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HEROES, HEROINES AND VILLAINS IN ENGLISH AND AMERICAN
MELODRAMA: 1850-1900

City University of New York

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HEROES, HEROINES AND VILLAINS IN
ENGLISH AND AMERICAN MELODRAMA:
1850-1900

by

LYN STIEFEL HILL

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty
in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
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1981

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1981

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

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Abstract

HEROES, HEROINES AND VILLAINS IN
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1850-1900

by

Lyn Stiefel Hill

Advisor: Professor Daniel Gerould

Playwrights of the late nineteenth century exercised more freedom in the creation of the three major stereotyped characters than has usually been assumed. Though heroines were always beautiful and heroes handsome, playwrights varied external traits such as age, occupation and socioeconomic status to endow their characters with individuality.

Furthermore, many heroes, heroines and villains deviated--in major or minor ways--from their conventional stereotypes. Heroes were not always paragons of virtue who executed daring rescues of the heroine; some were guilty of moral vacillation which actually contributed to the heroine's suffering. Nor were they, as some critics have suggested, invariably stupid and passive characters who avoided catastrophe only through sheer

luck or the help of other characters. There were intelligent and even intellectual heroes who displayed resourcefulness as well as physical strength in extricating themselves and loved ones from disaster.

Heroines always aspired to virtue but rarely did they--or their creators--equate virtue with chastity. Although most heroines were virgins, their sexual purity was generally far less important than the majority of critics have implied. All heroines suffered, but during the fifty years under discussion, they rarely endured physical torture. Sometimes heroines took upon themselves the responsibility for ending the mental suffering that they did endure; late nineteenth-century heroines were often active and resourceful.

Villains were rarely models of motiveless malignity; they were driven by rational, if evil, impulses. Occasionally, villains were sympathetic, or even heroic. Late in the century, the villain sometimes disappeared entirely.

It is clear that while the range of behaviors exhibited by heroes, heroines and villains was hardly unlimited, it was certainly more varied than has usually been acknowledged. To some degree, the boundaries within which variations could occur were fixed by the value system assumed by playwrights and their audiences. Interestingly, a detailed survey of these variations

has revealed that this value system was relatively rigid and unchanging. This study has shown that virtue was consistently defined as loyalty; evil, as its opposite, betrayal.

It is also true that reduction of the melodramatic triumvirate into the romantic triangle that most critics have taken for granted was often avoided through the introduction of subsidiary characters, here referred to as "adjuncts." With the addition of adjunct heroes, heroines and/or villains, a play might contain four, five, six or more characters who had active parts in the plot. This frequently resulted in a more intricate and interesting story with a more complex structure of character relationships.

Adjunct characters gave playwrights the chance to explore alternate behaviors and to depict variant personalities. While this exploration and depiction never crossed the boundaries set by the value system, it may well have influenced later innovations in the portrayals of major characters. In fact, the most significant finding of this study may be that the appearance and development of these subsidiary characters, which has previously gone almost unrecognized, played an important part in the maturation of dramatic characterizations in the late nineteenth century.

Late nineteenth-century playwrights demonstrated that melodrama was a more flexible form than twentieth-century critics have sometimes admitted. That flexibility is evident in the variations apparent in the characterization of the three major stereotypes. It might be an overstatement to suggest that these characters were the direct ancestors of those who peopled the drama of the new realism. But the more modest claim, that some of the same impulses that shaped the characters of the new realism were evident in English and American melodrama between 1850 and 1900, seems well founded.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I extend my grateful thanks to Professor Daniel Gerould who patiently read and reread the preliminary drafts of this treatise and gave me much valuable advice. It was in Dr. Gerould's seminar on melodrama that I first developed a special interest in the genre. The present study grew out of a paper written for that seminar. I also thank Professor Stanley Warren who, as Executive Officer of the Ph.D. Program in Theatre, offered encouragement during the years that I worked on this study and who graciously offered to fill a last-minute vacancy on the committee. Professor Robert Dierlam gave the manuscript a thorough and thoughtful reading which resulted in a number of helpful suggestions and comments. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Professor Dierlam, who has been my advisor, mentor and friend since I was an undergraduate. He introduced me to the study of theatre history and inspired me to pursue it. His presence on this committee has given me special pleasure, since it has meant continuity throughout my career as a student.

I am also grateful to my husband, Forbes Hill, for his help and support during the many years of my graduate studies.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Until recently, most studies of nineteenth-century theatre tended to focus on advances in theatre production; production was the area in which innovation was perceived to have occurred during that period of time. Nineteenth-century plays were frequently seen as mere vehicles for the display of acting and technical effects. For this reason, the drama of the nineteenth century (particularly English and American drama) was often dismissed as too superficial to warrant serious consideration. However, a new attitude toward the popular arts in general has, in the last two decades, led to a resurgence of interest in nineteenth-century melodrama.

This resurgence seems to have come with the recognition that it is unnecessary to measure the quality of melodrama on a yardstick developed for "purer" forms; the genre of melodrama has value in its own right. "Good melodrama is good theatre, and there is no reason to deny its hair-raising adventures a

legitimate place on the stage,"¹ asserts one modern critic. In an attempt to explain why melodrama can be good theatre, another critic has written: "The appeal of melodrama is well-nigh universal, chiefly because it gains its effects swiftly, permits the audience to enjoy the vicarious thrill of danger, and share volubly in the ultimate triumph. So long as simple emotions at conflict appeal to mankind so long will melodrama appear on our stages. To be supercilious toward melodrama is merely to admit ignorance of melodrama."²

In "A Defense of Nineteenth-Century English Drama," Michael Booth claims that the nineteenth century "is an age that we should value for the universality of its theatre," which produced a "truly popular drama in both senses of the word."³ He goes on to point out that the content of nineteenth-century drama has "intrinsic interest" in that it treats relevant contemporary life, and, especially in plays written late in the century, deals with serious social concerns. Furthermore, Booth asserts, "Well before Ibsen," nineteenth-century English

¹Jordan Y. Miller, American Dramatic Literature: Ten Modern Plays in Historical Perspective (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), p. 39.

²Martin I.J. Griffin, "Melodrama," Catholic World 141/845 (August 1935): 568.

³Michael Booth, "A Defense of Nineteenth-Century English Drama," Educational Theatre Journal 26 (March 1974): 8.

and American dramatists explored "stresses, tensions, conflicts, and discords against the detailed background of a domestic environment." Thus, "there is much in nineteenth-century drama fundamentally important to modern drama and to its intellectual background."⁴

Booth concludes that not only does nineteenth-century drama deserve to be taken seriously but that critics who have previously denigrated it must "learn something more about it. In that case opinion and argument would be based upon knowledge and insight, which is presumably what criticism is all about."⁵

The purpose of this study is to provide an addition to the growing body of "knowledge and insight" about nineteenth-century drama. The focus here will be on the three major characters who appeared in late nineteenth-century melodrama: the hero, the heroine and the villain. Booth, himself, has suggested elsewhere that these three "types repeat themselves endlessly . . . they were so universal . . . that there was very little difference between the work of different dramatists."⁶

The assumption that the world of nineteenth-century melodrama is inhabited by interchangeable stereotypes is implicitly accepted in nearly all works

⁴Ibid., p. 11.

⁵Ibid., p. 13.

⁶Michael Booth, English Melodrama (London: Herman Jenkins, 1965), p. 5.

of criticism on the genre. In fact, a substantial part of the commonly held definition of melodrama consists in the recognition of these types. Robert B. Heilman asserted that "The identifying mark of the melodramatic structure is not the particular outcome of the plot, but the conception of character."⁷ Earl F. Bargainnier, writing about the "formula" of melodrama said that "the basic plot of any melodrama . . . is composed of three characters, to whom all others are subsidiary. These are the innocent heroine . . . the villain . . . and the hero. . . . The major constants in melodrama are the unchanging natures of these three characters."⁸

Because of the presumably "unchanging natures" of the three major characters, critics have held that the use of stereotypes substituted for character exposition. "Audiences could know at once, by the initial appearance and first speeches of any person in melodrama, his or her character and forthcoming role in the play."⁹ Ernest Reynolds perceived the need for stereotypes in melodrama; because "speed and excitement

⁷Robert B. Heilman, "Tragedy and Melodrama: Speculations on Generic Form," in Perspectives on Drama, eds. James L. Calderwood and Harold E. Toliver (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 160.

⁸Earl F. Bargainnier, "Melodrama as Formula," Journal of Popular Culture 9 (Winter 1975): 730-31.

⁹Booth, English Melodrama, p. 15.

are necessary to its success . . . there is no time for the leisurely exposition of poetic tragedy."¹⁰

Another critic has drawn a much harsher line between characterization in melodrama and tragedy, calling melodrama "tragedy with character left out."¹¹ Clayton Hamilton took a more moderate position when he differentiated between tragedy and melodrama by explaining that whereas the characters in tragedy approach disaster because of their own natures, the characters in melodrama drift toward disaster in spite of themselves. They are entirely controlled by the plot.¹² In his monograph on melodrama, William Steele went so far as to call the characters "puppets, part of the machine that carries the plot along."¹³

Because they, apparently, exist only to serve the needs of the plot, melodramatic characters are often disparagingly described as two-dimensional or "flat." "The characters have no interior depth, there is no

¹⁰Ernest Reynolds, Early Victorian Drama (1830-1870) (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1965), p. 129.

¹¹Unattributed quotation cited by James L. Rosenberg in "Melodrama," in The Context and Craft of Drama, eds. Robert W. Corrigan and James L. Rosenberg (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1964), p. 169.

¹²Clayton Hamilton, "The Drama: Melodrama and Farces," Forum 41 (January 1909): 23.

¹³William Paul Steele, The Character of Melodrama (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1968), p. 4.

psychological conflict,"¹⁴ writes Peter Brooks. On the other hand, Heilman terms the lack of inner conflict "wholeness" and calls the experience of "wholeness" that is achieved in melodrama a "pleasure."¹⁵

Among the critics who write about melodrama, there has been almost no argument about the exact nature of each of the three major stereotypes. Each character is an extreme representation of an impossible ideal; Booth called them "dream people" who inhabit a "dream world."¹⁶ Typical individual descriptions are:

The hero is a handsome young man of action and courage, eternally devoted to sweetheart or wife, with a physical prowess frequently demonstrated in a series of desperate encounters with the villain and his allies, usually in defense of the heroine.¹⁷

Virtue and the heroine stood almost indistinguishable at the center of the melodrama, the one a personification of the other . . . the heroine always was a fair woman, though this was the least of her attractions, the outward sign of an even greater inner beauty.¹⁸

The villain [was] at his best a superman of crime, tireless in iniquity, implacable in vengeance, inexhaustible in evil resource . . .

¹⁴Peter Brooks, The Melodramatic Imagination (New York: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 35.

¹⁵Heilman, p. 160.

¹⁶Booth, English Melodrama, p. 14.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 16-17.

¹⁸David Grimstead, Melodrama Unveiled (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 172-73.

his ingenuity, his energy, and his sublime persistence kept matters in that headlong whirl which made these dramas what they were.¹⁹

These descriptions are not controversial but they, like most popular and critical assumptions about melodramatic stereotypes, seem to be based on the plays of the first half of the nineteenth century. The more thorough critics do give at least parenthetical recognition to the fact that there were some variations in the stereotypes as the century wore on. Booth sees "the blurring of the sharp distinctions essential to melodramatic . . . character types" as a "sign of decay" of the genre.²⁰ Rahill, on the other hand, views this "blurring" as an attempt at subtlety which characterized a more sophisticated "species of transitional melodrama." As the "stock types lost some of their primitive rigidity . . . heroines were to be discovered who were less than blameless, especially in love, villains who were more to be pitied than censured when all the evidence was in, and even heroes who refused to fight."²¹ In their most rigid forms, the stereotypes did survive through the nineteenth century to surface in the

¹⁹Frank Rahill, The World of Melodrama (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967), p. 207.

²⁰Booth, English Melodrama, p. 181.

²¹Rahill, p. xv.

ten-twenty'-thirt' melodrama. However, it seems clear that the general trend was for playwrights to take a more flexible approach to the three main characters.

Through most of the century the stock company system was prevalent. This meant that theatrical companies were made up of groups of performers who represented set lines of business. Those lines of business were a prime influence on playwrights' creation of characters. But it is also true that many roles were tailored to the talents of particular actors, especially as the "star system" became more popular. Boucicault, for example, wrote many of his most interesting parts for himself and his wife, Agnes Robertson (Myles na-Coppaleen and Eily O'Connor in The Colleen Bawn, Conn in The Shaughraun, the title role in Dot). In addition, managers must often have demanded that journeyman playwrights construct roles that would "fit" their current companies of performers. When a playwright wrote with a particular performer, rather than a line of business in mind, he would automatically tend to infuse the role with individuality--individuality which remained inherent in the role, even when it was later played by different actors.

Other changes were also taking place. By the turn of the century, a new realism in playwriting had emerged. Dramatists like the English Henry Arthur Jones

and the American James A. Herne, who had written successful melodramas, were eagerly exploring significant social problems in their plays.

The movement from "realism of surface" to "inner realism"²² had been preceded by a number of changes in English and American theatre practice. Theatres built during the second half of the nineteenth century tended to be smaller and more intimate than they had been previously. The larger theatres had necessitated a broad acting style; the new theatres made possible a more subtle interpretation of character. Advances in the art of scene design led to more detail in scenery which in turn offered playwrights more freedom in setting their plays.

An understanding of the potential of more intimate theatres and more realistic scenery is evident in the "cup and saucer" plays of T.W. Robertson, who is often cited as the first dramatist to break away from the old conventions of melodrama. The extent of Robertson's innovation is in some dispute; one dramatic historian argues that the cup and saucer dramas were truly different from what had gone before only with

²²Terms used by Alan S. Downer in his "Introduction" to American Drama (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1960), pp. 6-7.

respect to "inessentials."²³ Allardyce Nicoll, while asserting that Robertson was an innovator, suggests that "his work found its basis in the efforts of his predecessors," especially Boucicault.²⁴

The transition from the "antique melodrama" to the new realism appears to have been so gradual that it is virtually impossible to pinpoint exact dates for its beginning or ending. In an essay on staging mid-Victorian drama, Paul Wadleigh cited the 1870s as transitional.²⁵ Nicoll claims that the public desired "mixed forms" by the 1850s and that by the late 1860s there was a definite movement toward a "surer and franker delineation of life."²⁶

While the exact time of the transition may be in some dispute, there is little argument about the fact that by the turn of the century traditional melodrama, as such, had given way to a movement towards

²³M. Willson Disher, Melodrama: Plots that Thrilled (London: Rockliff Publishing Corporation, 1954), p. 37.

²⁴Allardyce Nicoll, A History of English Drama 1660-1900, Vol. 5: Late Nineteenth Century Drama 1850-1900 (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1962), p. 120.

²⁵Paul Wadleigh, "Staging Mid-Victorian Drama: Four Seasons at Pullman's Summer Palace," in Essays on Nineteenth-Century British Theatre, eds. Kenneth Richards and Peter Thomson (London: Methuen and Co., 1971), p. 56.

²⁶Nicoll, p. 84.

realism. Yet, the exact nature of the transitional period has remained somewhat obscure. Much has been written about the New Drama, and recently there have been several significant scholarly works dealing with nineteenth-century melodrama. But in these contexts, the transition from one to the other receives little attention; it is invariably eclipsed by what went before, or what came after it.

When we look back on the transition it is not difficult to perceive it as having encompassed a general trend. We know what changes occurred in theatre practices and how they may have influenced the contemporary drama. We know what came before the transition and what came after it. In retrospect, it is easy, and certainly accurate, to conclude that plays, and the characters that peopled them, became more realistic during the second half of the nineteenth century. But this facile conclusion describes only the broad outlines of the metamorphosis; it ignores the details.

A period of transition is, by definition, a period of increased possibilities. During the second half of the nineteenth century, playwrights moved from a formula for writing melodrama to an entirely new set of conventions for writing realistic plays. Because the change occurred so gradually, elements of the two

modes coexisted for most of the period. Playwrights exercised considerable freedom in experimenting with variations on the old formula, sometimes bringing to it features which would ultimately become integral parts of modern drama. As I have earlier indicated, characterization of the melodramatic stereotypes was one area in which significant modifications and deviations occurred.

In writing about the form of melodrama, Heilman has observed that it almost demands a "conventional agreement not to inspect characters."²⁷ Heilman, of course, is referring to the requirements for audience enjoyment, not critical insight. In this study I propose to inspect characters in terms of the accepted definitions of their stereotypes. My goal is not so much to challenge these definitions as to explicate and enlarge them. In particular, I plan to make a detailed investigation of the physical and psychological features that these characters display, the values that they embody, the behaviors that they exhibit and the functions that they fulfill. The ultimate aim of my investigation is to develop a set of answers to the question: In terms of characterization

²⁷Robert Bechtold Heilman, Tragedy and Melodrama: Versions of Experience (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968), p. 80.

and function, what variations exist within the stereotypes of hero, heroine and villain in English and American melodrama of the second half of the nineteenth century?

In making this investigation, I will not attempt to chart a definite linear course of melodramatic characterization with a chronological movement toward a more three-dimensional or "realistic" set of characters. Such an attempt would detract from what I perceive to be the significant focus of the study: the variations that existed and coexisted during a period of change and expanded possibilities. Nor do I expect to find fully developed characters peopling even the later melodramas that I examine. I accept the axiom that melodramatic characters are undivided and controlled by the plot. This precludes any significant inner character development. Attempts to write a melodrama with realistic characters seem doomed to result in failed tragedy or unsuccessful melodrama. Since a truly successful attempt at realism in character does not occur in melodrama, any play with a realistic set of characters is out of the range of this study.

The majority of the research for this investigation consists in the examination of about fifty English and American melodramas written and performed between 1850 and 1900. Partly because of

weak and ineffective copyright laws, English and American plays travelled back and forth across the Atlantic freely. Sometimes they arrived intact; often they were adapted, either to disguise their origins or to make the environment of the play more recognizable to the new audience.

Grimsted discusses this problem and suggests, "More significant than the mere interchange of plays was the similarity of their stereotypes, situations and sentiments." While Grimsted does see some basic distinctions between the dramaturgy of French and Anglo-American melodramas, he points out that "Basic distinctions between English, Irish and American dramas were largely matters of setting or low-comedy types."²⁸ In making these judgments, Grimsted refers to the first half of the nineteenth century. With regard to that early period, Rahill draws a similar conclusion, though he does suggest that as the century wore on, a more distinctively American style began to emerge.²⁹ But, even Rahill's study suggests that the national flavor of American melodrama was achieved through the use of distinctively American themes and settings and not through any significant difference in dramaturgy or the portrayal of major stereotyped characters. For

²⁸Grimsted, p. 156. ²⁹Rahill, p. 228.

this reason, it would seem to be unproductive to make an examination of the three major stereotypes in either American or English melodrama, without simultaneously considering their counterparts across the Atlantic.

Several recent dissertations on nineteenth-century melodrama³⁰ have analyzed the genre from a sociological point of view. However, in this study I make no attempt to use sociology as part of my methodology. To provide a context for understanding the plays I have made extensive use of secondary sources dealing with the form of melodrama, particularly nineteenth-century melodrama. The major books on nineteenth-century melodrama by Booth, Rahill and Grimsted have been particularly helpful; I have also relied heavily on works by Gilbert B. Cross³¹ and James L. Smith.³² In addition, I have drawn ideas

³⁰Margo Jean Voltz, Divergent Melodramatic Heroines of the Mid-Victorian Play; Or, The Woman Who Doesn't Faint (Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1976); Andrew David Mendelson, The Rise of Melodrama and the Schematization of Woman in England, 1760-1840: The Relationship between Theatrical Stereotype, Social Mythology and Social Change during the Industrial Revolution (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1977); Carol O'Loughlin Sweedler, Melodrama, 1870-1904: The Dramatic Reflection of Social Development in America (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at San Diego, 1975).

³¹Gilbert B. Cross, Next Week--East Lynne: Domestic Drama in Performance 1820-1874 (London: Associated University Presses, 1977).

³²James L. Smith, Melodrama (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1973).

and information from numerous popular and scholarly critics and dramatic historians who have treated the subject of melodrama.

But this is meant to be an intrinsic study and its primary sources are, naturally, the plays themselves. The choice of plays was dictated partially by their availability in printed or manuscript form. Beyond this pragmatic consideration, plays were chosen on the basis of popular success. In determining a play's popular success, publication, reputation and frequency of mention in both contemporary and modern secondary sources and frequency of production, were all considered. The reason for making popular, rather than literary, success a criterion seems clear: melodrama was a popular form of playwrighting, meant to be acted for an audience. To have any influence, or even to be considered representative, a play would have had to enjoy a large exposure through performance. In selecting plays, I attempted to achieve a balance that included dramas from each of the five decades covered.

Of course, not every play written during the second half of the nineteenth century was a melodrama. And there are a number of important plays written during the period whose genre is debatable; some of

these I ultimately decided to include in my examination, others I left out. In making these decisions I generally accepted Garff Wilson's dictum that "Most of the plays of the period, whatever their intention or subject matter, continued to exhibit the attitudes and devices of melodrama."³³ Thus, I included Masks and Faces, which has the form of sentimental comedy, but which has "the theme of a domestic drama," and which the historian H.B. Baker classified a "modern melodrama."³⁴ I also included Henry Arthur Jones's The Middleman, a play which shows evidence that its author attempted to break away from melodramatic conventions but which nevertheless exhibits enough of them so that the play has been included in standard bibliographies of melodrama.³⁵ Jones's later play, Saints and Sinners, belongs thematically to the New Realism, but structurally it seems to be cast even more deeply in the melodramatic mold than its predecessor. Similarly, James A. Herne's Shore Acres can best be seen as a

³³Garff B. Wilson, Three Hundred Years of American Dream and Theatre (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1973), p. 202.

³⁴H. Barton Baker, History of the London Stage (1576-1903) (London: George Routledge and Sons Ltd., 1904), p. 429.

³⁵Bruce Carpenter, The Way of the Drama (New York: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1929), p. 127.

melodrama with a tendency to "folk realism"³⁶ rather than the other way around.

On the other hand, I rejected for examination some plays that others might have deemed worthy of consideration. In spite of their importance to the transitional period, I ultimately decided to leave out Robertson's cup and saucer plays. These plays were clearly written and received as comedies. They display none of the tension characteristic of melodrama. I also excluded Denman Thompson's The Old Homestead, although it has been used as an example of transitional melodrama in a recent dissertation.³⁷ Not only does this play lack any feeling of threat or tension, it does not even have identifiable characters who fulfill the functions of hero, heroine and villain.

The very fact that there can be controversy about whether or not a play should be classified as a melodrama demonstrates that the genre is not as simply defined or explained as many critics have imagined. Even, or maybe especially, in an era when melodrama constituted the primary dramatic form, it is not possible successfully to derive a formula that is unfailingly adhered to. Perhaps dramatists were driven to vary the formula by an ideological affinity

³⁶Wilson, p. 231.

³⁷Sweedler.

for the coming Realism; on the other hand, it may often have been sheer boredom with past traditions that motivated them. At any rate, playwrights of the late nineteenth-century demonstrated that melodrama was a more flexible form than twentieth-century critics have sometimes admitted. That flexibility is evident in the variations apparent in the characterizations of the three major melodramatic stereotypes, the subjects of the following chapters.

Chapter II

THE HERO

The popular image of a traditional hero of melodrama is that of a virtuous, handsome, dashing, resourceful and virile young man, who spends his time protecting the heroine from the evil intentions of the villain. This characterization probably describes accurately the overall impression that audiences of the last century brought away from the plays they had seen. However, a number of twentieth-century scholars and critics of nineteenth-century melodrama suggest that this image is largely illusory. While they agree that the hero is indeed handsome and perhaps even dashing, they argue that he is hardly resourceful or virile--and even his virtue is questionable. In fact, they say, detailed examination of the plays indicates that the hero is generally a stupid and passive character who waits for others to extricate him from difficult predicaments.

For example, James L. Smith uses the words "brave," "dashing," "honorable" and "stupid"¹ to

¹James L. Smith, Melodrama (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1973), p. 8.

describe the hero. Further, he calls him "decent, dazed and infinitely gullible," and points out that he is generally a "disinherited, ostracized and outlawed" character who spends much of his time exiled or imprisoned, living in "perpetual danger of instant annihilation."² Gilbert Cross suggests that it was necessary for the hero to be "colorless" and relegated to the background," since he was designed to contrast with the villain and to "present a picture of idealized virtue."³ Michael Booth, in his discussion, appears at first to see the nineteenth-century hero from the perspective of his original audiences. He refers to the character as a "handsome young man of action and courage, eternally devoted to sweetheart or wife, with a physical prowess frequently demonstrated in a series of desperate encounters with the villain . . . usually in defense of the heroine."⁴ However, a few sentences later, Booth seems almost to contradict himself. Apparently switching to the more objective viewpoint of the twentieth-century critic, Booth writes:

²Ibid., p. 20.

³Gilbert Cross, Next Week--East Lynne: Domestic Drama in Performance 1820-1874 (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1977), p. 58.

⁴Michael Booth, English Melodrama (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1965), p. 16.

the "basic hero is really rather stupid"⁵ and "as a rule, a passive creature."⁶ Moreover, Booth finds that the hero is usually confused, muddled, gullible and incapable of plotting effective action.⁷

A hero must be a sympathetic character. If the audience at a nineteenth-century melodrama did not feel at least minimal sympathy toward the character who fulfilled that role, the play could not have been psychologically satisfying. Yet, a character who is stupid and passive would hardly seem likely to elicit sympathy from an audience. This apparent paradox suggests some central questions about the nature of the hero. How frequently, and to what extent, was the hero actually stupid and passive? What is it about the character that leads modern critics to interpret his behavior as stupid and passive? Why do the dramatists seem to have chosen to endow the hero with these negative characteristics? If the hero is truly stupid and passive, how does the dramatist compensate for these characteristics so as to keep the audience sympathetically involved with the hero? Finally, are there any other popular assumptions about the hero of late nineteenth-century melodrama that can be challenged?

⁵Ibid., p. 17. ⁶Ibid., p. 18. ⁷Ibid.

Before these questions can be answered, it will be necessary to examine a number of melodramatic heroes in detail. This examination can best begin with an inventory of some external characteristics of the late nineteenth-century melodramatic hero.

External Characteristics of the Hero

"His name is George, generally speaking,"⁸ one critic remarks, and at least two others have also claimed that this is the most usual name for the hero.⁹ Yet, a thorough inspection of a number of plays of the period does not seem to confirm these claims. While the name, George, is a popular one for heroes, it seems to be used with about the same frequency as Robert, Joe, Arthur and Ned--and the majority of heroes have names other than these. What is notable about heroes' first names is that, in general, they tended to be simple and unaffected. In this way they contrasted with villains who often had unusual names or names with unpleasant associations.

The great majority of heroes of melodramas of the period are between twenty and thirty years old.

⁸Jerome K. Jerome, Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow and Stage-Land (n.p.: A.L. Burt Company, n.d.), p. 169.

⁹James L. Smith, p. 18; and Harry James Smith, "The Melodrama," Atlantic Monthly, March 1907, pp. 320-28.

A significant minority are in their thirties; only a very small number are over forty. Apparently, in order to be suitable objects of romance for the young heroines, the heroes had to be relatively close to them in age. But the age of the hero served an additional function: regardless of his actual behavior in the course of the play, his youth implied a character who was inherently strong and energetic.

In the few cases where a hero is over forty, his advanced age is necessitated by the plot. In each of these cases, the dramatist has taken care to counter-balance the character's age with other details of character portrayal. Middle aged heroes are consistently vigorous and active men. In Lost in London (1867) Job Armroyd is fifty years old; he is, perhaps, the oldest hero in the melodrama of the period. It is important to the plot that Job be old enough to be his wife's father. Nelly was orphaned at an early age, and Job was her father's close friend. She loves Job, but she is bored with their life together. Job's age provides Nelly with motivation to long for the excitement she believes she would find with the villain, Gilbert Featherstone, in London. Although Job ages in the course of the play, he is initially portrayed as a "fine rough-looking specimen . . . a hale, strong

man."¹⁰ Job plays an active part in the resolution of the plot. After Nelly deserts him, he travels to London where he finds and rescues her. Then he sees to it that she is well cared for until her death. Physically and emotionally, Job is in direct conflict with the villain throughout the play.

Horace Welby in Forget-Me-Not (1879) is ten years younger than Job. The plot of Forget-Me-Not calls for Horace to have had a previous, but long past association with the villainess. Because he had already attained adulthood by the time of this association, he cannot be younger than forty at the time of the action of the play. Early in the first act, there is a great deal of teasing and joking about Horace's age--the heroine, Alice, tells him that he doesn't look any older than thirty-nine! Like Job, Horace is in direct conflict with the villain (in this case a female). Although the plot does not call for him to be involved in physical action, he utilizes his intellect, knowledge and legal training to extricate the heroine from a threatening situation. Horace's age is further offset by a trait which is rare among heroes. He has a

¹⁰Watts Phillips, Lost in London (1867), Act I, Sc. 1, in Michael Booth, ed., Hiss the Villain: Six American and English Melodramas (n.p.: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964; reprint ed., New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967).

delightful sense of humor, which suggests great vitality.

John Strebelow, hero of The Banker's Daughter (1878), is also forty at the beginning of the play. Like Horace, he is "rich, honored, well-born, a man of unusual intellect."¹¹ But unlike Horace, John has a past that is unstained and, while he lacks any sense of humor, he is one of the kindest and most unselfish heroes of the period. John marries his young wife, Lilian, without realizing that she feels no romantic love for him. When he learns that Lilian's father coerced her into agreeing to the marriage, John leaves his wife, not in anger, but because he does not wish to inflict himself on her.

Earlier in the play, Lilian's father and her sweetheart both had failed her. The closing scene, in which the hero is convinced that his wife has long since come to love him, is intended to be a moving one not only because it depicts a tearful reunion, but also because John is revealed as a perfect combination father-figure and sweetheart--an appropriate reward for the suffering of the heroine.

¹¹Bronson Howard, The Banker's Daughter (1878), Act I, in Allan G. Halline, ed., The Banker's Daughter and Other Plays (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1940).

There are a few melodramas in the period under discussion which cover a time span encompassing many years. In these plays, the heroes, who are introduced as young men, achieve middle age by the last act. This is true of Edmund Dantes in Monte Cristo (O'Neill's version, 1883) and Wilfred Denver in The Silver King (1882). These characters are victimized early in the play but thereafter they are strong and active; eventually they become the instruments of their own justice and revenge.

While it is possible, though rare, for a hero to be middle aged, it does not seem possible for him to be physically unattractive. Many dramatists do not bother to describe the hero's appearance, but his handsomeness is implicit in every play. The closest that any dramatist comes to producing an ill-favored hero occurs in Watts Phillips's Nobody's Child (1867). In the first act, Joe is described as a "wild eccentric timid creature [with] matted masses of hair [who] stoops and slouches along in a furtive, half ashamed way."¹² But Joe is soon transformed by a haircut and some encouragement, and the change in his appearance is "startling"; he has become "as handsome a fellow as any of those"¹³ who

¹²Watts Phillips, Nobody's Child (New York: Robert M. De Witt, n.d.; first produced 1867), Act I.

¹³Ibid., Act II, Sc. 1.

previously laughed at him. It is clear that the hero's engaging appearance was important to his ability to gain audience favor.

While heroes were nearly always young and invariably handsome, they differed widely in socio-economic status. Michael Booth suggests that early melodrama reflected class hatreds by presenting lower class heroes, who were pitted against upper class villains. Later, when melodrama became socially acceptable, Booth says, this changed somewhat, and heroes tended to be drawn from the upper class.¹⁴ However, during the fifty years under discussion here, no such logical progression seems to emerge. Upper, middle and lower class heroes are evident, with no single class predominating at any time. Boucicault's Octoroon (1859), a play of the fifties, has an upper class hero, while Henry Arthur Jones's Saints and Sinners (1884), written in the eighties, pits a working class hero against an aristocrat.

Often, the hero's economic status changes in the course of the play. A poor hero is sometimes rewarded, not only with the love of the heroine but also with financial wealth. Tom Meredith in Flying Scud (1866), Edmund Dantes in Monte Cristo (1883) and

¹⁴Booth, English Melodrama, p. 62.

Wilfred Denver in The Silver King (1882) all acquire fortunes by the final curtain. It is also possible for an upper class hero to lose his fortune. In general, this happens at the beginning of the play; the plot then details the events that lead to the hero's recovery of his estate. Dion Boucicault was fond of temporarily impoverished upper class heroes; George Peyton in The Octoroon and Hardress Cregan in The Colleen Bawn (1860) are two of them. Clay Britton in Bartley Campbell's The White Slave (1882) is another example of this type of hero. While wealth (or the lack of it) is significant in many plays, money was not always an issue in melodramas of the second half of the nineteenth century. In many plays, particularly those with middle class heroes, financial matters were not discussed at all.

In a satirical discussion of the hero in melodrama, Jerome K. Jerome wrote: "The stage hero never has any work to do."¹⁵ It is true that there are some aristocratic heroes who have no occupation. In addition to the two Boucicault heroes cited above, Robert Audley in Lady Audley's Secret (1863), Ray Trafford in Under the Gaslight (1867), and Arthur Carringford in Hazel Kirke (1880) spring to mind.

¹⁵Jerome, p. 169.

However, these idle aristocrats are actually in the minority. Nearly all heroes do have some "work to do."

Furthermore, rich heroes who have "no work" are often quite willing, and even eager to get some when the situation calls for it. When George Peyton in The Octoroon believes that he has lost all, he is almost elated. "The world, Zoe, the free struggle of minds and hands is before me, the education bestowed on me by my dear uncle is a noble heritage which no sheriff can seize; with that I can build up a fortune, spread a roof over the heads I love, and place before them the food I have earned; I will work--"¹⁶ In The White Slave, Clay Britton has been trained as a lawyer but has never practiced law. When he is about to lose the plantation, he announces his intention to "go North where I am unknown and work at my profession."¹⁷ In the end, George and Clay's fortunes are saved without their having to go to such lengths. But Arthur Carrington in Hazel Kirke does give up his fortune to be left with "Nothing but my own hands; my own

¹⁶Dion Boucicault, The Octoroon; or, Life in Louisiana (1859), Act II, in Myron Matlaw, ed., The Black Crook and other Nineteenth-Century American Plays (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co. Inc., 1967).

¹⁷Bartley Campbell, The White Slave (1882), Act II, in Napier Wilt, ed., The White Slave and other Plays by Bartley Campbell (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1940; reprint ed., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965).

brains, and the endless wealth of my love for [Hazel]."
 He is thereupon congratulated by his friend, who assures
 him "you're above a lord now--you're every inch a
 man."¹⁸

In some cases, the hero's type of work is important to the plot; in others it is used as a device of characterization. Although nautical and military melodramas no longer enjoyed the popularity that they had earlier in the century, the most common occupation for melodramatic heroes between 1850 and 1900 was that of military (or occasionally naval) officer. Not surprisingly, most military heroes inhabited plays set during wartime. Early in the period, the Revolutionary War was still a popular subject for American dramatists. Major Butler in Horse-Shoe Robinson (1858) was a "hero" of the Revolution. Towards the end of the century, it became possible (and fashionable) to write plays about the more recent Civil War. Although these plays dealt compassionately with the South (the heroines were Southern), the heroes were invariably Union soldiers like Kerchival West in Shenandoah (1888), Lewis Dumont in Secret Service (1896), Alan Kendricks in The Heart

¹⁸Steele MacKaye, Hazel Kirke (1880), Act IV, in Arthur Hobson Quinn, ed., Representative American Plays: From 1767 to the Present Day, 7th ed., revised and enlarged (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts Inc., 1953).

of Maryland (1895) and Will Trumbull in Barbara Frietchie (1899). The English Civil War (A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing, 1857); the French Revolution (Paul Kauvar, 1887); and wars with the Indians (The Girl I Left Behind Me, 1893) also provided military subject matter and heroes for plays of the period.

Though the military setting provided an excellent opportunity for the hero to demonstrate his courage and strength, there were also a number of military heroes in plays with nonmilitary settings. Elliot Grey in Rosedale (1863), Gordon Chumley in After Dark (1868), Philip Calthorpe in La Belle Russe (1881) and Julian Chandler in The Middleman (1889) are all soldiers; Henry Marchmont in London By Night (1868) is a naval officer. Here, the connection with the armed services was used purely as a device of characterization; it was a way of endowing the character with an air of adventurousness.

Of the characters discussed in the two paragraphs above, only a handful can be termed "active," that is, instrumental in determining the outcome of the plot. But even when the hero did not seem to perform actively, his military uniform surely suggested a man of strength and determination. This visual cue (which might not necessarily be obvious to the twentieth-century reader-critic) let audiences know that it was

not a passive temperament but the unusually constricting circumstances of the situation that prevented the hero from acting more resolutely on his own behalf and on behalf of his loved ones.

No other occupation seems to have been as predominant as that of soldier for heroes of the period. Several middle-class heroes were doctors or lawyers. The legal training of Archibald Carlyle in East Lynne (Tayleure, 1862; Oxenford; 1866, Palmer, 1874) and of Horace Welby in Forget-Me-Not had a minor part in the plot resolution of these plays. It also established the intelligence and respectability of the characters, as it did with Clay Britton in The White Slave.

Other heroes of late nineteenth-century melodramas worked at various active and adventurous vocations: sailor (Ned Plummer in Dot, 1859), miner (Job Armroyd in Lost in London), policeman (Christian in The Bells, 1871), backwoodsman (Davy Crockett, 1872), fireman (Arthur Manley in The Still Alarm, 1887), and detective (Sherlock Holmes, 1899). Most of these characters are, in fact, quite dynamic; their careers seem logical extensions of their adventuresome spirits. However, even when the hero plays a relatively passive role in the development of the plot, his occupation is used in the same way we have already seen the military career used: to suggest a strong and virile man who is

only temporarily inactive, due to circumstances beyond his control. It is no accident that there are no poets, or even professors, who function as heroes.

The Major Conflict and the Hero

Now that we have looked at some of the outward features of the late nineteenth-century hero, we are ready to begin examining his relationship to the plot of the play in which he appears. There are several types of conflicts depicted in melodramas of the period --some plays include or combine more than one type of plot. As we would expect, the major conflict of the play frequently arises directly from the difficulties caused by the hero's love for the heroine. In many cases, though the hero and heroine are in love with each other, a parent of one or the other is against the union, often for financial reasons. The mothers of Hardress Cregan (The Colleen Bawn), George Peyton (The Octoroon) and Arthur Carrington (Hazel Kirke) and the father of Julian Chandler (The Middleman) are all eager for their sons to drop their sweethearts and marry other young women, chosen because of the dowries they would bring with them. In Dot, Edward Plummer's beloved is pressured by her mother and in Shore Acres (1892) Sam Warren's is pressured by her father to marry a wealthy man.

Money is not the only cause for opposition to the marriage; the politics or beliefs of the hero may often raise objections. In several of the Revolutionary and Civil War dramas the hero fights on the side opposite that of the heroine's family and is thus automatically opposed as a suitor for her. This is true of the heroes of Horse-Shoe Robinson, Barbara Frietchie and The Heart of Maryland. And in Paul Kauvar, the heroine's father opposes marriage between his daughter and the hero for both political and financial reasons--he wants his daughter to marry a rich Royalist, not a penniless Republican.

In all of these plays, the hero must find a way to persuade the parent who opposes the match that it is, in fact, desirable. In cases where the hero's own parent is against the marriage, the emphasis tends to be on the heroine, who must be shown to be worthy of acceptance. The hero may be relatively undeveloped and passive. On the other hand, when the heroine's parent is the obstacle to their union, the hero is often quite active in his attempt to win the heroine. Frequently, he comes into direct conflict with the man who the heroine's parent has chosen for her in his stead; this character nearly always functions as the villain. Invariably, the hero triumphs over the villain --though not always because of his own achievements. In

triumphing over the villain and/or through other successful ventures, the hero proves his worthiness. At the same time, the villain's unworthiness is revealed. Ultimately, it becomes clear that qualities that the heroine's parent initially perceived the hero as lacking are actually dominant in his character.

This pattern is modified somewhat in Barbara Frietchie. Though he is not very well developed, tolerance and compassion as well as bravery and honesty are evident qualities of Will Trumbull, the hero of the play. But Barbara's father is unwilling to view him as anything other than an enemy soldier. Trumbull is never actually pitted directly against either his rival or the father of his sweetheart. Ironically, it is against Barbara's brother, Arthur, a Confederate soldier, that he must fight. Arthur Frietchie is as sensitive a man as Will, and is sympathetic to the romance between Will and Barbara. In their first encounter, Will finds a way to avoid capturing Arthur. Later, Arthur vainly tries to save Will's life--but only after he has mortally wounded him in battle. Will Trumbull is one of the few heroes of late nineteenth-century melodrama who dies--Barbara Frietchie was written just at the turn of the century. If Will Trumbull were a stronger, more highly developed character, the play might belong to a genre other than melodrama.

Shore Acres is another play which almost escapes classification as a melodrama. Its hero, Sam Warren, is not only opposed because he is not wealthy; he is actively distrusted because of his beliefs. "Dr. Sam, with his love of truth and his devotion to it, is far more religious than the rural traditionalists who scorn him because 'he doesn't believe in Hell.'" He is discouraged because he is an object of suspicion among the simple folk of the countryside, and has few patients."¹⁹ It is notable that Herne shows an interest in the social implications of this conflict as well as in its effect on the plot.

If a heroine is an orphan, she may well have a guardian who wishes to marry her himself; in this case, the hero is opposed as a rival. George Vendale battles this situation in No Thoroughfare (1867) and Matthew Leigh withstands a variant of it in Rosedale. In both cases, the guardian is the villain of the piece and so the hero is pitted directly against him. His worthiness is proved to the audience primarily because he emerges as a virtuous alternative to his evil rival.

Ned Fairweather in James A. Herne's Hearts of Oak (1879) also must contend with the heroine's

¹⁹Herbert J. Edwards and Julie A. Herne, James A. Herne: Rise of Realism in the American Dream, University of Maine Studies, second series, no. 80 (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1964), p. 91.

guardian as a rival, but in this play the situation is treated with unusual complexity. Chrystal's guardian, Terry Dennison, has also raised Ned; both Chrystal and Ned love and respect Terry as a father. When the two young people learn that Terry is in love with Chrystal, they decide that they are duty-bound to give each other up so that Chrystal may marry Terry. Normally a hero opposed by a parent or guardian remains resolute in his determination to win the heroine. But in this case the hero does precisely the opposite; first Ned helps convince Terry that he and Chrystal love each other only as brother and sister, then he removes himself from the scene so that there is no way in which he could possibly interfere with the marriage between Chrystal and Terry. Ultimately Ned is rewarded for his sacrifice just as if he had fought actively for Chrystal's hand. When Terry learns that he has been an obstacle to happiness for Ned and Chrystal, he shows himself to be as generous as and perhaps even more selfless than Ned. At the final curtain a marriage between hero and heroine is imminent--but not because the hero has struggled against an adversary. Instead, the character who would normally function as the adversary is actually a friend, who makes it possible for the hero to stop struggling against himself.

In plays that treat the type of conflict discussed above, the hero maintains control of his own destiny throughout, no matter what obstacles he encounters. It is not uncommon, however, for the hero to be involved in a conflict in which he is victimized directly, and so loses control of his fate--at least temporarily. In plays of this sort, the hero becomes a symbol of injured innocence. Robert Brierly in The Ticket of Leave Man (1863), Robert Penfold in Foul Play (1868), Joe Saunders in My Partner (1879), Wilfred Denver in The Silver King and Edmund Dantes in Monte Cristo are all "framed" by the villain, so that they appear to have committed crimes for which they are blameless. With the exception of Penfold, all of these heroes are exceptionally vigorous and active; they are ultimately victorious in clearing their names because of their own resourcefulness rather than because of good luck or the help of other characters.

Propaganda melodramas also tend to have victim-heroes. These heroes are exploited by the vices being condemned rather than by any personified villain. In Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852), George Harris is a victim of the institution of slavery; Joe Morgan in Ten Nights in a Bar-Room (1858) is enslaved by alcohol. With some help from other characters, but largely through their own efforts, both eventually emerge triumphant. George

and his family escape to freedom and Joe gives up drinking. Thus, these heroes personify both the bad consequences of the social evil being denounced in each play and the advantages of its elimination.

Sometimes, heroes may be "secondary" victims. In plays like East Lynne and Lost in London, the primary victims of the villains are the heroines. But, in both cases, because of his connection with the heroine and because he is unable to stop her exploitation by the villain, the hero is also victimized. His wife is destroyed, and he is left alone. Archibald, a relatively passive character eventually regains some semblance of happiness with a second family as well as with a political victory. In the political arena he is finally able to defeat the same villain who had earlier destroyed his marriage. But Job, who is initially depicted as a strong and active figure, does not recover from his loss.

A plot that results in the ruin of the heroine demands that the hero become a victim as well. But it is much more common for the hero to be presented as a rescuer who extricates the heroine from the clutches of the villain before he is able to harm her. The hero is in direct conflict with the villain--they stand at opposite ends with the heroine in between. Heroes of this kind are, obviously, always active; the popular

image of the hero as a man of action was doubtless formed around this type. Interestingly, most examples of plays with rescuer-heroes date from the latter half of the period under discussion. A classic example of a rescuer-hero is Davy Crockett. Davy, who is compared in the play with Walter Scott's *Lochinvar*, uses backwoods common sense and physical prowess to save the heroine from numerous dangers. In the first half of the play, Davy saves Eleanor's life twice; he keeps her from freezing to death and from being devoured by wolves. Later, he saves her from a loveless marriage and claims her himself. Other prominent rescuer-heroes include Joe Ferris in Across the Continent (1870), Joe Saunders in My Partner, Arthur Manly in The Still Alarm, Paul Kauvar and Edgar Hawkesworth in The Girl I Left Behind Me.

The rescues effected by the characters listed above usually involve some demonstration of strength or skill. It is, however, possible for a hero to rescue a heroine with no show of athletic strength at all. Horace Welby effects the rescue of the heroine of Forget-Me-Not by using his intellect, rather than physical resources. Sherlock Holmes uses his ingenious powers of deduction to save the heroine. While these heroes do not effect visually striking rescues, they function as effectively to move the plot forward as the group listed in the

preceding paragraph.

In general, the hero who rescues the heroine ends by marrying her, but this is not an invariable rule. In After Dark, Gordon Chumley rescues the heroine so she may be reunited with his good friend; in London by Night, a play with a similar plot, Henry Marchmont rescues the heroine so she may marry his brother. On the other hand, Arnold Brinksworth in Man and Wife (1870) dissolves his friendship with Geoffrey Delamayn in the course of rescuing the heroine, Geoffrey's wife, who is also a close friend of Arnold's fiance. Elliot Grey in Rosedale also rescues a heroine who is a close friend of his fiance, as well as an old friend of his. The heroine of Nobody's Child is also a friend of the hero's fiance. But here the hero, Joe, feels a personal attraction for the heroine, an almost idolatrous attraction, which is contrasted with the deeply loving but easygoing relationship he enjoys with his true love.

Temperamentally related to these heroes whose primary business is to rescue heroines are heroes who rescue characters other than the heroine. The heroine of Lady Audley's Secret does not need rescuing, but the hero, Robert Audley, is determined to keep faith with his friend, George Talboys, to whom he is devoted. He does this by discovering and exposing the crimes of George's wife. Another example is found in Shenandoah,

a play with a number of subplots. While one of these subplots involves the efforts of the hero, Kerchival West, to win the heroine, another depicts his rescue of the wife of his commanding officer from the villain.

All of the types of conflicts just described involve a hero who is pitted against an evil force--usually personified by the villain. There were, however, a few plays in which the hero was not directly involved in any conflict. These plays portrayed exceedingly passive heroes who acted almost as bystanders while the plots unfolded. The primary function of these heroes seems to have been to represent a virtuous alternative to the wicked behavior of the villain. George Kingsmill in Saints and Sinners is such a hero. The heroine says of him, "How good and true he is! How safe and sure of happiness I should be if I were his wife!"²⁰ When George hears that Letty, the heroine, has left with Eustace Fanshawe, he reacts like any normal rescuer-hero; he declares, "I will kill Him! As there is a heaven above us, I will kill him!"²¹ But, in fact, George does not kill

²⁰Henry Arthur Jones, Saints and Sinners (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1891; first published 1884), Act I.

²¹*Ibid.*, Act II, sc. 3.

him, nor is he instrumental in rescuing Letty. After she is publicly disgraced, George offers to marry Letty so she may bear a good name, but she refuses so that he is, once again, prevented from acting constructively. In the original produced version, George did finally marry Letty, after she had, herself, lived down her shame. In the final published version, however, Letty died, leaving him only with the assurance that she loved him. Essentially, George is very undeveloped; he stands for respectability and dependability and represents the "good" that Letty rejects when she chooses to run off with the villain.

In Little Em'ly (1869), an adaptation of Dickens's novel, the hero, David Copperfield functions as little more than an observer or, at most, as a catalyst who brings the various characters together. This play encompasses two major plots. David is almost entirely uninvolved in the first, which deals with the seduction of Little Em'ly. It is Pegotty and Ham who rescue and care for the heroine; Ham who displays heroism in his attempt to save Steerforth. In the plot that concerns Uriah Heep and the Wickfields, David is somewhat more involved, since his union with Agnes depends on the outcome. However, other characters (Micawber and Traddles) are the actual instruments of

Heep's downfall; David does little more than offer moral support.

Christian, who is technically the hero of The Bells, is even less an organic part of the play. The action of this play is wholly in the mind of the remorseful villain, Matthias; there is no possibility for Christian to become involved in a conflict. Christian is referred to several times as a brave and virtuous young man. He is also called clever and is shown to have a good theory about the crime that Matthias committed. There is a clear suggestion that if Matthias's guilty conscience had not killed him, Christian might have discovered the truth. As it is, he simply represents a "Christian" alternative to his future father-in-law, who acted sinfully in his treatment of the old Jew.

Implicit in this discussion of his relationship to the plot has been the hero's motivation for becoming involved in conflict. It is clear that the hero is, indeed, "eternally devoted to sweetheart or wife." The hero is nearly always motivated by his sweetheart, who is usually the heroine. This pattern is refined slightly in the cases of heroes with wives and children; these heroes usually find themselves separated from their families and are motivated by the desire to be reunited with them. Even when other

motives (such as clearing one's name or fighting for a cause) appear, they are generally connected to the hero's pursuit or rescue of his beloved. And, almost invariably, late nineteenth-century melodramas end with the hero's reunion with his wife or impending union with his sweetheart. The only exceptions occur in those rare cases where the play ends with the death of the hero and/or the heroine.

Vengeance is almost never a motive for the hero in English and American melodrama of this period. But, as we would expect, the hero is invariably in an adversary relationship with the villain. What is less expected is that the conflict between hero and villain is not always over the hand of the heroine. While, in general, the hero opposes the villain because he poses some threat to the heroine's ability to be with a mate of her choice, a conventional romantic triangle between hero, heroine and villain seems to occur less than half of the time.

The Hero's Actions

We have already seen that heroes go about achieving their ends in various ways. Some perform daring physical feats; others use their knowledge and intellect. It is interesting, however, that heroes rarely engage in direct violent confrontations with

the villain. When sorely provoked, a hero may threaten to kill a villain. Like George Kingsmill (Saints and Sinners), Job in Lost in London makes such a threat, but is prevented from carrying it out. Similarly restrained is Arthur Manly in The Still Alarm who actually engages in fisticuffs with the villain and declares that he will kill him. "Thief, incendiary, coward, murderer--you've only got an honest man to face--." ²² But the police arrive before Manly can carry out his threat. In Horse-Shoe Robinson, Major Butler, the hero, slays the villain--but the killing occurs in the context of a military battle. Only Edmund Dantes in Monte Cristo, actually kills a villain in a premeditated situation. The American version of Monte Cristo enjoyed great popularity in this country, but it was, after all, adapted closely from the French. True English and American heroes seem to have been too gentlemanly, moral and restrained to engage in violence which might appear to be vengeful or even criminal. They were quite content to allow law enforcement authorities or the villains' own guilty consciences to dispose of them. The emphasis in these melodramas is clearly on the triumph of the

²² Joseph Arthur, The Still Alarm (entered Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., 1887; Theatre Collection, New York Public Library), Act IV, Sc. 3.

hero and heroine rather than on the defeat of the villain.

The fact that he generally avoids violence should not, however, be construed to mean that the hero is always a completely blameless character. In his book on domestic drama, Gilbert Cross asserts that part of the hero's function was to "present a picture of idealized virtue."²³ While this was often the case, it was not invariably so. The critic, David Grimsted has suggested that the hero stood between the villain and the heroine, morally as well as physically: "Moral vacillation was allowable in him; his goodness, unlike that of the heroine, need not be untainted."²⁴

Bart Kennedy, a popular critic, described "moral vacillation" in more colloquial terms when he alleged that sometimes the hero "is a bit of a wrong 'un. . . . But when all is said and done, he isn't a wrong 'un. He does the wrong thing, of course, but--well you see what I mean. He is good at heart. He is all right deep down."²⁵ Maurice Disher in Melodrama; Plots that Thrilled devotes an entire chapter to heroes

²³Cross, p. 58.

²⁴David Grimsted, Melodrama Unveiled (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 179.

²⁵Bart Kennedy, Footlights (London: Henry Walker, 1928), pp. 102-103.

who are "Male Magdalens."²⁶ In his discussion of the "laxity of male morals" in melodrama, Disher refers to the hero's sexual indiscretions.²⁷ A typical example of a sexually indiscreet hero is Julian Chandler, hero of Jones's The Middleman. In all other ways, Julian is a sympathetic and admirable character, but he is responsible for the disgrace of the heroine, Mary, who becomes pregnant before their marriage.

Actually, during the whole of the period under discussion, sexual misconduct among heroes seem to have been less prevalent than a number of other kinds of offenses, ranging from insensitivity (Archibald in Palmer's East Lynne) to drug addiction (Sherlock Holmes).²⁸ The most common misdemeanor was "dissipation," which involved being associated with criminal types and included drinking and gambling. Gambling and bad company cause Clay Britton in The White Slave to lose his fortune. Because of drunken dissipation, Wilfred Denver in The Silver King and Robert Brierly

²⁶M[aurice] Willson Disher, Melodrama; Plots that Thrilled (London: Rockliff Publishing Corporation, 1954), pp. 129-34.

²⁷Ibid., p. 132.

²⁸It is interesting that Sherlock Holmes is the only hero who goes entirely unpunished for his moral laxity. Dr. Watson does warn him that at some point he will have to pay for his bad habit, but the audience never sees this.

in The Ticket-of-Leave Man are framed for crimes they did not commit. Joe Morgan loses his young daughter before he stops drinking in the temperance play, Ten Nights in a Bar-Room. All of these characters are shown in their dissolute states in the early scenes of the play. When they face the consequences of their wrongdoing, remorse sets in. During the rest of the play they repent and work to regain what they have lost.

Dissipation is treated a little differently in Forget-Me-Not. Horace Welby spent his youth in a state of dissipation similar to that of the heroes cited above. But by the beginning of the play, he has long since reformed and become a respected member of society. In this play, the hero's earlier failures have no direct bad consequences in terms of the line of action. Instead, Welby is better able to deal with the present situation because of experience gained during his wasted youth. His past also suggests a logical explanation for what William Archer called "a fine nature shining through a mask of experience and cynicism."²⁹ In addition, Welby's background serves a thematic purpose since it allows a comparison

²⁹William Archer, English Dramatists of Today (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1882), p. 252.

to be made between him and the villainess, who is currently trying to overcome a shady past. It was this thematic development that caused Archer to praise Forget-Me-Not because it poses a moral problem (the double standard) without sacrificing the plot and without making the characters mouth pat answers.³⁰

Another offense common among late nineteenth-century heroes seems to have been temporary disloyalty to their sweethearts. Though we have already seen that, in general, the hero is "eternally devoted to sweetheart or wife," there are cases where the devotion wavers. When Ray Trafford in Under the Gaslight believes that Laura, his fiancée, comes from a disreputable background, he decides to break their engagement even though he still loves her--he is too concerned with his reputation in society. Even when Ray changes his mind and decides to marry Laura, he determines to hide her in Europe for ten years. Ray's inability to remain loyal to her at a time when she really needs him causes Laura additional pain, and when she reproaches him, he admits that he despises himself for his behavior. Later, Ray is shown feeling great remorse for his moral cowardice and he redeems himself with a show of bravery when he jumps

³⁰Ibid., p. 260.

into the river to rescue a drowning Laura.

In pure melodrama, heroes do not go so far as to commit adultery but in the comedy-melodrama Masks and Faces (1852), the hero, Ernest Vane, is unfaithful to his wife. This "pastoral youth" has little experience in the ways of the city; that is the implicit excuse for his infatuation with the actress, Peg Woffington, which results in his rather cruel treatment of his wife, Mabel. It should also be noted that his adulterous affair with Peg is based on love, respect and friendship, not on exploitation of her. In this way, Ernest is contrasted with Peg's other suitors. Because Ernest is young, naive and basically well-intentioned, he is forgiven by the two women in his life and, presumably, by the audience as well.

A hero who seems less forgivable, at least to the twentieth-century reader, is Phoebus in Andrew Halliday's Notre Dame (1871). In making advances to the heroine, Esmeralda, Phoebus is unfaithful to his aristocratic fiancée, Fleur-de-lis. Later, while assuring Esmeralda of his love for her, he suggests that she become his mistress. Still later, when Esmeralda is accused of murder, he is seen telling Fleur-de-lis that he never loved Esmeralda. It seems clear that Phoebus is exploiting both women, and Quasimodo appears to speak the truth when he

says that Phoebus "would have let [Esmeralda] die on the gibbet."³¹ Yet Phoebus rescues Esmeralda from danger several times. At the beginning of the play we are told that Phoebus saved Esmeralda from harm by a group of street ruffians. In the first scene, he prevents Gudule from hurting her. And, ultimately, Quasimodo's assertion notwithstanding, Phoebus appears with a king's pardon for Esmeralda so that she is legally saved from the gibbet. Phoebus has no lines or interaction with Esmeralda in this last scene, but his appearance, with pardon in hand, and accompanied by her mother (and the absence of Fleur-de-lis) suggests an eventual union between him and Esmeralda. Yet, the two early rescues involve no genuine commitment on Phoebus' part and there seems to be little motivation for his gallantry at the end, except that it provides a tidy and traditional ending for a rather carelessly constructed play.

We should, however, consider the practical problems that Halliday faced in using the materials of Hugo's monumental novel to create a three-act melodrama. Clearly, Halliday felt that the audience of his day would not be eager to accept a play that

³¹Andrew Halliday, Notre Dame (Chicago and New York: The Dramatic Publishing Co., n.d.; first produced 1871), Act II, Sc. 1.

ended with the tragic death of the major characters. And if the incorruptible Esmeralda was to be allowed to live, a suitable reward in the form of a male partner had to be provided. Quasimodo, who could be highly sympathetic on the printed page, would clearly be unacceptable as a romantic hero when presented in the flesh. So Phoebus, a rather unpleasant character in the original novel, was pressed into service as the romantic hero of the play. Unfortunately, Halliday lacked either the time or the talent to fully carry out the conversion.

An even more ambiguous hero, at least from the standpoint of this twentieth-century reader, is Hardress Cregan of The Colleen Bawn. The plot of this play places Hardress in a painful dilemma--he must choose between loyalty to his secret wife and loyalty to his mother.

In his book on Boucicault, Robert Hogan calls Hardress a "complicated character" and sees the difficulty and pain of his dilemma as the cause for "shame for Eily and her background." Hogan further points out that "Hardress has a dilemma which comes not from the finagling of the plot, but from contradictory desires in himself; and, when a playwright draws such a character, he is heading in the direction

of art."³²

In his inability to tell his mother and friends about his marriage, Hardress demonstrates the same kind of moral cowardice as Ray Trafford. In his treatment of Eily, he is even more unfeeling toward the woman he supposedly loves. Although he loved Eily enough to marry her, he is clearly ashamed of her humble background. Though he says "love has made her my equal,"³³ he criticizes Eily behind her back and to her face for what he perceives as lower-class speech and manners.

³²Robert Hogan, Dion Boucicault (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1969), p. 85. I must admit that I am unconvinced that the character of Hardress Cregan has as much merit as Hogan suggests. He seems to be more than "a bit" of a "wrong 'un" and there is little evidence that he is "all right, deep down." I do not find that the character has been given sufficient realistic motivation to explain his behavior and render him an artistic creation. At the same time, the cruel treatment he gives his wife seems to me to disqualify him as a viable hero of melodrama. Hardress's wish to avoid seeing his mother disgraced is understandable. But it does not justify his attitude towards his wife. I believe that the poor and inconsistent development of this character is simply a result of sloppy writing on Boucicault's part. (Though the story may be apocryphal, Boucicault liked to claim that the play was written in under two weeks.) Clearly the playwright faced problems in adapting The Collegians, similar to the ones Halliday did in adapting Notre Dame. Hardress's weakness is central to the theme of the tragic plot of the novel. It is not necessary to either the plot or the theme of the play. Perhaps Boucicault did not take the time to think this through; at any rate, I submit that Hardress Cregan is a most unsatisfactory hero.

³³Dion Boucicault, The Colleen Bawn; or, The Brides of Garryowen (1860), Act I, Sc. I, in George Rowell, ed., Nineteenth Century Plays (London: Oxford University Press, 1953).

When he begins to regret their marriage because of the difficulties it has involved him in, Hardress asks Eily to destroy her marriage certificate and renounce their union so that there will be no obstacle to his marriage to an heiress. While he is not willing to go so far as to become involved in the murder of Eily, when Hardress thinks that murder has been accomplished he prepares to take the wife that his mother has chosen for him. But when he is actually on the brink of marriage, he shows great remorse: "I treated her with cruelty . . . Since then I have neither slept nor waked-- I have but one thought, one feeling; my love for her, wild and maddened, has come back upon my heart like a vengeance."³⁴

Hardress is a passive hero; he has no hand in the rescue of Eily or the resolution of his mother's financial problems. At the same time, his mother's defense of him, given at the end of the play, reminds the audience that Hardress was never directly responsible for Eily's suffering: "It was my foolish pride spoke in his hard words--"³⁵ The love for Hardress that is manifested by the virtuous Eily as well as by his devoted servant Danny and the high regard in which

³⁴Ibid., Act III, Sc. 5.

³⁵Ibid.

he is held by his friends are also important in helping the character to gain the audience's sympathy.

The last of the "imperfect" heroes that I will discuss is by far the most interesting. Frank Rahill has cited the hero of Secret Service as an "interesting exhibit" of variations that began to occur in melodramatic characterization as the nineteenth century wore on.

"Captain Thorne in that admirable play must make a choice between his duty to his country and his love for a lady--a moral decision."³⁶ Lewis Dumont, alias Captain Thorne,³⁷ hero of Secret Service acts in a manner that is typical of villains, yet he remains an entirely honorable character. If Dumont were a Confederate spy (and not beloved by the heroine), his actions would surely seem villainous, and those of Arrelsford, who he victimizes would appear heroic. In addition to the fact that he fights for a cause that the audience is likely to be sympathetic toward, there are a number of other features that make Dumont an appealing character. The simplest one is that his antagonist, Arrelsford, is thoroughly unpleasant. A

³⁶Frank Rahill, The World of Melodrama (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967), p. xvi.

³⁷Interestingly, this is the same alias used by the villain of East Lynne; and the villain of Shenandoah is named Thornton.

more subtle factor is Dumont's behavior toward his brother who works as his accomplice. No matter how important it is to the cause, Dumont is unwilling to carry his masquerade to the point where it forces him to kill his brother. When his brother, realizing this, shoots himself, Dumont is depicted as devastated by the death. Dumont's handling of the conflict between love for his brother and duty toward his cause foreshadows his behavior toward Edith Varney, the woman he loves. Though he is a hardened soldier, he is sensitive in the area of human relationships, and he refuses to exploit those he loves, even for the cause in which he believes. He refuses to take advantage of the commission that Edith, believing him a Confederate soldier, obtained for him, even though acceptance of the commission would allow him to achieve his military objective. Dumont's staunch loyalty to the Union is reiterated again at the end of the play when he refuses to join the Confederacy, even at personal sacrifice. But, already his even greater loyalty to Edith has been proved; Dumont is one of the few heroes of the period who fails to achieve his goal.

Adjunct Heroes

The critic Robert Bechtold Heilman has suggested that the characters of melodrama are essentially "whole,"

that is, without inner conflict.³⁸ It is clear that in this transitional period during the second half of the nineteenth century there are a significant number of examples of heroes who are not "whole." Furthermore, we can find a large number of plays which seem to contain more than one "whole" hero. Up until this point, the presumption of this chapter has been that each play contained a single character who could easily be singled out and labeled the "hero." In fact, this seems to be the case less than half the time. The majority of late nineteenth-century melodramas involve one or more characters, in addition to the "official" hero, who assume some traditionally heroic functions.

There are two major classes or types of "adjunct" heroes. The first, and perhaps less interesting, type encompasses a group of characters loosely related to the traditional confidant of drama. These characters are nearly always close friends of the hero, similar to him in age and social standing. However, they differ from the traditional confidants in that they nearly always have a significant effect on the plot. A useful term for this group of characters

³⁸Robert Bechtold Heilman, Tragedy and Melodrama; Versions of Experience (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968), p. 79.

might be "alternate hero." In a few cases, it is difficult to decide which of two characters is the hero and which is the alternate hero. The difference seems to be less in the characterization than in the plot focus; if the emphasis were shifted, the labels might be reversed.

This is true, for example, in After Dark and London By Night, two similar plays in which the heroes spend most of their time rescuing the alternate-heroes. Gordon Chumley and Henry Marchmont save George Medhurst and Frank Marchmont, respectively. George and Frank are quite similar to the "dissipated" heroes discussed earlier. They have indulged in drinking and gambling and allowed themselves to become involved with underworld characters. Now they are being blackmailed to give up their penniless sweethearts (in George's case his wife), so that they will be able to marry for money. Because the plot focuses on the successful attempts of obviously active heroes to extricate the alternate heroes from their difficulties, Gordon and Henry appear to be legitimate claimants of the label, hero. However, while Gordon and Henry are both rewarded with appropriate female mates at the end, it is George and Frank who are paired with the heroines. It could, therefore, be argued that from the romantic point of view the more passive characters are actually the heroes.

Two other alternate-heroes who are rescued by the heroes are Richard Hare in East Lynne and Tom Goodwin in Across the Continent. However, in both of these plays the distinction between hero and alternate-hero is plain; the alternates are clearly subordinate to the heroes in importance--and neither marries the heroine. In East Lynne, Richard Hare is the brother of Archibald Carlyle's second wife. Falsely accused of a murder, Richard is a fugitive through most of the play. Ultimately Archibald, who has been unable to prevent his wife from being ruined by the villain, clears Richard's name and thus prevents him from becoming another of the villain's victims. In Across the Continent Joe Ferris protects Tom Goodwin, who has actually committed a minor crime. Because of it, Tom's family is now being blackmailed by the same villain who had earlier framed Joe. In helping Tom, Joe not only sees justice done to his old adversary, he also clears the way for himself to marry the heroine, Tom's sister.

The alternate-hero is not always saved by the hero; sometimes he functions as rescuer or protector. Earlier in this chapter I discussed Terry Denmsion, who gives up his own happiness for that of his friend, Ned Fairweather, in Hearts of Oak. While Ned is clearly the romantic hero of the play, one could argue that Terry is portrayed as the more heroic character. His

sacrifices are ultimately greater and more deeply moving than Ned's. Another example of an alternate hero who functions as rescuer is the character of Brand in La Belle Russe. Like Horace Welby in Forget-Me-Not, Brand is a man with a past. However, unlike Welby, Brand was badly victimized in his youth--deceived by the same adventuress who he now perceives is about to victimize his friend, the hero, Philip Calthorpe. Brand is determined to unmask La Belle Russe, so much so that he begins almost to take on villainous characteristics. Brand's actions are in the best interests of the hero but his motives are questionable. Whereas Horace Welby acted out of love for the heroine, it is clear that Brand acts out of hate for his adversary. Only if the audience believes that this adversary is totally hateful can they feel unmixed admiration for Brand.

Melodramas frequently have subplots; occasionally they also have double plots; that is, two separate and almost equally important plots, usually connected by one or more characters. In these plays, the alternate hero may actually function as hero of one of the plots. However, the hero is instrumental in both plots. Kerchival West, the hero of Shenandoah, a play with multiple subplots, is active in all of them. The alternate hero, Robert, brother

of the heroine and ultimately husband of Kerchival's sister, is a less prominent, though equally virtuous character.

Boucicault's Dot has two plots. The first involves Ned Plummer's efforts to win May Tackleton. The second involves a marital misunderstanding between Dot and her husband, John--a misunderstanding that originates with and is cleared up by Ned. Ned is the hero of the play, but John, like some other alternate heroes, is paired with the heroine.

A more complicated Boucicault play with a double plot is Flying Scud (1866). The two plots of this play are connected by Goodge, the villain, who, in different ways, creates obstacles to both the union of the hero, Tom Meredith, and his sweetheart, Katy Rideout, and that of the alternate hero, Lord Woodbie, and his sweetheart, Julia Latimer. Although neither Tom nor Woodbie are particularly active characters--both are helped by others--Tom is somewhat more energetic than Woodbie, and the plot seems to focus more sharply on him.

Obviously, Boucicault had a taste for the type of character here being referred to as the alternate hero. Kyrle Daly in The Colleen Bawn is a particularly attractive one, especially when contrasted with Hardress Cregan, the hero of that play. Though he is not a

particularly active character, Kyrle serves a number of important purposes. In addition to being a conventional confidant for Hardress, Kyrle is featured prominently in his own subplot. This concerns his courtship of Anne Chute, the young heiress that Mrs. Cregan expects her son to marry. Kyrle's friendship with Hardress and his involvement in the major plot cause complications and a misunderstanding in the subplot. When the main plot is resolved, Kyrle and Anne also reach an understanding and so the play ends with a marriage--not between hero and heroine, but between alternate hero and his sweetheart.

In The Shaughraun (1874), another of Boucicault's Irish plays, we again find a strong sympathetic relationship between the hero, Robert Ffoliet, and Captain Molyneux, the alternate hero. However, whereas Hardress and Kyrle were boyhood friends, Robert and the Captain have their first meeting after the action of the play has begun. Furthermore, the hero and alternate hero of The Shaughraun are on opposite sides in the conflict between the British and the Fenians. What is interesting here is that in spite of different political alliances these two men are immediately attracted to each other and drawn into a mutually supportive relationship. Early in the play, before he is aware of Molyneux's identity,

Robert saves the Captain from falling off a cliff. Later, the Captain, who by this time has fallen in love with Robert's sister, Claire, determines to aid Robert in achieving a pardon. Although they are technically adversaries the two men develop such respect for each other that Robert is delighted about the prospect of the Captain's marriage to Claire. In characterizing these two potential enemies, Boucicault demonstrated the same tact later shown by writers of Civil War dramas who wished to avoid alienating a segment of their audiences.

The second major class of "adjunct heroes" is, perhaps, more significant than the alternate hero. In the introduction to his anthology of British drama, J.O. Bailey has made a distinction between the "'straight' hero" and the "active hero."³⁹ By "'straight' hero," Bailey means the character that we have been discussing through most of this chapter; the male lead, who is conventionally designated as the hero. "Active hero" refers to the character more usually called the "comic man," a role that would be taken by what we today would term a character actor. Michael Booth has written:

³⁹J.O. Bailey, British Plays of the Nineteenth Century (New York: The Odyssey Press Inc., 1966), p. 282.

The character actor may be a drunkard or a jolly sailor or a monster, but whatever he is there is no problem in deciding whether he is on the side of virtue or vice. The comic man is one of the more important characters. His job is to stick loyally by the hero and heroine and frustrate villainy. Very often the comic man--usually of humble station: servant, rustic, or artisan--is much more helpful in foiling the villain than the hero: he overhears his plots, insults him, and intervenes in the nick of time.⁴⁰

Of course, not every comic man served enough of a heroic function to be termed the "active" or "comic hero."⁴¹ Most of these characters, while sympathetic to and supportive of the hero, did little themselves that would properly be called heroic. Kester in A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing, Sample Swichel in Ten Nights in a Bar-Room, Snorkey in Under the Gaslight, Pittacus Green in Hazel Kirke and Stitch in The White Slave are all helpful to the hero, but they are all used primarily for comic relief.

On the other hand, there are many good examples of comic men who are seen performing unusually courageous or skillful feats on behalf of the hero or heroine. Dion Boucicault, whose heroes usually needed all the help they could get, created particularly well developed comic heroes. One of these was Salem Scudder, a good

⁴⁰Booth, Hiss the Villain, p. 11.

⁴¹Rahill uses the term "comic hero" in reference to this character (p. 190).

natured Yankee overseer in The Octoroon. Scudder's camera takes the picture which records the villain's crime, and thus, he is accidentally responsible for bringing the villain to justice. Salem also finds the letter which saves the plantation for George. Unfortunately, Scudder is unable to save the life of the heroine because she is an Octoroon, and Boucicault wished to avoid ending his play with a miscegenous marriage.⁴²

Myles-na-Coppaleen in Boucicault's The Colleen Bawn is a kind of Irish Salem Scudder. Like Scudder, Myles is in love with the heroine, who is friendly to him but does not return his love. Also like Scudder, he is willing to put aside his own feelings to help the heroine unite with the hero. However, unlike Scudder, Myles is actually able to save the life of the heroine. When an attempt is made on Eily's life, Miles saves her from drowning and shelters her until the time is right for her to be reunited with Hardress.

Conn, the title character and comic hero of The Shaughraun, is a "blood brother"⁴³ of Myles, but

⁴²In the British version of The Octoroon, Zoe did not die, and the play ended with her impending marriage to George.

⁴³Hoban, p. 92.

he is an even more delightful and interesting character. Like Myles, Conn is a "scallawag on the outside and a noble fellow underneath." Also like Myles, Conn is "something of a rogue" who is often involved in minor scrapes involving poaching or the like.⁴⁴ But Conn is a more vital character than Myles. "There is a magnificent vitality to Conn that comes out in his zest for drinking and poaching and love making. . . . Conn's irrepressible vitality and his equally irrepressible wit are probably best shown in the brilliant wake scene which suggests that nothing, not even death, can keep Conn down."⁴⁵

Conn's vitality is also manifest in the fact that he displays greater courage than Myles and also a greater sense of his own worth. Myles's adoration of the heroine moves him to rescue her and shelter her. In so doing, he takes no great risk and he does not expect or receive any substantial reward. At the end of the play he is left only with the satisfaction of knowing that he has contributed to Eily's happiness--happiness that he will not share. On the other hand, Conn is motivated by loyalty and love for the hero--and also by a desire to prove that he is a man who can be taken seriously. His rescue of Robert involves

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 86. ⁴⁵Ibid., p. 92.

great personal risk and, disguised in the hero's clothes, he displays heroic bravery. Conn's involvement in the main plot does not overshadow his own subplot, detailing his courtship of the priest's niece, Moya. Unlike so many other comic heroes, the Shaughraun loves a woman who is within his grasp. In effecting the rescue of Robert, and later of the two abducted women, Conn demonstrates that he is worthy of trust and respect. The result is that he is given permission to marry Moya.

The comic hero of After Dark also rescues the heroine from drowning. Old Tom saves Eliza when she attempts suicide by jumping from a bridge. Tom, who is initially portrayed as a drunkard, is older and less happy-go-lucky than either Salem Scudder, Myles-na-Coppaleen or Conn, the Shaughraun. His relationship to the heroine is different from theirs; the heroine is his long lost daughter. This relationship may have been more satisfying for audiences than one in which the comic hero adored the heroine but was not romantically involved with her, since it meant that the marriage of hero and heroine did not automatically mean a kind of rejection for the comic hero. Old Tom, whose name is actually Frank Dalton, performs a second heroic feat.⁴⁶ At the end of the third act, he digs his way through a brick wall to

⁴⁶With After Dark, Boucicault began to increase the number of sensation scenes to three or four per play (Rahill, p. 189).

reach and rescue Gordon Chumley, who has been left to die on the tracks of the London Underground. Tom is thus responsible for saving the lives of both hero and heroine; he is also responsible for bringing the villain to justice.

Nat Gosling in Flying Scud is a less dramatic but equally brave comic hero. Nat, the heroine's grandfather, is determined that the horse, Flying Scud, will win the Derby. This is important to the plot because a win for Flying Scud will mean ruin for the villains. Nat outsmarts the villains when they attempt to drug the horse, but is not able to prevent them from drugging the jockey. In a successful last minute effort to save the race, the old man rides the horse himself--and wins.

Boucicault was by no means the only playwright to see the full possibilities of the comic hero. Dognose in Selby's London By Night and Jaikes in Jones's The Silver King are other examples of this type of character. Despite the fact that the comic hero was often largely or even fully responsible for the resolution of the plot, he was almost always secondary to the "straight" hero in importance.

However, there were exceptions. The title character of Clifton Tayleure's Horse-Shoe Robinson is a comic hero who overshadows the romantic hero.

Robinson, a sergeant in the Rebel army, is a picturesque American backwoodsman, complete with appropriate dialect (as are most comic men). He is generous and fairminded, but easily angered by injustice. The emphasis in this play is on the cleverness, strength and courage of Horse-Shoe and the ways in which he uses these attributes successfully to further the Rebel cause as well as the romantic suit of Major Butler.

In Shore Acres, Uncle Nat, the character role, has far greater prominence than Sam Warren, who is technically the hero. Nat is not "comic" in the sense that other characters, or even the audience, would be tempted to laugh at him. However, he has a fine sense of humor which enables him to see things in perspective. Although Herne's plot and characters are melodramatic he clearly intended to use Shore Acres to explore serious questions about social and moral values. Uncle Nat represents a sensible and sensitive approach to a changing society. His reluctance to sell the family farm to a developer is not due to any general resistance to change; he demonstrates openness to and tolerance of new ideas in his acceptance of Sam. Uncle Nat gains the audience's respect as a man of action as well as a philosopher. He helps to arrange Sam and Helen's elopement and he is later responsible for rescuing the

young couple from shipwreck. Ultimately, Nat effects a rescue for the entire family when he is able to save the farm. But Nat must share the credit for this final rescue with Sam, who helped him secure the back pension that paid for it. While Uncle Nat holds the stage in the final moments of the play, the audience is assured that Sam Warren stands ready to take it over at some future time.

In a quite different vein, we have Uncle Tom, the title character in George Aiken's adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel. Tom is certainly not a "comic" man, but he is a non-romantic heroic character, meant to be played by a character actor. While nothing about Tom's situation is funny, he displays many of the features of the comic; he is a humble and picturesque ethnic type who demonstrates tremendous loyalty to the sympathetic characters.⁴⁷ George Harris, the straight hero is not seen after his escape to Canada, at the end of the first half of the play. Uncle Tom appears throughout the play; he is the force that unifies the rather disjointed series of episodes. Although nothing that Tom does changes the course of the action,

⁴⁷Placed in other types of situations (as Uncle Tom subsequently was, in burlesques and films) this character becomes a comic man. That is precisely why he later became a distasteful symbol of racial stereotyping.

he is shown performing a number of kind and brave deeds. While we only hear about his rescue of Little Eva, we see the strong and loving relationship that develops between them. It is this relationship that enables Tom to give comfort to Eva's father after her death, to persuade him to stop drinking and regain his faith in God. Tom's own faith helps him endure beatings and humiliation after he is sold to the heartless Simon Legree. He is flogged, not for any misdemeanor on his own part, but because he refuses to betray his fellow slaves. Thus, he performs the function that we have seen is often fulfilled by heroes: he "presents a picture of idealized virtue."⁴⁸ In a very real sense, Uncle Tom is, like Horse-Shoe Robinson, the hero of play that is named for him.

There is one other non-romantic hero who should be discussed. The pathetic and grotesque Quasimodo of Notre Dame is hardly a comic man but, though he lacks the humor that this character usually brings, he functions, dramaturgically in much the same way. Like some of Boucicault's comic heroes, Quasimodo idolizes the heroine with love that is unrequited. He loves her, he says, "with a love that is not known to the brilliant captain of archers upon whom her thoughts ever

⁴⁸Cross, p. 58.

dwell."⁴⁹ Because of this love, Quasimodo risks his life and ends that of Frollo, the only other person he ever loved. Thus, he makes it possible for Esmeralda to be reunited with Phoebus. In this dramatization of Hugo's novel, Quasimodo's heroism almost overshadows his pathos; however, the tragic dimensions of Hugo's original character are almost totally obliterated.

Conclusion

At this point, a rather unexpected conclusion to this examination has become apparent: the "straight" hero of late nineteenth-century English and American melodrama was not necessarily the protagonist. A small but significant number of plays have leading characters who do not in any way fit the mold of the conventional "straight" hero. And a large number have characters who share the spotlight with the hero, appropriating many of the features or functions ordinarily associated with him.

Clearly, one way for a dramatist to compensate for a weak or inactive hero was to provide another character or two who could act decisively to help the hero and resolve the plot. Another way was to provide the hero himself with external characteristics

⁴⁹ Halliday, Notre Dame, Act III, Sc. 1.

or personality traits that suggested a man of action, trapped by circumstances. Most often, if the hero was passive--and this was certainly not the case more than half the time--it was because of the constraints of the plot rather than because of any habitual weakness on his part. There were only a few heroes whose passivity manifested moral weakness.

But, ironically, the most common heroic characteristic to result in apparent inertia may have been sheer innocence. In their efforts to create a striking contrast between villain and hero, playwrights frequently defined the hero's innocence not only as lack of guilt, but also as naivete. A number of heroes had secluded rural backgrounds that helped dramatically to motivate "misjudgment." Naivete, resulting from ignorance, seems to have been an emblem for virtue to the audiences of the last century. To readers and critics of our time, who are more oriented to urban life, it suggests stupidity.

Even in the nineteenth century, the most interesting heroes were those who were not naive. Characters like Merrivale's Horace Welby and Gillette's Lewis Dumont are highly intelligent and experienced, almost to the point of cynicism. Knowledge and intelligence make it possible for a character to be engaged in an inner conflict. And when a dramatist

creates a character with an inner conflict, there is the possibility of going beyond the boundaries of melodrama into the realm of psychological realism. However, that possibility is hardly realized in any of the plays discussed in this examination. Although the hero of melodrama during a transitional period between 1850 and 1900 was not necessarily one hundred percent "whole," the conventions of the form in which he appeared were still rigid enough to limit his options and his actions.

Chapter III

THE HEROINE

Perhaps the postulate most commonly held by critics writing about nineteenth-century melodrama is that plays written within the genre invariably revolve around a heroine who is beautiful, virtuous, long-suffering and ultimately rewarded. Michael Booth suggests that the heroine's melodramatic function is an enlargement and intensification of the hero's; though she is ostensibly the weaker vessel, she actually exhibits greater moral strength and her suffering is more extreme. Booth concludes that "Most of the necessary sentimentalism and pathos attaches to the heroine, who is the emotional core of melodrama and very often the storm centre of its action."¹ David Grimsted also places the heroine at the center of melodrama: "Virtue and the heroine stood almost indistinguishable at the center of the melodrama, the one a personification of the other."² He further comments: "The heroine was always a fair woman, though this was

¹Michael Booth, English Melodrama (London: Herman Jenkins, 1965), p. 30.

²Melodrama Unveiled (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 172.

the least of her attractions, the outward sign of an even greater inner beauty."³

Similarly, James L. Smith calls the heroine "the blank embodiment of absolute perfection . . . the bright effulgence of her beauty, which brings strong men to their knees, is equalled only by the unsullied purity of her mind." Later, Smith adds that she "always suffers early and suffers long."⁴ Gilbert B. Cross concurs. "Even before her first entrance, or at the latest, during her first scene, the heroine must be suffering. These trials and tribulations, however, the heroine faced with resignation."⁵ Jerome K. Jerome, a popular critic of the early twentieth century, observed the same phenomenon somewhat less sympathetically when he flatly stated that the heroine was "always in trouble."⁶

Many of these critics acknowledge one major exception to the characterization offered above. During

³Ibid., p. 173.

⁴James L. Smith, Melodrama (London: Methuen, 1973), p. 19.

⁵Gilbert B. Cross, Next Week--East Lynne; Domestic Drama in Performance 1820-1874 (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1977), p. 58.

⁶Jerome K. Jerome, Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow and Stage-Land (n.p.: A.L. Burt Company, n.d.), p. 184.

the second half of the nineteenth century, Booth notes an "increasing tendency of the heroine to die of sin."⁷ Booth also refers to the adventuress, a popular female type in the late nineteenth century, but he classifies her as a kind of villain. Frank Rahill, on the other hand, sees this character as a type of melodramatic heroine who is "given to indiscretions--and worse." Unlike the non-virtuous heroine who passively "fell before the baseness of man," Rahill asserts, the adventuress-heroine took an active role in her own downfall.⁸ Maurice Disher also appears to view the adventuress as a potential heroine; he includes her along with the passively non-virtuous heroine in his discussion of the "magdalen."⁹ Rahill points out that the tendency toward the non-virtuous heroine never became a general one in popular melodrama. Still, by the last third of the nineteenth century, the trend had reached noticeable proportions.

Aside from the question of whether the adventuress is a heroine or a villainess, it is clear

⁷Booth, English Melodrama, p. 153.

⁸Frank Rahill, The World of Melodrama (University Park, Pa., and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967), p. 201.

⁹M. Willson Disher, Melodrama; Plots that Thrilled (London: Rockliff Publishing Corporation, 1954), chapter 16.

that there is little argument among critics about the nature and function of the heroine in nineteenth-century melodrama. This does not, however, necessarily imply that there is no more to be said about this character. While the conclusions drawn by these critics are both valid and valuable, they tend to leave the reader with the impression that any heroine, though perhaps pivotal in the plot of a given play, was, in terms of characterization, interchangeable with the heroine of any other play of the period. In fact, a thorough examination of a number of heroines reveals that there were significant variations in portrayals of the character. Even those who conformed most rigidly to the standard mold tended to have some touches of individuality--and a few heroines managed to break away from the mold almost entirely.¹⁰

Since the purpose of this examination is to expand, rather than to challenge, the accepted definition of the heroine, the central questions to be considered

¹⁰In her dissertation, Divergent Melodramatic Heroines of the Mid-Victorian Play; Or, The Woman Who Doesn't Faint (Ohio State University, 1976), Margo Jean Mellick discusses a number of extraordinary cases of heroines who do not conform to the stereotype. Ms. Mellick's criteria for choosing plays to be examined were quite different from mine. Many of the plays she discusses date from the first half of the nineteenth century and most were not great popular successes. For this reason, very little of the material in this chapter overlaps her interesting discussion of "the woman who doesn't faint."

arise directly out of that definition. By definition, the heroine is a shining (or occasionally tarnished) example of virtue, but in what does virtue consist? If the heroine must inevitably suffer, what, precisely, is the nature of her suffering? If the heroine is sure to be rewarded at the end, what is that reward likely to include? Does a single character invariably fulfill the function of the heroine, or are there sometimes female counterparts to the "adjunct heroes"? And, how do playwrights amplify the concepts of virtue, suffering and reward when a non-virtuous heroine is featured? I will begin a general investigation of these questions after the following discussion of the external characteristics of the heroine.

External Characteristics of the Heroine

No single name seems to have functioned as a symbol for the heroine quite the way that "George" did for the hero. James Smith uses "Amelia"¹¹ as a metaphor for the heroine; H.J. Smith suggested "Grace," "Gladys" and "Rose" as common names for this character.¹² Apparently, mellifluous names, or names that were suggestive of the heroine's character or beauty were preferred. But most

¹¹James L. Smith, p. 19.

¹²Harry James Smith, "The Melodrama," Atlantic Monthly, March 1907, p. 321.

frequently, names chosen for heroines probably reflected popular girls' names of the period. Variations on Helen (Eleanor, Nelly) were very popular. Louise, Alice, Anne and Mary were also used frequently.¹³

While there are some notable examples of "plain" heroines in Victorian fiction (such as Jane Eyre), no such phenomenon seems to have existed in the melodrama of the period. On the stage, external beauty was a prerequisite for the role of heroine. The heroine's physical attractiveness was more significant than that of her male counterpart. It made her desirable as a reward for the hero, and frequently it motivated the villain's interest in her. But, most important was its symbolic meaning; it was the outward manifestation of the heroine's inner goodness. As such, it was frequently referred to, usually early in the play. Eily, the Colleen Bawn, is "the pretty girl"¹⁴ and the heroine of The Bells is called "the pretty Annette."¹⁵ In Monte Cristo, a character looks at Mercedes and asks

¹³Interestingly, Mary was the name chosen, more than once, for an "impure" heroine. (Mary Brandon in My Partner and Mary Blenheim in The Middleman both have pregnancies out of wedlock.)

¹⁴Dion Boucicault, The Colleen Bawn (1860), Act II, Sc. 3, in George Rowell, ed., Nineteenth Century Plays (London: Oxford University Press, 1953).

¹⁵Leopold Lewis, The Bells (1871), Act I, in Rowell.

another, "isn't she pretty?"¹⁶ Possey, heroine of The Main Line (1886), is labeled "pretty" as well as "delightful" and "charming."¹⁷ In a slight variation, Lady Isabel in East Lynne is described as Archibald's "lovely bride."¹⁸

It is clear that most playwrights saw no need to display much inventiveness in language. The recurring epithets were simply intended to reinforce (or perhaps, sometimes, to redirect) the audience's visual perception. However, occasionally a playwright allowed one of his characters to wax metaphorical in the description of a heroine. In Nobody's Child, the heroine is referred to as a "star."¹⁹ In another play by the same dramatist, a similar metaphor emerges when Job says to Nelly, heroine of Lost in London, "Thee'st

¹⁶James O'Neill, adapt. Monte Cristo by Charles Fechter (1886), Act I, Sc. 1, in Barrett Clark, ed., Favorite American Plays of the Nineteenth Century (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1943).

¹⁷Henry C. Demille and Charles Bernard, The Main Line (1886), Act I, in Barret H. Clark, gen. ed., America's Lost Plays (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965; orig. copyright 1940, Princeton University Press), vol. 14: Robert Hamilton Ball, ed., The Plays of Henry C. DeMille Written in Collaboration with David Belasco.

¹⁸Clifton Tayleure, East Lynne (1862), Act I, Sc. 1, in J.O. Bailey, ed., British Plays of the Nineteenth Century (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1966).

¹⁹Watts Phillips, Nobody's Child (New York: Robert DeWitt, n.d.; first published 1867), Act III, Sc. 1.

a face as pleasant to look on as that bit o' heaven I often see shining up o' top o' th' shaft w' just a glimmer o' stars in it."²⁰ Several heroines who ultimately prove more virtuous than Nelly Armroyd are compared to sunlight. Salem Scudder says that Zoe, The Octoroon, is "worth her weight in sunshine."²¹ In Paul Kauvar, the heroine is described as "a ray of sunlight in this prison men call Paris."²² And Margaret Gath, heroine of The Forty-Niners, is consistently referred to by her nickname, "Sunlight."

Almost without exception, heroines were very young, in their early twenties or even their late teens. This meant that they were at what audiences would have regarded as just the proper age for marriage, particularly marriage to a hero who was in his twenties or early thirties. Furthermore, youth justified the innocence and inexperience which led to extreme vulnerability. Only adventuresses were

²⁰Watts Phillips, Lost in London (1867), Act I, Sc. 1, in Michael Booth, ed., Hiss the Villain; Six American and English Melodramas (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967; first published by Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964).

²¹Dion Boucicault, The Octoroon (1859), Act I, in Myron Matlaw, ed., The Black Crook and other Nineteenth Century American Plays (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1967).

²²Steele Mackaye, Paul Kauvar (1887), Act I, in Montrose Moses, ed., Representative Plays by American Dramatists (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co. Inc., 1921), 3:1856-1911.

over the age of thirty and, whether they were heroines or not, adventuresses never married the hero.

Most heroines were orphans. Many were entirely "alone in the world" with neither parent living. Those who had one parent were almost invariably motherless. To have had a mother without a father seems to have been even rarer than to have had two living parents.²³ The lack of "a mother to guide her" was obviously another element which went into the creation of a vulnerable and easily victimized heroine.

Fathers could not be expected to put the bulk of their energies into child rearing. Their minds were properly occupied with their livelihood, or with politics or with personal affairs. Even the most loving fathers were often oblivious to the propensities of their daughters and were inept when it came to protecting them from harm. In The Main Line, the heroine actually reproaches her father for having neglected the religious training which would have kept her "travellin' a straight road."²⁴ The fathers of Mary Brandon in My Partner and Mary Blenham in The Middleman are too preoccupied with

²³Lucy Fairweather in Boucicault's The Poor of New York is one of the few heroines with a mother. Annette in The Bells, Hazel Kirke, Helen Berry in Shore Acres and Edith Varney in Secret Service all have two living parents.

²⁴DeMille and Barnard, The Main Line, Act III.

their own problems to notice that their daughters are in trouble. Carmion Gath (The Forty-Niners, 1878) and Jacob Flecher (Saints and Sinners) are both ministers, but they fail to give their own daughters adequate counseling to prevent their involvement with decadent and destructive men.

Although fathers were unable to shield their daughters from danger, most were not responsible for their problems. There were, however, some fathers who contributed to or actually caused their daughters' suffering. While few fathers of heroines functioned as villains, a significant number, willingly or unwillingly, allied themselves with the villain's interests. In The Still Alarm, Elinore's father is blackmailed, and he is forced to ask her to give up her sweetheart and accept the proposal of the villain. The fathers of Dianne LeBlanc (Paul Kauvar) and Barbara Frietchie actively oppose the heroes and support the villains' suits for their daughters. In both cases they have based their choice on political affiliations. On the other hand, Dunstan Kirke (Hazel Kirke) and Martin Berry (Shore Acres) use financial criteria for choosing sons-in-law; both attempt to force the daughters to marry for money. In The Banker's Daughter the heroine, Lilian, is actually persuaded to marry for money by a father who sees a wealthy son-in-law as a way to avert

bankruptcy. Neither Lilian nor her father realizes that the marriage will ultimately prove a love match.

Heroines who were without parents frequently had relatives or guardians who exercised parental control over them. Often these guardians were kind and caring but, like loving fathers, ultimately incapable of protecting their wards. Thomas Goodwin Sr. in Across the Continent, Pegotty in Little Em'ly and General Haverill in Shenandoah are examples of this kind of guardian.

Other guardians were more exploitive of the heroine's dependent relationship. In Davy Crockett, Eleanor's guardian, who owes the villain money, pressures her to marry the nephew of the villain. When Eleanor defies her guardian and marries Davy Crockett, she agrees to give up her fortune to pay her guardian's debts; only then is the situation fully resolved. In Flying Squad, Julia Latimer's uncle has raised her to be an adventuress; he too intends to have her marry for money. In this case the heroine has actually fallen in love with her guardian's choice, but instead of resolving an external conflict this leads to an internal conflict for Julia.

The father of a heroine could not be a true villain, but a guardian could. Obenreizer, the villain of No Thoroughfare, is in love with his ward, Marguerite.

She must have his permission to marry, and he is determined to withhold it, even though he is well aware that she does not love him. Obenreizer plans to marry Marguerite himself, and she does not appear to be in a position to refuse him, since he exercises legal control over her.

In keeping with a familiar dramatic convention that goes back well before the development of nineteenth-century melodrama, a few heroines who appear to be without parents actually find a father or mother in the course of the play. One of the most exciting scenes in London By Night occurs when Louisa, the heroine, realizes that Dognose and she are father and daughter. This recognition scene occurs just as Dognose, who has been misled about her identity, is about to murder her. In After Dark, there is a similar reunion between father and daughter. Early in the play, Old Tom, the comic of the piece, rescues the heroine from drowning, just as Dognose does in London By Night. However, Tom discovers his relationship to Eliza in a less dramatic way than Dognose, and he determines not to reveal it until she is sure that Eliza "will not be disgraced by" his company.²⁵ Esmeralda, heroine of Notre Dame,

²⁵Dion Boucicault, After Dark (1868), Act II, Sc. 1, in J.O. Bailey, ed., British Plays of the Nineteenth Century (New York: The Odyssey Press Inc., 1966).

is reunited with her long-lost mother in a scene which is reminiscent of the Dognose-Louisa reunion. Like Dognose, Gudule is about to kill the heroine in vengeance for the death of her own child. Just in time, Gudule learns that Esmeralda is, in fact, the daughter that she had believed dead.

In all three of the examples just discussed, the new-found parents are relatively impoverished, or even derelict characters who have been brought to their low station in life by tragedies which included the loss of a child. But the father discovered by Lisa, heroine of The White Slave, contrasts with this pattern. Lisa, who had believed herself to be an Octoroon slave, learns that she is not only a free white woman but that her father is a French marquis, who will be happy to acknowledge her.

There is one notable reversal of the parent-daughter reunion theme. In Under the Gaslight, an undesirable set of parents are fortuitously discovered to be unrelated to the heroine. Laura believes herself to be the daughter of criminals, who threaten to force her to join the underworld. There is even a courtroom scene in which Byke, the villain, is awarded custody of Laura, whom he claims as his daughter. Laura's suffering ends when she learns that it is not she but her foster sister, Pearl, who is actually the

daughter of Judas and Byke.

Laura Courtland was one of a small group of heroines who were stigmatized in some way because of their ancestry. In addition to whatever other troubles befell them, these heroines were handicapped by, but ultimately transcended, the circumstances of their birth. We have just seen that in Laura's case, her criminal origins turn out to be entirely fictitious. In Notre Dame, Esmeralda's Gypsy origins and in The White Slave, Lisa's Negro ancestry also turn out to be fabricated.

Lisa suddenly discovers that she is, in fact, the Southern lady that she has always aspired to be. Zoe, The Octoroon in Boucicault's play, is not so lucky. Although she has been raised as a lady, there is no doubt that her ancestry is one-eighth black. Even if she is able to avoid enslavement, she will never be free to marry the man she loves. For Zoe, freedom from the stigma of her birth is possible only through death.

Eliza, the black heroine of Uncle Tom's Cabin, has more achievable aspirations than Zoe. Eliza was born into slavery and is married to another slave. She wants the freedom to be together with him and with her son. Largely because of her own courage, Eliza is able to escape to freedom. Notwithstanding the fact that Eliza's entire situation hinged on her existence

as a Negro slave, stage performances of the period functioned to minimize her race as much as possible. Not only was she played by a white actress without blackface, but, like the black hero, George, she spoke with no trace of the dialect used by the other slave characters in the play.²⁶

The dialect used by Eily O'Connor in The Colleen Bawn is the outward sign of her humble ancestry which, in this play, is viewed at least initially as a stigma. Ultimately, that stigma is shown to be illusory, not because it is nonexistent but because it is unimportant. In the last moments of the play, Eily's dialect, previously a sign of her undistinguished background, turns into a symbol of honesty, simplicity and goodness and is deliberately used by Anne Chute.

No matter what their background, the aim of all heroines was to marry and begin their own families. A small but significant number were already married at the beginning of the play, or got married shortly

²⁶In an article on the history of the play (Wesley Winana Stout, "Little Eva is Seventy-Five," The Saturday Evening Post, October 8, 1927), the author claimed, "It was fixed and immutable . . . that all the blacks should talk in dialect except George Harris, Eliza, Cassy and Emmeline. These four were played without burnt cork and spoken with a nice diction" (p. 194). In another article on Tom Shows (J. Frank Davis, "Tom Shows," Scribner's Magazine, April 1925), the author makes the same point but adds, "There was sound authority for this tradition; Mrs. Stowe had done it in the book" (p. 352).

after it had begun. In nearly all of these plays, the heroine was married to the hero and, instead of focusing on problems that might prevent them from marrying, the play concentrated on problems that resulted from or were intensified by the marriage, itself. The tension resulting from parental opposition, a common obstacle to the heroine's happiness, was heightened immeasurably if the marriage had already taken place, either secretly (as in The Colleen Bawn, After Dark and The Forty-Niners) or in open defiance (as in Hazel Kirke and Shore Acres).

In a few cases, heroines had agreed to a marriage, often to an older man, out of a sense of duty or gratitude. In plays that featured such marriages the plot stressed the temptation to infidelity faced by the heroine. Isabel in East Lynne and Nelly in Lost in London succumbed to this temptation; Chrystal in Hearts of Oak, Dot in Boucicault's adaptation of The Cricket on the Hearth and Lilian in The Banker's Daughter did not.

In plays that emphasized the problems and obstacles faced by the hero, it was convenient to have him married to the heroine from the start. This put the heroine in a position to demonstrate her loyalty to the hero in significant ways, sometimes over a period of years. Their marital status made it viable

--and respectable--for Eliza to follow George in Uncle Tom's Cabin and for Nelly Denver to wait many years for Will's return in The Silver King. If they had not been married, Anne Carew could not (without compromising her reputation) have kept Jasper hidden in her house (A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing), and it would have been impossible for Fanny Morgan to have seen Joe through a single attack of the DTs, much less years of drunkenness (Ten Nights in a Bar-Room).

While very few heroines had mothers, many were mothers themselves. Most frequently, the child or children of the heroine served to intensify the pathos inherent in her plight. When her situation was at its lowest point, the heroine often faced a separation from her child. Anne Carew, Lady Florence in Rosedale and Margaret Gath in The Forty-Niners all lost their children, temporarily. In East Lynne, Isabel, who had to bear a large measure of responsibility for separation from her children, lost them permanently.

Poverty and squalor were intensified and made to seem more harrowing because of the presence of children. In The Silver King, one of Nelly Denver's children nearly died as a result of the awful conditions under which they lived. In Ten Nights in a Bar-Room, Fanny Morgan's daughter actually did die as a result of circumstances arising from her father's constant

inebriation.

The children in Hearts of Oak and The Banker's Daughter are also used to intensify the pathos. Both of these plays portray heroines who, while loving younger men, marry older men out of a sense of duty. In Hearts of Oak, the existence of the child of Chrystal and Terry makes their separation more poignant. In contrast, Natalie, daughter of Lilian and John in The Banker's Daughter, is instrumental in their reconciliation. And in Dot, the humorous yet tender tone of an early scene involving the child of the heroine and her husband is an immediate indication that their May-October marriage is a happy one.

All of these children served an important additional purpose as well: they provided an opportunity for the heroines to display their maternal feelings. However, in a few cases, the heroine's maternal instincts were essential to the plot rather than incidental to the characterization; they provided motivation for the actions of the heroine. In La Belle Russe, "Geraldine"²⁷ attempts her deception largely for the sake of her child. When she is unmasked, she loses her daughter but is offered the possibility

²⁷The heroine of this play is actually named Beatrice but she assumes Geraldine's identity and is called by her name in both dialogue and stage directions throughout the play.

of her return if she eventually shows that she has truly changed her ways. Since the audience has been convinced that Geraldine's love for the child is genuine and strong, it is left with hope for her ultimate return to respectability. The heroine of Monte Cristo is also motivated by mother love. Convinced that her sweetheart, Edmund, is dead, she marries Fernand, his hated rival, to give Edmund's illegitimate son a name.

The fact that Mercedes has borne him an illegitimate child functions in Monte Cristo as a manifestation of the heroine's undying love for the hero. The transgression that led to the birth is acknowledged but not emphasized. This is an unusual treatment of this situation for late nineteenth-century melodrama. In relationship to the non-virtuous heroine, children were generally used as the visible signs of sin. If the illegitimate offspring was not the child of the hero, it frequently died. Isabel in East Lynne bore an illegitimate child who died in infancy, as did Mary Brandon in My Partner.

In the preceding chapter I noted that heroes were drawn from all echelons of the socio-economic scale. Not surprisingly, the same appears to be true of heroines. However, there are relatively few instances of heroines who are very rich. Owen Davis,

a successful writer of melodramas in the early years of the twentieth century, decreed that a heroine could be very rich only if the hero was poor.²⁸ This ruling seems to have held true for the late nineteenth century as well. A rich heroine in combination with a middle class hero might have appeared to put the woman into an undesirably dominant position at the end of the play. A rich heroine paired with a rich hero might have yielded a couple who seemed too far removed from the audiences' environment. But a rich heroine brought an extra reward to a poor hero and thus provided a satisfying variation on the Cinderella theme. Foul Play, Davy Crockett, Paul Kauvar and The Still Alarm all feature wealthy heroines and poor heroes. In Rosedale, a wealthy heroine marries a poor alternate hero.

In cases where an upper class heroine marries a wealthy man, her personal fortune is either currently threatened or has recently been lost. This is the case in Nobody's Child. While the marriage is not necessarily motivated by the bridegroom's ability to support the heroine in the manner to which she is accustomed, it has that fortunate effect.

The largest number of heroines during the period under discussion belonged to the middle class. By and

²⁸I'd Like to Do it Again (New York: Farrar and Rinehart Inc., 1931), p. 102.

large, the plays in which these middle class heroines were portrayed did not deal with money, or the lack of it, to any great extent. It is easy to see why middle class heroines were popular. They were not so rich that women in the audience had trouble identifying with them. At the same time they had both the background and the financial security necessary to embody ideal Victorian ladies. Almost no middle class heroines held outside jobs. A rare exception was Anne Sylvester in Daly's Man and Wife, but she was a governess and thus still considered a "lady."²⁹

Middle class women were born to the title of "lady"; lower class women could attain the title through the manifestation of respectable or "ladylike" behavior.³⁰ Poor but ladylike heroines were nearly as prevalent as those who belonged to the middle class. While middle class heroines generally married within their own class, lower class heroines sometimes married men who were "above their station." In some cases, this class difference formed the basis for the major conflict developed in the play. Eily O'Connor in The Colleen

²⁹Patricia Thomson, in The Victorian Heroine; A Changing Ideal 1837-1873 (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), makes the point that the position of governess was one of the few considered appropriate for a lady (p. 56).

³⁰Mellick, p. 5.

Bawn, Possy Burrough in The Main Line and Mary Blenham in The Middleman all married men with money and position.

As would be expected, lower class heroines worked outside the home more frequently than those in the middle class. The theatre was still not considered a very respectable business, but it was an appropriate place for a non-virtuous heroine like Peg Woffington to earn a living. On the other hand, the incorruptible Esmeralda of Notre Dame was also a performer; she danced for crowds in the streets. May Edwards in The Ticket-of-Leave Man was also a street performer--but she was delighted when she acquired the more respectable and secure position of housekeeper to a wealthy family. The most unusual vocation for a heroine seems to have been that of Possy Burroughs who, in spite of her naivete in other matters, demonstrated extreme competence as a telegraph operator.

In a few plays, upper and middle class heroines were involved in severe financial misfortunes. Without exception, these newly impoverished heroines were depicted, at least for a portion of the play, not simply as poor, but as destitute. Lucy Fairweather in The Poor of New York (1857), Eliza Medhurst in After Dark, Louisa Marchant in London By Night, Laura Courtland in Under the Gaslight and Nelly Denver in The Silver King were all threatened with starvation. Some of these heroines

attempted to support themselves. Lucy Fairweather worked as a milliner and Louisa Marchant as a seamstress, both respectable domestic occupations for nineteenth-century women, Laura Courtland colored photographs while searching for a job as a governess.

It was a mark of character that these heroines made an effort to support themselves by doing respectable work. The heroine's respectability was an external feature which, like her beauty, reflected her admirable inner qualities.

Virtue and the Heroine

Peter Brooks has written that the "focal point" of melodrama is "the admiration of virtue"³¹ and virtue, in melodrama, is represented by the heroine.³² However, the concept of virtue and its relationship to the heroine of nineteenth-century melodrama, has not always been clear.

In the popular mind, and even in much serious criticism, "chastity" would probably stand as a synonym for the heroine's virtue. For example, Gilbert Cross refers to the heroine's "halo of virgin purity" and

³¹Peter Brooks, The Melodramatic Imagination (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 25.

³²Ibid., p. 32.

claims that she had "inflexible chastity."³³ The author of a recent dissertation on nineteenth-century melodrama stated: "With a moral scale determined by the audiences' accepted proprieties, purity . . . became the most sacredly revered virtue, and in one way or another the preservation of female purity was involved in nearly every melodrama of this period."³⁴ However, my investigation indicates that while chastity was an essential quality for most late nineteenth-century heroines, it does not seem, by any means, to have been the most important. Careful examination clearly demonstrates that the virtue most consistently emphasized in melodramas of the period is loyalty. Heroines certainly display other virtues, including chastity, but these are nearly always treated as subsidiary to and resulting from the heroine's loyalty to loved ones.

Most frequently, the heroine's sweetheart or husband was the recipient of her unfailing loyalty. We have already noted that heroines were often put in the position of having to choose between the wishes of a father or guardian and those of a husband or sweetheart. Except under certain special circumstances

³³Cross, p. 58.

³⁴Carol O'Loughlin Sweedler, Melodrama, 1870-1904: The Dramatic Reflection of Social Development in America (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at San Diego, 1975), p. 40.

(to be discussed below) heroines faced with this dilemma remained faithful to husbands or sweethearts. Hazel Kirke and Helen Berry ran away and married their sweethearts in direct defiance of their fathers' wishes. Marguerite (in No Thoroughfare) followed her true love into the treacherous Swiss Alps to save him from her cruel guardian. And Julia Latimer ignored her uncle's training and instructions to avoid deceiving the man she loved.

Many heroines faced a conflict between love for their country and love for a man. This was invariably true in Civil War dramas like Shenandoah, The Heart of Maryland, Secret Service, and Barbara Frietchie. In each of these plays the heroine was, initially, a loyal Southerner and the hero was an officer in the Northern Army. In some cases (e.g., Barbara Frietchie), the heroine actually was converted to the Union principles, in others she simply decided to abandon her fervor for the Southern cause. It is interesting that in no case did a hero give up his political beliefs to win his love, nor was any hero placed in a situation where this was expected or necessary. Heroines, on the other hand, were given the opportunity to display their loyalty to their men by shifting their political allegiances, and it hardly seems accidental that these allegiances were

invariably shifted to the winning side.

In Paul Kauvar, a play about the French Revolution, the heroine is put in a position similar to that of a Southern heroine in a Civil War setting. Although she is secretly married to Citizen Paul Kauvar, Dianne LeBlanc is the daughter of a French aristocrat. Ideally, Dianne would like to remain loyal to her father as well as her husband, but a reconciliation between the two men is made possible only after she has determined to join the sans culottes as Dianne Kauvar. In a similar conflict, Anne Carew, heroine of A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing, simulates callous disregard for her mother-in-law and child in order to remain loyal to and aid her husband who is persecuted for his political affiliations prior to the Revolution of 1688.

In demonstrating their devotion to sweethearts or husbands some heroines had temporarily to oppose not only a single political faction but all of society. Helen Rolleston in Foul Play, Louisa Goodwin in Across the Continent and May Edwards in The Ticket-of-Leave Man believed in the innocence of their unjustly convicted men and helped them to prove it. In The Great Diamond Robbery (1895), Mary Lavelot took an active part in the plan to keep her falsely accused sweetheart from being convicted. Nelly Denver in The Silver King had no way of knowing that her husband was innocent of a

murder which he, himself, believed he had committed. Yet, even when she believed him dead, Nelly remained loyal to Wilfred's memory, refusing to tell her children anything that would destroy their memories of their father.

Earlier in The Silver King, Nelly manifests her devotion to Will in a different type of situation. Although his drinking and general dissipation are destroying their family's security and happiness, Nelly remains steadfast in her loyalty to him, even when she is humiliated in front of an old suitor. Another heroine who remains loyal to her husband in a similar situation is Fanny Morgan in Ten Nights in a Bar-Room. In spite of the fact that Joe Morgan's drunkenness results in the death of their child, his wife devotes herself to helping him to reform and regain his former place in society.

Several heroines were placed in the extreme position of being forced to display fidelity to their husbands by agreeing to renounce their very marriage vows. Eily O'Connor in The Colleen Bawn, Eliza Medhurst in After Dark and Hazel Kirke all agree to this heart-breaking arrangement when they are convinced that their husbands' prospects will be enhanced if they are out of the picture. In The Poor of New York, Lucy Fairweather

decides to give up her sweetheart to a young heiress for similar reasons.

I have earlier observed that when a heroine was forced to choose between loyalty to her sweetheart and loyalty to her father, she generally chose her sweetheart. There were, however, some cases where this choice was reversed. When a father was threatened by a villainous blackmailer, a daughter did what she could to avert the threat to him, even if it meant renouncing her sweetheart to marry another. Possy Burroughs in The Main Line and Elinore Fordham in The Still Alarm both promise to marry villains who threaten otherwise to expose their fathers as murderers. Fortunately, neither heroine is actually pushed into fulfilling this promise. On the other hand, I have already noted that Lilian Westbrook in The Banker's Daughter rejects the man she believes to be her true love in order to marry a rich man who will help her father out of bankruptcy.

When the heroine's fidelity to father or lover was not being tested, she sometimes had the opportunity to display loyalty to another family member or friend. In Nobody's Child, Lucy Tregarvon remains a close friend of her foster sister Patty Lavrock even though their social stations are far apart. Laura Courtland in Under the Gaslight, manifests boundless loyalty to her foster sister, Pearl. In spite of the fact that

Pearl seems to have betrayed Laura by contriving to win Ray's heart after the heroine's disappearance, and even though her former sweetheart is having second thoughts about his involvement with Pearl, Laura encourages Ray to find happiness with her foster sister. And, at the end of the play, when Pearl, not Laura, is shown to be the child of thieves, Laura declares: "You are my sister still--whatever befalls."³⁵

In Forget-Me-Not, Alice Verney cares so deeply for her sister that she is willing to risk her own reputation to insure Rose's health and happiness. Alice Faulker in Sherlock Holmes is motivated by loyalty to her sister's memory--and the desire to avenge the destruction of her sister's life.

Lucy Fairweather in The Poor of New York shows loyalty to her brother and her mother when she attempts to commit suicide so that the family will have one less mouth to feed.³⁶ In The Octoroon, another Boucicault

³⁵Augustin Daly, Under the Gaslight (1867), Act IV, in Booth, Hiss the Villain.

³⁶In The Character of Melodrama (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1968), William Paul Steele asserts that Lucy's mother, Mrs. Fairweather, is the heroine of the play. Steele suggests that this is so because she (a) has more concern for others than Lucy, (b) shows more virtue in her dialogue and (c) carries the final message of the play (p. 107). I believe that Steele's conclusion is unwarranted. In the first place, it does not seem at all clear that Mrs.

[continued]

heroine refuses to consider the possibility of leaving the country with her sweetheart because his aunt, her foster mother, would be hurt. When George questions a decision based on his aunt's prejudice, Zoe replies, "I'd rather be black than ungrateful!"³⁷

Thus, heroines of late nineteenth-century melodramas demonstrated loyalty to various loved ones in many different types of situations. It is also true that the loyalty they displayed took many different forms, each of which, itself, represented a subsidiary virtue. While chastity as a virtue was not necessarily emphasized, it was expected of all heroines and was significant as an implicit sign of fidelity to husband or sweetheart.

In a few cases, where a heroine's purity was directly threatened, this implicit virtue was made

Fairweather had more concern for others than Lucy. While both characters attempt suicide in an attempt to spare the others, it is Lucy who is willing to give up the man she loves so that he will have a better life. While it may be true that Mrs. Fairweather has more virtuous speeches, Lucy does more virtuous deeds and is clearly meant to epitomize virtue. The fact that Mrs. Fairweather acts as the *raisonneur* in the last scene does not seem to qualify her for the title of heroine; heroines do not, generally speaking, act as *raisonneurs*. And, of course, it is Lucy who is young, beautiful and the female romantic interest of the play. Lucy suffers more than any other character and is most highly rewarded at the end. While Mrs. Fairweather is a virtuous and sympathetic character, Lucy is clearly the heroine of The Poor of New York.

³⁷Boucicault, The Octoroon, Act II.

explicit. In Nobody's Child, the heroine threatened to shoot the villain when he announced his plans to spend the night in her rooms. Zoe in The Octoroon and Lisa in The White Slave were horrified to learn that they were to be sold as slaves because they knew that their masters planned to seduce them. When Lisa refused to bend to her master's will he threatened to reduce her to a field hand. She replied, "Rags are royal raiment when worn for virtue's sake, and rather a hoe in my hands than self-contempt in my heart."³⁸ In The Octoroon to avoid "self-contempt" and pain to George, who said, "I'd rather see her dead than his!"³⁹ Zoe committed suicide. This drastic expedient was only narrowly averted in The Girl I Left Behind Me. When it appeared certain that an impending Indian attack would result in her ravishment, the heroine, Kate Kennion, got her father to agree to shoot her before she was subjected to "the worst."⁴⁰

³⁸Bartley Campbell, The White Slave (1882), Act III, in Clark, gen. ed., America's Lost Plays, Vol. 19: Napier Witt, ed., The White Slave and Other Plays by Bartley Campbell.

³⁹Boucicault, The Octoroon, Act V, Sc. 1.

⁴⁰David Belasco and Franklin Fyles, The Girl I Left Behind Me (1893), Act II, in Clark, gen. ed., America's Lost Plays, Vol. 18: Glenn Hughes and George Savage, eds., The Heart of Maryland and Other Plays by David Belasco.

As a form of loyalty, self-sacrifice was emphasized more frequently than chastity. A number of examples of self-sacrifice have already been noted. In Forget-Me-Not Alice Verney offered to ruin her own reputation to protect that of her sister. Lilian Westbrook married a man she did not love to keep her father from bankruptcy. Eily O'Connor, Eliza Medhurst and Hazel Kirke agreed to renounce their marriage vows so their husbands might have brighter futures. Lucy Fairweather (The Poor of New York), the ultimate self-sacrificing heroine, first rejected the man she loved so that he would be free to marry a wealthy woman, then tried to kill herself, so her mother and brother would not have to worry about feeding her.

Certain types of self-sacrifice require a special kind of courage. Although the nineteenth-century heroine is frequently described as vulnerable and passive, she often demonstrated remarkable courage, especially in defense of others. In Under the Gaslight, Laura used an axe to break down the door of a storeroom she had been locked into and rushed out onto the railroad tracks to rescue Snorky, the comic man, from an oncoming train. As Laura broke her way out, Snorky cheered her on: "Courage! . . . Courage! . . .

That's a true woman. Courage!"⁴¹ Those words could also have applied to Mary Lavelot who, in The Great Diamond Robbery, allowed herself to be kidnapped and held in a den of criminals in order to help prove that her sweetheart was innocent of murder.

In The Heart of Maryland, the heroine performs an even more dramatic act of bravery. Inside a church that is being used as a prisoner-of-war center, she stabs the villain with his own bayonet and helps her sweetheart, a condemned prisoner, to make an escape. The villain suddenly revives and orders the church bell to be rung as an alarm to the pickets that a prisoner has escaped. Maryland climbs the belfry and as it swings back and forth she holds onto the tongue of the bell so that it cannot ring. Her sweetheart is not caught.

In another Civil War drama, Barbara Frietche, the heroine is equally courageous. In order to protect her fiancé, she shoots a soldier who has plotted to fire on him. Later, when Will is fatally wounded in battle, Barbara stands up to her father and their neighbors and keeps them from disturbing the dying man through sheer determination. After Will's death, Barbara performs a supreme act of bravery and defiance, which

⁴¹Daly, Under the Gaslight, Act III, Sc. 3.

results in her own death. As a triumphant procession of Southern soldiers marches by her house, she fastens a Union flag up on the balcony.

In the unending efforts to remain steadfast, many heroines display a resourcefulness which is closely related to, though perhaps less spectacular than, the courageous acts we have just discussed. In A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing, Anne Carew successfully hides Jasper, her fugitive husband, and tricks the villain, Captain Kirke, into swearing out a deposition to the effect that Jasper was killed in a shipwreck. When Kirke is relieved from command, Anne is free to leave for Holland with her family, friends and servants --including her husband, who masquerades as part of the entourage.

In The Girl I Left Behind Me, the heroine also evinces resourcefulness in a tense situation. Although she is aware that the fort is in imminent danger of being attacked by Indians, Kate helps her father to avoid a panic by keeping the knowledge from guests at a ball taking place in the next room. In Under the Gaslight, the newly impoverished Laura Courtland shows a different kind of resourcefulness when she teaches herself the skills necessary to keep house and earn a living.

During her period of impoverishment, Laura befriended and took in a young girl, Peachblossom, whom she endeavored to care for and educate. In doing so, she demonstrated two other virtues--kindness and generosity--that were subsidiary to loyalty. The heroine's faithfulness to her loved ones was reflected in her treatment of unfortunates--who nearly always returned her kindness by saving her from disaster at the hands of the villain. The aristocratic Lucy Tregarvon in Nobody's Child was idolized by Joe, a poor and timid waif, because she was always nice to him. Similarly, Esmeralda, in Notre Dame, was adored by Quasimodo because she had shown him simple kindness.

Suffering and the Heroine

The heroine's virtue was intertwined with her eventual, inevitable suffering. The suffering of virtuous heroines was all the more poignant because they were so evidently blameless. On the other hand, non-virtuous heroines were partially responsible for their suffering, which served as punishment for whatever sins they had committed.

A popular image of the suffering melodramatic heroine is that of a beautiful young woman being ravished or beaten or placed in imminent danger of destruction by sawmills or oncoming railroad trains.

Owen Davis described the typical treatment of a heroine as follows:

You piled catastrophe upon catastrophe. By the time the hero threw his protecting arms around her in the last act, she must have narrowly escaped scalping by Indians, been almost drowned in a millrace, missed death in a trainwreck, and been shot at and stabbed by the villain, to say nothing of having passed through several conflagrations, an earthquake or two, a mine cave-in, or a magazine explosion.⁴²

Notwithstanding Davis's colorful description, the assumption that most heroines endured physical torture, or even the threat of physical terror is, in the context of late nineteenth-century melodrama, as incorrect as the notion that virtue was synonymous with chastity. Examination of the plays clearly demonstrates that the vast majority of heroines experienced mental, rather than physical anguish.

This is not, however, meant to suggest that the amount of anguish and suffering that heroines endured has been exaggerated. It is certainly true that they were required to persevere through "catastrophe upon catastrophe." More often than not, their suffering had begun even before the opening curtain. Often it rose to reveal a heroine living in poverty and degradation (Lucy in The Poor of New York, May in

⁴²My First Years in Theatre, as quoted by Jordan Y. Miller in American Dramatic Literature: Ten Modern Plays in Perspective (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1961), p. 40.

The Ticket-of-Leave Man, Nelly in The Silver King) or a heroine who guiltily harbored the secrets of a shameful past (Louisa in London By Night, Anne in Man and Wife, Geraldine in La Belle Russe) or a clandestine marriage (Eily in The Colleen Bawn, Dianne in Paul Kauvar). Many orphaned heroines had lost parents under particularly tragic circumstances (Louise in Across the Continent, Eliza in After Dark, Lucy in The Poor of New York) or were in the custody of cruel or uncaring relatives or guardians (Marguerite in No Thoroughfare, Lady Isabel in East Lynne). Others were condemned to slavery (Eliza in Uncle Tom's Cabin) or held captive for other purposes (Alice in Sherlock Holmes). And some heroines were simply dissatisfied or bored with their ordinary lives (Nelly in Lost in London, Little Em'ly, and Letty in Saints and Sinners).

These pre-existing conditions were then exacerbated during the entire play, usually, though not always, through the agency of the villain. Sometimes the heroine's father was wholly or partially to blame for her plight. Other "good" characters were also occasionally (indirectly) responsible for the heroine's suffering.

Whatever its cause, the heroine's suffering was intense and prolonged, though it was generally mental or emotional rather than physical in nature.

The most frequent type of agony endured by the heroine arose from anxiety about the safety of her sweetheart. While heroines were not often in physical danger themselves, heroes and alternate heroes were and heroines experienced this danger vicariously.

Even heroines who had almost no personal worries were fearful about the fate of their sweethearts. Helen Rolleston in Foul Play is a beautiful and wealthy young woman who is unable to achieve peace of mind until her sweetheart is cleared of a false accusation. Edith Varney in Secret Service is a highly self-sufficient young woman who is agitated by the threat that faces the hero, a secret agent who is in imminent danger of being exposed.

Frequently, heroines were separated from their sweethearts and husbands, and the pain of this separation was generally intensified by the heroine's uncertainty as to the fate of her beloved. Gertrude, the heroine of Shenandoah, is an active young woman who becomes involved in the Civil War and is actually taken prisoner when she is caught delivering a dispatch. But it clear that she is most tormented by her fear that Kerchival, her sweetheart, is missing and may be dead. In Monte Cristo, the heroine is separated from the hero for over eighteen years, during which time she bears and raises his illegitimate son. In all this

time, Mercedes has no word from or about Edmund; for most of that time she continues to hope, against all odds, that he is alive and will someday return. Since nineteenth-century melodrama almost always ended happily, the heroine's worst fears about the fate of her sweetheart were seldom realized. There were, however, occasional exceptions; in Barbara Frietchie the heroine's love was fatally wounded in battle.

Heroines also suffered anxiety as a result of separations from loved ones other than their sweethearts; fathers, children and other family members. Many of these separations were temporary. Anne in A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing, Lady Florence in Rosedale and Meg in The Forty-Niners all endured separations from their children; Lady Florence and Meg were uncertain, during the separation, of their children's fate. In Shenandoah the heroine persevered during a long separation from her brother as well as her sweetheart. But unlike most partings from sweethearts, separations from other family members were sometimes permanent. In The Heart of Maryland, the heroine's brother is killed in the Civil War. Almost the only real suffering endured by Annette in The Bells occurs at the death of her father; the same is true of Alicia

in Lady Audley's Secret.⁴³ Lady Isabel (East Lynne) and Fanny Morgan (Ten Nights in a Bar-Room) both bear the pain of witnessing the death of a beloved child.

When heroines were not suffering anxiety and loneliness borne of physical separation, they often fretted about the security of their relationships with their sweethearts. By their very nature, the circumstances which gave heroines the greatest opportunities to display loyalty, also caused them the greatest suffering. Earlier in this chapter, we have seen that the threat of being coerced into a loveless marriage hung over a large number of heroines. While striving to remain faithful to their true loves, these heroines spent much of the play contemplating the probability of a permanent union with a man they despised. A few heroines even went through with these marriages. Even when a heroine had managed to marry the man she loved, the permanence of the relationship was not necessarily insured since under some circumstances heroines could be pressured to renounce marriage vows made to men they loved.

⁴³Annette and Alicia are two of the most passive and uninvolved heroines of the melodrama of this period. They have relatively little to do with the action of the plots of their plays. Yet they can still be seen as being at the emotional core of their respective plays, since the outcome of each has a profound effect on its heroine.

When no external force existed to get in the way of true love, the heroine's sweetheart, himself, sometimes unwittingly raised doubts about the viability of their relationship. In The Poor of New York, Lucy Fairweather mistakenly assumes that the hero has lost interest in her when he stops calling on her for a period of time. Possy Burroughs in The Main Line mistakenly believes that the man she loves is in love with another woman. In Notre Dame, Esmeralda is heartbroken by what appears to be her lover's indifference to her plight. In each of these cases, the anxieties are shown to be unwarranted by the time of the final curtain. On the other hand, in Man and Wife, Anne Sylvester, who has erred by becoming her lover's mistress, has genuine cause for alarm over his behavior. Although he had promised to marry her, Geoffrey attempts to renege on that promise so that he may marry a wealthy woman.

Sometimes, when her sweetheart did not give the heroine cause to question their relationship, she, herself conceived an inner conflict that threatened it. I have already noted that heroines of Civil War plays invariably showed loyalty to their sweethearts by ultimately choosing love over patriotism. But all of these heroines made the choice painfully; all were, at least initially, Southern patriots.

Humiliation and disgrace were inevitable types of suffering for non-virtuous heroines; occasionally they were the lot of virtuous heroines as well. Virtuous heroines who suffered humiliation were never, themselves, to blame for it. Possy Burroughs, who was disgraced after she indulged in gambling, was totally ignorant of the attitude toward that vice taken by polite society. Zoe (The Octoroon) and Lisa (The White Slave) were certainly not responsible for their race or for their supposed status as slaves. Laura Courtland had no control over the apparent ancestry that indicated she was the child of criminals. Laura suffered further humiliation when she was forced to live in extreme poverty. Lucy Fairweather and Nelly Denver who, like Laura, had been raised in comfortable circumstances were also mortified by the poverty they endured.

The notion that melodramatic heroines were "tortured"⁴⁴ physically rather than mentally is persistent, in spite of evidence to the contrary. It can, perhaps, be explained by demonstrating that while the threat of physical suffering was often

⁴⁴Booth describes heroines as "tortured" without specifying whether their tortures are physical or mental in English Melodrama (p. 14).

present, that threat was rarely carried out.⁴⁵ For every heroine who actually died, there were countless others on whose lives attempts were made and foiled (e.g., Anne in Man and Wife, Esmeralda in Notre Dame, Mary in The Great Diamond Robbery, Dianne in Paul Kauvar, Eily in The Colleen Bawn). A significant number of heroines attempted suicide, but nearly always these attempts turned out to be unsuccessful. Virtuous heroines like Maryland Calvert, Kate Kennion, Zoe and Lisa were threatened with seduction but that threat was always averted.

Of course, there were heroines who escaped from some more spectacular disasters. Helen Rolleston, Helen Berry and Lisa all were saved from being drowned in shipwrecks. Louise Goodwin and Kate Kennion narrowly escaped being raped and scalped by Indians. In Davy Crockett, Eleanor, the heroine, is rescued from freezing to death only to face the threat of being devoured by wolves. Elinore in The Still Alarm

⁴⁵Many people must have formed their impressions of plays from advertising illustrations of the period. Many of these illustrations depicted a heroine who appeared to be in imminent danger of physical suffering. The fact that this suffering would be averted in the next moment was, of course, irrelevant to the advertisement. A number of advertisements for plays discussed in this study are included in Stanley Appelbaum, ed., Scenes from the Nineteenth-Century Stage in Advertising Woodcuts (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1977).

escapes from her burning house without a blister. But only a minute percentage of nineteenth-century heroines seem to have endured any real physical suffering. Lucy Fairweather is genuinely ill in The Poor of New York. In Flying Scud, Julia Latimer was wounded in the arm when she was shot in the duel in which she had impersonated her sweetheart.

The contemporary playwright Bronson Howard wrote: "a play must be, in one way or another, 'satisfactory' to the audience . . . in England and America, the death of a pure woman on the stage is not 'satisfactory' except when the play rises to the dignity of tragedy. The death, in an ordinary play, of a woman who is not pure . . . is perfectly satisfactory, for the reason that it is inevitable."⁴⁶ With few exceptions, Howard's axiom was observed in the late nineteenth century. Zoe was one of the few heroines whose suicide attempt was successful. Barbara Frietchie, heroine of a play whose author clearly aspired to transcend the form of melodrama, was fatally shot by a madman. But, by and large, physical pain and death were reserved for non-virtuous heroines.

⁴⁶Bronson Howard, The Autobiography of a Play (New York: Dramatic Museum of Columbia University, 1914), p. 27.

Rewards

Whether or not they actually died at the end, non-virtuous heroines rarely progressed beyond the suffering they were forced to endure as punishment for their sins. On the other hand, virtuous heroines were invariably rescued from their anguish and rewarded for their forbearance. As we would expect, in most cases, the heroine was rescued by the hero or by the alternate hero. However, even in the age of the Victorian lady, there were heroines who took matters into their own hands.

Some critics have implied that the submissiveness which was generally considered a feminine virtue in nineteenth-century society was invariably seen that way in the drama of the period. Gilbert Cross refers to the heroine's "meekness, humility and patience."⁴⁷ In his dissertation on melodrama and the schematization of women, Andrew David Mendelson suggests that women in nineteenth-century melodrama were invariably depicted as passive paragons, thus reflecting the social ideal.⁴⁸ But a thorough examination of the plays of the period does not bear this assertion out. Non-virtuous heroines

⁴⁷Cross, p. 58.

⁴⁸The Rise of Melodrama and the Schematization of Women in England, 1760-1840: The Relationship between Theatrical Stereotype, Social Mythology and Social Change during the Industrial Revolution (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1977).

who allowed themselves to be seduced were depicted as being inappropriately passive. And stage heroines who took an active part in extricating themselves from mental or physical pain were not viewed as any less feminine than their more passive counterparts.⁴⁹

In most cases, the heroine who effected her own rescue did so by coming to the aid of a sweetheart who was in trouble, thus releasing herself from the agony of uncertainty about his welfare. Sometimes this required her to perform a physical act of bravery (The Heart of Maryland, Flying Scud), but often it merely involved the demonstration of inventiveness and ingenuity (Sheep in Wolf's Clothing, Secret Service).

In the preceding chapter I have shown that when neither the hero nor the heroine were in a position to effect a rescue, the comic man often stepped in. The heroine might also be saved by a combination of efforts --those of the hero and the comic hero (The White Slave, The Poor of New York)--or those of the hero, the comic man and the heroine (Shore Acres, Notre Dame).

⁴⁹On the other hand, late nineteenth-century melodrama shows little influence of the feminist movement, which was occasionally reflected in the novels of the same period. Aside from the anti-double standard arguments made in Forget-Me-Not and My Partner the only other significant reference to feminism occurs in Under the Gaslight after Laura rescues Snorkey from the railroad tracks. "And these are the women who ain't to have the vote!" Snorkey exclaims (Act III, Sc. 3).

The nature of her tribulations and subsequent rescue might vary, but the essence of the heroine's reward was always the same: she was permanently united with her sweetheart or husband (the hero or alternate hero). While every virtuous heroine was rewarded with romantic love and marriage, a few also received additional recompense in the form of material wealth. With the recognition of her secret marriage, Eily O'Connor moved several steps up the socioeconomic ladder. Lucy Fairweather and Lucy Tregarvon both received large inheritances that had previously been concealed from them. Nellie Denver discovered that her husband was "the Silver King." However, even when the heroine was granted a monetary reward, the strong emphasis at the end was on her union with her true love. Implicit in this union was the assurance of eternal tranquility in their life together. In most cases this was precisely the goal to which the heroine had aspired throughout the play.

However, there were a few cases in which the heroine's sweetheart turned out to be unworthy of her love. These "unworthy" fellows were not villains, but they displayed character flaws that were severe enough to make it clear to the audience, and eventually to the heroine, herself, that her adoration had been misplaced. But before she came to this realization, another man

(the true hero) had fallen in love with her. Bronson Howard who, with The Banker's Daughter, wrote a play built around this situation, explained its inevitable resolution:

There are axioms among the laws of dramatic construction, as in mathematics. One of them is this--three hearts cannot beat as one. The world is not large enough, from an artistic point of view, for three good human hearts to continue to exist, if two of them love a third. . . . [Unless one of the hearts is a bad one] art is merciful to it and puts it out of its misery by death.⁵⁰

That was exactly how Howard concluded the plot of The Banker's Daughter. Lilian's original sweetheart dies an untimely death, leaving the way open for Lilian to realize the true depths of her love for her husband. In a sense, the reward for a heroine who, like Lilian, is granted a second chance at love is even greater than that given an ordinary heroine since, in melodrama, second love is more intense than first. Howard says of Lilian's first love: "It must be the love of a young girl, however sincere and intense, which yields, afterwards, to the stronger and deeper love of a woman for her husband."⁵¹

Two other plays which revolve around a heroine who learns the difference between infatuation and true

⁵⁰Howard, Autobiography of a Play, p. 30.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 32.

love are The Forty-Niners and My Partner. In The Forty-Niners, Meg Gath is secretly married to a man who turns out to be weak-willed, if not entirely dishonorable. After his death, the hero, who has always loved Meg, confesses his love to her. In the last moments of the play, Meg calls her love for her first husband "a fancied love" and her love for Richard "a real one."⁵² Mary Brandon makes a similar but more poetic comparison in My Partner. Of her feelings for Ned, her first lover, she says: "the love of that man in his grave was a shallow stream, lovely to look upon in the sunlight of prosperity, but not deep enough to launch one's barque of life upon."⁵³ On the other hand, her feelings for Joe, her new husband are such that "a great love has flooded my life; a sweeter, healing tide, with all the power of purification in it."⁵⁴

Adjunct Heroines

Not many heroines were able to articulate the themes or morals of the plays in which they appeared as clearly as Mary Brandon. Of course, it was often the case that the plot and characterizations of

⁵²T.W. Hanshew, The Forty-Niners (1878), Act V, in Alfred Bates, ed., American Drama (London and New York: Smart and Stanley, 1903).

⁵³Campbell, My Partner, Act IV.

⁵⁴Ibid.

a melodrama were so simplified that no further moralizing was necessary or desirable. Yet, it is clear that a significant number of playwrights of the late nineteenth century aspired to some integrity, if not sophistication, in the development of plot, characters and theme. Conventional *raisonneurs* rarely appeared in late nineteenth-century melodrama. In this action-oriented form, there was no time for extended verbal explications of the theme. Playwrights who wished to highlight thematic points or to underline characterizations, had to find other devices for doing so.

Supporting characters were frequently used for these purposes. Often female characters, who can be viewed as counterparts to the "alternate heroes" discussed in the previous chapter, reflected or threw into relief the heroine's qualities and thus enriched the thematic development of the plot that revolved around her.⁵⁵

"Alternate heroines" occur in about half of all melodramas written in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁵⁶ Like their male counterparts (with whom

⁵⁵There are no real female equivalents of the "comic hero," although the comic woman, a rough counterpart of the non-heroic comic man, was a stock character in many melodramas.

⁵⁶In most cases their roles were probably taken by actresses who specialized in playing ingenues or soubrettes.

they are often paired at the end of the play), alternate heroines are related to the traditional confidante. In fact, used in her simplest form, the alternate heroine was little more than a sounding board for the heroine. Grace, Mary's sister in My Partner, functioned in this way.

But, in general, the alternate heroines plays a more substantial role. Often she provides a tonal contrast that accentuates the heroine's nature or situation. In The Middleman, Mary Blenham's sister Nancy has similar values to, but is a less romantic, more pragmatic person than the heroine. Nancy is as faithful and loving to her father as Mary is--but unlike Mary she does not understand him or his dreams. Her comic romance with Jesse Pegg contrasts with Mary's near-tragic love affair with Julian. Another Nancy is contrasted with Helen Rolleston, heroine of Foul Play. While the upper class heroine works to prove that the hero is innocent of any wrongdoing, the lower class alternate heroine learns that her sweetheart has been duped into participating in the villain's crimes.

Two alternate heroines in The White Slave provide light and dark shading that highlight the heroine's plight. In a humorous subplot, Letty, who later turns out to be Lisa's cousin, is prevented from marrying her sweetheart because her mother objects to

his poverty. This obstacle is, of course, a great deal less serious than the one Lisa faces, and is easily overcome when the two simply elope. In a more serious vein, Daphne, the villain's octoroon mistress, presents a picture of what Lisa's fate might have been, had she not been rescued from it. Degraded to the point of despair, Daphne is eventually fatally shot by her own master for having attempted to aid Lisa in an escape. Her death scene⁵⁷ contains as much pathos as if she were, herself, the heroine.

As is the case with alternate heroes, alternate heroines often play a pivotal role in a subplot, which is integrally related to the main plot. When this is the case, their problems, which tend to be outgrowths of the main conflict, are usually solved at the same time as those of the heroine. Alternate heroines who are involved in their own subplots generally enjoy a sympathetic relationship with the heroine in the main plot. However, their socioeconomic situation is often in marked contrast to that of the heroine.

Michael Booth points out that "All three [of Boucicault's Irish plays] possess two heroines;

⁵⁷This scene, at the beginning of Act VI, is included in the version published in Wilt, The White Slave and Other Plays by Bartley Campbell. The editor notes that it was not always actually included in performance.

a peasant girl and a lady of higher social standing."⁵⁸ The Colleen Bawn contains two characters who appear, at the outset, to be rivals not only for the hand of the hero, but for the title of heroine. Both of the young ladies are beautiful and virtuous; both perform--or show their willingness to perform--heroic sacrifices; both suffer; and both are rewarded. Ultimately, however, the rivalry of these two characters turns out to be illusory on both counts; they are not really rivals for the hero's hand, nor are they rivals for the central position. Instead, Anne Chute emerges as the alternate heroine.

While Anne and the heroine have many essential characteristics in common, there are certain important differences between them. Anne is wealthy and high spirited; Eily is poor and demure. From Boucicault's viewpoint, this contrast had two advantages, aside from the interest it provided in and of itself. First, it bestowed greater vulnerability and pathos on the heroine, and second, since Anne is the moral equal of Eily, it allowed the author to extoll the virtues of the lower class without appearing to indict the upper class.

⁵⁸Michael Booth, ed., English Plays of the Nineteenth Century, Vol. 2: Dramas, 1850-1900 (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 169.

The subplot of The Colleen Bawn consists primarily of a comic misunderstanding. Anne, who stands at its center, has spirit and wit which recall the heroines of Restoration Comedy. Anne is in love with Kyrle Daly, but she is tricked into believing that he, not Hardress, is secretly married to Eily. When the major plot is resolved with Eily's return, the misunderstanding that comprises the subplot is also cleared up. In the course of the subplot Anne, like Eily, shows her willingness to sacrifice for others, although the sacrifices that she offers are less drastic than Eily's. First, she offers to give up her fortune to aid the Cregans, even though she is not interested in becoming romantically involved with Hardress. Second, when she meets Eily she is so impressed with the heroine's goodness and innocence that she offers her aid and support, even though she believes that Eily is her rival.

The contrasting yet complementary natures of the heroine and alternate heroine of The Colleen Bawn and the sympathetic relationship that exists between them, are emphasized by the dialect used in the play. Throughout the play, Eily speaks with a heavy Irish brogue. She and Hardress see the brogue as a humiliating sign of her peasant background, but more objective characters, and clearly the author, himself, view it as a symbol of honesty, simplicity and goodness. Anne

speaks standard English for most of the play, but in emotional moments she lapses into brogue. In the last moments of the play she convinces the other characters that Irish dialect is superior to British English.

It is not only in the Irish plays that Boucicault depicts an alternate heroine who has the virtue and beauty of the heroine, without her vulnerability. In After Dark we once again find a beautiful and virtuous alternate heroine, Rose, who, out of feelings of duty almost marries her cousin, even though she loves another. Furthermore, the hero almost marries Rose because, like Hardress, he believes that his wife has committed suicide. In addition, the same kind of sympathetic relationship that existed between Eily and Anne in The Colleen Bawn is established between Eliza and Rose in After Dark. However, in After Dark the contrasts between Eliza and Rose are a good deal more muted than those drawn between Eily and Anne. The contrast between the wealthy alternate heroine and the impoverished heroine is still present, but Rose is less spirited and witty than Anne, and Eliza is a much more cultivated young lady than Eily.

Nobody's Child also features an alternate heroine whose social position contrasts with that of the heroine--but this time it is the heroine who is of the upper class. Patty Lavrock, a village girl who is

an old friend of the heroine's, is the alternate heroine. At one point in the play, Patty, like Anne Chute, mistakenly perceives the heroine as a rival for the love of the hero. But in her case, this misapprehension results in no comic misunderstanding. Patty tells Joe of her suspicions and is quickly reassured that while Lucy is a star that he worships, Patty is a flower that he wears next to his heart.⁵⁹ Thus convinced, Patty wholeheartedly aids Joe in his efforts to help Lucy.

Patty is referred to as the "foster sister" of the heroine. There is no further explanation of this relationship, but it is consistent with the "spiritual" sisterhood that is so often established between heroine and alternate heroine. Cad, a spirited young music hall performer, who is the alternate heroine of The Still Alarm, turns out to be the biological sister of the heroine. Like her long-lost sister, she has been the victim of the villain who sought to gain an inheritance by disposing of her. But even before their relationship is revealed, Willie, the hero's brother, has fallen in love with and proposed to Cad.

If the alternate heroine was not the heroine's sister, the hero was often her brother so that, ultimately, she became the heroine's sister-in-law.

⁵⁹Phillips, Nobody's Child, Act III, Sc. 1.

In The Girl I Left Behind Me, Lucy Hawkesworth, the hero's sister and the heroine's best friend, is one of several alternate heroines. Lucy's social station is similar to Kate's, but in a show of true democratic spirit, she becomes engaged to a private. Madeline, one of the alternate heroines of Shenandoah, is also the heroine's best friend and the hero's sister. But here the relationship is carried one step further; she marries the alternate hero who is the heroine's brother, thus making heroine and alternate heroine double sisters-in-law. An even more complicated form of sisterhood exists in Rosedale. In that play, the alternate heroine has been raised as the sister of the alternate hero. Rosa, a young village girl whose "brother" is romantically involved with the heroine is ultimately united with the hero. Their union becomes possible only when it is discovered that Rosa is not, after all, the biological sister of the alternate hero, since it is learned that he is the hero's biological brother.

Up to this point we have seen alternate heroines who enjoyed close and supportive relationships with the heroines. To the extent that contrasts between heroines and alternate heroines have been noted they have consisted in differences in socioeconomic status or background, not in values or morality. However, there

were a number of alternate heroines whose virtue, or lack of it, was contrasted with that of the heroine.

Dora, in The Octoroon, is a good example of an alternate heroine who is contrasted with the heroine in this way. Boucicault's portrayal of Dora is quite different from his characterizations of Anne Chute and Rose Egerton. Although Dora is as beautiful as Zoe, Zoe is clearly depicted as Dora's moral superior. Zoe is completely selfless, more concerned with the welfare of others than with her own happiness. Dora, on the other hand, is initially drawn as being totally spoiled and self-centered. She has little interest in anybody or anything which does not seem to relate directly to her own happiness. The difference between Dora and Zoe is, perhaps, best exemplified in a scene which takes place towards the beginning of Act II. The sheriff of New Orleans has come to take possession of Terrebonne. To Zoe this represents a catastrophe; to Dora it merely represents an opportunity to display yet another advantage that George would gain by marrying her. She takes Zoe aside and in an extremely patronizing way--she refers to her as "you little fool" and "you goose"--asks her to act as an intermediary between George and herself. In most melodramas, the alternate heroine offers help to the heroine.

Because of the difference in the heroine's line of action, the position, function and characterization of The Octoroon's alternate heroine depart from the general pattern. Usually the rivalry that may seem to exist between heroine and alternate heroine turns out to be illusory. Here, the rivalry is real; Zoe and Dora are both in love with George Peyton. In Boucicault's play about the pre-Civil War South there is no "alternate hero" to provide a happy ending for the alternate heroine, since Zoe's death at the end of the play leaves the way open for Dora to marry George. Consequently, there is no subplot revolving around Dora. However, Dora's position in the plot of The Octoroon is particularly interesting in that it shifts as the play progresses. At the beginning of the play, Dora seems to stand just outside the main action. As the play progresses, her emotional involvement with George and the resulting antagonism to Zoe, seems to move her closer to the center. By the end of the play, the reasons for this antagonism have disappeared and so the antagonism disappears. At this point, Dora is moved to a position which is just a step away from the center of the action. Although the play ends immediately after Zoe's death, it is clear that Dora stands ready to fill the void that has been created.

Because Dora is ultimately rewarded by getting exactly what she wants, Boucicault's characterization of her as a spoiled and selfish young girl seems somewhat surprising. However, Dora's behavior in the first part of the play serves to underline dramatically the nobility of her actions in the second part. At the beginning of Act III, Dora is utterly humiliated when George tells her that he is in love with Zoe. She runs away in a rage, announcing that she hates both of them. But she returns at the end of the act, to make a valiant attempt to outbid M'Closkey for possession of Zoe, even though it may cost her entire fortune. This act, along with the brief but effective reconciliation between Dora and Zoe in the last scene of the play, is used to justify Dora's reward. Furthermore, it helps to avoid the possibility of the audience's drawing the conclusion that Boucicault meant to take a political position on the slavery issue.

Another spoiled and snobbish Dora is the alternate heroine of The Main Line. This Dora is also jealous of the heroine, whose social station is much beneath her own. Dora's pride is hurt when the hero tells her that he is not romantically interested in her. Thereafter an antagonistic relationship develops between alternate heroine and heroine. Dora does not miss any opportunity to patronize or embarrass Posy. But she

has no real power over either Lawrence or Possy and she actually poses no threat to their relationship. While Lawrence's rejection humiliates her, the fact is that she is actually not romantically interested in him either. By the end of the play, reverses in her stage career have worked to take Dora down a peg, and she becomes a humbler and more agreeable person. The end of the play brings a suitable love match and a happy ending for her as well as for the heroine.

Dora in The Octoroon moves from selfishness to generosity. Dora in The Main Line moves from snobbishness to humility. But Pearl, the alternate heroine of Under the Gaslight, remains frivolous and self-centered throughout. Even though Pearl eventually finds herself in the same situation that Laura, the heroine, was placed in earlier, she never moves into the central position in the action as Dora does in The Octoroon.

In contrast to Laura, who is depicted as being more interested in the happiness of others than in her own well-being, Pearl is characterized as caring only for her own interests. This is clear from the very first scene in the play, when Pearl expresses her frustration with the long period of mourning which has curtailed her social life. Pearl's frivolity is further revealed when she admits that she "hate[s]

everything but fun, larks and dancing."⁶⁰ Later in the play, Pearl demonstrates her lack of constancy to others. She admits that she was once glad at Laura's misfortune because it cleared the way for her to become romantically involved with Ray. Then, even though she is engaged to Ray, she flirts with another man.⁶¹

However, in spite of the fact that Pearl is foolish and selfish she is never malicious. She rightly points out that although she gained from Laura's suffering, she did not instigate it.

Pearl's limited perspective probably causes her to view the turnabout in her situation as a convenient pretext for breaking her engagement with Ray, who has lost all charm for her. However, her self-centeredness does not detract from the fact that she accepts the reversal with utmost good grace. Another of Pearl's redeeming features is her cognizance of her own limitations. She says, at one point, "I'm a fool. But I can't help it. People say 'she's good-looking, but she's got no heart.' I'd give anything for one, but they ain't to be bought."⁶²

Although Pearl's selfishness disqualifies her from being rewarded in the way most alternate heroines

⁶⁰Daly, Under the Gaslight, Act I, Sc. 1.

⁶¹Ibid., Act III, Sc. 1. ⁶²Ibid.

are, her complete lack of malice keeps her from having to face any significant punishment. It has already been noted that Pearl's new circumstances provide her with an excuse for extricating herself from an uncomfortable situation. Moreover, with the villains disposed of, and with the guarantee of support and protection from Laura, the changed circumstances do not really pose a threat to Pearl's welfare.

A different kind of moral contrast is drawn between the heroine and alternate heroine in The Forty-Niners. The alternate heroine, Kate Delmayne, is, in fact, the fallen woman that some of the characters believe the heroine has become. Like Meg, Kate is sweet and demure, but where Meg radiates sunlight and joy, Kate is sad and downcast. The subplot in which Kate is featured is, in many ways, reminiscent of the main plot of My Partner--it includes a sweetheart named Joe who is quite willing to overlook Kate's past. However, the resolution of this subplot is achieved without any of the reflection or philosophizing found in My Partner. Kate insists that "she won't think of marrying till the stain is taken from her name."⁶³ Fortunately, the villain who is responsible for that stain has just been captured. Joe intercepts him just

⁶³Hanshew, The Forty-Niners, Act V. (Joe relates this information to another character.)

before he is about to be lynched and forces him into what is literally a shotgun marriage. Thus, the stain is, presumably, blotted out and, with justice done, the way is clear for Kate to marry Joe.

East Lynne also has an alternate heroine who contrasts with the heroine. But, since this is a play which features a non-virtuous heroine, the alternate heroine, Barbara Hare, is morally superior to the heroine. Barbara's superiority is demonstrated in both the main plot and the subplot. The subplot concerns her brother, Richard, who has been falsely accused of murder. Barbara is central to this plot because she is ultimately the instrument for Richard's vindication. In contrast to Isabel, who suspects her husband on the basis of the most flimsy evidence, Barbara maintains her faith in Richard, even when all available evidence seems to indict him, and all others believe him guilty.

In the main plot, Barbara's virtue is proven, not by any particular action that she takes, but by her lack of inappropriate action. Although Barbara is as jealous of Isabel as Isabel is of her, and although she has real grounds for jealousy, while Isabel's are illusory, Barbara makes every attempt to conceal her feelings and she does nothing to wreak vengeance on Archibald. Ultimately, Barbara's discretion is rewarded; her beloved Archibald takes her as his

second wife.

Barbara Hare is unusual in that she is an alternate heroine who develops almost no relationship with the heroine. In fact, the only interaction between Barbara and Isabel takes place during the time that Isabel is disguised as Madame Vine. Nearly all other alternate heroines ultimately establish some sort of sympathetic or supportive relationship with the heroine. In fact, there are a number of alternate heroines who function primarily to aid in extricating the heroine or, occasionally, the hero, from whatever predicament they are in. In some cases, these characters even risk their own lives, thus demonstrating a high degree of loyalty and friendship.

The servant girl Keziah is initially a relatively inconspicuous character in A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing. But ultimately she plays a vital part in effecting the release of the Carew family when she tells a crucial lie that disguises her master's identity. In Horse-Shoe Robinson Mary Musgrove, a loyal rebel, is also instrumental in helping the hero to escape from his captors. She too deceives the enemy, in this instance using deception to disguise the fact that she brings Major Butler plans for an escape.

Blanche Lundie, a loyal friend of the heroine in Man and Wife, is less active but nevertheless essential

in saving Anne's honor and, eventually, her life. Blanche personally attempts to obtain a stolen letter that would vindicate Anne. Later, when it is clear that only a man can help Anne, she "lends" her fiancé for that purpose. Even when circumstantial evidence suggests an illicit relationship between Arnold and Anne, Blanche remains steadfast in her loyalty to both, and she rightly assumes that they are innocent.

In The Girl I Left Behind Me, we find a more dramatic portrayal of loyalty in the character of the young Indian girl, Fawn Afraid, one of several alternate heroines in this play. Like Zoe, heroine of The Octoroon, Fawn Afraid is a racial outcast who blindly loves the hero. But in this case, the hero, though fond of the young girl, has no romantic interest in her; he is in love with the heroine. Thus, Fawn is condemned, like her Octoroon counterpart, to demonstrate Howard's axiom that "the world is not large enough . . . for three good human hearts . . . if two of them love a third." Fawn's death results from a brave and successful effort to protect her beloved.

If the alternate heroine was often active in helping the heroine or hero, there were other instances in which she, herself, needed help. In some plays the alternate heroine faced problems which would normally have been faced by the heroine. However, in these plays

the emphasis was not on the suffering that these problems caused but on the manner of their resolution, effected by the true heroine or, occasionally, by the hero. Thus, even though these alternate heroines were placed in situations that were conventionally associated with the heroine, they never achieved the focus that would have qualified them for that title.

In Peg Woffington, Mabel Vane, a young, innocent and highly vulnerable country girl is in grave danger of losing her husband. While the audience is moved by the plight of this alternate heroine, their primary sympathy goes to Peg, whose personal sacrifice saves Mabel's marriage. In Boucicault's Dot, May, the alternate heroine is, like countless heroines, in danger of being coerced into a loveless marriage. In extricating her from this predicament, her sweetheart enlists the aid of the play's heroine. Because of her involvement, Dot's own marriage is jeopardized but ultimately undamaged, and the play ends with the union of May and the man she loves.

It is not uncommon for the alternate heroine to be threatened by the same villain who threatens the heroine. For example, Tackleton, who attempts to marry May, also poses a threat to Dot. In Shenandoah, there is a variation on this arrangement. The villain, Thornton, does not directly endanger the heroine in any

way. But he does threaten the honor of an alternate heroine, Mrs. Haverill, who is the wife of the hero's commanding officer. She is rescued from the villain's unwanted advances by Kerchival, who not only thwarts Thornton's plans but fights a duel with him.

Kerchival's treatment of Mrs. Haverill could not be more chivalrous if she were the heroine, but throughout, it is clear to the audience (if not to General Haverill) that he defends her out of respect, not romantic love, which is reserved for Gertrude.

As we have seen, when plays had subplots, or even double plots, it was usual for the alternate heroine to be directly or indirectly involved with the heroine and with the main plot. But a few plays were so episodic in structure that they encompassed two or more plots that were essentially unrelated. For example, only the theme holds the various parts of Uncle Tom's Cabin together. In that play the "other" heroine does not alternate with Eliza--she replaces her in importance as Tom does with George. In his article on Tom shows, J. Frank Davis writes: "Early in the performance George Harris was the hero, and the heroine was his wife, Eliza. Presently George and Eliza vanished from the stage . . . and Uncle Tom became the hero, with Eva St. Clare pressing him hard for stellar honors until her untimely and pathetic death, with slaves on their knees

cluttering up the room and singing, 'I wonder where my Eva's gone.'"⁶⁴

Little Eva has all of the sweetness, innocence and vulnerability associated with the most virtuous of heroines. But, strictly speaking, the character cannot be classified as a heroine. Although she dies, Little Eva never really suffers, nor is she threatened with any suffering. Furthermore, Eva is too young for any romantic involvement--her friendship with Uncle Tom substitutes for this. Without a romance, she cannot receive the conventional heroine's reward; instead she is ultimately reunited with her loved ones in heaven. Essentially the role of Little Eva is a magnified and more pathetic version of a typical melodramatic child role. But the fact that the playwright sees Little Eva as a focal point for the second half of the play makes it possible to view her as an alternate heroine.

Halliday's version of David Copperfield, Little Em'ly, also has two distinct and separate plots, held together in this case by the central character, David Copperfield. Agnes, the heroine of the second plot, has no involvement and virtually no interaction with Little Em'ly. Unlike Little Eva, Agnes could easily be classified as a conventional heroine, if she had

⁶⁴J. Frank Davis, p. 351.

been given primary focus. In contrast to Emily, a sympathetic but non-virtuous heroine, Agnes has a character and situation which follow the pattern set by the most traditional virtuous heroines. She is every bit "as good a girl as [she] ought to be." She suffers under the threat of being forced to marry a man she despises, to save her father's reputation. And she is ultimately rewarded for her loyalty when her father is vindicated, and she is allowed to marry her true love, David Copperfield. It is interesting that in the original novel, Agnes emerges as the primary heroine. Apparently Halliday felt that the originally subordinate character, Little Em'ly, would make a more arresting heroine of a stage melodrama.

It is surprising that so little critical attention has been paid to the recurring character of the alternate heroine. None of the major critics of nineteenth-century melodrama takes note of her at all. Yet, she fulfilled an important function in terms of the themes and structures of the plays in which she appeared. Furthermore, she may have played a significant role in the development of a fully dimensional heroine. The alternate heroine made it possible for playwrights to examine women who displayed alternate, often contrasting types of behaviors in different situations. Although alternate heroines might be depicted as

superficially as their traditional counterparts, the very fact that they were presented suggests the possibility for acceptance of a less stereotyped, more fully developed heroine at a later time.

Non-Virtuous Heroines

A more drastic contrast with the conventional heroine could be achieved with the substitution of a non-virtuous heroine. Up to this point, this discussion has concentrated on the heroine as an exemplification of virtue. But as the century wore on, non-virtuous heroines grew more and more popular. As instruments of morality, these heroines were as useful as their virtuous counterparts; they provided the audiences with a cautionary look at sin and its consequences. Frank Rahill points out that it was "especially in love" that heroines were less than blameless.⁶⁵ Although the chastity of virtuous heroines was not necessarily stressed, the non-virtuous heroine was, almost by definition, a woman who had lost her virginity.

It is not, however, true that all heroines who had committed sexual transgressions were viewed in the same harsh light. Their motives in committing those transgressions were carefully considered. Sex outside of marriage was never condoned, but there were some

⁶⁵Rahill, p. xv.

situations where it was condemned less than others. A heroine who engaged in premarital sex with her sweetheart always suffered for it, but she was ultimately forgiven and nearly always went on to achieve a happy marriage. After all, whatever moral lapse might be suggested by engaging in premarital sex, the act implies no breach of the supreme virtue, loyalty.

In London By Night, the heroine, Louisa, tells how she became the mistress of Frank Marchmont, a dissolute gambler. She supported him by sewing and attempted suicide when he abandoned her. Her former fiance, Henry Marchmont, Frank's brother, promises to arrange for her to be married to Frank and by the end of the play Henry's promise is carried out. Anne Sylvester in Man and Wife also marries the man who seduced her. But in this case, there is an unusual twist. Anne's former sweetheart emerges as the villain. Even though Geoffrey has been forced to marry Anne, he makes it clear that he hates her, and the audience soon learns that he plans to murder her. Fortunately, Geoffrey is prevented from carrying out his plan, and moments after his attempt, he, himself drops dead. Anne is left a widow but, more important, the brief, though unhappy, marriage has made an honest woman of her.

Mary Brandon in My Partner is not so lucky. Although his intentions toward her are honorable, her sweetheart dies without having married her. Mary is left alone, carrying Ned's child. She disappears for several months, returning to her frontier town only after the birth and death of her baby. Shortly after her return, Ned's partner, Joe, who has always loved her, marries Mary to protect her reputation. By a fortunate coincidence, during her self-imposed exile, Mary has realized that it was really Joe that she loved deeply.

Mary's experiences are similar to those of other heroines who fall from grace; i.e., she is forced into exile, endures great suffering and humiliation, and is returned to grace because of a combination of her own repentance and great good luck. However, her actions are explained and excused in a way that is uncharacteristic of other plays which treat the same theme. Joe says of Mary's past transgressions, "you was a poor child raised out here in the wilderness . . . a poor girl as had no mother to guide her."⁶⁶ This explanation appears much in keeping with contemporary ideas, but Joe's next statement seems remarkably liberal for its

⁶⁶Bartley Campbell, My Partner (1879), Act IV, in Barrett H. Clark, ed., Favorite American Plays of the Nineteenth Century (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1943).

time: "The world of him who made it; the world of right and marcy and forgiveness has but one law for both sexes . . . wimmen have an equal claim with men to the charity that covers a great mistake."⁶⁷

The heroine of Monte Cristo also makes a "great mistake," and, like Mary, she loses her sweetheart before he can marry her. Also like Mary, Mercedes goes into exile to give birth to her baby. But Mercedes's child lives, and years later when she returns to her home, it is as the mother of an eighteen year old son. Believing Edmund dead, Mercedes marries to protect her son's future. She marries her sweetheart's rival for whom she feels affection but not love. Edmund's return precipitates the suicide of his rival, and the hero, Mercedes and their son are finally united as a family.

In The Middleman, it takes a great deal less than eighteen years for Mary Blenham to be united with her family. Like Mercedes, she discovers that she is pregnant before the departure of her sweetheart, but she is more fortunate than Mercedes because she has a chance to tell him about her condition. Julian, her sweetheart, is determined to marry her, despite opposition from his social-climbing father. But his father does succeed in

⁶⁷Ibid. It is interesting that Forget-Me-Not, produced in England in the same year as My Partner, also contains an anti-double standard argument, though in an entirely different context.

separating them temporarily and in complicating their reunion. In the interim, Mary goes into exile, contemplates suicide and is rumored to have died at sea. But, when she returns at the end of the last act, it is with Julian, who presumably married her before the birth of the child she proudly carries in her arms.

The "non-virtuous" heroines just discussed were treated sympathetically, in spite of their "sins." While they were not treated with quite as much tolerance as "Male Magdalens," the plots in which they were involved contained forgiveness and happy resolutions. But when a heroine who was married, or even engaged, allowed herself to be seduced by a villain, a happy ending was never possible. Michael Booth points out that while single women could sin and live, married women always died of sin.⁶⁸ It would appear that death as a result of sin was not necessarily a judgment on unchastity per se. Rather, it was a punishment for the disloyalty it reflected, marital infidelity being viewed as the ultimate act of disloyalty.

Lady Isabel in East Lynne is almost the prototypical non-virtuous heroine. During the early part of the play she appears, in most ways, to conform to the behavior pattern of a traditional virtuous heroine. She

⁶⁸Booth, English Melodrama, p. 155.

demonstrates respect, affection, gratitude and loyalty toward her husband who, by marrying Isabel, has rescued her from a situation in which she suffered greatly. When her former suitor, Sir Francis Levison, attempts to make love to her, she spurns his advances. She attempts to be kind and patient with her husband's disagreeable older sister. She is also kind and considerate to the servants.

However, in the early part of the play, there are hints that Isabel will not be able to continue as a virtuous heroine. In the first act, she shows a good deal of trouble coping with her new middle-class environment. In Under the Gaslight, Laura demonstrated great resourcefulness when she moved from luxurious circumstances to impoverished ones. Isabel, whose circumstances are not nearly as drastically changed as Laura's, shows very little ability to adapt. Laura learned to cook lambchops; Isabel cannot even order dinner. Laura found viable means of earning a living; Isabel has incredibly unrealistic notions about how she might help Archibald, her husband, with his business affairs.

Then too, we learn, through a conversation between Isabel and her uncle that, in spite of her loyalty to her husband, she is really more attracted to Levison. This is a serious fault; virtuous heroines

are faithful to their husbands in thought as well as in deed. What is even more serious is Isabel's jealousy of her husband's old friend, Barbara Hare. Despite Archibald's assurance that his relationship with Barbara is not a romantic one, Isabel becomes more and more suspicious of her husband.

Thus, Isabel herself generates the distrust that puts her in a position where she can easily be exploited by the villain. Eventually, Levison fans the flames of Isabel's fears to the point where she becomes incensed enough to agree to elope with him, partly to wreak vengeance on Archibald. When we next see Isabel, she has already begun to suffer greatly for her impulsive act, and she has long since repented it. The remainder of the play depicts the humiliation and torture, and ultimately the death, that she is forced to endure as punishment for her sin.

In Lost in London we find a heroine who resembles Lady Isabel, but is drawn from the working class. Like Isabel, Nelly feels respect and gratitude rather than romantic love toward her husband. Like Isabel, she is attracted to a handsome, unscrupulous man who exploits her innocence. But Nelly's motivation for leaving her husband differs from Isabel's. It is not jealousy, but a deep longing for excitement that impels her to allow Gilbert Featherstone to take her

to London. Once there, Nelly realizes her mistake almost immediately, but she must endure months of degradation before she is taken out of London to die of shame.

Little Em'ly in the play of that name (based on Dickens's David Copperfield), is a younger, unmarried version of Nelly. Seventeen year old Em'ly's father was a fisherman, but it is not evident from her looks or manner that she is "the daughter of such rough parentage."⁶⁹ Em'ly is betrothed to Ham, a young fisherman with whom she was raised and for whom she feels affection but not romantic love. Ham, she says, loves her too much and is too good. Several times she laments, "I am not half so good a girl as I wish to be."⁷⁰ Em'ly fantasizes about becoming a lady and it is largely in pursuit of this fantasy that she is led astray. Steerforth, a wealthy and polished friend of David Copperfield's, takes her with him to the continent and then, after a period of time, abandons her. Em'ly, who had vowed never to return home "unless he brings me back a lady,"⁷¹ is forced into the ultimate

⁶⁹Andrew Halliday, Little Em'ly (Boston: Walter H. Baker & Co.; New York: The DeWitt Publishing House, n.d.; first performed 1869), Act I, Sc. 1.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid., Act I, Sc. 5.

degradation before she is reclaimed by her loving and forgiving foster family.⁷²

On her return, she is further humiliated by Rosa Dartle, who had once hoped to marry Steerforth. Rosa calls her "a piece of pollution picked up from the water-side, to be made much of, for an hour, and then tossed back to its original place."⁷³ But Em'ly's family does not view her this way. The husbands of Isabel and Nelly graciously granted them forgiveness moments before their death. In contrast, Ham says of Em'ly, "Tain't that I forgive her. 'Tis more, as I beg her to forgive me for having pressed my affections upon her."⁷⁴ Em'ly is one of the few heroines of her type who survives. Although she is forever tainted, she has a chance to make a new life when her foster father takes her with him to emigrate to Australia.

Saints and Sinners was written two decades later than the three plays just discussed and it represented a serious attempt by its author, Henry Arthur Jones, to break away from melodramatic form and content. Yet the play is full of melodramatic conventions and its heroine, Letty Fletcher, seems

⁷²The audience is given a number of clues that make it obvious that Emily has been driven to prostitution, but this is never explicitly described or dramatized.

⁷³Ibid., Act III, Sc. 1. ⁷⁴Ibid.

to have been cast in the same mold as the heroines of the three earlier plays. Like Nelly, Letty, the daughter of a country minister, yearns for adventure or "anything that's exciting and not quite respectable."⁷⁵ Like Em'ly, she agrees to an engagement with a respectable young man whom she does not love and is, at the same time, attracted to a wealthy sophisticated and unscrupulous villain. Also like Em'ly, she is aware that she is about to be led astray: "Oh to be loved by these two men, and to feel that I shall leave the good and choose the evil!"⁷⁶ After she chooses "the evil" Letty fears that she "can never be good and happy again."⁷⁷ Letty never is depicted as happy again but during a period of repentance that seems even more extended than Lady Isabel's, Letty expiates her sins by nursing the sick. "If ever there was an angel on earth it's been our Miss Letty this last four years,"⁷⁸ one character remarks in the last act. During those four years, Letty realizes that she really does love George, and she lets him know of her feelings

⁷⁵Henry Arthur Jones, Saints and Sinners (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1891; first performed 1884), Act I.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid., Act III, Sc. 2.

⁷⁸Ibid., Act V.

in an emotional reconciliation scene that occurs immediately before her death.⁷⁹

In the introduction to this chapter I pointed out that there were two major varieties of non-virtuous heroines in nineteenth-century melodrama: those who passively allowed themselves to be seduced and thus, went astray, and those who were fully responsible for the planning and execution for their transgressions. Audiences and critics usually referred to members of this second group as adventuresses.

I have already noted that adventuresses were usually about ten years older than conventional heroines. They were beautiful, but their beauty was seductive, rather than innocent. Ultimately they suffered but, while plays with passive non-virtuous heroines emphasized the painful consequences of doing wrong, plays that featured adventuresses tended to emphasize the act of wrongdoing itself. Adventuresses were invariably unchaste women; usually they were also somehow involved with places known as "gambling hells" where they were used to decoys to lure in naive men. Whereas virtuous heroines married for love,

⁷⁹In the originally produced version, Letty did not die and the play ended with her marriage to George. In the introduction to the final published version (*Ibid.*), Jones made it clear that he preferred to have the play end with Letty's death.

adventuresses generally aspired to marry for money.

There has been some disagreement, among critics, about whether an adventuress is a type of heroine or a female villain. After careful examination of a number of adventuresses I have come to believe that proper classification is dependent on the portrayal and function of the individual character. For example, Lady Audley (in Lady Audley's Secret), and Stephanie de Mohrivart (in Forget-Me-Not) function as villains; they are depicted as wholly self-centered and destructive. Other female characters in each of these plays can easily be identified as true virtuous heroines. But some adventuresses are sympathetically portrayed. These women may engage in deception, but they do not plot to harm anyone and do not, ultimately, harm anyone but themselves.

Geraldine in La Belle Russe is such a character. Geraldine is cunning and clever, but not entirely ruthless or destructive. She assumes a false role to gain wealth and power, but wealth and power are not Geraldine's sole motives for impersonation. She is also seeking security and stability for her child and herself. When a man from her past appears and threatens to expose her charade, Geraldine makes an unsuccessful attempt at murder. But she does not compound this attempt with others and, when she

is ultimately exposed, she repents both her sinful past and the ill-fated plan to hide it.

Geraldine's masquerade requires her to play the part of another woman. This other woman, the real Geraldine, might have been the (virtuous) heroine of La Belle Russe, but she never appears on stage. During the first two acts, knowledge of Geraldine's ruse is withheld from the audience as well as the other characters, and she appears to be a very conventional virtuous heroine, as she talks about the poverty and deprivation that she has suffered. Even when she is exposed as an impostor, Geraldine is shown to have redeeming features. She shows a great deal of maternal instinct, loyalty and love for her child. She has genuinely fallen in love with the man whose wife she is pretending to be. Furthermore, she truly believes that if she is allowed to maintain her posture as a virtuous woman, she will, in fact, become "pure, womanly and good."⁸⁰ Finally, she demonstrates, in an impassioned speech, that she is not fully responsible for the lurid past she is trying to escape; after an initial mistake she was cast out of respectable society, even by her family. But although she would

⁸⁰David Belasco, La Belle Russe (1881), Act IV, in Clark, gen. ed., America's Lost Plays, Vol. 18: Hughes and Savage, eds., The Heart of Maryland and Other Plays by David Belasco.

like to turn to a life of respectability, Geraldine is forced to pay for her masquerade and for sins committed years earlier with the humiliation of exposure, the loss of her child, and exile from the family she had hoped to make her own.

An earlier non-virtuous heroine, Peg Woffington in Masks and Faces, is also cast out of respectable society. In Peg's case, she is looked down on because she is an actress. "The authors present her sympathetically as a misunderstood woman seeking a man who will love her honestly only to find herself regarded as 'a plaything for every profligate who can find the open sesame of the stage door.'"⁸¹ Peg is as aggressive as Geraldine, but a great deal less self-serving. Her most outstanding feature is her loyalty--to old friends and new. When Peg realizes that an old friend is down on his luck, she goes to great lengths to help him and to do so in a way that does not embarrass him. And when she learns that the man with whom she is in love is dearly loved by his wife she vows to renounce him. Peg is a more complex heroine than most--virtuous or non-virtuous. She personifies the "masks and faces" motif of the play. Although much of her superficial behavior makes her

⁸¹Winton Tolles, Tom Taylor and the Victorian Drama (New York: AMS Press, 1966), p. 84.

unfit for "polite society," her inner qualities are truly fine. They enable her to function as a very satisfactory heroine of a play which has a "theme of a domestic drama upholding the sanctity of womanhood and the home."⁸²

The non-virtuous heroine clearly held considerable fascination for audiences. On the other hand, the virtuous heroine was ultimately a more psychologically satisfying figure. There exist occasional attempts to combine the two by creating a virtuous heroine who appears, to other characters in the play, to have some non-virtuous qualities.

Julia Latimer in Flying Scud has been trained as an adventuress, and her uncle expects her to marry a wealthy but naive aristocrat for his money. When Julia actually falls in love with the young man, she refuses to go through with the plan. From the beginning, it is clear to the audience that Julia is no adventuress. Not only is she too young and sweet-natured for the title; her first lines of dialogue consist of a moralistic lecture against gambling, smoking and drinking. But it is only when Julia, through an heroic act of self-sacrifice, is able to shed her own self-image as an adventuress that she is able to accept the suit of

⁸²Ibid.

the man she loves.

We have earlier observed that the adventuress was often connected with some form of gambling. In The Main Line, Possy Burroughs shocks the man she adores when she proudly presents him with money she won by gambling. Although she has previously seemed an embodiment of innocence, several of the characters now regard her, patronizingly, as a "poor erring, sinful human creature."⁸³ But, when he recovers from his initial shock, Lawrence realizes that Possy's apparent indulgence in vice is due to ignorance and naivete, not to sinfulness.

In The Forty-Niners, Meg Gath is believed by both her father and the hero have eloped with another man and to have had an illegitimate child with him. The audience, however, is aware that Meg has been secretly married the entire time. The fact that he believes her to be a fallen woman makes the hero's continued devotion to Meg all the more admirable; the fact that she has not lost her virtue makes Meg a fitting reward for him.

Conclusion

It is no accident that this section on heroines is considerably longer than the chapter on heroes. As the emotional and structural core of melodrama and the

⁸³DeMille and Barnard, The Main Line, Act II.

"storm centre of its action,"⁸⁴ the heroine demands and requires a more lengthy treatment than the hero.

This chapter has demonstrated that within the generally accepted definition of the melodramatic heroine, there is considerable room for variation. Much of that variation involves patterns of characterization that are not, today, generally associated with nineteenth-century melodrama. While all traditional heroines of melodrama are virtuous, there can be different definitions of virtue. Most involve placing a high value on loyalty; chastity per se is merely one of many possible signs of fidelity.

All melodramatic heroines suffer, but the nature of suffering varies. Late nineteenth-century heroines generally endure mental rather than physical anguish, though the two are often connected. The heroine may be rescued by the hero, but frequently she actively participates in, or even engineers, her own rescue. Passivity was by no means a requirement for heroines of this period. Only the reward for virtuous heroines was consistent: unification with sweetheart or husband. Any additional material reward was incidental.

The heroines of late nineteenth-century

⁸⁴Booth, English Melodrama, p. 30.

melodrama were less interchangeable than most critics have suggested. Although they were not quite custom crafted, they were not all cut from the same pattern. There was more than one pattern and each offered several possible variations. Dramatists could make selections which resulted in a heroine who suited the theme and plot of the individual play in which she appeared. It seems likely that melodramatic playwrights devoted more thought and care to their portrayals of heroines than has previously been suggested.

Chapter IV

THE VILLAIN

For many of us living in the twentieth century, the "one dimensional villain in a stove-pipe hat"¹ has come to serve as a symbol of the melodrama of a hundred years ago. While most critics see the heroine as the center of melodrama, the villain is perceived as the controlling force that sets it in motion. One writer has commented that "the villain and his indomitable energy for evil doing . . . controls the melodrama until its final scene. Since melodrama is a play about how evil is eventually overcome, the villain is without contest its most vital character."²

The villain was nearly always painted in broader, more vibrant strokes than the other two major stereotypes. Within the play, the hero and heroine were almost never referred to as such, but the villain's status was regularly proclaimed in the dialogue. When

¹Michael J. Arlen, "The Air--On Giving the Devil his Due," New Yorker, March 12, 1979, p. 129.

²Carol O'Loughlin Sweedler, Melodrama, 1870-1904; The Dramatic Reflection of Social Development in America (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at San Diego, 1975), p. 22.

his true nature became apparent, his victims angrily denounced him by addressing him as "Villain."³ or, even more descriptively as "cold blooded murderous villain!"⁴ or "damned villain."⁵ In discussions about his evil deeds they referred to the "temptations of a villain"⁶ and despaired that "Honesty, fidelity and honor are no match for a villain who stabs you in the dark."⁷

"At his best," the villain of nineteenth-century melodrama could be expected to be "a superman of crime, tireless in iniquity, implacable in vengeance,

³Augustin Daly, Under the Gaslight (1867), Ray Trafford to Byke in Act IV; Charles Selby (?), London by Night (1868), Henry Marchmont to Hawkhurst in Scene 6; both in Michael Booth, ed., Hiss the Villain; Six American and English Melodramas (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967; first published by Eyre and Spottswode, 1964).

⁴Dion Boucicault and Charles Reade, Foul Play (Chicago: The Dramatic Publishing Co., n.d.; first performed 1868), Wylie to Wardlaw in Act III, Sc. 5.

⁵Andrew Halliday, Little Em'ly (Boston: Walter H. Baker & Co.; New York: The DeWitt Publishing House, n.d.; first performed 1869), Ham of Steerforth in Act I, Sc. 5.

⁶John Oxenford, East Lynne (1866), Isabel of Sir Francis Levison in Act IV, Sc. 2, in Michael Kilgariff, The Golden Age of Melodrama; Twelve 19th Century Melodramas (London: Wolfe Publishing Limited, 1974).

⁷Joseph Arthur, The Still Alarm (entered Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Theatre Collection, N.Y.P.L., 1887), Arthur Manley of Gorman, Act II, Sc. 1.

inexhaustible in evil resource."⁸ The vitality of this character may account for the clear picture of a "dark handsome man with a sneery expression . . . cold clear acid voice [and] a grating 'Ha! ha! I've got you' laugh"⁹ that, even a century later, forms in our minds when the word "villain" is uttered.

A somewhat more detailed portrait is offered by Gilbert Cross:

The villain, though a devil in his actions concentrated on foreclosures rather than souls. His pursuit of the heroine showed a persistence that would be wholly admirable in a more worthy cause. Not infrequently, he exhibited considerable courage and was seldom cowed by anyone. Even when defeated or rebuffed, he could confidently predict that his time would come. Occasionally, he showed signs of repentance or remorse, but generally he did not.¹⁰

As a generalization about nineteenth-century villains, Cross's description is a useful one. As a springboard for further investigation of these characters, it is equally useful. In the preceding chapters I have shown that while most heroes and heroines conform to their stereotypes in broad outline, they

⁸Frank Rahill, The World of Melodrama (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967), p. 207.

⁹Bart Kennedy, Footlights (London: Henry Walker, 1928), pp. 106-107.

¹⁰Gilbert B. Cross, Next Week--East Lynne; Domestic Drama in Performance 1820-1874 (London: Associated University Presses; Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1977), p. 58.

diverge noticeably in the ways in which details of their characters were filled in. In this chapter it will become clear that a similar conclusion can be drawn about the third member of the melodramatic triumvirate. Villains, by definition, commit or plot to commit evil deeds; they are ultimately defeated and punished. But their motivation to do evil, the nature of that evil and the punishments ultimately inflicted on them, vary widely.

Villains are not necessarily motivated by lust for the heroine, or even by a desire for revenge on the hero. Their "evil deeds" cover a wide range that includes everything from minor infractions to capital crimes. The inevitable result of this wide range is a diversity of punishments since, in the well-organized world of melodrama, poetic justice reigns and the punishment always fits the crime.

The bulk of this chapter will consist of a detailed consideration of the variations outlined above. In addition to investigating the traditional "black" villain, I will also discuss villainous supporting characters who correspond to "adjunct" heroes and heroines. "Adjunct villains" appear in many melodramas to aid (or sometimes to counteract) the main villain in his performance of evil. Many critics have recognized the existence of this group

of characters; Booth refers to them as "white villains."¹¹

One further issue connected with the villain in late nineteenth-century melodrama should be examined. I have earlier noted that the villain is consistently called the strongest and most vital character in the genre. Yet, during the last quarter of the century, a significant number of melodramas without villains were written. In dealing with this apparent paradox, I will discuss some of these plays and suggest some of the implications of the appearance of melodramas that depicted the conflict between good and evil without personifying evil.

However, since most of this chapter will deal with evil personified, at this point it may be useful to supply a description of the external characteristics of that person. In addition to providing a better understanding of the makeup of the villain, this should reveal something about his source of power. What was it about this wicked and ultimately defeatable character that made it possible for him to cause so much suffering and fear, through so much of the play?

¹¹Michael Booth, English Melodrama (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1965), p. 20.

External Characteristics of the Villain

In his short book on melodrama, James L. Smith refers to the villain as "Randall."¹² An earlier critic dubbed him "Lionel."¹³ Both seem to suggest that the villain is regularly given an aristocratic but somewhat pretentious first name. This is occasionally true, but it is by no means the rule. Furthermore, in most cases, the villain's first name is relatively unimportant. In contrast to the hero, who tends to be on a first-name basis with other characters, the villain, whose relationships are usually impersonal, is generally referred to by his last name.

Naturally, villains who were aristocrats had names which reflected their exalted status. But often these names sounded both affected and somewhat effeminate, perhaps signifying the villain's underlying decadence. The names of Gilbert Featherstone (Lost in London), Dudley Lazonby (Nobody's Child) and Eustace Fanshawe (Saints and Sinners) all function this way.

However, villains often had last names which described or at least hinted at their unpleasant natures. Bloodgood (The Poor of New York), Adderly (Across the

¹²James L. Smith, Melodrama (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1973), p. 38.

¹³Harry James Smith, "The Melodrama," Atlantic Monthly, March 1907, p. 322.

Continent), Craven (The Forty-Niners), and Skinner (The Silver King) could instantly be identified as villains when their names were known. Similarly, names like Crampton (Davy Crockett), Tackleton (Dot), Hawkhurst (London by Night), Thornton (Shenandoah), Scraggs (My Partner), and Negly (Barbara Frietchie) told audiences that their bearers were not to be trusted.

A number of villains had aliases. Sometimes, the villain's alias expressed his true character better than his real name. Sir Francis Levison (East Lynne) used "Thorne"¹⁴ and John Bird (The Still Alarm) called himself "Gorman." More often, a respectable or even aristocratic sounding alias was used to conceal a more apt name. "Chandos Bellingham" appeared to be a carefree "man about town"¹⁵ but he was actually Richard Knatchbull, an escaped convict. In Horse-Shoe Robinson, the apparently aristocratic St. Jermyn was really the cruel Tyrrell. I noted above that the villain of Across the Continent was John Adderly; this son of a saloon-keeper

¹⁴Lewis Dumont, hero of Secret Service, also used "Thorne" as an alias. Under that alias, he behaved deceptively and committed acts which might, in another context, have seemed villainous.

¹⁵Dion Boucicault, After Dark (1868), Cast of Characters, in J.O. Bailey, ed., British Plays of the Nineteenth Century (New York: The Odyssey Press Inc., 1966).

attempted to pass as Ellerton, a respectable businessman.

Like his name, the villain's appearance often masked his real character. Many villains were elegantly dressed. The silk hat has been referred to as the heavy's "badge of office,"¹⁶ although the opera hat and its accompanying cane were hardly appropriate for all villains in all situations. However, even in less formal contexts the villain's dress tended to be "irreproachable in cut."¹⁷ But audiences were not deceived by the surface polish of the villain's costume since another feature of it belied his true nature. Invariably, a villain was dressed in black. Moreover, his hair was black and he frequently sported a black moustache. In a period when the general fashion in men's clothing was somewhat more colorful than it became in the twentieth century, the villain's black attire must have been striking.

The somberness of his garb often reflected a gloomy personality as well as an evil nature. Booth has written that the villain seldom laughed or laughed only with an "uncomfortable quality."¹⁸ Very few

¹⁶Owen Davis, I'd Like to Do it Again (New York: Farrar and Rinehart Inc., 1931), p. 103.

¹⁷Description of Dudley Lazonby's costume in Watts Phillips, Nobody's Child (New York: Robert M. DeWitt, n.d.; first performed 1867).

¹⁸Booth, English Melodrama, p. 18.

villains demonstrated a sense of humor, although some white villains were portrayed comically. Characteristically, the villain had a low voice¹⁹ and his language, like his name and dress, was "calculated to reveal his essential duplicity."²⁰

Aspects of the villain's costume that suggested experience and sophistication confirmed the contrast between the villain and the innocent, often naive, hero. Except in occasional cases, villains were middle aged. "Younger" villains were in their late thirties or early forties; still noticeably older than most heroes. "Older" villains were in their fifties or sixties and often functioned as the heroine's legal guardian. The villain's age and experience endowed him with a temporary source of power over younger characters. But the villain's age also implied that his vitality was limited; ultimately he would be incapable of holding out against the youthful forces of good. Even though he seemed to be more vigorous than the hero, the threatening and cruel actions of this wicked character almost never had any permanent impact.

Up to this point, the quotations cited in this chapter, as well as the language I have used, have

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Cross, p. 153.

strongly implied that just as the hero and heroine are, by definition, male and female, the villain was invariably a man. Most frequently, this was the case; often the fact that he was a male automatically placed the villain in a position which allowed him to dominate the heroine. But it was not invariably so; wickedness is not a sex-linked trait, even in nineteenth-century melodrama. In the preceding chapter I suggested that some adventuresses were villains. Even in the "unliberated days" of the late nineteenth century, some members of the "weaker sex" were able to muster the strength to be "inexhaustible in evil resource."

Like their male counterparts these female villains were usually sophisticated and elegant, but no longer young. (Adventuresses tended to be well into their thirties, ten to fifteen years older than the typical heroine.) They generally had black hair, although Lady Audley (and some later imitators of her) were noted for flaming red hair.²¹ Often they had aliases. Lady Audley was really Helen Talboys, Stephanie de Mohrivart was known as "Forget-Me-Not" and Beatrice Hatheley masqueraded as Geraldine Calthorpe although she was actually a woman with a past, known as "La Belle Russe."

²¹H. Barton Baker, "The Old Melo-drama," Belgravia, May 1883, p. 331.

The title character of Lady Audley's Secret is, perhaps, the most famous nineteenth-century female villain. In common with other adventuresses, Lady Audley manifests cunning, ruthlessness, a strong personality and dazzling beauty. But, unlike adventuress-heroines, who ultimately harm no one but themselves, Lady Audley is a threatening and highly dangerous woman. From the beginning, she is presented as a hypocrite, a fortune-huntress and a bigamist. As the play proceeds, she commits even more serious crimes: murder and arson.

As a result of their transgressions, adventuress-heroines were chastised but left with the hope of eventual happiness. Passive non-virtuous heroines, like Lady Isabel, were sometimes punished quite severely. Lady Audley's punishment is more extreme than that meted out to even the most errant non-virtuous heroines; she dies unredeemed.

The Great Diamond Robbery, a play written over thirty years after Lady Audley's Secret, featured an adventuress who had obviously been cast in the Lady Audley mold. Maria Marino Bulford, a beautiful South American fortune-huntress is, if possible, even more deadly than Lady Audley. Lady Audley was guilty of capital crimes which were committed in a futile attempt to cover up her original, less serious, wrongdoing.

She was willing to murder rather than be exposed, but she was not motivated to murder by avarice. In contrast, Maria Bulford plots and executes the murder of her husband in order to gain his fortune and then attempts to frame an innocent man for the crime. Later, she plots another murder--that of the heroine--in order to avoid exposure.

While Lady Audley had only the temporary and reluctant aid of an unreliable servant, Maria leads a loyal group of miscreants who support her and increase the power she has already gained through her marriage. But even with this support, Maria cannot hold out indefinitely against the forces of good. A more cold-blooded villain than Lady Audley, when she realizes that no further escape is possible, Maria does not fail to maintain her serenity. She calmly swallows a vial of poison, thus choosing the same fate which was thrust on Lady Audley.

Stephanie de Mohrivart, the villain of Forget-Me-Not, is a considerably more complex character than either Lady Audley or Maria Bulford. Although she, too, is a dazzling, clever and ruthless adventuress, she is more subtle, and perhaps more deadly than either of the other two. Unlike most other female villains, Stephanie is not motivated by greed. This "ever-youthful and ever dangerous Circe of a French gambling-

hell"²² has become socially unacceptable in polite circles. She is eager to erase memories of her previous life as "Forget-Me-Not" and to establish herself as a respectable member of society. To that end, Stephanie is willing to destroy the reputations of two innocent young girls.

In many melodramas women are threatened with seduction by the villain. Here, the heroine is similarly threatened with "corruption" by a female villain. In trying to persuade Stephanie to abandon her plan to move in with Alice Verney and her sister, the hero tells her "your incarnate wickedness poisons the air she breathes, as your schemes darken her beautiful and upright life. If you stay in the house with her for six weeks, she will drop and wither like a blighted tree."²³ Although she is presented as wickedness "incarnate" and unrepentant, none of Stephanie's schemes are ultimately successful. This accounts for the fact that even though Horace deems her "a thing to kill without pity,"²⁴ she escapes the fate of Lady Audley and Maria Bulford. Although

²²William Archer, English Dramatists of Today (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1882), p. 257.

²³Herman Merrivale and F.C. Grove, Forget-Me-Not (n.p.; n.d.; microfilm of copy in N.Y.P.L.; first performed 1879), Act I.

²⁴*Ibid.*, Act III.

Stephanie is left without hope for much happiness in the future, she is allowed to live.

Just as not all adventuresses were villains, so not all female villains were adventuresses. There were some wicked women who, though cunning and ruthless, were as coarse and ugly as the adventuresses were polished and glamorous. In general, these "hag-villains" were secondary characters, serving as adjuncts who did the dirty work assigned them by the more elegant primary villains. In Under the Gaslight, Old Judas makes it possible for the more presentable Byke to engage in blackmail and kidnapping and to plot robbery and murder. Mother Rosenbaum in The Great Diamond Robbery is the hatchet-woman for Maria Bulford.

Whether she was an adventuress or a hag, her aggressive personality put the female villain outside the mainstream of acceptable Victorian society. One critic has called the villain a "perpetual outsider" who remains "forever the alien."²⁵ Much more common than the female villain was the villain who actually came from outside of the environment of the play. I have already pointed out that Maria Bulford was an exotic South American. Stephanie de Mohrivart was French.

²⁵ John Anderson, "The Stage Villain on the Run," Theatre Magazine, September 1926, p. 10.

Obenreizer, in No Thoroughfare, was Swiss. Count Carojac, a Frenchman, assumed the villain's role in The Banker's Daughter. In Trilby (1895), Svengali was not only German but Jewish. Shadrack Shabner (London By Night) was also an "infernal Jew."²⁶ And Dicey Morris in After Dark looked like "a Jewish horse-dealer."²⁷ Often, the villain's alien status was emphasized by having him speak with a foreign accent.

In plays about the South, the villain was often a Yankee like Jake M'Closky in The Octoroon or Simon Legree in Uncle Tom's Cabin. In Civil War plays which dealt sympathetically with both sides, the villain might be a double agent and therefore a total outsider. This was the case with Thornton, villain of Shenandoah, and Thorpe, villain of The Heart of Maryland.

Sometimes political alliances define the villain as an outsider. In A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing, Captain Kirke is a loyalist among a group of secret followers of Monmouth. In Horse-Shoe Robinson, Tyrell is a Tory while all sympathetic characters are Patriots. And in Paul Kauvar, Gouroc is a Monarchist in opposition to Citizen Paul and his supporters.

²⁶Selby, London By Night, Act I, Sc. 3.

²⁷Boucicault, After Dark, Act I, Sc. 1.

Class could also be used to place the villain outside the norm established by the sympathetic characters. While the majority of villains seems to have been from the middle class, a significant minority were members of the upper class. Cross's assessment that "villains generally hailed from the upper classes" appears to be an overstatement. But his conclusion that the "invariable fate" of aristocratic villains was seen as a victory by proletarian audiences is probably accurate.²⁸ When wicked aristocrats like James Steerforth (Little Em'ly) and Eustace Fanshawe (Saints and Sinners) ventured into the milieu of working and middle class heroes and heroines, they could immediately be spotted as trouble-making outsiders. Like the double agents of Civil War plays, these aristocrats were even more estranged if they were in financial trouble since, without a comfortable financial situation, they could not even live up to their status. Sir Francis Levinson in East Lynne, Goodge in Flying Scud and Geoffrey Ware in Man and Wife are all penniless aristocrats who are waiting to inherit fortunes. In the meantime, they are driven to villainy, at least partially because of their financial circumstances.

²⁸Cross, p. 58.

While being a member of the upper class tended to mark the villain as an outsider, it also bestowed some degree of power on him. Even if he was penniless, an aristocrat's position in society left him the credibility and authority to have things his way--at least for a time. A middle-class villain (few villains were lower class) often gained these attributes by developing enough resources to have economic, if not social, superiority.²⁹

Booth has suggested six major types of villains: gloomy tyrants pacing Gothic castles; Eastern potentates; desperate pirates; smugglers and brigands; seducing squires; heartless landlords and elegant aristocrats.³⁰ The first three types listed had all but disappeared by the second half of the century³¹ but squires, landlords and aristocrats were still in great supply. However, it is certainly not true that villains in either England or America were drawn entirely, or even predominantly, from these groups. A wide variety of professions and vocations

²⁹Rahill, p. 158.

³⁰Michael R. Booth, "The Acting of Melodrama," University of Toronto Quarterly 34 (October 1964), p. 38.

³¹The only villain in any of the plays examined for this study who resembles the earlier Gothic villain is Frolo in Notre Dame. The cathedral provides a castle-like Gothic environment for him. In this environment he acquires the power of a tyrant or a potentate.

were represented by late nineteenth-century villains. Often the villain's occupation was directly linked to the plot, and frequently it accounted for some of the villain's power.³²

The largest group of villains engaged in a single career appear to have been military officers. In a few plays with non-military settings (e.g., Rosedale, Nobody's Child) the military title served primarily to bestow a modicum of status and individuality on a character who would otherwise have been a nondescript penniless aristocrat. However, it was more common for a soldier-villain to appear in a play about war. His military career was then much more important, since it invariably provided at least part of the pretext for the villain's conflict with the hero. In Shenandoah, The Girl I Left Behind Me, The Heart of Maryland and Secret Service both villain and hero were military officers. Often the villain's rank was higher than the hero's, giving him an initial edge in any conflict. Thus, a villain's military rank worked in much the same way as a title

³²Rahill suggests that the majority of middle-class villains were lawyers (p. 166) but not a single play examined for this study includes a lawyer-villain. Although Corrigan, villain of The Colleen Bawn, is listed in the *dramatis personae* as "a pettifogging attorney," his effective occupation is that of landlord. As I demonstrated in Chapter I, my examination suggests that law was a profession generally associated with heroes.

of nobility, to confer temporary prestige upon him.

When a villain was neither an officer nor an aristocrat he commonly had acquired a powerful position through the acquisition of a large sum of money. The villains who were most successful in gaining this end were those whom had embarked on ambitious but, at least initially legitimate business ventures. Arthur Wardlaw in Foul Play owned a shipping line; Leroy Craven in The Forty-Niners was part owner of a gold mine and Joseph Chandler in The Middleman owned a porcelain factory. Gideon Bloodgood in The Poor of New York was a banker as was Danglars in Monte Cristo. Corrigan in The Colleen Bawn, Kinchela in The Shaughraun and Skinner in The Silver King adhered to the most stereotyped occupation: they were landlords.

While many villains committed illegal actions, a few were professional criminals from the start. In The Ticket-of-Leave Man, Dalton is wanted by the police, and particularly by Hawkshaw the detective, even before he involves the hero in a counterfeiting scheme. In fact, he is under such relentless pressure that, in the first moments of the play he complains, "There's no picking up a gentlemanly livelihood. Hang me, if I haven't often thought of turning respectable."³³ However,

³³Tom Taylor, The Ticket-of-Leave Man (1863), Act I, in George Rowell, ed., Nineteenth Century Plays (London: Oxford University Press, 1953).

during the remainder of the play, Dalton gives no further consideration to this possibility. In After Dark "turning respectable" never occurs to Chandos Bellingham at all. Having escaped from Australia where he had been transported eight years earlier, he is delighted to become involved in a scheme entailing blackmail, bigamy and attempted murder. Byke in Under the Gaslight is less successful than Bellingham in maintaining a respectable veneer; he too is a hardened criminal. Byke would probably have been pleased to work under Professor Moriarty, "ruler of the underworld" in Sherlock Holmes. Of course, all "underworld" villains were outsiders in the respectable world of the heroes and heroines. At the same time, the fact that they made no attempt to follow the legal or moral code endorsed by polite society gave them a special advantage in their dealings with it.

Overseers like Jake M'Closky and Simon Legree were also considered outside polite society but they exercised considerable power over the slaves who worked under them--and sometimes over their employers as well. Saloon-keepers like John Adderly and Simon Slade (Ten Nights in a Bar-Room) enslaved men in a different way.

Of course, not every villain derived his sole source of power from his social rank or occupation. A large number of these characters were in a position to

have the upper hand because they chanced to know a secret that, if revealed, might ruin one of the sympathetic characters. Later in this chapter I will discuss blackmail, one of the most prevalent crimes committed by late nineteenth-century villains.

If he lacked the knowledge to intimidate his victim, the villain might have financial resources to accomplish this purpose. This was commonly the case with villains who were landlords, but it was also possible in other kinds of situations. For example, in Davy Crockett Oscar Crampton held control over the heroine because her guardian was in his debt.

Sometimes guardianship itself was a legal means by which villains attained power over the heroine. In the preceding chapter I noted that fathers who stood in the way of romantic fulfillment for their daughters were mistaken, confused or coerced. But guardians who came between their wards and true love were usually villainous. Colonel May in Rosedale and Obenreizer in No Thoroughfare were two villains who had a legal advantage in their efforts to thwart the course of true romance.

If he lacked external attributes to endow him with the authority he needed to carry out his evil intentions, a villain had to rely on his own inner resources. Villains were characteristically "grim,

dauntless [and] resourceful,"³⁴ but some were especially cunning and skilled in the art of deception. Lady Audley successfully presented herself as an innocent and proper governess when she was actually an adventuress and a bigamist. Sir Francis Levison managed to persuade Lady Isabel that her guiltless husband was being unfaithful to her. In The Forty-Niners, Leroy Craven deceived and seduced an innocent young woman; later he duped his own brother. And in The Girl I Left Behind Me, Morton Parlow not only lied about his own cowardice, he falsely accused his fellow-officer of having shirked his duty in battle.

A few villains had hypnotic powers that seemed almost to verge on the realm of the supernatural. Obenreizer in No Thoroughfare seems to exercise some kind of hypnotic power over hero and heroine. In the stage directions of Sherlock Holmes, Professor Moriarty is described as looking at another character "almost hypnotically."³⁵ The most well-known hypnotist-villain is, of course, Svengali, who uses hypnosis to totally dominate and control the actions of the heroine for a period of years.

³⁴Booth, "Acting of Melodrama," p. 38.

³⁵William Gillette and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Sherlock Holmes (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1977; first performed 1899), Act I, Sc. 2.

Whatever the source of power, it was an essential component in the make-up of any villain. Obviously, without some special means of control, he would not have been able to create even a temporary threat. But power alone does not inevitably result in evil. An individual must be motivated to use that power for evil ends. In the following section, I will discuss the motivations that pointed these characters in the direction of villainy.

The Villain's Motivation

Because it is the villain's actions that set the melodrama in motion, it is especially important to understand what motivates this character. The actions of the hero and heroine are nearly always reactions to the threat posed by the villain and so their motives are generally limited to the establishment or reestablishment of an ideal order that would have existed if the villain had not intervened. In practical terms, this ideal order translates into the union or reunion of the young lovers. Since the villain invariably comes between them and often attempts to usurp the hero's place, it is logical to assume that the villain is motivated by a desire to seduce or marry the heroine. Most critics make this assumption; Cross, for example, asserts that it was the villain's desire for the heroine that "set the action

in motion."³⁶

While attraction to the heroine frequently did motivate the villain, it is inaccurate to make the sweeping claim that this was always the case. Furthermore, the notion that the villain was motivated by any single goal is incorrect. Even the most exaggerated villains often had more than one motivating force. Desire for the heroine or alternate heroine, avarice and revenge constituted the three most common grounds for the villain's behavior. The first two were about equally prevalent, the third was somewhat less so. Often more than one of these forces combined to strengthen the villain's resolve to wreak havoc with the lives of the sympathetic characters. And, of course, once he had allowed any of these motives to drive him to wickedness, the villain was frequently moved to further extremes by the need to cover his tracks.

Jerome K. Jerome once called the villain's love for the heroine "sublime in its steadfastness."³⁷ There are a few notable examples of villains who are motivated by deep, though unrequited, love. In No Thoroughfare Obenreizer is moved to embezzle and later to attempt murder in an effort to buy the love of his ward and

³⁶Cross, p. 58.

³⁷Jerome K. Jerome, Idle Thoughts of an Idle Family and Stage-Land (n.l.: A.L. Burt Company, n.d.), p. 178.

to eliminate a rival. In Secret Service Maxwell Arrelsford is unreasonably hostile to the hero because he correctly perceives him as a rival for Edith's affection. Jack Negly is driven mad and commits murder when he realizes that Barbara Frietchie will never return his love. However, in most cases the villain's desire for the heroine was not at all "sublime," it was lustful. Thus, the villain was contrasted with his rival who truly loved and adored the heroine.

Most villains were so much older than the women they pursued that the audience could immediately suspect that the two would not make a suitable match. It was not that heroines were never able to find happiness with older men. In the chapter on heroes I discussed some who were middle aged. But middle-aged heroes were depicted as unusually sensitive, kind and considerate as well as compatible with the women they adored. "Older men" like Adderly (Across the Continent), Tackleton (Dot), Jim (The Main Line), Gouroc (Paul Kauvar) and Josiah Blake (Shore Acres) had nothing in common with the innocent young girls they coveted. Furthermore, the fact that these girls had neither affection nor respect for them, did not deter them in the slightest. Perhaps the most sinister of these middle-aged "suitors" was Claude Frollo in Notre Dame. In his pursuit of Esmeralda, Frollo's age was not nearly as serious a

barrier as his religious vocation. Most older villains intended to marry the objects of their desire, but Frollo's relationship with Esmeralda could never have been anything other than illicit. The perversion inherent in his feelings toward the young singer was evidenced by the fact that though he mourned when he believed her dead, he was determined to have her executed if she could not be his.

Frollo was an exception among older villains, but younger ones were almost always interested in seduction rather than marriage. Goodge in Flying Scud, Thorpe in The Heart of Maryland and Lacy in The White Slave were unsuccessful in their respective attempts at seduction and rape. But in plays with non-virtuous heroines or alternate heroines, a younger villain could successfully seduce a maiden. In Lost in London, Gilbert Featherstone took the heroine to the big city and then forced her to play the part of a bird in a gilded cage. In some ways he was kinder than most villains of his type who, having "ruined" a girl, generally abandoned her, thus displaying the full extent of their duplicity and heartlessness. Steerforth in Little Em'ly, Sir Francis Levison in East Lynne, Leroy Craven in The Forty-Niners and Geoffrey Delmayne in Man and Wife all lost interest in their victims after they had "had their way."

Some villains were attracted to heroines primarily because of the potential riches they represented. In some ways these fortune hunters were male equivalents of adventuresses like Lady Audley and Maria Bulford. But whereas female villains were content to marry rich old men, male villains went after heiresses who were also young and beautiful.

Dudley Lazonby, villain of Nobody's Child, had been attracted to Lucy, the heroine, but broke off their relationship when he believed that her family fortune was depleted. He returned to renew that relationship when he learned that Lucy was, once again, about to inherit a fortune. Similarly, Captain Kirke and John Bird pursued the heroines of A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing and The Still Alarm mainly out of financial, rather than romantic attraction.

Even dissociated from love and lust, avarice played a major part in motivating the actions of nineteenth-century villains. Few went so far as Matthias in The Bells who (before the action of the play) had murdered a man in cold blood for the sole purpose of robbing him. But many were willingly driven to murder when less drastic plans to blackmail or cheat other characters failed. In most cases personal greed accounted for the villain's quest for wealth. But there were other possibilities. For example, in The

Poor of New York, Bloodgood was determined to amass a fortune so that he could indulge the whims of his beloved, but very spoiled, daughter.

When money, rather than the heroine, was the villain's main objective, his relationship to the other two main characters underwent a subtle change. Although his actions still functioned to keep the heroine and her sweetheart apart, the villain was no longer the hero's romantic rival. Still, the adversary relationship between villain and hero remained fierce.

Because the welfare of the hero and heroine was nearly always intertwined, it was almost impossible for the villain to victimize one without hurting the other. But the villain, himself, usually targeted one or the other as his prey. When avarice motivated him, the hero was likely to be the villain's primary victim as often as the heroine.

A villain who was unsuccessful in his plans to acquire the heroine and/or a fortune often added revenge to his motives. In some cases vengeance became his primary goal. In the chapter on heroes, I pointed out that the desire for revenge almost never motivated the law-abiding and gentlemanly English and American heroes of the late nineteenth century. It is not surprising that the villain, an outcast with his own perverted sense of justice, should have felt the need

to take the law into his own hands. "In nineteenth-century melodrama, revenge was not associated with justice . . . but rather with a heavy's passionate vindictiveness. Revenge is presented as criminal, even when the revenger has been bitterly wronged (in the past)."³⁸

Villains who were wholly or partially motivated by vengeance were often especially dangerous. A villain who wanted love or money often retained perspective on what he was about. For example, in The Still Alarm, John Bird coolly told the heroine's father, "well I'm going to emulate the example of the conventional villain of the play, who having a rich man in his power demands his pretty daughter."³⁹ But a villain who was after revenge developed a false sense of righteousness that made him lose all perspective on his own actions. After stabbing the hero of Shenandoah, the villain, Thornton, implies that he was obligated to attempt Kerchival's assassination. "I had an old account to settle, and I have paid my debt."⁴⁰

³⁸Martin Meisel, Shaw and the Nineteenth-Century Theatre (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 211.

³⁹Arthur, The Still Alarm, Act I.

⁴⁰Bronson Howard, Shenandoah (1888), Act II, in Myron Matlaw, ed., The Black Crook and Other Nineteenth-Century American Plays (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1967).

In Peg Woffington, the villain, Sir Charles Pomander, plots revenge on the heroine because she has refused to become his mistress. Geoffrey Delmayne in Man and Wife plans vengeance when his mistress forces him to honor his promise to marry her. In Saints and Sinners, Eustace Fanshawe makes the innocent heroine his mistress as a way of wreaking vengeance on all females. Even though he is genuinely charmed by her, he decides that "When a man has been as badly used by womankind as I have been, damn it all! he owes it to his sense of justice to be revenged on womankind as often as he can."⁴¹

However, a villain's revenge was most frequently directed at the hero who had, in some real or imagined way, humiliated or exposed him. This was frequently the case in military situations. In Horse-Shoe Robinson, Tyrell harbored an old grudge against Major Butler. Similarly, Thorpe in The Heart of Maryland, had not forgiven the hero for having him publicly flogged and drummed out of the regiment. In The Girl I Left Behind Me, Morton Parlow was humiliated when he learned that his fiance was in love with Edgar Hawkesworth. When his rival subsequently felt obligated to report

⁴¹Henry Arthur Jones, Saints and Sinners (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1891; first performed 1884), Act II.

the villain's blatant display of cowardice, Parlow lashed out against him in an attempt to avenge the hero's triumph in both love and war.

Revenge against a male rival was also a recurrent motive in other settings. A particularly good example is provided by the villain of Sherlock Holmes. Professor Moriarty, mastermind of the underworld, is threatened by Sherlock Holmes, who is developing a case against him. While Moriarty stands to make a profit through the blackmail scheme that he has taken over, it is clear that profit is a great deal less important to him than gaining a victory over the detective. Professional criminal though he is, Moriarty is unable to be dispassionate in his dealings with his rival. After one encounter with Sherlock Holmes, Moriarty "clenches [his] fist in Holmes' face, turns, boiling with rage, picks [his] hat up, and exits quickly . . . muttering aloud as he goes."⁴²

The degree of anger exhibited by Moriarty suggests a hatred that may go beyond any rational explanation. Indeed, several critics have suggested that whatever the villain's ostensible goals, he is actually driven by "motiveless malignity."⁴³ In her

⁴²Gillette and Doyle, Sherlock Holmes, Act I, Sc. 3.

⁴³James L. Smith, p. 20.

dissertation on late nineteenth-century melodrama, Carol Sweedler specifically cites Byke, in Under the Gaslight, as an example of a villain whose malice exceeds any possible cause.⁴⁴ Jerome K. Jerome asserted that villains were motivated only by the sheer love of villainy "as an art."⁴⁵

While it is obviously true that villains, by definition, are malicious and that they express their malice in ways that are utterly ruthless and out of proportion to the ends they hope to attain, it does not seem fair to nineteenth-century dramatists to label these characters motiveless. Whatever other faults these playwrights may have had, they rarely failed to provide a motive for the villain's behavior. The fact that he acted on that motive in ways that were morally unacceptable was precisely what defined the character as a villain. After all, his ends were rarely evil, per se; it was the behavior that they prompted that was abhorrent. At this point, a detailed look at that behavior is in order.

The Villains' Actions

Eric Bentley has suggested that "Pity for the 'hero' is the less impressive half of the melodrama,

⁴⁴Sweedler, p. 23.

⁴⁵Jerome, p. 180.

the other and more impressive half is fear of the villain."⁴⁶ What makes the villain so frightening is not that his desires are vastly different from those of the hero, or the man in the audience, but that he acts on those desires without regard for conventional moral standards or the welfare of others.

While not every one of the villain's actions is legally criminal, everything he does is morally outrageous. Villainous behavior like turning a poor woman out of her home (The Silver King), refusing to give a job to a destitute man (The Poor of New York), selling liquor (Ten Nights in a Bar-Room), or using it intemperately (Under the Gaslight, The Heart of Maryland), can be made to seem as despicable as cold-blooded murder. In most cases, the sinful deeds committed by the villain are also illegal. But, as I shall demonstrate in the following section, the legal status of his actions is important primarily because it ensures a just punishment for the villain.

Peter Brooks pointed out that "traditionally the villain is known as 'le traître,' no doubt because he betrays and undoes the moral order. Betrayal is a personal version of evil."⁴⁷ Betrayal is the overriding

⁴⁶Eric Bentley, The Life of the Drama (New York: Atheneum, 1964), p. 200.

⁴⁷Peter Brooks, The Melodramatic Imagination (New York and London: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 33.

evil displayed by villains; it encompasses all of the types of wicked deeds they commit. Interestingly, betrayal is also the exact opposite of loyalty, which I have earlier shown to be the heroine's overriding virtue. Numerous critics have made the point that heroine and villain invariably occupy places at the two opposite poles of melodrama. Yet, the plot of a melodrama does not invariably involve a strong adversary relationship between the two; often the hero opposed the villain more strongly than the heroine. It must be understood that the villain and heroine are not only representatives of the opposite abstractions "good" and evil." Rather, they personify interpretations of those terms which, in turn, imply a specific value system. When this is clear, the thematic tension between heroine and villain becomes apparent. No matter what their relationship with regard to the plot, these representatives of loyalty and betrayal must inevitably and invariably stand at opposite thematic poles.

Just as the heroine displayed her loyalty with a variety of subsidiary virtues, so the villain's betrayal manifested itself in an amazing number of ways. And few villains confined themselves to a single act of wrongdoing. James L. Smith enumerated most of the possibilities when he stated that the villain "plots,

slanders, steals and defrauds with impunity, incites rebellion, hires assassins, murders witnesses, wrecks trains, sinks ships, burns down cottages, blows up banks, and generally does what he can to get the plot moving."⁴⁸ However, villains tended to favor some of these exploits over others.

Most villains did not start off with the intention of committing capital crimes. They were led into them when more modest schemes did not work out as planned. These schemes invariably involved the villain's betrayal of trust that had been placed in him by friends or associates. When the villain's malice was not primarily directed against the heroine his initial offense generally involved cheating, blackmail or embezzlement. Heroes and alternate heroes who had committed minor transgressions of their own were particularly vulnerable to exploitation by a villain who masqueraded as a friend.

John Adderly in Across the Continent and Chandos Bellingham in After Dark blackmailed alternate heroes by threatening to reveal misdemeanors that they had committed long ago. Goodge in Flying Scud and Lacy in The White Slave posed as intimate friends of Lord Woodbie and Clay Britton respectively, while they

⁴⁸James L. Smith, p. 20.

actually contrived to cheat them out of their fortunes. When Lord Woodbie finally became aware of Goodge's intentions, that villain countered by forging his "friend's" name to a large check. The hero of The Shaughraun, while innocent of wrongdoing, was a political outlaw and this left him in a position where he could be deceived and cheated by the villain, Kinchela, who pretended to be his friend and protector. Thornton in Shenandoah and Thorpe in The Heart of Maryland betrayed the trust of their comrades in arms. As double agents in the war between the states, they earned the title "traitor" in the strictest military sense.

In a similar vein, the villain often abused a business relationship in which he had developed the confidence of his associate. In The Octoroon, Jake M'Closky cheated his employers out of their plantation. The banker, Bloodgood and the merchant, Obenreizer, embezzled funds of their clients in The Poor of New York and No Thoroughfare. In Foul Play, Arthur Wardlaw embezzled funds from his own father, the senior partner in their shipping firm. The villain of Davy Crockett used a debt owed him by the heroine's guardian as a pretext for blackmail. In The Colleen Bawn, the villain is able to blackmail the hero and his mother because of the mortgage he holds on their estate.

When the heroine was the villain's primary victim, his initial offense usually involved the threat that he would force himself on her, either by attempting seduction or by trying to coerce her into a loveless marriage. In the latter case he often expected to be taken seriously as a suitor because of his "friendship" with her father. Tyrell in Horse-Shoe Robinson and Josiah Blake in Shore Acres had each thoroughly ingratiated himself with the heroine's father in order to win her hand. Ingratiation was unnecessary when there was the possibility of blackmail. Jim in The Main Line and John Bird in The Still Alarm dropped all pretense of good will towards old friends because they had the ammunition to blackmail them for their daughters' hands.

In some cases, the villain's attempt to force a marriage between himself and the heroine involved a direct betrayal of a relationship with her. In The Girl I Left Behind Me, Morton Parlow refuses to let Kate Kennion out of their engagement, even though he knows that she loves another. In so doing, he demonstrates that he cares more about his own pride and prestige than about the feelings of the woman he supposedly loves. Dudley Lazonby is primarily interested in the heroine's imminent inheritance when he tries to resurrect their previous betrothal in

Nobody's Child. His utter disloyalty toward the woman who had once adored him is revealed when he blackmails her with loveletters she had written during the height of her infatuation. In Trilby, Svengali goes much further in exploiting a relationship with a trusting heroine, using his hypnotic powers to make her his wife and, for all practical purposes, his slave. Lady Audley was guilty of a similar type of betrayal when she dissembled her way into a bigamous marriage with Sir Michael.

In the context of nineteenth-century society, seduction must have seemed a particularly cruel form of betrayal. When a heroine was seduced, the villain took her love. In return, he made an implicit promise to return that love; a promise which he invariably broke. The broken promise left the heroine in a situation which was "worse than death," and, in fact, often led to her early demise. Sir Francis Levison in East Lynne is, perhaps, the prototypical "seducing villain," he is calculating in his approach and heartless in subsequently "breaking faith"⁴⁹ with the heroine. Although he promises to marry Lady Isabel before their child is born, Levison later announces that his recently

⁴⁹ Clifton Tayleure, East Lynne (1862), Act II, Sc. 2, in Bailey, ed., British Plays of the Nineteenth Century.

inherited title precludes their marriage; "to make you my wife would offend my family."⁵⁰ He then taunts her by admitting that he deceived her before their elopement and mocks her for having been taken in. "The temptation to sin lay not in my persuasion half so much as in your ridiculous, jealous anger against your husband."⁵¹

Gilbert Featherstone in Lost in London, James Steerforth in Little Em'ly, Geoffrey Delmayne in Man and Wife and Eustace Fanshawe in Saints and Sinners are somewhat less cruel but equally destructive versions of Levison.

Often the villain seduces an alternate heroine or another female. In this case the emphasis is not on the seduction itself, which usually occurs before the beginning of the action of the play. Instead, this past misdeed is referred to and used as a means of revealing and darkening the villain's character. Chandos Bellingham, who blackmailed the heroine's husband in After Dark had, as Richard Knatchbull, seduced and abandoned her mother. Leroy Craven was guilty of the same behavior toward Kate, the hero's sister and alternate heroine of The Forty-Niners. Both Morton Parlow (The Girl I Left Behind Me) and Captain Thorpe (The Heart of Maryland) forced unwelcome attentions on the heroine; each, it turned

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid.

out, had previously ruined a female relative of one of his brother officers. In Shenandoah, the double agent, Thornton, attempts to seduce the wife of his own commanding officer.

When his target was a virtuous heroine it was, of course, impossible for the villain to succeed in seducing her. Perhaps he sensed the likelihood of failure; at any rate this type of villain rarely bothered to masquerade as a sincere lover. His approach was frequently intimidating and usually crude. Goodge, the would be squire in Flying Scud, expected to brook few obstacles in his effort to have his way with the country girl, Katey Rideout. Frollo, the pious priest of Notre Dame, attempted to blackmail the heroine into submission. In The Heart of Maryland, Captain Thorpe was particularly coarse as he announced his intention to ravish the heroine. Like her male counterparts, Stephanie de Mohrivart, whose assault on the heroine of Forget-Me-Not was a type of seduction, accosted her victim with little pretense at good will.

Regardless of what the villain's initial misdeed was, or whom it was directed against, it invariably led to further mischief. Though the villain was a careful strategist, he could never quite foresee all of the complications that could get in the way of his scheming. And so it became necessary to plot

further misdeeds to conceal his role in the initial one and to achieve his ultimate goal.

The most common recourse for a villain who realized that he was likely to be unmasked was to frame someone else for his own crime. Occasionally the villain tried to implicate a minor and relatively unimportant character. For example, in The Octoroon Jake M'Closky managed, for a time, to make it seem that the Indian, Wahnotee, was responsible for the murder of Paul. But usually the villain tried to frame the hero. Thus, he threw the scent off his own trail at the same time as he harrassed and further betrayed his adversary.

In The Ticket-of-Leave Man, Moss and Dalton frame the innocent Robert Brierly for counterfeiting. Here, the framing incident occurs near the beginning of the play; at that point the villains see Brierly primarily as a convenient "pigeon." Maria Bulford, who accuses Frank Kennet, alternate hero of The Great Diamond Robbery, of murdering her husband, also appears to have chosen him because he is easily available as a logical suspect. The same is true of Skinner, chief villain of The Silver King, who frames the hero for murder.

On the other hand, when Morton Parlow falsely accuses the hero of The Girl I Left Behind Me of cowardly actions that he, himself, committed, there is

an animus in the accusation that transcends Parlow's desire to evade the consequences of his own actions. The same type of animus is evident in the actions of Adderly toward Joe Ferris in Across the Continent. Adderly's original reasons for framing Joe are unclear, but his continual persecution of the hero makes it evident that he harbors a deep hatred toward him.

A more calculated, but perhaps more cowardly cover-up is executed by Villefort, one of the triumvirate of villains in Monte Cristo. Originally the hero, Edmund Dantes, had been falsely accused of espionage by Danglars and Fernand, his professional and romantic rivals. Edmund was able to convince Villefort that he was entirely innocent and Villefort promised to release him on condition that Edmund aid him in apprehending one of the true conspirators. But when Villefort discovered that this conspirator was his half-brother, he decided to avoid possible disgrace and arranged for Edmund to be arrested after all. Eighteen years later he determined to have Edmund released from prison, only to change his mind at the reappearance of his errant half-brother. At that point, he ordered Edmund's execution.

A more spectacular way for the villain to attempt a cover-up was to commit arson in an effort to distract attention from himself or to destroy evidence

and/or witnesses who might testify against him. In The Poor of New York, the villainous banker, Bloodgood, buys and then attempts to burn a building where a purloined receipt that would incriminate him is hidden. M'Closky in The Octoroon sets fire to the steamer, Magnolia, to divert the attention of a group that has just discovered that he is guilty of murder. Neither of these conflagrations involved harm to human life. However, other villains were more ruthless. Lady Audley had every intention of murdering Luke, the servant who witnessed her previous crime, when she set fire to his house. And John Bird had the same intention toward a similar character, Wilbur (in The Still Alarm), when he tried to burn down the Fordham mansion. It should be noted that the fire in this play, unlike those in the other three, grows out of the plot organically and provides the firefighting hero with a thrilling rescue scene.

In the last two plays mentioned, arson was actually a spectacular form of murder or attempted murder. While few villains started out with the intention of committing murder, many were driven to this ultimate form of betrayal as the plot progressed. Occasionally, the villain tried to kill the heroine but, in most cases, the villain's intended murder victim was the hero. In the melodrama of the period, attempted

murder of the hero was handled in much the same way as attempted seduction of a virtuous heroine and it was invariably doomed to failure.

However, there were some villains who succeeded in murdering minor characters. Like many seductions, these murders often occurred offstage and the fact that the perpetrator was capable of such a deed was emphasized more than the deed itself. For example, in London By Night, Hawkhurst has murdered the heroine's mother before the beginning of the play's action. M'Closky in The Octoroon and Lacy in The White Slave demonstrate their gratuitous cruelty when they kill relatively helpless characters.

In addition to revealing the basest aspects of the villain's personality, murders of minor characters frequently functioned to set the plot moving or to ease the way to its resolution. The villains of East Lynne, The Silver King and The Great Diamond Robbery each committed murders of which the heroes or alternate heroes were suspected. Josiah Scraggs, villain of My Partner also committed a murder and allowed the blame to fall on the hero's shoulders. But this murder also charted a line of action for the heroine, since its victim, Ned, was the man whose baby she carried. Scraggs' murder of Ned, which incites much of the action of My Partner also carries the seeds of its

resolution. With Ned out of the picture, Mary is able to become aware of the much deeper love that she feels for the hero, Joe. A somewhat similar situation arises in The Forty-Niners. When Leroy Craven kills his own brother, Gaspard, he not only demonstrates his utter depravity; he clears the way for the heroine, Gaspard's widow, to be joined with the hero, a far more worthy mate.

No such advantage could derive from the murder of one of the protagonists and so, even though villains were often ingenious in their attempts, they almost never succeeded. A rare exception occurred in Barbara Frietchie when, in the last moments of the play, the heroine was shot by a villain who was insane, rather than evil. Byke in Under the Gaslight, Frollo in Notre Dame, and Maria Bulford in The Great Diamond Robbery were all thwarted in their attempts to kill the heroine.

A villain's decision to murder the heroine was made out of pure expediency--her existence stood in the way of the achievement of his goal. To some extent this was also true when it came to deciding to murder the hero. However, no matter how detached their initial relationship was, the villain always grew to hate the hero passionately. Thus, when the hero proved enough of an obstacle to his plans that murder seemed to be necessary, the villain took particular pleasure in

plotting to kill him.

Some plots were elaborate as well as ingenious. For example, in Across the Continent, Adderly arranged for the hero to be massacred in an Indian uprising incited primarily for this purpose. This was a spectacular variation on the military or political executions that villains more commonly set in motion. Tyrell in Horse-Shoe Robinson, Kinchela in The Shaughraun, Gouroc in Paul Kauvar, and Thorpe in The Heart of Maryland all plotted for the hero to be executed by order of a civil court or military tribunal. A death of this type allowed villains to avoid any actual personal or physical involvement. Despite strong hatred for his adversary, many a villain seemed content to have it this way.

There were exceptions. Goodge, the villain of Flying Scud, planned to kill the alternate hero in a duel. In Shenandoah, the villain stabbed and critically wounded the hero. Obenreizer in No Thoroughfare almost managed to push the hero off a stormswept mountain. But often villains devised quite imaginative schemes for doing away with the hero while avoiding hand-to-hand combat. In After Dark, the villain tied the hero to an underground subway track minutes before a train was

scheduled to pass by.⁵² Professor Moriarty in Sherlock Holmes was thwarted in the attempt to lock his victim in a gas chamber.

Unfortunately for the villain, the pleasure of murdering the hero was all in the plotting. His own ineptitude or that of his associates, often combined with the cleverness and bravery of the hero, resulted in ultimate failure, no matter how ingenious the plan. And of course, it was not just at murder that the villain ultimately failed. Less ambitious crimes and sins were also bungled at the end. Even villains who had some initial success could never enjoy their ill-gotten gains. Nineteenth-century audiences and playwrights could rest secure in the certain knowledge that "Heaven, who watches over all its creatures, will never in the end suffer so cowardly, heartless and infamous a man as [a villain] to triumph."⁵³

Punishment of the Villain

With failure came discovery and exposure. Thus, the villain was driven "to the end of that crooked lane, where the guilty find their steps barred by the gates of

⁵²Although this later became a relatively common form of attempted murder, After Dark was among the first plays to feature this spectacular thrill. (Under the Gaslight had set the vogue a few months earlier.)

⁵³Selby, London By Night, Act I, Sc. 6.

justice."⁵⁴ The retribution that awaited villains behind the "gates of justice" ranged from mere humiliation at being "foiled" to painful and violent death. In the world of melodrama, the criminal justice system was efficient, inexorable and incorruptible. This was possible because "Heaven," watching over "all its creatures," worked in concert with law enforcement agencies to provide appropriate punishment for villains. The nature of the villain's punishment was strictly determined by the nature of his misdeeds. However, it was not always necessary for him to be sentenced in a court of law, since Providence could and often did intervene.

The critic, Ludwig Lewisohn, asserted that the great aim of melodrama is the killing of the villain. Whether he be tribal enemy or moral or social dissenter, he is permitted only small successes, shadowy evasions, brief exultations. But these are known to be momentary, and felt as rudely ironic. The net tightens, its cords cut closer and closer into the victim's flesh until the magnificent instant of the clicking handcuff or the whirring bullet is ripe.⁵⁵

While not every single villain of nineteenth-century melodrama actually died at the end, in a metaphorical sense, Lewisohn is certainly correct. The punishment

⁵⁴Boucicault, After Dark, Act III, Sc. 4.

⁵⁵Ludvig Lewisohn, The Drama and the Stage (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922), p. 33.

meted out to villains resulted in an end to their powers and to the threat they represented, if not to their persons.

While most punishment was imposed by external sources, an occasional villain also suffered self-inflicted punishment in the form of remorse and repentance. Since few villains possessed a conscience, this was rare. The most notable exception was Matthias who, in The Bells, was literally consumed by remorse. I will discuss this character in some detail in a later section. However, aside from Matthias, there were a few villains who discovered, to their own surprise--and disgust--that they had a conscience. This is true of Jake M'Closky in The Octoroon. As Scene 2 of Act V opens, M'Closky is just waking up from a dream.

Burn, burn! Blaze away! How the flames crack.
I'm not guilty; would ye murder me? Cut, cut
the rope--I choke--choke!--Ah! (Waking.) Hello!
Where am I? Why, I was dreaming--curse it! I can
never sleep now without dreaming. Hush! I
thought I heard the sound of a paddle in the water.
All night, as I fled through the cane-break, I heard
footsteps behind me. I lost them in the cedar
swamp--again they haunted my path down the bayou,
moving as I moved, resting when I rested--hush!
There again!--No; it was only the wind over the
canes. . . . In a little time this damned business
will blow over, and I can show again. Hark!
There's that noise again! If it was the ghost
of that murdered boy haunting me! Well--I didn't
mean to kill him, did I? Well then, what has my
all-cowardly heart got to skeer me so for?⁵⁶

⁵⁶Dion Boucicault, The Octoroon (1859), Act V, Sc. 2, in Matlaw, ed., The Black Crook and Other Nineteenth-Century American Plays.

Arthur Wardlaw, the villain of Foul Play, was bothered by similar pangs of conscience: "Rest! I am so weary . . . of the continual struggle . . . Giddy, weary to heartbreaking. Oh how my head burns! how it burns!"⁵⁷ But after acknowledging these feelings, Wardlaw continued along his wicked path for another two acts. Like M'Closky, he never admitted to any stirring of remorse.

Although villains hardly ever indulge in true repentance, there are several examples of villains who do feel genuine remorse. After committing a heinous crime, John Bird, villain of The Still Alarm, manifests the same guilt and fear as M'Closky and Wardlaw, but he goes one step further than they when he admits that "remorse consumes me." Still, he determines to "carry out to the bitter end the plan which has cost me my soul's welfare--"⁵⁸

Eustace Fanshawe also refuses to acknowledge the remorse he feels after ruining the heroine:

To think that I have fallen into my own trap and really grown to love the girl! For I do love her, and she's good and true too--that is, compared with me. There's something in goodness after all, or why should I feel a half longing to be good when I am with her? Why should I feel sorry that I have ruined her poor little

⁵⁷ Boucicault and Reade, Foul Play, Act III, Sc. 1.

⁵⁸ Arthur, The Still Alarm, Act IV, Sc. 2.

life? (Rises) Hang it! I'm getting maudlin moral. My digestion must be out of order.⁵⁹

In Little Em'ly a similar character, James Steerforth, anticipates an unspoken reproach from his old friend David Copperfield when he begs him, "if anything should ever separate us, you must think of me at my best."⁶⁰ He then goes on to do his worst.

That was not atypical; it did not seem illogical for a villain to feel sorry about his wrongdoing but continue it in spite of his feeling. In The Girl I Left Behind Me, Morton Parlow commits an act of cowardice and is intensely remorseful: "(Sees colors of the troop on the wall) Ah! (with a cry, hides his face.) I am not fit to look at that flag. I am the lowest and most contemptible thing on God's footstool--a coward."⁶¹ Yet, after this speech, Parlow's behavior grows even more contemptible and cowardly. In Notre Dame, Frollo mourns Esmeralda when he believes she is dead--but immediately plots to kill her when he learns she is alive.

⁵⁹Jones, Saints and Sinners, Act III, Sc. 3.

⁶⁰Halliday, Little Em'ly, Act I, Sc. 1.

⁶¹David Belasco and Franklin Fyles, The Girl I Left Behind Me (1893), Act II, in Barrett H. Clark, gen. ed., America's Lost Plays, Vol. 18: Glenn Hughes and George Savage, eds., The Heart of Maryland and Other Plays by David Belasco (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965; original copyright, 1940, Princeton University Press).

In Uncle Tom's Cabin, a lock of Little Eva's hair reminds Simon Legree of his dead mother and brings on deep feelings of remorse. But Legree fights these feelings and goes on to beat Uncle Tom to death. Bloodgood, villain of The Poor of New York, is less successful in countering the reproaches of his daughter, who is very much alive. The very fact that Bloodgood had been motivated to evil by his desire to keep his daughter well provided for gives her words extra sting: "What am I fit for--With your tainted name and my own sad heart? . . . I am fit for the same fate as yours--infamy."⁶²

In some cases remorse led to an attempt at material recompense, if not personal repentance. In Dot, Tackleton grudgingly allowed the festivities planned for his marriage to the alternate heroine to be used to celebrate her marriage to the hero. Chandler, in The Middleman, offered the heroine financial aid, after having been responsible for her separation from the hero.

During the period under discussion, very few villains were truly repentant. One of these few was Gilbert Featherstone in Lost in London. By the end of the last act Featherstone became aware of the full extent

⁶²Dion Boucicault, The Poor of New York (1857), Act III, Sc. 3, in William Paul Steele, ed., The Character of Melodrama (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1968).

to which he had needlessly destroyed the lives of the hero and heroine. When the hero challenged him to a duel, he refused. "I have deeply--cruelly injured you--I will not add another crime to the catalogue . . . I will not raise my hand against you." Minutes later he offered: "If there were atonement possible--," but Job sternly bid him: "Begone! . . . ye carry wi' thee thy own punishment."⁶³

Although he carried his punishment with him, Gilbert Featherstone escaped an external sentence. Some villains attempted to do the same by simply feigning remorse. In Under the Gaslight, Byke made a mockery of an apology when he was cornered: "My conduct, I know, has been highly reprehensible. I have acted injudiciously, and have been the occasion of more or less inconvenience to everyone here. But I wish to make amends, and therefore I tender you all, in this public manner, my sincere apologies. I trust this will be entirely satisfactory."⁶⁴

The insincerity of Byke's speech is blatant; that is not the case with an apology made by the villainous Stephanie de Mohrivart in Forget-Me-Not.

⁶³Watts Phillips, Lost in London (1867), Act III, in Booth, ed., Hiss the Villain; Six American and English Melodramas.

⁶⁴Daly, Under the Gaslight, Act IV, Sc. 1.

"I never had a chance, and I could have been so good, so womanly, if I might! . . . Every door has been barred to me, every hope denied. And now, when day breaks for me at last, it is you who . . . throw your shadow between me and the sunlight which my very soul is thirsting for! . . . Forgive me, if I was defiant just now! I have been so hardened against my own better nature."⁶⁵ But only a few minutes later, it becomes clear that, while this speech is more subtle and convincing than Byke's, it is equally insincere. Like nearly all villains these two must ultimately submit to punishment imposed from without.

In most cases the villain's punishment was determined by other characters in the play; in some cases it was Providential. But no matter how the villain's punishment was decided, it was sure to be appropriate and in direct proportion to his crimes. Psychological satisfaction was guaranteed for nineteenth-century audiences, who could always depend on poetic justice for the villain.

The fact that a villain had engaged in multiple misdeeds in the course of a play often aided in insuring poetic justice. It might have been difficult to legally prosecute a villain who had behaved in a

⁶⁵Merivale and Grove, Forget-Me-Not, Act II.

manner that was merely morally outrageous. But if he had also committed actions that were criminal, it was possible to get a legal conviction that adequately punished him for sins as well as crimes. Audiences despised Sir Francis Levison for his seduction of Lady Isabel, but he was sentenced to transportation for life for the murder of John Hallijohn. That Skinner, the villain of The Silver King, dealt heartlessly with Nelly Denver was as significant to audiences as his murder of the unpleasant Geoffrey Ware. But it was for the murder that Skinner was arrested and probably executed. In Flying Scud, Goodge dispossessed the hero, attempted to seduce the alternate heroine and wounded the heroine in a duel. Fortunately, he was also guilty of forgery, for which he was arrested at the end of the play.

Occasionally, the villain's punishment consisted primarily of the humiliation and frustration resulting from the failure of his plans. This was especially true of villains who had plotted relatively modest mischief. Those who did nothing more than interfere with the hero or heroine's romantic attachments were often merely "foiled again." The romantic couple was united and the villain was, once again, pushed outside the inner circle. I mentioned above that when Tarkenton, villain of Dot, learned that his fiance, May, had secretly married her true love, he did have the good

grace to allow the wedding reception that he had planned for May and himself to be held for the newlyweds. A less amicable resolution was in store for Corrigan in The Colleen Bawn. Not only were his marriage plans disrupted; he was ignominiously thrown in the horsepond.

Colonel May in Rosedale and Oscar Crampton in Davy Crockett both failed to engineer the marriages they had planned for the heroines. For Colonel May that failure represented sure disinheritance. It represented no financial hardship for Crampton but it did foil his plan for vengeance and his frustration at that was rife.

Chandler, who fills the role of villain of The Middleman, is humiliated at the end of the play when he finds that he has exchanged positions with the employee he formerly exploited. Captain Kirke, villain of A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing, loses his military command as well as the rich widow he expected to marry. Stephanie de Mohrivart admits defeat when she abandons her attempt to break into respectable society. Maxwell Arrelsford is thoroughly frustrated by his inability to outsmart his rival.

But for most villains, being "foiled" was simply a first step on the way to more serious and enduring punishment. Although villains were inherently inept at murder themselves, death was most frequently the

villain's punishment. Some villains were moved to take their own lives--the ultimate admission of defeat. In No Thoroughfare Obenreizer commits suicide in the last moments of the play. Gouroc in Paul Kauvar, shoots himself; Maria Bulford drinks a vial of poison in The Great Diamond Robbery. Two of Edmund Dantes's adversaries kill themselves in the last scenes of Monte Cristo.

However, most villains preferred to stand and fight to the very end. A number of those who were particularly malicious met with appropriately violent ends. In fact, the possibilities for violent deaths among villains were as varied as the types of torture that villains were capable of planning to inflict on sympathetic characters. In Across the Continent, Adderly was killed in the Indian uprising he himself had incited. M'Closky, in The Octoroon, was also killed by an Indian. Tyrell was fatally wounded in battle in Horse-Shoe Robinson. Danglars, in Monte Cristo, died in a duel. In Notre Dame, Frollo was thrown out of a window. The villain of Little Em'ly drowned in a shipwreck while the villain of The Main Line perished in a train wreck. In Shenandoah, Thornton was shot by a minor (though heroic) character; Simon Slade, who functions as villain of Ten Nights in a Bar-Room, was murdered by his own son. Simon Legree was shot for resisting arrest; Bill Lacy met the same fate in The White Slave. The

comic hero shot the villain of The Shaughraun; the villain of Nobody's Child was shot by the heroine. And in The Forty-Niners an angry mob took justice into their own hands and lynched Leroy Craven.

Interestingly, many of these deaths occurred offstage; justice rather than violence was emphasized. Thus, arrests and executions that resulted from legal proceedings appear to have been equally satisfactory to audiences. At the end of plays like East Lynne, The Ticket-of-Leave Man, London By Night, My Partner, The Still Alarm and The Silver King there was never any doubt that juries would convict and that judges would sentence villains to the maximum terms or to execution. "The clicking of the handcuff" signified the end of the villain as surely as if a gallows scene had been portrayed on stage.

Legal justice was, of course, unnecessary when Providence intervened. Madness, immediately followed by death, was the fate of Arthur Wardlaw in Foul Play and the title character of Lady Audley's Secret. Svengali died of a heart attack in Trilby; Geoffrey Delmayne had a fatal stroke at the end of Man and Wife. But whether it was God or Man who was directly responsible for the demise of a villain, the exposure and punishment of the villain served to confirm "the audience's faith in Divine Providence." Perhaps even more important, it

heightened, "by contrast the enduring triumph" of the hero and heroine "through whom the audience experience[d] an eminently satisfying vicarious triumph over the persecuting tyrannies and accidents of their own everyday lives."⁶⁶

Adjunct Villains

The magnitude of that triumph was also heightened by the sheer volume of mischief and evil against which the sympathetic characters were forced to fight. Although there were some cases where a single character could generate enough trouble to function as sole villain and unifying force for several subplots (Shenandoah, East Lynne), it was more common for villains to have help in their work.

In the preceding chapters I discussed the secondary characters who functioned as adjunct heroes and heroines. With the exception of comic heroes, these characters have, as types, previously been overlooked by critics. However, "adjunct villains" and the frequency with which they appear in nineteenth-century melodrama, have often been described by experts writing about the genre. Booth and Grimsted both note that in addition to the conventional "grim, determined [and] immensely

⁶⁶James L. Smith, p. 38.

evil"⁶⁷ villain, there is another, less threatening, powerless, half-comic type.⁶⁸ Booth calls this second type the "white villain" and describes him as "pale [and] pink with bloodshot eyes."⁶⁹ Smith suggests that there are two "shades" of villainous accomplices: "Heartless Black for human bloodhounds" and "Cowardly Grey for haggard milksops."⁷⁰ In point of fact, careful examination of the plays indicates that "adjunct" villains come in a greater variety of shades than any of these critics have recognized.

There was a significant group of troublemaking characters who were not accomplices, or even acquaintances of the major villain. Plays which had double plots needed two villains, just as they needed two heroes and two heroines. Simon Legree is remembered as the villain of Uncle Tom's Cabin, but Haley, the slave trader, is the villain of the George-Eliza plot. A more thoroughly developed villain is Uriah Heep, villain of the David Copperfield plot in Little Em'ly. Here, the playwright had the advantage of working from Dickens's

⁶⁷Booth, English Melodrama, p. 18.

⁶⁸Ibid., and David Grimsted, Melodrama Unveiled (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 176.

⁶⁹Booth, English Melodrama, p. 19.

⁷⁰James L. Smith, p. 20.

rich novel. The character of Heep made an admirable transposition to the stage. Variouslly referred to as a "snake," an "eel" and "hound," Heep behaves as a typical stage villain. He blackmails the heroine's father to force him to give up his daughter in marriage. As might be expected, he is ultimately exposed and arrested.

In most plays, secondary villains functioned to unknowingly advance the main villain's purpose by further complicating the lives of the hero and heroine. In Nobody's Child, the thoroughly unpleasant Peter Grice, a miser who exploits the hero and tries to cheat his niece out of her inheritance, is a lower class counterpart to the polished Dudley Lazonby. Bishopriggs, a sneaky waiter in Man and Wife, complicates matters for the heroine when he steals a crucial letter. Geoffrey Ware, who taunts the impoverished hero in the first scene of The Silver King, is largely responsible for his dissipated state. In The Girl I Left Behind Me, the Indian chief, Ladru does not initially appear to be an unsympathetic character, as he makes a case for Indian rights and religious freedom. But later he plans an attack and threatens a horrible revenge on the heroine. While he and Morton Parlow are technically enemies, their actions reinforced each other to create a nightmare of terror for Kate Kennion.

Danny, the secondary villain in The Colleen Bawn, has been characterized as a study in "human contradictions; he is conscious of right and wrong, but his fidelity to his master overpowers his conscience fairly easily, and there is only something of a balance in his deathbed scene. There we get a kind of racking agony because of his awareness of the contradictions pulling at him."⁷¹ Corrigan, who is technically the villain of The Colleen Bawn, is responsible for creating the hero's dilemma. But actually he does nothing worse than attempt to coerce the hero's mother into a loveless and humiliating marriage. Yet, Corrigan remains an unsympathetic character throughout; the audience rejoices in his final humiliation. The hunchbacked Danny, on the other hand, actually attempts to murder the heroine. His punishment for that is the conventional one for villains--he, himself dies. Yet, because his motivation was unselfish and his execution unsuccessful, the audience is eventually moved to pity, and ultimately to forgive, Danny.

Hoggard, a villainous character in Saints and Sinners, seems almost to have been created as a demonstration of the evil inherent in hypocrisy. Eustace Fanshawe is largely a traditional stage villain who

⁷¹Robert Hogan, Dion Boucicault (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1969), p. 86.

ruins the heroine's life when he seduces her. But Hoggard may well be the real villain of Saints and Sinners. While Fanshawe makes little pretense about his nature and his motives, Hoggard piously presents himself as a virtuous and upstanding Christian. Yet, the audience sees him try to cheat a widow and five orphans out of their rightful inheritance, enter proudly into a number of dishonest business deals, pressure the minister to deliver sermons that promote these deals and later blackmail the minister with his knowledge of Letty's disgrace. Ultimately, he is responsible for the exposure and destruction of Letty. While Fanshawe is guilty of a kind of limited, though callous, self-indulgence, Hoggard displays an overwhelming selfishness which permeates the whole fabric of the society presented in the play.

In contrast to secondary villains, who had little contact with the major villain, there existed a type of "alternate villain" who worked in partnership with him. Alternate villains were similar in both type and function to traditional villains, but were relegated to a less prominent position in the plot. Teams like Moss and Dalton in The Ticket-of-Leave Man must have been almost inseparable in the minds of the audience. In Flying Scud, Davis and Mulligan form a somewhat less cohesive unit with Goodge, their leader. Their falling

out at the end of the play provides a humorous illustration of the maxim that there is no loyalty among thieves. In Monte Cristo, the three villains have almost equal status; this is implicit in the hero's dramatic exclamations of "one," "two," and "three" as he finishes off each of them. Although each of these characters has his own motive for opposing the hero, they make common cause and conspire to destroy him. In Sherlock Holmes, the Larabees, who torture a young woman they have imprisoned, and their friend Sid Prince, a safecracker, appear, at the beginning, to be the villains of the play. Only when they go to the King of the Underworld for help does it become clear that Professor Moriarty is the primary villain of the piece.

Closely related to alternate villains were those who worked with the main villain in a somewhat subservient relationship; those whom James L. Smith called the "human bloodhounds." Coombes and Cripps functioned as Skinner's hatchet men in The Silver King. The cowardly Harvey Duff filled this position more and more reluctantly for Kinchela in The Shaughraun. Miles McKenna had his own personal reasons for offering to take care of matters for Colonel May in Rosedale.

Curiously, a number of plays featured hag-like women in the "human bloodhound" role. McKenna, himself, was aided by Mother Mix, who kept the heroine's

kidnapped son in her custody for a year. Old Judas, in Under the Gaslight, was crueller, as well as cruder than Byke; she was also more severely punished. Mother Rosenbaum assisted a more polished female villain in The Great Diamond Robbery. She kidnapped and attempted to murder her heroine. These ugly, old and wicked "hatchet women," who had lost all semblance of femininity, presented a striking contrast with the beautiful young virtuous heroines.

Some "human bloodhounds" are almost entirely undeveloped; they are merely "hired help" who do the villain's dirty work. In The Forty-Niners, Big Lib and his gang are simply hoodlums who lend muscle to the threat represented by Leroy Craven. Craigen, Leary and McTague are thugs in the employ of Professor Moriarty in Sherlock Holmes. The hired hit men in Across the Continent are somewhat more exotic; Giovanni is a volatile Italian and Black Cloud is an Indian chief. But, in spite of their depiction as ethnic stereotypes, no real effort is made to explore these characters.

Perhaps the most interesting adjunct villains are those which Booth probably referred to when he described the "half-comic" white villain. Often these inept and unthreatening figures were, themselves, in conflict with the main villain. The "comic villain" can well be seen as a counterpart to the "comic hero."

In Horse-Shoe Robinson, Curry, who works for Tyrell, is a foil for the comic hero and is pitted against him in several situations. Horse-Shoe, of course, is always revealed as the smarter and stronger man. Shadrack Shabner is Hawkhurst's sidekick in London By Night. "The infernal Jew"⁷² provides the start-up capital for his partner's infamous scheme. The two have a comic falling out over who is to blame when their plot starts to go awry. There is no open dissension between Joseph Chandler and his obsequious employee, Batty Todd. But the opportunistic Todd plots to double-cross Chandler and in the last scene, Chandler is utterly humiliated when Todd is in a position to condescend to him. In contrast, Dicey Morris, the comic villain of After Dark is, himself, double-crossed by Bellingham, who cheats him out of the paper being used to blackmail the hero. Like many other comic villains, Morris speaks with a peculiar and ridiculous dialect. He is especially amusing at the end of the play as he tries to weasel his way out of the consequences of his association with Bellingham.

On the other hand, Gilbert Featherstone's servant, Blinker, in Lost in London, serves his master faithfully. In doing so, he contributes to the ruin of the heroine, but he does so with no malice and without

⁷²Selby, London By Night, Act I, Sc. 2.

a full understanding of the implications of his actions. Later, he sabotages Featherstone's plans to reclaim Nelly; as his comic sweetheart Tiddy Draggleshorpe says, "He ha' a conscience, that lad!"⁷³

Quite a few comic villains did turn out to have consciences. Booth mentions that the white villain often turns to the side of goodness at the end."⁷⁴ Sometimes it almost seems that the white villain exists to provide a way to undo the work of the black villain. For example, in Paul Kauvar, at the villain's instigation, Potin perjures himself to testify against Paul. But, precisely because he has been instrumental in causing Paul's difficulties, he is later able to help save Paul and Dianne. In The Still Alarm, Wilbur, the comic villain, had, years earlier, been hired by Gorman to kidnap the daughter of a wealthy man. In the course of the play he first attempts to blackmail Gorman; later he turns on him entirely and helps the hero to expose the villain. Because of this help and also because of his kind treatment of the girl who has grown up as his daughter, Wilbur is ultimately forgiven. Joe Wylie, the comic villain of Foul Play is also forgiven for his part in the villain's plot. Partly under the influence

⁷³Phillips, Lost in London, Act III, Sc. 1.

⁷⁴Booth, English Melodrama, p. 18.

of his sweetheart, Nancy, Joe makes a clean breast of his role in the scuttling of a ship. Thereafter he tries (unsuccessfully) to persuade Arthur Wardlaw to do the same.

Characters like Blinker and Joe Wylie suggest that a comic villain with a conscience was also entitled to his own sweetheart, who usually provided both incentive and reward for his reformation. But some comic villains chose the heroine, herself, as their inspiration and object of adoration. Because of their devotion to the heroine, some characters who had started the play in league with the villain ended it in total alliance with the sympathetic characters. By the last act, these comic villains were almost indistinguishable from comic heroes. In Trilby, Gecko, the servant of Svengali, vows that "For Trilby I will go to the scaffold, and to the devil after."⁷⁵ Of course, precisely because he was willing to make this type of sacrifice, it was clear to the audience that Gecko would not be going "to the devil."

Badger, the comic villain of The Poor of New York, is a more fully developed example of this type of character. Originally a clerk to Bloodgood, Badger, in

⁷⁵Paul M. Potter, Trilby (1895), Act III, in Michael Kilgariff, ed., The Golden Age of Melodrama; Twelve 19th Century Melodramas (London: Wolfe Publishing Limited, 1974).

typical comic villain fashion, uses his knowledge of his former boss's crimes to blackmail him. But Bloodgood is not an easy mark and he turns out Badger and arranges to have him arrested. Later, still armed with the evidence, Badger is motivated by revenge as well as greed to blackmail Bloodgood again. However, after he helps nurse the heroine back to health, his adoration for her becomes his overwhelming motivation. It gives him the courage to run into a burning building to recover the paper which will restore her family's fortune. Badger is instrumental in resolving the heroine's romantic problems as well as her financial ones. His behavior, by the end of the play, seems almost a model for some of the comic heroes in Boucicault's later works.

The range and variety of adjunct villains in late nineteenth-century melodrama demonstrate that evil is not always unadulterated and that it can be packaged in numerous ways. In that sense adjunct villains may have served a purpose that transcended any dramatic function; they may have helped to pave the way for melodramas without villains.

Villainless Melodramas

Rahill notes that, late in the century, there

were some villains "more to be pitied than censured."⁷⁶ When these transitional villains became sympathetic enough, they began to usurp the protagonist's position from the hero or heroine, and their very status as villains became questionable. A forerunner of this type of sympathetic villain is Lady Audley. Earlier in this chapter I treated this character as a conventional villain-adventuress, and I believe that this is the appropriate classification for her. However, it is also true that she shares some traits with the conventional heroine. She is beautiful and, ultimately at least, she suffers. She holds the central position in the action. And, no matter how much Lady Audley deserves her punishment, her final speeches help her to gain the sympathy of the audience in the last moments of the play.

A fully developed example of this type of sympathetic villain is Matthias, the protagonist of The Bells. Matthias' crime--murder in cold blood--is as heinous as that of the most evil villain. But the emphasis in this play is not on the crime, or even on its external effects. The murder occurred many years before the beginning of the play. Its victim was someone with whom audiences would be unlikely to identify. None of the characters with whom the audience

⁷⁶Rahill, p. xv.

is involved are threatened in any way. And, whereas conventional villains rarely feel remorse, the focus here is entirely on the guilty conscience of the villain. Technically the play contains a hero and a heroine. But, in previous chapters I have pointed out that these characters are quite underdeveloped and that they are involved in little action or conflict. In point of fact, the real conflict of the play goes on inside the mind of Matthias. Structurally and stylistically, The Bells is a conventional melodrama, but in its treatment of character and its point of view it represents a departure. The nature of that departure is reflected by the depiction of the character who fulfills the function of the villain.

Somewhat less of a departure is taken in La Belle Russe but it contains an interesting variation in its handling of villainy. In the preceding chapter, I argued that Geraldine, though an adventuress, functions as a heroine. If this is so, then Brand, her adversary, must be the villain. In fact, Brand has many villainous characteristics. He is facially disfigured, which renders him an outsider; he has an alias, Robert St. Omer; he is motivated by revenge; he is even called "villain" at one point.⁷⁷ However, he does nothing

⁷⁷David Belasco, La Belle Russe (1881), by Philip Calthorpe in Act IV, in Clark, gen. ed., America's Lost Plays, Vol. 18: Hughes and Savage, eds., The Heart of Maryland and Other Plays by David Belasco.

immoral; instead, he is allied with the hero and all other forces of good in the play. Yet, he cannot be seen as an alternate hero unless Geraldine is accepted as the villain. And while Geraldine's behavior is somewhat immoral, she is consistently treated sympathetically. It would appear that between them, Brand and Geraldine share the attributes generally possessed by the villain. This assures the presence of conflict but actually La Belle Russe is essentially villainless in any conventional sense.

Secret Service is another play which has an unpleasant character who does nothing wrong but who, in terms of his impact on the audience's emotions, functions as the villain. Maxwell Arrelsford is the heroine's former suitor and therefore he sees the hero as a romantic rival. He is disagreeable and even vengeful in his attitude toward Dumont; however, his actions are entirely in accordance with his duties as a confederate soldier. It is Dumont, the hero, who as a spy acts in ways that could be seen as morally objectionable. The audience's sympathy is with the hero throughout, but it is he, not the villain, who is taken prisoner at the end. In the chapter on heroes, I discussed the portrayal of Dumont in some detail. Arrelsford is not nearly as highly developed and, in that way, he is typical of villains. However, it is obvious that the

playwright of Secret Service meant to espouse a view of good and evil which was far more complex than that projected in most melodrama of the period.

In most nineteenth-century melodrama, it is clear that immorality was seen as stemming from personal wickedness rather than social decay. However, the reverse was true in plays which were specifically directed against one of society's problems. In nineteenth-century propaganda plays the character who functioned as the villain was merely a personification of a larger problem. Like the other characters in these plays, the villains tended to be minimally developed cardboard figures, created primarily to help convey a message.

In Ten Nights in a Bar-Room, the tavern-keeper Simon Slade is a representative of those who profit by the sale of alcohol. Motivated entirely by avarice, he sells the liquor that enslaves men and refuses to consider the consequences. Slade is appropriately punished when his son, an alcoholic, murders him. Especially when considered in light of the hero's line of action, the moral is plain: alcohol brings only pain and grief.

In a similar fashion, the real villain of Uncle Tom's Cabin was slavery, but the institution was personified by Haley, a slavetrader and the better-known Simon Legree. In the course of the two plots in which they appeared, Haley and Legree were responsible

for all of the most atrocious abuses of slavery: the separation of families, the auctioning of human beings and the physical abuse of slaves.

Henry Arthur Jones's The Middleman, written over three decades later than the two plays just discussed, is an attempt at a considerably more sophisticated examination of a social problem. Joseph Chandler, the nouveau riche owner of a porcelain works, does some typically villainous deeds; he cheats an employee out of the fame and profits justly due him and he uses deception to come between the hero and heroine. But he does these things because he is selfish and shortsighted rather than wicked or malicious. He demonstrates both his basically good intentions and his lack of perspective when he offers the heroine financial help after having separated her from her sweetheart. The fact that Chandler is misguided rather than evil is confirmed by the mildness of his punishment; he is humiliated and financially ruined, but he is not destroyed.

Notwithstanding its social implications, the conflict in The Middleman seems to arise more out of common human frailty than out of individual human wickedness. This is true of a number of plays which appeared during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In each of these plays a conventional plot

formula is used--but the character who conventionally would be cast as the villain turns out to be non-villainous. For example, in The Banker's Daughter, the heroine is coerced into marriage with an older man. If the play had been written twenty-five years earlier, the older man would have been a villain who wished to marry the heroine for her money. But, in this case, the older man is the hero, an exceedingly kind man who, in fact, marries the heroine with the knowledge that her family is on the verge of bankruptcy. Twenty-five years earlier, the heroine would have been coerced into the marriage by a heartless guardian. Instead, she is persuaded by a loving, though misguided, father. The only thoroughly disagreeable character in The Banker's Daughter is the French nobleman, Count Carojac. Like some other "false villains," Carojac has some of the attributes of a villain; he is an alien and a rejected suitor with revenge on his mind. But Carojac's actions result in the exposure, rather than the creation of conflict. Like Brand and Arrelsford, Carojac provides audiences with a target for their anger about the tribulations the sympathetic characters are forced to bear. But he, personally, carries no responsibility for those tribulations.

Even a "false villain" like Carojac is missing from James A. Herne's Hearts of Oak. Montrose Moses

quoted Herne as having called the play "crude in construction"⁷⁸ because it had neither conventional hero nor conventional villain. Perhaps it looked this way to some of the less imaginative audiences and critics of its time. But, on later reflection, Herne seemed quite proud of his early play: "When I sat down to write Hearts of Oak I did not say to myself 'I'm going to write a play in which there shall be neither the traditional stage hero, nor the stage villain. . . . Such characters do not exist in life, nor do they appear in any of my plays.'"⁷⁹ Terry, the older man who marries the heroine, is in the villain's position of Hearts of Oak; he comes between the heroine and her sweetheart. But Terry is motivated by love and his only fault is the slight self-indulgence of allowing himself to believe Chrystal's assurance that she feels romantic love for him. When he becomes aware of his mistake, Terry's remorse is great and he reacts to it with the utmost self-sacrifice. Far from being a traditional

⁷⁸Montrose Moses, The American Dramatist (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1925; reprint ed., New York: Benjamin Blom, 1964), p. 221.

⁷⁹James A. Herne, "Art for Truth's Sake," The Arena 17 (February 1897): 368. It is also in this essay that Herne refers to the play as "a bit of crude construction." While he does so in the same paragraph in which he mentions that the play had neither a hero nor a villain, he does not seem to imply a correlation between these, as Moses infers.

stage villain, Terry approaches the stature of a tragic hero.

This is not true of Aaron Rodney, the "false villain" of Hazel Kirke, but he too is a kind man who actually is concerned only with the heroine's happiness and would do nothing to hurt her. Dunstan Kirke, Hazel's father, is willing to sacrifice his daughter's happiness for his own pride. Because of his proud nature he functions as a villain to some extent, but the suffering and remorse he later endures, and his eventual reconciliation with Hazel certainly disqualify him for consideration as the villain. Steele MacKaye seems to have intended to draw the audience's attention to his novel treatment of evil and villainy when he had another character describe Rodney as "the heavy villain, old Rod."⁸⁰ As an unwelcome older suitor, that is just what Rodney would have been if MacKaye had not "take[n] a large step toward realistic drama by relating the motivation for evil action with the pride, ignorance, fear and stubbornness which even the best of men harbor within their hearts. Thus the nature of evil is portrayed . . . not as an isolated phenomenon which can conveniently be removed, but as something which is

⁸⁰ Steele MacKaye, Hazel Kirke (1880), Pittacus Green, Act I, in Arthur Hobson Quinn, ed., Representative American Plays: From 1761 to the Present Day, 7th ed., rev. and enl. (New York: Appleton Century Crofts Inc., 1953).

intricately interwoven with man's nature."⁸¹ From the point of view of melodrama, the disappearance of a traditional villain represents "crude construction" or the deterioration of the genre. But viewed from a wider perspective, the disappearance of the villain is clearly a step toward realism.

Conclusion

It is no more possible to chart a chronological progression of the development of the villain in the second half of the nineteenth century than it is of the hero or heroine. However, this character does emerge as a more limited stereotype than either the hero or heroine. He presented the late nineteenth-century playwright with a rather narrow range of options. Although the villain could be male or female, his or her line of action was highly predictable. Motivated by avarice, lust, revenge or a combination of the three, the villain committed acts of betrayal that caused or threatened to cause a separation of the hero and heroine. Before the effects of his treachery could become irreversible, it was discovered and the villain was thwarted. He was appropriately punished, often, if the nature of his crime warranted it, with death.

⁸¹Sweedler, p. 125.

The confines of that narrow line of action must eventually have begun to seem constricting to playwrights and to audiences. One reaction to that constriction may have been the creation of a large variety of types of "adjunct villains." While there are two major "types" of adjunct hero and only one "type" of adjunct heroine, there are at least a half dozen varieties of adjunct villains. These range from those who are almost indistinguishable, in personality, from the conventional villain to those who are closely related to the comic hero. Perhaps it was experimentation with the adjunct villains which led some playwrights to the understanding that they could find ways of totally eliminating the traditional villain.

One of the more fascinating aspects of the development of the nineteenth-century melodrama is the fact that the villain--seemingly the most vital member of the melodramatic triumverate--was also the most dispensible. Perhaps this is not as much of a paradox as it appears to be. The villain's vitality and the threat that it carried lay partly in the fact that he was drawn as larger than life--in even broader strokes than the other two characters. Because the traditional villain was more stereotyped, he was eventually depersonalized to the point where he could disappear without being missed. The conflicts that

sprang from his evil intentions were replaced by conflicts that sprang from weaknesses inherent in man and society, weaknesses which could not easily be disposed of and which therefore demanded more thorough examination.

Plays without villains point to a significant departure from melodrama. They imply a more complex view of evil, since if evil is not personified the focus must necessarily be on the evil, itself, rather than on its cause or agent. When evil is examined in such depth, and when its cause is left ambiguous, a solution becomes more difficult. A play which makes this type of examination can have a resolution, but often there is a clear suggestion that a problem still remains. This type of ending is antithetical to the form and spirit of melodrama. Thus, the occasional disappearance of the villain at the end of the nineteenth century, clearly indicated a movement away from the genre.

Chapter V

CONCLUSION

In the preceding pages, I have attempted to examine possibilities for modifications and variations in the depiction of the three major characters in late nineteenth-century melodrama. I believe that I have shown that playwrights during this period exercised more freedom in the creation of these characters than had previously been assumed. Though heroines were always beautiful and heroes handsome, playwrights varied external traits such as age, occupation and socioeconomic status to endow their characters with individuality.

Furthermore, many heroes, heroines and villains deviated--in major or minor ways--from their conventional stereotypes. Heroes were not always paragons of virtue who executed daring rescues of the heroine; some were guilty of moral vacillation which actually contributed to the heroine's suffering. Nor were they, as some critics have suggested, invariably stupid and passive characters who avoided catastrophe only through sheer luck or the help of other characters. There were intelligent and even intellectual heroes who displayed

resourcefulness as well as physical strength in extricating themselves and loved ones from disaster.

Heroines always aspired to virtue but rarely did they--or their creators--equate virtue with chastity. Although most heroines were virgins, their sexual purity was generally far less important than the majority of critics have implied. Provided that no disloyalty was involved, it was possible for heroines to lose their virginity and still live happily ever after. All heroines suffered, but during the fifty years under discussion, they rarely endured physical torture. Most frequently, loneliness and anxiety, caused by separation from their loved ones, gave rise to the anguish they endured. Sometimes heroines took upon themselves the responsibility for ending that anguish; late nineteenth-century heroines were often active and resourceful.

Villains were rarely models of motiveless malignity; they were driven by rational, if evil, impulses. Occasionally, villains were sympathetic, or even heroic. Late in the century, the villain sometimes disappeared entirely; his functions were carried out by basically decent characters who were merely misguided. Plays that left audiences without a villain to hiss were not altogether uncommon by the end of the century.

It is clear that while the range of behaviors exhibited by heroes, heroines and villains was hardly

unlimited, it was certainly more varied than has usually been acknowledged. To some degree, the boundaries within which variations could occur were fixed by the value system assumed by playwrights and their audiences. Interestingly, a detailed survey of these variations has revealed that this value system was relatively rigid and unchanging. In general, the value system of late nineteenth-century melodrama has been described as one which embraced virtue and eschewed vice. But this vague description hardly gives a clear picture. My study has shown that virtue was consistently defined as loyalty; evil, as its opposite, betrayal.

Heroines manifested their virtue through unswerving loyalty. In non-virtuous heroines unchastity or adultery was sinful precisely because it was a sign of disloyalty. Villains evinced evil by betraying those who had trusted them. Heroes who were wholly virtuous were as faithful as heroines; heroes who committed moral indiscretions did so by betraying loved ones. I believe that recognition of the fact that loyalty and betrayal formed the two extremes of the value system of melodrama of the late nineteenth century may be one of the more significant results of this study.

The value system of late nineteenth-century melodrama demanded that heroine and villain be placed at opposite thematic poles, with the hero at some

variable point in between. However, when it came to assigning characters positions in the plot, the arrangement was somewhat more flexible. While the heroine was always central to the action, the functions of the hero and villain varied. The hero was not always the protagonist; that position could be assumed by the alternate or comic hero. It could even be assumed by the villain, who would ordinarily have been expected to take the role of antagonist.

Nor is the melodramatic triumvirate always placed in the rigid triangular relationship that most critics have taken for granted. Villain and hero do not invariably oppose each other over the heroine. While the villain is usually in direct or indirect conflict with the hero, he is not always romantically interested in the heroine. Furthermore, while the hero and heroine always enjoy a sympathetic relationship, they are not always sweethearts.

Reduction of the triumvirate into a romantic triangle is often avoided through the introduction of the subsidiary characters, which I have referred to as "adjuncts." With the addition of adjunct heroes, heroines and/or villains, a play might contain four, five, six or more characters who had active parts in the plot. This frequently resulted in a more intricate and interesting story with a more complex structure of

character relationships.

Adjunct characters took over some of the functions of their counterparts which, in turn, freed those counterparts from the obligation to conform to every facet of their stereotypes. Further, they provided playwrights with the opportunity to experiment with new options and to depict alternate behaviors for characters who were like the hero, heroine and villain. Alternate heroines could be selfish and still sympathetic; comic heroes were brave and good men who were not romantically attractive; comic villains allied themselves with the sympathetic characters.

Adjunct characters gave playwrights the chance to explore alternate behaviors and to depict variant personalities. While this exploration and depiction never crossed the boundaries set by the value system discussed above, it may well have influenced later innovations in the portrayals of major characters. In fact, the most significant finding of this study may be that the appearance and development of these subsidiary characters, which has previously gone almost unrecognized, played an important part in the maturation of characterization in the late nineteenth century.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the mainstream of serious playwrighting in England and America was beginning to move away from melodrama and its

stereotypes in the direction of the new type of realism associated with Ibsen, Chekhov and Shaw. But the movement toward realism was hardly universal. At the turn of the century, a popular type of melodrama, known in the United States as the "ten, twent' thirt'" (the prices charged for tickets) developed and flourished. In this popular melodrama, the conventions of the nineteenth century were reduced to a strict formula. Playwrights who wrote for the "ten, twent', thirt'" were expected to follow a "recipe,"¹ which had, as its major ingredients, highly stylized versions of the hero, the heroine and the villain. The results were plays that looked like parodies of their nineteenth-century antecedents. In fact, the plays were, themselves, the objects of ridicule among audiences and critics who aspired to any level of sophistication.

The "ten, twent', thirt'" disappeared after the first decade of the twentieth century when the emerging art of film developed to the point where it could do a "far better job"² of entertaining the masses. With the approaching demise of this last bastion of nineteenth-century melodrama, it became common for critics to begin

¹Porter Emerson Browne, "The Mellowdrammer," Everybody's Magazine, September 1909, p. 348.

²Frank Rahill, The World of Melodrama (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967), p. 283.

to analyze and evaluate the form from a retrospective point of view. Early critiques of melodrama tend to be patronizing and sarcastic in tone and derisive in their appraisals.³ Innovation in dramaturgy and staging was being hailed by critics of the period and apparently, no writer wanted to appear to be an apologist for the old-fashioned "mellowdrammer."

But close reading of such critiques reveals that their authors were reminiscing, for the most part, about the exaggerated and cynically constructed⁴ "ten, twent', thirt'" melodramas, rather than the genre as a whole. Their perceptions of melodrama were either limited by or filtered through their personal and relatively recent experiences with it. Still, these early critiques have formed part of the basis for contemporary impressions of nineteenth-century melodrama and its stereotyped characters.

Later critics were more descriptive and less evaluative in their assessments of melodrama. By mid-

³In addition to the article by Browne, cited above, some typical examples are: Jerome K. Jerome, Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow and Stage-Land (n.p.: A.L. Burt Company, n.d.); Bart Kennedy, Footlights (London: Henry Walker, 1928); and Harry James Smith, "The Melodrama," Atlantic Monthly, March 1907.

⁴The most successful "ten, twent', thirt'" collaboration is referred to in the title of Lewis Goff's article, "The Owen Davis-Al Woods Melodrama Factory," Educational Theatre Journal 11 (October 1959): 200-207.

century, critics and playwrights had become secure with new dramatic forms and formulas and melodrama no longer posed any threat to newer trends. For the past thirty years, critics have been writing about melodrama with relative objectivity. However, in their efforts to trace the historical evolution of the form, modern critics have generally tended to concentrate on melodrama as it emerged and developed in the first half of the nineteenth century. Perhaps this explains why the more subtle changes and variations that occurred in the second half of the century have been given less attention.

Thus, twentieth-century conceptions of nineteenth-century melodrama have largely been based on either the form as it existed in the first half of the nineteenth century or on the caricature of that form that signalled its demise in the early years of the twentieth. This has certainly been true of critical generalizations about melodrama's stereotyped characters.

As I suggested in my introduction, little of what modern critics have written about these characters is untrue or invalid, per se. In spite of the fact that I believe that many critics have overlooked the shades of difference that existed in late nineteenth-century melodramatic characterization, I do not mean to imply that most heroes, heroines and villains were not,

basically, predictable. After all, part of the appeal of melodramatic characters is in their predictability; an audience can derive deep satisfaction from watching characters do what is expected of them. Eric Bentley, and others, have distinguished between "round" characters, who are free to act and therefore unpredictable, and "flat" characters, who can only behave in predictable ways. Bentley suggests that flat characters have an important place, since most of us are creatures of habit and therefore predictable.⁵

E.M. Forster defined flat characters, in their purest form, as characters who are "constructed around a single idea or quality."⁶ In making the distinction between flat and round characters, Forster did not disparage flat characters, in fact he pointed out that they had two distinct attributes: they were easily recognized and easily remembered.⁷ It is clear that these attributes made "flatness" a distinct advantage for characters in a form which precluded any lengthy exposition.

⁵Eric Bentley, The Life of the Drama (New York: Atheneum, 1964), p. 41. Bentley attributes this distinction to E.M. Forster, who discusses the two types of characters in Aspects of the Novel (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., 1927; reprint ed., 1954), pp. 103-13.

⁶Forster, pp. 103-104.

⁷Ibid., p. 105.

The points made by Forster and Bentley are certainly valid, but I must admit that I find myself somewhat uncomfortable with the use of the term "flat." Although this term is commonly used by critics to describe melodramatic characters, I do not believe that it actually constitutes an accurate description of them. The characters of late nineteenth-century melodrama have enough external details of personality and appearance and enough variation in function and behavior to create an illusion of realistic characterization. While they are never round, they are nearly always constructed around more than one idea or quality. That melodramatic characters lack depth cannot be denied, but because they present an impression of external verisimilitude, I believe that "hollow" constitutes a better description of them than the term "flat."⁸

We perceive something as flat immediately, but we cannot tell that something is hollow until we examine it with great care. We rarely attempt to glimpse the inside or true nature of the people who surround us in real life; our impressions of them are formed by the external characteristics they display. Why then, should we take the time to probe the depths of externally

⁸Forster describes some of Dickens's characters who unsuccessfully "attempt roundness" as "bubbles" (p. 108).

realistic stage characters, especially when the dramaturgical devices of the plays they inhabit are largely set up so as to divert our attention from this kind of examination?

Seen as "hollow" rather than "flat," melodramatic characterization seems to be very much in keeping with melodramatic conventions in general; there is enough attention paid to external detail to make that which is portrayed seem genuine, though there is rarely any solidity or substance to back up the impression. However, melodramatic characterization may represent a view of people as audiences actually do see them. Although we know that real people are not "hollow," we rarely look beneath the surface to find objective evidence for this. While nineteenth-century melodrama is surely unrealistic in its portrayal of characters as realistically developed people, it might be called realistic in terms of its portrayal of audience's perceptions of people as stereotyped characters.

Melodrama, by definition, is plot-oriented; its characters serve the plot. It is important for melodramatic characters to be motivated to act, but psychological realism is neither necessary nor helpful. Melodramatic characters are attractive to audiences because they are predictable people living in a predictable world. But, beyond that, "it is the

wonderful, frank, quite self-conscious vitality of these melodramatic heroes that delights us and gives us a vicarious stimulation--for here surely are people living at about 101 percent of their vital capacity at any given moment, people living every minute of their lives at, in Gerald Manley Hopkins's fine phrase, 'the highest pitch of stress.'"⁹

No group of characters who were merely computed from a rigid formula could project this type of vitality. Late nineteenth-century playwrights had to experiment continuously with variations on the formula in order to develop characters who both served their plots and were interesting and appealing to audiences. In the course of their experimentation, they began to create some characters who appeared to be more "realistic" or realistically motivated than their predecessors; characters who reflected a more complex view of the nature of good and evil. Perhaps it would be an overstatement to suggest that these characters were the direct ancestors of those who peopled the drama of the new realism. But the more modest claim, that some of the same impulses that shaped the characters of the new realism were evident in English and American melodrama between 1850 and 1900, seems well founded.

⁹J.L. Rosenberg, "Melodrama," in R.W. Corrigan and J.L. Rosenberg, eds., The Context and Craft of Drama (San Francisco: Chandler, 1964), p. 178.

Appendix A

GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED TO DISCUSS "ADJUNCT" CHARACTERS

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Adjunct Hero: A character who has a number of traits and functions traditionally associated with the hero, but who is secondary to him in importance. There are two major types of adjunct heroes:

Alternate Hero: Similar to the traditional confidant of drama; usually a friend of the hero's, about the same age as he. Often takes a more active role than the hero, but may be relatively passive. Usually romantically involved with the heroine or alternate heroine.

Comic or Character Hero: An older male character, often lower class, who takes an active part in the rescue of the hero and/or heroine, while at the same time providing comic relief (a type of "comic man"). In a few cases (e.g., Uncle Tom's Cabin, Notre Dame) this character is not treated humorously, and would more appropriately be called the "character" hero.

Adjunct Heroine: A character who has a number of traits and functions traditionally associated with the heroine, but who is secondary to her in importance. There is only one type of adjunct heroine--the alternate heroine--and the terms are used interchangeably:

Alternate Heroine: A female counterpart of the alternate hero. She is usually a friend of the heroine and romantically involved with the hero or alternate hero.

Adjunct Villain: A character who has a number of traits and functions traditionally associated with the villain, but who is secondary to him in importance. There are four major types of adjunct villains:

Secondary Villain: A villainous character whose actions tend to reinforce those of the main villain, but who is not in league with him.

Alternate Villain: A villainous character who works closely with the main villain and may be almost equal to him in importance.

"Hatchet" Villain: A character who works for the main villain in a subservient position. Often he or she is responsible for the "dirty work."

Comic Villain (traditionally referred to as the "white" villain): A character who works for the main villain but who is relatively ineffectual and non-threatening. Like the comic hero, he provides some comic relief. In some cases the comic villain is converted to the side of virtue before the end of the play, in which cases he may play a major part in the rescue of the hero or heroine.

Appendix B

TABLE OF MAJOR CHARACTERS IN PLAYS DISCUSSED
(IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER)

Play/Date of first production	Hero	Adjunct hero(es)		Heroine	Adjunct (Alternate) heroine(s)	Villain	Adjunct villain(s)
		Alternate	Comic/ Character				
<u>Uncle Tom's Cabin</u> , 1852 (Aiken)	George Harris		Uncle Tom	Eliza Harris	Little Eva	Simon Legree	Haley (secondary villain)
<u>Masks and Faces; or, Before and Behind the Curtain</u> , 1852 (Taylor & Reade)	Ernest Vane			Peg Woffington	Mabel Vane	Sir Charles Pomander	
<u>The Poor of New York</u> , 1857 (Boucicault)	Mark Livingstone	Paul Fairweather		Lucy Fairweather		Bloodgood	Badger (comic villain)
<u>A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing</u> , 1857 (Taylor)	Jasper Carew			Anne Carew		Captain Percival Kirke	
<u>Ten Nights in a Bar-Room</u> , 1858 (Pratt)	Joe Morgan			Fanny Morgan		Simon Slade	
<u>Horse-Shoe Robinson</u> , 1858 (Tayleure)	Major Henry		Horse-Shoe Robinson	Mildred Lindsay	Mary Musgrove	Tyrell aka St. Jermyn	Curry (comic villain)

(continued)

Play/Date of first production	Hero	Adjunct hero(es)		Heroine	Adjunct (Alternate) heroine(s)	Villain	Adjunct villain(s)
		Alternate	Comic/ Character				
Dot, 1859 (Boucicault)	Edward (Ned) Plummer	John Perry- bingle		Dot	May	Tackleton	
<u>The Octoroon; or, Life in Louisiana,</u> 1859 (Boucicault)	George Peyton		Salem Scudder	Zoe	Dora Sunnyside	Jake M'Closky	
<u>The Colleen Bawn; or, The Brides of Garryowen,</u> 1859 (Boucicault)	Hardress Cregan	Kyrle Daly	Myles Na'Copp- aleen	Eily O'Connor	Anne Chute	Corrigan	Danny (secondary villain)
<u>East Lynne,</u> 1862 (Tayleure)	Archibald Carlyle	Richard Hare		Lady Isabel Vane	Barbara Hare	Sir Francis Levison, aka Capt. Thorne	
<u>Lady Audley's Secret,</u> 1863 (Hazlewood)	Robert Audley	George Talboys		Alicia		Lady Audley	
<u>The Ticket-of- Leave Man,</u> 1863 (Taylor)	Robert Brierly			May Edwards		Moss	Dalton (alternate villain)
<u>Rosedale; or The Rifleman's Ball,</u> 1863 (L. Wallack)	Elliot Gray	Matthew Leigh		Lady Florence May	Rosa Leigh	Colonel May	Miles McKenna Mother Mix (hatchet)

(continued)

Play/Date of first production	Hero	Adjunct hero(es)		Heroine	Adjunct (Alternate) heroine(s)	Villain	Adjunct villain(s)
		Alternate	Comic/ Character				
<u>Flying Scud; or, A Four-Legged Fortune</u> , 1866 (Boucicault)	Tom Meredith	Lord Woodbie	Nat	Julia Latimer	Katy Rideout	Goodge	Mo Davis Mulligan (alternates)
<u>East Lynne</u> , 1866 (Oxenford)	Archibald Carlyle	Richard Hare		Lady Isabel Vane	Barbara Hare	Sir Francis Levison aka Capt. Thorne	
<u>Under the Gaslight</u> , 1867 (Daly)	Ray Trafford			Laura Courtland	Pearl Courtland	Byke	Old Judas
<u>No Thoroughfare</u> , 1867 (Dickins & Collins)	George Vendale			Marguerite		Obenreizer	
<u>Lost in London</u> , 1867 (Phillips)	Job Armroyd			Nelly Armroyd		Gilbert Featherstone	Blinker (comic)
<u>Nobody's Child</u> , 1867 (Phillips)	Joe	George Penryn		Lucy Tregarvon	Patty Grice	Dudley Lazonby	Peter Grice (secondary)
<u>After Dark</u> , 1868 (Boucicault)	Gordon Chumley	Sir George Meredith	Old Tom	Eliza	Rose Egerton	Chandos Bellingham aka Richard Knatchbull	Dicey Morris (comic)

(continued)

Play/Date of first production	Hero	Adjunct hero(es)		Heroine	Adjunct (Alternate) heroine(s)	Villain	Adjunct villain(s)
		Alternate	Comic/ Character				
<u>Foul Play</u> , 1868 (Boucicault & Reade)	Robert Penfold			Helen Rolleston		Arthur Wardlaw	Wylie
<u>London by Night</u> , 1868 (Selby?)	Henry Marchmont	Frank Marchmont	Dognose	Louisa		Jonathan Hawkhurst	Shadrack Shabner (comic)
<u>Little Em'ly</u> , 1869 (Halliday)	David Copperfield	Ham		Little Em'ly	Agnes	James Steerforth	Uriah Heep (secondary villain)
<u>Man and Wife</u> , 1870 (Daly)	Arnold Brinkworth			Anne Sylvester	Blanche Lundie	Geoffrey Delmayne	Bishoppriggs (secondary & comic)
<u>Across the Continent; or, Scenes from New York Life and the Pacific Railroad</u> , 1870 (McCloskey)	Joe Ferris	Tom Goodwin Jr.		Louisa Goodwin		John Adderly aka Ellerton	Giovanni Black Cloud (hatchet)
<u>Notre Dame</u> , 1871 (Halliday)	Phoebus		Quasimodo	Esmeralda		Claude Frollo	
<u>The Bells</u> , 1871 (Lewis)	Christian			Annette		Matthias	

Play/Date of first production	Hero	Adjunct hero(es)		Heroine	Adjunct (Alternate) heroine(s)	Villain	Adjunct villain(s)
		Alternate	Comic/ Character				
<u>Davy Crockett; or Be Sure You're Right, Then Go Ahead</u> , 1872 (Murdoch)	Davy Crockett			Eleanor		Oscar Crampton	
<u>The Shaughraun</u> , 1874 (Boucicault)	Robert Ffolliot	Captain Molineaux	Conn, the Shaughraun	Arte O'Neal Moya	Claire Ffolliot	Kinchela	Harvey Duff (hatchet)
<u>East Lynne</u> , 1874 (Palmer)	Archibald Carlyle	Richard Hare		Lady Isabel Vane	Barbara Hare	Sir Francis Levison aka Capt. Thorne	
<u>The Forty-Niners; A Drama of the Gold Mines</u> , 1878 (Hanshew)	Richard Delmayne aka Hawley Briggs		Joe Wiston	Margaret (Meg) Gath	Kate Delmayne	Leroy Craven	Big Lib (hatchet)
<u>The Banker's Daughter</u> , 1878 (Howard)	John Strebelow			Lilian Westbrook		none	Lawrene Westbrook Count Carojac assume some of villain's functions

(continued)

Play/Date of first production	Hero	Adjunct hero(es)		Heroine	Adjunct (Alternate) heroine(s)	Villain	Adjunct villain(s)
		Alternate	Comic/ Character				
<u>My Partner</u> , 1879 (Campbell)	Joe Sanders	Ned Singleton		Mary Brandon	Grace Brandon	Josiah Scraggs	
<u>Hearts of Oak</u> , 1879 (Herne)	Ned Fair-weather	Terry Dennison		Chrystal		none	
<u>Forget-Me-Not</u> , 1879 (Merivale & Grove)	Horace Welby			Alice Verney	Rose de Brissac	Stephanie de Mohrivart	
<u>Hazel Kirke</u> , 1880 (MacKaye)	Arthur Carringsford			Hazel Kirke		none	Dunstan Kirke and Lady Travers assume some functions
<u>La Belle Russe</u> , 1881 (Belasco)	Philip Calthorpe	Dudley Brand aka Robert St. Cyr		Geraldine (Beatrice) Hathely		none	aside from Geraldine herself, Dudley Brand aka Robert St. Cyr fulfills some of villain's functions

(continued)

Play/Date of first production	Hero	Adjunct hero(es)		Heroine	Adjunct (Alternate) heroine(s)	Villain	Adjunct villain(s)
		Alternate	Comic/ Character				
<u>The White Slave</u> , 1882 (Campbell)	Clay Britton	Jack		Lisa	Letty Lee, Daphne	Bill Lacy	
<u>The Silver King</u> , 1882 (Jones)	Wilfred Denver		Jaikes	Nelly Denver		Capt. Herbert Skinner aka "The	Geoffrey Ware (secondary) Corkett, Coombes & Cripps (hatchet)
<u>Monte Cristo</u> (O'Neill version) 1882 (ad. from Fechter)	Edmund Dumas			Mercedes		Villefort	Danglars Fernand (secondary-alternate)
<u>Saints and Sinners</u> , 1884 (Jones)	George Kingsmill			Letty Fletcher		Eustace Fanshawe	Hoggard (secondary)
<u>The Main Line; or, Rawson's Y</u> , 1886 (DeMille)	Lawrence Hatton	Jack Hatton		Positive (Possy) Burroughs	Dora	Jim Blakely	
<u>The Still Alarm</u> , 1887 (Arthur)	Arthur Manley	Willie Manley		Elinore Fordham	Cad	John Bird aka Gorman	Wilbur (comic)
<u>Paul Kauvar; or Anarchy</u> , 1887 (MacKaye)	Paul Kauvar			Dianne LeBlanc		Gouroc	Potin (comic)

(continued)

Play/Date of first production	Hero	Adjunct hero(es)		Heroine	Adjunct (Alternate) heroine(s)	Villain	Adjunct villain(s)
		Alternate	Comic/ Character				
<u>Shenandoah</u> , 1888 (Howard)	Kerchival West	Robert Ellingham Captain Heartsease		Gertrude Ellingham	Madeleine West Mrs. Con- stance Haverill Jenny Buckthorn	Edward Thornton	
<u>The Middleman</u> , 1889 (Jones)	Captain Julian Chandler		Jesse Pegg	Mary Blenham	Nancy Blenham	Julian Chandler (functions as villain)	Batty Todd (comic)
<u>Shore Acres</u> , 1892 (Herne)	Sam Warren		Uncle Nat	Helen Berry		Josiah Blake	Martin Berry (functions as alter- nate villain)
<u>The Girl I Left Behind Me</u> , 1893 (Belasco & Fyles)	Edgar Hawkes- worth	Pvt. Bob Jones Arthur Penwick		Kate Kennion	Lucy Hawkes- Fawn Afraid "Wilbur's Ann"	Morton Parlow	Ladru (secondary)

(continued)

Play/Date of first production	Hero	Adjunct hero(es)		Heroine	Adjunct (Alternate) heroine(s)	Villain	Adjunct villain(s)
		Alternate	Comic/ Character				
<u>The Great Diamond Robbery, 1895</u> (Alfriend & Wheeler)	Dick Brummage	Frank Kennet		Mary Lavelot		Maria Bulford	Marino Mother Rosenbaum (secondary)
<u>The Heart of Maryland, 1895</u> (Belasco)	Alan Kendricks	Lloyd Calvert		Maryland Calvert		Colonel Thorpe	
<u>Secret Service,</u> 1895 (Gillette)	"Captain Thorne" aka Lewis Dumont	Wilfred Varney		Edith Varney	Caroline Mitford	Maxwell Arrelsford	
<u>Trilby, 1895</u> (Potter)	William Bagot (Little Billee)	Talbot Wynne (Taffy) Sandy McAlister		Trilby		Svengali	Gecko (comic)
<u>Barbara Frietchie,</u> 1899 (Fitch)	Capt. Will Trumbull	Arthur Frietchie		Barbara Frietchie	Sue Royce	Jack Negly	Colonel Negly Mr. Frietchie (secondary)
<u>Sherlock Holmes,</u> 1899 (Gillette & Doyle)	Sherlock Holmes	Dr. Watson		Alice Faulkner		Professor Moriarty	Madge & James Larabee Sid Prince (hatchet)

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AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Lyn Stiefel Hill was born in New York City in 1947. She attended public schools in New York and received her B.A. degree from Queens College, The City University of New York, in 1967. Her undergraduate major was in Communication Arts and Sciences, with a concentration in Theatre.

While still an undergraduate, Ms. Hill began working in professional theatre. Between 1963 and 1968 she worked with various companies as Wardrobe Supervisor, Costumer or Costume Designer. In 1968 she was Costume Shop Supervisor and Assistant to the Designer of the APA-Phoenix Repertory Company, which was then performing at the Lyceum Theatre on Broadway. Ms. Hill studied costume design at the Lester Polakov Studio and Forum of Stage Design.

Ms. Hill's career in professional theatre was interrupted when she decided to enter graduate school, to study theatre history and dramatic criticism. She received her M.A. degree from Queens College in 1971. In that year she entered the Ph.D. in Theatre Program at the Graduate Center of The City University of New York.

From 1968 until the present, Ms. Hill has taught in the Department of Communication Arts and Sciences at Queens College, first as graduate assistant, and later as instructor and adjunct lecturer. At present she is also adjunct lecturer in the Department of Speech and Theatre at Montclair State College in New Jersey.

Ms. Hill appeared on the debut panel of the Speech Association of the Eastern States convention in 1970, where she presented the paper, "The Green Pastures --A Modern Mystery Play." In November 1975, her article, "There Was An American Toy Theatre," was published in Theatre Survey. Musical Quarterly published her review of Stanislavski On Opera in July 1976. Ms. Hill is a member of the American Society for Theatre Research.

She married Forbes Hill in 1970. Together with their children, Stephanie, born 1975, and Timothy, born 1978, they live in Brooklyn.