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TONIGHT'S AMUSEMENTS: PARATHEATRICAL ENTERTAINMENT AND THE
DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN DRAMA

by

CRAIG B. ITURBE

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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By CRAIG B. ITURBE

Dissertation Director:

Professor Elin diamond

This project examines the effects of a variety of popular amusements on the development of American drama in the nineteenth century. These amusements, sometimes called paratheatrical entertainments, made up a significant portion of the chaotic entertainment landscape of the nineteenth century. It is my argument that the nineteenth century should be viewed as a paratheatrical era for American drama, and that we cannot properly understand the evolution of theatre in America without understanding its place within a system of available diversions, all of which were furiously competing for audience attention. This competition led to an explosion of genres and subgenres within American dramatic writing, and played a key role in shaping the specific trajectory

of such theatrical events as the development of modern celebrity and the advent of American realist drama.

I begin with the museum industry, most famously represented by P. T. Barnum. Barnum and his colleagues created a powerful entertainment apparatus in the urban centers of the northeast. The cheap, popular entertainment offered by museums presented a problem for playwrights and theatre managers, a problem that was solved by the invention of sensation melodrama. From there, I move to the medicine show, a form of amusement with a long history in America. The medicine show's mix of low overhead and big promises helped to secure it a perpetual American audience. James A. Herne was able to recapture some of this audience by writing the spectacle of the medicine show into his own drama, resulting in an American realist theatre that was specifically indebted to the logic of medicine. My next chapter concerns the development of celebrity in American culture, and the indebtedness of that development to the rise of revival preaching. In particular, the American preacher Charles Grandison Finney, who preached to his congregation in a New York City theatre, played an important role in teaching audience members how to respond to a charismatic performance. Finally, I look at the Lyceum circuit, and the way that its persuasive performance style led to the development of argument drama, which is sometimes called moral reform drama.

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Introduction: The Organ Grinder in the Tombs

Augustin Daly's *Under the Gaslight* (1867) is best known for its locomotive scene, in which a helpless victim is tied to a set of railroad tracks, only to be rescued by the play's heroine seconds before a train barrels through. The scene thrilled audiences, and is today frequently cited as a revealing sign of the theatre's turn toward spectacular stage effects in the nineteenth century. Its spectacle, however, may have caused it to overshadow another scene that provides an even more telling window into the conditions on the ground for nineteenth-century American theatre. The scene in question represents a diversion from the main action of the play, as the protagonists are briefly held offstage so that a man and his pet monkey can be put on trial.

This man, Rafferdi, is an Irish man pretending to be an Italian organ grinder. He is called before a judge in "The Tombs Police Court" (29). His case is heard between a pickpocket and a drunk and disorderly charge. Rafferdi, who provides free entertainment, or at least entertainment that is paid for on a voluntary basis, is charged with "complaint of disturbing the neighborhood" (30). Rafferdi's lawyer tries to make the case that his impulse to entertain for a living should be respected: "He came to our free and happy country, and being a votary of music, he bought an organ and a monkey, and tried to earn his bread. But the myrmidons of the law were upon him, and the Eagle of Liberty drooped his pinions, as Rafferdi was hurried to his dungeon" (30). The judge, however, makes his contempt of this pursuit clear, saying, "You fellows are regular nuisances" (30). The judge threatens to imprison Rafferdi, but eventually decides to be merciful out

of concern for Rafferdi's monkey, which cannot be imprisoned and will be unable to care for itself without its master.

To properly understand this scene, we must first understand the chaotic theatrical marketplace in which *Under the Gaslight* premiered. Theatre historians have long noted that American drama in the nineteenth century was forever churning itself into new and distinct types of theatre.¹ Most of these fell under the heading of melodrama, which dominated the American theatre through much of the nineteenth century. Within the confines of this larger category, however, American drama continually fragmented, producing such variants as the fairytale melodrama, the heroic melodrama, and the moral reform melodrama. In addition to these multiple competing subgenres of theatre, the century saw an explosion of forms of performance that did not call themselves theatre. As transportation throughout the country became more and more feasible, especially with the advent of the railroad, more people began to offer mobile amusements to various cities. This phenomenon was encouraged by the liminal status of theatre during this period. During the revolutionary period, theatre was banned in several colonies, and was frowned upon in most (P. Buckley 429). As the theatre began its slow movement toward legitimacy in the United States, it was often safer for audience members to spend their time on an amusement that did not carry the stigma of the theatre. Many entertainers were happy to provide performative displays to fill this demand.

Peter G. Buckley has usefully supplied a term for these performance types: “paratheatrical entertainments” (424). My dissertation argues that we cannot properly

¹ See P. Buckley, Butsch, Demastes, Durham, McConachie, Miller, and Richardson, among others.

understand American drama in the nineteenth century unless we consider it paratheatrically, as part of a larger entertainment marketplace. As Buckley explains, “by 1870, the United States was saturated with forms of political performance and acts of religious testimony and was in love with commercial entertainments” (427). It is my argument that playwriting during this period was shaped by the constant pressure presented by these other, less formal competitors. In making this claim, my dissertation bridges the gap between the two major strands of critical work on theatre and the paratheatrical in the American nineteenth century.

The first of these strands, representing the majority of the work so far done on paratheatrical forms, is the cultural historical study. Historians have, in recent years, compiled a series of excellent accounts of paratheatrical entertainment in America. Taken together, they provide an essential body of knowledge about the backdrop against which nineteenth-century American drama developed. Buckley’s essay, “Paratheatricals and Popular Stage Entertainments” provides a comprehensive overview of the entertainment landscape up through 1870. Because his approach is focused on breadth, he cannot provide more than a sketch of each individual paratheatrical. Most other histories are narrowly focused on particular paratheatrical forms, although not all of them recognize their subjects as paratheatrical. Joel Orosz, for example, provides us with a comprehensive account of the history of the American museum in *Curators and Culture* (2002). Brooks McNamara is similarly exhaustive in *Step Right Up!* (1976), his history of the medicine show. And Anne Taves, writing in *Fits, Trances, and Visions* (1999), offers a thorough history of America's understanding of what it means to have a religious

experience. While all of these studies understand their subjects as participating in a kind of performance, they all discuss these performances on their own terms, not as a part of the theatrical marketplace.

When historians of the paratheatrical discuss the interactions between theatre and other performance types, these discussions tend to be unidirectional. In almost every case, the focus is on the influence of the theatre on the paratheatrical. Jeanne Kilde and Lawrence Moore provide excellent examples of this type of work in *When Church Becomes Theatre* (2002) and *Selling God* (1994), respectively. These books both chronicle the effect of America's performance culture on popular Christianity. They look, in detail, at the ways in which American churches and preachers had to accommodate audience demand for a certain kind of performative entertainment, and detail the effects of these accommodations on American Protestant doctrine and practice. What they do not discuss is the effect of this process on the theatre. In these histories, the theatre acts as a kind of unmoved mover, pushing other forms of address into greater and greater degrees of performativity without ever itself being compromised. Even Buckley, despite his attempt to analyze paratheatrical forms that “shed some ambient light” on the theatre, mostly focuses on the way that those forms were animated by their proximity to the theatre, and not vice versa (425).

A central claim of my dissertation is that this influence always works in both directions. Kilde and Moore, to continue with the previous example, are undoubtedly correct that congregants who observed the change wrought on their churches by proximity to the theatre came away with altered attitudes toward their religious practices.

It is my argument, however, that theatergoers would have experienced a parallel change in their attitudes toward the theatre. As the line between a church and a theatre became blurred, elements of churchgoing would begin to encroach on the experience of theatergoing. My dissertation works to fill in the other half of the equation presented by histories like Kilde's: the theatre's reaction to paratheatrical co-opting of its own tactics.

My aim here is to bring this historical understanding to bear on the other strand of criticism with which my dissertation is engaged: the analysis of nineteenth-century American drama. Here the selection is somewhat more limited, owing to a continuing scholarly bias against this period in American dramatic history. While it is true that scholars of dramatic literature are becoming increasingly interested in melodrama, the field remains dominated by writing about modern drama, generally beginning with realism. As recently as 2007, Tice L. Miller thought it necessary to assure his readers that "There was an American drama before O'Neill and Glaspell" (*Entertaining* xvi).

Still, the field is not entirely empty. Bruce McConachie's *Melodramatic Formations* (1992) remains the definitive study of this period in American drama. McConachie tracks the development of American melodrama from 1820 to 1870, from fairy tale melodrama, through apocalyptic melodrama, and into the more respectable incarnations at the end of the century. The argument of *Melodramatic Formations* is an argument about culture and ideology; as McConachie explains, "the narrative thread stitching together *Melodramatic Formations* traces the decline of one type of cultural hegemony and the gradual rise of another" (xii). This largely entails a preoccupation with the class dynamics of the melodramatic audience, and an analysis of the ways in which

playwriting helped to satisfy the demands created by that shifting class landscape.² My dissertation uses this as a starting point for a more expansive view of the wider entertainment landscape in which the melodrama was situated. McConachie's claim is that "audiences and theatre artists in the Northeast needed new melodramatic forms to project their newfound hopes and assuage their modern fears" and that these forms, developed in the Northeast, later circulated throughout the rest of the country (*ibid.*). My claim is that there is no reason to restrict ourselves to recognized 'theatre artists.' These forms, I argue, were also incubated in other performance communities before making their way on to the melodramatic stage.

More recently, Marc Robinson's *The American Play* (2009) presents a long-term history of American Drama, which includes several chapters that examine the nineteenth century. Robinson's method, as he explains, is to "map the landscape of an era's thematic preoccupations and formal procedures and then zero in on a small number of selected plays, paying attention to how their writers either embody ambitions shared by a generation or launch the art beyond existing conventions" (1). Robinson goes on to do just that, explaining, for example how a "preoccupation with an image's truth and one's ability to recognize it... becomes in certain midcentury plays as integral to their dramaturgy as any event or character" (37). This thematic exploration proves fruitful for Robinson, allowing him to uncover a set of previously unrecognized resonances in several dramatic texts. My dissertation aims to complement this kind of thematic study by proposing and investigating a mechanism for these "thematic preoccupations" to travel in

² See Butsch, Frick, Graver, Herget, Hodge, Miller, and Richardson for more examples of this approach.

and out of the theatre. How, my dissertation asks, did nineteenth-century playwrights know that audiences wanted to see plays that discussed the validity of images? How did audiences?

The answer, I argue, in many cases, can be found in an exploration of the paratheatrical competition that plagued the American theatre throughout the nineteenth century. The paratheatrical marketplace could serve as a kind of testing ground, and a gauge of popular engagement with particular topics. After all, the clearest source of information about whether or not an audience was interested in seeing a play speak to a specific subject is that audience's attendance or non-attendance at the play. In an extremely competitive theatrical market, playwrights naturally gravitate toward ideas and devices toward which audiences have already proven themselves to be favorably disposed. A successful paratheatrical entertainment, particularly one that is so successful that it begins to reduce theatrical profits, provides a direct source of such proof.

Of course, successful paratheatrical entertainments also presented a threat to the theatre. They threatened playwrights not just in the commercial marketplace, but in what Ted Smith has called the "economy of attention" (77). Theatre relies on its own ability to provide audiences with a singular experience. Paratheatricals threatened playwrights in a way that rival playwrights did not, because they had the potential to erode the notion that the theatre had something unique to give to its audience. If the spectacle of a stage show could be just one of many exhibits at P. T. Barnum's museum, or if a preacher could deliver an exciting star turn while saving his audience's souls, it no longer seemed necessary for audiences to go to the theatre. This represents an existential threat to the

theatre, since, as Herbert Blau notes, "since the eighteenth century... the audience has been esteemed as the representative ideal of its own representations, the theatre's judge and master, deferred to as such" (4).

This competitive environment is written into the history of melodrama, but has generally been overlooked by criticism. Elaine Hadley comes closest when she notes that "the melodramatic mode was as much a product as a participant in the history of nineteenth-century capitalist culture, and its features were more a result of contemporary pressures than an exact historical reproduction" (11). Hadley, however, is specifically interested in an engagement with "the emerging values of institutionalized capitalism" (12). In other words, Hadley's project is to track the influence of the melodramatic mode on capitalism writ large; she examines the ways in which capital and commodity relations imprint themselves on the theatre. My goal here is to look at the theatre with a narrower focus. My dissertation is a specific exploration of the theatrical and paratheatrical threats faced by playwrights in the nineteenth century, and the ways in which those threats prompted playwrights to act in their capacity as businessmen.

These threats were important, because they were powerful enough to force the hands of many nineteenth-century playwrights. Generally speaking, the theatre was in a kind of asymmetrical warfare with its paratheatrical rivals. They almost always had lower overhead and production costs, and were thus able to undercut the theatre's ticket prices. Sometimes, as in the case of the Lyceum, they possessed a respectability that the theatre could never hope to attain, especially in America, which had an anti-theatrical bias from the very beginning.

With this in mind, Rafferdi's trial in *Under the Gaslight*, in which Augustin Daly literally has a stand-in for his paratheatrical competitors dragged into court and threatened with jail for creating a public nuisance,³ takes on new resonances. Rather than simply an amusing diversion or an excuse to bring a monkey on stage, it represents an attempt to manage this kind of paratheatrical competition. The scene accomplishes this in two ways. The first is that it satisfies audience demand for this competing performance form. Audience members who previously might have had to choose between seeing *Under the Gaslight* and seeing an organ grinder with a monkey no longer have to make that choice; *Under the Gaslight* includes an appearance by the monkey that would presumably be the main draw of an organ grinder performance. The second way that this scene helps Daly stave off competition is by training his audience to dislike that competition even as he is including it in his production. The organ grinder is a figure of mockery in Daly's play. The entertainment he offers is, in Daly's telling, not entertainment at all. Instead, it is labeled by a judge, in his official capacity, as a nuisance. In addition, Rafferdi is portrayed as not just irritating but actively fraudulent: he is an Irishman who, despite speaking in an Irish accent, takes an Italian name and self-identifies as Italian. Daly clearly suggests that it would be better for everyone except Rafferdi's monkey if Rafferdi were to be locked up. Daly's presentation of Rafferdi allows him to have it both ways: he can give his audience a version of his paratheatrical competitor while simultaneously teaching them that that competitor is not worth seeing.

³ This successful prosecution is indeed plausible; by the time of *Under the Gaslight*'s premier, these sorts of street performers had become so prevalent that many cities passed laws that attempted to get them off the streets (P. Buckley 441).

He presents an organ grinder while mocking the very idea that an organ grinder's performance is a valid form of entertainment. The competition is incorporated into Daly's text in a hostile way, which is why I call this procedure hostile incorporation.

To varying degrees, many nineteenth-century playwrights incorporated a version of their competition into their own plays, but did so in a way that criticized that competitor. This turns out to have fairly significant implications for the way that American drama developed during this period. Some of the major trends that other critics have observed in nineteenth century American drama, up to and including the specific form in which realism arrived on the American stage, have their roots in this competitive strategy.

Hostile incorporation was one of the two major competitive techniques adopted by the savviest playwrights and theatre managers in this paratheatrical era. The other technique was audience training. Some playwrights engaged their paratheatrical competitors in a less adversarial way, with a dramaturgy that activated and satisfied the expectations formed by the audience in other venues. In so doing, the theatre turned its competition into a kind of training ground for audiences, a place that prepared them to enjoy the offerings of the theatre. This strategy was most effective when the theatre was able to present its audience with the thrill of the paratheatrical competition, while asking less of that audience than the paratheatrical did. As such, it was most often employed to combat paratheatrical forms that competed with the theatre on the basis of legitimacy.

My dissertation views the entertainment marketplace of the nineteenth century not as a series of other forms that are derived from the theatre, but as a larger system, in

which the theatre participates. My purpose is to discover how nineteenth-century American drama was shaped by the business of the theatre. To this end, I will examine the ways that four categories of paratheatrical entertainment influenced the development of American drama. Two of these, museum entertainment and medicine shows, prompted a hostile incorporation response from the theatre. The other two, revival preaching and Lyceum lectures, prompted an audience training response.

My first chapter looks at the relationship between the rise museum entertainment in America and the increasing popularity of sensation melodrama. Scholarship on sensation melodrama has tended to employ a technological argument, suggesting that melodramas began to include spectacular effects simply because these effects became possible. At the same time, some excellent historical work has been done on the ways that museum owners, led by P. T. Barnum, began to capture national attention. Many of these accounts include some discussion of the ways that Barnum and others borrowed from the theatre, but they seldom discuss the ways that the theatre may have borrowed from the museums. It is my argument that playwrights and theatre managers began to include spectacular set pieces in their plays to stave off competition from museums. Museum owners could provide audiences with an exciting display without having to go to the trouble of constructing a complete narrative. As audiences became accustomed to seeing such incredible sights so cheaply and so easily, they began to associate spectacle with entertainment in general. This prompted playwrights to begin to incorporate such displays into their own offerings to lure audience members back to the theatre.

This chapter uses the relationship between Dion Boucicault and P. T. Barnum as a case study. Barnum's offerings were successful, in part, because they were so spectacular. His promotional apparatus was particularly effective at luring patrons into his museum with the promise of seeing something that was unavailable anywhere else, including the theater. An important component of this was Barnum himself; he included his own persona in many of his promotions, and was as much of a draw as any of his exhibits. Indeed, much of Barnum's public life was a kind of ongoing performance which could be seen for free or cheap. This was a problem for playwrights like Dion Boucicault, who made their living selling compelling characters to their audiences.

Boucicault's solution to this problem was to put Barnum into his play *The Octoroon* (1859) in the form of Salem Scudder, a Northern overseer and inventor. Scudder's dialogue in *The Octoroon* is strongly reminiscent of Barnum's promotional rhetoric. This is most evident in his constant praise for his own invention, a camera with a self-developing plate. Looking at Scudder this way helps clarify Scudder's role within the play, and to resolve a mystery that has long troubled scholars of *The Octoroon*. *Octoroon* criticism often stumbles when it reaches a moment, close to the play's climax, in which Scudder argues both for and against lynch mob justice within the space of a minute. Critics have generally been unable to reconcile this moment of apparent contradiction with the rest of Scudder's actions in the play. Understanding Scudder's characterization as inflected by Barnum's public persona allows us to contextualize his sudden change of heart; like Barnum, Scudder allows his opinions to be dictated by the goals that he's trying to achieve at any given moment.

My second chapter looks at the interactions between the theatre and the medicine show, with a particular focus on the ways that these interactions contributed to the development of realism in American drama. Medicine shows predate the formation of the United States, and even predate the colonization of North America. They are generally regarded to have begun in Italy, where *commedia dell'arte* troupes travelled with mountebanks, who used the troupe's theatrical performance to draw a crowd and sell a series of dubious medical products. The form proved successful among American audiences, whose Protestant Republican ideology made them especially susceptible to the idea that they could take control of their own health.

Medicine shows were able to co-exist peacefully with the theatre until theatre companies began to embrace a touring model, with entire casts and stage sets travelling the country to play at smaller theatres. This was already the medicine show business model, but medicine shows, which typically did not have expensive sets or well-compensated stars, had much lower overhead, and so were in a much stronger business position. They also had the advantage of an audience, and a medical establishment, that was largely misinformed about basic health information. As a result, pitchmen were able to frighten as well as entertain, and draw audiences by convincing people that their lives literally depended on attending a medicine show.

The theatre, meanwhile, was intruding on the medicine show's territory by touring, and doing so at a decided disadvantage. Once again, the theatre tried to level the playing field using a technique of hostile incorporation, which bears some striking similarities to the theories underpinning the homeopathic claims made by many patent

medicines. This is important, because this conflict between the theatre and the medicine show played out against the backdrop of a larger struggle for legitimacy between the newly formed AMA and various other schools of medicine, including homeopathy, naturopathy, and Christian Science. Medicine shows were just part of a larger collection of medical non-professionals, who used advertising to pervade the market with sensational claims about their own products.

James Herne, sometimes called "The American Ibsen," is my primary case study here. Herne attempted to co-opt the spectacle of the medical pitch by writing a series of doctors, homeopaths, and patent medicine salesmen into his plays. This strategy of incorporation coincided with Herne's experiments with realist drama. As a result, the competitive pressure exerted by the medicine show helped to shape the specific form that Herne's realism took. What this meant in practice was that Herne's realism tended to be medicalized in a way that Ibsen's for example, was not. Because doctors play such a crucial role in Herne's realist drama, the accurate explanation of medical facts ends up being particularly important to Herne's conception of realism. This is particularly evident in Herne's *Margaret Fleming* (1890), in which a specific, detailed description of properties of a character's glaucoma plays a pivotal role in the mechanics of the plot. Following *Margaret Fleming*, Herne's engagement with medicine shows, and the medical establishment in general, became increasingly entangled with his own advocacy of a tax plan that existed largely on the fringes of American political discourse.

My next chapter moves from hostile incorporation to audience training, and explores the effect of revivalist preaching on the development of celebrity in America.

The nineteenth century saw an important shift in the relationship between American Protestantism and the theatre. Preachers in America had a long history of opposition to the theatre, and, by extension, any religious practice that included theatrical elements. Concerns about "enthusiasm," the insincere and excessive display of religious feeling, worked to temper the practices of even charismatic preachers like George Whitefield. An outbreak of religious rivals in the nineteenth century, however, injected a new variety of preacher into the mainstream of American Protestantism. These preachers, led by Charles Grandison Finney, unapologetically co-opted the methods of the theatre to engage congregants and prompt conversion experiences. Finney was especially revolutionary in formulating a list of techniques, which he called "new measures" to ensure that his congregants would undergo conversion; most preachers were suspicious of any tactics that aimed to deliberately prompt religious experiences, so Finney's designation of the new measures as measures drew some ire.

These new measures helped to turn Finney into a star preacher. He regularly drew huge crowds to his revivals. When he began preaching in New York City, his audience exceeded the amount of space available. His solution, which was not without controversy, was to lease a theatre in lower Manhattan and convert it into a church. By venturing directly into the theatre's territory, and borrowing some of its methods, Finney helped to erode some of the separations between church and theatre for nineteenth century residents of New York. He also helped to train them to respond in a visible way to a charismatic performer. This training helped to lay the groundwork for the rise of the star system in the American theatrical community. Audiences had been accustomed to

being powerfully and personally affected by a certain kind of performance. Stars like Edwin Forrest and Edwin Booth were able to channel this audience response towards a public appreciation of their own acting genius. They were helped, in this regard, by the relatively undemanding nature of their own performances, as opposed to Finney's. Stars like Forrest were able to offer audience members the thrill of a revival sermon without the attendant anxiety. Forrest's habit of commissioning plays to showcase his talents helped to write the particular features of his celebrity into the history of American drama.

My final chapter focuses on popular lecturing in America, especially as represented by the Lyceum system. The Lyceum presented itself, from its inception, as a legitimate and respectable alternative to the theatre. It attempted to pry audience members away from the theatre not by making itself cheaper or easier to attend, but by arguing that people ought to attend the Lyceum and, just as importantly, ought not to attend the theatre. This strategy might have worked had the Lyceum remained the education-focused institution that its founders envisioned. Instead, the Lyceum was transformed, probably by its proximity to the theatre, from a venue for edifying lectures on scientific subjects to a home for impassioned arguments on controversial political topics. This shift was accompanied by an increase in performance tactics and actorly behavior among lecturers. This dramatization of the Lyceum trained audiences to expect, and even demand, that their entertainment contain an argument. This, in turn, paved the way for the theatrical community to respond by co-opting the argumentative dimension of the Lyceum for its own purposes. The result has generally been called social reform melodrama but is more properly called argument drama. Argument drama is an

embodied, enacted version of the rhetorical strategies of the Lyceum. The need to compete with the more-respectable Lyceum helped push the theatre toward an renewed engagement with various political issues, including temperance, Mormonism, and abolitionism. The specific form of this engagement closely followed the pattern set by the Lyceum, which was informed in turn by the dominant rhetorical theories of the nineteenth century.

Because of its respectability and its close relationship to the publishing community, the Lyceum also had a significant impact on novel writing in the nineteenth century. This effect was particularly strong in the case of Nathaniel Hawthorne, who served as the corresponding secretary for the Salem branch of the Lyceum. Hawthorne's experiences with the Lyceum are reflected in his novel *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), and go a long way toward explaining some of that novel's oddities. *The House of the Seven Gables* is continually preoccupied with lecturing and platform speaking. At several points during the novel, the movement of the plot stops dead so that the characters can deliver long, direct addresses to one another. The effect of the Lyceum is perhaps most evident during "Governor Pyncheon." In this chapter, the novel's narrator becomes a lecturer, with an audience of two: the reader and a corpse.

Part 1: Hostile Incorporation

Chapter 1: Dion Boucicault and the American Museum

Museums in America

It is no exaggeration to say that the museum industry,⁴ particularly as represented by P. T. Barnum, dominated the entertainment landscape of New York in the mid-nineteenth century. Upon Barnum's death in 1891, *The New York Times* wrote, "There is hardly an American now in the vigor of life who can remember when the name of BARNUM was not familiar to him" ("P. T. Barnum" 4). Although Barnum is today best known for the traveling circus that still bears his name, the beginning, and the hub, of his empire was his New York City American Museum. Purchased from John Scudder in 1841, Barnum's was only the most successful of an extensive and thriving network of popular museums, most of which were clustered in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, but some which could be found in Cincinnati, as well as farther west.

Although these museums were far from homogeneous, it is possible to identify broad trends in the industry. Museum culture began in the American colonial period with a series of curio cabinets, many imported from England and other European countries. Many of these cabinets were either available only to private clubs, like the one compiled by Benjamin Franklin's "Junto," or else were available for paid public viewing at

⁴ By this I mean nothing more than the various museum entertainments on offer in New York, taken together. My use of the term is not meant to suggest the existence of an organized industry, or of any kind of institutionalized collusion.

prohibitively expensive prices, like the medical cabinet at the Pennsylvania Hospital in Philadelphia. In post-revolutionary America, the effects of the Enlightenment worked to gradually shift collectors away from the cabinet model, and toward the museum. Perhaps the most important of these early museums was the one founded by Charles Wilson Peale in Philadelphia in 1786; Peale's museum would remain in operation throughout almost the entirety of the museum movement. Peale's Philadelphia Museum was originally conceived as a natural history exhibition, designed, in part, to counter the Comte de Buffon's promotion of the theory of Western Hemisphere degeneracy, which claimed that all life in the Western Hemisphere existed in a weakened, atrophied state in comparison to its Eastern Hemisphere counterpart. The Philadelphia Museum attempted to refute this theory once and for all by showcasing the vitality of life in America (Orosz 52).⁵ At around the same time, Gardiner Baker established the Tammany American Museum in New York, which would soon eclipse Philadelphia as the center of the museum industry in America. Baker's museum was an early forerunner to Barnum's, mixing scientific exhibits with a wax museum and a small zoo.

In 1809, shortly after Baker's death, the American Museum passed into the hands of John Scudder. He continued the museum's tradition of mixing natural science with exhibitions designed to appeal to popular taste; carefully composed mountings of animals mingled with wax figures of Sleeping Beauty (Orosz 75). Scudder maintained this

⁵ Indeed, the relationship between nationalism and museum culture went beyond merely disproving the degeneration hypothesis. As Peter Buckley explains, "the American enthusiasm for museums in the early national period was underwritten by the role that natural history played in forging a distinct national identity. Lacking the trace of history to be found in the built environment un Europe, and assuming that Indian burial grounds were evidence of a civilization entirely lost, American intellectuals turned to the evidence of a pristine nature to find national symbols: the buffalo, the mammoth, the bald eagle" (448).

balance successfully until his death in 1821, at which point his museum was taken over by his son, John Scudder, Jr. Infighting among the Scudder family, combined with a new form of competition from the lyceum lecture circuit led the American Museum to a period of decline, after which the museum was relocated to a new building on the corner of Broadway and Ann street. John Scudder, Jr., successfully managed the new museum toward renewed profitability, but was fired as manager by the American Museum trustees following a series of interpersonal conflicts that culminated in a bar fight in 1831 (Orosz 133). Following a period of further decline, the museum was once again brought into a brief spurt of solvency; this rebirth, however, proved insufficient, and in 1841 the desperate Scudder family sold the museum to P. T. Barnum.

Barnum presided over the American Museum during a period of renewed focus on professional scientific education among museums in general, a trend which Barnum gleefully ignored. Instead, Barnum's museum was, as Henry Tappan declared in 1851, a place "for the exhibition of monsters, and for vulgar dramatic performances—a mere place of popular amusement" (qtd. in Orosz 172). This strategy proved a winning one, as Barnum's museum attracted more than forty-one million visitors, allowing him to purchase Charles Wilson Peale's old museums in Philadelphia, New York, and Baltimore (Orosz 172). Barnum began his career as a showman with his exhibition of Joyce Heth, an elderly former slave who Barnum claimed had been George Washington's nurse. He continued this sensibility in his museum, with exhibits like the "Feejee Mermaid," which was constructed by attaching a monkey's head to the body of a fish. Eventually, Barnum expanded his museum's offerings to include a theatre. This performance venue, classified

as a “lecture room” to circumvent the persistent American suspicion on theatres in general,⁶ opened with a performance of *The Drunkard* (1850), a temperance play, and did not serve alcohol, in a bid to attract a respectable audience. Barnum also famously arranged and promoted the American appearances of singer Jenny Lind, the ‘Swedish Nightingale.’ By 1860, Barnum’s American Museum was, in many ways, the entertainment center of New York.

Barnum’s construction of a theatre and promotion of a musician are potentially misleading developments, as they might lead us to divide his pursuits into theatrical and non-theatrical enterprises, and to only see the theatrical enterprises as existing in the same orbit as the popular melodramas of the period. Instead, it is more accurate to view both endeavors as part of a larger system of entertainment, which also included the theatres in New York and elsewhere. Indeed, from the perspective of the nineteenth century, the distinction between a museum and a theatre is almost entirely illusory. Newspapers at the time, such as the *New York Herald*, did not distinguish between museum exhibits and plays when compiling their daily lists of “tonight’s amusements.” Instead, the two are listed alongside each other, as in the following image:

⁶ For more on this see chapter 4.

Long advertisements for Boucicault's *The Octoroon* and the offerings at Laura Keene's theatre are crowded together with a blurb for Barnum's museum, which lists his theatrical presentations right alongside "NEW CURIOSITIES," including a "beautiful pair of LIVING KANGAROOS" and "FIFTY BABY ANACONDAS with their mother." Even the advertisement for *The Octoroon* sells the play as a mixture of drama and exhibition, noting both the well-known cast and "THE BURNING STEAMER that breaks from her moorings and swings in the stream." Potential audience members in the mid-nineteenth century would have been confronted by this undifferentiated mass of entertainment options every day. Museums, exhibitions, minstrel shows, and even paintings were listed alongside plays, with no particular organizing logic, and no separation into categories. Museum exhibits like the kangaroos and the anacondas are not full theatrical presentations. Instead, they are paratheatrical presentations; they are entertainments that are viewed by paying customers, and that occupy roughly the same place in the customer's entertainment landscape as a more traditional stage play. Since the media, and the marketing, of the period does not distinguish among different categories of entertainment when publicizing or describing the different options for potential audience members, we should consider these different forms as existing on the same continuum when describing or examining the entertainment landscape of the nineteenth century. To separate these amusements into theatre and non-theatre categories, and examine these categories in isolation from one another is to wrongly impose a set of contemporary classifications and limitations on a marketplace to which it does not apply. If we are to properly understand playwriting in the American nineteenth century, we must

view both types of entertainment as participating in a complex system, of which the museum industry frequently served as the engine.

This is perhaps most evident with respect to the prevalence of theatrical spectacle. The mid nineteenth century was a time of increasing reliance of spectacular stage effects in American theatre. This is often explained in technological terms, with the assumption that a new ability to create an effect on stage will invariably lead to a surge in reliance on that effect.⁷ Other critics favor a thematic approach, matching up the preoccupations of the spectacular theatre with the composition of that theatre's audience. Bruce McConachie, for example, attributes the rise of stage spectacle in part to the rise of apocalyptic melodrama, a genre which requires such devices. According to McConachie,

The formula for apocalyptic melodrama was unique... in its focus on the righteous quest of an Avenger, its depiction of good and evil ritual activities, and especially in its climactic scene of a catastrophic final judgment... A final distinguishing characteristic of these plays—and perhaps the most significant one considering their popularity among Bowery audiences—was their reliance on extravagant scenic spectacle (*The Theatre of the Mob*, 24).

McConachie links this scenic spectacle to the startling incidence of rioting among the working-class theatergoing public during the apocalyptic melodrama's heyday. It is certainly plausible that, as he argues, the combination of apocalyptic melodrama's valorization of vengeance and its tendency to locate this vengeance within a large-scale, spectacular stage effect contributed to a public mood that found rioting an especially

⁷ William Paul Steele, for example, writes in *The Character of Melodrama* (1968) that "*Melodrama contains sensational elements*," and that these sensational elements include "*striking stage effects*" (7). This is presented without further comment, as though the inclusion of sensational stage effects were a natural and inevitable feature of all melodrama, instead of a historically specific and determined one. Similarly, Glenn Hughes's exhaustive *A History of the American Theatre 1700-1950* (1951) notes the rise of spectacle in the 1850s without commenting on its possible origins.

attractive avenue of expression. Such spectacles, however, did not originate in apocalyptic melodrama, nor did they disappear once it declined. McConachie notes that “after 1850, the foundation for apocalyptic melodrama... gradually collapsed” (24). The same cannot be said of spectacular stage effects, which continued to thrive post-1850, completely detached from apocalyptic melodrama.⁸ While it may be the case that the social conditions that lead to the rise of apocalyptic melodrama stoked a public appetite for such spectacle, it is clear that that appetite must have had other sources as well.

One such source was the cheap availability of pure spectacle offered by the American museum industry. In the Western Museum in Cincinnati, for example, patrons could tour an automated model of Dante’s *Inferno*, complete with a frozen lake, shrieking and groaning sounds, and a Lucifer with moving eyes (Orosz, 130). Barnum’s American Museum prominently advertised “the great model of Niagara Falls with real water!” which customers were likely disappointed to learn was eighteen inches tall (Orosz, 176). As was often the case with Barnum’s amusements, the failure of the model to live up to expectations did not stop it from being a significant audience draw, and thus a potential threat to playwrights and theatre managers. The audience for the theatre directly overlapped with the Audience for Barnum’s theatre, and that audience had a limited amount of time, money, and attention to spend. It is possible that, as is often argued, the mid nineteenth century saw a sudden rise in audience demand from theatrical spectacle, which both theatre managers and museum owners worked independently to meet. But such demands do not arise from nothing; something must cause audiences to realize what

⁸ Indeed, such stage-effects remain popular in contemporary Broadway productions, where crashing chandeliers and descending helicopters have long been staples.

it is they want to see. In this case, the spectacle offered by the museum industry worked to change audience expectations, and forced the theatre industry's hand to a certain extent. If audiences could go to Barnum's lecture room and see a play and a spectacle, managers like Boucicault and Wallack could draw larger crowds by including such spectacles in their plays. As is often the case, this inclusion would prove to have surprising effects on the way those plays developed.

Indeed, the whole array of entertainments available at American museums exercised a competitive pressure on nearby playhouses. The presence, in the larger entertainment market, of spectacular special effects, performers with unusual physicalities, and highly-visible characters like P. T. Barnum shaped the development of melodrama in the American mid nineteenth century, affecting both the development of individual plays and of American theatre and culture more generally.

Spectacular Stage Effects in American Drama

Perhaps the most well-known deployer of spectacular stage effects during this period was Augustin Daly. The image from his *Under the Gaslight* of a helpless victim tied to railroad tracks in the path of an approaching locomotive remains iconic to this day, long after Daly's actual play has largely been forgotten. His most intrusive inclusion of such spectacle, however, is in *A Flash of Lightning* (1868). This play, as its title suggests, features the dramatic stage effect of a violent lightning storm.⁹ This storm takes place

⁹ The title also suggests a sudden idea or insight, which is appropriate considering the play's mystery format and eventual solution.

during the opening scene, when the main plot of the play, along with all of its principle characters, is introduced. Garry Fallon, the head of the play's primary household, has two daughters, Bessie and Rose. Bessie has been pursued by Jack Ryver, who has left to work on the railroad in order to make a fortune enough to appease Fallon, and Rose by Fred Chauncey, who occasionally wavers and sets his sights on Bessie. Fallon enters early on, having just bought a gold chain for Rose. He is careful to secure the jewelry in an upstairs room, which Bessie sees. In the midst of the lightning storm, Jack returns, argues with Bessie, and flees up the stairs when he is in danger of being discovered by the other Fallons.

Throughout this crowded, busy scene, the play is very careful to indicate when the audience should see flashes of lightning, when they should hear the sound of thunder, and how strong these effects should be at any given moment. Early on, the primary effect is one of wind: "*Goes to door and opens it; it is immediately slammed by the wind. Wind is heard*" (55). Conditions escalate shortly thereafter, with a note that the scene should "[grow] *gradually darker from this time*" (57). This is quickly followed by the first appearance of severe storm conditions: "*ROSE opens the door; as she does so a flash of lightning almost dazzles her*" (59). Later "*The lightning flashes and there is a louder roll of thunder*" (62), and, at the moment of greatest tension in the first scene, when Jack angrily confronts Bessie and says "remember what I might have been – an honest man! What I shall be, is your work," the stage directions call for a "*Fearful flash of lightning and instantaneous peal of thunder*" (62). Shortly thereafter, Fallon discovers that the gold chain is no longer in the box where he has left it.

The remainder of the play is structured as a kind of mystery, in which the audience is not shown the theft of the chain, and so is never able to judge the guilt or innocence of any of the characters. Bessie and Jack are both suspected, and are forced to leave home while a detective pursues them. Eventually, Jack returns to the Fallon house, examines the room where the chain was being stored, and concludes that it was not stolen, but was instead obliterated by a bolt of lightning that entered the house through the window. At no point, however, does Jack abandon the language of theft and mystery in favor of the language of electricity or science. This framing of a scientific phenomenon in terms of a mystery narrative is in keeping with nineteenth century ideas about the best way to communicate scientific information to the public at large. Andrew Wilson, a popular science lecturer, explicitly calls for scientists to model their public presentations on the conventions of the whodunit story:

The taste for inductive reading is very widely diffused; there is a keen pleasure in seeing a previously unexpected generalization skilfully developed. The interest should begin at its opening words, and should rise steadily to its conclusion. The fundamental principles of construction that underlie such stories as Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue" or Conan Doyle's "Sherlock Holmes" series, are precisely those that should guide a scientific writer (Qtd. in Mussell 3).

Daly follows this prescription, and so Jack describes the lightning as a particularly brutal thief:

While you shuddered at the thunder, his aim was accomplished. In the turning of a thought, this robber came and was gone! Mark his footstep! See how it shriveled up the leaf in one vase, while it spared the other – cut with its sword of fire the cord on the wall and severed the wire of the bell – then... passing through the hearth into the flue – was gone (101).

He then goes on to explain how the chain "pleased the lightning" which "took it up, fashioned it to suit it's [*sic*] own fancy – and dropped it" (101).

This revelation is just barely enough to save Bessie, who, distraught at being accused of theft, has attempted suicide. This play clearly has no shortage of villains; Fallon's ill treatment of his daughter pushes events to the crisis point they eventually reach, and Skiffly, the detective, is dangerously incompetent in ways that imperil several other characters. Still, the principle villain of the play, the thief who takes action in the first scene to set the plot in motion and is not unmasked until the last scene, is the lighting. Put another way, the culprit is the stage effect. *A Flash of Lightning* is structured to present its audiences with a sensational plot, easily recognizable character types, and the kind of spectacle they would otherwise have found at the museum. This spectacle, however, is not written neutrally in to the play; it is not simply one element among the rest of the diversions on offer. Instead, it is written into the play as the villain, and personified as such. This villain, responsible for all of the suffering that occurs within *A Flash of Lightning*, is included in the play in response to the audience's demands. It is given top billing; it features prominently in advertisements and gives the play its title, which make explicit Daly's expectation that his audience comes to the theatre primarily to see his spectacular stage effects. The audience is told directly what is often left unsaid: that they have come to the theatre to watch the villain, and the villain is present in the play in order to satisfy their demands. This makes the audience's desires complicit in the adversity that besets the characters in *A Flash of Lightning*. Since these desires for more and larger spectacles were prompted by the museum industry, that industry is similarly complicit; both the museums and their patrons created the demand for the flash of

lightning in *A Flash of Lightning*, which obliterates the necklace and sets in motion the persecution of the play's protagonists.

This is only the most extreme example of the hostile incorporation technique practiced by the spectacular melodramas of the American mid nineteenth century. Dramatic stage effects that are pure entertainments when presented on their own almost always take on an antagonistic quality when incorporated into a dramatic situation. To put such sights on a bare stage is to invite the audience to take pleasure from the safe reproduction of dangerous phenomena, natural or otherwise, and to marvel at the technical skill required for that reproduction. Having such spectacles share the stage with human actors significantly changes the equation. Suddenly, the audience's own safety is contrasted with the apparent danger for an audience surrogate.¹⁰ The pleasure that the audience is allowed to take from its ability to view a disaster and emerge unscathed is mixed with the tension and anxiety that such a danger creates.

Further, the market conditions of the mid nineteenth century make the audience complicit in the threat that these spectacular set pieces often pose to the characters on stage. These effects were often arbitrary; they were clearly and unabashedly introduced into the play purely to draw audiences who had become accustomed to demanding spectacle from their entertainment. Boucicault's *The Poor of New York* (1857), for example, features a tenement fire at its dramatic climax; the fire is an accident that is caused by a character's attempt to gas herself to death. Similarly, *The Octoroon*'s spectacular stage effect is an exploding steam ship; McClosky. The villain of the play,

¹⁰ See E. MacKay for an explanation of the very real possibility of this danger affecting the actual audience, and not merely a surrogate.

has been temporarily imprisoned on the ship following his ad hoc trial, and he sets it on fire in order to provide cover for his escape. In both of these cases, the stage effect arises from a series of coincidences (including McClosky's imprisonment on a steam boat in the first place), and serves no purpose other than thrilling audiences and increasing the perceived danger for each play's characters. Such spectacles were often featured prominently in a play's promotional materials; audiences were, in part, going to see plays in order to see these effects, and were made aware of that desire in themselves by having it explicitly presented to them as a reason to attend the theatre. Reviews of plays typically accepted as a starting premise that such spectacular displays would be included, and often used them as the primary basis for evaluation. The British *Illustrated Times*, for example, noted of Boucicault's American import *After Dark* (1868),

the attraction of 'After Dark' depends greatly on the very real realities with which it abounds and which make in imposing show both on the stage and in the programme. There is the Victoria station, so closely copied that, as far as his eyes are concerned, the spectator is transported from Oxford Street to Pimlico. There is a wonderful representation of that wonderful object which Mr. Boucicault not inaptly terms 'Blackfriars Bridge on crutches' ("After Dark" 122).

The reviewer also praises the London version of *The Poor of New York* by noting that it includes "the best conflagration ever witnessed on stage" (*ibid.*).¹¹

¹¹ These effects had larger consequences for the development of theatre as well. Bruce McConachie has pointed out that the social experience of theatergoing changed in the 1850s, as the formerly bright house lights were increasingly dimmed during performances. This change was in part motivated by the need to produce impressive stage illusions: "the house had to be nearly dark for the climax of *Under the Gaslight*, since Daly's locomotive effect depended on the engine's headlight partly blinding the audience so that they wouldn't see the two stagehands pushing the contraption across the stage" (McConachie, *Melodramatic* 245). The result, argues McConachie, was to change theatergoing from an experience of public interaction to an experience of individualized, private entertainment. McConachie attributes this shift mostly to a change in the composition of the typical theatre audience; a new business-class audience was interested in replacing the prior hierarchical display model, in which elites expected to be seen by the masses at the theatre, with a system that dissolved all distinctions among the upper and middle classes, creating an undifferentiated category of respectability.

Large-scale spectacles were not, however, the only attraction for patrons of New York's museums. The small and the strange sat alongside the grand and impressive, as oddities, human and otherwise, drew substantial crowds.¹² Barnum's first major exhibit, Joyce Heth, was just as popular for her supposedly extremely advanced age as she was for Barnum's claims that she had been George Washington's nurse; attempts to debunk the exhibit, including some authored by Barnum himself, generally focused on the impossibility of her being so old. Following his exhibition of Heth, Barnum made his reputation with General Tom Thumb, whose "remarkable minuteness and perfection of... physical composition" netted Barnum over \$16,000 in four weeks (McConachie, *Melodramatic* 171). American dramatists responded by coopting some of the public interest in these personal oddities. Dion Boucicault and Josheph Jefferson's adaptation of Washington Irving's *Rip Van Winkle* (1866), for example, departs from its source in featuring a dwarf; in Irving's story, Rip is drugged by Henrick Hudson's original crew, who are described as being merely slightly short. Our present image of that story, which has Rip Van Winkle meeting a party of dwarves in the mountains, is an invention of the dramatic adaptation, not of Irving.

The situation of mid-nineteenth century melodrama within the same entertainment system as the museum industry had consequences beyond the theatre's increased, and increasingly complicated, reliance on spectacle. The museums, after all, offered patrons

¹² Adams is helpful in describing the composition of these crowds: "The Museum privileged the values of its core patronage of middle- and working-class 'respectables': entrepreneurialism, temperance, Christianity, and domesticity. The wisdom of this strategy was borne out at the ticket office. Reflecting on the receipts of the Ann Street Museum... the *New York Commercial* concluded that 'it was the most extensively patronized of any place in the country'" (76).

attractions beyond grand displays and intriguing oddities. They also presented American audiences with a different kind of spectacle: the spectacle of the museum industry itself. Museums were often managed in full view of the public, with newspapers commenting on their owners' exhibits and statements in the same columns as theatre reviews.

Although its effect was more subtle than the blunt market forces that pushed playwrights toward the inclusion of more dramatic spectacle, the proximate existence of this highly visible, parallel entertainment industry helped to shape the theatrical market, and the plays in that market. This is perhaps most visible in one of the best-known plays by one of the period's most successful playwrights: Dion Boucicault's *The Octoroon*.

The Octoroon

Four days after the execution of John Brown, Dion Boucicault's *The Octoroon* premiered in New York. By releasing a play about slavery, plantation life, and interracial romance into such a charged national atmosphere, Boucicault was courting controversy, and he was not disappointed. On December 5, *The New York Herald* published an editorial titled "Abolition On and Off the Stage." In it, the *Herald* praises Boucicault as a dramatist, while attacking what is assumed to be his approach to the subject matter:

The author of this play, Mr. Bourcicault [*sic*], is undeniably a clever man, and we have no doubt he has made the courteous, generous and chivalrous traits of our Southern brethren very prominent; but that is of but little consequence. The play will carry with it the abolition aroma, and must be classed with the sermons of Beecher and Cheever and the novels of Mrs. Stowe (6).

The writer goes on to accuse Boucicault of "prostitut[ing]" the theatre "to the works of disunion and treason" (*ibid.*). He argues that playwrights should not take up the issue of

slavery from either side, since a new play causes a sensation that can “irritate” the public consciousness, but betrays his, and the *Herald*’s, ideological sympathies when he laments that New Yorkers “cannot even go to the theatre without having the almighty nigger thrust under their noses.” The piece ends with a dramatic declaration: “For these reasons, we wage war against the ‘Octoroon’” (*ibid.*).

Although it is unlikely, given *The New York Herald*’s anti-abolitionist bias, that Boucicault was surprised by this editorial, he affected surprise in a response that ran in the same publication two days later. Boucicault’s letter takes issue with the *Herald*’s argument that he ought not to have engaged with the question of slavery at all: “not until to-day have you taught me that a muzzle was the emblem of American freedom and the handcuffs symbols of its liberty” (“Winter Garden” 5). He pointedly declines to state his position, or the position of his play, on slavery, which would have alienated a significant portion of his potential audience, hurting ticket sales. Instead, Boucicault simply claims, “I have involved in ‘The Octoroon’ sketches of slave life, truthful I know, and I hope gentle and kind.” (*ibid.*) The *Herald* responded, two days later, with an escalation of rhetoric, claiming that, as Boucicault was British, “It comes natural to him to abuse and vilify the institutions of this republic” (“Anti-Slavery” 6). The *Herald*’s writer explicitly links Boucicault to the recently executed John Brown, and claims that, in portraying slavery, Boucicault “takes an extreme case, and puts it forward as the general rule,” in which case “He might as well go into his neighbor’s house, steal his neighbor’s dirty linen, and exhibit it in public as a fair specimen of his domestic affairs” (*ibid.*).

This debate over *The Octoroon*'s position on slavery, inaugurated by the *Herald*, continues among critics today. This disagreement stems, in part, from the play's careful avoidance of direct commentary on the slave question. But it is more directly attributable to the structure of *The Octoroon*'s plot, which turns on a deeply troubling incident. At the very moment when misrecognitions are being cleared up and the characters come into possession of the truth about what has occurred, the play suddenly stumbles into confusion, offering a grand statement on the nature of justice, and then almost immediately voicing the opposite position. This reversal is so consequential because the questions it raises, questions of justice and legitimacy, were at the heart of the abolitionist debate that surrounded the play; it's so confusing because these contradictory statements are both delivered by the same character: the northern inventor and overseer Salem Scudder. Critics of *The Octoroon* have been drawn to and baffled by this reversal in equal measure, and have largely been content to treat it as a lapse of consistency on Boucicault's part. It is my argument, however, that Scudder's sudden change of heart is absolutely consistent with his character, as long as that character is considered in light of the paratheatrical entertainment marketplace in which *The Octoroon* premiered, as well as Boucicault's theorization of his own writing practice. This theorization is made explicit in an article by Dion Boucicault which has so far largely escaped scholarly notice. In light of this document, Scudder's reversal can be properly seen not as a moment of bad melodramatic plotting, but as the hinge upon which *The Octoroon* swings into modernity.

Scudder is a crucial figure in *The Octoroon*. He is the most active protagonist in the play, starkly opposed to George, the nominal hero who nevertheless remains largely passive and reacts in horror to events beyond his control.¹³ He's also one of Boucicault's inventions; he's absent from Mayne Reid's *The Quadroon* (1856) from which Boucicault adapted his play.¹⁴ Scudder's confusing reversal comes toward the play's conclusion, and is highlighted by its proximity to the exploding steam ship in the next scene, which was featured prominently in advertisements for *The Octoroon*. The plantation of Terrebonne has been shocked by the murder of Paul, a well-liked young slave. Jacob M'Closky, Paul's actual murderer, leads a group of men toward the capture of Wahnotee, an Indian who does not speak English, and thus cannot defend himself. They are preparing an ad hoc trial with the intention of lynching the alleged murderer, and Scudder calls into question the legitimacy of the proceedings. He argues that "this ain't the place, nor you the authority to try him," since "there are no witnesses but a rum bottle and an old machine" (140). This machine is Scudder's camera, which Wahnotee has smashed after discovering Paul's body and believing the unfamiliar technology to be responsible for his death. He goes on to call the trial "wild and lawless" and says that "it is such scenes as these that bring disgrace upon our Western life" (*ibid.*).

All of this changes, however, four lines later, when Pete, another slave, discovers that the camera has captured M'Closky in the act of killing Paul, that camera having been

¹³ This follows the pattern that Bruce McConachie, writing in *Melodramatic Formations*, has identified for melodrama of the period, wherein the nominal hero is largely powerless, while a detective figure accomplishes much of the plot's movement (221-4).

¹⁴ The closest analogue in Reid's novel is the character of Dr. Reigart, but he bears only a passing resemblance to Scudder, and plays nothing even approaching Scudder's role in the plot.

conveniently loaded with a self-developing plate that Scudder has invented. Scudder then volunteers himself as M'Closky's accuser, and makes an impassioned speech in support of the very vigilante justice he has just condemned:

Fellow citizens, you are convened and assembled here under a higher power than the law. What's the law? When the ship's abroad on the ocean, when the army is before the enemy, where in thunder's the law? It is in the hearts of brave men, who can tell right from wrong, and from whom justice can't be bought. So it is here, in the wilds of the West, where our hatred of crime is measured by the speed of our executions—where necessity is law! I say, then, air you honest men? Air you true? Put your hands on your naked breasts, and let every man as don't feel a real American heart there, bustin' up with freedom, truth, and right, let that man step out—that's the oath I put to ye—and then say, Darn ye, go it! (141).

This speech proves persuasive, and the men immediately spring to action, declaring M'Closky to be guilty and preparing to lynch him.

Scudder's argument here has significant implications for *The Octoroon's* engagement with abolitionism, and with slavery in general. His claim that the law resides in "the hearts of brave men" implies that such men possess an innate moral sense, and that their actions will tend toward justice. Such rhetoric would have been found on both sides of the abolitionist debate, since both camps argued that their own side was intuitively and self-evidently correct. Even more consequential for *The Octoroon's* political position is Scudder's choice of an example situation: "When the ship's abroad on the ocean... where in thunder's the law?" Scudder's argument is about how men of character make decisions about justice in a legal vacuum, absent a formal legal apparatus. Louisiana, which had been a state since 1812, was not generally regarded as lacking such an apparatus. Indeed the plot of *The Octoroon* turns on a contract dispute, which indicates a functioning legal system with the authority to enforce such contracts, and a legal code designed to regulate

them. Scudder's speech, however, assumes as a premise that such an authority is not available to his audience, and that there will be no justice for McClosky unless the men mete it out themselves. The implication, then, is that the legal system of Louisiana, and of the United States, is inadequate for the current situation.¹⁵ In the absence of a legitimate legal framework, Scudder suggests that the men must find justice in their own internal senses of right and wrong, and then express that justice in their actions. In other words, *The Octoroon* suggests preemptively that the outcome of McClosky's lynch trial will be just, and will in fact supply the standard for justice that is otherwise absent in Louisiana.

The far-reaching implications of this speech prompts Bluford Adams to call Salem Scudder is *The Octoroon*'s stand-in for John Brown: "For Boucicault's audience, the most memorable invocation of the higher law had come during John Brown's sentencing speech, when he defended his violation of the slaveholders' 'wicked, cruel, and unjust enactments' in the name of justice" (152). He goes on to note that Boucicault stops short of precisely echoing Brown's sentiment, citing the situation of Zoe, the octoroon of the play's title; Scudder objects to Zoe's enslavement, but does not contemplate responding by breaking the slavery statutes, or by using force. Adams argues that Scudder is a poor version of John Brown, since he is driven to extra-legal means by some crimes, but not by slavery: "[Scudder] can transcend the law to punish a murderer, but not to free a slave" (*ibid.*). Boucicault, according to Adams, thus "appropriates the moral righteousness of the era's most famous radical by detaching it from its specific abolitionist goal" (*ibid.*).

¹⁵ This assumption provides some support to the claim that *The Octoroon* is ultimately more sympathetic to the abolitionists than it is to the South.

Adams' reading, however, is only able to accommodate Scudder's second speech; it cannot make sense of Scudder's sudden shift from impassioned foe to impassioned supporter of lynch mob justice. He calls it "a reversal bordering on absurd" and says that "To justify himself, Scudder distinguishes between the lynch juries that 'try' Wahnotee and M'Closky: whereas the former is dedicated to racial revenge, the latter serves a 'higher power than the law'" (152). Scudder, however, never makes this distinction explicit. In fact, he never accounts for his sudden change of mind at all, nor is he called upon to do so. The reasoning behind Scudder's shift is apparently much more interesting to critics working on *The Octoroon* than it is to any of the characters in that play, none of whom ask for an explanation before moving on to M'Closky's lynch trial.

As *The Octoroon* has enjoyed a resurgence of scholarly attention in recent years, Scudder's change of heart has continued to trouble readers of the play, and our critical conversation has become more and more comfortable with the ambiguity that surrounds it. Bluford Adams, as I've noted, reads it as an "absurd" betrayal of what he sees as the play's abolitionist tendencies. Joseph Roach stops at highlighting the disparity between Scudder's two speeches, and saying that Scudder "speaks with a forked tongue;" he reads the shift as interesting but ultimately inexplicable (*Cities of the Dead* 201). Gary Richardson, who initially identifies Scudder as "Boucicault's spokesman for goodness" calls this reversal "one of the most disturbing elements of the play," and argues that it has far-reaching implications: "Since it is Scudder, the author's surrogate, who shifts, the audience is left with more than a little suspicion that the law can be manipulated if one merely has the talent." Stephanie Pocock is perhaps the only critic so far to hazard an

explanation: “His sudden shift seems rather to be motivated by a desire for revenge against M’Closky for his financial exploitation of the Peytons and his purchase of Zoe—a noble enough sentiment for melodrama, but one that sits uneasily on the judicial stage” (559). This explanation, however, raises further questions. If we accept Pocock’s analysis, we must then account for Scudder’s transformation from a measured voice of reason to a bloodthirsty seeker of vengeance; absent such an account, the question remains open. The consensus appears to be that this moment represents a breakdown of either Boucicault or Scudder’s sense of justice, an instance where the demands of *The Octoroon*’s plot trump the demands of consistent characterization.¹⁶ Scudder argues against Wahnotee’s lynching, these readings imply, because the prospect of a group of men preparing, without due process, to execute a character whom the audience knows to be innocent is horrifying, and must be prevented from coming to pass. They further suggest that Scudder argues for M’Closky’s lynch trial because somebody has to set that strand of the plot in motion—M’Closky needs an incentive to escape if he is going to trigger the steamship explosion promised by the play’s promotional materials—and Scudder is the only one handy who has the requisite powers of persuasion. His sudden change of heart, in this view, cannot be explained in character terms, but such an explanation is unnecessary, since Scudder is a creature of sensation melodrama, and so must bow to the genre’s demand for spectacle.

It is certainly true that character consistency is often less important than crowd-pleasing displays in sensation melodrama, and, to judge from the way *The Octoroon* was

¹⁶ Richardson argues most forcefully along these lines: “Since melodrama as a genre emphasizes action, it is not surprising that Boucicault focuses his audience’s attention not on his characters, but rather on the plot, or more correctly, plots” (Boucicault’s “The Octoroon” and American Law,” 158).

advertised, audience members were likely drawn to the theatre primarily by the promise of an exploding steamship. Many of Boucicault's melodramatist contemporaries routinely sacrificed characterization for the creation of spectacular moments. In the famous locomotive scene from Augustin Daly's *Under the Gaslight*, for example, when Snorkey, who has been tied to the railroad tracks, is liberated by Laura, the play's heroine, he jumps up and exclaims, "And these are the women who ain't to have a vote!" (86). Snorkey has, until that point, given no indication that he is aware of the politics surrounding women's suffrage or of any politics at all. His comments about the United States are entirely confined to stories about his experience in the Union army, and when another character notes that "Uncle Sam has forgotten [him]," Snorkey indicates that he's not interested in entering that sort of discussion: "don't blame Uncle Sam for that, he's got such a big family to look after, I can't find fault if he don't happen to remember all us poor stumps of fellows" (12). His line about women being denied a vote, then, is out of place among his other lines, but it does not register as such because it helps to diffuse the tension just created by the onrushing train; his character is momentarily forgotten in the service of a moment of spectacle, and that moment was so successful that it has since been repeated countless times.

This kind of analysis, however, cannot be so readily applied to Boucicault's plays. It violates his own theorization of character, and of melodrama in particular. This theorization is neatly encapsulated in a practically unseen article, written by Boucicault near the end of his career. Writing in New York's *Dramatic Mirror*, Boucicault lashes out against a disturbing new trend in the theatre. This trend was the beginnings of

dramatic realism, represented primarily by the plays of Ibsen. The article is surprising, since we do not generally think of Dion Boucicault and Henrick Ibsen as contemporaries. Although both men were writing at roughly the same time, it is often difficult to think of the Norwegian realist and the Irish-born, American-adopted melodramatist as inhabiting the same world, much less working in the same business.¹⁷ Our critical conversation has generally reflected this, and our discussion of these two playwrights tends to occur separately, much as we imagine them to have been.¹⁸ Boucicault's article, however, indicates a surprising level of engagement with Ibsen. It also provides a kind of manifesto in defense of the style of playwriting we today call melodrama. This defense is offered against realism, which we today understand as one of the most significant movements in the history of drama, but which Boucicault characterizes as an irritating strain of bad playwriting that must be resisted at all costs.

Boucicault's article appeared on the front page of the *Dramatic Mirror*, a weekly theatre trade paper. For much of the *Mirror's* early history, the front page was reserved for a commentary by the paper's editor, Harrison Grey Fiske. Later, the paper's front page was home to "Nym Crinkle's Feuilleton," a summary of theatrical news and commentary by Andrew Carpenter Wheeler. On November 23, 1889, Fiske announced a new feature, "a series of interesting and instructive essays by distinguished contributors, written in a popular style and dealing with subjects of the first importance in respect to

¹⁷ Ibsen was writing from 1850-1899, and Boucicault was most prolific between 1841 and 1885.

¹⁸ A search of the MLA International Bibliography for items that include both "Boucicault" and "Ibsen" yields no results. This is hardly exhaustive, but it does provide an indication that the two are seldom discussed as part of the same study.

the various developments of stage art” (“A New Feature” 1). Boucicault supplied the first such essay, which ran on the paper’s front page with the title, “The New Departure.” In this article, he describes a troubling development in the art world, which had recently spread to dramatic writing. “The grotesque element,” he warns, “threaten[s] to swamp the sublime” (1). Shortly thereafter, he describes the potential consequences of this new trend for the theatre:

We are told, I say, that the drama as it is, and as it has been, is imperfect, and a conventional matter; that a higher, truer form and spirit has been discovered which is destined to sweep into respectable obscurity the works of all the dramatists, great and small, from Marlowe to me, to make room for a new order of things dramatic (*ibid.*).

This “new order” is primarily represented, for Boucicault, by “the peculiar dramas of Ibsen” (*ibid.*). Boucicault seems to recognize realism primarily as a challenge, and appears determined to mock it into oblivion.

He begins this mockery by ventriloquizing the realist camp’s objections to plays like his own: “They deny that the drama, as it exists, is a true copy of nature, as they claim it should be. The subject of a drama, they say, is shaped into a plot, in which the incidents are grouped artificially. Such episodes do not occur in nature” (*ibid.*). He then goes on to push these objections to what he imagines to be their logical conclusion. A play, he writes, generally should not last more than three hours, for reasons of audience attention. If the realist demands fidelity to nature in dialogue writing, Boucicault asks, should he not also demand the same fidelity in the representation of time? “But this,” he claims, “is the Greek unity of Time, so the tail of the serpent returns to the mouth!” (*ibid.*). This *reducto ad absurdum* provides an illustration of Boucicault’s primary claim:

“The existence of the drama depends on conditions which, it may be admitted, are not, in this modern sense, natural” (*ibid.*). The phrase “this modern sense” does a lot of work for Boucicault, who makes the word “natural” appear both contingent and narrowly defined in the present moment. Boucicault implies that the realists and naturalists are attempting to pass off their own particular sense of what is natural as a picture of nature in general. He claims that the realists, in trying to produce an exact copy of natural life, are doing something deeply unnatural for the theatre. He reiterates this more emphatically later: “I am asked: Is the drama intended to be an exact reproduction of nature? I answer distinctly[*sic*]: No!” (*ibid.*). This statement of principles makes heavy strategic use of the passive voice; it’s not clear who, if anyone, has asked Boucicault this question, and his phrasing also cleverly dodges the question of whether or not drama can be “intended” to do anything, and if so, by whom. By ignoring the possibility of different playwrights making different uses out of drama, he co-opts the very stridency that he sees as animating the realists, and repurposes it to make his own theory of dramatic composition seem like the only sensible course.

Although Boucicault’s argument is concerned with realism and naturalism in general, his focus is clearly on Ibsen. Having established the principles of realism, especially its opposition to the conventions of plot, Boucicault turns his attention to Ibsen’s *The Pillars of Society* (1877). The play was the first of Ibsen’s to be performed widely outside of Scandanavia, and marked the beginning of his international reputation; his next play would be *A Doll’s House* (1879). Boucicault offers a summary of the play’s

events that, while technically accurate, highlights its reliance on sudden reversals and coincidences:

A shipbuilder who holds a leading social position in a small seaside town... has committed an act for which another has suffered in public opinion. This man returns from America and... demands the facts shall be discovered to the community, which means the ruin of the shipbuilder. The imposter promises to confess, but begs the injured man to return to America, to which country he sends him in a “coffin” ship sure to founder at sea. In the same vessel goes the only son of the shipbuilder, who is a fugitive from his father’s cruelty (*ibid.*).

Boucicault then sarcastically asks, “is not this a complication of incidents very like what a poor benighted creature like myself might call a good plot for a domestic drama of the used-up period?” (*ibid.*). Of course, Boucicault promises, his own version of the same events would not be identical to Ibsen’s: “Perhaps I might have tried to accentuate the characters a little more clearly, and the dialogue would not have been strictly what one may hear at any street corner or in a club window” (*ibid.*).

This is remarkable in hindsight, as what is now recognized as one of the most important developments in the history of drama, the move toward common bourgeois speech, is identified by Boucicault as simply an instance of poor playwriting. Boucicault does not write as though he sees Ibsen and himself as operating in two different modes, or as though he believes that realism represents a decisive break from melodrama. Instead, he writes about Ibsen as simply another participant in the same global marketplace of entertainment. Boucicault treats Ibsen as another in a long list of competitors to his own drama, and not a very strong one at that. The very term “realism” is, he explains, meaningless to him: “We hear so much about realism and naturalism that it is time these terms should be defined and understood... I have searched... for

something distinct, but can find nothing but vapour. I have tried earnestly to discover what these terms may mean” (*ibid.*).

Having established this continuity between his own work and Ibsen’s, he is free to hold Ibsen’s plays to the standards that he believes should govern all dramatic writing, and to find them wanting. In particular, he takes Ibsen to task for what he perceives as a series of indistinct and interchangeable characters. Boucicault goes on to describe his own ideal standard for character composition and motivation, which he compares favorably to Ibsen’s: “The test of excellence in the treatment of characters composing the *dramatis personae* of a play is, or should be, that sentiments, forms of expression, the moral and mental being of each character is made so distinct that the speech of one cannot be transferred into the mouth of another without being palpably out of place” (*ibid.*).

Boucicault here focuses on dialogue, but his mention of “moral and mental being” suggests that this sentiment applies to actions beyond speech. What this amounts to is a defense of melodramatic types; Boucicault appeals to clarity, and to the importance of character in determining motivation, to make a case for his own mode of playwriting. For Boucicault, clear, consistent characterization demands that every character be, if not a recognizable stage type, then at least a type of himself; his actions must follow a recognizable pattern throughout the play. Ibsen’s playwriting, in which “the characters might interchange speeches without detection” is, to Boucicault, a betrayal of a fundamental principle of drama: character should be the primary determinative element of motivation. What is left unsaid in this prescription, but heavily implied, is that this

character motivation should be transparent to the audience. The problem with Ibsen's plays, Boucicault suggests, is that while the actions of the characters may have clear motivations in Ibsen's imagination, these motivations are muddy and indistinct on stage, which leads to muddy and indistinct characterization.

From this starting premise, Boucicault develops a theory of stage types that stands in stark contrast to the terms in which we discuss such types today. A type, for Boucicault, begins as an organizing principle; it is what differentiates characters. Boucicault's sense of what it is about a type that performs this differentiation, however, leads to some surprising conclusions. We generally oppose stage types to characters with interiority, on the assumption that stage types are driven by the characteristics associated with their dramatic function and not by any imagined internal processes. Winifred Herget, for example, writes about villains in melodrama using a framework that takes for granted that a type is the opposite of an individual:

According to established conventions, which allow a rather uncomplicated interaction between the stage and auditorium, the audience can readily identify the villain by his body language, his physiognomy and pantomimically expressive ways of moving, his gestures and poses... Villains in melodrama are types rather than individuals (23).

For Boucicault, however, this is backward. Boucicault's claim is that types are the only characters that display any individual interiority, and that it is Ibsen's characters that lack any internal motivation. Boucicault's critique of Ibsen's characters rests on the assumption that it is these characters that are not individuals, because they are so similar to each other as to be interchangeable. Linda Williams, making the case for melodrama as a modernizing, rather than archaic, mode, argues along similar lines:

It is the constant goal of melodrama to make visible occulted moral distinctions through acts and gestures that are felt by audiences to be the emotional truths of individual, but not too individualized, personalities. What is truly modern about melodrama, then, is its reliance on personality—and on the revelation of personality through body and gesture—as the key to both emotional and moral truth (40-41).

It seems that Boucicault anticipated some of our current critical efforts to rehabilitate melodrama, or, more accurately, that he sidestepped the idea that melodrama ever needed to be rehabilitated.¹⁹ Williams's claim that melodramatic characters function primarily by revealing their personalities through their physicality is of a piece with Boucicault's identification of typed characters as characters who display their moral and mental being with every line. It is this redefinition that allows him to classify Ibsen's characters as indistinguishable and undifferentiated, and therefore possessing no interiority.

These charges apparently touched a nerve for some readers of the *Mirror*. The following day's edition included a withering rebuttal by C. Sadakichi Hartmann. Hartmann, a Philadelphia-based critic and supporter of Ibsenite realism, opens his response by speculating that "the applause of [Boucicault's] various dramatic successes is still ringing in his ears and disabling him to judge the merit of other literary works" (2). Hartmann goes on to accuse Boucicault of provincialism, saying that his dislike of *The Pillars of Society* indicates that "he is thoroughly ignorant of the social conditions in

¹⁹ Similarly, Boucicault's argument seems to anticipate Matthew S. Buckley's claims about the psychological dimensions inherent in melodrama's characterization: "the notions—still commonplace today—of melodrama as an emotionally superficial, patently unrealistic drama, populated by characters lacking in psychological interest, characterized by hackneyed, laughable convention, and credible only to the naïve and illiterate constitute a serious misconception. To the contrary, the form appears... closer to sensational expressionism, an emotionally harrowing, psychologically incisive drama, populated by characters whose flatness marks them out as figures of emotional projection, structured by conventions that correspond to, and help create and reinforce, deep-seated patterns of affective response" (188).

Scandinavia,” and further claims that “American writers are even more limited in regard to the knowledge of foreign literature than the Frenchmen” (*ibid.*).²⁰ Indeed, Hartmann uses this line of reasoning to attack Boucicault’s central thesis, arguing that “Ibsen owes his present European reputation to his wonderful character delineation” (*ibid.*). Hartmann implies what drama critics would later enshrine as conventional wisdom: that Boucicault and Ibsen are operating in completely separate spheres, and that Boucicault thus has no standing from which to evaluate Ibsen’s playwriting. Eventually, he makes this point explicitly: “whatever the faults of Ibsen may be—and they are manifold—one should respect the fact that he is one of the leading dramatists of to-day” (*ibid.*). In this one sentence, Hartmann asserts his own right to criticize Ibsen (his faults are “manifold”) while denying that same right to Boucicault. Our current separation between Boucicault and Ibsen may well originate with Hartmann’s letter.

Whatever one thinks of Boucicault’s diagnosis of *The Pillars of Society*, his prescriptions serve as a fairly good description of the properties of melodrama. Whether we follow Boucicault in calling this clarity of character, or his realist critics in calling it an over-reliance on types, the effect is the same: in a melodrama, what one does is primarily determined by who one is. In Kenneth Burke’s terms, the agent is the primary motivating force in melodrama.²¹ Most of Boucicault’s characters bear the marks of this

²⁰ It is interesting to note that Hartmann identifies the Irish Boucicault as an American; American critics of Boucicault would frequently refer to his Irish birth when dismissing *The Octoroon*’s picture of the American South.

²¹ Burke summarizes his terms as follows: “They are: act, scene, agent, agency, purpose. In a rounded statement about motives, you must have some word that names the *act* (names what took place, in thought or deed), and another that names the *scene* (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred);

theory of characterization. In *The Octoroon*, for example, the *dramatis personae* is largely composed of clear character types: the villain Jacob M'Closky, the pure, tragic Octoroon heroine Zoe, the young hero George, and the stage Indian Wahnotee. *The Octoroon*'s characters pass the test Boucicault proposes in "The New Departure"; a line of Zoe's dialogue is instantly identifiable, and could never be mistaken for a line of M'Closky's.

Boucicault's tirade against Ibsen's characterization helps us to unpack the moment that has so troubled readers of *The Octoroon*. "The New Departure" makes it clear that Boucicault's understanding of a properly written melodrama includes, as an essential component, clear, consistent characters. In criticizing Ibsen, Boucicault formulates a "test of excellence" for characterization: characters that are clearly defined in such a way that their actions and speech are absolutely characteristic; their lines would sound impossible if spoken by another character. In light of all this, we can no longer simply write off consistent characterization as unimportant in a Boucicault melodrama, since Boucicault has identified it as absolutely central to his own playwriting, and to combating the threat posed by playwrights like Ibsen. Scudder's "sentiments" about justice, this expression of a subject that goes to the heart of his "moral and mental being" must, then, be internally consistent. If both of Scudder's lines "exhibit his character" as Boucicault claims that all dramatic lines should, and the two lines appear to exhibit opposite characters, then our reading of Scudder must accommodate this dramatic shift..

also, you must indicate what person or kind of person (*agent*) performed the act, what means or instruments he used (*agency*), and the *purpose*" (xv).

Much of the critical confusion surrounding Scudder stems from mistakenly classifying him as a 'Yankee Jonathan' stage type, referring to the character popularized by Royall Tyler's 1787 play, *The Contrast*.²² There are reasons to follow this example. For one, the name Salem Scudder, with its direct invocation of New England, follows the conventions of stage Yankee monikers like Deuteronomy Dutiful and Industrious Doolittle. In addition, Scudder repeatedly refers to himself as a Yankee. In fact, the first time we hear his name it is linked to that type, as he calls himself "a Yankee named Salem Scudder" (Boucicault, *Octoroon* 105). This repeated invocation of the Yankee type, however, already raises a problem with this characterization: Scudder is far too self-aware to simply be a stage Yankee. He repeatedly narrates his own role in the drama, blaming himself for bankrupting the Terrebonne plantation with his inventions and improvements. Still, it is his invention, a self-developing photographic plate, that provides the resolution to the play's plot.

He is, in other words, too smart to be a Yankee Jonathan. The vast majority of Yankee characters, from Tyler's Jonathan onward, are one-dimensional bumpkins. Indeed, a tendency toward comically misunderstanding his circumstances is one of the clearest marks of the Yankee type. In *The Contrast*, for example, the original Jonathan accidentally attends a production of *School for Scandal* (1777), but does not even realize that he is watching a play. Stage Yankees frequently speak in what Richard Moody has termed "picturesque colloquial language," and such language typically places a heavy

²² Most notably, Joseph Roach does this repeatedly in *Cities of the Dead*, while making Scudder the center of his argument about *The Octoroon*. Roach begins his chapter on *The Octoroon*, "One Blood," with a quotation from Salem Scudder, who he calls "a homespun character in the Anglo-American tradition of Yankee Jonathan" (179).

emphasis on the colloquial elements (115). While Scudder's language is certainly picturesque, this quality largely manifests itself as a facility with metaphor unmatched by any typical stage Yankee. Crucially, Scudder's language is not composed of impenetrable rural idiom, but instead makes use of expressions that he has borrowed from his adopted Louisiana home:

Let me proceed by illustration. (Sits.) Look thar! (Points with his knife off.) D'ye see that tree?--It's called a live oak, and is a native here; beside it grows a creeper. Year after year that creeper twines its long arms round and round the tree--sucking the earth dry all about its roots--living on its life--overrunning its branches, until at last the live oak withers and dies out. Do you know what the niggers around here call that sight? They call it the Yankee hugging the Creole (Boucicault, *Octoroon* 113).

Scudder acts as a kind of translator here - he explains a black conception of sectional relations to Jacob M'Closky, a fellow northerner. He thus stands as a representative of the South, interpreting local idiom for an outsider

Scudder's speech, while it identifies him as a Yankee, also makes it clear that the classification is strictly geographical. It displays an intelligence, an understanding of local culture, and a critical sense of his own place in that culture, all elements that are excluded from the stage Yankee type. We cannot, then, evaluate Scudder's sentiments about justice, and the sharp reversal in those sentiments, in terms of the Yankee character type. If Scudder is invested with a clear, consistent characterization, as Boucicault insists that all his characters are, then it must have its roots in some other dramatic type.

We may begin to account for Scudder's transformation by taking another look at the "old machine" that serves as the only witness to M'Closky's crime. One key difference between the circumstances of Scudder's two speeches is the presence of

photographic evidence in M'Closky's trial. This should not be enough to change Scudder's mind; his objection to Wahnotee's lynch trial was that the trial was illegitimate, not that Wahnotee was innocent. Nevertheless, it is the discovery of the photograph that appears to effect Scudder's sudden transformation. He uses the occasion to link the camera to the omniscience of God, telling M'Closky, "The eye of the eternal was on you—the blessed sun in heaven, that, looking down, struck upon this very plate the image of your crime!" (141). This camera is Scudder's most prized possession in *The Octoroon*, and his praise for the device is constant and unqualified. The camera first makes an appearance in his introductory autobiographical speech: "[Scudder] and his apparatus arrived here, took the judge's likeness and his fancy, who made him overseer right off" (105). In Scudder's narration, the camera is a device which instantly charmed the Judge; his taking of the plantation owner's likeness and fancy were simultaneous. The reaction of *The Octoroon's* audience was less assured. As Adam Sonstegaard has noted, nineteenth-century audiences were not automatically prepared to accept photographic evidence, and plays like *The Octoroon* helped to "coach" them toward a consensus that a photographic record represents compelling proof of guilt or innocence (376-377).

Much of this coaching takes the form of Scudder's enthusiastic praise of his device. He repeatedly testifies to the camera's fidelity to reality, usually framing that fidelity as a kind of limitation on the part of the camera: "The apparatus can't mistake" (116), "the machine can't err" (119), and "the apparatus can't lie" (141).²³ This odd

²³ Mark Robinson argues that these lines provide a venue for Boucicault to "invit[e] us to reach the same unequivocal conclusion about his own visual honesty" (36). In fact, Boucicault argues precisely the opposite in "The New Departure," in which he invokes the infallibility of the camera to argue against

phrasing works to convince a skeptical public of the veracity of a camera's images. Rather than making what might seem to be outlandish claims about the camera's abilities, he describes it as a mechanism that is constrained to by its design to do nothing but produce an accurate image of reality, much in the same way that a train is constrained to move along its tracks.

Boucicault's presentation of the state of the art and science of photography in 1860 is, it should be noted, simply false. Photography in this period was a decidedly uncertain business. Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861) includes an interview with a photographer who confesses to frequently giving his customers old pictures of strangers in lieu of the photographs he had supposedly taken of them; the poor quality of the images themselves, combined with the general lack of familiarity with photographs among the population, prevented customers from detecting the fraud (208-209). As Harley Erdman has noted, Scudder's self-developing plate was a technology that would not arrive until the invention of the Polaroid camera (338). Erdman further argues that the taking of an intelligible portrait in 1859 required so much time and so little motion that the evidence supplied by the camera in *The Octoroon*, supposedly taken while M'Closky murders Paul, seems especially preposterous; the picture would "amount at best to a blurry double-exposure, featuring multiple bodies in multiple positions" (*ibid.*). A fair amount of Scudder's claims about his camera, then,

excessive accuracy in the presentation of human flaws: "When the photographic portrait is drawn by the sun, it gives an exact reproduction of the face of the sitter--every line, spot, freckle and minute imperfection is brought to the foreground. The photographer employs art to efface these blemishes, and then we have a likeness... For the same reason that I, in giving a likeness of a human being in one of my comedies, endeavor to preserve a likeness by the expression which is the life of the man, and not by a pimple on his nose or any other casual defect" (1).

amount to mere bluster; he is much more interested in raising the prestige of his apparatus than he is in presenting its abilities and limitations in an accurate light. This kind of aggressive promotion is strongly reminiscent of the language employed by the publicity apparatus of the museum industry in general, and of P. T. Barnum in particular.

The rhetorical style of museum promotions featured grandiose claims about the astonishing properties of exhibits, a practice which Barnum frequently refers to as “puffery.” These claims were often delivered in a mixture of informal, colloquial language and a language of inflated scientific respectability. Many of these promotions were embedded within a narrative framework. In 1849, for example, Barnum advertised his museum with a piece called “Sights and Wonders in New York,” which took the form of a fictional visit to New York City by “Uncle Find-out” and his two nephews. (“American Museum” 122). While there, of course, the three pay a visit to the American Museum. Barnum’s account of the trip sometimes lapses into picturesque, metaphorical language: “didn’t the boys stare with all the eyes they had? They saw so much to look at, that if their heads had been full of eyes they would not have had eyes enough” (*ibid.* 123). When he moves on to describe the stuffed birds that the boys are staring at, Barnum switches to a kind of moderately sophisticated specificity that reads like Scudder’s descriptions of his camera: “These birds attack the boobies, and, striking them upon their bodies, force them to disgorge the product of their fishing, which they dexterously seize before it falls into the water” (*ibid.* 125). And, in much the same way that Scudder promotes his camera by claiming it is too limited to make a mistake, Barnum often sold his attractions as much on the basis of their weaknesses as their strengths; when interest

in Joyce Heth, an elderly black woman who was being passed off as George Washington's nurse, began to wane, Barnum wrote an anonymous newspaper item claiming that she was an automation, a claim that had the intended effect of renewing curiosity and ticket sales.

Dion Boucicault responded to these potential threats with a particularly clever variant on the hostile incorporation strategy. *The Octoroon* avoids competition from the museum industry by putting that industry on stage, in the person of Salem Scudder, who shares a surname with John Scudder, Barnum's predecessor as owner of the American Museum. Scudder's behavior, language, and role in the play's plot diverge from the traditions of the stock Yankee type in ways that accommodate his second role as a representative of American museum culture. Because Barnum's public persona was so outsized, it translates easily into a theatrical type.²⁴ Boucicault, with his preference for clear, defined personalities on stage, appropriated this type for his play. It is only our historical distance from Barnum and his museum culture that makes Scudder's character type so confusing to contemporary readers. Indeed, it was likely this media environment that allowed Boucicault to develop his theory of types in the first place; types do not ring as false on stage when public figures like Barnum were busy transforming themselves into similar types.

Scudder frequently speaks in the language of museum promotions. This is true not only in his praise of his camera, where it might be expected, but also to his overblown,

²⁴ In effect, Barnum created what Joseph Roach has called a "role-icon," a public character that the performer can never drop (*It* 39). While Roach generally reserves the term for professional actors, I would argue Barnum's promotional apparatus required him to put on a near constant performance, which more than qualifies him as a role-icon.

Barnum-esque rhetoric regarding almost every topic he addresses. Here, for example, is Scudder's description of Zoe in conversation with George, who has recently returned from Europe:

Guess that you didn't leave anything female in Europe that can lift an eyelash beside that gal. When she goes along, she just leaves a streak of love behind her. It's a good drink to see her come into the cotton fields—the niggers get fresh on the sight of her. If she ain't worth her weight in sunshine you may take one of my fingers off, and choose which one you like (Boucicault, *Octoroon* 104).

And here is Barnum promoting Jenny Lind, the Swedish singer for whom he arranged a U.S. tour:

Perhaps I may not make any money by this enterprise, but I assure you that if I knew I should not receive a farthing profit, I would yet ratify the engagement, so anxious am I that the United States shall be visited by a lady whose vocal powers have never been approached by any other human being, and whose character is charity, simplicity, and goodness personified (qtd. in Adams 45).

Both descriptions are similarly hyperbolic, attributing a kind of supernatural purity and goodness to their respective subjects. Both gesture toward a patriotic appeal, with Scudder's insistence that Zoe's beauty is unmatched by any woman in Europe echoing Barnum's implicit claim that America deserves to house Lind's talent, and would be conceding a kind of defeat if it failed to do so. And both make empty offers to put themselves at risk; Scudder by figuratively proffering one of his fingers and Barnum by explaining that he thinks the Lind tour is worthwhile even if he makes no money, a state of affairs that was not in danger of coming to pass.

Given Scudder's Barnumesque rhetoric and behavior, it is perhaps not so surprising that his ideas about the law, or about justice, prove to be somewhat flexible. To borrow another of Burke's terms, Scudder's motives are heavily driven by purpose, by

what he is trying to achieve by his actions. No matter how deeply felt his twin speeches may be, they are primarily driven by two different purposes, and so express two different sentiments. This does not, then, violate Boucicault's test of excellence, because it is perfectly within Scudder's character to change his mind when his objective changes, and such a shift, while it is commensurate with his character in the rest of the play, would not be credible coming from any of the other characters. Even M'Closkly is not capable of subordinating his personal opinions to his goals in this way; his villainy is simply too single-minded. Scudder is an unusual type of agent: the type of agent for whom purpose is ultimately more determinative than any internal convictions. In this, too, he mirrors P. T. Barnum, who made an entire career out of putting the purpose of an individual action before any other considerations, and did so in full view of the public. Indeed, a dramatic reading of Barnum's promotions, or of his actual actions, reveals them to be almost entirely motivated by purpose.²⁵ Scudder's reversal, and the plea for ad hoc justice that follows from it, is thus inseparably bound up with his promotion of the technology he has adopted, as well as the accessory he has invented.

Boucicault's particular choice of technological device, the camera, helps to highlight the significance of this moment for *The Octoroon's* place in the development of American drama. Marc Robinson has argued that American drama in the nineteenth

²⁵ Barnum, for example, cynically exploited anti-slavery sentiment while exhibiting Joyce Heth, promising that proceeds from her display would go to freeing her enslaved grandchildren. He then embraced a soft stance toward the South with his production of *The Octoroon*, neutralizing its politics by subordinating it to the dehumanizing "What Is It?" Finally, he became active in politics in the 1860s, sitting on the Connecticut legislature as a Republican and running on that party's abolitionist platform. In each case, his stance on the question of slavery appears to have been entirely subordinated to the ends that that stance could achieve. For more on Joyce Heth and Barnum's relationship with slavery see Reiss.

century moved past melodrama by dramatizing an increasing skepticism about visuality and seeing.²⁶ Scudder's camera, however, distinguishes Boucicault from his melodramatist contemporaries, since it offers itself as a substitute for human vision, but must be supported in that substitution by a considerable amount of Barnum-esque bluster. With the character of Salem Scudder, Boucicault performs the kind of interrogation of visual evidence and its relationship to epistemology that the American stage would not see again until James Herne's *Margaret Fleming*. The audience of *The Octoroon* sees Paul's murder enacted on stage, then watches the other characters as they make sense of a mechanical proxy for that kind of firsthand visual experience. This proxy is accepted as valid only because Scudder is so persuasive that he is able to offer his own version of what constitutes seeing, a version that happens to include his own invention. This characterization allows Boucicault to criticize Barnum while capitalizing on his popularity; he situates Scudder within a set of circumstances that have life and death consequences, which highlights the way in which his moral compass is subordinated to his own ends.

This is not to say that Scudder's speech should be considered meaningless, or that it should not be read as part of the play's working out of what justice means within a fundamentally unjust slave system. It is, however, also simultaneously a piece of "puffery," as Barnum frequently termed his promotional activities. Its genuine attempt to grapple with the question of how the men he is addressing can arrive at the truth about M'Closky's actions cannot be separated from its practical effect as a testimonial

²⁶ For more on this see Robinson 25-156.

advertisement for Scudder's camera. This reveals an element of opportunism to a character that many critics have identified as the moral center of Boucicault's play. This opportunism does not undermine Scudder's role in the moral universe of *The Octoroon*, but it does complicate it. Scudder's ultimate argument for justice, after all, is a perfectly coherent argument for justice, but it is one that is shot through with self-interest and subtle self-promotion. It is not quite what as it is advertised, but it does approach what is advertised. It is far from the complete truth, without being wholly false. It is, in other words, a humbug.

The humbug as practiced by P. T. Barnum is, according to Neil Harris, a carefully calibrated mixture of exaggeration, showmanship, and sincerity. When, for example, it became clear that Barnum had overstated the smallness of Tom Thumb, one of his most lucrative performers, by adding several years to his age, he defended himself by claiming that the deception was small enough not to violate the spirit of the exhibit: "Announcing the younger as only five, his true age, 'it would have been impossible to excite the interest or awaken the curiosity of the public. The thing I aimed at was, to assure them that he was *really a dwarf*... and in *this*, at least, they were not deceived'" (Harris 215). Just as Tom Thumb was really a dwarf, Scudder's position really does represent the closest thing to a picture of justice that is available in *The Octoroon*. That Scudder's position also inescapably includes a selfish ulterior motive is a consequence of the broken moral logic of *The Octoroon*, or of a slave society more generally. This engagement with the kind of justice that is possible in the antebellum South is crucial, because *The*

Octoroon's audience was so divided on whether the play was a shameless apology for slavery or a shrill abolitionist screed.

This, then, helps to clarify the confusion that the *Herald* and others experienced with respect to *The Octoroon*'s politics. After all, there is a case to be made that *The Octoroon* takes a pro-slavery position. It is worth noting, for example, that the slave auction that would have to be at the center of any attempt to distill abolitionist sentiment from *The Octoroon* is a model of Southern gentility and humanitarian concern. When a character, due to his poor hearing, accidentally bids to separate a pair of children from their mother, Scudder quickly explains the situation to him, and he just as quickly withdraws his bid (135). It is only M'Closky, the Northerner, who profanes the sale by purchasing Zoe. Indeed, Zoe's sale is presented by the play as uniquely tragic, even within the context of the selling of all of Terrebonne's slaves. The majority of the slave auction takes place in a convivial atmosphere, with individual slaves requesting to be purchased by particular buyers. Most of the slaves are already in the room when the auction begins, so, as they are announced, it is a simple matter to have them mount the table that serves as Terrebonne's auction block. Most of these movements are denoted by a simple, unadorned stage direction; when a pair of children are up for sale, a moment that a more clearly abolitionist author like Harriet Beecher Stowe would use to create as much pathos as possible, Boucicault's text simply says "*they get on the table*" (134). Some of these moments even become occasion for comedy; the aged Pete "*tumbles upon the table*" and tries to claim his age, which Pointdexter reveals as seventy-two, as forty-six (135).

All of this changes, however, when it is Zoe's turn to be sold. Unlike the other slaves, Zoe has been kept offstage until her name is called. When Pointdexter announces, "No. 4, the Octoroon girl, Zoe" (135), Boucicault's stage direction creates a noticeable change in the atmosphere on stage: "*Enter Zoe, very pale, and stands on the table*" (136). It's clear from just this statement why Zoe's sale is a special case: as an Octoroon, she appears to be white. She is played by a white actress,²⁷ and so is only marked as black by her own dialogue and the laws of Louisiana. Indeed, Boucicault indicates that she is to be "*very pale*" when she is at auction; she is at her whitest at the moment she is treated most like a slave. As a result, her sale is not a representative moment of the slave system, but instead an instance of typical melodramatic peril for a functionally white heroine; Zoe's sale to M'Closky acts as a stand-in for the forced marriage that often threatens the female protagonist of a melodrama. The *New York Herald's* complaint, that Boucicault presents an exceptional situation as though it were a representation of the slave system as a whole, is not borne out by this scene. Instead, most of the pathos of Zoe's situation is created by the particulars of that situation; her sale is unjust not because all sales of human beings are unjust, but because she is almost white, and because her owner and father intended to free her.

This seeming support for the slave system, however, is undone by the ambiguity surrounding Scudder's twin exhortations; his reversal involves a changing opinion of the rights that a group has to exercise over the body of an individual, which was at the heart of the debate over slavery. Seen as an instance of poor characterization or internal

²⁷ Agnes Robinson, Boucicault's wife, in the play's initial run.

contradiction, the moment is simply incoherent, and can tell us nothing about *The Octoroon*'s position on abolitionism. Seen as a telling inconsistency, as a characteristic action by a character who is by nature inconsistent, it reveals a surprisingly nuanced engagement with abolitionism. Rather than being, as Adams claims, "a play that feels more antislavery than it literally is" (152), *The Octoroon* is a play that is more slyly antislavery than it is willing to admit. It avoids taking a direct stand on the abolition question, objecting more to the enslavement of its heroine, played by a white actress, than to slavery in particular. But situating the play within the confines of the slave system has consequences for *The Octoroon*'s portrayal of the law in general. Scudder, the closest thing the play has to a moral voice, is able to partially subordinate his entire conception of justice to the goal of promoting his camera, just as justice for Zoe is subordinated to the vagaries of debt law and the process surrounding manumission. All justice in the South of *The Octoroon* is as *ad hoc* as McClosky's trial, and as subject to sudden reversals and ulterior motives.²⁸ Ultimately, it seems, the *Herald* was right: *The Octoroon* is neutral on its face, but antislavery by implication. This ideological positioning comes not from any determined abolitionism on Boucicault's part; rather it is an epiphenomenon that arises from the collision of Scudder as a P. T. Barnum stand-in and Scudder as the moral voice of the play.

The After-effects of *The Octoroon*

²⁸ This is similar to Richardson's claim, quoted above, with a crucial difference: it is not the law in general that can be manipulated, but the law in *The Octoroon*'s version of the slave South. Boucicault's critique is sharper than Richardson's argument suggests.

This collision also has implications for the progress of the popular conception of the Yankee. Scudder's repeated self-identification as a Yankee, combined with his Barnum-inflected divergence from the standard iterations of the stage Yankee, represents a transitional moment in the existence of the Yankee type. Classifying him as a Yankee does not have much value for reading *The Octoroon*, since Scudder is sufficiently different from the typical Yankee type that that type loses much of its explanatory force where he is concerned. Nevertheless, he still has a kind of phenomenological effect in the history of American theatre; whether or not he is a stage Yankee in any inherent sense, his insistence on his own membership in that class has the potential to move popular conceptions of both Yankee stage types and Yankees in American society.

This worked in concert with P. T. Barnum, who was also a popular figure identified as a Yankee by the American public. Together, they helped effect a transformation of the Yankee in the public imagination; what began as a paragon of simple, uncultured honesty became a figure of doubletalk and manipulation, one who, as Joseph Roach puts it, "speaks with a forked tongue" (201). Denman Thompson's 1893 play *Our New Minister* features a character named Skee-zicks who fulfills the typical Yankee function, providing peripheral comedy that largely originates in cultural differences between himself and the rest of the play's characters. He, like most Yankee characters, is an outsider, a New York transplant. But he also bears clear marks of the influence of Boucicault's Barnum-inflected version of the Yankee. The other characters often have a hard time understanding him not, as in early versions of the Yankee type, because his speech is hopelessly rustic, but because he, like Scudder, is capable of talking

circles around them. Instead of an unsophisticated outsider who, like Asa in Tom Taylor's *Our American Cousin* (1858), does not know how to use a shower, Skeezicks is in a position to mock the provinciality of the play's other characters: "I can see you in New York with one of those paper grips and a whale-bone umbrella; (*Imitating Rube walk*) why, it would take all of your time keeping out of coal holes, and dodging autos, you wouldn't know where you were at" (16). Skeezicks shares several key characteristics with Scudder, although he is notably less self-aware. Scudder, a New Yorker like Skeezicks, frequently comments on his own failings, and blames himself for Terrebon's decline. Nevertheless, he has few qualms about using his verbal facility to outwit the southerners that surround him, shifting between his two opposing pictures of justice without the slightest hesitation. Skeezicks simply takes this a step farther, moving into outright mockery, which the play evidently endorses, since the stage directions call Skeezicks's imitation of his interlocutor's gait a "*Rube walk*" (16). Once Boucicault incorporated Barnum's persona into the Yankee type, it proved surprisingly durable.

The competition between Boucicault and Barnum continued after Boucicault's original production of *The Octoroon*. Boucicault even directly compares himself to Barnum in an essay called "Theatres, Halls, and Audiences," while managing to subtly disparage his rival. After claiming that a theatre should seat no more than two thousand because "there is a limit to the genius of the actor as regards its reach over his audience," Boucicault muses,

how, in a city of over two million inhabitants like New York... when a popular play is running, does the public so measure the capacity of a theatre that, if it holds fifteen hundred people, that number exactly, or within a hundred or so, present themselves nightly for admission; but if it be the Madison-Square Garden,

with Barnum's exhibition, holding ten thousand, that number will present themselves? ("Theatres, Halls" 436).

The superior drawing power of Barnum's exhibition is recast as a weakness, his audience as a disorganized mob that no performer could ever hope to engage. This procedure is really just a minor repetition of his previous use of Salem Scudder; Boucicault co-opts Barnum's popularity in order to make his point, but does so in a way that weakens this supposed popularity by recasting it as a failing.

Of course, the interaction between the museum industry and the theatre of the period was not unidirectional. Since *The Octoroon* was extremely popular, and P.T. Barnum was, by all accounts, tireless in his pursuit of customers, it is perhaps inevitable that 1860 also saw a production of *The Octoroon* at Barnum's Lecture Room. In many ways, Barnum's staging of Boucicault's play, complete with a coded representation of himself, was nothing new; Barnum had been staging a version of himself for the American public for most of his career. Still, as Bluford Adams argues in *E. Pluribus Barnum* (1997), this was not a neutral production:

The Museum brought Boucicault's nonwhites in line by juxtaposing them against Barnum's latest star attraction, the "What Is It?" Beginning on 25 February, Boucicault's play... shared Museum bills with the famous "CONNECTING LINK BETWEEN MAN AND MONKEY"—an attraction supposedly captured by adventurers hunting gorillas in the interior of Africa... This was not Barnum's first "What Is It?"... It was, however, the first time he had cast a black male in the role, and the press immediately seized the opportunity to make racist comparisons between the freak's physique and that of "the negro" (158).

Adams's argument is the inverse of my own: that Barnum, governed purely by profit motive, incorporated Boucicault's rival entertainment into his own apparatus in a modified form. According to Adams, this modification was the use of the "What Is It?" to

blunt any antislavery sentiment in *The Octoroon*. By yoking together these two attractions, Barnum neutered any radical sentiment in Boucicault's play; instead of two very different performances, he presented a single unit of entertainment that was, on balance, decidedly skewed toward white supremacy. If anything, Adams understates the case. Newspaper advertisements for the double bill make it clear that the "What Is It?" was the headlining act at Barnum's Lecture Room. *The Octoroon*, in these advertisements, is reduced to an appendage to Barnum's racialized spectacle:

BARNUM'S AMERICAN MUSEUM.

EVERY DAY AND EVENING.

SEEN AT ALL HOURS. SEEN AT ALL HOURS.
 SEEN AT ALL HOURS. SEEN AT ALL HOURS.
 SEEN AT ALL HOURS. SEEN AT ALL HOURS.
 SEEN AT ALL HOURS. SEEN AT ALL HOURS.

WHAT IS IT?
 WHAT IS IT?
 WHAT IS IT?
 WHAT IS IT?

Is it a lower order of man? or
 Is it a higher development of the monkey? or
 Is it both in combination?

Nothing of the kind
HAS EVER BEEN SEEN BEFORE!

It possesses, in brief, the

Face of man.	Limbs of monkey.
Face of man.	Limbs of monkey.
Face of man.	Limbs of monkey.
Face of man.	Limbs of monkey.

WHAT IS IT?
 WHAT IS IT?
 WHAT IS IT?
 WHAT IS IT?

This curious creature is

Two-thirds size of Man.	Laughs, but can't speak.
Two-thirds size of Man.	Laughs, but can't speak.
Two-thirds size of Man.	Laughs, but can't speak.
Two-thirds size of Man.	Laughs, but can't speak.

WHAT IS IT?
 WHAT IS IT?
 WHAT IS IT?
 WHAT IS IT?

Besides which, the famous

SEA LION.	GRIZZLY BEAR.	LEARNED SEAL.
SEA LION.	GRIZZLY BEAR.	LEARNED SEAL.
SEA LION.	GRIZZLY BEAR.	LEARNED SEAL.
SEA LION.	GRIZZLY BEAR.	LEARNED SEAL.
SEA LION.	GRIZZLY BEAR.	LEARNED SEAL.

THURSDAY, March 8, 1860.

AFTERNOON at 3 o'clock, the Comedy of the
AMERICAN FARMER,
 And the farce of
YOUR LIFE'S IN DANGER.

EVENING, at 7½ o'clock, the renowned, touching and amu-
 sing drama, fifth and last week but one of its repetition,
BOURCAULT'S FAMOUS OCTOROON.

OCTOROON, **OCTOROON,** **OCTOROON,**
OCTOROON, **OCTOROON,** **OCTOROON,**

in five acts and a multitude of tableaux, from the author's
 copy, with **NEW SCENERY,**
NEW MUSIC, NEW DRESSES, NEW EFFECTS,
 presented by the entire
DRAMATIC GENIUS OF THE COMPANY.

The Wax Statue of John Brown, Living Baby Anacondas and
 enormous Serpents, Living Kangaroos, beautiful Aquaria, &c.
 Admittance, 25 cents; children under ten, 13 cents; parquette,
 13 cents extra.

Barnum's American Museum. Advertisement.

The New York Herald (New York, NY) March 8, 1860, 1.

In addition, the presentation of *The Octoroon* under the heading of “What Is It?” unavoidably applies that question to the characters in Boucicault’s play. Adams notes that the behavior of Barnum’s curiosity most closely resembles that of Wahnotee, especially given the supposed inability of the “What Is It?” to speak English, or indeed any language. Instead, the actor in Barnum’s spectacle would communicate his desires through an intentionally crude pantomime, much as Wahnotee does in *The Octoroon*. Still, there is never any question in *The Octoroon* about what Wahnotee is. To identify Wahnotee with the “What Is It?” is to assume that the question posed by the attractions name was not intended to be taken seriously, that the identification of the performers body with the African body was written in to the exhibit from the start. As James Cook has noted, however, Barnum repeatedly declined to take a position on how audiences should classify his human curiosity. Instead, he called the “What Is It?” a “nondescript,” and resisted any attempts to identify it further (Cook 124). Indeed, Barnum issued careful instructions for his exhibitors when the “What Is It?” went on tour: “The thing is not to be called *anything* by the exhibitor. We know not & therefore do not assert whether it is human or animal. We leave that all to the sagacious public to decide” (qtd. in Cook, 134). Earlier in this same letter, however, Barnum calls his exhibit an “*animal*” (*ibid*). It is clear, then, that Barnum had, if only for the sake of convenience, privately classifies the “What Is It?” in a way that he was unwilling to do in his public promotional materials.

This divergence between private certainty and public ambiguity was part of a longstanding strategy of Barnum’s; by leaving as much uncertainty as possible

surrounding his exhibits, he drew crowds that were at least partially motivated by a desire to solve the case for themselves. A kind of categorical ambiguity, in other words, is good for business. This kind of ambiguity cannot readily be associated with the character of Wahnotee, who is easily categorized by audiences. Instead, it is more properly applied to Zoe, as the Octoroon of the play's title. Barnum's advertisements make this explicit, linking the question "What Is It?" with *The Octoroon*, which appears directly below.

This marketing strategy is only effective, however, because it takes advantage of a sentiment that is already at work in *The Octoroon*. The categorical ambiguity of Barnum's "What Is It?" surrounds the character of Zoe for the entirety of Boucicault's play. Indeed, the question is explicitly raised, in very similar terms, during one of the play's pivotal exchanges. When George, several days after first meeting her, asks Zoe to marry him, she responds by asking, "Do you know what I am?" (119). When it becomes clear that he thinks she is referring to her illegitimate birth, she directs an aside to the audience: "Alas! He does not know, he does not know! And will despise me, spurn me, loathe me, when he learns who, what, he has so loved" (119). Finally, she states the issue explicitly: "I'm an unclean thing--forbidden by the laws--I'm an Octoroon!" (120). Zoe thus repeatedly presents her racial ambiguity in the same dehumanizing language that Barnum uses for the "What Is It?"; she refers to herself as a "thing," and even corrects her own concerns about "who" she is, substituting "what."

The nature of Zoe's racial identity in the slave South is such that answering the question does nothing to resolve it. For while there can be no question about "what" Zoe is—she is referred to as "the octoroon" countless times—it is far from clear what an

octoroon is, at least on Terrebonne. Zoe is a slave under the law, but is treated as though she is free by most of the characters, until legal restrictions come into play. She sees herself as “unclean,” but most other characters follow Scudder’s pitch about her, that she’s “worth her weight in sunshine” (104). Within Boucicault’s play, the word “octoroon” functions much like Barnum’s “nondescript:” it is a classifying term that ultimately resists classification. Both terms work as linguistic placeholders, which allow people to speak about particular subjects without taking a position on the identity of those subjects. Both terms allow their promoters to retain the ambiguity that is so effective at drawing a crowd. Effectively, then, both performances put their own categorical uncertainty right up front, in their respective titles. This is particularly consequential for *The Octoroon*, given Boucicault’s tendency to end his plays with a statement that includes the play’s title. Zoe’s statement of self-identification at the moment of her death is thus required to highlight her racial status: “George, you may, without a blush, confess your love for the Octoroon” (150).

Zoe’s dying words are noteworthy for several reasons, not the least of which is her use of a definite article to describe herself. What George can now openly confess, she claims, is not his love for *an* octoroon, but his love for “*the* Octoroon” (150, italics mine, capitalization in original). This is not Zoe’s usual mode of self-reference. Even when using dehumanizing language to reveal her racial status to George, she still calls herself “an Octoroon” (120). Further, Zoe is not the only one who uses this formulation. It originates with M’Closky, and is directed at Scudder: “you would persuade yourself that it was this family alone you cared for; it ain’t—you know it ain’t—‘t is the ‘Octoroon’;

and you love her as I do” (114). The formulation then reappears during the slave auction at which Zoe is sold to M’Closky, as Pointdexter, the auctioneer, announces, “Fifteen thousand bid for the Octoroon” (136). For most of the play, then, this mode of reference makes an appearance when Zoe is being treated most like property, it is used first by M’Closky, who wants to possess her even before he learns that her manumission is not legally binding, and then by the auctioneer at the moment of her sale. It is, in other words, Zoe’s commodity name; it is what she is called when she is ownable and exchangeable, and it is what she reverts to at the moment of her death. It is her exhibit title, and so it makes sense that it is also the title of the play in which she exists. In both cases, her categorical ambiguity is crucial; the same uncertainty that makes her an object of property and display within the play also works to draw crowds to the play itself.

This is not to say that Boucicault’s highlighting of Zoe’s ambiguity is so prominent that Barnum’s juxtaposition had no effect. Crucially, the question in the title of the “What Is It?” refers not to race, but to species. While the “What Is It?” was generally portrayed by a black man, it was his humanity that was being questioned by Barnum’s promotional apparatus, not his racial status. Barnum, following the same norms of popular science discourse as Daly, structured his exhibition as a mystery. Because Barnum’s museum depended on repeat visitors, however, that mystery would have to remain unsolved; a scientist like Andrew Wilson would have insisted on settling the question, but a showman like Barnum knew better than to provide such closure. Instead, he presented crowds with a question, and invited them to try to answer it themselves, visiting the exhibit as many times as necessary. But since the mystery in question was

whether or not the person on display was actually a person at all, Barnum's exhibit had the side-effect of teaching visitors that an individual's humanity could be put to a popular referendum. When the advertisement for this referendum is combined with one for *The Octoroon*, the effect is to make Zoe subject to its terms as well. Joining together Zoe's racial ambiguity and the ambiguous personhood of the *What Is It?* inescapably has the effect of implicitly questioning Zoe's humanity as well, and of giving visitors the sense that the question was up to them to solve. Barnum's production of *The Octoroon*, then, despite being the same play that Boucicault mounted at the Winter Garden, was a version of the play that *The New York Herald* would have found much more palatable.²⁹ Barnum and Boucicault both practiced their own versions of hostile incorporation: Boucicault's character of Salem Scudder co-opted Barnum's publicity apparatus while taking Barnum to task for his lack of convictions, and Barnum's production co-opted Boucicault's play while neutering the critique of the South that Scudder represents.

Although Boucicault's *The Octoroon* is the clearest example of the effects of the public spectacle of the museum industry on nineteenth century American drama, those effects reached beyond his plays. As he did with the museum-inspired spectacular stage effects, Augustin Daly joined Boucicault in incorporating the drama of the museum businessman into his own plays. His *The Big Bonanza* (1875) is a domestic farce that manages to dramatize several of the warring strands of the museum industry, although they are not explicitly identified as such. The plot centers around a pair of cousins, Jonathan Cawallader and Professor Cornelius Agassiz Cawallader. Jonathan is, as

²⁹ For more on the relationship between Boucicault, the "What Is It?", and the politics of slavery see Rebhorn.

described by the *dramatis personae*, a “*banker, broker and bondholder; in fact, the representative of ‘Money’*” (168). The Professor is “*an ‘A.M.,’ ‘M.S.,’ ‘F.G.S.,’ etc.; in short, the representative of ‘Brains’*” (168). Between them, they represent two of the primary warring impulses in the American museum industry: the desire to turn a profit and the desire to educate the public.³⁰ Although Jonathan is portrayed as a successful businessman, does not share Salem Scudder’s Barnum resonances. Instead, his business dealings are presented as upright and valuable, and his success a result of his facility at the difficult pursuit of stock speculation, rather than any kind of deception. Indeed, early in the play, his cousin accuses him of cheating his clients, and he responds angrily: “*Cheat! This is too much*” (183). He then proceeds to give The Professor three hundred dollars to invest, with the expectation that his cousin will fail at speculation. This turns out to be the case, testifying to both Jonathan’s talent and character. Indeed, it is the Professor who attempts to cheat in order to earn money. When he finds himself holding an inordinate amount of nearly worthless shares of the Big Bonanza silver claim, he tries his hand at market manipulation, buying more shares in order to fool other investors, “*bull Bonanza,*” and inflate the price (214). This attempt fails, indicating once again that Jonathan’s business methods are honest, and are successful because they reflect an actual understanding of the operations of the market.

This is not to say that the influence of P. T. Barnum is not at work in *The Big Bonanza*. The first conversation after the opening curtain is between Jonathan’s wife, Lucretia, and her uncle, Rympole, who remembers when the two of them had teamed up to

³⁰ The Professor’s middle name, Agassiz, is probably a reference to the extremely well-known natural historian, Louis Agassiz, who directed the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard (Orosz 185).

trick Lucretia's husband in a minor matter: "don't you remember—last summer—when Cawallader wanted to go to California, and you preferred Saratoga, I dropped in occasionally every evening and called attention to your precarious state of health and the necessity for the waters, eh?" (169). She does appear to remember, since she has summoned him to her household in order to help her trick her husband into giving up wine and cigars; "The way to touch him," she proposes, "is to excite his apprehensions about his health" (170). Rymple, despite his previous deceptions on her behalf, thinks it goes a step too far, and claims that she is enlisting him to "humbug [her] husband" (170). When Rymple applies Barnum's word to this act of deception so early in the play, he ensures that Barnum will be a presence throughout; the action that Rymple describes is something that is practiced repeatedly in *The Big Bonanza*, by almost all of the characters. Jonathan harmlessly tricks his cousin, setting up their contest while instructing the cashier at his company to shield the Professor from any actual losses resulting from his poor investments. Characters repeatedly withhold their identities from other characters in order to elicit particular responses.

Not all of these deceptions, however, are quite so harmless. Robert Raffles, a character who enters the play by returning from a stint prospecting in the West, describes how he has been cheated:

The very first fellow I saw had a mine for sale... You're just the person I've been looking for, says he. I'm in want of a superintendent for the richest silver mine around the Bonanza. I like your looks. I'll take you. To place you above temptation, as you'll have to handle millions, I'll give you five thousand dollars a month... I only require, says he, security for your honesty and fidelity (191).

This security turns out to be a deposit of one thousand dollars, all of Raffles's available cash, which the man pockets and departs, never to be seen again. When Raffles attempts to find the mine he has purchased, he learns that it does not exist, leading him to conclude, "It was a sell—humbug" (192). This is a far cry from the "humbug" of the play's opening pages, which is only designed to nudge Jonathan toward healthier habits. By attaching this same word to both actions, *The Big Bonanza* links the two, and links them both to Barnum.

The Big Bonanza, then, essentially stages the disjunctures of the American museum industry as a farce, with the high-minded pretensions toward public education pitted against the naked spirit of capitalism. The latter, so often personified by P. T. Barnum in the popular imagination, is instead separated from the showman's hucksterism, which is instead allowed to wander freely through the play like a ghost, exhibiting varying degrees of malevolence. Both the Barnum impulse and the scientific impulse are ultimately discredited, allowing audiences to enjoy the spectacle of the museum industry while slyly deflating that industry's claims to be anything other than a money-making machine.

The Big Bonanza was first performed in 1875, at the beginning of what Joel Orosz calls a period of unprecedented stability for the American museum industry. The conflict dramatized by Daly's play was just starting to be resolved, as the warring impulses toward education and entertainment achieved a kind of truce, which Orosz calls "the American compromise." This compromise, which is represented by "the form of the modern American museum as an institution which simultaneously provides popular

education and promotes scholarly research,” is still visible in contemporary metropolitan museums (Orosz ix). One consequence of this compromise, with its focus on education rather than entertainment, was the disentangling of the economies of the museum and theatre industries. By the mid 1870s, museums had largely abandoned spectacle and theatrics, moving toward a model like the one specified by the charter of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, which specified “a Museum and library of art, of encouraging and developing the study of fine arts, and the application of arts to manufactures and practical life, of advancing the general knowledge of kindred subjects, and, to that end, of furnishing popular instruction and recreation” (qtd. in Orosz 235). While this style of museum remained popular, it no longer qualified as an “amusement” in the same way that a trip to the theatre would. As a result, theatres and museums moved into separate orbits, easing the competitive pressure that they had formerly exerted on each other. The museum industry was free to develop into the institution it is today, while the theatre industry, never free from outside competition, was left to face its next paratheatrical threat. When Dion Boucicault died in 1894, his estate was put up for auction. Potential buyers eagerly bid on hundreds of items, including lot 338, “40 Years, recollections of P. T. Barnum” (Kreiser 17).

Chapter 2: James Herne and the Medicine Show

Realism and Touring in American Drama

By the late nineteenth century, dramatic realism, heavily influenced by Ibsen, was beginning to gain a foothold in American theatre. It continued to have its detractors, who followed Boucicault's example in characterizing this new style of theatre as dull or confusing, but a number of American playwrights took up the challenge represented by Ibsen's plays, and responded with realist plays of their own. Steele MacKaye aimed for detailed psychological portraiture, and Bronson Howard attempted to present an accurate picture of American business.³¹ They were urged forward in these efforts by Henry James, whose critical writing attempted to push theatre toward realism, and William Dean Howells, whose advocated realism both by writing criticism and by producing some realist plays of his own.³² By a wide margin, however, the playwright most responsible popularizing realism in American drama was James A. Herne.

Herne began his theatrical career as an actor in Troy, New York. He made a name for himself with notable performances in *Oliver Twist* and *Rip Van Winkle*, eventually moving into management in San Francisco. He then leveraged his management position to launch a playwriting career, beginning with the 1879 premier of his first play, *Within an Inch of His Life*. Like many nineteenth century American playwrights, Herne also acted in productions of his own plays. He continued to experiment with dramatic realism in *Hearts of Oak* (1879), and is generally regarded to have fully embraced it with *Margaret Fleming*. This is not to say that Herne fully disdained the sensational techniques of melodrama. *Margaret Fleming*, in addition to its

³¹ See Richardson, *American Drama* 169-181.

³² See Richardson, *American Drama* 154-169.

experiments with realism, is a veritable catalogue of popular genre references; it includes a virtuous female brought low by the sins of the world, a comically disreputable snake-oil salesman, and a stern but caring homeopathic doctor. In addition, almost all of his plays included some elements that were clearly designed to pander to the audience. This is highlighted by Herne's advertising, which generally made special mention of the babies that proved to be a crowd favorite, and which he was sure to include in his plays whenever possible:

AMUSEMENTS - HEARTS OF OAK.

GRAND OPERA HOUSE.

NUNNEMACHER & MARSH,

LESSEES AND MANAGERS.

SPECIAL NOTICE.

In consequence of the Unprecedented Success of Hearts of Oak, Messrs. Nunnemacher & Marsh most respectfully announce that they have at an Enormous Expense effected a

Reengagement for One Week Only, Commencing Monday, Dec. 29,

OF

MR. JAMES A. HERNE and

KATHARINE CORCORAN

In Herne & Belasco's New and Powerful American Play,

Hearts of Oak

WITH ITS

Superb Cast,

Grand Chorus,

Realistic Scenery,

The Thrilling Wreck, The Thrilling Wreck,

The Working Mill,

Rain Burst

Real Water,

Superb Cast,

Grand Chorus,

Realistic Scenery,

The Working Mill,

Rain Burst

Real Water,

OF

AND REAPPEARANCE
AND REAPPEARANCE
OF THE GREAT ORIGINAL
OF THE GREAT ORIGINAL
AND ONLY
AND ONLY

HEARTS OF OAK BABY.

BABY.
BABY.

BABY.
BABY.

BABY.
BABY.

See It!

See It!

See It!

HEARTS OF OAK.

Thursday Afternoon, Jan. 1, Grand New Year's Matinee.

Last Grand Matinee Saturday Afternoon, Jan. 3. Positively Last Performance Saturday Evening, Jan. 3.

JANUARY 3, ONE WEEK,

RICE'S SURPRISE PARTY.

Hearts of Oak. Advertisement. *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel* (Milwaukee, WI) December 28, 1879, 5.

Still, the subject matter of Herne's plays, and the manner in which it was presented, increasingly aligned itself with Ibsenite realism as his career progressed, a tendency which perhaps reached its height when Herne participated in the formation of a theatre that declared its motto to be "Art for Truth's Sake" (Herne, "Art" 361).

This period in American theatrical history, during which realism was ascendant, was also a period dominated by touring. While New York City remained the hub of the American theatre industry, the late nineteenth century also saw a substantial increase in professional theatrical productions in towns and cities throughout the U.S.³³ The development of an extensive rail network allowed large groups of actors, accompanied by sets and stage properties, to be transported throughout the country with relative ease. The first manager to exploit the possibilities of this available transport was Dion Boucicault, who developed the "combination" system in 1860. Under this system, a play's entire company would tour together. This provided an alternative to the "stock and star" system, under which theatres would retain a stock company of supporting players, and well-known stars would tour the country. By 1870, the combination system had become the standard model, leading to the demise of stock companies, who found themselves crowded out of their theatres by touring companies. On the road, theatre companies presented successful productions from major theatrical markets, usually playing in smaller-sized theatres that were designated as 'opera houses.'³⁴ Many plays were also

³³ For more on this, see Hughes, 206-208.

³⁴ This designation was initially used in the eighteenth century to evade restrictions on theatres; an opera house, promoters could argue, was not a theatre, and so would not run afoul of anti-theatre laws (Hughes 58-9). By the 1860s, they had become commonplace, appearing in such far-flung locales as the mining town of Virginia City, Nevada (Hughes 226-7).

tested in the touring market before being brought to larger theatres in larger cities; Herne's *Margaret Fleming*, for example, premiered in Lynn, Massachusetts. The touring company was, of course, not a new feature in the American theatrical landscape; "barnstorming" companies had been putting up small-scale performances in mid-sized towns for years. What was new, however, was the dominance of the touring model, and the extent to which major playwrights and companies participated in that model. This new way of doing business, as is often the case, brought new challenges. Among these was a new potential paratheatrical competitor, which threatened to crowd theatre companies out of the new market they were trying to enter. By embracing a touring model, the American theatre industry was intruding on the territory of an American performance institution which had been travelling a series of established circuits and entertaining crowds since the early colonial period: the medicine show.

The Medicine Show in America

Medicine shows have existed, in some form, since at least the seventeenth century. They proliferated throughout Europe, but especially in Italy, where mountebanks would typically travel with *commedia dell'arte* troupes. These troupes generally presented a variation on a fairly simple formula: an activity designed to draw a crowd to a public place, followed by a *commedia* performance, followed by a medical pitch, which typically lasted more than an hour and contained all manner of dire warnings for the spectators and outlandish promises for the pitchman's wares. As settlement of the American continent began in earnest, mountebanks and other quacks began to flock to the

emerging market. By 1773, two colonies had attempted to ban pitchmen from operating within their borders. Connecticut's "Act for suppressing of Mountebanks" took aim at those engaged in "dealing out and administering physic and medicine of unknown composition indiscriminately to any persons whom they can by fair words induce to purchase" (qtd. in McNamara, 8). The act went on to declare

That no mountebank, or person whatsoever under him, shall exhibit or cause to be exhibited on any publick [*sic*] stage or place whatsoever within this colony, any games, tricks, plays, juggling or feats of uncommon decsterity [*sic*] and agility of body, tending to no good and useful purposes, but tending to collect together numbers of spectators and gratify vain or useless curiosity (qtd. in McNamara, 9).

Finally, the act concludes banning such performers from selling or dispensing "any physic, drugs, or medicines, commended to be efficacious and useful in various disorders" (*ibid*).

Connecticut's law is noteworthy for a number of reasons. Its very existence testifies to the prevalence of the medicine show in the colony; such a law would be unnecessary if mountebanks did not represent a significant problem for Connecticut. Still more telling is the language in which the ban is couched. The act takes special care to enumerate the types of performance employed by mountebanks, and then goes on to ban those performances outright, whether or not they accompanied a medical pitch. The ban on selling and dispensing medicine is a separate sentence, and almost seems like an afterthought. Indeed, while the act does note that mountebank medicine "has a tendency to injure and destroy the health, constitution and lives" (8) of those who take it, it is clear that the colonial legislature was equally, if not more, concerned about the way that the medicine show "tends to draw together great numbers of people, to the corruption of

manners, promotion of idleness, and the detriment of good order and religion” (9). The act, then, betrays more anxiety about the ‘show’ than it does about the ‘medicine.’ It reads like a general ban on performance, with an additional ban on the sale of dubious medicine tacked on for good measure. Even at this early date, American attitudes about medicine shows were entangled with American attitudes about theatre and performance. This entanglement would only increase as time passed. In any event, legislative efforts like Connecticut’s proved futile. Medicine shows only increased in popularity, drawing huge crowds throughout the revolutionary period and reaching a height in the latter half of the nineteenth century.³⁵

Performance-focused studies of Medicine shows tend to concentrate on the parts of the show that are obviously marked as entertainment—the vaudeville bits and blackface routines—assuming that these are the audience draw and the heart of the show.³⁶ It is my argument, however, that the medical lecture portion of the medicine show, the actual pitch, should not be viewed as a separate entity from the more conventionally theatrical part of the show. Instead, the pitch should be viewed as the main attraction, and as the primary performance element of the medicine show form. After all, the pitch was, from a business standpoint, the most important part, the *raison d’être* for the entire show, and operators could not risk having their audience’s attention

³⁵ This was an ideal time for the medicine show in America. Prosperous companies were able to take advantage of the newly built travel infrastructure, including the railroad, but many potential customers did not have access to this same freedom of travel, leaving them reliant on the medicine show for entertainment. As this balance began to shift at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, medicine shows declined, although the last major medicine show did not stop touring until 1964. For more on this see McNamara 17-18.

³⁶ See Anderson, McNamara, and Strasser for examples of this approach.

wane at this crucial moment. Lecturers needed to put the crowd in a buying mood by first terrifying them. This was often done with language that resembles nothing so much as Jonathan Edwards's "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," since both Edwards and the pitchmen attempted to persuade their auditors that death is always immanent, and that their remedy is necessary to save their audience members souls or lives. Here is Edwards's appeal to his audience: "And it would be a wonder if some that are now present, should not be in hell in a very short time, before this year is out. And it would be no wonder if some person that now sits here in some seat of this meetinghouse in health, and quiet and secure, should be there before tomorrow morning" (103). And here is a representative medical pitchman: "You laughing, happy audience; you mother, you father, you young man, woman and child, every one of you—within you are the seeds of death! Is it cancer? Is it consumption? Is it perhaps some unknown malady?" (Qtd. in Young, 196). In both cases, death is presented as imminent and inevitable, and in both cases the solution, conversion or medicine, is equally immanent. This kind of terrifying promise is, in itself, a kind of entertainment. There is something compelling about the tension-building of being persuaded that death lurks within one's body at all times, especially when that tension is relieved in short order by the promise of a fast remedy.

Indeed, from the perspective of audience experience, there are striking similarities between a well-executed medicine show lecture and the celebrated locomotive scene from Augustin Daly's *Under the Gaslight*. Both manufacture anxiety out of existing external fears: the always-present possibility of disease and the uncertainty surrounding the spread of the railroad. Both work through a kind of simulation to bring

that anxiety to a fever pitch before abruptly relieving it. It is in this relief that the two types of entertainment find their most important difference: the stage-effect delivers its relief as a matter of course, through the forward movement of the plot, while the medicine show requires each spectator to relieve his own anxiety through an individual purchase. While the melodrama creates anxiety for the audience through a stage surrogate, the medicine show attacks the spectator directly, positing an illness that is really and invisibly at work in his body. The most successful medical lecturers essentially tied their audience members to the railroad tracks, and then asked for a cash donation before untying them. But it is important to note that, with the pervasiveness of these touring medicine shows, audience members were unlikely to have been blindsided by the content of the medical lecture. There were simply too many medicine shows for the form to survive if audience members did not attend presentations by multiple pitchmen, which means that medicine shows relied on attracting an audience that was fully aware it was about to see a medical pitch. In light of this, it was essential that the pitch itself be entertaining, or at least compelling.

It is tempting, from the present vantage, to explain the popularity of these shows by pointing to either the skill of the performers or the gullibility of the audience; we may conclude that nineteenth century pitchmen were so mesmerizing that they overwhelmed the crowd's rational defenses, or that the crowd lacked such defenses in the first place. Recent scholarship on the history of American medicine, however, has demonstrated that such a view is not merely uncharitable, but inaccurate. Any discussion of the popularity of the medicine show in eighteenth and nineteenth century America must include an

understanding of the wider medical landscape during that period. Such an understanding, in turn, must begin with a simple medical fact: the majority of illnesses will eventually go away without any intervention. Although serious and fatal conditions tend to command a greater share of the public imagination, most of the sicknesses actually encountered throughout a lifetime can be banished by the human immune system alone. This phenomenon underlies the widespread faith in any number of dubious remedies; people often believe their health is improving because it actually is. In such cases, the job of the medical charlatan is a simple one: he needs only to claim credit.

Such claims did not originate in the United States, but they seem to have found a particular purchase there. The history of America is a history of rapidly shifting popular ideas about medicine, beginning with George Washington, who was a casualty of Benjamin Rush, sometimes called the “American Hippocrates” (Oberholtzer 110), and Rush’s faith in the medicinal efficacy of bloodletting. Rush, speaking of the instrument most commonly used in bloodletting, told his students, “Venerate the Lancet. It is the *Magna gratia Cocli*. The great gift of Heaven” (qtd. in Gad 117). Rush and his colleagues responded to a bacterial infection that Washington contracted by draining two liters of their patient’s blood in a single day, “about 40% of total volume for an average male” (Gad 117).³⁷

America’s religious development was, unsurprisingly, similarly affected. In 1820, Lorenzo Dow, founder of American Methodism, patented a “Family Medicine” for

³⁷ For a more balanced account of Rush, see Rutkow 33-36.

distribution along his famous preaching circuits (Young 40).³⁸ The text of the patent application, which was successful, was reproduced in the *Pacific Medical and Surgical Journal* in 1873:

1st, Take 9 pounds of Epsom Salts, dissolve in 8 quarts of soft boiling water, to which add tincture of bloodroot, 4 ounces; 2d, Take 1 pound of salts of nitre, dissolve in boiling water, adding 8 ounces of pure sulphuric acid, making 4 quarts of the solution; when cool mix with No. 1, to be called: Dow's Family Medicine. Directions of this mixture: Take from oz. ss. to oz. i, in a half pint of cold water every two hours until it operates. Remarks: In costive habits a corrective, and in dysentery a speedy relief (Murphy 591-2).

The title of the article in which this application appears, “On Patent Medicines—Their Evils and the Remedy,” indicates the position of the professional medical community on Dow’s product.

Patent medicines and their conflict with professional medical practice was also entangled with American literary history. James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Spy* (1821), arguably the founding novel of American literature, features an extended debate between the protagonist’s housekeeper Katy and Sitgrievs, a military surgeon, on the merits of both folk remedies and, once again, bleeding, or phlebotomy, as the surgeon calls it. Initially, the two believe they are in agreement, as both express admiration for the healing powers of “the needle” (138). This brief accord collapses, however, when Katy explains that the needle she is referring to is one that a child in her care had stepped on. She describes her medical response: “The offending instrument had been carefully wrapped in woolen and placed in a certain charmed of the chimney while the foot from a fear of the incantation was left in a state of nature” (140). Sitgrievs is horrified at this explanation,

³⁸ This medicine fulfilled two purposes for Dow: it generated a profit and helped him to strengthen and consolidate his preaching circuits.

having been under the misapprehension that Katy was referring to the phlebotomy needle, which he uses to bleed his patients. The doctor is unable to convince Katy, who also favors treating patients “with yarbs”(136), of the rightness of his methods, and must settle for conceding that her homemade remedies, or “simples” are “safer in the hands of the unlettered than more powerful remedies” (136). He is equally unable to convince the soldiers in his care to accept his medical practices. Directly following his conversation with Katy, the surgeon is called upon to minister to a captain’s wounded shoulder. The patient in this case roundly rejects his doctor’s proposed course of treatment:

“If you had let me perform the operation of phlebotomy when I first saw you, it would have been of infinite service.”

"No phlebotomy," said the other, positively.

“It is now too late; but a dose of oil would carry off the humors famously.”

To this the captain made no reply, but grated his teeth, in a way that showed the fortress of his mouth was not to be assailed without a resolute resistance (143).

Both Katy and the doctor are certain that their methods are correct, and neither one is able to convince a patient to share that view. The novel, then, presents both the leading medical theories of the day and their amateur alternatives as equally suspect. The status of medical professionalism was so uncertain that, for Cooper, the wisest position was to stake out a middle ground and view both folk and professional medicine with considerable skepticism.

This debate anticipates the rise of proprietary, or patent, medicines in the United States.³⁹ The pre-revolutionary period, and the early years of the republic, was marked by a widespread faith, at least among professional doctors, in “heroic” medicine. This

³⁹ ‘Patent medicine’ is the more commonly used term, but ‘proprietary medicine’ is more accurate, since not all of these formulas were protected by patents.

doctrine held that sickness must be combated by extreme measures, typically substantial bleeding and large doses of calomel, a compound of mercury and chlorine that is, in hindsight, clearly not fit for human consumption. With such horrors serving as the professional standard, it is unsurprising that Americans increasingly turned toward less daunting remedies.

Such remedies were varied. In 1911 the American Medical Association compiled a series of reports on the deceptions and dangers inherent in patent and proprietary medicine; these reports provide a comprehensive look at the state of popular and proprietary medical thinking during the previous century.⁴⁰ This report was admittedly part of a struggle for legitimacy that brought with it a clear economic motive for the AMA, but the weight of historical evidence ultimately supports most of the AMA's claims. It is now clear, for example, that electrical current does not treat liver failure, and that a belt coated in capsicum—red pepper, which creates a tingling sensation when applied to bare skin—is a poor substitute for electric current in any case. None of this stopped pitchmen from hawking a series of simulated electric devices during the nineteenth century, recommended for all manner of complaints. The AMA played an important role in debunking the multiple layers of fraud inherent in such products. It was led in these efforts by Morris Fishbein, editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, and author of several books on dubious medical practices, including *The Medical Follies* (1925) and *Fads and Quackery in Healing* (1932).

⁴⁰ See Cramp.

Most of the remedies compiled by the AMA were merely ineffective, although some were clearly harmful, and a medicine that delays proper treatment can be just as harmful as one that is actively toxic. As an example of this danger, Fishbein includes in his catalogue an anecdote of a moment of odd convergence of America's literary, political, and medical histories:

When Eugene Debs, eminent leader of the Socialist party, left Atlanta Prison, he was sent by a woman practitioner of the Abrams electronic methods in Terre Haute, Indiana, to the Lindlahr institution. One night I went to see him with Sinclair Lewis and Paul De Kruif. Lewis was interested in Debs as material for a novel on labor... I explained to Mr. Debs casually the nature of the institution to which he had committed his health. I remember that Lewis pleaded with him to get some modern medical attention. I did not see Debs again, however, until the night before his death (119).

As Debs's case makes clear, some of these remedies had significant institutional support. This extended, in some cases, to a number of medical schools. The most prevalent of these schools devoted to the teaching of homeopathic and eclectic medicine. Fishbein provides the pertinent ratios: "In 1880 there were in the United States, 72 regular medical colleges, 12 homeopathic colleges, and 6 eclectic colleges. In 1890 there were 93 regular, 14 homeopathic, and 8 eclectic. In 1900 there were 121 regular, 22 homeopathic, and 10 eclectic" (25).

The struggle for legitimacy between homeopathy and mainstream medicine forms an important part of the backdrop against which the medicine show operated. This uncertain climate is what allowed proprietary medicines to thrive, and so it is worth examining how pervasive that climate was. Homeopathy is still practiced today, but has become a general term for several species of non-traditional or non-Western medicine. In the nineteenth century, homeopathy referred to a very specific theory on the best

approach for curing diseases. This theory was first formulated by a German doctor, Samuel Christian Friedrich Hahnemann, at the end of the eighteenth century. Hahnemann knew that malaria was cured by Peruvian bark, which contains quinine. Since Peruvian bark will also sometimes induce malarial symptoms in a healthy patient, Hahnemann theorized that something in the bark would both cause and cure malaria, and so the cause and cure for the disease were the same. He generalized this theory for all sickness, creating the core homeopathic doctrine of *similia similibus curantur*, or “like cures like” (Fishbein 20-1). In practice, homeopathic medicine involved giving patients extremely diluted quantities of the agents believed to be causing their illnesses in the first place; these remedies were generally so dilute as to be essentially water. Homeopathy declined in popularity in the Twentieth century, and was replaced by a succession of different alternative schools of medicine. Before this decline, however, it played an important role in the formation of another arena of medical pursuit: mind healing and Christian Science.

In *Science and Health* (1875), the founding text of the Christian Science religion, Mary Baker Eddy explains that her experiences with homeopathic medicine led to her to formulate her beliefs about disease in general:

My experiments in Homeopathy had made me skeptical as to material curative methods... The drug is attenuated to a degree that not a vestige of it remains; and from this I learn that it is not the drug which expels the disease, or changes one of the symptoms of the disease. I have attenuated *Natrum muriaticum* (common table-salt) until there was not a single saline property left. The salt had “lost its savor;” and yet, with one drop... I have cured a patient sinking in the last stage of typhoid fever (47).

Eddy goes on to use this example to support her claim, and one of the central tenants of Christian Science, that sickness is not real, but is instead an illusion resulting from a

misunderstanding of the nature of the world. This is, in many ways, a reasonable conclusion, given that the placebo effect was not widely understood at the time. The body's response to the mind's belief in a medical intervention is a crucial ingredient in the popularity of dubious medical remedies in the nineteenth century. Eddy recognized this phenomenon, but, not having the training to interpret it correctly, drew the conclusions that gave rise to an entire branch of sectarian healing.

The response of the AMA, and especially of Morris Fishbein, to Eddy's popularity illuminates another crucial element of the medical landscape in the American nineteenth century. Although Fishbein's account of Eddy's experiences and medical theories appears to be factually accurate, it is shot through with a palpable contempt for its subject. Legitimate criticism of her methods is repeatedly interrupted by a series of increasingly off-putting *ad hominem* attacks. He writes that Eddy's first husband fought in the civil war, "perhaps in search of peace" (46), claims that "whenever she wanted to indulge in some remarkable exacerbation of her personality she could find excuse for it in a revelation from her special providence" (57), and uncharitably refers to her throughout as "Mary Morse Baker Glover Patterson Eddy" (59), calling attention to her many divorces.

The condescending attitude of the AMA, combined with the dangerous remedies sometimes embraced by fully credentialed American doctors, activated a particular anti-establishment strain in American Republican politics. As Nathan Hatch explains in *The Democratization of American Christianity* (1989), the rhetoric surrounding the American Revolution injected the early Republic with a skepticism about institutional authority that

persisted for generations, and is still, to some extent, with us today. Hatch is most interested in this phenomenon as it relates to established and official churches, but explains that it was an equally potent force in the areas of law and medicine. Indeed, it is Hatch's claim that the explosion of sectarianism that we typically call the second great awakening was part of a larger "crisis of authority" in American public life (17). In the arenas of law, religion, and medicine, Americans began to demand similar reforms, including a weakening of professional authority and an increased reliance on vernacular English, instead of the Latin typically used by the clergy, lawyers, and doctors. For medicine, this translated to a resistance to prescriptions, which were typically written in Latin, and toward purchased remedies that made their claims in comprehensible language right on the label. Much as American Protestants began to insist on the primacy of their own literal interpretations of the Bible, American patients increasingly turned toward their own common-sense and intuition in treating their own ailments.

Of course, common-sense and intuition are not reliable providers of medical advice. Americans in this period who attempted to treat themselves were at the mercy of a double opacity; they could not accurately assess what was happening in their own bodies, and they did not know the contents of the medicines that they used. The nascent American advertising industry promptly filled the gaps created by these limits to knowledge. Patent and proprietary medicines companies were essentially advertising agencies that promoted only one product.⁴¹ After all, the ingredients in the generally ineffectual remedies made no difference, and certainly did not treat or cure any diseases.

⁴¹ For more on this, see Young.

With no money or energy spent on research and development, medicine companies devoted themselves fully to distinguishing themselves in an increasingly crowded marketplace. With a surplus supply of basically identical products, it fell to medicine salesmen to manufacture demand. Indeed, it was during this period that the proprietary medicine industry played a major role in creating the modern American advertising industry. Professional advertising agencies first appeared in America in 1841 (Schudson 169). By the 1870s, proprietary medicines accounted for a quarter of the business for a typical agency (Schudson 162). Professional advertising worked in tandem with medicine show companies to establish medical discourse as a form of entertainment for Americans. Newspaper advertisements for medical products sat side-by-side with advertisements for the theatre, reinforcing the equivalency between the two that the medicine show had already begun to build. All of the following ads, for example, appeared on the same newspaper page:

RED STAR COUGH CURE
 PROMPT, SAFE, CURE.
NO DANGER.

Most Efficient for Bronchitis. Xenia, Ohio.
 I can cordially endorse the Red Star Cough Cure as a most efficient medicine for cases like mine—Bronchitis—the first dose giving relief.
 A. C. WHITE, Agt. D. & T. R. R.

Wonderful for Cold on the Chest—Cured. 619 N. 5th St., Philadelphia, Pa.
 This is to certify that I had a heavy cold on the chest, accompanied with severe coughing. I determined to use Red Star Cough Cure and in a very short time I was entirely cured. It is wonderful.
 J. HOWARD JAMES.

Nothing Like it for Hacking Cough. 2725 Sacramento St., San Francisco, Cal.
 In my several visits to this coast, I have always been attacked with a hacking cough, but never found any relief like that afforded me by the use of your "Red Star Cough Cure." I am now free from any cough.
 CHARLES BROOKS, SR.

Colds and Sore Throat—Cured. Philadelphia, Pa.
 My family has been using during the severe weather of the past month, "The Red Star Cough Cure," and they have been much benefited by the same.
 JAMES N. KERNS, U. S. Marshall.

Cough! Cough! Cough!—Cured. 75 Antoine St., Detroit, Mich.
 During the past winter I have suffered from a very bad cough. It was nothing but cough, cough from early morning till night. I was at last advised to try the "Red Star" and I am thankful to state that after two bottles I am entirely relieved.
 A. F. RANSOM.

THE CHARLES A. VOGELER CO., Baltimore, Md.
 All persons USING St. Jacobs Oil or Red Star Cough Cure, will by sending a two-cent stamp and a history of their case, receive **ADVICE FREE.**

ST. JACOBS OIL
THE GREAT GERMAN REMEDY
For Pain
 Cures Rheumatism, Neuralgia, Backache, Headache, Toothache, Sprains, Bruises and other Pains and Aches.
 Fifty Cents. At Druggists and Dealers.
 THE CHARLES A. VOGELER CO., Baltimore, Md., U. S. A.

AMUSEMENTS.

GRAND OPERA HOUSE.
 R. L. MARSH, Manager
 This Afternoon and Evening Only Last Two Performances of Bartley Campbell's Great Spectacular Success, **OLIO**, with its Grand Refined Ballet, headed by the world's greatest prima ballerina assoluta, Mlle. Adele Cornalba, and the great Shakespearean actor, John L. Burleigh, as Fabian.
 Our Matinee Prices: **25c**
 BOTH BALCONIES—
 Admission 50c; reserved 25c extra.

GRAND OPERA HOUSE.
 R. L. MARSH, Manager

ONE WEEK
COMMENCING Monday, Feb. 14,
JAMES A. HERNE'S
HEARTS OF OAK.
 Jas. A. Herne, as
 TERRY DENNISON.

THURSDAY, FRIDAY, SATURDAY AND SUNDAY.
MATINEES Sat. and Sun.

FIRST TIME IN MILWAUKEE.
THE GRAND PICTORIAL
6-ACT DAMA,
The Minute Men.
 JAMES A. HERNE, as Reuben Foxglove.
 KATHARINE C. HERNE as Dorothy Foxglove.

Sale Seats Saturday, Feb. 12.

"Multiple Classified Advertisements." *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, (Milwaukee, WI)

February 13, 1887, 8.⁴²

⁴² As Branhurst and Nerone explain, this arrangement is typical of newspapers from this period, which they call the "Transitional Period" (55). They describe the advertising landscape in the middle of the century thusly: "Display advertising began to arrive at the newspaper office already packaged; the newspaper conductor simply provided space for the designs of an external entrepreneur. As a result, dozens of people designed advertising matter for any given newspaper, while only one designed the news. Eventually the advertising sections filled with innovation and the news trailed behind." (73). As a result, they explain,

As the proprietary medicine industry and the professional advertising industry fed each other, tactics perfected over the years by medicine show pitchmen made their way in to advertising for other products; most of these tactics are still employed today. In his *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics* (1986), Wolfgang Fritz Haug explains how twentieth century deodorant companies convinced customers to fear their own bodies:

Anxiety-ridden nausea bringing feelings of revulsion leads to panicky defensiveness and evasion and the idiosyncrasy thus engineered tends to become aggressive. Thus a new social norm of hygiene is established, anchored powerfully and directly as a norm in the individual's senses, and completely opposed to what is considered dirty and repugnant (77).

This resembles nothing so much as the classic medicine show device of presenting normal aches, pains, and fatigue as symptoms of life-threatening illness, raising the threshold for what is considered acceptable health and creating a demand for their own products.

These tactics point to a crucial element of the proprietary medicine and medicine show business model: addiction. Many proprietary medicines were literally addictive, containing large amounts of opium and alcohol (Young 68). But even in the absence of such addictive chemicals, the spectacle of the medicine show, along with its newspaper advertising accompaniment, was designed to foster dependency. It is no coincidence that most proprietary medicines promised to combat ailments with vague or invisible symptoms, as this allowed pitchmen to turn everyday bodily experiences into profitable fear. Worms and other parasites were especially popular, along with a generalized loss of vitality, which could be used to describe everything from mild fatigue to sexual

advertising began to be organized by category (99). This makes the proximal placement of theatre and medicine advertising even more telling.

impotence. Proprietary medicines promised customers that they could take control of their own health without the intervention of a professional doctor.

The Lydia Pinkham Medicine Company

Proprietary medicine salesmen used a variety of methods to disseminate their message. Newspaper advertising was perhaps the easiest and the cheapest, and the nineteenth century saw news pages crowded with medicine ads. The Lydia Pinkham Medicine Company in particular achieved success with an aggressive periodical-based advertising strategy that addressed the American public's skepticism about the medical profession. Pinkham's ads combined this pervasive skepticism with a specifically gendered concern about the ability of male doctors to treat female patients. The company distributed pamphlets emblazoned with a drawing of a smiling woman; this drawing was accompanied by the motto, "No More Doctors for Me! A woman best understands a woman's ills" (*Treatise* cover). These pamphlets argued that men, even with the benefit of medical training, could not be trusted to help women with any aspect of their reproductive health:

Even Medical Men Cannot Understand These Things.—To a man, all pain must be of his kind; it must be a man-pain, not a woman-pain. Take, for instance, the long list of diseases and discomforts which come directly from some derangement of the female generative organs; as, for instance, the bearing-down pains, excessive flowing, uterine cramps, and leucorrhœa. Do you think it is possible for a man to understand these things? ... You know, we know, everyone knows that he cannot (*Treatise* 3).

This was followed by an offer for free medical consultation, conducted by mail. Women were instructed to describe their symptoms in a letter addressed to the Pinkham

headquarters in Lynn, Massachusetts. The pamphlet assured readers that inquiries would be kept confidential, and, more importantly, would be read only by women. It is likely that women who sent such letters to Pinkham would have received a recommendation to use at least one of the Pinkham company's four primary patent medicines: the Vegetable Compound, the Sanative Wash, the Blood Purifier, and the Liver Pills.

The company's marketing materials should be seen as an extension of the tactics of medicine show pitchmen. They helped to amplify these tactics, providing the discourse of the medicine show with a reach that far exceeded its physical presence. These materials frequently implied that only Pinkham's medicine could save ailing women from either debilitating surgery or death. They included testimonials from Pinkham customers, including one that claims, "without Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound I would not be alive" (*Help for Women* 7). These pamphlets also followed pitchman strategies to prime their audiences to believe in the remedy:

Have Faith In Us.—Don't purchase the bottle thinking you will "see what it will do," having made up your mind that you will "try the experiment." Don't come in this spirit, for there is no need of it. Come with the feeling that has inspired so many thousands of your sisters—come believing you have at last found a remedy that will relieve you from this terrible slavery to suffering (*Treatise*, 6).

This insistence on faith, also employed by medicine show pitches and by fellow Lynn resident Mary Baker Eddy's Christian Science, helps to activate the placebo effect and increase the medicine's perceived efficacy. The company also followed pitchmen in presenting Lydia Pinkham's lack of formal training as a recommendation for the product,

rather than a point against it.⁴³ “Experience,” argued the *Treatise on the Diseases of Women* (n.d.), “is a perfect teacher” (3). The *Treatise* goes on to describe how Lydia Pinkham made her first batch of medicine on her kitchen stove, again using the lack of professional facilities as an argument for the product’s grounding in common sense and everyday experience (3). Like medicine show pitchmen, Lydia Pinkham attempted to present her remedies as both scientifically proven and rooted in folk wisdom. Although the language of the advertisements frequently touted scientific studies proving the medicine’s efficacy, these advertisements were usually placed, in women’s magazines like *The Cottage Hearth*, among reader-submitted medical tips that directly recall the medical theories of Katy from Cooper’s *The Spy*: “Sufferers from asthma should get a musk-rat skin and wear it over their lungs, with the fur side next to the body. It will bring certain relief. Mrs Betsy Magoon” (“Medicinal” 134).

The use of Lydia Pinkham’s Vegetable Compound was, the company claimed, a moral obligation for American women. “Upon the sound health and vigor of the young women of today will depend,” claims one pamphlet, “the health and capacity of future generations” (*Treatise* 5). The pamphlet goes on to ask how much its readers value the “twelve million young women in the United States between fourteen and twenty-eight years of age,” explaining that this question is “largely a question of physical health” (*ibid*). The pamphlet concludes with a charge to its readers: “It is the stern duty of the mother to make this clear to her daughter, and it is the solemn duty of every young

⁴³ This feature of the Pinkham Company’s marketing conforms to Nathan Hatch’s description of the American cultural landscape; institutional education is distrusted and individual common sense is valorized.

woman to thoroughly study the subject herself” (*ibid*). The pamphlet, unsurprisingly, suggests the Pinkham Company as the best source for this kind of health education. What is surprising is that, for many women, this suggestion was probably beneficial. While it’s true that the books and pamphlets that the Pinkham Company supplied inevitably steered women toward the Vegetable Compound, they also supplied a fair amount of practical medical knowledge. The pamphlet *First Aids* (1907), for example, which declares itself to be a “private text book upon ailments peculiar to women” (front cover), always recommends other treatment in addition to the Pinkham medicines, frequently suggests exercise for minor complaints, and includes detailed instructions for, among other things, the preparation of hot compresses (4-6). It joins the other Pinkham pamphlets in offering a frank discussion of female reproductive symptoms in plain, non-euphemistic language, which would have been in short supply elsewhere. This is particularly noteworthy, since the theatre’s response to the medicine show would heavily involve specifically gendered medical complaints.

The implicit promise of the most of the Pinkham advertising materials is the possibility of women taking control of their own health. These materials positioned Lydia Pinkham within a tradition of practical, hands-on medical care by women; one pamphlet includes pictures and biographies of Clara Barton and Florence Nightingale, and suggests that Lydia Pinkham was continuing their work. Both medicine show pitchmen and proprietary medicine advertisements were already employing a strategy that exploited doubt about the efficacy of medical professionals and offered customers the opportunity to exert control over an arena of their lives, medical care, in which they formerly felt

helpless. Lydia Pinkham's innovation was the recasting of this strategy within a rhetoric of female empowerment. This promise of female-led health care was so central to the company's business that Lydia Pinkham continued to be the focus of its advertising materials long after her death in 1883. Her male relatives took over running the company, and women seeking medical advice who wrote letters to Lydia Pinkham continued to receive replies.

The company's advertising campaign had an extensive reach, with promotional materials appearing in every major newspaper in every American city of at least moderate size. Typically, the Pinkham company would purchase a regular spot in each newspaper, and send the paper a series of plates with detailed instructions on which plates should be printed on which specific days, along with information about where on the page the ads should appear. Although the size of the advertisements varied to a certain extent from paper to paper, the company generally bought five column inches in a given periodical. This level of exposure was expensive; in 1897, the company spent \$461,866.82 on advertising, with \$349,790 of that devoted to periodical advertising ("Other Charges"). Because of its considerable advertising expenditures, the Lydia Pinkham Medicine Company helped to bring the spectacle of the American debate over professional medicine to a wide audience. Indeed, the company probably did more to increase popular skepticism about professional doctors than did any other actor.

The Pinkham Company's pitch to women had its male-focused counterparts. Some salesmen who specialized in the treatment of impotence and infertility employed men's anatomical museums, which lured patrons with dioramas of Custer's battle at

Little Bighorn, sent them down a darkened hallway, and confronted them with a pane of glass through which they could see a mentally disabled man, labeled as the end result of infertility – a doctor would then become conveniently and suspiciously available for a consultation (McNamara 37-40).

Newspaper ads and museums were effective in many cases, but were largely passive vehicles for sales. As the marketplace became more crowded, more and more patent medicine companies turned toward the more active sales vehicle of the medicine show. By the late nineteenth century, the American version of these productions had wandered far from its *commedia dell'arte* roots. Famed pitchman Nevada Ned describes it:

Here full evenings of drama, vaudeville, musical comedy, Wild West shows, minstrels, magic, burlesque, dog and pony circuses, not to mention Punch and Judy, pantomime, movies, menageries, bands, parades and pie-eating contests, have been thrown in with Ho-And-Nan, the great Chinese herb remedy, and med shows have played in opera houses, halls, storerooms, ball parks, show boats and tents, large and small, as well as doorways, street corners and fairs (qtd. in Young 191).

One of the most successful medicine shows was run by John A. Hamlin, selling Hamlin's Wizard Oil. Hamlin began his career as a magician, and so already had an instinct for showmanship when he moved into the patent medicine business. His troupes performed skits and songs from songbooks, which they also sold, and presented medical lectures which were, as I've noted, themselves a form of stage entertainment.

Medicine shows and more traditional theatre, then, both aimed to elicit the same response in their audiences. Through the middle of the nineteenth century, it was possible for the two to pursue this identical goal in parallel, appealing to different audiences

without interfering with each other. Medicine shows during this period would not have represented a serious competitor for any major theatre companies; they rarely played in the large cities where such companies tended to operate, and so shared an audience only with the smaller, barnstorming troupes. That all changed, however, with the rise of the combination model. By relying on a touring circuit for support, theatre companies were venturing into a landscape already inhabited by medicine shows. Suddenly, company managers and playwrights like James Herne were competing for audience members with pitchmen who quite literally claimed that attending their shows was a matter of life and death. Medicine shows represented a particularly fierce form of competition for managers, because medicine shows required large audiences to be successful. As pitchman Thomas P. Kelly explains, “An audience isn’t worth a tinker’s damn to a medicine man with heavy expenses unless he has at least two thousand people before him. It all boils down to percentages and the number of people who will buy” (qtd. in A. Anderson 120). The demands of these percentages pushed medicine show promoters to be especially voracious where audiences were concerned.

Some actors and playwrights responded to this competition by throwing their lot in with the medicine companies; both Edwin Booth and William Gillette offered paid endorsements for proprietary medicines (Young 187). Some playwrights, however, resisted the medicine show with a kind of homeopathic remedy: they combated the threat by introducing an attenuated form of that threat into their own work. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the spectacle of the medicine show, and of the discourse surrounding American popular medicine in general, found its way into any number of

legitimate stage productions, and doctors of all sorts began to play a key role in the development of American drama. These doctors were sometimes simply examples of America's emerging professional class, but they often allowed playwrights to dramatize America's fascination with both amateur and professional medicine, and to work out questions of evidence, truth, realism, and representation. James Herne was the most prominent of these playwrights, as well as the most interested in such questions. In fact, Herne's interest in medicine and doctors, of varying degrees of medical legitimacy, exerts a powerful influence on the specific forms of his forays into Ibsenite realism.

James Herne and the Medical Pitch

Herne took his first halting steps in these directions with *Hearts of Oak*, which opened in 1879. *Hearts of Oak* is not, by most measures, a proper realist play; it is, instead, a melodrama with realist tendencies. Its plot concerns three characters: Terry Dennison, "The sailor miller," Ned Fairweather, "The boy he brung up," and Chrystal, "the sweetheart," who, like Ned, Terry has raised but not fathered (Herne, *Hearts* 255). As the play begins, both Terry and Ned are in love with Chrystal. Terry proposes to her, and she accepts out of a feeling of obligation, causing Ned to go to sea for two years. He returns to find that Chrystal and Terry have a daughter, and Chrystal confesses that she still loves Ned, a confession that Terry overhears. Not wanting to keep Ned and Chrystal apart, Terry also leaves for sea, after first securing Chrystal's promise that she will not marry Ned for five years. The play ends five years later, as a blind Terry returns on Ned and Chrystal's wedding day, gives the couple his blessing, and dies. Later, Herne would

describe the play's role in his development as a playwright: "It was as true as I knew how to make it when I wrote it, and it was expressed in as good art form as I then knew. Of course, I see now that it was crude and often silly" (qtd. in Perry 61). That attempt at truth included a typically realist density of stage properties, most notably in a thoroughly detailed dinner scene, and an avoidance, when possible, of broad, typically melodramatic dialogue.

It is in this dialogue that Herne displays the beginnings of his tendency toward staging his own version of the medicine show. Although *Hearts of Oak*, unlike Herne's later productions, does not count any doctors among its *dramatis personae*, it is marked by its persistently medicalized dialogue: the progress of the main plot, and its effect on the protagonist, Terry, is almost always expressed in terms of sickness and medicine. Early in the play, when Terry's friend Owen suggests that Chrystal would marry Terry, he responds by saying,

One moment, Owen—say it gently—if you don't want to choke me. Why man, the bare thought on't—the bare thought on't is—as refreshin' as a breeze after a calm—a doctor's cheerin' word to a dyin' patient—a dose of physic to a bilious man. That's exactly how I feel, only I'm wuss nor all three on 'em put together, an' I'm afeared my cure ain't to be found on this side of Eternity (260).

Although Terry initially uses a sailing metaphor to describe the effect of Owen's news, he immediately gravitates toward medical metaphors, comparing himself to both a dying patient and a "bilious man" in need of "physic." He even expresses concern about the possible side-effects of this salutary news, warning Owen that too much too quickly might "choke" him.

When Terry is later confronted with the truth about Ned and Chrystal, he once again resorts to the language of terminal illness. Declaring that he is “no longer of this world,” and “dead,” he tells Owen that “all the pain is gone” (305). Even the stage directions convey his distress in terms of his health: “TERRY *comes slowly on from the left. He is pale, haggard, older, and altogether changed*” (304). It seems that Terry’s relationship with Chrystal did indeed act as a kind of long-term medication for a dying patient; as soon as it is withdrawn, he rapidly declines, passing, in his terms, through the end stages of illness and into a death that is a welcome respite from that illness. This medicalized discourse carries with it the rapid cycling of sickness and cure that is the hallmark of the medicine show. The medical profession is not, however, included in *Hearts of Oak* in a neutral way. Instead, it is the source of horror for the audience favorite: little Chrystal, Chrystal and Terry’s daughter. Little Chrystal, played by the popular child actor Maude Adams, who would go on to originate the role of Peter Pan, was a tremendous audience draw; Herne’s collaborator David Belasco later wrote that “From the time Maude Adams created the role, it became one of the most vital parts of the play” (qtd. in Perry 53). This young actress’ major scene in *Hearts of Oak* was a reunion with her father, whom she does not recognize, at the play’s conclusion. During this scene, upon learning that Terry has been in the hospital, she is instructed to react “*In awe and wonder, as if it were some dreadful place,*” then asks Terry what he stole and whether or not he killed someone, apparently believing the hospital to be a punitive institution (315). At the emotional climax of the play, then, the character toward whom the audience would have felt overwhelmingly affectionate voices a deep suspicion of the

medical profession. Crucially, she attacks not the patent medicine industry, but the medical establishment. *Hearts of Oak*'s most popular run was at Hamlin's Opera House, owned by proprietary medicine magnate John Hamlin. Hamlin opened the theatre with the proceeds from his Wizard Oil company, and would have appreciated Herne's focusing his criticism on 'professional,' and not proprietary, medicine. The conflicted attitudes about doctors and medicine that were shared by most nineteenth-century Americans, and that were typically activated by medicine shows, thus found their way into Herne's drama, albeit in a hesitant, limited way.

This hesitation would not be evident in *Margaret Fleming*, Herne's next move into realism. *Margaret Fleming* opened at the Lynn Theatre in Lynn, Massachusetts on July 4, 1890.⁴⁴ This opening venue put the production squarely in the territory typically owned by medicine shows. The production began on the road, in a theatre that Herne's daughter later described as "a great, old-fashioned barn" (qtd. in Perry, 141). Given these circumstances, it is only appropriate that the plot of *Margaret Fleming* is propelled forward by a series of visits from several types of doctors.

Margaret Fleming opens in a mill, in the owner Phillip Fleming's office. After conducting some business, some of which indicates that his mill is in some financial trouble, he is visited by his friend Joe Fletcher. Joe is, among other things, a pitchman for his own brand of patent medicine. He introduces himself with claims that Herne's stage directions are careful to undermine: "Inventor of Dr. Fletcher's famous cough mixture,

⁴⁴ Lynn, in particular, was a hub of American popular medicine. It was home to Lydia Pinkham, of the Lydia Pinkham Medicine Company. It also housed the birthplace of Mary Baker Eddy, founder of Christian Science, and to this day serves as the center of the religion based on Eddy's particularly American brand on faith healing.

warranted to cure coughs—colds, hoarseness and loss o’ voice. An infallible remedy for all chronic conditions of the *pul-mon-ary* organs (*He coughs again*)” (223). Joe is revealed to be dishonest about more than his medicine’s efficacy. He claims that his wife has left him, saying “She fixed me up a pack and sent me out on the road to sell goods, and when I got back, she was gone” (226). He goes on to claim that he hasn’t seen her since. The audience later learns that he had, in fact, seen his wife, Maria, earlier that morning at the Flemings’ house, where she is a nursemaid, and that he was the one who sent her out to sell goods as a pretext for abandonment, not the other way around, as he claims to Philip. He even runs a short con on Philip: Philip agrees to buy a sponge from Joe out of pity, and Joe, claiming not to have any change to give to Philip, pockets more than the cost of the sponge.

Joe Fletcher is, in short, thoroughly disreputable. He is not to be trusted, and neither is his medicine. His case is the most straightforward example of hostile incorporation in *Margaret Fleming*, since he allows Herne to both provide his audience with some of the fun of the medical pitch, while thoroughly undermining its claim to legitimacy, or indeed the possibility of its being taken seriously at all. Joe serves mostly to provide a comic foil for *Margaret Fleming*. Indeed, all of his problems are played for laughs, even though they often mirror Philip’s problems, which the play never treats as humorous. When Margaret relates an incident of actual physical violence between Joe and Maria, for example, she is unable to take the situation seriously: “When I came she had him by the ears and was trying to pull his head off. Then she got him to the floor and threw him down the front steps. It was the funniest thing I ever saw. I couldn’t help

laughing, yet my heart ached for her” (238). The disputes between Joe and his wife prove to be a portent of Phillip and Margaret’s fate; when Joe tells him that Maria has left him, he responds quickly, then belatedly seems to realize that Joe’s problems could be his own: “PHILIP. (*Touched.*) Left you! (*He shakes his head compassionately, then the thought comes to him.*) If my wife left me I’d kill myself” (225). This, as it turns out, is true; when Margaret and Philip are separated, Philip attempts suicide. Joe, for his part, is just as unable to take his own problems seriously as Margaret is, and responds by assuring Philip, “Oh, no, no, ye wouldn’t. You’d get over it, same as I did” (225). The first sort of doctor introduced into *Margaret Fleming*, then, is not to be taken seriously, even when he undergoes the same experiences that are treated with extreme gravity when they happen to Philip. He provides the entertainment of the medical pitchman without any of the attendant fear; audiences watching Joe Fletcher have no reason for anxiety.

The same cannot be said of Doctor Larkin, who enters the play almost immediately following Joe’s first exit. The play immediately invests him with a legitimacy that Joe Fletcher lacks; although both Joe and Larkin call themselves doctors, only Larkin is referred to as a doctor by the play, which marks his dialogue with the word “doctor” (226). His entrance dramatically changes the tone of *Margaret Fleming*, replacing the casually comedic dialogue that Philip exchanged with Joe with what becomes a morally serious harangue about Philip’s indiscretions. This tonal shift occurs so quickly that Philip initially doesn’t notice it. At the beginning of Philip’s conversation with Larkin, his dialogue is frequently accompanied by stage directions that mark his refusal to abandon the light, bantering manner he had shared with Joe; his lines are to be

delivered “*Lightly,*” “*Carelessly,*” and “*Without noticing the DOCTOR’S manner,*” while Larkin’s lines are said “*Abruptly,*” “*bitterly,*” and “*With a subtle shade of repugnance*” (227). When Philip offers Larkin a cigar and Larkin refuses, Philip remains unaware of what has changed, and responds with a joke: “What’s the matter, doctor? You used to respect my cigars” (227). When Larkin responds with the directly confrontational “I used to respect you,” Philip still stubbornly refuses to shift his tone, and “*laugh[s] good-naturedly*” while asking if the Doctor still respects him, then “*smoke[s] placidly*” while asking why (228). It is only then that the Doctor manages to jolt Philip into the reality of their interaction by revealing that he has just assisted in the birth of Philip’s illegitimate child.

Having effected this tonal shift, Larkin firmly establishes himself as *Margaret Fleming*’s voice of moral judgment. He badgers Philip into going to visit Lena, the mother of that child, who is dying from childbirth complications. He further demands that Philip take Margaret out of town until there is no longer any chance of her learning about Philip’s child, and then tries to influence events on Margaret’s end as well, telling her to make sure to go on Philip’s proposed vacation. Doctor Larkin makes an appearance in every scene in *Margaret Fleming*, with the exception of the second scene of act one, and, in Herne’s revision of the play, is the sole figure of authority, displacing the police from the original version.⁴⁵ At every major point of change in Margaret and Philip’s

⁴⁵ Herne revised *Margaret Fleming* in 1892, in response to audience demands. In the original version, Philip and Margaret are reunited by a Boston police officer. The revised version makes two primary changes: it supplies a more optimistic ending, since Margaret is more open to reconciliation after Herne’s revision, and it expands Doctor Larkin’s role, since he, and not the police officer, is the one present at Philip’s return to Margaret’s life. The original script was lost, and so all of my quotations come from the

relationship, when she discovers Lena and the child, when she adopts the child and Philip leaves, and when Philip returns to resume his responsibilities to her and both of his children, Doctor Larkin is there, directing the action and issuing moral condemnation or praise. He is, in this regard, the opposite of Joe Fletcher; Joe is disreputable and unreliable, while Larkin is marked by both his constancy and his scrupulous attention to matters of character and reputation.

He also appears to possess some measure of actual medical judgment, which Joe of course lacks. He warns Philip, early in the play, that Margaret has glaucoma, which could be exacerbated by stress and ultimately cause blindness; this exact series of events eventually comes to pass. Larkin is not, however, a licensed medical doctor in the conventional sense of the term. Instead, the play is careful to note that he is a homeopathic doctor: “*He carries the medicine satchel of a homeopathic physician*” (226). The uncertain status of homeopaths in the medical community is acknowledged when Philip asks Larkin in amazement, “In God’s name, how did they come to send for you?” upon learning that the Doctor assisted in Lena’s childbirth (228). He even gives his audience an example of homeopathic practice when Larkin gives Margaret some medicine for Philip to take. The medicine consists of two phials full of pellets, which he is instructed to take every hour, alternating between phials. Philip and Margaret almost immediately have an argument about the inconvenience of this arrangement:

MARGARET. Well, in an hour, take two from the other phial.

PHILIP. Yes’m. (*He lights a fresh cigar, and MARGARET gives a cry of reproof.*)

revised version. For more on this, see Matlaw 213-217. For a review of the original production that helps illuminate some of these changes see Pizer.

MARGARET. Philip! What are you doing? (*She rushes at him and takes the cigar from him.*) Don't you know you mustn't smoke when you are taking medicine... It'll kill the effect of it. You may smoke in an hour.
 PHILIP. I've got to take more medicine in an hour?
 MARGARET. Well, I guess you'll have to give up smoking.
 PHILIP. What!
 MARGARET. Until you're well.
 PHILIP. But I'm well now.
 MARGARET. (*Going through the door on the left.*) *Until you have stopped taking those pellets!* (248-9).

There is something faintly ridiculous about homeopathic medicine as Herne presents it here. It seems utterly divorced from the condition of the patient, who feels healthy, and instead is dependent on the predetermined schedule of the medication. This schedule is comically arduous, requiring pills every hour and bringing with it a set of arbitrary restrictions; it's not clear why Margaret thinks that Philip can't smoke while taking Larkin's medication, but Larkin himself sees Philip smoke cigars several times over the course of *Margaret Fleming*. The ease with which Margaret uses a medical rationale to put restrictions on Philip points to the shifting foundation on which homeopathic practice rests.

Larkin's status as a specifically homeopathic practitioner complicates *Margaret Fleming's* engagement with the medical profession, and disrupts what would otherwise have been an easy dichotomy between the clearly disreputable Joe Fletcher and the legitimate Doctor Larkin. It swallows the whole of the American public debate about medical legitimacy into the play, and does so in a fairly consequential way, since Doctor Larkin is *Margaret Fleming's* primary authority figure. Margaret's eventual blindness further entangles Larkin's medical authority with the plot of the play, since it comes as a response to her learning of Philip's infidelity, and so medicalizes the emotional climax of

Margaret Fleming. The play is at pains to call attention to this, as Doctor Larkin gives Philip a conspicuously long explanation of the physical defect in Margaret's eyes:

The eye—like other organs—has its own special secretion, which keeps it nourished and in a healthy state. The inflow and outflow of this secretion is equal. The physician sometimes comes across a patient of apparently sound physique, in whom he will find an abnormal condition of the eye where this natural function is, through some inherent weakness, easily disturbed. When the patient is subject to illness, great physical or mental suffering—the too great emotion of a sudden joy or sorrow—the stimulus of any one of these causes may produce in the eyes a super-abundant influx of this perfectly healthy fluid and the fine outflowing ducts cannot carry it off (243).

Larkin goes on to explain that such cases can result in blindness, and to warn Philip that Margaret must be shielded from the emotional shocks that could exacerbate her condition.

Margaret's condition, and Doctor Larkin's explanation of that condition, is noteworthy for a number of reasons. Since it is a congenital physical defect, rather than an illness that can be contracted from some external source, Larkin cannot be expected to provide medical assistance; the homeopathic doctrine that like cures like has nothing to say about such cases. It also, in Larkin's description, responds to both extreme sadness and extreme joy. Margaret is, in effect, allergic to melodrama. The plot developments that form the spine of most melodramas are potentially destructive to Margaret, and Philip has been instructed to keep her away from them from them at all costs. These developments include the devices by which melodramas sometimes reward their virtuous heroines in the end; Margaret is, presumably, just as likely to be struck blind by a sudden financial windfall as she is by discovering Philip's infidelities. Philip fails utterly to follow Larkin's instructions, and so Margaret is confronted, due to a series of

coincidences that would be at home in any of *Margaret Fleming's* melodramatic predecessors, with exactly the sort of encounter she is supposed to avoid: she discovers Philip's illegitimate child just as his mistress dies from childbirth-related complications. Margaret's eyesight might have been preserved in Herne's later plays, once he had firmly committed himself to realism, but *Margaret Fleming* still owes too much to melodrama for her to escape unscathed. It is telling that this transitional play, awkwardly situated between melodrama and realism, features a character who is physically resistant to melodramatic plot devices, and equally telling that she is unable to avoid those devices.

Margaret's glaucoma is, crucially, an organic condition with a specific, physical etiology. Herne is very careful not to present Margaret as suffering from hysterical blindness; her loss of sight is emphatically not a purely psychological or emotional response to her circumstances, but is instead a structural defect that is aggravated by psychological and emotional factors. This is significant, because it comes at a time when both professionalized medicine and the discourse surrounding hysteria were entangled with the shift from melodrama to realism that was taking place.

Elin Diamond has written at length on the role of the figure of the hysteric in the development of dramatic realism. Her claim is that "Ibsenite realism guarantees its legitimacy by endowing the fallen woman of popular melodrama with the symptoms and etiology of the hysteric. In deciphering the hysteric's enigma realism celebrates positivist inquiry, thus buttressing its claims for 'truth to life'" (4). Realism, Diamond argues, develops in conjunction with a psychoanalytic understanding of hysteria that arose to replace the previous uterine theory of hysteria, which claimed that symptoms were

caused by a displaced womb. Both melodrama and uterine theory subscribed to an exceedingly simplistic picture of their female subjects; both melodramatic acting styles and the attribution of distress to a wandering uterus imagined a kind of direct correlation between internal and external states. According to Diamond, “Realism and psychoanalysis celebrate precisely what melodrama and farce, and uterine-theory physicians had ignored; motivation arising from the complications of an ‘individual’ shaped by inherited traits, social contexts, and forgotten traumas” (15).

This triumvirate of complications also conspire to blind Margaret: her glaucoma is congenital, and thus inherited, her social context, pervaded as it is by the double standard that grants sexual freedom exclusively to men, creates the conditions for Philip’s infidelity, and her discovery of that infidelity, while not forgotten, supplies the trauma that finally steals her sight. Importantly, however, Herne declines to employ the discourse of hysteria, which would have provided a ready-made device for Margaret’s blindness. Nineteenth-century audiences would not have required much explanation had Margaret’s blindness been hysterical; the sudden fainting or blindness of a heroine in response to a traumatic emotional event would have been a familiar event to audiences raised on melodrama. Herne’s use of glaucoma, by contrast, requires a detailed explanation of the workings of the eye, which would have been new information for the overwhelming majority of audience members. Since the cost of asking audiences to sit through this sort of expository speech is potentially high—nineteenth-century American audiences, after

all, did not suffer their boredom quietly⁴⁶—it is worth examining the potential gains of such a strategy.

A clear benefit to casting Margaret's blindness as physiological rather than hysterical is that it leaves Margaret's character comparatively unblemished. If, as Diamond argues, "the new science of psychoanalysis and the new 'sex problem play' . . . both [target] the 'woman with a past'" (4), then the use of hysteria in Margaret's case would create insinuations about Margaret that Herne seems at pains to avoid. Margaret's position in the play is one of unmitigated moral purity; Larkin describes her as a "high-minded, splendid little woman" (229) and tells her "everything depends on you" (263). Margaret, the play is careful to remind us, is emphatically not a 'woman with a past.' Locating the flaw in the structure of her eye, rather than in the structure of her mind, allows Herne to present a relatively uncomplicated picture of his title character; it becomes impossible to blame her for her condition. A glaucoma-sufferer and hysteric are both flawed in some way, but the hysteric's flaw is deeper, and carries with it a taint that glaucoma lacks.

Larkin's explanation of Margaret's glaucoma is also *Margaret Fleming's* clearest attempt to co-opt the devices of the medicine show. Like any good medical lecture, Larkin's speech creates a picture of an insidious, previously undetectable disease that can roar into life at any moment, condemning its victim to death or, in this case, disability. The resulting health-related anxiety, which is every medical pitchman's stock in trade,

⁴⁶ Indeed, audience behavior throughout the century was so bad that, in 1902, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* launched a campaign to get theatre managers to crack down on such disruptions. Among the complaints: "whistling, howling, yelling, stamping feet" and "jeering actors" (Butsch 127).

hangs over the remainder of *Margaret Fleming*, as the audience awaits the emotional shock that will doubtless follow Larkin's warnings about Margaret's susceptibility to such shocks. Indeed, as in the narrative of the medical pitchman, illness is, in many ways, the principle villain of *Margaret Fleming*.⁴⁷ One of the key features that distinguished Herne's realist play from their melodramatic predecessors, according to Herne, was their absence any villainous characters: he calls his play "a new departure in playwriting, in that it contain[s] neither a hero nor a villain ("Art for Truth's Sake" 366). While it's true that Philip's behavior is roundly condemned by the play, his ignoble actions come from a place of weakness; he shows none of the malevolence of a melodramatic villain like *The Octoroon*'s McClosky. Instead, the fallibility of the human body does most of the villain's work in *Margaret Fleming*, killing Lena in childbirth and then blinding Margaret. Like a melodramatic villain, illness preys on *Margaret Fleming*'s female characters, striking them down when external circumstances have conspired to put them in a weakened state. This notion that women are especially likely to be preyed upon by various medical ailments, including glaucoma, which is not gender-specific, is reminiscent of the Lydia Pinkham Company's sales pitch. Since Margaret's glaucoma is exacerbated by emotional shocks, and her status as a virtuous female makes her more susceptible to such shocks, the danger posed by her glaucoma is effectively a result of her femininity. Dr. Larkin's status as a homeopath sets him apart from the medical

⁴⁷ Herne here is helping to support Lukács's claim that bourgeois drama replaces destiny with pathology as the engine of tragedy: "When a mythology is absent... the basis on which everything must be justified is character. When the motivations are wholly based on character, however, the wholly inward origin of this destiny will drive the character relentlessly to the limits of pathology" (Lukács 448). It is the specific marketplace of American drama, surrounded as it is by medicine shows, that pushes Herne towards a specifically medical and organic pathology; hysteria, while pathological, will not do here.

establishment to which the Pinkham Company opposed itself. It slightly feminizes Larkin, which makes sense, since he generally takes Margaret's side against the patriarchal sexual double-standard that Philip exercises.⁴⁸

This villainous picture of the human body offers Herne a middle term between the realism he is reaching towards and the more familiar melodrama he is leaving behind. In plays without villains, conflict is created by the whims of external circumstance. Illness is a convenient device for such a play, since it is a circumstantial development with clear, direct, immediately obvious effects on the characters. This particular use of sickness as villain has important consequences for the play, consequences which clearly distinguish Herne's variety of realism from Ibsen's. Ibsen, as I've noted, gravitates toward psychological distress for his female protagonists. Herne's realism, at least in *Margaret Fleming*, instead employs physiological distress. Although the two share some superficial similarities in their initial presentation, they tend to have vastly different effects. The ultimate fate of, for example, Ibsen's Hedda Gabler, who commits suicide in *Hedda Gabler*'s final moments, presents a stark contrast to that of Margaret Fleming, who, at the conclusion of her own play has her husband restored to her, with her sight promised to follow. The reason for this divergence is both simple and telling: glaucoma can be remedied with a surgical intervention, while hysteria cannot. A physiological ailment is much more conducive to a satisfying, optimistic ending than a psychological ailment is, especially in the nineteenth century, because a psychological ailment requires a

⁴⁸ Indeed, homeopathy already participates in the discourse of femininity as it stood in the nineteenth century, since the "like cures likes" doctrine of homeopathy involves a kind of curing through sympathy, an impulse prized by writers of so-called "women's fiction."

protracted therapeutic intervention, which does not fit easily between the curtains of a normal-length play. The possibility of treatment here is crucial to understanding the two types of diseases, as Diamond notes: “without an etiology, a theory of causation, hysteria was indeed a case of nothing, that is nothing that medicine could treat” (9). In other words, the complaint’s validity hinged upon its capacity for treatment; a sickness that could not be subjected to any kind of medical intervention was functionally similar to no sickness at all, or to some kind of phantom sickness. This is, in part, why the psychoanalytic community was engaged in a search for an effective treatment for hysteria, a treatment that depended on understanding its cause. This concern with causes and treatments was also a distinguishing feature of early realist drama, as Diamond explains: “the search for an etiology is basic to realism’s departure from episodic melodrama” (18). For Ibsen, this entails a detailed examination of the possible causes of Hedda’s hysteria, an examination which makes for interesting theatre but is not intended to bring about a cure. Herne’s variant on Ibsen’s style requires a more effective intervention, since his plays are still pitched at audiences, trained on melodrama, who demand a certain amount of triumph for their heroine at the end.

The concrete physical evidence supplied by a condition like glaucoma also lends itself to Herne’s understanding of his own realist agenda; a psychological ailment would not have provided such evidence. It is Herne’s position that truth and accuracy are essential to drama, that drama fulfills “its mission... to interest and instruct” only when it contains these elements (“Art for Truth’s Sake” 370). He is confident that his own work fulfills these conditions, but claims to be at a loss as to how it does so:

I know what constitutes truth in my own work; I know when I write true and when I act true... I can pick out the false notes in my own work or in the work of any other actor or dramatist as readily as a musical director can detect the false note of a singer or of a musician, but I do not believe I can explain *how* I know all this (*ibid.* 361-362).

Herne's choice of a musical analogy is illuminating; it suggests that his idea of truth as it pertains to drama includes an imagined objective, correct standard by which all dramatic writing can be judged. There is, at any moment, a single true thing that can be said or written, and a myriad of false ones, just as there is only one correct note to be sung at each moment of a piece of music. Given this conception of ideal dramatic form, it is perhaps unsurprising that Herne would gravitate toward the observable physical symptoms of glaucoma, as opposed to the mysterious opacity of hysteria. Indeed, the discourse of medicine was crucial to the development of literary realism more generally, as Lawrence Rothfield argues:

The rise of the novel occurs during an era when philosophy purports to offer a model of truth-conditions... upon which truth-telling novels, as well as a number of other forms of knowledge, depend for their authority. Sometime near the end of the eighteenth century, however, a rearrangement... occurs within the hierarchy of knowledges. Between the noumenal world of metaphysical philosophy and the phenomenal world of the real... the sciences are now understood to supervene... The knowledge they *do* provide, although limited by definition, nevertheless qualifies as true knowledge of the real (8).

Rothfield's understanding of the realist project is similar to Herne's; he equates realist writing with the production of "truth-telling novels." This production is aided, he argues, by the new discourse of medical science, and is simultaneously constrained by the burdens imposed by this discourse.

Herne appears to have been in a similar position with respect to medical discourse and his 'truth-telling plays.' It is my argument, however, that medical discourse did not

simply enter Herne's drama as a convenient way to shore up his realist credentials. Instead, the competitive pressure of the medicine show helped to push doctors, diseases, and medical lectures into Herne's plays, where they became entangled with his realist agenda in a way that only looks inevitable in retrospect. Any discourse rooted in empiricism would have served similar aims; Herne was pushed toward medicine in particular because medicine was the domain of his most pressing paratheatrical competitor. Further, the public conversation sparked by the medicine show was one of professional legitimacy, which is a question that Herne was clearly invested in exploring. *Margaret Fleming*, in particular, is intensely concerned with questions of professionalism. Philip uses the demands of his job as an excuse for Margaret when he needs to account for his whereabouts while visiting Lena. At the end of the play, when Philip asks Margaret what he can do to atone and move forward with her, she says, "Go to the mill tomorrow and take up your work again" (265). *Margaret Fleming* implies that Philip would not have betrayed Margaret had he been more professional, had he actually been at work for the long hours he claimed, and that professional labor is the key to their repairing their life together. Philip, it turns out, is like Joe Fletcher in every respect; both men have lax professional habits that beget lax personal habits. It is no surprise, then, that Herne's treatment of the medical profession in *Margaret Fleming* reflects this interest in the value and challenges of professionalism.

Herne's interest in doctors, especially homeopathic physicians, did not end with *Margaret Fleming*. His next major play, *Shore Acres*, stages another medical conflict. Unlike *Margaret Fleming*, this conflict is not between homeopathy and proprietary

medicine, but between homeopathy and tradition. *Shore Acres*, which opened in 1893 but was first published, with some revisions, in 1928, concerns the Berry Family, owners of a coastal farm and lighthouse in Maine. The Berry household is led by Martin Berry, whose older brother Nat also lives on the premises, despite having ceded his share of the property to Martin long ago. Martin's daughter Helen is in love with Sam Warren, whom the stage directions identify as "a young physician" (3). Later, Josiah Blake, a store-owner and land speculator, elaborates on this description during a conversation with Martin: "Now he's come out as a home-a-pathic physician— [*Laughs.*] He ain't a doctor—he's a pheesyician— Goes around wantin' to cure sick folks with sugar shot—by George! [*Both laugh heartily*]" (21). This mocking statement is indicative of the casual contempt in which Sam is held by many of *Shore Acres*' older characters, and of the reason for that contempt. Sam is mocked for his belief in homeopathy, for his practice of using inert materials that we would today recognize as placebos to treat his patients. But he is also mocked for his attempts to position himself as medical professional. Blake pointedly refuses to pronounce Sam's title properly, first calling him a "home-a-pathic physician" and then, despite having just pronounced physician properly, "a pheesyician." He emphasizes the unfamiliarity of the words to highlight their violation of the traditional discourse of the community to which he belongs. This is not Sam's only violation of these traditions; Blake also recalls "thet free lecture [Sam] gave with the magic lantern in the school house, on evolution 's he called it" (21). Once again Blake marks Sam's words as alien, by appending "'s he called it" to "evolution." Sam has, it seems, used the relatively new technology of the magic lantern to introduce the new concept of evolution

to the community. The reaction was not favorable: “some of ‘em wanted to tar an’ feather ‘im thet time” (21).

Martin, as a member of this more traditional segment of the community, strongly opposes any union between his daughter and Sam. In response, Sam announces his intention to leave Maine in favor of more forward-looking people: “I’m going out West, where a fellow can *believe* as he likes and *talk* as he likes” (27). He needs to raise one hundred dollars to finance this trip, and when that exact sum of money goes missing from Blake’s store, Blake and Martin immediately accuse Sam. This prompts Sam and Helen to run away together, boarding a boat, the “Liddy Ann,” that will carry them down the coast. Martin incorrectly assumes that Helen’s flight means that she is pregnant, which so enrages him that he puts out the light at the lighthouse in an attempt to wreck the Liddy Ann, killing everyone aboard. Nat stops this from happening by overpowering Martin and relighting the lighthouse.

While Helen and Sam are away, Martin, at Blake’s urging, divides his property into building lots to capitalize on a boom in coastal land speculation. A rival land company undercuts Blake, however, and the Land Company fails, ruining Martin and wiping out his savings. Shortly thereafter, on Christmas Eve, Sam and Helen return, with a newborn in tow. Martin’s anger has apparently abated in the interim, as he welcomes the couple back into his home. Sam then presents Martin with some good news: he has petitioned the government for the Army pension that Uncle Nat never received, and has been successful. The \$1,768.92 that Nat is awarded is more than enough to restore solvency to the Berry family, and to save their property. All is forgiven, and Martin and

Blake both apologize to Same for the way they had treated him, an apology that he easily accepts, saying, “You folks around here didn’t understand fellows like me, that’s all” (109).

Indeed, much of the plot of *Shore Acres* is driven by the inability of the community, particularly Martin and Blake, to understand fellows like Sam. But that summation by Sam is too vague to be a useful diagnosis of the situation; Sam and Blake agree to put aside their conflict without ever discussing which of Sam’s many oddities was intolerable to the older generation of *Shore Acres*. Sam, after all, has many qualities that alienate him from the community; he can barely have a conversation in the first few acts of the play without inadvertently offending someone. Blake and Martin mock him for his homeopathic practice and his self-identification as a physician, and are troubled by his belief in evolution. But these are not Sam’s only problematic heterodoxies. The most prominent of these concern Sam’s religious beliefs. When Martin accuses Sam of having no religion, Sam asks him to listen to the insects in the field, and then explains “that’s their religion, and I reckon mine’s just about the same thing” (31). Martin’s response is unmixed loathing: “[*With supreme disgust and contempt in his voice and manner.*] Oh! Good Lord!” (31). Equally troubling is Sam’s rejection of traditional gender roles; when Helen tells Blake that she will not allow her father to choose a husband for her, he notes that “Sam Warren *has* been filling [her] head with his new fangled ideas” (60).

All of these characteristics conspire to make Sam a permanent outsider in *Shore Acres*; the reason he and Blake do not identify a particular point of difficulty is that the problem with Sam is the sum of all of these. Luckily, Sam himself supplies a term that

encapsulates all of his distinguishing qualities when he tells Helen, “You girls have come to stay, there’s no getting around that fact, and we cranks are going to help you stay here” (28). Sam, by his own slightly sarcastic admission, is a crank. His unwavering acceptance of ideas that appear outlandish to the community at large is what alienates him from that community; each one of those specific ideas may rankle Martin and Blake, but ultimately it is his relentless difference that they cannot accept, and his homeopathic medical practice is symptomatic of that difference.

Shore Acres, then, presents a significantly different picture of the homeopath from the one presented in *Margaret Fleming*. Where Doctor Larkin was the voice of traditional morality, Sam threatens to upend the traditional moral systems of *Shore Acres*, which are based on rigid gender roles and divine judgment; “there are lots of people,” he tells Helen derisively, “who wouldn’t be happy in this world if they couldn’t look forward to a burning lake in the next” (24). Doctor Larkin’s respectability is never questioned by any of the characters in *Margaret Fleming*, while Sam is not granted any respectability by most of *Shore Acres*’ characters, at least until the last few pages of the play. Finally, Larkin’s homeopathic methods, while gently mocked, are accepted by everyone in *Margaret Fleming*; his medical advice is sought and followed on a variety of subjects. Sam, by contrast, is never awarded the same status. Martin and Blake do not accept his medical credentials or his methods even after they have reconciled with him; Blake excuses himself from the Berry household after the play’s climactic reunion, saying that he does not feel well, and responds to Helen and Sam’s suggestion that Sam treat him by saying, “What with, sugar shot? No, by George, I haint’t got t’ thet yet” (116). That last

statement is tellingly ambiguous, as it could be taken to mean simply that Blake is not sick enough to require Sam's treatment, but also suggests that Blake has not accepted Sam enough to accept the validity of his medical care. As far as Blake is concerned, Sam's remedies are no different from the cough medicine Joe Fletcher is peddling in *Margaret Fleming*: useless at best, but certainly not worth trying.

In many ways, Sam's character in *Shore Acres* represents a fusion of the characters of Doctor Larkin and Joe Fletcher in *Margaret Fleming*. The play treats many of his ideas with respect, endorsing, for example, his views on Helen's right to marry whomever she chooses. In addition, his medical practice is the same as Larkin's, and Blake's reference to "sugar shot" suggests that he would prescribe the same sorts of phials of pellets that Philip is given in *Margaret Fleming*. Many of the play's characters, however, regard Sam much in the way that the characters in *Margaret Fleming* regard Joe: as a disreputable clown at best, and as something more malicious and dangerous at worst.⁴⁹ They eventually change their minds about his general character, but not about his medicine.

The play itself is notably silent on the subject of homeopathy. Sam's lone patient in *Shore Acres* is a woman named Mrs. Swazy, and Sam is only allowed to treat her because conventional medical methods have failed. Mrs. Swazy's illness is never named, and she is never on stage; Sam's treatment of her takes place before he enters in Act I. Shortly after treating her, Sam says that "She'll pull through this time" (25). Helen reacts

⁴⁹ This is in contrast to the play's picture of Sam. While the other characters tend to view him as something of a joke, *Shore Acres* presents him, including his homeopathic practice, as a freethinker who rises above senseless persecution.

excitedly, saying, “they’ll have to acknowledge that you’re a great physician now” (25). They quickly move on to discuss other topics, and Mrs. Swazy is not mentioned again for the remainder of the play. She is presented by Helen as the test case for Sam’s medical skill, but because Herne never reveals her fate the audience must remain ignorant of the results of that test. *Shore Acres* refuses to let its audience know whether Sam is a “great physician”, as Helen would have it, or a quack, as Blake would. *Shore Acres* is more interested in the debate over Sam’s medical legitimacy than it is in resolving that debate; his role in the play is not to be a skilled physician or a charlatan, but to be seen as both of those.

Sam’s character, then, encapsulates and represents the public debate over the status of homeopathy. Audiences who were invested in this debate could listen to a medicine show pitchman’s lecture, which would enflame their opinions on this question, whatever they happened to be, and also conceivably terrify them into the purchase of some proprietary medicine. Herne’s play offered a different choice: audiences could see these same questions debated within a narrative format, in a realist play with some melodramatic tendencies. The terror, in this case, would be supplied by the play’s lone spectacle: the near shipwreck of the *Liddy Ann*. The play offers the same tension and release of a medicine show, but allows audiences the comfort of experiencing those emotions vicariously, rather than directly. It also presents the debate over medical legitimacy, which was such a prominent part of the medicine show’s public face, as a divisive and unnecessary distraction from more important things. The disagreement over

Sam's medical credentials helps to ostracize him from the community in *Shore Acres*, which delays the help that he brings the Berry family at the end.

The homeopathic question also distracts from the much more pressing public debate that is presented by *Shore Acres*. While the parts of the play that relate to Sam Warren are primarily concerned with medicine and homeopathy, the rest of the play is preoccupied by the issue of land speculation. Indeed, despite the emotional weight placed on the conflict between Martin and Helen, most of the stage time is devoted to Martin's decision, at Blake's urging, to divide his property into lots in order to take advantage of the ongoing land boom, a decision that nearly ruins his family. Martin's brief foray into speculation is not only unwise from a financial standpoint but, the play argues, deeply wrong from an emotional perspective. Most of the other characters express horror at the idea of the property being divided up into lots, and this horror is never tied to concerns about the risks of the investment. Instead, their distress comes from a connection to their home, and the prospect of leaving it. Nat is particularly opposed to the idea, since Martin and Nat's mother is buried on the property, and would have to be moved. The family's sentimental attachment to their homestead is presented by the play as understandable and inevitable; Nat says that "it's only nat'ral that I should feel kind o' bad to see the ol' place cut up" (42). Martin's decision, by contrast, appears callous and short-sighted. Land speculation, *Shore Acres* claims, has severed Martin's connection with his family and ruined him financially. This issue was an obsession for Herne, who was a vocal supporter of Henry George and his proposal to reform the U.S. tax code around a single tax based on land value. Herne frequently described himself as "a single tax man" (qtd. in Perry

126), and gave lectures in support of his position. The touring of *Shore Acres* happened in tandem with a flurry of these lectures, some of which also included speeches by Henry George himself. The timing was no coincidence; *Shore Acres* was written explicitly as a Georgist play, and Henry George responded to it by writing to tell Herne that he had “taken the strength of realism and added to it the strength that comes from the wider truth that realism fails to see” (qtd. in Perry 135).

Most significantly, Herne’s vocal support for what was something of a fringe political movement caused him to be labeled a “crank” (Perry 135). This, of course, is the same word that is invoked in *Shore Acres* to describe Sam’s practice of homeopathy. It is the word that he himself uses to describe his unconventional views on gender relations: “You girls have come to stay, there’s no getting around that fact, and we cranks are going to help you stay here” (28). Herne’s use of the word that was so often applied to his economic beliefs, the beliefs that form the basis of *Shore Acres* to describe Sam suggests a conflation of Sam’s homeopathy and Herne’s own Georgism. This widens the scope of the debate over homeopathy that would otherwise have been a minor part of the plot; it is a microcosm of the larger collision of stubborn tradition with new, innovative ideas, a collision in which Herne had a significant personal stake. Herne’s version of realism, his “truth-telling plays,” involved telling the truth as he saw it. When this truth involved land speculation, Georgism, and the single tax, Herne’s position was both clear and passionately held. When that truth involved schools of medicine, matters were more complicated. Herne, after all, does not appear to have held a strong belief about the efficacy of homeopathic or proprietary medicines. The question of medicinal legitimacy

was pushed into his plays by the competitive pressure exercised by medicine shows, and, once there, it was strongly influenced by its proximity to Herne's other, more firmly held convictions. In *Margaret Fleming*, a play concerned with professionalism and respectability, homeopathy becomes a legitimate method because the alternative is the proprietary medicine sold by Joe Fletcher (and by Herne's competitors in the medicine shows). *Shore Acres* presents a completely different picture of homeopathy, treating it as a radical alternative to traditional medicine, but regarding it sympathetically due to the play's sympathy of radical causes in general, and Georgism in particular. Taken together, the two plays express skepticism about both medicine show remedies and professional medicine, and present homeopathy as a radical but respectable middle ground. In Herne's plays, this dual skepticism becomes aligned with realism, since Herne was not reticent about claiming that his realist plays were designed to tell audiences the truth.

William Dean Howells and the Farce of Medicine

Herne was joined in his advancement of this realist project by William Dean Howells. Howells is well known for his support for realism in writing, a support that he primarily demonstrated in his critical and editorial work, but which was also evident in his novels and plays. In a review of Ibsen's *Ghosts* (1882), for example, which appeared in *Literature* in 1899, Howells imagines approvingly that realism will continue to progress until public discomfort with its honesty creates a nostalgia for Howells's contemporaries: "I can fancy an indignant and public-spirited criticism demanding the 'scientific' methods of our then outdated day as against those of some yet truer dramatist

which shall hold the mirror still more unshrinkingly up to nature” (“Propriety” 102). Howells has some especially kind words to say about *Margaret Fleming*, which he praises in explicitly realist terms: “It clutched the heart. It was common; it was pitilessly plain; it was ugly; but it was true, and it was irresistible (“Moral Reformation” 54). He later would say that “Mr. Herne has come to stand... for naturalness” (“New Kind of Play” 92). In supporting Herne, and realist drama more generally, Howells is always mindful of the economic considerations that make theatrical innovation difficult. Writing in *Harper’s Weekly*, he explains that “It costs so much to stage a play that everything has to be left out of the account which will not pretty sure appeal to the pocket power” (“Economics” 75). His concern over the cost of producing a play is matched by a concern over the cost of attending a play. In that same essay, he is sharply critical of the then-typical ticket price of two dollars for a play: “the cost of the ticket [is] simply prohibitive in the case of vast numbers of people who could most enjoy and perhaps best judge the play” (*ibid.* 74). This focus on the expense, both for the audience and the producers, of mounting a professional theatrical production indicates that Howells would have been especially wary of competition from medicine shows, which were typically cheap to produce and free to attend. Indeed, Howells calls the theatre “the amusement of the city, of people whose wives are crowded with pleasures and distractions” (“Good Drama” 29), and later specifically mentions “costly vices” (“Economics” 77) as an impediment to theatergoing. Taken together, these two statements suggest his awareness that entertainments like medicine shows could steal audience members in two ways: either by

taking up their time with free entertainment, or by taking their money with expensive and addictive medicines, rendering them unable to afford a ticket.

Howells's plays, considered alongside Herne's demonstrate the significant variation that exists within the realist category. This is largely a result of Howells's interest in writing farces, which was a genre that Herne mostly avoided. Much like Herne's early realist plays, which serve as transitions between popular melodrama and Ibsenite realism, most of Howells's plays occupy a middle ground between traditional farce and realism. His farces, at times, seem like they could not have been written by someone so vocally committed to realism. They are much more obviously indebted to a tradition of comedy through plot contrivance than they are to anything resembling "art for truth's sake." Nevertheless, moments that herald the concerns of realist playwriting do crop up in between the slamming doors and mordant asides. His *The Unexpected Guests* (1893), for example, concerns a typical middle-class dilemma: confusion over the arrival of unexpected guests to a dinner party, and the social acrobatics required to minimize embarrassment for all involved. Comedy is generated by the complications of the situation, but also by the dialogue, which veers between typically realist conversation and the slightly absurd quips that are more typical of farce.

The play is also an extended meditation on what constitutes truth, which makes it an interesting entry into Herne's category of "art for truth's sake." *The Unexpected Guests* opens with a discussion of whether or not, as one character claims, "Truth... is a female virtue" (420). That character, Mrs. Campbell, is arguing with her husband about the observation of official middle-class etiquette. He believes that a commitment to the

truth precludes the social niceties that constitute much of this etiquette, while she argues that such niceties are essential and should not be evaluated according to a literal rubric of truth or falsehood. This argument reoccurs throughout the play, but the first time it arises it is refereed by a third party: a doctor. His credentials in this case are identical to his professional credentials, since he claims that his status as a doctor exempts him from developing a working sense of the truth:

DR. LAWTON: No! Excuse me, Campbell! I don't wish to intercept any little endearments, but really I think that in this case Mrs. Campbell's sacrifice of the truth is a piece of altruism. She knows how it is herself; she wouldn't like to be in the place of the person she wants to get out of seeing. So she sends word that she is not at home, or that she's engaged.

MRS. CAMPBELL: Of course I do. Willis's idea of *truth* would be to send word that he didn't want to see them.

DR. LAWTON, *laughing* : I haven't the least doubt of it.

CAMPBELL: Well, you hoary-headed impostor, what would yours be?

DR. LAWTON: Mine? I have none! I have been a general practitioner for forty years (420).

Lawton's indifference to the truth is, he indicates, directly related to his medical practice. This theme is returned to later in the play, when he returns to the drawing room to escape a phonograph which has been playing an excerpt from William Cullen Bryant's "The Battle-Field," which contains the line, "Truth crushed to earth will rise again" (422). He interrupts the Campbells, who are arguing over what, if anything, to say to the Belforts, who have arrived at the Campbells' party after apparently sending their regrets:

CAMPBELL: You've used up all your invention in convincing the Belforts that they were expected. Good gracious, here's Dr. Lawton! What do you want here, you venerable opprobrium of science?

DR. LAWTON, *standing at ease on the threshold of the drawing-room* : Nothing. I merely got tired of hearing the praises of truth chanted in there, and came out here for---a little change.

CAMPBELL: Well, you can't stay. You've got to go back, and help keep the Belforts from supposing they weren't expected, if it takes all your hoarded

wisdom as a general practitioner for forty years.

MRS. CAMPBELL: Oh yes; do go back, doctor!

DR. LAWTON: What has been the treatment up to the present time?

CAMPBELL: The most heroic kind. Amy has spared neither age nor sex, in the use of whoppers. You know what she is, doctor, when she has a duty to perform (422).

The Doctor is made uncomfortable by Bryant's pronouncements about the immanent resurrection of truth, and so flees to another room, where he is promptly enlisted to help perpetuate a falsehood. He is so enlisted because, the Campbells indicate, his profession makes him just the man for the job. This is even conveyed using medicalized language; Mrs. Campbell's stream of socially-mandated lies is equated with the "heroic" medicine of Benjamin Rush's era. Like Rush's regimen of calomel and phlebotomy, Campbell suggests, such dishonesty is well-intentioned but ultimately does more harm than good.

At no point does Lawton, or any other character, explain why experience as a general practitioner would prevent him from forming a theory about the truth, or why it qualifies him to deceive the Belforts. Indeed, these lines assume that the audience already holds such opinions about physicians, or is at least familiar with those opinions. *The Unexpected Guests* aims to evoke laughter from several distinct sources, but Dr. Lawton's character is used primarily to generate humor through recognition; his lines can be funny only to the extent that they present an exaggerated version of something in the audience's experience. Just as audiences unfamiliar with the custom of smoothing over awkward social situations with minor falsehoods would be baffled by the central conceit of *The Unexpected Guests*, audiences that had not absorbed the idea that doctors have a tendency toward dishonesty, or at least indifference to the truth, would probably greet Dr. Lawton's dialogue with unamused silence.

Howells's play, however, goes beyond merely poking fun at the supposed dishonesty of the medical profession. It also casts that dishonesty as distinctly feminine. After all, Lawton's neutrality on the subject of truth implicitly aligns him with Mrs. Campbell, who subscribes to a much more flexible idea of honesty than the one supported by her husband. The conflict between the two is presented not as a difference of opinion between two individuals, but as a gendered dispute in which each party holds a representative opinion. Dr. Lawton quickly wades into this disagreement, and just as quickly supports Mrs. Campbell's opinion. He describes her practice of lying to unwelcome visitors as "altruism," and when she suggests that Mr. Campbell would insist on complete honesty he responds by agreeing with a knowing laugh (420). This is not the only time that Dr. Lawton is emasculated by his own dialogue. Shortly thereafter, Lawton and Mrs. Campbell have the following exchange:

MRS. CAMPBELL: That is a man's idea; you think that the great thing about a dinner is to get it eaten.

DR. LAWTON: Oh, not *all* of us, Mrs. Campbell!

MRS. CAMPBELL: Well, I will except you, Dr. Lawton (420).

Mrs. Campbell goes on to explain that women believe that the great thing about a dinner is "to get it over" (420). Dr. Lawton does not agree with this point, and is instead silent while the Campbells argue. He has, however, already revealed himself to be sympathetic to the female position on this matter; he quickly objects to being linked to the typically male view, and has no such objections to its female counterpart. *The Unexpected Guests* spends much of its running time engaging with gendered differences in opinion and behavior, and Dr. Lawton is almost always, implicitly or explicitly, identified with the female side of the debate.

Doctors, for Howells, are evidently figures deserving of some amount of ridicule.⁵⁰ Like Herne, Howells co-opts the entertainment value of medical professionals from his competitor, the medicine show. Also like Herne, he uses the doctor as a way to dramatize questions of truth and representation as part of a larger move toward realist theatre. He is, however, much less equivocal in his attack on this potential competitor than Herne is. Rather than staging a complex system of different medical practitioners presented with varying degrees of skepticism, he introduces a character to stand in for the entire medical profession and identifies this character with the very form of feminized dishonesty that his play criticizes. Howells's incorporation of medicine is significantly more than Herne's.

The starkly different treatment that doctors receive in Herne and Howells's plays suggests that realist playwrights did not have a single characteristic response to medical professionals. Instead, they had a general interest in the issue of what constitutes truth and evidence, coupled with a professional necessity to fight off competition from the medical spectacle offered by the medicine show. Their individual ideological agendas, in combination with a general, cultural skepticism about credentialed professionals in all arenas, led them to produce specific variants within the new realist theatre; the theatre of Herne and Howells was a kind of medicalized realism.⁵¹ Together, they helped to move

⁵⁰ Interestingly enough, this engagement with the medical profession appears much more frequently in Howells's plays than it does in his novels. This makes sense, since Howells's fiction was not in direct competition with the medicine show, while his plays were.

⁵¹ Not all elements of the medicine show proved as fruitful for realism as the medical pitch itself. Indian themed medicine shows enjoyed popularity through the nineteenth century (McNamara 96-108), but the stage Indian, a mainstay of American melodrama, was already a well-worn character by the time of realism's ascendance, and was too firmly associated with its melodramatic past to have much of a place in

American drama in general away from pure melodrama, although elements of melodrama would always persist.

As American realism became more commonplace, it also necessarily became less self-conscious, and later realist plays were able to be, as Herne would have it, “truth telling” without explicitly grappling with the question of truth on stage. The role played by doctors in early realist plays like *Margaret Fleming* and *The Unexpected Guests* were thus less necessary in realism’s later incarnations. The medicine show, for its part, started to decline in popularity in the twentieth century. The passage, in 1906, of the Pure Food and Drug Act gave the U.S. government the power to regulate any products that made medical claims, and companies from making false or unverifiable claims on the labels for such products. The AMA, motivated as much by a desire to crowd out the competition as by a desire to clear up misconceptions, stepped up its anti-quackery efforts, releasing reports on the falsehoods of proprietary medicine at an increasing rate in the 1920s and 1930s. Improved communication technology made the physical presence of a touring medicine show less necessary, as medical advertisements were able to reach wide audiences all on their own.⁵² This detached the medicine from the show, and allowed it to circulate more easily on its own. The non-medical portions of the medicine show

the new realism. The heyday of the stage Indian in America was the 1830s and 1840s (Moody 91). There is an Indian character, named Roanoke, in Herne’s *“The Minute Men” of 1774-1775*. Roanoke serves as more of a refutation of the Indian medicine show than as an appropriation; he is raised by white colonists, and he repeatedly thanks them because they “brought light to his darkened mind” and gave him “hope that he might one day be something more than a mere Indian” (49). These lines suggest that important knowledge is to be found among white Americans, and that it is foolish to look to the “darkened mind” of the Indian for medicine.

⁵² For more on this see Strasser 112.

survived in the form of vaudeville, which achieved full popularity around 1910 (Hughes 322), and which borrowed some of the “bits” that were popularized by medicine shows, forgoing the medical lecture. The pairing of mass entertainment with the sale of medical remedies did not end, however, with the decline of the medicine show. In 1933, for example, radio listeners tuning in to a program called the *National Barn Dance* were told about an exciting new product. That product, the *National Barn Dance*'s sponsor, was Alka Selzter (A. Anderson 161).

Part 2: Audience Training

Chapter 3: Edwin Forrest and the Celebrity Preacher

The Astor Place Riots and the Violence of Celebrity

On May 10, 1849, an unruly mob rioted outside the Astor Opera House in New York City. Participants threw stones at the theatre and tried, unsuccessfully, to set the building on fire. For the first time in U.S. history, a state militia was dispatched to quell a civic disturbance; that militia proceeded to fire on the crowd, killing at least twenty-two rioters. The Astor Place Riot, as it came to be called, can be traced back to a variety of factors. As historians would later argue, the rioters were there that day in part because of an American nativist fury at claims of English cultural superiority, and in part because of a class dispute that was ongoing within New York City's theatergoing community. They were also there because they had been mobilized by Tammany Hall supporters to embarrass the new Whig mayor. They were, however, also there for another reason, a reason that is at once more and less conceivable than the larger historical and cultural forces pushing them toward Astor Place that night. The Astor Place rioters thronged into the streets, fought, and in some cases died, because they were fans of an American actor named Edwin Forrest.

Edwin Forrest was, for a time, the most popular actor in America, and the most popular American actor in the world, regularly drawing huge audiences. This broad public support helped to set the stage for the Astor Place riot. Briefly put, the riot began

with a dispute between Forrest and William Macready, an English actor of similar renown. The two initially enjoyed a collegial relationship, hosting one another in their respective countries and praising each other in public. American theatergoers sometimes debated which of them was the superior performer, and Forrest and Macready took advantage of this, mounting dueling productions throughout the South, and encouraging audiences to see both in order to settle the question. This professional rivalry, however, soon curdled into genuine antipathy. In 1845, while touring England for the second time, Forrest was hissed at by several members of the audience during a performance of *Macbeth*. An outraged Forrest publicly blamed Macready, whom he claimed had organized the hissing as part of a coordinated attack on Forrest. Shortly thereafter, Forrest attended a production of *Hamlet* and hissed at Macready's performance in the title role, enflaming English public opinion. Forrest returned to the United States a committed Macready detractor, and Macready, for his part, no longer had any patience for Forrest. This mutual acrimony was still in place in 1849, when Macready toured the American cities. In what must have seemed to theatre managers at the time like a brilliant business strategy, Macready and Forrest starred in simultaneous productions of *Macbeth* in two different New York theatres. A crowd of Forrest supporters showed up to Macready's opening night and disrupted the performance, hissing, shouting, and throwing debris onto the stage. Macready, in response, walked off in the middle of the show, determined to cancel the rest of his engagement. He was persuaded to change his mind by a delegation of New York's upper class, led by Washington Irving, who worried that America's international reputation would be damaged if its citizens hounded a prominent

Englishman from the stage.⁵³ They assured Macready that his second night would go more smoothly than his first, and bought up most of the theatre's seats to ensure as much. Forrest's supporters, getting wind of this, resolved to storm the theatre from without. They gathered cobblestones from a nearby construction site and hurled them at the building, breaking the windows and the surrounding streetlamps. While Macready finished his performance inside, the crowd of rioters outside the theatre swelled in size, and began to skirmish with the New York militia. When the militia responded by firing into the crowd, the rioters became enraged that American soldiers were, as they perceived it, killing American civilians on behalf of a British actor. They personally blamed Macready, who fled the city as an angry mob attacked his hotel, as well as any vehicles suspected of harboring the actor. Macready escaped with his life, but never again acted on the American stage.⁵⁴

How was Forrest able to inspire this level of passion in his fans? How is it possible that a crowd of people literally risked their lives to show their support for a stage actor? The answer lies in the particular moment in the history of celebrity that Forrest inhabited, and the specific type of celebrity that that moment allowed him to achieve.

The birth of the modern conception of celebrity in eighteenth century England has been well-documented, as has its perfection in twentieth century Hollywood. The transitional period in between, however, is less well understood. Indeed, most critical

⁵³ This concern is a telling sign of how far the theatre had come as a national institution. It had not, after all, been very long ago that many of the American colonies banned theatrical amusements in the years leading up to the American Revolution.

⁵⁴ The definitive account of the Astor Place riot can be found in Nigel Cliff's *The Shakespeare Riots*, which also discusses the political background for the disturbance.

studies of celebrity concentrate on its advent, or its contemporary apex, or both; few if any are interested in how one became the other. Joseph Roach, among others, has written extensively about the new possibilities for public renown that became possible in the eighteenth century, using the public mourning surrounding the actor Thomas Betterton's death in 1710 as an exemplar of a mass response to a well-known individual. His study of the development of celebrity, *It* (2007), moves from Betterton to the stars and starlets commented on by Samuel Pepys, the eighteenth century diarist, then skips ahead to the silent film actress Clara Bow. This method allows Roach to highlight the ways in which the early concept of fame that was formed in the eighteenth century is still with us today. But it also has its limitations, since it does not fully account for the ways in which that concept has changed. These limitations are especially significant with respect to the intersection between celebrity and religious belief.

The influence of religious belief and practice on the public's reaction to a celebrity has long been noted by those who study the history of the celebrity concept. The word *charisma*, which we use to describe the qualities that allow individuals to amass fame, is derived from the Greek *χάρισμα*, for "gift of grace," and its uses were exclusively theological until Max Weber appropriated it in 1925 to describe the ability of leaders to command the public through the force of their personalities ("charism," OED). Roach, for example, argues against a secularist interpretation of the "public intimacy" that he sees as an essential element of celebrity:

Public intimacy may seem to be a purely modern and secular idea, but it is in fact rooted in traditional religious doctrine and, more deeply and lastingly, in popular religious feeling... cultural theorists have interpreted the mysterious force of mass attraction as a 'reenchantment' of the world... In order to become enchanted in

the first place, saints and martyrs must make themselves tangibly accessible to ordinary mortals even as they communicate with the divine. They must seem at once touchable and transcendent (*It* 16).

Chris Rojek, following Durkheim, looks to elementary religious forms to provide a model for celebrity, which he understands as having its roots in shamanism:

Shamans, sorcerers and medicine men are distinguished by extraordinary qualities. All have been singled out by the spirits, either by virtue of bloodline, or by dint of stigmata... The shaman possesses the power to conjure different collective intensities of being that, through the metaphor and experience of ecstatic journey, admit transcendence (55-6).

He goes on to claim that “Durkheim’s prediction about the decline in popularity of organized religion has proved to be accurate,” and to suggest that popular entertainment acts as a secular replacement for the role of religion (57). In Rojek’s narrative, celebrity emerges to fill the void left by the absence of a strong religious community, and of the meaning supplied by religious belief: “With the death of God, and the decline of the Church, the sacramental props in the quest for salvation have been undermined. Celebrity and spectacle fill the vacuum” (90).

Both of these arguments are useful, but both share the same problem: they are not sufficiently attentive to changes in religious practices and belief. Rojek’s argument treats shamanism as a stand-in for all religion, ignoring the considerable differences between the *mana*-based religions he examines and the Christianity that dominated most celebrity-producing cultures. More problematically, it is entirely dependent on Rojek’s assumptions about secularization; it can only be applied to a post-religious society.

Whether or not Rojek is correct that our contemporary culture is marked by the death of God, it is clear that earlier historical moments included both a strong concept of celebrity

and a strong role for religion in public life. It is my argument that the replacement narrative offered by critics like Rojek is far too simple. Instead, religious practice and celebrity culture contributed to each others' development during a period of contentious coexistence.

Roach's argument is more historically robust, and is useful for illuminating the constitutive parts of celebrity at its birth, in the British eighteenth century. Since the trajectory of Roach's argument ends in America, however, we must be mindful of the particularities of American religious practice. The Anglican culture that first produced celebrity is different in several key ways from the American Protestant culture that helped to perfect it; the "saints and martyrs" that Roach mentions are largely absent from American religious discourse.

If investigations of the religious roots of celebrity culture have been useful, then surely an investigation of the specific religious milieu of that culture will be even more valuable. If examining shamanistic practices contributes to our understanding of the crowd's reaction to the star, then surely examining the actual religious practices of that crowd will be an essential component of that understanding. In fact, the nineteenth-century American Protestant churches played an essential role in transmuting celebrity from its original, English form to its eventual, Hollywood incarnation. The passion that Edwin Forrest was able to evoke in his fans turns out to have less to do with Forrest than it does with those fans; their ability to be so affected by his performances was, in part, something they learned in church. With the surge in revivals during the nineteenth century, a highly performative style of preaching became more available to American

Protestants than it previously had been. Anxieties about enthusiasm waned, and some preachers began to understand themselves as putting on a show for their congregants, however sincerely felt or motivated that show was.⁵⁵ This newly performative preaching posed a serious threat to theatre managers; preachers were sating their potential audience's demand for passionate, intense displays, and were actively urging that audience not to go to the theatre in the process. Revival preachers thus enjoyed a twofold advantage over the theatre: revivals were free to attend, and had a legitimacy that the theatre, with its longstanding reputation for sinfulness, lacked.

Fortunately for these managers, stars like Forrest were able to give audience members what they were getting at church: the opportunity to be personally affected by a charismatic individual. Actors like Forrest developed a new, more unabashedly theatrical, style of acting that paralleled the preaching style employed by Finney. In Forrest's hands, the religious practice of the crowd became not a threat, but instead a kind of training; audiences who had been taught how to react to a preacher were primed to react in a similar way to an actor. Ironically enough, Forrest was able to do this precisely because of Christianity's emphasis on the importance of transferring experiences between church and the outside world. As Greg Jackson explains, "the ability to read oneself into newly

⁵⁵ Some excellent work has been done on this transition from the religious perspective. Lawrence Moore's *Selling God* documents American Christianity's long history of borrowing from popular culture, and Jean Kilde's *When Church Became Theatre* explores the changes in church architecture that both followed and encouraged this new emphasis on performance. Ted Smith's *The New Measures* is a thorough examination of this style of preaching, and contains an enlightening discussion of the influence of the emerging theatrical star system on preachers like Charles Finney (203-220). These studies all concern themselves primarily with the effects on Christianity of these interactions between religion and entertainment. The effects of these same interactions on the theatre have been given much less attention, and it is my proposal to correct this disparity here.

interpreted typologies was vital to the cultivation and maintenance of personal faith” (25). American preachers taught this skill specifically in reference to biblical typology, but could not then control the other contexts in which it would be put into practice. American Protestants had been trained to map their religious lives onto the rest of their lives. By deploying preaching techniques in a context that was designed to demand less of the audience than preachers did, Forrest was able to borrow Finney’s crowd management strategies to lure congregants back into the theatre. In this chapter, I will argue that preachers like Charles Finney unwittingly trained audiences to respond to theatrical celebrities like Edwin Forrest, and that the efforts of these celebrities to take advantage of the crowd’s training were instrumental in the development of what is sometimes called the heroic melodrama.

Charles Finney and the “New Measures”

The nineteenth century witnessed a startling transformation in the religious practices of American Protestants. As Anne Taves has argued, Protestant theologians of the eighteenth century were required to achieve a precise balance between formalism, exhibiting the forms and trappings of religious observance without any true religious feeling, and enthusiasm, false and ostentatious claims of divine inspiration, including bodily displays like shouting and fainting (Taves 16). While these two potential dangers are ostensible opposites, they both share a key quality: they are both forms of performance. The formalist engages in a hollow, insincere show of observance while the enthusiast engages in a fraudulent display of ecstatic feeling, but both are presenting a

false face to the world in the name of piety. Since the performance of the enthusiast was, for the most part, more visible than that of the formalist, and thus more apt to influence others, enthusiasm represented the primary threat for eighteenth century preachers. This threat became more pronounced as revivals began to spread across the American colonies. As Taves explains,

All the moderate leaders of the early-eighteenth century revival, therefore, took aggressive action to distance themselves from the threat of enthusiasm. Most of the moderates, including George Whitefield and Charles Wesley, actively discouraged bodily manifestations while they were preaching. Others, such as Jonathan Edwards in New England... joined with the ministerial critics of the revivals, such as Charles Chauncey (19).

Even George Whitefield, widely known as a charismatic and powerful preacher, attempted to contain his own audience's reactions. According to Chauncy, a Congregationalist minister, the performance of enthusiasm among congregants was often prompted by excessive performance by preachers and lay exhorters. His anti-enthusiast writings include numerous accounts of the effects that grand displays by preachers have on their audiences:

When he again assum'd the *terrible*, and spake *like Thunder*, the *like violent Strugglings* immediately returned upon them, from Time to Time. Sometimes he put a mighty Emphasis upon little unmeaning Words, and delivered a Sentence of no Importance with a mighty Energy, yet the sensible Effect was as great as when the most awful Truth was brought to View (qtd. in Taves 32).

Chauncey's concern is exacerbated by the disconnect between the preacher's words and their effect on the audience; in his telling, the preacher's congregants react only to the performance of the sermon, to its manner of delivery, not to its actual content. This is representative anti-enthusiasm: through the eighteenth century, a primary source of

anxiety for American Protestants like Charles Chauncey was the threat that performance posed for their religious practice.

This anxiety over performance is perhaps unsurprising, given the adversarial relationship between the theatre and the churches in early America. The colonies, with their established, official churches, frequently passed laws against the theatre. The Massachusetts Bay Colony banned theatrical displays in 1699, and reaffirmed that ban again in 1750, and a similar law was passed in the Quaker city of Philadelphia (McConachie, "American Theatre in Context" 120-121). The ratification of the U. S. Constitution brought with it the disestablishment of religion in the new republic, which meant that these kinds of legislative solutions were no longer viable. Instead, preachers at the end of the eighteenth century had to rely on persuasion and exhortation to keep their congregants clear of the theatre.

This antagonism did not disappear in the nineteenth century, but its terms changed considerably. Jeanne Kilde explains the shift in terms of Church architecture: a typical Protestant church at the beginning of the nineteenth century was a rectangular meetinghouse, with a pulpit at the center of one wall, while by 1886 a church was more likely to be constructed as an amphitheatre, with pews positioned on sloping floors radiating outward from a large stage (5-6). This change in worship spaces was necessary to accommodate a changing style of worship; although American Protestantism did not embrace the theatre during this period, preachers and congregants became increasingly comfortable incorporating performative elements into their religious observance. This

partial acceptance of performance was prompted by the nineteenth-century outbreak of religious revivals.

In New York, revivalists were led in their effort by Charles Grandison Finney. Finney's evangelical Presbyterian revivals began upstate, drawing huge crowds in cities like Utica, Troy, and Rochester. In 1828, he was invited by the Presbyterian Association of Gentlemen to preach at Presbyterian churches in New York City. This association, which attempted to bring revivals to New York City, was led by Lewis Tappan, a wealthy philanthropist and former Unitarian whom Finney had personally converted to Presbyterianism at an upstate revival. The following year, a member of the Association offered to pay for a permanent church for Finney in New York City if he would move his operations downstate; Finney agreed, and together the two of them founded the Union Presbyterian Church. The venture was successful beyond their expectations, and the swelling congregation overwhelmed the small church they had selected as their home. For a time, Finney solved this problem by renting larger halls and other meeting spaces, but eventually it became clear that more permanent measures had to be taken. In 1832, Tappan took such measures: he leased the Chatham Theatre, a working class theatre in lower Manhattan, and converted it into a church (Kilde 26-28).

This unconventional choice of worship space met with opposition, but opposition was nothing new for Finney and his co-revivalists. He frequently clashed with more traditionalist Presbyterians over his "New Measures," a series of preaching tactics designed to bring people toward their own conviction of sin and an ensuing sudden, dramatic conversion. This conversion strategy allows for some agency on the part of the

individual congregant in his own conversion. As a result, Finney was often accused of Arminianism, of preaching that humans can affect their own salvation. This doctrine was in conflict with the Calvinist doctrine of grace that most traditionalist Presbyterians preached, which states that only God can grant conversion and salvation, and that an individual sinner can do nothing to influence God in this regard. Finney never directly embraced Arminianism, but instead formulated a doctrine whereby individuals cannot force their own conversion and salvation, but can help to create the conditions for conversion:

People talk about religious feeling as if they could, by direct effort, call forth religious affection. But this is not the way the mind acts. No man can make himself feel in this way, merely by *trying* to feel... But [feelings] can be controlled *indirectly*. Otherwise there would be no moral character in our feelings, if there were not a way to control them. We cannot say: "Now I will feel so-and-so towards such an object." But we can command our *attention* to it, and look at it intently, till the proper feeling arises (*Revivals* 33).

Finney here is positing a very specific relationship between intention and affect, one that is mediated by attention. He begins by claiming that affect cannot be directed by intention, that human subjects cannot control their own feelings. He then suggests a mechanism to circumvent this problem: directing attention toward an object that will produce the desired affect. Importantly, this mechanism is, in Finney's estimation, practically guaranteed to work if done properly. Instead of claiming that directing attention at the correct object will encourage proper feeling, he presents a strict causal relationship in which intense attention necessarily results in the correct outcome: "proper feeling arises." The object to which Finney commanded his audience's attention was a

familiar one for American Protestant churchgoers: their own state of sin. His methods for directing attention were, if not entirely new, much less familiar.

These methods would have been at home in the Chatham Theatre; they were unapologetically performative and theatrical. Indeed, Finney's lectures on how to create an atmosphere conducive to salvation, collected in *Revivals of Religion* (1835), read like a performance manual. Like all preachers, he is concerned with the content of revival sermons, but he is also uniquely concerned by the mechanics of performance for such sermons. "No wonder," he writes, "that a great deal of preaching produces so little effect. Gestures are of more importance than is generally supposed. Mere words will never express the full meaning of the Gospel. The *manner* of saying it is almost everything" (220-1).⁵⁶ Indeed, a poor performance, or one that is accompanied by an inappropriate affect could, according to Finney, put its target audience in jeopardy: "Go to a sinner, and talk to him about his guilt and danger; and if in your manner you make an impression that does not correspond, you in effect bear testimony the other way, and tell him he is in no danger" (148).

This emphasis on the manner of presentation, predictably, struck Finney's critics as evidence of insincerity, as either a calculated show of enthusiasm or a new kind of formalism that replaced sober, traditional observance with showy displays, but rang just as hollow. They leveled the same charge that preachers had been deflecting for years: that his performance was just a performance, and not an indication of true religious feeling.

⁵⁶ In this emphasis on manner and gesture for the purposes of persuasion, Finney recalls the classical rhetoricians of the seventeenth century, who developed a specific set of gestures designed to convey and evoke specific passions. For more on the rhetoricians, see Roach, *The Player's Passion* 23-57.

Henry Ward, a Boston Reverend, was among the most vocal of Finney's accusers: "He had talents, unquestionable talents, but no heart. He feels no more than a mill-stone... acting a cold, calculating part... His tones of voice, his violent, coarse, unfeeling utterance, his abject groaning, his writhing of the body as if in agony all testify that he is a hypocrite" (qtd. in Kilde 36). Finney's response to these charges of excessive theatricality was, perhaps surprising: he embraced them. His lectures on revivals include an extended meditation on the similarities between actors and preachers, both in their task and their execution of that task:

It is objected that this preaching is *theatrical*. The bishop of London once asked Garrick, the celebrated play-actor, why it was that actors, in representing a mere fiction, should move an assembly, even to tears, while ministers, in representing the most solemn realities, could scarcely obtain a hearing. The philosophical Garrick well replied, "It is because we represent fiction as a reality, and you represent reality as a fiction." This is telling the whole story... And if by "theatrical" be meant the strongest possible representation of the sentiments expressed, then the more theatrical a sermon is, the better (228-229).

He closes this discussion with a final parting shot: "But let them remember, that while they are thus turning away and decrying the art of the actor, and attempting to support "the dignity of the pulpit," the theatres can be thronged every night. The common-sense people *will be* entertained with that manner of speaking, and sinners will go down to hell" (229). Theatres, in other words, represent a direct competition for audience attention. If other preachers are too traditionalist to adopt the methods of the actor, who makes a living holding the attention of a crowd, then they will lose their congregation, and that congregation will suffer the consequences.

Finney's "New Measures," then, were unapologetic about their emphasis on performance and theatricality. Indeed, as Ted Smith has argued, Finney's innovation was

less the introduction of performance into preaching, which had been done previously by circuit riders and ring shouts,⁵⁷ than it was the acknowledgement of this performance as intentional:

[His] definition of the practices of church life as measures was the breakthrough that framed every other new measure. Most of the new measures themselves were not really new... But earlier generations that honed the persuasive, informal styles that came to be called new measures usually took great pains to stress their lack of self-conscious decision (57).

This is what distinguished Finney from an earlier generation of preachers like George Whitefield, Whitefield, by all accounts, put on an impressive performance while preaching, but was always careful to claim that his performance was incidental, and not calculated. Finney borrowed his spirit of approach from actors; he preached with the understanding that he could deliberately manipulate his manner of presentation so as to have the maximum possible impact on his congregants.⁵⁸

This emphasis on performance extended beyond Finney's prescriptions for preachers and exhorters; his methods also recognized the effect of performance on the performer, and so encouraged a kind of public, theatrical display among individual congregants. Finney created a device for prompting this display, which he called the anxious seat. "By this," Finney explains, "I mean the appointment of some particular seat

⁵⁷ The ring shout was a specifically African-American phenomenon that developed among Christian slaves, and, as such, comes out of a distinct tradition that is nevertheless entwined with mainstream American Protestantism. For more on the ring shout see Taves, 81-82.

⁵⁸ At the same time that Finney was ascendant, the general atmosphere around tent revivals became more and more like what one would see at certain types of performance. As Peter Buckley explains, "camp meetings took on the aspect of traditional fairs, with horse trading and other forms of hucksterism... set up on the periphery... Manuals recommended that a roofed preaching platform be erected at the northern end of the chosen ground, and before it an 'altar,' which was no more than a fenced enclosure or 'pen,' with seats for anxious 'mourners.' Beyond the pen, seats spread out for many rows" (442).

in the place of meeting, where the anxious may come and be addressed particularly, and be made subjects of prayer, and sometimes conversed with individually” (280). What Finney implies, but does not quite say directly, in this description is perhaps the most important feature of the anxious seat’s design: it was located by or on the stage, in full view of the congregation. The occupant of the anxious seat, then, suddenly found himself transformed into a performer, presenting his state of anxiety over his own sin and, hopefully, subsequent conversion for a large and rapt audience. There are, according to Finney, two main benefits of this method. The first is to force the individual congregant into a public display, to pull him out of his private life and into the public space in which Finney’s conversions occurred: “When a person is seriously troubled in mind, every body[sic] knows that there is a powerful tendency to try to keep it private that he is so, and it is a great thing to get the individual willing to have the fact known to others. And as soon as you can get him willing to make known his feelings, you have accomplished a great deal” (280). The second is to hold the congregant accountable in the future, “to detect deception and delusion, and thus prevent false hopes” (281). Both of these functions of the anxious seat are efforts to encourage the congregant to put his own transformation on display, to enter into a performance that confirms how deeply he has been affected by the revival, and, by extension, how deeply he has been affected by Finney. I do not mean to suggest by this that Finney was insincere in his efforts to convert his congregants, or that his revivals were driven purely by vanity. Indeed, he never seemed to stop pushing for conversions; he ends one his lectures on revivals by suddenly transforming his audience from potential exhorters to potential converts, saying,

“Finally, if there is a sinner in this house, let me say to him: ‘Abandon all your excuses. You have been told to-night that they are all in vain. This very hour may seal your eternal destiny. Will you submit to God to-night—NOW?’” (179). An essential part of these conversions, however, was the public display of a dramatic, sudden, transformative experience. Indeed, Finney was suspicious of conversions that did not fit these conditions.⁵⁹

Audience members at a Finney revival, then, expected to undergo a transformative experience. They, in turn, were expected to put this experience on display to the rest of the congregation; to present visible evidence of their transformation. Finney’s primary goal was the conversion of his audience, but his efforts toward this goal had another effect: they taught Americans to be profoundly affected by the speech and gestures of a man on a stage, and to demonstrate that effect to others. Indeed, a congregant in Finney’s anxious seat was made to understand that he must immediately decide whether or not to visibly react to Finney’s performance, and that this decision would be the most important one in his life. Ted Smith calls this “the NOW of revival,” in which congregants “entered a specially marked-off space and stayed there, as if suspended at a perpetual point of decision, until they made up their minds” (230). While Smith does note that, for Finney, “Real change of heart required a public performance” (127), he is mostly uninterested in exploring the pressure that the expectant public might have exercised upon the congregant, and the role of that pressure in prompting the

⁵⁹ For more on this, see *Revivals of Religion*, in which Finney discusses the trap that a belief in gradual, progressive conversions represents for potential Christians: “When persons talk about conversion as a progressive work, it is absurd... They know nothing about it as they ought to know (354).

expected performance. In this he follows Finney, who primarily saw the anxious seat as a way of eliminating performance: “I had found, that with the higher classes especially, the greatest obstacle to be overcome was their fear of being known as anxious inquirers” (qtd. in Smith 133). According to Finney, then, congregants were naturally inclined to put on a show of being at ease, even when they were in the beginning throes of a conversion experience.

This understanding of the shame of conversion was informed by Finney’s own conversion experience. As he reports in his memoirs, when gripped by a powerful anxiety about his sinful state, he fled to the woods, to pray in secret. Once there, he becomes convinced that his desire to keep his conversion secret is, in fact, his primary sin, and his primary obstacle to salvation: “An overwhelming sense of my wickedness in being ashamed to have a human being see me on my knees before God, took such powerful possession of me, that I cried at the top of my voice, and exclaimed that I would not leave that place if all the men on earth and all the devils in hell surrounded me” (16). The job of the new measures was to convince congregants to undergo a similar process, to drop their act, and to display the turmoil that they were actually experiencing. The anxious seat put this performance under public scrutiny, and the exhortations of the preacher, where it was likely to collapse. The possibility that the conversion experience itself might be a performance, prompted by the demands of the audience’s attention, appears not to have troubled Finney.

Finney was so pleased with his success at the Chatham Theatre that he incorporated some of its design elements into the plan for his next church, the Broadway

Tabernacle. If anything, the idea of designing a church as a theatrical space was more controversial than simply conducting revivals in an existing church. Finney's memoirs include an account of the objections of his own architect to the plan:

The plan of the interior of that house was my own. I had observed the defects of churches in regard to sound; and was sure that I could give the plan of a church, in which I could easily speak to a much larger congregation than any house would hold, that I had ever seen. An architect was consulted, and I gave him my plan. But he objected to it, that it would not appear well, and feared that it would injure his reputation, to build a church with such an interior as that. . . . It was finally built in accordance with my ideas; and it was a most commodious, and comfortable place to speak in (*Memoirs* 326).

Finney's experiences preaching in a theatre convinced him that a theatre was superior to a more traditional church in terms of its acoustics. The theatre, he argues, is specifically designed to allow a single person to hold the attention of the audience. This is what he aimed to do when preaching, and so he was willing to adopt the conventions of theatre design in the service of that goal.⁶⁰

Ultimately, Finney did more than anyone else in the nineteenth century to codify the type of performance that was expected from an audience member in the presence of a charismatic individual. He did this directly, and through inspiration, as other preachers followed his lead and elaborated on his measures, spreading his methods across an even larger public. Jedediah Burchard, a rival preacher and fellow traveler of Finney's, went so far as to use professionals to instruct his congregants in the proper response to his preaching; he employed "fuglemen" to demonstrate the expected performance to the crowd. As Smith explains, "They moved their bodies up and down at his instruction.

⁶⁰ For an image of the distinctly theatrical results of Finney's church design, see Kilde 44.

They helped set the cadence of responding to his calls. And when Burchard gave the invitation, the fuglemen moved to the anxious bench. They acted as living models for revival” (15). Although these audience performances were initially motivated by the specific demands of Protestant religious practice, they did not remain confined to this realm. Instead, this set of audience responses could be activated by other charismatic figures on the stage, figures like Edwin Forrest.

Forrest and the Feast Crowd

Edwin Forrest was born in 1806 in Philadelphia. Although his early life was spent in preparation for joining the ministry, he had begun to act in an amateur capacity by age thirteen, and made his professional debut in 1820. By 1826 he was drawing large crowds, especially at the Bowery Theatre in New York. The Bowery would be a home to Forrest throughout his career, and the fervor of the crowd would increase year after year. Walt Whitman, in *November Boughs* (1888) recalls a typical performance:

The old Bowery, packed from ceiling to pit with its audience mainly of alert, well-dress'd, full-blooded young and middle-aged men, the best average of American-born mechanics—the emotional nature of the whole mass arous'd by the power and magnetism of as mighty mimes as ever trod the stage—the whole crowded auditorium... bursting forth in one of those long-kept-up tempests of handclapping peculiar to the Bowery—no dainty kid-glove business, but electric force and muscle from perhaps two thousand full-sinew'd men (qtd. in Moses 85).

Whitman's description is illuminating for two reasons. It attests to Forrest's popularity, to his ability to bring large groups of people to the theatre and have them respond enthusiastically to his presence. More importantly, it also characterizes that enthusiastic response as a latent characteristic of the audience that Forrest evokes, rather than an

indication of Forrest's singular mastery. He does give Forrest some credit for the proceedings, including him among the "mighty mimes." The bulk of the description, however, is concerned with the members of the audience, and the electrical and mechanical potential that they carry with them to the theatre, ready to be unleashed in a "tempest" that seems to impress Whitman at least as much as the performance that prompts it. A successful Forrest performance, then, relied upon both the actor and his audience. The audience's capacity to be powerfully moved by Forrest, and to demonstrate this audibly and visibly, is as essential as Forrest's capacity to move the audience. Whitman is interested in this primarily as it relates to the physical and professional lives of the audience members; he sees it as a natural extension of their status as working-class Americans. This capacity to respond, however, was equally a part of the religious experiences of many of those same audience members. While preachers like Finney did not specifically aim for applause, they did regard audience response as a crucial benchmark of their own success. Using Finney's *New Measures*, especially the anxious seat, nineteenth-century preachers trained congregants to publicly demonstrate the effects of a performance on themselves. In other words, the capacity for feeling and applause that Whitman approvingly classifies as a typical feature of the working-class audience was more likely a habit that was developed and reinforced in Finney's revivals.

Forrest's ability to evoke this response was due, in part, to his employment of a relatively new style of acting. Before Forrest, American acting tended to have a particularly regimented quality: "Certainly the acting of that day was unbending, statuesque, almost haughty; muscles fell into place, the voice was turned to a recognized

pitch and timbre. Tragedy on stilts with a megaphone is the cartoon impression” (Moses 28). Opposed to this was Forrest’s method: “Nature was laid on thick; psychological response to visions seen, to violent situations, to homely memories, was deep-dyed in emotion” (Moses 99). This style was likely developed during Forrest’s early barnstorming days, in which he travelled the country, creating an audience for theatre.

One of Forrest’s biographers describes the requirements of this kind of itinerant acting:

The actor needed to be a backwoodsman, skilled with rod and gun ... he must needs be a contractor, seeing that a town have its theatre, if no such thing existed before he came. He was ready to be faced by all sorts of audiences, huddled in dimly lighted, narrow rooms, or gentlemen farmers who came as eagerly their many miles on horseback to witness Shakespeare as they came to market or to court—their two contacts with the world outside their broad acres (Moses 36).

Moses identifies the theatre, the market, and the court as the villager’s primary means of contact with the outside world. This list omits one major source of outside contact: the itinerant preacher.

Itinerant stars were borrowing a model that had long been in use by American churches. Itinerant preachers had been moving through the country for years, gathering congregations and winning conversions. This model was most extensively employed by the Methodist circuit riders, who travelled along carefully determined routes, pulling disparate towns into a larger denominational community. Charles Finney explicitly patterned his own Presbyterian revivals on Methodist practices; his stay in New York City during the 1830s, which lasted long enough for him to lead the Broadway Tabernacle, was unusual for him. Like itinerant preachers, travelling stars first had to establish markets for their appearances in various locales, and then revisit those markets periodically to keep interest alive. This was easier to do if public excitement for their visit

would be assured, and so it was primarily well known stars that toured, playing with the stock companies of the theatres at which they performed.

One incident from early in Forrest's life shows the extent to which Forrest's own attempts at publicity and the response to those attempts by his fans both follow the patterns established by American Protestantism. The incident is first fully described in *The Life of Edwin Forrest* (1874), a biography written by the theatre critic James Rees.⁶¹ Rees was Forrest's friend from childhood, and the two remained close throughout their lives. When Forrest died, Rees assembled a biography out of his own memories, as well as Forrest's reminiscences, which he also published as articles in the *Philadelphia Mercury*. Early in this biography, Rees relates Forrest's behavior under the influence of nitrous oxide, which was at the time being dispensed by traveling chemists:

We were one evening in the Tivoli Garden, situated on Market Street near Broad, north side, some time in the year 1817, when a professor of chemistry was administering what at that time was called "laughing gas." Some very amusing scenes occurred, arising from its effect on those who inhaled it. At last a fine looking lad, whose age might have been about thirteen years, presented himself to the man of science to be experimented upon... He inhaled the gas; immediately after the bag was removed he started out on the gravel walk, and throwing himself into a position peculiarly dramatic, he recited a portion of Norval's speech and also of Richard III., but ere he got through, the current of his mind changed, and he made a dash at the bystanders, and a race ensued.... That boy was EDWIN FORREST (48-9).

Rees relates the story dramatically, saving for the end the revelation that the subject of his description was Forrest. The anecdote is, however, light on details about Forrest's delivery, and notably silent on the subject of the audience's response. Later biographies would fill in this gap. Lawrence Barrett, writing in 1881, describes Forrest "dash[ing]

⁶¹ It had previously appeared in Alger's biography, but Alger relates the incident briefly, and gives it scant attention.

wildly” into Richard’s soliloquy, and describes an enthusiastic reaction from the crowd: “the speaker awoke to find himself deafened by the plaudits of an audience which was surprised and delighted by the unexpected performance” (14). Motrose Moses elaborates even further in his 1929 *The Fabulous Forrest*, describing how Forrest “suddenly burst forth in elocutionary glory with the Shakespearean lines” and noting that “despite the uncontrolled exhilaration of his voice, Forrest held his audience spellbound” (14). Moses, more than any other biographer, situates the incident as an origin story for Forrest the actor; he describes how “a stranger stepped from the crowd, and, taking him kindly by the hand, pronounced words which thrilled through him with a spell-like influence. ‘This lad,’ said he, ‘has the germ of tragic greatness in him’” (14).

As this anecdote radiates outward from its original source, Forrest and Rees’s recollections, it comes more and more to resemble a conversion experience. Specifically, it resembles the kind of conversion experience that Finney and other new measures preachers favored: a sudden, powerful experience, prompted by a combination of external force and innate capacity, that permanently changes its subject’s life. Forrest’s involuntary recitation of Shakespeare recalls the sudden fits of laughter and weeping that frequently accompanied the conversions at Finney’s revivals. It also echoes a key feature of many Protestant conversion narratives: the sudden mental intrusion of a line of scripture. Most accounts of Protestant conversion, from the nineteenth century and before, include an episode in which the anxious sinners are either comforted or distressed by a passage or verse of Scripture that enters their minds unbidden. This detail is included in Finney’s own conversion story: “Just at that point this passage of Scripture seemed to

drop into my mind with a flood of light: "Then shall ye go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. Then shall ye seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." I instantly seized hold of this with my heart... I knew that it was God's word" (*Memoirs* 16). In Forrest's telling, his conversion to the stage is accompanied by a sudden and unprompted outpouring of lines from the sacred text of the American stage: Shakespeare. I do not mean to suggest that Edwin Forrest actually underwent a mystical experience, or that that experience prompted him to seek a career on the stage. But it is striking that Forrest and his biographers seem to have highlighted the details of this anecdote that run parallel to the details of Protestant conversion narratives; Forrest's inability to control his own speech or actions is made more and more prominent as this anecdote is retold. A certain amount of mythologizing is an inescapable part of any celebrity biography; Forrest's particular mythology is influenced by the conversion narratives circulated by Protestant preachers during his lifetime, and this influence was highlighted more and more as his story was passed on to subsequent tellers. This was made possible by the tendency of most traditional Protestant conversion narratives toward theatrical details and displays; George Whitefield's account of his own conversion, for example, includes the curious detail that his religious experience began while he was reading a play aloud.⁶²

⁶² Here is Whitefield's account: "One morning as I was reading a play to my sister, said I, 'Sister, God intends something for me which we know not of. As I have been diligent in business, I believe many would gladly have me for an apprentice, but every way seems to be barred up, so that I think God will provide for me some way or other that we cannot apprehend.' How I came to say these words I know not. God afterwards showed me they came from Him" (16).

Perhaps the most important similarity between Forrest's acting and Finney's preaching was the tendency of both men to define their performances primarily in terms of their effect on audiences. According to Nathan Hatch, Finney's primary contribution to American Christianity was "to make religious life more audience-centered" (197). To accomplish this goal, he called for a greater degree of continuity between the language and experience of church and that of everyday life. Preachers, he argued, should use "the language of common life" (qtd. in Hatch 97). Forrest, of course, had less control over the language of his performances than Finney did, but he was in charge of the manner in which that language was spoken. He followed Finney in making his performance resonate more with the audience's experience by toning down the lofty, presentational style of his predecessors in favor of a more plain-spoken, naturalistic style. His plays were not always written in the language of common life, but they were delivered as though they were. Theatre was audience-centered before Forrest, but the audience rose in prominence alongside Forrest. In the Forrest era, performance was linked more strongly than ever before to audience responses, which can be seen from the relentless focus on crowd reaction in newspaper reviews and articles about Forrest.

Both Forrest and Finney, then, departed from previously accepted methods in favor of a more impassioned, spontaneous performance style. And like Finney, Forrest faced some opposition for this departure, as Montrose Moses explains:

Forrest's style was not considered by everyone legitimate; there were advocates of 'chaste acting' which had 'no rant in the impassioned passages, no startling attitudes, with a pause and a gaze to elicit the thundering applause'; rather would such champions 'have the player the mere recite, or, rather, the reader behind the table in the sitting posture' (99).

Such advocates resemble Finney's critics, who objected to his performative, audience-driven sermons; some theatre critics were as suspicious of excessive performance on the stage as Finney's critics were of performance at the pulpit.⁶³ In many ways, then, Forrest developed a set of "new measures" for acting. Like Finney's new measures, they had, as their goal, an increased intensity of audience response. In this they were wildly successful.

This success was absolutely central to Forrest's celebrity; the response of the crowd is cited by almost every positive review of one of his performances, and is mentioned in most evaluations of his talent. Writing late in Forrest's career about a performance in Washington, one critic begins by paraphrasing Emerson to say that "great men magnetize their contemporaries so that their companions can do for them what they could never do for themselves," then goes on to describe the experience of being so magnetized by Forrest: "You may analyze his style, but you cannot analyze the effects he produces; you cannot explain the feelings that control you when witnessing his representations" (*The Press*, "Drama in Washington" 1). This review recalls Finney's suggestion that affect can be directed through appropriate attention. In this case, attention on Forrest's performance inevitably and inexorably prompts particular emotional responses. These responses are so powerful that they "control" the audience members, and so automatic that they cannot be explained.

⁶³ There remains an important difference between these two groups: Finney's critics were wary of any performance at all, while Forrest's critics expected some performance, but were troubled by the possibility of too much performance.

Even negative reviews made mention of Forrest's ability to move a crowd: "everything is sacrificed to a seeking after such coarse effects" (qtd. in Moses 156). Announcements of his performances tended to make special mention of his drawing power. *The Daily Atlas's* notice is typical: "The eminent American tragedian, Mr. Edwin Forrest, commences an engagement this evening... The house will be filled in every part, of course" (1). The *New York Herald* frequently urged its readers to "Go early and secure seats, for doubtless there will be a tremendous rush" ("Multiple News" 1). Crowds flocked to his performances the way they did to Finney's revivals, and for similar reasons; in both cases the audience expected to be personally affected by the performer's voice. Indeed, the similarities between the task of a revival preacher and the task of a star like Forrest appears to have been taken for granted by many of Forrest's contemporaries. One advertisement made particular use of this association, announcing:

IMPORTANT NEWS TO THOSE CLERGYMEN, Public and Private Singers, and other persons suffering from Bronchial Affections of the throat, hoarseness or colds of longer or shorter duration. Certificates of the salutary effects from the use of the BRONCHIAL COMPIT have been received from Rev. Mr. Lawrence, of Haverhill; Edwin Forrest, the celebrated tragedian... and others ("Bronchial" 1).

The ad, aimed first and foremost at preachers, addresses itself in the same breath to performers, and cites Forrest alongside a preacher as offering testimonials for the effectiveness of the advertised remedy.

Forrest's particular stardom was characterized by an especially passionate fan response. It was during his period of dominance that stars began to address the audience after the show, giving the "curtain speech" that has since evolved into our present practice of "curtain calls." The curtain speech was invented for American audiences by

the British actor Edmund Kean while Kean was on a tour of the United States, and quickly became a popular practice in America, reaching a height during Forrest's ascendancy. Often, the stars who made such speeches were rewarded with tangible proof of the crowd's affection, in the form of the "floral tribute," typically given to both male and female stars. Such tributes steadily increased in frequency as the nineteenth century progressed, reaching a height in 1850 (Butsch 80). Both of these rituals gave the crowd and the star opportunities to enact and reaffirm their roles. The curtain speech gave the star a chance to display exceptional charisma and magnetism, and to demonstrate that it was his personal qualities, and not the words of the play, that so moved the crowd. This crowd, for its part, used the floral tribute to demonstrate its devotion to the star, and its ability to be deeply and personally affected by a performance. The floral tribute was an opportunity for audience members to engage in a performance of their own, to stand in front of the rest of the crowd and proclaim their superior appreciation for the work of the actor on stage. Together, the curtain speech and the floral tribute functioned as a sort of altar call for theatergoers. The star appears before the crowd and delivers an address that is implicitly intended to move that crowd. Audience members, responding to that pressure, rise and approach the stage, visibly displaying the effect that the star's performance has had on them. The more times this ritual is repeated, the greater the expectation that the star will deliver a satisfying address, and the greater the pressure on the audience members to demonstrate their satisfaction. For theatergoers susceptible to this kind of pressure, the Park and the Bowery became much less threatening versions of Finney's anxious seat; they put the onus on the audience to perform their own

appreciation for what they have seen, while providing the safety of a crowd in which to engage in this performance.

It is no coincidence that this period also saw the rise of mesmerism as a form of popular entertainment. Like revival meetings and star-driven theatre, mesmerist displays offered audience members a chance to become performers by demonstrating their ability to be affected by a figure on the stage. Mesmerists, like actors and preachers, needed to demonstrate their ability to move the audience; unlike actors and preachers, moving the audience was the entirety of the mesmerist's task. A successful mesmerist display, by definition, involved visible signs of audience members falling under the sway of the performer. While preachers and actors had to rely on the strength of their material and performance to accomplish this, mesmerists claimed to be in possession of a more direct method. La Roy Sunderland, one of the more successful mesmerists, described the "agency by which one person, by manipulation, produces emotion, feeling, passion, or any physical or mental affect, in the system of another;" he called this process "pathetism," but it essentially describes the goals of both preachers and actors (Taves 138). Sunderland evidently borrowed tactics from Forrest and Finney in the service of this goal, as Anne Taves explains: "in the manner of a preacher, he invited entranced subjects from his audience onto the stage" (131). Sunderland evidently employed a mesmerist equivalent to Finney's anxious seat and Forrest's curtain speech and floral tribute. He put on a performance that addressed the audience as a collective body, and then asked that individual audience members who were particularly affected by his performance come forward and display those effects to the remainder of the audience. By

doing this, he created an equivalence between exceptional status and susceptibility to his art.

This equivalence is crucial, because the 1830s and 40s appear to have been marked by a surge in audience desire for visibility and participation. At precisely the moment that stars were coming to dominate theatres, revivals, and mesmerist lectures, audience members began to clamor for opportunities to incorporate themselves into the performance, either by answering an altar call, bestowing a floral tribute, or giving in to the power of suggestion. A performance landscape dominated by individuals who were awarded exceptional status, then, led to a corresponding audience hunger for a taste of that status. This, in turn, helped to further cement the celebrity of the performer, since it was channeled into audience displays of devotion and susceptibility to the star. This same dynamic played out in the political arena, as the expansion of the franchise allowed for wider participation in the political process, accompanied by a kind of stardom for Andrew Jackson.⁶⁴ Indeed, one of the requirements for celebrity during this period was the ability to repurpose the audience members' desire to differentiate themselves from the crowd toward actions that attest to the celebrity of the performer.

We can better understand this phenomenon by making use of sociologist Stephen Turner's important revision to Max Weber's concept of charisma. Weber's *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (1947) presents three distinct types of authority: bureaucratic, traditional, and charismatic. According to Weber, Charismatic authority is

⁶⁴ See McConachie, *Melodramatic* 74.

categorically distinct from bureaucratic and traditional authority, since it derives from an invisible quality of the leader in question:

Charismatic authority is... sharply opposed both to rational, and particularly beurocratic, authority, and to traditional authority... Bureaucratic authority is specifically rational in the sense of being bound to intellectually analyzable rules; while charismatic authority is specifically irrational in the sense of being foreign to all rules. Traditional authority is bound to the precedents handed down from the past and to this extent is also oriented to rules... The only basis of legitimacy for [charismatic authority] is personal charisma (361-2).

Turner argues that Weber's formulation of charisma is problematic, since charisma itself largely serves as an empty category that explains otherwise inexplicable success.

According to Turner, charisma is not useful as a description of characteristics possessed by an individual, but instead should be used to describe a relationship in which an individual gives cover to a tendency already inherent in a crowd (15-16). In other words, charisma is a phenomenon that is more about the crowd's ability to be moved than it is about the individual's ability to move that crowd.

In my reading, Forrest's fame provides support for this understanding of charisma. The crowd, trained by preachers like Finney, was anxious to be given an individual to which it could express its adulation. Finney derived his authority in part from the strength of his own performance, but largely from concrete ideas about salvation and damnation that his audience already held. This structure was then able to be transferred over to the theatre, where it continued to function in the absence of the high stakes that Finney was able to bring to his performances.

Perhaps the clearest indication of Forrest's reliance on this kind of charisma was his increasing identification with the curtain speech, and with crowd address in general.

When he began a tour of England, the *Herald* took the opportunity for what appears to be a joke at his expense: “Edwin Forrest sailed yesterday for Liverpool in the Europe. Will he make speeches in London?” (*Herald* 1). The answer, as it turned out, was yes. Forrest kicked off his tour with a performance of Robert Montgomery Bird’s *The Gladiator* (1831), which Bird had written specifically for Forrest. The crowd reacted well to Forrest’s performance, but, as the *New-York Spectator* reports, Forrest made the mistake of thanking audience members for their appreciation of Bird’s tragedy, at which point “the expression of dissent was so strong, that Mr. Forrest did not farther allude to the subject” (*New-York Spectator*, “England” 1). Evidently, Forrest could not control a crowd in London the way he could in New York. Indeed, while Forrest was certainly popular in England, he never received the kind of rapturous response he could elicit in America. Even a generally positive English review of his debut performance included some sharp criticism:

His features are marked but by no means of a classic cast, nor are they well suited for histrionic effect. Abundantly indicative of energy, they have not breadth of character, or beauty, or variety of expression... Mr. Forrest’s voice is of a twofold kind—deep, rich, and powerful, coming naturally from the chest, and high and thin coming from the throat... Its general intonation is decidedly what we shall call provincial (*ibid.*).

The qualities of Forrest’s acting style that were so celebrated in America, including his plain style of speech and his lack of classicism, were derided in the English press.

London audiences could appreciate Forrest’s displays, but had not been as thoroughly trained as American audiences had to respond well to his “new measures” acting.

Forrest’s propensity for making speeches led to his being asked by a New York Democratic organization to deliver an Independency Day address in 1838. Organizers

needed a space which would be large enough to accommodate the anticipated crowd, which the *Morning Herald* reported as in excess of four thousand, and which would supply an adequate stage for Forrest. They selected Charles Finney's Broadway Tabernacle.⁶⁵ The church, designed to feel like a theatre, was exactly right for the occasion, provided, the *Morning Herald* reports, the audience did not behave as they might in a theatre: "the elders of that very respectable meeting house had permitted them the occupancy of the building... on condition the audience would not indulge in any boisterous applause, smoke segars [sic], stand upon the seats, or kick up a row in any manner or shape, that would tend to profane the holy tabernacle" ("The Celebration" 1). The *Morning Herald's* review of the speech makes special mention of Forrest's ability to affect masses of people: "Mr. Forrest... is in a position of becoming one of the greatest champions of democratic principles the world has ever known, and if he does not seize upon his advantage and place himself at the head of that party, he does not know his own powers" (*ibid.*).

Both Finney and Forrest clearly reaped the benefits of their audience-focused strategies. The audience also benefited, as their expectations became more and more important in various arenas. As audience members moved back and forth between church and theatre, bringing these same expectations with them, the two spaces began to cross-pollinate more and more. Audiences in the mid nineteenth century were increasingly taught that their response was the defining feature of a given performance. This came to shape that response, putting even more pressure on both preachers and actors.

⁶⁵ The speech was evidently initially planned for Tammany Hall, and the *New-York Spectator* erroneously reported that it had indeed taken place there ("Fourth of July" 1).

Forrest had a significant advantage over Finney in this regard, and one that allowed him to deal very effectively with his paratheatrical competition: Forrest's use of his audience was much more in keeping with the individual's expectations of crowd participation than was Forrest's. Many of these expectations were made explicit by a group of theorists at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century who wrestled with the behavior of individuals operating within groups. This theoretical interest in crowd behavior is a close ancestor of the current discipline of social psychology. It is generally thought to have begun with Gustave Le Bon's *The Crowd* (1895), and to have been elaborated by psychologists like Sigmund Freud and Elias Canetti. Le Bon's central claim about crowd behavior is about the ability of individuals to disappear within a crowd: "the individual forming part of a crowd... will be the less disposed to check himself from the consideration that, a crowd being anonymous, and in consequence irresponsible, the sentiment of responsibility which always controls individuals disappears entirely" (50). According to Le Bon, crowds behave differently from individuals because the visibility of the individual as an individual, which generally keeps people feeling accountable for their actions, dissolves in the crowd. Freud would later elaborate this, with a greater emphasis on the unconscious, in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1922):

In a group the individual is brought under conditions which allow him to throw off the repressions of his unconscious instinctual impulses. The apparently new characteristics which he then displays are in fact the manifestations of this unconscious, in which all that is evil in the human mind is contained as a predisposition. We can find no difficulty in understanding the disappearance of conscience or of a sense of responsibility in these circumstances. It has long been our contention that 'social anxiety' is the essence of what is called conscience (9-10).

These theorizations help to explain just how much less Forrest was asking of his crowds than was Finney. While Finney's church was designed according to a theatrical model, his anxious seat was a tool for violating the de-individuation that Le Bon and Freud argue is central to the crowd experience. Both were supplying the audience with an opportunity for visibility and participation. But Forrest called upon the crowd to respond to him as a group, while Finney focused his attention, and the attention of the crowd, on an individual audience member. The strain of this encounter on the individual in the anxious seat would only be exacerbated by that individual's experience of first being part of a crowd and then being pulled out. This process would ensure that the congregant would feel the relief of de-individuation, immediately followed by a shocking return to individual accountability. This accountability is heightened by the presence of the very crowd of which the anxious congregant had just been a member. In other words, the congregant has his de-individuation removed and replaced by a panoptic state; he is taken out of an environment in which he has no accountability and thrust into one in which he is hyper-accountable, with all eyes on him.

This stands in stark contrast to Forrest, who is content to allow the crowd to remain a crowd. This is, in large part, because of the difference in objectives between Forrest and Finney. Finney had an instrumental goal for his crowd, the production of conversion experiences, while Forrest required only that the crowd bolster and affirm his own fame. As Elias Canetti explains, "Fame is not fastidious about the lips which spread it. So long as there are mouths to reiterate the one name, it does not matter whose they are. The fact that to the seeker after fame they are indistinguishable from each other and

are all counted as equal shows that this passion has its origin in the experience of crowd manipulation" (396). Canetti goes on to explain who Forrest's crowd, in contrast to Finney's, was allowed to stay obscured within the crowd: "The crowd which the seeker after fame envisages consists of shadows, that is, of creatures who do not even have to be alive so long as they are capable of one thing, which is to repeat his name" (397). To this, end, Forrest creates a variant of the crowd that Canetti calls the feast crowd: "There is no common identical goal which people have to try to attain together. The feast *is* the goal and they are there" (Canetti 62).

Forrest's career provides support, before the fact, for Le Bon's theories about crowd behavior. Indeed, Le Bon's description of theatrical representation's ability to spur a crowd to action can help explain the behavior of Forrest's fans, from the floral tribute to the Astor Place riot: "theatrical representations, in which the image is shown in its most clearly visible shape, always have an enormous influence on crowds... The entire audience experiences at the same time the same emotions... Sometimes... the sentiments suggested by the images is so strong that they tend, like habitual suggestions, to transform themselves into acts" (89). This analysis also applies to Finney's sermons, with one important caveat: the act that Finney was hoping to elicit from his crowd was the act of leaving the crowd, of fleeing from anonymity and into individuality. His goal was to use his own theatrical performance to magnify the crowd's distress, and then promise individuals a respite from that distress if they were willing to renounce the safety provided by their fellow congregants. The stakes, and the risk, for Finney's audience were much higher than for Forrest's, who were only required to temporarily surrender their

anonymity to perform the crowd-approved ritual of the floral tribute. Indeed, Forrest was able to use the crowd's tendency to try to remain a crowd to his own purposes; in a Forrest audience, the quickest way to be ejected from the safety of the crowd was to fail to express the appropriate adulation.

“Feeling Passed Through Thought and Fixed in Form”

Theatre managers were adopting preachers' tactics at a moment of particular contention between churches and theatres. The increasingly theatrical nature of preaching exemplified by Finney led to a backlash among some preachers and churchgoers, and even preachers who embraced Finney's New Measures were unlikely to have much affection for the theatre. Actors and preachers were in competition for audience attention. This sort of competition was not unusual for the theatrical community, which would fend off a succession of competing entertainment and performance types throughout the nineteenth century, but the particular competition offered by revival preachers was unusually adversarial. While museums and medicine shows merely siphoned off potential audience members, preachers were actively engaged in preventing their congregants from attending the theatre.

Henry Ward Beecher's *Lectures to Young Men on Various Important Subjects* (1844) makes it clear that he sees himself in direct competition with the theatre, and that he intends to go on the offensive against this particular rival. The book runs through a variety of potential threats to the young men in Beecher's audience, including idleness, dishonesty, and gambling, before closing with "Popular Amusements." This lecture is a

warning against the dangers of all sorts of diversions, including “cock-fighting, bear-baiting, and pugilistic contests,” but it reserves special ire for the theatre, which Beecher argues serves as an initial step towards those other, more unsavory activities: “These are the desperate excitements of debauched men; but no man becomes desperately criminal until he has been genteelly criminal” (223). This genteel criminality, according to Beecher, is generally supplied by the racetrack and the stage, and the lecture spends far more time addressing the theatre than the track.

Before Beecher can enumerate the theatre’s dangers, however, he must first defend his right to talk about this subject at all. He ventriloquizes what he imagines the objections of the theatre community will be: “*Do you mind your own business, and leave us with ours. We do not interfere with your preaching, do you let alone our acting*” (217). The actors, in Beecher’s imagined scenario, are claiming that their enterprise is separate from his, and that the two of them ought not get involved in each other’s business. Beecher strongly disagrees with this sentiment: “Every parent has a right—every citizen and every minister has the same right, to expose traps, which men have to set them; the same right to prevent mischief, which men have to plot it; the same right to attack vice, which vice has to attack virtue” (220). The theatre and the church, in Beecher’s telling, are in direct competition. Beecher implies that this competition is over the souls of the young men in his community, but this is also necessarily a competition over audience members. He later asks his audience, “Which would surprise you most, to see actors steadily at Church, or to see Christians steadily at a Theatre?”, answering that “both strike [him] as singular incongruities” (233). Put another way, a person can either be a

theatergoer or a churchgoer, but not, as far as Beecher is concerned, both.⁶⁶ This suggests that both the theatre and the church are drawing from a finite pool of potential attendees, and that Beecher at least believes the conflict between the two to be zero-sum. The very stridency with which he makes his claims however, as well as the frantic tone of this lecture, suggests that Beecher's congregants did go to the theatre. His battle with the playhouses was thus ongoing, and even a converted Christian had to be continually kept away from the theatre. The urgency of this battle confirms the very audience overlap that Beecher was trying to prevent.⁶⁷

Beecher's competition with the playhouses goes beyond mere attendance: both the theatre and the church, in Beecher's telling, aim to elicit similar behavior from their audience members. He begins his warnings about the theatre with what he sees as the most pressing concern:

The first reason is, *their waste of time*. I do not mean that they waste only the time consumed while you are within them; but they make you waste your time afterwards. You will go once, and wish to go again; you will go twice, and seek it a third time; you will go a third time, -a fourth; and whenever the bill flames, you will be seized with a restlessness and craving to go, until the appetite will become a *passion* (239).

This picture of the effect of the theatre on its audience is strikingly similar to the effects that Finney attempted to elicit from his congregants. In a section of his *Revivals*, he outlines the various ways in which a revival can fail. Among these is a lack of repeat customers: "A revival will decline and cease, unless *Christians are frequently re-*

⁶⁶ This idea has retained its currency well into our present scholarship. In *Melodramatic Formations*, for example, Bruce McConachie classifies a portion of Jacksonian Americans as "revivalists," and dismisses, in a single sentence, the possibility of their going to the theatre (95).

⁶⁷ For more on the overlap between theatergoers and churchgoers, see T. Smith 76.

converted" (298). The problem, Finney explains, is that after a revival conversion "the Christian's heart is liable to get crusted over, and lose its exquisite relish for Divine things; his unction and prevalence in prayer abate, and then he must be converted over again" (*ibid.*). Finney frames this problem as one of individual salvation, saying that a congregant must be re-converted because he will otherwise retreat into his pre-conversion state.⁶⁸ It is also, however, simultaneously a problem of maintaining an audience for the revival. Since a revival is focused on conversion, rather than static religious observance, it requires a ready supply of unconverted sinners to maintain its momentum. A revival that converts too many people is in danger of falling victim to its own success, and simply running out of potential converts. An emphasis on re-conversion solves this problem, because it allows for the possibility that the same audience members might come to the revival again and again, having similar but distinct conversion experiences each time.

Finney offers a solution to this:

Revivals decline, commonly, because it is found impossible to make Christians realize their guilt and dependence, so as to break down before God. It is important that ministers should understand this, and learn how to break down the Church... or else Christians will soon become mechanical in their work, and lose their fervor and their power of prevailing with God (*ibid.*).

Ministers, he explains, must be able to maintain a state of crisis for their congregants, and must be continually breaking down those congregants and then helping them to give themselves over to God again and again. In Beecher's terms, he must create a

⁶⁸ See also Roach's discussion of the afterimage in *It*. The afterimage of a performance is "a sensation that persists even after the external stimulation that caused it has disappeared" (91). Finney was evidently attempting to create a preaching style with a strong afterimage, which would carry his congregants until the next revival, when their re-conversion would refresh this image.

“restlessness and craving to go.” Finney’s “fervor” is remarkably similar to the “passion” that Beecher warns young men against developing for the theatre. The exhortations of these two ministers reveals a common preoccupation with the compulsive return of an audience to a performance. Since Finney’s performance is his own revival preaching, he is interested in encouraging it, while Beecher concerns himself with popular performance, and so is interested in preventing it. In both cases, however, the mechanic is the same; a tendency inaugurated by the theatre could be activated by the revival, and vice-versa. This interpenetration existed between the two not in spite of their adversarial relationship, but because of it. It was precisely the competition between theatre and preaching in the American marketplace of attention that led each to adopt the tactics of the other.

This contentious interaction between the church and the theatre was directly addressed in the first biography of Edwin Forrest, written by Unitarian preacher William Alger. It features several lengthy digressions on the relationship between actors and clergymen, the mutual hostility of the two, and the prospects for their future harmonious coexistence. This begins in the book’s preface, which includes an acknowledgment of the apparent strangeness of a clergyman’s willingness to write the biography of an actor:

Analyzed down to its origin, the long warfare of church and theatre, the instinctive aversion of priest and player, will be found to be rooted in the essential opposition of their respective ideals of life. The ecclesiastical ideal is ascetic, its method painful obedience and prayer, its chief virtues self-restraint and denial; the dramatic ideal is free, its method self-development and culture, its ruling aims gratification and fulfillment (14).

Having summarized the conventional view, that the theatre and the church are constitutionally incompatible, Alger offers a defense of the acting profession:

the great actor, properly equipped for his work, is the most flexible and comprehensive style of man in the world, master of all types of human nature and all grades of human experience; and that the priestly profession in our day has as much to learn from the histrionic as it has to teach it (14).

This defense recurs again and again throughout Alger's biography, as he repeatedly likens the work of an actor to the work of a preacher, and strongly implies that an actor like Forrest is better equipped for that work than most preachers.

What Alger recognizes in Forrest, and what he sees as valuable for the instruction of clergymen, is the same quality that dominated newspaper reviews of Forrest's performances: his affect on his audiences. Alger describes this affect in the strongest terms available to him: "This has, thus far in history, been the divine plan for lifting the multitude: the appearance of a single inspired superior whose characteristics the inferiors look up to with loving reverence and put on for the transformation of their own personalities into the likeness of his. That is the dynamic essence of Christianity itself" (82). Alger is literally drawing a parallel between Edwin Forrest and Jesus Christ, claiming that both possess the ability to so capture the admiration of the masses that those masses will instinctively desire to emulate them. As a Unitarian, Alger's conception of Jesus' significance rests more on this quality than it does on any claims about his divinity. In Alger's conception, then, the crucial element in both Forrest and Jesus is charisma, the personal magnetism necessary to draw and hold the gaze of a crowd, and to direct the actions of that crowd by example. According to Alger, an especially talented actor is able to accomplish this because he can present a heightened reality to his audience, a version of everyday life laden with extra significance and more vibrant emotions: "The highest value and service of histrionic genius consist herein; that the

magical power of its performances evokes in the souls of those who throng to gaze on them the noblest thoughts and sentiments in a degree superior to that which they experience them in ordinary life. They thus feel themselves exalted to a grander pitch than their native one” (20).

This kind of heightened experience of reality was also offered by revival preachers like Charles Finney. Finney’s *Revivals* indicates that he understood his own task as a preacher to be the amplification of the anxieties and other emotions felt by his congregants. “Christians,” he writes, “feel compassion for the anxious, and so they ought. But the last thing they ought to do is to flinch just at the point where it comes to a crisis” (375). Instead, according to Finney, Christians “should lay open to the sinner the worst of his case, expose his guilt and danger, and then lead him right up to the cross, and insist on instant submission” (*ibid.*). Finney’s procedures, then work the same way as Forrest’s, but in the opposite direction. Forrest, according to Alger, presents his audiences with an inspiring example and thus raises the standards of their behavior, while Finney reflects an exaggerated example of his congregants’ own behavior back at them, magnifying their distress and desire to change. These different ends can be accounted for by the differences between Finney’s Presbyterianism and Alger’s Unitarianism: Finney believes that his congregation is composed of innately depraved sinners who have a spontaneous conversion experience to escape damnation, while Alger would likely be satisfied with a simple change in audience conduct. In both cases, however, it is taken for granted by all concerned parties that it is within the abilities of the performer to profoundly affect the

subsequent direction of his audience members' lives, and that it is his responsibility to do so.

While Alger makes it clear that he believes that this is the task of the actor in general, he is mostly interested in exploring Forrest's unique talent for having this sort of impact on an audience. In Alger's account, Forrest's breakthrough as an actor comes during a production of *Othello*, in which Forrest was playing Iago to Edmund Kean's Othello. One of Forrest's line readings was notable for the effect that it had on the production's star: "The fearful suggestiveness of this produced from Kean a reaction so truly artistic and tremendous that the whole house was electrified" (145). Forrest, Alger indicates, truly arrived as an actor at the moment that he is able to elicit a strong and spontaneous reaction from his elder peer. This Alger credits, in large part, to Forrest's New Measures acting style, which Alger characterizes as "*feeling passed through thought and fixed in form*" (198). This description perfectly encapsulates what was so revolutionary about Finney's preaching and Forrest's acting: they both developed formalized and systematized procedures out of, and in the service of, spontaneous emotional reactions.

This description, "feeling passed through thought and fixed in form," also hints at the complex negotiations between public and private display that Finney pioneered, and that Forrest borrowed. As Gus Stadler argues, the essence of performance genius in the nineteenth century was the ability to "render the presence of individual interiority out of an experience in a mass public setting. One experiences genius in its pure, sublime state in public, then takes it home, where it can be fully and individually realized in all its

depth” (62). Writing specifically about the singer Jenny Lind, Stadler explains the process:

Thus, even as the criticism emphasizes Lind’s originality and individuality, touting those qualities as ideals for readers and audience members, it also enthusiastically portrays the apprehension of these ideals as a collective process taking place in public. What is also notable is how the simultaneous idealization of collective and individual experience registers *as* paradox, as tension (62).

Celebrity in this part of the nineteenth century, then, required the public management of private experience. Finney’s *New Measures* are precisely calculated to achieve this end. His focus on the state of sin in his individual congregants is a preliminary step towards making a private conversion into a public event. This impulse reaches its culmination in the anxious seat, which literally turns the individual’s internal struggle into a performance for the instruction of the whole congregation. Forrest’s use of these tactics was necessarily more subtle, as he could not explicitly bring audience members forward to display their rapturous responses to his acting, but he could make a speech that implicitly called for such a tribute. Further, the goal of his acting was, whenever possible, to prompt his audience to have a private emotional reaction in the public space of the theatre. This is similar to Roach’s “public intimacy” (16), with an important distinction. Roach’s argument, rooted as it is in Anglican eighteenth century England, is concerned with the public intimacy offered by saints. Such saints, Roach argues, “must make themselves tangibly accessible to ordinary mortals even as they communicate with the divine” (*ibid.*). This was an important component of Forrest and Finney’s performances as well, but those performances also worked to make individual audience members tangibly accessible to the star, and to the rest of the audience. The most important

difference between an American evangelical preacher and an Anglican saint is the physical co-presence of preacher and congregant, which gives the preacher and the congregant equal access to each others' emotional responses. This same level of access is shared by actors and their audiences.

As churches and theatres in the nineteenth century competed with each other for audience attention, they each intensified each other's tactics. Preachers like Finney came to resemble actors more and more, and actors like Forrest came to resemble preachers. The result, from the audience's perspective, was an increasing convergence between the two spaces, and the experiences that they offered. In light of this, it is less surprising that the Astor Place rioters were willing to go to such lengths to express their devotion to Forrest. Forrest and Finney, borrowing each other's tactics, created a climate in which a performance by an actor or preacher demanded a reciprocal performance from the audience. The rioters had been taught by this climate to express their appreciation for actors like Forrest in the most visible and bodily way possible. In addition, a series of celebrity melodramas had trained them to follow charismatic leaders like Forrest, and to prove through their devotion that they were worthy of the guidance such figures authored, unlike the faithless crowds in Forrest's plays. Preachers like Charles Finney, then, did more than just change the structure of American Protestant worship. They also exercised a competitive pressure on the theatre that changed the terms of what it meant to be a star, and a fan, in America.

Forrest's Play Contests and the Celebrity Melodrama

The force of Forrest's celebrity exercised a direct influence on American playwriting in the 1830s and '40s. In 1828, he placed an ad in the *Critic*, a Philadelphia paper, announcing a contest:

To the author of the best Tragedy, in five acts, of which the hero or principle character shall be an aboriginal of this country, the sum of five hundred dollars, and half of the proceeds of the third representation, with my own gratuitous services on that occasion. The award to be made by a committee of literary and theatrical gentlemen (qtd. in Moses, 96).

This offer prompted a flood of potential plays, from which Forrest, in consultation with his committee, selected *Metamora* (1829), by John Augustus Stone. The play, with Forrest in the title role, was so successful that Forrest repeated this play contest method eight more times. In all, he received around two hundred manuscripts, of which he selected nine; he later decided not to produce three of these (Moses 93). In addition to *Metamora*, the prize-winning plays included *Caius Marius* (1831), by Richard Penn Smith, *Jack Cade* (1841), by Robert T. Conrad, and *Mohammed, the Arabian Prophet* (1851), by G. H. Miles. Robert Montgomery Bird wrote three qualifying plays for Forrest: *The Gladiator* (1831), *Oralloossa, Son of the Incas* (1832), and *The Broker of Bogota* (1834). John Augustus Stone also wrote an additional accepted play: *The Ancient Briton* (1833).

Forrest's involvement in the writing of these plays was not limited to soliciting the manuscripts and making a final decision. He edited all of the manuscripts that he produced, sometimes making significant changes. These plays, however, all bore the mark of Forrest's public persona from the moment of their writing; they were Edwin Forrest plays long before Edwin Forrest had a chance to read them. Indeed, despite

having different authors, these plays bear a remarkable similarity to one another. Forrest exercises a palpable influence over them, since they were all written, first and foremost, with the goal of impressing him; the enjoyment of the audience was a secondary concern. At times, these two goals were at odds with each other: Bird's *Oralloossa* succeeded in gaining Forrest's approval, but failed to similarly move audiences (Foust 55). Still, a play that pleased Forrest but not the audience would still win its author five hundred dollars, while a potentially crowd-pleasing play that left Forrest cold would win its author nothing. It is thus unsurprising that playwrights attempted to flatter Forrest above all else. In keeping with this goal, the plays accepted to Forrest's play contest are all clearly designed to showcase Forrest's particular skills, and to play in to the public's conception of Forrest as a star.⁶⁹ Even their limitations are designed to play to Forrest's strengths, as Motrose Moses explains: "Their rhythm is familiar, their imagery stilted, and one meets in them many reminiscences of Shakespeare... An intensity of utterance was required in the delivery of such speeches as are here to be found, and Forrest possessed the requisite robust vigor" (99).

The plays accepted by Forrest shared several key characteristics. One of these was their tendency to give Forrest an opportunity to showcase his talent for oratory. Forrest's characters are all recognized as talented speakers; they do not just make a series of dramatic speeches, but are continually recognized by other characters for their speaking

⁶⁹ Forrest's influence over these plays is as clear an example of Foucault's "author function" as I've encountered.

prowess.⁷⁰ Forrest's characters do not have to wait for this recognition, however, since they are more than willing to remind the audience of their own oratorical ability. In *Metamora*, for example, Forrest's Indian character bolsters the authority of his own voice: "The high hills sent back the echo, and rock, hill and ocean, earth and air opened their giant throats and cried with me, "Red man, arouse! Freedom! Revenge or death!" [Thunder and lightning. All quail but *Metamora*] Hark, warriors! The Great Spirit hears me and pours forth his mighty voice with mine" (Stone 25). *Metamora* specifically says that the Great Spirit has spoken with him, rather than to him, linking his voice to the play's stand-in for God.⁷¹ In *The Gladiator*, the Romans in charge of Forrest's character are continually frustrated by his tendency to launch into an oration when he is supposed to be fighting. They typically describe this as "prating," and attempt to cut this speech short in favor of action: "Now marry, villain, thou wert bought not to prate, but to fight" (Bird 317).

These plays also always portrayed Forrest's character as a charismatic leader of men, whether he is a respected Indian chief or a slave in the coliseum. He possesses a quality that Le Bon calls "personal prestige," "a faculty independent of all titles, of all authority, and possessed by a small number of persons whom it enables to exercise a

⁷⁰ So great are Spartacus's powers of oratory that some of the play's characters would rather die than be on the receiving end of his invective. Late in *The Gladiator*, Phasarius, Spartacus's brother, deserts Spartacus's command to lead a splinter rebellion. Without Spartacus's leadership this second rebellion fails, and Phasarius is forced to return to Spartacus's camp and apologize. Spartacus repeatedly castigates his brother for disloyalty, and Phasarius begs for death to end this verbal abuse: "Why shouldst thou stab me with thy words? O brother,/ Strike me with thy sharp sword, but speak no more:/ Give me to punishment, or drive me forth/ To die by Romans; but upbraid no more" (408).

⁷¹ Unsurprisingly, the play is not especially interested in presenting an accurate version of native theology.

veritably magnetic fascination on those around them" (154). Shortly after Spartacus arrives at the coliseum, for example, he learns that he will be expected to fight for the amusement of the Romans. He immediately proposes an uprising: "Were it not better/ To turn upon your masters, and so die,/ Killing them that oppress you, rather than fall,/ Killing your brother wretches?" (Bird 339). Spartacus takes an inventory of the available gladiators, and what he finds prompts a reply that is marked more by incredulity than excitement: "Four hundred/ Arm'd slaves, that hate their masters!" (*ibid.*). When Spartacus presents the situation in these terms, it seems almost impossible that nobody has thought of a gladiatorial uprising before. Indeed, it appears that the armed mass of gladiators in Rome has simply been waiting for Spartacus to enter its ranks. Once he does, the rebellion of the gladiators becomes an inevitability, one that is set in motion almost immediately. Spartacus incites this rebellion not through his fighting prowess, although he is depicted as an exceptional fighter, but through his ability to make stirring speeches that prompt action from other men.⁷² In other words, Spartacus leads by sermon. Like Finney and the other revival preachers, Spartacus's primary skill is forcing ordinary people to make an immediate decision to join a particular movement. The conditions of gladiatorial slavery may underlie this decision, just as Finney's congregants were also moved by anxiety over their own sinful state, but Spartacus is the proximate cause, the preacher who brings their concerns over their present condition to a crisis point.

⁷² When his authority is challenged, he cites this ability as a basis for his legitimacy: "Under my authority,/ In a few days your ranks have been swell'd up/ To fearful thousands; and from a band of slaves, Skulking in caves, you have become an army/ Can fight a Roman Consul. This is proof,/ I have deserved obedience; and therefore,/ I still command it" (363).

When Forrest revised the plays that he selected, the revisions were invariably designed to highlight these qualities. He edited *Oralloossa*, adding a line about his character's ability to influence others: "Millions of brown barbarians join'd his standard,/ And fear beset us in our citadels:/ Scarce could our strongest garrisons resist him" (Bird 447-8). When revising *The Gladiator*, Forrest added a few lines of posthumous appreciation for Spartacus, to be delivered by one of the Romans: "Thy bark is wreck'd, but nobly did she buffet/ These waves of war, and grandly lies at last,/ A stranded ruin on this fatal shore./ Let him have burial; not as a base bondman,/ But as a chief enfranchised and ennobled./ If we denied him honour while he lived,/ Justice shall carve it on his monument" (Bird 440). Spartacus, it seems, is so charismatic that he is able to garner praise even from his enemies.

A distinct subgenre of melodrama was thus born out of Forrest's play contests, which Bruce McConachie calls "heroic melodrama" (*Melodramatic* 104). For McConachie, these melodramas are significant primarily for their interaction with the Jacksonian politics of the America in which they were produced. "In general," he argues, "the image of heroism perceived by Forrest's fans was the same image seen in Andrew Jackson by worshipful Democrats" (88).⁷³ The influence of the political climate on Forrest's dramaturgy and reception should not be ignored, but it operated alongside an equally potent religious climate. In addition, Forrest's plays responded to their own production and reception; they commented on Forrest's stardom, and helped to reaffirm

⁷³ This claim is complicated by Forrest's preference for playing Indians; Indian removal was a key part of Jackson's campaign and presidency.

that stardom. Indeed, these heroic melodramas were just as interested in exploring the operations of charisma and fame as they were in dramatizing heroic actions.

In a heroic melodrama, the action is pushed forward by a charismatic protagonist who demonstrates an exceptional ability to influence masses of people. The stars of these shows qualify as heroes but virtue of what they say and who they are, not what they do. *Metamora* and *Spartacus* mostly mobilize other men to action; neither one of them performs a feat as heroic as Eliza's jumping across ice floes in George Aiken's adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Heroic action, then, would have to wait for the sensation melodramas later in the nineteenth century, and even then would often not be taken by the ostensible protagonist. Indeed, one of the identifying features of the sensation melodrama, the nominal hero who remains largely passive while events unfold around him, can be traced back to Forrest's melodramas. A play like Boucicault's *The Octoroon*, where George is the hero because of his position in the play's structure, not because of anything that he does, is an echo of the so-called heroic melodrama, in which the actions of the protagonist are less important than the fame and status of that protagonist. Such plays trained audiences to accept a different kind of protagonist, and to transform "hero" from a description of a character's actions to a description of a character's place in the hierarchy of the *dramatis personae*. Heroic melodramas, then, are more properly called celebrity melodramas; their protagonists are celebrities, not heroes. They are known by people who have never met them, and are constantly discussed when not on stage. They are famous before the play begins, before they have a chance to do anything, and it is this

fame that produces their accomplishments once the play gets underway. The plays, then, are essentially about fame: they explore its power, and its dangers.

These dangers generally supplied the endpoint for celebrity melodrama: a tragic conclusion caused by the hero's betrayal at the hands of his followers (McConachie, *Melodramatic* 104). In each of these plays, the celebrity protagonist mobilizes masses of people toward an uprising, only to see his plans ruined by the shortsighted or selfish behavior of those same people. This concluding formula was essential for the plays' ability to satisfy the audience's demand for increased prominence and participation while still maintaining the hierarchy of the celebrity order. Plays like *The Gladiator* acknowledge that the celebrity hero derives much of his power from his followers, and from his ability to inspire them. But they also make it clear that the star is a different class of person from those followers, none of whom are worthy of his leadership, and none of whom could attain the same position as the star.

This continual reaffirmation of the celebrity's status points to a final, key difference between Finney and Forrest's relationships with their audience. Revival preachers like Finney may have traded on their celebrity status, but they also posited an essential sameness between themselves and their congregants. It would not make sense for Finney to claim that his audience was not worthy of his leadership, because Finney's Protestant theology rests on the assumption that both he and his audience are equally unworthy of divine leadership, but could receive it anyway. This is why Finney uses his own conversion experience, with its moments of doubt, shame, and self-abasement, to serve as an example to his audience; he expects, and implies, that they will experience

something very similar, with the same results. Forrest, by contrast, cannot afford to put himself on the same level with the audience. His own audience-centered acting was a potential threat to his livelihood, since it carried with it the possibility of the erosion of his special status as a star. He neutralized this threat by offering the audience a single channel to express its sovereignty: approval of his performance.⁷⁴ In addition, he chose and encouraged plays that clearly set the celebrity apart from the crowd, in both ability and morality. This setting apart even extends to Forrest's own theatrical conversion experience, which follows the pattern of a Protestant conversion with one telling departure: it highlights the special talents of its subject. Specifically, it demonstrates his exceptional ability to recall and recite Shakespearian dialogue. Forrest's spontaneous recitation of *Richard III*, while superficially similar to Finney's sudden memory of a line of scripture, serves a very different purpose. Protestant conversion narratives often included such scriptural intrusions in order to demonstrate the power of the word of God, not to testify to the convert's skill at memorizing biblical verse. Forrest's story makes no such claims about the word of Shakespeare; its glory falls entirely on Forrest.

This, ultimately, was Forrest's most important talent: his ability to channel the crowd's desire to respond to performance into a specific appreciation of his own genius as an actor. The narrative that Whitman presents—where the audience's response is due more to the qualities of that audience than it is to the qualities of Forrest's performance—was clearly unacceptable to Forrest, however accurate it may have been. Instead, he worked continually to establish himself as the source of the “tempest” that the Bowery

⁷⁴ For more on the rise and fall of audience sovereignty in American entertainment, see Butsch 57-65.

crowd was capable of unleashing. His dramaturgy and acting style together formed his new measures for the theatre. Like Finney's new measures, Forrest's new measures were designed to elicit a reaction from the crowd, and to influence the crowd's interpretation of that reaction. Finney's tactics encouraged the crowd to credit their experiences to the grace of God, and Forrest's tactics encouraged the crowd to credit them to Forrest.

Coda: Edwin Booth

The case of Edwin Booth indicates that Forrest's effect on the way that stars were received by American audiences outlasted his own particular period of celebrity. For a time after Forrest, a theatrical star was a star in the Forrest mode, regardless of the many differences between his approach to acting and celebrity and Forrest's.

Edwin Booth was born near Baltimore in 1833, the son of Junius Booth, once of the most famous actors of his time. He was named after Edwin Forrest, despite Junius's stated desire to steer his son away from acting. Edwin was one of fourteen children, four of whom died as children. Edwin would almost certainly have been the most famous member of his family were it not for his brother John Wilkes's assassination of Abraham Lincoln in 1865. As it was, his fame was sufficient to withstand the scandal caused by his brother's actions; he responded to the assassination with a self-imposed hiatus from acting, after which he was welcomed back to the stage by rapturous applause.

Booth further developed Forrest's naturalistic acting style, a sharp contrast to his father's style, which was more reminiscent of William Macready's. Booth's acting style was a more extreme version of Forrest's; he was quieter than his predecessor for much of

the play, and then suddenly launched into a theatrical display at key moments. When he did arrive at one of these moments, however, he was unabashed in his employment of theatrical devices. Most famous among these came at the climax of his performance as the title character in *Richelieu* (1839), when he delivers a curse upon his enemies.

Biographer Richard Lockridge describes how Booth created the appearance that he grew in stature as the curse progressed:

He wore, of course, robes which trailed the ground. As he stood to begin the curse he rose slowly on his toes, his feet begin concealed under the robes. And as he rose, every one else on stage sank to his knees... It was magnificent. The audience gasped and, when the spell was broken, cheered. It seemed like a miracle, and they told their friends, who hastened to see it (104).

This intensification of Forrest's new measures acting style apparently allowed Booth to match, and perhaps surpass, Forrest's level of fame, or at least his ability to draw a crowd.

Critics were not always as enthusiastic about Booth's acting; like Forrest and Finney, he faced opposition from traditionalists. New York's *Tribune* characterized his acting style in an early review:

He omits many opportunities for making technical points and slips over many sentences which, in other hands, have seldom failed to gain the audible approval of the house; but, on the other hand, when he takes up a favorite scene with the resolve to make it a sensation, all his tameness instantly vanishes and he renders the passage with a vigorous truthfulness which startles his audience into wild enthusiasm (qtd. in Lockridge 80).

This kind of description was typical; critics frequently noted that Booth's acting was more presentational at moments of great import to the play, and otherwise sometimes "lack[ed] force and dignity" (qtd. in Lockridge 118). It seems that critics accustomed to Forrest initially bristled at Booth's technique. When Forrest and Booth were put in direct

competition, playing in rival New York productions, their audiences tended to break down along generational lines, with older playgoers preferring the familiarity of Forrest, and younger audiences drawn to the novelty of Booth (*ibid.* 94-5).

Booth also departed from Forrest's example in his choice of acting material. Where Forrest expressed a desire to encourage American playwriting, and to act in plays specifically designed to accommodate his talents, Edwin Booth performed almost exclusively in Shakespeare's plays. Booth represented a kind of fundamentalist adaptation of Forrest's new measures acting, approaching Shakespeare as a fundamentalist preacher might approach the Bible. He once admonished one of his fellow actors for failing to do the same: "Please, speak the text as it is written. We cannot approach our immortal plays too reverently. Never change the text of Shakespeare—to *make it easier to act*" (Goodale 64). The text of Shakespeare may be difficult or inconvenient at times, he implies, but actors have a responsibility to remain faithful to that text as it is literally written. This spirit of extreme fidelity extended to Booth's staging of Shakespeare's plays. As a biographer later noted, Booth's productions "carried fidelity, actuality, into the last detail... The throne room of Booth's 'Hamlet' was a throne room, complete with throne, pillars, walls, and velvet draperies" (Lockridge 182). This level of detail is not demanded by Shakespeare's stage directions, which do not specify scenic presentation. Rather, it indicates a preoccupation on Booth's part with presenting the world of the play as completely as possible, with making the audience's experience match, in all particulars, the experience of actually being in a throne room in Denmark.

To this end, Booth began to build a new theater in 1867. This theater, he announced, would allow him to mount productions of Shakespeare that properly conveyed his respect for the material: “I intend to restore to the stage (to mine, at least) the unadulterated plays of Shakespeare” (qtd. in Lockridge 183). His theater, which was completed in 1869, featured a fifty-five foot stage which sat atop hydraulic machinery capable of raising and lowering extremely complicated sets, including a sixty foot wall with a balcony for *Romeo and Juliet*. Unfortunately for Booth, his theatrical skills did not include theater management, and he was forced to sell the theater in 1881.

Booth does not appear to have courted the same audience response that Forrest did, but he received it nonetheless. As Katherine Goodale, a longtime member of Booth’s company,⁷⁵ later reminisced, “before I had ever seen him on stage, I had given him my hero-worship. It was in the air to be ‘insane on Edwin Booth’” (5). Indeed, he frequently expressed irritation at his audience members’ tendency to demonstrate his effect on them. Goodale recalls that Booth typically looked “insulted” during curtain calls, and reports that, when she asked him why, his response was full of contempt for the custom: “I reveal the soul of masterpieces. And tyros think it incumbent upon themselves to let me see they approve of me! It is impertinent... They drag me out to show their approval!—so I may rejoice that in their good nature I have amused them” (60). Goodale’s response is that the audience’s response is spontaneous, unconsidered, and automatic. She expresses this in language that is strikingly similar to the language used to describe involuntary religious experiences: “I sit out there and watch them until you make me lose my head over your

⁷⁵ Goodale played Jessica to Booth’s Shylock, and Ophelia to his Hamlet.

acting. It's like being whirled around until you're dizzy. They applaud because they can't help it. That's why they stand on their seats, and yell!" (*ibid.*). The audience, it seems, had been so thoroughly trained by Finney and Forrest that Booth's disapproval could not quell their enthusiasm. By the height of Booth's career, audiences understood that seeing a star, in a church or a theatre, meant loudly proclaiming their own transfiguration at the hands of that star. The structure of a star's performance had been codified, and it would be followed with or without the individual star's consent.

The inability Booth's disapproval of his audience's response to quell that same audience's desire to make itself heard indicates a shift in the relationship between the star and the crowd; Forrest had more control than this. Goodale's account of her time with Booth's company contains several moments in which Booth had to bow to the audience's whims:

[The ovation] lasted more than five minutes. It waxed in volume until it seemed nothing could exceed that steady flow of tireless energy. Mr. Booth held his somber mood and posture as long as he could, then bowed gravely—not a trace of a smile upon his face. But they—out there—kept it up, until he was forced to step out of character and wanly smile upon them. More applause. He rose now, but in his dignity, and reseated himself. More applause. He rose again, and bowed a slightly more human smile this time, and sat down. The applause was gaining in volume and intensity. At last Mr. Booth recognized the feeling back of this ovation, and in spite of himself responded—with all of himself (179).⁷⁶

Although Goodale presents this anecdote as proof of her friend's star power, it primarily attests to his powerlessness. Goodale's summary of the interaction, "I saw him utterly conquered by his audience and his audience utterly conquered by him," is only half

⁷⁶ We should not ignore the possibility that Booth was making at least a partial show of not desiring this kind of response from the audience in an effort to appear more humble, and to actually increase the fervency of their applause. The contempt with which he viewed such audience displays, however, makes this affectation considerably less likely than it otherwise would be.

accurate; it is far from clear that Booth had conquered anything. Instead, he is forced again and again to satisfy the audience's seemingly unquenchable demand that he acknowledge their appreciation of him. Goodale's repetition of the sparse phrase "more applause" takes on an increasingly sinister cast as the anecdote progresses, until Booth is helpless in the face of the relentless "volume and intensity" of the crowd.

Booth's experiences indicate the importance of Forrest's dramaturgy in allowing the star to retain control of his fans. The roles that Forrest chose, and encouraged through play contests and editing, reminded the audience that he was in charge, that the role of the crowd was to follow him, and to prove their worthiness to do so. Booth, by contrast, was known primarily as a Shakespearian actor, and Shakespeare, as far as nineteenth-century American audiences were concerned, belonged to everyone. It was easy, then, for the audience to demand that Booth cater to their need to take command of the performance by loudly and aggressively showing their appreciation, and that he remain on the stage until they allowed him to leave.

It should not be surprising that a star like Booth was unable to control his audience, and that a star like Forrest was only able to do so in the context of roles that had control mechanisms written into their very structure. The experience of audience members during the middle of the nineteenth century, in both the church and the theatre, was marked by a rise in the importance of their own response, coupled with a decline in prohibitions on the manifestations of that response. This tendency would have been felt most strongly among Protestants who had attended revivals, where preachers like Finney departed from earlier prohibitions against bodily displays of faith, and instead declared

that true faith always results in a visible action (*Revivals*, 385).⁷⁷ As this same pool of potential audience members filled both churches and theatres, this sense of the importance of their own response only increased, until it grew out of the bounds of control and reached a crisis point, as evidenced by the Astor Place riot and by Booth's inability to control his own crowds. As the nineteenth century wore on, audiences appear to have acquired a strong sense of ownership over the performance of a star. This served to dramatically intensify what Joseph Roach calls "the It-effect," in which stars' "images began to circulate widely and hyperbolically in the absence of their persons" (149). It culminated in the advent of film, which eliminated the need for the physical co-presence of star and audience. It allowed the crowd a much stronger sense of possession, since the image of the star's performance could be moved around at will, and released the star from the exhausting demands of that same audience. Booth was one of the last major stage stars in America before the rise of film. Although the invention of the cinema is often discussed as a threat to the stage actor, it is not hard to imagine that a weary Edwin Booth would have welcomed the opportunity to perform away from a crowd that had, as a result of decades of training, come to view itself as the real star.

⁷⁷ Finney did caution against mistaking such action for certain evidence of faith, but even this caution carries with it the encouragement of bodily manifestations: "Teach them that religion does not consist *in raptures*, or *ecstasies*, or high flights of feeling. There may be a great deal of these where there *is* religion. But it ought to be understood that they are all involuntary emotions" (*Revivals*, 431).

Chapter 4: Nathaniel Hawthorne and the American Lyceum

The Lyceum-Style Lecture in America

In 1826, the *American Journal of Education* published an article by a self-taught geologist named Josiah Holbrook. Holbrook had been making a living running a school in Connecticut and delivering scientific lectures in the surrounding area. These lectures were, by necessity, offered on a freelance basis, since the United States had no institutions to organize and employ lecturers. Holbrook, however, was about to change all that: his article presented a plan for a “Society for Mutual Education” that would later become the American Lyceum.⁷⁸ The article explains that the society would have two main goals:

The first object of this society is to procure for youth an economical and practical education, and to diffuse rational and useful information through the community generally. The second object is to apply the sciences and the various branches of education to the domestic and useful arts, and to the common purposes of life (qtd. in Ray 194).

The Lyceum, however, would not limit itself to these two purposes for long. Over the course of its history it would transform itself from a local, education-based society to a centralized, professional organization with a stable of professional lecturers delivering speeches with a persuasive, rather than educational, agenda. It would also become a major entertainment venue for nineteenth-century Americans, shaping audience

⁷⁸ The Lyceum was named for Aristotle’s Peripatetic school (Grafton 547).

expectations in ways that would influence the development of fiction and theatre during that period.

At its outset, the Lyceum generally followed Holbrook's plan. This is reflected in Holbrook's own list of advantages to the Lyceum, which he both revised and republished with some frequency. The 1829 version of this list included "the introduction of good topics of conversation into the daily intercourse of families, neighbors, and friends," "Providing a Seminary for Teachers," and "Agricultural and Geological Surveys" (qtd. in Bode 24-5). Even this early in its history, however, the Lyceum showed signs of understanding itself as, at least partially, a form of entertainment. The second item on Holbrook's list, "Directing Amusements," offers the Lyceum as a safe and enriching alternative to the array of harmful diversions that confront America's youth:

Young people always have had, and it is believed and hoped they always will have, places of resort for social enjoyment. From the neglect of parents, and other persons of influence, to furnish them with occasions and opportunities to meet for exercises calculated for the instruction and improvement of each other, as well as for the enjoyment of social affections of a generous and elevated character, they resort to those calculated to corrupt and debase their minds (*ibid.*).

Holbrook immediately concedes that young people require, and will demand, to be amused. He suggests that "exercises calculated for... instruction and improvement" present a compelling option for the nation's youth, and that they will default to less lofty entertainment options only in the absence of such exercises. As a result, while the Lyceum defined itself from the beginning in opposition to the theatre, it did not make use of the kinds of strident warnings that preachers like Henry Ward Beecher frequently employed. Instead, it assumed the simple presentation of a morally superior alternative would be enough. In Holbrook's initial plan, the Lyceum would apparently function as a

knowledge collective, with each member presenting his own expertise to the rest of the body, with the total knowledge of the group always rising to meet the level of its most informed members.

The actual progress of the Lyceum, however, indicates that the public wanted something slightly different out of such an institution than what Holbrook was initially prepared to deliver. In the early years of its competition with the theatre, the relatively young Lyceum was at a decided disadvantage, and so needed to respond to the competitive pressure exercised by its rival performance venue. Over time, the Lyceum moved away from “exercises” and “mutual education,” and toward a model based on passive reception. If changes in the Lyceum’s offerings are any guide, it quickly became clear that audience members did not want to educate each other, or to be asked to participate in their own education. The history of the Salem Lyceum, summarized in H. K. Oliver’s *Historical Sketch of the Salem Lyceum* (1879), is illuminating in this regard. As Oliver explains, the Salem Lyceum switched, at its inception, from a proposed interactive debate society to a more passive lecture hall: “It was originally intended that public debates should be among the exercises of the Lyceum, and the by-laws provided for the appointment of the disputants upon the affirmative and negative sides of such questions as might be discussed. But this plan was never carried out” (4).

More significantly, Oliver’s catalogue of the lectures delivered at the Salem Lyceum over the years offers a useful picture of the changes that the organization underwent, presumably in response to changes in popular tastes. The most notable of these changes is the shift from talks delivered by local Lyceum members to those

delivered by outsiders, many of whom were making a living as professional lecturers. Of the eleven lecturers listed as speaking at the initial, 1830 series, all but one are identified as Salem residents. In 1837, just six of the twenty-three lecturers are from Salem, and 1856 saw a series without a single local lecturer. Later series are more likely to include celebrity lecturers like Ralph Waldo Emerson, James Russell Lowell, and Daniel Webster, and the number of lectures delivered in a given year generally increased, with some minor fluctuation, from year to year. Over time, the Lyceum transformed itself into an intellectual star system that operated more efficiently than its theatrical counterpart, since star lecturers did not require stock companies to fill in the rest of the parts. Like the theatrical star system, this version of the Lyceum became increasingly centered around New York City, whose large population and voracious appetite for diversion ultimately enabled it to outpace New England as the most important hub of Lyceum activity.⁷⁹ The ascendancy of the star lecturer carried with it a change in the relative importance of different positions on the Lyceum board; as outside lecturers began to make up the bulk of the Lyceum's offerings, the corresponding secretary, who was responsible for booking speakers from outside the community, became a crucial position.⁸⁰ It also made the Lyceum a much more serious competitor for playwrights; after years of modifying itself

⁷⁹ See Bode 141.

⁸⁰ According to Peter Buckley, the corresponding secretary was the official primarily responsible for managing the Lyceum's competitive relationship with the theatre: "attendance at lectures usually about cost twenty-five cents, roughly comparable to popular musical performances and cheap theatre. Local lyceums thus had to face similar pressures of drawing a crowd, which had the effect of making the corresponding secretary little more than a manager who had to worry about house receipts" (474).

to respond to the threats represented by more conventional theatre, the Lyceum was finally in a position to exercise some pressure itself.

In this chapter, I will argue that Lyceum-style⁸¹ lectures trained audiences to become consumers of what are generally called social reform melodramas, but which I will call argument dramas. Many lyceums initially banned lectures on politics and religion, as well as on controversial topics in general. Over time, however, these restrictions were abandoned, and more inflammatory subject matter became routine.⁸² Early Lyceum audiences expected to be educated, while later Lyceum audiences expected to be persuaded, or to have their pre-existing opinions strengthened.⁸³ Both groups also expected to be entertained, which speaks to a shift in audience expectations as to what constitutes entertainment. Over time, then, the Lyceum trained audiences to accept, and even demand, that their amusements contain arguments. The Lyceum and its imitators occupied a different position within the entertainment landscape than did many of the other nineteenth-century paratheatrical forms. While lectures enjoyed wide popularity, their audiences were somewhat more limited than, for example, audiences for medicine

⁸¹ Because the Lyceum was the first institution to popularize lecturing as a form of mass entertainment, it was able to set some of the standards for the popular lecture in general. Throughout this chapter, I will be using the term “Lyceum-style lecture” to refer to the kind of one-person audience address that was incubated within the Lyceum system, but then spread out across the country on a variety of competing circuits.

⁸² See Ray 29.

⁸³ The catalogue of offerings by the Salem Lyceum provides a helpful picture of this shift. The inaugural course of lectures consists entirely of informational talks on subjects like “circulation of the blood,” “geology,” and “optics” (37). Such lectures were included among every course of lectures offered at the Salem Lyceum. As time went on, however, more and more argumentative lectures began to appear; audiences at the Salem Lyceum in 1843 could hear talks with titles like “Dangers of our Present Form of Government,” “Advantages of a Liberal Education,” and “Want of a Distinctive National Character” (46-7). The more popular the Lyceum became, the more comfortable audiences became with hearing speeches delivered from outside the community, and with hearing agenda-driven speeches.

shows. Lecture audiences self-selected on the basis of interest in education and persuasion; the people sitting in a lecture hall were, almost by definition, interested in either learning about a particular topic or engaging with a pressing contemporary issue. The early Lyceum also explicitly targeted itself at the middle class, who, its founders believed, would benefit from an introduction to useful knowledge. The argument dramas that flourished in the second half of the nineteenth century, and were especially popular among this audience, bear the distinctive marks of the Lyceum-style lecture, and these marks point to a pattern of competitive influence.

Before the Lyceum could exercise this kind of competitive pressure, the lecture had to gain traction as a form of entertainment. It was helped along in this regard by the formation of the Redpath Bureau, which James Redpath founded in 1867. The Bureau, which began its life under the name of the Boston Lyceum Bureau, was a booking organization that managed many of the more popular speakers in America. The Bureau typically organized the offerings of its lecturers into courses; it also, in rare and lucrative cases, booked individual lecturers into solo engagements. In essence, the organization acted as what we would now call a talent agency, cultivating a stable of speakers and placing those speakers in venues throughout the country for a percentage of the speaker's fee.⁸⁴ The Redpath Bureau brought much of the nation's lecturing business under a single umbrella, helping to turn the Lyceum into an institution with some degree of standardization. The Bureau made it possible to discuss 'the lecturing industry' as an entity.

⁸⁴ See Gentile 18-19.

The growing popularity of the Lyceum also prompted freelance lecturers to operate independently of the Lyceum system, and several competing lecturing institutions began to form. The most successful of these was the Chautauqua Institute. Founded in upstate New York in 1874, the Institute began as a summer course in religious instruction. Chautauqua's founders almost immediately began to broaden its offerings to include secular lectures and other entertainments. By the 1880s, Chautauqua was emphasizing the diversity of its offerings: "Chautauqua meant study, music, dramatic interpretation, lectures and oratory, stereopticon views and camping by the lake shore, the best in the cultural and educational world, with good food and fireworks, for a grand total of six to seven dollars a week" (qtd. in Gentile 38). The phrase "dramatic interpretation" is important, since it creates a space for a kind of performance that offers some of the features of the theatre while still differentiating itself from the theatre. John Gentile explains the way that this distinction played out: "The Chautauqua hostility towards the theatre contributed to the continuing success of one-person shows. Unwilling to offer plays as part of their cultural program, the Chautauquas avidly subscribed to platform performances" (39). The success of New York's Chautauqua institute led to a proliferation of independent imitators, who adopted the Chautauqua name and mission as a way to offer respectable entertainment to local citizens. 1904 saw the invention of the tent Chautauqua, a traveling program of lectures and other entertainments that circulated throughout the country. The tent Chautauqua was eventually taken over by the Redpath Bureau, at which point the two institutions became part of the same system.

Although individual lectures exhibited considerable variation, there were some key features common to most, if not all, Lyceum-style lectures. Barnet Baskerville summarizes what American audiences expected of their lecturers:

American audiences of the pre-Civil War period required of an orator... that he be “eloquent” — that is, that he be able to manipulate words in a manner regarded at the time as artistic — and that he be capable through voice, action, and personal magnetism of exerting a mastery over his listeners (83).

This is an accurate picture of what audiences demanded in a lecturer, but what did they demand in a lecture? An examination of several representative lectures reveals some key features common to successful Lyceum speeches. These features will be useful in recognizing the Lyceum’s influence on the theatre, since they are also evident in the plays that subsequently borrow from the Lyceum model.

Audiences, drawing on their experience as theatre-goers, apparently had little patience for lectures that presented a dry, logical, progression of argument. Instead, they tended to favor a more impressionistic style of argument. As Nan Johnson, explains, American theories of rhetoric in the nineteenth century would have demanded that lecturers shape their style based on the specific goals of the lecturer and the audience: "Throughout most of the nineteenth century, theoretical discussions of the principles of oratory were predisposed by the assumption that the aims of oral discourse can be understood in terms of epistemological dynamics: the requisite nature of any speech is constrained by whether the orator seeks to influence the understanding, move the will, or engage the passions" (115). The implication is that a speaker cannot do all three at the same time. Lyceum audiences, especially once the Lyceum had shifted from an educational model to a persuasive one, most often attended lectures to have their passions

engaged, thus leaving them with little time to have their understanding influenced. To this end, Lyceum lectures often forego logical progression and argumentation in favor of a series of points that are relatively disconnected from each other, but that, taken together, add up to a defense of the lecture's central argument. Richard Lathers's *A Lecture on Woman, and Her Relations to Society* (1883) is representative in this regard. The lecture, delivered to the New Rochelle Lyceum, begins by making some claims about the general value of women to society. It then quickly moves out of the realm of logical argument, and instead begins piling up examples of specific women. These examples are not ordered by any argumentative logic; their sheer number is what does the persuasive work in this case. Some of Lathers's examples are surprising, as when he praises the biblical Eve for her curiosity: "Progress, as well as its great factor, invention, comes mainly from the impulse of curiosity, the great incentive and avenue to knowledge. This is peculiarly a female quality, exemplified when Eve was induced to eat the prohibited apple by the serpent who excited her curiosity for the knowledge of good and evil" (13).

Even the more conventional examples, however, are linked by nothing more than their being examples of notable women. The examples are not even all admirable; Lathers includes figures like Cleopatra as examples of corrupted and destructive women. Lathers is fully aware of the unordered nature of his argument, and he frequently prefaces a list of examples with an introduction that suggests he is raising the issue for no particular reason: "It may be well to remind you of a few of the many distinguished women who have tended to reform and have illustrated society by their efforts and genius

in literature, art, and drama” (33). He even identifies some of these examples as “imperfect sketches, which for want of time are shorn of their real merit, and adduced only to interest [listeners] in farther investigation” (45). Lathers is far from alone in this regard, as most Lyceum lectures have a similarly disorganized structure. They aim to evoke particular feelings in their audience members, rather than make a series of logical points.

The Lyceum’s episodic tendency is a necessary component of its role in changing audience expectations. The Lyceum accustomed audiences to entertainment that contained arguments, but retained their expectation to be engaged and entertained. As a result, audiences came to expect an impressionistic style of argumentation, one in which disparate sections and examples together give the sense of a larger point. This would be crucial for playwrights and authors who were influenced by the Lyceum, since the melodrama of the nineteenth century was much more easily adapted into an impressionistic argument than a logical one.

This impressionistic style was aided by a heavy reliance on, and faith in, the power of the dramatic and representative example. Lecturers who needed to hold audience attention for the duration of a lengthy argument turned to narrative as a means for simultaneous illustration and entertainment. Rhetorical instruction in the nineteenth century heavily favored arguments that made use of “experience, analogy, or testimony” (N. Johnson 61) Lathers’s lecture exemplifies one variant of this strategy: he accumulates a series of short sketches without dwelling for very long on any one of them. He displays a quantitative style of lecturing; his argument relies on the number of his examples,

without being too particular about the quality of those examples. Other lectures took the opposite tack, expounding at length upon a small set of examples. Russell Herman Conwell's "Acres of Diamonds" (1886), a lecture on the opportunities for wealth in Conwell's home city of Philadelphia, takes its title from a long anecdote which Conwell claims to have heard from an Arab guide on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. This story, about a man who travels the world in search of diamonds and unknowingly leaves behind a rich diamond mine on his own property, is one of a series of three stories that dominate the lecture. All three are essentially the same; they all describe a person who leaves home to find wealth, and they all end with the discovery of immense wealth at that person's home. These anecdotes consume most of the running time of the lecture, occupying nine of the published version's twelve pages. The actual argument, that his audience should remain in Philadelphia if they wish to grow wealthy, does not come in until the end, and relies heavily on the impression made by the narratives that have come before it. Cubí I Soler's case for Phrenology includes an anecdotal visit to an asylum populated with colorful characters:

The case which has struck me with peculiar force, and afforded to my mind irresistible proof of the truth of Phrenology, is that of an insane patient now at the State Lunatic Hospital at Worcester, in Massachusetts... The first time I saw him, he was playing on the flute. I thought I never heard such exquisite music produced by that instrument. "Yet," said Dr. Woodward, the able, intelligent, and benevolent superintendant of the Hospital, "he is a complete maniac" (11).

Cubí I Soler ends this portion of his lecture with this anecdote, forgoing additional argumentation in the service of allowing his audience to linger on his story.

While many lecturers made use of this kind of theatrical, anecdotal presentation, it was a particular hallmark of the Washingtonian temperance lecturers. The

Washingtonian movement began in Baltimore in 1840 and quickly spread throughout the country. As John W. Frick explains, the Washingtonians represented an important departure from the existing temperance movement:

The new movement attempted to reclaim chronic drunkards, previously considered irrevocably lost by its predecessors, and drew from the lower middle and working classes. These segments of society had largely been ignored by earlier temperance societies... Furthermore, the Washingtonian appeal was to the drinker's emotions rather than his reason. Consequently, the intemperate were addressed directly and in person, not simply provided with tracts to read on their own (33).

While the Washingtonians did not invent the temperance lecture, their focus on direct address helped to place it at the heart of the temperance movement. The Washingtonians-style temperance lecture differed from previous incarnations in its focus on the "experience speech," which provided a detailed personal account of the havoc that alcohol had wreaked on the lecturer's life. In their focus on the particulars of a single example, and their belief in the power of that example to transform the lives of their auditors, the Washingtonians elevated the representative example to an unusually prominent position within the world of argumentative speech.⁸⁵ Their focus on emotional rather than logical appeal meant that the experience speech tended to follow the loose, impressionistic style established by the Lyceum.

Lyceum-style lectures also tend to be multi-vocal. This tendency is best exemplified by the section, common to most lectures, in which the lecturer raises and answers potential objections to the point being argued. Doing so requires lecturers to

⁸⁵ One key difference between the experience speech and the representative example in other lectures was the intensely personal nature of the experience speech. Although the two filled similar roles, the content of the experience speech was of a starkly different tenor.

ventriloquize their opponents, often at length. Mariano Cubí I Soler's lecture, *Phrenology*, delivered at the Woodville Lyceum in 1840, is exemplary in this regard. Almost every point that Cubí I Soler raises is accompanied by a likely objection, followed by a counterargument to that objection. His assertion that the mind operates through the brain, for example, is yoked together with the following:

Some individuals impressed with the belief that the mind or soul is identical in every individual, discard Phrenology, because, say they, "It leads to establish the doctrine that men's souls are different." Phrenology disclaims having any such tendencies... it has nothing to do with the *essence*, but merely and solely with the *manifestations* or mind (7).

This procedure is repeated when he argues that the brain is divided into different parts with different functions, an argument that he claims "has been assailed with many shafts of ridicule," which prompts him to marshal a greater amount of those facts and that evidence upon which it is established, than would otherwise be allowed by the narrow limits to which [he] must confine this address" (8). This continual answering of anticipated objections helps to populate the lecture platform with multiple voices. It turns what would otherwise have been a monologue into an implicit dialogue with an imagined, hypothetical interlocutor, adding a theatrical quality to the lecture.

Lyceum lectures were rarely able to give voice to all possible objections. Instead, they operated by conspicuous compression. That is, lecturers were rarely able to supply all of the information necessary to present a complete picture of the issue at hand, and put their omissions and elisions in full view of the audience. Lathers supplements his long list of examples with a confession: "This paper is already so long and diffusive that I must forgo citing the many interesting and influential women who have figured as artists" (45).

Such a statement appears again and again in the published Lyceum lectures. Lemuel W. Belden, in his *Account of Jane C. Rider, the Springfield Somnambulist* (1834) seems particularly fond of calling attention to the gaps in his own account, telling audiences that “Without entering into minute detail, [he] will only mention some of the most remarkable circumstances which occurred” (38), and that “A single illustration will suffice, though many more might be given” (48). A Lyceum lecture, then, is at pains to suggest to the audience that there is more to the argument than is being presented. This gives the impression that the case in favor of the lecturer’s position is even stronger than the one being presented, but that some details were omitted for reasons of time. Audience members were thus given the opportunity to fill in the gaps themselves, which helped them to feel more engaged with the lecture, prompting them to engage more actively with the lecture than they otherwise would, and providing them with the pleasure that comes from performing some successful detective work.

Finally, Lyceum-style lectures also made heavy use of the device of imaginary travel; they frequently promised their audiences the experience of being transported to another place and time. In this, they were informed by theories of rhetoric that stressed the power of “the use of description, comparison, and narration” (N. Johnson 61). “Acres of Diamonds” begins with a long description of the trip down the Euphrates river on which Russell Herman Conwell claims to have heard the story that occupies the heart of his lecture; the setting is incidental to the argument being made, but is presented in detail. And Cubí I Soler’s anecdote of his trip to a Lunatic Asylum offers audiences a trip to an institution whose doors were closed to them.

Although Lyceum-style lectures were similar in many ways to sermons, the two forms of address differed in some crucial respects. Both were public speeches with an argument, and so both expected to have an impact on their audience that would last beyond the duration of the individual performance. They often touched on the same themes, including abolitionism (on both sides of the issue) and temperance. Finally, both of them, despite the Lyceum's claims to rational and reasoned discourse, operated at least partially by activating the emotions of their auditors. But the means by which they did so, and the ultimate ends to which this was directed, were very different. A sermon, in general, was directly concerned with the audience. Sermons, especially revival sermons, attempted to effect changes in congregants by convincing them of the danger they were in. This was in the service of a sudden, transformative experience that was to be publicly displayed, and that would leave the congregant wholly different than when he entered the church, or, more often, the tent. Lectures had a more modest set of goals. They aimed to either change minds, or, more often, to reconfirm existing opinions, and to encourage audience members to engage more actively with those opinions. As Barnet Baskerville explains, American oratory, particularly politically engaged oratory, aimed "to intensify and give felicitous expression to opinions already held, rather than to advance new arguments" (50).

It is difficult to quantify the effects of Lyceum lectures on audiences, but Baskerville supplies a useful analogue, noting that Senator Charles Sumner, one of the most celebrated orators of the antebellum period, rarely if ever saw any of his colleagues change their votes as a result of the speeches he delivered from the Senate floor (52). In

addition, lectures rarely required audiences to publicly display their own capacity to be affected by the lecture. The exception to this was the temperance lecture, which did expect direct and immediate action the part of its audience. Even in this case, however, the types of reactions required differed considerably. Temperance lectures generally asked audience members to sign a pledge to either stop drinking liquor or to swear off drinking entirely, depending on the particular temperance society running the lecture. The signature was treated as a kind of contractual declaration, one that testified, in and of itself, to the signatory's sincerity. Sermons, on the other hand, required a demonstrable conversion experience.

Argument Melodrama

All of these Lyceum tendencies worked to shape audience expectations about what was possible, and even desirable, in entertainment. Audiences raised on the Lyceum were accustomed to being persuaded while they were amused, to being asked to extrapolate from a handful of representative examples, and to trust that there was more to be said than what they were being told. In addition, the Lyceum fed and strengthened some of the expectations that theatre audiences already held, including the chance to engage in imaginary travel to exotic locations and to experience intense emotional responses. As is almost always the case in the entertainment world, these expectations did not remain within the bounds of the medium that created them. Instead, audiences carried them into other arenas. A Lyceum-trained audience was prepared to accept a style of playwriting that other audiences might reject. The always inventive American theatre

community responded with a variant on the familiar melodrama that worked to satisfy audiences' new tastes. This subgenre is often called the social reform drama, but many plays with an agendas that do not fit comfortably under the banner of 'social reform,' including plays attacking the Mormon settlement in Utah, have much in common with plays that do, plays like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. This category of play is better called the argument drama. Such plays took their cue from the Lyceum and delivered entertainment with an agenda, both satisfying and intensifying the audience's sense that their night's diversion should include an argument.

Scholars of the drama of the American nineteenth century have long noted that the 1830s and 1840s saw an upsurge of theatre that aimed to present itself as respectable. They have generally presented moral reform melodrama as arising out of the particular class relations of the mid nineteenth century. In this narrative, a newly respectable business class became anxious about its own respectability, and thus unwilling to patronize the traditional theatrical entertainment of the disreputable lower classes. Theatre managers cynically profited from this anxiety by offering a veneer of respectability in the form of the moral reform melodrama. By calling their theatres 'lecture rooms,' refusing to sell alcohol, and, most importantly, presenting plays with didactic, uplifting messages, these managers made the theatre safe for the middle class, and thus greatly expanded their audiences.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Bruce McConachie makes precisely this argument in *Melodramatic Formations*: "Patrician and plebian urbanites alike had assumed that they would encounter prostitutes, drunkards, noisy spectators, and occasional riots... when they went to the theatre. Business-class moralists, however, increasingly ruled such behavior out of bounds for respectable folks, and the result was a minor revolution in the theatre... As heroic and apocalyptic melodrama declined in popularity, moral reform plays took their place" (157-8).⁸⁶ Richard Butsch makes a similar argument in *The Making of American Audiences*: "Theatres disguised as

In this telling, the role of the market in bringing about the rise of moral reform melodrama was its creation of a class of theatergoers who demanded the subgenre. These audience members were aware of their status as middle class, but lacked confidence in this status. As a result, they fled from entertainments that they associated with the working class, and toward more self-consciously elevated offerings. With its prescriptive attitude toward behavior and its emphasis on the role of individual respectability in solving social problems, the moral reform melodrama filled this need.

It is my argument, however, that the marketplace had a more complicated role to play in bringing about the moral reform melodrama. While it is certainly correct that class anxieties led to the desire for some respectable form of theatrical entertainment, there is nothing about that class anxiety that requires moral reform melodrama in particular. The specific form that moral reform melodrama took was a direct result of the presence of the Lyceum, and of the American lecturing culture in general, as a competing form of entertainment. Audiences who were looking for a respectable version of the theatre, and the managers who aimed to cater to these audiences, did not need to invent an entirely new theatrical form. The Lyceum, since its inception, had explicitly positioned itself as a respectable alternative to the theatre. When the Lyceum began, within a few years of its founding, to present arguments alongside its more traditional, informative lectures, it expanded the scope of what could be considered respectable entertainment. The Lyceum had established itself as an institution dedicated to improving

'lecture rooms' attached to museums were the first to systematically seek women, particularly mothers, as an audience. Although proprietary museums had been in existence for some years, it was not until the 1840s that they began to present moral reform melodramas in their 'museum theatres,' to appeal to a new market of religious middle class who heretofore would not set foot in the 'immoral' halls of theatre" (71).

its audience, and so the presentation of arguments began to fall under the rubric of audience improvement. This provided an essential opening for playwrights and theatre managers, since it allowed them to present plays that promised respectability and education without simply flooding their audiences with information. A play that explains geology to an audience would not have been likely to be successful, but a play that makes the case for temperance reform could be, and often was. We can tell that the playwriting of this period was shaped by proximity to the Lyceum, rather than by a general desire for more socially engaged theatre, because of the distinct formal characteristics shared by argument drama and Lyceum-style lecturing.

A narrative of theatrical development that is predicated on an emerging self-conscious business class should include a look at the Lyceum, and at lecturing in general. The Lyceum, after all, was born out of an impulse to help create exactly the sort of business class that served as the audience for moral reform melodrama. The initial aim of the Lyceum, to spread scientific and useful knowledge throughout the community, seems designed to serve this new managerial class; Lyceum audiences had to come armed with enough leisure time to consider knowledge acquisition a form of entertainment, and with an occupation that allowed the application of new knowledge, useful or otherwise. As the Lyceum shifted away from education and towards argument, this prerequisite may have become less important. Nevertheless, the argument-focused incarnation of the Lyceum was perhaps more effective than its prior version in the creation of self-conscious classes and groups among its audience.

As I've noted, public lectures in America rarely convinced people to abandon their positions and adopt new ones. Instead, they were generally aimed at strengthening existing beliefs, and making people more passionately committed to causes to which their support had previously been mostly tacit. In practice, this means that the lecture's primary function was to increase group affinity. People who were generally against alcohol consumption, or even just overconsumption, were encouraged to become Washingtonian temperance advocates. People who were made uneasy by slavery were asked to identify themselves as abolitionists. And people who felt an aversion to Mormons were asked to join a cause to lobby the government to take action against the Utah settlement. An argumentative lecture worked by filling a lecture hall with disparate individuals who often felt vague agreement on a particular topic and then knitting as many of those individuals as possible into a larger group. Generally, this larger group preceded the lecture, and already had an established agenda.

It should not be surprising, then, that the theatre found itself suited to the task of finishing what the Lyceum began. The theatre was already an old hand at creating precisely this sort of unity; disparate patrons became as one in their astonishment as they beheld the speeding locomotive rushing toward its helpless victim. It would not have been a large leap for playwrights and managers to re-purpose this inherent ability of the theatre toward the service of some moral reform cause, such as temperance reform. The success of the public lecture in America provided them with an impetus to do so, especially when it became clear that audience members who felt an affinity for a particular cause-based group would pay again and again to see plays organized around

those causes. Indeed, from a business perspective, the failure of lectures and plays to significantly change the minds of their audiences is a crucial element. A play that had as its primary goal the conversion of audience members to a particular cause would burn out quickly; a successful temperance play, having convinced most of the audience pool would make subsequent temperance plays impossible. Instead, these plays were patterned after lecture-tested principles that strengthened the bonds of affinity for particular groups, a process that has no real endpoint.

Argument melodrama thus performed a kind of double identity formation. The theatres changed their environment to create a space that encouraged audiences to think of themselves as part of a burgeoning, respectable business class. At the same time, the content and structure of the plays offered by these theatres was calculated to increase audience identification with various smaller, ideologically focused groups. The simultaneity of these processes helped to finish what the Lyceum started, lending an additional air of respectability to the causes being espoused. In addition, the identification of these plays with the already respectable Lyceum worked alongside the bans on liquor and ‘unescorted women’ to transform the theatre into a viable pastime for respectable, middle-class patrons. In this way, the Lyceum’s attempt to provide a more legitimate alternative to the theatre backfired. Like so many paratheatrical entertainments before it, the Lyceum attempted to siphon off the theatre’s audience by offering what its founding members saw as a superior version of the elements of the theatre worth retaining. As was so often the case, the theatre proved remarkably agile at co-opting the distinguishing elements of its new competitor, and incorporating them into a more overtly theatrical

form. In this case, the process had the added benefit, at least as far as the theatrical community was concerned, of lending the theatre the very legitimacy that the Lyceum sought to use against it.

In light of this, we should not be so quick to dismiss the proliferation of “lecture room” theatres as nothing more than an exercise in marketing. After all, the plays produced in these theatres really were heavily informed by the structure and content of the lectures that could be found, among other places, at the Lyceum. By taking the designation seriously, we can more properly understand the operations of these plays, which sought to out-lecture the Lyceum, to provide a superior, because more entertaining, alternative. This seems especially plausible when one considers the *Lecture on the Usefulness of Lyceums*, delivered by S. C. Phillips in 1831. Most of Phillips’s discourse is taken up with a general discussion of the character of the American people, and of the differences between the American political system, which was still relatively new, and the politics of most other nations: “It is our good fortune to live in a country and an age, in which the condition of man *as an individual, as a member of society, as a political agent, and as an intellectual and moral being* is exhibited in a striking aspect—involving new relations, conferring new trusts, and consequently implying singular responsibility and important duties” (4). Phillips’s claim is that this unique historical and political situation requires a particular model of education; since so much depends upon American individuals, America must educate its individuals carefully. His proposed solution, of course, is the Lyceum, but his explanation of the Lyceum’s benefits could apply equally well to any system of mass education, or indeed any form of mass

communication. Here, for example, is his summary of what is essential about the Lyceum:

The Lyceum is adapted to the condition of our society. Its doors are open to all. Its objects are interesting to all. Its success must be beneficial to all. It calls together all who wish to improve themselves... It seeks the good of society by diffusing correct sentiments, liberal feelings, and useful knowledge. It recognizes no distinctions, it creates none but those of intellectual and moral worth (21).

This description could have come from any manager of a lecture room theatre. Indeed, one could argue that such a venue actually fits Phillips's summary better than the Lyceum does: the Lyceum's goal may have been to be "interesting to all," but the theatre was the unquestioned master of creating mass interest.

By the middle of the century, the line between the lecture circuit and the theatre had largely faded. An exchange from Edward S. Gould's *The Very Age!* (1850) indicates the extent to which these two venues were increasingly considered to be interchangeable:

MRS. Sp. Doctor, you must give a lecture on Fashion at the Tabernacle.⁸⁷ Your sentiments would tell famously with an audience. They would make a great hit in a theatre.

DOCT. S. Just what I was thinking, lady: only, instead of a lecture, I will write a comedy, and take the principle character myself. How would it read in the bills? Doctor Stubbs will make his first appearance on any stage in the new play written by himself, entitled "Every Tub on its own Bottom." My life on't, 'twould draw a great house the first night. (29-30).

Note that the Doctor's interlocutor already thinks of a lecture as something that should take place in a theatre. The Doctor, however, goes even further; he easily replaces the suggested lecture with a comedy, which could presumably disseminate the same argument that a lecture would have, and would play to a larger house besides.

⁸⁷ She appears to be referring to Charles Finney's Broadway Tabernacle. For more on Finney's theatrical church, see chapter 3.

The plays being produced in the 1850s suggest that Doctor Stubbs would have been in good company in mounting such a production. Many of these plays presented arguments to their audiences, and shared enough key characteristics with Lyceum-style lectures to make it clear that they were specifically borrowing tactics from the lecture industry. J. J. Austin's *Golden Age to Come* (1854) is an instructive example. It makes an argument for Universalism, the Christian doctrine that all souls will be saved, with sinners either being reconciled with God at the moment of death or redeemed after a temporary period of punishment in Hell. Universalism was considered heretical by most mainstream Christian denominations at the time, and, indeed, remains outside the mainstream of American Christian theology today. Theologians arguing in favor of Universalism, then, faced a significant barrier to acceptance of their creed: a sermon, the most logical venue for doctrinal arguments, would likely be attended by the audience least receptive to their claims. A lecture might have more success, but the early Lyceum excluded discussion of both religion and politics. Austin's solution was to write a play that is structured like a Lyceum-style lecture, bringing his case to a wide and persuadable audience.

Golden Age to Come makes its Universalist argument by populating the stage with representatives of various conflicting creeds: An Atheist, a Deist, a Calvinist, an Armenian,⁸⁸ and, of course, a Universalist. Much of the play consists of the Universalist holding court, explaining his philosophy in response to the questions raised by the other

⁸⁸ Armenian theology is the doctrine that individuals could affect their own salvation. It is opposed to the Calvinist doctrine of election, which holds that only God can cause a person to be saved, and that this salvation is unaffected by that person's actions or beliefs.

characters. In practice, this amounts to a performance that bears many of the markers of the Lyceum-style lecture: it argues impressionistically, it is multi-vocal and largely concerned with the anticipation and refutation of objections,⁸⁹ and its points proceed additively, rather than logically.⁹⁰ The play's final scene hews even more closely to the Lyceum model, bringing forward a second Universalist to deliver an address directly to the audience, with the other characters all presenting experience speeches that detail their own journeys toward accepting Universalism.

Even plays that did not have argumentation as their primary purpose were market by the popularity of the Lyceum. Sidney Bateman's *Self* (1856), for example, spends most of its running time gently poking fun at middle-class social climbers, in the style of Anna Cora Mowatt's *Fashion* (1845). Throughout the play, wisdom is periodically dispensed by "Mr. John Unit, a retired Banker" (3). At the end of the play, Unit delivers an unexpected summation, revealing an underlying argument for *Self* that is largely undetectable throughout the play's running time. When another character declares that "the pervading sin of all human nature" is "selfishness," and that "to that engrossing passion may be traced all our sorrows," Unit disagrees: "Yes I tell you, yes... I serve you by lending you money I don't want, to gain gratitude and affection, which I do. All the

⁸⁹ This structure takes the normal tendency of the Lyceum lecture, in which the lecturer will ventriloquize and dismiss the likely arguments of his opponents, and dramatizes it, putting the objections to Universalism into the mouths of the Atheist, Deist, Calvinist, and Armenian. The Calvinist, for example, opens one scene by saying, "Sir, I suppose your heresy extends/ To the great Triune mystery of God!" (91). This prompts the Universalist to explain, at length, why Universalism does not accept the doctrine of the Trinity.

⁹⁰ The points addressed by the Universalist do not proceed according to any logic or structure, but seem to be raised at random as they occur to the other characters, or to the playwright. The discussion of the Trinity, for example, follows an unrelated scene which presents an explanation of the rituals inherent in a Universalist service, prompted by the Deist's less hostile question, "What thinkest thou of Forms, good friend?" (62).

same in the end—all selfish—all human beings are selfish” (46). He then broadens the scope of his argument to include the institution of the theatre: “[*To audience.*] Perhaps you think that our exertions to-night were induced by a desire to please you? No, sir, no—not a bit of it—all a mistake” (*ibid.*). Mary, the heroine of the play responds, strangely enough, by staying in character but simultaneously acknowledging the existence of the audience, saying, “If so, Uncle John, it is because the deep delight we feel in their approval gives us so much more pleasure than our exertions merit that—“ (*ibid.*). Unit then cuts her off to deliver the play’s closing line: “Yes—just as I said—that, after all, our labors are prompted by that great motive power of human nature—*Self!*” (*ibid.*). At the last second, then, this play recasts itself as an argument in favor of the virtues of selfishness, and declares that all plays, by their very existence, are also implicitly making that same argument.

Although there are many plays, like *Self*, that shoehorn their argument in at the end, and that make vague or general arguments about human nature, the majority of argument plays weighed in more specifically on a social or political issue that would have been of great importance to the audience. There were many such issues for playwrights to choose from. In this chapter, I will consider three major types of argument play: the temperance play, the anti-Mormon play, and the abolitionist play.

Temperance Plays

Perhaps the most popular form of argument drama in the nineteenth century was the temperance play. Unlike most other argument dramas, which tended to peak in the middle of the century, temperance plays continued to be produced in large numbers through the beginning of the twentieth century. This is due more to the persistence of the underlying issue, Americans' relationship with alcohol, than to any particular features of the plays themselves. Since the temperance issue raged throughout the nineteenth century, and into the prohibition period at the beginning of the twentieth, playwrights could be assured that temperance plays would consistently draw large crowds. These playwrights responded by keeping American audiences well-supplied with plays arguing against the consumption of alcohol, and in favor of banning its sale.

Temperance plays also had a much clearer relationship with the lecture circuit than many other argument dramas, since they had a direct antecedent in the temperance lecture. In the early nineteenth century, temperance drama was kept largely separate from more traditional temperance activities like lecturing. As John W. Frick explains, temperance dramas "were frequently ignored or even repudiated by... temperance organizations... during the early years of temperance reform when most of the prominent leaders were from within the church" (11). Beginning in the 1840s, however, the temperance movement began to secularize, as the Washingtonians filled their leadership positions with former alcoholics,⁹¹ rather than clergymen. The Washingtonian movement placed a much greater emphasis on "experience speeches," in which a reformed drunkard would explain the depths to which alcohol had dragged him, than previous temperance

⁹¹ This term is used anachronistically and would not have been available to mid-century temperance advocates; it did not enter popular usage until 1891 ("alcoholic," OED).

advocates had (Frick 85). Put another way, the Washingtonian phase of the temperance movement, which was ascendant during the mid-century period, was a phase that was dominated by narrative. It should be no surprise, then, that the 1840s and 1850s saw an explosion of temperance plays. As the century wore on, temperance drama and temperance lectures increasingly became part of the same system. As Frick explains, economic pressure often forced lectures and temperance drama into the same space: “While the more generously endowed halls could be reserved exclusively for temperance activities sponsored by the organization that owned them, less wealthy halls were frequently rented to ‘temperance-friendly’ political clubs, traveling stock companies, or lecturers” (150). Some temperance plays, most notably *Ten Nights in a Bar-room* (1858), played on the Chautauqua circuit, alongside a variety of lectures. Indeed, William Pratt, who wrote the theatrical adaptation of *Ten Nights in a Bar-room*, made his living as both a playwright and a lecturer.

Temperance plays were patterned heavily on the temperance lectures that inspired them. Many of them contained miniature versions of the “experience speech” that was so important to the Washingtonian temperance lecture. S. N. Cook’s *Out in the Streets* (1879), for example, bills itself as a temperance drama. The play, however, is only tangentially related to the subject of temperance. Instead, it presents the story of an unscrupulous landlord, and the poor young woman who is forced out of her home by that landlord’s greed. The play’s sole mention of alcohol comes when that young woman, Mrs. Bradford, explains how she has come to poverty:

I married Orland Bradford, believing him to be all that was good and noble. Father, mother, brother, all warned me, and told me he was a drunkard and a

gambler, but I would not listen to them...When he learned that my father had disowned me, the demon within him awoke. It is terrible to think of the life which I then led. I would see nothing of him for weeks at a time, and when he did come, it was only to abuse me. One night, it was late—nearly morning, I was waiting for him—thinking of the happy life which I led at home—of the fearful one I was then enduring, when I heard approaching footsteps—tramp, tramp—heavy and slow; they stopped—my heart stood still. The door was thrown open, and there was Orland, my husband—dead—shot through the heart in a gambling hell while drunk (16).

This experience speech is what gives *Out in the Streets* the right to call itself a temperance play, despite none of its characters so much as touching a glass of alcohol. Mrs. Bradford uses the form of the temperance lecture to retroactively establish intemperance as the source of evil in the play, the agent that makes her vulnerable to her villainous landlord.

Most temperance plays, however, more closely follow the form of the temperance lecture. In particular, they tend to spend a substantial portion of their running time answering potential objections. These objections were in ready supply, since American audience's appetite for temperance plays was at least matched by their appetite for alcohol. E. C. Whalen's *Under the Spell* (1890) is exemplary in this regard. It begins with a series of debates about temperance, and actually allows its temperance opponents to make a strong version of their argument. In the play's opening scene, Harold Fitzmaurice, an attorney who does not himself drink, argues against temperance, since "it would be an infringement upon the personal rights of the American citizen" (6). Laura Wilbur, his interlocutor, dismisses this objection to the temperance cause: "Do you think that the business of making criminals and paupers, and spreading misery and vice through a community, is one of the rights of an American citizen?" (*ibid.*). The next scene follows

the same pattern. Kate Green, Laura's maid, argues with Dennis McShane, an Irishman whose dialect renders his speech almost unintelligible. He argues that prohibition would rob the community of money, since the saloon pays a \$500 license fee. Kate says, "Dennis McShane, you've got the least sense of any full-grown man I ever saw! Where is that man going to get the money to pay his license with?" (9). Dennis answers that he pays it from the money he makes from his customers, prompting Kate to ask, triumphantly, "Then who is it that really pays that \$500 license?" (*ibid.*). In both cases, the play is careful to air the arguments against prohibition exactly as they would be raised by an actual anti-prohibition activist.

The play's early scenes make the logical case for temperance. This case fails within the play, as the townspeople vote to allow the local saloon to retain its license for two years. The play then jumps forward in time almost the entirety of that period, and uses the fallout among the community to make an emotional case that runs in parallel to the logical appeal of the early scenes. Almost all of the respectable characters experience a precipitous drop in fortune, and lose that respectability. In essence, the characters in *Under the Spell* act as experience speeches; their sole purpose is to convey the typical temperance narrative of decline and ruin. To this end, the audience sees them at their highest, and then sees them brought low by the operations of the saloon. Not content to present characters as living experience speeches, the play also makes sure to include a statement of the effectiveness of speeches as a persuasive medium; once Fitzmaurice has come around on the temperance issue, the disgruntled saloon owner blames his drop in

fortunes on “the work of that traitor, Fitzmaurice. The people’s heads have been turned by his speeches during the past month” (53).

Even minstrel shows were affected by the popularity of temperance lectures. Elliot H. McBride’s *Well Fixed for a Rainy Day* (1882) is a minstrel temperance play. Almost the entirety of the play is occupied by the antics of three black farmhands, who get drunk while sorting potatoes in a barn during a rainstorm. This drunkenness is mostly expressed by Pompey Rockaway, who responds to his inebriation by delivering a parody of Lyceum-style lectures. In response to another farmhands request for him to “git up on dot half bushel an’ give us a lecter” (4), Pompey delivers a rambling address that mimics and mocks the impressionistic style and loose, episodic structure of the typical lyceum lecture:

“I rise fo’ de pupose ob sayin’ a few wo’ds on a few diff’ent subjec’s. I am a putty good arator an’ I want to ‘dress a few wo’ds to yo’ on diss occasion ‘bout some things which I think yo’ ought to know... Yo’ is all expectin’ somethin’ edifyin’... Now, how shall I divide my disco’sse? I shall divide it as follers: De fust head ob de disco’sse will be about de hoss, derefore it will be de hoss’s head. De nex’ head ob my disco’sse shill be in relation to de cow, derefo’ dat head will be de cow’s head. An’ den de nex’ an las’ division ob my disco’sse shill be about de’ insece’ which is called de hog. Dat head will be a hog’s head” (4-5).

The speech’s organization structure is designed to mock both the style it imitates and the character delivering it; Rockaway divides his address into sections, but does so arbitrarily. He appears to be taking cues from his environment, assigning the three parts of his lecture to the three animals that he can see when he looks around the barn. He is upfront about his speech’s lack of a unifying theme or subject, saying only that he is going to talk about a few things that his audience ought to know. And this preliminary portion of the lecture is littered with inaccuracies, including the identification of a hog as

a type of insect, that are supposed to generate comedy from the profound ignorance of the speaker. All of these conspire to present an exaggerated version of the weaknesses present in many Lyceum-style lectures.⁹² The play demonstrates an equal measure of contempt for its own characters and for argumentative speaking, which prevents it from effectively delivering a temperance message; the farmhands enjoy their drunkenness, and they only swear off alcohol when a white gardener tricks them into believing that they have been drinking horse medicine, and not whiskey.

Anti-Mormon Plays

Another popular form of argument drama in the nineteenth century was the anti-Mormon play. As with most argument plays and Lyceum lectures, these are designed more to strengthen and intensify beliefs already held by the audience than to expose them to novel positions. Given that the Mormon settlement in Utah was actively skirmishing with the United States army in the middle of the nineteenth century, it is unlikely that American audiences would have held favorable views of the church. Anti-Mormon plays, however, worked to convert a low-level background antipathy to an active antagonism, to convince audiences that the Mormons were not merely distasteful, but an immediate threat to the security of the United States. They did this using a two-pronged attack: they highlighted the dangers of polygamy, and of the aspirations of Brigham Young, who was the Prophet of the Mormon Church and the governor of the Utah territory. Two plays,

⁹² McBride is, of course, also mocking his characters for their blackness. The specific form of this mockery, however, tracks closely with the features of a typical lyceum speech.

The Mormons (1858), by Thomas Dunn English, and the anonymously written *Deseret Deserted* (1858) neatly exemplify the argumentative strategies of the anti-Mormon play. Tonally, the two plays are extremely different. *The Mormons* is a melodrama with occasional comedic elements. The extended title of *Deseret Deserted, Deseret Deserted; or, The Last Days Of Brigham Young. Being a Strictly Business Transaction, in Four Acts and Several Deeds, Involving Both Prophet and Loss*, provides a good picture of the play's tone: it is a comedy, full of puns that make even its own characters groan in disgust. Nevertheless, both plays use similar tactics in building their arguments against the Mormon settlement.

The Mormons opens with a pair of women, Mary Blanford and Lucy Woodville, who are travelling to Utah. Mary is an orphan, and Lucy is married to Ambrose Woodville, who has joined the Mormon church and is on his way to join the Mormon settlement, called Deseret by its inhabitants. The play immediately establishes that both Mary and Lucy have been deceived about the Mormon practice of polygamy, believing it to be a lie told by the non-Mormons, or Gentiles, as the Mormons call them. They learn the truth from the guides who are accompanying them: an Indian named Whiskey Jake, and a mysterious white man, living with the Indians, named Eagle-Eye.⁹³ Lucy soon learns more about the effects of polygamy on the women involved from Mrs. Noggs, the first wife of Timothy Noggs, whose ambitions have led him to acquire more wives than any other man in Utah. Mrs. Noggs explains what Lucy should expect:

⁹³ Eagle-Eye is very clearly patterned after James Fennimore Cooper's Natty Bumppo, who is sometimes referred to as Hawk-Eye.

You'll learn to stand it like the rest of us. I think I can trust you. Yes; you're not here long enough to be steeped in the devilry of the place. I can tell you that this is the nearest approach to the bad place there is in this world... I came here with Timothy... He thought he was going to be Prophet right straight, and to help him on the faster, married every woman what would have him... your husband'll do the same. They all have to do it. I tell you, when the second wife came I could have torn her to pieces. I sulked and sickened; but when Timothy brought in a third, then No. 2 and I made up, and tried to make the house too hot for No. 3. She complained to Timothy and he beat us... The wives kept droppin' in after No. 3, pretty fast, and now I just despise Noggs for a brute; and that's the way you'll feel toward yours" (22).

This resembles nothing so much as a Washingtonian experience speech, itself a borrowing from the Lyceum's heavy emphasis on the power of representative examples. The pain that polygamy has caused for this woman is meant to be generalized to all of the women living in Utah, and is embodied for the audience, with accompanying feeling and gesture. The speech proves prescient, as Brigham Young soon offers his own daughter as Lucy's husband's second wife, promising advancement within the Mormon church. When Lucy interrupts her husband's second wedding ceremony, she, like Mrs. Noggs, focuses on the emotional effects of polygamy on the women involved: "You can but take my life, and when all has gone that made life dear, what is it to live? Am I not scorned, contemned, deserted⁹⁴—what fate have I to fear worse than that? Is there any pang deeper than that of a breaking heart?" (29).

The polygamy represented in *The Mormons* is a kind of scam at the expense of everyone involved. The women are brought to Utah under the pretense of monogamy and then tricked into plural marriages. The men, on the other hand, are pushed into

⁹⁴ These words, in the nineteenth century, carried with them a specific connotation of sexual abandonment, implying that sexual relationships within polygamy are consecutive, rather than concurrent. Audiences thus were given the additional thrill of a secondhand look into the sexual logistics of a polygamous marriage.

polygamous commitments by Brigham Young under the promise of advancement; Mrs. Noggs says that her husband acquired wives because he thought that would help him become the next Mormon Prophet, and Young convinces Ambrose Woodville to marry Young's daughter using a similar line of argument. For the most part, the men in *The Mormons* do not express an inherent interest in having multiple wives. Polygamy, then, is an institution that creates misery in the lives of everyone it touches, and that is perpetuated almost entirely by the personal efforts of Brigham Young. Young is an entirely malevolent figure in *The Mormons*, and one who is actively plotting against the Gentile United States. Early in the play, he all but twirls his moustache as he announces his plans: "Here, in this western Circassia, I can defy the power of my enemies; consolidate these Indian tribes under one standard; and, when the Union crumbles to pieces, build up an independent empire, which shall honor me as a ruler while living, and canonize me when dead" (14). Later, when Ambrose Woodville is being inducted into the Mormon priesthood in anticipation of his second marriage, he is required to take an oath that affirms his antagonism toward his former country:

And you also swear to cherish constant enmity towards the government and people of the United States... to do all you can towards destroying that government, and inflicting injury on that people; to baffle the designs of that Union and frustrate its intentions; to renounce all allegiance and refuse all submission; to teach this hatred to your children, to instill it into their youth, confirm it in their manhood, and leave it on your deathbed as a dying mandate (28).

Young, in other words, is making all of his followers swear to nurture a hatred toward the United States that is, by its very design, single-minded and uncompromising. *The Mormons* works to give the impression that the leadership of the Utah settlement cannot

be reasoned with, that the Mormons are hell-bent on destroying the Gentiles, and that nothing short of domination or elimination will stop that. And, indeed, that is what defeats them in the end, as the U. S. army attacks and overwhelms the Danites, a group of Mormons that acts as Young's personal militia. This illustrates one of the primary advantages that the argument drama has over the Lyceum-style lecture as a persuasive device: the license of fiction. English has no way of knowing if Young requires his acolytes to swear such an oath, and no way of proving it, in any case. Since the play is a series of dramatic events, rather than a first-person address, English is free to present a version of Young that is especially hostile to the United States, without having to claim any knowledge or evidence of that hostility. For all that argument plays borrowed from the Lyceum, and played to a Lyceum-created audience, they were also able to make use of the separate set of audience expectations that are inherent to the theatre. The spectators were able to make use of a similarly expanded range of possibilities; the fiction portrayed by *The Mormons* allowed them the vicarious thrill of feeling deeply about a set of injustices that were closed off from their own day-to-day experiences.

The Mormons also suggests that the Utah settlement faces an internal threat, and one brought on by its own doctrines and practices. Specifically, the play implicitly argues that the practice of polygamy creates a dangerous situation for Mormon men, who find themselves outnumbered by unhappy women. This is illustrated in *The Mormons* by the case of Mr. Noggs, whose wives have a meeting and decide to demand better treatment. They are led in these efforts by the first Mrs. Noggs, who delivers a stirring lecture on the indignities of the Mrs. Noggesses' situation and the opportunities for remedying that

situation. When she has finished, one of the other Mrs. Noggsses declares, “Three cheers for the *orayur* [*sic*]” (24), and all are converted to the cause. Like the experience speeches about the emotional toll of polygamy that the women of Utah deliver, Mrs. Noggsses’ address represents a co-opting of the lecture format by *The Mormons*. It is apparently successful; when Mr. Noggsses does not comply with his wives’ demands, they tar and feather him, and put him on a mule headed out of the settlement. This threat, however, never reaches beyond the Noggsses household. It is probably included for the benefit of male audience members who might be attracted to the idea of plural marriage, and is never presented as a serious solution to the problem posed by the Mormons, which, the play suggests, can only be remedied by external intervention.

This stands in stark contrast to *Deseret Deserted*, in which this same kind of female uprising ultimately defeats the Mormon settlement and replaces it with a Republic of Women. The impetus for this rebellion is the intervention of three Gentile outsiders, Tom Scott, Lunny O’Flab, and Lucifer Sparks.⁹⁵ The three men have travelled to Utah to rescue their wives, since *Deseret Deserted* suggests that most of the women in the Mormon settlement have been kidnapped. Once there, they attempt to formulate a plan, and Sparks is struck by a sudden inspiration. “Suppose,” he says, “each of us had fifty wives a-piece... That would make a hundred and fifty to three. What chance would we have if they coalesced, and turned to whip us?” (18-19). Scott agrees with his implied

⁹⁵ Lucifer’s name is probably a reference to a popular brand of matches, and not to the devil; the matches refer to Lucifer’s literal translation as light-bringer.

conclusion: “The Power of finger-nails is uncommon” (19). This, in turn, provides Sparks with the insight into the Mormon situation necessary to formulate a plan:

Well, those Mormon fellows are exactly in the same predicament. The odds are against them. Women, you know, are always odd and never even. All we have to do, is to bring about an insurrection among the females, hoist the red petticoat of rebellion, erect barricades of crinoline, and make the defense of Salt Lake City, and then Saragossa (*ibid.*).

It would, however, be going too far to claim *Deseret Deserted* as any kind of proto-feminist play; Spark’s speech is a good example of the way that the play presents women as formidable precisely because they are unreasonable. As the derisive reference to “the red petticoat of rebellion” indicates, *Deseret Deserted* views political domination by women as a very real, but highly undesirable, possibility. It presents the ominous specter of women seizing political power because of their troubled marriages as an argument in favor of keeping those marriages untroubled.⁹⁶

It is fitting that the Mormons of *Deseret Deserted* are vanquished from within, since the play’s version of Brigham Young is much less competent than *The Mormons’* version of the prophet. *Deseret Deserted’s* entire second act is occupied by a dream that Brigham Young has after drinking too much bourbon and passing out. The Young in this play, in other words, is not even a good practicing Mormon; he uses the authoritarian structure of the religion to gain political power while ignoring its prohibition against drinking alcohol. Young’s drunken dream serves several functions within the narrative. It

⁹⁶ The Seneca Falls conference, after all, had taken place ten years earlier in 1848.

sates the Lyceum-trained audience's appetite for imaginative travel; they have already been transported to Salt Lake City, and are now being given a glimpse of the "Paradise of Mahomet" (12), which Young visits in his dream. The particulars of the place, and of Brigham Young's interaction with the Muslim prophet, also allows the playwright to highlight the dangers and the strangeness of the Mormon way of the life by aligning it with Islam. This takes the form of a conversation between Young and Mahomet, in which the two discuss their shared appreciation for polygamy:

Brig. [Brigham Young] I am the Prophet of a mighty race---a race of pious, upright [107] men---

Mah. [Mahomet] Omit the men, and come to the women.

Brig. By our creed, each man is allowed one wife to whom he is obliged to remain true and faithful.

Mah. Speak!

Brig. Until he finds another that suits him better... And by a simple system of progression, I have now arrived at my sixtieth improvement upon my first.

Mah. By my beard! The rogue has filched my first idea (13).

This doctrine of Mormonism, then, is presented as nothing more than a borrowing from the decidedly alien religion of Islam. This dream sequence further alienates Young and the Mormons from the audience by having Young announce, "I am not an American. I'm a Mormon" (*ibid.*). The scene description for Mahomet's Paradise also includes the following: "*Upon the door, a plate bearing the name of Mahomet .---Above the wall a placard 'Any Christian found trespassing on these premises will be persecuted'*" (12). Young ignores the sign and is not subject to any persecution, indicating that Mormons are not, from the perspective of the supernatural realm, Christians.

The structure and arguments of these plays sit comfortably alongside the lectures on Anna Dickinson, whose signature addresses condemned the Mormon Church, and the

United States' government's continued sufferance of the Utah settlement. Dickinson had made a name for herself as a platform speaker who delivered impassioned abolitionist lectures. Although she faced significant criticism for violating traditional gender roles with her forceful public speaking, she became a highly sought-after lecturer; she was even invited to speak before the U. S. House of Representatives with Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln in attendance (Ray 148). By 1872, she was earning up to \$400 for a speaking engagement (Ray 150).⁹⁷ After the Civil War, Dickinson's lecturing increasingly turned toward broader themes of social justice, especially as related to women's rights. She delivered a series of lectures calling for equal pay for equal work, as well as a lecture, entitled "Idiots and Women" lamenting the fact that women had the same voting rights as the mentally ill (Gallman 69). A visit to Utah in 1869 sparked her interest in the specific plight of Mormon women living under the polygamous regime of Brigham Young's settlement.

The resulting lecture, "Whited Sepulchers" (1870), follows the pattern set by *The Mormons* and *Deseret Deserted*, both of which had already borrowed from Lyceum lecturers like Dickinson, in a feedback loop that should by now be familiar. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, it seems, ideas and tactics were able to migrate freely between Lyceum-style lectures and argument dramas. Like the anti-Mormon plays, Dickinson's lecture allows audiences to imagine travelling to the exotic Salt Lake City while still condemning its inhabitants. "Whited Sepulchers" begins with a description that sounds like nothing so much as the opening stage directions to a play:

⁹⁷ In 2012 dollars this amounts to \$7,547.17 (Sahr).

A great stretch of level plain; beyond it, an inland sea of sapphire reflecting a sapphire sky; all about it, range after range of stately mountains, glowing through the marvelously clear air, masses of amber and purple and gold, whilst all over ranged, diamond bright, the eternal walls of snow... Wide, clean, cool streets; a dashing mountain stream flowing through the principle avenue with rivulets cutting away from it through the streets” (221).

This description includes an admonition for the audience not to enjoy their imaginary travel too much: “this ‘Whited Sepulcher’ [is] fair indeed to the eye, pleasant to the traveler who knoweth not that the dead are there, and that her inhabitants are in the depths of Hell” (*ibid.*).⁹⁸ This ability for the audience to have it both ways, to enjoy a trip to Salt Lake City while feeling righteous indignation toward the actual residents of that city, is a consequence of the mixture of entertainment and argument that characterized both the Lyceum lecture and the argument drama. The vicarious thrill of visiting the forbidden city is presented as a necessary first step to understanding the degeneracy that lurks within, and, conveniently, also serves as a lure for potential audience members. This also allows her audience to travel to Salt Lake City without exposing themselves to the dangers that, Dickinson is careful to emphasize, would be faced by actual visitors to the Mormon settlement. Like both *The Mormons* and *Deseret Deserted*, Dickinson’s lecture lingers over a description of the sinister Danites: “Brigham Young’s Danites have a speedy and effectual method of settling discontent in the midst of his domains. These Danites are an organization... sworn to the destruction of whomsoever may menace the destruction of the faith they believe” (223).

⁹⁸ Angela Ray, writing in *The Lyceum and Public Culture in the Nineteenth-Century United States*, explains the reference: “The title of Dickinson’s speech is an allusion to the words of Jesus in Matthew 22:27: ‘Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness’” (320-321).

Like the anti-Mormon plays, particularly *The Mormons*, “Whited Sepulchers” relies heavily on direct testimony about the emotional consequences of polygamy from women in Salt Lake City. One woman relates her experiences, and the effects they have had on her and other women, as follows:

When I came to this place... My husband took me to his home where I found a woman who had a prior claim; a woman whom I had known in my babyhood and in my girlhood, who had been a second mother to me in fact... I stood face to face with my aunt... There is not one woman in ten [in Utah] that cares anything for her life; but what would be glad to die to morrow[sic] and be through with all this (233).

Another woman tells Dickinson that she had no “pang of conscience or feeling of uncertainty” about becoming a Mormon man’s second wife, until that man married a third time (234).

This is not to say that Dickinson’s lecture is in lockstep with *The Mormons* and *Deseret Deserted*. In particular, Dickinson rejects the claim, made by both of those plays, that an insurrection by the women of Salt Lake City could topple the Mormon patriarchy. She does this partially through direct argument, saying, “It is a universal belief, and a natural one, that the women of the territory far outnumber the men, yet, it is a mistake, I believe” (225). But she also makes this argument implicitly, once again employing the device of the representative example. Her example comes from that same woman who entered into a plural marriage as the second wife, who explains what happened when she tried to band together with her husband’s first wife to prevent his acquisition of a third:

I went to his first wife. I thought on this ground we might make common cause... I said “Let you and I join together to prevent this thing; we can do it; we can keep another woman from coming into this house, if only you will help me,” and the woman... said, “Help you? No, you came into my home, you stole away my

husband, you broke my heart, and now your turn has come and I am glad of it” (234-5).

According to Dickinson, then, the practice of polygamy is so poisonous to any unity among women that any kind of collective action by the women of Salt Lake City is impossible.

Dickinson’s other departure from the argument offered by the anti-Mormon plays is in her understanding of the relationship between the Utah settlement and the rest of the United States. Both *The Mormons* and *Deseret Deserted* offer Salt Lake City as an aberration, with its polygamous practices representing a unique state of affairs for women. Dickinson sees the place of women in Utah as a logical extension of the place of women in the rest of America. She quotes a series of non-Mormon men who claim that “the sole and only purpose for which woman was created and sent into the world was that she should be some man’s wife and a mother of his children,” and then argues that “Stripped of all sentimentality and all glamour; of delicate words and airy sentences, full of idle compliments that signify nothing, the actual theory of these men finds its legitimate consequence in Utah” (231). She goes on to argue in favor of “the so-called woman movement of to day” (235). This is a bolder argument than the one made by either anti-Mormon play, and a more nuanced one. This should not be surprising; while argument dramas and Lyceum lectures share key features, and developed in relation to one another, they are not identical. Argument dramas had the benefit of audiences who expected to be persuaded as part of their entertainment, but those audiences would not accept persuasion as the entirety of their entertainment. As a result, their arguments had to be presented in broad, simple strokes, and interspersed with more traditional dramatic

elements; this is why *Deseret Deserted* practically drowns its argument in favor of a Republic of Women in puns.

Abolitionist Plays

George Aiken's adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* may well be the most popular argument drama in American history. It was such a hit that it inspired numerous imitators, some of which were full-length plays, and some of which were essentially minstrel acts. Aiken's version, however, remains the standard dramatization of Stowe's novel. It is remembered primarily for its scenes of sensation and spectacle, including the death of Little Eva and Eliza's crossing of the ice. These scenes, however, are anomalous in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Most of the play's running time is occupied by people making arguments against slavery. The play makes its intentions clear from the opening scene, in which two married slaves, George and Eliza, discuss the practice of slavery. George presents a clear argument against the institution, and for the rights of slaves to run away and escape their masters. Eliza responds by raising objections to George's argument, all of which George forcefully answers. Here is a typical exchange:

ELIZA. Well, it *is* dreadful; but, after all, he is your master, you know.
 GEO. My master! And who made him my master? That's what I think of? What right has he to me? I'm as much a man as he is. What right has he to make a dray-horse of me?—to take me from things I can do better than he can, and put me to work that any horse can do? He tries to do it; he says he'll bring me down and humble me, and he puts me to just the hardest, meanest and dirtiest work, on purpose (4).

The choice to open the play with this conversation is a departure from the source material. Stowe's version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) begins with a conversation between George Shelby, Eliza's master, and Haley, a slave trader. This conversation sets the plot of the novel in motion by establishing that George is in debt to Haley, and that he will resolve that debt by selling both Uncle Tom and Harry, Eliza's son. This sale directly leads to the separate travels of Eliza and Tom. Aiken's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, by contrast, saves this interaction for its second scene, and instead opens with the conversation between George and Eliza that occupies the novel's third chapter.

This rearrangement fundamentally alters the terms of the audience's entrance into the story of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: the novel's sequence foregrounds the characters who will drive the plot, while the play's sequence foregrounds the argument that will be put forward by that plot. Similarly, the play's presentation of the argument between George and Eliza inaugurates the bluntness with which that argument will be presented. Stowe's novel is more respectful toward Eliza's position, noting that George is not so much winning as he is steamrolling her points: "Eliza trembled and was silent. She had never seen her husband in this mood before; and her gentle system of ethics seemed to bend like a reed in the surges of such passions" (17). In Aiken's version, by contrast, there is no question as to whose position is correct. Although it is framed as a conversation, it is not a staged debate between two equally plausible conclusions. Eliza's counterarguments are all straw men; none of them raises a serious objection to George's abolitionist stance. Instead, they serve as the objections that George's argument, in a manner familiar to lyceum-trained audiences, must answer.

Writing about Aiken's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* tends to focus on its spectacular set pieces; like Gertrude Stein, many critics seem only to remember Eliza crossing the ice. The play's structure, however, forces audiences to wade through a series of arguments like George and Eliza's, and a series of lengthy speeches, before delivering the exciting scenes for which it came to be known. Aiken tips his hand in the first scene, beginning with George's outright statement of the main lines of argument that the play will make. Such a structure would have been impossible had audiences not been accustomed to the idea that entertainment can have an argument, and that sitting and listening to an argument unfold was a viable way to spend an evening. Aiken, then, is as indebted to the Lyceum system as he is to Stowe: the popularity of Stowe's novel may have supplied him with his audience, but the Lyceum trained that audience to watch plays like this one.

The argument of the play unfolds from its initial scene, and tends to follow the pattern set by the arguments presented at the Lyceum. It is highly episodic, presented through a series of events that sometimes follow logically from one another, but just as often do not. It heavily employs the device of the representative example, using the case of Uncle Tom as a general argument in favor of abolition. Finally, it employs the same kind of conspicuous compression that was a hallmark of Lyceum lectures, suggesting that there is much more to the argument against slavery than can be presented in the running-time of a typical play.

The plot of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, like the plot of its source material, has a tendency to meander. It generally follows two main threads, tracking the journeys of Uncle Tom and Eliza after the both leave George Shelby's plantation—Uncle Tom because he is

sold, and Eliza because she escapes with her son, Harry, in order to prevent his being sold as well. Taken together, the incidents portrayed tend to answer most of the common anti-abolitionist arguments familiar to *Uncle Tom's Cabin's* audience. Their underlying logic, however, is additive, rather than deductive, following the assumption among nineteenth-century rhetoricians that persuasive speech should “embody associative relations,” including “resemblance” and “contiguity” if they are to “engage the faculties of the mind” (N. Johnson 60). Tom’s journey is made up of a series of events, each of which testifies to a problem with the institution of slavery, but which do not unfold according to any kind of progression. Tom, for example, has three masters over the course of the play. The third and final, Simon Legree, is cruel and abusive. The first two, however, are equally benign. This is also the case in Stowe’s novel, but Aiken’s version goes far beyond its source in erasing the practical differences between Tom’s life under George Shelby and his life under Augustine St. Claire. In particular, Aiken all but removes Marie St. Claire, Augustine’s wife, from his version of Tom’s story. In Stowe’s novel, Marie is an important factor in making Tom’s life with the St. Claire’s worse than his life with the Shelby’s, and it is Marie who ensures that Tom is sold, rather than freed, when St. Claire dies. In Aiken’s play, by contrast, Marie’s role is greatly diminished, and she is purely a comic figure whom the play mocks for her hypochondria. Indeed, she is taken so lightly by the play that St. Claire’s cousin, Ophelia, refers to her repeatedly as “shiftless” (20-1), which is a word that Ophelia otherwise reserves for Topsy, another comic figure. When St. Claire dies, the play cuts straight to the estate sale at which Tom is sold, making no mention of Marie’s role in putting him on the auction block.

The dramatic adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* necessarily relies heavily on representative examples to bolster its abolitionist argument. In this it far exceeds its source material, since it cannot include the editorial insertions that recur throughout Stowe's novel. As a result, the characters in Aiken's play alternate between embodying facets of the abolitionist argument and delivering them outright. This is the play's primary narrative mode, and it is employed even in parts of the play that do not directly bear on the abolitionist argument: several passages that are delivered as narrator asides in Stowe's novel must instead be spoken aloud by the characters in Aiken's adaptation. This leads, at times, to some narrative inconsistencies. Stowe's version, for example, includes a meditation on the innocence of Little Eva, St. Claire's doomed child (Stowe 242). The same words are included in Aiken's version, but are spoken aloud by St. Claire himself. This speech is curiously at odds with St. Claire's professed agnosticism: "When you see that deep, spiritual light in the eye when the little soul reveals itself in words sweeter and wiser than the ordinary words of children, hope not to retain that child; for the seal of heaven is on it, and the light of immortality looks out from its eyes!" (Aiken 47-8). Similarly, Legree's tortured past is presented as narrated back-story in the novel (Stowe 345) but, in a moment of uncharacteristic self-disclosure, recited by Legree in the play (Stowe 81).

Still, the most prominent representative examples from the play, while both borrowed from the novel, benefit greatly from being enacted in front of an audience. Eliza's escape across the Ohio River with her child was, as I've noted, one of the most memorable sequences in the play. The scene was staged to attract audience attention, and

was made even more prominent by being wordless. The entirety of Act One, Scene Six, the final scene of the first act, is conveyed by the following stage directions:

The entire depth of stage, representing the Ohio River filled with Floating Ice.—Set bank on R.H. and in front. ELIZA appears, with HARRY, R.H., on a cake of ice, and floats slowly across to L.H.—HALEY, LOKER, and MARKS, on bank R.H., observing.—PHINEAS on opposite (17).

The staging is designed to mark this as an extraordinary scene. It commandeers the entire stage and fundamentally alters it from a static ground to a shifting body of water. The motion supplied by the water is unusual for an act break in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; most of its acts end on motionless tableaux. The scene also provides a series of audience surrogates to react, without any dialogue, to the spectacle presented by the play, signaling to the audience that special attention must be paid to this scene. Finally, the silence and slowness of the scene arrest the momentum that has been building for some time as Eliza struggles to evade her captors. The preceding scene was marked by stage directions indicating speed and panic: “*They all rush to the window,*” “*They all leap through the window,*” “*Enter ELIZA, with HARRY, hurriedly,*” “*Rushes off,*” and “*Music.—They rush off*” (17). Having this rising action suddenly be cut short by a scene in which the only active stage direction is “*floats slowly*” is all but guaranteed to designate that scene as especially memorable, a strategy that appears to have worked. This is significant, because the scene serves as a powerful rejoinder to anti-abolitionists who claimed that slavery was a benevolent institution. Eliza’s daring escape is presented as evidence for the horrors of slavery; her maternal instinct, Stowe and Aiken suggest, drives her to these extreme measures. In the novel, this escape is one data point among many in the argument against slavery. It is, by contrast, the highlight of the play, as Aiken employs all

the tricks of the theatre—pacing, set design, and sound—to focus his audience's attention of a representative example that would resonate for years to come.

Uncle Tom's Cabin's most successful lecturing counterpart was undoubtedly Fredrick Douglass. Douglass, whose freedom was purchased by British abolitionists several years after his successful escape from slavery, made a career out of delivering anti-slavery and anti-white-supremacist lectures, both before and after the Civil War. His *Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass* (1845) was written, in large part, to establish his own credibility as an anti-slavery speaker; audiences often did not believe that he was a former slave (Douglass, *Bondage* 363). Douglass understood the close relationship between the lyceum and the theatre. As he wrote to James Redpath in 1871, "people do not attend lectures to hear statesmanlike addresses, which are usually rather heavy for the stomachs of young and old who listen. People want to be amused as well as instructed" (qtd. in Ray 124). During his career as a speaker, he was perhaps best known for his lecture "The Races," which he first delivered in 1854. "The Races" aimed to establish both that all men, regardless of race, were men and that all races arose from a single origin. Although it was first delivered as a college address, it bears all the hallmarks of the Lyceum-style lecture. As Angela Ray notes, "He rhetorically accepted premises long familiar to lyceum participants--like the value of ordinary experiential observation, the importance of learning via models, and the unique role of the United States in world progress--and then adapted them to correspond to the lived experience of black Americans, changing the foundation of these premises in the progress" (139). Like so many lyceum lectures, the bulk of Douglass's speech is concerned with the answering of

objections. Indeed, the very premises of the address are formed in response to popular theories about race at the time; his claim that black men are men is itself already a response to the commonly heard claim that they are not. Finally, Douglass's lecture is, at its heart, an emotional appeal designed to strengthen the already-held convictions of its audience.⁹⁹ It begins by claiming otherwise: "Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me to say, that I hope you are not expecting any thing like a rhetorical display on this occasion. Neither the nature of the Subject--nor my aptitude as a speaker will permit me to gratify any such expectations" (qtd. in Ray 208). This disavowal of rhetoric is itself a rhetorical move, and Douglass's subsequent words belie his claims that he is only going to deliver a series of facts. Douglass's proof of the humanity of all races, for example, is clearly designed to elicit an emotional, rather than a logical, response: "[the negro] lacks nothing, but Cultivation. He has two hands; he talks[,] he laughs, he weeps. Man is the only laughing, talking, and weeping animal in the world" (209). He begins with physical characteristics, but quickly moves on to discussing a shared emotional experience. His choice of laughing and weeping as two crucial markers of humanity seems calculated to produce the same feelings of sympathy that Stowe's novel, and Aiken's play, aimed to stir.

While Douglass's lectures share many key features with abolitionist plays like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the two forms of address tended to use slightly different strategies to achieve similar goals. This makes sense, given that the question on which the abolitionist debate turned, the humanity of black Americans, was one that touched the day-to-day

⁹⁹ Douglass most often lectured in front of abolitionist societies, and so presumably did not have to convince most of his audience members that slavery was an evil institution.

lives of many audience members. In contrast to the anti-Mormon plays and lectures, which had to educate audiences about an abstract threat which they had not directly experienced, abolitionist plays and lectures could point to real people who their audiences encountered every day. They could also enact the scenes of suffering that lecturers had to merely describe. Douglass, on the other hand, had the advantage of presenting his fully authentic humanity to the audience, and not having to settle for the fictionalized, and minstrelsy-inflected, versions that plays like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* employed. Still, this advantage was often no match for even an abolitionist audience's prejudices. As Douglass explains, his skill as an orator was the very thing that caused some audiences to doubt his authenticity: "People doubted if I had ever been a slave. They said I did not talk like a slave, look like a slave, nor act like a slave, and that they believed I had never been south of Mason and Dixon's line" (*Bondage* 362).

The Narrator as Lecturer in *The House of the Seven Gables*

The lecture circuit's influence was not confined to the theatre; it also entangled itself with the American publishing industry, as printed versions of popular lectures began to circulate independently of the lecturers. These unique factors meant that the lecture circuit occupied much of the same ground as the literary sphere in the United States; lecture attendance was almost as much of a substitute for novel-reading as it was for play-going.

This interaction left traces in the writing of many American writers, especially those writers who had some involvement with the Lyceum circuit, and with lecturing in

general. Edgar Allan Poe, for example, had a well-publicized association with the Boston Lyceum, which resulted in scandal when he publicly performed a poem from his own juvenilia, presenting it as though it was a new composition.¹⁰⁰ The intersection between Poe's lecturing and his writing had significant consequences for the history of detective fiction, a subgenre which Poe is generally regarded as having invented. Poe's 'ratiocination' stories, featuring detective Auguste Dupin, established something that would be standard practice in most subsequent mystery stories: that the solution to a mystery should be presented, by the detective, in lecture format. Each of these stories ends with Dupin's lengthy explanation to the narrator, an explanation which generally includes an imagined journey back to the scene of the crime, and which typically involves Dupin answering several of the narrator's objections. In every case, the entire last portion of the narrative is given over to this performance. This pattern was then taken up by Arthur Conan Doyle, and is today so strongly identified with the structure of mystery stories in general that it is difficult to imagine them ending any other way.

While many nineteenth-century writers were, like Poe, influenced in small but significant ways by the rise of the Lyceum and its imitators,¹⁰¹ one American author's work was much more strongly inflected by his involvement with the Lyceum: Nathaniel Hawthorne. Hawthorne served as the corresponding secretary for the Salem Lyceum from 1848-1849. As I've noted, the corresponding secretary was a critical position in the mid-century Lyceum. As corresponding secretary, Hawthorne was responsible for booking

¹⁰⁰ See McGill 214 for a thorough account of this incident.

¹⁰¹ Herman Melville, in particular, must be counted among this number, since many of the non-narrative chapters in *Moby Dick* (1851) bear the distinctive marks of the Lyceum style.

lecturers, and putting together the Salem season. This would have required him to familiarize himself with the offerings of most major lecturers, giving him a deep knowledge of popular lecturing practices. We know from his introductory essay that Hawthorne's time working at the custom house in Salem was an essential component of his writing *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). It was the loss of this job, following the presidential election of 1848, which led to Hawthorne's accepting the position at the Lyceum. Just as *The Scarlet Letter* shows the effects of Hawthorne's employment as a surveyor, his next novel, *The House of the Seven Gables* is strongly marked by his work as a Lyceum corresponding secretary.¹⁰²

Discerning these marks is important, because without them *The House of the Seven Gables* can be a deeply confusing novel. It plays strange tricks with its own narrative voice, arrests its plot in favor of numerous asides, many of which turn out to be ultimately irrelevant to the progress of that plot, and radically shifts in both tone and genre from chapter to chapter. Most critics who discuss *The House of the Seven Gables* attempt to reckon with these various oddities, proposing frameworks that can account for some of the novel's quirks. Meredith McGill persuasively argues in favor of an engagement on Hawthorne's part with the past and present of the sphere of literary production in which Hawthorne operates: "I will argue that in *The House of the Seven Gables*, illegitimate and uncertain property claims stand in for modes of narration that seem equally problematic and untenable... Hawthorne, like the Pyncheons of his story,

¹⁰² This is not to say that *The House of the Seven Gables* is the only Hawthorne novel that appears to be shaped by the prominence of the Lyceum. This influence is particularly evident in the way that *The Scarlet Letter*'s plot turns on a series of public addresses.

constructs a new literary edifice by incorporating prior modes of writing” (235). This engagement is a difficult one, McGill argues, “shot through with anxiety about prior modes of writing” (241). These prior modes, while anxiety-ridden, are ultimately familiar for Hawthorne, and so prove irresistible: “Lacking ready tools for the task of realist description, Hawthorne turns with great ambivalence to forms that had served him well in the culture of reprinting: the sketch and the gothic tale” (241-2). Put another way, Hawthorne’s past as a writer of magazine pieces serves as a refuge during the writing of *The House of the Seven Gables*, resulting in a patchwork novel that is seemingly assembled out of such pieces. It is my argument that Hawthorne’s past as a Lyceum corresponding secretary must be considered as well, and that doing so will illuminate some of the portions of *The House of the Seven Gables* that do not fit comfortably within the territory of magazine writing. Several of the stranger elements of the novel can be best understood as attempts by Hawthorne to co-opt some of the strategies that he would have learned at the Salem Lyceum, in much the same way that playwrights co-opted various paratheatrical forms throughout the nineteenth century.

The House of the Seven Gables begins by announcing its engagement with the performed lecture. It does so by immediately making an issue out of one of the hallmarks of such a performance: the corporeal presence of the speaker. The narrator, it is true, identifies himself as “a disembodied listener” (28). This self-identification, however, is belied by the narration that follows, which insists at every turn on its own physical locality in space. Indeed, the very sentence in which the narrator claims disembodiment also serves to render such disembodiment impossible:

Far be it from us the indecorum of assisting, even in imagination, at a maiden lady's toilet! Our story must therefore await Miss Hepzibah at the threshold of her chamber; only presuming, meanwhile, to note some of the heavy sighs that labored from her bosom, with little restraint as to their lugubrious depth and volume of sound inasmuch as they could be audible to nobody save a disembodied listener like yourself (28).

The narrative thus occupies a specific point in space; it lingers outside of Hepzibah's bedroom, and is able to hear her sighs but unable to see her morning preparations. For Hawthorne's narrator to be able to hear Hepzibah but not see her, that narrator must be within earshot of her sighs but still be unable to view her body. The narrative spends the next several pages reinforcing this special locality by continuing to reiterate that Hepzibah is audible but not visible; Hawthorne's narrator makes a show of interpreting the sounds that emanate from Hepzibah's chamber to give the reader a sense of what she is probably doing. In so doing, he turns the reader into a spectator, and an illicit one at that. The reader is being given a sense of eavesdropping on Hepzibah's private morning rituals, and the constrained point of view, the veiling of Hepzibah from the reader's imagined gaze, only serves to highlight the voyeurism inherent in this scene. By restricting the reader's perspective, Hawthorne injects some of the thrill of theatergoing, the sense that one is observing the private lives of others, into his novel's narration.

The question of performance and physical co-presence in *The House of the Seven Gables* goes beyond the spacial locality of its narrator. The novel's¹⁰³ description of two of its principle characters, Hepzibah and Judge Pyncheon, highlights the difficulties raised by engaging in, and watching a performance. Hepzibah and the Judge share

¹⁰³ I use the term for convenience, and with apologies to Hawthorne, who insisted that *The House of the Seven Gables* is a romance and not a novel.

opposite versions of the same problem: the manner of their self-presentation does not match the content of their consciousness. In Hepzibah, this disjuncture manifests itself as a “forbidding scowl,” which is not caused by any malice on her part, but is “the innocent result of her near-sightedness, and an effort so to concentrate her powers of vision as to substitute a firm outline of [an] object instead of a vague one” (31).¹⁰⁴ Hepzibah is cursed to present this sour expression to the world while “her heart,” Hawthorne assures us, “never frowned” (31). The Judge’s facial expressions are similarly false, but while Hepzibah’s scowl creates difficulties for herself, his characteristic expression, a brilliant smile, mostly causes misery for others. It is presented, from its first appearance, as wholly false and insincere. The unreliability of Hepzibah and the Judge’s facial expressions presents a skepticism about the efficacy of lecturing, and of embodied performance in general. If the face cannot even be trusted to accurately convey affect, *The House of the Seven Gables* asks, then how can we trust an argument delivered through a live, embodied performance? Hawthorne thus begins his strategy of simultaneously co-opting and critiquing the lecture form; he incorporates various elements of the Lyceum’s entertainment apparatus into his writing, while raising doubts about its capacity for honest communication.

These early instances lay the groundwork for *The House of the Seven Gables*’s later forays into something that more directly resembles Lyceum-style lecturing. Indeed, some of the novel’s most important narrative moments are presented in a lecture format. Throughout the remainder of the novel, Hawthorne presents three versions of a Lyceum-

¹⁰⁴ Interestingly enough, the problems that one faces in trying to make Hepzibah visually legible result from her own difficulty in seeing the world around her.

style lecture, each one problematic in a different way. The first of these is supplied by Holgrave, a visitor to the House of the Seven Gables and descendent of the Maule family from whom its property was stolen by the Pyncheons. He offers to describe some of the House's history to Phoebe, one of its current residents and the youngest of the Pyncheon line. By way of introduction, he tells Phoebe, "I have put an incident of the Pyncheon family-history, with which I happen to be acquainted, into the form of a legend, and mean to publish it in a magazine" (160). The implications of Holgrave's career as a writer of magazine stories have been explored at length by Meredith McGill.¹⁰⁵ My concern here is not the spirit of Holgrave's story's composition, but the manner of its delivery. Holgrave does not offer to give Phoebe his manuscript, but instead asks, "shall I read you my story?" (161). Phoebe, in other words, does not receive Holgrave's story as a magazine reader would, but instead hears it as an audience member would hear a lyceum lecture. In keeping with this mode of reception, her immediate concern when agreeing to hear the story is that "it is not very long... nor very dull" (161). Holgrave apparently attempts to use his vocal performance to sustain her interest: "Holgrave, plunging into his tale with the energy and absorption natural to a young author, had given a good deal of action to the parts capable of being developed and exemplified in that manner" (182). Holgrave's story then, is identified as an interpolated magazine tale, but is actually delivered as a staged reading. It is not just a story; it is also a performance.

This is appropriate, since a central feature of the tale is a demonstration of the dangers of vocal performance. The story, entitled "Alice Pyncheon," concerns a pervious

¹⁰⁵ See McGill 253.

chapter in the ongoing conflict between the Maule and Pyncheon families. In Holgrave's telling, Matthew Maule, grandson of the builder of the house of the seven gables, is asked by a member of the Pyncheon family to provide information about the whereabouts of a document granting the Pyncheon family ownership over a tract of land to the East. Maule agrees to help locate the document, but says that he needs the help of Pyncheon's daughter, Alice, in order to do so. When Pyncheon summons her, Maule uses a combination of gestures and instructions to place her in a mesmeric trance. His proposal is to use her as a medium to ask his ancestors where the document is. This attempt is unsuccessful, as the Maules, no friends of the Pyncheon family, refuse to help. The trance, however, is so successful that it lasts for the rest of Alice's life:

A power that she little dreamed of, had laid its grasp upon her maiden soul. A will, most unlike her own, constrained her to do its grotesque and fantastic bidding... And, therefore, while Alice Pyncheon lived, she was Maule's slave, in a bondage more humiliating, a thousand-fold, than that which binds its chain around the body... Thus all dignity of life was lost (180).

This single performance, then, far exceeds the bounds of its own duration. It is so effective that Alice remains under its sway for the rest of her life. It initially requires Maule's physical presence, as Alice must hear his voice and see his gestures to fall under his control. Once it has begun, however, this physical co-presence is no longer necessary: "Seated by his humble fireside, Maule had but to wave his hand; and, wherever the proud lady chanced to be... her spirit passed from beneath her own control, and bowed itself to Maule" (180). This sort of performance, for Hawthorne, is so powerful that, once inaugurated, it becomes limitless.

Hawthorne is careful to indicate that the mesmeric force of Maule's lecture is not simply an invention of Holgrave's magazine story. Phoebe, listening to Holgrave's performed narrative, falls under the same sort of trance as Alice does. "It was evident," writes Hawthorne, "that, with but one wave of his hand and a corresponding effort of his will, he could complete his mastery over Phoebe's yet free and virgin spirit; he could establish an influence over this good, pure, and simple child, as dangerous, and perhaps as disastrous, as that which the carpenter of his legend had acquired and exercised over the ill-fated Alice" (182).

Further, this mesmeric effect is specifically due to Holgrave's vocal performance. In what initially appears to be simply a joke at his own expense, Hawthorne informs his reader that Phoebe's drowsiness is "wholly unlike that which [he] possibly feels himself affected" (182). As he goes on to describe the particulars of her mental state, however, it becomes clear that Phoebe's condition actually is qualitatively different from the kind of boredom-induced sleepiness that *The House of the Seven Gables's* readership might feel. Indeed, Phoebe's trance is characterized primarily by intense focus, in contrast to the disengagement of a bored reader: "A veil was beginning to be muffled about her, in which she could behold only [Holgrave], and live only in his thoughts and emotions" (182). Phoebe's trance, it seems, is a direct result of being in physical proximity to Holgrave during his monologue: "It was the effect, unquestionably, of the mystic gesticulations, by which he had sought to bring bodily before Phoebe's perception the figure of the mesmerizing carpenter" (182). It is unclear whether Maule or Holgrave is the more dangerous figure here; either Maule's embodied performance is so powerful that

it retains its menacing properties even when re-enacted by Holgrave, or Holgrave's embodiment of Maule is so eerily accurate that he inadvertently channels the mesmeric force of his ancestor. In either case, Hawthorne has established that a performed lecture can escape the intention of the lecturer and pose a serious threat to its listeners. This expands Hawthorne's critique of Lyceum entertainment: lecturing is no longer merely unreliable, but is now actively dangerous, and outside the control of both lecturer and audience. This sets the stage for a later chapter, called "Governor Pyncheon," in which Hawthorne lectures his readers.

"Governor Pyncheon" is probably the most commented-upon chapter in *The House of the Seven Gables*.¹⁰⁶ This is understandable, since it represents the kind of strong departure for the rest of the novel that cannot fail to draw critical attention: it contains no living characters. Instead, the entirety of the chapter takes place in Judge Pyncheon's study, which contains the dead body of the Judge, who has died two chapters previous. The chapter lingers over the Judge's corpse, in large part, because of *The House of the Seven Gables*'s narrator's stubborn refusal to admit that the Judge has died. This refusal is maintained by the spacial localization of that narrator, with which Hawthorne opened the novel. Put another way, the "Governor Pyncheon" chapter would not be possible in a novel with a truly omniscient narrator. It is only the limited perspective of Hawthorne's narrator, who must assimilate information through his senses, that allows

¹⁰⁶ In particular, see McGill 233-241 and Dinius 49-85, each of which presents an alternate take on the oddities of "Governor Pyncheon." McGill reads the chapter as heavily influenced by Hawthorne's engagement with magazine writing, while Dinius reads it as Hawthorne's attempt to present the reader with a textual representation of a daguerreotype. For more standard takes on the chapter see Bellis and C. Johnson.

him to continue to deny the mounting evidence that the Judge has died. Chief among this evidence is the Judge's complete lack of motion: "How profound a fit of meditation! Or, supposing him asleep, how infantile a quietude of conscience, and what wholesome order in the gastric region, are betokened by slumber so entirely undisturbed with starts, cramp, twitches, muttered dream-talk, trumpet-blasts through the nasal organ, or any the slightest irregularity of breath!" (230). The narrator's pretense here is that he cannot tell whether the Judge is asleep with his eyes opened, or merely sitting very still. This pretense requires an embodied narrative perspective, one which is hampered by physical limitations, and so cannot get close enough to the Judge to be sure, and one that possesses senses that are capable of being deceived.

Hawthorne's insistence that the Judge is alive leads to the primary source of "Governor Pyncheon's" strangeness: since nobody enters or leaves the room in which the chapter takes place, and the Judge is dead and motionless, it is impossible for anything to happen in the chapter, at least in the conventional sense. For the plot to proceed, something must change, but the beginning conditions of "Governor Pyncheon" rule out the possibility of such change. So, with narrative progression an impossibility and an embodied, physically present narrator at the ready, Hawthorne turns to lecturing to pass the time, and the chapter.

The move away from traditional narrative, and toward lecturing, is apparent almost immediately, as the narrator begins to directly address the reader: "[Judge Pyncheon] holds his watch in his left hand, but clutched in such a manner that you cannot see the dial-plate" (230). This statement bears several of the hallmarks of Lyceum-style

lecturing. It is, of course, written in the second person, addressing the reader as “you.” More importantly, however, is the way that it relocates the reader into the room with the dead Judge. The reader is physically embodied in the Judge’s chamber along with the narrator, and shares in the narrator’s sensory limitations; neither one is able to see the dial of the Judge’s watch. This tactic, in which a location is described by reference to the listener’s hypothetical experience of that location, is a commonly-employed lecturing trick, and a key feature of the Lyceum’s use of imagined travel. It establishes that the listener is having an interaction with the lecture’s subject that is entirely mediated through the lecturer. In this case, for example, the reader is limited by Hawthorne’s narrator’s perspective. He says that the dial is not visible, and since he will not shift his perspective within the room to one that allows visibility of the watch, that visibility is also unavailable to the reader. This construction appears to grant the listener or reader an individual experience of the described location while making that experience entirely dependent on the lecturer’s monologue.

It is no accident that Hawthorne chooses a watch to set the terms of his narrator’s relationship with the reader, and of the reader’s relationship with the Judge and his chamber. This chapter unfolds over time, and does so as conspicuously as possible. This is what separates this chapter from *The House of the Seven Gables*’s first chapter, which supplies the back-story for the Maules, the Pyncheons, and the house. That chapter, called “The Old Pyncheon Family,” is located outside of the narrative space of the novel, as Hawthorne makes clear with its closing sentence: “And now—in a very humble way, as will be seen—we proceed to open our narrative” (27). What this means, practically

speaking, is that narrative time does not pass during “The Old Pyncheon family.”

Hawthorne does not suggest that his characters are going about their lives while we learn about their family histories, or that we are somehow missing something else while our attention is being distracted. Time has not yet begun to pass in *The House of the Seven Gables*, and so Hawthorne may supply us with a leisurely telling of the information relevant to the narrative that is about to unfold.

“Governor Pyncheon” does not follow this pattern. Instead, it is haunted by the persistent passage of time. Since the deceased Judge refuses to move, and will not display his watch, this time is marked by the narrator’s description of the events that must be unfolding in the outside world, particularly those events that the Judge was supposed to attend. This description is what gives the chapter its mocking title: the Judge is scheduled to have dinner with a group of politically powerful men who are prepared to orchestrate the Judge’s ascent to the governorship of Massachusetts. He would, Hawthorne implies, be “Governor Pyncheon,” were it not for his inexplicable refusal to rise from his chair. The progress of this dinner is described in painstaking detail, to make it entirely clear what the Judge is missing. Indeed, as “Governor Pyncheon” proceeds, it becomes positively obsessed with the passage of time. “Why, Judge,” the narrator declares, “it is already two hours, by your own undeviatingly accurate chronometer!” (232). He later exhorts, “Pray, pray Judge Pyncheon, look at your watch, now! What—not a glance! It is within ten minutes of the dinner hour!” (234). The emphasis on the need for the Judge to look at his watch “now” is of particular use in creating the sense that this chapter unfolds over the course of quantifiable time. Hawthorne’s narrator eventually stops using the

dinner as a benchmark for the passage of time when he notes with resignation that “it is absolutely too late for dinner” (236). This does not, however, end the chapter’s marking of time, as the setting sun provides Hawthorne with another opportunity to make his readers aware of the departing minutes: “Meanwhile, twilight is glooming upward out of the corners of the room. The shadows of the tall furniture grow deeper, and at first become more definite; then, spreading wider, they lose their distinctiveness of outline in the gray tide of oblivion, as it were, that creeps slowly over the various objects” (237). This is nightfall, described in excruciating detail. The effect of this level of detail is to emphasize that the sun does not set at all once, that it does not simply become dark. In other words, this description of the sunset has the advantage of including a minute to minute sense of temporality.

This obsession with the passage of time is what marks this chapter specifically as a lecture. Lyceum lectures are exceedingly conscious of their own duration, and of its relationship to the time allotted. Recall that Lyceum lecturers frequently referred to how much time their addresses had taken, and to the elements that must be rushed through or omitted entirely in the service of time. As I’ve noted, this gives those lectures a sense of being larger than themselves; it creates the implicit promise that the lecturer could deliver more, could more fully support his argument, but had to truncate his examples and explanations to work within the Lyceum’s time constraints. It also gives the lectures a sense of urgency, since it dramatizes the lecturer’s struggle to communicate all of the information in his possession in a conspicuously limited amount of time. Given that such lectures could sometimes last for several hours, the information imparted must have

seemed vital indeed if some details were being skipped. Hawthorne borrows this tactic from the institution on whose board he served, and uses it to give a similar sense of urgency to a chapter in which, strictly speaking, nothing at all happens. He even supplies the Judge with a set of lecture notes, in the form of “a card which is, or ought to be, In Judge Pyncheon’s right vest pocket” (232). This card provides the plan for the rest of the chapter by containing the Judge’s schedule; the narrator’s account of the events proceeding in the Judge’s absence purports to come from the information on this card. It is so important for the progress of the chapter that Hawthorne is required to engage in some conspicuous narrative trickery in order to locate it within the Judge’s pocket. Later, after the Judge has been confirmed to be dead by *The House of the Seven Gables*’s other characters, an Italian street musician, finds something in the street:

In fact, it was an engraved card of Judge Pyncheon’s with certain penciled memoranda on the back, referring to various businesses which it had been his purpose to transact during the preceding day. It formed a prospective epitome on the day’s history; only affairs had not turned out altogether in accordance with the programme. The card must have been lost from the Judge’s vest-pocket, in his preliminary attempt to gain access by the main-entrance of the house (254).

Hawthorne, then, is at pains to point out that the card was not in the Judge’s pocket during “Governor Pyncheon.” It was sitting outside the house the entire time, and has to be there in order to alert external characters that something has happened to the Judge. This same card is not, strictly speaking, necessary for “Governor Pyncheon.” Hawthorne’s narrator could just as easily have enumerated the events that the Judge had planned to attend for the rest of the day without positing the existence of a written schedule, and certainly without locating that schedule on the Judge’s person. Doing so, however, allows Hawthorne to maintain the sense of physical presence that is so crucial

for “Governor Pyncheon’s” lecture format. For the duration of “Governor Pyncheon,” Hawthorne’s narrator suspends his omniscient privileges. He locates himself in the room with the Judge both physically and epistemologically: he cannot know anything that is not apparent from the information in that room.

This restriction is confirmed at the end of the chapter when the narrator decides to “make a little sport” with the “ridiculous legend, that, at midnight, all the dead Pyncheons are bound to assemble in [the] parlor” (239). Despite the fact that the narrator claims to be inventing the procession of ghosts, it is not long before he becomes surprised by some of the apparitions he sees:

Indulging out fancy in this freak, we have partly lost the power of restraint and guidance. We distinguish an unlooked-for figure in our visionary scene... Were we to meet this figure at noonday, we should greet him as young Jaffrey Pyncheon, the Judge’s only surviving child, who has been spending the last two years in foreign travel. If still in life, how comes his shadow hither? If dead, what a misfortune! (240-1).

Near the end of *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne reveals that young Jaffrey has, in fact, died while abroad. During “Governor Pyncheon,” then, Hawthorne restricts his narrator’s knowledge, and forces him into the pretense that young Jaffrey’s presence among the Pyncheon ghosts is inexplicable. His reluctance to draw the obvious conclusion mirrors his refusal to draw the same conclusion about Judge Pyncheon’s stubborn motionlessness. This has the effect of highlighting the narrator’s physical embodiment in the room with the Judge, and of giving the reader the sense that he is speaking from a particular and human perspective, rather than narrating from a god-like vantage point.

Crucially, the lecture delivered by “Governor Pyncheon” manages the strip away all of the concerns about performed lecturing that Hawthorne raises in the rest of *The House of the Seven Gables*. This is largely due to the fact that Hawthorne’s corporialization of his narrative voice is incomplete. He has a specific location in time and space, and an awareness that is limited by that location. But because he does not have a visible body or an audible voice, at least none that can be experienced by readers, he does not pose any of the same dangers as the other performances in the novel. We cannot be misled by his facial expressions, either supposing him less friendly than is warranted, as we would Hepzibah, or more friendly, as we would the Judge. Without the rhythmic sound of a voice, or the exposure to mesmeric hand gestures, we cannot be put into a trance, as Phoebe and Alice Pyncheon are. Put another way, Hawthorne presents his readers with several models of problematic or dangerous lectures, and then removes this danger from the lecture that he delivers himself. Doing so allows him to play on the public fascination with lectures, which his role as the Salem Lyceum’s corresponding secretary allowed him to experience firsthand, while ultimately positioning himself, and his own narrative voice, as the safest available practitioner of the form.

There is another reason that the lecture delivered in “Governor Pyncheon” seems so harmless: it periodically lapses into outright parody. The lecturer clings to the pretense that the Judge is still alive long past the point at which he should have been forced to admit otherwise. Indeed, it becomes clear, as the chapter wears on, that the speaking voice must be aware that the Judge has died, and is working very hard to suppress that knowledge. How else to account for the panic that begins to seep into the narrator’s tone

midway through “Governor Pyncheon,” and that continues to rise throughout the chapter? This panic is perhaps most evident in Hawthorne’s continued description of the fading light outside, which is yet another way that the chapter expresses its obsession with the passage of time. What began as a detailed meditation on the way that shadows lengthen into a “gray tide of oblivion” suddenly becomes charged with emotion:

There is no window! There is no face! An infinite, inscrutable blackness has annihilated sight! Where is our universe? All crumbled away from us; and we, adrift in chaos, may hearken to the gusts of homeless wind, that go sighing and murmuring about, in quest of what once was a world! (237).

Nightfall has apparently become terrifying, suggesting that Hawthorne’s narrator is afraid of the dark. Of course, the dark is not the only possible source of this fear. Since he is physically localized, Hawthorne’s narrator has something else to contend with: not only is he in the dark, but he is in the dark with a corpse. Over time, this realization changes the tone of his address to the Judge. Mocking statements like “Well! it is absolutely too late for dinner!” (236) give way to something that resembles pleading: “Yonder leaden Judge sits immovably upon our soul. Will he never stir again? We shall go mad unless he stirs!” (241). The narrator’s willful ignorance of the most obvious facts of the Judge’s situation, combined with his histrionic reactions as those facts assert themselves, represents an implicit critique of the lecture as a form of address.

“Governor Pyncheon” is not the only parodic lecture embedded within *The House of the Seven Gables*. In fact, the preceding chapter, “The Flight of Two Owls,” contains a similar construct. Rather than using his narrator to address the reader, “The Flight of Two Owls” finds Hawthorne employing the character of Clifford as his lecturer, and generating an entirely new character, who serves no purpose beyond providing Clifford

with an audience. The two owls of the chapter's title are Hepzibah and Clifford, her cousin. They have fled the house of the seven gables after Clifford has discovered Judge Pyncheon's corpse.¹⁰⁷ They board a train, with no real destination in mind, apparently seeking to put as much distance between themselves and their ancestral home as is possible. Once they've boarded, they make the acquaintance of "a gimlet-eyed old gentleman" who is sharing their train car (222). The man makes an idle comment, saying that "The best chance of pleasure, in an easterly rain... is in a man's own house, with a nice little fire in the chimney" (*ibid.*). This one comment is enough to launch Clifford into a lengthy discourse on the perils of real estate, and the benefits of a transient lifestyle.

Clifford begins his lecture by claiming "that this admirable invention of the railroad... is destined to do away with those stale ideas of home and fireside, and substitute something better" (*ibid.*). His address goes on to ramble, in typical Lyceum-style, across a variety of arguments in favor of this claim. He employs a historical argument, saying that "in the early epochs of our race, men dwelt in temporary huts" (223). He goes on to claim that mankind is destined to return to this state of affairs, since that lifestyle "possessed a charm, which, ever since man has quitted it, has vanished from existence" (*ibid.*). He later emphasizes the constraints posed by permanent dwellings, making special mention of the oppressive nature of some common building materials: "Why should [man] make himself a prisoner for life in brick, and stone, and old worm-eaten timber, when he may just as easily dwell, in one sense, nowhere[?]" (224). He

¹⁰⁷ Note that he is a full chapter ahead of Hawthorne in admitting that the Judge has died.

returns to this theme later, describing homes as “heaps of bricks, and stones, consolidated with mortar, or hewn timber, fastened together with spike-nails, which men painfully contrive for their own torment (*ibid.*). Crucially, this is an emotional, rather than a logical, appeal. Clifford’s description of the physical materials of home construction dwells on aspects of those materials that are irrelevant to homeowners. He discusses the “spike-nails” as if they were to be driven into the resident, rather than into the walls. Like so many politically-motivated Lyceum lectures, Clifford’s discourse argues by insinuation and implication, piling up stirring images instead of relevant facts.

In true Lyceum style, Clifford spends much of his lecture answering the objections that may be raised to his argument. Because he is addressing an audience of one, many of these objections are voiced by his listener, rather than ventroloquized by Clifford himself. So, for example, when the other man declares it “common sense” that people would enjoy their own parlors, Clifford immediately replies, “These things have not the merit which many good people attribute to them,” and then goes on to explain why this is the case (223). When his audience declares that he would not want “to live everywhere and nowhere,” Clifford declares that “it is as clear to [him] as sunshine” that permanent homes represent “the greatest possible stumbling-blocks in the path of human happiness and improvement” (224). The reason that he provides is that “There is no such unwholesome atmosphere as that of an old home, rendered poisonous by one’s defunct forefathers and relatives” (*ibid.*). The implied argument is that permanent homes are objectionable primarily because they accumulate history, and that a life of perpetual transit would avoid such an accumulation. This represents a mockery of the Lyceum’s

claims about its own power to improve its audience and bring about social reform, since Clifford's proposed program is manifestly preposterous.

As Clifford's address continues, the act of lecturing begins to have a visible effect on him, and upon those around him: "Clifford's countenance glowed, as he divulged this theory; a youthful character shone out from within, converting the wrinkles and pallid duskiness of age into an almost transparent mask. The merry girls let their ball drop upon the floor, and gazed at him" (224). Clifford becomes more animated as his lecture progresses, and his increasingly lively demeanor expands his audience. The girls on the train are drawn in, and stop what they're doing to listen to Clifford. They are, perhaps, interested in the content of Clifford's speech, but they are particularly captivated by his manner, his performance.

This is important, because much of what Clifford has to say in this impromptu lecture is self-evidently nonsense. His argument follows the format of many Lyceum lectures, but deploys that format in the service of a series of claims that border on absurdity. When, for example, he argues against the telegraph, and the gimlet-eyed man responds that telegraph alerts help to catch fleeing bank-robbers and murderers, Clifford's answer is that "A bank-robber, and what you call a murderer, likewise, has his rights" (227). While it is easy to agree that even criminals should be granted some rights, Clifford apparently includes among these the right to escape detection, and to commit their crimes without being punished. Clifford's use of the phrase "what you call a murderer" is especially telling, since the other man has not specified any of the circumstances of this hypothetical murder. Clifford, then, is not arguing against the other

man's designation of a particular case as a murder. Instead, he is assuming as a premise of his address that most people subscribe to an incorrect definition of murder, and that most people branded as murderers by society do not deserve to bear that title. He later indicates that murderers "are often excusable in the motives of their deed, and deserve to be ranked among public benefactors, if we consider only its result" (228). Again and again, he returns to his own personal circumstances, to the horror that the house of the seven gables represents for him, and to the torments to which Judge Pyncheon has subjected him. What we see in Clifford's lecture is an argument delivered by a man unable to rise above his own personal circumstances; he elevates the unique particulars of his own situation, which are unlikely to be shared by anyone else, into a general prescription for how everyone ought to live. This, combined with the hysterical tone of "Governor Pyncheon," has the effect of painting the lecture as faintly ridiculous, and as a flawed method of education and argumentation.

The House of the Seven Gables represents an extreme case for the influence of the paratheatrical on nineteenth-century entertainment. It is perhaps to be expected that paratheatrical forms would apply pressure to the theatre, but it is more surprising to find a non-theatrical genre, like the novel, responding to an institution like the Lyceum. Still, Nathaniel Hawthorne appears to have been particularly sensitive to potential competing forms of diversion, and to anything that might hurt his sales.¹⁰⁸ This, in combination with

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, his "Mrs. Hutchinson," which begins with a short polemic against the growing number of women who were finding success in magazine writing: "As yet, the great body of American women are a domestic race; but when a continuance of ill-judged incitements shall have turned their hearts away from the fireside, there are obvious circumstances which will render female pens more numerous and more prolific than those of me, though but equally encouraged; and... the ink-stained Amazons will expel their rivals by actual pressure, and petticoats wave triumphant over all the field" (15).

his personal history with the Salem Lyceum, not to mention his tendency to write novels informed by his various other occupations, provided the conditions for *The House of the Seven Gables*'s response to the American lecture circuit. Like so many playwrights and theatre managers before him, Hawthorne's writing was shaped by competition: it bears the marks of a strategy of defensive absorption. *The House of the Seven Gables* delivers a series of lectures to a reading public hungry for argumentative performance. But its lectures are all compromised in some way; some are merely ineffective, while some are actively dangerous. Taken together, they allow Hawthorne to have it both ways, giving his audience a taste of the lecture circuit while also implicitly arguing that they would be better off sticking with his novels. These tactics also have the effect of producing a strange novel, with an unconventional structure produced by its particular goals. The odd feeling that one gets when reading *The House of the Seven Gables*, that most of its action is taking place offstage and being relayed secondhand, is a direct consequence of the novel's engagement with the lecturing industry.

Because of its engagement with the publishing industry, the Lyceum left a much more lasting imprint on America's cultural history than did any other paratheatrical form. Scholars today continue to analyze and debate the output of various Lyceum lecturers, including Dickinson and Douglass. Nevertheless, the Lyceum as an institution, and lecturing as a form of entertainment, declined in the twentieth century. The lecture industry, however, may yet have the final word; in the fragmented, Internet-based media landscape of today, one of the most popular vehicles for the dissemination of knowledge, the TED talk, directly recalls the Lyceum model. In addition, a number of network-based

platforms, services like Skillshare, and Code Academy, are implementing the Lyceum's original vision of a mutual education society, replacing Holbrook's local community with a virtual one.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Of these types of companies, the one that most closely follows the Lyceum plan is the Brooklyn Brainery, in which teachers are encouraged to accept admission into other courses in lieu of monetary compensation. Thus, Holbrook's goal of a 'mutual education society' is finally realized.

Conclusion: Paratheatricals and Paramedias

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the relationship between paratheatrical entertainments and more traditional diversions began to shift. The rise of film dramatically shifted the entertainment landscape; a single, dominant alternative to the theatre in the twentieth century took the place of the cacophony of paratheatricals that characterized the nineteenth century. In many ways, the nineteenth century was a period of intense local competition, while in the twentieth century competition for audience attention tended to take place on a national level. While paratheatricals certainly continued to put pressure on playwrights and theatre managers throughout the twentieth century, they paled in comparison to the existential threat posed by film and television. In retrospect, we can identify the nineteenth century as a "paratheatrical period" in the development of American drama. Playwrights and theatre managers during this period had to contend with an especially noisy and inventive performance marketplace, and the plays that they produced took on many of the aspects of this marketplace. Whether through hostile incorporation or audience training, everything from the sensation melodrama, to the argument play, to the rise of realism was touched by the theatre's ever-present need to stave off a variety of threats.

Indeed, it is this variety itself, more than any of the specific paratheatrical forms, that ultimately proves to have the greatest effect on playwriting in the American nineteenth century. The plurality of subgenres that arose during this period can only be properly understood when situated within the chaotic entertainment marketplace of the

paratheatrical. Viewed in this light, the explosion of theatricality in the nineteenth century is the result of a kind of anxious production, of a large and powerful industry nervously trying to outrun a series of small, but formidable, challengers—challengers that were never more than a step behind. When we look back at American drama in the nineteenth century, what we are seeing is the result of the theatre's self-preservation instinct. This instinct helped to turn threats into fodder for theatrical devices, and competitors into content testing grounds and audience training grounds. It is my hope that this study will illuminate these vectors of competition along which devices, characters, and set pieces made their way into dramatic practice.

These vectors were far too numerous to be contained within the bounds of this project. And so, in the manner of a Lyceum lecturer, I must point to the compression of my argument, and to the avenues of inquiry that I was forced to pass by. Chapter three briefly touches on Edwin Forrest's involvement with the Democratic Party in New York City, and on the pageantry involved with his Fourth of July oration. This represents only a tiny fraction of the theatrical displays involved in American politics, especially during the Jacksonian era. It is undoubtedly the case that the public events that were a staple of American party politics influenced dramatic writing in much the same way as the paratheatrical forms that I was able to examine. Similarly, minstrel shows and blackface performance were so popular during this period that their effect on the theatre was a powerful one. This effect is an essential component of, for example, Aiken's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, where it complicated the plays' engagement with abolitionism in

fascinating ways. These and other paratheatrical forms are outside of the scope of this study, and must await either future projects, or future iterations of this one.

In closing, I note with interest that the media landscape has, in recent years, entered into a new paratheatrical period, or, more accurately, a paramedia period. The chaos that once plagued and fueled theatre in America has now returned to do the same for theatre's most lasting competitors: film and television. Once again, entertainment competition is taking place on an intensely localized level. In this case, however, that competition is localized in terms of taste, not geography; the ability to customize one's consumption has led to a series of fierce battles to dominate niche markets. As was the case in the paratheatrical period, the enabling factors are low overhead and relative ease of dissemination. Just as a medical pitchman could put together a show and a product with just a few bottles of flavored alcohol, many people today are literally able to carry fully functional production studios in their pockets. And broadband Internet access, it seems, is playing the same role as the nineteenth-century railroad in bringing entertainment to an audience's doorstep. These two factors have combined to encourage an explosion of entertainment forms that are difficult to classify using traditional categories, and that are increasingly presenting themselves as viable substitutes for those traditional categories. The entertainment marketplace, and the economy of attention, is crowded to an extent unimaginable to nineteenth-century audiences.

As was the case in the nineteenth century, these paramedia forms are exerting a competitive pressure that is shaping the development of their traditional rivals. It is now

common for movies and television shows to begin their lives as podcasts,¹¹⁰ Internet videos,¹¹¹ and even novelty Twitter accounts.¹¹² With some historical distance, we may well view entertainment in the early twenty-first century as a churning, messy, inventive analogue to the theatre of the nineteenth century. It is too early to say how much of this century's cultural production will be created out of simple business necessity, and how much the development of our performance culture will be shaped by attempts to manage competition. In any case, it is fitting that American entertainment has returned to the chaos from which it was born.

¹¹⁰ See "IFC Orders."

¹¹¹ See Kornhaber.

¹¹² See Hale, C2. This review of an attempt by CBS to turn a Twitter account with an un-airable name into a sitcom vehicle for William Shatner points to a key difference between the paratheatrical era and the paramedia era: in the paramedia era, incorporation tends to be cynical rather than hostile.

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