to at least one significant part in fifteen years -- Claudius.⁹⁹

An actor might make headway -- at least in the early Hallam company -- by proving useful in an extra-theatrical capacity. Hallam, Sr. was having considerable trouble in his appeal to Governor Hamilton to open his theatre in Philadelphia. Malone was appointed to go to Pennsylvania on this embassy mission, and his reward for doing so was Falstaff in both Henry IV and Merry Wives, as well as a leading role in one of the more popular afterpieces.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸Oral Summer Coad, "Stage and Players in Eighteenth Century America, Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 19 (April, 1920), 208.

⁹⁹Dunlap, History, I, 286.

¹⁰⁰Selhamer, I, 294.

On the basis of the contrastive cast lists for New York and Philadelphia performances, together with the absence of any evidence suggesting political turmoil or dissension, the Hallam company appears -- until its return from Jamaica after the Revolutionary War -- to have been managed on highly democratic principles. Neither Hallam, Sr. nor Douglas appears to have tolerated the right of actors to claim part possession. The sole exception, the leading first female line, may be explained by the possible inadequacies of the female company except for Mrs. Hallam (Douglas). Her complete domination of that line, where no other actresses were brought forward or tried in those parts, may explain why the line was so thoroughly assumed by Miss Cheer in 1767. No one else was capable.

The post-war tenure of Hallam and John Henry was an altogether different matter. Rivalries began almost immediately. Unlike his predecessors, Lewis Hallam was a leading man and the first in consequence of a steady climb over the thirty years since the company had begun in America. Henry, who had made his debut with the company in 1767, had begun as a responsible utility in parts like Tybalt, Tubal in The Merchant and Malcolm, and had begun to attract notice with his Irishman, particularly Captain O'Blunder in Brave Irishman. Dunlap says he also had "great merit" in serious and pathetic fathers of tragedy.¹⁰¹ He was ambitious and bought into the

¹⁰¹Dunlap, History, I, 29.

firm, no doubt on the assumption that he could thereby improve his parts as an actor. As he was six feet tall and uncommonly handsome, he would seem to have had good prospects. Hallam, however, appears to have stood in his way at every turn. Unfortunately, history provides no evidence of specific quarrels between the managers - at least as regards casting matters. They appear simply to have agreed to disagree on everything.¹⁰²

This volatile situation was further exacerbated by the presence of Thomas Wignell. A former comedian at Drury Lane, he had joined the troupe at the outbreak of revolutionary hostilities and had to wait until after the war to make his American debut. He was an instant success and became the favorite of audiences everywhere.¹⁰³ Hallam and Henry commanded nearly all the good parts, but Wignell commanded the audience. His rivalry with Hallam was first suggested in a quip in the Daily Advertiser of March 13, 1786:

A HINT to the Managers of the Theatre. A number of your steady friends who have the prosperity of the Theatre at heart, are full in opinion for the benefit of the House, that the character of Tony Lumpkin, in the 'Mistakes of a Night,' be performed by Mr. Wignell.¹⁰⁴

This may well have been planted by Wignell himself, of course, in order to wrestle the part from Hallam. No record of this performance exists, but Ireland assumes that Hallam did not

¹⁰²Dunlap, History, I, 155.

¹⁰³Cf. Seilhamer, II, 176, *passim*.

¹⁰⁴Dunlap, History, I, 172; Rankin, p. 187.

surrender the part.¹⁰⁵ Wignell had managerial aspirations too, and served as the company's treasurer and financial manager.

By 1792, Wignell was in severe opposition to Henry as well. Wignell had been promised the position of recruiter to London in that year, and, having made his travel arrangements, was furious to find that Henry had decided to go himself. When Wignell confronted Hallam, Hallam disclaimed any part in the matter. Wignell subsequently found that the switch had been agreed upon by the managers jointly.

This was the first idea I had of Hallam's duplicity, and I immediately saw my situation. I represented to the meeting the promise given to me, and the arrangements I had made in consequence of that promise. I repeated the threat of Mr. Henry to destroy me, and the mode in which I understood he intended to accomplish it, by bringing out an actor to supersede me in my business, which, by keeping me out of the management, he could effect, as, by casting new plays, he could bring a new performer into public favour, and thereby ruin me in my profession. . . .¹⁰⁶

It must be pointed out that the managers' motive in sending Henry was highly flattering to Wignell. They reasoned that if Henry went, they could remain open; if Wignell went, they would have to shut.¹⁰⁷ His superior popularity was apparently quite obvious at the box office.

Wignell did subsequently succeed in going to London for recruiting, but under his own auspices. He seceded from the Hallam troupe (with Mr. and Mrs. Morris) and, with Rein-

¹⁰⁵Ireland, I, 73.

¹⁰⁶Quoted in Dunlap, History, I, 175.

¹⁰⁷Dunlap, History, I, 175.

agle, a professor of music, started his own company in Philadelphia at the newly built Chestnut Street Theatre. This company was immediately superior and offered the Hallams the first serious rivalry they had ever known. They even moved into the Hallam territory of New York, on Greenwich Street, for a short time.

Henry's trip may have been precipitated by a letter he and Hallam received at the beginning of 1792:

An ardent desire to visit America has forced me to inquire how your theatres are situated. Have you, a first line vacant? or would you be glad to make one for a principal character in this Kingdom? I have in all the first theatres out of the capital, maintained one, as I do now in Bath. Among my range of characters here, are Young Mirabel, Young Quaker, Dashwood, Sir John Restless, The Liar, Othello, Iachimo, Belville (Wives), Clifford (Heiress), Mahamet, Scapin, Captain Plume, Jaques, Deaf Lover, Myrtle, Villeroy, Petruchio, Marplot, Don Carlos (B. S. Husband), Zanga, Richmond, Don John (Chances), Dyonisius, &c &c.

Now as it may seem singular, that a man in possession of so great a line, and in a first theatre, who has refused, and has now offers of a considerable nature from London, should wish to emigrate; give me leave to say that no pecuniary extravagance has caused the idea, nor could that without great imprudence, be the case, my receipts being near four hundred pounds a year from the theatre.

I know many who, were they once convinced of the firm establishment of your country would be glad to visit it; and I can treat for you with as capital a singer as any this country has, Mrs. Billington excepted. My wish is, you would be candid with regard to every information relative to your towns, &c. What salary you can give two such people as I have mentioned; and should this meet your approbation do not disappoint in any thing, for on my part or those mentioned, should any take place, you shall be at liberty to relinquish in an instant. Our vacancy here takes place the beginning of August. Some times between that and September my wish would be to set sail.

I should thank you to attend to these points, I am sure you'll pardon my being particular in them all, and in requesting an answer by the first return. Rest assured that on my part, or the person I treat for, no failure shall take place.

I am, gentlemen,
Your servant,
John Hodgkinson

Bath, December 28, 1791.¹⁰⁸

Known as the "Provincial Garrick," Hodgkinson had a splendid reputation. He was exceptionally versatile and, though his forte was comedy, he succeeded as well at tragedy, genteel and light comedy, opera and pantomime. Dunlap insists that his engagement was the co-manager's conspiracy with which they might finally supplant Wignell's preeminence.¹⁰⁹

With Wignell gone by the time Hodgkinson arrived, however, it was soon the managers themselves who were to be supplanted. His contract with Hallam and Henry, the first extant American contract, dated May 5, 1792, carries the seeds of dissension which would finally dissolve the firm of Hallam-Henry and ultimately replace even Hallam himself.

The last article of this agreement states:

John Henry engages to use his best endeavours with Mr. Hallam to which he makes no doubt will be successful that he shall divide with Mr. Hodgkinson the young heroes of tragedy and gentlemen in first comedy; he will also pledge himself that Mrs. Henry shall in the most ample manner divide with Mrs. Hodgkinson the first line of opera characters.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸Quoted in Hornblow, I, 191.

¹⁰⁹History, I, 191.

¹¹⁰Dunlap, History, II, 172.

Dunlap, who knew Hodgkinson far better than he wanted to, and as a partner, stated that the actor was as rapacious for characters "as Bonaparte would be for Kingdoms."¹¹¹ Henry had, in engaging Hodgkinson, committed two fatal errors: (1) in seeking to supplant Wignell, he succeeded only in creating a formidable rival at the Chestnut Street in Philadelphia; and (2) he gave away, by the terms of his contract, half of all his partner's roles. Hallam would eventually retaliate.

In the course of a short time and by the terms of his contract, Hodgkinson had succeeded in becoming the first line of the theatre, with the inevitable result: "Mr. Hallam quarrelled with me because he did not perform many of the young First Rate Characters, which he said he had supplied since his first arrival in America, and that he had not resigned them, nor ever would,"¹¹² thereby claiming possession of them. At this point, Dunlap bought a quarter interest in the company.

The "Articles of Agreement" between Hallam, Hodgkinson, and Dunlap reveal how far the company had moved away from the easy and equitable distribution of parts presided over by Hallam, Sr. and Douglas. The old English principle of possession had reared its head once more:

¹¹¹Dunlap, History, I, 190.

¹¹²John Hodgkinson, "A Narrative of his Connection with the Old American Company," New York: J. Oram, 1797; Appended to Dunlap's History, 13-14.

THAT Lewis Hallam shall exert himself as a Performer in all those Characters which he has performed, on Stock Nights, since the Commencement of the Firm of Hallam and Hodgkinson, if called upon so to do by the Acting Manager, either by Notification that the Plays containing such Characters will be performed, or otherwise: That these characters are considered as his Property; but he shall not resign any one or more of them, without the Concurrence of the Acting Manager; and then only into his Hands, to be at his sole Disposal.

THAT John Hodgkinson shall exert himself as a Performer in all those Characters which he has performed, on Stock Nights, since the Commencement of the firm of Hallam and Hodgkinson, if called upon so to do by the Acting Manager; either by Notification that the Plays containing such Characters will be performed, or otherwise: That these Characters are considered as his Property; but he shall not resign any one or more of them, without the Concurrence of the Acting Manager; and then only into his Hands, to be at his sole Disposal . . .

THAT the following Plays, The Revenge, Distress'd Mother, Suspicious Husband, Hamlet, Much Ado About Nothing, and such other of the old Drama as have not been performed during the Firm of Hallam and Hodgkinson, shall be liable to the Cast of the Acting Manager; Mr. Hallam or Mr. Hodgkinson having no other Controul over such Cast than the Refusal to play in the Piece, if the Character allotted to either of them is such as he shall object to.¹¹³

Most historians are wrong in their assumption that the possession of a part was an inherent feature of the American company from its inception. Dunlap and David Schaal, for instance, state that the principle was brought from England with the first repertory.¹¹⁴ Only Seilhamer appears to recognize the flexibility of the company in its early years through his contrastive cast lists. He, however,

¹¹³Quoted in Hodgkinson, pp. 20-21.

¹¹⁴Dunlap, History, I, 29; David George Schaal, "Rehearsal Director Practices and Actor-Director Relationships in the American Theatre from the Hallams to Actors Equity Association," (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Illinois, 1956), pp. 44-5.

makes no inference from those facts. Had he done so, he would have discovered that possession, as a principle of casting, was resurrected in America during the Hallam-Henry tenure and most probably by Hallam himself.

At the company's restructuring in 1794, Henry, defeated at every turn by Hodgkinson, finally sold his shares to him and left the theatre. The firm was now Hallam-Hodgkinson. Two years before, the company had changed from the sharing scheme of forty years' duration to a salaried organization because the managers had found sharing "subversive of good discipline" and the actors too volatile in their reaction to the vicissitudes of theatre management.¹¹⁵

Another restructuring occurred in 1796. By the "Articles of Agreement Between Lewis Hallam, John Hodgkinson, and William Dunlap," Dunlap was put squarely in charge of the company, at least in theory:

That William Dunlap shall, as Acting Manager of the Company, determine, weekly, the Business of the coming Week; that is, what Plays shall be performed; subject to noother Controul than the joint Disapprobation of the other Proprietors. That he shall get up what new Pieces he shall think best, and in the Manager he shall deem proper, subject only to the same Controul; and Cast them in Conformity to his Judgment, and the Articles of the several Performers.¹¹⁶

In effect, this only came to mediating quarrels between Hallam and Hodgkinson. The bones of contention were worth

¹¹⁵Hornblow, I, 188-9; Dunlap, History, I, 171.

¹¹⁶Hodginkson, p. 20.

fighting for: Hamlet, Orestes, Rangers, and Benedick. Hodgkinson insisted on all of them and refused to play at all if he did not get them. Hallam was "as surprised at Hodgkinson's demand of the parts as if he had demanded his table and chairs."¹¹⁷ By the terms of the tripartite agreement, Dunlap, as Acting Manager, was given the specific power to cast all new plays and old plays never before performed during the Hallam-Hodgkinson tenure. Hallam and Hodgkinson individually agreed to perform all parts they had already played, those parts being referred to as their "property," and each agreed not to resign parts without Dunlap's permission.¹¹⁸ How equitable Dunlap's decisions were is a matter of dispute. At all events, Hallam did in fact resign most of what Hodgkinson wanted -- which was everything. With this resignation of parts also went the loss of the first salary of the company.¹¹⁹

It was now, in effect, Hodgkinson's organization. One need hardly read between the lines of Dunlap's History to discover that its author was nothing more than a rubber stamp for Hodgkinson's ambitions. One of these was the removal of Mrs. Hallam from the company. Hodgkinson had, from his first arrival, pushed the claims for his wife,

¹¹⁷Dunlap, History, I, p. 289.

¹¹⁸Hodgkinson, p. 22.

¹¹⁹Dunlap, History, II, 306.

formerly Miss Brett, who was a good singer but a feeble actress. Hallam likewise did the same for his wife, though it became increasingly difficult to do so because she was an alcoholic and a morphine addict. She finally agreed to leave the stage at the end of the 1796-1797 season but, after Hodgkinson had engaged a Mrs. Johnson to replace her, she had a change of heart. She ended up retaining all the parts she had played and the newly arrived Mrs. Johnson, in hopes of everything, was limited to "the elegant Characters in comedy."¹²⁰ The removal of Mrs. Hallam never occurred; it was perhaps the only thing Hodgkinson could never accomplish.

It need hardly be added that with such dissension at the top, there should also be problems further down. Casting errors of a conspicuous kind were rampant. In 1795, for instance, a new actor -- perhaps never before seen by anyone in the company -- played the father in Miller's Mahomet. His extreme youth was contrasted by the stout and much older Hodgkinson and the most matronly Mrs. Melmoth, who played his children. A six-foot-tall James Fennell played Romeo to Mrs. Marshall's Juliet, who stood not quite five feet. And Twaits, at five feet one inch played Prince Hal to the utter disgust of the critical brigade, who obviously liked their princes somewhat taller.¹²¹

¹²⁰Hodgkinson, p. 13.

¹²¹Coad, "Stage and Players," 210.

In a final restructuring of the company in 1797, Dunlap and Hodgkinson purchased Hallam's shares in the wardrobe and general stock list. Hallam retained a one-fourth interest in the new theatre and the managers agreed to engage both Hallam and his wife at first salaries.¹²² A new theatre would open, but many of the problems of the old company would remain.

The Park Theatre, 1798-1848

The Park Theatre, known originally as the New Theatre and then simply as The Theatre for the first quarter of the century, was but a continuation of the Hallam-Hodgkinson-Dunlap arrangement, with Hodgkinson running roughshod over all. Hallam was finally brought to his knees in the summer of 1797. In order to be retained, Hodgkinson insisted that he give up Hamlet and play the Ghost, and that he give up Ranger and play the second lead of Strickland. He might retain Dogberry. Mrs. Hallam, the albatross around everyone's neck, might play the characters she had played, but her casting in any new productions was to be left to the manager's discretion.¹²³

The opening on January 28th with As You Like It was a glittering success, attended by the socially elite of New York. Throughout its history, the Park retained its allure for the upper classes. The second performance of School for

¹²²Dunlap, History, I, 385-6.

¹²³Dunlap, Diary (June 14, 1797), I, 61.

Scandal saw a drastic reduction in receipts, and the decline continued without relief until the engagement of Thomas Abthorpe Cooper from the Wignell-Reinagle company in Philadelphia. This engagement, already mentioned as the first instance of a star attraction in America, was a small shot in the arm to the Park's financial deficit. Cooper ran through the traditional repertory of the first tragedian, beginning with Hamlet, and saved the day.

Where did the ambitious Hodgkinson fit into this scheme? He apparently felt that he did not. Even before Cooper was signed, Hodgkinson announced that he would be departing for Boston.¹²⁴ Perhaps ten years of first line tragedy and comedy had diminished his lustre for New York audiences and he sensed that it was time to move on to a newer and more responsive locale. He returned to the Park for the 1799-1800 season, with a list of some 146 characters he wished to perform -- and nearly as many for his wife.¹²⁵ What they got, however, was leads in melodrama. By 1803, the Hodgkinsons decamped again, this time to Charleston, where he died two years later.

Dunlap's tenure as the Park manager may be reduced to a formula: when Cooper was engaged, the receipts were up; when Cooper was out of New York -- either touring as a star

¹²⁴Dunlap, Diary (February 15, 1798).

¹²⁵Odell, Annals, II, 71.

in American cities or England -- business was poor. From the opening performances of old English comedy, the repertory changed to a modern one of contemporary London hits, Dunlap's adaptations of Kotzebue and a few of the manager's own plays. While Kotzebue managed to keep the house open, the seasons were uniformly disastrous financially. Dunlap declared bankruptcy in 1805 and never again participated in the Park's management, except as the treasurer in subsequent tenures.

The besetting sin of Dunlap's casting policy was his inability to come to effective terms with the so-called right of refusal. In a letter to Giles L. Barrett, who had earlier failed to make an impression at the John Street Theatre but whom Dunlap was now forced to re-engage as a replacement for Hodgkinson, we see the manager's idea of authority with regard to casting:

. . . I believe, Sir, that a situation in the N Y Company to which you have it in your power to be eminently serviceable may be made a permanent situation to you more than I intend it to be to me, & when I quit I feel assured of the power of putting any deserving man in possession of the Theatre. The Company will be much lessened from what it has been tho' I hope no less efficient, but the diminution of numbers, without which I have no prospect of keeping the charges within those bounds which alone can give hope of success, renders it necessary that the members of the company should adjust themselves to its exigencies and occasionally do such parts as in an over abounding company would fall into other hands: this is an accommodation which has been agreed to by Mr Cooper & others. You know as well as I do, what a vast range of business is left unoccupied by the absence of Mr Hodgkinson; in Comedy the Rangers, Vapids &c &c in low Comedy a great variety, & of both these the greater part are open to your acceptance with a share of the Tragedy. I take it for granted that any part done by Mr Hodgk: will not be refused if cast to you. I certainly shall expect accommodation, and as I shall for the next season (which is the only one I at

present make arrangements for) keep the direction of the business, the choice of plays, their casts &c entirely in my own hands, I shall expect usefulness to the best of your ability and I feel sure that you may expect from me, justice.

Mrs Barrett is no doubt aware, that tho' Mrs Johnson has left the Company, there remains in Comedy Mrs Hallam & in Tragedy Mrs Melmoth. It is Mrs Johnson's business, (which certainly was of the first kind) that is now vacant; & the youthfull characters which I have agreed with Mrs M to give up; I certainly should not wish Mrs Barrett to degrade herself, but as I said above, I shall cast the plays myself.

As I look upon both you & Mrs Barrett as occupying the first stations of the profession so my offer of salary was of the highest grade any prospect of profit in N. Y. will permit: but I look upon the matter of business as so very essential to the well-being of a Theatre that I can think of salary but as a secondary consideration. It is usefulness which constitutes worth.

In regulating stage business, I shall pay just deference to your opinion, and I think it not improbable but your knowledge may be rendered serviceable to me and if so by mutual agreement, beneficial to you: (tho' I by no means at present propose such an agreement) notwithstanding this I would wish clearly not to be misunderstood, that while I direct the stage my opinion must be paramount to any, or all other.¹²⁶

A comfortable doctrine, and much may be said for it -- but not that it worked.

The right of refusal to play a part had, as we have seen, played a large part in the English tradition. The exigencies of performing a huge repertory with a handful of actors made this old custom quite untenable for the Hallams. Everyone had to carry his own weight, and the sharing scheme no doubt gave incentive. Under Dunlap at the Park, however, the custom was resurrected, and, despite his firm avowal of absolute authority in casting matters, he spent the better

¹²⁶Dunlap, Diary, I, 297-9.

part of his days trying to plug up holes in a repertory decimated by actor ego and temperament.

When, for instance, Mrs. Oldmixon was taken ill in her dressing room just before a performance of Hamlet, the manager's pleas to read the part of Ophelia fell on Mrs. Hallam's deaf ears. The part had been Mrs. Hodgkinson's, Mrs. Hallam had never played it, and she was not going to now. The performance was therefore necessarily cancelled and the money refunded.¹²⁷ Dunlap's Diary is riddled with similar occurrences for 1797:

[Nov.] 27th Mr Bates returns from Philadelphia, & tho' I had cast him for Sir Oliver in the S[chool] for Scandal at his request he hesitates doing it for the opening, talks of tryals & first appearance

[Nov.] 28th Mr Tyler refuses the King in Hamlet. Bates positively refuses to do Sir Oliver & I am obliged [to] make out a bill without him by putting Martin Joseph & walking out to Tyler's to ask him to study Sir Oliver by Monday.

[Nov.] 29th . . . Cooper changes his style in respect to doing occasionally second Characters. Mr. Jefferson refuses Dr Phlogiston, but retracts on my speaking to him. Mrs Hallam dont chuse to play Kitty in High life below [stairs]. I draw up regulations with annexed forfeits, to be signed by the company. Mr Hallam refuses signing them, altho' previously informed that I should consult him as to the parts he was to do.

[Nov.] 30th Looking anxiously for Mrs. Oldmixon. . . . The Box book is open to day for the first time, & the School for Scandal & high life below Stairs advertised in the papers for Monday the 3d Decr. The disposition of the Company seems eminently hostile to each (as usual) and to me.

¹²⁷Dunlap, Diary, I, 355.

[Dec.] 3d Obligated to get Mrs Tyler to do Lady Sneerwell & put Mrs Hogg into Mrs Oldmixons place as Mrs Candour. She arrives in the Afternoon. Open the Theatre with an apology. In the house \$730. Martin spoke the address instead of Cooper who is lame. A lame beginning.

[Dec.] 11th . . . Rehearse he's much to blame. Evening Mrs Barrett lets me know that she must decline playing Lady Vibrate. Determine on doing Secrets worth knowing, before the other in consequence.¹²⁸

No one, except the actors themselves, understood the right of refusal and its importance to a career better than Dunlap.

we [must] consider that the consequence or standing of the individual is estimated by the parts he plays, and that the good part marks and sometimes makes the good actor. We must also remember, that the salary, the share, and the benefits, may be measured by the cast of parts.¹²⁹

To safeguard against the refusal issue, he might have invoked the same measures that Harris used at Covent Garden in 1799 during the "Glorious Eight" rebellion. A severe financial penalty might have solved his most persistent managerial problem with actors, yet there is hardly a word of penalty or forfeit of any kind in either the Diary or History. Dunlap was aware that actors were continuously defensive about their parts -- in fear of losing esteem -- and he simply obliged them by making accommodations. He was a kind manager, but not often a wise one.

Another problem with regard to casting became clear after Hodgkinson's departure. The company did not have an

¹²⁸Diary, I, 348-56.

¹²⁹History, I, 29.

attractive and reasonably young resident leading man, and this situation would persist for years to come. Cooper fit the bill perfectly, but he was clearly not interested in engaging with the Park for anything other than starring engagements. Being a resident member of the company was not for him, and so the field was left to Barrett, "well past the meridian" and clearly inferior to Hodgkinson.¹³⁰

With Dunlap's bankruptcy, the proprietors of the Park were desperate and made an appeal to Cooper to run the theatre. He declined. Finally, a lease was given to Johnson and Tyler, two actors of Dunlap's company. They returned to the sharing scheme and called themselves a "republic of actors."¹³¹ With no resident leading man to count on, tragedy was dropped and the company tried a series of comedies, operas, and farces, to no avail. The managers then turned with open arms to the star policy and set the tenor of the house for its entire life to come. James Fennell was engaged for seven nights during the 1805-06 season, G. L. Barrett steadfastly refusing to support him in anything but Venice Preserved,¹³² where the two male parts of Jaffier and Pierre are comparable.

¹³⁰Odell, Annals, II, 39.

¹³¹Odell, Annals, II, 246; Dunlap, History, II, 215.

¹³²Odell, Annals, II, 251-2.

Cooper was also engaged for a brief time at the end of the season and was finally convinced by John Beekman and J. J. Astor, who had built the theatre, to act as its sole manager. His first season was given over to stars, himself principally, Fennell and John Bernard of Boston with whom Cooper began substituting performances for each other at their respective theatres. Mrs. Warren (Mrs. Merry) of the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia, and the mainstay of that company for nearly fifteen years, also appeared. Throughout his two-year tenure, Cooper continued to be very much the itinerant star, playing Mondays and Wednesdays in New York or Charleston, Fridays and Saturdays in Philadelphia, as well as the previously mentioned Boston engagements.¹³³

Cooper partially withdrew from the star policy in his second (and final) season of 1807-08. Odell sees three identifiable tendencies here: (1) the opening of a newly renovated and sumptuous theatre; (2) a repertory made up largely of new plays, in order to atone for the absence of luminaries; and (3) the introduction of extravagant spectacle.¹³⁴ When present, Cooper could be counted on to take the lead, even in the spectacles, and serviceable actors like Harwood, Twaits, and Mrs. Oldmixon appear, from the lack of evidence to the contrary, to have accommodated Cooper's

¹³³Dunlap, History, II, 238-9.

¹³⁴Odell, Annals, II, 290.

policy without dissent. It should be noted, perhaps to explain this harmony, that the Hallams were not engaged by Cooper in 1806. The one career which had survived the vicissitudes from 1752 was finally finished.

In 1808, Stephen Price bought a share of Cooper's interest and would henceforth remain, with Edmund Simpson, the manager, until his death in 1840. Price was a businessman, with a clear motive of profit behind every decision. He was joined by Simpson, a handsome young actor who excelled at comedy and melodrama, and who, as a co-manager, saw the financial necessity of not pushing his ambitions for certain parts. He got his just deserts by being an extremely useful member of the company, and Cooper even resigned his favorite part of Lothario to him.¹³⁵ He also played Jaffier to Cooper's Pierre in Venice Preserved and would serve as a handy second lead in the years that followed. Dunlap noted that Simpson was one of the few actor-managers he had ever known without the besetting sin of avariciousness for roles, and, no doubt thinking of Henry, Hallam, and Hodgkinson, he further noted that Simpson was unencumbered with an actress-wife.¹³⁶ He was known as an extremely kindhearted manager and would finally be taken to task for it.¹³⁷

From 1808 to 1812, forty-four new productions were mounted, nearly all of them melodramas or spectacles.¹³⁸

¹³⁵Odell, Annals, II, 337.

¹³⁶Dunlap, History, II, 271.

¹³⁷Odell, Annals, III, 298.

¹³⁸Odell, Annals, II, 341.

This policy, together with an ever-increasing use of English stars, would remain dominant until Simpson's death in 1848, only months before the house burned to the ground for the second and final time.

The list of stars who appeared at the Park from 1810 until 1840 is quite simply a roll-call of every famous theatrical name of the first half of the nineteenth century. From George Frederick Cooke, the great tragedian of Covent Garden who arrived in 1810, to Fanny Elssler, the world-famous dancer, who came in 1840, there was never, except for the war years with England (1812-1814), a season without several luminaries. An extremely limited list gives some notion of the calibre: Edmund Kean, Charles W. Macready, Junius Brutus Booth, the elder Charles Matthews, Charles Kemble and his daughter Fanny, James W. and Henry Wallack, James H. Hackett, William Buckstone, Edwin Forrest, Charlotte Cushman, Ellen Tree, and Mrs. Duff of the Boston Theatre.

Attractions were not, however, limited to starring actors. The famous Garcia Opera Company, with the soon-to-be Mme. Malibran as its centerpiece, equestrian troupes and ballet companies rounded out the seasons. Anything which Price and Simpson thought would draw an audience, including the short-lived rage for masked balls in the late 1820s, was presented.

Even as early as the 1808-09 season, Price inaugurated what would later be known as a theatrical syndicate -

"a sort of trust with the managers of other cities, by which he was to supply them with notable imported stars."¹³⁹ After importing his English stars for their initial engagement at the Park, he simply farmed them out to Bernard in Boston or Warren and Wood in Philadelphia -- sometimes at considerable profit. In time, of course, the stars began to see the angles and simply booked their own itineraries. For a short time, Price assumed the management of London's Drury Lane Theatre as well, and thus achieved something of a monopoly on star attractions:

Macready, who had passed from Covent Garden to Drury Lane, no doubt was induced to undertake the American tour by Stephen Price, then in his brief management of the great English house of Garrick and Sheridan. From London Price sent stars like rockets across the Atlantic to the Park Theatre. His management of Drury Lane was undoubtedly from the standpoint of the New York audience the most glittering part of his engagement of the Park; whether it worked for the solid prosperity of the New York establishment is another question. Hitching your management to stars is an expensive experiment.¹⁴⁰

As stars could generally be induced into only three performances a week, in 1816 Price attempted to operate the Park on a six-night-a-week basis, alternating the star attraction with another piece. The scheme failed initially, and he cut back to four a week. By 1817, plays and musical attractions were being alternated for a six-night policy and by 1820 the full performance week (except Sunday) was firmly established.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹Odell, Annals, II, 581.

¹⁴⁰Odell, Annals, III, 233.

¹⁴¹Glenn Hughes, A History of the American Theatre, 1700-1950 (New York: Samuel French, 1951), p. 102; Odell, Annals, II, 464.

As for the regular stock company, the star system did nothing for its prestige. Since the founding of the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia, the old Hallam-Hodgkinson company and its antecedents at the Park generally took second place. With the coming of George Frederick Cooke, however, the inchoate New York critical press began to note glaring deficiencies in the company, where parts were "unmercifully butchered."¹⁴² With only a few exceptions over various seasons, this remained a principal critical contention.

Whether the actors were truly inferior to their predecessors or whether they suffered by unfair comparison with the new stars is not an issue that can be resolved. The policy at the Park, at all events, would never give them a chance to prove themselves. When, for instance, Cooke departed for Boston after his initial appearance, the managers turned to pantomime and expensive spectacles. Of old English comedies -- the standard by which stock companies and their actors both collectively as an ensemble and individually as performers were best judged -- there are less than a handful in forty seasons.

What the actors were left with, after the already mentioned pantomime and spectacle, was melodrama -- and plenty of it. The frequency of this dramatic type at the

¹⁴²Columbian, November 23, 1810; quoted in Odell, Annals, II, 357.

Park is thoroughly consistent with the general analysis already made. They appeared at the rate of one every two weeks or so, and, after considerable preparation by the stock company as well as the scenic department, usually vanished without a second hearing. There were some splendid exceptions, of course. In 1824 a thing called The Cataract of the Ganges, an equestrian melodrama, was presented for forty-two performances in that one season. Mrs. Shelly's Frankenstein was nearly as successful, and in 1838 Bulwer-Lytton's The Lady of Lyons bowed and remained a staple for years to come. A creation called Alladin, or The Wonderful Lamp, of the romantic variety, is most interesting from the casting standpoint. The entire company switched roles in every single performance of the play for the season.¹⁴³

The weaknesses of the Park company were nowhere more evident than in W. H. Keppell, a second line tragedian. Price and Simpson cleverly decided that during the initial Charles and Fanny Kemble engagement they could bolster the receipts by never having the two appear together on the same evening. Keppell forced the managers' and stars' hand, however, by thoroughly botching a Venice Preserved and a Romeo and Juliet, opposite Miss Kemble. She refused to appear in that play with him a second time, and so Charles Kemble played his daughter's lover.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³Odell, Annals, II, 450.

¹⁴⁴Odell, Annals, III, 606.

How far this situation of stock support had degenerated by 1842 is best shown by George Vandenhoff, who recalls his repertory. Vandenhoff was surprised and perturbed to find that the manager expected him to bring his own Beatrice for Much Ado as well as a Lady Macbeth. Simpson had no one for those parts in his company. Othello also had to be cut as there was no Emilia. After much haggling, they agreed on Virginus, the only play of Vandenhoff's that could be acceptably cast.¹⁴⁵ We may infer from this conversation that, at this particular point, Simpson expected the star to bring his own company with him or at least the principal supports he would need. Simpson was generally in a position to offering a star a theatre, and little or nothing else.

Individually, some of the regular members were excellent and would in time become stars themselves. Henry Placide began with the company in 1823 and remained with it virtually to the end, appearing in one of the last great attractions at the house, Boucicault's London Assurance in 1841. It was, in fact, Placide who brought this money maker to Simpson's attention. Like William Warren, who appeared for over forty years at the Boston Museum, Placide managed to become -- despite the obvious difficulties which the Park threw in his way - a consummate craftsman and artist of versatility. Edwin Forrest called him the greatest actor of

¹⁴⁵George Vandenhoff, Leaves from an Actor's Notebook (New York: D. Appleton, 1860), pp. 186-7.

the century. Be that as it may, he was certainly an actor's actor. Staying in one company for over twenty years no doubt had much to do with that fact. His colleagues, on the other hand, came and went on a seasonal basis, had their hour and then were heard no more, at least not usually in New York. By the 1830s and 1840s, however, a failed New York actor had a large array of theatres to play in -- all the way to the Mississippi Valley.

There are few extant documents of the Park Theatre from which we may discern a concrete casting policy. One, however, makes clear that the managers certainly countenanced the line of business tradition -- at least in contracts. In an undated memorandum of an agreement with William Chippendale, an English actor who came in 1836 and was noted as one of the best of the old men line in classical comedies, the terms are clear. Chippendale is obliged

to perform and act in such characters in all plays, operas, farces or entertainments as should be obliged him in his line by the said Edmund [Simpson] to the best of his skill and ability for two regular seasons of the New York Theatre commencing on 1 September next and the second ending in July 1838 . . .

. . . the line of characters of the said William to consist of first comic old men and young men, countrymen, Scotsmen and singing -/not interfering with Placide.¹⁴⁶

Odell infers from the regular absence of Placide in many of the 1836-37 season bills, that his position in the company -- as a star himself -- "warranted his declining to learn

¹⁴⁶Uncatalogued ALS, Harvard Theatre Collection.

new characters in so many ephemeral plays."¹⁴⁷ These fell, by the terms of the contract, to Chippendale. Not only were the lines of business thus clearly defined, but the old right of refusal to play a given part was much in evidence.

When T. S. Hamblin of the rival Bowery Theatre took over the management of the Park in 1848, he could hardly imagine how short his tenure would be. On December 16th the theatre burned to the ground and was not rebuilt. Thus, the nearly one-hundred-year continuous link of New York theatrical management had come to an end. For much of its life, the Park had been the only theatre in New York and history was made there nearly every season. But its true historical value lies in the lessons which it taught to rival and succeeding stock companies.

The Bowery Theatre, 1826-1836

While the Park had had the first quarter of the century to itself, only the Chatham Garden and Olympic Theatres giving occasional but short-lived competition, the opening of the Bowery in 1826 signalled the dawn of a new and fiercely rivalrous age. After a highly successful and rather atypical season of old comedies presented at the Park in 1825-26, Charles Giffert, the former music director at the Park, took a lease on this new theatre and decided to compete with Price and Simpson on their own ground. The

¹⁴⁷Odell, Annals, IV, 127.

theatre was the biggest and most sumptuous in America at the time, and the intention was simply to steal away not only the aristocrat audiences of the Park but the actors from the other houses as well.

Giffert was an accomplished musician with a strongly Teutonic disposition. He had little or no regard for the exclusivity clause of the standard contract, whereby an actor was obligated to appear at no other theatrical establishment for the duration of the contract. The Bowery manager ignored this principle and hired actors away at higher salaries, paying their fines for doing so. These did not set him back much, however. When Mr. and Mrs. John Duff were hired away from William H. Wallack's Chatham Garden, the fine was a normal six cents!¹⁴⁸

It should be noted here that the forfeit system in American stock companies at this time was largely a point of honor; the house rules were standard and the fines nominal because the whole relationship between actor and manager was a gentlemen's agreement. It would not be until much later that the rules and regulations of a given theatre would be appended or printed on the back of the actor's contract and thus made a legal issue. But Giffert had flown in the face

¹⁴⁸New York Evening Post, March 2, 1827; quoted in Theodore Shank, "The Bowery Theatre, 1826-1836" (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Stanford Univ., 1956), p. 113.

of integrity and would do so many more times. Joseph Cowell described him as a "consummate rogue."¹⁴⁹

Giffert's original scheme was to compete with the Park in old English comedies, with his wife as the centerpiece of a company strong in comedic lines. It was a most expedient policy. Comedy was certainly cheaper and quicker to produce than melodrama, relying as it did on stock scenery, and the repertory was thoroughly known to his company.

Giffert had not expected Edwin Forrest to fall into his lap, but when he did all was changed. He promptly added Mr. and Mrs. John Duff, who had come to America in 1810 and were notable in tragedy. The rest of the company of comedians, including Mr. and Mrs. George L. Barrett, serviceably fleshed out Forrest's rentlessly tragic repertory. The rest of the season saw a steady stream of tragic performers: William Conway, Henry Wallack, Cooper, and Forrest, again and again.

The company was not, in its initial season, well organized as far as the lines of business were concerned. Surprisingly, with old English comedy as its centerpiece, the Bowery had only one old man, Thomas Faulkner. A production of School for Scandal therefore forced the twenty-five-year-old John Augustus Stone, the company's resident playwright, into Sir Oliver Surface. Otherwise, the company,

¹⁴⁹Joseph Cowell, Thirty Years Passed Among the Players in England and America (New York: Harper and Bros., 1844), p. 34.

while generally holding to lines that were appropriate in terms of age and style, had to accommodate the shift in policy. George Barrett, a comedian known for his Benedick, Captain Absolute and Charles Surface, was enlisted for Cassio in Othello and Pierre in Venice Preserved. Utility performers truly ran the entire gamut from farce all the way to tragedy. One Mrs. Brazier, for instance, played Lady Sneerwell in School for Scandal and Albert in William Tell, as well as a considerable number of walking and utility parts in tragedies.

Giffert incurred the first legal battle in the American theatre which centers on a casting dispute. In 1827, a Miss Deblin brought suit against the manager. She claimed to have been engaged as the leading dancer but that a Mme. Hutin, "a lady of dancing celebrity," was brought in over her. Deblin was thus thrown in the shade and ordered to go on in processions and country dances; she considered this an outrage to her professional dignity and refused. A jury awarded her \$395 in damages.¹⁵⁰

The effects of this dispute might have been far greater than they actually were. In awarding her what would appear to have been her entire season's salary, the jury endorsed her claim that she had been hired in a certain capacity and had suffered undue diminution of her prestige as a

¹⁵⁰Alvin F. Harlow, Old Bowery Days (New York: D. Appleton, 1931), p. 239.

performer with the substitution of Mme. Hutin. Deblin thereby set a legal precedent -- a performer might seek redress when used contrary to the terms of contract or to a verbal agreement between the parties. This situation had occurred many times before, of course, and certainly would occur many times in the future. What is interesting is that this case seems to have had no effect whatsoever on the actor-manager relationship. Casting disputes were common occurrences, as we have seen, and it appears that their customary resolution was and remained a private matter between the parties involved.

If he suffered from the lower ranks, Giffert certainly knew how to deal with his stars. Forrest was originally hired for \$26 a week, but after his highly successful debut the manager gave him \$40 a week. When not needed at the Bowery, Giffert obliged the young star to appear in Boston, Baltimore, and Philadelphia, where the manager collected \$200 per performance!¹⁵¹ He made a similar arrangement with J. B. Booth. Giffert had obviously taken his cue from Price at the Park, but he bettered that instruction considerably.

Neither the Park nor the Bowery was profitable by 1827. A financial panic set in and was long-lived, and the mad rage for masked balls -- which required extensive and expensive scenic effects -- proved to be short-lived. Gif-

¹⁵¹Shank, p. 74.

fert began to compete in this market just as the crest of its popularity had been reached.¹⁵² He had begun his company with English comedy when the popular tendency was toward melodrama and spectacle, and he had opened Pandora's box by showing the stars their real worth in the huge profits he made from them. Unlike his unlucky rivals at the Park, however, he would not live long enough to suffer their retaliation. He died the day after his lease was revoked in 1829.

Extant contracts for the Bowery Theatre are exceedingly rare, usually stipulating a weekly salary (from a low of \$10 to a top of \$40), and a duration of one year (with three offered to promising or established performers). The terms were arrived at in a conference with the stage manager or by letter.¹⁵³ In almost none does a line of business stipulation occur. While it was clearly defined and used as a working principle in this and every stock company, managers apparently avoided incurring obligation to their actors with regard to casting by leaving this stipulation out of the contract.

One notable exception to this generality appears in perhaps the single most important document of the nineteenth century American theatre. In 1825, Junius Brutus Booth wrote a letter attempting to induce George Holland, a fast-rising low comedian in England, to migrate to America and

¹⁵²Shank, p. 234.

¹⁵³Shank, p. 51.

join Booth's company at the Chatham in New York. The letter is far too well known and far too long to be included here, but its significance for us lies in the fact that Booth actually promised Holland a clear line, meaning that no other actor would be allowed to compete with Holland or play his parts. These same terms could not be extended to the two young ladies with whom Holland was to travel to America because the manager had engaged, or at least hoped to engage, Mary Ann Duff. They would, therefore, have to appear as cast. It is entirely likely that the manager included these fairly anomalous terms (at least for the 1820s) as an inducement to Holland. The actor did finally come to America but not under Booth's auspices.

Unlike his predecessor, T. S. Hamblin, who took over the Bowery management in 1830, was an actor. He had appeared as a star of some consequence at the Park. These facts must not obscure the even more important fact that he was a shrewd businessman and an acute observer of the theatrical weathervane. He changed both the tenor and policy of the house immediately, and within no time had established the first serious rival the Park had ever known.

Star appearances were cut to the bone. Forrest, of course, could be counted on for frequent seasonal visits, when not in England, but he had become a fixture and the principal ornament of the house. Over the course of the early 1830s, a tidal wave of patriotism had engulfed Amer-

Safford: Then how did you meet a guy to marry him?

Edith: We meet them at school or church.

Bea: School occasions, and things.

Martha: You remember we'd go down the store and they had those pickles?

Eleanor: Yeah. You had one of those pickles and you were rich.

Safford: You know that song, "I Wish I Had a Nickel"?

Chorus: "I wish I had a nickel, I'd buy myself a pickle."

Safford: That's it. That's a good song. Let's try and remember the words for it.

Eleanor: First they had the sour ones, then they had the dill. I could eat those dills forever.

(Some try to remember the words of the song. They can't.)

Safford: So on your way home from school, you'd buy yourself a pickle?

Eleanor: Everytime you get a nickel . . .

Daisy: You didn't pay a nickel for them, you'd pay two cents for them.

Eleanor: That's right.

Daisy: You could get two for a nickel.

Bea: You know a friend told me once, and she was twenty-one and working, and she came home, and she said, "Mum, I met this man and I love him." And she slapped her so two teeth was out. Twenty-one and working. I said, "What?" She said, "Yes." That's right! Twenty-one and working.

Martha: I don't think there were too many mothers like that.

Edith: No.

Martha: Wouldn't be these days.

(Lots of chatter)

Safford to Flo:

You were down South during your childhood? And your father was here?

Flo: Yes.

Safford: Someone took care of you?

Flo: (Nods)

Safford: Let's just think about this kind of a mother for a minute. Even if you didn't have this kind of a mother. Even if your mother was really nice and lenient, let's just think about this kind of a script, because I think this would be a good kind of a scene for our play.

Edith: My brother, he was eighteen, right, and the girl next door, he tried to, you know what I mean? And my mother, she beat the brains out of him. She beat my brother, yes she did: Stay away from that girl!

(They all laugh and chatter.)

Safford: Let's try and think about the kind of mother you had. Just think about it for a minute. What she looked like

Eleanor: Well, my mother was a beautiful woman. She had beautiful hands, she was proud and stylish. I didn't have mean strict parents. My father died when I was quite young. It was my mother and my grandmother. My mother took care of us. My grandmother was very strict. "You go over there, and you work" You know things like that.

(Safford started to organize an improvisation of Martha's story, but one person said she had to leave for an appointment, and the others said they had to go too. The workshop ended.)

This workshop did accentuate tensions in the group. Some participants contributed freely, but many said nothing, and some like Flo were blatantly non-committal. There was some obvious resentment on the part of many to Safford's questions which they interpreted as prying questions. Had the topic not been so personal, the method of questioning would not have seemed offensive.

Another difficulty for Safford was the sheer mechanics of working once a week in a Center. Often Center events were scheduled at the same time as her class, and because of her personal schedule she was unable to spend more time than the allocated hour a week with her group. This is going to be a problem in most centers, unless the drama person is a full-time staff member--which is usually not the case. The attitude and degree of support of the particular center's

director is, therefore, crucial to the successful implementation of a drama program in any center, but especially one where many different activities are scheduled for its members.

Yet the Hodson group eventually gelled and put on a successful performance: in part, because Safford stayed with the group; in part, because she shifted the focus of direction. She let the group suggest scenes, and she included songs and dances--theatrical forms which they found non-threatening. So we can see, then, that Safford and her new Hodson Drama Group were at the beginning stages of developing Living History Theatre. The long process had just begun. In their next play they would, perhaps, be able to locate some collective experiences in a larger historical context. The trust level in the group should increase and this would, in turn, facilitate a freer sharing of experiences. And Safford would be better able to apply what she had learned of the process of developing Living History plays.

CHAPTER SEVEN

LIVING HISTORY THEATRE: AN EVALUATION

Living History Theatre: Its Values

The previous four case studies show us that each Living History Theatre director and group is at a different stage in her and its evolution: an evolution that is only partly theatrical. Because the form has its roots in oral history, people's theatre, and gerontology, directors of Living History Theatre must be able to bring together harmoniously those elements which traditionally are assumed to belong to "pure" theatre, and those which are tangential to it. Initially, the director listens to the stories the members of the group tell, the reminiscences they share from different places and from different moments in time. He/She must then transform those stories into a theatrical presentation. The stories heard are not normally shared publicly and en masse. And the nature of the Living History Theatre process, because of the age of the participants, can be explained within the framework of certain gerontological theories, most especially those that relate to reminiscence. This coalescing of the artistic, the historical, and the psychological, while it has many values, obviously creates problems. Those problems seemingly must be resolved by the

1830s and early 1840s show a bewildering transience in the company; few actors appear for more than a single season.¹⁶⁰ Performing melodramas may have been easier work than any stock actor had had for two centuries, but it was probably just as unrewarding.

Perhaps inevitably, Hamblin saw in the consecutive-run policy a way to cut actor expenses. The exact date is in dispute, but certainly by 1840 he began hiring his actors on a weekly basis.¹⁶¹ The steady seasonal engagement was over. The financial panic which began in 1837 had drastic effects on the theatre until about 1842 and this situation probably had much to do with Hamblin's decision. Whatever had forced his hand, however, he would henceforth be under no obligation to pay an actor's salary when that actor was not used in performance. With this move, the Bowery ceased, in strict definition, to be a stock company at all.

When Hamblin assumed the management of the Park in 1848, he merged the two companies into one, utilizing them as necessary at either theatre.¹⁶² The integrity of each company was thereby seriously compromised. When the Park burned shortly thereafter, the stock company, as it had existed for over two hundred years, was rapidly metamorphosing itself into a new and perhaps more financially efficient

¹⁶⁰Annals, IV, 230ff.

¹⁶¹Odell is most emphatic that only the Park and the National were hiring actors seasonally for the 1837-38 season, Annals, IV, 232; Shank suggests that the change occurred at the Bowery in the early 1840s, pp. 450-451.

¹⁶²Odell, Annals, V, 412.

organization. It was stepping out of historical tradition and facing the new order of things squarely. Before this change could be completed, however, a new breed of managers would try to restore the old stock format to its former glory.

PART III

LINE OF BUSINESS: THE NEW YORK STOCK COMPANY RENAISSANCE, 1839-1869

By 1837, the theatre in New York had reached what would be its low ebb in the nineteenth century. Stars were demanding increasingly larger salaries at the Park, and audiences were turning away from the ten-year surfeit of melodrama at the Bowery. The so-called "Species Panic" of 1837 caused a general financial depression, the effects of which were still being felt until the mid-1840s. Odell called the 1840-41 season "one of the most depressing in the history of American theatricals."¹

Nationally, the various companies were gradually being centralized by travelling stars who, as often as not, came with their own support. A regional theatre manager was therefore less involved with operating his own producing company than with booking a steady stream of stars and attractions. He simply provided a theatre for prefabricated presentations over which he had almost no artistic control.

If the stock company had lost much of its integrity, there were still those who kept the idea of an integral

¹Annals, IV, 440.

producing organization alive. Looking at the theatre from a forty-year perspective, William B. Wood could point the way for the managers:

The stock system . . . is the only one--and their only policy is in a stern adherence to it. They must set their face steadily against any other. A considerable class of stars will be happy to make regular members of any settled establishment, conducted upon principles of integrity, decorum, and honesty. Sensible actors and wisely ambitious aspirants will be happy to find a home, where the managers and the public are their guardians and protectors. They will soon seek, in the settled form of stock establishments, to escape from the degradation and uncertainty to which they have been of late so much and so painfully exposed under the other [star] system ²

This sounds, of course, like prophecy, but it was written in 1855 and is but a description of a trend that was by then already at its apex.

The New York stock company "renaissance," a term happily coined by Odell to circumscribe the activities of the 1840s and 1850s, began with James W. Wallack's National Theatre in 1837.³ While this company lasted for only two years and cannot therefore be included in the strict scope of this analysis, Wallack pointed the way for successive managers. He came to America originally in 1818 as a star and travelled extensively. Whatever his personal feelings about the star system may have been - and he was most emphatically a part of it - he began to grope toward a new, or at least resuscitated, idea of stock management in 1837.

²Personal Recollections, pp. 457-8.

³"Some Theatrical Stock Companies of New York," Theatre Annual, 9 (1951), p. 7.

His company was made up entirely of players from London, he took significantly greater care in the mounting of his productions, he placed emphasis on the ensemble, and while he certainly used stars, they were forced, frequently to their chagrin, to fit into the aggregate scheme.⁴ He aimed, in short, for a total dramatic effect in lieu of brilliant star turns.

The National Theatre in which his company played was unfortunately situated in a bad neighborhood, surrounded by New York's most notorious brothels, and the financial panic did nothing for business either.⁵ When the theatre burned in September 1839, he moved his organization to Niblo's Garden, but business was bad and he was forced to close in November. After only two brief seasons, the National was finished. Its historical significance should not be underestimated, however, for it set the tenor of the times to come. The regular company actor would begin to figure more prominently than he had for nearly thirty years and begin to recover the prestige he had lost to the disastrous star system. The manager, likewise, began to exercise greater artistic control, shaping not only individual productions but entire seasons around a usually consistent policy.

⁴Cecil Derwent Jones, "The Policies and Practices of Wallack's Theatres, 1852-1888 (unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1959), p. 18.

⁵Ibid.

This renaissance also coincided with the development of a new staging technology, first seen in America in Boucicault's London Assurance at the Park Theatre in 1842:

. . . the famous piece inaugurated in both London and New York a new method of staging. It has generally been stated that Mme. Vestris's mounting of the comedy at Covent Garden put for the first time a box set on the boards; however untenable that theory may be, it is certain that great verisimilitude was obtained at both that theatre and the Park, when the rich drawing rooms required by Boucicault's comedy were placed before the audiences in those theatres. Staging was probably never again so shabby or so stereotyped in London or New York, after London Assurance had pointed the way to stage rooms which actually copied details of contemporary house-furnishings. Thus the production marked an era; it cut off the past of John Kemble from the future of Mrs. Bancroft in London, or of Augustin Daly in New York. A room with three walls became, from that date, a necessity in fashionable playhouses; furthermore, this room must be luxuriously furnished in the latest mode.⁶

The box set was only a single aspect of this new trend.

When Charles Kean presented his Richard III in 1846, New York got its first taste of antiquarianism.⁷ Stock flats were on the way out, and specifically designed scenery for each production now became a necessity. While the expense and effort were thus increased, so also was the need for a central perspective and vision. The origins of the American director are traceable throughout this period.

Competition throughout the renaissance was unusually keen. The population of New York had by 1850 swollen to

⁶Odell, Annals, IV, pp. 534-5.

⁷Odell, Annals, V, p. 173.

half a million. With most denizens living in boarding establishments, an evening's out-of-house recreation was essential. The theatrical community misjudged the market, however; by that year there were six legitimate theatres and again as many which offered variety, opera, concerts, circuses, and even freak shows.⁸ There was simply too much to choose from, and in order to remain open, a theatre needed to have a distinct appeal.

Of the five theatres which now follow, all but one - the totally anomalous Broadway Theatre - were owned and operated by English actor-managers. Each of them had come to America to capture a foothold in the burgeoning theatrical market, usually as stars, and each had become thoroughly disenchanted with the prevailing system. Collectively, they altered the state of New York theatre for mid-century and greatly influenced its future.

William Mitchell's Olympic Theatre, 1839-1850

Like most of these theatres, Mitchell's Olympic mirrored the taste and talents of its manager. Mitchell had begun in an English provincial troupe and worked his way up to the low and eccentric comedy line at Covent Garden by 1831. He was brought to America as a star by Flynn and Willard at their National Theatre, just before Wallack took it over in 1837. For Wallack he served as principle low

⁸Hughes, p. 170.

comedian and stage manager and seems to have been greatly influenced by him.

The Olympic was what Odell refers to as a "small bandbox" theatre; its capacity was only about twelve hundred, or half the size of the Park and Bowery. It had an extremely small stage which excluded the standard wing and grave scenic system. The pit was held exclusively for males and the boxes for ladies. From its inception, the theatre catered to all classes in New York, but by the mid-1840s its audiences were increasingly the disaffected B'hoys of the Bowery. In this cozy environment Mitchell created "the drawing room of comedy."⁹

As Mitchell personally excelled at burlesque, low broad comedy, travesty, and mimicry (particularly of leading actors like Macready and Charles Kean), this is precisely what he and his company gave their audience. He drew his initial troupe from the National, the Chatham, the Bowery, and the Park. In the opening 1839-40 season, 63 pieces were given for 565 performances, of which 8 were played twenty or more times. By the 1846-47 season, 116 pieces were presented, but only 48 of them were new.¹⁰ An evening's entertainment generally consisted of three or four short comic pieces, ranging from topical extravaganzas (Charles Dickens'

⁹Odell, "Stock Companies," p. 9.

¹⁰David Leslie Rinear, "William Mitchell's Management of the Olympic Theatre, 1839-1850" (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1971), pp. 44, 196.

Visit to New York) to burlesques and travesties (the highly successful The Roof Scrambler was a send-up of La Sonambula, while Fanny Elssler, the dancer who was the rage at the Park, was the target for La Musquitoe). Success followed success with this format; Mitchell needed only to mix his bills to keep the Olympic full and profitable. During the disastrous 1840-41 season, when every other theatre closed for several weeks in the middle of the season, Mitchell's played on and made money.¹¹

With only three exceptions, Mitchell never engaged stars in his eleven-year tenure. Mrs. Mossop, on joining the company in 1842, was given a week's worth of large case type at the top of the bills, but thereafter was listed as a regular member of the company. In 1848, when the competition from Burton's Theatre bore down on him, Mitchell gave Dan Marble and then George "Yankee" Hill top starring billing.¹² Otherwise, Mitchell clearly eschewed the ruinous star syndrome. It is entirely possible that this policy was motivated by practical rather than artistic considerations: the modest-sized Olympic could not bear the standard \$300 star salary.

Mitchell usually hired new, largely untrained or inexperienced actors who could be molded to the specifics of this peculiar repertory. The salaries were low but there

¹¹Rinear, pp. 61, 63.

¹²Odell, Annals, IV, 410; Rinear, p. 90.

was considerable job security, offering a stability which neither the Park nor the Bowery had offered for years. Charles Walcot, for instance, provides a classic example of ascension within the company according to the time-honored tenents of study and apprenticeship under a master. The master was, of course, Mitchell himself who hired Walcot to learn (from him) the art of mimicry - or burlesquing of other well-known actors and their individual styles - for which the house had become famous.¹³ When Walcot deserted the Olympic, Frank S. Chanfrau, who had begun as a walking gentleman at the Bowery in 1843 and who was known for his mimicry without having established much reputation, succeeded to this specialty "genre." It served him well, as he was catapulted to stardom as Mose, the fire laddie, in A Glance at New York in 1848. George Holland, whose career will be analyzed later, was engaged in order to allow Mitchell time to devote to his managerial duties. Holland brought his own large repertory of successes - breezy, mad-cap skits most of them.¹⁴

Tyrone Power's success in America created a rage for the Irishman, and his death in 1841 likewise created a gaping void. George Mossop supplied a few Hibernians at the Olympic, but when he departed, Mitchell had no one for his now

¹³Rinear, p. 143.

¹⁴Rinear, p. 142.

valuable and necessary line. Nickinson, an actor who had been with him since the beginning, expressed a desire to learn the line. He finally achieved success with The Happy Man and several other pieces, while he supported Mitchell and the rest of the company in extravaganzas. This is but another example of Mitchell's overriding policy of hiring unknowns and then training them to fit his needs. Nickinson supplied a highly commercial need, and he was the only resident Irish line actor in New York at this time.¹⁵

Mitchell was equally successful with his women. Mrs. Sara Timms, who debuted as a utility at the Park in 1834, was the first female success of the all male pit. After she defected to Niblo's Garden, she was replaced by two actresses, Mary Taylor and Constantia Clarke, who developed an intense rivalry, which Mitchell milked for all it was worth. When Taylor departed in 1846-47, a large part of her repertory went with her, until Timms was persuaded to rejoin.¹⁶

In his dissertation on Mitchell's Olympic, Rinear asserts that the theatre was the first in America to abolish the lines of business tradition.¹⁷ He cites as an example

¹⁵Rinear, pp. 86-7.

¹⁶Rinear, p. 180.

¹⁷Rinear, p. 260.

the instances during the initial season when Henry Hardcastle and one Everard alternated leads, and supernumerary positions.¹⁸ Rinear's point is well made, as far as it goes. The fact is, however, that Mitchell had no need of specific lines - other than the aforementioned Irishman - because there was only one line at the house: the low comedian. Everyone played it and the parts of this single line were distinguishable only by age and sex. The series of skits and vignettes and finally farces all required the same low broad humor, and the company paraded through an evening of three or four of these, alternating leads and supernumeraries, without regard to a traditional system of casting used for conventional theatrical fare. The contracts which have survived are uniform and never stipulate anything in the way of casting. The Olympic was an "as cast" house from beginning to end.

Mitchell's policy of hiring unknowns or neophytes and then training them to supply the various performing needs was well within the established tradition of stock management. He soon found, however, that another established tradition - the nightly alternation of plays - was not for him. He began almost immediately to run a piece consecutively until its appeal was exhausted. The Hamlet Travesty of 1840, for example, was played consecutively for

¹⁸Rinear, pp. 34-5.

eight nights, taken off for two nights, and then run continuously for nine more, thus running for a total of 17 out of 19 nights.¹⁹ While this hardly constituted a record, recalling certain productions at the Bowery in the 1830s, it is clear that the frequency of a long run was becoming an integral part of Mitchell's policy. The Savage and the Maiden and A Glance at New York both managed to establish record runs before P. T. Barnum's production of The Drunkard in 1850.²⁰

The long run policy was slightly rescinded during the 1845-46 season, when Mitchell began to change his repertory to include farces which had proved popular with London audiences (Box and Cox, for example). This addition soon replaced burlesque and extravaganza as the house genre, and these were alternated nightly giving the impression of a succession of hits.²¹

The eleven years of the Olympic coincided with a period of peculiar taste in New York for zany humor of the topical variety and travesties of drama and opera. The taste began to change in the late forties, however, and Burton's Theatre began to compete with the same imported farce repertory. George Holland departed, as did Frank S.

¹⁹Rinear, p. 32.

²⁰Rinear, p. 263.

²¹Rinear, p. 178.

Chanfrau, after his Mose success. Mitchell himself had long since ceased to appear and there was no one to carry the banner. The company disbanded on March 7, 1850.

As the first company of the New York stock renaissance, Mitchell's Olympic must be seen as a directional weathervane for the years that follow. By avoiding stars, by emphasizing an ensemble, and by limiting his repertory to a specific, fairly narrow type of entertainment he set precedents for those who followed. Finally, with regard to the actor-manager relationship, he reestablished the supremacy of the manager in all artistic matters.

The Broadway Theatre Stock Company, 1847-1858

Opened in September 1847, the Broadway was the most splendid theatre ever built in America up to that time. It was commissioned by Alvah Mann, a circus promoter, and was intended to rival the fast-fading Park for the city's elite. E. A. Marshall of Philadelphia's Walnut Street joined the venture after a few months, but the partnership was dissolved in October 1848, leaving Marshall in full control. The original intention had been to present a resident company without stars. The opening bills of School for Scandal and The Rivals give us some notion of the artistic calibre aimed for.

When the Park burned in December 1848, all this was abandoned and the Broadway simply picked up the charred mantell of that illustrious house, and turned open-armed to

the star policy. Properly speaking, the Broadway was not a stock renaissance company at all, but merely a continuation of the now nearly fifty-year-old star syndrome. It is included here because it provided a serious rivalry to renaissance stock theatres and because it managed to last through eleven important seasons.

The ravages of the star system were nowhere more evident than at the Broadway. Throughout this period, any actor who had ever appeared on the London stage (and that now included any number of minor theatres as well as Drury Lane and Covent Garden) might take license to star in America. Marshall proved to be one of the most gullible (or unscrupulous) of managers in this regard. He booked everyone and anyone who he thought might draw an audience. Some of the attractions were genuine, even great: Edwin Forrest, Charlotte Cushman, James H. Hackett, Charles Matthews the Younger, Mr. and Mrs. Barney Williams (Irish specialists), and Josh Silsbee of Yankee fame. Notable circuses, opera companies, and ballet troupes were thrown in for good measure. As often as not, however, Broadway attractions proved spurious. Let one example stand for many: one Sir William Don, a real English baronet, was booked by Marshall during the 1850-51 season. The attraction rested solely on the fact that here New York audiences had the rare opportunity to see a genuine peer of the realm. The bills called him "the highly talented and eccentric comedian." Joseph

Jefferson remembered him somewhat differently - "once an amateur, always an amateur."²²

The general format at the Broadway was to present the star in his own individual repertory over the course of one to three weeks, with the resident company in support. The quality of this company varied considerably from season to season, but many of the best actors on the American stage in later years either appeared or debuted here: Mr. and Mrs. G. H. Barrett, Lester Wallack, Charles Burke, William B. Chapman, George Vandenhoff, William Rufus Blake, John Dyott, George Jordan, Mme. Ponisi, Mrs. George Vernon, Fanny Morant, and Jean M. Davenport. Individually, they supplied most of the later theatres with their best resident talent. Collectively at the Broadway, however, they rarely appear to have coalesced into a notable ensemble. They are infrequently mentioned in the reviews of stars, perhaps quite naturally, but when the resident company was left to its own devices on stock nights, the critical press usually sneered, saying it "presents no strong points of individual excellence."²³

After the initial season, of course, the company was hardly ever given a chance to shine. While Marshall presented the full dramatic spectrum, he increasingly turned on stock nights to spectaculars like The Vision of the Sun and

²²Quoted by Odell, Annals, VI, 5.

²³Odell, Annals, V, 333.

The Cataract of the Ganges, where the sumptuousness of the scenery and costumes often swept the actor aside. There was little here for him.

Marshall appears to have engaged his company according to traditional lines of business. They could not, of course, be strictly maintained in such a mixed and free-ranging repertory. Actors simply did their specialty when and if it occurred, and filled in serviceably otherwise. At least one actor, however, had a most strict view of his line, and this was a highly inappropriate position to take in a star house. When Mann engaged George Vandenhoff, who had come to America as a star but had quickly dwindled in reputation, the manager promised him that he should never be held inferior to anyone in the company - he was to be strictly the leading man. When the policy of the house changed to starring, James Wallack, Jr. was engaged to play Othello with Vandenhoff, therefore, cast as Iago. The latter did not appear at the theatre for the performance but simply sent a note, which arrived five minutes before curtain, stating that as his name did not appear in the bill and advertising in equal prominence with Wallack's, he did not intend to appear.²⁴ Vandenhoff's action was thoroughly at odds with decorum in a starring establishment, where resident actors had stepped aside for nearly fifty years.

²⁴Lester Wallack, Memories, pp. 139-140.

Unable to withstand the financial panic of 1857, Marshall left after the closing of the season in 1858. The disjointed organization, run now by Edward Eddy, managed to limp into the 1858-59 season but then succumbed quickly. From the standpoint of the New York stock renaissance, the Broadway offered nothing new. It was but a continuation of the policy begun by Price and Simpson of the Park in 1810. As such it contributed nothing to the stock aesthetic or to the artistic calibre of theatre - which had now begun to grow by leaps and bounds.

Burton's Chambers Street and New Theatre, 1848-1858

Much more typical of the stock renaissance manager was William E. Burton. After years in English provincial stock, he fled to America in the summer of 1834 after being charged with bigamy, and settled into an acting career, meanwhile pursuing his life-long literary aspirations. He joined the well-known literati in Philadelphia and New York and became editor and publisher of The Gentleman's Magazine for several years. His collection of Shakespeariana was perhaps the greatest in America at this time.²⁵

This literary sophistication was sharply contrasted by Burton's talents as an actor. He was an extremely broad, low comedian humorist - often running to the profane - and

²⁵Rue Corbett Johnson, "The Theatrical Career of William E. Burton" (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1967), passim.

he rarely missed a chance to make the most of his broad posterior. Naturally then, his repertory was comedy, nearly every possible form of it.

Burton had extensive management experience before opening the Chambers Street Theatre in 1848. He began with the New National in Philadelphia in 1840, adding the Arch Street, Chestnut Street, and the Front Street Theatre in Baltimore in 1845.²⁶ It is suggestive of his boundless activities that he continued to operate the Arch Street and Front Street theatres after he opened in New York. He was ruthless with the competition. Laura Keene, in particular, felt his sting when Burton managed to lease her theatre, the Metropolitan or Tripler Hall, from under her after her initial season in 1856. This theatre had been built for but never used by Jenny Lind, the Swedish Nightingale; it had a capacity of 5,000 persons and was far too vast for dramatic presentations. Keene would come to thank Burton for her dispossession, and he would come to regret the move, for he could not fill it. He finally disbanded in the quake of the 1857 panic.²⁷

In theory, at least, Burton knew exactly what policy he would pursue when he began managing in 1840:

. . . to restore and preserve good stock companies was his idea. He desired to throw off those feudal tram-

²⁶Johnson, p. 313.

²⁷Odell, Annals, VI, 407.

mels of the starring system which had destroyed the dignity and the true interest of the stock actors.²⁸

This policy was frequently aborted in his early Philadelphia and Baltimore managements, however, by the importation of stars like Macready, Hackett, Josh Silsbee, and Mrs. Mowatt. Competition with William Marshall's Walnut Street Theatre was especially fierce and this rivalry may account for the change of heart. Burton used all the typical nineteenth century tactics, including getting the jump on competition by pirating their plays with a mere change of title.²⁹

By 1846-47 Burton had returned to his ideal with a consistent trend toward true stock policy. This began to pay off for him financially and he turned his sights on New York. Lester Wallack says that Burton came to the city, saw what Mitchell was doing and simply did it better - with better scenery, better casts, and the assistance of John Brougham³⁰ (a rotund Irish low comedian who proved the perfect performing foil for Burton, until he decamped to begin his own short-lived company at the Lyceum).

In order to defeat Mitchell, Burton began with the same fare - farces and burlettas. He achieved his first big

²⁸Charles Durang, A History of the Philadelphia Stage, 1749-1855 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Library, 1868), p. 173.

²⁹Johnson, p. 278.

³⁰Wallack, Fifty Years, p. 106.

success with Brougham's adaptations of Dickens' Dombey and Son and David Copperfield. He then turned to old comedies like School for Scandal, which was poorly received because the house style was entirely too broad, even coarse, to accommodate the gentle elegance of Sheridan.³¹ The company appears to have dusted themselves off, however, for they met with better success in The Rivals, Wild Oats, and She Stoops to Conquer.

The engagement of Mrs. Warner, a noted Shakesperean actress from Samuel Phelps's Sadler's Wells Theatre in London, turned the repertory to Burton's beloved bard. The Winter's Tale, Twelfth Night, and, perhaps at Mrs. Warner's insistence, an untypical Macbeth, were presented during her short stay as a member of the company. The Merry Wives of Windsor, The Tempest, and, finally, A Midsummer Night's Dream followed her departure and the latter in particular was a huge success; Burton threw everything he had into processions, spectacle, and scenery, but this happily did not swamp the text:

One great feature about the production of this piece is that the adjuncts are just such as are required to assist the piece. The audience gets Shakespeare in a magnificent binding. They do not have to take up with the binding without the Shakespeare.³²

³¹Odell, Annals, VI, 17.

³²New York Herald, February 4, 1854.

As a scholar, Burton had carefully studied the details of Greek archaeology, and the whole effect was such as to rival Charles Kean's landmark productions at the Princess Theatre in London.³³

After the opening of Wallack's Theatre in 1852, the preeminence which he had held for four years was seriously challenged. He was driven out of the old comedies by Wallack's superior forces, and, beginning to feel the strain at the box office, he reverted once again to the desperation ploy of engaging stars. James E. Murdoch, Charlotte Cushman, E. L. Davenport, J. W. Wallack, Jr., and the steadily rising Edwin Booth were among the most prominent. This policy, of course, put him in rivalry with Marshall's Broadway: after 1852, therefore, Burton was relatively hemmed in both artistically and financially by his competitors.

Burton's resident acting company was a fairly erratic affair. He employed excellent and sometimes well-established actors and actresses but could rarely keep them for more than a few seasons at most. Brougham, for instance, with whom Burton had developed an apparently priceless comic team known as the "Busy B's," departed after only two seasons. As Brougham had provided the manager with twelve successful plays, he not only lost an actor but his resident playwright as well.³⁴ Lester Wallack of the Broad-

³³Odell, Annals, VI, 291.

³⁴Johnson, p. 323.

way joined Burton, changing his name to John Lester, but quite naturally left to join his father's company in 1852. George Jordan, a handsome leading man from the Broadway, and Caroline Chapman, an equally attractive young leading lady, provided the company with visual appeal, while William Rufus Blake, a notable of the old man line, and Mrs. Josephine Russsell (better known as Mrs. John Hoey in later years) provided Burton with older humorists. None of these stayed for more than a few seasons, however. When Laura Keene opened her theatre in 1855, she decimated Burton's ranks just as he had done to Mitchell and Marshall in 1848.

One of Burton's early Philadelphia proteges recalled that the manager was the first to employ Philadelphia actors at the Chambers Street. While this was perfectly natural for Burton, who had, after all, managed three different theatres in Philadelphia before coming to the city and might quite naturally draw on that talent pool, it was a policy totally alien to New York's "Chinese Wall of inexcusable resistance."³⁵ The ranks of New York actors were still, as they had been for a century, almost entirely British. These Philadelphia actors provided Burton only with the walking gentlemen and utility performers at the Chambers Street, however.

³⁵Effie Ellsler Weston, The Stage Memoirs of John A. Ellsler, 1822-1886 (Cleveland: Rowfant Club, 1959), p. 28.

Burton had a keen eye for talent and appears, like Mitchell before him, to have enjoyed nurturing and training young actors. At his Arch Street Theatre, for instance, a twenty-four-year-old John Ellsler was tried in every single line of business, except leading man. Burton began to see that Ellsler had some abilities as a comedian and, though the young man was thoroughly unconvinced that he was capable, the manager placed him in the old man line, which he played for the entire 1847-48 season.³⁶

With regard to his casting policy, Burton appears to have followed the lines of business engagement tradition and to have honored it, unless his back was against the wall. An amusing exchange of letters between Burton and W. H. Norton not only illustrates the manager's integrity in this regard but also his urbane sense of humor.

Mr. BURTON, My Dear Sir:--It was not necessity which drove me to America. I wished to travel, to see the country, and, after having satisfied myself as to whether it pleased me, professionally or otherwise, to arrange either to remain in it or return to England. I consider myself greatly insulted by being cast for the part of Sealey in 'Nicholas Nickleby.' To offer such an indignity to a gentleman who has held a good position in the Olympic Theatre, London, under the management of so great an actor as Mr. W. Farren, where he has played Sir John Melville, Sir Lucius O'Trigger, Sir Arthur Lascelles, etc., I consider a great insult, and positively request you to take me out of the objectionable cast, and in future to keep to the promise you made on engaging

Yours, W. H. Norton.

³⁶Weston, p. 25.

Burton made the following reply:

My DEAR Mr. Norton:--When I engaged you I thought you were merely an actor. I find that you are a gentleman on your travels, and I have to apologize for detaining you. If you proceed let me advise you to visit Niagara about this time. Take a tour through Canada. After that take your way through the country generally, not forgetting the caves of Kentucky, and in mid-winter return to Niagara, a splendid sight. But should you feel inclined to defer your travels, W. E. Burton will be happy to retain your services until the close of the season.³⁷

He could be far less amusing when confronted with an actress' desertion, however, as the following letter to Moses Kimball of the Boston Museum shows:

Phila.
Aug. 28, 1845

My dear sir,

Miss Kirby who it seems has engaged herself with you for the ensuing season, is under an acknowledged and public engagement with me for the Chestnut Street Theatre, from which I have no intention of releasing her. She requested a month's vacation (August) stating publicly that she had that month engagement with you, and borrowed money from me to enable her to journey to Boston, pledging herself to return to me by the first of September. I have this day received a note from her that she does not return, having concluded an engagement with you for the winter. As I know you to be an honorable man, I state these matters to you, requesting in all fairness, to relinquish those agreements which she had not the liberty to contract. I have no one to supply her place; and as public men, we are bound to stand by one another in opposition to these dirty actions of swindling and arrogance.

I feel it my duty to publicly advertise her should she not return to her engagement.

³⁷Quoted in Durang, Philadelphia Stage, p. 256; and Odell, Annals, VI, 212.

Trusting to your politeness to excuse this letter,

I remain, my dear sir,
Yours, truly

W. E. Burton³⁸

There do not appear to have been any infractions of the line of business tradition in his New York management; at all events, we have no record of any. An open breach occurred at the Chestnut Street, however, during November 1845:

An order was issued from the stage manager that all the ladies, without distinction of rank or position, or in accordance with theatrical usage, should go on in the choruses of 'The Bohemian Girl.' This autocratic rule, to suddenly enforce upon the established rights and privileges of stock actors and actresses, caused a commotion. Some complied with the order; others, with a very proper spirit, did not. It was too much to ask for a lady, who had been playing Lady Macbeth or Mrs. Haller, the night before to hop over the stage with a tamborine in her hand, to sing when she had not a singing note in her voice, nor any right to be translated into a mere supernumerary. Who would look at an actress performing Julia or Juliet who, the night previous, had been seen in a common corps de ballet? It is a destructive policy in any management, and all to suit the whims of some pet star, who, for the moment, draws money to the house Mrs. John Greene refused to comply with this order, and very properly.³⁹

Burton had at this point just taken on the management of the Arch Street Theatre and the Front Street in Baltimore, and he had clearly not yet sorted out a clear policy for each, so that the above should properly be seen as an exception

³⁸Uncatalogued ALS, Harvard Theatre Collection.

³⁹Durang, Philadelphia Stage, p. 256.

and a mistake on his part. This account is also interesting for Durang's point of view. But for William Dunlap, Durang is the only American theatre historian I have ever found who not only acknowledges the lines tradition but actually takes a position on it.

The foregoing examples make it quite clear that Burton certainly did use written contracts with his actors (though none seem to have survived). Whether he allowed for a lines stipulation in them is a matter of conjecture, however. Norton's letter, for instance, refers to "the promise you made on engaging" that actor, but it could easily have been the usual, tacit or verbal agreement which had predominated for centuries. I find it quite hard to believe Odell's assertion that Burton had no contracts whatever with George Jordan, John Dyott, Kate Reignolds and the other actors whom Laura Keane picked off from him when she opened her initial season.⁴⁰ From the foregoing examples, it is clear that contracts were a definite part of his policy and there seems to be no reason for him to have suspended that policy, particularly with such valued players. He had been managing theatres for fifteen years at that point and, in view of the many desertions he sustained, he would have been highly suspicious of actor "loyalty."

When Burton's theatre closed in 1858, New York lost one of the finest producing organizations the city had ever

⁴⁰Annals, VI, 431.

known. The company must ultimately be seen as the first in a line where taste and a centralized artistic control were beginning to surface. That Burton was guilty of occasional backsliding with regard to the star system may be explained, if not completely excused, by the intense cutthroat competition of his day. He found, like nearly all the managers of the stock renaissance, that certain concessions had to be made in order to stay open. On the positive side, his lavish and archaeologically correct productions of Shakespeare set a new standard for his competitors and successors.

Wallack's Theatres, 1852-1888

While Burton was at the high tide of his success, James W. Wallack decided to reenter the managerial fold. He leased the defunct Brougham's Lyceum in 1852, moved further uptown in 1861, to Broadway and Thirteenth Street, calling this the New Wallack's, and then finally, under his son Lester's control, the company took a third residence at Broadway and Thirteenth Street in 1882. By then it was Wallack's in name only, having deserted its once high artistic policies for imported Adelphi melodramas from London. The company was finally disbanded in 1888.

From his debut at the Park in 1818 until he opened his own theatre in 1852, J. W. Wallack was a star. He came from a family which produced no fewer than fourteen actors in four generations, and, while he had been intended for a

commission in the Royal Navy, he found himself at Sheridan's Drury Lane at the age of twelve. The fire there in 1809 sent him packing to Ireland, but he reappeared with the Drury company when it reappeared. Before coming to America, he had scored a number of impressive credits, not the least of which was supporting Edmund Kean as Iago, Edgar, MacDuff, and Richmond. He also succeeded at romantic parts like Rob Roy, Rolla, Petruchio, and Benedick. After 1818, he made many transatlantic crossings, starring in America or stage-managing for Elliston and Stephen Price who briefly managed Drury Lane.⁴¹

Thirty-four years of stardom were not apparently satisfactory for him - something in all of that was missing. His short tenure as manager at the National in New York must have convinced him that there was a better way, and while that effort seems somewhat ill-defined, he had certainly begun to grope for a distinct artistic policy. By the opening of his theatre in 1852, he had it. He announced before the opening night curtain that the offerings here would be conservative and traditional, the style to be high comedy, the highest and best class of farces, vaudeville, "dramas of stirring interest; such as the Rent Day and Don Caesar de Bazon," but no tragedy (much as Wallack loved them). His company would be drawn from the highest ranks of "estab-

⁴¹Jones, "The Policies and Practices of Wallack's Theatres, 1852-1888," pp. 10f.

lished favorites . . . and new candidates for your favor."⁴² He omitted to say, but it was certainly implicit, that there would be no stars.

Wallack's appeal was to a refined, educated and affluent segment of New York's increasingly heterogeneous audience, the same fashionable element that patronized the Opera House. Composed largely of women, they came for fashion shows, and Mrs. John Hooey, now returned to the stage after her marriage to a rich and generous industrialist, gave them what they wanted - the latest and most spectacular of contemporary couture. The theatre itself had been made as luxurious as possible to cater to this class and for thirty-six seasons Wallack managed to keep his three different locations at the epicenter of New York society.⁴³

The manager kept his promise regarding repertory. Standard or "old English" plays were first and foremost here. We have alluded to this genre throughout this investigation but it is now perhaps time to define as precisely as possible what is meant by it. Brander Matthews pinpoints it historically:

They are a score or so of more or less comic plays written by various English dramatists at intervals during the one hundred and fifty years intervening between 1700 and 1850, and distinguished from among the thousands of other comic dramas written during that

⁴²"A Sketch of the Life of J. W. Wallack" (New York: T. H. Morrell, 1865), p. 45; quoted in Jones, p. 80.

⁴³Jones, pp. 101, 110.

century and a half by the fact that they have had vitality enough to keep the stage. In all departments of literature there is a struggle for existence, and the acknowledged classics are the result of the survival of the fittest.⁴⁴

William Winter, the venerable critic of nearly the entire last half of the century, was more specific with regard to character and plot.

The note that is always audible in the old English comedies is the note of gallantry. The predominant impulse that animates their people is the impulse of desire. The figures that glisten and sparkle through their flowery and fragrant labyrinths of artifice, equivoque, raillery, frolic, and intrigue are the representative figures of languishing allurement, tantalizing witchery, gleeful mischief, and audacious and exultant animal life. In almost every one of them there is an enchanting maid or a superb widow, to be pursued and captured by a potential rake whom marriage will reform, or there is a wild and reckless cavalier, whom the omnipotent charms of awful and irresistible beauty are finally to invest with the rosy curb of the matrimonial yoke. Ardent man nimbly careers after enticing woman, and lovely and capricious woman exerts her arts, either to allure or elude her follower, or her rival, or subdue her captor, or augment her triumphs. The time is always mating time, and the sole question is the question whether courtship will prosper and love prevail.⁴⁵

Like the melodrama, standard English comedies were written to formula in terms of plot and character. They fit the accommodations of the stock company like a glove, and each actor had a part readily identifiable in terms of specific line of business. Unlike melodrama, many of these plays endured and some (School for Scandal, The Rivals, She Stoops to Conquer, Wild Oats, and Boucicault's London Assurance)

⁴⁴Studies of the Stage (New York: Harper and Bros., 1894), p. 191.

⁴⁵Shadows of the Stage, 3 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1892-95), III, 83-84.

still do; they are, like Shakespeare, classics of the English-speaking theatre. Wallack presented thirty-six of them and they were the centerpiece of his repertory for twenty years. Their general excellence was measured - not in terms of the actors' individual talents - but in terms of the aggregate company style.

Contemporary comedies ran a close second. While Boucicault, Tom Taylor, Jr., Sterling Coyne, and William S. Gilbert saw productions here, the works of Thomas W. Robertson were the ones that found a long-lasting berth in the repertory. Robertson's most successful plays were Ours, School, Caste, and Howe. There was nothing innovative or risk-taking about Wallack's presenting these "cup and saucer" comedies - they had already established themselves as tremendous hits at the Bancroft's Prince of Wales Theatre in London and appear to have been as tailor-made for Wallack's company of English actors as for their originators.⁴⁶

Shakespeare was also a staple at the house, at least until the retirement of James W. in 1859. Much Ado, The Merchant of Venice, and As You Like It gave the old actor his last chance for the romantic parts in which he had excelled in his youth. After his death in 1864, Shakespeare was virtually dropped from the house repertory. Lester Wallack, who succeeded him as manager, did not have the Shakespearean inclination.

⁴⁶Odell, Annals, VIII, 130-1.

Of the other dramatic forms at Wallack's little need be said. Burlesque was rare, though Brougham's popular travesties of the then overdone Indian genre, Po-ca-hon-tas and Charles Walcot's Hiawatha, were briefly successful. The afterpiece remained a staple until the 1870s when it began to die out everywhere. The Captain of the Watch, High Life Below Stairs, and Faint Heart Ne'er Won Fair Lady were the bigger hits. The most financially profitable genre of all, however, was romantic melodrama. Rosedale, which Lester wrote and produced in 1863, and Boucicault's The Shaughram were the two most lucrative productions in thirty-six seasons.⁴⁷ Uncomplicated character types like the hero, heroine, villain, and humorous confidants fit neatly - if not quite so artistically- into a company which was, as we shall see, rigidly constructed on the lines of business tradition.

Both James W. and Lester paid meticulous attention to the details of their productions. Others, of course, were appointed to various duties, but their positions come down to us as ill-defined and confusing. One Selwyn, for instance, is listed as both "stage director" and "stage manager" in the same 1866-67 season, while John Gilbert, an actor with the company for many years, was credited in that same season as "stage manager," "stage director," and, fi-

⁴⁷Jones, pp. 90, 121, 127.

nally, "acting manager."⁴⁸ It is impossible, therefore, to distinguish the duties of these positions, and the titles were probably used interchangeably and synonymously. At all events, it was the Wallacks themselves who attended to the painstaking details of everything on their stage. Odell, who was convinced that Wallack's was unquestionably the greatest American stock company of the nineteenth century, claimed that the company

really first showed New York what was meant by perfect stage management with an eye to every detail, however slight; never on his [J. W.'s] stage were noticed . . . incongruities of costume, scenery, etc. . . .⁴⁹

Lester came in for his own glowing notices as well, particularly with Robertson's Ours in 1866-67.

The new play at Wallack's has taken the town The admirable dialogue, the equal acting, the completeness of the mise-en-scene combine to make 'Ours' the most acceptable production of the season Accustomed as we are to the unvarying excellence of the stage management at this house--justly and properly regarded as the leading theatre of America--we were yet surprised with the pleasant air that was maintained throughout. The scenes were cosy and well furnished, except in the last act, where the fierce winds of the Crimea howl around the hut, and exhibit the cheerless aspect of war. This scene is in the highest degree picturesque, and deserves additional attention as an unusual specimen of stage architecture. The dresses throughout are correct and effective. Of the acting we need say but little, that little being entirely strong.⁵⁰

This review is characteristic of many in other New York papers: the critics noted the "equal acting" of the company,

⁴⁸David Henry Swinney, "Production in Wallack's Theatres, 1852-1888" (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1962), p. 100.

⁴⁹Annals, IV, 211.

⁵⁰New York Times, December 24, 1866; quoted in Odell, Annals, VIII, 431; similarly, The New York Herald (February 1, 1853), p. 5.

individuals were rarely singled out, and the encomium went to the company collectively. Lester, like his father before him, had become a master at welding the divergent elements of production into a seamless, indivisible unit.

Rehearsals played a major part in this. Though statistics for rehearsal frequency are not available for the 1850s, by the 1860s new plays were given six to nine work-outs and most revivals between two and four. The standard old comedies needed even fewer - one "warm-up" was generally considered sufficient. Spectaculars, such as the revival of Much Ado in 1869 received twenty-one rehearsals, but by then Lester had increased his rehearsal time appreciably. The original Rosedale was given 15 rehearsals in 1863 and its revival in 1876 bettered that by one. The number and frequency of rehearsals was, therefore, somewhat above the average for the period, but, even more telling is the fact that both James W. and Lester demanded a full-out effort from their actors during these sessions.⁵¹ Perhaps like Macready before them, they could not tolerate a slovenly, undisciplined approach either in preparation or execution. A rehearsal schedule for All for Her indicates, for instance, that during the three-day call, all properties, music, and set pieces were required for regular rehearsals.⁵²

⁵¹Jones, pp. 42-44, 47.

⁵²Swinney, p. 113; quotes the prompt book, Harvard Theatre Collection.

If this may be taken as indicative of Wallack's general policy, it goes a long way toward explaining the excellence of ensemble effect usually noted by the critics. It would also have been an extremely innovative policy for the American theatre at this time.

Regarding the non-star policy, a few points must be made. While James W. and Lester were both stars in their own right, their billing at the house was never suggestive of an individual attraction but rather as members of the Wallack company. Similarly, E. L. Davenport, a noted tragedian who was exceptionally versatile and fit well into comic roles, was engaged on a regular company basis for a short time. During the 1856-57 season, William Stuart leased the theatre and presented Matilda Heron as Camille - one of the biggest star turns of the 1850s - but this was not done under Wallack auspices.⁵³ In 1871, Charles Matthews, the younger, one of if not the most noted light comedians in England and America, made an appeal for engagement with Lester, and Lester refused on the grounds that Wallack's did not hire stars and never would. Matthews was insistent, and wanted to be a regular member of the company. Lester, incredulous at his luck, hired the old actor for \$100 a week and watched him work serviceably for an entire season. E. A. Sothern did more or less the same thing.⁵⁴ If Wallack

⁵³Jones, p. 73.

⁵⁴Lester Wallack, Fifty Years, pp. 65-66.

would not hire stars, then the stars would give up their status in order to work for him. No theatre ever received a higher honor than that.

We turn now to casting practice and policy. There is considerable evidence that neither Wallack Sr. nor Lester really personally approved of the lines of business tradition and actually laughed at it. James W., for instance, managed London's Haymarket Theatre for a time and sent the following undated letter to an unknown:

Sir -

I have already cast Trip to ----- on looking in the cast book.

Miss Reynolds could study Charice and Ernestine both she says -- but very kindly offered to do either -- tho' of course I and she preferred Ernestine. Miss Reid begged off against the part of Julietta as being quite out of her line. I have given it to Miss Buckingham and Miss Reed in consideration thereof [will] act 'for that night' Maria. Keely does Moses for that night!

Arn't the players funny fellows?

I wish you would turn your [mind] in thought toward Cooper for next season -- he is a Capital Horse on a Team. Ready in more parts than any man on the stage and a gentleman ⁵⁵

This letter suggests that he found an actor's rigid adherence to a line foolish and, from his standpoint as a manager, inconvenient. It also, in the reference to Cooper, shows how much he valued utility and versatility.

Lester similarly valued these qualities in an actor, and William Winter noted that Lester ". . . was accustomed

⁵⁵Uncatalogued and undated ALS of James W. Wallack, Harvard Theatre Collection.

earnestly to insist that a really good actor is one who is not obliged to restrict himself to a single line of business, but is capable of playing parts of all kinds."⁵⁶ However much he may have looked for these qualities, when it came to casting he looked with a sharp and often perceptive eye. Tom Taylor's Our American Cousin, which with Barnum's production of The Drunkard was the greatest hit of the fifties, was originally submitted to Wallack who had to reject it because it could not be cast properly at his theatre. He suggested that the only actor in America who could play the central part of Asa Trenchard, "a shrewd, keen Yankee boy of 25," was Joseph Jefferson, employed at Laura Keane's theatre.⁵⁷ By rejecting the play, Wallack lost a fortune and gave considerable comfort to his principal rival. Artistic considerations were foremost at Wallack's, however, and, until late in its history, were never compromised.

Tact and diplomacy ruled Wallack's casting policy from start to finish. The following letter, which I have quoted entirely because it gives an almost complete picture of Lester Wallack - The Gentleman, fairly bows and scrapes in deference to his employee. It is dated from the theatre, September 21, 1866:

⁵⁶Other Days (New York: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1908), p. 184.

⁵⁷Lester Wallack, Fifty Years, pp. 159-60; corroborated by Joseph Jefferson, Autobiography, p. 148.

Dear Mrs. [George] Vernon -

I write to you on a delicate subject but I approach it in your case with less hesitation because I think I may flatter myself that I address an old friend. When I read the play of 'The Favorite of Fortune Lost Alive' I formed the 'cast' in my mind's eye, but on giving the play to [Mr. Gilbert, the stage manager] a day or two ago, I did not apprise him of the inadvertently distribution as I had first intended it but inadvertently (from lack of memory) substituted your name for Miss [Fanny] Morant's.

Now I certainly ought to have reread the piece and thus have refreshed my memory but it is a labor now to me to get through a M.S. & I thought I recollected enough of the characters to give Gilbert the right list. The part is that of a woman some 37 or 8 years, though mother of marriable daughters, her youthful appearance is the theme of frequent remark and some of her scenes are very serious - the feeling at times almost tragic -

Of course you will see clearly that such is not the style of character in which the audience is used to see and admire you.

But mind - if you are attracted to the part and it would grieve and annoy you to take it away, I should be very loth to do so.

I have to ask your indulgence for an error of mine and to beg you to help me gracefully out of it. I may add that in London the part was acted by Miss Showden - a lady of some 35 or 6 years of age and was made quite a young woman - most expensively and fashionably dressed.

Let me know your reply to this at once - and believe me My dear Mrs. Vernon

Always affectionately yours,

Lester Wallack⁵⁸

Whether this letter may be taken at face value or whether Lester was using every trick in the book to get an actress to step out of her line for a more finely tuned cast we cannot know. The play, which Odell calls insipid, opened two weeks later, however, with Miss Morant in the part.⁵⁹

⁵⁸Uncatalogued ALS, Harvard Theatre Collection.

⁵⁹Odell, Annals, VIII, 129.

The "Rules and Regulations" of Wallack's theatre present a very firm policy on the old, troublesome right of refusal issue. Article #7 of a copy of these rules, undated but probably around 1870, stands out in bold capitals and is the most prominent of twenty items:

A Performer Refusing a Part Allotted to Him or Her, by the manager, will forfeit His or Her Salary During the Run of the Piece, and on any night of its Presentation During the Season, & Be Liable to Discharge by the Manager.⁶⁰

Shades of Covent Garden in 1800! But in contrast to this emphatic dictum is a letter Lester wrote to one Harry Edwards:

My dear Mr. Edwards:

My company being divided just now, any objections to parts are doubly inconvenient--but I have no desire that you should feel uncomfortable in my theatre All the principal artists at 'Wallack's' have, at times, been called upon to make up the strength of a cast by playing parts inferior in length and strength to those they usually assume. However, I should be sorry to insist on anything incompatible with your understanding of your engagement and must do the best I can in the company.

I have been unable to track down this actor in any of Odell's bills and must conclude that he assumed a minor position - walking gentleman or even utility. That Lester could tolerate what is obviously here a complaint, and further, answer it with such tact and generosity, indicates a patience that passes all understanding.

⁶⁰Reprinted in William Calm's The Laugh Makers (New York: George Putnam and Sons, 1957), p. 40; quoted by Jones, Appendix C, p. 154.

As Wallack's was the undisputed home of legitimate comedy and never presented tragedy and only rarely melodrama, the lines of business were somewhat altered from a conventional stock company. The leading male line, for example, was light and high comedy. James W. retired in 1859 when Lester filled this line on a permanent basis and by retaining all the best roles of that repertory, made it difficult to hold onto first-rate actors who naturally had ambitions of their own in that direction. Osmond Tearle lasted six years, and Fred G. P. Robinson four, while Harry Montague left after two, probably because, though he was a "matinee idol" of the 1870s, he was extremely limited to contemporary comedy and could do nothing in the artificial style that pervaded this house.⁶¹ Maurice Barrymore, Owen Marlowe, and Ellen Plympton saw even shorter tenures.

With many of the other lines, however, Wallack had considerably better luck. An actor moved into the company in a specific line and stayed there: there is not, apparently, a single instance of an actor moving from his original designated line of parts to another, unless, of course, it was a situation where Lester begged for accommodation - as in the letter to Edwards quoted above. Such situations were temporary, at all events.

⁶¹William Winter, Brief Chronicles, p. 219.

What is interesting about the lines system at Wallack's is that, perhaps because of its rigidity, we see the old seniority-succession-possession arrangement more clearly here than at any other American theatre. The unusual longevity of careers at Wallack's also furthers the impression that here was a family of actors and a home for acting.

In the old man line, William Rufus Blake stayed for eight seasons and was then replaced by Henry Placide. I find it surprising that Placide, who had been a mainstay of the Park company for nearly 25 years, should leave a place almost custom-made to his particular excellence in such parts as Sir Peter Teazle after only one brief season. Perhaps after so long a tenure at the Park, he was no longer looking for a professional home. He was succeeded by John Gilbert who stayed for an astonishing 26 seasons.

The eccentric comedy line was originally Brougham's, then it passed to J. H. Stoddart and Charles M. Walcott who each stayed eight years. After 1879, the line was dropped - from necessity - for Lester simply could not find a versatile enough artist to fill it.⁶²

The low comedian line, to be discussed in detail further on, was initiated by George Holland who remained for 11 seasons. He was succeeded by Henry Beckett in the sev-

⁶²Jones, pp. 62-3.

enties and William Elton in the eighties. Both were English, as in fact all Wallack's employees were, and had been trained in the burlesque technique. By the late seventies, the line had dwindled to little better than that of utility.⁶³ Low comedy nearly always verges on the bawdry and rambunctiousness of farce and, as such, probably never attained the level of prestige at Wallack's that it had at Mitchell's and Burton's.

The melodramatic villain was, quite naturally, a stranger to Wallack's. Like the leading tragedian, he had no place there. With walking gentlemen, however, Wallack was uncommonly lucky; he appears to have hired good, rather than the more typical mediocre, actors and this fact may certainly have contributed to the general excellence of the house. In the fifties, for instance, H. B. Philips saw six years, Felix Vincent three, and an unknown by the name of Douglas Stewart lasted for five, before he was picked off by Laura Keane and subsequently changed his name to E. A. Sothorn. Of the five actors Jones mentions as walking gentlemen during the sixties, the average tenure was seven years, and for the seventies it was nine.⁶⁴ Utility actors, however, lead the longevity charts, with from 14 to 17 years each.⁶⁵ This is a long time to move furniture and props and

⁶³Jones, p. 63.

⁶⁴Jones, p. 64.

⁶⁵Jones, p. 71.

have but few or even no words to say; being a part of what was generally called New York's finest theatre must have compensated somehow.

The female lines were equally long-lived in most instances. When James W. began in 1852, he hired Laura Keene, from Madame Vestris' Olympic Theatre in London, as his leading lady. After one highly successful season, she departed without giving any notice. Her line was therefore taken immediately by Mrs. John Hooey - a society lady with lots of pretty dresses - who remained for 11 years.⁶⁶ She was followed by Clara Jennings who remained for eight seasons, Rose Eytinge who would become a regular at Daly's Theatre for only two, and Rose Coghlan closed the house as leading lady, having given eight seasons.⁶⁷

The ingenue or "second lady" line was capably filled by Mary Gannon, previously of the Park and Mitchell's Olympic, for 13 years. A universal favorite, she was followed by Madeline Henriques, who stayed for nine seasons, Mrs. Charles Walcott and Ione Burke. Mrs. John Sefton played the line for the first few seasons of her 18-year tenure and is the only exception to the rule that no one ever changed lines at Wallack's. She "graduated" to second old woman. The first line of these parts was taken by Mrs. Rufus Blake

⁶⁶T. Allston Brown, History of the American Stage (rpt. New York: Burt Franklin, 1969), p. 178.

⁶⁷Jones, pp. 65f.

and Mrs. Brougham in the fifties, Mrs. George Vernon for 14 years and then, beginning in 1871, Mme. Elizabeth Ponisi who closed the theatre in 1888 after 17 seasons. The female "heavy" was generally not needed at Wallack's but Fanny Morant supplied those parts when needed for eight years in the sixties. Soubrettes and "singing chambermaids" were given to Kate Saxon, a Mrs. Conover, and Effie Germon who served for 18 seasons.⁶⁸

What the foregoing figures all add up to is, of course, continuity. Wallack's provided a company of actors who played together for years, who knew the ins and outs of each other's performing inclinations and could "play off" each other with skill. William Winter noted that Wallack's company could not be rivaled or duplicated "unless the best actors of a dozen of the best professional companies in America could be assembled, and kept in association for a year or two."⁶⁹ Wallack's individual talent was strong but many other New York companies could claim the same. What distinguishes this theatre from its rivals and made it the indisputable favorite was the company continuity factor.

The company reached its peak in the late fifties and sixties and sustained a general level of excellence until the late seventies. Brander Matthews appears to have seen the beginning of the decline:

⁶⁸Jones, pp. 68-70.

⁶⁹The Wallet of Time, 2 vols. (New York: Moffat, Yard, 1913), I, 35.

If I may be allowed to call myself as a witness, I can depose that I have seen not a few performances of the well-chosen company at Wallack's Theater forty-odd years ago which were far less effective than they might have been because one or two prominent characters had to be assigned to performers who were good actors in their own lines, but who were hopelessly unsuited to the parts forced upon them because they alone were available. In the 'Shaughraun' of Dion Boucicault, for instance, by the side of Boucicault himself and Harry Beckett, Ada Dyas and H. J. Montague, John Gilbert and Madam Ponisi, who were all admirably adapted to the characters Boucicault had composed for them, there were also Joseph Polk and Ione Burke, who were entirely unsuited to the parts assigned to them. And there were two equally unfortunate miscastings in 'Diplomacy.'⁷⁰

It is interesting to note that Matthews attributes the problem here to a corruption of the lines of business tradition. This led to bad casting. The former high level of excellence could not be maintained after about 1875 simply because there was no leading man, no eccentric comedian, and no ingenue who could play in the proper style. Accommodations naturally had to be made, but Lester Wallack must have felt rather foolish playing the twenty-six-year-old Young Marlowe in She Stoops to Conquer on his sixty-sixth birthday.⁷¹

For all its superiority, however, Wallack's sits rather uncomfortably in American theatre history. While the company had succeeded admirably at its own proclaimed intention of bringing the best of comedy - both old and new - to New York, with the finest assembly of "established favorites"

⁷⁰"The Old Stock Companies" (Century Magazine, Cl, January, 1921), p. 322.

⁷¹Jones, p. 57.

instead of the usual parade of stars, it is also certainly true that Wallack's did absolutely nothing for the American theatre, American actors, or American drama. It was a London company, transported to New York.

That major objection aside, however, Wallack's was, finally, in its rigid adherence to the lines of business tradition and in its repertory of established and well-loved comedies, the classic model of the nineteenth-century stock company. It influenced nothing after itself; it was at the end of the tradition, not at its beginning. When it finally closed in 1888, virtually everything about the American theatre had changed. The drama was moving toward a new particularization in character; the actors, untrained in the classical mode, were becoming more "realistic," more "ordinary" in their portrayals; and, finally, the organizational mechanics of theatrical production were rapidly turning the stock system into an anachronism.

Laura Keene's Theatres, 1855-1863

The last stock company of the New York renaissance was the first in the city to be owned and operated by a woman. As noted, Laura Keene had been brought to America by Wallack. After establishing herself as an excellent and versatile actress, she left that company and went to Baltimore where she opened her own theatre. This management is a landmark of American theatre history, for she was (jointly with Catherine Norton Sinclair, the ex-Mrs. Edwin Forrest,

who opened her Metropolitan Theatre in San Francisco on the same night, December 24, 1853) the first manageress of record in America. After a three-month season at the Howard Athenaeum (Charles Street Theatre) in Baltimore, she travelled to Australia (with Edwin Booth) and back to San Francisco, where she once again attempted her own management of the American Theatre there in the spring of 1855. She returned to New York that fall and, with this wealth of managerial experience behind her, began the Varieties. After losing her theatre (the huge Metropolitan) to Burton, she commissioned John Trimble, a noted theatre architect, to build her own theatre. Laura Keene's Theatre thus opened in November of 1856 with As You Like It.

Like the other actor-managed companies of the renaissance, Keene avoided stars and relied on a core company of seasoned and well-known actors, presenting her repertory and her troupe as an ensemble attraction. She never billed herself above her employees. Her rivalry with Burton, Wallack, and Marshall's Broadway was fierce - at times even ugly. On her opening night at the Varieties in 1855, for instance, her scenery was found slashed to pieces, forcing a three-day postponement.⁷²

From the beginning of her management, Keene had promised "artistry and the finest of dramatic literature."⁷³

⁷²Odell, Annals, VI, 451.

⁷³From an undated newspaper advertisement in "Letters of Laura Keene," Library of Congress; as it is titled from "Laura Keene's Varieties," it must be of the 1855-56 season.

While her audiences and critics rarely quibbled with the level of artistry, "the finest of dramatic literature" proved hard to find. But for four Shakespeare plays (A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Tempest, Much Ado About Nothing, and As You Like It), and four from the old comedy repertory (The Rivals, School for Scandal, and the far later but formulaic Money and London Assurance) and Boucicault's beautiful The Colleen Bawn, Keene's repertory was bogged down in melodrama and burlesque as Hamblin's Bowery and Mitchell's Olympic had been.

Joseph Jefferson claimed she had no taste in plays, and it is certainly true that most of her hits were accidents. Our American Cousin, for instance, fell to her by default because of Jefferson's presence in her company, Lester Wallack having claimed that this actor was the only man in America who could play the central part. Keene hated the play and only produced it as a "pigeon-hole" presentation when another production fell behind schedule.⁷⁴ Another scheduling predicament in 1859-60 forced her to turn in desperation to Boucicault who had just completed the famous Colleen Bawn. It was a big hit but, like Our American Cousin, it had fallen into her lap and was certainly not the result of any artistic judgment or policy. There is nothing wrong with luck, except that it does not last.

⁷⁴Jefferson, Autobiography, pp. 140, 146-7.

What did last at Keene's theatre, however, was a consistent scenic policy. Nearly all of her productions received raves for their spectacular beauty. Mme. Vestris, whom Keene had worked for in London, was known for the painstaking detail and lavishness of her productions,⁷⁵ and Keene probably learned much from her in this regard. The New York Times saw "a wealth of fancy and an artistic finish that have never been equaled or even approached at any other New York theatre but her own."⁷⁶

The Vestris influence may also be traced in Keene's continual effort to weld her company together by keeping her actors together over a number of years and by diligent and scrupulous attention to consistency and quality throughout a series of performances.⁷⁷ The longevity of actors' careers in her company cannot, of course, be compared with Wallack's; that company lasted four times longer. But a few of her actors remained with her from the beginning of her managerial career in Baltimore, appear to have travelled to San Francisco with her and remained to close the New York theatre in 1863. One reason for this may have been the inherent prestige of her organization: she regularly advertised her actors as

⁷⁵William W. Appleton, Madame Vestris and the London Stage (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), pp. 62f.

⁷⁶November 6, 1862, p. 6.

⁷⁷Appleton Madame Vestris, p. 62.

"The Celebrated Stock Company of Star Comedians."⁷⁸ It was as close as most of them ever got to that appellation.

Odell claims that Keene's audience never knew what they were going to see,⁷⁹ and it is certainly true that the manageress ran the gamut from classic dramatic literature to popular entertainment. Mitchell, Burton, and Wallack each had a special repertory which they had established and were known for. Keene, to the contrary, tried everything. While there is nothing inherently wrong with variety, the tenor of the times was for specialty. Beginning in 1860, she turned to extravaganza with The Seven Sisters. It was a tremendous hit, the first of the spectacular species of which the later Black Crook would become the most famous, and its success was probably due to the escapist sentiments of a nation headed toward civil war. The Seven Sons followed the next year - it was the same play and the same production, the only change being the topical allusions.⁸⁰ These two presentations, while financially lucrative, were flagrant defections from her "artistic and literary" policy. Her company appears from that point to have lost whatever prestige it may have had and it closed the following season; business was still

⁷⁸Various undated newspaper clippings, "The Letters of Laura Keene," Library of Congress.

⁷⁹"Some New York Stock Companies," p. 23.

⁸⁰Odell, Annals, VII, 385.

good, but the heart and soul of her management had disappeared. She would later regret closing, as she also regretted leaving Wallack's in 1853.⁸¹

Her relationship with her acting company was a confluence of various factors. First of all, she had established herself in one season at Wallack's as an extremely versatile actress and, perhaps naturally, she believed that all good actors should be too. This may have had something to do with the heterogeneous repertory which she chose for her "star comedians." Secondly, Keene was, by nature, a domineering and impetuous individual with a combative, even pugnacious, nature that brooked no interference in what she had set her mind to. She quarrelled with Marshall of the Broadway Theatre by announcing and entitling her opening production of the same play he was presenting. Similarly, with Burton she thought nothing of hiring nine members of his company away from him at mid-season.⁸² She was certainly not the sort of manageress to bow and scrape in deference to actors' whims.

Keene was not adverse to the lines of business casting tradition, far from it. The following letter, written to her agent C. H. Hall who served as her business manager

⁸¹William Winter, Vagrant Memories (New York: George N. Doran Company, 1915), p. 54; Odell, Annals, VII, 703.

⁸²Odell, Annals, VI, 451.

for a summer tour in 1870, shows her taking an inventory of her company according to precise tradition:

. . . What have you or Day done about leading man for [tour]? I left instructions for Keeble or Grusdale. Hubbard is a good leading man and his wife very excellent chambermaid. They have a child that I want but I dare say that can be arranged. I engaged them out west.
 You have then
 Miss Durham-walking gentlewoman
 J.W. Drew-second walking gentleman
 Purcell - heavy
 Miss Osborne - lead
 Scallon Shape - low comedy
 Wm. Foster-old man
 Miss L. Bren or Miss Andrews, M. Carr-sister, old woman at 30
 Hubbard for leading man.
 If you have not another - Miss Hubbard - chambermaid
 That completes your ladies for 'Ravels,' does it not?⁸³

Nor was she adverse to line of business stipulations in her contracts with her actors. One with James G. Burnett, dated May 26, 1857, on a standard printed contract, shows that she appended, in her own hand, a clause which states that he should "play first old men and such eccentric business as may be hereafter agreed upon between the two parties." The contract also states, however, that he should be obligated to play "such parts and characters, in all theatrical performances, as shall, from time to time, be allotted to the said James G. Burnett."⁸⁴ This actor and the manager appear to have gotten along quite well together, and he served her as stage manager for a few years.

⁸³Undated ALS in "Actors and Actresses" series, "James W. Wallack," facing p. 65, Harvard Theatre Collection.

⁸⁴"Letters of Laura Keene," Library of Congress.

The actor's right of refusal of a part was an altogether different matter, however, and could be counted on to draw Keene's fire at nearly every turn. The rules and regulations for the Varieties Theatre are, like those of Wallack's, quite emphatic on this issue. Article #13 stands out prominently in dark, boldface print:

13.- A Performer refusing a part allotted him by the Manageress, forfeits a week's salary and may be discharged.

If Keene thought that her company would willingly fall into her scheme of presenting versatility, she was deluded. In her notable production of A Midsummer Night's Dream, for instance, she decided to cast Joseph Jefferson as Puck, a part that was clearly out of his line as low comedian. The only proper part for him, according to lines tradition, was Bottom, but that had been assigned to Rufus Blake, who, having not appeared in the long consecutive run of Our American Cousin, had been standing idly by and drawing a salary for months. Jefferson objected strenuously to his own casting, justifiably as anyone who has managed to concoct a mental image of the actor can testify; he was anything but a sprite physically. Keene, however, in a fit of pugnacity (and wrong-headedness) held firm to her own casting. Jefferson, after three or four rehearsals, finally convinced Keene of her mistake and assumed Bottom, also making the facetious suggestion that perhaps Blake, who tipped the scales at 250 pounds, should play Puck. After another two or three re-

hearsals, Jefferson then decided that he could not play Bottom either and resigned from the company to take Our American Cousin on a starring tour.⁸⁵

An even more famous and salutary instance of Keene's interference in line of business casting was her assignment of E. A. Sothern to the part of Lord Dundreary in Our American Cousin. Sothern, under the name of Douglas Stewart, had appeared with her as a walking gentleman in Baltimore and had been making some headway in lines at Wallack's before rejoining her. He was, therefore, quite indignant to find that Lord Dundreary was a part of some forty or fifty lines of dialogue and that his assignment put him back in the walking gentleman or second old man class. He objected and she persisted. Finally, he gave in and took the assignment.⁸⁶ It proved, of course, to be one of the most famous characterizations of the nineteenth century.

Like all stock managers, Keene assumed that an actor once assigned a part would play the part always thereafter. Tradition, probably since Shakespeare, dictated this procedure and it was a corollary to the old right of possession. It was probably the reason that the right of refusal of a part had become so troublesome: once an actor took a part, he was stuck with it, and this would consequently

⁸⁵Jefferson, Autobiography, pp. 155-6.

⁸⁶Jefferson, Autobiography, pp. 149-50.

require some caution in the acceptance. George Jordan, an extremely handsome matinee idol of the fifties, was of a different mind, however. He had been with nearly every company of the renaissance and Keene hired him as the second or juvenile line. A season or two later, he had climbed up to Keene's leading man. When Keene decided, after a series of flops in the 1859-60 season, to revive An Unequal Match with Jordan as Henry Arncliffe (a part he had already played), he refused to reappear in that part because he considered it inferior to his new leading status.⁸⁷

Keene was determined that this particular insurrection should cease and invoked the above quoted Article #12 of her rules and regulations, withholding Jordan's current salary until he signed a termination of employment agreement. He refused to sign and sued Keene in Marine Court in January of 1860 for his wages. Charles Wheatleigh and Joseph Jefferson both testified on Jordan's behalf that the disputed part was not a leading one.⁸⁸ Unfortunately, the minutiae of legal issues and the details of the case as a legal suit were not followed closely by the newspaper. The result of this suit, which went through nearly a dozen appeals, was totally inconclusive and, like the rebellion at Covent Garden in 1800, left no precedent. We find Jordan in

⁸⁷New York Tribune, January 21, 24, 25; July 2; August 10, 1860.

⁸⁸New York Tribune, July 2, 1860.

Keene's company in the following season,⁸⁹ so we must assume that neither of them decided to take this issue seriously anymore.

Keene usually managed to fill her lines adequately, but she appears to have had early difficulties with the first old man line. In the old comedy repertory, this line is of major importance in supplying Sir Peter Teazle and Old Hardcastle. Keene's intention had been to compete with Wallack in those plays, but she could not fill the line adequately because Harry Placide and then Rufus Blake had a vice-grip on the audience's expectations. When Blake finally did engage with her, she presented both plays immediately.⁹⁰

At least one actor in her company appears to have fulfilled her ideals. Charles Wheatleigh was not a brilliant actor but he was certainly a versatile one. He began with her in Baltimore and closed with her ten years later in New York and appeared in everything from Benedick to Caliban, playing major roles or skipping about in her fairy extravaganzas.⁹¹ Unlike Jefferson and Sothern, he seems to have been content being a utility performer, which was precisely what Keene required.

In her eight New York seasons, Keene managed two innovations: the long run and the matinee. Instances of

⁸⁹Odell, Annals, VII, 218.

⁹⁰Odell, Annals, VII, 36.

⁹¹Odell, Annals, VII, passim.

both can, of course, be traced to the 1820s, but it was Keene who initiated both as consistent operating policies. With Our American Cousin, she ran it until its appeal was temporarily exhausted (she, Jefferson, and Sothern each toured in it for years afterwards). The Seven Sisters managed to achieve a record for consecutive performances: eight months and fourteen days.⁹² The Seven Sons in the following season did nearly as well. She began matinees with Our American Cousin on Christmas Day 1858, and they were a regular feature of her theatre thereafter.⁹³ Almost immediately the other managers took up these new production policies. The old nightly alternation of plays, which had served the stock company for nearly three hundred years, was about to disappear completely.

When Augustin Daly opened his first theatre in 1869, the New York stock renaissance was over. Wallack's would, of course, continue to 1888 but in each succeeding season after 1863 it would make concessions to the new order of theatrical production. The nightly alternation would disappear, the size of the companies would dwindle and the actor could no longer necessarily count on a seasonal engagement but would begin to settle for a limited term of employment, often no longer than the run of a single play. The home and the family represented by the stock company were thereby destroyed.

⁹²Brown, New York Stage, II, 140.

⁹³Brown, New York Stage, II, 133.

PART IV

THE DISSOLUTION OF THE OLD STOCK SYSTEM AND THE DEMISE OF LINES OF BUSINESS, 1869-1899

When Augustin Daly opened his first New York theatre in 1869, the American theatre had already begun a complete of virtually every aspect of production. While these changes have been summarized as an "industrial revolution of the theatre," there are several other factors which were not so much economic as aesthetic. On the one hand, the rapidly increasing long-run and combination systems had rendered the old stock company system an anachronism as an economically efficient organization. On the other, a change in the drama and the rise of the stage director both signaled a new aesthetic in production. We shall look at each of these factors before turning to the management of Augustin Daly, who is generally regarded as the greatest and certainly the last of the American stock company entrepreneurs. His death in 1899 and the subsequent closing of his theater are generally taken as the terminal dates for the three-hundred-year-old production system.

The Long Run and the Combination Companies

We have watched the occasional and gradual increase in the number of performances of an individual play at the theatres from the opening of the Bowery in 1826. When at various times the New York renaissance managers were caught

in the contingencies of production, they might keep a play on for a consecutive run. Laura Keene appears to have been the first to have made this a consistent operating policy, with Our American Cousin which opened October 18, 1858, and ran uninterruptedly until the following March 25, three seasons before Aiken's version of Uncle Tom's Cabin had seen 200 performances at the National. Keene broke her own record with The Seven Sisters in 1860, and Wallack finally jumped on the long run wagon by giving 125 consecutive performances of his own Rosedale in 1863.

The diminishing size of Wallack's repertory makes clear the general tendency of the last half of the century. When his theatre opened in 1852, it mounted 76 productions, followed by 90 in the following season. By 1858 and owing to the success of Lester's The Veteran, which had a long run, the repertory dropped to 44. It climbed back to 55 in 1862 but thereafter stabilized at between 10 to 12 productions per season until the theatre closed in 1888.¹ While the abandonment of the afterpiece - which is counted in all the above figures - took place about 1861 and was certainly a factor, in the diminishing numbers, we see that Wallack's theatre offered only about a fifth or sixth as many productions in its last years as it had in the beginning. That theatre and nearly every other theatre in New York abandoned the

¹Swinney, p. 86.

alternating nightly rotation for (exhaustive) consecutive runs. The consequences were almost immediately forthcoming.

Augustin Daly's brother Joseph, in an attempt to keep their theatre in alternating repertory, wrote to Augustin that the theatre should "no longer try to get a piece for a run!" He listed four distinct advantages of the old-fashioned system: (1) under the alternation method, each piece need not be so elaborated and it was not necessary to fit the entire company into every play - whoever was left out would be back in shortly; (2) one big run required another or "people will say you're not successful"; (3) the actors cannot, in alternating stock, "get lazy nor saucy nor treacherous because they are kept well at their work"; and (4) the Daly theatre could do without stars.^{1A} This argument, needless to say, fell on deaf ears - Daly, like every other producer in America, could ill afford the old system once it had been shown to be financially inefficient.

When asked about the effects of the long run at his theatre, Lester Wallack replied:

Very good as regards advertising a play for other cities, and good for the theatre so long as it was drawing money, but not very good for the art, as a 'long-run' has a tendency to make the performers careless and to keep them too much in one groove.²

^{1A}Marvin Felhim, The Theatre of Augustin Daly: An Account of the Late Nineteenth Century American Stage (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956).

²New York Herald, August 28, 1879, p. 3.

That statement is as succinct an analysis of the long run effect as we are ever likely to have, and it pays full heed to the art-versus-commercialism issue which had, of course, always existed - but never quite so conspicuously.

A long run went beyond the commercially expeditious, however. It became a thing of glamour in and of itself. There is no better example of this phenomenon than Edwin Booth's 100-night run of Hamlet at the Winter Garden from November 26, 1864 to March 22, 1865. It proved nothing; it was a stunt, pure and simple. Booth might just as easily have alternated his repertory and done just as well at the box office; he might also just as easily have saved himself a tremendous amount of fatigue. The motive for the Hamlet run appears to have been the novel achievement, the "heroic" feat - and the publicity. It was never a question of art.

The long run also allowed for an increase in scenic effects, in terms of numbers as well as quality. If a production could be counted on to run at the same theatre for an extended period of time, obviously more care, attention, money, and permanence could be placed in its scenic investiture. The stock flats were no longer adequate. Everything had to be made and painted to the specifics of a single production.

The other factor contributing to the demise of the alternating repertory and lines of business was the rise of the combination system. The exact origins of the combination or "combo" company are obscure. During the 1830s and 1840s,

traveling stars began to find a general inadequacy in the stock companies and began to employ supporting performers of their own. Charlotte Cushman, in fact, went so far as to keep the structure strictly in the family, by engaging her sister Susan to play opposite her in that peculiar repertory of breeches roles for which she was known.

It is Dion Boucicault, however, who made the strongest claim to originating the combination company, and popular tradition has given him assent. The copyright laws were finally given enough legal muscle in 1856 for playwrights to begin to take their properties seriously. By 1860, Boucicault mounted a production of his Colleen Bawn, where "the play was the star," and was supported by four American comedians - John Drew, Mr. and Mrs. Sloane, and Mrs. Andron Kirby. Boucicault then attempted to book the show into various English provincial houses. After some initial resistance, he finally won his terms which included one half of the nightly gross receipts. In time he sent out several duplicated companies of the play, repeating this procedure with The Streets of New York in 1861 and Arrah-na-Pogue, which had three separate companies, in 1865.³ Once Boucicault was successful, everyone else fell with the new scheme.

³Dion Boucicault, "Leaves from a Dramatist's Diary," The North American Review, 149 (August, 1889), 232.

Like Lester Wallack, Boucicault was fully aware of the monster he had created:

The profession has fallen into such disorder that the managers of theatres throughout the Union have resolved next season to engage no companies at all, but will job their houses to 'combinations', or traveling companies that play one or two pieces. This system is destructive to the art of acting for the rising generation of artists will play one part per year . . . If any 'star actor' will speak of his experience, he will say that by constant repetition of one part the artistic power becomes blunted.⁴

The effect on the acting profession, as Boucicault and Wallack both surmised, was tremendous. Actors were no longer hired seasonally but for a fixed or limited time, engaged to play one specific part (and probably no other), and, as often as not, would probably have to tour in it. The stay-put mentality, even domesticity, of the old stock system had disappeared. To act once again meant to travel.

It could also mean, of course, a vastly superior theatrical product. More time was allowed for preparation, the acting appears to have been better - at least in terms of the total ensemble effect -- and the casting would quite naturally be more realistic. No more need to suffer the slings and arrows of superannuation. There was a more finely tuned relationship between the actor and his part, both physically and temperamentally.

There was also no longer any concern for "utility" or "capacity." If an actor could do effectively what he had

⁴"Dion Boucicault on the Drama," the New York Mirror, June 7, 1879, p. 8.

been hired for, that was all that was required. The New York Herald noted the strange new mobility of the profession:

No fewer than sixty troupes have been organized for the 'road' this season . . . Young girls who five years ago were 'walking ladies' and 'utility,' but who had the good fortune to achieve a single 'hit' are out this year with companies to which they lend their names as stars.⁵

It was no longer necessary to scale the steps on the company ladder. Seniority now stood for nothing, and professionalism was being totally redefined.

A recent sociological study of the acting profession in England points up the fact that between 1860 and 1890 there was a distinct decline in the old actor communities, a sharp increase in middle class recruits and an upsurge in "civilian newcomers" who had no stock background and did not come from theatrical families.⁶ The new touring combinations - with their emphasis on one and only one role to be repeated continuously - had no need of the craft foundations which the acting profession had honored for centuries. Also, as we shall see with the changing drama, the new "polite" comedies required an educated demeanor which upper-class amateur recruits could generally supply more easily than the old professionals. The old-stock trained actor was rapidly becoming a debased article.

⁵August 12, 1877, p. 5.

⁶Michael Baker, The Rise of the Victorian Actor (London: Rowan and Littlefield, 1978), p. 86.

The reason for his decline is that what he offered most was now needed least. The traditional approach to acting was now frankly old-fashioned. Charles Wyndham, a successful London actor-manager, noticed:

The tendency of the comedy to realism has its effect in shaping the method of the comedian. There was a time, not so very many years since, when the plays most in vogue permitted the player the use of a dozen conventional moulds, in any one of which he would shut himself up, like a man in armor, and walk on the stage a lively, talking puppet. Nowadays each fresh character exacts study and adaptation founded on a penetrating study of people who are playing their parts in real life.⁷

William Archer, a highly perceptive critic of the English theatre, also saw the change taking place:

Character acting, which may be defined as mimetic realism, the minute and unconventional reproduction of observed idiosyncrasies, is to be regarded as the distinguishing feature of this period.^{7A}

This long-run and combination companies permanently changed the actors' employment and methods of working.

The Changing Drama

One can trace certain "modern," realistic tendencies in comedy and drama to a huge number of sources at around mid-century, of course, but it was in Thomas W. Robertson that the new theatre found its most perfect expression. Odell describes his effect succinctly:

⁷"The Tendencies of Modern Comedy," North American Review, 149 (November, 1889), 615.

^{7A}Quoted in Ernest Bradley Watson, Sheridan to Robertson: A Study in the Nineteenth Century London Stage (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926; rpt. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1963), p. 382.

The influence of T. W. Robertson became nearly as great on the American as on the English stage. The quiet, refined character of his plays, written for the Bancrofts, at their tiny Prince of Wales Theatre, the exquisite home-like settings involved, the naturalness of the dialogue and action, revolutionised the method of writing, acting and setting comedy. 'Cup and saucer' dramas these delightful things were called, and doubtless something of the commonplace lay at the root of their undeniable charm. The fact cannot be denied, however, that from the inauguration of the Robertson-Bancroft regime, the old, stilted manner disappeared, and the reign of the simple, the natural, and the human began.⁸

Writing of contemporary life in a far more realistic vein than any playwright had achieved before, Robertson also gave detailed stage-business in his scripts. Frequently, his narrative comes to nearly as much as the dialogue itself. He was aiming for a totally integrated and artistic effect, and in terms of character he had distinct ideas.

Writing, for instance, as "Lounger" in the Illustrated Times, Robertson said, "character parts are those that do not positively belong to any of the usually recognized lines of business . . . They are too exceptional to require any detailed description."⁹

Robertson died prematurely in 1871, but his effect was by then already enormous and would continue to reverberate for decades.

While the Robertson style flourished, the old traditional English comedy withered. Lester Wallack made the following lament in 1879:

⁸Annals, VIII, 130.

⁹Watson, pp. 381-2.

Up to five or six years ago they had formed a most important item in the programme of amusement for a season, but now, let them be never so well acted and the scenery and accessories never so elaborate, they will not draw even a tolerable house. As proof of this I produced last year, after due announcements, Sheridan's 'School for Scandal' and 'Rivals,' Holcroft's 'Road to Ruin,' Colman's 'Jealous Wife,' and others, all produced and mounted with the greatest care, and acted, I am convinced, better than they could have been by any other English-speaking company of artists. Yet although these plays had not been given on any stage for five years they did not pay for the cost of bringing them out. But comedy, though a good and paying attraction at my theatre years ago, was never pecuniarily as successful as drama.¹⁰

In view of the fact that Wallack's had based its earlier reputation on the brilliant manner in which it handled this particular repertory, the Herald critic was justifiably remorseful:

The days of illusion are truly over when that elegant picture of men and manners . . . fails to awaken enthusiasm when acted by Wallack's excellent company . . . The elegant yet rollicking wit and quiet witticism of Oliver Goldsmith have had their day.¹¹

But it is to the audience itself that we must turn for an explanation of the changing tastes:

It fed itself on romantic dreams, on love of class distinction in a country where no class was supposed to exist. It cared nothing for the craft of the theatre. The playhouse was a stunt, not an organism; the emotional quality of the actor was what counted. The relish was for just the kind of melodrama the French dramatists were turning out. The heightened emotion of Dumas fils, the sentimentality of Robertson, the scenic efforts of Daly's 'The Streets of New York' or of 'The Two Orphans' - lords and ladies, bandits, wronged innocence . . . To it was brought the most superlative

¹⁰New York Herald, August 26, 1879, p. 3.

¹¹December 9, 1884, p. 7.

acting of a certain type; the acting that threw emotion in the face to blind one to the crudities of expression, of motive, of story.¹²

It would not be until the last decade of the century, and almost imperceptibly even then, that the quality of the drama would improve, but by the 1860s and 70s subtle changes in characterization were already well under way.

The Emergence of the Director

Whoever the first director was - and that is probably not an issue which can ever be completely resolved -- it is certainly true that the new and ever-increasing technology of the stage was beginning to demand his presence by mid-century. The development of photography had greatly increased the audience's appetite for realism, so that when it came to the theatre it began to expect a stage picture which actualized observable nature. Also, the rise in antiquarianism and the accompanying passion for correct costumes, furniture, and stage furnishings, all made the mounting of a production a complex - and often costly - affair. With so many expectations and so much at stake, decisions were necessarily channeled to a single point of perception called a director or regisseur.

He emerged in a number of theatrical capitals at approximately the same time and, regardless of the language he spoke, he tended to look at his work in much the same way

¹²Montrose J. Moses, The American Dramatist (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1925; rpt. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1964), p. 174.

as his counterparts. The most salient characteristics of his contribution were a close, detailed preparation of the script at hand in advance of the first rehearsal. He therefore knew, or could at least approximate, what the production would look and sound like in advance. He was also a rigorous and meticulous rehearser of his company - details were generally gone over until they reached the necessary state of preparation. The director likewise insisted that his actors, who had been hand-picked for their specific part by him, should act "full out" at rehearsals. He was naturally involved in every aspect of the production and would certainly have had the maximum amount of control over scenic decisions. And finally, and perhaps most necessarily, he was invariably an autocratic, dictatorial "perfectionist."¹³

The first directors also tended, in most instances, to avoid the use of stars, who generally proved intractable to a single, centralized vision not their own. Even more importantly, however, a star's presence in a production tended to throw off the balance of the piece. It is generally true of the director that he holds the play as the central, overriding concern rather than any individual performance.

Before he achieved any success as a playwright, T. W. Robertson had a quite precise notion of what and who the stage director ought to be:

¹³Cf. Thomas Robertson's article for [London] Illustrated Times, quoted in A. M. Nagler, A Source Book on Theatrical History (New York: Dover, 1959), p. 493.

The Stage-Manager is the man who should direct everything behind the scenes. He should be at one and the same time a poet, an antiquarian, and a costumer; and possess sufficient authority, from ability as well as office, to advise with a tragedian as to a disputed reading, to argue with an armourer as to the shape of a shield, or to direct a wardrobe-keeper as to the cut of a mantle. He should understand the military science like a drill-sergeant, and be as capable of handling crowds and moving masses as a major-general. He should possess universal sympathies, should feel with the sublime, and have a quick perception of the ludicrous. Though unable to act himself, he should be able to teach others, and be the finger-post, guide, philosopher, and friend of every soul in a theatre, male or female, from the manager and author to the call-boy and the gasman, from the manageress and principal soprano to the back row of the extra children's ballet and the cleaners. Above all, he should be endowed with a perfect command of his own temper, and the power of conciliating the temper of others. The art of stage management consists chiefly in a trick of manner that reconciles the collision of opposing personal vanities.¹⁴

This article is all the more remarkable in its precision for having been written in the 1850s, well before the stage director's debut is officially acknowledged.

Each of the foregoing features of the last half of the nineteenth century - the long run and combination systems, the subtly changing dramaturgy and the emergence of the director - all militated against any continuation of the lines of business tradition. Rooted as it was in the old stock system, it offered nothing to the new and changing theatre. Augustin Daly is generally given credit for having "abolished" the lines system in America, but before turning to him we must now glance at a few continental examples.

¹⁴[London] Illustrated Times, quoted in A. M. Nagler, Source Book, p. 493.

Continental Parallels

That the hierarchial structure and the accompanying line of business procedure were indigenous to the stock system is proved by its appearances in virtually all the professional theatres of Europe from the Renaissance. France, Germany, and Russia in particular not only used the system but even codified it - observing lines of business became in some cases a state law.

In a recent study of Moliere's troupe, for instance, it was found that the distribution of the roles and the continuity of casting during the early years depended totally on the individual actor's ambition rather than on Moliere's perception of his abilities.¹⁵ In other words, the organization of the company was so rigid in its seniority that Moliere had virtually no control over who played what. The system also worked to the extent that there is no evidence that an actor of the troupe ever lost a role unless he exchanged it for a more important one, no actor was ever disqualified by age from performing a role he had created, and once he had created a role, it belonged to him. The casting in the company was "essentially frozen" and by 1685 the repertory shows that most actors specialized in either tragedy or comedy and the boundaries were rarely crossed. As the company operated under a sharing scheme, occasional gagistes, hirelings, or jobbers, were brought in to fill the ranks.¹⁶

¹⁵Roger W. Herzel, The Original Casting of Moliere's Plays (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), p. 85.

¹⁶Herzel, Moliere, pp. 25, 7.

Very little changed when this once poor provincial troupe became the Comedie Francaise in 1680. The battle field of hierarchy and jealously guarded seniority drew the fire of many of the French theatre's greatest actors. Francis Joseph Talma made his debut at the Comedie Francaise in 1787 and became a societaire in 1789. Though a passionate and very popular leading man, he was assigned only minor parts because of his lack of seniority. He decided to fight the system. He declared that the societaries' rights to the possession of roles was a "theatrical feudalism" and should be abolished, making all parts open to all the actors. Nothing came of his appeal and he seceded from the company in 1791, but was reinstated when Napoleon reestablished the house in 1799.¹⁷

Frederick Lemaitre, the great romantic hero of a few decades, later, was likewise extended the courtesy of a societaire membership; but while he deliberated, knowing full well that the established actors of the company had no intention of relinquishing any of their leading roles to him, the Comedie Francaise withdrew its offer.¹⁸

The utter implacability of the casting system can be seen in the "Regulations of the Theatre Francais, established by the Government" of about 1830:

¹⁷Edwin Duerr, The Length and Depth of Acting (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), p. 277.

¹⁸Duerr, p. 321.

LINES OF ACTING. - The superintendent determines the lines of acting. He draws up an estimate of pieces to be studied, names the actors and actresses who are to play as principals, doubles, or thirds, assigning the parts according to the respective line and seniority. No performer can hold as principal two different lines, without permission of the superintendent - rarely granted. A performer in possession of a line as principal, wishing to act in another line, such actor or actress can only do so as second, even though senior to the person first in possession.¹⁹

It should be pointed out, in leaving the French, that these rules and regulations have not changed at all up to the present time. The oldest theatre organization in the Western world is run today very much as it was in Moliere's time, and it is, of course, a totally state-subsidized theatre.

While the German theatre was slower in developing, it had mushroomed by the end of the eighteenth century to an extent unrivaled in Europe. The famous Hamburg experiment led to the creation of the Gotha Court Theatre in 1775. All employees were state pensioners and this arrangement would prove to be the principal scheme of the subsidized German theatre thereafter. The following year, the Burg Theatre, the imperial and national theatre of Vienna, was created by order of the Emperor Joseph II along the lines of the Comedie Francaise. Mannheim Hot-und-National Theatre followed in 1779 and soon there was a profusion of state theatres. While they were decentralized, they ultimately contributed in part to the unification of the Germanies.

¹⁹Appendixed to Dunlap's History, II, 368.

Here too the lines of business tradition pervaded. Known as the Rollenfach, it totally dominated the casting of the eighteenth century. The classic French influence, with its underlying idealism of the neo-classical era, gave the German theatre a stilted and artificial manner, and the rigidity of character types was well served by companies organized around strict lines of business.²⁰

The Rollenfach for the Mannheim State Theatre of around 1800, for instance, is listed in a state document of that year and stipulates an actor for each of the following classifications: leading heroes, young heroes and lovers, lovers and young roles, father types, fathers of "different nuances," intriguers (plotters) or "intrigants," "bonvivants," heroines, leading and lively lovers, ladies, noble mother types, comic old women types, and an assortment of minor, utility positions to fill in where needed²¹

The Rollenfach system appears to have begun to recede about 1830, owing to a confluence of factors. By that year there was a distinct decline in neo-classical French character types in the dramatic repertory while there was a sharp increase in German national characters, which were now

²⁰Hans Doerrn, "Das Rollenfach in deutschen Theaterbetrieb des 19. Jahrhunderts," Diss. Erlangen, 1926, *Schriften der Gesellschaft für Theatergeschichte* (Berlin: Selbstverlag der Gesellschaft für Theatergeschichte, 1926). I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Anne McKenna in the translation of this material.

²¹Doerrn, p. 37.

being particularized from the artificial French. Character names began to die out, realism in the drama began to surface with the new arrivals of the "bonvivants" and "salon ladies," and there were more roles per play (moving to between twenty-five and thirty from the previous average of seventeen to twenty).²²

It was the rise of the director, sometime shortly after this date, which appears to have had the most decisive impact on the Rollenfach system. As early as 1806, Mohlmann's "Suggestions for the Uplifting of the German Theatre" called for a central artistic vision, and asserted that as the consequence of a theatre director, acting could move from the idealized to the realistic, from the typical to the individual, from the conventional to the characteristic, and from the external to the internal.²³ How much of the history of nineteenth-century international drama and acting is subsumed in that statement is remarkable.

When the playwright Heinrich Laube demanded and received the right to cast his play Prinz Friedrich in 1845, the barriers of the system began to crumble.²⁴ Ibsen's assertion "I don't write roles; I write people" became the regisseur's battle-cry. His characters bore no resemblance to conventional types and when the plays were put into the various German theatre repertoires, there was considerable

²²Doerrn, pp. 20-33.

²³Doerrn, pp. 60-61.

²⁴Doerrn, p. 61.

consternation as to who was to play what.²⁵ The system suffered further diminution when the directors of the various theatres began to insist on revamping the old classics. They would now be subject to realistic, particularized interpretation and casting at the director's discretion rather than to any interference from the acting company. It need hardly be pointed out that this was a point of major dissension: actors fought to retain the Rollenfach system because it provided them with protection, security, and a constraint on the impresarios; directors wanted it eliminated because its existence was antithetical to a single controlling artistic vision.

The Union of German Stages was founded in 1850, and by 1886 it had developed sufficient power to legislate the elimination of the system. Thereafter, nearly every theatre employed and retained actors on an "as cast" basis. It was in this year that the famous Meininger Theatre officially dropped the listing of roles from its contracts, the first to do so.²⁶

The significance of the Rollenfach system for this study resides in the parallel with the American theatre. The differences in the two countries' theatrical structure are, of course, considerable: German theatre was (and still is) totally subsidized, whereas the American operated on the

²⁵Doerrn, p. 82.

²⁶Doerrn, p. 121.

commercial profit system. As state-subsidized entities, none of the German theatres had to undergo the "industrial revolution" of American theatrical economics around 1870. What is interesting, however, is that while the American line of business tradition was a natural fatality of the stock system demise, the German counterpart Rollenfach, presumably safe within the confines of a time-honored and continuing tradition, suffered the same fate. No cataclysmic long run or combination system beset the German theatre. The deciding and terminating factor there, as in America, was the changing theatrical aesthetic, which centered in the rising director.

The story of the Meininger Court Theatre is far too well known to be repeated here, but as the most forwarding looking organization in the nineteenth century German theatre, its particular casting policies are of some significance. From its inception, both Duke George II and his intendant Ludwig Chronegk were committed to making the Meininger a model of the ensemble. George Henry Lewis, an English critic who visited Germany in the 1860s (well before the Meininger had been fully established) stated that the public there expected and cared for an ensemble, and that the actor was cognizant that his worth was measured as much by how well he played the small parts as the large.²⁷ Toward

²⁷George Henry Lewis, On Actors and the Art of Acting (New York: Grove Press, 1957), p. 186.

welding an ensemble, Duke George and Chronegk insisted that all members of the troupe, from the most famous to the newest, should take roles in the chorus, and the published regulations of the theatre in succeeding years from 1868 to 1880 reflect the dismantlement of the old Rollenfach system.²⁸

Nothing exists in a pure form - especially in the theatre - and DeHart has found evidence that a hierarchial system certainly did obtain throughout the Meininger's most productive years. Established actors were hired with an old Rollenfach classification whereas new or unproven actors were hired without specialty. Once this principle was established, however, "it was generally ignored by everyone" and in fact every actor was expected to play all types and sizes of parts.²⁹ It appears that the company almost universally fell in with the Duke's scheme and became a part of a generally acknowledged "noble experiment."

The Meininger tours to Russia in 1885 and 1890 were, along with the visits by the famously titanic Italians - Adelaide Ristori and Tomasso Salvini - the principal events which moved the Russian theatre into the modern age. Stanislavski, its prime mover, had much with which to contend: the Russian theatre organization appears to have been as unyielding as those in any other country. A state budgetary document of 1766, for instance, lists the various acting

²⁸Steven DeHart, The Meininger Theatre, 1776-1926 (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), p. 81.

²⁹DeHart, p. 82.

line categories which were to prevail throughout the entire state: first, second, and third comic lovers, tragic heroes, comic and tragic lovers, noble fathers, comic fathers, first and second domestics (exactly what is meant by this expression is unknown but it certainly does not, given its fairly high status in the list, refer to servants), moralizers, clerks, confidants, while the considerably fewer female lines were made up of first and second tragic and comic lovers, first and second chambermaids, old women and confidantes. Every actor in the company was engaged for a special category, and that was so stipulated in his or her contract.³⁰

When Stanislavski created the Moscow Art Theatre in 1898, the rigidity of the system still prevailed. Since it was a state theatre with subsidy, he needed somehow to do what directors were beginning to do or had already succeeded in doing in other countries. The casting of productions was to be taken out of the hands of the actors themselves, the capricious lines of business tradition was to be disposed of, and the director was to stand front and center in every decision.

The Theatres of Augustin Daly
1869-1899

Like most of the managers of the New York stock renaissance, Augustin Daly approached the theatre as an

³⁰Boris V. Varneke, A History of the Russian Theatre (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1951), p. 113.

artistic rather than a speculative venture. He saw it as a temple of art, with himself as high priest. This self image appears to have affected some of his contemporaries who were historians - to such an extent, in fact, that the name of Daly, together with that of Edwin Booth, is virtually sanctified in nineteenth-century American theatre history.

Born to an Irish-American merchant family in North Carolina in 1838, he and his brother Joseph Francis, who would become an appellate court judge and remain a vital part of Augustin's theatrical ventures, came to New York in 1856 and managed an amateur troupe of "Juvenile Comedians." From 1860 to 1869 he served as dramatic critic for the New York Sunday Courier, The Sun, The Express, The Citizen, and The Times, all the while continuing as a playwright and adaptor, most notably for Kate Bateman in Leah, the Forsaken and of French plays for Avonia Jones. He became the sole critic of The Times in 1867, the same year he wrote and produced the immensely successful Under the Gaslight, the first melodrama to introduce a purely external force as a determining factor in the action (the train).

After ten years as drama critic, Daly quite naturally evolved certain ideas: (1) art is lofty when it most resembles what is natural; (2) theatre must amuse and be moral at the same time; (3) sensational melodrama might be sublimated into tragedy; (4) comedy requires the inculcation

of a sound moral; (5) care and labor are essential to make the theatre worthy of its patrons.³¹

The list is not one of profound observations about the drama or theatre; Augustin Daly was not himself a profound thinker or critic, but a self-schooled pragmatist who believed he could make a more genuinely theatrical product than anyone else. His initial policy when he began as a producer in 1869 was "the production of whatever is novel, original, entertaining and unobjectionable, and the revival of whatever is rare and worthy in legitimate drama."³²

Like most New York renaissance managers, Daly subscribed to the notion that the "Representative Theatre" should be one that presented a special genre. He had a difficult time implementing his idea, however.³³ In 1870-71, he described his own specialty as "contemporary romantic comedy." The following season, he had his first real hit in Divorce, a production so marked in its naturalness of dialogue and action and a "finish" which was said to abolish stereotypical acting to such an extent that it reached the "perfection of the ensemble."³⁴

³¹Albert Asermely, "Daly's Initial Decade in the American Theatre, 1860-1869," (unpublished Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1973), pp. 176-8.

³²William Winter, Vagrant Memories (New York: George H. Doran, 1915), p. 223.

³³New York Herald, September 28, 1870, p. 9.

³⁴Herald, September 6, 1871, p. 7.

By 1874 he had moved to the old comedy repertory, beginning with The School for Scandal. John Ranken Towse, arguably the best New York critic of the last half of the nineteenth century, saw many fine things in the production, but in the overall, "the interpretation was a patchwork of old and new, inharmonious in design and unequal in execution. Only the costliness of the framework in which it was set made it seem a precious thing."³⁵ Daly followed this production with Sheridan's The Critic and Masks and Faces, the latter doing best of all, in Towse's judgment for the Evening Post.

A series of Shakespearean productions began with The Merchant of Venice in 1875. E. L. Davenport shone in the part of Shylock, but "the histrionic quality of the general support was worse than indifferent."³⁶ As You Like It followed next season along with Much Ado About Nothing, Twelfth Night and As You Like It. In an uncharacteristic arrangement with Edwin Booth, Daly placed his entire company in support of the great star for one month beginning in October, 1875. The repertory was Booth's standard Hamlet, The Apostate, Richelieu, Othello, Lear, and The Stranger. This engagement did nothing for the prestige of the company which "viewed as a whole . . . possesses neither the professional education

³⁵John Ranken Towse, Sixty Years of the Theatre: An Old Critic's Memories (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1916), p. 129.

³⁶Towse, p. 131.

nor the professional adaptability to act Shakespeare."³⁷

By 1879, after a two-year hiatus, the stated policy was to "produce plays of the Vaudeville order, in which the charm of good music should be associated with mirth and sentiment alternately with serious comedy."³⁸ Music, however, proved too expensive and this policy was dropped quickly. Daly was casting about for another scheme for his theatre when he hit on the idea of Americanizing foreign plays (either French or German) in 1880. Seven-Twenty-Eight, Love on Crutches, and The Last Word were all big financial hits. Finally, Daly could stay with a single, distinct production genre.

What made his theatre a success after 1880 was the skillful way in which these foreign farces were mounted. Using a quartet of actors - Ada Rehan, John Drew, Mrs. G. H. Gilbert, and James Lewis, collectively known as The Big Four, Daly put them into endless variations on the same comic themes: The audiences were thrilled, and Daly finally had a policy. This successful arrangement lasted until 1892 when John Drew left the theatre to star under the Frohmans. Daly then threw up his hands at attempting to run a stock company and gave over to starring Ada Rehan in a series of spectacular Shakespearean productions until his death in 1899.

³⁷New York Tribune, November 15, 1875, p. 5.

³⁸Edward A. Dithmar, Memories of Daly's Theatres, With Passing Corrections of Others Including a Record of the Fifth Avenue Theatre and Daly's Theatre, 1869-95 (New York: Privately printed for Augustin Daly, 1897), p. 117.

Daly has been the subject of a number of books, articles, and dissertations, and nearly every one of them infers a great artistic scheme of one form or another. That much overworked nineteenth-century term - the genius - has been applied to him and he is the subject of considerable historical reverence. A close examination of the facts, however, particularly with regard to his management "policies" and his relationships with his acting company will reveal a somewhat less idealized portrait of him.

Daly's reputation is predicated largely on the detailed excellence of his productions in terms of scenery and properties and the apparent seamlessness of an aggregate acting ensemble. The latter in particular appears to have been achieved by painstaking rehearsals. Daly seems in most cases to have known exactly what effect he wished to produce and these "extensive and exhausting hours," where he did not allow time for dinner breaks, left his company "exhausted in the extreme."³⁹ There is no more effective way to break down resistance in a group than to exhaust it, and this was apparently his methodology in getting the minute and exacting details of his staging from the actors, who were certainly not used to "direction" of any sort.

³⁹Otis Skinner, Footlights and Spotlights (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1923), pp. 145-7; Clara Morris, Life on the Stage (New York: McClure, Philips and Co., 1901), p. 289.

This approach also allowed him to orchestrate the whole effect. Clara Morris informs us of a speech Daly once gave to the press regarding the ensemble:

I don't want individual successes, Sir, in my theatre. I want my company kept at a level, I put them all in a line, and then I watch and if one head begins to bob up above the others, I give it a crack, and send it down again.⁴⁰

This statement fairly bristles with arrogance, as does a comment he made to the critic William Winter:

A radical error in the stage management of the late Augustin Daly (who was a superb stage-director), rose from his propensity to insist that every part should be acted in strict accordance with his personal view of it. 'If my actors will only do exactly what I tell them to do,' he once said, 'I will never complain.'⁴¹

Implicit in the foregoing quotations is Daly's claim to have been a teacher - a master teacher of acting. John Ranken Towse, no particular fan of Daly, had to admit in 1898 that his was "the only true school of acting in the United States."⁴² With the thorough breakdown of the stock system, and the gradual dying off of the old stock trained personnel by about 1870, a new and inexperienced corps descended on the theatre. They were perfect bait for Daly.

⁴⁰Morris, Life on Stage, p. 319.

⁴¹William Winter, Other Days (New York: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1988), p. 325.

⁴²J. Ranken Towse, "An American School of Dramatic Art" (Century Magazine, 56, 1898), 264.

Daly had served notice on the line of business tradition well before he ever became a manager. He was writing for the New York Express during the summer of 1864 when the so-called "actor-manager strike" occurred. This was a totally inconsequential flare-up in labor relations. The ticket prices had been raised for the coming season and the actors felt that their salaries should reflect that increase. For good measure, they also threw in a demand for a strict maintenance of lines of business. Daly countered with the following diatribe:

The actors by some of the ridiculous conditions adopted at their meetings, on the contrary, are robbing themselves of our sympathy. Among their resolutions is one proposing a revival of the old system of engaging for 'special lines of business,' and never deviating on any consideration. We regret this disposition on their part to return to a system which was always inconvenient and injurious. It was injurious to managers, because every actor set himself up as the judge of what character was in his 'line,' and obstinately refused to take this character or that, as his fancy . . . might dictate. It was injurious to actors, because when they were engaged for certain lines of characters they never advanced beyond them, and many excellent opportunities for progress in other branches of their profession were lost. It was injurious to the public because from both the above operations of the system, the audiences were deprived of the best renditions of many characters of the drama.⁴³

At least two other newspapers, however, took a decidedly different view. The New York Herald of July 22, 1864, came out wholeheartedly for the actors and The Spirit of the Times not only called for the maintenance of lines

⁴³New York Express, July 30, 1864, p. 2.

but a return to the now almost completely abandoned stock system:

Let 'The Stars' and 'The Sticks' [those unqualified people who surround the stars] be replaced by good stock companies; the right men and women placed in the right places; lines of business observed; good and legitimate pieces in each department of the drama be placed upon the stage, and the public appetite will soon pall of the unhealthy dramatic food on which it has been too long fed, and a new and vigorous tone given to dramatic art.⁴⁴

The action of the actors during this dispute was ill-defined and, in fact, none of the newspaper articles about it ever named any leaders of the party. By that fall, things had returned to normal and the "actors' strike" looked like a midsummer squabble on "the rialto." What is significant about it, however, is that a dialogue had been introduced and "the stock company question" would reverberate for the rest of the century.

Judge Daly claimed that Augustin's abolition of lines was "to free the actors from the trammels of 'lines' into which they had settled as in a groove."⁴⁵ The claim is sheer nonsense. He abolished lines in his own company because he demanded the right to cast his plays as he saw fit, without regard to actors at all.

Versatility was yet another part of the Daly rhetoric. He insisted repeatedly that his actors must be and were

⁴⁴Spirit of the Times, August 13, 1864.

⁴⁵Joseph Francis Daly, The Life of Augustin Daly (New York: Macmillan, 1917), p. 90.

versatile artists. But, except for James Lewis, who will be discussed in the next section, few actors were ever given an opportunity to demonstrate anything like versatility. Mrs. G. H. Gilbert, a leading actress of the company and member of The Big Four, appeared in only one role in thirty years that was not an old woman. Charles Fisher, a specialist in old man, and William Davidge, a low comedian, were literally never cast out of those lines in their many years with Daly.⁴⁶ Established actors were repeatedly engaged and cast in those parts, or types of parts with which they had become identified. It was only with the young and inexperienced that Daly really ever exercised creative casting.

Even after the heyday of the 1880s, the press repeatedly took Daly to task for his monotonous casting.

They have one way of playing comedy at Daly's and only one. Whether the piece be Sheridan's or Shakespeare's or Schonthon's or Jerome's, the actors are always good, bright, middle-class Americans . . . They change their costumes but keep their characters.⁴⁷

And the author adds, this "mistaken policy, instead of making the actors fit their parts, adapts the parts to the actors."^{47A}After a close study of Daly's management policies,

⁴⁶Richard Harlan Andrew, "Augustin Daly's Big Four: John Drew, Ada Rehan, James Lewis and Mrs. G. H. Gilbert" (unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1971), p. 32.

⁴⁷New York Herald, January 25, 1891, p. 10.

^{47A}Ibid.

Marion Michalak concluded that in achieving and "perfecting" his ensemble, Daly quite often had to resort to "specialty" (whether he called it that or not) and that the company was not as versatile as he claimed or hoped for. What he ultimately ended up with, after "abolishing lines of business," was "a restrictive form of type casting."⁴⁸

Daly's initial season - indeed his initial decade as a manager - was a catastrophe as far as his relationships with his actors were concerned. He could not hold on to them. He tended during this period to make stars - perhaps unintentionally - of a succession of leading ladies. Clara Morris, Agnes Ethel, Kate Claxton, Fanny Morant, and Ada Dyas each rose to a level of prominence in various productions. Once the run of the piece was exhausted, however, Daly moved on to a new production which saw these ladies cast in much smaller roles. After bristling at such treatment, Agnes Ethel, for instance, left Daly's company and went to Europe to study and "begin again at the bottom of the ladder." She was most unsuccessful in this endeavor and only succeeded in meeting Victorien Sardou who wrote Agnes for her. She paid ten thousand dollars for it but made four times that much on it at A. M. Palmer's Union Square Theatre.⁴⁹

⁴⁸Marian Victor Michalak, "The Management of Augustin Daly's Stock Company, 1869-1899" (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1961), p. 242.

⁴⁹New York Dramatic Mirror, January 14, 1899.

It was a huge success and established her as a leading actress on the New York scene. What drove her away from Daly initially was that her position, as his leading actress, was being undermined by the rise of Clara Morris.

Morris, in her turn, also felt the glow of stardom at Daly's. The new theatre in 1873 opened with her in the title role of Alixé, a Parisian sensation long on emotionalism. Morris had joined Daly in 1870, had the leading roles in Man and Wife and Jezebel and had made a particular success of the role of Cora - a Creole beauty in Article 47, with an electrifying mad scene. By 1873, her position was being challenged by Fanny Morant, and she and Daly had a falling out "because she failed to triumph as completely as is her wont."⁵⁰ Morant was put into her role in the Philadelphia leg of a tour and this proved the last straw. Morris moved to the Union Square, as Agnes Ethel had done before her. Fanny Morant and Kate Claxton followed the same pattern.

If Daly enjoyed giving actors' heads "a crack" to keep them in their place, he was not totally in control of them or of his theatre's destiny until after the two-year hiatus in 1877. A succession of stars had appeared under his banner from 1869 until then. A letter to Daly from Frank Lawlor regarding a casting matter reveals Daly's bold,

⁵⁰New York Herald, September 28, 1873, p. 6.

scribbled note at the bottom of the page: "Am not playing stars."⁵¹

But he was, had been and would continue "playing stars" until he found his ultimate policy in 1879. E. L. Davenport had opened his initial season in 1869, playing in a style which was, incidentally, totally at odds with Daly's supporting company.⁵² Mrs. Scott-Siddons, a Shakespearean veteran from London, followed in a quartet of comedies - Twelfth Night, As You Like It, She Would and Would Not, and Much Ado. Charles Matthews, the younger, appeared in fifty-six performances over two months in a series of short farces for which he was famous: The Critic, Patter versus Clatter, and Used Up. Charles Fechter, a great French star and one of the genuine novelties of the era, appeared in his standbys - Monte Cristo and The Corsican Brothers. Adelaide Neilson, with whom New York was thoroughly enraptured, made such financial demands on Daly (forty-five percent of the gross) that no profit accrued to the manager from this engagement. J. K. Emmett, from the vaudeville and variety stage, even managed to get seventy percent of Daly's gross in 1873.⁵³

After 1879, when he finally knew what he was about, Daly does appear to have settled on a very definite attitude regarding stars: there would no longer be any at his theatre.

⁵¹ALS of Frank Lawlor to Augustin Daly, dated January, 1875, Augustin Daly Collection, Folger Shakespeare Library.

⁵²New York Times, August 18, 1869, p. 4.

⁵³Colonel T. Allston Brown Agency contract, dated June 3, 1873, Augustin Daly Collection, Folger Shakespeare Library.

Over the course of the next twenty years, he made few if any concessions. By the 1890s, he was willing to allow Ada Rehan, Mrs. G. H. Gilbert and James Lewis combination star billings while they were on tour, but never when in the New York house. He announced in the New York Herald:

In the future, . . . Mrs. Rehan each year will make a brief starring tour appearing in the stronger plays produced by the regular company. At this theatre, and also in London, she will continue to be simply the leading lady of my company.⁵⁴

This dictum rings hollow, however; a series of grand Shakespearean revivals which began in the late '80s most emphatically did star Miss Rehan. She was in fact the raison d'etre of these productions.

Whatever may be said of their personal relationship, it is certainly clear that Daly and Rehan, the tyrant and the nightingale, provided the American theatre with one of its most graceful symbiotic partnerships. Rehan had begun at Mrs. John Drew's Arch Street Theatre in Philadelphia and attracted Daly's attention in 1879. Her letter of engagement to Daly was everything he ever wanted from an actor:

Byron Cottage
Long Branch, N.J.

July 1st, 1879

Dear Sir - I am in receipt of your favor. I am willing to risk everything with you - with no stipulated line - trusting you will do what is right in casting me for such parts as you may deem advisable. . . .⁵⁵

⁵⁴August 12, 1894, p. 7.

⁵⁵Augustin Daly Collection, Folger Shakespeare Library.

Here, at last, was a leading lady after his heart. She rapidly became a tremendous favorite in America and beginning in 1884, through a series of European tours, an international star. G. B. Shaw found her "an actress of genius as well as of extraordinary technical accomplishment."⁵⁶ All the while, however, she was safely tucked under the Daly banner, as his company's leading lady - never anything more or less.

But for the occasional hit of the 1870s, Daly's theatre did not truly become the famous institution of the American theatre until the emergence of The Big Four in 1880. John Drew was always seen as a dashing young professional man who finally won the hand of Miss Rehan, the vivacious young heroine. James Lewis and Mrs. Gilbert generally appeared as the hen-pecked husband and his wife, often the parents of Miss Rehan. The only real variation to this scheme was that Lewis was sometimes cast as an old bachelor pursued by Mrs. Gilbert.⁵⁷ This formula was immediately successful and Daly did not waver from it until 1892, when John Drew resigned from the company for some personal stardom under the Frohmans. After his departure, the quartet was, of course, impossible and everything changed to focus on Rehan.

⁵⁶George Bernard Shaw, Our Theatre in the Nineties, 3 vols. (London: Constable and Company, 1932), III, 184.

⁵⁷Richard Harlan Andrew, "Augustin Daly's Big Four: John Drew, Ada Rehan, James Lewis, and Mrs. G. H. Gilbert" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1971), p. 1.

This quartet was, in many ways, the embodiment of Daly's ideal. He had his actors all in a line and no head was allowed to bob up above the rest. The polished nature of their performances, the interplay between them, was often the only reason for the production, the repetition of the same characters giving a deftness that was its own excuse for being. The four appeared together in 29 contemporary plays, only two by Shakespeare (The Taming of the Shrew and Merry Wives) and only one old English comedy, The School for Scandal.⁵⁸

The special relationship between Daly and Rehan notwithstanding, Daly appears to have been as difficult and arbitrary in his dealings with The Big Four as he was with the rest of his company. When Daly announced he was giving up his theatre in 1877, Mrs. Gilbert made arrangements with Palmer's Union Square almost immediately, before consulting with him. He was, perhaps justifiably, miffed at what he considered a betrayal. Lewis and he quarreled on the same instance and when he returned to the theatre the next night, Lewis found he had been replaced by Owen Fawcett and dismissed from the company.⁵⁹ These breaches were mended and both rejoined Daly in 1879. His relations with Lewis, however, would, as we shall see in Part V, remain forever strained.

⁵⁸Andrew, "Big Four," p. 13.

⁵⁹Andrew, "Big Four," p. 35.

John Drew's troubles with Daly, on the other hand, proved catastrophic for the whole organization. A tour in 1888 upset the delicate balance in the quartet. The press in London began to rhapsodize where Rehan was concerned and to denigrate all else. Daly wrote to his brother Joseph:

I shall not send you any of the notices except the Telegraph for they all confine themselves to praises company as a company is not praised now as it was before.⁶⁰
fore.⁶⁰

The tide had begun to turn and, increasingly, Drew found himself in a distinctly supporting capacity. In a review of The Great Unknown, an unknown author noticed:

John Drew was half hidden again by Miss Rehan's skirts, and his chances to exercise his fine skill of comedy were far too rare for my liking. . . . It is observed that John Drew is systematically suppressed in Mr. Daly's recent productions. It would be interesting to know if he has offended the head of the house.⁶¹

By the spring of 1891 Drew resigned Daly's company and the equilibrium balance of the near perfect ensemble was destroyed. The quartet lasted for twelve profitable years and was, in the final reckoning, the apex of Daly's management.

From a number of letters to Daly in the Folger Shakespeare Library the general impression emerges that he was not a man of his word, particularly where actors were concerned. He managed to keep every scrap of paper that ever crossed his desk, incriminating and otherwise, and the collection gives a picture of a man with only the most marginal of ethics.

⁶⁰ALS of Augustin Daly to Joseph Daly, May 6, 1888, Augustin Daly Collection, Folger Shakespeare Library.

⁶¹Clipping from The Black Cat, October 25, 1889, in Daly's Theatre Scrapbooks, vol. 23.

Promises were made, then broken. In most cases we have no record of his response, so that perhaps we are seeing only one side of the picture. But it is a most consistent picture.

A letter to Daly from Joseph Polk of 1871 but undated, for instance, appears to have a legitimate complaint:

I have no specification of business in my articles, but you distinctly engaged me for light comedy and told me I should be the recognized comedian of the theatre - Two established light comedy parts have been assigned to other hands, and when I consented to play Spanker [London Assurance] you told me you would not cast me for any other than the light comedy part if there were such in the piece.⁶²

There was, of course, no written specification of business in any Daly Theatre articles. Whatever was agreed orally between the manager and the actor constituted their agreement with regard to casting. It was therefore only as good as individual integrity permitted.

Clara Morris claims, as a further instance of this integrity issue, to have been outraged by Daly's treatment of her. She had, of course, signed her articles without specialty. "I must trust to his honor not to degrade me by casting me for parts unworthy of me." After she made a personal success in Man and Wife, Daly promptly cast her in a very minor role in Saratoga. "The part was a walking lady of second quality. It was an indignity to give it to me.

⁶²ALS of Joseph Polk to Daly, n.d. 1871, Augustin Daly Collection, Folger Shakespeare Library.

Like lightning, I recalled the terms of my contract. I realized my helplessness."^{62A}

A much later letter gives the same impression. It is dated July 5, 1897, and is from Mme. Julie Rosewald, the teacher of Mabelle Gillman, whom Daly appears to have hired with "a promise to advance her to develop her talents, which you then recognized . . . What has caused you to break your word?"⁶³

Daly was naturally beset with letters of engagement requests from unknown actors, and he appears to have saved every one of them. None of these is really distinguishable, but what is interesting is that after 1879, none of these letters names a preferred line of business. Letters of engagement to various theatres had, for nearly two centuries, named the particular specialty of the applicant. It was not so when they dealt with Daly; it appears to have been common knowledge that he could not abide being told how an actor might be cast. Many of the letters, however, do mention a specific part which the actor was applying for.⁶⁴

Does Daly deserve the credit for "abolishing" the lines of business tradition? If so, then what did he put in its place?

We have already seen instances in the foregoing of certain managers, William Mitchell and Laura Keene, for ex-

^{62A}Life on Stage, p. 319.

⁶³Augustin Daly Collection, Folger Shakespeare Library.

⁶⁴Various letters to Daly, Augustin Daly Collection, Folger Shakespeare Library.

ample, who took an aggressive stance in the casting process, asserting their right to form their casts as they saw fit rather than submit to the blindly rigid force of lines of business. While Mitchell's cast contained youths, Keene tried to break through the system by arbitrary decision, and when it failed she lost a few valuable members. Even earlier, however, Sol Smith and Noah Ludlow made the claim to having abolished lines of business in their theatres in 1840. A letter to C. H. Mueller, their orchestra conductor, says:

We cannot promise to Mrs. Mueller any particular line of business - we engage nobody nowadays for particular or exclusive lines. - We should expect Mrs. M. to play such business as may be required of her.⁶⁵

This does seem to be the first instance of record when the system was - if not abolished - at least disallowed. A little later, on June 19, 1866, Moses Kimball, the manager of The Boston Museum warned his colleague F. M. Fields of the correct approach to take in engaging an actor:

I need not advise you to be too careful about allowing him to expect special lines of business or even parts, but that on the contrary to give him to understand that he is to go with the work generally and rely upon you to give him his deserts.⁶⁶

The trend of the times after about 1860, in other words, seems to have been generally away from line casting, particularly with regard to any agreements with new recruits.

⁶⁵Quoted in William G. B. Carson's Managers in Distress: The St. Louis Stage, 1840-1844 (St. Louis: Historical Documents Foundation, 1949), p. 87.

⁶⁶ALS of Moses Kimball to F. M. Fields at Boston Museum, June 19, 1866, Harvard Theatre Collection.

Those who had worked under the old system clung to it for their life's sake. In a letter to R. J. Field, as late as 1875, Mary Carey wrote that she was "happy to reengage with you on a continuation of our old understanding, namely that I have the second choice of parts, whether juvenile, soubrette or ingenue."⁶⁷ New recruits, however, could expect nothing more than a single specific part so stipulated in a run-of-play contract or, if hired by a permanent company, then the "as cast" designation.

Nothing dies so hard as tradition, however. A directory of actors in New York for 1888, apparently to have been published annually but never seen again after the initial issue, indicates how fiercely the actors clung to the old (and now useless) system. Those actors included listed themselves in a series of lines of business which totalled nearly forty different categories for men and nearly twenty for women. Given the late date and the profusion in number of lines, this document is the last vain flourish of the nearly three-hundred-year-old and now defunct lines of business tradition.⁶⁸

Daly appears, therefore, to have come at the end of a tradition. Lines of business were being rescinded as a

⁶⁷ALS of Mary Carey to R. J. Fields, March 16, 1875, Harvard Theatre Collection.

⁶⁸Harrison Grey Fiske, ed., The New York Mirror Annual and Directory of the Theatrical Profession for 1888 (New York: New York Mirror, 1888) passim.

viable determinant of casting fully twenty years before his management began. He was, however, the right man to abolish it completely. Forceful, even pugnacious in his dealings with actors, he seems to have won the line of business issue - at least in his own theatre - without a blow being struck.

It is true, as we have seen, that many of his actors could not live with his arbitrary casting, and once abused in small parts, they generally left his company, often to star at the Union Square Theatre. What is certain, however, is that no actor appears to have received any casting guarantees from him per se, and that the disputes at his theatre centered on the difference between what the actor and the manager saw as "just deserts." As Dunlap had observed much earlier, an actor's casting was his prestige and could often be measured only in terms of the size of the part. Daly could not, and did not, attempt to satisfy anyone but himself in casting matters, with the possible and highly extenuating exception of Miss Rehan.

When Daly died on the streets of Paris in 1899, the stock system had been dead for nearly thirty years. He had produced a hybrid version of it which closely approximated the original. He achieved a compromise by adapting theatrical conditions. Each play was placed in the repertory for a run, even if it was not a long one; a certain level of permanence in the company composition could be noted after 1880 and, of course, the theatre always had a permanent home -

two, in fact, as Daly opened his London theatre in Leicester Square in 1893. The only true stock ingredient missing, and it is perhaps the most interesting and distinguishing one, was the retention and repetition of the alternating performance pattern.

Far more important than the dismantling of the stock system was the effect on the actor. Frequently, in our theatrical literature, a valedictory to the old stock system is tantamount to a valedictory for great American acting. John Ranken Towse offered the following characteristic lament:

To-day there are not on the American stage half a dozen players, male or female, who could bear the test of comparison with any one of fifty who were flourishing thirty or forty years ago. Of great actors there is not one. The best we have, in almost every department of drama - musical comedy and wild farce, of course, are not included in that category - are survivors of a past generation. Stars there are in plenty, but only two or three of them could by any stretch of courtesy be called first-rate actors. Most of them are specialists in the art of self-production, and, therefore, utterly unprogressive. The name of the new performers is legion, but the number of them who exhibit signs of brilliant promise is woefully small. In all the arts of production - in painting, lighting, machinery, and spectacle, even in playwriting - the stage is making progress, but the race of competent actors is threatened with extinction.⁶⁹

The reason for this, of course, was the disappearance of the means by which "the race of competent actors" was trained. The appeal for a return to stock became more urgent as the century drew to a close, but no one appears to have been listening.

⁶⁹Towse, Sixty Years, p. 462.

PART V
THE LOW COMEDIAN

All low comedians descend from Harlequin of the commedia dell'arte. Known for and identifiable through his stupidity, which is frequently relieved by flashes of shrewd wit, he is the prince of numbskulls.

His character is a mixture of ignorance, naivete, wit, stupidity, and grace. He is both a rake and an overgrown boy with occasional gleams of intelligence, and his mistakes and clumsiness often have a wayward charm. His acting is patterned on the lithe, agile grace of a young cat, and he has a superficial coarseness which makes his performances all the more amusing. He plays the role of a faithful valet, always patient, credulous, and greedy. He is eternally amorous, and is constantly in difficulties either on his own or on his master's account. He is hurt and comforted in turn as easily as a child, and his grief is almost as comic as his joy.¹

The Italian comedy provided an almost endless array of variations on this character: Brighella, the intriguer; Pantaloon, the old man; the Doctor, a Latin-quoting pedant; and the Captain, a blustering broggart and sniveling coward. Each were special characters of the commedia and each a character which an actor played for a lifetime.

¹Jean Francois Marmontel, quoted by Duchart, The Italian Comedy, 132.

A low comedian of the English speaking tradition played them all, however. Of all the lines of business, the low comedian was the most varied, required the most versatility and, frequently, the hardest work. There was generally, but for the melodrama, a fairly prominent low comedian part in every play of the nineteenth century repertory. Added to the main piece, of course, was the afterpiece, which was the low comedian's principal domain. He figured prominently in every stock company and on nearly every bill.

What distinguished the "low" from the "high" comedian resided in the nature of the particular comedy. Verbal, literary or intellectual humor required a special facility from a usually conventional "proper" sort of actor. There are no greater examples of these roles than Sheridan's Sir Peter Teazle or Sir Anthony Absolute. High comedy is distinguished by its appeal to the mind and the ear.

The low comedian, by contrast, has the wide world of physical action in which to play and he is bound only by his own destiny or bumptious residence. The irrepressibility of Bob Acres or Tony Lumpkin are classic examples.

The low comedian repertory is vast. From Shakespeare he drew Bottom, Dogberry, Belch, Falstaff, and Sir Andrew. From the old comedy of Goldsmith, Sheridan, Farquhar he might choose Tony Lumpkin, Bob Acres, Scrub, and the countless characters from Restoration comedy. The nineteenth century repertory provided Dr. Angloss and Zekiel Homespun of Colman's Heir-at-Law, both Asa and Lord Dundreary of Taylor's Our

American Cousin, to say nothing of adaptations of Dickens. There were always plenty of parts and the low comedian's biggest problem was in selecting those which might reflect his particular qualities. It is not surprising, therefore, that he was unusually sensitive to his casting.

His material needs as an actor were also greater than those of his company colleagues. The number of wigs required of him was considerable, and Rede lists no less than twenty, plus skull caps, complete head coverings, bald pates, and the like.² Every theatre had a generous stock of costumes, of course, but the low comedian was more or less obliged to bring his own specialty outfits. Like Harlequin, he often had his own stock-in-trade, as much a part of his performance as voice and gesture.

Of all the lines of business, the low comedian was the least restricted by traditional playing. This situation is probably due to the fact that low comedy was often created by the actor, the playwright having given him leeway in the physical business. While business and by-play could certainly be passed on from generation to generation - and it was - each succeeding actor had the right to do as he pleased, under one and only one provision - that he get the laughs. In resurrecting The Recruiting Officer and The Alchemist, for example, Garrick could throw caution to the wind and

²Rede, Road to the Stage, 23f.

play them as he wished, unencumbered by set business. Likewise, in America, Thomas Wignell certainly had no traditional, theatrical model with which to fashion his Jonathan in The Contrast. That was an act of pure creation on his part and he had only the rustic and folk types which he encountered around him for inspiration.

Our first theatre historian, William Dunlap, insists that by about 1830 there were three distinct species of clown in America - English, Low Dutch, and German immigrants. James H. Hackett was "the true and original" of them all.³ It is significant that Hackett had no benefit of regular stock company training, did not work his way up into a company, and relied solely on his native talents for his considerable success. These factors can in no way be taken as a pattern for the development of American low comedians, but they do suggest a new flexibility in the stock system.

The career analyses of three leading nineteenth century low comedians which now follow may be taken as representative of the various stages in the stock system development and its disintegration. Each was noted as the leading low comedian of his respective period, each played in the leading theatres in America throughout that period (collectively, these three careers span the entire century)

³Dunlap, History, II, 354.

and coincidentally, they were each extremely popular not only with their audiences but with their colleagues as well.

The three appendices which follow this study are respective listings of the roles each is known to have played. Occasionally the name of the part cannot be ascertained. Each list approximates the chronological order in which the actor first played the parts, has been compiled from various sources (Odell and various playbills, principally) and, finally, makes no claim to being complete, though each is fairly representative of that respective career.

Joseph Jefferson, I (1774-1832)

Of all the actor dynasties in America, the Jeffersons' is the longest. Over five generations, sixteen actors or actresses of that name trod the boards. Their intermarriages with various other acting families - the Burkes and the Warrens, for example - extended their patrimony to every corner of our theatre. Joseph, III was the most famous of the clan by virtue of his *Rip Van Winkle*, and his fame has obscured the considerable accomplishments of his ancestors.

The first of the line and Joseph I's father was Thomas. Virtually nothing is known of his early years. By family tradition, he is said to have met David Garrick on a provincial road and the two struck up a friendship that lasted their lifetimes. Garrick enlisted him for Drury Lane and he appeared there at various intervals from 1750 to 1776, the year Garrick retired. He played Horatio to Garrick's

Hamlet, Buckingham to his Richard, and Paris to his Romeo. Such parts would constitute the second male line in serious drama, and the balance of his parts are also along that order. He was in such sympathy with Garrick that he never appeared at Drury Lane after his great friend's retirement. Intermittently during his career there, he would take leave for a season to manage theatres in Richmond, Exeter, Lewes, and Plymouth.⁴

Thomas married a Miss May, a very elegant and even-tempered lady, whose father was sufficiently outraged at her marriage to an actor as to force young Thomas' agreement to forfeit 500 pounds should she ever appear on any stage. The couple had two sons, John and Joseph I, and they appear to have lived at near poverty level. When Joseph was two years old, his mother died, and the father remarried a Miss Wodd, who bore him two more sons and two daughters. Joseph is said not to have gotten along with his step-mother and this fact, along with his republican sympathies, made immigration to America a near compulsion.⁵

Joseph was trained for the stage by his father at the Plymouth Theatre and was a choice recruit for Charles Stuart Powell, who had come to England seeking actors for

⁴Montrose J. Moses, Famous Actor Families in America, 1906, reprinted: New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968, 69-60.

⁵Moses, Famous Families, 63.

his Boston Theatre which opened in 1794. Joseph was engaged at \$17 a week, his passage paid for. After sixteen months of bad business, however, Powell was bankrupt, just in time for Joseph's arrival.⁶

Whether Joseph ever appeared in a Boston theatre at this time is in dispute, but it is certain that he did form some valuable acquaintances with the Hodgkinson-Hallam troupe that played the Boston Theatre in late 1795. Jefferson engaged with them as scene painter on the condition that he might "make trial" as an actor, which he did as La Gloire in Colman's The Surrender of Calais. He was immensely successful and his acting career in America was finally launched.⁷ He engaged with that troupe for their regular seasons at the John Street Theatre in New York and remained with it during the transition to the Park Theatre (1798), until 1803.

It is regrettable that nothing specific is known of Joseph's training for the stage, other than its being under his father's tutelage. Dunlap's recollection of his first season points to an already finished actor of the best English stock company tradition:

He was then a youth, but even then an artist. Of a small and light figure, well formed, with a singular physiognomy, a nose perfectly Grecian, and blue eyes full of laughter, he had the faculty of exciting mirth

⁶William Winter, The Jeffersons, 1881, reprinted: New York: Benjamin Blom, 1969, 52.

⁷Winter, The Jeffersons, 53.

to as great a degree, by power of feature, although handsome, as any ugly-featured low comedian ever seen. The Squire Richard of Mr. Jefferson made a strong impression on the writer. His Sadi, in 'The Mountaineers,' a stronger; and, strange to say, his Verges, in 'Much Ado About Nothing,' a yet stronger.⁸

Since his father left Drury Lane (for good) when Joseph was a child, it is unlikely that Joseph had access to that theatre or its backstage during the twenty years from his birth until his immigration to America. It hardly mattered, of course, as what he learned on his father's Plymouth stage was entirely sufficient.

A dearth of critical opinion about Jefferson leads a researcher of the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia to an interesting, if somewhat circuitous, conclusion about his art. She deduced, for instance, that since Jefferson and the famous Joseph Munden in England each shared many of the same roles and the noted ability to manipulate facial muscles for comic effect, that there must be an affinity. Munden's major characteristics were a constantly changing facial expression, a conscious, studied comedy technique, and the ability to convey to an audience with a single expression all the joys to be derived from a single object.⁹ Charles Lamb called this "making-faces," and it goes by an even less

⁸Dunlap, History, quoted by Winter, The Jeffersons, 54.

⁹Ruth H. McKenzie, "Organization, Production, and Management at the Chestnut St. Theatre, Philadelphia, from 1791 to 1820," Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1952, 196-7.

flattering name in the modern theatre, but interestingly, Jefferson was never accused of coarseness or lack of artistry.

One of Jefferson's first real successes at the Park was as Peter in The Stranger by the German playwright, Kotzebue, as adapted by Dunlap. This proved to be a landmark production because it gave the season at the Park its first real success and provided Dunlap with a nearly endless source of hits, once he had mastered the German language. Jefferson and one Bates held up the comic, even farcical scenes of the play, and provided great amusement. Joseph's part, according to William Winter, had no merits and, in fact, neither did many of the other "bad low comedy parts and old men" that fell to him during his five years there.¹⁰

The reason for Jefferson's antipathy toward Lewis Hallam has been totally lost to us. When Hodgkinson sounded Jefferson on engaging with the New York Theatre, Dunlap writes mysteriously that Jefferson "expressed an unwillingness to do anything in opposition to Mr. Hallam, but inquired the salary." Hodgkinson, apparently desperate for a good low comedian, assured him he would receive as much as any man in the company.¹¹

Hostilities between Jefferson and Hodgkinson broke out with the Kotzebue-Dunlap Fraternal Discord. Dunlap assures us they were both excellent in it and played well

¹⁰Winter, The Jeffersons, 58.

¹¹Dunlap, Diary, I, 41.

together, but that Hodgkinson was decidedly the better of the two. "Jefferson's excellence was great, but not to be put in competition with Hodgkinson's, even in low comedy." From this rivalry sprang a new series of headaches for the manager-historian.

In 1797, at the beginning of his New York career, Jefferson appears to have been generally quite amenable. Dunlap, for instance, informs us of his refusal to play Dr. Phlogiston on November 29, 1797 but on Dunlap's speaking to him, Jefferson "retracted."^{11A} Two years later, in 1799, he appears to have changed very little and was easily, or at least reasonably, placated in most casting matters.

Feb. 6th. [1799] . . . Hallam was on the stage at rehearsal all the morning, but spoke not to me. Hodgkinson & Jefferson had some altercation this morning about the addition which Jefferson says was promised to him by Hodgkinson for his wardrobe \$2. Hodgkinson talked in a very cavalier manner, and Jefferson on his positive refusal, told him not to put his name in the bills for the Friday, which Hodgkinson told him he should not, & intimated or said that he wanted not his services. I afterward told Jefferson not to determine rashly, that I would speak to Hodgkinson again on the subject, that my interest was as much concerned as Mr. Hodgkinson's and that the sum in question should not by my consent part us. I had a conversation soon after with Hodgkinson, he said he minded not the money, but Jefferson questioned his veracity, I said no, only his memory . . . he talked much of Jefferson's insolence. I told him that a quarrel with Jefferson at present must be avoided: he said I might agree to give him addition . . . but he would never speak to him again. I call'd on Jefferson & settled the matter to his apparent satisfaction.¹²

^{11A}Ibid.

¹²From Dunlap's Diary, quoted by Odell, Annals, II, 10.

Life at the Park was not all backstage bickering, however. Jefferson had a genuine personal success as former Ashfield in Morton's Speed the Plough, and proved highly serviceable elsewhere. His name is rarely out of the bills, though they indicate only a fraction of his contribution, since casts for afterpieces were not generally published. It should be pointed out here that Jefferson was a singer as well, and with Mr. Tyler supplied all the vocal music.

Beginning in 1800, Jefferson turned manager, at least seasonally. Out-of-town summer theatres were a new tradition and, quite naturally, specialized in farce and comedy and an occasional musical entertainment. He ran Mount Vernon Gardens for three seasons with the aid of his wife, one Euphemia Fortune, also an actress, who had coincidentally been born on the same day in the same year, but in America.¹³ The marriage, incidentally, produced nine offspring - all but two of whom turned actor.

Regretfully, nothing is known of Jefferson scenic talents. The first record of it is the story already told of his entree into the Hodgkinson-Hallam troupe. In the 1795 season, we know he painted the scenery for The Whims of Galatea, or, The Power of Love. This was followed shortly after by his work on O'Keefe's Life's Vagaries. When Ciceri, the famous imported designe at the Park, was finally driven

¹³Winter, The Jeffersons, 94.

¹⁴Odell, Annals, I, 407, 432; II, 25.

off by Hodgkinson, Jefferson was enlisted briefly as the leading house artist.¹⁴ What is most telling about him from these scenic excursions is that he offered his services totally gratuitously.¹⁵

After a brief summer season in Albany in 1803, Jefferson made the most important decision of his life: he engaged with the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia. Jefferson would return to New York periodically over the next 15 years and always with acclaim and star status. His first reappearance in 1806 at the Park was as Jasper Gawky in The Chapters of Accidents, followed by his famous impersonation of Jeremy Diddler in Raising the Wind. The four-night engagement was highly successful. He also played a few nights in the 1811-12 season and returned in triumph in 1821 in a medley of his best pieces: Bob Acres, Tony Lumpkin, Lord Ogleby -- a refreshing and light-hearted stint after ten long consecutive runs of Fennell, Cooper, and Kean.^{15A} But the Chestnut Street in Philadelphia was his real bone. It had opened in 1794 by virtue of Thomas Wignell's defection from the New York Harlam troupe, and had done successful recruiting from England since then. Mrs. Wignell (who somehow managed to marry everyone whose last name began with a W) ran the theatre with good success. William Warren, Sr. and Hugh Reinagle were directors and William B. Wood was the actual stage-

¹⁵Winter, The Jeffersons, 69.

^{15A}Odell, Annals, II, 257-8, 590.

manager. The company comprised the best acting talent in America at that time and, in addition to those already mentioned, included William Francis, William Twaits, Francis Blissett, the inestimable Mrs. Oddmixon, Mrs. Wignell, and others. It was certainly the richest assemblage of acting talent ever seen in America, and the theatre managed to retain its superiority well into the 1820s, when Philadelphia finally succumbed to New York. The company was especially deep in old men and low comedians, each with a very definite specialty: Warren, supreme in the line of Old Dornton and Sir Robert Bramble, Falstaff and Sir Toby; Blissett appears to have created, according to Winter at least, tastefully executed and polished "delicate miniatures"; Twaits had Dr. Pangloss, Tony Lumpkin and Goldfinch; Jefferson "conscientious and thorough, and at the same time brilliant - ranged from Mercutio to Dominic Sampson, from Touchstone to Dogberry, and from Farmer Ashfield to Maw Worm, and was a consummate artist in all."¹⁶

From the beginning of the Chestnut Street, Wignell and Reinagle took great care in their selection of actors for their social and moral qualities. The company was pre-eminently respectable, despite the occasional visitations of the drunken James Fennell, or flare-ups by John Oldmixon.¹⁷

¹⁶Winter, The Jeffersons, 66.

¹⁷MacKenzie, Chestnut Street, 291.

Jefferson fit well into such a harmonious scheme. William Winter, his biographer, summarized the impressions of his contemporaries:

. . . He was a man of original mind, studious habits, fine temperament, natural dignity, and great charm of character, and his life was free from contention, acrimony, and reproach.¹⁸

He is not to be construed as a "milk toast," however, for he frequently had to fight for his professional dignity, even in so generally agreeable a theatre as the Chestnut Street. Fairly late in his career, for instance, he was cast as the first witch in Macbeth. The formidably tempered Macready was the star. Jefferson, suffering from the gout, arrived at rehearsal with a cane, an infraction of a well-known rule, which had heretofore gone by the boards in an agreeable company. Macready severely reprimanded him, through the stage-manager, and Jefferson left the rehearsal and refused to appear with the star during the entire engagement. The two had met as social equals and Jefferson resented the lack of civility in this encounter and complained in his diary:

His purpose was to overbear and humiliate me, so as to discipline and subjugate the rest of the company. It was a rude exercise of authority, and its manner was impertinent.¹⁹

Jefferson was also extremely fastidious in his observation of all the old rules of lines of business. His

¹⁸Winter, The Jefferson, 78.

¹⁹Jefferson's diary, quoted by Winter, The Jeffersons,

seniority was a particular point of conflict when the manager Weymss sought to support him with one John Sloman, a comic singer new to the company, who had a reputation but certainly no talent as an actor. For an entire season Weymss gave him all the new musical pieces. Jefferson patiently held himself in check, confident that Sloman could in no way challenge his position with the public. The last straw occurred at a benefit late that season, where Jefferson's new farce The Illustrious Stranger was billed dead last after a five-act tragedy, six successive songs by the upstart Sloman, then a farce with him. Jefferson insisted on his long-established right of seniority and, though the bills had already been printed, he won his privileged position back and immediately followed the tragedy. His son, Thomas, whom Winter quotes from some unknown source, says it was the first and only time he ever saw his father truly angry and so provoked as to use profanity.²⁰

Jefferson's swan song to Philadelphia in 1829 was bitter. His benefit happened to occur on the same night that Edwin Forrest, the fast-rising new home-grown tragedian, was appearing at the rival Walnut Street Theatre. The result was, of course, a fiasco for Jefferson and a tremendous loss of money. All of these were nothing, of course, compared to the injury the city had given one of its greatest artists for twenty-five years. Jefferson vowed

²⁰Quoted by Winter, The Jeffersons, 119-120.

then and there to leave the city and never return, and he obstinately kept his word. Forrest was appalled at these events and later in Washington played a benefit for him, but Jefferson refused to accept the funds. Attempts were made to reengage him at the Chestnut Street and Forrest's brother at the Walnut Street made a generous offer, with no conditions.²¹ All this failed to move him. His pride was cut to the quick. He had had Philadelphia.

The rest of his life was spent as an itinerant actor in a company composed of his wife and nearly all of his children. His son Joseph, II acted as manager, actor and, following his father's footsteps, scene-painter. John, who died in 1831 after injuries he sustained in an on-stage stunt, was considered by the family to have been the most brilliant. The most notable engagements during these years from 1829 to 1832 were at the Chestnut Street Theatre in Lancaster, Harrisburg, and numerous stops at least as far south as Richmond. A letter of Jefferson's, bearing no date, in the Virginia Historical Society, is a rather desperate plea for an engagement for the next week.²¹ The Jefferson troupe was, sadly, having to play the touring game close to its chest. It cannot have been easy for Joseph I, whose health was rapidly deteriorating from the ravages of the gout. Finally, in 1832, Joseph died during an appear-

²¹A. L. S. of Joseph Jefferson I, n.d. and addressee illegible; Virginia Historical Society.

ance at his son's theatre in Harrisburg, where he was buried in an Episcopal churchyard without a marker. This oversight was set right in 1843 with a memorial stone placed by a Supreme Court judge of Pennsylvania.²²

Joseph Jefferson I was rather an anomaly as a low comedian in terms of his personal appearance. He was tall and extremely handsome, and many noticed an uncanny resemblance to the Founding Father, Thomas Jefferson. They were, in fact, acquainted but Joseph was naturally reticent to presume on his position. He regarded being an actor as a humble profession and, though he appears to have been happy in it, he was not impressed by it.²³

Handsome though he was, however, the essence of his art was plasticity. Almost without exception, accounts of his acting mention the lightening-like speed of his transitions and the remarkable mobility of his face. The Three and the Deuce offered him three roles: a rustic, an eccentric, and an idiot, which had to be played in swift alternation throughout three acts. His Jeremy Diddler was called definitive by The Thespian Monitor.²⁴ Ireland's description of one of his most famous parts is most telling:

²²Winter, The Jeffersons, 107.

²³Winter, The Jeffersons, 111.

²⁴Winter, The Jeffersons, 89.

In low or eccentric comedy he has been rarely equaled, yet his excellence in other lines was very great. Speaking of his Farmer Ashfield in "Speed the Plough," an eminent critic remarked "that no man possessed such happy requisites for exhibiting the character in the true colors of nature as Mr. Jefferson. In the rustic deportment and dialect, in the artless effusions of benignity and undisguised truth, and in those masterly strokes of pathos and simplicity with which the author has finished the inimitable picture, Mr. Jefferson showed uniform excellence; and as in the humorous parts his comic powers produced their customary effect, so in the serious overflowings of the honest farmer's nature -- the mellow, deep, impressive tones of the actor's voice vibrated to the heart and produced the most intense and exquisite sensations."²⁵

Other rustic parts included Touchstone in As You Like It, Stephano in The Tempest, and Justice Greedy in A New Way to Pay Old Debts.

But these formed only a single string to his bow. He was particularly notable with certain courtiers, such as Mercutio (he also played Peter), Sir Hugh Evans in Merry Wives, Cloten in Cymbeline, and Polonius. Of the last, The Old New York Spirit of the Times said:

Jefferson was the best Polonius that ever trod the American stage. No other actor ever succeeded so well in combining the courtier and the gentleman with the humorist. He gave elegance and dignity to the character.²⁶

In everything from the country bumpkin to the elegant courtier, it was the artistic execution which drew comment. Noah Ludlow visited Philadelphia and was most impressed:

In Jefferson's acting there was a perfection of delineation I have seldom, if ever, seen in any other comedian of his line of character; not the least attempt at exaggeration to obtain applause, but a naturalness and

²⁵Ireland, Records, 131-2.

²⁶Quoted by Winter, The Jeffersons, 80.

truthfulness that secured it, without the appearance of any extraordinary efforts from him. The nearest approach to his style is that of his grandson, of the same name.²⁷

The foregoing attention to Jefferson's plasticity and artistry have somewhat mitigated the most important part of his craft. John P. Kennedy, a novelist of the period, makes it clear, however, that laughter and fun were the keys to his kingdom:

He played everything that was comic, and always made people laugh until the tears came in their eyes . . . I don't believe he ever saw the world doing anything else. Whomsoever he looked at laughed. Before he came through the side scenes, when he was about to enter, he would pronounce the first words of his part, to herald his appearance, and instantly the whole audience set up a shout. It was only the sound of his voice. He had a patent right to shake the world's diaphragm, which seemed to be infallible. When he acted, families all went together, old and young. Smiles were on every face; the town was happy.²⁸

Much of his humor was seen in mimicry and make-up. One of his first successes in Philadelphia, for example, featured his disguises in Catch Him Who Can: an old Frenchman, Keeper of a madhouse in Paris; a drunken postillion; an apothecary; and a blacksmith. The characters were naturally two-dimensional and the fun of the piece lived in action. Jefferson's sense of fun was highly visual, in the best low comedy tradition. From the back waters of the eighteenth century, for instance, he once resurrected one of Garrick's

²⁷Dramatic Life as I Found It (reprinted: New York: Benjamin Blom, 1966), 276.

²⁸Quoted in Winter, The Jeffersons, 77-8.

most famous stage tricks. The great actor had Perkins, the Drury Lane hair dresser and wig-maker, devise a means whereby the hair on Garrick's wig could be made to stand on end at his initial meeting with the Ghost.²⁹ Ludicrous as it sounds, the effect was apparently quite profound. Jefferson used the same device to much different effect in a poor musical farce by John O'Keefe entitled The Farmer, and Winter claims that it saved the play.³⁰

Of the 198 roles listed for Jefferson in Appendix A, a remarkable number of them are either classics of English comedy or familiar material from the early nineteenth century. In this respect he was fortunate; he had good material to work with and the style of the pieces generally lent themselves to the traditional low comedy approach which he undoubtedly learned at his father's example in Plymouth, England. His reputation and standing as Philadelphia's premier low comedian went unchallenged. He was first and foremost an artist, in a fashion similar to two other great comedians of the succeeding generation - William Warren of the Boston Museum and Henry Placide of the Park. These three constitute a triumvirant of the American comedy school.

George Holland, 1791-1870

George Holland's career, which spanned the truly formative years of the century, is in many ways the most

²⁹Joseph R. Roach, Jr., "Garrick, the Ghost and the Machine," TJ, December, 1982, 431.

³⁰Winter, The Jeffersons, 116.

typical, certainly the most representative of any I have encountered. He suffered all the vicissitudes of nineteenth century theatrical life, from occasional stardom to grinding poverty and periods of unemployment. It is fairly certain he never met Joseph Jefferson but if they had met, they should have recognized in themselves kindred spirits. Jefferson was the natural gentleman, while Holland was an innate clown, but they were both well tempered fun-makers and the most popular performers in their respective troupes and with their audiences. While Jefferson confirmed his appearances primarily to New York and Philadelphia, Holland ranged far and wide. It is possible he may have played every major theatre in the country until about 1850.

Holland was born in Lambeth, England in 1791, the third of seven children. His father was a dancing teacher who also performed. He cannot have had a lucrative career, though certainly enough money was found to place George in a boarding school in Hertfordshire, where he did not appear to succeed at anything except athletics. In time he became a clerk in a silk warehouse and in various soft-goods shops. This he followed with a stint in a newspaper office, became a printer briefly and finally seems to have settled on "commercial travelling" in Ireland.³¹

³¹William B. Maclay, *Holland Memorial: Sketch of the Life of George Holland, the Veteran Comedian, with Dramatic Reminiscences, Anecdotes, etc.* New York: T. H. Morrell, 1871, 8-13.

By 1818, Holland appears to have fallen in with a theatrical crowd and in that year he was engaged by Vincent de Camp at Newcastle-upon-Tyne for \$23 a week, and shortly found favor with Elliston at his Olympic in Birmingham where he succeeded as Tom in All at Coventry and The Whims of a Comedian, a piece of his own devising which he played with spectacular success nearly his whole career. At Manchester, he had the good fortune to be trained and put into the Harlequin act of Mr. and Mrs. Usher, whose particular version featured four cats. He also managed in these early years to play the theatres in Surrey, Shrewsbury, Leeds, Wakefield, and York.³² This pattern of constant itinerancy so early established remained a feature of his career.

The ubiquitous William Charles Macready saved Holland's first London engagement in Virginius at the Haymarket by staring down an audience which had been set to go laughing by Holland's face. Macready, displeased with the actor cast as Icilius, requested Holland in this serious part and apparently got what he deserved. It is fortunate for Holland, of course, that the temperamental star turned his ire on the audience this time.³³

Whatever Holland may have gotten from his training in England, and Noah Ludlow lamented that he had not started

³²Maclay, Holland, 30.

³³Maclay, Holland, 31.

in "the right school" or begun in "the right way,"³⁴ it is certain that he was not spoiled. When he began with Elliston in Birmingham in 1817, the manager sent Holland and a friend of his named Brodie a letter engaging them both. It expressly states that there would be no rights and privileges of the profession regarding casting matters:

. . . But, it must be distinctly understood by both that you and Mr. Holland are to assist in every department, as your services may be required, and if each of you do this with a willing spirit, it may lead to something permanent at the Olympic [in London] . . .³⁵

The weekly salary for each was 15 shillings. Thus did the provincial manager hold his actors - with large promises and small guarantees.

By 1825, Holland was making serious inroads as a low comedian of consequence. He met Junius Brutus Booth in that year at Bath and was subsequently engaged at the Haymarket; he was there when Booth asked him to go to America. The conditions of that offer constitute one of, if not the most, historically significant document of the era. Booth meticulously described the theatrical landscape and inadvertently gave posterity one of its most telling portraits. The letter is both too well known and too long to be included here, but the casting terms are interesting. Holland planned to travel to America with two ladies Booth also hoped to engage.

³⁴Ludlow, Dramatic Life, 698.

³⁵Dated May 19, 1817; quoted by Maclay, 14.

Now sir I have offered to you and those ladies as much as I can in honesty afford to give, their travelling expenses to and from Theatres in the United States (not including board) I should defray, as I told you respecting your own - and the use of their names for benefits on Stock nights - Your line of business would be exclusively yours. For the ladies I would not make this guarantee - The greatest actress in the World I may say is now in this city (Mrs. D_____) [Mrs. Mary Ann Duff, known at this time as "the American Siddons"] and several very talented women - besides I would endeavor to make such arrangements for Miss P_____ and Miss H_____ as would not be very repugnant to their ambition.

Booth's terms were a ten-month engagement at \$30 a week, one half of a clear benefit, and the terms were to be secret between them.³⁶

If Booth could not entice with well-turned words, one Dr. Hart, Giffert's London agent for the New York Bowery, proved he could win with lucre. In one of the largest personnel swipes of the century, Hart engaged eleven performers from the Haymarket, all but one of whom was not a comedian or singer. Holland, William B. Chapman, soon to be famous with Mississippi River Boat Theatre, and Holland's old provincial touring partner, Vincent De Camp, were the leading lights of this entourage.

Holland did not make his New York debut at the Bowery in 1827 as a star, but it did not take him long to attain that status nearly everywhere he played. The following review of his debut is quoted at length as it gives a good picture of Holland's material as well as his craft:

³⁶Quoted in Arthur Hornblow, A History of the Theatre in America, 2 vols.: New York: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1919 (reprinted: New York: Benjamin Blom, 1965), I, 77-80.

On Wednesday a Mr. Holland came out in a farce called A Day after the Fair, written we are told by himself and for himself. The piece has no great merit. It is a mere vehicle for limitations and transformations. To look at Mr. Holland's face and person we should scarcely take him for a Momus or a Proteus. Yet he is a mixture of both. His hard, stern features, are capable of great comic expression, and his stout frame is as lithe and flexible as a serpent's. The part is that of a clever footman who personates half a dozen different characters, in order to expel a fidgety old gentleman from a house he has recently purchased. The experiment is sure to succeed, for a more unendurable combination of noise, riot, and offensiveness was never imagined. First comes a drunken cobbler who thumps him; next a beggar woman with her brats who squalls at him; then a practising drummer who beats the reveille in his ears; a washer-woman hangs her wet linen on his flowers, and a tragic actress makes him mad with her rant; then comes an opera-singer with her shrill cadenzas; and she is followed by a maniac just let loose from Bedlam. All these plagues drive the poor Squire out of his senses, and he abandons the cottage at a sacrifice of much of its value, and when the eclairissement takes place he discovers "a day after the fair," that he has been duped and deceived. Some of Mr. Holland's personations were surpassingly ludicrous. We never saw a more ingenious disguise than that of the Opera singer. He sings a good comic song, and is skilful in catching the voices and cries of animals. At one time we thought all the bipeds and quadrupeds of Noah's Ark were let loose upon us. This actor is a great gain to the establishment.³⁷

The New York American of September 13 was every bit as enthusiastic, too.³⁸

There is every reason to assume that George Holland was a born itinerant, for no sooner had he established himself in New York than he made an arrangement with Charles Giffert and other managers to play a New York-Boston-Philadelphia-Baltimore circuit for \$1,500 a month. He also made an agreement with Simpson of the Park for seven nights. But his gypsy feet turned restless by 1829, and he engaged with

³⁷[New York] Albion, September 15, 1827. n.p.

³⁸September 13, 1827.

James Caldwell of the Camp Street Theatre in New Orleans. He would remain in the South until that theatre burned to the ground in 1842.

During the southern sojourn, Holland was frequently involved in various managements. In 1834, he joined Caldwell at the new St. Charles Theatre in New Orleans where he served as secretary and treasurer. It is to his credit that he managed to deal successfully with the famous dancer Fanny Ellsler. She had nearly ruined Simpson of the Park and a few other managers with her terms. In that same year, he united with Sol Smith in the management of his Montgomery Theatre for a season. After a stint with Junius Brutus Booth in Natchez, he who had been kept waiting ten years for Holland's services, Holland once more set his sights on travel. His wife died in 1834 and he remarried a Catherine de Luce five years later. She bore him five sons and a daughter; three of the children became actors. Edmund Milton was the most well known and served Wallack's Theatre for thirteen seasons.³⁹

Holland returned to New York in 1842 and was no doubt relieved to find that his old friend from the New-castle company of years ago was a highly successful New York manager; William Mitchell and Holland shared the top honors at the Olympic until 1849. It was an ideal position for both men; Mitchell's health could no longer support nightly

³⁹Moses, Famous Families, 257.

performing, and Holland had the run of the most absurd, ludicrous repertory he would ever find. As previously mentioned, the Olympic gave itself to novelties and skits and five or six of these usually comprised an evening's bill. The whirligig Holland finally had a home, and of all the theatres he ever worked the Olympic was undoubtedly the best suited to his particular talents.

When Mitchell closed in 1849, Holland returned to the South. He joined Sol Smith's Varieties in New Orleans and his fame was very great.⁴⁰ In 1853, he returned to New York to join Burton's Chamber Street Theatre and then he moved to Wallack's in 1854, where he was periodically employed until 1869. He spent occasional summers with Burton at Niblog.

The panic of 1857 took a heavy toll on the theatre but Holland appears to have suffered more than most. Wallack apparently found that a low comedian was an expendable commodity in this time of stress and Holland was summarily dismissed in the 1857-8 season. With a large family to support, Holland acted quickly and took what some considered a drastic step, as outlined in the following "card" he published in the Herald of December 18, 1857:

George Holland, late of Wallack's Theatre, respectfully informs his friends and the public that in consequence of the unfortunate state of the times - which has prevented the managers of what are termed the legitimate

⁴⁰Maclay, Sketch, 84.

theatres from fulfilling their contracts, and thus caused him to be unable to provide those comforts for his family as heretofore - he has made an engagement with Wood & Christy's minstrels, . . . which will not only enable him to support his family as usual, but also enable him, in a short time, to resume specie payments, and settle all his title accounts which have been rendered with so much kindness. He also begs to assure his friends and the public that he will appear before them in the same public capacity - in the same or similar pieces - in the line of low comedy - the only difference will be that instead of coloring his face with red paint, it will appear black; which, when washed off, he hopes they will perceive the same honest countenance he has hitherto maintained.

One of Holland's bigger hits in minstrelsy was as Black George in My Friend, Black George from White Plains. Odell takes this engagement as an outrage to Holland's professional standing and prestige, but it is clear that as a husband and father he had no choice. At all events, after some short engagements at the Bowery, the Winter Garden and a brief engagement with an English company at the German Stadt Theatre, he was reinstated at Wallack's where he remained until 1869.

By this time, Holland was known as "America's oldest comedian," which was no doubt true, but he was also perhaps now a little too old for Lester Wallack's taste and he was released in 1869. In what can only be described or understood as an act of mercy, Augustin Daly hired him for the 1869-70 season.

Because of its increasingly light comedy repertory, Wallack's probably did not have much need for a low comedian, particularly of Holland's fairly coarse stamp. His

salary in the sixties reflects this: in the range from \$125 (to the house star, Lester) to the call boys who received \$5, Holland drew only a measly \$25.⁴¹ A series of letters in the Harvard Theatre Collection suggests his extreme poverty and his acute embarrassment over a series of loans he had made.⁴² But there was always an occasional fillip: in 1864-5, Holland had joined the famous Wallack-Davenport combination, said to be the first such, and played in The Iron Mask and Oliver Twist.

By the end of the 1869-70 season with Daly, retirement was imperative. If he had not been well paid in the last years, he could at least take comfort in the send-off the profession gave him. His final performance and benefit occurred on May 16, 1870 at Daly's Fifth Avenue and was said to have been unusually affectionate. He was so enfeebled that Daly had to read Holland's goodbye address, after which a bouquet of "greenbacks" (treasury notes) was presented to him.⁴³

He died on December 20, 1870 but the profession did not cease its tribute.⁴⁴ A benefit for his family occurred January 21, 1871 and Holland Testimonial occurred at eleven different theatres simultaneously in New York, Brooklyn,

⁴¹Odell, Annals, VII, 378.

⁴²Uncataloged A.L.S. of Holland to various individuals.

⁴³Odell, Annals, VIII, 580.

⁴⁴Uncataloged M.S., Harvard Theatre Collection.

Baltimore, and other cities. The total receipts came to over \$15,000 - a tremendous act of public affection.⁴⁵

The story of Holland's funeral has been told far too often. Much controversy stemmed from a priest's refusal to bury Holland because he was an actor. Joseph Jefferson III, who was attempting to plan the funeral, was instructed to see about "The Little Church Around the Corner." It became and remains to this day the "actors' church."

Unlike Joseph Jefferson I, George Holland came to the stage with no training and what he learned in his formative years appears to have been picked up by trial and error. He brought with him a quick and ready wit, a talent as a ventriloquist (which he used most often in songs and the famous Pillbury Family skit) and an irrepressibility which knew no bounds. Noah Ludlow informs us that he was too naturally the clown to ever play tragedy, and when forced to play Tyrell in Richard III, which he did with total seriousness and conviction, he brought havoc with him.⁴⁶ Like Jefferson I, audiences simply could not tolerate seriousness in one so naturally amusing. J. H. Stoddart tells of a sustained backstage joke over a series of nights when Holland made up his young son, Edmund Milton, for his role as a savage in Pocahontas. The father took special delight in giving the child a new and increasingly funnier make-up at each performance, to the company's amusement.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Maclay, Sketch, 110.

⁴⁶Ludlow, Dramatic Life, 702.

⁴⁷Quoted in Odell, Annals, VI, 444.

The most acute description of Holland's acting craft is quoted in Maclay and has been attributed to Dr. Northall, a New York dentist who wrote sketches for both Mitchell and Burton:

We can think of no standard by which he would be correctly judged. He has, then, no genius. His appreciation of a part he had to play had nothing to do with the opportunity it might afford him of developing a passion or eccentricity of mind, but simply from the amount of practical fun of which the part would admit. An opportunity of tumbling over a chair, upsetting a table, or burning his nose on a candle were worth to him more than all the finest sentences of wit and sentiment which could be written. It was so rarely we could detect in George Holland anything like a bit of legitimate acting, that we always attributed such an exhibition, when it did occur, to accident rather than thought or design. In the over-strained, unnatural and exaggerated style of farce incident which characterizes the modern school, George Holland was in many respects unequalled . . .⁴⁸

If his approach to his craft was unorthodox and sui-generis, his indifference to traditional hierarchial procedures was equally so. Joseph Jefferson III gives this account of his first meeting with Holland:

. . . George Holland was distinctly an actor of the old school, invariably introducing even into modern characters its traditions and conventionalities; his effects were broadly given, and his personality was essentially comic. He was quite an old man when I first knew him, and I had serious doubts as to whether our acquaintance in the theater would be an agreeable one; for by the terms of my engagement I was to hold a leading part as the comedian of the company, and he, who had always occupied that station, was placed second to me. I naturally thought that feeling himself comparatively subordinate, and that I, a younger man, was to outrank him, he would, by his manner at least, resent my intrusion upon his former ground. I was, however, agreeably mistaken; for I found him too generous a man to harbor

⁴⁸Maclay, Sketches, 37.

any jealous feelings, and to my gratification we were friends from our first meeting. It is pleasant also to know that this relationship extended over many years, and up to the day of his death.⁴⁹

But is Holland himself who gives us the keenest insight. In a letter to Ben Webster at the Haymarket in London dated 1845, he makes an appeal for a job there as "funny man":

Not offered as a bona fide legitimate comedian - no - no - I like Billy Shakespeare very well but I don't want to show off in any of his stuff . . . I go in for those pieces that are made to make people laugh without their knowing what it's all about - in those kind [sic] of things I can make the folks laugh as well as anyone else. Therefore upon consideration - would there be any chance for you to make use of my ugly mug next summer for two months"[?]⁵⁰

Here was an actor who had a keen perception of his own talents and apparently would not, or could not, delude himself about his goals. He did not have any interest in literary comedy and of the more than 260 roles listed in Appendix B, less than ten of them can lay any claim to literary merit. He was true to his word about Shakespeare and appeared in only four of his plays: the already mentioned Richard III, Launcelot in The Merchant, the gravedigger in Hamlet and, of course, the part he was born to play in Merry Wives. No critical opinion of that performance has survived, unfortunately.

⁴⁹Jefferson, Autobiography, 336-7.

⁵⁰Uncataloged A.L.S. of Holland to Benjamin Webster, Haymarket Theatre, London, July 27, 1845.

In old English comedy, he appeared as Moses in School for Scandal, Diggory in She Stoops to Conquer, David in The Rivals, and finally, at the age of 75, he debuted as Tony Lumpkin at Wallacks! For all the rest of his repertory, it was as transitory as a glance at the titles of Appendix B can possibly suggest. Many of the pieces Holland wrote himself, though he does not appear to have claimed credit for anything after his debut piece at the Bowery, A Day After the Fair, in which he characteristically played six parts. As Thomas in The Secret, he played the part over 500 times.⁵¹

No real physical description of Holland has survived and a portrait of him as Bunberry Kobb in Rosedale (1863) tells us next to nothing. He appears to have been about middle height and a bit portly, but by no means a natural Falstaff. His skills were unlearned and emanated from that rare and wonderful human obsession to mimic and arouse laughter. In a book on the great comedians of the day, William Keesee said:

. . . George Holland was one of the funniest men known to our stage. He was not an artist in the way of bringing out points of character; his aim was to ransack the part for points of fun. He was the very spirit of farce, and an adept in the employment of every comic device that would amuse his audience. He seemed to care as much for farcical display as for wit or sentiment or character drawing. He has left no theatrical comedy portraits of finished excellence that stand out as exemplars like those of Placide and Blake. Indeed, he often set at naught all the rules, principles, and

⁵¹Odell, Annals, VI, 286.

purposes of legitimate acting. He was a born funmaker, and made laughter for a generation.⁵²

Holland's career probably suffered from his apparent compulsion to keep travelling. But for Mitchell's in the forties and at Wallack's in the fifties, he knew no home. He seems to have been inventive and certainly amusing as an actor, but his particular style was excessively broad (he does not appear to have had a rival in this line). As we have seen, however, that kind of comedy was winding down, and Holland appears to have died at precisely the right historical moment.

James Lewis, 1837-1896

In sharp contrast to Holland, James Lewis was a virtual recluse. When not engaged at Daly's Fifth Avenue Theatre from 1869 til his death in 1896, he vanished from the world of theatre and kept house on Long Island. Lester Wallack, in particular, found him most anti-social -- Lewis declined two of his invitations to join the coveted and prestigious Lamb's Club.⁵³ Nothing is known of his early life as he never discussed it in the few interviews which he granted. At all events, the Dictionary of American Biography claims he was born James Lewis Deming on October 5, 1837.

⁵²William L. Keesee, A Group of Comedians (New York: The Dunlap Society, 1901), 72-3.

⁵³Uncatalogued A.L.S. of Lewis to Lester Wallack, February 26, 1886, Harvard Theatre Collection.

In his own words, he "stubbed his toe, and fell on stage." An actor friend of his in his home town of Troy, New York resigned from the local stock company with no notice. Lewis coned the part with speed and was therefore engaged as "general utility business."⁵⁴ From here he moved to the Greene Street Theatre in Albany for a short season and then joined a Georgia circuit tour which engaged him for four years, until the Civil War was declared.

Lewis demonstrated his allegiance quickly by returning north to Rochester. He toured and then settled in Cleveland where he was principal low comedian at John Ellsler's Theatre. Returning to New York, he engaged with Mrs. John Wood's Olympic Theatre (not to be confused with Mitchell's Olympic of the forties). This alliance proved to be quite unsatisfactory for all parties concerned. One version of Lewis' engagement there claims that he was so immensely successful in his first appearance that he was brought before the curtain for an ovation. This Mrs. Wood could not tolerate, either as a question of policy or of personal jealousy and she subsequently never gave him another opportunity with a good part. She excluded him from the cast of David Copperfield in 1865-6 and this, more than any other evidence, proves she was operating under a vendetta; it is otherwise inconceivable that the manageress should avoid a face and physical frame

⁵⁴From his letters signed "T." in the New York Daily Graphic, June, n.d., 1875.

that was literally made for Dickens.⁵⁵ Mrs. G. H. Gilbert, an actress with whom Lewis would soon create the outstanding comedy team of the period, has it differently and claims Lewis was at his best at this period in old farces, although they were going out of vogue.⁵⁶ Sensing he was a failure in his New York debut, he turned to E. L. Davenport's Continental Theatre in Boston and, as first comedian, supported Edwin Booth, Forrest, and Lotta Crabtree.

If in time of need George Holland could turn to minstrelsy, Lewis proved equally resourceful in burlesque. He joined Eliza Holt's troupe and played a series of heroines in Lucretia Borgia, Ivanhoe, and Paris.⁵⁷ The engagement at New York's Waverly Theatre in 1869 was a big hit and Lewis does not appear to have felt any loss of dignity, unlike Holland in minstrelsy. Lewis had nothing to lose, of course, having established no reputation as yet.

When Daly's agent engaged him for the 1869-70 season, neither party could have guessed how successful - and difficult - the alliance would become. In 1877 Daly was forced to abandon his theatre, and he suspended operations until 1879. In September of 1877, The New York Times reported that Daly and Lewis quarrelled and when the actor returned to the theatre the next night, he found himself replaced by

⁵⁵From a clipping of The Daily Graphic, June, 1875.

⁵⁶Gilbert, 88.

⁵⁷Odell, Annals, VIII, 498-9.

one Owen Fawcett.⁵⁸ It hardly mattered, of course, because within a few days the entire company was "set at liberty."

During this hiatus, Lewis was far from idle. In Chicago, he scored a triumph as a traveste Rebecca in Ivanhoe and especially as King Dingdong in White Fawn!, a fairy extravaganza under the management of J. B. Booth, Jr. During Thanksgiving week of 1877, he received his first star billing as Archibald Meek in Marriage with the "Boucicault Comedy Company" at the Brooklyn Academy. In 1878, Lewis engaged with Henry Abbey, a fast-rising entrepreneur, at the Park Theatre in New York and scored a series of personal triumphs in broad comedies like Baby, Champagne and Oysters, and Otis Alderman.

When Mrs. G. H. Gilbert reengaged with Daly in 1880, she persuaded the hesitant manager to take Lewis back as well. She had appeared with him, though not opposite him, in a number of pieces at Henry Abbey's and they appear to have developed a friendly, professional alliance. They would eventually work in almost perfect harmony, as the humorous older couple, as members of "The Big Four" (which also included Ada Rehan, and John Drew) and around which Daly picked his string of successes until the ensemble was destroyed by Drew's departure in 1892. Lewis remained with Daly's Fifth Avenue Theatre and made a series of tours, both

⁵⁸The New York Times, September 12, 1877, in Daly's Theatre Scrapbooks, vol. VII, 395.

with the company internationally and under his own star billing in America until his death at his Long Island home in 1896.

We have seen, from the previous examples of Jefferson and Holland, how important their faces were to their craft; both appear to have had highly flexible and well-trained physiognomies. Lewis, by contrast, had the sort of face which one laughs at rather than with. Fortunately, many photographs of him were taken and most have survived. All of them suggest an oldbird: wise, well-domesticated and happy. The eyes goggle, even bulge, and appear to be set on pivots which moved curiously about as he spoke. He was short, thin and wiry; his nose was long and thin; he had a large mouth and no chin at all. The overall impression was that of an imp.

With such distinctive physical characteristics, one might assume he was definitively limited in casting matters. There is some evidence that Lewis thought so himself because in the New York Mirror Directory of the Theatre for 1888 he listed himself as an "eccentric comedian,"⁵⁹ a lines category dating from the 1840s which is almost impossible to limit and can only be defined in terms of the distinctly personal characteristics of the actor. Lewis certainly had lots of these and he was undoubtedly correct in his self-classification.

⁵⁹(New York: New York Mirror, 1888), n.p.

Daly had different ideas, however:

He [Lewis] was given, in the first two seasons at this theatre, a range of parts in which the ordinary lines of theatrical business were so crossed and opposed as to bewilder the most experienced professionals of the period. Through the range of low comedy, high comedy, 'juveniles' and 'first old men' Lewis moved with equal facility.⁶⁰

This use of Lewis was, of course, thoroughly consistent with Daly's policy regarding new and young recruits, but it must have taken a tremendous leap of the imagination to cast him in a romantic part opposite Ada Rehan.

In 1880, he played Leonardo Tompkins in Our First Families; he was critically condemned for it and thereafter any part offered to him by Daly that he did not like became a "Leonardo Tompkins role." Even as late as the 1882-3 season, Daly was still trying to fit a clown into the boudoir. He somehow coerced Lewis into accepting Digby de Rigby in Our English Friend, a part which the actor feared because it was "a heavy swell" and the play was riddled with love scenes.⁶¹ It was also a big success and Lewis personally had one of his biggest hits at Daly's.

Otis Skinner recalls Lewis as an actor of distinctly modern parts with little sympathy for the classics. The annual revival of an old comedy was "a chastisement to him" and he was often heard to remark, "Hey! Shakespeare is no

⁶⁰Joseph Francis Daly, The Life of Augustin Daly, (New York: MacMillan, 1917), 90-92.

⁶¹Odell, Annals, XII, 14, quoting Judge Daly.

friend of mine."⁶² He did not want the part of Paroles in All's Well That Ends Well and once cast in it, he bombarded Daly with a continuous stream of letters begging to be let out.⁶³

During the 1887-88 season, Daly mounted a highly sumptuous A Midsummer Night's Dream that would ultimately become a landmark production. Contrary to the established tradition of "stout unctiousness," Lewis was cast as Bottom. Odell, who saw his performance, credits it highly, remarking that it had the perfect blend of ignorance and conceit. Odell also claimed that it was the best production of the comedy in half a century.⁶⁴ Bernard Shaw was less kind, but perhaps more incisive: "Mr. Lewis as Bottom is not as funny as his part, whereas in modern plays he is always funnier than his part." Shaw also speculated, in a general swipe at Lewis' talents, that ". . . Mr. Lewis would be as funny in *Autolycus* as he is in Bottom; but he would be exactly the same in both parts."⁶⁵

Despite Shaw's implication that Lewis was a "one-performance actor," the critical compendium almost invariably applauded his extreme versatility:

⁶²Otis Skinner, Footlights and Spotlights: Productions of My Life on the Stage. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1923, 67.

⁶³Various A.L.S. of 1883, from Lewis to Daly, Folger Shakespeare Library.

⁶⁴Odell, Annals, XIII, 418.

⁶⁵George Bernard Shaw, Our Theatre in the Nineties, vol. I, 181.

Some of the characters in which Lewis appeared were alien, in the extreme, to his temperament and inharmonious with his physical peculiarities, yet he embodied them with a fidelity that made them always credible and often delightful. For every part which he played he provided a distinct identity and an appropriate, characteristic "make-up," and each part that he thus presented was a coherent, consistent, authentic type of human nature - the pervasive quality of all being genial, comic eccentricity.⁶⁶

Versatility, like beauty, apparently resides in the eye of the beholder. It is certainly true that Lewis could not completely camouflage his rather eccentric self, but Winter's analysis suggests that he approached each part differently and as a character with a distinct personality rather than as a vehicle for his own clowning. Holland, as we have seen, had used stage characters for his own purposes, and while he was judged extremely funny, his ranking as an artist was probably compromised. William Winter gives the clearest, and perhaps most insightful, analysis of the Lewis craft:

His effects in acting were caused not by grimace, posturing and other extravagance, but by assuming a definite personality and permitting his droll humor to permeate it, and to show itself through amusing peculiarities of demeanor and felicities of comic expression, visual and vocal. Not concealing his individuality, . . . he aimed to merge himself in the character represented, and to that aim he inflexibly adhered.⁶⁷

⁶⁶William Winter, "Memories of the Players," Colliers, March 29, 1913, n.p.

⁶⁷Unidentified, but signed, clipping in James Lewis File, Harvard Theatre Collection.

If, as a humble burlesque actor, Lewis felt any intimidation in the legitimate theatre, he never let it show for an instant. His relationship with Daly was established early and cannot be said to have improved at all in nearly thirty years. Lewis' complaints were limited to his casting and the more general grievance over the choice and quality of plays. There are no fewer than sixty letters from Lewis to Daly in the Folger collection, each of them demanding that Daly not cast him in certain parts. The letters begin in the early seventies and continue well into the nineties. They are, on the whole, extremely vituperative.

In 1872, for instance, Lewis asked for a release from "Goldfinch" in The Road to Ruin. His objection was "not because it is not good enough but because it is so entirely out of my line that I fear it would bring disaster on us both."⁶⁸

Two years later Lewis was taking a different and rather headstrong track. He declined, for instance, to continue his part in The Authors after the third performance. He found the part "too insignificant" and, claiming to be the most popular male member of the company, that if such inferior casting persisted, he would quit.⁶⁹ This dropping

⁶⁸A.L.S. of Lewis to Daly, n.d. (Saturday, p.m.) 1872, Augustin Daly Collection, Folger Shakespeare Library.

⁶⁹A.L.S. of Lewis to Daly, n.d., 1874, Folger Shakespeare Library.

of a role was not an accepted procedure of the old stock companies because of the intense performance pattern of alternation. In general, only death or extreme superannuation could free an actor of a part once he had agreed to do it. Lewis apparently neither asked for nor wanted a right of possession, and certainly claimed the prerogative of dropping the part at will. He likewise surrendered the part of Moses, a traditional low comedy role, in School for Scandal to William Sampson.⁷⁰

Throughout his career, Lewis remained extremely sensitive to his casting and fought Daly at nearly every turn. The only respite from this dissension occurred during the fabulously successful period of French and German adaptations on which the reputations of the theatre and The Big Four were built. As late as 1891, Lewis was still making "mistakes" - at least by his own calculation. In a letter to one Freiburger, he wrote: "The character of Syntax in 'Cinderella at School' was the first and probably will be my last of that kind. I hope the long suffering public will forgive me for it."⁷¹ The piece was, of course, a burletta; and a thing that Lewis, like most low comedians, despised.

Shakespeare continued to be his nemesis. The Dramatic News bewailed his casting as Slender in The Merry Wives of Windsor as beneath his dignity and his abilities, but

⁷⁰Odell, Annals, XLV, 501.

⁷¹Uncatalogued A.L.S. of Lewis to Freiburger, June 27, 1891, Harvard Theatre Collection.

recognized "that it was the only part in the play for him and he had to appear. A comedy at Daly's without Lewis would hardly be tolerated."⁷²

Beginning in the 1880s, in Daly's series of French or German adaptations (generally prepared by his brother, Joseph Francis), Lewis' fame became almost inextricably tied to that of Mrs. Gilbert. Seven-Twenty-Eight, Dollars and Sense (1883), Red Letter Nights (1884), A Wooden Spoon, and A Night Off (1885) were the plays which set the pattern of The Big Four and Lewis and Mrs. Gilbert were cast opposite each other as the comic old couple whose daughter, played by Ada Rehan, was beset upon by a young gentleman, John Drew. Of the old couple, John Drew graciously recalled: "By long practice, their stage business had developed a finesse which was a delight to their audiences and which could have been attained in no other way."⁷³

High comedy Lewis repeatedly failed at; farce was clearly his province, and fortunately the big plays of the eighties were generally quite farcical. In Americans Abroad, Needles and Pins, and An International Match, he scored heavily and become a great favorite with Daly audiences. He was empathetically a low comedian in the most traditional use of that term, but in time he seasoned the clowning with an artistic perspective.

⁷²The New York Dramatic News, January 19, 1886, in Daly's Theatre Scrapbooks, vol. 16, n.p.

⁷³John Drew, "Recollections of Mrs. Gilbert," Harpers Weekly, January 21, 1905.

A more delicate, well-balanced, and pleasing piece of low comedy work has not been seen from this actor for some time. Where there was any temptation to be broad and exaggerated, he was, and it is worthy of notice, quiet, subdued and suggestive in the quality of his mirth.⁷⁴

The play was Seven-Twenty-eight, produced at Daly's in 1883.

The Dramatic Times, among other sources, believed Lewis was always at his best as comic old men and paid him the following tribute:

There is no trick, no expression, no position of the body, no enunciation [sic] of the voice peculiar to a hearty or a lachrymose old chap that he has not studied, that he cannot render with the fidelity of nature. . . . his method is so simple so natural and so life-like, that the humor of it is irresistible.⁷⁵

But it was an unknown writer, called "T." who saw in Lewis a total comic revolution. The changing drama naturally occasioned a changing acting style, and Lewis was in its vanguard:

While the old like of caricaturing comedians is running down, and the old style farce is committed to such importations as Toole and exportations like J. S. Clarke, a new style of comedy - in much adapted from the French, conventional, chatty, played without grimace, and extending its effects in harmonious relations with the general movement of the play - has come into vogue. The master of conversational comedy is Mr. Lewis, of the Fifth Avenue Theatre, New York.

While he has not played parts available to a star actor, he has yet been the principal attraction in a series of plays which have two or three times enriched his manager, and which have been performed outside of New York with the refinement and completeness of Daly's Theatre.⁷⁶

⁷⁴The New York Commercial Advertiser, February 26, 1883 in Daly's Theatre Scrapbooks, vol. 11.

⁷⁵March 27, 1886 in Daly's Theatre Scrapbooks, vol. 16.

⁷⁶The Daily Graphic, New York, June - n.d., Signed T.: Clipping in Lewis' file at New York Public Library Theatre Collection.

This "new style of comedy," of which the writer felt Lewis was the master, undoubtedly owed everything to the continuous interplay and perfecting of timing which was a feature of Daly's and most specifically of Lewis' work with Mrs. Gilbert. For twelve years, these two worked in near perfect accord.

Thus, over the period of the nineteenth century, through the careers of Jefferson, Holland, and Lewis, the line of the low comedian -- like other lines of business -- gradually deteriorated as a unique identifiable stage character in the lifetime possession of a particular actor, to a style -- or a type -- of performance suitable to a wide variety of characters in many different plays. By the end of Lewis' career, the traditional line of the low comedian may be said to have dissappeared.

CONCLUSION

The modern theatre is separated from its origins, not by the technological wonders which began with the Industrial Revolution, but by its diminishing conventions. For nearly the whole of English-speaking theatre history -- from its inception as a professionally produced commodity during the Elizabethan era until its gradual acceptance of the Industrial Revolution in the last half of the nineteenth century, the major, central convention resided in the actor. He was at the core -- lynch-pin upon which all other theatrical periphera hung. He was the nuclear center of the theatrical transactions -- the center, and yet a polarity for the audience. To go to the theatre meant to watch the actor perform his craft or art. He was its excuse and the central motivation for the transaction. And during all that time he worked to a "line of business."

The term "lines of business" informs nearly every extant theatrical journal, diary, professional letter, contract, and reminiscence of the eighteenth centuries. Used interchangeably with "possession of parts," it denotes tacit and implicit agreement between actors and managers concerning the casting of that actor throughout a season or a series of seasons. Frequently, by extension, a "line" also refers

to the range of parts and specific character types which an actor could be called upon by the manager to perform or which the actor considered his contractual right to play. As the repertory of any given stock company was large and constantly changing, and rehearsals were relatively scant and infrequent as a rule, an actor was required to be master of a line of characterizations. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were periods of a highly soecialized division of theatrical acting labor.

This specialization by actors has here been shown to have existed since the beginning of the professional English-speaking theatre, and by the time of the Hallams and the founding of theatre in America, the line of business was a firmly entranced tradition, wielding considerable influence as a determinant of the repertory and a restriction on membership in individual companies as well as in the entire profession of ating. Not until the late nineteenth century was this traditional casting policy finally dismantled and replaced by a director who demanded and got the artistic right and privilege to cast "against line" or "out of line" as he saw fit.

We have seen that, by the close of the Elizabethan period, an heirarchical system obtained in the casting of plays, with the actor's position in the company determined by the size and perhaps the quality of the parts he might play. This system prevailed whether the theatre was an entrepreneurial one like Henslowe's or a communal one like Shakespeare's.

In the Restoration period, the insistence of actors to lines of business caused dissension with such managers as Christopher Rich, but by 1775, not only "lines of business" but "possession of parts" was a firmly established policy in casting. Indeed, the Restoration period saw the consolidation of the hierarchical system to include the rights of seniority and succession, as well as precedence in performing and possession of parts. Those actors with the longest tenure in a company came first in its privileges. A line of parts was generally only transferred from one actor to another by reason of the death or retirement of the senior actor. Precedence in performing assured the actor that, having once played a part, he could thereby lay claim to succeeding performances of the same part. Possession of parts meant not only the right to play the parts but, often, the literal possession of the sides upon which the part was written. Non-acting managers tried to enforce their rights to cast as they saw fit, but, in general, they were defeated by the entrenched hierarchical system.

These casting policies and practices journeyed to America with the Hallam company, and dominated theatre through most of the nineteenth century. Indeed, individual actors were hired for a season or a succession of seasons to a given "line of business," as detailed in Appendix D. Although the repetitive use of these categories over the years became rigid and implacable, it was regarded as a form of back-stage etiquette to observe the tradition. Indeed, one

might wonder if the overwhelming popularity of melodrama on nineteenth century stages might not be due, in part, to the neatness with which the characters of melodrama fit the categorical lines of business. More research is definitely in order on this subject.

The star system worked against the tradition of lines of business as did the gradual emergence of the long-run. Its final demise came with the introduction and triumph of realism as a dramatic mode. At long last, the casting prerogatives demanded over many years by managers devolved upon the "directors" of the new drama, and the age of the actor as chief progenitor of theatrical performance was over.

These evolving trends and changes in casting policies are nicely illustrated by a logitucinal analysis of one "line of business": that of the old man/low comedian, throughout the course of the American theatre from its inception to the close of the nineteenth century. The briefly overlapping careers of Joseph Jefferson I (1774-1832), George Holland (1791-1870), and James Lewis (1838-1896) illustrate the point.

These specific careers were selected because each actor was considered one of, if not the most, representative artist of the old man/low comedian line by audiences and theatre professionals alike, and because each was employed by notable stock companies during important periods. Through

their careers it becomes evident that the line of the low comedian -- like other lines of business -- gradually deteriorated as a unique, indentifiable stage character in the lifetime possession of a particular actor. By the end of Lewis' career, as we have seen, the traditional lines had disappeared.

Thus did long established and sorely fought for policies and practices become inoperable. Thus did the theatre of the twentieth century become a director's province, with the actor relegated to a less significant role than that which he had long enjoyed.

APPENDIX A

THE ROLES OF JOSEPH JEFFERSON, I 1774-1832

The Provoked Husband - Squire Richard
The Spoiled Child - Tagg
The Guardian - Young Clackett
The Surrender of Calais - La Gloire
The Midnight Hour - Sebastien
Rosina - William
Bombastes Furioso
I'll Tell You What - Sir Harry Harmless
The Merry Girl, or The Two Philosophers - one of the philosophers
The Deserted Daughter - Grime
A Bold Stroke for a Husband - Don Vincentio
The Wheel of Fortune - Sir David Daw
The Young Quaker - Endless
Poor Vulcan, or Gods upon Earth - Adonis, alias Foe the Shepherd
Know Your Own Mind - Charles
The Whims of Galatea, or The Power of Love - Dorilas
The Haunted Tower - Edward
The Liar - Papillion
The Mountaineers, or Love and Madness - Said, the Moor
Bon Ton - Davy
The Archers, or The Mountaineers of Switzerland - Lieutenant
The Spanish Barber - Tallboy
The Man of Fortitude - Carlos
Hamlet - Polonius
The Road to Ruin - Silky
Harlequin's Vagaries - Clown
Zorinski - Witzki
The London Hermit, or Rambles in Dorsetshire - Toby Thatch

The West Indian - Varland
 The Independence of America - Officer
 As You Like It - Touchstone, Adam, Le Beau, and William
 The Battle of Hexham - Gregory Gubbin
 My Grandmother - Dickey Gossip
 The Siege of Belgrade - Leopold
 The Man of Ten Thousand - Herbert
 Tell Truth and shame the Devil - Tom Holton
 The Critic - Don Ferolo Whiskerandos
 The Prisoner - Robert
 Speculation - Jack Arable
 The Two Misers - osman
 First Love, or The French Emigrant - David Mowbray
 The Adopted Child - Michael
 Much Ado About Nothing - Dogberry and Verges
 Love Makes a Man, or The Fop's Fortune - Sancho
 The Wedding Day - Sir Adam Contest
 The Stranger - Peter
 Secrets Worth Knowing - Nicholas Rue
 The Telegraph - Sir Peter Curious
 He's Much to Blame - Williams
 Sterne's Maria, or The Vintage - Lafleur
 The Will - Realize
 The Natural Daughter - Sir Stately Perfect
 Every Man and His Humor - Stephen
 Lover's Vows - Count cassell
 Bourville castle - James
 The School for Arrogance - Sir Samuel Sheepy
 The Way to get Married - Toby Allspice
 Next Door Neighbors - Bluntly
 The Suspicious Husband - Jack Meggott
 Cymbeline - Cloten
 Lock and Key - Ralph
 A Quarter of An Hour Before Dinner - Plainwell

Half an hour After Supper - Frank
 Fortune's Fool - Tom Seymour
 Fountainebleau, or Our Way in France - Sir Shenkin
 The Doldrum - Septimus
 The Life and Death of Tom thum, the Great - Lord Grizzle
 Fraternal Discord - Jack Bowline and Captain Bertram
 Speed the Plough - Farmer Ashfield
 The East Indian - Lord Listless
 The Merchant of Venice - Launcelot Gobbo
 The Spanish Castle, or the Night of Guadalquiver - Pero
 Abaellino - Memno
 Life - Lackbrain
 The Captive of Spilsberg - Kourakim
 The Wild Goose Chase - Hans Molkin
 The Force of Calumny - Young Scharfeneck
 Laugh When You Can - Sambo
 The Virgin of the Sun - Diego
 The Stranger's Birthday - Conrad
 The Horse and The Widow - Ferrett
 Five Thousand A Year - Sir Matthew Maxim
 Columbia's Daughters - Jack Acorn
 Bunker Hill, or The Death of Warren - Sir William Howe
 The Indians in England, or The Nabob of Mysore - Samuel
 The Tempest - Stephano
 The School for Soldiers - Soleby
 The Heir at Law - Zekiel Homespun
 Self-Immolation, or Family Distress - Jew
 False shame - John
 The Robbery - Louis
 The Wandering Jew, or Love's Masquerade - Toby
 The Mysteries of the Castle - Cloddy
 The Castle Spectre - Motley
 The Italian Monk - Paulo
 The Maid of the Oaks - Hurry
 Count Benyowski - Kudrin

The Italian Father - Fool
 The Harper's Daughter, or Love and Ambition - Marshal Ingelheim
 Columbus - Bribo
 The Lottery - Jack Stocks
 The Follies of A Day - Don Gunzman
 The Three and the Deuce - Humphrey Grizzle and Frank
 Don Juan- Scaramouch
 The Siege of Montgatz - Bras De Fer
 A New Way to Play Old Debts - Justice Greedy
 The Bulse of Diamonds, or What is She? - Fargon
 The Toy, or The Lie of the Day - Alibi
 The Wise Man of the East - Tom Starch
 The School for Scandal - Sir Peter teazle, Sir Oliver Surface,
 Charles Surface, Crabtree, and Moses
 The Village Lawyer - Sheepface
 Where is He? - Block
 The Abbe de L'Epee, or Deaf and Dumb - Dubois
 Richard Coeur de Lion - Guillot
 The Poor Gentleman - Sir Robert Bramble and Dr. Ollapod
 Folly As It Flies - Peter Postobit
 Adelmorn, the Outlaw - Lodowick
 Blue Beard, or Female Curiosity - Ibrahim
 Fiesco - Muley Hassan
 Paul and Virginia - Dominique
 The Duenna - Mendoza
 The Irish Mimic, or Blunders at Brighton - Colin
 The Follies of Fashion - Nicholas
 King Henry IV - Francis
 Il Bondocani - Cadi
 The Votary of Wealth - Sharpset
 The Hypocrite - Mawworm
 Which Is the Man? - Bobby Pendragon
 The Relapse - Lord Foppington
 Gil Blas - Gil Blas
 The Wheel of Truth - John

The School for Prejudice - Ephraim
 The Good Neighbor - Thomas
 Retaliation - Precipe Rebate
 A Tale of Mystery - Michelli and Francisco
 The Blind Boy - Carlos
 Hear Both Sides - Quillet
 She Would and She Would Not - Don Manuel
 Delays and Blunders - Robert Grange
 The Review, or The Wags of Windsor - John Lump
 The Fair Fugitive, or He Forgot Himself - Lord Dartford
 A House To Be Sold - Matthew Mug
 The Brothers - Sir Benjamin Dove
 Raising the Wind - Jeremy Diddler
 Every One Has His Fault - Solus
 A Roland for an Oliver - Fixture
 The Honeymoon - Jacques and Rolando
 Comedy of Errors - Dromio
 Othello - Roderigo
 Romeo and Juliet - Mercutio and Peter
 The Soldier's Daughter - Timothy Quaint
 Three Weeks After Marriage - Drugget
 Killing No Murder - Apollo Belvi and Buskin
 The Devil upon Two Sticks - Doctor Last
 The First Floor - Tim Tartlet
 The Man of Fortitude - Carlos
 A Good Spec--Land in the Moon - Jasper Lunge
 The Dramatist - Ennui
 A Cure for the Heartache - Frank Oatland
 A Chapter of Accidents - Jacob Gawky
 Town and Country - Kit Cosey
 The Weathercock - Tristram Fickle
 The Shipwreck - Stave
 The Iron Chest - Sampson Rawhold
 The Rivals - Bob Acres
 The Welsh Girl - Sir Owen Ap Griffith

A Cure for the Heartache - Old Rapid
Miss in her Teens - Captain Flash
The Prize, or 2-5-3-8 - Dr. Lenitive
Guy Mannnering - Dominie Sampson
He would be a Soldier - Caleb
A Budget of Blunders - Dr. Smugface
The Springs of Laurel - Nipperkin
Charles the Second - Captain Copp
Animal Magnetism - La Fleur
John Bull - Job Thornbury
The Merry Wives of Windsor - Sir Hugh Evans

APPENDIX B
THE ROLES OF GEORGE HOLLAND
1791-1870

Sweethearts & Wives
Paul Pry
The Secret
Guy Mannering - Dominic Sampson
Turned Out - Gregory
Bill of Fare
Who's the Composer
Lend Me Five Schillings - Golightty
The Devil in Paris
Mr. & Mrs. Candle (Mrs. C.)
A Wife for an Hour
Robinson Crusoe the Second
Box & Cox
Kissing Goes by Favor
The Child of the Regiment
Open Sesame
The Mayor of Garratt
Caleb Quoteen - John Lump
Tristram Sappy
The Family of the Pillbury
The Elbow Shakers - Billy Bladder
The New Footman Bottery Breakdown
The Secret - Thomas
A Thumping Legacy - Jerry Ominous
Deaf as a Post - Tristram Sappy
My Wife's Second Floor - Jacob Close
The College Boy - Dabster
The Printer's Devil - Pierre Pica

'Twould Puzzle a Conjuror
 Mogul Tale - Jonny Atkins
 The Double-Bedded Roam - Dulcimer Pipes
 The Railroad Station
 The National Guard (opera by Dubes) - Achille Bonbon
 The Savage and the Maiden - Folair
 My Wife's Out - Mr. Scrumble
 A Trip by Railroad - Blondel Bristle
 The Lamentations of Billy Lackaday
 Robinson Crusoe - Nipcheese
 Abon Hassan - Zabouc
 The Spoiled Child - John
 A Good Night's Rest - Mr. Snobbington
 Comfortable Lodgings - Sir Jippington Miff
 Cinderella (opera by Rossini) - Pedro
 Bears Not Beasts - Snapall
 Alpine Maid - Surig
 The Dan Not Done - Leporello
 The Marriage of Figaro - Antonio
 The Young Scamp - Mr. Miedow
 Paul Shack
 Peter White
 A Mistaken Story - Mr. Pickaninny
 the Vivandiere - Lobwitz
 The Forth Thieves - Hassarac
 Polka-Mania - Jemmy
 New Inventions - Joe
 Robert Macaire - Jacques Strop
 Wilful Murder - Pythagorus Sphoon
 Turning on the Tables - Jack Humphries
 Thimblorig - John Ginger
 The Post of Honor - Cobus Yerks
 The Ladder of Love - Francois
 Fighting by Proxy - Ailsop
 The Devil in Paris - Crequet
 Young England - John James Pooley

Home Again - Ben Bradshaw
 A Trip to Kissingen - Hercules Crisis
 Somebody Else - Hans Moritz
 The House Dog - Dust
 On the Tiles - Peter Periwinkle
 Drawin for the Army - Moufflet
 The Mysterious Family - Narcissus Daffadils
 The Swiss Cottage - Natz Tiekc
 Fashionable Arrivals - Mrs. Harris
 The Two Queens - Magnus Lob
 Married Life - Mr. Dove
 The School for Scandal - Moses
 Nicholas Nickleby - John Brawdie
 You Can't Marry Your Grandmother - Tom Small
 Fellow Servants - Nicholas Bridle
 My Sister and I - Peter Redsteak
 The Wigwam - Pluffy Plumpton
 A Wife for an Hour - Joskyn Gaites
 The Eight Troop of St. James - Master Thomas Smallbones
 The Jacobite - John Duck
 How to Settle Accounts with your Washer-Woman -
 Whittington Widgetts
 Kissing Goes by Favor - Jean Grillon
 Luck's All - Pierre Gabemouche
 Out on the Sly - Pimlico Pippins
 Robinson Crusoe, the Second - Snodgrass
 This House to be Sold, the Property of the Late William
 Shakespeare! Inquire Within! - Chatterton Chopkins
 The Pride of the Market - Isidore Farive
 Box and Cox - Box
 Love in a Garret - Fitzlang
 Where's Eliza - Smitherton
 Who's My Husband? - Daniel Tootles
 The Tipperary Legacy - Turnem Green
 Charles XII
 Peggy Green - Nicholas Snozzle

The Young Scamp - Mildew
 City Wives - Lovewell
 The Loan of a Lover - Peter Spyk
 Dearest Elizabeth - Mr. Lau
 Sketches in India - Tom Tape
 The Sentinel - Schloppser
 Dave on Both Sides - Pygmalion Phibbs
 Lavater - Betman
 Family Jarr
 The Boarding School
 The Post of Honor - Cobus Yerks
 Grist to the Mill - Billy Lackaday
 A Day Well Spent
 Poor Pillicaddy - title role
 Old Honesty - Toby Perch
 Lola Montanez - Michael Bowski
 Going to the Races - Jeremiah Twiddle
 Founded on Facts - Mr. Skeptic
 The Queensbury Fete - Giles Fairland
 The May Queen - Caleb Ripkin
 The Midnight Watch - Coco
 The Maid of Croissey
 Slasher & Crasher - Slasher
 The Haunted Man - Tetterby
 The Witch of Windemere - Natty Primrose
 How to Die for Love - Trap
 The Light Troop of St. James - Master Thomas
 Smallbones
 No. 5 - Tittlebat Strut
 Your Life's in Danger - John Strong
 Lavater the Physiognomist
 A Capital March - Mr. Sunnyside
 X. Y. Z. - Neddy Bray
 Lend Me Five Shillings

Turn Out

The Poor Gentleman - Dobbins

The Post of Honor - Jerks

The Good for Nothing - Albertine

All That Glitters Is Not Gold - Toby Twinkle

The Widow's Victim - Podge

The Merchant of Venice - Launcelot

London Assurance - Meddle

The Game of Love - Jacob Chubb

500 Pound Reward - Mr. Dumbleton

A Lady in Difficulties - Puffengruntz

The Man of Many Friends - Sam Skrymscher

The Waterman

Manifest Destiny - Greenege

The Loan of a Lover - Spyk

An Awkward Arrival - Gilliflower

To Oblige Benson - Trotter Southdown

The Post of Honour

New Year's Day - Edmund Quick

She Stoops to Conquer - Diggory

Sweethearts & Wives

First Impressions - Fly

My First Fit of the Gout - Tony

Who Stole the Pocket-Book?

Hamlet - gravedigger

The Fire Eater - Jeremiah Gosling

Going to the Races

'Twas I

Dave on Both Sides

Victor Vanquished - Baron Gartz

Hiawatha - No-go-miss, Hiawatha's grandmamma

The Creole - Bokes

Waiting for Funds - Robert Robinson

I'll Tell Your Wife - Dr. Bile

Who's the Composer?

The Knights of the Round Table

A Decided Case - Stabbs
 One Coat for Two Suits - Miles Martyrman
 The Revow
 Paul Jones
 Out for a Holiday
 My Friend from Leatherhead - Mr. Loophole
 Past and Present - Placideau
 A Splendid Investment - Titus Fulgert
 The Invisible Husband - Dan Japhet
 A Fearful Tragedy - Timonthy Slumpington
 Sudden Thoughts
 The Candle Lectures - Mrs. Arinmta Belinda Candle Toodles
 The Rivals
 Art and Artifice - Kerwyn von Twilt
 The Road to Ruin
 Two B'hoys
 The State vs. Pawkins
 The Octoroon - Sunnyside
 The Black Knight
 You Can't Marry Your Grandmother - Tommy Small
 Secrets Worth Knowing - Undermine
 Merry Wives of Windsor
 Speed the Plough
 Love for Love - Foresight
 The Invisible Husband - Gil Perez
 The Provoked Husband - John Moody
 Married Life - Mr. Dismal
 True to the Last - Wardour
 Rosedale - Bunberry Kobb
 The Winning Suit - Joseph
 Rory O'More - Scrubbs
 Eveleen - James Cartwright
 My Wife's Maid - Mr. Pottles
 The Compact - Gil Zote
 Men of the Day - James

Uncle John - Friend Thomas
 The Ticket of Leave Man - Melter Moss
 Mind Your Own Business - Weazle
 All That Glitters Is Not Gold - Toby
 An Unequal Match - Blenkinsop
 The Iron Mask - Michel
 Oliver Twist - Bumble
 The Serf - Steinhardt
 The Double Gallant - Old Mr. Wilful
 The Needful - Mr. Meek
 Henry Dunbar - Jerrams
 Society - John Chodd, Sr.
 The Porter's Knot - Captain Oakhum
 It's Never Too Late to Mend - Mr. Hawes
 Shamus O'Brien, the Bould Boy of Glengall - Colonel Tarleton
 La Famille Bensiton - Mr. Fornichel
 A Dangerous Game - Gringoire
 Investment - Sir Paul Pantile
 Black-Eyed Suron - Doggrass
 The Honeymoon - Lopez
 The Rivals - David
 The Wonder - Don Pedro
 Firefly, or, Friend of the Flag - Ben Arslan
 Masks & Faces - Quin
 The Lancashire Lass - Jellick
 Speed the Plow - Farmer ashfield
 Play - Bedimin Todder
 Richard III - Tyrrel
 Surf - The Reporter
 The Busy Body - Whisper
 She Would & She Would Not - Soto
 Dreams - The Octagenarian Fauver
 The Game of Love - Chubb
 A Capital March - Sunnyside
 The Child of the Regiment
 A Bill of Fare

The Day After the Fair

Virginus

Tom & Jerry

Forty Thieves

The Broken Sword

Bertram - a monk

School for Scandal - Moses

APPENDIX C
THE ROLES OF JAMES LEWIS
1837-1896

Your Life's in Danger - John Strong
London Assurance - Dolly
The Sea of Ice - Peter Pugnashus
The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood - Larry O'Log
Monte Cristo - Calderouse
Black-Eyed Suron
Cinderella - Buttoni
The Three Guardsmen - Fouchet
Lucrecia Borgia - title role
Ivanhoe - Rebecca
A Quiet Family - Barnaby Bibbs
Paris - Oenoue
The Good for Nothing
Saratoga - Bob Sackett
Our Boys - Perkin Middlewick
Piqui - Sammy Dymple
Weak Woman - Captain Ginger
Jenny Lind at Last - Grouby Gag
Life - Pony Matuel
School for Scandal - Sir Benjamin
The American - Clarkson
Citronen - Major Gooseberg
The Princess Royal
The Dark City - Simon Smygsby
The Dead Secret - Cristol
My Precious Betsey - Bobtail
Baby
Our Akerman - Lyman Drake

The Big Bonanza - Professor Caldwellader
 Champagne & Oysters
 White Fawn! - King Dingdong
 Hurricanes - General Compton
 Bouquets and Bombshells - Horatio Softly
 Engaged - Cheviot Hill
 When a Little Farm We Keep
 The Wedding March - Poppytop
 Chawle, or, a Fool and His Money - Chawles
 Liverpool
 Our First Families - Leonardo Tompkyns
 Needles and Pins - Nicholas Geagle
 Zannia - Strakoschimo Mapello
 School - Syntax
 Cindrella at School
 Quits, or, a Game of Tit for Tat - Buttles
 Americans Abroad - Silas K. Wilks
 The Passing Regiment - Hofmeister, Jr.
 Odette - Bechamel
 The Squire - Gunnion
 Our English Friend - Digby de Rigby
 She Wou'd and She Wou'd Not - Trappanti
 Serge Panine - Tommy Piele
 7-20-8, or, Casting the Boomerang - Lancelot Bargiss
 Dollars and Sense - Eliphat Lamb
 Red Letter Nights - Cornelius Poswog
 The Wooden Spoon - Titus Grumbleigh
 Lords and Commons - Mr. Smee
 Love on Crutches - Dr. Epenetus Quatter
 The Recruiting Officer - Sergeant Kite
 A Woman Won't - Father-in-law
 A Night Off - Justinian Babbitt
 The Magistrate - AEneas Posket
 The Merry Wives of Windsor - Slender
 A Sudden Shower
 Nancy and Company - Ebenezer Griffing

After Business Hours - Tommy Chipper
Love in Harness - James Naggitt
Taming of the Shrew - Grumio
Dandy Dick - Blore, the butler
The Railroad of Love - Phenix Scuttleby
A Midsummer Nights Dream - Bottom
The Lottery of Love - Benjamin Buttercorn
Popping the Question
An International Match - Quincy Caramel
Samson and Dalilah - Goliah Puttybank
The Golden Widow - Campanilla
The Great Unknown - Jeremiah Jarraway
As You Like It - Touchstone
A Priceless Paragon - Narcisser Burnitrop
New Lamps for Old - Mr. Buster
The Last Word - Alexander Airey
School for Scandal - Moses
Lover's Labor's Lost - Costard
The Cabinet Minister - Sir Julian Twombley
Love in Tandem - Pappa Skinnastone
Little Miss Millian - Beverly Primrose
A Test Case - Jonathan Pognip
Twelfth Night - Sir Toby Belch

APPENDIX D

LINE CATEGORIES THROUGHOUT THE 19TH CENTURY

Lines for Men

leading business (tragedian
comedian)

light comedy and eccentric
business, including foreign
characters:

French
Irish
Yankee
Jew

1st and 2nd low comedy business

1st and 2nd heavy business
(villains)

1st and 2nd old men

1st and second walking gentlemen

respectable utility

general utility

dancers, singers, musicians (chiefly to perform
the entr'actes, but sometimes playing small parts)

supernumeraries (jobbers)

Lines for Women

leading lady

juvenile lady (tragedy,
light comedy)

chambermaid (sometimes
"singing" chambermaid)

1st and 2nd old woman
(one usually a low comedy
role)

walking gentlewomen

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