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A

MELODRAMA, PARODY,
AND THE TRANSFORMATIONS OF AN AMERICAN GENRE

by

JAMES M. CHERRY

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

2005

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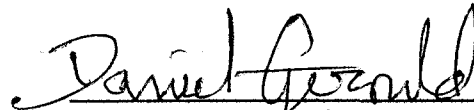
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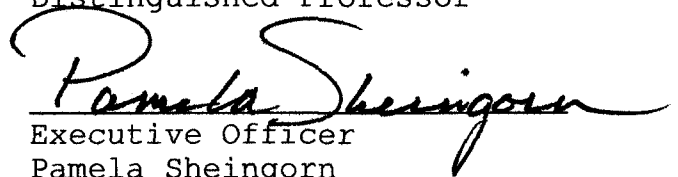
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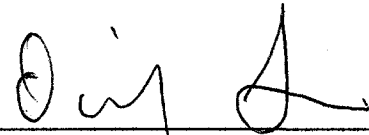
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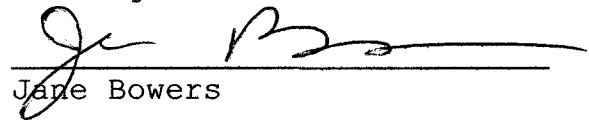
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Abstract

Melodrama, Parody, and the Transformations of an American Genre

by

James M. Cherry

Advisor: Distinguished Professor Daniel C. Gerould

In this dissertation, I discuss various intersections between parody and melodrama on the American stage of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The most popular genre of the nineteenth century, melodrama still serves as the spine of many artistic productions today. But while most genres of significance are given parodic treatments, melodrama is the rare form that exists in the popular imagination as a parody of itself. This dissertation thus tracks the varying integrations of the two forms in American performance.

The first chapter situates the dissertation in the vast critical literature about parody and melodrama, comparing their initial disparagements at the hands of critics, as well as their recent scholarly reclamations. The two chapters that follow focus on the parodies of some of America's most significant dramatic works. The second chapter examines the parodies of the most performed play in American history, the Stowe/Aiken version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, while the third centers on two notable temperance dramas: *The Drunkard* by William W. Pratt, and *Ten*

Nights in a Barroom by W. H. Smith. In these chapters I argue that the numerous parodic emergences, varying from early minstrel travesty and burlesque to postmodernist reinventions and nostalgic simulations, reveal important responses to dominant political discourses. While the melodramas articulate a vision of America, the parodies answer this enunciation, some with scorn, some with kindness, but always with critique. Grouped together, the parodies disclose the different ways that the parodic impulse can manifest itself.

The fourth chapter takes up a discussion of present-day melodrama performance in the always-nostalgic form of “old-fashioned melodrama”—the hybrid of the continual cross-pollination between parody and melodrama—in contemporary productions of amateur and tourist theatres of the American West and the San Francisco Mime Troupe. Like their parodic forebears, these performances also reveal widely differing perspectives regarding the meaning of the melodramatic narrative and certainty of the myth of America.

Parodic subversion and transformation reveal and destabilize the artifice of constructs, allowing for narratological growth and development. Persistent parodic re-workings of melodrama may be seen as attempts to offer contributions to the articulation of “America.”

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helped me through many a rough patch both during the dissertation and before.

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And finally, I wish to thank my best friend, most cherished colleague, and the love of my life, Crystal Benedicks. Any appropriate declaration of my gratitude would run longer than this dissertation, so I make this brief:

This, my love, is for you.

J.M.C.
April 17, 2005
New York, New York

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Everything changes, nothing perishes

--Ovid

Introduction

At a panel entitled “Parody as Method” at the American Theatre in Higher Education Conference in 2002, Deb Margolin, New York solo performer and former member of the performance group Split Britches, described parody as “the direct result of an attempt to make room for oneself within an airtight, closed, or exclusive social cultural or theatrical construct ... a kind of aria of the poor.”¹

This envisioning of parody as a song sung by the disempowered in the voice of their betters is reflected in both Margolin’s evocative work with Split Britches and her later solo material. With Split Britches, Margolin sent up the canonical American texts in *Salad of the Bad Café* and *Little Women: A Tragedy* and later in her solo work turned toward Shakespeare (*Hamlet*), and Tennessee Williams (*A Glass Menagerie*, *970-DEBB*). Just as her work has frequently been characterized by the use of parody, her appearance on the panel was very much a parody of a typical conference presentation. Her half-improvised paper/performance came as a satyr play to the presentation of my own paper and that of another presenter. She began by sitting and reading a prepared text and then moved into the audience performing bits of her own work in the process of presentation. A self-proclaimed practitioner at an academic conference, she used the constraints of the panel format to speak movingly of her art but also to reveal the potentials of parodic

¹ Margolin’s paper, entitled “Parody,” was later published in *Theatre Topics*. See “A Performer’s Notes on Parody,” *Theatre Topics* 13:2 (September 2003), 247-253. Margolin, 248.

performance; Margolin's unraveling of her relationship with parody emerged in a setting that always denies its own theatricality. But Margolin's invocation of parody as a form that can wangle a seat at the best table is also an articulation of identity through an act of subversion. By performing an "aria of the poor," the parodist sings out to an audience that already knows the song by heart, but also hears it anew. In doing so, parody serves as a reminder of the mutability of the seemingly-concrete.

It seems we now live in a time particularly rife with parody. In a mediatized age, entrance into the ever-widening public sphere immediately engenders a parodic response. From *The Daily Show* on television to *Forbidden Broadway* on the stage to the *Scary Movie* series on film and *America: The Book* in print, parody has become an even more central element of American culture than ever. With this shift, parody has also become a more important topic for scholars with new conferences and publications dedicated to the study of the form. Taking advantage of this new interest, I focus in this dissertation on the parodies of a particular genre that has also itself become infused with parody: melodrama.

Melodrama was the most popular genre of the nineteenth century, and it still serves as the spine of many artistic products today. Scholars like Bruce McConachie, Daniel Gerould, David Grimsted, and Jeffrey Mason have explained the significance of the genre to the theatre of the nineteenth century, rehabilitating it from its position as a mere precursor to realism. Melodrama came to be seen as a subject that could illuminate class and racial politics and help explain the

underpinnings of modern American theatre history and popular culture. But Jeffrey Mason's contention in *Melodrama and the Myth of America* that melodramas of the nineteenth century helped determine what it means to be "American" seems to be particularly pertinent in our own time. To Mason, in plays like *Metamora*, *The Drunkard*, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the American national myth was articulated as "an idea of America that is homogeneous and more stable than the multicultural dialectic that I perceive in my own time."² The plays helped shape and reinforce "a myth of our shared experience ... A prelapsarian sentimental garden where the natural state of humanity is virtuous domesticity, where industry produces happiness, where sensible people conform to established belief, and where property is the emblem and evidence of moral and worldly success."³ This idyllic paradise, like other nostalgic visions of the past, never actually existed. Yet this vision of America as monolith of homogeneous culture has never entirely lost its potency, even in a more purposefully pluralistic society. It is the cliché that cannot be anything other than true, connecting a nation with its forebears and forefathers, the pious patriots and pioneers of our past. This vision also purposefully excludes the possibility of change or alteration. Donald Pease has noted that this narrative of nation produces identity "by way of a social symbolic order that systematically separated an abstract, disembodied subject from resistant materialities, such as race, class, and gender."⁴ The grasp of this vision on American culture has ebbed and flowed throughout the country's

² Jeffrey D. Mason, *Melodrama and the Myth of America* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 22.

³ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁴ Donald Pease, "Introduction," *National Identities and Post-Americanist Narratives*, ed. Donald Pease (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 3-4

history, yet was particularly strong in the nineteenth century and made all the more so by its repetition in the national artistic discourse.

Melodrama is the narrative of the “abstract, disembodied subject” of America. In the melodrama that grounds the American myth, America is seen not simply as “the Beautiful,” but as the Transcendental Signified. In its formal elements, and as the most frequently performed of all types of American plays, melodrama articulates “America” to Americans. Yet, the very pervasiveness of melodrama in the American cultural eye also brought about critique and rejoinder in the form of parody. The result is a song more cacophonous than choral.

Parody’s omnipresence in the theatrical world affirms its significances; for every canonical text, there is a parody that mocks it, attacks it, deconstructs it, rehabilitates it, or offers homage to it. Since the time of its advent, the genre of melodrama has been accompanied by parodies and burlesques; T. Dibdin’s *Bonifacio & Bridgetina; or, The Knight of the Hermitage; or, The Windmill Turret; or, The Specture of the North-East Gallery; A New Grand Comick, Tragick, Operatick, Pantomimick, Melo-dramatick Extravaganza*, which appeared at Covent Garden in 1808, is, to my knowledge, the first in English. As a genre, melodrama’s antecedents are wide and varied and anything but American: the *Sturm-und-Drang* of Goethe and Schiller, the Gothic novel, the sermonizing *drame* of Diderot, and the spectacles of pantomime. If we consider that the plays of French playwright Guilbert de Pixérécourt began the genre, the first formal parody of melodrama followed them to the stage just a few years later. Some parodies appeared quickly after the premieres of American melodramas: *Uncle*

Tom's Cabin was parodied onstage before Harriet Beecher Stowe even completed the novel. In the case of temperance dramas, popular opinion had to shift before the plays could be parodied in public. But critical voices inevitably seek to answer the melodramatic myth of America in kind.

And, unfortunately, there are a number of voices that will not be heard within the context of this dissertation. The plays that serve as the basis of this work are frequently written by amateur playwrights. Their performances frequently received little recognition at the time and little scholarly attention since. The items offered up to analysis here are those that survived. Their very survival signifies a certain import given to them and subsequently helps guide the direction of this study. As the most prominent play of the nineteenth century, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* undoubtedly gave birth to the largest number of parodies. Temperance dramas in general, and *The Drunkard* and *Ten Nights in a Barroom* in particular, were also hugely popular and were also parodied numerous times. The repeated parodying of any cultural object necessarily reveals its significance to the era in which the parody is produced. This also results in a new understanding of the parodied object. To track the parodies of melodrama across American theatrical history is to follow a genealogy of discourse between the definitively popular theatrical form and a theatrical culture that nourished, degraded, reinterpreted, and re-imagined it. Melodrama can be seen in its various parodies as a sign of a foolishly simplistic world-well-lost, of a respectably simple age of American cultural childhood, and of a place worthy of re-visitation and re-conception.

An interesting complication is that melodrama is a genre that exists in the popular imagination today as a parody of itself. While most genres are given parodic treatments, melodrama is seen today as already parodied. A reason for this is that one of melodrama's most significant features, exaggeration for emotional effect, is itself a fundamental element of parody. Therefore, a parody of a melodrama amplifies already existing exaggerations and serves to blur distinctions between the melodrama and its parodic double. Because melodrama is a distinctly popular genre, always integrating new elements to maintain audience interest, melodrama's parodization has not only changed the popular perception of the genre but also the shape of the genre itself.

As the sentimentality and emotionalism of melodrama have always served as easy targets for parody, constant parodying has also kept melodramatic plays before the public eye. Of his brother Augustin's most famous production, Joseph Daly wrote, "Not only was *Under the Gaslight* played in every city, but for many months the vaudvillists, 'sketch artists,' variety performers and minstrel troupes were inventing burlesque acts of the railroad scene ... these travesties were so many evidences of the wide and strong impression" of the play.⁵ Clearly, the sequence in which a helpless victim is saved from a hurtling railroad engine and certain doom has become, in the popular imagination, the very quintessence of what is frequently referred to, with degrees of both condescension and fond recollection, as "old-fashioned melodrama." Significant here is Daly's idea that the "wide and strong impression" of a performance upon the dramatic landscape can be judged from the parodies and travesties it spawns. This "repetition with

⁵ Joseph Daly, *The Life of Augustin Daly* (New York: MacMillan, 1917), 77.

critical difference”⁶ also allows Margolin’s “clumsy, refreshing voice of the uninvited”⁷ to be heard. Performances of parodies of melodrama open up the genre, and simultaneously point toward new ways of viewing the construction of American identity.

The first chapter of this dissertation, “Parody and Melodrama: Contemporary Critical Contexts,” considers the scholarly treatments of parody and melodrama in the same space, comparing how the two very different forms have received similar receptions at the hands of critics. They are each always haunted by other genres. Frequently, parody has been unjustly compared with the work being parodied and thus seen as parasitic and lacking true artistic integrity. Melodrama has always been seen as a lesser genre compared with more highbrow genres like opera and tragedy. Perhaps because of this unmerited neglect, both parody and melodrama have seen an important resurgence in recent scholarly work. In this chapter, I also analyze what happens when a genre like melodrama becomes continuously intermeshed with elements of parody. If melodrama is seen today largely as a parody of itself, there are ways in which performances of parodies of melodrama both escaped and embraced that simple redundancy.

The second chapter concerns the most produced (and also parodied) theatrical production of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Its original form in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel artfully expressed the sentimental vision of America and provided material for the perfect stage

⁶ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 2nd ed. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 20.

⁷ Margolin, 248.

melodrama. The focus of the audience's sympathy is placed on a sickly, but angelic little girl and tortured slave. The devilish Simon Legree acts the perfect villain, and levity is provided by the Lawyer Marks. Despite its focus on the topic of slavery and its evils, Jeffrey Mason argues that in its stage adaptation by George Aiken, the play "reduces societal dysfunction to a personal level and enacts an impossible fantasy of social change whose terms and interactions deny the validity of the problem and leave society essentially intact."⁸ The minstrel parodies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* sought to blunt the "impossible fantasy" by asserting the "truth" of white male dominance and black subservience. In the twentieth century however, productions began to reclaim the Tom story through parody. Productions like Bill T. Jones's *Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/ The Promised Land* reexamined old nineteenth century performance traditions and all of the baggage of the narrative to reclaim the piece, thus forging new possibilities for melodramatic performance.

The third chapter concerns the temperance drama, one of the most prevalent forms of moral melodrama. With the widespread performances of *Ten Nights in a Barroom* and *The Drunkard* in the nineteenth century, the temperance narrative became a formidable touchstone of moral rectitude. In the temperance narrative, alcohol is a force that invades the middle class household and destabilizes the underpinnings of American culture. Following the trauma of the American Civil War and the seismic cultural shift that it engendered, parodies began to pop up, pushing the figure of the hypocritical temperance preacher to the fore. The end of Prohibition in 1933 caused an explosion of performances of

⁸ Mason, 195.

temperance melodrama in which audiences were encouraged to drink while watching. In performances throughout the country, and most notably at Los Angeles's Theatre Mart, the temperance melodrama became a synecdoche for a long-lost period of American innocence. Through parodic reception, the temperance narrative became a conduit for a nostalgic desire to return to an original state and, to use Susan Stewart's terms, to construct an "authentic experience."⁹ Audiences sought out performances of old-time morality as a way to connect with the past through a historical recreation. By the turbulent 1960s and 70s, the temperance melodrama became cultural shorthand for "the good old days," a sub-genre suggestive of the power of an America of the past.

In the final chapter, I consider how the relationship of parody and melodrama is seen today in the proliferation of "old-fashioned melodrama" performance, the always-already parodied version of the melodramatic genre. Since the beginning, parodies of melodrama almost inevitably focus on the genre's sentimentality and excess. *Bonifacio & Bridgetina's* string of titles mocks a genre that tries too hard, attempting to be everything to everyone in the strongest possible terms. The extremity of melodrama, seen through parody, codifies melodrama as something that in fact it had never really been. The "old-fashioned melodrama" is as indebted to the cartoon *Dudley Do-Right* and sketches on *The Carol Burnett Show* as to historical nineteenth-century melodrama. But even as its ancestry is unclear, "old-fashioned melodrama" of heroes, heroines, and villains, always pared down and parodied for comic intent, can be used for

⁹ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 133.

different purposes. The “melodrama theatres” of the Mid-west and West that engage in this type of performance trace their lineage to an age of moral stability. It is a performance that shows America “as it was” and thus “how it is” in its soul. In the radical performances of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, we see “old-fashioned melodrama” utilized in a more explicitly propagandistic fashion. This version of “old-fashioned melodrama” shows not a nostalgia for days past, but serves as a means to an end, a delivery system for ideology. Both types of performances qualify as parodic, as they critique and reference the genre from within, but show vastly different visions of the genre. In doing so, they debate the myth of America.

In our newly sentimentalized age, melodramatic attitudes are struck everywhere. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, America sought to rearticulate a sentimental affirmation of identity with heroes protecting the homeland from foreign villains. In a time defined by the public use of melodramatic terminology of “hero” and “evil” and the Manichean dichotomy of “us versus them,” an investigation of the operations of the melodramatic ethos seems apt. Perhaps parody can enable us to spot ways of being released from the seemingly unbreakable fetters of a narrative of our own making. In this way, the various parodic re-workings of melodrama may be seen as admonitions to a culture often spellbound with the apparent certainty of the boundaries of virtue and vice.

Chapter 1:

Parody and Melodrama: Contemporary Critical Contexts

I. Introduction

To consider the bodies of critical discourse concerning the subjects of parody and melodrama is to be overwhelmed by both their magnitude and their fervor. As seminal modes of artistic expression, they have existed since antiquity in various guises, and have been interpreted in various ways. Many critics have seen both parody and melodrama as unimportant, showcasing limited talent for debased tastes. As recently as thirty or forty years ago, few scholars considered either form reputable, let alone any intersection or interaction between the two. For various reasons to be discussed in this chapter, parody and melodrama as artistic forms, while well-known and significant parts of popular culture, have been frequently considered unworthy of scholarly consideration or attention. However, both parody and melodrama have become recently fashionable in scholarship, countering long-held prejudices that both were forms beneath academic attention.

In the past few decades, there has been, and continues to be, a spirited discussion about both parody and melodrama, at least partly rising from a renewed interest in forms and genres often considered outside the scope of the traditional canon. The growing interest in historical trends in popular culture, fomented by Lawrence Levine and others, has helped recently to push the study of parody and melodrama center stage. Likewise, the work of Julia Kristeva and her

conception of “intertextuality” have revived interest in parody, a form dependent upon intertextual discourse. Yet, in the scholarship of parody and of melodrama, long periods of scholarly neglect have engendered a number of attempts to mark out the shapes, classifications, and merits of these forms. In the many restrained attempts to discern the forms’ boundaries, scholars have taken the musings of Marcus Aurelius very much to heart:

Make for thyself a definition or description of the thing which is presented to thee, so as to see distinctly what kind of a thing it is in its substance, in its nudity, in its complete entirety, and tell thyself its proper name, and the names of the things of which it has been compounded, and into which it will be resolved.¹

The recent discussions of parody and melodrama have frequently been framed in terms of “see[ing] distinctly” what parody and melodrama are, attempting to move past overly-simplified, superficial, and emotional reactions. For a proper reconsideration to take place, these forms have had to be mapped out seriously in order to combat more traditional scholarly reactions that have been, until only recently, largely characterized by knee-jerk negativity. Of American melodrama for example, Garff Wilson has written that “the addiction to melodrama did not weaken until the end of the century when native playwrights, along with their European colleagues, felt the cleansing, therapeutic effects of such giants as

¹ Marcus Aurelius, “Meditations,” *The Apology, Phaedo, and Crito of Plato; The Golden Sayings of Epictetus; The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius with Introduction, Notes and Illustrations*, trans. George Long (New York: P.F. Collier and Sons, 1937), 209.

Ibsen, Strindberg, and Chekhov.”² Tom Postlewait has written that much of the academic discourse on the subject of American melodrama has been soured because of a tendency to privilege a narrative of “evolutionary progress” with the work of Eugene O’Neill as the proper beginnings of a real American drama.³ But the idea that melodrama was a sentimental disease afflicting stolid American drama haunts its study still.

Similarly, parody has been seen in the past two centuries “as irredeemably lightweight and second order: in a more hostile vocabulary, as trivial and parasitic.”⁴ As in the case of melodrama, long-held negative opinions still impose themselves upon the study of parody. Linda Hutcheon in the new edition of her hugely significant *A Theory of Parody* shows signs of having to explain an interest in parody.⁵ Scholars of the melodramatic and the parodic have sought to refine and redefine their fields of research, by looking to dig deeply and discover “what kind of a thing it is in its substance, in its nudity, in its complete entirety” in the clear light of day so as to diminish and dispel the ghosts of the past.

Scholars of parody in particular have struggled mightily in this task; despite a great deal of ink being spilt in the attempts to do so, there is no contemporary consensus on the meaning of the word “parody.” Each text on the subject creates a new definition of the term, one usually placed in opposition to

² Garff Wilson, *Three Hundred Years of American Drama and Theatre: From Ye Beare Ye Cubb to A Chorus Line* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982), 105.

³ Thomas Postlewait, “From Melodrama to Realism: The Suspect History of American Drama,” *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Genre*, ed. Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou (New York: St. Martin’s, 1999), 50-51.

⁴ Simon Dentith, *Parody* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), ix.

⁵ In the new preface, Hutcheon refers to parody as “her obsession,” and explains her interest in ways that foreground an emotional commitment to the subject. Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 2nd ed. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), xvii.

previous definitions. Hutcheon's own description of parody as a "repetition with critical distance"⁶ differs from Margaret Rose's definition as a "comic refunctioning of preformed linguistic or artistic material"⁷ which is related to, but not completely in sync with, Simon Dentith's conception of parody as a "cultural practice which makes a polemical allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice."⁸ The result, from the perspective of analysis, is a cacophony of varying insistences. But this apparent inability to pin down exactly what parody "is" does, I think, point toward a path out of the quandary. Instead of inventing an entirely new definition, I hope instead to coalesce some of the varying viewpoints using a setting that has been rarely used in the discussions of the parodic: the theatre. And in doing so, I intend to generate a conception of a more generalized "parodic impulse" that can place all of parody's varied practices, including travesty and burlesque, but also adaptation and aftertexting, in a new rubric based on a shared intentionality where all of parody's varied forms, can be considered together, regardless of tenor.

Fortunately and by contrast, the concept of "nineteenth-century melodrama" has been clarified and revived by the work of several scholars over the past few decades. The result is a fairly concise understanding of the particular form, one that has, thus far, a clearly defined shape. Perhaps Frank Rahill describes it best:

Melodrama is a form of dramatic composition in prose partaking of the nature of a tragedy, comedy, pantomime, and spectacle, and intended for a

⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁷ Margaret Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 52.

⁸ Dentith, 20.

popular audience. Primarily concerned with situation and plot, it calls upon mimed action extensively and employs a more or less fixed complement of stock characters, the most important of which are a suffering heroine or hero, a persecuting villain, and a benevolent comic. It is conventionally moral and humanitarian in point of view and sentimental and optimistic in temper, concluding its fable happily with virtue rewarded after many trials and vice punished. Characteristically it offers elaborate scenic accessories and miscellaneous divertissements and introduces music freely, typically to underscore dramatic effect.⁹

These elements, along with tell-tale scars, railroad tracks, and many a dark and stormy night, are all parts of what Robert Heilman has termed a single-minded, “monopathic”¹⁰ experience of life, lived by characters that are “undivided, unperplexed by alternatives, untorn by divergent impulses.”¹¹ To put it another way, Peter Brooks sees in melodrama “the theatrical impulse itself: the impulse toward dramatization, heightening, expression, acting out.”¹² But as the scholarship of parody suffers from the form’s slipperiness, the scholarship of melodrama has been troubled by its subject being altogether too well known. The snobbish dislike of popular, and the meaning of the term in common parlance as “overly emotional,” has frequently tainted scholarly discourse. As a result, it is because of the difficulty in conceptualizing parody and the all-too-easy

⁹ Frank Rahill, *The World of Melodrama* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967), xiv.

¹⁰ Robert Heilman, *Tragedy and Melodrama* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968), 86.

¹¹ Robert Heilman, *The Iceman, the Arsonist, and the Troubled Agent* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973), 57.

¹² Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), xv.

stereotyping of melodrama that both have often been undervalued, slighted, and ignored. And the deeper ramifications of their junction have remained unexplored.

It is also not without a certain irony that the confluence of parody and melodrama in the nineteenth century helped degrade them both in the eyes of many. Parodies of melodrama were seen as attacking a particularly easy target; while enjoyable, scholars have sensed a kind of unsportsmanlike conduct about them. Forms considered “high art” have been seen as worthy of the attentions of parody; a vast majority of parody compilations either fail to include melodrama parodies or place them in particularly disadvantageous positions.¹³ Both forms came to be looked upon as unserious and common, always suffering in comparison with their more serious contemporaries. They were also seen as oppositional forces: parody, the reflection of art in a fractured mirror, and melodrama, the exaggerated, fun-house mirror reflection of realism. In a sense, melodrama’s relationship with realism parallels parody’s with the parodic “pre-text.”¹⁴ The “original” and the “real” stands in stark contrast (and appears more seemly than) the tartly sent up and the exaggerated.

In truth, both can also be seen as “parasitic” forms, using the works and genres that surround them as material. Parody always appears alongside of other artistic forms, rather than as an artistic form unto itself. The less important half of an unnecessary binary, parody’s secondary status is architectural. Meanwhile, melodrama, while it always fed off public opinion and used any number of techniques to interest an audience, also utilized other theatrical forms to suit its

¹³ In Walter Hamilton’s expansive six volume *Parodies of the Works of English and American Authors* (1884-1889), dramatic parodies, including both those of melodrama and of more canonical texts, are segregated from other forms of parody to be included only in the last section of the last volume.

¹⁴ In this dissertation, the term “pre-text” will refer to the parodied text.

purposes. Frank Rahill, in his definition in *The World of Melodrama* points toward this tendency, characterizing melodrama as “*partaking* of the nature of tragedy, comedy, pantomime, and spectacle and intended for a popular audience.”¹⁵ As a hybrid form that takes from the “purer” genres that surround it, melodrama, like parody, finds its strength in its flexibility. The capacity of melodrama to shift from scenes of bitter tragedy and pathos to those of delight and hilarity reflects the parodic bouncing between the parody and the parodied. These shifts and bounces reveal an important commonality between these forms, as they both retain their identities as genres through purposeful variation.

What follows is a number of sections that detail, albeit briefly, the recent theorizing about parody, some thoughts on the performance of parody in order to properly locate melodrama within a long and complex system of parodic discourse, and lastly an engagement in the study of melodrama, particularly American. Using these sections as a base, I situate my study of the parodies of American melodrama within not only a historical context, but a theoretical one as well.

II. Critical Conceptions of Parody

In its extraordinarily long and convoluted critical history, parody has had its share of both champions and detractors. It is only in recent years, following the work of the Russian Formalists and the increased critical interest in Kristevan intertextuality and the postmodern condition that parody has come squarely into its own as a form or mode of consistent theoretical interest. With the publication

¹⁵ Rahill, xiv. *Italics mine.*

of Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Parody*, parody was reconsidered entirely and its study, for good and for ill, pointed in an entirely different direction, simultaneously advancing and problematizing parodic scholarship. Before Hutcheon, much of the discussion revolved around the debate as to whether the different forms of parody should be delineated as such or if instead the always-blurry lines between them be ignored altogether. On this topic, *The Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* stated: "No good purpose can be served by a too rigid insistence upon nomenclature in a discussion of parody, burlesque, or travesty in literature."¹⁶ However, Gérard Genette in *Palimpsests* (1982) systematically divided parody into twenty-odd separate forms, each sharply separated from the other. This section will introduce the major conceptions of parody and will be dedicated to an analysis of the kinds of major theoretical trends and disagreements that have influenced the subject of parody in recent years. The formulations of our major critics of parody will be unpacked so as to lay the groundwork for a somewhat manageable description of the form and its aesthetic propensities. In an attempt to enter into the already-heated discussions of the form, I will conclude this chapter with a new, theatrically-oriented characterization of parody that will help illuminate the interactions between parody, melodrama, and the stage.¹⁷

¹⁶ *Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. A. Preminger, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), s.v. "Parody" 88. Cited in Henryk Markiewicz "On the Definitions of Literary Parody," *To Honor Roman Jakobson*, II (The Hague, Mouton, 1967), 1264. A more recent edition of the *Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (1993) concurs with its previous stance: "Agonizing over such schemes [rigid division of types of parody] might in itself seem to [burlesque] the critical process were it not for the fact that, in practice, critical discussions of specific works show a dismaying lack of agreement in terminology." In *Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. A. Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), s.v. "Burlesque" 151-152.

¹⁷ The only book-length analysis of the history of the study of parody is Margaret Rose's excellent *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern*. This text also includes a useful timeline that marks out the positions of modern scholars on the topic of postmodernity and, by extension, parody. See Margaret Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern and Post-Modern* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

It should be noted that, with the exceptions of Simon Dentith's *Parody*, in which a chapter is dedicated to the subject, and V.C. Clinton Baddeley's *The Burlesque Tradition in the English Theatre after 1660*, theatre, outside of the canonical classics like the plays of Aristophanes, is infrequently studied by the scholars of the parodic form. The focus is almost entirely upon novels and poetry, and in the case of Hutcheon, visual art as well. The popular theatre of which the innumerable theatrical travesties are a part has gone almost unmentioned. The question must be addressed: why is so very little written on theatrical parody in the first place? As David Krasner has recently shown in *Resistance, Parody, and Double Consciousness in African American Theatre, 1895-1910*, the attempt to establish a "generalized" parodic reception in a performance environment has frequently unpredictable results. In his text, Krasner analyzes the parodic forces at work in *A Trip to Coontown* (1898), a minstrel performance at the Third Avenue Theatre in New York. In the production, Bob Cole, a black actor, performed the role of Willie Wayside, a white hobo character. For Krasner, Cole's whiteface performance subverted the established racial discourse, interrupting "the continuity of minstrelsy's semiotic tradition,"¹⁸ although many white audience members did not see his performance as parodic in the least. Indeed, Krasner indicates that white audiences did not "see" Cole at all, as Cole was "perceived as black no matter what makeup he wore, while white actors in black face claimed to represent 'authentic' blackness."¹⁹ Cole's parodic subversions of racial norms

¹⁸ David Krasner, *Resistance, Parody, and Double Consciousness in African American Theatre, 1895-1910* (New York: St. Martin's, 1997), 32.

¹⁹ Ibid.

were seen by different spectators differently. The intrinsic imprecision of any assumption of audience response complicates the study of theatrical parody.

Theatrical parody has also been continuously saddled with terms that, while often inappropriately applied, have negative connotations, like “travesty” and “burlesque.” The fact that most scholars of parody consider these forms as “lesser” compared to strict parody at least also partially explains the scholarly neglect of theatrical parody. If theatre is associated with the “burlesque,” a form traditionally held to be even lower in value than strict parody, theatrical forms of parody would necessarily be marginalized, regardless of their widespread popularity in their own times.

As I mentioned earlier, much of the work on parody has been concerned with discovering and teasing out a definition of the term. Unfortunately, a concept so slippery, always so between and betwixt, does not lend itself to easy definition. However, there are a few terms that should be understood as a necessary part of the conventional terminology of parody. These definitions are by no means conclusive, and each has shifted in position with great regularity. Yet, in order to comprehend much of the study of parody, a brief gloss of how *some* scholars have attempted to define the terms seems useful.

- 1) *Travesty* is commonly defined as a form that parodies a particular work by treating the subject of that work in an overly familiar (some would say disrespectful) fashion. To quote Dwight Macdonald (who calls travesty the most

primitive of forms), in travesty, "Achilles becomes a football hero ... Helen, a beauty queen."²⁰

- 2) *Burlesque* parodies a particular form or genre by treating it in an overly familiar (and again, some would say disrespectful) fashion, yet in the style of the original. To continue Macdonald's metaphor, Achilles would still be a football hero, and Helen would be a beauty queen, but their story would be told in epic verse.
- 3) *Parody* is defined frequently as the application of a high style to a lowly subject. In other words, the story of a generic "football hero" and a generic "beauty queen" would be told "in the style of" the epic. The conventions of the epic would be followed, with the focus on parodying the genre rather than any epic in particular.

These definitions can be found, with some modest differences, throughout much of the discourse on the subject. Recently "parody" has come to be seen as more general and overarching, describing all forms of parodic discourse, rather than a specific form. But even in this, there is no consistency: in 1972, John Jump considered "burlesque" to be a term that can encompass various parodic forms, while, thirteen years later, Hutcheon considered "parody" more appropriate. The major difficulty with such water-tight definitions like "travesty" and "burlesque" is that they rarely fit the work they describe completely. Technically, burlesque could easily shift into travesty and then back into burlesque, with the simple reference to a specific work.

Parody's beginnings, like theatre's, are with the Greeks: in the second chapter of the *Poetics*, Aristotle refers to a work of Hegemon of Thrasos as a

²⁰ Dwight Macdonald, *Parodies: An Anthology from Chaucer to Beerbohm, and After* (New York, Random House, 1960), 557.

parodia, a narrative poem written in epic meter, but about a light, trivial subject. The frequently cited *Batrachomyomachia* or the *Battle of the Frogs and Mice* is the only extant version of a *parodia*. John Jump in *Burlesque* summarizes the inciting action: "It ascribes the hostilities which form its subject to the destruction of a mouse while the guest of a frog, and it shows how the Olympian deities interest themselves in the strife."²¹ Here, the epic poem concerns itself with an absurd subject (a war between tiny animals) that seems inappropriate or unsuitable. Importantly, the translation of the term *parodia* can be either "a song beside or near" or "a song opposite or against" due to the ambiguity of the prefix *para-*. This uncertainty in the proper translation of the prefix would feed much of the confusion, consternation, and debate in the centuries to come, creating a difficult dialectic from which to escape. Is parody inherently subversive or reactionary? This irresolvable issue is still at the heart of the current discussions of parody. The result of these two entirely different, yet completely possible, definitions is that scholars in the past have felt the need to choose one and espouse it to the exclusion of the other. The inherent uncertainty about the meaning of the term, at the earliest point in its history, suggests that the range of possible parodic discourses and reformulations will persistently evade acts of definition.

One of the reasons that parody has been considered undeserving of serious study is because of a belief that it unjustly maligns the work upon which it is

²¹ John Jump, *Burlesque* (London: Methuen, 1972), 37. Jump's book is a part of Methuen's "The Critical Idiom" series. The point of this series is to briefly encapsulate words of the scholarly note: "Irony," "Satire," "Symbolism," etc. A text entitled *Melodrama* (1973) was also a part of this series, written by James L. Smith. In 2000, Routledge began "The New Critical Idiom Series," including Simon Dentith's *Parody*. It should be noted that there has been no update of Smith's text.

based. Margaret Rose has suggested that the beginnings of parody's poor reputation among scholars began in 1561, as she explains that J.C. Scaliger, in *Poetices Libri Septem*, may have mistranslated Aristotle's definition of the *parodia* to intimate that the purpose of the parody was to ridicule the text to which it refers. Scaliger used the word *ridicula* to describe the nature of parody, and did not clarify if the parody "laughs with" its pre-text or "laughs at" it. The result of this mistranslation, Rose believes, is the beginning of a long period of general critical dislike of the parodic form.²²

In the tumult of the French Revolution that gave birth to the melodrama, parody also came to the fore, particularly in Romantic literary circles that conceived of themselves, among other things, as parodies of their neo-classic forebears. In *The Romantic School*, Heinrich Heine quotes the Schlegel brothers: "... our Muse is an old wife with a distaff; our Cupid is not a blonde boy, but a shrunk and shriveled dwarf with grey hair."²³ In their repudiations of all things classical, the Romantics saw parody as "a core element of the new romantic theory of literature."²⁴ Romantic self-referentiality, in which the "narrator's stance is that of a self-conscious raconteur, standing alongside his narrative" and "offering overt comment on his work" draws attention to the act of artistic creation.²⁵ And while irony and parody should certainly not be conflated, they both share a detachment of the created work, a focus on the consciousness of creation. Theatrically, romantic irony and parody took the form of works like

²² Rose, 9.

²³ Heinrich Heine, "The Romantic School," in *The Romantic School and other Essays*, eds. Jost Hermand and Robert C. Holub (New York: Continuum, 1985), 18.

²⁴ Gabrielle Bersier, "A Metaphoric Mode of Literary Reflexivity: Parody in Early German Romanticism," in *Parody: Dimensions and Perspectives*, ed. Beate Müller (Amsterdam; Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1997), 29.

²⁵ Lilian R. Furst, *The Contours of European Romanticism* (London: Macmillan, 1979), 26.

Ludwig Tieck's *Puss-in-Boots* in which Tieck "recycle[d] the entire gamut of the late Enlightenment popular repertoire."²⁶

In an important critical move that was repeated many times in the years to come, August Schlegel sought to separate parody from its less reputable sibling, travesty.²⁷ In doing so, he sought to reverse some of the damage that Scaliger may have done to the reputation of the genre. In his *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, Schlegel also pronounces the significance of parody to drama. He repeatedly extols the virtues of Aristophanes, and also the Athenians for whom he performed, parody's ideal audience: "Aristophanes required of his auditory a cultivated poetical taste; to understand his parodies, they must have almost every word of the tragical master-pieces by heart."²⁸ Schlegel's appreciation for an audience receptive to the parodic jibes of Aristophanes is appropriate to Schlegel's own contemplation of a new Germanic audience.

In his 1896 text, entitled *On Parody*, A.S. Martin attempts a further rehabilitation of the form by pointing to the "closeted" parodist. He writes that Dr. Johnson found parodies to be vulgar but wrote them anyway. Of this hypocrisy, Martin sarcastically observes: "So far as the doctor's own efforts go ... we are inclined to accept his estimate of the art."²⁹ Martin's text, like much of what has been written about parody early in its critical history, indicates a desire to elevate parody and see it as a kind of critical discourse, and thus proper and

²⁶ Bersier, 35. Tieck's translation of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, a novel of extraordinary import to the Romantics, is also significant in showing the relationship between parody and Romanticism.

²⁷ A.W. Schlegel, "Vorlesungen über die schöne Litteratur und Kunst," in *Geschichte der klassischen Litteratur. Zweiter Teil (1802-1803)*, ed. Bernhard Seuffert (Heilbronn, Heinninger, 1884), 222 and 225. Cited in Bersier, 32.

²⁸ A.W. Schlegel, *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, trans., John Black (London: George Bell, 1904), 157

²⁹ A.S. Martin, *On Parody* (New York, H. Holt, 1896), 77.

appropriate. Parody, when properly conceived, should “smile, not sneer.”³⁰ As a result of this particular emphasis on seeing parody as a critical tool, a way to understand the workings of a text from the inside through imitation, parody was considered a critical force able to reform and purify. To quote Martin: “its province is to criticize and to amuse, but not to disfigure and to debase.”³¹ Later critics moved away from Martin’s early stance as they purposefully differentiated parody from satire, yet the possibility of seeing parody as a critical apparatus, an entrance point from which to comprehend the text, is an idea that winds its way through much of scholarship of parody.

Many critics of the past sought to give parody this explicitly utilitarian edge—in order for a form to be good it had to be useful. Importantly, the use of parody as a device for the critique of artistic work separates it from, and also elevates it above, burlesque and travesty. Parody can be seen as better because it can, like the text it parodies, perform a function of critical significance. Travesty and burlesque have been construed as forms that cannot, because of their coarse simplicity, have any other purpose than easy humor at the expense of “real” artists. Today, with concepts of “play” so crucial to the discourse, separating the forms strictly on the basis of their capacity for work seems quite old-fashioned. The result has been a move away from this perspective; instead of focusing on the tendency of parody to cleanse artistic discourse of that which is overblown and excessive, recent scholarship, fueled by an interest in popular and “low” forms, has been interested in how parody destabilizes and problematizes long-held attitudes.

³⁰ Ibid., 95.

³¹ Ibid.

The various attempts to explain and quantify parody in all of its various modes were questioned very early on—current scholarship has much in common with that of nearly one hundred years ago. The unknown author on the subject of parody for the July 1895 edition for the *Quarterly Review* noted, “The essential conditions of parody are commonly understood to be brevity and wit. It must also closely follow the original, and that original must be fairly familiar.”³² The same author, when discussing the very significant question of how to differentiate parody from other forms such as travesty and burlesque, cites the Belgian bibliophile Octave Delepierre:

la fille ainée de la satire, aussi ancienne que la poésie meme ... le burlesque, la caricature, le grotesque et la parodie se rentrent parfois tellement l'un dans l'autre que souvent il est difficile d'apercevoir la différence.³³

The idea of these genres “bumping” into one another suggests an almost violent interaction, a generic mosh pit. Moreover, the expression “se rentrer dedans” not only suggests a competition, but also, in some contexts, a flirtatious encounter. Delepierre’s ambivalent word choice is telling: in either case, the suggestion is that all the forms are so close in their *modus operandi* that it is difficult to tell the distinctions between them at all. Instead it seems that a definition with greater breadth, one that can describe the parodic operation, may be more significant than attempting to bracket and differentiate between different kinds of parody.

³² Anonymous, “Parody,” *Quarterly Review* (July 1895), 154.

³³ *Ibid.*, 154. “The oldest daughter of satire, which is as ancient as poetry itself ... burlesque, caricature, the grotesque, and parody sometimes bump into each other so much that it becomes difficult to perceive the difference among them.”

In his 1915 treatise Christopher Stone concludes: “no attempt will be made to distinguish between the words parody, burlesque, skit, imitation, and travesty. Each has its shade of meaning to differentiate it, but no useful purpose would be served by a meticulous classification of each poem under these headings.”³⁴ Stone pointedly refuses to assign rigid classifications, create differences where none exist, or privilege certain types (parody with its treatment of “form” in its own “style”) over others (burlesque and travesty). By making it clear that any attempt to differentiate between these forms, other than as having “shades” of difference, is futile, Stone points toward a much more modern understanding of parody. Just as the author of the article in the *Quarterly Review* noted that it is the “witty distortion or displacement of ideas or words”³⁵ that makes for good parody, these very distortions and unsettling of meaning cause an actual definition of parody to become always too facile.

Parody’s true resuscitation as an important critical form began in the early twentieth century. Literary critics, particularly the Russian Formalists, began to analyze the use of parody in works like Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*. In “A Parodying Novel: Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*” (1929), Viktor Shklovsky notes that Sterne’s novel is far from being just a chaotic mess in which the narrative is persistently interrupted with lengthy digressions, the preface comes in the middle of the book and whole chapters are left out entirely. To Shklovsky, Sterne’s novel is nothing short of revolutionary act as “the disorder is intentional.”³⁶ Sterne

³⁴ Christopher Stone, *On Parody* (New York: G.H. Doran, 1915), 12.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 154-155.

³⁶ Viktor Shklovsky, “A Parodying Novel: Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*,” in *Laurence Sterne: A Collection of Critical Essays*, trans. W. George Isaak, ed. John Traugott (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 67. Shklovsky’s essay was original published in *O Teorii Prozy* (Moscow, 1929).

commits a revolutionary act by “laying bare” the conventions of the novel. Despite its muddled surface, Shklovsky concluded that “*Tristram Shandy* is the most typical novel of world literature.”³⁷ Gillian Beer has since characterized Sterne’s novel as “both solid object and assimilated process” in which the reader “is constantly made aware of his limitations as a performer of another man’s consciousness and shown the limits of his own imaginative capacities.”³⁸ The parody in *Tristram Shandy* causes the reader to be always estranged from the act of reading by narrative interruptions and extratextual references and allusions. With criticism of works like *Tristram Shandy*, parody began to be seen as having an innovatory effect on literature.

This signifies a seismic shift in attitudes toward parody and a beginning of its repositioning as a part of modern high culture. The Formalists considered parody a way in which genres evolved. Parody allowed for the various elements at play in any literature of any period to be reordered, allowing new elements, however unlikely or low-brow, to emerge and break through to the surface. Through parody, the old and the hackneyed would be reformulated: “The obsolete device is not thrown overboard, but repeated in a new, incongruous context, and thus rendered absurd through the agency of mechanization and made ‘perceptible’ again.”³⁹ This concept of generic evolution through an intermingling of styles foreshadows the vogue for postmodernist pastiche later in the century.

³⁷ Ibid., 89.

³⁸ Gillian Beer, “‘Coming Wonders’: Uses of Theatre in the Victorian Novel, in *English Drama: Forms and Development*, ed. Marie Axton and Raymond Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 165.

³⁹ Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History—Doctrine* (The Hague: Mouton, 1969), 258.

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³⁵ *Ibid.*, 154-155.

³⁶ Viktor Shklovsky, “A Parodying Novel: Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*,” in *Laurence Sterne: A Collection of Critical Essays*, trans. W. George Isaak, ed. John Traugott (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 67. Shklovsky’s essay was original published in *O Teorii Prozy* (Moscow, 1929).

they are as keenly alive to their silliness as the historical critic of to-day.”⁴³

Delepiere and Stone expressed this idea earlier—that parody can serve as a body of contemporary criticism from which we can gauge certain works in their own environment.

As mentioned before, the only text solely dedicated to parody in theatre is V.C. Clinton-Baddeley’s *The Burlesque Tradition in the English Theatre after 1660*. By cataloging the history of English parodic theatre from the Restoration through the early twentieth century, Clinton-Baddeley is able to give us a very real sense of the sweep of the theatrical parodic. He characterizes the difference between parody and satire as a matter of tonality:

Satire is the schoolmaster attacking dishonesty with a whip. Burlesque is the rude boy attacking pomposity with a peashooter ... Satire must laugh not to weep. Burlesque must laugh not to burst.⁴⁴

Clinton-Baddeley’s separation of satire and parody is apt; while both can include elements of the other, strictly speaking they are not at all the same thing; satire punishes and purges while burlesque pricks and annoys. However, Clinton-Baddeley does enlarge the rubric of “burlesque,” including in it the caricature of a generalized tone like “solemnity.” This seems to link parody with the comic. Strictly speaking, a “burlesque” has to have a literary pre-text from which to work, not just a mood or attitude.⁴⁵ Clinton-Baddeley’s accomplishment in pulling

⁴³ George Kitchin, *A Survey of Burlesque and Parody in English* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1967), ix.

⁴⁴ V.C. Clinton-Baddeley, *The Burlesque Tradition in the English Theatre after 1660* (London: Methuen, 1952), 2. Clinton-Baddeley’s stance recalls the famous aphorism of Nabokov: “Satire is a lesson, parody is a game.” Vladimir Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), 75.

⁴⁵ Various sententious figures are mocked in parody, but usually because of the part they play in a form with that characteristic. Certainly, the teetotaler in temperance melodrama was frequently held up to ridicule in the parodies of the genre.

together a common tradition of parody that stretches from the Davenant and Buckingham to Max Beerbohm points toward a way of considering the commonalities of various works in the continuum of dramatic parody.

Dwight Macdonald, in the introduction to *Parodies: An Anthology from Chaucer to Beerbohm, and After*, sees parody as having a tripartite system. First, he sees it, like many others, as an “intuitive kind of literary criticism.” In this Macdonald suggests that parody allows for a particularly vigorous and incisive analysis of form. Yet, the fact that Macdonald also finds it “intuitive” suggests that parody lacks a certain degree of rigor; parody is not thoughtful, but rather instinctual. Along this line, he also refers to it as “Method acting,” since a successful parodist must live himself, imaginatively, in his parodee.⁴⁶ Third, Macdonald sees parody as a form of literary *jujitsu*, “using the impetus of the opponent to defeat him.”⁴⁷ This defeat must be seen as a playful one as he explains, “Most parodies are written out of admiration rather than contempt.”⁴⁸ Near the end of his introduction, Macdonald confesses that he likes parody because it is “a kind of literary shop talk ... I like its classical moderation, its commonsensability.”⁴⁹ While Macdonald finds an appeal in parody’s chumminess with the receptive reader, he attempts to cudgel parody into a form that he likes. He refuses to explain how *Ulysses* is an example of “classical moderation” or how *Finnegan’s Wake* functions within a logic of “commonsensability.” And while Macdonald does assert, “the complexity of parody forced many observers and critics to be quite contradicting about its form,

⁴⁶ Macdonald, xiii.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., xv.

its intent and its structure,” he cannot resist creating those very contradictions in the appendix to his book. There he seeks to draw hard and fast differences between parody, travesty, and burlesque, creating a hierarchy with parody at the summit. Burlesque is positioned beneath parody as a form that is like parody in that it imitates the style of the original but is mostly concerned with “topical humor.” For Macdonald, parody is not, like burlesque, new wine in old bottles, but a “new wine that tastes like the old, with a slightly lethal effect.”⁵⁰ He characterizes “travesty” as a primitive form that brings down the high and places them in prosaic situations.

What is significant about his study, and in turn points out several problems with the separation of the forms into these particular conceptions of them generally, is the fact that Macdonald uses the works of Aristophanes as the example of parody. He explains that the play’s mockery of the playwrights Euripides and Aeschylus are the best that parody has to offer, as he sees it. That being said, by his own definition, there are also clear elements of burlesque and travesty to be found in *The Frogs*. The nasty squabbings of Euripides and Aeschylus, while certainly showing a certain nostalgia for their great writing, do not show either, and of course, particularly Euripides, in a good light. And there are also frequent references in the play to the then-recent military defeats of the Athenians. These can only be seen as topical humor, though quite black. Macdonald’s attempt to shoehorn texts into easily-made, but largely indefensible, definitions is a tantalizing process that was picked up by other scholars in the years to come.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 557-9.

In *Palimpsests* (1982), Gérard Genette takes Macdonald's attempt to separate parody into various genres to the extreme. He is part of the structuralist movement that attempts to hammer out, the exact, literal meaning of the terms. He is very careful to separate parody from travesty and twenty-some other works on formal pretexts. Genette differentiates on the basis of mood and relationship to the "hypotext" (or pre-text). Travesty has a "satirical" mood because of its negativity and also a "transformative" relation to the pre-text as the travesty reassembles the pre-text for its own purposes. This is to be compared with the parody that is "transformative," yet is "playful" rather than nastily "satirical." Of course, the line between playfulness and satire is, frequently, difficult to measure and for the most part, a matter of opinion. Yet, as other writers have noted, Genette's formalism problematizes his argument. Simon Dentith, whose text *Parody* I will examine soon, remarks, "[*Palimpsests*] suffers from the difficulty of attempting to reform or reconstitute a whole vocabulary by an act of scholarly *force majeure*, as through habitual usage could be single-handedly transformed in the name of greater precision."⁵¹ While Genette's categorizing may serve to illuminate minute differences between forms, it seems that such delimiting, while useful and conducive to teasing out exact differences between various parodic forms, also seems to occlude any possibility of overlap between them.

As the Russian Formalists placed parody at the center of literary evolution, other theorists used parodic constructs as ways of looking at texts. Roland Barthes's declaration of the Death of the Author (itself, of course, a parody of Nietzsche's previous declaration about the Almighty) points toward an idea that all

⁵¹ Dentith, 14.

texts are not only open, but also operate in one way or another, parodically.

Barthes writes: "We now know that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the message of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash."⁵²

The idea of the "blend and clash" of writings within a text is evocative, and calls to mind both Aristotle's ambiguously succinct concept of the *parodia* and Delepuerre's image of the relationships between the various forms of parody. The result is the idea that parody can both amalgamate other texts to create a new whole and fire a punishing fusillade. In a sense, the Barthian Death of the Author is always apparent in parody, a form that seems to deny and rebuke any fixed concept of authorship, even when calling attention to the author of the pre-text. The parodic entanglements of meaning and intent are certainly part of the reason why parody has been considered less serious and important than "original" texts. However, critics like Barthes, Umberto Eco, and Mikhail Bakhtin in particular discuss this entangling, parodic language, viewing parody as a possible resistant reading of traditional discourses as well as a way of problematizing language.

In *The Role of the Reader*, Umberto Eco explains that in the "open work," the position of the Addressee is always envisaged in the generation of the text.⁵³ For Eco, the role of the audience is necessary to the creative process. We can envisage in this case an example of parody in which the creator of the piece has expected the audience to comprehend the parody as parody. Typically, the reader/viewer supplies the material to fill in the narratological gaps to create or

⁵² Roland Barthes, *Image—Music—Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142.

⁵³ Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1979), 49.

supplement meaning. In the case of parody, these gaps are to be filled in by knowledge of the pre-text. In *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*, Susan Bennett takes up Eco's concept of the "inferential walks" adding that audience members take in the bouncing back and forth between texts because "unlike the reader, the spectator of the theatre experiences the 'text' within specific time constraints which deny the chance to repeat readings."⁵⁴ Bennett rightly supposes that the semiotics of the stage mandate a near-instantaneous reception of meaning. As a result, theatrical parody must be quite lucid and clear to its audience, leaving the spectator with no doubt as to the parodic pre-text.

Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of the "heteroglossic" and the "carnavalesque" are also importantly and intimately connected to parody. In *Rabelais and his World*, Bakhtin describes medieval and Renaissance literary and performance practices that react to dominant discourses of power. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin writes that the act of "parodying is the creation of a *decrowning double*; it is that same 'world turned inside out.'"⁵⁵ This doubling troubles hierarchical systems as these "carnavalesque" movements, like the medieval Feast of Fools, destabilize structures by creating situations in which they appear to be overturned. The result of the carnivalesque, a "heteroglossic" intermingling and clashing of systems of language and meaning, explicates and clarifies how parodic systems operate outside of the carnival setting. The multi-

⁵⁴ Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (London; New York: Routledge, 1990), 150.

⁵⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. and ed. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 127.

vocality of parody in which two or more “voices” speak at once inevitably circles back to the lack of a clear referent.

This thread is also taken up in his “From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse” in which Bakhtin writes of the significance of parody as a crucial, and omnipresent, discourse:

It is our conviction that there never was a single strictly straightforward genre, no single type of direct discourse—artistic, rhetorical, philosophical, religious, ordinary everyday—that did not have its own parodying and travesty double, its own comic-ironic *contre-partie*.⁵⁶

As significant to Bakhtin as parody’s ubiquity is its position as an “intentional dialogized hybrid” in which “languages and styles actively and mutually illuminate each other.”⁵⁷ The parodic, can engage with the parodized, causing not a fractious confrontation, but instead a deepened understanding of each.

Bakhtin’s concept of a hybridized parodic form is one that is anticipated by Luigi Pirandello in *On Humor*. Pirandello writes that the comic mind is schizophrenic, torn between the world and its opposite, the comic: “My view is that the comic and its opposite are both present in the humoristic disposition itself and are inherent in the process that results from it.”⁵⁸ Pirandello also suggests that a “feeling of the opposite” comes over those who understand a comic situation; reflection, followed by an awareness of difference, causes the realization of the

⁵⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, “From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse,” *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 53.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁵⁸ Luigi Pirandello, *On Humor*, trans. Antonio Illiano and Daniel P. Testa (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 124

comic. This process of analysis followed by consciousness is crucial to an understanding of the parodic.

Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Parody* engages parody's versatility by attempting to expand the meaning of the term, while, simultaneously, closing it off chronologically. Significantly, Hutcheon's conception removes comedy as an intrinsic part of the parodic; in her well-known definition, seeing parody as a "repetition with a critical difference," comedy is pointedly left out of the parodic construct. Thus, Hutcheon prefers to see parody in the vein of neo-classical imitation, in which texts were repeated as a way of learning and continuing an intellectual tradition:

This more positive method of dealing with the past recalls in many ways the classical and Renaissance attitude to the cultural patrimony. For writers like Ben Jonson, it is clear that imitation of previous works was considered part of the labor of writing poetry.⁵⁹

Through parody, Hutcheon believes, an artist is able to commune with those who have come before. Parody, for Hutcheon, is primarily a method of artistic creation through *imitatio*.

Obviously, the bawdy sarcasms of burlesque do not neatly fit into this neo-classicist rubric. As a result, one of the ways that Hutcheon is able to eliminate comedy from the parodic equation is to limit her focus to "twentieth-century art forms." She begins her book by writing: "We must broaden the concept of parody to fit the needs of the art of our century."⁶⁰ While it certainly is Hutcheon's right to limit her scope to a certain number of texts, her attempts to

⁵⁹ Hutcheon, 4.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 11.

characterize “good” parody as a particular phenomenon of the twentieth century, casts the parodies of the past in a light they do not deserve; she writes that “parody in the twentieth century has gone beyond this conservative function of keeping modishness in line.”⁶¹ While Hutcheon is certainly correct in her assertion that, “parody in this century is one of the major modes of formal and thematic construction of texts,” it seems that to portray nineteenth-century parody as having a “conservative function” is to limit the significance of any parody to the period in which it was conceived. As I argue later, nineteenth-century parodies of melodrama, as they changed and subverted melodramatic norms, allowed for an exchange of ideas on important social and political topics of the day.

The idea of a “neutral” parody that does not have to engage in a comedic or satirical association with its pre-text does not originate with Hutcheon’s work. Tynyanov held that if the parodic pre-text were to be forgotten or concealed, any comedy could drop away:

When the parody is not revealed, the work changes. So changes every literary work taken out of the plane to which it was assigned. Even the parody, the main element of which lies in stylistic details, naturally loses its parodic character when torn away from its second plane (which can simply be forgotten). This is an important measure for resolving the question about parody as a comic genre. The comic is usually the coloring which accompanies parody, but is by no means the coloring of the parodic itself. The parodic character of the work may fade away while its comic colouring remains. Parody lies wholly in a dialectical play with the device.

⁶¹ Ibid., 2.

If a parody of tragedy becomes a comedy, a comedy parodied may be a tragedy.⁶²

What this does suggest is that the “neutral parody” that Hutcheon describes is not merely a postmodern phenomenon; it could occur outside of the twentieth century at times when the parody is unmoored from its pre-text. While Hutcheon is against the creation of any trans-historical definition of parody, her choice to open up the possible meanings of parody by eliminating the necessity of a comedic element points toward the significance of the impulse to parody itself.

In the years that followed the publication of Hutcheon's text and with the integration of parody into the contemporary critical discourse, writers began to take issue with many of Hutcheon's assumptions. A brief important example is in an essay by Tore Rem, published in Beate Müller's anthology, *Parody: Dimensions and Perspectives*. In an article entitled “Sentimental Parody,” Rem asks whether Hutcheon's concepts of parody can be applied to epochs other than our own, indicating that Hutcheon herself looks outside of the twentieth century to substantiate her claim of a parody without comedy. Rem writes:

Hutcheon ... needs reverential parody from another era than our own to open the way for her argument. The mock epics [like *Batrachomyomachia*] revere the epic.⁶³

Rem follows this with a coherent study on the intermingling of parody and sentimentality in the work of Charles Dickens. Rem concludes that Dickens's penchant for the intermixture of parody and sentimental melodrama in his novels

⁶² Yuri Tynyanov, “Dostoyevsky i Gogol,” in *Arkhaisty I Novatory* (Munich, 1967). Cited in Rose, 121.

⁶³ Tore Rem, “Sentimental Parody? Thoughts on the Quality of Parody in Dickens,” in *Parody: Dimensions and Perspectives*, ed. Beate Müller (Amsterdam; Atlanta: Rodopi, 1997), 156.

has a number of motivations: he sought to have as large an audience as possible, thus using parody as a way of increasing the appeal; secondly, parody could keep sentimental fiction afloat in a time when that form was becoming unpopular; thirdly, because parody made his novels more amiable (as compared to the colder, nastier Austen); and lastly, that parody appeals to the English tradition of mixed genres (like tragicomedy). Here, Rem cites Samuel Bethell's concept of the "multiconsciousness" of an English popular audience that was able to "take in rapid shifts between tragedy and comedy."⁶⁴ Rem's study of the intermingling of parody and sentimental melodrama, by showing these seeming opposites existing side by side in Dickens, helps us better understand how they may have functioned together on the stage.

In Rem, we see the ways in which Hutcheon's provocations have caused a refocusing in the scholarship of parody. By looking into the parody of the nineteenth-century, Rem points toward a way that "supports the expansion of parody's range of attitudes toward the pre-text which Hutcheon argues from modern and postmodern examples."⁶⁵ Since the publication of *Theory of Parody*, many authors have taken issue with Hutcheon's views, and I will briefly introduce four of them here: Margaret Rose, Robert Phiddian, Michelle Hanoosh, and finally, Simon Dentith.

In her *Parody/Metafiction: An Analysis of Parody as a Critical Mirror to the Writing and Reception of Fiction* and the later and more comprehensive *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern*, Margaret Rose suggests that in order for parody to operate, it fundamentally needs to encompass the comic and the

⁶⁴ Ibid., 166.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 168.

meta-fictional. For Rose, parody's meta-fictional element is significant as parody must act in such a way that it always draws attention to the fact of its existence. Indeed, one of the main issues found throughout scholarship on the subject is that, whatever the definition of the term, whatever the distinctions between different types of parody, the act of parody itself must be known to the receiver of the text. Parody must announce its presence as a form.⁶⁶ Rose notes that the focus on the meta-textual is an action "to show 'how' the fictional work, and its depictions of truth and reality, [is] constructed."⁶⁷ This act of showing how a text operates is similar to the ways that the critics from the turn of the century considered the form: as a way of critiquing, of laying bare strategies in the pre-text.

Robert Phiddian's recent text *Swift's Parody* focuses on the deconstructive notions of French philosopher Jacques Derrida and applies Derrida's conceptions of operating under "erasure" to the study of parody. For Derrida, a thought or concept exists, while at the same time not, transfigured by a cancellation. Phiddian rightly points out that parodic act of erasure must be allowed, in the case of Swift, to "operate critically rather than as a merely neutral cancellation of an object."⁶⁸ The fact that parody always must take a particular critical stand of *some kind* or other is important. Critics have bandied about the idea that parody is necessarily regressive or reactionary, or that it is inherently subversive. However, Phiddian's argument suggests that, no matter what, parody must be *critical* in one way or another. There can be no such thing as a "neutral" erasure. This concept,

⁶⁶ Authors of parody often use this need to label the parody as parody as a chance for some not-so-subtle comedy. *Chrononhotonthologos* by Henry Carey and *The Tragedy of Tragedies, or the Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great With Annotations by H. Scriblerus Secundus* by Henry Fielding are good examples of this.

⁶⁷ Margaret Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern and Post-Modern* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 99.

⁶⁸ Robert Phiddian, *Swift's Parody* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 13

coupled with Rose's emphasis on meta-textuality, demonstrates how parody must take an action in relation to a previous text, but any re-functioning leaves evidence of a perspective, an ideology. Thus, the study of the parodies of a certain pre-texts can trace these very shifts of perspective.

Phiddian also suggests that Swift was always considered a satirist rather than a parodist because of the "illegitimate textuality" of the Swiftian pretexts. He explains: "Swift's texts have not generally been analyzed as parody, because their pre-texts have not been considered literary or sufficiently significant of themselves."⁶⁹ This point is certainly pertinent to my work here. The fact that the study of parody has been focused on parodies of canonical texts suggests why parodies of melodrama, despite melodrama's intense popularity and centrality to nineteenth-century theatre, have seen little scholarly attention.

Michele Hannosh in *Parody and Decadence* indicates that formulaic works (like epic poetry and melodrama) are easily parodied because their formal elements are so clear.⁷⁰ Hannosh, however, does refute Linda Hutcheon's contention that parody is not inherently comic. She presupposes that while ridicule is not necessarily a part of the parody (as it sometimes can be), the comic must be because the raising and denial of expectations is inevitably comedic. From Hanoosh's perspective, Hutcheon's separation of the comic from the parodic is useful in that it opened a way for parody to come back into cultural discourse, without the elements of ridicule and satire being necessarily central. However, for Hannosh, Hutcheon's broad defining of parody as "repetition with a critical difference," in which she leaves out the comic entirely, flies in the face of

⁶⁹ Ibid., 19.

⁷⁰ Michele Hanoosh, *Parody and Deacence* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989), 12

anything that scholars, dating back to Aristotle, have understood concerning the nature of parody. The parodic reconsideration of the pre-text would have been considered comic to Aristotle because if comedy shows people worse than they actually are, parody performs a similar action with a genre. Also, if parody raises expectations and then denies (and undercuts) them, yet delivers the same form in an entirely new way, the difference between the two forms is necessarily comic. The very broadness of Hutcheon's definition allows other scholars to broaden it further, considering parody as comic and also outside of the twentieth century.

I conclude with a consideration of Simon Dentith's recent contribution to the critical discourse, *Parody* (2000). This text is part of Routledge's "New Critical Idiom" series and replaces John Jump's previous *Burlesque* (1972). Certainly the amount of discourse on the subject of parody calls for a new examination of the topic, but the switch in terminology signifies a change in thinking, one that falls in line with Hutcheon's perspective. "Burlesque" is a particularly comic form, while "parody" is seen as more value-neutral. Dentith's *Parody* neatly summarizes much of the work to date on the subject and makes, as I mentioned earlier, an important break with tradition in that he includes a chapter dedicated to parody in the theatre, including a section on "burlesque melodrama." The inclusion of burlesque drama as well as other comedic forms permits Dentith, who takes cues from Hanoosh and others, to broaden Hutcheon's focus. He accepts Hutcheon's argument that parody does not have to be funny, citing frequent neoclassical "imitations" of a beloved author as an example. But he differs from Hutcheon in that he considers that the "polemic" nature of parody to be central as "the polemic [in the parodic text] can work both ways: toward the

imitated text or toward the 'world'." ⁷¹ For Dentith, parody can comment upon the pre-text, society, or both. As a result, Dentith broadens the ways that parody can be defined by increasing the number of its viable targets. The parody can act not only against the targeted text or genre, but also against the world-view or ideology that characterizes the work. As a result, he writes: "Parody should be thought of, not as a single and tightly definable genre or practice, but as *a range of cultural practices which are all more or less parodic*." ⁷² The result of Dentith's new definition is to increase the number of parodic texts, moving beyond those which Hutcheon wished to consider. If parody can be any number of "cultural practices," we are clearly moving away from the delineations sought by Genette and Macdonald and the earlier scholars and to a more limited extent by Rose and Hutcheon. Under this system, only a polemical attitude toward either the world of the text or the world in general is needed, creating a recognizable "continuum of parodic cultural work or parodic cultural effects." ⁷³ The idea of parody as a continuum allows a critical move denied earlier by Hutcheon, a step backward into the nineteenth century and moving forward into our own time, while measuring the different parodic practices toward a particular subject along the way.

Dentith concludes his study by alluding to the "parodic paradox, by which parody creates new utterances out of the utterances that it seeks to mock, mean[ing] that it preserves as much as it destroys—or rather, it preserves in the moment that it destroys—and thus the parasite becomes the occasion for itself to

⁷¹ Dentith, 17.

⁷² Ibid., 19.

⁷³ Ibid.

act as host.”⁷⁴ This moment of oscillation in which the parasite and host switch places is a good way not only of destabilizing the long-standing slur against parody as a “parasitic” form, but also of viewing the long history of melodrama parody in the United States. Melodrama and its sensual delights, and parody with its critical pleasures, caused both to stay in the forefront of our dramatic imagination, locked in a passionate embrace. Melodrama, and the perceptions of melodrama, have been defined and re-defined by its parody, through a process of generic “evolution,” in the Russian Formalist sense of the term. As I discuss in the chapters to come, the continual shifts in the public perception of melodrama were both motivated and shaped by its parodies and as a result, tracing the parodies of the American melodrama can reveal a new cultural history of the genre.

III. Some Brief Thoughts on the Parodic Stage Tradition

As I mentioned previously, the vast majority of scholarship on the subject of parody has frequently neglected the study of drama and theatre. One of the main reasons theatrical parody is so repeatedly left out of the critical discussion is that the element of performance complicates the parodic issue significantly. The inclusion of a third arbiter of meaning between the writer and the viewer—the performer—allows for the creation of a number of alternate parodic combinations, giving way to some remarkable moments in theatrical history. An example of just this complexity is found in a famous historical event involving the French actor Frederick Lemaître. Lemaître, an actor of extraordinary talent and popularity in the first half of the nineteenth century, played the part of the melodramatic villain

⁷⁴ Ibid., 189.

Robert Macaire in *The Inn of the Adrets* (1823). He tipped his performance toward parody in part because, as Albert Bermel and others suggest, Lemaître believed that the audience could not enjoy the plot otherwise. By injecting the role with a misplaced sense of self-importance, Lemaître created a wildly popular character out of Macaire. Daniel Gerould has pointed toward a more radical political reasoning for Lemaître's adapting the part of the villain to become a comic figure. Gerould writes that Lemaître enabled his Macaire to become "an expression of the mob's rage against society's injustices."⁷⁵ Whether Lemaître's purpose was aesthetic or political (or both), the audience was extraordinarily pleased with the result and a new play was written by Lemaître himself, *Robert Macaire* (1834) with Lemaître reprising his newly-parodic role. Bermel, however, relates in a footnote that,

The two authors [of *The Inn of the Adrets*, Benjamin Antier and St. Amand] were delighted with their play's new personality and with the royalties therefrom. The third author, a Dr. Polyanthe, strenuously objected to Lemaître's interpretation ...⁷⁶

Lemaître's reinterpretation of *The Inn of the Adrets* points toward the dangerous difficulty in discussing theatrical parody, the uncertainty and instability of performance. Importantly, the fact that the audience comprehended the parody *as a parody* would indicate that they "read" Lemaître's performance as intentional

⁷⁵ Daniel Gerould, "Melodrama and Revolution," in *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen*, ed. Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook, and Christine Gledhill (London: BFI, 1994), 187.

⁷⁶ Albert Bermel, "Where Melodrama Meets Farce," *Melodrama*, ed. Daniel Gerould (New York: New York Literary Forum, 1980), 177-8. Antier and St. Amand would later collaborate with Lemaître on *Robert Macaire*.

parody, and not as a “bad” performance.⁷⁷ As Frederick Brown notes: “Having come into existence as ridicule of the moral scheme sustained by melodramatic formulas, as a character in quotation marks, he spoke to the feelings of profound dissociation that beset his diverse audience.”⁷⁸ Lemaître’s example shows that by the inclusion of the actor on the stage into the parodic mix, a third, uncertain element is added to the encoder/decoder dyad. The variable of performance not only distressed Dr. Polyanthe, but continues to problematize the work of scholars of the parodic, complicating further an already confusing form.

It seems that the inherent act of *imitation*, of *mimesis*, which both theatre and parody share, opens up very serious possibilities in the discussion of the performance. It could be argued, in a sense, that *any theatrical performance may be a parody of the text upon which it is based*. The range of possible critical and meta-theatrical positions that a performer or director may inhabit situates theatre as an almost unavoidably parodic form. Parody on stage takes the form of a double-mimesis, the action of the always twice-imitated. This confluence between parody and theatre, two forms so fundamentally linked, has existed since the very early days of the stage. Here I will attempt to highlight a few major, famous examples of theatrical parody. What can be inferred from this particular grouping is that just as every audience is different, every parody does not act (or react) the same way in every circumstance.

⁷⁷ However, the fact that the actor performing the role was, after all, one of the premier actors of the French stage, would certainly cause the audience to believe that he intended the role to have a parodic edge. Another actor attempting this kind of performance might not have been so fortunate.

⁷⁸ Frederick Brown, *Theater and Revolution: The Culture of the French Stage* (New York: Viking, 1980), 114.

In fact, one interesting facet of the intermingling between theatre and parody is that a great many of the theatrical parodies are self-referential about themselves as plays. Margaret Rose has intimated that all parody, to some extent, has built into it a moment of self-examination as a fictional practice. As a result, parody can be used not only as a critical tool as many scholars have noted, but also as a way to understand theatrical history from an intimate, contemporary perspective.

Parody has been used frequently to comprehend and comment upon theatrical practice or history. In *The Frogs*, Aristophanes's famous editorial in a time of national strife, the works of the two great tragedians of the then-recent past, Aeschylus and Euripides (who himself had parodied the Cyclops episode from the *Odyssey*), are read out of context, parodied, and also used to comment on the degradation of Athenian literature. One of Shakespeare's funniest scenes is a dramatic burlesque: the sequence between Pyramus and Thisbe in his *A Midsummer Night's Dream* parodies the interludes of the previous generation.⁷⁹ This "play-within-a-play" format is frequently used to make such meta-theatrical critiques as it is uniquely able to represent the form being parodied in an alternate context. *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* by Beaumont and Fletcher, *The Rehearsal* by Buckingham, and *The Critic* by Sheridan sent up theatrical traditions. The vaudeville and variety shows of the nineteenth century included a large

⁷⁹ Frank Kermode has pointed out that Bottom's ecstatic revelation of his vision of Titania's bower in which he exclaims "The eye of man has not heard, the ear of man has not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was" (Act IV, i) is a parody of I *Cortinthians*, ii: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard ..." in which the pleasures of the afterlife are noted. See Frank Kermode, "The Mature Comedies," *Stratford-upon-Avon Studies III: The Early Shakespeare*, ed. John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris (London: Edward Arnold, 1961), 219.

number of sketches of that mocked various types of theatre: many of the skits and plays described in the next chapter come from vaudeville repertoires.

Lawrence Levine notes in *Highbrow/Lowbrow* that the fact that minstrels frequently parodied Shakespeare signifies the position of Shakespeare as a "popular" artist in nineteenth-century America. Dwight Macdonald writes that in *Four Saints in Three Acts*, Gertrude Stein "exploits everything from liturgy to grand opera, to Negro spirituals."⁸⁰ Beckett references music-hall tradition in *Waiting for Godot*. In his absurdist *Macbett*, Ionesco parodies one of Shakespeare's darkest plays, one that has been already parodied (amongst other genres and theatrical conventions) in Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*. In his analysis of the play in *Palimpsests*, Gérard Genette writes that Ionesco "redirects toward Shakespeare the paroxystic buffoonery of infamy affected by Jarry, and rewrites *Macbeth* in light of Jarry."⁸¹ This leaves *Macbett* as a parody of a parody of a Shakespearean original (which was, of course, an adaptation from a story from Anglo-Saxon history, written down in the twelfth century by Saxo Grammaticus in *Historia Danica*). The critical referencing back and forth opens up innumerable meanings. More recently, Tom Stoppard, in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, created a postmodernist tragicomedy out of a coupling of *Waiting for Godot* and *Hamlet*. Here the elements of the comic and the meta-fictive are constantly in play, perhaps best encapsulated when Guildenstern buttonholes the Player saying:

⁸⁰ Macdonald, xv.

⁸¹ Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 359

Operating on two levels are we?! How clever! I expect it comes naturally to you, being in the business so to speak.⁸²

The list of possible plays, of course, is endless.

However, if we can think of the triune structure of theatrical reception—author-director/performer-audience—we must consider that the parodic function may reside in any of these particular situations, and therefore must look to performance practice as well as to written parodic texts. David Krasner describes how the performance of *A Trip to Coontown*, on the surface a simple racist tract, was perceived in vastly different ways by the white and black audiences for which it was performed. As Krasner indicates: “white audiences probably received the text of “No Coons Allowed!” (a song from the show) as a particular joke on a foolish African American who momentarily lost sight of his subordinate status; on the other hand, the underlying critique of America’s racism within the parody was not lost on blacks.”⁸³ In revealing the mixed racial identity of the audience, and digging up the historical circumstances in which works were performed, Krasner found fresh significance in *A Trip to Coontown*. Therefore, as tempting as it might be to use only texts of parody, in line with traditionally logocentric parodic scholarship, the theatrical form dictates that examinations of the performance tradition of written texts, even those not typically construed as parodic.

The reason that audiences might be particularly conditioned for such parodic exchanges is that they know very well, after all, that they are sitting in a theatre. The audience is conditioned to the slippages between reality and fiction,

⁸² Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* in *Nine Plays of the Modern Theater*, ed. Harold Clurman (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1981), 731.

⁸³ Krasner, 35.

and thus perhaps more attuned to the oscillations between pre-text and parody. Marvin Carlson has noted that audiences marveled at famous New York productions of *Tobacco Road* and *Street Scene* because their masterfully authentic facades seemed offered up, made available, displayed for public appreciation. This “created an agreeable tension between the audience’s knowledge of illusion and its appreciation of the illusion’s effectiveness.”⁸⁴ I suspect that for the theatre audience, theatrical parody plays upon a very similar “agreeable tension” between the narrative remembered (the pre-text) and performance in the moment (the parodic text), between memory and the here and now.

IV. American Melodrama

Another kind of “agreeable tension,” in this instance between comedy and pathos, is found repeatedly in the melodrama; the expected consistency of the form ensured the return of patrons to view a familiar narrative arc. However, despite (or perhaps because of) its widespread popularity, melodrama has only recently been widely considered worthy of critical study. As mentioned previously in this chapter, melodrama and parody share a similar focus on imitation but also the same scholarly trajectory: initial disparagement followed by later appreciation as academia expanded its canonical horizons. Like parody, “melodrama” has been hobbled by its negative connotations. Just as parody suggests immediately the sort of humor found on *Saturday Night Live*, melodrama causes the average person to think of over-the-top emotionalism. When parodies

⁸⁴ Marvin Carlson, *Theatre Semiotics: Signs of Life* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 77.

of melodrama are mentioned in melodrama scholarship, the intent is usually to add a bit of levity, and to set the tone for melodrama's eventual downfall.

Scholars of parody also imply that parodies of melodrama were somehow too easy, that the target, melodrama, was so broad and readily open to parody that it denied any possible artistry. This argument, made by Dwight Macdonald in particular, pre-supposes that any parody of a work not deemed canonically significant is not worth study. Yet the parodies of a form of such significance to national culture seem pertinent if for no other reason than melodrama is a major narrative of America.

The transparency of melodrama's generic elements is certainly part of the reason that parodies of melodrama have been so frequent and successful. Melodrama's "simple formula"⁸⁵ seems so destined for parody precisely because it is so easily identifiable. Its simplicity caused it be seen as "crude, slipshod, debasing, superficial, ignoble, and utterly non-sensical"⁸⁶ compared with realism. Thus, the "monopathy" of melodrama's characters, to use Robert Heilman's term, allowed for their easy inclusion into a parodic heteroglossia. Importantly, it was a step away from looking at melodrama generically and a move toward understanding it as something far more pervasive and complex that allowed for the study of melodrama, as a particularly American form, to move forward. Just as in the case of Hutcheon's *Theory of Parody*, Peter Brooks's *The Melodramatic Imagination* allowed the study of melodrama to move in entirely new directions.

⁸⁵ James L. Smith, *Melodrama* (London: Methuen, 1973), 15.

⁸⁶ Christopher Strong, "Good-by Melodrama," *Green Book* 8:3 (September 1912), 435-39. Cited in Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 2. Singer's excellent book contains, among other things, a treasure trove of anti-melodrama editorials.

Brook conceived of melodrama not as a simple dramatic form, but “as a mode of conception and expression, as a certain fictional system for making sense of experience, as a semantic field of force.”⁸⁷

By moving the study of melodrama away from pre-set conceptions of genre, Brooks makes the appealing case that melodrama is utilized by many authors, like Hugo, James and Balzac, who ordinarily are not affiliated with the form.⁸⁸ He situates melodramatic “moral polarization”⁸⁹ as a fundamental element of much of nineteenth-century literature. In this, Brooks follows the lead of writers like Wylie Sypher who saw the melodramatic oppositions as part and parcel of the “archetypal behavior of 19th Century thought.”⁹⁰ But by reconsidering melodrama as a prevailing mode or “semantic field of force” and thus as a more generalized form, Brooks illuminates the use of melodrama as a way of explaining the central conflicts of human existence. For Brooks, melodrama embodies “an urging toward combat in life, and active lucid confrontation of evil.”⁹¹ Not only does Brooks find melodrama in the most “legitimate” of writers, but he removes the stigma of simplicity from melodrama.

⁸⁷ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, and the Mode of Excess*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), xvii.

⁸⁸ A similar argument is made by Jacques Barzun in *Classic, Romantic and Modern* in which he attempts to rehabilitate the reputation of Romanticism by connecting the genre to more established and “legitimate” forms. Just as Brooks gives melodrama a new relevance by uncovering melodramatic elements in Hugo and other Romantics, Barzun situates Romanticism as a seed from which other genres, like Symbolism and Naturalism, have sprung. Indeed, the way that Barzun characterizes the common scholarly opinion of Romanticism as “naïve, silly, wrongheaded, stupidly passionate, criminally hopeful, and intolerably rhetorical” (xv) echoes many early scholarly comments about melodrama. See Jacques Barzun, *Classic, Romantic and Modern* 2nd ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1961).

⁸⁹ Brooks, 112.

⁹⁰ Wylie Sypher, “Aesthetic of Revolution: The Marxist Melodrama,” *The Kenyon Review* 10 (1948), 437. Sypher’s essay explains convincingly that Marxist thought is grounded in the melodramatic ethos of nineteenth-century Europe.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 206.

Depicting the trials of human existence, melodrama becomes an important form through its “excesses” rather than in spite of them.

One of the more significant aspects of melodrama is the centrality of an explicitly moral universe. Brooks cites Charles Nodier who, while writing of the plays of Pixérécourt, described a relationship between melodrama and the viewer that could readily apply to the position of certain American melodramas: “I have seen [Pixérécourt’s plays] in the absence of religious worship, take the place of the silent pulpit.”⁹² The inflexibility of melodrama’s moral certainty is seen here as a kind of dogma of aesthetics. Melodrama can be seen as a religious theatre in which cosmic battles are waged between the forces of good and evil.

However, in the introduction to *American Melodrama*, Daniel Gerould concludes that these “absolutes are only provisional.”⁹³ While good and evil are set in stark contrast, the melodramatic is never completely stable—as Gerould notes, even villains can have a change of heart. The situation can always change for the better as melodrama’s sunny optimism always shines even in the midst of despair. The perpetual hopefulness of melodrama dovetails perfectly with the yeoman farmer ethos of America.

The role of melodrama in the manufacture of national identity has been a topic of serious significance in melodrama studies. David Grimsted, in his *Melodrama Unveiled: American Theater and Culture, 1800-1850*, attempts to use melodrama as a way to “glimpse that most devious of historical objects, the

⁹² Ibid., 43.

⁹³ Daniel Gerould, “The Americanization of Melodrama,” in *American Melodrama*, ed. Daniel Gerould (New York: PAJ, 1983), 9.

popular mind of an age.”⁹⁴ Grimsted attempts to discover the American mindset in its very early days through an examination of the place of melodrama in society. He aptly sums up the nineteenth-century audience’s appreciation of melodrama as follows:

... the melodramatic form itself embodied much of this democratic society’s attitude toward morality and nature, its enthusiasm for democracy and domesticity, its tacit separation of the world into spheres of the practical and the transcendent, its desire to see ordinary lives taken seriously and yet be charged with excitement, and its faith in and doubts about progress and providence.⁹⁵

Obvious in this description is that the melodramatic form can have everything both ways. In melodrama, unlike the tragedy, the hero hails from humble origins and rises to significance through a series of trials. The average American’s existence is grafted onto a narrative of sublimity. However, this narrative also allowed for troubling issues to be played out on the stage; each heroine saved from harm and every inheritance restored showed uncertainties staged and confidently resolved.

Jeffrey Mason’s *Melodrama and the Myth of America* engages the relationship between America and melodrama in a particularly useful way. Through an examination of five representative American melodramas, *Metamora*, *The Drunkard*, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, *My Partner*, and *Shenandoah*, Mason

⁹⁴ David Grimsted, *Melodrama Unveiled: American Theater and Culture, 1800-1850* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), xv.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, xvii.

describes how America used melodrama to create and manipulate its own national identity through performance. At the tail end of the text, Mason argues that

[m]elodrama becomes an exercise in fomenting crisis and outrage over questions that are no longer compelling or even contingent, an approach much in the tradition of a nation borne out of a revolution conducted by men who wished not to change society, but to restore it to the former condition that they preferred. Melodrama staged the vision of these conservative revolutionaries.⁹⁶

I agree with Mason that melodrama, existing as it does as a narrative with certain laws and rules that cannot be broken under any circumstances, does have a certain reactionary feel to it. It produces onstage a paradoxical world in which while the struggle is always victorious, the status quo is always maintained. But while its form may remain static, melodrama, like parody, does not have a particular political slant of its own. Its form, however, is ideally suited as a purveyor of ideology. For instance, Daniel Gerould has noted that melodrama has frequently been used for revolutionary purposes, both in France of the nineteenth century as well as in the Soviet Union of the twentieth.⁹⁷ But, it seems that if we consider that parody has haunted melodrama from the very beginning, we must consider that melodrama's narratological stability would have been open to parodic subversion.

⁹⁶ Mason, 196.

⁹⁷ Daniel Gerould, "Melodrama and Revolution," in *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen*, ed. Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook, and Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1994), 185-198.

Mason describes melodrama as a part of the formation of the “myth of America,” and the medium for a “sentimental vision of humanity.”⁹⁸ For Mason, this “sentimental vision” holds that feeling and emotion are more significant and important than reason. Melodrama is always intuitive, making the right decisions right from the gut. Mason argues that the American addiction to sentimentality is a strategy of the middle class to clarify and perform its own virtuousness. The sentimental gestures toward an innate goodness of Calvinistic predestination, justifies the middle-class obsession with worldly goods. This thread is also picked up in Bruce McConachie’s *Melodramatic Formations: American Theatre and Society, 1820-1870*, as McConachie explains how this sentimentality shifted in the Jacksonian period from an elitist paternalism to an ideology of “manly honor, republican independence, and hero worship [that] circulated in other social arenas beyond the theatre ...”⁹⁹ The parodies of melodrama pilloried and refashioned these same evolving societal norms, opening up avenues of transgression.

Ben Singer in his recent *Melodrama and Modernity* looks into the position that the emotional and the sentimental can have in a newly-industrialized society. Though focusing primarily on the film melodramas of Douglas Sirk and the like, Singer is able to colorfully situate the reader in the theatrical underpinnings of the very end of the nineteenth century pointing toward an inextricable relationship between melodrama and the industrialization of America. Singer implies that melodrama engaged the uncertainties of modernity on the stage—the helpless victim tied to the railroad tracks in a sense stands in for a society, which has

⁹⁸ Mason, 12.

⁹⁹ Bruce McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations: American Theatre and Society, 1820-1870* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 68.

become, for better or for worse, tied to technology. Singer's book is particularly interesting in that Singer, unlike McConachie and Grimsted, focuses on that time in which stage melodrama begins to falter in popularity and to be eventually overcome by film. It is this period in which melodrama makes a transition from theatre to the cinema that marks a change in both melodrama and its parodization. Its new medium, coupled with the First World War and the urbanization, changed the way that parodists conceived of melodrama, moving toward a position of nostalgic remembrance of blood and thunder gone by.

I conclude with Albert Bermel's "Where Melodrama Meets Farce," a particularly fascinating essay on the subject of melodrama's interminglings with other forms. While this primarily deals with film and with the melodramatic generally and not as a generic term, Bermel maintains that melodrama and farce are two forms that seem to be on the verge of one another almost constantly.

Bermel writes:

Thus when we say that a work is a farce or a melodrama, we have to mean that the farcical or the melodramatic effects predominate, not that the work consists of a single genre only.¹⁰⁰

What Bermel correctly reminds us of here is that no genre is entirely whole; even, and perhaps especially, a genre supposedly so well codified as melodrama. The nineteenth-century melodrama that is the focus of my study is the epitome of the melodramatic mode, a point when all is focused toward a "melodramatic effect." But as Bermel surmises, parody always seems ready to burst through and deconstruct the serious. However, if the performance of melodrama was, and is, a

¹⁰⁰ Bermel, 175

way that “America or ‘America’ performs its own self-conception,”¹⁰¹ the perpetually unstable position on the brink of parody and reformulation has constantly served to further nuance and redefine not only melodrama, but also the conception of the national character.

V. Conclusion

Parody and melodrama have both moved from the margins to center stage in terms of their importance to the study of critical theory and performance. And while both languished in critical backwater for many years, they have regained a stature in the intellectual community that both have quite often held in the popular culture. They are now guilty pleasures available for cogent analysis.

Importantly, both of these seminal forms are grounded in artistic exaggeration. Parody, as I have noted earlier, must be exaggerated in some way in order to be recognized; it must be noticeable to be noticed at all. Melodrama, since the time of its conception, has always depicted life lived *in extremis*. Just as exaggeration is a common element between these two forms, it is also central component to the popularity and enjoyment of both.

With the rise in scholarly interest in melodrama and parody, I believe that we should reassess their relationship. In the following chapters, I maintain that parodies of melodrama affected explicitly the ways that melodrama came to be conceived. Parody would become a central element in an always evolving theatrical tradition. Through constant parodization and “refunctionalization,”

¹⁰¹ Jeffrey D. Mason, “American Stages (Curtain Raiser),” in *Performing America: Cultural Nationalism in American Theater*, ed. Jeffrey D. Mason and J. Ellen Gainor (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 1.

nineteenth-century melodrama existed on the stage in a constant state of flux. Similarly, the parodies of the form also evolved over time as the impulse to create them changed. I suggest that the travesties of the nineteenth century and the nostalgic recreations and postmodernist aftertextings of the twentieth century come from a similar impetus: the need to get in touch with and utilize the power of melodrama *through parody*. An effort to recapture and re-examine the melodramatic impact through the vehicle of parody seems natural for a country like America, a country possessed of a melodramatic idealism on a national scale.

Significantly, a study of a parodic theatrical tradition may indicate how performance can elide the supposed differences between different kinds of parody. As I have shown, much of what has been written about parody has sought to break down the distinctions between different forms of parody, burlesque and the like. Attempts have been made to discern particular differences in terms of high and low, form and content, mean-spirited and whimsical. Yet, because of the inherent imitative process of theatre, because theatre is particularly, indeed perhaps solely, concerned with mimesis and the performances of other objects on stage, I believe a certain eliding of the supposed differences between burlesque, travesty, parody and the like in terms of theatre is advantageous. As a result, we are able to note a skein of performance that stretches throughout theatrical history, as adaptation follows adaptation, and the ghost of the last performance follows the performance onstage in the present. If we were to take a particular genre, nineteenth-century American melodrama, and follow its different parodic embodiments and manifestations throughout the decades, a nineteenth-century

parodic lineage to the contemporary ironic aftertextings emerges, informing the melodrama performance of our own time.

And while any number of definitions has been forwarded in recent years, Simon Dentith's conception of parody as "any cultural practice that makes a relatively polemical allusive imitation to another cultural production or practice"¹⁰² seems particularly valid for my purpose. As the parodies of melodrama took a number of different forms in America, and approached their subject with widely varying degrees of vitriol, affection and/or critique, a definition of breadth and purposeful non-specificity seems useful. While Dentith, like Hutcheon, certainly casts his net wide, his intent in his use of the term "parody" is to loosely circumscribe and group together a variety of different parodic modes whose precise definitions—like travesty and burlesque—are difficult to specify without resorting to hard and fast distinctions. However, Dentith's use of the term "polemical" seems too harsh, a throwback to the old inclinations that parody had to satirize its target text. After all, can one be playfully polemical? As a result, the coherent meaning of the term "parody" will, for my purposes, come to mean *any text that imitates and references another text, in whole or in part, generally or specifically, for any comedic purpose*. But what concerns me here is the *impulse* to perform that text theatrically.

So what follows? In the chapters to come, I will analyze a series of plays and performances in relation to each other to show the scope of parody as a historical practice when applied to melodrama. What I hope to prove is that a parodic tradition of significance exists, from the very beginnings of melodrama in

¹⁰² Dentith, 37.

America to the present, which is constantly engaged, theatrically, with melodrama. While the various parodies will “imitate and reference” for certain comedic purposes, those perspectives can be widely divergent. Yet, the “parodic impulse,” the desire to theatrically refashion, is very much the same. The theatrical refashionings of the narratives that defined America to itself are those, to quote Raymond Williams, “certain characteristic forms and devices, evidence of deadlocks and unsolved problems of the society.”¹⁰³

But what did the existence of a popular, persistent theatrical refashioning of melodrama on American stages do to affect “straight” stage melodrama? It seems that the continuing presence of parody in a position both adjacent to (and opposed to) melodrama would have powerful, if not omnipresent, consequences in the writing, performance, and reception of melodrama. Such parodies existed to perpetually confront the form with itself, acting as an inevitable Topsy to melodrama’s Eva. The inclusion of parody in the study of melodrama helps illuminate the development of a deceptively flexible form.

¹⁰³ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 1965), 86.

Chapter 2:

Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Parodic Performances of Race

I. Introduction

Henry James called Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "a wonderful, 'leaping' fish": a work of such central significance to American discourse that it could move effortlessly through the nation's culture. As a book it outsold all but the Bible, as a dramatic piece it was performed more than any other on this country's stages for decades, and in a series of one and two-reelers it helped establish a nascent film industry. In its unparalleled ubiquity "it simply sat down wherever it lighted and made itself, so to speak, at home."¹

Since the novel's publication in 1852, "Uncle Tom" has also become a term with loaded significance. An "Uncle Tom" now identifies one who "cosies up to or kowtows to whites to his personal advantage—but usually to the distinct detriment of his entire race."² In *Ceramic Uncles and Celluloid Mammies*,

¹ Henry James, *A Small Boy and Others* (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1913), 160.

² "Group of Black College Presidents Honors Strom Thurmond," *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 12 (Summer 1996), 8. The late activist Khallid Abdul Muhammad rendered his definition in stronger terms: "some boot-licking, butt-kicking, buckdancing, bamboozled, half-baked, half-fried, sissified, punkified, pasteurized, homogenized nigger that they can trot in front of you." Khallid Abdul Muhammad, speech at Kean College, New Jersey, November 1993. Cited in Richard Laurence and James B. Lowe, *The American Directory of Certified Uncle Toms: Being a Review of the History, Antics, and Attitudes of Handkerchief Heads, Aunt Jemimas, Head Negroes in Charge, and House Negroes Against the Freedom Aims of the Black Race*, Millennial Edition (New York: CBIA, 2002), 23.

Patricia Turner relates a classroom discussion in which her African-American students referred to the then-newly appointed Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas as an “Uncle Tom.” She was struck by the gulf between the Uncle Tom of Stowe’s novel and the modern perception of that character today, writing that her students all agreed “that from a political perspective, Uncle Toms were black conservatives,” living contradictions of ideology and identity.³ While the perception of Uncle Tom as a perpetually-grinning, obsequious servant filled with racial self-loathing is as ever-present today as it is evocative, it is also clear that the first step toward this conception of Uncle Tom as racist stereotype was made, not in the novel *per se*, but on the American stage. It is the parody of Uncle Tom, transformed by an image of blackness nurtured on the minstrel stages, which resides in the American imagination. The ways this problematic image has been used since are not easily codified, a series of performances at cross purposes. This chapter seeks to wend its way through these shifting meanings of the term as a way of discerning initial conception of an iconic racial figure and how that figure shifted on stage through time. A study of the various parodies of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* reveals explicitly how parodies of melodramas reflect the history of race in the nation.

This substitution of the parody of Uncle Tom for the “actual” also parallels popular perception of the term “melodrama.” The overturning and

³ Patricia A. Turner, *Ceramic Uncles and Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994), 70.

reversal of meaning, in which black becomes white and white black, is a fundamental aspect of the parodic. At first, it was a parodic contamination in the form of minstrelsy that set the tone for the first parodies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; T.D. Rice's performances "jumping Jim Crow" parodied the very possibility of a strong, independent black male long before Rice's own performances as Uncle Tom at the Bowery Theatre in 1854.⁴ Parodic performances since that time sought to play with and, in some cases, resolve this initial parodic perspective.

And just as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* exists as a series of fundamental moments in American literature, theatre, and film, the divisive issue that it presented to wide and varying audiences—race in America—is an equally fundamental part of the American cultural life. In *The Inadvertent Epic*, Leslie Fiedler concludes that *Uncle Tom's Cabin's* success arose from both tapping into and transforming racial archetypes at the center of American culture. Fiedler writes that Stowe offered the reader "primordial images rather than living persons, they emerge mysteriously from the collective unconscious and pass, scarcely mediated by [Stowe's] transparent text, into the public domain, to which, like all authentic popular literature, they properly belong."⁵ For Jeffrey Mason, in *Melodrama and the Myth of America*, "the division between black and white is most devastatingly and perhaps irreconcilably profound; the very semantics of the terms reveals an

⁴ He would later perform burlesques of the novel in New Orleans. See Stephen A. Hirsch, "Uncle Tomitudes: The Popular Reaction to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," *Studies in the American Renaissance* 1978, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 325.

⁵ Leslie Fiedler, *The Inadvertent Epic* (New York: Touchstone, 1980), 23.

underlying conception of absolute opposition.”⁶ As “America” conceives of race in terms of polarization, Mason argues that “[to] stage *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is to perform America’s conception of race in the context of relative access to social power and cultural expression.”⁷ Performances of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and the parodies and adaptations that followed perform America’s racial past while simultaneously contrasting it to the present.

While Mason rightly couches the American conception of race as at least superficially analogous to the Manichean binary of melodrama with two races standing in polar opposition to one another, he also notes that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* served to muddy the ideological waters. While it is itself a melodrama, the narrative does not view race in the stark melodramatic hues of black and white. For every Christian Uncle Tom, there is a heathen Topsy. For every saintly St. Clare, a Legree. The first parodies of the play sought to simplify the conception of race in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, a critical move that would shift the impression of the character and the play in the popular imagination.

In the years that followed the publication of the book and its theatrical adaptations, a vast spectrum of parodic performances would reveal various reactions to the complicated vision of race in America. The early parodies trumpeted the racial superiority of whites, situating blacks in positions of scorn and derision. Later, as slavery passed into distant memory, parodies of *Uncle*

⁶ Jeffrey Mason, *Melodrama and the Myth of America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 89.

⁷ Ibid.

Tom's Cabin would recall that time with nostalgia, with activist militancy, with ambiguity. Some parodies attacked the progressive views of slavery and the more benevolent attitudes toward blacks endorsed by Stowe in her novel,⁸ while others turned it into a spectacle for knowing nostalgia and yet others sought to recapture the novel's original purpose, while still dealing with its troubling reputation. The story became the subject of every kind of performance in the parodic spectrum: minstrel travesties and burlesques, gentle mockeries, ironic warpings, and postmodernist re-inventions.⁹ The evolution from travesty to nostalgia to reinvention is a common pattern found in parodies of melodrama, yet it is articulated most explicitly in the case of this most beloved of American plays. An analysis of the parodies of the most performed melodrama in history can reveal explicitly some of the ways in which parody and melodrama interact on the American stage. As this chapter cannot hope to cover the vast numbers of parodies and adaptations of the play, I will restrict this treatment to some of the more significant examples. In its own way, each reveals a strategy of dealing with race and past injustices and offers a glimpse of how America looked at the most troubled time in its history and judged its progress.

⁸ Of course, there are differing perspectives on Stowe's attitudes toward persons of color, most notably is James Baldwin's celebrated essay on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in which he claims that Stowe's novel causes Tom to be "robbed of his humanity and divested of his sex." See James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel," *Partisan Review* 16:6 (June 1949), 578-581.

⁹ Due to its popularity and connections to minstrelsy, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was parodied more frequently than any other melodrama of race. By contrast, I have found no parodies of Boucicault's *The Octoroon* (1859), a very popular melodrama concerning issues of race, until 1924, some sixty years after its initial production.

II. Initial Reactions: North and South, Black and White

Within a year of its publication in March of 1852, Stowe's novel became an unqualified success, selling more than 300,000 copies. Its explosion into the popular culture was unrivaled: an entire industry manufacturing trinkets and remembrances sprung up, producing all manner of *Uncle Tom* memorabilia. This brand name merchandising extended even further: by 1853, three hundred little girls were christened Eva in Boston alone.¹⁰ Songs based on the characters and incidents in the novel, particularly Eva and Topsy, were sung in homes throughout the country.¹¹ Yet, despite (and in part due to) its spectacular success, the story drew critical fire early on, even from those who supported Stowe's cause. One frequently stated grievance of Northern intellectuals was that due to its widespread popularity, the classics of the canon would be dethroned in favor of the lower-brow melodrama. The *Literary World* fulminated:

The Uncle Tom epidemic still rages with unabated virulence. No country is secure from its attack ... The prevailing affection is universal, all have the Uncle Tom, whether at rest or in motion, at leisure or at work, on the rail or at the street corner, in the idle repose of the parlor, or in the busy bustle of the kitchen.¹²

¹⁰ Thomas Gossett, *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1985), 164.

¹¹ The songs about Topsy and Eva, frequently sung as either Topsy or Eva, were also the roots of the Duncan Sisters' later show, *Topsy and Eva* (1923).

¹² "The Uncle Tom Epidemic," *Literary World* 11 (December 4, 1852), 355.

The viral spread of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* across the country, both literally and figuratively, seemingly unifies and democratizes all: the cook in the kitchen and the gentleman in his parlor both catch the same cold. Gender and class divisions fall away. And this particular novel, due to its content, would also transgress racial lines as well. Reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin* became an act of intellectual miscegenation.

The novel was also attacked from other angles: many black abolitionists disagreed with novel's depiction of slavery and forcefully countered Stowe's even-then problematic argument that slaves should be relocated to Liberia. Black activist Martin Delany declared, "Mrs. Stowe knows nothing about us."¹³ Others disliked Stowe's use of a dying child (who was also white) as a focus for easy sympathy. After all, in a novel about slavery and its cruelties, a large portion of the narrative is dedicated to a melodramatic fixture—the perishing young innocent—which complicated the story's effectiveness from the very beginning.¹⁴

Not surprisingly, the vast majority of criticism of novel came from the South. In *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson*, Linda Williams writes that many of the initial pro-slavery reactions to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* took parodic forms. The "anti-Tom" novels that

¹³ Cited in Gossett, 174.

¹⁴ In the first stage version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* written by George Aiken, Aiken ends the play with the death of Eva. Only after calls by the public for an extended version of the play did he relent to compose a play with the death of Tom as its subject and eventually the two plays were combined to create the six act version cited here. Again, this initial reluctance to include the death of Uncle Tom in the first version of the play, does not make Aiken indifferent to the cause but perhaps more pragmatic and overeager to see his play performed. See Gossett, Chapter 14.

appeared almost immediately following the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were "written as apologies for slavery and featured kind masters and happy slaves" and in so doing, "frankly set out to 'answer' the Tom story."¹⁵ Utilizing parody as a way to "speak to" and "answer" a text has been a part of history of parody since Aristophanes. These rejoinders frequently used characters and situations from Stowe's novel and, by switching around the narrative, overturned and degraded Stowe's anti-slavery statement. These "anti-Tom" novels also used Stowe's own formal strategies against her: as in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the narrative frequently switches to direct address, allowing the author to engage the reader directly in the political aspects of the piece. In a way that foreshadowed the later stage parodies of the play, most of these "anti-Tom" novels were quite formulaic.¹⁶ A frequent option was to highlight the goodness of the Southern plantation owner (a tactic used by Stowe herself in the figures of George Shelby and Augustine St. Clare) and forego any extended scenes of violence and subjugation. Slaves were largely treated with decency and hence were not eager to be free from the patriarchal care of their white betters. Slavery was set up as a condition in which blacks were happy to live and that, if there were any violence in the slavery system, it was brought on either by the slaves themselves or by

¹⁵ Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 101.

¹⁶ *Uncle Tom in Ruins* by "Nicholas Brimblecomb, Esq." was billed as a "Triumphant Defense of Slavery in Series of Letters to Harriet Beecher Stowe." It is a parody of the anti-Tom novels; it is itself an "anti-anti-Tom" novel. Stephen A. Hirsch notes that it was: "far from subtle; it defended Legree and Haley, attacked Tom and Eva, and rapidly became dull and obvious. It is disconcerting to find that the January 21, 1853 edition of *Frederick Douglass' Paper* took it seriously." See Stephen A. Hirsch, *Uncle Tom's Critics*, (unpublished manuscript, 1975), 20.

meddling Northerners. In these cases, parodies served as tendentious idealizations of an alternate reality, positing a universe which served to counter the real world of slavery that Stowe illuminated.

In Mary Eastman's *Aunt Phillis's Cabin* (1852), slavery is depicted both natural and enjoyable for blacks. She offers up two contrasting, but compatible visions of blackness for her readers, a minstrel burlesque and the simple, God-fearing servant. The Tom figure of the novel, "Uncle Bacchus," is a preening, drunken fool who always gets into trouble. By contrast, his wife, Aunt Phillis, is a "tall, dignified, bright mulatto woman" who "scorned the idea of running away, or of obtaining [freedom] otherwise than as a gift from her owner."¹⁷ Despite their difference in demeanor, they are each happy in servitude. In one episode in the novel, abolitionists visit the area and convince a number of slaves to run away. When the slaves are finally captured and returned to their masters for punishment, Bacchus describes the abolitionists as having "the imperance, sir, to 'suade those poor deluded niggers that they were born free.'"¹⁸ Freedom is not desirable to the slaves in Eastman's novel and the Abolitionist movement only serves to disrupt the natural state of things. After the slaves are captured, Bacchus wishes God would bring all of the abolitionists to Virginia so that they could be tarred and feathered. He himself would be willing, he says, "to spread de tar on neat, and den

¹⁷ Mary Eastman, *Aunt Phillis's Cabin; or, Southern Life As It Is* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo and Co., 1852), 102. The illustration on the frontispiece of Eastman's novel portrays slave life as natural and pleasurable in a "Negro Village on a Southern Plantation." This drawing is included in the Appendix (Figure 1).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 215.

stick de feathers on close and thick.”¹⁹ Bacchus is seen as being so happy in servitude that he would physically harm (and in a particular fashion so frequently inflicted upon blacks in this period) those that would fight for his freedom. In *Aunt Phillis’s Cabin*, Uncle Tom’s steady Christian stoicism is reformulated into a desire for stasis in servitude.

Like other “anti-*Tom*” novelists, Eastman pointedly attacks Stowe and her penchant for “raw-head and bloody-bones’ stories”²⁰ that supposedly exaggerate the brutality of slavery. But Eastman also uses arguments grounded in Biblical sources to counter Stowe’s invocations. Citing the Book of Genesis and the Noah’s curse upon Canaan that condemned him to serve his brethren (Gen. 9:22), Eastman writes: “Is it not preposterous that any man, any Christian, should read these verses and say that slavery was not instituted by God as a curse on Ham and Canaan and their posterity?”²¹ Moreover, Eastman utilizes the argument that slavery is beneficial to blacks as it brings them in contact with the civilizing forces of Christianity. Eastman even suggests that if Africa becomes sufficiently Christianized, Southerners will return blacks to their homelands, writing, “Should this be the Divine will, oh! That from every port, steamers were going forth, bearing our colored people to their natural home.”²² Eastman’s Christian justification of slavery is an attempt to undermine, through parody, Stowe’s application of the Gospel.

¹⁹ Ibid., 216.

²⁰ Ibid., 63.

²¹ Ibid., 14.

²² Ibid., 50.

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin: Contrasted with Buckingham Hall* (1852),

Robert Criswell configures a situation in which the only cruel master is a Mr. Harding, a former abolitionist who becomes a slave owner when a plantation is left to him. He expects his slaves "to do as much in a day as white men; and because they do not he beats and half-starves them."²³ For Criswell, it is the overly high expectations of Northerners of the capacity of blacks to act appropriately and engage in the Protestant work ethic that actually causes the suffering of blacks in slavery. Characters in the novel frequently comment upon the inaccuracy of Stowe's work, attempting to position *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as the fictive rantings of an extremist. As one plantation owner remarks to a colleague "We Planters well know that no such monsters exist as that Legree ... although some of our Planters are hard masters, they do not beat their slaves to death, or *burn them alive*, or *murder* them, as Legree is represented to have done."²⁴ Like Eastman, Criswell depicts charges of cruelty as preposterous, as proper Southern gentlemen do not commit acts of barbarity. Only Northerners who do not understand the nature of slavery act in such ways.

The most significant "anti-Tom" novel was Thomas Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots* (1903), an explicitly racist novel that would eventually be combined with Dixon's other work into a play entitled *The Clansman* (later filmed by D.W. Griffith after *The Birth of a Nation*). In *The Leopard's Spots*, the

²³ Robert Criswell, *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Contrasted with Buckingham Hall, the Planter's Home, Or, A Fair View of Both Sides of the Slavery Question* (New York: D. Fanshaw, 1852), 132.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 140-141.

reader follows the exploits of Eliza's son, George Harris Jr., after the end of the Civil War.²⁵ Even though he is Harvard-educated, George is still barred from entering white society. His education at the hands of naïve Northerners has caused him to become haughty, disrespectful of the kind of work to which he, as a black man, is suited. Dixon writes that he was no better fit to be a bootblack or porter "than he was to live with his head under water."²⁶ In an attempt to replace the "happy Negro" stereotype with something a bit more dangerous, Dixon eventually has George turn to crime after he is denied the hand of an abolitionist's white daughter. When George protests the rejection of his suit, the abolitionist, who sees kindness to blacks only as a means to political power, tells George:

One drop of your blood in my family could push it backward three thousand years in history. If you were able to win her consent, a thing unthinkable, I would do what old Virginius did in the Roman Forum—kill her with my own hand, rather than see her sink into the black waters of a Negroid life!²⁷

Dejected, George follows his father's tracks back south in search for work, falling into a life of vice and gambling and eventually pleading for work in the mills of

²⁵ In Stowe's novel, George and Eliza's son is named Harry rather than George Jr. I suspect that this change it is an attempt on Dixon's part to more forcefully connect with Stowe's text. After all, readers would have been more likely to remember the name of the brave runaway slave than his infant son's. Thus, in *The Leopard's Spots*, George Harris, at least in the figure of a son that takes his name, is punished for his audacity.

²⁶ Thomas Dixon, Jr., *The Leopard's Spots, A Romance of the White Man's Burden—1865-1900* (New York: Doubleday, 1904), 399.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 398.

Simon Legree. In *The Leopard's Spots*, the story of George Harris's escape comes full circle as his son follows his path, except in the opposite direction.

Dixon also remodels the character of Legree in such a way as to make him into a more appropriate villain for the tale. Capitalizing on Stowe's designation of him as a Yankee, Dixon resurrects Legree and turns him into a cowardly draft dodger, as "at the first rumour of war, he had sold his Negroes and migrated nearer the border land that he might the better avoid service in either army."²⁸ Later in the book, Legree becomes a brutal capitalist who now enslaves thousands of white workers with paltry wages. Paradoxically, the demise of slavery freed Legree from his swamps and unleashed him on the whole world. For Dixon, Stowe's novel birthed greedy businessmen not beholden to standards of gentility, and blacks who no longer know their place.

The specter of miscegenation that Dixon evokes in the aborted relationship between George Harris, Jr. and the abolitionist's daughter was rarely seen in the stage parodies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Traditionally, Tom was seen as a desexualized old man, specifically so that he would pose as little threat as possible to Eva. Similarly, the stage parodies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were rarely pro-slavery; instead of answering Stowe's statements against slavery, the stage parodies attacked and undermined the stage practices of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The end of slavery following the Civil War caused a shift in "anti-Tom" movement.

²⁸ Ibid., 86. Williams notes that Stowe made Legree into a Yankee in order to not wholly vilify the South. In Dixon's hands, this part of Legree's heritage becomes tremendously significant.

No longer was the novel to be reviled, but it could be mocked for its blatantly melodramatic structure and its own always self-undermining representation of race through blackface in stage versions.

The “anti-*Tom*” novels signify a desire to answer the questions that *Uncle Tom* raises in a like mode. By utilizing the same characters and assigning them their “true” racial identities, by repeating with a racial difference, the “anti-*Tom*” novels used parody to reassert the “real truth” about “the South as it then was.” It is highly ironical that one of the catalysts that hastened the end of slavery would become a way to remember the halcyon days of the Old South.

III. Aiken's Adaptations

In adapting Stowe's novel for the stage, George Aiken laid the dramaturgical groundwork for the parodies to come. As Aiken attempted to include the most gripping and memorable portions of the novel in the stage version, he winnowed the story down to the elements that were most famous and enjoyable. He chopped the text to pieces, removing the strongest political messages and introducing comedic characters in order to create an ideal combination of the serious and comedic scenes required for theatrical melodrama. Aiken foregrounded scenes of great tension and excitement, like Eliza's flight from Haley across the Ohio, and heightened the scenes of pathos by expanding

the emphasis on the death of Eva, the saintly, but sickly, child of melodrama.

Indeed, Aiken dissolved all of Stowe's complicated characters into specific types:

A study by Perley Issac Reed has defined twelve American character types in native plays before 1870. The types range from Yankee characters to charlatan characters. Every character in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* fits into one of these categories with the only types not found in the play being the Indian, a military figure, and charlatan. The Yankee category is represented by Gumption Cute and Miss Ophelia; the frontier character, by Phineas Fletcher; the politician by Mr. Wilson; an agrarian character by Mr. Shelby and St. Clare; a man of affairs, by Haley and Legree; fashionable society characters by Marie and Eva St. Clare; servant characters by Uncle Tom, Chloe, Eliza and George Harris, and Topsy; and professional characters by Deacon Perry and Marks. Incidentally this panorama of character types has added considerably to the popularity of the play because of the wide representation that would provide at least one "favorite" for everyone."²⁹

Aiken's adaptation sought to satisfy the widest possible audience base. In so doing, and perhaps most importantly, he shifted the main sympathetic focus from Uncle Tom to Eva, resulting in an entirely different ending to the play.

²⁹ Perley Issac Reed, *The Realistic Presentation of American Characters in Native American Plays Prior to Eighteen Seventy* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1918), 68. Cited in William Jackson Kesler II, "The Early Productions of the Aiken-Howard Versions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" (doctoral dissertation, University of Texas, Austin, 1968), 304-5. I find this breakdown of stock characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to be largely accurate with the sole exception of the character of Gumption Cute, who seems to me to be as much of a "Charlatan" character as he is a "Yankee."

In melodrama, emphasis on spectacle results in the theatrical tableaux at the end of individual acts and often individual scenes. The ending of Stowe's version, while certainly melodramatic, does not compare to the ending of the piece which Aiken devised. In Stowe, George Shelby returns home to his family and, as he is now the master of his father's plantation, frees all of the slaves, promising fair wages should they care to stay on. He attributes his change of heart to the courageous life and brutal death of Uncle Tom. His words end the novel as he proclaims to both the freed slaves on his plantation and to the reader:

So, when you rejoice in your freedom, think that you owe it to that good old soul, and pay it back in kindness to his wife and children. Think of your freedom, every time you see Uncle Tom's Cabin; and let it be a memorial to put you all in mind to follow his steps, and be as honest and faithful and Christian as he was.³⁰

While the ending of Stowe's book certainly tends toward the melodramatic with its extremity of emotion, it pales in comparison to the ending which Aiken devised as indicated by his stage directions for the final scene of Act VI:

Gorgeous clouds, tinted with sunlight. Eva, robed in white, is discovered on the back of a milk-white dove, with expanded wings, as if just soaring upward. Her hands are extended in benediction over St. Clare and Uncle

³⁰ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, intro. Charles Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 447.

Tom who are kneeling and gazing up to her. Expressive music. Slow curtain.³¹

In the previous scene, Legree is killed by Marks and young George Shelby arrives on the scene, carrying the badly-beaten and rapidly-expiring body of Uncle Tom. As Tom dies, young Shelby explains that he has “come to buy you [Tom] and take you home.”³² There is no reference to Shelby freeing all of the slaves on his father’s plantation, nor is there any nod to any change in George’s heart. Indeed, the focus on Aiken’s drama turns on the figure of Little Eva, whose body is marked with “the seal of heaven” and emanates “the light of immortality.”³³

In Stowe’s novel, there is an important difference between the death of Eva and the death of Uncle Tom not found in Aiken’s play. Stowe simply writes that Eva “gave one sigh and passed from death unto life”³⁴ while during Uncle Tom’s final scene,

... the sudden flush of strength which the joy of meeting his young master had infused into the dying man gave way. A sudden sinking fell upon him; he closed his eyes; and that mysterious and sublime change passed over his face, that told the approach of other worlds.³⁵

³¹ George Aiken, “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” in *American Melodrama*, ed. Daniel C. Gerould (New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1983), 133.

³² *Ibid.*, 132.

³³ *Ibid.*, 106.

³⁴ Stowe, 304.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 427.

In the novel, death is a passing beyond the threshold, through the cosmic membrane into a total union with the God of Life. On the stage, this view of Tom's death cannot be staged as equivalent to Eva's. Indeed, it is very clear at least by the end of the play, that they are very much not equal, as Eva appears on the white dove hovering over both the kneeling St. Clare and Uncle Tom. As a visual image, we can comprehend the full inequality of death; even as Tom enters Heaven, he only can do so on his knees, indicating that Heaven is as racially stratified as Earth. St. Clare, Eva's father, stabilizes the final tableau by making sure under his watchful eye that Uncle Tom and Eva are not going to be alone together in Heaven.

In her essay "Changing the Letter," Hortense Spillers argues that Eva's love for Tom is not entirely chaste, arguing that "a covert discourse of sexual desire for black men pulses throughout the book, erupting most blatantly when Eva urges her father to buy Tom because, as she puts it, 'I want him.'"³⁶ The sexual tension between Uncle Tom and Eva would likely have been apparent for the audiences who experienced Eva as old as age thirty-five. Harry Birdoff even cites a husband and wife team of Tom and Eva who played in the late nineteenth century.³⁷ One would imagine the knowledge that the actors were a husband and wife team would color the audience's interpretation of the play to a certain

³⁶ Hortense Spillers, "Changing the Letter: The Yokes, The Jokes of Discourse, Or, Mrs. Stowe, Mr. Reed," in *Slavery and the Literary Imagination*, ed. Deborah McDowell and Arnold Rampersad (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989), 130.

³⁷ Harry Birdoff, *The World's Greatest Hit: Uncle Tom's Cabin* (New York: S.F. Vanni, 1947), 328.

degree, yet undoubtedly they would have gained comfort from the fact that older black male on the stage only appeared that way due to a wig and burnt cork.

The formation of the Eva/St. Clare/Uncle Tom triad assures Eva's position at the apex of importance, leaving the audience with a white character triumphant on stage, while the black character kneels before her. Later performances of the play develop the trope of white supremacy during the final tableaux to include Lincoln freeing the slaves from their chains or the advancing army of the North coming to emancipate them. Inevitably, iconic whiteness dominates the stage in its final moments, an image which disputes Stowe's final evocation of the strong, Christian Uncle Tom.

Clearly, we are standing in a place where adaptation and parody draw close together; for the sake of theatricality, the ending is changed and while the melodramatic sentiment itself is not changed, the subject of sentiment is. While there is little parodic comedy here to be sure, there is a "repetition with a difference" in which the audience can read and enjoy the ironic "bouncing" from text to text. By reconfiguring the ending of the narrative in such a substantial way, Aiken allows the audience the pleasure of recognizing and perhaps approving of the redistribution of the sympathetic focus from Tom to Eva. The performance of the play itself becomes Hutcheon's "authorized transgression"³⁸ in which the irony brought into being by the triangular relations of the double text and the

³⁸ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 2nd ed. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 26.

audience confirms prevailing concepts of race. In the case of Aiken's adaptation of Stowe's text, it is the audience's theatrical experience, rather than the playwright's words, which reifies the parodic.

While George Aiken's overwhelmingly successful stage adaptation of Stowe's story does not seem to be overtly racist, he does create an environment where later stereotyping can occur. By eliminating the explicitly political slant of Stowe's text, by slicing apart its narrative and simplifying its plot and characters, by injecting new comedic elements to balance the tragic, and by introducing original situations of extreme excitement—in other words, by creating a stage melodrama—Aiken helped to forge the way for the caricaturing of Uncle Tom on stage. By pushing aside the politics of Stowe's novel in favor of the spectacular delights of stage, Aiken stripped away Stowe's exhortations for change and opened her radical politics to theatrical parodization and her characters to travesty. In essence, as Aiken made *Uncle Tom's Cabin* into a sensation that would play continuously for the next century, he also created the situation in which it could be relentlessly parodied.

IV. *Uncle Tom* on the Nineteenth-Century American Stage

In 1953, Frank Rahill calculated that over a million performances of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had been given in the century since its appearance on the American stage, "draw[ing] more people into the theatre than the combined efforts of any

other dozen plays.”³⁹ Even after its original purpose for existence—the horrors of slavery—was resolved with the end of the Civil War, it continued to be performed throughout the country and the world. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was performed with requisite seriousness until well into the twentieth century.

However, perfectly serious versions of the play had to contend with the particular visuality of race in nineteenth-century America. Uncle Tom, along with many of the characters in the play, was, by necessity, performed in blackface. Prior to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, it is likely that the only instances in which audience would have seen people of color represented on stage in performance would have been in minstrel shows. This is not to say that the only representations of persons of color on stage was in minstrelsy—*Othello* was certainly very popular—but the overarching perception of race on the American stage was framed by minstrelsy. As a truly indigenous form, minstrelsy’s amalgam of sketches and songs necessarily shaped, and was shaped by, white American impressions of race.

While it is difficult to truly develop a comprehensive knowledge of the audience which viewed *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the following general statements can be made about the likely audience mentality concerning both the play and persons of color. First, because of the wide-spread popularity of the book, the basic plot of the novel was well-known. This is significant as a “peculiar combination of sophistication and provinciality is needed for a good parody, the former for obvious reasons, the latter because the audience must be homogeneous enough to

³⁹ Frank Rahill, “America’s Number One Hit,” *Theatre Arts* 36 (October 1952), 18.

get the point.”⁴⁰ As *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a well-known text, most were well acquainted with Tom, Legree, Eliza, and George; the figures were part of the cultural iconography of the period. Also, as Robert Toll points out in *Blacking Up*, “although conflicting sides in the debate over slavery had completely opposite views of the institution, they had rather similar views of black slaves’ character ... reveal[ing] general American tendencies to cast Negroes as inferior to whites and to use them for comic relief.”⁴¹ As a result, many white audiences could have been perhaps sympathetic with Uncle Tom, but they would not have considered him to be an equal.

Perhaps most importantly, the most common staging of persons of color was in the form of a minstrel show, a theatrical form which denigrated and habitually stereotyped persons of color. As Thomas Gossett indicates in *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture*, “there had been few black characters in American plays aside from the malign stereotypes of minstrel shows ... [any] black hero would probably have struck almost any stage manager as an absurdity.”⁴² The Uncle Tom of Aiken's version has more in common, as a purely theatrical image perceived by the audience, with an actor performing in blackface than with the Christian hero of Stowe's novel. G.C. Germon's hesitancy

⁴⁰ Dwight Macdonald, ed., *Parodies: An Anthology from Chaucer to Beerbohm—and After* (New York: Random House, 1960), 567.

⁴¹ Robert Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974): 30.

⁴² Gossett, 260.

to take the role of Uncle Tom for fear he would not be taken seriously as an actor would attest to the pervasiveness of this perspective.⁴³

Significantly, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* would have also shared a similar audience with the minstrel show. Both melodrama and minstrelsy catered to mass audiences, offering up reliable, accessible entertainment. Dale Cockrell has also shown that while minstrelsy was performed in many theatres in New York, it was rarely placed on the same bill as opera as "theatre managers believed the audiences for opera and the audiences for minstrelsy did not easily overlap" and that it was added to the prestigious Park Theatre's repertory only after that theatre fell into dire financial straits.⁴⁴ In this way we can assert a probable tendency toward a middle and lower class audience for both forms. The fact that producers of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* may have sought to capitalize on its connection to minstrelsy is not surprising in that regard.

The first major production of Aiken's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* immediately points toward its minstrel heritage. In August of 1852, a groundbreaking production was performed at Purdy's National Theatre, one that would run for over three hundred and twenty-five performances. It is described as having Uncle Tom come home safely at the end though "throughout it were dispersed frequent

⁴³ Birdoff, 42. According to Birdoff, Germon's initial reply to G.C. Howard, the manager of the Troy Museum when he asked to play Uncle Tom was: "I'm not going to play a Jim Crow darkey. It will jeopardize my reputation."

⁴⁴ Dale Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and their World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 26. The decision at the Park to include minstrel performance as a way of increasing audience attendance parallels the ways many theatres sought to capitalize on *Uncle Tom's Cabin's* popularity in times of economic need.

slave beatings and musical numbers of a definite minstrel show nature, such as the successive 'Chorus: Nigga in de Cornfield' and 'Kentucky Breakdown Dance.'"⁴⁵ Birdoff explains that "the evening began with a *mélange* of Nergo airs, to a bootheel accompaniment marking time to the music."⁴⁶ Importantly, Birdoff also describes the situation of the opening night as one in which the audience *at first* reacts to the play as if it were a minstrel show, but then is affected so strongly by the sentiment that it capitulates in tears:

At the appearance of Uncle Tom they expected to laugh once more, because a black man meant only one thing to them, an ignorant comic. Now their unaccustomed ears heard something unknown in the theatre: A good actor had the part of Uncle Tom, and his first words were delivered with *the* accent—broad and guttural—but spoken so earnestly that the first laugh died away into deep silence.⁴⁷

While Birdoff's romantic retelling makes it pointedly clear that the audience of the play quickly surrendered in the face of the play's melodramatic sentiment, it is significant that the first image, before the voice with "*the* accent," is associated in no uncertain terms with minstrelsy. I would assert that this clash between the image and the narrative in the performances of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—the parodic blackface image superimposed theatrically on an anti-slavery narrative—is *exactly* what consecrated the performance tradition. In a sense, the coexistence of

⁴⁵ Hirsch, 320.

⁴⁶ Birdoff, 67.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

parody and the parodied in the same space recalls Tore Rem's analysis of the place of parody within the Dickens *oeuvre*. But while Rem portrays Dickens's attempts to have it both ways by having sentiment gently parodied from within, the slippery back-and-forth between iconography and ideology in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* created a performance dynamic that situated Uncle Tom as an ultimately ambiguous cipher. This fundamental uncertainty would set the stage for later parodic performances.

During Aiken's initial run in New York at the National, a version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* opened at P.T. Barnum's American Museum in which "scenes like the slave auction were treated lightly and the production ended happily with Uncle Tom being melodramatically rescued from Simon Legree just in the nick of time."⁴⁸ Barnum's production focused primarily on the scenic possibilities of the play, particularly a panorama of the Mississippi "which alone is worth the price of admission."⁴⁹ Adapted by H.J. Conway and a true piece of pragmatic showmanship, Barnum's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was meant to appeal to as many audience members as possible, both North and South, by avoiding the more argumentative portions of the work.⁵⁰ The *Liberator* of December 16, 1852 condemned the expurgated version:

⁴⁸ Toll, 91. See also Birdoff, 88-91.

⁴⁹ Birdoff, 87.

⁵⁰ The only extant version of this text resides in the Howard Collection, Theatre Arts Collection, Univ. of Texas, Austin and it is reproduced on the "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* and American Culture" website, <http://www.iath.virginia.edu/utc>. In a playbill advertising the Conway production, the final scene is described as such: "DEATH OF THE WRETCH LEGREE! UNCLE TOM'S FREEDOM! THE HAPPY END TO A HARD TRIAL. "May your best wishes attend poor UNCLE TOM to his *Cabin*--and your

To make amends for the manner in which the New York theatres have set the South at defiance, and the humanity they have inculcated, Barnum has offered the slave-driver the incense of an expurgated form of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. He has been playing a version of the great story at his Museum, which omits all strikes at the slave system, and has so shaped his drama as to make it quite an agreeable thing to be a slave. 'Verily, he will have his reward.'⁵¹

If we take the *Liberator's* critic at his word, Barnum and Conway did not seek to parody the play, but merely to adapt it. Yet, they did show to a willing public a sterilized version that shifted the narrative itself in terms of its relationship to the institution of slavery. But if the minstrel tradition haunted the performance semiotics of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, an acceptance by an audience of such a drastic shift in plotting would not have been seen as surprising, but rather acceptable.

There were also various attempts to refocus the play even further away from its anti-slavery message. Generically, melodrama uses comedy as a way to increase dramatic tension: when the more pathetic elements in the plot are unveiled, they are made all the more heartbreaking by contrast to what has come before. The comedy that was frequently inserted would usually involve stock comic characters like Lawyer Marks, Aunt Ophelia, and Phineas Fletcher.

hopes that his future Life may be Happy--although it be, LIFE AMONG THE LOWLY." Playbill for Performance, Boston Museum, 13 December 1852. Special Collections, University of Virginia. Assuming that the ending was not changed for the Boston audience, Tom evidently survives the experience. His survival at the end to live happily "among the lowly" would seemingly dampen the need for reform.

⁵¹ Cited in Birdoff, 88.

Versions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* would also occasionally include a dance sequence in which the slaves about to be sold would buckdance for the audience. With a touch of sarcasm, Vera Jiji explains that such reactions were connected to the "psychology of despair."⁵² While adding to the spectacle, the buckdancing of slaves before their sale would likely have undermined the seriousness of the scene. The inclusion of the dance sequence probably cannot be seen as parody, but the drawing together of specific minstrel traditions and the Stowe/Aiken narrative helped occlude any differences between the two.

In the years that followed, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was performed all over the country and the world, frequently by companies known as "Tommers." "Tomming" became a life-long profession with actors reportedly spending their entire careers performing various roles in the play. Because of the large number of Tommer companies that moved from town to town, each sought to make its version of the play different, frequently adapting the text to each audience.

Productions sought to be as lavish as possible in order to persuade audiences to come to the show. One interesting development that is also quite telling was the rise of the "Double Show." A classic, though particularly well-heeled, Tommer troupe that employed doubling was The Stetson's Big Double Uncle Tom's Cabin Co. which produced two posters alternately showing Tom as

⁵² Vera Jiji, "Considering *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as Drama," *Showcasing American Drama: George L. Aiken/Harriet B. Stowe Uncle Tom's Cabin: A Handbook of Source Materials* (New York: Humanities Institute, 1983), 14.

“a sentimental hero” or “a minstrel grotesque.”⁵³ These productions either alternated different Toms for different audiences or featured simultaneous performances of both, truly “a repetition with a difference.” Two performances of the same character being performed at the same time reify *Uncle Tom’s Cabin’s* inevitable oscillation between parody and sentiment. This idea of the “double performance” had occurred on the minstrel stage before as there had been “a little ‘Jim Crow’ to a big ‘Jim Crow,’ as in the case of the then four-year old Joseph Jefferson and T.D. Rice.”⁵⁴ Doubling of characters not only capitalized on the spectator’s love of spectacle and the lavishness of expense, but it also recalled certain performance modes that, like the cork on Tom’s face, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* had borrowed from minstrelsy.

In *The World of Melodrama*, Frank Rahill makes a reference to an advertisement for a Tom show “at the Windsor on the Bowery in 1891” in which “alligators would assist the hounds” in their pursuit of the fleeing Eliza.⁵⁵ Rahill follows this frequently repeated reference with exclamation-pointed amazement at the incongruity of the “alligators on the ice-choked Ohio!”⁵⁶ In Stowe’s novel, Eliza flees without any dogs in pursuit at all; performances of Aiken’s stage adaptation added hounds to heighten the dramatic tension. Birdoff writes that

⁵³ Copies of the Stetson posters can be found in the “Uncle Tom’s Cabin and American Culture Multi-Media Archive” at <http://www.iath.virginia.edu/utc/onstage/images/tspostersf.html> as well as in the Appendix (Figures 2 and 3).

⁵⁴ Birdoff, 309.

⁵⁵ Frank Rahill, *The World of Melodrama* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967), 152.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Tommer groups found using actual bloodhounds theatrically uninteresting, so larger and larger dogs were used, even those that never would have been used in manhunt situations. As a result, at least on the surface, the alligators at the Bowery may seem a simple theatrical gimmick used to induce audience members to come into the theatre. Certainly, the Tom shows of the late 1800s employed any and all means necessary to lure people into their productions.⁵⁷ Rahill's statement on the presence of alligators at the Bowery signifies a particularly dim view of nineteenth-century audiences as he seems to find the combination of the alligators and the icy river both contradictory and typical of the extremities of Tom shows. Yet, the alligators at the Bowery may have more cultural significance than, as Rahill would assume, a simple stratagem to separate theatergoers from their money.

In *Symbolic American Wildlife*, Jay Mechling writes that the alligator has been used as a device for displaying the superiority of the white race over the black, as alligators supposedly prefer to eat more black people than whites. Patricia Turner takes up this strand in the chapter entitled "Alligator Bait" in *Ceramic Uncles and Celluloid Mammies*, concluding that racist alligator myths "depict more than the presence of a negative stereotype, they implicitly advocate a form of aggression in eradicating an unwanted people."⁵⁸ Turner also cites the musings of John Muir, an author and naturalist who walked from Indiana to the

⁵⁷ *The World's Greatest Hit* is filled with examples of the outrageous lengths which companies were willing to go in order to distinguish themselves. See Birdoff, Chapter 12.

⁵⁸ Turner, 36.

Gulf Coast following the Civil War and after speaking with many denizens of the South claimed: "Alligators are said to be extremely fond of Negroes and dogs and naturally the dogs and Negroes are said to be afraid of them."⁵⁹ Certainly, we must view the use of the alligator on stage in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to be significant as a bit of intertextual racism in the performance of the play. Mechling further concludes that the alligator functions as an apparatus through which the white male can symbolically castrate the black male.⁶⁰ This issue is crucial if we take into consideration the writing of Elizabeth Ammons who puts forth that Uncle Tom becomes "a classic Victorian heroine: gentle, pious, non-violent, long-suffering, self-sacrificing, and endlessly loving."⁶¹ Even though it is Eliza who is chased by the alligator in the production of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the very presence of the alligator on stage calls up the regional racist attitudes that subvert the meaning of the play.

If we can take the pop cultural significance of the alligator as accurate, then the parodization of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has shifted to include outright and self-conscious parody on the performance level. Again, through the play, the meaning of the original becomes inverted when an outside reference recognized by the audience is dropped into the text: in this case, the alligator, an element

⁵⁹ John Muir, *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 96. Cited in Turner, 33.

⁶⁰ Jay Mechling, "The Alligator," in *Symbolic American Wildlife*, ed. Angus K. Gillespie and Jay Mechling (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 88.

⁶¹ Elizabeth Ammons, "Stowe's Black Maternal Christ, Tom," *Showcasing American Drama: George L. Aiken/Harriet B. Stowe Uncle Tom's Cabin, A Handbook of Source Materials* ed. Vera Jiji, (Brooklyn NY: The Print Center, 1983), 4.

foreign to Stowe's original, evokes for the audience a slippery chain of racist stereotypes. Of course, it is impossible to know with any accuracy what exactly went on in the mind of the nineteenth-century theatregoer and to see how the codes were transferred between the work of art and the audience. However, the existence of racist alligator folklore suggests that certain productions of *Uncle Toms' Cabin* included parody that could have been intended for certain audience members and unnoticed by others. This is a hybrid form of parody in which the text doubles itself, representing both a production of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and a parody of it, simultaneously. Such a production could ostensibly invoke the perennial image of sentimental melodrama, the woman in distress, while simultaneously subverting it by calling upon racist tropes that could be recognized by a knowing audience.

Birdoff also relates a possibly apocryphal story in which an actor portraying Uncle Tom, noticing that his fellow performers were not ready to go on with the next scene, rose from his death swoon to stall for time. According to Birdoff, he first began with a pantomimic retelling of his trials and tribulations. When he was still asked to stretch out his death throes, he launched into a Christy's Minstrel song, "Good Ol' Jeff Hab Gwine t' Rest." He finally concluded by addressing the audience: "An' I feel that I could even do de good ol' plantation dance, which yuh kind folks always lubbed so."⁶² What seems to be significant here is the trajectory of the performance: incrementally, each new bit was a more

⁶² Birdoff, 248.

stereotypical performance of stereotypical blackness, even at the moment of Tom's death. The performance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the nineteenth century, even in seriousness, always teetered on the brink of self-parody. It is not surprising that others would take it upon themselves to push it off.

Cordelia Howard, who performed the role of Eva in the 1850s, wrote of *Uncle Tom*:

[*Uncle Tom's Cabin*] began with something of dignity ... It kept its own for many years, and then gradually became so degraded, with its bloodhounds, donkeys and double casts, that it has become really a burlesque and is the butt of all the critics' ridicule. But it has a wonderful vitality, and I think it will rise from its ashes and probably regale one or two more generations. One reason, of course, is that it represents a phase of society entirely passed away. Like the novel, it will become a classic."⁶³

Here Howard points to the resurrection of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as an object of nostalgia; the "reason" why it can return is that it stands for a time that no longer exists. After its initial possibilities as a piece for social change, and after countless performances on the stage, its position can only be as a signifier for a bygone age.

⁶³ Cordelia (Howard) McDonald, "Memoirs of the Original Little Eva," *Educational Theatre Journal* 8 (1956), 281.

But signification is never so simple. The minstrel image made *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, to use Marvin Carlson's term, a particularly "haunted text."⁶⁴

V. Travesty and Ridicule

Due to a lack of primary materials, it is impossible to track with accuracy exactly how the parodying of *Uncle Tom* (or any other melodrama for that matter) evolved, particularly in the early periods. It is fortunate that a great number of scripts of early parodies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* have been preserved, a number that exceeds that of any other original American play. It seems likely that this is the result of both the play's popularity and the minstrel show tradition that was uniquely able to take advantage of it. If the popularity of blackface minstrelsy on the nineteenth-century American stage troubled the iconography of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, it is not surprising that minstrel troupes would use *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a springboard for parodic humor. The plays to be discussed in this section made light of Uncle Tom in ways that on the surface may seem simply bigoted, but beneath also reflect changing considerations of race in America.

The schism between the two early versions of the play at the National and the American, one condemning slavery and the other not, opened the door for

⁶⁴ Marvin Carlson, "The Haunted Text," *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), chap. 2.

other versions that would take on and attack Stowe's version even more directly. The Bowery Theatre began another adaptation to join the other two on January 16, 1854. In this new adaptation, Uncle Tom was portrayed by T.D. Rice, the actor who, according to tradition, originated minstrelsy. To experience the actor who most embodied minstrel blackness perform Uncle Tom must have been like watching the figure of Uncle Tom superimposed on Jim Crow. Yet, there is little to suggest that Rice's performance explicitly mocked the Uncle Tom character. Birdoff tells us that "a very large painting of Little Eva crowning Uncle Tom with flowers soon hung over the Bowery's façade,"⁶⁵ an image that suggests a more traditional standpoint on the Tom story. Rice's performance of Uncle Tom, however serious, would have been necessarily viewed as at least partially parodic by the audience. In addition, Birdoff writes: "The Bowery Theatre substituted a far different version on May 8th" that included members of the Virginia Minstrels."⁶⁶ This performance, *Happy Uncle Tom*, is the first recorded stage parody of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

While there is little information about this first parody, it did evidently situate the character of "Uncle Tom" within the minstrel show dynamic. In the sequence Birdoff notes, Uncle Tom enters the scene and gets into the familiar back and forth with Bones, the traditional minstrel figure. Positioning Uncle Tom among the usual minstrel characters in a minstrel show environment places Uncle

⁶⁵ Birdoff, 140.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 140-141.

Tom on the same level as them. Placed among minstrels and without his melodramatic martyrdom, Tom became worthy of disparagement, just another corked-up “darkey.”

In the minstrel sketch *Uncle Tom: An Ethiopian Interlude* (1874), there is little to tie the Uncle Tom figure in the sketch to the Uncle Tom of the Stowe/Aiken version. It seems that it is simply his name that is used in the minstrel piece, but the character is a standard “Jim Crow” figure. Since he is Uncle Tom in name only, the sketch is not truly parodic of the *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* tradition, as Uncle Tom does not have any of the characteristics to link him with the Stowe/Aiken text and exists only as an outright mockery of blackness. Even so of course, the name alone would conjure up extratheatrical remembrances and associations. The plot of the piece involves Uncle Tom performing a “breakdown” dance in order to sell his turtle (!) to Pete, a prospective buyer. As Tom dances, Pete “fastens the turtle on the rear expanse of Uncle Tom’s pants,” causing Tom to dance frenetically in panic and run off stage. A panicked Uncle Tom reacts unhappily, “What am dis? Oh, Lor’, Peter! De cooter dot de ole man! What I gwine to do?” to which Pete replies, “Ketch ‘im by the tail, Uncle Tom.”⁶⁷

In the twenty-two years that Uncle Tom had been in existence, he had become an

⁶⁷ Anonymous, *Uncle Tom: An Ethiopian Interlude* (New York: Happy Hours, 1874), 6. Pete’s response itself is a likely reference to a line from the children’s rhyme, “Eenie meenie miney moe.” Before the civil rights era, “Eenie meenie miney moe” was followed by “catch a nigger by his toe,” rather than “catch a tiger by its toe.” See David Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions: The Cognitive Psychology of Epic, Ballads, and Counting-out Rhymes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), chap. 10. This scene also recalls the previously-mentioned “alligators on the ice-choked Ohio!” and the possible connection to racist alligator folklore.

other versions that would take on and attack Stowe's version even more directly. The Bowery Theatre began another adaptation to join the other two on January 16, 1854. In this new adaptation, Uncle Tom was portrayed by T.D. Rice, the actor who, according to tradition, originated minstrelsy. To experience the actor who most embodied minstrel blackness perform Uncle Tom must have been like watching the figure of Uncle Tom superimposed on Jim Crow. Yet, there is little to suggest that Rice's performance explicitly mocked the Uncle Tom character. Birdoff tells us that "a very large painting of Little Eva crowning Uncle Tom with flowers soon hung over the Bowery's façade,"⁶⁵ an image that suggests a more traditional standpoint on the Tom story. Rice's performance of Uncle Tom, however serious, would have been necessarily viewed as at least partially parodic by the audience. In addition, Birdoff writes: "The Bowery Theatre substituted a far different version on May 8th" that included members of the Virginia Minstrels."⁶⁶ This performance, *Happy Uncle Tom*, is the first recorded stage parody of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

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⁶⁵ Birdoff, 140.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 140-141.

but as an almost quaint, ‘peculiar institution’ never to be revived, but ritualistically to be indulged in the nostalgic glow of melodrama’s ‘space of innocence,’ there was a tendency to imbue the work with even greater amounts of nostalgia for the lost ‘Kentucky’ home while relaxing the representation of the suffering of slaves.”⁶⁹ As the years passed, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* came to become symbolic of a simpler time more represented by magnolias and cotillions than by slavery and degradation.

One of the most common tropes found in the various travesties of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* that followed the Civil War is the interest in modernization: Uncle Tom is frequently shown in eras not his own, or alternately, in indeterminate periods of time. This goes along with one of the most important elements of parody: decontextualization can render forms both familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. Yet, simultaneously, this de-periodization also further separates the character of Uncle Tom from Stowe’s original intent, to deliver a sermon against the evils of slavery. Taken out of his historical context, Uncle Tom becomes disassociated from the “peculiar institution.”

It is in the later vaudeville sketches that we can sense a greater sophistication in the parodization of the narrative. The play transforms into a vehicle not only to mock persons of color but also other targets of prejudice such as Jews and trade unions. Vaudeville, like melodrama, was a manifestation of American popular culture and “thrived by accommodating local preference and

⁶⁹ Williams, 85-86.

custom.”⁷⁰ Yet the jibes which were aimed at ethnic groups and organized labor also began to strike out at the tradition of melodrama; indeed there seems to be an entire subset of vaudeville performance that mocked melodrama. The parody of the content is coupled with the parody of the form, revealing just how subject to attack both were.

By the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, outright parodies of the play began to be produced on the vaudeville stage. By contrast to plays like *Uncle Tom's Cabin: An Ethiopian Interlude*, the later parodies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* invert the entire universe of the play; the old narrative is both recognizable to the viewer/reader and simplified to permit easy recognition. And again it is important to note that it is the performance traditions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Aiken's text that are mocked, not Stowe's novel.⁷¹ For example, Eva is described as the opposite of what we have come to expect of her: in *A Burlesque on Uncle Tom's Cabin*, she is:

A character to be played by a large man. Blonde wig; very red cheeks; waist with low neck and short sleeves; ballet dancer's skirt and tights; large bunches or knobs to give limbs a grotesque appearance.⁷²

⁷⁰ Robert W. Snyder, *The Voice of the City: Vaudeville and Popular Culture in New York*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), xix.

⁷¹ However, it should be noted that Stowe herself did continue to receive abusive treatment, frequently being both depicted and mocked in many parodies, both in the nineteenth century and later.

⁷² Harry Newton, *A Burlesque on Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Chicago: Will Rossiter, 1903), 1. Harry Newton also wrote *East of Lynn, Mass.* (1913) subtitled “A Gabfest burlesque on “East Lynne” in one act and some imaginary scenes.” Newton composed a large number of sketches for the amateur stage, specializing in “ethnic” sketches including: *The Troubles of Rozinski: A Hebrew Monologue*, *Pilsner and Poppyseed*, *The Two German Gazabos: A Sketch in One Act*, and *Five Minutes from Yell College: A Dutch Rapid-Fire Talking Act*.

She is described similarly in *The Filming of Uncle Tom's Cabin*:

Tough soubrette character, with curly blonde wig. Very stout. Wears large shell-rim glasses. Dress of gaudy design, white canvas gloves. Hat of old Bowery type with long stringy feather.⁷³

It seems that in addition to parodying the character of Eva, the authors are also mocking the theatrical tradition as, according to Birdoff, there were many Evas who outsized the Uncle Toms with whom they played. Her character in *A Burlesque on Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Filming of Uncle Tom's Cabin* becomes the fun-house mirror version of her character in the Stowe/Aiken tradition. If this Eva flew to Heaven on the wings of a dove, she would undoubtedly cause the bird to plunge earthward. And indeed in both parodies, Eva is shown making an ascent which is none-too-easy and inevitably ends with her falling upon Uncle Tom from her heavenly perch.

The grotesquely fat Eva also makes an appearance in "Hap" Ward's *Uncle Tom's Bungalow* and, in this case, gets sold at the auction around which the action revolves. In a parody of Stowe's auction sequence, Uncle Tom and Simon Legree bid on Eva, until eventually it becomes clear that no one desires Eva enough to buy her. In the final moments, as the entire cast turns its back on Eva, she cries out to Tom: "Tom, Tom where can I go?" to which the cast responds "You can go

⁷³ Arthur Leroy Kaiser, *The Filming of "Uncle Tom's Cabin"* (Chicago: T.S. Denison, 1922), 2.

to Hell!”⁷⁴ The reversal here—a white girl sold at auction instead of a black, Eva going to hell instead of heaven—utilizes some of the simplest and most effective forms of parody, offering up Eva’s all-too-immaculate innocence to ridicule.

The character of Uncle Tom is shown in two different lights in these plays: in *A Burlesque on Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, he is portrayed as foolish and insipid version of his character from the play, much like the rotund Eva. By metatheatrical contrast in *The Filming of Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Uncle Tom is shown as one who is “more at home with Shakespeare.” He is dressed to the nines, described as:

Very dignified and pompous in speech and manner. Blackface makeup, with grey Negro wig. Immaculately attired in full dress, with large imitation diamond stud, and jewelry galore.⁷⁵

Uncle Tom enters the scene after driving up in his “Cadillacker” and is revealed to be a ham actor playing the role of Uncle Tom. He is both overly dramatic and effete: during his elongated death sequence he spreads a white handkerchief upon the ground so as not to dirty himself. This seems to fall in quite well with the account that formal American minstrelsy began in the 1820s when the actor Charles Matthews play-mocked an American black he claimed to have witnessed

⁷⁴ John “Hap” Ward, *Uncle Tom’s Bungalow* (New York: M. Furst, n.d.), 7. While the date for this piece is uncertain, there is a reference in the text to the Greb/Wilson boxing match at the Polo Grounds, which took place on August 31, 1923. It is likely that this play was written soon after that.

⁷⁵ Kaiser, 1.

butchering the role of Hamlet.⁷⁶ Tom is directed in his role by a stereotypical Jewish director Levi Shootzum who, remarking upon Tom's narcissistic posturing before the camera, tells him "Hey, wait a minute. Vot you tink you was, Sapolia Bonesypart? Don't stood like a statchoot."⁷⁷ For his part, Legree is rather effeminate and does not relish bringing the whip down upon Uncle Tom's back during his scene, crying out: "My deah boy, it pains me to strike you thusly ...". And later, when Eva attempts to prevent Legree from beating Tom:

Eva (drops to her knees and puts her arms around Legree's legs): Oh, please do not strike.

Legree: My deah girl, I do not intend to strike. I do not even belong to the union.⁷⁸

Again, in parody, the sadistic Legree becomes a Southern dandy, incapable of causing any serious harm at all. This is a far cry from the sentimentality of Aiken's theatrical version and from the call for racial tolerance evoked in Stowe's novel.

Certainly the attacks found in *The Filming of Uncle Tom's Cabin*—the grotesque reversals of character and the concentration on mocking the memorably melodramatic episodes of Aiken's version—take place many years after both the publication of Stowe's novel and the inception of melodrama as an established form. The fact that *The Filming of Uncle Tom's Cabin* is not a parody of a stage

⁷⁶ Toll, 26.

⁷⁷ Kaiser, 9.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 10.

production of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* but of a film production of the play is significant. This parody does not simply attack the extremes of melodrama and the creakiness of the story, but also stands as a cultural document of the initial reaction to a new medium. The stereotypes still exist: the stereotypical Jewish director who "vants de punch"⁷⁹ and the self-indulgent actor. After eighty years, the parodization of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* takes on a new and more complex form in a theatrical parody of a film melodrama which is derived from a stage melodrama based upon the melodramatic novel.

R.H. Burnside's *Uncle Tom's Saloon* (also known as *Uncle Tom's Cabaret*, 1929) begins to point in a new and very important direction. Here Burnside toys not with *Uncle Tom's* status as an old melodramatic warhorse or as a vehicle for racist innuendo, but instead focuses on the commodification of narrative in the twentieth century. The first words of the piece depict the obverse of the constant melodramatic worldview. The curtain rises on an immediately recognizable scene—Uncle Tom reading to Eva as she sits on his lap. But the tale that Tom relates is macabre: the first line is "The hero seizes the heroine by her golden hair" and the "hero" then proceeds to drag her across the floor and strangle her. The villain interrupts this action and shoots the hero dead, ending the story. At the conclusion of the tale, Eva exclaims:

Oh, I like the way it ended.

I love the way it ended.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 1.

When the villain killed the hero—

Gee! I thought it was divine.⁸⁰

Eva then continues, saying that she is “not surprised at the hero’s dreadful fate. And I think it’s great ‘cause it’s so up-to-date.”⁸¹ Little Eva enjoys this modern take on the melodramatic denouement in which both the hero and villain act in violent ways because it strikes her, a modern girl, as realistic. Eva is not only not surprised that the hero is slain, she is pleased because of the story’s realism. This focus on realism is also taken up in the action of the piece. Uncle Tom’s saloon has fallen on hard times and he is in debt to Simon Legree. In order to help Tom pay what he owes to Legree, the cast of Topsy, Eva and all the rest choose to hit the vaudeville circuit as Lawyer Marks declares:

And we think that the public still like Uncle Tom and
always will—

So the U.B.O. wants to know if you will go-

For Fifty weeks with them, or Marcus Loew/*in a dancing*
show.

And each week they’ll hand you a thousand dollar bill.⁸²

It is unlikely that the United Booking Service would have been so liberal—they had been particularly harsh to performers in the early years of the century,

⁸⁰ R.H. Burnside, “Uncle Tom’s Cabaret [Saloon]” in *1929 Catalogue of Musical Comedies—Dramatic and Musical Sketches* (typescript, 1929), 2. R. H. Burnside Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

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⁷⁹ Ibid., 1.

belongs ter Warner Brothers.”⁸⁵ Mighty Mouse saves Eliza from Simon Legree in “Eliza on the Ice.” The short ends with Mighty Mouse and a voluptuous Little Eva rising on a cloud together for an inter-species tête-à-tête. In “Uncle Tom’s Cabana” (1947), by MGM, Uncle Tom, sitting on the porch, tells of the “true” story of how he came to finally defeat Simon Legree. In the cartoon, Uncle Tom, in dire financial straits, opens a nightclub with Eva (not so little at all) as a sultry chanteuse.⁸⁶ After a tall tale in which Legree attempts to kill Tom with every trick from the melodramatic playbook—tied to railroad tracks, cut up by a buzz-saw, thrown off of a cliff and the Empire State Building (complete with racist echoes of *King Kong*)— Tom eventually hurls the Empire State building over the moon and into the sea with Legree sitting on top of it. The rapid-fire run-through of all the traditional melodramatic devices parodies the production techniques of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as well as all of the most well-known action sequences in the genre as a whole. If the cartoon became the depot for vaudevillian humor at Uncle Tom’s expense, the parodic pieces that developed in the decades to come would borrow from both the long performance tradition of the play and also its travesties.

⁸⁵ This is an often-repeated bit in the travesties with the producer of the production’s name substituted for Simon Legree: Adolph Zukor, Jacob Litt, and others. See Birdoff, 403-404.

⁸⁶ These were part of Tex Avery’s “Little Red Riding Hood Films” so popular in WWII. According Leonard Maltin, the Wolf’s (Simon Legree’s) aroused reaction to Eva’s performance “springing into a stiffened-board pose in mid-air—was too phallic for the Hollywood censors, who ordered Avery to tone things down.” Leonard Maltin, *Of Mice and Magic: A History of American Animated Cartoons*, Revised Ed. (New York: New American Library, c1980), 293.

VI. Into Adaptation

The racist sketches that began the history of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* gave way in later years to more interesting forms that would lay the groundwork for the adaptations to follow. Importantly, one of the most notable parts of these plays and performances is the fact that they are effectively “post-minstrel.” While minstrelsy certainly did not die out completely until well into the twentieth century, the early twentieth century gave birth to the first parodies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that were not explicitly racist, but rather nostalgic for the old play, pointing toward an audience that certainly had experienced the play's long performance history. Instead of ridiculing the play, productions began to appear that toyed with its conventions, highlighting elements that seemed particularly out-of-date. The narrative having proven so malleable in the nineteenth century, the productions of the early twentieth century fragmented the story even more (even to the point of eliminating Uncle Tom altogether), each putting a new, modern spin on the old classic. Performers used the text as a vehicle for their own purposes, pouring some very new wine into some very old bottles.

It was with great fanfare that Otis Skinner's production of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* returned to Broadway in 1933, allowing the city's many reviewers to indulge in a nostalgic reverie. *The New York Herald* declared that “Having lain in the theatrical swamps for more than a quarter of a century, soiled and even made

ridiculous by ignoble use, this relic of the slavery fight came to life at the hands of the Players, lived to its optimum, energized to its maximum.”⁸⁷ Simon Legree became a more fully realized character, becoming something other than a standardized villain of melodrama. One reviewer wrote that he was interpreted as “as much a ‘victim of environment’ as the most skillfully drawn gangster of modern melodrama.”⁸⁸ E.C. Sherburne wrote that:

Mr. Donald Oenslager’s settings were always in the vein, with their time-honored painting of chairs, pictures, bookcase and fireplace (with flames) upon the wings and backdrops. A kitchen scene even disposed of the stove in this highly practiced fashion. Once a background swayed back and forth. Could that have been intended?”⁸⁹

Sherburne’s question is a good one. While the performance of the play seemed to be fairly straight, the backdrop tellingly places the play in those old Tommer days. The intermixture of the obviously painted set after the on-set of realism with the serious performance of the play might have created an eloquent oscillation for the audience between the psychological acting and the contrived setting in which it was performed.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ “Carriage Trade Shedding Tears for Uncle Tom: There’s no Foolery Either in the Sentimental Manifestation at the Alvin,” *New York Herald Tribune*, June 11, 1933. Clippings Folder, “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

⁸⁸ Gossett, 385.

⁸⁹ E.C. Sherburne, “The Players Revive ‘Uncle Tom’,” *Christian Science Monitor* [?], June 5, 1933. Clippings Folder, “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

⁹⁰ Evidence that the company may have been utilizing parody may be found in the invitation for them to see the Yale Puppeteers version of the play entitled *Uncle Tom’s Hebb’n*, “a musical travesty in black, white, and café au lait.” Unfortunately, this text has likely been lost and whether or not the company accepted the invitation is unknown.

Oenslager would later design the set for another version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on Broadway, George Abbott's adaptation entitled *Sweet River*. In this version, Abbott attempted to update the play by eliminating many of its more melodramatic elements, seeking to render it more acceptable to mainstream audiences. Eva neither dies nor ascends into Heaven. Topsy's antics are limited to a few brief appearances. The comic bits of Lawyer Marks are cut. Reviews of the play were generally negative, with complaints mostly stemming from the freedoms that Abbott took with the script. By depriving the story of most of its fun and humor, the play sags beneath its own weight. The *New York American's* review declared "I go on hankering for the old 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' of the acetylene flares and the artless peanuts of our youth. That was a great show. This is only a pretty one."⁹¹ John Anderson of the *New York Evening Journal* grouched: "We are not invited to his Legree by the faintest burlesque posturing of that hearty villain, though I suppose we are asked to weep for the St. Clares and their lacy woes."⁹² I would suggest that the failure of Abbott's production (which closed after five performances) stems from his choice to exclude parody from the production. By performing the play straight and by refusing to release the steam-valve of parody, Abbott left his audience with no choice but to see the play as overly earnest. By seeking to remove the melodrama from the melodrama, that

⁹¹ "Sweet River": Mr. Abbott Adapts "Uncle Tom's Cabin" to Some Modern Meanings," *New York American*, Oct 29, 1936. Clippings Folder, "Sweet River," New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

⁹² John Anderson, "Sweet River," *New York Evening Journal*, Oct. 29, 1936. Clippings Folder, "Sweet River," New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

dramatic tension between comedy and pathos, Abbott rendered his production an unintentional parody of itself.

One of the most notable parodic adaptations of the early twentieth century was The Duncan Sisters' *Topsy and Eva*. First performed in San Francisco's Alcazar Theatre on July 8, 1923 and continuing well into the 1950s, Rosetta (Topsy) and Vivian (Eva) Duncan performed three acts of songs that were adapted from various "plantation melodies," criss-crossing America with a version of the play that bore almost no resemblance to the original *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Simon Legree only cracked the whip in time to the London Palace girls' dance number and Uncle Tom's suffering was transmuted into a few songs. Interestingly, truly parodic moments were few and far between, as the production largely adhered to musical comedy conventions of the day. It is noted however that at the end of the play Topsy "ascended" *à la* Little Eva, riding the curtain as it was raised to the proscenium. While it is unclear if Eva rose to Heaven in her traditional way (one would suspect that she did), Topsy's ascent embraces the meta-theatrics of dramatic parody. Her rise is literally "of the theatre."

Of *Topsy and Eva*, the reviewer for the *Telegram* announced that "They deliberately make it funnier than any tank-town company could do with the original, even unconsciously."⁹³ The *New York World* declared that while "it is a show of marked and agreeable excellence," "[i]f the spirit of Harriet Beecher

⁹³ "Uncle Tom's Gabbin': Duncan Sisters' Gay Chatter About Topsy, Who's Grown Up Into a Music Show," *Telegram*, December 24, 1924. Clippings Folder, "Topsy and Eva," New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Stowe was flitting about the Sam H. Harris Theatre last night it might have objected.”⁹⁴ Alan Dale offered a more scathing review, castigating the production as “a little bit childish and stupid.”⁹⁵ In a conversation following the performances with a famous Topsy, Maude Raymond, Dale quotes Raymond as saying:

“It is another century,” as Miss Raymond remarked. “perhaps we are now ripe again for another ‘Uncle Tom.’ I shouldn’t be surprised. Why not the real thing instead of this musical misfortune.”⁹⁶

Raymond’s remarks parallel Cordelia Howard’s desire for the “real thing” as opposed to parody and adaptation.

Of course, authors outside of the theatre got their hands on this “jumping fish” as well. Of note, Wolcott Gibbs, a humorist and frequent contributor to the *New Yorker*, wrote a parodic treatment of the death of Eva titled, “Eva’s Deathbed Revisited.” For all its brevity, a scant five pages long, its humor is striking, the more so because Gibbs skewers both *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and his contemporary Maxwell Anderson simultaneously. Gibbs sets the stage: “The following play is an account of a nightmare experienced by a man who went to a play by Mr. Maxwell Anderson and then went home and tried to get to sleep by reading *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.”⁹⁷ Gibbs recommends for performers that as “most of the speeches are supposed to be in blank verse ... the actors’ voices should be imagined

⁹⁴ “Topsy and Eva,” *New York World*, December 24, 1924. Clippings Folder, “Topsy and Eva,” New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

⁹⁵ Alan Dale, “Topsy and Eva Return to White Way,” *New York Journal* [?], December 1924 [?]. Clippings file, “Topsy and Eva,” New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Wolcott Gibbs, “Eva’s Deathbed Revisited,” in *More in Sorrow*, (New York: Henry Holt, 1958), 51.

swooping around a good deal, rhythmically, like the cars on a roller coaster.”⁹⁸

Gibbs’s jabs at Anderson’s effusiveness and use of blank verse land particularly well when placed in context with the most saccharine scene in Aiken’s play. After Eva passes on, following a treatise extolling Heaven’s quasi-socialist government, St. Clare and Tom square off as Tom admonishes St. Clare for his patrician language: “Yo’ think I’s e fooled by al dem purty words dat don’ quite rhyme, but run in neat and calculated rhythm, again’ de colored man?”⁹⁹ Finally, each shoots the other, both relishing the fact that if they both go to Hell, neither has to live with Eva in Heaven. In his death-throes St. Clare admits to Tom:

I loathed her too, the empty-headed brat. The half-chewed thought, the sanctimonious smile, the pat, inane abstraction—all that she borrowed was from bad books, all that she loved was Little Eva’s voice. She was the queen of bores. I die content, now she belongs to God.¹⁰⁰

The two then march into Hell together, hand in hand and smiling, going “to that fair place where Little Eva ain’t.” Gibbs takes the degradation of Eva, a common part of any of the travesties of the play, to a new level by making her Anderson’s voice.

The unproduced 1935 ballet by e.e. cummings entitled *Tom*, begins to point toward a new recognition of an old story. Lincoln Kirsten of the American Ballet Company commissioned the work, describing *Tom* as “one ballet out of

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 54

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 55.

American life that would be available for the Balanchine repertory if he would agree to start a company in the United States.”¹⁰¹ It was rejected for being “too literary and too idiosyncratic.”¹⁰² William Strickland describes the original frontispiece, a striking watercolor by Ben Shahn, as “depicting a sinewy, brawny Tom in the foreground towering larger-than-life over a white columned Southern mansion.”¹⁰³ In the text, cummings draws on the *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* mythology, coupling the familiar story with inventive flourishes of language. As Eliza crosses the “Icechoked River ... totteringly balancing herself”:

... in the high distant darkness from which Eliza came,
spurt brutally luminous dogfaces; framing with intricate
frustrations her crude whirl-leaping—reelsinking—
staggerrising—leapwhirling progress.¹⁰⁴

The slave catchers hunting Eliza wear dog masks, unifying the familiar performance trope with the animalistic traits of the characters themselves. The harnessing of poetic language with balletic movement frames the story anew.

Karen Hubbard has suggested that the “Small House of Uncle Thomas” sequence featured in *The King and I* by Rodgers and Hammerstein has its genesis in cummings’s work. Jerome Robbins, who choreographed the sequence for

¹⁰¹ Francis Mason, *I Remember Balanchine* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 118. Cited in Karen H. Hubbard, “Lincoln Kirsten, E.E. Cummings, George Balanchine and Uncle Tom: On the Page but Never Staged,” *Dancing in the Millennium, An International Conference, Proceedings*, Washington, DC, 2000.

¹⁰² Richard S. Kennedy, *E.E. Cummings Revisited* (New York: Twayne, 1994), 105.

¹⁰³ William Franklin Strickland, “E.E. Cummings’ Dramatic Imagination: A Study of Three Plays and a Ballet” (doctoral dissertation, University of Florida, 1973), 61. A copy of Shahn’s work can be found in the Appendix (Figure 4).

¹⁰⁴ e.e. cummings, *Tom* (New York: Arrow, c1935), 17.

Rodgers and Hammerstein, evidently knew of cummings's *Tom* some eight years before.¹⁰⁵ While there is no mention of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in *Anna and the King*, the novel by Margaret Landon upon which *The King and I* is based, Rodgers and Hammerstein utilize the story both parodically, not only to make light of the old play, but also in a more straightforward manner to highlight the plight of Tuptim, the King's newest consort. The sequence, some fifteen minutes long, engages the spectator in a parodic back and forth between the traditional versions of the play and its new performance tropes. While the audience may be allowed a snicker or two at the clash of nineteenth century melodrama and a broadly "Oriental" performance style, particularly from the position of the mid-twentieth-century America, which would look down on both, the piece is striking in its effect, showing a theatrical Westernization of the "pre-modern" Siam.¹⁰⁶ The flight of Eliza from *Legree* parallels the desperate need for Tuptim to return to her lover, just as Eliza wishes to escape servitude to join George Harris. Tuptim speaks over the pantomime herself and allows her emotions to carry her away at the end of the story after King Simon of *Legree* has drowned:

(Another symbol crash. Tuptim frowns, an earnest dramatic note comes into her voice. She steps forward)

But I do not believe

Topsy is a wicked critter

¹⁰⁵ Hubbard, 244-245.

¹⁰⁶ Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 192.

Because I too am glad

For death of King.

Of any King who pursues

Slave who is unhappy and tries to join her lover!¹⁰⁷

The cymbal crash and Tuptim's new tone signals the end of the parodic part of the play. In this case, the actors perform the play within the play that does catch the conscience of the king. Here, the actors know the stakes very well. Up until that point, the audience has undoubtedly been at least somewhat amused by the differences between the Asian version of the play and the traditional version. But the foregrounding of race in this sequence through meta-theatrics gestures toward a newer comprehension of how the story could work, even a century after its conception.

VII. Race and Melodrama in the Late Twentieth Century

In the years of the Civil Rights Movement, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was attacked repeatedly as a work that, perhaps more than any other, promoted racial stereotypes. Many African-American authors spoke out against the book, viewing the stereotyping that followed in the Tom shows as a necessary out-growth of an inherently racist work. Dramatic adaptations of the novel were protested by local chapters of the NAACP. It therefore follows that in the most recent adaptations of

¹⁰⁷ Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein, *The King and I* (New York: Random House, 1951), 107-108.

the play, parody is frequently used as a way to recontextualize *Uncle Tom's Cabin* from within. In a way that recalls the previous attempts to give as much "realism" as possible to productions through elaborate stagings, the new adaptations used other texts as a way to reintroduce *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to a public that had come to identify it as opprobrium. The ghosts of past productions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are exorcised in many of these works through parody, "talking back" to the performances of the past.

One of the first attempts to find a new voice for Uncle Tom was performed by Harry Birdoff himself, the author of the exhaustive *The World's Greatest Hit*. In 1961 he composed *The Thatched Hut of Long Tom*, a Chinese version of the *Uncle Tom* story. Birdoff largely adhered to the *Uncle Tom* story, with the only major change being the move to China as a setting. While this Chinese Opera *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is sometimes ham-handed, it is an attempt to create an extended and non-meta-theatrical version of "Small House of Uncle Thomas." This attempt at a cross-cultural *Uncle Tom* results in some interesting choices; Birdoff makes the sympathetic female child Eva into the male "Little Starbright" in order to reflect an "Asiatic" patriarchal culture. The characters' names are often divided by a dashes (Legree becomes Lee-Gree) and the dialogue frequently reads as an Orientalist fantasy. Li-see (Eliza) refers to Gee-Orge (George) as "My dragon-hearted one!" Fractured English abounds:

Long Tom: I'll kneel one knee before you, master. On both knees only when I pray to Buddha.

Lee-Gree: (Snorting) Such flowers of speech! Hang them on the Southern
Wall facing the valley of plum and apricots! ... Here, Tam-Bo! Quim-Bo!
—My Claws and Flesh!—Give this slanderous dog a bamboozing!¹⁰⁸

While to my knowledge Birdoff's play did not receive a major staging in the United States, it was eventually performed to critical acclaim in mainland China.¹⁰⁹ But Birdoff's attempt to resituate the Uncle Tom story in a new environment signifies an attempt to bring *Uncle Tom's Cabin* past the black/white dyad and recast it as a struggle for broader racial/cultural acceptance.

From the 1970s to the present day, a major technique of re-staging *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has been to place the play in relation to other major texts. The roots of this dramaturgy exist in both the Stowe novel and the Aiken dramatization. Stowe often begins her later chapters with epigraphs from the Bible that lend support to her anti-slavery position. But in the epigraph to Chapter 40, entitled "The Martyr," Stowe combines two works by William Cullen Bryant, "Deem Not That They Are Blest Alone" and "Bless Are They That Mourn":

Deem not the just by Heaven forgot!

¹⁰⁸ Harry Birdoff, *The Thatched Hut of Long Tom*, (unpublished manuscript, 1966) 66. Stowe Center Library, Harriet Beecher Stowe House, Hartford, CT. Among Birdoff's own handwritten notes are list after list of various Chinese proverbs that find their way into the dialogue of the text. The advertising posters include the exhortation: "One seeing, however, is better than a thousand people telling you of it. —Chinese Proverb."

¹⁰⁹ *The New York Herald Tribune* (Nov. 26, 1961) announced the success of *The Thatched Hut of Long Tom* at the Peiping Theater with the lead: "Peiping Tom Current Hit." Birdoff also wrote another adaptation of the play entitled *Uncle Tom's Cabin: The Steamboat Version* in which the entire play takes place aboard a steamboat on the Mississippi, piloted by Mark Twain himself.

Though life its common gifts deny,
 Though, with a crushed and bleeding heart,
 And spurned of man, he goes to die!
 For God hath marked each sorrowing day,
 And numbered every bitter tear;
 And heaven's long year of bliss shall pay
 For all his children suffer here.¹¹⁰

Stowe replaces Bryant's line "Through life its common gifts deny" with "Deem not the just by Heaven forgot," attempting to make the "just" Tom's martyrdom more poignant in the eyes of her reader. Stowe's use of intertextuality foreshadows the ways in which her text would be represented onstage. In productions of Aiken's adaptation, the final tableau included various scenes from the American mythology: Lincoln freeing the slaves, the Union bound back together. In a play that became popular through its packaging as "history," it is not surprising that many of the adaptations to follow would use historical imagery as a way to evoke the original sentiments of the play.

In 1978, The Trinity Square Repertory Company performed *Uncle Tom's Cabin: A History*, an adaptation by Adrian Hall and Richard Cumming. Jeannie Woods' description of the play highlights a recontextualization of the play as a historical piece: "utilizing numerous historical documents and Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, Hall, Cumming, and the company created an epic pageant of

¹¹⁰ Stowe, 416.

American history which explored themes of slavery and women's suffrage, the personality and philosophy of Stowe, theatre history, black stereotypes, and the complex relationships of all these subjects."¹¹¹ While many of the elements of the production did not vary much from the Aiken version of play, this performance included what Thomas Gossett in *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture* termed a "fantasy sequence" in which Tom shoots Augustine St. Clare because he is the father of Eva. Interestingly enough, this sequence is none other than a segment of the aforementioned Wolcott Gibbs's "Eva's Deathbed Revisited" in which Uncle Tom reveals his dislike for Eva following her death and gets into a shoot-out with St. Clare. Utilizing a tactic of the "anti-Tom" novelists, Hall and Cummings use a parody to reveal an alternate fantasy universe from the standpoint of one of the characters, in this case Uncle Tom himself. After killing St. Clare in his brief reverie, Uncle Tom returns to his usual self. Hall and Cumming reveal a way of rehabilitating the Uncle Tom figure by showing, through the use of parody, that an inner life can exist within the cardboard constructions of his character. The absorption of Gibbs's parody into the *Uncle Tom* text fleshes out Tom as a character, depicting a righteous rage beneath his pious exterior.

First produced at the Public Theatre in 1986, George Wolfe's *The Colored Museum* sought to undermine and explode the revered texts of African-American

¹¹¹ Jeannie Marlin Woods, *Theatre to Change Men's Souls: The Artistry of Adrian Hall* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1993), 69.

drama. The major plays of the African-American canon—*A Raisin in the Sun*, *Native Son*, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf*, among others—are indicted by Wolfe for reinforcing stereotypes in Black culture. Wolfe attempted to trouble these stereotypes as a way for forging a new African-American theatre. It would seem that appropriate in this litany of parody a piece of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* would appear; although it is not an African-American play, it is one that helped define African Americans in the national consciousness. In Wolfe's play, the character of Topsy Washington channels famous African Americans of the past, and dances to the "party in her head":

That's right girl, there's a party goin' on inside of here.

That's why when I walk down the street my hips just
sashay all over the place. 'Cause I'm dancing to the music
of the madness in me.¹¹²

Topsy's madness, unencumbered by white standards of sanity, is truly free, enabled by her "colored contradictions." Wolfe's empowered Topsy strikes out on her own, defying her pickaninny heritage and reinventing herself outside of "sane" white society.

In *I Ain't Yo Uncle: A New Jack Revisionist Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1992), playwright Robert Alexander sought to reconnect *Uncle Tom's Cabin* with minstrelsy. The poster promoting the show featured a minstrel mask set ablaze,

¹¹² George Wolfe, "The Colored Museum," in *Black Theatre USA*. ed. James V. Hatch and Ted Shine (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 471.

crazily grinning while flames leapt about the head as hair. The caption read:

“Where will you be when a stereotype gets his revenge? Be there when it happens.” First produced in 1990 by the San Francisco Mime Troupe and the Lorraine Hansberry Theater, the play revolves around the characters’ reconfiguring of their own history. In an interview published in the *The Hartford Advocate*, Joan Hedrick points out: “Alexander takes [Stowe’s characters] and makes you see them from an Afrocentric point of view ... But it’s not a complete departure from what Stowe was trying to do.”¹¹³ Through parody and adaptation, Alexander is able to circle back to many of the original points that Stowe attempted to raise in her novel, while enabling her characters with new autonomy.

The play begins with Harriet Beecher Stowe on trial for the reduction of all her characters to racial stereotypes. Alexander joins a long line of parodists who take Stowe to task, in this case for creating as a racist stereotype in Uncle Tom. When he first enters, Tom dodders through the audience, allowing the viewer the chance to see, up close and personal, the stereotype of black emasculation. Alexander situates Uncle Tom within the audience’s space in a way that parallels his lines at the end of the play when he explains why he makes the choice to die once again at the hands of Simon Legree: “If I live, nobody will remember ... My dying always stays in everybody’s face.”¹¹⁴ There is a renewed vigor in Tom’s martyrdom, one that recalls the murders of many Civil Rights

¹¹³ Kathy O’Connell, “From Blackface to Black Power: Hartford Stage looks at *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* through 20th century eyes,” *The Hartford Advocate*, November 9, 1995.

¹¹⁴ Robert Alexander, “I Ain’t Yo Uncle,” in *Colored Contradictions: An Anthology of Contemporary African-American Plays*, ed. Harry J. Elam, Jr. and Robert Alexander (New York: Plume, 1996), 89.

leaders in the 1960s, that contradicts the passivity of the character in the Tommer shows of the past and undermines the foundations of the stereotyping that dogged the character for decades.

While Ben Brantley refers to Alexander's sending-up of melodramatic conventions as "shooting fish in a barrel,"¹¹⁵ there is frequently more complexity than meets the eye in confronting the formalism of melodramatic performance. When Eliza reaches safely the other side of the Ohio at the end of Act One, she "gives clenched-fist salute."¹¹⁶ Here we have parodic confluence of an image of 60s black radicalism (the Black Power salute) and melodramatic conventionality (shaking the fist in either heroic defiance or villainous disapprobation). In the traditional version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the slave hunting Loker and Haley shake their fists at Eliza. Here we see an Eliza less the tragic octoroon and more the militant radical.

As part and parcel of Alexander's toying with melodramatic stage traditions, direct addresses to the audience become a central formal element of the play. When Phineas comes on stage in Act I, Eliza announces him to the audience and comments on the traditional melodramatic alternations between scenes of high tension and comedy: "The tavern scene, where we meet a scene-stealing, tobacco-chewing, corny-ass white guy stuck in for comic relief."¹¹⁷ Alexander also uses the aside to answer some of the fundamental questions of the play,

¹¹⁵ Ben Brantley, "Topsy Returns to Confront Another Century's Legacy," *New York Times*, November 25, 1995.

¹¹⁶ Alexander, 37.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

particularly those that deal with Tom's passivity. In Act II, ii, Tom explains to the audience exactly why he can't run away from his masters:

You [the audience] sitting there thinking, "He ain't chained! What's wrong with him? Why don't he run? George ran!" George can pass for white. I can only pass for midnight. I'se too tall, too black, and too far South to think about running ...¹¹⁸

Here Tom gives a true history lesson to the audience: George is not so much brave as fortunate to be able to pass for white in a racist America. Melodramatic notions of Providence are overturned here because after so many years, Uncle Tom and the rest of the characters know better than to hope for good things. In Eva's death sequence, after her declaration to St. Clare that she wishes Tom to be freed after her death, Tom takes up Eva and addresses the audience saying:

Now I hear you white folks choking back your tears, getting out your handkerchiefs—and I hear you bloods going, "Drop the bitch." This child done all she could to get me my freedom. But y'all can't take credit for what she did.¹¹⁹

Alexander refuses to give his white audience a way out, unmasking and discounting self-congratulatory white liberalism.

But, following Wolfe's lead, Alexander's most successful recreation is the character of Topsy. Topsy, the classic minstrel pickaninny, has always been a

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 41.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 60.

problematic figure. The reinvention of Topsy as a confident, in-your-face rapper explodes her previous incarnations: her “wickedness” is recreated as empowerment. In Act IV, ii, she forcefully puts forth her position in the hierarchy, always the dark side of pre-adolescent femininity. When Topsy’s theft of Eva’s earrings is revealed, Topsy reformulates Sojourner Truth’s “Ain’t I a woman”:

You gave everybody earrings but me. Ain’t I a girlie?! I got as much right to look pretty as your dead little Goldilocks.¹²⁰

When Topsy enters in the finale, she raps:

I love to hear glass break. I love to watch shit burn. I love to hear motherfuckers scream. Word!!¹²¹

Topsy has become not just Miss Ophelia’s but everyone’s problem and Tom speaks to this as he addresses the audience one final time: “Any volunteers to take Topsy? Ya’ll think she come from nowhere? Do ya ‘spects she just grewed?”¹²²

As Alexander explains in an article for the *Hartford Courant*:

Like a withered flower cut off from her roots, I have seen her [Topsy] in all her magnificent fury—the byproduct of the hate that hate made. Like a goblin from another world, she crashes into our sensibilities to remind us of the continued economic disparities between then and now, and like an

¹²⁰ Ibid., 67.

¹²¹ Ibid., 90.

¹²² Ibid.

impatient bill collector tired of getting the runaround, she lives to

remind us that reparations are overdue and are still gaining interest...¹²³

The Topsy of Wolfe and Alexander are each remarkable in their fierceness and drawn in such a way that moves her from a simplistic child of nature to a woman of considerable power.

Another significant parodic reworking of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is Bill T. Jones's *Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/ The Promised Land*, one of the first productions that followed the death of Artie Zane, Jones' longtime collaborator. The Jones/Zane team had given a series of performances that incorporated dance with politics. The work was a project that Zane was developing from a hospital bed in the last months of his life.¹²⁴ In his review, Clive Barnes describes *Last Supper* as, "a theatre piece of deconstruction, fragmentation, and literary allusion."¹²⁵ It is also "a tongue-in-cheek, *faux naïf* version of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (odd shades of Jerome Robbins's 'The Little House of Uncle Thomas' from *The King and I*) which has a special jerky charm."¹²⁶

Jones's piece brings back all of the old nineteenth-century performance traditions, including the *tableaux*. He also uses various masks to complicate stable perceptions of race as performers of color portray white characters, and vice

¹²³ Robert Alexander, "Who is this loud slave urchin Topsy?" *Hartford Courant*, Dec 10, 1995.

¹²⁴ Jones, Bill T, *Body against Body: the dance and other collaborations of Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane*, ed. by Elizabeth Zimmer and Susan Quasha (Barrytown, New York: Station Hill, 1989), 119. Zane's own interest in the parodic can be seen in Jones's text (47) in his photograph entitled "Olympia's New Shoes" from 1976. A model's legs are shown in close-up in much the same position as Manet's *Olympia*, but with four inch, patent leather, stiletto heels.

¹²⁵ Clive Barnes, "Uncle Tom, the Bucket, and the Works," *Dance and Dancers* (January 1991), 20.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

versa. As in many of the older parodies, Harriet Beecher Stowe appears on stage as well, attempting to wrest control of her story from the narrator, who is African-American.¹²⁷ They finally agree to share responsibility for the task. In the final moment of the play as Uncle Tom reaches his hands up to the angelic Eva, who is held aloft by a slave, the entire production halts and rewinds to the moment when Legree whips Tom. What transpires next is an elongated beating of Tom by Legree that evolves into Legree whipping the entire cast, as each steps up to take Tom's place as the lights fade out. The tortured black male body on display is shown over and over, yet with white men and women choosing to substitute themselves for Tom. The result is a startling reclamation of the long-reviled *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in which the futility of Legree's violence in the face of a united front is shown in a memorable reconfiguration. This unified front reappears in the final tableau of the play as the entire company, some fifty-plus members, old and young, black and white, male and female, turns out to face the audience, in various stages of nudity. While not subtle, the image of a mass of bodies, united by pain, revises that last vision of Eva's apotheosis in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, replacing it with an image of egalitarianism and hope.

A similar enactment of the mutability of gender and race is also found in the last production I will discuss here, *The Drama Dept.'s Uncle Tom's Cabin; Or the Presentation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life*. Premiering at New

¹²⁷ Usually, Stowe's name was intentionally mangled in the parodies in which she appeared. An early *Uncle Tom* parody, *Uncle Tom's Cabin in Louisiana*, has a character named "Harriet Bleacher Straw, a Milliner Authoress," and another has a character named "Harriet Screecher Blow."

York's Greenwich House Theatre in 1997 and described as "theme and variations in 2 acts, 17 scenes, 7 narratives, 1 burlesque, and 1 combat," The Drama Dept.'s production takes Aiken's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and places it in discourse with other texts including slave narratives, James Baldwin's famous *Partisan Review* article and e.e. cumming's *Tom* ballet. Like Jones's piece, a mixed race cast takes on the various roles of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* enacting Stowe's belief of the common humanity of all people. Margo Jefferson's analysis of the play reveals the potentiality of a pastiche of melodramatic techniques and parodic subversions:

We get to feel the thrill and shock of the highly wrought gestures and movements; the extremities of the diction and inflection, the individuals, the types, and the stereotypes. At the same time, we watch from a distance that is critical but never smugly arch or pious; we see the power and the corruption of both forms simultaneously. And the tie that binds them. Minstrelsy insisted it was comedy, but it was always shadowed by social and political disaster; melodrama flaunted its high seriousness, but always risked mockery by imposing such a fixed structure on a world everyone knew had more ambiguity.¹²⁸

The "high seriousness" of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that thrilled audiences in its early days is recaptured for new audiences through the admission and performance of intertextual ambiguity. Through parodic adaptation, Alexander, Jones, and The

¹²⁸ Margo Jefferson, "Theatrical Art That Rises Up From Ruins," *New York Times*, January 6, 1998.

Drama Dept. reveal an explosive potential in the intermixture of parody and melodrama. Tired melodrama regains its power to move audiences again from laughter to tears, presented as a narrative “haunted by decades of buzzing interpretive voices.”¹²⁹

VIII. Conclusion

In this chapter I have analyzed many different parodic performances of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, viewing the various locations of parody: from the audience, to the specific production, to the play, each making parodic statements upon a single work. It is easy to see how both melodrama and people of color can so readily become the targets of parody, as both can be stereotyped in parodic imitation and both exist liminally, divorced from normative high culture and the centers of power. In the varying parodies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, melodrama becomes more defined as we see its merits exploited just as the underpinnings of the racist stereotype of the “Uncle Tom” are laid bare. Yet, the ways in which parody and melodrama begin to intersect in the twentieth century show promise and point toward modalities of collusion. Parodies become incorporated into each other as “The Small House of Uncle Thomas” sequence in *The King and I* sprang from e.e. cummings's *Tom* and then influences *Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land*. The cummings piece is included in the Drama Dept. production.

¹²⁹ Ben Brantley, “Stowe's ‘Cabin,’ Reshaped as a Multistory Home,” *New York Times*, December 12, 1997.

And Wolcott Gibbs's work emerges in *Uncle Tom's Cabin: A Short History*.

Spinning out from the same narrative, parodies and adaptations collectivize and talk back to the past in heteroglossic tones. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is not "reduced" to parody, but reactivated by it. Ironically, the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* plays in our own time that are to be found closest to the union of parody and melodrama are also those that perhaps best articulate Stowe's original purpose: to render visible the invisible commonality of anger, isolation, and oppression within all people of all races.

Chapter 3:

Melodrama with a Twist: Parodic Adaptations of the Temperance Melodramas *Ten Nights in a Barroom* and *The Drunkard*

I. Introduction: Temperance and Middle-Class Morality

In terms of sheer vigor and intensity, the only rival to the movement to abolish slavery from America was the one that would have put an end to the sale of alcoholic beverages within that country's borders. Beginning in the first quarter of the nineteenth century with the rise of such groups as the Massachusetts Society for the Suppression of Intemperance and the American Society for the Promotion of Temperance, temperance became a widespread and well-organized cause that found its way into every corner of the new nation. Temperance activism easily eclipsed women's suffrage and other social reform movements in size of membership, and its forceful propaganda engaged the American people in a debate that would last well into the next century.¹ Novels, popular music, drama, and all other manner of artistic discourse revealed an American cultural obsession with drink and its influence. Like the emotional sentimentalism of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the fear of the "drunkard's doom" and the moral and cultural implications of that fall from grace gripped nineteenth-century America. And in very significant ways, America's battle with the bottle helped articulate a highly

¹ It can be argued that the rise of the temperance movement both engendered and inhibited the struggle for suffrage. The narrative of the wife and mother abused by a drunkard husband became a seminal element of temperance propaganda. The plight of the beaten, passive woman became a rallying cry to the middle-class women who became active in the cause of temperance. While the temperance movement empowered women to seek political change, it also likely diluted efforts to gain the vote.

specific vision of the new nation, one that coalesced around the strictly-held and inviolate dichotomies of melodrama.

However, it is important to note that, despite outward appearances, this “temperance movement” cannot be considered a unified, hegemonic force for social reform. As John Frick mentions in his *Theatre, Culture, and Temperance Reform in Nineteenth-Century America*, the first book-length treatment of the subject of temperance melodrama, “[though] historians routinely refer to nineteenth-century temperance reform as if it were a monolithic, unified, and continuous movement, temperance agitation was, more precisely, a series of related, interlocking movements often with different motives and often radically different cultural missions.”² Attitudes of temperance activists differed widely in respect to the degree to which they believed alcoholic beverages should be banned and the tactics they used in the fight against intemperance. For example, an early temperance group, the Massachusetts Society for the Suppression of Intemperance, shunned the use of distilled liquor while favoring the pleasures of wine and beer, while others, like the Washingtonians, extolled the virtues of nothing but cold water. Activists varied widely in temperament, from the docile sermons of Congregationalist preachers to Carry Nation’s hatchet-wielding acts of domestic terrorism. “Temperance” should be seen as a clustering of different ideological stances toward alcohol, and these different perspectives frequently played themselves out on stage. The temperance play would become one of the ways that America debated the question of temperance, and later, in the years

² John Frick, *Theatre, Culture, and Temperance Reform in Nineteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 202.

after Prohibition, it was the way that America contemplated both that movement's extremes and also its comforts.

From the very beginning, the American temperance movement had its work cut out for it; strong drink was a national institution from the earliest years of the Republic, a part of the very structure of democratic society. Debra J. Rosenthal and David S. Reynolds argue that the saloon and church existed as the twin pillars of community life, "suggesting townsfolk's equal devotion to spirits and the Spirit."³ The two forces were not even at odds at first, as early American religious leaders did not advocate abstinence at all. Increase Mather called alcohol "a creature of God ... to be received with thankfulness."⁴ Alcohol was a part of social rituals on every level of society: men of the established classes sipped madiera in private clubs, while farmers and laborers sought comradeship and community as they drank rum in taverns. In election years, politicians would frequently buy rounds of alcohol for barrooms of possible constituents in the attempt to influence their votes. The way to men's hearts, explained one nineteenth-century Kentucky politician, is "down their throats."⁵ Alcohol was plentiful in the workplace and at home. It crossed class, gender, and regional lines, and was situated at the very heart of the American cultural life.

Yet, with drink frequently hindering laborers in their work, the benefits of sobriety were clear to a growing merchant class. The bottle came to be seen as bad for business. While the reasons for the rise of temperance in American

³ David S. Reynolds and Debra J. Rosenthal, "Introduction," in *The Serpent in the Cup: Temperance in American Literature* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 2.

⁴ W.J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 23.

commercial life have been treated frequently, Antonio Gramsci perhaps best summarizes it:

Puritanical initiatives simply have the purpose of preserving, outside of work, a certain psycho-physical equilibrium which prevents the physiological collapse of the worker ... Thus the struggle against alcohol, the most dangerous agent of destruction of labouring power, becomes a function of the state.⁶

For Gramsci, the movement against alcohol is one that seeks to mold a worker to be more useful to capitalistic pursuits. Conditions that improved effectiveness in the workplace must also be adhered to outside as well. Not only should workers abstain from drinking on the job, but they had to believe that any drinking at all is dangerous to the common welfare. This helps explain why temperance propaganda characterizes alcohol as a destabilizing force that threatens the nation as a whole.⁷

With the publication of Dr. Benjamin Rush's *An Inquiry into the Effects of Spirituous Liquors* in 1784, the early temperance movement gained a particularly effective tool. Rush sought to end the widespread use of distilled liquor, advocating instead the moderate drinking of wine. But importantly, Rush's exhaustive reportage of the numerous health effects that accompanied alcohol abuse buttressed long-held Puritan ideals of moderation and self-restraint. Jeffrey Mason notes that "The New England patrician who proscribed hard liquor was

⁵ Ibid., 20.

⁶ Antonio Gramsci, "Americanism and Fordism," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International, 1983), 304-305.

acting completely to his own advantage; he probably drank wine as part of the social rituals of his class, preferring it to spirits, and if he could control local laborers, both his business and his political interests were more likely to thrive.”⁸

When the patrician class lost control of the temperance movement beginning with the rise of the Washingtonians in the 1840s and a stricter teetotaling ideology, a new strain began to surface in temperance ideology: nativism. In the face of the rising immigrant threat to national identity, temperance was seen as a way that all true “Americans” could unite. As a result, the Washingtonian Temperance Society “crossed class boundaries to include laborers, employers and professionals.”⁹

Joseph Gusfield implies that the reformer of the 1840s “was likely to see the curtailment of alcohol sales as a way of solving the problems presented by an immigrant, urban poor whose culture clashed with American Protestantism.”¹⁰ It is the moral values of “American Protestantism” that would fuel the vehemence of the temperance movement and shape the narrative it espoused.

For Gusfield, “[t]he Temperance movement became a major social and political force only when it was freed of the symbols of aristocratic dominance and converted into a popular movement to achieve self-perfection among the middle and lower classes of the nation.”¹¹ Temperance became widespread only when it became a democratic and egalitarian movement, mirroring in terms of class the country it sought to save. By the 1830s, living as a teetotaler became a

⁷ The alarmist tones in temperance propaganda presage similar rhetoric in the twentieth century: the “Demon Rum” was the “Red Menace” of its day.

⁸ Jeffrey D. Mason, *Melodrama and the Myth of America* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 65.

⁹ Mason, 65.

¹⁰ Joseph R. Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963), 6.

sign of future upward mobility, the pledge of sobriety, an acknowledgment of both past weakness and future prosperity. Temperance may have been born Brahmin, but it extolled the virtues of the households of the middle class.

Temperance soon packaged itself as a primarily agrarian movement of pious rural people, compelled to fight against the degrading dangers of immigrant urbanity.¹² Ante-bellum temperance activists spoke in eschatological terms of the power of intemperance to overthrow the government and lay waste to the country. Gusfield notes:

The rural, native American Protestant of the nineteenth century respected Temperance ideals. He adhered to a culture in which self-control, industriousness, and impulse renunciation were both praised and made necessary. Any lapse was a serious threat to his system of respect.¹³

It should be noted that the ideals of “self-control, industriousness, and impulse renunciation” are all part of Mason’s conception of the incorruptible “myth of America,” for as Mason explains, “To be respectable or virtuous is to be an exemplary American.”¹⁴ Temperance’s unquestionable respectability made the choice to abstain a part of what it meant to be a proper American. But when stories of hypocrisy among the ranks of temperance activists began to circulate in

¹¹ Ibid., 44.

¹² This rural/urban disconnect was evident in forms of temperance media. A Prohibition Party cartoon depicting the party as a virile young woodsman cutting down the “saloon tree” can be found in the Appendix (Figure 5). This image can also be retrieved from The Ohio State University, Department of History, “Temperance and Prohibition” website. See “Temperance and Prohibition,” The Ohio State University, Department of History, <http://prohibition.osu.edu/ProhParty/cartoon3.htm> (accessed March 2, 2005)

¹³ Gusfield, 4.

¹⁴ Mason, 190.

the latter nineteenth century and then began to be staged, the veneer of respectability began to wear thin.

The significance of the fact that the power and self-identification in the temperance movement passed from being predominantly upper-class to being largely middle-class cannot be understated. The middle-class Temperance movement saw both the upper classes (in their decadence) and the poor (in their shiftlessness) as flouting norms of respectability. These new societal norms became further elucidated with the establishment of a distant, threatening alien force. As America became a more industrialized nation, the forces of temperance were able to point toward a nameless enemy from outside the community: the liquor dealer. Before the 1830s, the selling of most liquor was local: a farmer distilling surplus grain to sell to his neighbors. With the rise of a national grain market, farmers sent their produce off and it returned bottled by an unknown businessman. The sale of liquor seemed to be controlled by “the far away distiller [who] loomed as a frightening symbol.”¹⁵ In the temperance drama, however, the distiller never figures prominently, but he places the tools for the propagation of vice in the hands of the local barkeep. Frick notes that in temperance dramas the local bartender usually promotes the sale of alcohol as a legitimately middle-class endeavor and part of the spirit of Protestant entrepreneurship. In *Ten Nights in a Barroom*, when Simon Slade is asked about his choice to begin his trade, he replies that “Every man desires to make as much money as possible, and with the

¹⁵ Rorabaugh, 90.

least labor.”¹⁶ Of course, it is also the easy road to fortune that is attacked here. Even if the barkeep cloaks his spiritual possession by the Demon Rum in capitalist vocabulary, the right-thinking Prohibitionist still recognizes the threat to the economic center of the middle-class status quo.

With the advent of the non-normative outside force, the liquor distributor, the temperance movement effectively situated itself as a heroic presence in the melodrama of America. Throughout the nineteenth century and into the next, this movement propagated its vision of itself as the savior of civilization, articulating a narrative that would become one of the most oft-repeated forms of American melodrama. The creation of this narrative, and its competing projections onto the stage, will be treated in the sections to come. The uncomplicated articulation of the drunkard's story and the temperance narrative would make the form ready for easy parody when social standards changed, but such stories would also persist, past parody, as representative of an earlier age, when true “respectability” was possible. The performance of temperance melodrama becomes, after Prohibition, a site for the staged intermingling of parody and collective national nostalgia.

II. Temperance Narratology

The temperance narrative was a direct expression of the middle-class, teetotaling ideology. And, in a very real sense, the narrative *was* the ideology, its elements frozen and repeated over and over again, ingrained in the American

¹⁶ William W. Pratt, “Ten Nights in a Barroom: A Temperance Drama in Five Acts,” in *Hiss the Villain; Six English and American Melodramas*, ed. Michael Booth (New York: B. Blom, 1964), 154.

psyche. In *Manhood Lost: Fallen Drunkards and Redeeming Women in the Nineteenth-Century United States*, Elaine Frantz Parsons shows how the “story of the drunkard” was replicated in both fictional and non-fictional forms, from novels, plays, and poems to trial testimonies. She writes that a “great bulk of these accounts had elements in common: a familiar explanation of why the drinker fell, an account of how the family suffered in consequence, and similar language and metaphor used to describe the drinker.”¹⁷ The appeal of the temperance narrative caused it to invade every narrative form in popular life. As Parsons explains: “Some would argue that drunkard narratives in trial testimony and temperance fiction bore such close resemblance to each other because ‘that’s how it really happened’ ... Others, more discursively oriented, might suggest that the two resembled one another because plaintiffs understood their experiences in terms of available language and thus applied current literary tropes to their own lives. The truth is no doubt between the two.”¹⁸ The manifestation of “truth” in the temperance narrative would become significant, as later stagings of this “truth” would prove to be by turns both laughably false and seductively accurate.

The establishment of the temperance narrative as the “current literary trope” fixed it as the prevailing “reality.” The “reality” of the temperance narrative was further reified through acts of public performance. Men were encouraged to “sign the pledge” of abstinence in public, affirming the societal narrative for all to see. The connection between patriotic duty and temperance was shown by having citizens sign their oaths on the Fourth of July, as

¹⁷ Elaine Frantz Parsons, *Manhood Lost: Fallen Drunkards and Redeeming Women in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 7.

temperance reformers “argued that abstinence from liquor required as much virtue as had fighting the British during the Revolution [and] demanded the same kind of sacrifice as renouncing British tea in 1773.”¹⁹ Frick writes that “[i]t was a common practice ... to refer to the abstinence pledge as a second Declaration of Independence, to substitute “Prince Alcohol” for “George III” in versions of the Declaration intended for public reading.”²⁰ Speeches would frequently be given at temperance meetings in which members would relate tales of their own drunkenness as cautionary tales and for personal catharsis. When temperance plays were performed, the spectators were expected to be part of the experience, frequently cajoled into signing the pledge to abstain from alcohol directly after the performance of the play in the lobby of the theatre. While undocumented, the pressure to sign the pledge in such circumstances must have been intense, a necessary capitulation in the face of overwhelming societal force.

These public performances also created a false Manichaeian dichotomy on the issue of temperance. The frequent public debates on the subject contrasted a “wet” side and a “dry” side.²¹ One either signed the pledge, or one did not. On the frontier, temperance rallies known as “camp meetings” were often frequented by drunken rowdies seeking to break up the meeting with taunts. The result “led

¹⁸ Ibid., 7-8.

¹⁹ Rorabaugh, 194. Patriotism and temperance were frequently intermingled. For instance, in 1909, the Anti-Saloon League of America set up a publishing house in Westerfield, Ohio to print its materials. It was called “American Issue Publishing Company,” a name that signified the centrality of temperance as an “American” issue, at least in the eyes of temperance partisans. See the Westerville Public Library website for more details: “American Issue Publishing Company,” Westerville Public Library, www.wpl.lib.oh.us/Antisaloon/related/Issue.html (Accessed March 2, 2005).

²⁰ Frick, 73.

²¹ This debate tradition is still alive, albeit as a form of entertainment. The Twinings Tearoom of Cape May, NJ presents “costumed actors portraying Dr. Emlen Physick and his guests, saloonkeeper Patrick Collins and Jennie Wales, staunch advocate of temperance, as they debate the merits of this burning issue.”

frontier revivalists to preach sermons contrasting the defiant, unrepentant drinker with the pietistic, humble churchgoer,”²² creating a further sense of alienation. This strict division between the drunkard and the rest of society would be played out on the country’s stages as well.

If there is an enduring symbol of the performative aspect of the temperance movement, it is surely the activist Carry Nation. She was born Carry Amelia Moore and was herself a victim of alcoholism, as her first husband drank himself to death within two years of their marriage. Nation’s smashing of saloons and lectures to vaudeville audiences stand as an enduring testament to a particular thread in the temperance narrative, the “female invasion.” In *Manhood Lost*, Parsons explains the connections between the temperance movement and feminism. In the temperance narrative, as well as in the reality of the American home, women frequently bore the brunt of the alcoholic legacy. The drunkard was incapable of providing for his family, leaving his children and their mother bereft and alone.

For Parsons, the behavior of the drunken husband calls attention to the inequalities of patriarchal ideology. Drink, in possession of the husband, was seen as an unwelcome, marauding invader of the sanctity of the middle-class homestead, overturning the bourgeois rules of order and despoiling the virtue of the home. Nation reversed this narrative, by entering into and abusing men in traditionally “male” spaces: Nation’s demolishing of the sumptuous Hotel Carey Saloon in Wichita gained international attention for her cause. In this way, “the

See “Living History Tour: Tea & Temperance,” Mid-Atlantic Center for the Arts, <http://www.capemaymac.org> (Accessed February 2, 2005).

narrative of feminine invasion reformers ultimately addressed the problem of the individual as posed by the drunkard narrative. Women reformers imagined that they could step outside of their protected domestic confines to construct a virtuous and stable society.”²³

It could be said, in fact, that Nation utilized parody to transfix the country. She herself played the role of the destructive force entering the sacred, gendered space; her weapons of choice, the hatchet and the brickbat, symbolized vigorous projections of power that overturned traditional notions of femininity. The creation of “Carry Nation” exists as a prime example of a movement highly concerned with narrative and with the power of that narrative expressed through performance.

As the temperance movement was striking in its singular theatricality, it is not surprising that temperance drama would incorporate these elements into itself. Scholars have frequently remarked that the temperance melodrama included sermons that preached the gospel of teetotalism directly to the audience. The temperance debate found its way repeatedly into the dramaturgical fabric of the temperance drama. The riotous antics of the rowdies of the camp meetings became part of the stage drunkard’s repertory before he was brought back into the fold. The drunkard’s confession of guilt and society’s expiation of that guilt paralleled what transpired at the meetings of the Washingtonians. Carry Nation, the iconic temperance worker, became a national figure on the vaudeville stage. The manner in which temperance was staged outside of the theatre affected to a

²² Rorabaugh, 206.

²³ Parsons, 175-176.

large extent the way that it was performed within it and gave the drama it spawned the impression of truthful history in the decades to come.

III. Performing Temperance Melodrama

Bruce McConachie writes in *Melodramatic Formations*, "Overall, moral reform melodrama set the stage for business-class progress through rationality, conformity, and obedience."²⁴ As the 'heroic' melodrama of *Metamora* declined, a new form, the moral reform melodrama, ascended. Through productions of "moral melodrama," the American theatre sought to expand its audience base, improve its public image, and financially capitalize on this nascent interest by producing plays that reflected the new ideology. As Catherine Gilbert Murdock notes in *Domesticating Drink*, temperance melodrama extolled a respectability that transcended class and ethnicity, as "respectable people sought to behave properly according to the parameters of their culture."²⁵ The performance of "respectability" on the American stage helped deflect the attacks traditionally made upon the theatre by religious institutions. In *Melodrama Unveiled: American Theater and Culture, 1800-1860*, David Grimsted writes that "the energy the clergy devoted to attacking the theater's immorality indicated the weakness of their position as compared to theater's burgeoning popularity."²⁶ And

²⁴ Bruce McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations: American Theatre and Society, 1820-1870* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 199.

²⁵ Catherine Gilbert Murdock, *Domesticating Drink: Women, Men, and Alcohol in America, 1870-1940* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 6.

²⁶ David Grimsted, *Melodrama Unveiled: American Theater and Culture, 1800-1850* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 229.

though invested with a strong anti-theatrical prejudice itself, the temperance movement gained traction and support from thrilling reiterations of its ideology in the performance of temperance melodrama on the American stage. The middle-class ideologies reflected in melodrama caused that shopkeeper caste to flock to the theatre as:

The melodrama stressed situations and offered rewards that were perfectly democratic, that were available equally to all men. It urged men to purity, patriotism, and faith in providence, and it promised them earthly happiness from God, home, and country; but the greatest of these was home with its cornerstone of female purity.²⁷

And in order to woo these new audiences into their venues, theatre operators in the nineteenth century frequently staged plays that would extol middle-class values of upstanding modesty and patriotism. The temperance narrative, of course, fit this desire for new audiences perfectly. These same virtues that were espoused by melodrama encouraged the bourgeoisie not only to seek temperance drama on stage, but later, with the advent of film, also on the screen.²⁸ *Fifteen Years of a Drunkard's Life*, by the British playwright Douglas Jerrold, played to enthusiastic houses in London in 1827 and few years later W.H. Smith's *The Drunkard* and W.W. Pratt's *Ten Nights in a Barroom* became classics on the

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ With the arrival of the new medium of film at the end of the century, it was not long before stage classics were put on film in an effort to win over the same audiences that had enjoyed them on stage. *Ten Nights in a Barroom* was particularly prolific in this regard, with film productions made on ten different occasions by nine different companies between 1897 and 1931. Importantly, with a production on average every three and half years until 1931, there was not been another film version of *Ten Nights in a Barroom* since that year. The cessation of film productions of *Ten Nights in a Barroom* can be attributed to a number of factors—the aging of an audience base familiar and interested in the old classics of the American stage, the

American stage. In both of these early plays, the besotted drunkards finally reform by the fifth act and alcoholism is seen as a scourge that can be battled with the requisite Protestant fortitude. They became the most representative of American temperance melodramas, drawing on British sources dramaturgically, while demonstrating distinctively American ideologies.

The narratological structure upon which the temperance story was built was an unwavering melodramatic form, filled with rises and falls, angelic children, heart-quickenings escapes, and just deserts. Mason explains the basic elements of the temperance narrative as follows:

Temptation is virtually irresistible, for man is inherently weak and somewhat naïve regarding the potential consequences of his actions. Drink itself precludes and displaces all interests, endeavors and concerns. The inevitable consequence of drinking is decline into disaster; the mere fact of tipping compromises respectability, and the reprobate falls into one or more of a list of dire consequences—a very public loss of wealth, property, and prospects, sometimes through the thunderclap of foreclosure; an equally public loss of position and consequent shame and disgrace; madness; or death, sometimes visited upon innocent victims rather than the drunkard himself ... [The drunkard] is almost always a man, and a man with a family ...²⁹

disillusionment and cynicism with didactic moralism caused by World War I, the enactment and repeal of Prohibition, and the time-worn repetitiveness of the narrative.

²⁹ Mason, 71

The two plays I consider here adhere closely to the narrative described by Mason and are also the most frequently performed (and as a result, most parodied) of all temperance dramas. *The Drunkard* (1844) concerns Edward Middleton, a man of bourgeois upbringing who, upon marrying his sweetheart Mary and thus depriving the villain, Lawyer Cribbs, of the woman he desires, is duped into drinking and brings his family into poverty and disrepute. His downward spiral into dissipation ruins his middle-class stature and compels him to hide his shame and take safe haven in the saloons of New York City, a place that to the requisite comic old biddy, Miss Spindle, is “no safe place for romantic sensibilities and virgin purity.”³⁰ On the brink of suicide, Edward is saved by a temperance worker, Rencelaw, who asks Edward to “take not your life, but mend it.”³¹ In the following scenes, Edward is set right and Lawyer Cribbs, who has also sought to defraud both Rencelaw and Mary in the course of the plot, is brought to justice. The final scene concludes with the family reconciled in the country cottage and framed in *tableau* with Edward’s hand on the family Bible and his finger gesturing toward Heaven.

First performed some fourteen years later, the basic plot of *Ten Nights in a Barroom* (1858) follows the same narrative arc as its predecessor: Joe Morgan, an inherently good man, succumbs to the temptations of the bottle, resulting in a catastrophe that afflicts his family. In this case, in a stunning *coup de théâtre*, the drunkard’s only child, Mary, is struck in the head by a flung beer schooner as she attempts to free her father from the clutches of the saloon. This innocent child,

³⁰ W.H. Smith, “The Drunkard,” in *Early American Drama*, ed. Jeffrey H. Richards (New York: Penguin, 1997), 294.

who drags her father home from Simon Slade's saloon every night crying "Father, dear father, come home with me now,"³² is the epitome of melodrama's elevation of pre-adolescent feminine purity.³³ Joe's wife, Fanny, is also the embodiment of a similar feminine saintliness as Joe exclaims that his wife "has never been anything but a loving, forbearing, self-denying angel."³⁴ Mary's battered body is brought home and hopes for her recovery are dashed as she, like *Uncle Tom's* Eva, foretells her own death. The child dies, but only after eliciting a promise from her father to never set foot within the precincts of Simon Slade's tavern. The remorseful father's bout with the D.T.s is soon followed by reform. Simon Slade, the wealthy owner of the bar, falls victim to the bottle and is killed in a drunken brawl with his own son. At last Romaine, the story's *raisonneur* and a temperance activist, visits Joe Morgan at his home and extols the virtues of prohibition, saying:

But you must cut off the fountain if you would dry up the stream ... Let us, then, one and all, resolve this night that traffic shall cease in Bolton county. A large majority of the people, I am convinced will vote in favor of such a measure. Look at Simon Slade, the happy kind-hearted miller,

³¹ Ibid., 291.

³² W. W. Pratt, "Ten Nights in a Barroom," in *Hiss the Villain: Six English and American Melodramas*, ed. Michael Booth (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1964), 159. The song "Father, Dear Father, Come Home With Me Now" was written by Henry C. Work and published in *Compositions of Henry C. Work* (Cleveland: S. Brainard's Sons, 1864). It seems that the song was not part of the original text of *Ten Nights*, but it was incorporated into later productions of the play. Later publications of the song included a prelude that introduced the tune as "Tis The SONG OF LITTLE MARY/ Standing at the bar-room door/ While the shameful midnight revel/ Rages wildly as before." Henry Clay Work, *Songs*, *Earlier American Music* 19 (New York: Da Capo Press, 1974): 53-56. Cited from "Representative Poetry Online," University of Toronto, <http://eir.library.utoronto.ca/rpo/display/poem2385.html> (Accessed March 2, 2005).

³³ In an article published in *American Quarterly* (March 1995) entitled "Temperance in the Bed of Child: Incest and Social Order in Nineteenth-Century America," Karen Sánchez-Eppler concludes that this relationship between the virtuous daughter and dissolute father in temperance melodrama is riddled with incestuous eroticism.

and Simon Slade, the tavern-keeper. Was he benefited by the liberty to work harm against his neighbor?³⁵

Even moderate drinking is excoriated in the following lines as spoken by Sample Switchel, a representation of the popular “Yankee” figure which is common to American melodrama, as he says: “I thought moderate drinking was all right. Wal, I s’pose it was all well enough until I got to swillin’ the stuff down for a livin’, then I found it pooty tough.”³⁶ The play ends with the town resurrected from the scourge of drink and all its members clean and sober—even the Yankee Switchel will turn to activism as he claims in the last lines of the play that he will “raise [his] standard—spread it bold and high: down with rummies—‘root, hog, or die!’”³⁷

The strictly codified narratological elements made these plays ripe for parody. As with all parody, expectation and recognition by the receiver of the parody is of utmost import. There were three elements upon which the parodist frequently focused in the years that followed, and all three came to define the temperance melodrama as such: the over-the-top physicality of the *delirium tremens* scene, the assertion of the total truthfulness of the narrative and the stalwart, unshakable moralism of the play.

It was in *The Drunkard* that *delirium tremens* made its bow as a melodramatic device.³⁸ The fit of DTs was frequently accompanied by mad cries

³⁴ Ibid., 158.

³⁵ Ibid., 199.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 202.

³⁸ Frank Rahill, *The World of Melodrama* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967), 242. The *delirium tremens* sequence became a set piece that was included as a star turn in nearly every temperance drama.

of self-pity and disgust; in *The Drunkard* Edward attempts to kill the landlord of his lodgings, “A wretched out-house or shed,” and begins to rail:

Here, here, friend, take it off, will you—these snakes, how they coil
around me. Oh! How strong they are—there, don’t kill it, no, no, don’t kill
it, give it brandy, poison it with rum, that will be a judicious punishment,
that would be justice, ha, ha! Justice! Ha, Ha!³⁹

It was seen as a test of an actor’s vigor and talent to render the sequence believably. The theatrical effectiveness of the obligatory *delirium tremens* scene revealed itself with its omnipresence in parodies of the form. When performed “straight,” the sequence regularly impressed audiences with the overflow of bodily excess, revealing the ease with which the body itself may become unhinged.⁴⁰ The DTs vividly materialize the shame of alcohol in a vision of the body beyond control. In the preface to *The Drunkard*, Smith describes the first portrayal of Edward in Boston as “at times terribly real, particularly the scene of *delirium tremens*, which though far short of the horrors of that dreadful malady, and appearing, to those unacquainted to the disease to be overstepping the bounds of nature, was true to the letter, and universally acknowledged to be the most natural, effective acting ever seen in the city.”⁴¹ An audience in the presence of such a “natural” performance would undoubtedly be affected by it. Upon

³⁹ Smith, 290.

⁴⁰ The spectacle of the spasmodic body was a common element in nineteenth-century performance, particularly opera. The “mad scene” in the third act of Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor* is a prime example of this trope. Significantly, the DTs-afflicted men in temperance melodrama nearly always recover their wits, while the mad women of opera rarely do, frequently dying of their insanity. Yet both reinforce a patriarchic status quo as the disruptive man can be redeemed while the disruptive woman must die. The mad women of opera offer a similar emotional exhibitionism as the drunkards of temperance melodrama, but do not gain salvation.

attending a performance of Charles Reade's temperance play *Drink*, an adaptation of Emile Zola's naturalist novel *L'Assommoir*, a reviewer remarked of the audience's reaction:

As the play progress the number of men who went out between the acts materially lessened and those who had in earlier scenes gone for liquid refreshment were content to sit, amazed and shocked, with great beads of perspiration on the their brows. They had sen [sic] a hell so fearful that they stayed in their seats mute and temporarily free from any desire for any sort of drink. Though the theatre was intensely hot on the Indian Summer Night, the saloons in the neighborhood were almost deserted.⁴²

The "hell so fearful" can only be the physical manifestation of drunkenness taken too far. In fact, the sequence is so powerful that even after the performances, men ordinarily given to drunkenness stay out of the bars and saloons. The powerful image of the DTs is impossible to resist, an emancipating force that, through sheer ugliness and terror can free a man from his "voluntary slavery" to alcohol.⁴³ The "temperance effect" caused by such an exhibition could therefore be seen to be "effective" in Smith's terms. Later, however, the *delirium tremens* scene would also be constant cause for hilarity, epitomizing as it does a body contorted by the acting styles (and morality) of the past.

⁴¹ W.H. Smith, "Preface to *The Drunkard*," in *Early American Drama*, ed. Jeffrey H. Richards (New York: Penguin, 1997), 250.

⁴² "'DRINK' A THRILLING PLAY," *New York Times*, Sep 15, 1903.

⁴³ The concept of the drinker as being a "slave" to drink occurs repeatedly in temperance literature. This choice of words find its way into temperance parodies as well: in *Ten Nights Without a Barroom*, a parody in novel form by "T.S. Arthur, Jr." the book is dedicated to "the Emancipation of American Prohibition Slaves." See T. S. Arthur, Jr., *Ten Nights Without a Barroom*, Indianapolis, IN: Bell, 1930.

In discussing the novel form of *Ten Nights in a Barroom*, Mason writes that “the narrator is a business traveler who passes through a small town several times over a period of years, and so witnesses the various stages of the fall of a miller-turned-innkeeper and his family; the traveler becomes a spectator of an ongoing and ostensibly historical drama.”⁴⁴ In the best of circumstances, the sense of an “ostensibly historical drama” would have been translated to the stage. In performance, the production of the normative values of culture gave the effect of an exposé of the startling effects of drunkenness on the families in the small town of Cedarville. Frick describes how this “time-sequence device ... illustrat[es] the progressive nature of alcoholism.”⁴⁵ The narrative was seen as truthful and logical, and unlike *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, preserved from subversion by its own theatricality. As Smith describes in the preface to *The Drunkard*, “In the representation it was a powerful and living picture, and all that saw it, felt it, for IT WAS TRUE. No one who had not seen it would feel included, from the mere reading, to believe the very powerful effect produced.”⁴⁶

Rehabilitation is an important theme in temperance drama; the *raisonneur* characters in both plays, Rencelaw in *The Drunkard* and Romaine in *Ten Nights in a Barroom*, are both former drunkards. Both have, in the words of Sample Switchel, “been through the mill.”⁴⁷ Romaine describes his experience with alcoholism as one which he “escaped almost by a miracle; the exertion of friends, after years of suffering, at last caused me to see the danger in time and fly from

⁴⁴ Mason, 70-71.

⁴⁵ Frick, 132.

⁴⁶ Smith, 250.

⁴⁷ Pratt, 165

it.”⁴⁸ Similarly, in *Ten Nights in a Barroom*, Rencelaw pleads his case to Edward that drunkenness can be overcome by telling him that “[y]ou see before you one who for twenty years was prey to this dreadful folly.”⁴⁹ As both Rencelaw and Romaine attest, alcoholism is a disease that can be cured, but only with the support of others. In the case of performance, the play itself serves this role. In addition, when the play was performed both in Boston and in New York at Barnum’s American, Smith played the role of Edward, while making it public knowledge that he was himself a reformed drinker. The audience that saw Smith perform the play knowingly watched a man who had experienced the DTs personally. There is little doubt that the realism attributed to Smith’s performance is rooted in the audience’s outside knowledge of his condition. The performance of the play compelled audience members to consider the real-life consequences of alcoholism as Smith/Edward writhed in all-too-truthful agony before them. The fact that characters on the stage were able to reform, both in the narrative and in real life, underlined the very reality of the temperance narrative itself.

The moralism of the plays is an elemental part of the genre, and indeed, of melodrama as a whole. P.T. Barnum chose *The Drunkard* to open his new Moral Lecture Room at the American Museum in 1850, “serv[ing] as a model for moral entrepreneurs to follow—from vaudeville impresarios Tony Pastor and B. F. Keith to Walt Disney.”⁵⁰ The morality of the melodramatic universe sees the family as an inviolate nucleus; the action of play begins when the family is threatened by outside forces which seek to penetrate that sanctified area. In

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Smith, 291.

temperance melodrama, the menace that seeks to batter the family unit is the temptation of alcohol. Typically in melodrama, the representative of this middle-class family morality is the unspoiled, virtuous child. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* used sentimental theatrics in forging a bond between audience and performer by creating iconic Little Eva. In the case of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, as we have seen, Eva is used as a way to make Tom's martyrdom more palatable. In a temperance drama like *Ten Nights in a Barroom*, the innocent child is also focal point for the audience's sympathies. The drunkard of the melodrama was a figure to be pitied and his resurrection at the end of the play transforms sympathy into a moral rectitude. The oft-mentioned circularity of the temperance narrative—the drunkard is born, suffers, and returns to sobriety at the end—affirms and recreates the always-virtuous figure of the child. However, the drunkard is only saved by the grace of middle-class morality, and with his sobriety, the middle-class home is made whole once again.

This particular morality of the temperance melodrama revealed itself in other manifestations of the drunk on stage. Of the comic drunk, Frick writes that “plays in which the drunkard is presented in a positive manner—even as an attractive, loveable character—can be interpreted as a logical and necessary resistance to the containment efforts of the middle-class, ‘dry’ hegemony.”⁵⁰ However, this figure of the drunk was frequently of an ethnic origin, a fact that reinforced nativist sympathies. The comedy of the situation was built upon this denial of traditional middle-class expectations.

⁵⁰ Frick, 119.

⁵¹ Ibid., 187.

If a certain shared knowledge of the textual and narratological elements is essential for the production of parody, the elements described above were the most easily recognized and therefore parodied. Unlike *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which was accompanied with traces of parody from the very moment of its production through the necessary blackfacing of Uncle Tom, the middle-class weight behind the temperance narrative created its own omnipotence.⁵² While there were many minstrel parodies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, there were few, if any, temperance melodramas that were subjected to burlesque in this particular fashion. As a result, while there were anti-temperance activists in the nineteenth century—songs mocking temperance and extolling liquor will be touched upon in the next section—theatrical parodies of temperance melodrama were few and very far between. However, when they did arrive at the turn of the century, the forces of Prohibition were in a struggle to fashion middle-class ideology into national law. The fissures that opened came from unease with this concretization of morality.

IV. Questioning Reform

Even from the very beginning of the temperance movement, there were some voices of dissent. America's relationship with alcohol dated to its inception and there were many who believed that the forces of temperance were composed largely of noisome, humorless busybodies. While evidence of strong anti-temperance performance in the beginning of the nineteenth century to counteract

⁵² Harriet Beecher Stowe herself revealed her stance on alcohol in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the depiction of two drinkers, St. Clare and Simon Legree. While Legree's violence is only enhanced by alcohol, St. Clare is seen as far more sympathetic (though weak-willed), although he is himself slain in a barroom brawl.

the rise of teetotalism is scarce, there are brief flashes from the period that indicate an undercurrent of anti-temperance performance.

One of the most telling references to anti-temperance performance is in the memoir of John Gough, a major temperance reformer. In his early days, before his work as a renowned temperance speaker, Gough was a professional actor and, in tune with the profession, a hard drinker. While moving from city to city to ply his trade, he found himself in Boston where he performed in an anti-temperance play now lost to history entitled, *Departed Spirits, Or the Temperance Hoax*.⁵³ Gough describes the play as one in which “Deacon Moses Grant, Dr. Lyman Beecher, and other prominent temperance men, were held up to ridicule.”⁵⁴ Gough played the part of a “keeper of a temperance house” who is played for a fool by revelers and eventually has a fire hose turned on him. He ends his brief description by indicating that it was “no fun for me, I assure you; but then, I was engaged at a salary of five dollars per week—which I never received, for the theater closed in a few weeks, and, deprived of my pay, I was once more thrown like a foot-ball on the world’s highway, at the mercy of every passing foot.”⁵⁵ Gough’s troublesome time with the company in Boston shows the briefest glimpse of a trend that would expand greatly in later years: the mocking of the overly officious temperance activist.

⁵³ The Rev. John Pierpont, the pastor of the Hollis Street Church in Boston during the 1830s, railed against the production of this play from the pulpit. His vociferousness on this topic, along with many others concerning social issues, caused his parishioners to attempt to impeach him. Moreover, Pierpont’s co-authorship of *The Drunkard* has been suggested by McConachie and others. This may have contributed to his attempted ouster as an artistic life was seen as dangerously impious. See Frick, 115-119.

⁵⁴ John B. Gough, *Autobiography and Personal Recollections of John B. Gough with Twenty-Six Years’ Experience as a Public Speaker* (Springfield, MA: Bill, Nichols & Co., 1869), 83.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 84.

Other forms of popular culture reflected feelings of dissent. Many temperance songs like “Father, Dear Father, Come Home With Me Now” were popularized by their incorporation into temperance melodrama and, as in the case of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the merchandising of temperance melodrama was quite common. Yet, for all the songs that appeared to instill a fear of alcohol in the common man, others inevitably extolled the virtues of the bar. Even with the strength and prevalence of temperance in the media at the time, there were still moments of rebellion like “The Grog-Shop” from *Green’s Anti-Intemperance Almanack* (1831):

O come, let us all to the grog-shop:

The tempest is gathering fast—

There surely is nought like the grog-shop

To shield from the turbulent blast.

O then let us off to the grog-shop;

Come, father, come, Jonathan, come;

Far drearier far than a Sunday

Is a storm in the dullness of home⁵⁶

In the frenzy for song sheets at the time for the Civil War, numerous parodies emerged, mocking popular airs. One of the most interesting was “Rum! Rum! Rum!: The Bummer’s Hope” which parodied the Civil War tune “The Prisoner’s Hope.” The chorus of the pre-text speaks for itself:

Tramp, tramp, tramp the boys are marching,

Cheer up comrades they will come,

And beneath the starry flag
 We shall breathe the air again
 Of the free land in our own beloved home.⁵⁷

The parody turned the comradeship found on the fields of battle into something else entirely:

Rum! rum! rum! the boys are coming:
 Cheer up! bummers, have no fear,
 And, before another night,
 We'll all get jolly tight,
 At the Carlton, drinking Schnapps and Lager-beer.⁵⁸

With the temperance narrative as normative, it seems likely that songs, which could be sung the privacy of one's own home, would be preferable to plays which could become targets of Prohibitionist activism.

In the years following the Civil War, plays began to emerge that questioned some elements of the temperance movement, while still simultaneously extolling its virtues. The appearance of such plays as George Melville Baker's *A Little More Cider* (1870) and *We're All Teetotalers* (1876) reveal a changing tack, an attempt in some quarters to modify the temperance message. The lack of such plays before the Civil War suggests that the horror of internecine conflict changed societal values with regard to temperance. In Baker's

⁵⁶ Rorabaugh, frontpiece.

⁵⁷ George F. Root, "Tramp! Tramp! Tramp! (The Prisoner's Hope)," n.d., http://www.civilwarmusic.net/display_song.php?song=tramp (accessed March 14, 2004).

⁵⁸ John C. Cross, "Rum! Rum! Rum! The Bummer's Hope: A Parody on The Prisoner's Hope," (New York: H de Marsan, n.d.), Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress.

plays, temperance laborers were frequently hypocritical Tartuffes who would extol temperance's virtues in public, but not follow them in private. With farcical humor, Baker depicts old killjoys who become drunk, while showing younger temperance reformers working within the system to fix it.

In *A Little More Cider*, Baker questions the logic of older temperance leaders' belief that beer and cider would be acceptable, but not hard liquor. The plot revolves around an old Yankee family that has come into money with the passing of a town temperance law banning hard liquor. The patriarch, Erastus Applejack, doles out cider to everyone in town including the obligatory German stock character, Hans Drinker. Applejack's daughter Polly is enamored of the preacher's son, Issac Peachblossom, though he is a strict teetotaler and Applejack has forbidden the match as Issac once argued against him in court. The Preacher himself is in love with Applejack's sister and one night, after his temperance speech, he plans to pledge his love to her, but instead becomes drunk on Applejack's cider. In a parody of the classic melodramatic love scene, the Deacon promises his love not to a woman, but to cider:

Sp—len—did! That loosens my tongue. Yes, Miss Patience,—dear Miss Patience,—dear Patience,—I do long to clasp to my arms—a little more cider...I'm a drefful lonesome man. I want somebody at my side (hic) to bathe my throbbing brow (hic), to give me—to give me—a little more cider ...⁵⁹

⁵⁹ George M. Baker, "A Little More Cider," in *The Temperance Drama: A Series of Dramas, Comedies, and Farces* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1874), 110.

Patience, the dim old maid, remarks to the audience, "How strangely he acts! But I believe he is on the brink of a proposal."⁶⁰ The Deacon's drunkenness proves Issac's point that cider is not "[n]ature's own brewing for the lips of thirsty travelers in this journey of life."⁶¹ While the presentation of the drunken Deacon (and the perennially intoxicated German character) is humorous in a classic vaudeville fashion, its message is one that insists that total abstinence from alcohol is the only way.

This message becomes clearer as Issac Peachblossom uses his knowledge of Applejack's brewing techniques to gain the affection of his daughter. Applejack has been cutting his cider with whiskey, and thus violating the law. Issac compels Applejack to consent to his marrying his daughter and also to shutting down his operation. The first analysis is that the Demon Rum exists in all forms of alcohol and only total teetotalism can save one from social embarrassment. And while the DTs are never seen on stage, Issac's upward mobility seems certain as he will likely take over for his father. While *A Little More Cider* is not a parody of temperance melodrama, quite the opposite, it did set up the straw man of the old, out-of-date temperance lecturer, a stock figure that would present itself again later in actual parodies of the form. By contrast, Issac appears as young and educated, dressed in a "genteel modern suit."

In another play by Baker, one can also detect another thread that becomes apparent later in the parodic cycle of temperance melodrama. In *We're All Teetotalers*, a man-about-town from the city, Tom Townbred, visits his country

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 109.

cousins who live on a farm in Vermont. The family repeatedly declares that they believe in temperance, yet each offers Tom a drink when they get him alone. Each character makes up a health reason for keeping gin around the house and then offers it to their more cosmopolitan relative on the assumption that he would be used to it. Mr. Maple explains: "Tom, I 'spose yeow have been used to havin' a nipper in the morning when yeow are in New York?"⁶² As mentioned previously, a significant thread in the development of temperance parody runs along class lines and the distinction between rural and urban life. Townbred's urban, "upper crust" status marks him as one of the temperance holdouts. At the end of the play, Tom pretends to have injured himself while drunk and when he asks the assembled family for a drink to ease his pain, each member of the family runs off to fetch him their own personal bottle. The family's hypocrisy made public, Tom demands that the daughter marry the boy that she likes and, while he himself was not in favor of temperance before he arrived, Tom insists that they all take temperance pledges so that everyone can say "We're All Teetotalers" in earnest.

In the figures of Issac Peachblossom and Tom Townbred, a young, urbane version of the old temperance lecturer is forged. Each is good looking, educated, and well-bred, yet capable of a joke. What is more important, each is steadfast in his belief in temperance, even when surrounded by the hypocrisy of elders. Baker's texts counter the two most consistent charges against temperance activists, their lack of cosmopolitan urbanity and their innate hypocrisy. In the face of this, Baker creates characters that are in fact in on the joke, creating a

⁶² George M. Baker, "We're All Teetotalers," in *The Temperance Drama: A Series of Dramas, Comedies, and Farces* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1874), 173.

“teetotaling comic man.” Baker’s characters are very much the comic version of the observer figure from *Ten Nights in a Barroom* as the outsider who comes to town to observe the happenings and right the wrongs of its overdrinking denizens; through his young, strapping temperance workers, Baker seeks to make teetotaling lighthearted.

Some years later, plays began to develop that, while not entirely condemning the temperance movement, seriously questioned its motives. *A Temperance Town* (1892), written by Charles Hoyt, an author of farces and a sometime drama critic, reveals a deep ambivalence about the cause of temperance. The plot revolves around a small town in Vermont in which a temperance battle rages, and while Hoyt at first endorses temperance values in his play, he then attacks the movement, depicting temperance activists as both buffoonish and hypocritical sinners. The character of “Mink” Jones, articulates the author’s voice when he combats a group of temperance activists in the first scene of Act II. His monologue, delivered past the characters to the audience and clearly explicating the author’s message, mirrors the frequent sermonizing in temperance melodramas:

You think you are right when you deprive a people of their personal liberty. Suppose we had the making of the law and passed one compelling you to drink two glasses of liquor a day, would you like that? ... Then let me tell you! You could drink it a damned sight easier than I could let it alone! If a man ain’t born a man, you can make him one by law! When I quit drinking, I’ll do it because I want to, and not to please the whim of a

lot of cranks like you! As long as you try to reform me by law, I'll drink!

And I'll get it too and no darn country legislature can stop me, either!⁶³

"Mink" Jones's fervent defense of personal liberty against the inroads of temperance workers indicates a sense that reformers have gone too far.

A common figure among plays that questioned the temperance melodrama was the rum-seller. In temperance melodrama, the character of the bartender was frequently that of the devil himself; in *Ten Nights in a Barroom*, Simon Slade attempts to induce people to drink, including his own children. By contrast, Oakhurst, the bartender in *A Temperance Town*, is a figure of gentle good humor and pity. While a little girl enters his saloon to purchase whisky for her father, he sends her away telling her that "A saloon is no place to send a little girl!" and gives her a nickel to buy some candy.⁶⁴ When in *Ten Nights* the little girl leaves the bar with a cracked skull as a result of her father's bad deeds, the little girl in *A Temperance Town* leaves the bar with money in her pocket, even though Oakhurst's bar has fallen on hard times.

In a sequence in Act II, the temperance activist Deacon Kneeland Pray attempts to persuade Oakhurst to sell him a bottle of whisky to give to his sick mother. When confronted with the fact that his mother is not sick at all, he blithely lies to keep up the story. Oakhurst then offers him a complimentary bottle, thus short-circuiting Prohibition laws against selling alcohol. Pray tries to give him money anyway. When Doctor Sawyer, who has been administering to Oakhurst's ill daughter free of charge, hears of this, he demands Oakhurst take the

⁶³ Charles H. Hoyt, "A Temperance Town," in *Five Plays by Charles H. Hoyt*, ed. Douglas L. Hunt (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 172.

money in order to pay for his medical services. At the moment Oakhurst takes the money to pay for his own daughter's health, he is arrested for selling alcohol. The outrageous lengths to which the temperance characters in the play go to catch their prey parallel those of the nasty barkeepers and liquor distributors in temperance melodrama. Oakhurst's acts of generosity undermine the perception of the bartender/saloon owner as selfish and immoral. Of the play, Frick writes:

While there is no evidence that Hoyt's play was intended as a direct response to Arthur's *Ten Nights in a Barroom*, the similarity in dramatis personae, the centrality of the saloon and the socially vulnerable position of the tavern keeper raise the question of whether Hoyt was coming to Simon Slade's defense, albeit many years after Slade was created and then destroyed.⁶⁵

Whatever Hoyt's intention was, either to attack Arthur's play or the temperance narrative as a whole, the result is the same: an anti-temperance play that takes the form of a typical temperance drama.

Edward Locke's *The Drunkard's Daughter* (1905) is a useful text as it gives the impression by its title of being an out-and-out temperance drama. Taking elements from Braddon/Hazlewood's *Lady Audley's Secret*, the result is an oddly bifurcated drama: one part slapstick comedy that plays on the foolishness of the drunk, the other part melodramatic thriller. Significantly, it shares the same name as an earlier temperance tale written by "Mrs J. Thayer" in 1842 to which it likely bears little resemblance. However, "the Drunkard" of the

⁶⁴ Hoyt, 169.

⁶⁵ Frick, 185.

title is not an unhappy wretch and the daughter is abused not by his drunken shenanigans (as in the case of traditional temperance drama), but is instead bullied by her conniving husband. The husband, while a tippler himself, never strikes Helen in a drunken rage, but seeks to use her savings to improve his stature with his comrades. In the opening scene of the play the father and his friend—both old drunken soldiers—search for liquor in the house. In a macabre touch, they find the bottle hidden in the unused cradle of a dead child. Of course, the bottle that replaces the lost child works metaphorically as the drunkards of various temperance melodramas routinely choose liquor over the health and safety of their family. Yet later in the scene, the drunken Captain uses the bottle to protect his daughter from her abusive beau. It is not without irony that the only reason that the Captain has the strength and will to do it is that he was inebriated in the first place. The drunkard of the temperance melodrama here is reformed to serve the needs of the family while intoxicated.

In these later plays, it seems that the entire temperance narrative is challenged: the evil saloon-owner has a heart and the drunkard chooses family and liquor, instead of family over liquor. As the century turned, temperance's stable narrative became troubled by its own extremism. The once-simple dichotomy of drunkenness versus sobriety and evil against good broke in such plays. I would assert that the staging of such ruptures in the temperance narrative rendered that narrative open to parody in the decades to come. The temperance narrative's strength was a moral consistency, one that intermeshed with the "myth of America." With the figure of earnest temperance reformer problematized on

stage and the complexities of the issues involved in the movement revealed, the temperance melodrama opened itself up to burlesque. It was with the enactment of Prohibition in 1920 and the national realization of temperance goals that the narrative would come under near-continuous parodic fire.

V. Temperance in The Big City

In *Theatre, Culture, and Temperance Reform in Nineteenth-Century America*, John Frick refers to many of the following parodic performances as ushering in “the saddest chapter in the history of temperance dramaturgy.”⁶⁶ Frick’s desire to prop up the temperance narrative is laudable, especially since the form has received more than its share of abuse in this century. But in lashing out against parodic forms of the plays, Frick purposefully excludes them from the “traditional” genealogy of the form. It is imperative that the plays that Frick discards be seen as a part of the grand tradition of melodrama. Parody inevitably contributes to the manner in which nineteenth-century melodrama is experienced today. The performances of temperance melodrama described hereafter are not simply cheap send-ups of the form; they are the logical result of changing social codes and perspectives. The sustained production of these plays cannot be attributed merely to the ease with which temperance narratives could be parodied. Rather, the repeated production of the parodies of temperance melodrama reveals the centrality of the form in American dramaturgy and shows how directors and

⁶⁶ Frick, 193.

producers attempted to find, in Susan Bennett's terms, "new ways to play old texts."⁶⁷

The late 1920s were a significant period in the evolving history of melodrama performance. In 1928 and 1929, Christopher Morley, in partnership with Cleon Throckmorton, revived Boucicault's *After Dark* in a warehouse-turned-theatre in Hoboken, New Jersey. They deliberately chose to present the melodrama as a parody, burlesquing the form with "overacting, top hats, and twirling mustaches."⁶⁸ Dorothy Mackin, a creator of one of the oldest and best known summer melodrama theatres in the American West, The Imperial Players, concludes that Morley parodied the play as "apparently the reputation of melodrama had deteriorated to the point that they choose to present it as a burlesque."⁶⁹ The term "Hoboken" thus came to be shorthand for "burlesqued melodrama." References to this style in the major New York papers of the time began with Morley's productions, which took place "on the last seacoast of Bohemia,"⁷⁰ New Jersey.

A version of temperance melodrama that stayed well away from those parodic shoals was the production of *Ten Nights* as revived by Kathleen Kirkwood and the Triangle Theatre in 1927. This last stand of serious temperance melodrama was produced, according to Frick, straight with no parodic intentions. The review in the *Herald Tribune* Frick cites is to this effect, as there were

⁶⁷ Susan Bennett, *Performing Nostalgia: Shifting Shakespeare and the Contemporary Past* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), chapter 1.

⁶⁸ Dorothy Mackin, *Melodrama Classics: Six Plays and How to Stage Them* (New York: Sterling, 1982), 178. Mackin's theatre, one of many "melodrama theatres" in the western United States, will be discussed at length in Chapter 4.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

“solemn nods of righteous heads as wayward Willie Hammond is led astray.”⁷¹

However, to look at the review for *Times*, one cannot be quite so sure:

Throughout “Ten Nights in a Barroom” is played with a straight face and with no conscious attempts at burlesque, in the fashion it might have been given in a lesser community thirty or so years ago. Only in the sermonizing of the last act does the edge of caricature break through the earnestness of the acting. Otherwise it is meant for dead serious and, at times, moving drama.⁷²

The reviewer concludes by calling it a “merry novelty, and the thing to do should be to visit it after dining well.”⁷³ The reviewer’s conclusion indicates that the play is something to “visit,” rather than attend, accentuating the fact that the production seems to be out of step with the times, a version that belongs in another time, another place. While Frick asserts that the play is performed “straight,” the fact that “the edge of caricature” pierces the veneer of the play is telling. How and from where does this “edge of caricature” emerge? Either the production is purposefully parodying the play, which does seem unlikely, or the reviewer cannot help but read a certain part of the play, the “sermonizing” in the last act, as parody. The performance cannot exist outside the experience of the audience and to that audience, at least in part, the actors unconsciously parodied their own play simply by performing in it. While the production could have been

⁷⁰ This was also the title of Morely’s memoir. See Christopher Morely, *Seacoast of Bohemia* (New York: Doubleday, 1929).

⁷¹ *The Herald Tribune*, March 29, 1928. Cited in Frick, 193.

⁷² “Demon Rum Is Downed in ‘Ten Nights’ Revival: Triangle Group Brings 70-Year-Old Play to Wallack’s in Dead Earnest Production,” *New York Times*, March 28, 1938.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

approached as a serious piece, by the later years of Prohibition, any production would have been necessarily haunted by the fact that its ideology is out-of-step with the times.

By contrast, R.H. Burnside's parodies of *Ten Nights in a Barroom* from his "1929 Catalogue of Musical Comedies—Dramatic and Musical Sketches" stand as good examples of the vaudeville parodies of the temperance play. In the Burnside Collection of the New York Public Library of Performing Arts, there are two different versions of the play: one is the barest outline, while the other a fully-fleshed out sketch. While they both deal with the same pre-text, the outline version (referred to as either *Ten Nights in a Lunchroom* or *Ten Barrooms in a Night*) takes a decidedly darker tone. In a manner that recalls the bloated vaudeville versions of Little Eva from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Mary enters, orders a cocktail and smokes a cigar. When Joe returns and is faced with his cigar-chomping daughter pleading for him to come home, the action is described as follows:

He has a drink. Then throws Mary out over doors.

Bus[iness] of treating with Dummy.

Mixes Pousse Cafe—mix of everything.

has D.T.s Does trick dance—

Face on bar room floor

Faces appear. Red flash in glass—

Scarred—etc. finally trampoline [sic] effect

and dive through mirror—at finish

smash up place.⁷⁴

While the details of the sketch are obviously obscure, what is evident is that Burnside wished to include all of the classic elements of the play—in particular an extended DT sequence in which special effects are used to create a ghostly image on the mirror above the bar. The use of the bar mirror as a window into a new experience recalls the ending of Burnside's parody of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Uncle Tom's Cabaret/Saloon*, also from 1929. It seems likely that this device became popular with the rise of cinema as the mirror took on the quality of a movie screen.

In its more complete version in the Burnside Collection as a play titled *Ten Minutes in a Lunchroom*, the tone is much lighter, and the playtext is replete with songs that recall the Civil War era drinking songs that parodied popular ditties. Of the songs most usually connected with temperance melodrama, the most popular was "Father, dear Father, come home with me now" sung by Mary. In Burnside's version, the bar seems to be a much better place than home:

Oh Father, dear Father, don't come home tonight.

For Mother's gone clean off her head.

I've known for a long time she wasn't quite right.

I know that her reason has fled.

She's just fired the cook,

And I took a look

⁷⁴ R. H. Burnside, "Ten Minutes in a Lunchroom" (typescript, 1929), 1-2. R. H. Burnside Collection, New York Library for the Performing Arts. Even though the outline does not resemble "Ten Minutes in a Lunchroom," it is included in the copy of that text in the Burnside Collection. The reference to "face on the

At a pie she's been making for you.

And if you eat that pie,

You'll be certain to die.

And then what will your poor Willie do.

Stay here- Stay here.

You'll be safe if you'll only stay here.⁷⁵

In classic parodic reversal, home becomes the unsafe region and only the bar remains a safe place.

While the minstrel show sketch seemed to be the genre most useful for parodies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, parodic performances of temperance melodrama tended to take the form of full-length plays that sent up conventions of temperance melodrama, rather than condensations of the text. According to Frick, "the critics did not take seriously" a performance of *The Drunkard* at the MacDougal Street Playhouse in 1930. Reviews were certainly mixed, suggesting that some critics saw the performance as parodic. The reviewer for the *Times* noted, "When Birnam Wood moved to Dunsinane it was a portent. How portentous it is for Hoboken to move to Macdougall Street, this reviewer will not undertake to say."⁷⁶ The reviewer also commented on the significance of geography to the success of the play, performed in the old Provincetown playhouse: "If the galled shades of past performances by Eugene O'Neill winced

barroom floor" that Burnside makes in his outline is likely a reference to the Edwin Porter's 1908 temperance film *Face on the Barroom Floor*.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 14.

⁷⁶ "PLAY OF THE '40S REVIVED," *New York Times*, Dec 31, 1929.

and the beer belt across the water shivered, the [audience] ... was entertained.”⁷⁷

But on the subject of how temperance melodrama is received during Prohibition, the reviewer shows how the new law has affected dramaturgy:

In bone-dry America any play dealing with drink may be counted on to put the audience in a receptive mood. It has to be a comedy of course, because drink in a bone-dry America is a matter of laughter—the tragic aspects are rejected. Here you have drink and the devil too, dressed up as a rascally lawyer ... What was done was well enough done—with more seriousness that the Morley plays usually achieve.⁷⁸

The reviewer from the *Times* makes a point of significance here: before Prohibition, drinking was a call for concern on American stages. Burlesques were few and far between, and even plays that questioned the temperance movement were rare. Yet, when Prohibition was enacted, all the extremity of teetotalism became utterly apparent. Charles Crouch’s review in *Billboard* from January 25, 1930 notes this change as well: “playhouse audiences are howling with laughter at *The Drunkard; or, The Fallen Saved* which, when it was originally produced at the Boston Museum in 1844, must have been pretty serious drama.”⁷⁹ National mores turned against temperance and, especially when its spirit was on the wane during the Depression and following the rise of organized crime, comedic takes like that at the Macdougall Street Playhouse became possible, and eventually, the only kind possible for the production of temperance drama.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Charles Crouch, “Village Group Revives Ancient Melodrama,” *Billboard*, Jan. 25, 1930.

Other performers played with the intricacies of parodic reception. Billy Bryant's production of *Ten Nights in a Barroom*, which Frick excoriates in his text, brought the practice of parodying melodrama to a whole new level. Referred to as "The George M. Cohan of the River," Bryant seems to have been a blend of Will Rogers and P. T. Barnum. In *Children of ol' Man River: The Life and Times of a Show-Boat Trouper*, Bryant describes his career in a self-effacing, "aw shucks" manner, describing the arc of his career as "hic" showboat captain and actor who turns Broadway impresario and comes back again.⁸⁰ In his memoir, Bryant repeatedly asserts that the rural folk along the rivers of the country make up the audience with which he is most comfortable; his career was made performing with his family on a showboat that toured the rural, unsophisticated towns and villages on the Mississippi. According to Bryant, however, it is with the performance of a temperance melodrama that his entire life changed. Just when the family's fortunes seemed to flag, he describes a performance on the showboat outside of Cincinnati that took place when the captain of a pleasure cruise pulled up and "offered us twenty-five dollars to play *Ten Nights in a Barroom* that night for his out-of-town guests who had never seen a showboat before."⁸¹ The result was for Bryant a rousing success that had long runs in Cincinnati and then Chicago. Bryant describes the success as a surprise:

⁸⁰ See Billy Bryant, *Children of ol' Man River: The Life and Times of a Show-Boat Trouper* (New York: Lee Furman, 1936). Billy Bryant's nostalgia for the "Big Sandy" did not have last. After the publication of his book in 1936, Bryant promised that he would produce a travesty *Hamlet* on Broadway. His comments on this subject appeared in the *New York Times* frequently between 1937 and 1941. Unfortunately, the financing for the project collapsed repeatedly year after year and Bryant never staged the play.

⁸¹ Bryant, 254.

You may not believe it, but old *Ten Nights in a Barroom* was an instant hit, a sensation! They applauded our cotton-stockings heroine and stood up in a body and cheered Joe Morgan's denunciation of the demon rum. They laughed at our stale river jokes and thought our villain Harvey Green, with his handlebar mustache, was the funniest human being they had ever seen on any stage, and hissed and booed him to their hearts' content.⁸²

Bryant positions himself as part of the old tradition of melodrama and acts surprised to see a modern, more ironic, more cosmopolitan reaction to his production. It is with a purposeful naïveté that he professes confusion that audiences could find humor in the drama:

It was all new and confusing for us to see our earnest river classic go so completely haywire in such a strange manner. We didn't know what it was all about, but we knew that our audience was having a good time. After the show they took our entire company aboard their gorgeous yacht and entertained us in a royal fashion. There we learned that they had not been kidding us as inferior actors, but on the contrary, considered us finished comedians. They had taken the play as a satire or something like that, and thought we were smart showmen to present it in that way. And we didn't argue with them. They had been our guests, in a manner of speaking, so we remembered our manners as hosts and let it go at that.⁸³

According to Bryant, the following night's performance was sold out and requests for other old-time melodramas began to pour in. "Characters who had been buried

⁸² Ibid., 254-255.

⁸³ Ibid., 255.

for generations were dragged out of their graves to moan and groan and curse and pray their ways through sob-wrenching stories.”⁸⁴ Bryant’s grandstanding as an actor who unintentionally amuses his audiences was, of course, the key to his success. As proved in later performances of temperance melodrama, humor comes from letting the audience have the joke.

Later, Bryant describes performing the play for an audience of physically challenged children. The children, who evidently had never seen a melodrama before, are described as being afraid to laugh. According to his memoir, faced with a silent, uncomprehending audience of handicapped children, he stopped the show and told the children how to react. The result was a riot that continued until the end of the show. One feeble little girl, so exhausted by the performances “fell off her chair in a dead faint and we had to carry her to the front of the boat where the cool breeze revived her.”⁸⁵ It cannot be proven that Bryant’s summary of this performance is accurate, but the curtain speech was a part of later performances. This speech served the purpose of instructing the audience how to react, but also placed the audience in a position of superiority as compared to the folksy figure before them.

Bryant and company traveled to Chicago to put on their performance of *Ten Nights* at the Studebaker Theatre, where audiences “praised us to the skies, had been the utmost in hospitality and appreciation, but they took us as clowns.”⁸⁶ Bryant tells in his memoir that he was still quite confused about the Chicago audiences, pointedly not comprehending that old fashioned melodrama was seen

⁸⁴ Ibid., 257.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 261.

parodically by “citified” audiences. Having been seen by an agent for New York producer John Golden, Bryant’s play made it to Broadway, where, while they received generally good reviews, the play closed less than a month after its opening on January 20, 1932. Bryant declared that this choice was his own—leaving the bustle of the city to go back to his showboat on the Mississippi. Bryant’s recollection of his treatment at the hands of New York audiences is not without peevishness. He quotes John Mason Brown and notes his own reaction, “It must be hard to sit through Billy Bryant’s *Ten Nights in a Barroom*,’ he wrote obviously not having sat through it himself. ‘But his curtain speech is not to be missed.’”⁸⁷

In the program for the play, Bryant invites the audience backstage for “a couple or three steins of that famous and delicious Trommers Malt Brew, with our compliments.”⁸⁸ Inclusion of free beer, coffee, and sandwiches during the intermission was an addition to the New York performances, and oddly, it is never mentioned in Bryant’s memoir. As melodrama exists itself as a mixture of genres, dramatic elements alternating with comic elements, if the play as a whole is to be successfully parodied, the audience must be invited to view the serious aspects of the melodrama as parody. The audience’s drinking of beer at the tables of Simon Slade’s *Sickle and Sheaf* mocks the more serious elements of the play, while the humorous curtain speech before has to be taken not as parody. Bryant’s purposeful naïveté and his instinct that the audience cannot know that they are

⁸⁶ Ibid., 273.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 278.

⁸⁸ Program, *Ten Nights in a Barroom*, John Golden Theatre, 1932.

being let in on the joke set the pattern for other performances in the decades to come.

Bryant's production was part of an explosion of performances of temperance melodrama following the repeal of Prohibition. Of *The Drunkard* alone, it is estimated that "between 1933 and 1953, there were 400 separate productions of the play across the country."⁸⁹ The New York Library for the Performing Arts has programs for twenty separate performances of *The Drunkard* between 1933-1940. And in the summer of 1934, there were three performances of *The Drunkard* in Chicago alone.⁹⁰

A good indication of the interest in temperance drama in the years that immediately followed the end of Prohibition is the numerous productions of *The Drunkard* by The Federal Theatre Project.⁹¹ According to *The Federal Theatre Project: A Catalog-Calendar of Productions*, there were seven separate Federal Theatre productions of *The Drunkard* between February of 1936 and February of 1939.⁹² Judging from the extant photographic evidence, it seems they were all separate productions—each with a different set and actors.⁹³ While perhaps not as critically significant as *It Can't Happen Here* or *Triple-A Plowed Under*, these performances of *The Drunkard* show how temperance melodramas, even after

⁸⁹ "'The Drunkard'—You Can Boo, Cheer, Hiss," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 30, 1977.

⁹⁰ Galt Bell, whose production of *The Drunkard* will be discussed later in this chapter, brought his company from Los Angeles to Chicago for stagings at the Opera Club and the Music Hall.

⁹¹ Hallie Flanagan, *Arena* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1940), 419.

⁹² The Staff of the Fenwick Library, George Mason University, *The Federal Theatre Project: A Catalog-Calendar of Productions*, (New York: Greenwood, 1986), 49-50. Oddly, *Ten Nights in a Barroom* was not revived frequently by the FTP, performed only in Jacksonville, FL. There it did have an extended run however, from May 4, 1936 to May 12, 1936 and from June 29-30, 1936 (156).

⁹³ The opening dates and venues of the FTP *Drunkard* productions are as follows: Feb 29, 1936, Asheville NC; May 12, 1936, Raleigh, NC; June 10, 1936, Tampa FL; January 19, 1937, Atlanta GA; July 20, 1938, Hartford CT; September 5, 1938, Holyoke MA, and February 12, 1939, New Orleans, LA.

Prohibition, were seen as obligatory staples of the American theatrical canon. Fortunately, directorial reports for two of the productions, the first in 1936 at the Mt. Park Casino in Holyoke, Massachusetts, and the other in 1939 at the St. Charles Theatre in New Orleans offer contrasting takes on the play and reveal the different issues involved in producing temperance melodrama in a post-Prohibition America.

Directed by William Dashiell, the Federal Theatre production of *The Drunkard* at the Mt. Park Casino seems to have been an exercise in historical recreation. The program explains that “The Management has been at great PAINS to produce this drama PRECISELY as originally performed with SENSATIONAL SUCCESS in Barnum’s American Museum.”⁹⁴ The Directorial Report of the play confirms this desire as Dashiell writes how the play is typically performed by others: “The Play in its entirety, runs two hours and fifteen minutes, but it is usually cut to an almost tabloid version and an Oleo [*sic*] inserted, with an M.C. and a “Community Sing” added. We gave the play complete and as legitimately as possible.”⁹⁵ This “complete” and “legitimate” performance seems to leave out any possibility for parodic interpretation. In fact, the director decries how “present day sophisticates may exclaim on how little people knew in those days and how smart we are today.”⁹⁶ From his writings, it seems clear that Dashiell’s intent is largely restorative—the production of historical accuracy—rather than interpretive.

⁹⁴ Program, *The Drunkard*, The Mt. Park Casino, September 5, 1938. Federal Theatre Project Collection, Library of Congress.

⁹⁵ Willard Dashiell, “Director’s Report for *The Drunkard*” Federal Theatre Project Collection, Library of Congress.

However, newspaper reviews of the play indicate that a curtain speech, one perhaps not unlike Billy Bryant's, was given by Dashiell himself. The *Holyoke Transcript* wrote that "Willard Dashiell who staged the play made a brief speech to the audience before the play asking that the production not be taken too seriously."⁹⁷ Violating historical accuracy to please an audience is nothing surprising of course, yet Dashiell's omission of his own nightly speech before an audience in the Director's Report seems less about his humility, and more about the particularities of this type of parodic performance. In a historically accurate production, any direct address to the audience would have pleaded with the audience to take the play more seriously, rather than less. The fact remains that regardless of directorial intent, a melodrama played as "historically accurate" would have been perceived by an audience as parody and a director would likely have known that to be the case. The result was instead an attempt to defuse expected ridicule through a historically incongruous speech.

Of the New Orleans production of some months later, the director Herbert Ashton Jr., wrote that "the director's biggest problem is impressing on the actors that they must at all times give sincere performances and let the audiences do all the kidding."⁹⁸ In his production, Ashton used audience plants, rather than a curtain speech, to guide the emotions of the audience and to model proper melodrama viewing behavior. He wrote that "It helped the audience fall into the spirit of the thing and in no time they were applauding the hero, crying with the

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ "Hisses and Cheers Great 'The Drunkard' at Park Casino," *The Holyoke Transcript*, September 6, 1938.

⁹⁸ Herbert Ashton, Jr., "Director's Report for *The Drunkard*," 1939. Federal Theatre Project Collection, Library of Congress.

heroine and hissing the villain.”⁹⁹ Reviewers highlighted that the fun of the production was to be an active member of the audience and only one reviewer mentioned the plants in the audience, writing that the “organized hoopla” finally “gave way to genuine emotion in the audience.”¹⁰⁰

The New Orleans production also included olios between the acts. One such performance by Maude Hollingsworth is notable as she played Mrs. Wilson, the doomed mother of Mary. After her death in the second act, Hollingsworth reappears in an olio dressed in taffeta and performing “Ta-Ra-De-Boom-De-Ay” as “Yesterday’s Glamour Girl.”¹⁰¹ Hollingsworth’s performance is praised by in the reviews of the time, as columnists enjoyed the virtuosity of a performer who could die of sorrow in one act and dance a “naughty-naughty” in the olio. This choice also highlights a great strength of Ashton’s production that would be repeated elsewhere in the years to come. Ashton sought to “call up” a certain historical period rather than to present it accurately. The singing of classic songs combined with the performance of melodramatic moralities (and a curtain that evidently slammed with gusto into the stage at the end of every act) places an audience in a position of both parodic and nostalgic reception. In sum, the Federal Theatre productions show a conflict over the legacy of melodrama. The desire for the virtue of historical accuracy rubbed uncomfortably against the fact that audiences could no longer recognize performances *as accurate*. Yet, Ashton’s

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ “‘Drunkard’ Rages at St. Charles; Audience Screams With Delight—Victorian Melodrama With All the Ancient Frills and Thrills Put on by Federal Theater Players to Accompaniment of Uproarious Applause,” *New Orleans States*, February 13, 1939.

¹⁰¹ A publicity still of Maude Hollingsworth as “Yesterday’s Glamour Girl” can be found in the Appendix (Figure 6).

production reveals how a knowing conglomeration of nostalgic imagery can summon forth “history” in the minds of an audience while leaving the audience with a parodic outlet.

Following the lead taken by Bryant and others, performances of temperance melodrama also began to include drinking of beer by the audience. A significant example of this tradition was a production of *The Drunkard* performed in 1934 at the American Music Hall in New York. It was advertised as “P.T. Barnum’s Hilarious Revival—Funniest Evening in the Theatre.”¹⁰² For the ticket price of \$1.65, free beer was served. John Anderson wrote that the production is

Mr. Morley’s Hoboken venture glorified and set down on Lexington Avenue ... The tables and beer-hall atmosphere give “The Drunkard” an edge which all other burlesque revivals of old American plays have lacked. It is one thing to sit in a formal theatre watching the funny antiques of our mothball drama, and quite another to take them in the genial informality of the “American Musical Hall” as the church has been rechristened.¹⁰³

John Mason Brown, called it a “spoof revival”—one of a large number that had been going on at that time, including “Mr. Throckmorton’s ‘East Lynne,’ Billy Bryant’s ‘Ten Nights in a Barroom,’ and Mr. Langner’s ‘The Streets of New

¹⁰² “Advertisement for ‘The Drunkard’ at the American Music Hall,” *New York Times*, Mar 18, 1934.

¹⁰³ John Anderson, “‘The Drunkard’: Patrons Weep Into Their Beer With Laughter Over Revival of P.T. Barnum Classic,” *New York Evening Journal*, April 11, 1934. Collection of Newspaper Clippings of Dramatic Criticism, 1933-1934, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

York’.”¹⁰⁴ Robert Garland’s review also highlights the parodic nature of these productions: “at ‘*The Drunkard* you get the vicarious thrill at scoffing at what we used to be rather than at what we are.”¹⁰⁵ For William D. Patterson, “the actors play with restraint and sincerity, except for a few not inappropriate gestures” very much in the Bryant fashion, but even more significantly he recommends the play to his readers who might wish for “an evening dewy with the nostalgia of things not so long past.”¹⁰⁶

But by far the most significant production of a temperance melodrama in the years after Prohibition was Galt Bell’s production of *The Drunkard* at the Theatre Mart in Los Angeles. It exists not only as a uniquely significant parody of melodrama, but it also set the record for the longest uninterrupted run in American theatrical history. Opening in 1933, it ran uninterruptedly, seven days a week, for twenty-six years.¹⁰⁷ It was frequented by many members of the Hollywood community, many of whom, like W. C. Fields, James Gleason, Mary Astor, and Boris Karloff, competed to see who could see the play the most number of times. It became a popular tourist attraction not only as a piece of theatre, but also as an opportunity to stargaze. It has been reported that stars took turns performing impromptu olios for ecstatic audiences. The playbill from the performance contains “A Page from The Drunkard Guest Book” with listings of

¹⁰⁴ John Mason Brown, “‘The Drunkard; or, The Fallen Saved’ Revived at the American Musical Hall by the Fifty-Fifth Street Group,” *New York Evening Post*, March 15, 1934. Collection of Newspaper Clippings of Dramatic Criticism, 1933-1934, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

¹⁰⁵ Robert Garland, “Old P.T. Barnum Play Exerts 90-Year Grip,” *New York World Telegram*, April 30, 1934. Collection of Newspaper Clippings of Dramatic Criticism, 1933-1934, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

¹⁰⁶ William D. Patterson, “‘Drunkard’ Revival Brings Back ‘Meller’ Days,” April 9, 1934. Collection of Newspaper Clippings of Dramatic Criticism, 1933-1934, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

¹⁰⁷ “‘The Drunkard’ to End 26-Year Run on Coast,” *New York Times*, July 10, 1959.

such luminaries as Mary Pickford, Edward G. Robinson, Al Jolson, Jimmy Durante, and Jack Benny.¹⁰⁸ With its celebrity status, the Theatre Mart production attained an “insider” quality, a feature often associated with parody.

The “true reportage” aspect of the temperance drama considered earlier must be seen anew with Bell’s production. The plays were performed as museum pieces, performances that one’s grandfather would have taken one to, yet the plays were received parodically by the spectators. An audience of drinkers experiencing the production could only take the sermonizing of the characters as a joke. Yet, in order for that joke to play *as parody*, the play would have to be performed dead seriously. In the successful performances of temperance melodrama after Prohibition, the parodic position shifts away from the playwright to the audience, and in the best possible parodic tradition, the production allows the audience to find the parody for itself and to experience the play parodically. And the inclusion of audience participation in the performances would also make it seem likely that performances by the audience would have occurred. The presence of Hollywood (and former vaudeville) actors like W.C. Fields (who played the comic drunk, onstage, on film, and in real life) onstage in impromptu *olios* would have also been an empowering force for the audience.¹⁰⁹ The

¹⁰⁸ Program, *The Drunkard*, Theatre Mart, 1950.

¹⁰⁹ Fields himself sent up temperance melodrama in *The Fatal Glass of Beer* (Paramount, 1933) and *The Old Fashioned Way* (Paramount, 1934). Film parodies of temperance melodrama appeared the year that Prohibition came into being (1919) in such forms as the one-reeler from Star Comedy entitled *Ten Nights in a Tea Room*. This was followed the next year with Sunshine Comedy’s *Ten Nights without a Barroom*. While nearly nothing of these films is known other than their copyright at the Library of Congress, their mere presence is the first filmic representation of an outright parody of temperance melodrama. Anecdotes circulated about Fields’s tomfoolery in the audience of the Theatre Mart. During one performance, he reportedly declared to a group of nurses who had tended to him in a sanitarium, “Well ... you gals wouldn’t let me have a drink out there, but by golly—(triumphantly hoisting a stein of beer)—try and stop me now!” Gladwin Hillos Angeles, “How ‘The Drunkard’ Rose Again,” *New York Times*, July 4, 1948.

presence of Fields at such a performance would have been the conflict of the two classic narratives about alcohol: the comic drunk and the tragic drunk. These rival narratives in the same place would have created a unique parodic moment with the audience (in the figure of Fields) confronting the master narrative of temperance. Here, audience reception becomes, like the temperance narrative and the confession of the drunkard in the revival meeting, a public act of performance, yet with a parodic twist.

VI. Nostalgia and Parody

W.J. Rorabaugh suggests in the preface to *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* that “drinking customs and habits were not random but reflective of a society’s fabric, tensions, and inner dynamics, and of the psychological sets of its people.”¹¹⁰ For Rorabaugh, alcohol’s place in society is largely (to pun perhaps unforgivably) fluid, both shifting with and reflecting back systemic changes. The same might be said to be true for the performances of temperance melodrama, as performances and the audience reception of those performances reveal the stresses and pressures of a society in a state of flux and change. In the years in which the forces of temperance held sway, audiences flocked to see the spectacle of the unfortunate drunkard and his blighted family. When Prohibition ended, and the normative thinking toward alcohol became more

¹¹⁰ Rorabaugh, xii.

moderate, audiences began to see temperance melodrama in a largely parodic light.¹¹¹

With the passage of time, and Prohibition an increasingly distant period of history, audience perception of the form shifted toward one outside of direct experience, yet saturated with complex and paradoxical meanings. Theatrical audiences no longer extolled the ideology of the temperance melodrama, even as temperance plays continued to be produced. For modern audiences, the temperance melodrama signifies a simpler age. In the programs of these modern productions of temperance melodrama, the audience is encouraged to follow the time-honored rules of melodrama performance:

The fullest measure of entertainment for *The Drunkard* can be realized only when the audience enters into the spirit of the great melodrama—hissing and booing the villain upon his every appearance—applauding the hero and heroine—whether justified or not, and joining in the singing with gusto.¹¹²

¹¹¹ It should not be concluded that alcohol ceased to be depicted as a destructive force after Prohibition. The antics of W. C. Fields aside, Hollywood depicted the problems of drinking for decades after. In such films as *What Price Hollywood* (1932) *A Star is Born* (1937), *The Lost Weekend* (1945), *Days of Wine and Roses* (1962), and *Clean and Sober* (1988), alcohol is treated not as a demon as in the temperance plays, but as a substance that can cause the disease of alcoholism. Norman K. Denzin explains the subtlety of such a critical move as these films

introduce models or pathways to recovery from alcoholism into the social order, including the love of a good woman (or man), A.A., will power, or a spiritual experience ... At the same time many of them dress up reality in a way that gives it a sense of naturalness and history that does not correspond to the lived experiences of everyday individuals who are alcoholics. In doing so they may make recovery appear to be easier than it is in actuality, or they may exaggerate, for dramatic purposes, the negative effects of alcoholism on a family situation (xiv).

See Norman K. Denzin, *Hollywood Shot By Shot: Alcoholism in American Cinema*, (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1991).

¹¹² Program. *The Drunkard*, Thirteenth Street Theatre, 1970.

So then, why does an audience go to see a play to which they have to be told how to react? My contention is simple: modern-day audiences of temperance melodrama seek to bask in a glow of a day long past, delighting in antediluvian moral strictures that no longer have any real authority.¹¹³ In acts of widespread cultural nostalgia, modern day temperance plays revisit and re-enact an imagined national past of innocence and incorruptibility.

Significantly, this transition did not occur all at once. After the end of Prohibition and the initial reaction to its elimination, the temperance melodrama passed from being a humorous, outdated relic to being altogether ignored. Productions of temperance melodrama dwindled substantially during the 1950s and the next resurgence of temperance melodrama occurred at the end of the 1960s. The rise of the counter-culture brought back the importance of determining exactly what "mainstream" American culture might be. Again, the temperance melodrama tapped into a public desire for definition. Temperance's moralism appeared humorous, but quaint. Moral reform melodramas like *The Drunkard* and *Ten Nights in a Barroom* conjured up a vision of an idealized past for a new audience. While the didacticism remains largely untenable, modern audiences

¹¹³ An interesting analogy to the kind of interest audiences can have in parodies of temperance melodrama would be with the fun midnight-movie audiences have with propaganda films like *Reefer Madness* (1938). In his excellent book on exploitation films, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*, Eric Schaefer writes that "*Reefer Madness* proved popular with 'potheads' and their straight counterparts alike due to its outlandish depictions of the effects of marijuana on its users. The film's original antidope message was drowned out by the laughter of audiences who grooved on overripe performances, the trite dialogue, and the strained sermons" (2). But while the laughter of the two audiences may sound similar, I would argue that attendance at a production of the temperance melodrama symbolizes something different than seeing a film like *Reefer Madness*. The lives of the adolescents in *Reefer Madness* and other pot films are always destroyed by their experimentations, while the drunkard of the temperance melodrama survives his experience to return to the bosom of his family. The temperance melodrama is, in the end, an optimistic form. Even in parody, this sunny ending is never subverted, and audiences receive a consistent moral message even as the form itself

attend these plays to be entertained by the depiction of an idealized past, creating a situation in which the plays could be enjoyed again through a nostalgic responsivity.

A musical version of *Ten Nights in a Barroom*, entitled *Ten Nights in a Barroom: A Musical Comedy Version of the Famous Temperance Drama by William W. Pratt* and adapted by Fred Carmichael was first performed at the Dorset Playhouse, in Dorset Vermont by the Caravan stable Theatre Summer Stock Company on August 3, 1968. The villain, Harvey Green, is described as such:

He is a villain and a worse one never drank at a bar. He wears a black silk top hat, black tailcoat, riding pants and boots. His tie is brightly colored and a diamond stick-pin holds it in place. His make-up is quite light and accentuates his twirling, black moustache which is 'painted' in on his face.¹¹⁴

The description of the character reveals that, even with the addition of music, not a great deal has changed. However, the play has been adapted to become more representative of the "period" in which temperance takes place. Carmichael begins his play with a "Women's Chorus" "carrying placards saying 'Down With the Tavern,' 'Close the Barroom,' etc."¹¹⁵ An added character named "Goldie Hills" is described in the notes as "the personification of a dancehall girl and

is undermined. See Eric Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True! A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999).

¹¹⁴ Fred Carmichael, *Ten Nights in a Barroom: A Musical Comedy Version of the Famous Temperance Drama by William W. Pratt* (New York: Samuel French, 1969), 12.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

singer.”¹¹⁶ The various songs included in the production are of the “period” including: “Ta-Ra-Ra-Boom-Der-E” and “In the Baggage Coach Ahead.”¹¹⁷ Such is the very nature of nostalgia, a process manifestly concerned with “the pure (even purged) images we construct of a privileged, genealogically useful past, a past in which we exclude unwanted elements, vestiges, narratives.”¹¹⁸ The “unwanted elements, vestiges, narratives” are pared away in favor of a more generalized and idealized conception of a period long ago.

One of the most significant recent productions of a parody of a temperance melodrama is a musical version of *The Drunkard*, premiering at New York’s Thirteenth Street Theatre in 1970. Drawing on the Galt Bell’s version in Hollywood, it was adapted and directed by Bro Herrod with music by Barry Manilow.¹¹⁹ The play had run for six years off-off-Broadway and then, after acquiring an Equity cast to bring it off-Broadway, ran for two years and has become a staple of amateur and community theatre since. Reviews of the play were generally positive. Clive Barnes’s review was the only uniformly negative one: “The show doesn’t truly know what it is doing. It has sing-along songs out of period, and the entire show, as an attitude, seismographically varies between honest and camp.”¹²⁰ Barnes’s criticisms do point toward intriguing problems and complexities with the show as it seems that the production of the play does not

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 19.

¹¹⁷ The latter tune also makes an appearance in O’Neill’s *A Moon for the Misbegotten*.

¹¹⁸ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 15.

¹¹⁹ It should be noted that Barry Manilow’s ascent to pop stardom had not yet begun; he wrote the score when he was only nineteen years old.

¹²⁰ Clive Barnes, “*The Drunkard*: Musical Melodrama Invites Hissing,” *New York Times*, April 14, 1970.

seek to create historical accuracy, but rather to evoke a certain time in history.¹²¹

Carry Nation makes an appearance in the play, as her standing as the personification of the temperance movement made her inclusion important. Blending different historical elements together seems correct considering how Martin Washburn, in his review for *The Village Voice*, viewed the play:

The old Temperance clinker has become a sort of crossroads of the entertainment industry. Dressed in the costumes of that era, the actors do everything: pour your beer, lead you in song, provide targets for your witticism, generally create an atmosphere, and by no means least, act. It is musical, bar, and theatre.¹²²

The play seems to collapse history lesson and performance together, creating a piece that evokes with a purposeful lack of rootedness, and of historicity.

Herrod and Manilow's adaptation of *The Drunkard* has been produced frequently in years since by community and dinner theatres across the country with great success. It played the Alhambra Dinner Theatre of Jacksonville in 1970 with Pia Zadora as the long-suffering Mary. In 1973, at Stage/West in Springfield, Massachusetts, Armand Assante performed the role of Edward's foster brother, William. In the years since, the Herrod/Manilow *Drunkard* has been performed countless times by colleges and amateur groups. In the 2002-2003 season for example, it was produced by the St. Louis College of Pharmacy Theatre, the

¹²¹ Indeed, the program for the production, a replica of an old-fashioned newspaper, shows a great deal of dramaturgical research. Among various tidbits of information about the play, its history and the era from which it sprang, the program includes a quote from W. H. Smith's grandson H. Allen Smith on the subject of his grandfather's play: "It is tantalizingly horrible and it drove me to drink and made me move to Texas...where I'd have more room to stagger."

¹²² Martin Washburn, "*The Drunkard*," *The Village Voice*, April 23, 1970.

Clarion University of Pennsylvania 2002 Summer Musical Theatre Festival, Canyon Moon Theatre in West Sedona, Arizona and the Corvallis Community Theatre of Albany, New York. The frequency of the productions of the play on college campuses and in amateur groups points toward the circumstances in which the play can be successfully performed. In these productions, the audience comes with a connection to the play already as it is likely that many in the audience are familiar with the performers; the actors and the audience already constitute a pre-existing community outside the theatre. As a result of this relationship, a certain amount of inexperience on the part of the performer can be tolerated. Also, any tension caused by a lack of knowledge about the theatrical conventions of the genre can be relieved by what the audience does know—the actor. But these performances for intimate communities also signify a ritualistic playing-out of a nostalgic national past, with melodrama as the medium.

While his production frequently pokes fun at itself, John Ulmer, the director of the Stage/West production of *The Drunkard* in 1973, added a nostalgic thought about melodrama:

But, as you laugh at the simplicities of this play tonight, remember that hundreds of thousands of people, over the period of 50 years or more, were moved by it and concerned for the welfare of its characters. I can not but be just a little wistful for a time when people believed that they knew what was bad, who was wrong and that they could set it all right, given a bit of time and a true heart.¹²³

¹²³ Program, *The Drunkard*, Stage/West, 1973.

Of course, what is striking here is the fact that no one in the past would have been moved by this particular production, a modern adaptation of an old play. Ulmer's wistful thoughts concerning the melodramatic absolutes of right and wrong seem highly indicative of what Svetlana Boym calls "restorative nostalgia," an attempt to "[reconstruct] emblems and rituals of home and homeland in an attempt to conquer and spatialize time."¹²⁴ And while Boym asserts that this type of nostalgia must take itself, in a highly evocative choice of words, "dead seriously," the form that this nostalgia takes need not be. To put it another way, parody's crystallization of a subject renders it available to be grasped as a whole; it can make an ideology, a genre, a historical period, a site to be visited. Thus, the nostalgic rendering of the past can be an impulse for the creation of parody.

Six years after Manilow's production, Francis Cullinan adapted *The Drunkard* again, this time playing it straight, with the production interspersed with song and dance routines in-between the acts. The 1976 production at Missouri Repertory Theatre was an attempt to "return to the original source and intention of W. H. Smith."¹²⁵ But, separated by time, and huge shifts in social mores, the difference between returning to and sending up that "original source and intention" seems impossible to determine.

Cullinan's words are evocative: a desire for the "return to the original." But in knowing the temperance melodrama for the first time, the audience receives an oddly contradictory message. Temperance morality is re-envisioned as both naïve and inborn to America. These parodic performances may cause us to

¹²⁴ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 49.

¹²⁵ Program, *The Drunkard: or The Fallen Saved*, Missouri Repertory Theatre, 1976.

laugh gently at the strictness of our forefathers, but they also harken back to a time in which self-control, discipline, and sobriety were the highest virtues. It is, in some sense, like a purposeful misquotation, a romanticization of a world that never was. These plays may be a “repetition with a critical difference,” but the impulse to perform them and to see them is part of what Susan Stewart termed the desire for an “authentic experience.”¹²⁶ For Stewart, the “authentic experience” becomes both elusive and allusive as it is placed beyond the horizon of present lived experience, the beyond in which the antique, the pastoral, the exotic, and other fictive domains are articulated.”¹²⁷ For the contemporary viewer: “The present is either too impersonal, too looming, or too alienating compared to the intimate and directed experience of contact which the souvenir has as its referent.”¹²⁸

For present day audiences, the temperance melodrama serves as a souvenir of a past that was neither physically experienced by the audience nor ever truly existed historically. The performances of temperance melodrama are seen through a lens that focuses simultaneously on the burlesques of the 1920s and 1930s and the “actual” performances of the nostalgically-recalled prelapsarian age of simplicity and steady moral thinking. This performance of nostalgia exists as a dominant strain of modern melodrama performance. This fact again underscores melodrama’s inherent flexibility as a genre always evolving with its audience. In the chapter that follows, this interbreeding of nostalgia and parody in the

¹²⁶ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 133.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 139.

performances of melodrama will be shown to be a significant American tradition at present, staging the simple grandeur of the American myth to be both burlesqued and believed.

Chapter 4:

Nostalgic Acts: "Old-fashioned Melodrama" at the Millennium

I: Introduction: "Old-fashioned Melodrama"

In the two preceding chapters, I considered the theatrical adaptations of two mainstays of the American theatre of the nineteenth century: the anti-slavery melodrama, represented by the seminal Aiken version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and the temperance melodrama, typified by *The Drunkard* and *Ten Nights in a Barroom*. These melodramas have a long, storied history on the stage, and the number of their parodies testifies to their centrality of these plays to American theatre. The popularity of melodramas among the theatre-going public and importance to the national discourse meant that their parodies could command a wide potential audience both familiar and engaged with the source material. Melodrama's tendency toward Manichean extremes, stock characters and situations, and visual theatrics left it readily open to lampooning. And the efficacy of the plays' moral didacticism also compelled them to be seen as cultural objects that required engagement. The successes and excesses of plays such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the temperance dramas created a long history of theatrical riposte.

This persistent parodying of plays that helped negotiate the issues a nascent America faced reveals a long-standing struggle over the nature, adequacy,

and truthfulness of the perspectives they represented. While Jeffrey Mason concludes that the melodramas of the nineteenth century were themselves the sites of deliberation of the “complex interchange between received narrative, new contributions to discourse, and actual experience,”¹ the parodies of those plays serve as testimonies to alternative ideologies. The continued dramaturgical engagement with the stories that defined an emergent American culture and morality shows how playwrights and audiences sought to accept or deny the reality and legitimacy of that culture. From minstrel one-acts to dense poetic ballets to musical extravaganzas, playwrights throughout the decades have contributed retorts to important American narratives. In its various forms, melodrama served, and continues to serve as, a space for debate about the fundamental issues upon which the nation is grounded.

In addition, parodic adaptation also made the nineteenth-century narrative palatable to later audiences, reengaging new spectators with the political and cultural concerns of the original text. One can certainly argue that the dated dramaturgy and the chauvinistic and unsophisticated racial politics of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* make it almost unperformable as serious drama today. Performances of the play have become few and far between. Yet the fact remains that America has grown up in the shadow of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the theatrical ruminations upon the question of race that it has engendered. Parodic interpretations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* like Robert Alexander's *I A'int Yo Uncle*, Bill T. Jones's *Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and The Drama Dept.'s *The Drama Dept.'s Uncle*

¹ Jeffrey D. Mason, *Melodrama and the Myth of America* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 22.

Tom's Cabin demonstrate how that narrative remains a place to revisit one of the primal scenes in American race relations. They show the artistic wisdom of returning to a seemingly obsolete form in order to articulate thorny issues that are difficult to address openly; in their hands, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* regains something of its original power.

The repeated parodic performances of *Ten Nights in a Barroom* and *The Drunkard* tell a different story, however. The performances of these plays show not an engagement with history, but attempts to contain and rewrite it. Clive Barnes's criticisms of performances of the Herrod/Manilow *The Drunkard* analyzed in Chapter 3 stem from his distaste for the ahistorical liberties taken with the production. In the type of parody of melodrama presented by Herrod and Manilow, history collapses into the undifferentiated mass of "our collective past." The point of these productions is to wrap the audience in the warm glow of the "olden times" by positing a concentrated, theme-park vision as a return to a mythical age. Many of the parodies of temperance melodrama after Prohibition have this element: the present positioned as ever more modern, more evolved than the past. As performed history, the productions allowed a spectator an atmosphere of intertextual bouncing in which the very presence of the spectator locates the past as both accessible and fixed in place.

In this light, the fact that the production of *The Drunkard* at Los Angeles's Theatre Mart was the longest-running play in American history is no accident. The parodied melodrama of the production operates both as mockery of the prudery of a dry past and a purposefully uncontextualized, nostalgic vision of it.

The morality in the play was offered up for ridicule, but the centrality of its oft-coupled principles—"personal industry and righteousness"—is never compromised.² Year after year, the audiences laughed at moralism and then came back to receive its teachings again. Audiences laughing and drinking beer while watching a temperance melodrama necessarily reify the moral center of the narrative by their presence even as they neutralize it with their actions. Rather than just poke fun at their forebears, the thousands of Theatre Mart audiences also came for a nostalgic sense of community in a theatrical space, seeking an idealized, prelapsarian community with those who enjoyed and engaged emotionally with the plays generations ago.

The type of melodramatic performance symbolized by the Theatre Mart productions of *The Drunkard* would later become a form of dependable "family entertainment"; unlike Jones's aestheticism or Alexander's radicalism, melodrama as sacralized at the Theatre Mart was one suitable for the traditional American nuclear family and one in which the apple cart of proper middle-class morality is never upset. This Theatre Mart version of the melodramatic ethos is one that is replicated hundreds of times throughout the country every year. Its own particular venue, the "melodrama theatre," can be found scattered throughout the Great Plains and the West. The "melodrama theatre" is one of the most widespread theatrical formats in America, though it has gone almost entirely unnoticed by theatre scholars. It lives in small community theatres in Iowa, tourist traps in Colorado, and up and down the coast of California. And its pervasiveness is only matched by its position well beneath the culture radar.

² Ibid., 86.

The performances of melodrama in the “melodrama theatres” constantly reaffirm a desire not only to invoke the spirit of the past, but to situate audience members within a period that predates even their grandfathers. Long running “melodrama theatres” like The Great American Melodrama in Pismo Beach, California, The Gaslight Theater of Tucson, Arizona, The Cripple Creek Players in Cripple Creek, Colorado and The Golden Chain Theatre in Oakhurst, California persistently seek to capture the imagined melodrama performance of a bygone era. Velvet curtains, wooden planking, and footlights are used to give the theatre an old-fashioned aura, but modern amenities like air conditioning and imported beer undercut this aesthetic.³ These theatres allow audiences a seat within a pre-mediatized age while giving them, *à la* the Theatre Mart productions of *The Drunkard*, the comfort and superiority of distance. Their signature is not simply the presentation of a performance, but the transmission of the imagined experience of a former performance.

The “melodrama theatre” repertory includes either genuine melodramas (temperance melodramas and adaptations of *The Girl of the Golden West* and *After Dark* are frequent favorites) or what can be termed “old-fashioned melodramas,” plays in the style of nineteenth-century melodramas. I would define the “old-fashioned melodrama” as *the staged version of the idea of “melodrama” as conceptualized in the popular imagination*. It is a honed-down, always-already parodic vision of heroes and villains; the plots of the plays are always highly formulaic, always follow the same familiar narrative arc in which good triumphs

³ A good example of such a performance environment is the Gaslight Theatre of Tucson, Arizona. A photograph of the interior can be found in the Appendix (Figure 7).

over evil.⁴ A good example of “old-fashioned melodrama” would be *The Girl of the Frozen North; or, Condemned to a Dead Man’s Glacier* by Eddie Cope and Buster Cearley, performed in September and October of 2004 by The Golden Chain Theatre of Oakhurst, California. An advertisement for the play is listed below, obtained from the publisher’s website:

Here's a melodrama with a blizzard of laughs, suspense and plot twists! Dainty Nettie and her mother get lost in a snowstorm while searching for a missing family member in the icy Yukon. They locate a seedy hotel, owned by the villainous Mr. Cesspool, where they meet a stranded Shakespearean actress, her klutzy maid who yearns for a life in show business, an absent-minded professor/explorer from the Smithsonian Institution and a timid fur trader who lives with an odd Eskimo tribe. When things look darkest, in dashes a dynamic, but naïve, red-coated Canadian Mountie to save the day. It's an all-fun show that will please directors, actors and audiences of all ages.⁵

There is a wide gap between this description and its supposed pre-text, the high-brow “villainless melodrama” of Belasco that evolved in the late nineteenth

⁴ The quotation-marked term “old-fashioned melodrama” will be used for the remainder of this chapter to denote the modern, already-parodic version of the melodramatic genre. These plays are usually published cheaply and singly. A rare compendium of “old-fashioned melodramas” is entitled *Gay Nineties Melodramas: A Collection of Old-Fashioned Melodramas of the Gay Nineties Period*, and includes twenty-three plays by Leland Price, James Floyd Stone and notably Arthur Kaiser, the author of *The Filming of Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1922) mentioned in Chapter 2. Interestingly, half of the plays in the volume are described as either “burlesque” or “parody,” yet they, either in subject matter, dramaturgy, or tone, differ little from plays described as merely “old-fashioned.” See Lawrence M. Brings, ed., *Gay Nineties Melodramas: A Collection of Old-Fashioned Melodramas of the Gay Nineties Period* (Minneapolis, MN: T.S. Dennison, 1963).

⁵ “Advertisement for *The Girl of the Frozen North; or, Condemned to a Dead Man’s Glacier*,” Pioneer Drama Service, http://www.pioneerdrama.com/catalog/girlfrozen_md.html (accessed February 22, 2005).

century.⁶ Dramaturgically, the “old-fashioned melodrama” is close in shape to the 10-20-30 melodramas, but if the 10-20-30 melodramas were vehicles for spectacle, the present day “old-fashioned melodrama” is both medium and message. The clearly distinguished and exaggerated characters of the hero-heroine-villain triangle and the simplified plot attempt to summon up a nostalgic vision of the “Gay Nineties,” one filtered through one hundred years of media. Certainly, the Canadian Mountie figure reads like the title character from the cartoon “Dudley Do-Right.” Just as nostalgia can collapse time into itself, it can also collapse one form of media into another.

Hundreds of such plays have been written and continue to be produced, and in this way the genre of melodrama remains very much alive. Even in this cut-down, simplified, and self-referential form, the comfortable melodramatic worldview of neatly tied-up endings and resolved complexities remains inviolate. In plays like the *Girl of the Frozen North* and many hundreds of others written by amateur playwrights, the “old-fashioned melodrama” is a vehicle for performed nostalgia. And the “melodrama theatres” that perform them defend a nostalgic ideal by preserving a form through performance.⁷ In the case of melodrama, the form of its historical recreation also necessarily reifies the existence of inviolable moral absolutes.

The performance of “old-fashioned melodrama” always explicitly recalls melodrama’s early nineteenth-century origins as a popular form. Its authors seem purposefully unconcerned with aesthetic pretensions in favor of sheer

⁶ Daniel C. Gerould, “Introduction,” in *American Melodrama*, (New York: PAJ, 1983), 26.

⁷ Sylviane Agacinski, *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia* (New York: Columbia UP, 2003), 120.

entertainment imbued with a nostalgic vision of the “good ol’ days.” In the hands of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, however, this vision of “old-fashioned melodrama” is also used as a medium for articulating the need for radical political action. The melodrama theatres and the San Francisco Mime Troupe both share the same mode, but turn it to pointedly different uses. Like the melodrama theatres, the San Francisco Mime Troupe uses the vagaries of the abstract concept of “old-fashioned melodrama” to create and perpetuate conceptions of community. And unlike Bill T. Jones, the Mime Troupe uses the form’s populist heritage as a way of connecting with viewers.⁸ Beginning with Joan Holden’s *The Independent Female, or A Man Has His Pride!* (1970), the Troupe has used “old-fashioned melodrama” to such an extent that critics today have come to see such performances as timeworn attempts to recall the activist theatre of the Sixties. It is the same kind of melodrama, but it invokes a very different kind of nostalgia. For the Mime Troupe, the hissing and booing so often the part of the standard “old-fashioned melodrama” performance has had no lack of objects of progressive derision; for the Troupe, Richard Nixon, Phyllis Schlafly, and Dick Cheney have made uncommonly dastardly villains.

⁸ It is very important to note that the use of “old-fashioned melodrama” in combination with other forms is also a prevalent element in the camp aesthetic in modern American theatre perhaps best typified by the work of Charles Ludlum and Charles Busch. Ludlum’s *Bluebeard* and *The Mystery of Irma Vep* certainly utilize melodrama parodically, and Busch’s work frequently utilizes some aspect of the melodramatic whether in the form of the historical melodrama, (*Queen Amarantha*, 1997), the “adventure film of foreign intrigue” (*Shanghai Moon*, 1999), or the “grande dame guignol” films of Betty Davis and Joan Crawford, (*Die, Mommy, Die!*, 1999). While the work of Ludlum and Busch is certainly significant to the study of the intersections between parody and melodrama, I would agree with James Leverett’s contention that Ludlum (and Busch as well) is more concerned with melodrama’s “great theatricality” and “exuberance,” rather than its position as “popular” or “populist.” See James Leverett, “Old Forms Enter the New American Theater: Shepard, Foreman, Kirby, and Ludlum,” in *Melodrama*, ed. Daniel Gerould (New York: New York Literary Forum, 1980).

Thus, in its new forms, modern use of “old-fashioned melodrama” frequently oscillates between two poles: nostalgia (in which the play is performed with the specific purpose of taking the audience back to an imagined past) or politics (in which the playwright/director uses the melodramatic structure as a basis from which to make political points). If melodrama served in the past as a form in which cultural stories and myths were negotiated, it may be said that as a genre and as a tactic it still remains a space of considerable tension. The interplay between melodrama and parody in the form of the “old-fashioned melodrama” can create a potent articulation of a particular world-view. In the case of the melodrama theatres, “old-fashioned melodrama” is a performance of a nostalgically-recalled past of moral absolutes. For the Mime Troupe, “old-fashioned melodrama” serves as an instantly-recognizable vessel for political speech. In both cases, “old-fashioned melodrama” serves a propagandistic purpose.

As seen in the previous chapters, how a play is parodied “situates” the play in a cultural context.⁹ The differing uses of “old-fashioned melodrama” today become significant when we consider that frequently the very performance of melodrama is part of a greater social discourse. Plays like *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, *Ten Nights in a Barroom*, and *The Drunkard* explicitly endorsed causes in performance, and, as we have seen, parodies of melodrama treated these causes according to the playwright’s position in the discourse, manifested in the “parodic

⁹ Elin Diamond, “Stoppard’s *Dogg’s Hamlet*, Cahoot’s *Macbeth*: The Uses of Shakespeare.” *Modern Drama* 29 (1986), 594. Diamond’s analysis of Stoppard’s parodic treatment of Shakespeare also notes the duality of parody as each play serves as a different mode of parody: “in *Dogg’s Hamlet*, Shakespeare’s text serves the oppressor; in *Cahoot’s Mabeth*, Shakespeare’s text subverts the oppressor—but not without help” (599).

impulse.” In this final chapter, I would like to posit that the contemporary vision of melodrama as always already parodic and camped-up, as well as its stage version in the form of the “old-fashioned melodrama,” needs to be noted with interest as cultural expressions of community. Because the popular perception of melodrama is inherently parodic, these productions are not actually parodies of melodrama as much as the latest incarnation of a form that is always in the midst of transformation. The “old-fashioned melodrama” embraces parody and is used, like the moral reform melodramas of old, in different communities in different ways.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I wrote that melodrama is a rare genre that exists in the popular vernacular as a parody of itself, the sum of its various extremes. But just as the term “melodrama” is synonymous today with mustache-twirling villains, always-incorruptible heroes and ever-virtuous heroines, its particular distillation in the “old-fashioned melodrama” is highly useful for the propagation of ideology. If, as Northrop Frye noted in *Anatomy of Criticism*, “[i]n the melodrama of the brutal thriller we come as close as it is normally possible for art to come to the pure self-righteousness of the lynching mob,”¹⁰ the parodic re-workings of the “old-fashioned melodrama” of popular classification also serves as perfect venue for the propagation of ideology.

¹⁰ Northrop Frye, “Comic Fictional Modes,” *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 47.

II: Looking Backward: “Old-fashioned Melodrama” as Nostalgic Ritual

In the first chapter of *Over the Footlights* (1923), Canadian humorist and political economist Stephen Leacock describes the quintessential melodrama and its presentation on the stage of his youth:

Everybody who has reached or passed middle age looks back with affection to that splendid old melodrama *Cast Up by the Sea*. Perhaps it wasn't called exactly that. It may have been named *Called Back from the Dead*, or *Broken Up by the Wing*, or *Buried Alive in the Snow*, or anything of that sort. In fact I believe it was played under about forty different names in fifty different forms. But it was always the same good old melodrama of the New England coast ...¹¹

What follows Leacock's rumination is a chapter-long exegesis of the plot of the play along with the recreation of its fictive performance and the audience's reactions to it. For Leacock, this ideal melodramatic performance of memory can be favorably compared with the film and theatrical productions of the present; it is a production so thrilling that as a spectator he was too excited to eat the popcorn and peanuts purchased in the lobby.

Leacock's whimsicality is a typical response to the passage of time and the idealization of certain childhood events. The fact that melodrama of his youth came in “forty different names in fifty different forms” is immaterial as it is

¹¹ Stephen Leacock, *Over the Footlights*, (New York: Dodd and Mead, 1923), 3. Arthur L. Kaiser travestied this type of melodrama in his one-act *Tragedy of the Sea*. See *Gay Nineties Melodramas: A Collection of Old-Fashioned Melodramas of the Gay Nineties Period*, ed. Lawrence M. Brings (Minneapolis, MN: T.S. Denison, 1963), 303-310.

“always the same.” This same resolute sameness, this desire for immobility afforded by nostalgia, is the hallmark of the modern “melodrama theatre.” If Leacock views melodrama as a form from a bygone age and looks back with a parodic glance at its simplicity, melodrama theatres throughout America actually present these same performances of imagined memory in the form of “old-fashioned melodrama.” No matter how inaccurate historically, the perception of melodrama as an arrested form of unswerving regularity and consistency has caused the genre to be emblematic of those thrilling, yet comforting, days of yesteryear.

Leacock sees his own nostalgia for the melodrama of his youth as a consequence of aging. It is time that generates the possibility for nostalgia—one cannot have nostalgia for something that occurs in the present. Like parody, nostalgia is a kind of repetition, a return of the past to the present. Yet nostalgia’s repetition differs from parody’s in that nostalgia is instinctively uncritical; the past is idealized rather than analyzed. In *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia*, Sylviane Agacinski indicates that nostalgia also necessarily moves counter to the teleological perspective of human progress, as “[a]ttachment to the past or returning to old forms thus appears suspect, indeed even regressive, in light of the necessary movement of history.”¹² Certain operations of nostalgia act as the opposite of parody: if parody causes genres to move forward through analytic repetition, nostalgia forces an uncritical return to the past.

The manner in which melodrama theatres use nostalgia to foster audience interest is important and goes to the very heart of the operations of these theatres.

¹² Agacinski, 106.

While all artistic forms try to command the interest of the viewer, melodrama as a genre is specifically designed to keep the viewer engaged with the story through the use of various plot devices and strong appeals to the emotions. One of the most frequent mechanisms for the maintenance of audience interest is the plea for audience sentiment, often seen in a character in an unwarranted plight. The sickly, but cherubic Eva in the performances of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the scenes of drunkards and their spells of DTs amid their impoverished families in the temperance dramas elicited primal responses from audiences.

In the modern "melodrama theatres" nostalgia for a sepia-hued era of the past takes the place of sentiment toward a character in peril. In performance, the figure in unwarranted plight is the performance itself. The past, the moral center of America, is in danger and its cultural manifestation, the "old-fashioned melodrama," can hope to keep that alive for new generations. An advertisement for the Diamond Circle Melodrama of Durango, Colorado describes its productions as putting forth the genuine article: "In today's world of electronic reproductions this is *real* entertainment. Red velvet curtains, checkered tablecloths, brass chandeliers and authentic Victorian costumes create an atmosphere that is truly unique, and a memory you'll treasure for years to come."¹³ Nostalgia sits at the center of the melodrama theatre project, stemming from a specific conception of American identity as manifested in a particular performance tradition.

¹³ "What is melodrama?" Diamond Circle Melodrama, <http://www.diamondcirclemelodrama.com/melodrama-information.htm> (accessed February 24, 2005).

Both melodrama and the nostalgia for the simpler time it has come to represent always seem to be on the verge of eclipse in the national memory. In the dedication to *Melodrama Classics: Six Plays and How to Stage Them*, Dorothy Mackin, the co-founder of The Imperial Players (now The Cripple Creek Players) melodrama theatre, protests against neglect of melodrama in the American theatrical repertory:

It is my sincere hope that this book may be instrumental in helping to move melodrama out of the theatrical trash heap into which it has been tossed, and back into the realm of "legitimate theatre" from whence it came.¹⁴

This is an appeal that has been made by many theatre scholars like Tom Postlewait who view melodrama as a form frequently undervalued.¹⁵ But Mackin also calls for a theatrical evangelism. Her book, along with others like *Between Hisses: A Book of Songs and Olios for Melodrama* by James Burke and Paul T. Nolan, attempts to assist in the production of melodramas by community theatres and high schools. The result is a great deal of proselytizing in the texts: both traditional melodramas and "old-fashioned melodramas" are packaged as easily-produced and readily acceptable to a wide variety of audiences. The acting style is portrayed as a nice departure from Stanislavsky, "introduc[ing] young actors and actresses to a wide variety of audience responses at close range."¹⁶

¹⁴ Mackin, 4.

¹⁵ Thomas Postlewait, "From Melodrama to Realism: The Suspect History of American Drama," in *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Genre*, ed. Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou (New York: St. Martin's, 1999), 39-60.

¹⁶ Dorothy Mackin, *Melodrama Classics: Six Plays and How to Stage Them* (New York: Sterling, 1982), 19.

Melodrama's position as a genre that parodies itself also allows for greater audience interaction, as Mackin explains:

Whatever else it may be, at whatever time or place, melodrama is good entertainment, fun for audiences who take its messages seriously as well as for those who ridicule the virtues and vices it portrays. It still brings into the theatre people who would otherwise never become acquainted with flesh-and-blood live stage performance ...¹⁷

Here, melodrama is described as a versatile piece that may bring in audience members who may never have been exposed to live theatre before. For Mackin, the "fun" audiences experience can come either through ridicule or by taking the play earnestly. This precarious balance is one that has been a part of the melodramatic system, although frequently it had much to do with the performance of the play in question. In Chapter 2, I noted that performances of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in which alligators appeared could have been read as either racist folklore or as a spectacle that located the performance in a particular region. This duality is possible constantly in these performances of the melodrama theatres.

Geographically, most "melodrama theatres" are in the western half of the United States and this particularly geographic setting plays an important part. The performances at the melodrama theatres show audiences a condensed, sanitized vision of the Old West. And the audiences that frequent these theatres seek a vision of West that is inherently melodramatic and romanticized, free from the influences of modernity. David Grimsted notes that the ideal melodramatic hero of the nineteenth century could be characterized as "nature's nobleman," as

¹⁷ Ibid.

“nature, rather than man, was the only proper distributor of patents of nobility”¹⁸ according to the dogma of American democratic progress. Stars like “Buffalo Bill” Cody presented a vision of the West to Easterners, one replete with Indian war dances, prairie fires, and generous amounts of fancy rifle-shooting. The success of Cody and his “Combination” codified the vision of the West as a place where moral absolutes still held fast in the face of danger. As Robert G. Athearn wrote of the effect of the West on stage: “If believed ardently enough, long and strongly enough to shape the way in which we live our days, anything becomes true.”¹⁹ The popularity of melodrama theatres in western communities signifies an attempt to “shape the way in which we live our days.” But as François Lyotard suggested in *The Postmodern Condition*, the postmodern moment always denies “the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable.”²⁰ Hence, the changeable, postmodern America takes the place of Indians as the prevalent threat to a more “natural” American culture. Yet, parody is used to complete the melodramatic image for a new audience.

For Mackin, the “old-fashioned melodrama” also places both actor and audience in a long American theatrical tradition that dates back more than a century. In terms of geographic situation as well as ethos, performances at melodrama theatres inevitably come wrapped up in the mythology of the Old West; in a sense, melodrama theatres are as evangelical about melodrama and its

¹⁸ Grimsted, 209.

¹⁹ Robert G. Athearn, *The Mythic West in Twentieth-Century America* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1986), 274.

²⁰ François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 81.

centrality to the vision of the West as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and temperance melodrama were about their respective subjects. In *Melodrama Classics*, Mackin details how the melodrama performers came west with the gold prospectors to entertain them in even in the most "remote mining camps around the world."²¹ By the late-nineteenth century, financial successes in the eastern cities led to tours on the various circuits through the small towns of the Middle West and West. Like Billy Bryant and his showboat before her, Mackin situates her company in an impressive historical narrative and describes her obligation to continue the legacy. Melodrama theatres still play to "hard-working pioneer people with a continent to subdue" and hence "little time for art."²² In doing so, melodrama theatres like Mackin's attempt to represent American virtue in its barest, least problematized form.

It should not be surprising therefore that the harsher side of the American westward expansion is rarely explored in melodrama theatres. For nostalgia to operate, the displacement and genocide of Native Americans must remain outside the scope of the invocations of the American west. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the most significant American play from the period melodrama theatres seek to invoke, is never performed, symbolizing as it does another uncomfortable element of the American past. In this way, the melodrama theatre performances are modern equivalents of the Wild West exhibitions of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The extravaganzas of Buffalo Bill Cody were condensations of the mythologized West for primarily urban audiences, especially "recent

²¹ Mackin, 13.

²² Grimsted, 140.

immigrants who had never known the Indian or the West but relished stories and legends about frontier life and the frightfulness of Indian captivity.”²³ Richard Slotkin has written that “If the Wild West was a ‘place’ rather than a ‘show,’ then its landscape was a mythic place, in which past and present, fiction and reality could coexist; a space in which history, translated into myth, was reenacted as ritual.”²⁴ While Buffalo Bill and others brought the West to Buffalo and Brooklyn, the melodrama theatres continue to perform a similar simplified version of the West for visitors today. Paul Reddin has described the Wild west shows as “particularly important reflectors of American values because they were self-consciously American institutions devoted to defining their nation’s values and history through the lens of the frontier experience.”²⁵ Just as Wild West shows “glossed over the negative aspects of the westward movement,”²⁶ melodrama theatres remain engaged in the performance of a legacy sterilized of the painful events of the past.

The evolution of stage melodrama toward a romanticized, nostalgic version of itself actually reveals how a genre deemed dead after it had been taken over by cinema, in fact took refuge in its own outdatedness. The dwelling upon obsolescence that characterizes “old-fashioned melodrama” necessarily connects it with the myth of a once-idyllic America. A good example of the use of nostalgia in the melodrama theatre can be found in the operations of the longest

²³ William Brasmer, “The Wild West Exhibition: A Fraudulent Reality,” *American Popular Entertainment: Papers and Proceedings of the Conference on the History of American popular Entertainment*, ed. Myron Matlaw (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1979), 213.

²⁴ Richard Slotkin, “Buffalo Bill’s ‘Wild West’ and the Mythologization of the American Empire,” in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, eds. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 166.

²⁵ Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 220.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 221.

running melodrama theatre in the United States, Mackin's own Cripple Creek Players of Cripple Creek, Colorado.²⁷ Founded by Wayne and Dorothy Mackin, it is continued today by their children. Cripple Creek, a former gold mining town, has parlayed its history to a position as a large-scale historical recreation and Mackin's melodrama theatre has become one of the town's major attractions. Once housed in Cripple Creek's Imperial Hotel and now recently moved to the renovated Butte Opera House, the company has been in existence since 1948. A preserved program for *The Star Crossing; or What's Done Cannot Be Undone* (1957) describes the milieu of the Imperial Hotel:

Presently, the management of the Imperial Hotel makes every effort to retain all of the charm and spirit of the old days. Pieces of period furniture have been added, and mementos and antiques have been gathered for the pleasure and interest of visitors. The Gold Bar Room, a monument to the Gay 90's past, was opened in 1948 and here each summer is presented a season of authentic old-time melodrama which draws record crowds at two daily performances.²⁸

The city as a whole has attempted to create a simulation of the Wild West in the present: actresses pose for photographs on city streets in nineteenth-century attire, mock train holdups are performed on the Cripple Creek & Victor Narrow Gauge

²⁷ Cripple Creek also set the stage for the first film western, *Cripple Creek Barroom*, produced by the Edison Company in 1898 and thus predating Edwin Porter's groundbreaking *The Great Train Robbery* by five years. See: Robert Heide and John Gilman, *Box-Office Buckaroos: The Cowboy Hero from the Wild West Show to the Silver Screen*, (New York: Abbeville, 1989), 33.

²⁸ Program, *The Star Crossing; or, What's Done Cannot Be Undone*, The Gold Bar Room, Imperial Hotel, Cripple Creek, Colorado, 1957.

Railroad, and staged cavalry encampments are available to visit.²⁹ The introduction of limited-stakes gambling in 1991 resurrected the town's flagging fortunes, and today visitors can prospect for riches with nickel slot machines. According to the city's director of marketing, "In Vegas they blew up the history. Here, they preserve it ... We have done a real good job of preserving the look and feel of the 1800s gold-mining town."³⁰

The performances of the Cripple Creek Players contribute to this vision of the West. While the Cripple Creek Players frequently perform melodramas that have non-Western situations but historical significance like *Hazel Kirke* (James Steele MacKaye, 1879),³¹ just as frequently they perform plays like *The Spoilers* (Rex Beach and James MacArthur, 1906), a play about the Alaskan Gold Rush. In the Cripple Creek version, the setting is changed from Nome, Alaska to Cripple Creek itself. Performances of plays like *The Spoilers* recall not only the good old days of nineteenth-century melodrama, but also make direct references to the town and community in which the play is performed. On the whole, the performances of the Cripple Creek Players seem to adhere to a largely serious interpretation of the "old-time melodrama." In a June 2004 production of *The Thief of Frisco*, the actors' performances of the play are described by a reviewer as "broad, but not campy."³² Mackin herself warns in *Melodrama Classics* of the danger of unintentional travesty:

²⁹ Joann Jacobsen-Wells, "Gold Rush; Former Mining Town in Colorado Draws Prospectors Looking to Gamble," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, March 2, 2003.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ First performed under the title *The Iron Will*, this play made MacKaye's career, running for 486 performances at his Madison Square Theatre.

³² Mark Arnest, "Lots more cheering than booing for Cripple Creek Players' 'Thief'," *The Gazette* [Colorado Springs], June 25, 2004.

Melodrama is strongly concerned with basic human emotions: love, laughter, grief, pain, the struggle between good and evil, happiness and misery. Everyone who will be conveying these feelings across the footlights should approach the effort with "heroic seriousness."³³

The "heroism" that Mackin advocates is not the "mock heroism" of burlesque. Like the performances of the Theatre Mart, seriousness is essential in order to allow the audience the choice of reception.

Melodrama theatres frequently incorporate the use of historical relics in performance as a way to have the audience engage nostalgically with the performance. For example, the Virginia City Players of Virginia City, Montana include a vintage cremona in performances.³⁴ The cremona acts as a trace of a long ago past that continues to exist and, most importantly, perform in the present. The tones of the same cremona are heard upon entrance to the website dedicated to advertising the group. The use of the cremona in performance presents a past that appears indefatigable even in the present. The gap between past and present is foreclosed in a way that recalls Jean Baudrillard's description of the "repatriation" of the cloister of Saint-Michel de Cuxa from the Cloisters in New York to its

³³ Mackin, 324.

³⁴ A cremona is a self-contained instrument attempts to replicate a full orchestra for small theatre spaces. The cremona of the Virginia City Players is described in detail on their website:

It is sixteen feet wide and features two side chests containing flute, violin, and bass pipes, a xylophone, bass drum, crash symbol, tom tom, tympani, snare drum, sleigh bells, tambourine, castanets, wind siren, cathedral chimes, triangle and train bell. It was manufactured in Chicago by the Marquette Piano Company, whose wide variety of coin operated player pianos, orchestrians, and photoplayers sold under the Cremona trademark and were regarded as "top of the line." No expense was spared in their creation, from the piano keys of genuine ivory, to the double-veneered hardwood cases, new-scale (imparting the piano with an extraordinarily rich tone most noticeable in the mid-bass range).

See "Cremona," Virginia City Players, <http://www.vcplayers.com/cremona.html> (accessed December 13, 2004).

original home in Paris in “The Precession of Simulacra.” Baudrillard describes the return of the cloister to its “rightful place” not as a laudable act of restitution but as instead “supplementary subterfuge, acting as if nothing had happened and indulging in retrospective hallucination.”³⁵ For Baudrillard, acting as if one can ever go home again is an exercise in pantomime. Similarly, the use of the cremona musically creates the illusion of the erasure of time passed; in the “melodrama theatre” “acting as if nothing had happened” is the mode to ensure the melodrama’s survival.

Given an aesthetic that always makes the past present, melodrama theatres can also serve as centrifuges of community. The melodramatic distillation of that which is good and that which is evil encourages the creation of community, one that Anthony Cohen in *The Symbolic Construction of Community* has explained as a conception of boundary and the manifestation of the similar and the different.³⁶ And Sonja Kuftinec notes in “A Cornerstone for Rethinking Community Theatre,” “[i]n order for a community to distinguish itself, its members must differentiate themselves in some way from other communities through boundaries of land, behavior, or background.”³⁷ The obligatory audience responses in a melodrama performance create that very vision of community through a ritualistic performance of moral binaries, “highlight[ing] social and aesthetic representations that embody, enact and mythologize community.”³⁸

³⁵ Jean Baudrillard, “The Precession of Simulacra,” *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994). Reprinted in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, ed. Mennakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 528.

³⁶ Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (New York: Youngstock, 1985).

³⁷ Sonja Kuftinec, “A Cornerstone for Rethinking Community Theatre,” *Theatre Topics* 6:1 (1996), 92.

³⁸ Sonia Kuftinec, *Staging America: Cornerstone and Community-based Theater* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003), 19.

An example of such a communal moment happens regularly every year during the melodrama performance at Mahoney State Park in Valparaiso, Nebraska. Located in Ashbury, Nebraska, the Denman and Mary Mallory Kountze Memorial Theatre has been the site of melodrama performance since 1993 and is part of a trio of melodrama theatres in and around Lincoln.³⁹ In a newspaper interview, Suzanna O'Hearn, the concessions manager of the theatre, pointed out a reoccurring trope: "In the second act of all the shows, the villain is chased into the audience by the hero—so you can hit him with the popcorn."⁴⁰ The tradition is good-humored and playful, owing in spirit as much to going to the movies as the theatre, an elision of different responses to different forms. It is a part of the response expected from an audience in many melodrama theatres and a reaction that seems to be an attempt to call up an outdated performance form. It is watching a play "in the style of" an earlier audience, underlining the essential tension of these performances as they attempt to evoke a prelapsarian past. With hisses and cheers, audience members take part in a liturgy in which the past is repeated, evoked, and summoned up, sacralizing an "authentic" form of theatre. The melodrama theatre is a secular ritual of collective nostalgia in which simpler time in America is resurrected, a vision of communal identity.

³⁹ In addition to the Mahoney State Park melodrama, the "Freemont Dinner Train" in nearby Freemont frequently performs melodramas a part of a dinner theatre. In addition, melodramas are also performed on the Missouri River aboard the "Sprit of Brownville" riverboat. "Melodrama!" Melodramas at Mahoney State Park, <http://www.melodrama.net> (accessed December 13, 2004).

⁴⁰ Jim Delmont, "Don't just sit there. Booing, repeating lines and throwing your popcorn at the villain aren't just tolerated at the Mahoney State Park melodramas—they're encouraged," *Omaha World-Herald*, Arts & Travel Section, July 6, 2003. It should also be noticed that the expulsion of the villain from the community recalls Satan's fall from the community of Heaven, a scene represented in the English mystery plays. See John D. Cox, *The Devil and Sacred in English Drama, 1350-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 19-38.

The melodrama theatres of Cripple Creek and Mahoney State Park function as different kinds of theatres—the former primarily for tourists and the latter for the local population, but they both seek to articulate the same sense of fixed national identity through the presentation of “old-fashioned melodrama.” Baudrillard notes that Disneyland is “a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate the fiction of the real in the opposite camp.”⁴¹ In the Baudrillardian sense, melodrama theatres act as localized Disneylandes that perpetuate the perception of a true America, beneath the suburban sprawl. They aim to maintain a collective cultural memory. Advertisements for such productions frequently invoke the ancestors of the community—“see the theatre of your grandfather!”—as a way of situating audiences in a trans-generational continuum. It is not simply the presentation of a performance, but the transmission of the experience of a performance of the past. Precautions are taken to ensure the survival of the performance. Forms of performance are regularly modified with time, rearticulated for new audience in new circumstances. But this congealing of theatrical history in this place reveals a particular interest in invariance—in the ritualization of a particular theatrical form.

The Internet is a singularly important venue for studying these small theatres. Most of these productions are not covered by major newspapers as the plays seem to be very much the same—the “old-fashioned melodrama” every time. As a result, websites become the way for a person from outside of the community to study melodrama theatres. And the sites themselves also reveal the

⁴¹ Baudrillard, 529. Not surprisingly, melodrama theatres are frequently a part of exhibits in theme parks. The Bird Cage melodrama theatre (which has recently closed) located inside Knott’s Berry Farm in Buena Park, California began comedian Steve Martin’s career.

tension between the simulacra and “the real”; they are advertisements for a theatre of the past in a form that is perhaps the most emblematic of our own time.

Perhaps sensing this paradox, many of these websites utilize music of some kind to create an atmosphere of old-fashioned musicality. The ability of the internet-streamed music brings the anachronistic into a new context, which creates the illusion that the past (and an idealized past at that) can exist again, and literally does exist in the present. This is not simply repetition, it is resurrection through a simplified, always-already parodied form. In the hands of the melodrama theatres, “old-fashioned melodrama” becomes a delivery system for an ideology of nostalgia while also existing as a manifestation of that ideology.

III: Looking Forward: “Old-fashioned Melodrama” as “Festive-Revolutionary” Performance

In *History of the American Drama: From the Civil War to the Present Day* (1964), the theatre historian Arthur Hobson Quinn described melodrama as an evolving form composed of the “old” kind—the one with villains, heroes, and the like—and the “new” sort which can be characterized as a much more “serious” and realistic drama. Quinn here follows the teleology that has permeated American letters for decades: the belief that melodrama’s sole significance comes from the fact that it gave birth to its much more worthwhile and sophisticated progeny, realism. The “new” melodrama that Quinn describes is that of James A. Herne, Edward Sheldon, Augustus Thomas and others, plays set in realistic

settings and lacking the stereotyping of the earlier form. As “art for truth’s sake,”⁴² the “new” melodrama engaged with societal difficulties even as the structure still harkens back to Boucicault. Herne’s *Margaret Fleming* (1890) examined the life of an average middle class family at the turn of the century and challenged simplistic perspectives about middle class life. The transition from melodrama to realism can be seen in the fact that Margaret’s discovery of her husband’s fathering of another child out of wedlock causes her physical blindness. Through her illness, Margaret comes to realize that their old relationship as husband and wife must make way for something else. Herne’s turn from melodrama toward investigations of life was endorsed by William Dean Howells and others who attempted to hold a microscope up to society. Quinn cites Herne’s interest in social reform as a move toward the new drama, noting the Herne saw his art as “the epitome of a powerful but savage truth.”⁴³

While the “woman question” was a predominant political theme in many melodramas of the period—Edward Sheldon’s *Salvation Nell* (1908), Rachel Crothers’s *A Man’s World* (1909) and Augustus Thomas’s *As a Man Thinks* (1911) are good examples of this trend—other issues like Prohibition, the position of blacks in America, and diplomatic tensions with Spain over Cuba were also common. The jingoism of William Randolph Hearst can be found in I. N. Morris’s *The Last Stroke* (1896) in which a love triangle between an American fighting for Cuba, a Spanish spy, and a young Cuban girl plays out against a backdrop of Cuban political turmoil. A critic described the reactions of the

⁴² Arthur Hobson Quinn, *A History of American Drama: From the Civil War to the Present Day* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1964), 139.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 159.

audience as fiercely nationalistic: “American patriotism was stirred to the depths and American sympathy for the struggling Cubans gave vent when the American consul of the play said: ‘No. We don’t want diplomacy! Where would American have been if we had diplomacy instead of Bunker Hill?’”⁴⁴ Significantly, the reviewer for the 1896 production considered the Cuban audience members to be as important as the play itself, dwelling over the “flashing eyes” and “non-chalant sombreros” of the “pretty Cuban señoritas” in attendance with their “dark skinned hidalgos.”⁴⁵

A concern with the sexuality of racial exotics has always been reflected in American drama. Beginning with Dion Boucicault’s *The Octoroon* (1859) and Bartley Campbell’s *The White Slave* (1882), miscegenation has always been a prominent social issue addressed in melodrama. Typically embodied by the “tragic octoroon or quadroon,” the threat of the interracial sexual union troubled “the dominant discourse, which argued for racial purity and white supremacy.”⁴⁶ In *The Nigger* (1909), Edward Sheldon used the miscegenation melodrama format to lure his audience into expecting a traditional melodramatic ending. In refusing to deliver it, he highlighted instead a need for social change. The plot concerns Phillip Morrow, the governor of a Southern state who learns of his interracial background while in office. In the first act, Morrow acts the traditional melodramatic hero, generously protecting the life of a black man on the verge of

⁴⁴ “‘The Last Stroke,’ A CUBAN PLAY. A GOOD MELODRAMA.” *New York Times*, March 24, 1896. Caspar Harold Nannes would later describe the politically-charged melodramas of the period as having “an almost childish immaturity in their approach to grave problems” (24). See Caspar Harold Nannes, *Politics in the American Drama* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1960).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Diana R. Paulin, “Acting Out Miscegenation,” *African American Performance and Theater History: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 254.

being lynched. The man later turns out to be a blood relation, the motivation for his act of generosity, the *cri du sang*. His background revealed and about to be made public knowledge, he makes the choice to stand up for black people as he explains:

My gran'fathah did somethin' wrong, an' it's resultin' in mighty seveah pain fo' ev'ry once conce'ned. But aftah this pain's been used—fo' it *has* a use, an' a good one, too!—Why, we'll get the fruits o' the whole experience, an' I reckon they'll make up fo' ev'rythin'!⁴⁷

Morrow owns up to the sins of the father and gives up his office and his marriage to fight for civil rights. Brenda Murphy has noted that the audience expects a traditional ending in which Morrow's marriage is saved and his problems are resolved, but is instead “educated to accept Philip's giving her up and taking on the enormous task of fighting for social change.”⁴⁸ Paradoxically, the “new” melodrama revealed life as it was through exaggeration.

To be sure, the gritty examination of social problems in “new” melodrama like *Margaret Fleming* and *The Nigger* are not the only way to analyze society's ills. Melodrama has frequently proven a natural outlet for the presentation of uncomfortable realities and an excellent medium for political causes. The seeds of such attempts to use melodrama to show the evils of society exist in English plays like John Walker's *The Factory Lad* (1832). The play premiered at a time of

⁴⁷ Edward Sheldon, *The Nigger* (New York: Macmillan, 1910), 259.

⁴⁸ Brenda Murphy, *American Realism and American Drama, 1880-1940* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 108. Another change in the ending of the miscegenation plot came with *Showboat* (1927) in which Julie, a performer on the *Cotton Blossom*, is revealed to have a racially mixed background. Her husband, Steve, who is white, drinks her blood, declaring that now he too has a drop of black blood in him. *Showboat* troubles concepts of “passing” in ways that *The Nigger* does not; Philip Morrow must leave behind his white wife to pursue his black destiny while Julie and Steve can remain together. Morrow remains, though empowered to fight social injustice, a “tragic octoroon.”

rising Luddite activity and when the question of steam technology and the resulting displacement of workers had become frighteningly present. The playbill for *The Factory Lad*'s premiere characterized the play as "an entirely new and original Domestic Drama, of deep interest, and founded on Passing Events."⁴⁹ Even in this early period, *The Factory Lad* complicated the standard elements of melodrama. The villain, the factory owner Westwood, though he dies in the end at the hands of the firebrand hero Ruston, is never seen as entirely evil. When he fires his workers in the beginning of the play so that he can use the more cost-effective steam power, his response to the anger and shock of the workers is: "I can't help it. I am sorry for it; but I must do as others do."⁵⁰ His haughtiness comes from being a member of "England's proud aristocracy"⁵¹ rather than a sign of personal wickedness. The traditional happy ending of the melodrama is replaced with a much more ambiguous one with the workers endangered by the soldiers' leveled muskets. The interest awakened by such work is not merely sentimental; sentiment arises through recognition of social inequalities in the world outside the theatre.

The simplified vision of "old-fashioned melodrama," used to reaffirm certain static nostalgia about America of the past, can also be used for radical political ends. James Leverett in his article "Old Forms enter the New American Theater" claimed that playwrights could "[b]reak up melodrama into its

⁴⁹ John Walker, "The Factory Lad," *Victorian Melodramas: Seven English French and American Melodramas*, ed. and intro. James L. Smith (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1976), 40.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 44. This narrative recalls Wylie Sypher's formulation that Marxist theory frames itself in an explicitly melodramatic way: the heroic worker fighting the good fight against the corruption of Capitalism. See Wylie Sypher, "Aesthetic of Revolution: The Marxist Melodrama," *The Kenyon Review* 10 (1948), 431-444.

⁵¹ Ibid., 51.

components and use these elements analytically rather than synthetically—in other words, not to write melodramas but to explore some aspect of the melodramatic in our existence.”⁵² In sum, “old-fashioned melodrama” could be used like the “new” melodrama of Herne and Sheldon to expose social ills. However, instead of seeking greater realism, “old-fashioned melodrama” can be used as a way to depict a purposefully non-realistic conflict with a pantheon of villains threatening the citizenry. In a sense, “old-fashioned melodrama” is an explicitly post-realist form as its comic exaggerations and parodying of the melodramatic gesture back toward the drama of a simpler age. I wish to consider here how the San Francisco Mime Troupe has used “old-fashioned melodrama” in this way.⁵³

The San Francisco Mime Troupe’s history has been covered by a number of scholars, most recently by Claudia Orenstein in her *Festive Revolutions: The Politics of Popular Theater and the San Francisco Mime Troupe* (1998). A brief look at the troupe’s beginnings helps to explain the group’s use of melodrama as their primary medium of performance. Founded in 1959 by R.G. Davis, the Mime Troupe focused at first on mime and pantomime and Davis’s interest in non-traditional forms led to a kind of theatre that “approached reality selectively, preferring symbol to reproduction.”⁵⁴ This preference for non-realism led to performances of the avant-garde European drama of Jarry, Brecht, and Beckett as

⁵² Leverett, 112.

⁵³ The Mime Troupe has also used specific melodramas as subject matter; Robert Alexander’s *I A’int Yo Uncle* had its premiere with the group.

⁵⁴ Mary Elizabeth Booth Edelson, “The San Francisco Mime Troupe as Radical Theater” (doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1975), 53.

well as experiments with *commedia dell'arte* in the mid-1960s. Davis described his interest in stereotyped characters in this way:

We discovered that the stereotypical characters operated both as an escape valve for irritation and as an integrating force. To the liberal, they often appear to show prejudice. However, if you dig the people and the contradictions, the stereotypes are more accurate in describing social conditions than bland generalities.⁵⁵

The use of stereotyped characters as a way to provoke audience response was carried over from the *commedia* experiments to more traditionally American popular forms like melodrama.

In "Contemporary Theatre for Working-Class Audiences in the United States," Daniel Friedman remarks that the transition from mime and *commedia* to American popular forms began as a desire to attract a working class audience. The Mime Troupe's struggle

... included the exploration of popular American theatrical forms, the development of a clear working-class stand in the content of their plays, the racial integration of the troupe, and attempts to link up with working-class social, political, and trade union organizations ... The Mime Troupe in the seventies abandoned the *commedia* that had characterized its work in the sixties and experimented with such popular American forms as

⁵⁵ R.G. Davis, *The San Francisco Mime Troupe: The First Ten Years*, intro. Robert Sheer (Palo Alto, CA: Ramparts, 1975), 32

melodrama, vaudeville, and comic books, as well as the circus and Brecht.⁵⁶

The exploration of seminally American theatrical forms led fittingly to the use of melodrama. In melodrama, the Mime Troupe found a way to make political points while poking fun at a supposedly “old-fashioned” kind of theatre. Melodrama was used “as a way of pointing out the inability of the genre they are working in to cope with the realities of the narrative it describes.”⁵⁷ And it also meant addressing the political nature of melodrama in relation to the radical politics of the present.

In “The Politics of the Popular?—From Melodrama to Television,” Bernard Sharratt cautions against the use of melodrama as a tool for political change. He argues that the form inevitably works against political activism. Sharratt writes:

The attractions of the ‘normal,’ the familiar, may well be enhanced by a thrilling venture into adventure and that enhancement can have a deeply disabling effect politically. One might claim that, after coming out of a melodrama, it is the *normal* world which is made to seem more attractive—and, indeed, the internal structure of some melodramas rests not upon a final betterment of the initial situation but simply on the peculiar satisfaction of a return, more or less, to the *status quo ante*: it is

⁵⁶ Daniel Friedman, “Contemporary Theatre for Working-Class Audiences in the United States,” in *Theatre for Working-Class Audiences in the United States, 1830-1980* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1985), 202.

⁵⁷ Edselson, 111.

the normal which becomes the normative ideal; that endorsement of

'normality' is at the root of conformism, of acquiescence, of ideology.⁵⁸

Sharratt's formulation supposes that melodrama's extremity leaves audiences comforted by the unadventurous simplicity of life outside the theatre. The circular plot structure of the melodrama in which the status quo is upset and then, following a series of crises, returns to normal, is certainly found in some melodramas, but by no means all. The "new" melodramas mentioned previously certainly do not match this model as in each case the world is irrevocably changed by the crisis that takes place in the play. In the case of many of the Mime Troupe's plays, the "old-fashioned melodrama" formula that has already been simplified to a few rote elements and parodized through exaggeration and self-referentiality is used to provoke the audience to demand political change. For the Mime Troupe, "old-fashioned melodrama" is a medium for agit-prop.

After Davis left in 1970, the group became a collective and began to focus more on contemporary popular forms rather than *commedia* and mime, though these influences were still evident. The first play after Davis' departure was a feminist "new melodrama" with parodic elements, Joan Holden's *The Independent Female, or A Man Has His Pride!* (1970). The plot tells the story of Gloria Pennybank and her husband John Heartright, an average couple confronting the changing attitudes of society toward women. Heartright insists that Gloria quit her job once they are married, as Heartright sees gender roles as

⁵⁸ Bernard Sharratt, "The Politics of the Popular?—From Melodrama to Television," *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama: Aspects of Popular Entertainment in Theatre, Film, and Television, 1800-1976*, ed. David Bradby, Louis James, and Bernard Sharratt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 280-281.

inviolable. Heartright as a true man wants “a woman in my cave” and “a wife, not a business partner.”⁵⁹ Discomfited by this adherence to old-fashioned values, Pennybank befriends Sarah, a militant lesbian, and the two embark on a political career, leading strikes for equal pay for equal work. Heartright tries to compel Pennybank to leave her feminist politicking by threatening to kill himself. Gloria finally relents and Sarah is eventually shot by Heartright. The play ends when Pennybank decides to pursue feminist causes, regardless of Heartright’s thoughts on the matter.

A largely feminist audience viewed the preview production of the piece and engaged in a dialogue after the play that excoriated its politics. The dialogue resulted in modifications that changed the play from strict adherence to the tenets of melodrama as a form to something more interwoven with parody. In the first version of play, Sarah, the feminist lesbian, was evidently far more villainous, having “cast a spell on innocent Gloria so as to destroy all men.”⁶⁰ Her death instead became a “comic exaggeration rather than merely a tragic event or a working-out of fate.”⁶¹ Also, in the original version, in keeping with tenets of melodrama, Gloria returns to John, creating a happy ending. Instead of this traditional melodramatic ending, Gloria decides, like Philip Morrow in *The Nigger*, that political engagement is more important than the traditional happy ending of hearth and home. Political enlightenment of the audience through the

⁵⁹ San Francisco Mime Troupe, “The Independent Female, or A Man Has His Pride!” in *By Popular Demand: Plays and Other Works by The San Francisco Mime Troupe* (San Francisco: San Francisco Mime Troupe, 1980), 171.

⁶⁰ Shank, 114.

⁶¹ Orenstein, 137.

epiphany of a character onstage is really the “happy ending” the Mime Troupe desired then and continues to work towards today.

In the years that followed *The Independent Female*, Mime Troupe productions began to follow the pattern begun by the combination of melodrama and parody. The Mime Troupe sought to combine genres and styles in order to generate more unpredictable and free-wheeling energy. “Old-fashioned melodrama” came to be seen as one of a number of different possible tactics for a particular production. Problems with the first reception of *Independent Female* arose from spectators’ inability to recognize its parody of melodrama. Joan Holden and the Troupe attempted to obviate this difficulty by mixing stereotypical forms of melodrama with other styles. For example, *The Dragon Lady’s Revenge* (1971) was a combination of “old-fashioned melodrama,” *commedia*, “the adventure movie of foreign intrigue, and even ... comic strips such as ‘Terry and the Pirates.’”⁶² Written collectively by five different playwrights, the pastiche style of *The Dragon Lady’s Revenge* would become fundamental to subsequent Mime Troupe productions.

As a result of the Mime Troupe’s method of generic appropriation, even when the text is not an “old-fashioned melodrama” narrative, parodic melodramatic images occur frequently in its work, often undermining a certain melodramatic moment or character type. *Americans, or Last Tango in Huahuatenango* (1981) destabilizes the melodramatic hero/villain binary. Much of the plot revolves around the “Agent,” the handsome, appealing, devil-may-care soldier-of-fortune with a shady past, and his assistance of the leftist rebel fighters

⁶² Shank, 114.

in a Central American banana republic. He has all the cocky insouciance of a melodramatic hero—when he is asked if he sells arms for money, he replies, “Fancy hardware doesn’t grow angel wings and fly in for free.”⁶³ The rebel leader, the “beautiful and barefoot” Luisa, finally comes to trust the “Agent” after it is revealed that he used to help radicals in New York City during the 1960s. In a scene at the beginning of Act II however, the “Agent” reveals his true colors as he betrays Luisa and her compatriots to Hernandez, a leader of the reactionary government. And in the third to last scene of the play, “Agent,” having successfully laid a trap for the revolutionaries, gloats to the audience while counting his money:

So the guerillas went down to the river, where Hernandez had moved his men after dark. They went carefully—right into the ring of snipers who were tracking them on infra-red sights. When Luisa flashed the lantern, the lights went on: signal flares. Sharpshooters blew them all right off the beach.

That makes me a bad guy, huh? Everybody loves the revolutionaries: no cheers for the pig out here keeping the jungle away from your front door. Ever stop to think what you’d pay for a candy bar, if these people get what they want?

No—Luisa’s the hero right? Let me tell you something—heroes just get people hurt. ‘Course that don’t matter, ‘cause they believe—and you believe too—that they’re going to make the world better. You can afford to believe that, ‘cause there’s enough of us out here who understand: the

⁶³ Joan Holden, “Americans, or Last Tango in Huahuatenango” (typescript, San Francisco, 1981), 21.

world a'int never going to get any better. We just try to keep it from getting a whole lot worse...

*Lights down. Folk dance music repeats softly, under sound of machine guns.*⁶⁴

The Agent's remarks to the predominantly leftist audience surely met with silence rather than boos as the character betrayed his heretofore concrete melodramatic persona. There also is a sense of disillusionment with the Agent's choice that is reflected in much of Mime Troupe's performances in the 1980s. In *Ripped van Winkle* (1988), a hippie awakens twenty years after 1968 to find that the idealists of the Movement have gone corporate as Rip's old girlfriend muses, "suddenly, everyone else puts their kids in private school, starts remodeling the house they just bought, has a glamor job at a salary they don't even discuss—at least not with me."⁶⁵ This element of nostalgia for the rebellious Sixties is a significant part of Orenstein's disappointment with later Mime Troupe productions. The betrayal of the "Agent" in *Americans, or Last Tango in Huahuatenango* indicates a certain dissatisfaction both with the policies of the US Government, but also with the Left as a whole. Orenstein eventually concludes that:

The reviews in the local papers continue to debate the success of the summer shows. Depending on the reviewer, this annual ritual of performance is either a sign of the Troupe's continued relevance as a part of an ongoing tradition or as a nostalgic remnant of the past put on for the entertainment of disenfranchised activists or now successful middle-aged,

⁶⁴ Ibid., page 35-36.

⁶⁵ Joan Holden, Ellen Callas, and Bruce Barthol, "Ripped Van Winkle" (typescript, San Francisco Mime Troupe, 1988), 13. Cited in Orenstein, 153.

middle-class audiences. The truth is that at their best these shows are both.

They are pieces of the past revisited for the present.⁶⁶

Thus, this wistful looking back to a nostalgic past is characteristic of both the melodrama theatres of the West as well as the Troupe. They are both forms that are held on to by a need to connect with the past, the romantic West in the case of melodrama theatres, and the turbulent Sixties for the Troupe audiences.

Political melodrama may naturally swerve easily in the direction of nostalgia as Robin Estill noted in an analysis of *The Factory Lad*:

The play looks two ways at once; pointing out the need to kill the exploiter as well as destroy the instrument of his exploitation, but also looking back to a golden age—the paternalism of the old employer. The second is evident in the argument to refute Westwood [the owner of the factory], which makes clear the choice the employer has between aiming for maximum profits and a decent livelihood for his men ...⁶⁷

In arguing for change in the present, there is an inherent comparison to a more favorable past, a radical envisioning of “the way things used to be.” Harkening back to a golden age of youth and idealism is something that has been a part of the Mime Troupe since the 1980s. Orenstein in *Festive Revolutions* concludes that recent Mime Troupe productions like *Killing Time* (1997) in which the brain of an evil CEO is transplanted into a Gen-X slacker (the contemporary—and politically apathetic—update of the radical hippie) fail “to articulate a vision for change in

⁶⁶ Orenstein, 164.

⁶⁷ Robin Estill, “The Factory Lad: Melodrama as Propaganda,” *Theatre Quarterly* 1 (October 1971), 24.

the future.”⁶⁸ And the inability to articulate a vision of change seems to be the fault of that (ungrateful?) youthful generation.

Therefore, it is highly significant that after the election of George W. Bush to the White House in 2000, the Mime Troupe began a long series of “old-fashioned melodrama” productions along the lines of *The Dragon Lady’s Revenge*. *1600 Transylvania Avenue* opened in 2001 and was followed by *Mr. Smith Goes to Obscuristan* (2002), *Veronique of the Rockies* (2003), and *Showdown at Crawford Gulch* (2004).⁶⁹ These are true “old-fashioned melodramas” built around the hero/heroine/villain triangle, with the Bush Administration always playing the heavy. The use of parodic versions of the melodramatic to attack the Bush Administration seems to be part of an attempt to destabilize the Manichean worldview that the Bush Administration has taken great pains to maintain.⁷⁰ This uninterrupted march to domestic harmony and inevitable victory over the forces of evil mirrors the inescapability of the melodramatic narrative. Thus, instead of using the serious village tragedy like *The Factory Lad*, the Mime Troupe used the broad strokes of “old-fashioned melodrama,” the simple eloquence of villains and heroes and comic helpers, to compel audiences to consider and question the “certainties” of the present.

⁶⁸ Orenstein, 163.

⁶⁹ Lisa Drostova of the *East Bay Express* has referred to the tetralogy as “The Bushiad.” See “Patriot Act: The Mime Troupe goes four for four with Dubya,” *East Bay Express*, Culture and Review section, July 14, 2004.

⁷⁰ Indeed, one can see the assured President Bush on the deck of the aircraft carrier *Abraham Lincoln* as attempting to summon up an American version of the scrappy, proletarian Jolly Jack Tars of the nautical melodramas. And just as Bush’s folksy, outdoorsman-like activities on the ranch in Crawford, TX call up visions of melodramatic stock characters like the “frontiersman,” his endearing verbal miscues also recall the always honest and well-meaning Yankee Jonathan.

A good example of the anti-Bush “old-fashioned” melodrama is *Mr. Smith Goes to Obscuristan* (2002). Opening in the wake of the American overthrow of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, the play depicts democracy on the march in another little-known Central Asian nation, “Obscuristan.” Written by Josh Kornbluth, the play depicts the Bush Administration’s Machiavellian designs to improve its image in the world. As Dick Cheney remarks in the beginning of the piece, Obscuristan is chosen to launch “Operation Enduring Image” in order “[t]o show the world that we’ll even export democracy to a nation that appears to have nothing for us to plunder.”⁷¹ When Marcie, the earnest television reporter, suspects foul play in the election, the Bush administration decides to send a genuine American hero to observe the elections and determine that everything is fair. Passing over Jimmy Carter for his evident closeness to Cuba, they send Jefferson Smith, a figure named for and patterned on Jimmy Stewart’s Mr. Smith in Frank Capra’s *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939). Like his namesake, the Mime Troupe’s Mr. Smith is at first considered to be a rube by those in power, before rising up to become a figure who fights for the rights of common citizens.

Kornbluth makes an interesting choice, however, by making Jefferson into a fireman. He has all of the classic fireman traits, coming off as a twenty-first century example of Mose the Fireman from Benjamin A. Baker’s *A Glance at New York* (1848). The figure that Baker creates, Mose, is a mountain of a man and thrashes his enemies and rival while rescuing powerless women and children. In *Obscuristan* in fact, Smith takes on a young protégé Mustafa, whom he dubs

⁷¹ Josh Kornbluth, “Mr. Smith Goes to Obscuristan” (manuscript, San Francisco Mime Troupe, 2002), 8.

“Moose” and creates a Junior Fireman’s Club for Obscuristani children. The use of such a figure as Jefferson Smith is evident—his is a heroism that stands up for democracy and the safety of voters, rather than corporate oligarchy. And considering the centrality of the fireman to the attacks on New York on September 11, 2001, such a choice is doubly significant. The Bush Administration sending the melodramatic hero Jefferson to Obscuristan acts as a symbol of how the Right has used the heroism of others as political cover.

In its most recent play, *Showdown at Crawford Gulch* (2004), the Mime Troupe uses the Western as a way to skewer the Bush Administration. The plot synopsis that follows is from the press release:

It is 1886, and a rust red sun rises on the sleepy frontier town of Crawford Gulch, Texas, as its peaceloving citizens start a new day. A silent tumbleweed rolls lazily across the prairie. A coyote cries out. And then...in the distance ... the sound of...Drums! Comanche drums, announcing ... danger! Crawford Gulch is in danger! Bloodthirsty savages are on the warpath, and this innocent, isolated island of civilization is threatened with horrible annihilation!

Or is it?

Well that’s what Cyrus T. Bogspavin wants everyone to believe! He’s the robber baron from back east who already owns most of the county, leaving only the Town of Crawford Gulch, and the nearby Comanche tribal lands out of his grasp. ... Once the Comanche have been pacified out of

existence Bogspavin will make a generous offer for their worthless patch of prairie. What in tarnation could it be about this out-of-the-way piece of land that caught the eye of a wealthy man like Bogspavin? What could be on it? Or is it something under it ...

Meanwhile, in town, Mayor Canem is the only protection the citizens have from the savage hordes and their constant attacks. Sure, there were some questions back when he was elected, but all that blew over once he and the heroic Sheriff alerted the citizens of Crawford Gulch to the Red threat! Yessiree, since then no one has questioned his legitimacy. Why, he's even introduced a "Home Range Security" program ...

But somehow things ain't workin' as smoothly as the Mayor and Bogspavin would like. The townspeople are complaining: Is all this security necessary?

In the press release for the play, the playwright Michael Gene Sullivan is quoted as saying that "*Showdown at Crawford Gulch* takes a look into the not-too-distant past to see how xenophobia, greed, and images of bloodthirsty terror were used to 'tame' another desert land—and how those tools are just as powerful today."⁷² Sullivan was also a contributing writer for the Mime Troupe's other recent melodrama-inspired performances including *Mr. Smith Goes to Obscuristan* and was the head writer for *Veronique of the Mounties in Operation: Frozen Freedom* and *1600 Transylvania Avenue*. Sullivan's recent refocusing of

⁷² David Perry, "Press Release for *Showdown at Crawford Gulch*," San Francisco Mime Troupe, <http://www.sfmt.org/pressrelease.html> (accessed March 2, 2005).

the Mime Troupe on the use of parodic melodrama seems a highly significant shift as radical theatre seeks to confront the Manichean worldview of the Bush Administration. In the present day, parodies of melodrama seem the perfect vehicle for Orenstein's "festive-revolutionary" theatre.

An interesting combination of the political perspective of the Mime Troupe and the nostalgic expressions of community of the melodrama theatre is the yearly Santa Fe Fiesta Melodrama. The Fiesta, an old institution in Santa Fe, was

established in 1712 when the Marques de la Penuela, captain general and governor of Spain's providence of New Mexico issued the following proclamation:

It is our desire to hold a fiesta in honor of the elevation of the Holy Cross and the reconquest of the city of Santa Fe by General de Vargas. We obligate all who may succeed us in this illustrious *cabildo* [council] to celebrate this fiesta for all time to come.⁷³

In the early days of the Fiesta, much time was dedicated to performance of the dances and ceremonies of Native Americans. Historic scenes were staged detailing the history of the American Southwest. The sense of community is described in the program note from the 1925 Fiesta:

The Fiesta is not a hired performance behind a ticket gate to be managed by a few showmen. It is Santa Fe celebrating, as she has celebrated annually for centuries. It is a spontaneous expression of our own selves, as

⁷³ "Santa Fe Fiesta Aug. 29-Sept. 1, Part of Tradition Begun in 1712. Event to Be the Gayest of All Times, With Pre-War Features Reinstated; Caravans, Parades, Dances and Fair to Mark Festivities," *New York Herald Tribune*, August 17, 1947.

indifferent to spectators from abroad as the procession that walks around the Plaza when the band plays on Sunday evenings ... The time is coming when it is an eagerly sought privilege in America and the world to see the Fiesta of Santa Fe, and the greatest attraction will always be that part of the spectacle which would be as gay, colorful, and full of enthusiasm were there no Easterners to see it or care.⁷⁴

The threat of appropriation by Easterners echoes a resolute attempt to maintain a cultural status quo. An essay included in the 1927 Official Program explicitly evokes the definitions of community as the boundaries between “us” and “them.”

Instead of a mill-made American town, standardized and interchangeable as Ford parts with 10,000 other American towns, it is realized that Santa Fe’s foremost claim to love and admiration from the world is that it is *Different*—that it is the last romantic jewel of the brave old days when America was young and chivalric—the days of the First Frontier.⁷⁵

Placed within this community-centered program of events is a parody of melodrama that works without nostalgia, even as it is surrounded by different manifestations of it. There is little of the longing for the “olden days” in the performance of the melodrama, either of the idyllic West or of the rebellious Sixties. Housed in the oldest continuously running theatre west of the Mississippi, the Santa Fe Playhouse, and first performed in 1921, the Fiesta Melodrama has played the part of the satyr play in the nostalgia of the Fiesta. It has become an Aristophanic platform for mocking local and national public officials. The

⁷⁴ *Official Program: Santa Fe Fiesta 1925*, 11.

⁷⁵ Charles F. Lummis, “Santa Fe—The Capital of our Romance,” *Official Program: Santa Fe Fiesta 1927*, 7.

authors have always chosen to remain anonymous to “protect the not-so-innocent.” The “old-fashioned melodrama” format is always held to very strictly and the fodder for the satire ranges from local school board issues to “the horrible drivers in the Whole Foods parking lot.”⁷⁶ The melodrama for the 2004 season entitled *The People’s Perfect Proletariat Plot to Propagate Profits from Prodigiously Purloined Pictures, Paintings and Priceless Pieces, or Natasha & Boris Revisited or The Russians are Conning, The Russians are Conning!* takes aim at a number of different prominent political figures. The play’s plot finds Gerogi Double-U-efsi Bushki and his sidekick Donnie Roomsfeltkoff attempting “to traffic stolen art under the guise of a bogus exhibition called ‘Russian Summer.’”⁷⁷ The subject matter of the play comes from the “Nicholas & Alexandra” exhibit at the Museum of Fine Arts during the summer. Like the Mime Troupe, the play deals with contemporary political subject matter in the form of melodrama, yet keeps the play very much situated in the community.

In both the cases of the Mime Troupe and the performers of the Santa Fe Melodrama, the intersection between progressive politics and nostalgia at a civic event reveals ways in which melodrama can be utilized as a form to speak truth to power. The instantaneously recognizable form of “old-fashioned melodrama” allows for it to be politically useful; “Dick Cheney” putting on a black hat to some ominous strains of Verdi may be simple, but it is highly effective in its immediacy. It is also an act of generic reclamation through parody; the power of declaring someone good or evil remains not the province of a single ideology.

⁷⁶ John Arnold, “Santa Fe Fiesta Melodrama Razzes Politicians, City for Its Art Thefts,” *Albuquerque Journal*, August 27, 2004.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

IV. Conclusion

Melodrama's distillation into "old-fashioned melodrama" came both as a result of parody and the form's own capacity for evolution. Its current form seems to be used today as a way to define community through the evocation of nostalgic common history and the simplicities of good and evil, black and white. But a particular difference between the "old-fashioned melodrama" of the melodrama theatres and the San Francisco Mime Troupe is the relationship to the world outside. Both seek to reclaim the present by reverting to a form of the past. In the melodrama theatres, all attempts are made to situate the audience in a simulacrum of the nineteenth century. Actors stay in character, the stage has footlights, and the crowd is coerced into rowdy catcalls. In the Mime Troupe performances, the audiences are treated to very much the same performances as in years past. The same crowds are a little grayer and the same politics are a little less strident.

The times, however, seem to be changing back, and fundamentally, this will likely mean a renaissance of the Mime Troupe's use of melodrama as political theatre. The apathy of the Left during the Clinton years has vanished in the face of an administration perceived to be as bad, if not worse than, Nixon's; to those on the Left, the war in Iraq has become "George Bush's Vietnam."⁷⁸ The Mime Troupe and the Fiesta Melodrama seemingly stand in a unique position to create meaningful political theatre again as their ideological foes so frequently use the very terminologies of melodrama as political tools. The American love for the

⁷⁸ Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA), Speech to the Brookings Institution, April 6, 2004.
<http://www.cnn.com/2004/ALLPOLITICS/04/05/kennedy.speech/index.html> (accessed February 23, 2005).

melodramatic is played upon by characterizations of terrorists as “evil” and “hating freedom” by a president whose reelection was predicated on rooted steadfastness above all else. The Mime Troupe’s recent choice to perform largely melodramatic parodies seems a conscious choice to contradict and undermine the melodramatic tactics of the current Administration.

Epilogue: The Politics of Parody

In the conclusion to *Melodrama and the Myth of America*, Jeffrey Mason writes

The myth does not offer a critique of culture; it rather affirms the status quo. The idea of America may change over time and from play to play, but no single text admits that the idea is changing or has changed, it rather refers to the idea as fixed and perfect ... The entire motion of the myth is return; return to what was or return to what is imagined, but always return to what should be.¹

For America, melodrama has been a way to play out the national narrative on stage. What this dissertation has hoped to accomplish is to gauge staged contradictions to the surety of that myth. In some cases, parody confirms a predetermined myth of America, and in others troubles it. The uses of the distillation of “old-fashioned melodrama” examined in the last chapter point toward specific political uses, a refashioned melodrama that as a parody of itself can still be used as a way to shape discourse.

At this point, I would like to introduce some trendy terminology from our present political discourse: “metro” and “retro.” The terms are defined in *The Great Divide: Retro vs. Metro America*, a sprawling socio-economic text that analyzes the so-called “red” and “blue” state division in America. “Retro” states are those which dominate the South, Middle West, and West. Their common

¹ Jeffrey D. Mason, *Melodrama and the Myth of America* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 195.

elements are “religiosity, social conservatism, an economic base of extraction industries, agriculture, nondurable goods manufacturing, military installations, and a commitment to the Republican Party.”² “Metro” states include New England, the Mid-Atlantic states, the Industrial Midwest and the Pacific Coast and are “loosely held together by common interests in promoting economic modernity and by shared cultural values marked by religious moderation; vibrant popular cultures; a tolerance of differences in class, ethnicity, tastes, and sexual orientation; and a tendency to vote Democratic.”³ The book points the way toward a new Democratic majority—one that sacrifices the “red” states in favor of cultivating a centralized message for the “blue,” thereby forming a permanent base for a twenty-first century Democratic party. In many ways the book simplifies the current political system, an openly partisan book for a particularly partisan election year. Other books, like David Lebedoff’s recent *The Uncivil War: How a New Elite Is Destroying Our Democracy*, point toward a division between those that favor leadership based on the theorizing of ivory tower elites and those that endorse the wisdom of “traditional values.” Regardless of these simplifications, our democracy is now defined by these divisions.

Without endorsing these theories that insist on America as an irreparably divided nation against itself, I should like at this point to briefly explore what these formulations could signify in modern melodrama performance. Just as melodrama has been used for political ends in the cases of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and temperance melodrama, we have seen that it is still being used for explicitly

² John Sperling, Suzanne Helburn, Samuel George, John Morris, and Carl Hunt, *The Great Divide: Retro vs. Metro America* (Polipoint, 2004), xvii.

³ Ibid.

political ends today. Perhaps the “old-fashioned melodrama” of the melodrama theatres should be seen as a “retro melodrama,” in which a melodrama is performed to consciously perpetuate an ideology of Manichean simplicity. Does the popularity of melodrama theatre in the so-called “red” states signify the performance of an eternal American exceptionalism, a perpetual battle in which “America is somehow threatened but emerges unscathed from a conflict whose outcome is a foregone conclusion”?⁴ Melodrama theatres adhere to a fixed nostalgia for a simpler time, one that is, in fact, represented on the stage. The performances of temperance melodrama in the years that followed Prohibition held fast to this particular formulation. The parody is used not to critically examine melodrama but to uncritically succumb to its pleasures as hypothetical audiences of the supposed past did. Scholarly work on the melodrama theatres is only in its beginning stages, but an exhaustive study of these groups would prove to be an invaluable contribution to the study of contemporary American performance and society, detailing a parodic impulse that affirms rather than subverts the melodramatic ethos.

“Metro melodrama,” on the other hand, would take melodrama, and its emotionalism, to be a means to explicate political issues from a progressive perspective. In a very real way, this form of melodrama bears more resemblance to the moral reform melodrama of the nineteenth century, even if the plays that it frequently uses as pre-texts are not moral reform melodramas at all. The discussions of race in the later reformulations of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* parallel the performances of “old-fashioned melodrama” in the hands of the San Francisco

⁴ Mason, 197.

Mime Troupe and the Santa Fe Fiesta Melodrama. These serve as examples of this “metro melodrama,” using the form to work through complex political issues ranging from feminism in the 1970s to a critique of the Bush Administration’s policies today. The black-and-white morality of melodrama can serve current ideologies of both the Right and the Left.

The melodrama theatre seeks to replicate nineteenth-century entertainments, with the accompanying moral stability, to give audiences a performance of their past free from new cultural negotiation. The San Francisco Mime Troupe likewise seeks to replicate the radical street theatre of the Sixties, using genres like melodrama as a way to theatricalize complicated political issues. What becomes clear is that the uses of melodramas by the melodrama theatres and the San Francisco Mime Troupe show how they are populist theatres for different populaces. In the various parodies of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and the temperance melodramas, we can see threads of how the simplified conception of the “old-fashioned melodrama” came to be devised in the forms of San Francisco Mime Troupe and the melodrama theatres of the West. But whatever form they take, parodic performances of melodrama serve as ritualized performances of prevailing national attitudes. In doing so, they take part in the continual negotiation of the myth of America.

In the larger cultural marketplace, melodrama in its various forms reigns triumphant. The television detective series, the western, the science fiction film, the horror flick, and the action block-buster are all its progeny. In fact many, if

not most, of the popular films of our age contain that same heady mix of excitement, comedy and pathos found in the plays of Boucicault and Daly. With the arrival of film at the turn of the century, the stage melodrama was eclipsed by a medium that could transmit thrills with ever greater verisimilitude. In a recent interview filmmaker Stephen Spielberg said of his own films, "In my work, everything is melodrama. I don't think I've ever not made a melodrama. *E.T.* is melodramatic, and so is *The Sugarland Express*. I mean, there's melodrama in life and I love it. It's heightened drama, taking things to histrionic extremes and squeezing out the tears a bit."⁵

If American popular culture seems melodramatically inclined, it is perhaps because America itself is a nation that imagines itself as eternally adolescent. As Eric Bentley noted in *The Life of the Drama* that "theatre corresponded to that phase of a child's life when he creates magic worlds," he also continued: "[m]elodrama belongs to this magical phase, the phase when thoughts seem omnipotent ... in short when the larger reality has not been given diplomatic recognition."⁶ The American narrative is set in that "magic world" in which anything can happen, but everything turns out alright. Parodic subversion and transformation reveals and destabilizes the artifice of constructs, allowing for growth and development of the narrative. In making a new "room for oneself within an airtight, closed, or exclusive social cultural or theatrical construct"⁷ onstage, one acts to remake the world offstage.

⁵ "A Dialogue on Film with Steven Spielberg," American Film Institute, <http://www.fathom.com/feature/122046> (accessed February 24, 2005).

⁶ Eric Bentley, *The Life of the Drama* (New York: Atheneum, 1967), 217

⁷ Deb Margolin, "A Performer's Notes on Parody," *Theatre Topics* 13:2 (September 2003), 248.

Appendix



Figure 1

Illustration of "Negro Village on a Southern Plantation"

Frontispiece of Mary Eastman's *Aunt Phillis's Cabin* (1852)



Figure 2

Lithograph poster for stage production. Stetson's Big Double Uncle Tom's Cabin Co. (1890s)



Figure 3

Lithograph poster for stage production. Stetson's Big Double Uncle Tom's Cabin Co. (1890s)

Uncle Tom: "Don't Be Afeard Ob Me, Chicken. I Is Uncle Tom. I Won't Hurt You."

Chicken: "All Coons Look Alike to Me."



Figure 4

Ben Shahn's watercolor frontispiece image for e.e. cummings's *Tom* (1935)

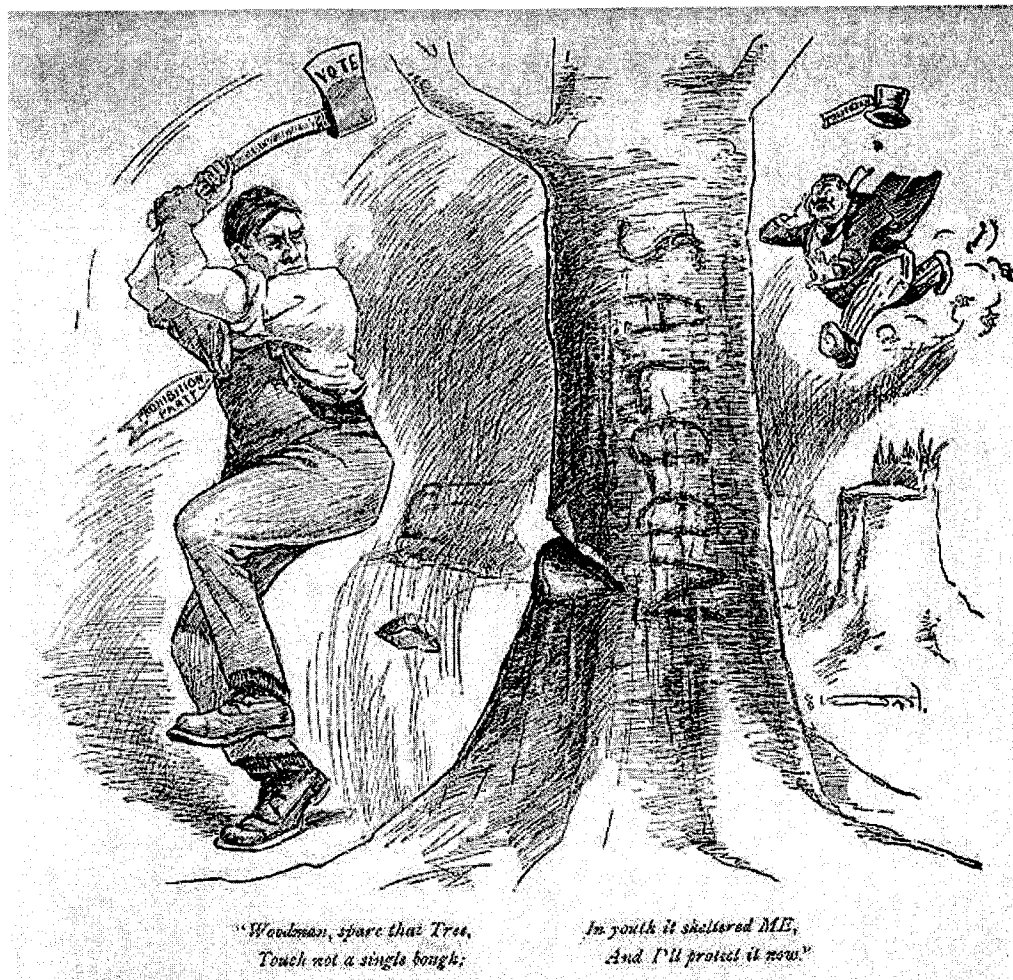


Figure 5

Prohibition Party Cartoon (1904)

From *Prohibition Cartoons*, New York: Defender, 1904.

Politician: Woodsman, spare that Tree, Touch not a single bough; In youth it sheltered ME, And I'll protect it now.



Figure 6

Publicity still of Maude Hollingsworth as "Yesterday's Glamour Girl"
in a Federal Theatre Project production of *The Drunkard* (1939)

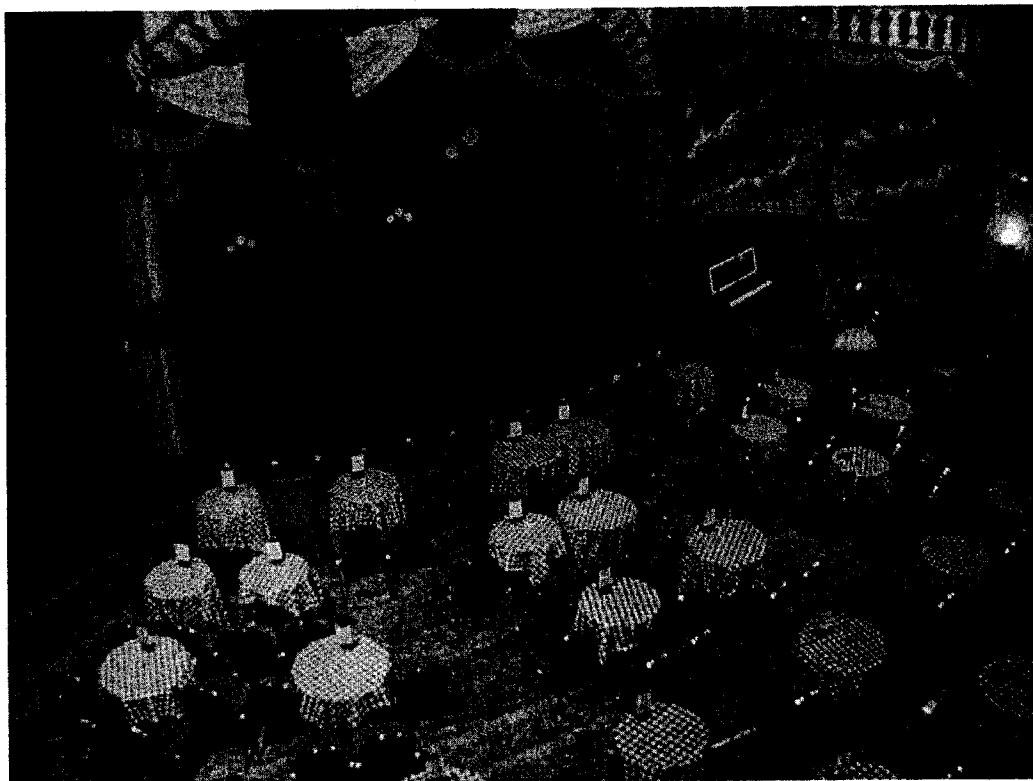


Figure 7

Interior of the Gaslight Theatre of Tuscon, Arizona

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